FINDING AN EFFECTIVE MEANS OF TEACHING MANAGERIAL BEHAVIORAL SKILLS:
TWO DIFFERENT EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING METHODS COMPARED

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ABSTRACT

This Study was undertaken to try to discover an effective means of reaching managerial action skills. Two methods were designed and tested. One approach featured experiential in-class exercises. The customary exercises of this approach, however, were augmented with action-initiation-assertion modifications and additional action exercises. The other approach featured experiential out-of-class activities. A progressive series of exercises was designed to condition subjects to take on a succession of increasingly difficult action skills In their everyday lives. They literally learned on the streets. Only the latter approach proved significant in changing five action-oriented characteristics of subjects, as measured by pre and post testing.

INTRODUCTION

One pervasive problem in management development is teaching people how to actually manage--how to take effective action, how to influence people and situations, how to get desired results, and how to live comfortably with the consequences.

Scholars recognize this problem. Thompson [16] points out the problem of managers' inability to cope with uncertainty. Schein [15] observes that the highly technical manner of training managers often causes professional dissonance and high attrition rates. Livingston [7] notes the bland career consequences that most present management education programs induce. Drucker [3] states that action commitment is a part of any decision, but he goes on ro say that managers are uneasy with making changes or bearing the responsibility for them. Leavitt [6], Mintzberg [9] and Pascale [12] call attention to the need for the initiative-wholistic mode of thought and action. And Levinson [8] advocates a stick-to-the-task perseverance to make decisions a reality and to get around obstacles and maintain a confident optimism.

Even so, most actual managerial training concerns itself with the understanding of concepts, analysis and problem solving, and decision making, rather than with implementation. Yet managerial prowess is measured not only by what you know but also by what you can do with what you know.

what seems to be needed, then, is a means of managerial teaching which emphasizes action-taking and balances the analytical and conceptual training which managers presently get. Those emerging from such a program would then have the substantive background necessary to lend credence to what they do, but they would also have the necessary personal clout to make their decisions become reality.

with this in mind a study was undertaken to try to discover an effective means for teaching action skills. Corollary purposes were to teach an insight as to when to use a skill and to instill a willingness to use it.

THE MANAGERIAL QUALITIES SOUGHT

For purposes of this study, action-oriented managers are characterized as having the following qualities:

1. High confidence and self-esteem. Consistent with expectancy theory, high self-esteem people better estimate their own ability to successfully carry out a task. They also are more apt to set realistic expectancies for themselves and respond more realistically to their environment [4].

2. Higher inner locus of control. Consistent with expectancy theory, people who believe they can influence what happens to them and what outcomes they obtain are better motivated and able to per- form well because they see a stronger connection between their behavior and the goals they seek [4].

3. Assertiveness. Assertive people have the ability to initiate action and change and to face confrontation in order to effect results. They are neither passive nor aggressive. As a result they tend to get what they want without affronting others. They make things go their way, at the same time making future contacts easier.

4. Spontaneity and adaptability. People with these qualities can adjust to varying situations. They can conform to or disregard protocol to achieve their objectives. As a result they are less apt ro be blocked by difficulties that arise or by barriers that are put up in their way.

5. The ability to see the 'big picture. People with this kind of perspective are able to clearly distinguish between means and ends and to adjust means to ends and ends to realities. -As a result they can maintain a practical cognitive set toward a goal and maximize the chances of reaching it.

In short, managers so pictured are more apt to be able to make decisions, take action, and get the kind of results they want--at the same time maintaining credibility and laying groundwork for future successes.

THE EXPERIMENT

To attempt to achieve these qualities in students, two separate approaches were tried. Both approaches used students at an accredited university who were majoring in business administration and enrolled in organizational behavior type courses. Both approaches exposed the students to the usual conceptual learning that is appropriate for these kinds of classes. Both approaches, too, used an experiential mode of teaching which was felt necessary in view of the action nature of the overall training. One experiential mode used in-class exercises. The other experiential mode used out-of-the-classroom and off-the-job exercises.

The in-class experiential group consisted of 37 students--27 males and 10 females. The out-of-the- classroom group contained 83 students--66 males and

21 females. The composition of the groups was arbitrarily determined from the makeup of class enrollments.

The In-Class Training Approach

The in-class experiential group was drilled in a manner familiar to most people involved with organizational behavior. Such things as case construction and dramatization, role-playing, games, simulations, group coaching and practice, and other forms of small group classroom participation were used. Although a popular experiential exercise book was used as a guide, most of the exercises were either modified or replaced by others to emphasize the kinds of experiences that were believed to induce an action-initiatory-assertion mode.

For example, an exercise that demonstrated group consensus-seeking was augmented to show the effects on people and results if individual autonomy is exercised after individual needs and talents of the participants are revealed. Thus after playing the Universal Wicket exercise of Kolb, McIntyre and Rubin [5, pp. 310-317], an exercise was introduced in which an autonomous 'takeover" leader had the power to hire, fire, transfer, restructure, and change strategies. An exercise designed to make use of power, propriety, alliance, and chance as factors providing for success followed an exercise where only achievement was emphasized. Accordingly, a Con" game designed around the Machiavellian research of Christie and Gels [1, pp. 106-129] was played after the Moon Tent and Shallow- Water Cargo Carrier exercise of Kolb, McIntyre and Rubin [5, pp. 85-113]. A negotiation game designed by Whitney [17] was used to practice both collaborative and conflict types of bargaining. Wherever possible, therefore, an added action-implementation orientation dimension was introduced into the in-class exercises.

The Out-of-Class Training Approach

The out-of-class experiential group was exposed to a progressive series of exercises designed to condition the Student subjects to take on a succession of increasingly tough tasks in increasingly tough situations. The exercises required then to work alone at first and then gradually work with and through others. Yet they were never involved directly with their classmates nor their work situations in the performance of the exercises. An everyday world, street" approach to learning was used to see if insight of when to use a skill as well as willingness to use it would also gradually be enhanced.

The out-of-the-class exercises were set up in a series of graduated phases in accordance with the method described in Mitton and Lilligren-Mitton [11]. Each phase was supported with an extensive list of suggestions and techniques used to guide individuals to shape and pace their experiences in a pattern of *growth* and increasing maturity.

Individuals proceeded at their own pace, but a different phase of the training was introduced and discussed in class each week. The subjects were asked to keep diaries of their relevant activities to reinforce their learning and to permit monitoring of their progress. Participation at all levels of the program was voluntary, and grades were in no way contingent on compliance. This point was impressed on the students repeatedly to keep extrinsic pressure to a minimum.

THE TESTING PROCEDURE

Students in both groups were given a battery of tests as soon as the class enrollment stabilized and prior to any kind of experiential exposure. They were retested with the same battery of tests at the end of the term. All tests were given meaningless titles so as not to betray their testing intent.

The following tests were used:

The Coopersmith (adjusted by Bennett) Self-esteem Test [2] to measure self-esteem.

The Rotter I/E Control Test [14] to measure locus of control.

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule [13] to measure assertiveness.

The Mach IV Test and the Mach *V* Test [1, pp. 10-34) to measure spontaneity, adaptability and cognitive set. The tests actually measure Machiavellian tendencies. High Machiavellians report an ability to both conform to and disregard protocol to gain advantage. They report an ability to both establish and utilize human relationships to advantage. They display ability to stay on course and avoid being side-tracked by emotion. These Machiavellian characteristics are interpreted as similar to spontaneity, adaptability, and cognitive set. The Mach V Test is a more sophisticated test, in that the stigma of social undesirability, which is evident in the Mach IV Test has been removed.

The Mitton Leadership Profile [10] to measure the big picture perspective. The test actually measures entrepreneurial tendencies, which in turn are future and systemically oriented.

THE RESULTS

The presumption was that both methods of training would:
[1] increase the subjects' self-esteem, indicated by significantly higher scores on the Coopersmith
[2] increase the subjects internal locus of control, indicated by significantly lower scores on the Rotter
[3] increase the subjects' assertiveness, indicated by significantly higher scores on the Rathus
[4] increase the subjects' spontaneity, adaptability, and cognitive set indicated by significantly higher scores on the Mach IV and Mach V
[5] increase the subjects' big picture perspective, indicated by significantly lower scores on the Mitton.

Before and after test score means and standard deviations for both the In-class group and Out-of-the- Classroom groups are presented in Table 1. The null hypothesis was tested using a matched-pairs t-test. The two-tail probability is also shown in Table 1. As the data indicate, for the Out-of-the-Classroom group the null hypothesis was rejected for each test (p < .001) and all mean differences were in the hypothesized direction. For the In-class group, only Mach IV shows significant change (p < .001)

TABLE 1
"BEFORE" AND "AFTER" TESTING RESULTS

	Rathus Assertion		Coopersmith Self-esteem		Rotter I/E Focus		Mach IV Machiavellianism		Mach V		Mitton Leadership	
	Out-of-class	In-class	Out-of-class	In-class	Out-of-class	In-class	Out-of-class	In-class	Out-of-class	In-class	Out-of-class	In-class
Mean Before	22.1	15.5	73.1	72.5	9.1	8.8	91.8	91.4	104.0	104.3	36.5	38.4
Std. Dev.	23.2	23.5	12.6	12.0	4.2	4.2	17.4	11.4	10.7	8.2	5.5	5.2
Mean After	40.3	18.4	78.3	73.6	6.7	8.1	112.0	98.6	113.7	106.8	32.7	37.6
Std. Dev.	21.5	27.0	11.3	12.6	4.4	4.0	19.4	13.6	10.7	9.4	6.4	6.4
n	65	36	66	37	83	37	83	37	83	37	83	37
t	-6.72	-1.96	-4.41	-0.83	5.97	1.82	-9.49	-3.44	-8.19	-1.82	5.59	1.18
p	<.001	>.05	<.001	>.05	<.001	>.05	<.001	<.001	<.001	>.05	<.001	>.05

DISCUSSION

The experiment indicates that the Out-of-the-Classroom experiential teaching is effective and superior to the more traditional In-class experiential training in changing people as measured by these tests. Assuming that the tests measure what they are purported to measure, and that the translation of what they measure is consistent with the qualities earlier ascribed to action-oriented managers, the conclusion can be drawn that the Out-of-the-Classroom experiential approach is a useful managerial training approach for changing attitudes and behaviors. Subjects changed significantly and favorably on all dimensions measured. Further, the In-class experiential approach, at least as conducted in this experiment, is not very useful in changing attitudes and behaviors except possibly for those qualities measured by the Mach IV.

A possible explanation as to why there was a significant shift in Machiavellianism for both groups as measured by the Mach IV test is: Machiavellianism was studied by both groups as part of their conceptual course work learning. The usual connotations of Machiavellianism are negative. In-depth study of the Machiavellian personality, however, reveals many characteristics both likable and effective, especially when compared to the authoritarian personality. Consequently, certain behaviors described in the tests, which were seen as socially undesirable at the beginning of the course, may be seen in a more favorable light by the end of the course, for both groups. The Mach IV test would detect this shift. However, the Mach V, which is designed to neutralize social desirability/undesirability would measure something more deeply rooted in the personalities of the subjects and would not measure the social thoughts that many people instinctively respond to. In other words, when the factor of social desirability/undesirability is removed as it is in the Mach V, there was no significant shift toward Machiavellianism in the In-class group.

OTHER FINDINGS OF INTEREST

There were no significant differences in test scores between male or female subjects in the beginning population. Women in the Out-of-the-Classroom group tended to increase their self-esteem more than men by the conclusion of the

experiment. This was significant at the .005 level.

The Out-of-the-Classroom students also repeatedly reported that they were doing things they had never done before--with satisfaction and self-assurance--to get results that they wanted. The In-class group did not exhibit or report an increased action pattern.

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