

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 11, 1984

## A MODEL FOR TEACHING MANAGEMENT SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

A model is proposed which helps students improve their competencies in critical management skills. Issues surrounding classroom application of the model are discussed.

### INTRODUCTION

Criticism of the preparation students receive in American business schools for management positions has become widespread in the business community. For example, Edward Mandt (1982), Vice President of Mutual Life Insurance Company, observed:

The business school graduate is adequately trained to get the first job but often has difficulty holding it and advancing. To be blunt, the typical business school curriculum fails to prepare students properly (p. 49).

Frank Endicott (1977), director of placement, emeritus, at Northwestern University, summarized the problems of new business school graduates this way:

The graduates lacked a practical, disciplined understanding of themselves and their environment. ...they didn't know how to use knowledge effectively. In short, they weren't educated (p. 48).

Sterling Livingston's (1971) indictment of business school preparation is well known:

Many highly intelligent and ambitious men are not learning from either their formal education or their own experience what they most need to know to build successful careers in management. Their failure is due, in part, to the fact that many crucial managerial tasks are not taught in management education programs (p. 88).

A common suggestion among critics is to incorporate management skill training into the business school curriculum, so that students are better prepared to use their knowledge rather than just regurgitate it. Making a distinction between teaching about management and teaching to manage is a prerequisite pointed out by a variety of these writers (Mintzberg, 1975; Miner, 1973; Pfeiffer, 1981).

Our intent in this paper is to describe a model for teaching students to manage rather than just about management. This model is based on the assumption that individuals will become more competent managers by developing critical management skills in the classroom rather than by waiting until they are on the job. We have developed and refined this model over the last several years in our teaching of undergraduate, graduate, and executive development courses in business schools and in public and private sector organizations. We do not claim our approach to be the only appropriate way to teach management skills, but we are convinced that it provides a useful alternative to traditional management and organizational behavior classroom approaches.

Our discussion begins with a brief treatment of what we mean by management skills and a description of a set of skills found in our investigations to be particularly relevant for effective managers. Our discussion then turns to a model for helping students develop and improve their competency in these skills. We conclude by reviewing a variety of issues connected with teaching management skills, giving particular attention to the evaluation of skill development in the college classroom.

### Identifying Critical Management Skills

In order to develop an approach to helping students develop management skills, we first had to be clear about what was meant by the term management skill. Skills differ from inherent personality traits (e.g., being aggressive), motives (e.g., need for security), roles (e.g., supervisor), and functions (e.g., planning). On the one hand, they encompass more than single managerial actions such as writing one's name or smiling at an employee. On the other hand, they encompass less than the multiple behaviors involved in the classic management functions (e.g., POSDCORB). Skills include cognitive knowledge of how to perform an action, but they involve more than just knowledge itself.

While it is difficult, and somewhat arbitrary, to establish the boundaries for what is and what isn't to be considered a skill, we feel comfortable in adopting the following definition of management skill: A management skill involves a sequential pattern of behaviors performed in order to achieve a desired out. (See Boyatzis, 1982, and Katz, 1974, for a more thorough discussion of what constitutes management skills.) This definition eliminates traits such as honesty or loyalty since these concepts are not defined by a specific, sequential set of behaviors. It also eliminates roles or functions such as leading or controlling as skills since they involve a variety of patterns of behaviors.

With an idea of what constitutes a management skill, our next step was to identify the skills that are performed by effective managers. First, we conducted a study in which over 400 managers at various hierarchical levels of both public and private organizations were asked to identify the skills they used in their work on a regular basis. (The specific results are reported in Whetten and Cameron, 1984). Our results were then compared with the characteristics of effective managers proposed by others (Boyatzis, 1982; Flanders, 1981; Ghiselli, 1963; Livingston, 1971; Miner, 1973; and Mintzberg, 1975). A summary list was formed that fit the following criteria: 1) the list contains a combination of both personal and interpersonal skills; 2) it focuses on proven characteristics of high performing managers; 3) it contains only characteristics that have trainable behavioral components; and 4) it avoids highly situational specific techniques that are best suited for on the job training. The final summary list is given in Table 1.

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### Social Learning Theory As An Approach to Teaching Management Skills

To effectively integrate management skills training into the curriculum requires the implementation of new pedagogical approaches. Staying with the traditional lecture-discussion format might teach students the skills they need to acquire, but It would not provide an opportunity for them to develop these skills. The use of traditional approaches would also give the erroneous impression that these skills are simply techniques to be recalled from memory and applied when the need arises and then returned to storage (similar to cost accounting or cash flow analysis techniques). Katz (1974) points out the error in thinking about management skills in this manner.

Real skill in working with others must become a natural, continuous activity, since it involves sensitivity not only at times of decision making, but also in the day-to-day behavior of the individual. Human skills cannot be a "sometime thing." Techniques cannot be randomly applied, nor can personality traits be put on or removed like an overcoat. Because everything which an executive says and does (or leaves unsaid or undone) has an effect on his associates, his true self will, in turn, show through. Thus, to be effective, the skill must be naturally developed, and unconsciously as well as consistently demonstrated in the in- every action. It must become an integral part of his whole being.

If students are to learn managerial skills, a new approach to classroom learning is needed. The approach we suggest relies heavily on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Davis and Luthans, 1980), which has been used widely in supervisory training programs in industry (Goldstein and Sorcher, 1974), as well as in allied professional education classroom settings such as teacher education and social work (Rose, Cayner and Edleson, 1977; Singleton, Spurgeon and Stammers, 1980). Social Learning Theory focuses on changing behavior through the modeling process. By focusing on shaping behaviors directly, Social Learning Theory differs from traditional approaches to education by relying less on the power of intellectual persuasion to induce changes in behavior and more on observing role models and adopting their behaviors.

The reason we are advocating the use of a modified form of Social Learning Theory in this paper is that there is substantial evidence that management effectiveness can be significantly improved by using it in skill training (see Burnaska, 1976; Smith, 1976; Moses & Ritchie, 1976; Lathan & Saari, 1979; Porras & Anderson, 1979). Extrapolating from the impressive track record of this approach to management training in applied settings, we are confident that students who do well in a course on management skills using this learning model will significantly increase the probability of their doing well as managers on the Job.

The learning model used most widely for skill training in industry usually consists of four steps (Goldstein and Sorcher, 1974): first, the presentation of principles (sometimes called behavioral guidelines, or key action steps) that are based on data collected from successful practicing managers or derived from general theories of human behavior; second, demonstration of the principles to participants by the instructor, a videotaped incident, or written scripts; third, opportunities to practice the principles in role plays or exercises; fourth, feedback on personal performance received from the instructor, experts, and/or peers.

Our suggestion for teaching management skills follows these four activities, but we also have made two additions. First, because most students do not have extensive managerial experience in organizations, It is difficult for them to know their current level of competence in management skills. Moreover, because of this lack of experience, the importance of developing some of the skills may not be immediately apparent. Therefore, we suggest the addition of a preassessment activity at the beginning of the learning experience which serves both to let students know how well they can perform the skill (since it is impossible to improve unless one knows where one is starting), and to motivate them to improve their skill performance.

Second, we have added an application activity at the end of the learning experience. This activity is designed to help students apply the skills in a setting similar to one they will face on the Job. its purpose is to provide an opportunity to practice the skill in an environment more similar to an actual managerial environment than the college classroom. Most application activities require that students record their experiences in a journal or an essay so as to analyze their degree of success or failure.

Based on these modifications, our suggested approach to teaching management skills follows the format in Table 2. First, at the beginning of each skill learning experience, students should be given an opportunity to assess their current level of understanding and competence in each skill topic before engaging in any learning activities. This skill preassessment takes the form of a questionnaire, questions about a brief case, or a role play or other experiential activity. The purpose of the preassessment is to increase the efficiency of the learning process by focusing attention on deficiencies in knowledge or performance.

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Second, conceptual material based on theory and research should be presented in a skill learning activity. The purpose of this activity is to present the most essential and relevant material available on each subject. That is, "need-to-knows" take priority over "nice-to-knows," and empirically tested principles take precedence over anecdotal or opinion data. The specific objective is to provide a sound rationale for the behavioral principles that are summarized and enumerated by the instructor. it is important that behavioral guidelines are specified by the instructor rather than just descriptions of theories, cases, or examples. This set of guidelines serves as the foundation for subsequent practice and application activities, and it is generally presented best in a lecture-discussion format.

Third, a skill analysis activity should be presented wherein students are asked to analyze one or two brief cases. These cases serve both a modeling function, showing competent and/or incompetent skill performance, and a cognitive function, allowing students to analyze how the behavioral principles apply in real-world situations. The intent of this section is to bridge the gap between intellectual assimilation and behavioral application. Critiquing the performance of managers in these cases provides students with an opportunity to check comprehension of the skill learning material prior to practicing it them

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selves, and to analyze a model of the skill being performed. We have used written cases for this activity as well as video tapes, audio recordings, and movies.

Fourth, the skill practice activity allows students to begin trying out and experimenting with the behavioral guidelines in the supportive atmosphere of the classroom. It is important that they avoid getting into the rut of simply mimicking the style or particular mannerisms of a role model (either written or visual). Instead, they are encouraged to experiment, adapting each set of behavioral principles to their particular personality and interpersonal style. Feedback from peers and from the instructor performs an important function during this activity by allowing students the opportunity to correct mistakes, rehearse various alternatives, and find out with little risk how well they are doing. Student observers sharpen their observation, perception, and feedback skills as they help one another, and the new skill behaviors begin to become internalized and habitual. Skill practice activities generally take the form of exercises, role plays, and group activities, all of which are accompanied by observation and feedback.

Fifth, the skill application activity contains specific assignments to facilitate the transfer of classroom learning to everyday practice. These assignments may ask students to teach the skill to someone else (an excellent test of understanding), to report on the impact that friends and associates have on others when they succeed or fail in utilizing the behavioral principles, to report on a personal effort to apply the principles in an appropriate setting, to confront a problem where skill performance is required, and so on. The intent of these activities is to provide the opportunity to perform the skill in a real-world setting while still maintaining a close monitoring relationship with the instructor. Opportunities for self-analysis and feedback from others during this activity can help refine and improve skill performance.

Combining these five activities in teaching skill development has advantages over other common approaches to teaching. For example, it incorporates the lecture-discussion technique, but goes beyond that method by allowing for personal diagnosis and skill practice. This approach also uses case analysis as a method, but cases are incomplete as a single tool for learning to manage. They help students analyze problems and apply concepts to new situations, but preassessment, presentation of behavioral guidelines, practice, and application all are left out of the traditional case approach. Similarly, experiential exercises and group participation have their place, but they are not included merely to illustrate concepts or theories, (or even just to entertain students), as happens in many textbooks and classrooms. Rather, exercises are designed as practice opportunities and evaluation activities where competencies can be improved. (Preassessment instruments, behavioral guidelines, cases, practice exercises, and application assignments are provided for the nine skills listed in Table 1 in Whetten and Cameron, 1984.)

### Issues In Teaching Management Skills

Introducing management skills into the business school curriculum is not a straightforward nor unencumbered endeavor. A variety of issues are associated with teaching management skills that must be addressed.

For example, fewer subjects can be covered in a skills course

than in a traditional OB or management course. Extra time is required for students to analyze and practice new behaviors. Faculty must be prepared to model some of the behaviors associated with effective skill performance. Students often look to them as an example whether or not faculty are prepared to be role models. Large class sizes are more difficult to handle than small classes when teaching skills. The logistics of video-taping each student's performance, for example, is often prohibitive. Teaching management skills is seldom directly connected to faculty members' research. Trade-offs between spending extra time in teaching versus research, therefore, may become an issue. Alternative class schedules may need to be considered. Traditional 50 minute time slots may not always be appropriate. The level at which the skill course is taught is an important consideration. It generally should not be the first management or OB class students take, because the theory and management principles taught in most introductory courses serve as a good foundation for students' skill development. (We have found that the closer students are to graduation and the job market the more motivated they are to develop skill competencies.) Care must be taken to maintain students' sense of self-worth. Derogatory or insensitively given feedback can be more damaging than helpful as students try to improve their behavioral skills.

Aside from these issues, probably the most important issue associated with teaching management skills is how to evaluate and grade skill competency. Rose, Crayner, and Edleson (1977) pointed out:

The development of professional interpersonal skills is of paramount concern.... However, few of these [skill training] programs have been evaluated to determine their effectiveness or their relevance to interpersonal activities. At best, participants are asked to indicate their satisfaction with programs or are given some form of paper-and-pencil test to measure what they have learned (p. 125).

The cognitive component of skill development can be assessed relatively easily using traditional paper- and-pencil tests, but other methods are also required if behavioral competency is to be evaluated. Evaluating the behavioral component of skills often raises issues of what criteria are to be included, who is to do the evaluating, can an equitable standard be established, and how long will it take? We have derived several guidelines that have proven useful to us in addressing these issues in our own skill development classes.

First, behavioral guidelines must be clearly specified. It is difficult to assess skill competency unless it is clear what constitutes effective performance. That is why the skill learning activities must be more than a review of theory and examples. Instructors must help students learn what behaviors are to be performed (see, for example, Whetten & Cameron, 1984).

Second, multiple assessment sources are needed. Because there is always some subjectivity in evaluating skill competency, instructors may be accused of being biased, arbitrary, or stylistic in rating students' performance. Having multiple rating sources guards against the accusation that "it's your opinion against mine." We use four sources of ratings to assess the extent to which students perform a skill competently: (1) the own self-assessments after viewing a video or audio recording of performance; (2) peer assessments of performance;

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which are always guided by an assessment or observer's form (i.e., a form outlining the appropriate behaviors to be performed); (3) instructor's ratings; and (4) outside ratings, frequently business executives or practicing managers who are invited into the class. Evaluation from these four sources is usually done in the context of a role play, in-basket exercise, interview, formal presentation, or group problem solving session.

Third, multiple assessment devices are needed. Because traditional tests are inadequate by themselves, we have relied on at least four different devices to grade skill competency. They are not listed in priority order, because depending on the skill being assessed, the weighting of importance given to each assessment device may change: (1) paper-and-pencil examinations which assess the cognitive component of the skill (e.g., reading material); (2) rater evaluations of behavior from the four sources mentioned above; (3) a personal journal kept by each student. This journal is used by students to analyze their own skill performance and skill application, and frequently we have asked students to respond to certain questions or problem situations in their journals. Students write in Journals regularly, and the written material is evaluated several times during the skill course. Our experience with requiring students to keep journals has been much the same as Kaiser (1981), Proffoff (1975), and others:

...the Journal was a vehicle that led to greater creativity. But I found that a good many Journals were Just diaries: without a project to be done, people's diaries Just went around in circles (p. 76).

When kept in connection with attempts to improve skill competency, Journals become powerful tools for personal growth for students as well as a device for evaluation by the instructor; (4) written essays by students, which address issues, solve problems, discuss when particular skills are relevant, point out conditions in which the behavioral guidelines are not appropriate, and so on. These essays differ from Journal entries in that they are much longer, and they generally involve library research.

The fourth evaluation guideline is that presence-absence or frequency-type rating scales are often better than are good-bad rating scales in evaluating skills. It frequently is easier, less controversial, and more helpful to students to record whether or not they performed a behavior, or how many times they displayed an action, than to judge how well they did or how good they are. Presence-absence evaluations are more objective than are good-bad evaluations, and reliable ratings are less dependent on prior experience by the rater (i.e., untrained students can serve as raters). Moreover, suggestions for how to improve skill performance can be more easily provided by suggesting what behaviors to include in skill performance than to simply suggest, "do it better." This type of evaluation requires that the behavioral guidelines associated with each skill are specified in a presence-absence format, so that just doing certain behaviors is sufficient to indicate effective skill performance. For example, performing effective delegation requires specifying a time to report back, indicating the level of initiative to be taken by subordinates, informing those to be affected by the delegated task, and so on. The evaluation question is, was the behavior performed? Not, how well was it performed? Differences in the quality of skill performance always exist among students, of course, but those quality differences are more reliably assessed by experts such as the instructor or the outside raters than by student peers.

Previous experience in management is generally a prerequisite to differentiating reliably among qualitative differences in performances.

We have discovered that evaluating students is much more time consuming in management skill courses than in regular O.B. or management courses. This is mainly due to the necessity of rating behavioral performance and providing feedback in addition to reading papers and grading tests. This extra time commitment is one of the major inhibitors to management skill training being widely practiced in business schools. We have tried to reduce the extra time required of instructors by having multiple rating exercises going on simultaneously (where multiple sets of peers or outside raters are present) and by instituting several structural changes in the format of the class itself. For example, we have used lab sessions (similar to a biology lab), conducted by teaching assistants, for the skill practice and the evaluation activities. Students receive a lab grade from the TA. We have divided large classes into smaller sections and had teaching assistants conduct the sections independently. We have had students go to the media center on their own time to be video-taped in certain evaluation exercises. Tapes were analyzed later by the instructor or in class. We have limited the number of students permitted in the course so that the workload was less burdensome. Each of these formats has advantages and disadvantages, and some may be more practical than others in certain institutions. Despite these time conservation methods, however, instructors in management skill courses must still recognize that evaluation and feedback play a central role in helping students develop competencies. Therefore, the time required to perform these activities properly is greater than in most other types of classes.

### Conclusion

We have suggested in this paper that including management skills in the business school curriculum will be a positive step in helping students prepare for successful management careers. It is important first, however, to identify the skills required by effective managers, and to teach them in a way that behavioral change occurs, not just cognitive awareness. Evaluating skill competency in students also requires methods that are different from traditional college classes. In response to these requirements, we have presented an approach to teaching and evaluating management skills that we have found to be successful in college classrooms and executive training seminars. That approach relies on Social Learning Theory, and it prescribes that five distinct learning activities be present in teaching each skill.

There are some faculty and administrators who still argue that teaching management skills is inappropriate in a university setting. Education should be separated from training, they claim. Education belongs in the university; training belongs in the technical school or on-the-job. Our feeling is that not only are management skills a prerequisite for making students better prepared to be successful managers, but skill competencies are a critical requirement for any educated person. A quotation from John Holt (1973) summarizes our point of view succinctly:

When we talk about intelligence, we do not mean the ability to get a good score on a certain kind of test or even the ability to do well in school; these are at best only indicators of

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something larger, deeper and far more important. By intelligence we mean a style of life, a way of behaving in various situations. The true test of intelligence is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don't know what to do.

Developing such intelligence is the goal of management skills courses.

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TABLE 1 Characteristics of Effective Managers: Management Skill Topics

<p>1. Self Awareness --personality --values --needs --cognitive style</p>	<p>6. Effective Delegation and Joint Decision Making --assigning tasks --evaluating performance --autonomous vs joint decision making</p>
<p>2. Managing Personal Stress --time management --goals --activity balance</p>	<p>7. Gaining Power &amp; Influence --sources of power --converting power to influence --beneficial use, not abuse, of power</p>
<p>3. Creative Problem Solving --divergent thinking --conceptual blocks --redefining problems</p>	<p>8. Managing Conflict --sources of conflict --assertiveness and sensitivity --handling criticism</p>
<p>4. Establishing Supportive Communication --listening --empathy --counseling</p>	<p>9. Improving Group Decision Making --chairing meetings --avoiding pitfalls of bad meetings --making effective presentations</p>
<p>5. Improving Employee Performance Motivating Others --needs/expectations --rewards --timing</p>	

TABLE 2 Suggested Skill Learning Approach

COMPONENTS	CONTENTS	OBJECTIVES
1. Skill Prerequisite	Survey Instruments Role Plays	Assess current level of skill competence and knowledge.
2. Skill Learning	Written Text Behavioral Guidelines	Teach correct principles and present rationale for the behavioral guidelines.
3. Skill Analysis	Cases	Provide examples of appropriate and inappropriate skill performance. Analyze behavioral guidelines and why they work.
4. Skill Practice	Exercises Simulations Role Plays	Practice behavioral guidelines. Adapt general prescriptions to personal style. Receive feedback and assistance.
5. Skill Application	Assignments (behavioral and written)	Transfer classroom learning to real-life situations. Foster on-going personal development.