Development In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 21, 1994

SOME RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CULTURAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENCE

Carroll C. Halterman, University of Denver

ABSTRACT

Experienced project team members (N = 341) outdoor experiential training graduates (N —SO), and software development specialists (N = 32) assess the effectiveness of leader influences. Each of the three groups places different values on influence attributes and characteristics. Each sees the most effective influence as a *person's perceived experience and expertise* Each also highly values a *person's ability to provide interesting and challenging work.* Neither the *application of pressure* nor the *assessment of penalties* is seen to influence effectively.

CULTURE & EXPERIENCE, INFLUENCE & TRAINING

Every manager, educator, and facilitator is concerned with how the people he or she deals with can be influenced. One asks. "What kinds of actions or approaches can a trainer, a trainee, a group member or a group leader, rely upon to move others toward his or her goals?"

Influence is best understood as how persuasive we come across to others. We can think of it as "those attributes, characteristics, or activities of an individual that result in gaining desired performance."

But what one does is influential only if others think it isl This paper examines three ostensibly different classes of trainee respondents, to see what specific leader activities or characteristics *each group feels to be effective* in their specific domain. Our interest is in seeing how dissimilar [trainee] cohorts are influenced, and how they are not.

THE METHOD WE EMPLOYED

Customarily, assessments of influence and effectiveness are made by the perceptions of superiors or outsiders; or by performance outcomes; or by evaluators other than directly involved work group members (for some examples see Haleblian & Finkelstein, (1993); Neslund,(1 991); and Spencer(1 993). Out of respect for Roy Jacques' position that "... meaning should be sought in social processes rather than in abstractions,"(1992. p. 104) this study draws primarily on how respondents themselves say they perceive another's influence.

The Instrument

Well-known descriptors of "leader influence" (Gemmill & Thamhain, 1973; Halterman, Sotiriou & Liu, 1989) were reexamined, retested and refrained to insure(1) content and current relevance; (2) readability and understanding; and (3) freedom from item bias. Cochran's

EXHIBIT 1
STATEMENTS EXPRESSING INFLUENCE FACTORS

The team leader
..who has formal authority over members.
..whom members respect, and who has relevant experience and expertise.
..who makes sure members get interesting and challenging work.
..who has a say about work assignments.
..who affects or determines rewards.
..whom members see as a personal friend.
..who applies pressure or assesses penalties.

alpha = .72. The resultant aphorisms are shown as Exhibit 1. Respondents are simply asked to indicate "the *EXTENT* to which each of the seven statements describes *AN EFFECTIVE LEADER.*" They reply on a five-point Likert scale, where "1" presents the item as seen to be "Very True", and "5" presents it as seen as "Not Very True."

The Samples

Three different trainee groups, each with different cultural, organizational, and educational experience, are examined and compared.

Project Team Professionals. This sample is composed of 341 experienced project personnel from 31 different US companies. These experienced team members were sampled during 1988-89 after ettending training sessions to update and advance their project management skills. It is referred to as "Project" respondents.

Enrolled MBA Students. This sample is composed of graduate students at a college of business. Data were gathered during 1991-92, upon completion of required Outward Bound experiences. This activity, required of each enrollee, must be completed at the beginning of his or her academic program. Non-US responses were excluded, leaving 80 replies. This second sample is referred to as "Outward Bound" respondents.

Technological Teams. In response to today's focus on the training of technology-based groups (Opper & Fersko-Weiss, 1992) we assessed a sample (n=32) of software specialists. These respondents design and redevelop guidance programs in a large high-tech firm, which has a heavy emphasis on team development. This third sample is referred to as "Software Specialists."

The Statistical Approach.

Data were processed by SPSSX. Means, ranks, variance, F-scores and p-levels were computed. Results are in Table 1 and Figure 1.

RESULTS
Significant differences are found between assessments made by each

TABLE 1
PROJECT (PR), OUTWARD BOUND (OB)& SOFTWARE (SFF) RESPONDENTS COMPARED.

| INFL	PR	*F	OB	*F	SFT	*F	PR
EXPE	1.39	13.7	1.65	7.0	1.56	3.9	1.39
CHA	2.04		1.91		2.03		2.04
FREN	3.50	118.	2.40	54.8	3.94	5.5	3.50
REW	2.61		2.63		2.88		2.61
ASSI	2.57	18.1	2.96	11.7	2.31		2.57
FOR	2.53	52.3	3.30		3.34	15.2	2.53
PEN	3.29	22.6	3.80		3.81		3.29
MANOVA>>		30.1		54.9		4.7	
p. =		.000		.000		.000	

Of the three respondent groups (Table 1.. Figure 1.) Members of different kinds of teams *are dissimilar in the way they value influence attributes and characteristics.* Specifically, the perceived effectiveness of influence attributes and characteristics differs significantly among project teams, software teams, and educational teams.

DISCUSSION

All three groups agree (1) that the most effective influence springs from an individual's perceived *expedience & expense.* Also, (2) they closely agree that it is highly influential for a person to be able to provide *challenging and interesting work* (cf Sheridan, 1992). And (3) they essentially agree on the value they place on a leader's ability to *determine rewards.*

The three groups diverge (1) in the value they place on a loader's per*zone/friendship* as an influencer (it seems to be uniquely important to student trainees; (2) in how they evaluate a person's *formal authority* [this seems to be of higher value to project trainees); and (3) in how they assign importance to someone's having a say about

FIGURE 1
PROJECT. OUTWARD BOUND & SOFTWARE
RESPONDENTS COMPARED.
[Transformed: highest Y-value has highest Importance
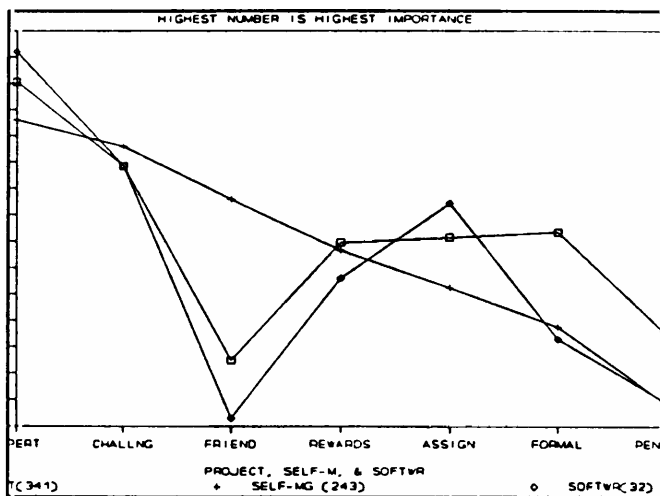
panicipants 'work assignments. Interestingly, the software specialists seem to give this latter variable the most importance, whereas the Outward Bound alumni give it the least (See Fig.1).

Ibarra (1933. p. 495) calls our attention to a close relationship between influence, expertise and innovation. Problem solving (or innovation) happens to be a common thread running through the activities of all of our samples.

As Ibarra would probably explain (cf.p. 494), our findings are consistent with other researchers' conclusions that "the importance of various sources of power is contingent upon the specific domain in which influence is to be exercised."

CONCLUSIONS

Project teams outdoors-experiential teams and software design teams differ in their perceptions of the effectiveness of influence attributes and characteristics.

Our respondents say that among a person s most important influence bases are (1) his or her experience and expertise, and (2) an ability to

Keep the work challenging and interesting (cf. Sheridan). Both applying pressure and awarding penalties appear to be relatively ineffective.

Manifest developmental requirements like (1) the *need for network building* (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993); (2) the *primacy of members' interpersonal relationships* (Sheridan); (3) the necessary *integration of performance and/earning* (Spencor); and (4) the dominant importance of a *"friendship network"* (Ibarra) oil point to a sort of cold reality in "experiential training & development": --tho nourishment of trainee interpersonal growth is paramount.

Facilitating such learning and growth requires that we know and respect others' opinions of what they feel to be influential or important, if we are to skillfully expedite their training, learning and change.

REFERENCES

Brass, D. & Burkhardt M. 1 993. Potential power and power use: An investigation of structure and behavior Academy of Management Journal. 36 3. 441-470.

Gommill, G. & Thamhain, J. 1973 The effectiveness of different power styles of project managers in gaining project support IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management. Vol. EM-20, #2 (May).

Haleblian, J. & Finkeistein, S. 1993 Top management team size. CEO dominance, and firm performance: The moderating roles of environmental turbulence and discretion. Academy of Management Journal 36 4:844-863.

Halterman, C.. Sotiriou C. & Liu L. 1 989. Characteristics of the influential project loader of the 1 990's. The Journal. Colorado-Wyoming Academy of Science XXII: 31.

Ibarra, H.1993 Network centrality, power end innovation involvement; determinants of technical and administrative roles Academy of Management Journal 363 47 1-501.

Jacques, R. 1 992. Critique and theory building: Producing knowledge "from the kitchen." The Academy of Management Review. 17 3: 582-606.

Neslund, R. (1991) Team excellence on large teams Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Denver Colorado

Opper S. & Fersko-Weiss H. 1992 Technology for Teams.(Van Nostrand Reinhold. New York, N.Y.) 181 pp.

Sheridan, J. 1992 Organizational culture and employee retention The Academy of Management Journal. 35. 5:1036-1056

Spencer, K.1993 [Review of The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization. The Academy of Management Executive VII, 3: 100-103