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THE USE OF PRE-PLAYS IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The American Management Associations is in the fourth year of management education programs based upon a competency model. The model was developed for the AMA by McBer and Company and involves 18 competencies related to managerial initiative and planning, analytic skills, human resources management, direction of subordinates, and organizational leadership. Clients of the program are active managers from Fortune 500 companies.

In its assessment center, courses, and developmental programs, the AMA has utilized pre-plays of expected situations which participant/managers are likely to face when they return to their work places. Such simulations provide a realistic scrimmage for participant/managers who learn in that situation whether they do in fact have a handle on the competencies they seek to utilize. The group, video recording, and the faculty mentor assist in the evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The American Management Associations, a non-profit corporation, has been doing management education for sixty years. Recently its efforts have focused upon a model of managerial competency developed for the AMA by McBer and Company of Boston. The AMA's Institute for Management Competency has developed three programs--a master's level graduate program, an assessment/professional development workshop called the Competency Development Laboratory, and skill courses which use the competency model as foundational. Simulations, role plays, and videotape utilization play a heavy part in such programs. One technique which shows extremely high effectiveness in these programs is the pre-play (an anticipatory role play), used at the end of courses and of the Competency Development Laboratory.

THE PRE-PLAY

A pre-play is a lightly scripted scenario which the participant will actually face in which he or she expects to use a particular competency. Colleagues in a class work group play the roles of others in the situation which he or she expects to face back in the work place. An extensive evaluation process ensues after the role play with the participant/manager leading off-- how did it go? did you do what you expected to? what helped you do so? what complicated your doing so? Group members then report on their experience with the focal participant/manager and then critique the use of the competencies. The faculty mentor has the last word both in critique, summation and proposing alternate approaches.

The AMA uses the pre-play toward the end of the course or developmental laboratory. It represents steps 4, 5, and 6 in the Competency Acquisition Process (experimentation; practice; and application). The first steps which have preceded the pre-plays moment in the sun are recognition, understanding, and assessment. Thus, participants have already come to understand the competency model, the particular competencies, and their own strengths in relationship to them. A developmental need has been flagged by the participant/manager and an appropriate situation where the competency's use is applicable is identified.

For example, a staff person in a loosely structured association of medical facilities sought to work on Managing Group Process (essentially team building) and chose to role play a decision meeting regarding a new program whose cost/benefit ratio was uncertain. A marketing manager was interested in doing a research project on advertising media mix and effectiveness which would be charged to participating units and in this role play sought to build a coalition (the competency-- Use of Socialized Power) to achieve the goal.

THE DEMONSTRATION

The demonstration will use video-tape examples of actual pre-plays done by participant/managers. In the demonstration the pre-play examples will be accompanied by distributed background information on the particular person and situation, the competencies being tried out, and the process of preparation and analysis. Demonstration participants will, thus, learn something of the AMA competency model and its utility in role play situations and in management education.

Why is it effective? It builds upon the assessment process and student goals. It utilizes a group with a history of trust and effective feedback. It has a behavioral focus. The situations are real. It is video taped and then critiqued under the leadership of skilled faculty.