

SUPERVISORY TRAINING IN THE ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

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•THIS paper briefly outlines the development, implementation, and evaluation of a training program that is being undertaken to improve the supervisory skills of managers and supervisors of the Ontario Department of Transportation and Communications. The project, started in 1970, is being developed by the staff development section of the department with some assistance from a consulting company, the Sterling Institute of Canada. The development of the program is summarized under the following general headings.

1. Research—Research was undertaken in which more than 200 separate interviews of supervisory staff were conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to establish training needs of supervisory and managerial staff, gather and catalog information and incidents for use in role plays and case studies, and give staff development officers the opportunity to establish rapport with trainee supervisors.

2. Development—An analysis of the research data resulted in a statement of training needs. A program specification was developed that outlined the priorities among the needs and defined the objectives of each part of the program. During this time, the department's staff development section worked closely with the consultant and with the Ontario Government Central Agency Staff Development Unit. Program development continued during implementation with two basic purposes in mind: (a) make the program more effective and (b) instrument the program and make it possible for line managers and supervisors to run the program with only minimal input by the staff development group.

3. Implementation—During the implementation phase, the program was attended by 180 supervisors (first to fourth line) who were drawn from all parts of the organization. Each participant attended two 3½-day seminars that were held approximately 1 month apart. Each seminar accommodated 25 to 30 participants. The program was implemented over a period of about 6 months.

4. Evaluation—This is being carried out in three different stages: (a) an immediate post-seminar evaluation by the participants, (b) a short-term (6 months after the seminar) evaluation of the effects and achievements of the program, and (c) a long-term evaluation of the program in terms of performance and/or behavioral changes.

BACKGROUND

In June 1969, the Sterling Institute of Canada submitted a preliminary report on department-wide supervisory and management needs. The main findings of this report were as follows:

1. Managers and supervisors tend not to think and act as managers but rather as technical experts. This has produced a general imbalance in the performance of the managerial role.
2. Resources could be used more effectively in some areas by the introduction of a different managerial approach.
3. The department tends to be reactive rather than initiative in the performance of its role.

As a result of the study, the Institute made a number of recommendations, among which were the formation of a full-time staff development group and the inception of a supervisory training program to cover both newly appointed and long-term supervisors. Both recommendations were accepted. With the help of the consultant, the newly formed staff development section undertook an extensive program of interviews with supervisors across the province. The purposes of the interviews were to establish training needs, validate the consultant's findings, gather and catalog information and incidents for use in role plays and case studies, and give the staff development officers the opportunity to develop rapport with the potential trainees.

The interview program achieved its objectives. Analysis of the data revealed the following major areas of concern:

1. Most supervisors tend to act and think as technical experts rather than as managers.
2. Many supervisors tend to be reactive rather than initiative in the performance of their roles.
3. Many supervisors feel frustrated by a perceived lack of opportunity for growth and advancement. In some cases, this feeling is magnified by a perceived loss in personal responsibility and status.
4. Most supervisors have an inadequate understanding of the role and function of other department branches and sections. This applies even to the members of sections with common interests.
5. Most supervisors are highly task-oriented and do not have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to train and develop their subordinates.
6. Employees generally expressed dissatisfaction with their knowledge of how well they were performing.
7. The role of a supervisor as seen by his boss is dramatically different from the same role seen by those he supervises. The training needs study results suggested that the supervisors were faced with a conflict between the expectations of their bosses and the expectations of their staff and, further, that the supervisors had a very clear understanding of the extent of the conflict.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

A specification for the program was formulated based on the data obtained from the interviews. The program was named Encounter.

Each seminar was divided into two 3½-day sessions with approximately 1 month between sessions. The first session was referred to as Encounter I and the second as Encounter II. The adoption of a code name helped to draw attention to the program and provided a means of communication that avoided confusion with other programs.

The necessary materials, instructors' guides, films, games, and simulations were selected from various sources; some were developed in the department, whereas others were taken from commercial and government sources. All of the role plays and some of the case studies were taken from commercial and government sources. All of the role plays and some of the case studies were taken directly from incidents revealed in the interview data. A theory-simulation-practical application sequence was followed in each module.

The program was closely timed with sessions scheduled every evening. Seventy-five percent of the trainees in the first three seminars were from the construction branch. In the later programs, the trainees were a completely heterogeneous mix with one candidate selected from each branch and section. The employee level of the participants was mixed at all sessions. First, second, and third line supervisors were at every session, and fourth line supervisors attended some sessions. All of the sessions were held in a motor hotel. In some cases, the location was remote from all departmental headquarters, and all of the participants lived in. Other sessions were held in the hometown of most of the participants. At these sessions only 30 to 45 percent of the participants lived in. The locations of the accommodations did not affect the results of the sessions. Participation in evening sessions was almost 100 percent throughout. The early programs were carried out by a staff of four: two trainers and two audio-visual technicians. This number was reduced at the later sessions to a single trainer.

DESCRIPTION OF MODULES

Appraisal Module

Need—The original investigation showed that employees were not satisfied with the review process. The current appraisal system was perceived to be inadequate, and it was used at the discretion of the local manager. Many employees had not had a formal, or perhaps any, appraisal for 10 years or more.

Objective—The objective of the module was to change the negative attitude of the supervisor toward the appraisal process.

Methods—As part of the pre-course material, the trainee was provided with a duplicate set of three forms: job responsibility rating, job performance rating, and learning objectives. A set of the forms was made out by both the trainee and his supervisor. They then met to reach an agreement about the ratings.

Each trainee took part in an appraisal role play. The role plays were video-taped and were replayed and critiqued by the entire group. This took place during the three evening sessions.

A classroom session on appraisal was conducted using a case study. The session examined appraisals in the light of (a) what they were at the moment, (b) what they should be, and (c) how to change them.

Between Encounter I and Encounter II, participants were encouraged to develop an appraisal form, or part of a form, or a method and to use it on their own staff.

Observations—This portion of the program was well received. All of the participants completed their own pre-course forms. Approximately 80 percent of the participants completed the entire exercise, including reaching a consensus with their supervisors. In performance, employees learned that they were more highly rated by their bosses than by themselves. In achieving consensus, most participants found their bosses to be reasonable and flexible. Most participants were willing to have the results of the consensus displayed on a screen for discussion by the group. All those who participated fully stated that they had achieved a better understanding with their supervisor in both the performance and responsibility areas. The last part of the module, that is, the on-job attempt to develop an appraisal form and to use it, was only carried out by 5 percent of the participants. Approximately 15 percent of the participants did develop an appraisal form or some part of a form without actually testing it. All of the information obtained through this exercise is being accumulated and will be considered when revision of the current appraisal system is undertaken.

Communications Module

Need—The following needs were considered when the module was developed. Supervisors find themselves in dead-end jobs and fail to perceive or consider promotional opportunities that exist outside of their sections. Employees of certain sections do not have an adequate understanding of the functions of other sections within the department, especially in cases where the sections involved have interests in common.

Objectives—The objective of the module was to measurably increase the participants' general knowledge of the department. Each participant gained an in-depth knowledge of one section.

Method—A classroom session involving a film, games, and role plays was used to introduce various theories of communication and to give participants the opportunity to test the theories and their own normal practices in simulated situations.

In the second phase of the module, the group was divided into five work groups with five to six participants in each group. Each work group was made up of participants who had expressed an interest in learning more about a particular section. Each group was assigned the task of preparing a 20- to 30-minute presentation concerning the department section it had chosen to study. The groups were provided with the necessary equipment and assistance. Each group was also provided with a resource person from the appropriate section. Only 3 hours of seminar time were allowed for the preparation of the presentation.

Observations—Most groups spent many hours of their own time preparing their presentation. The final presentations appeared to be interesting, informative, and quite

imaginative. The resource people seemed enthusiastic. Most of the groups tended to identify strongly with the section that they discussed. This was especially evident during question periods. On one occasion, several observers sat through all five presentations under the illusion that the members of the groups were from the sections being presented.

EVALUATION

The purpose of the immediate post-seminar evaluation was to obtain the initial reactions of the participants in terms of pre-seminar information, general arrangements during the seminar, and the quality and content of the presentations. Most participants expressed general satisfaction with these aspects of the program.

After the completion of the first phase of the program, 10 participants representing a cross section of geographic location, function, and level were invited to take part in a 1-day feedback workshop. The group tended to be unexpectedly positive in its opinion of the seminar and suggested that the seminars be extended to all supervisors and that each seminar have participants from a broad cross section of function and level. These, plus other minor suggestions, were implemented in subsequent seminars.

Short-Term Evaluation

This part of the evaluation is still in progress and will continue for all future seminars. To ensure objectivity, the Government Central Agency is coordinating the evaluation process. To measure the impact of the program on the work situation, we developed a specific questionnaire. Approximately 6 months after the seminar, the questionnaire was sent to all 51 participants from two of the five regions. Forty-three participants responded. The results of the structured items in the questionnaire are briefly summarized in the Appendix.

The results indicate that the seminars were perceived as being relevant to the participants' work areas specifically and to the department generally. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents who had had specific expectations felt that their expectations had been met to different degrees. Fifty-six percent felt that their expectations had been met to a moderate extent. Only 58 percent of the respondents felt that the most important problems facing their units had been discussed more than slightly.

It seems that the major benefits of the program occurred in the area of department information exchange and communication. This information has apparently been useful to the participants as well as to the department as a whole.

Eighty-two percent of the respondents felt that they had gained new, "implementable" ideas from the seminar. Specifically, the contents of the communications module seem to have been implemented to a greater degree than the contents of the appraisal module. This may be a result of the problems associated with introducing new concepts into an existing system, that is, the problem of introducing change. The greater acceptance of the communication module may well reflect the nonspecific nature of its contents and implementation.

Sixty-six percent of the respondents reported that they had made either slight modifications or none at all in their operations as a result of the seminar. With regard to changes in productivity, 44 percent perceived signs of improved productivity in their own unit, and 23 percent felt the efficiency of the department had improved. Thirty-five percent of the respondents did not answer the question related to departmental productivity. The main indicator given for the increase in unit productivity is better supervisory performance. The increase in departmental productivity seems to be the result of increased communication among its members.

Most participants expressed a desire to attend more seminars. This indicates that the seminars have been successful in creating a climate of acceptance, support, and concern for training and development as a formalized activity. Many respondents expressed the opinion that additional and more extensive seminars would lead to useful change in the department.

Long-Term Evaluation

The next step in the evaluation process will be to obtain the opinions of the participants' supervisors, peers, and subordinates. Attempts will be made to measure job satisfaction and, where appropriate criteria exist, changes in performance. This should become increasingly possible with the implementation of the planning-programming-budgeting system and, in a few areas, the management-by-objectives system.

CONCLUSIONS

It would seem that the greatest achievements of the seminars have been in areas such as improved communications among the members of the seminar. The implementation of ideas in the more concrete areas, such as performance appraisals, has been unspecific and limited. It is obvious that any change in the current performance appraisal system will require a great change in the supervisory behavior of managers and strong organizational support. Such an effort must start at the top.

APPENDIX

Table 1.

| QUESTIONS | RESPONSE PERCENTAGE | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Uncertain | Agree | Strongly Agree | No Response |
| 1. <u>Relevance of seminar contents:</u> | | | | | | |
| a) immediate work situation | 5% | 12% | 16% | 65% | 2% | 2% |
| b) department generally | | 12% | 19% | 58% | 9% | 2% |
| 2. <u>Expected to gain from seminar</u> | <u>Yes</u> 77% | <u>No</u> 19% | | | | |
| 3. <u>Extent the most important problems were discussed.</u> | <u>Not At All</u> | <u>Slight Extent</u> | <u>Moderate Extent</u> | <u>Great Extent</u> | <u>V. Great Extent</u> | <u>No Response</u> |
| | 12% | 30% | 30% | 12% | 7% | 9% |
| 4. <u>As a result of the seminar:</u> | <u>Strongly Agree</u> | <u>Agree</u> | <u>Uncertain</u> | <u>Dis- Agree</u> | <u>Strongly Disagree</u> | |
| a) better idea of the overall goals, direction of the department | 5% | 19% | 26% | 49% | 2% | |
| b) better appreciation for others' problems and difficulties | 17% | 65% | 9% | 7% | 2% | |
| c) greater knowledge of functions and people | 9% | 73% | 9% | 9% | | |
| 5. <u>Utility of the information gained:</u> | <u>Not at All Useful</u> | <u>Slightly Useful</u> | <u>Moderately Useful</u> | <u>Greatly Useful</u> | <u>Com- pletely Useful</u> | <u>No Response</u> |
| a) to the participant | 2% | 9% | 47% | 33% | 9% | 2% |
| b) to the department | 5% | 16% | 35% | 35% | 7% | 2% |

Table 1. (Continued)

| QUESTIONS | | RESPONSE PERCENTAGE | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 6. <u>Gaining of new implementable ideas.</u> | <u>None</u> | <u>A few</u> | <u>Some</u> | <u>Many</u> | <u>Very Many</u> | <u>No Response</u> | |
| 7. <u>Modification of operations</u> | 9% <u>Not At All</u> | 33% <u>Slight Extent</u> | 47% <u>Moderate Extent</u> | 7% <u>Great Extent</u> | 2% <u>V.Great Extent</u> | 2% <u>No Response</u> | |
| | 26% | 40% | 27% | 2% | 5% | | |
| 8. <u>Implementation of modules</u> | <u>Not At All</u> | <u>Slight Extent</u> | <u>Moderate Extent</u> | <u>Great Extent</u> | <u>V.Great Extent</u> | <u>No Response</u> | |
| a) performance evaluation modules | 26% | 36% | 21% | 5% | - | 12% | |
| b) theories of motivation and leadership | 2% | 40% | 37% | 7% | 2% | 12% | |
| c) Group process and behaviour | 12% | 40% | 27% | 7% | - | 14% | |
| d) Communications module | 5% | 33% | 36% | 7% | 5% | 14% | |
| 9. <u>Increased productivity</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | | | | | <u>No Response</u> |
| a) immediate work unit | 44% | 49% | | | | | 7% |
| b) the department | 23% | 42% | | | | | 35% |
| 10. <u>Interested in further seminars</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Un-decided</u> | <u>Probably</u> | <u>Yes</u> | | | |
| | 5% | 12% | 18% | 65% | | | |
| 11. <u>Recommend such seminars to others</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Un-decided</u> | <u>Probably</u> | <u>Yes</u> | | | |
| | 2% | | 21% | 74% | 3% | | |
| 12. <u>Holding more seminars would lead to useful change</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Doubtful</u> | <u>Probably</u> | <u>Yes</u> | | | |
| | 5% | 5% | 39% | 49% | 2% | | |
| 13. <u>Overall opinion of the seminar</u> | <u>Very Poor</u> | <u>Poor</u> | <u>Average</u> | <u>Good</u> | <u>Very Good</u> | | |
| | | 2% | 19% | 65% | 14% | | |