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A SURVEY OF BEHAVIORAL LABS USED BY AMERICAN BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

As the American workplace becomes more automated and less humanized, a new breed of employee is reacting adversely to the lack of a high-touch, people-approach to management. Critics of the situation contend that the emphasis on production technology and scientific methodology is reinforced by the "rational model" of management that is being taught in today's business schools. The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business and the European Foundation of Management Development have recently called on business schools to incorporate affective, cognitive skills into the curriculum to help managers deal with the high-touch need. Behavioral labs are being encouraged as a learning tool which can be used by educators to meet this challenge. This study finds that U.S. business schools have shown very little progress in incorporating behavioral lab experiences into their curricula.

THE HIGH-TOUCH NEED

Employee Dissatisfaction

One of the more perplexing problems facing today's management deals with the dehumanizing effects of the operational technology that dominates the typical workplace. As more and more automated equipment and systems are incorporated, people seem to be more and more turned-off. Some of the most common and popular catch-sayings of our time are anti-work and anti-employer in nature (e.g., "TGIF" and "Take this job and shove it"). Leboeuf [1] writes, "In fact, the situation has deteriorated to such an extent that fewer than half of all Americans report being very satisfied with their jobs and 60 percent would prefer to have a different job." Toffler [7] adds:

"Even supposedly mature and complacent businessmen are not exempt from this disaffection with the present. The American Management Association finds that fully 40 percent of middle managers are unhappy in their jobs, and over a third dream of an alternative career in which they feel they would be happier. Some act on their dissatisfaction. They drop out, become farmers or ski-bums, they search for new life styles, they return to school or simply chase themselves faster and faster around a shrinking circle and eventually crack under the pressure."

Blame the Business School

The current focus on high-tech without high touch- in the workplace is caused, say the critics, by the philosophy expounded by U.S. business schools. The most specific criticism of the business school is that it teaches the "rational model" of management, which critics claim: (1) is too academic and too scientific; (2) is too quantitative and too technique-oriented; (3) is too narrow; (4) maximizes short-run profits at the expense of long-run effectiveness; (5) does not foster creativity or produce entrepreneurship, (6) punishes mistakes and fosters risk-avoidance at all costs; (7)

promotes paralysis-by-analysis; (8) creates overcomplexity and inflexibility; (9) fails to recognize and facilitate informality; (10) denigrates values; (11) produces managers without vision, without an overall sense of business perspective, and without the ability to cope; and (12) fails to develop the people-approach to management [1;4;5].

The AACSB/EFMD Challenge

Because of these and other criticisms leveled at business schools, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) conducted a three-step project to determine: (1) The Changing Expectations of Society in the Next Thirty Years, featuring a colloquium at Windsor Castle in February 1979; (2) The Implications for Management in the XXI Century, featuring a colloquium at Arden House in November 1979; and (3) The Implications for Management Education and Development for the XXI Century, featuring an international conference in Paris in June 1980. The results of the project were widely published through three volumes, one for each step in the project [2;3;6], and were the focus of the AACSB national and regional meetings for the years 1979 to 1981.

The major thrust of the AACSB/EFMD findings was to challenge business schools to provide future managers with more effective affective noncognitive skills. The AACSB/EFMD reports contend that managers of the future will be forced to utilize greater amounts of noncognitive skills such as those required for empathetic interpersonal communication, interpersonal relationships, negotiating, and bargaining. This will involve the learning of affective attributes such as leadership, administration, oral and written communication, interpersonal behavior, organizational behavior, organization development and change, and the emerging skills of the future--negotiating and bargaining. According to the AACSB/EFMD, the future will be shaped by negotiated arrangements in a transformed social contract, demanding new learning in the critical field negotiating and bargaining. Because of the pluralistic nature of international business, there is a need to develop more flexible and humanized organizational structures through a comparative management approach based on a people-approach to management behavior [2;3].

AACSB Accreditation Philosophy

In the past, the AACSB has employed an "input" philosophy in determining which business schools to accredit. That is, the quality of a school was measured in terms of inputs such as student ACT/SAT scores, student GPA, faculty credentials, class size, library holdings, the number of secretaries, and so on. However, in recent years, the AACSB committee has been developing a new methodology whereby accreditation standards would shift away from inputs to outputs, by testing graduating students to measure their knowledge of the Common Body of Knowledge (CBK). To date, valid and reliable paper and pencil instruments have been developed that measure all areas of

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the CBK except for the affective, noncognitive skills discussed above. To measure these "people" skills, it is being proposed that accreditation teams will observe samples of graduating students, who are placed in controlled experiential situations in which they must demonstrate specific people skills. In order to perform these tests, schools must possess behavioral labs complete with observation facilities. In order for students to learn the necessary skills for the tests, they must take courses that utilize behavioral labs for experiential exercises.

THE STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of this inquiry was to study and evaluate the utilization of behavioral labs by U.S. business schools in order to meet the challenge of AACSB/EFMD and the emerging AACSB accreditation standards.

Methodology

The study was conducted in three steps: (1) a survey instrument was mailed to the deans of the 516 business schools who were members of the AACSB to determine if their schools used behavioral labs; (2) for those schools that reported the use of labs, a second questionnaire was used to obtain more indepth information; and (3) personal visits were made to selected schools for additional information.

RESULTS

General

Of the 516 U.S. business schools, only 56 reported the use of behavioral labs. Follow-up questionnaires were then sent to those 56 schools to obtain further information. That second inquiry determined that four schools, whose deans had reported the use of labs, did not in fact have labs or use labs. Thus, only 52 of the 516 surveyed schools were found to be using behavioral labs. As shown in Table 1, 42 of those 52 labs were administered by business schools and 10 were administered by departments outside the business school. Of the labs administered outside the business school, participation on the part of the business school was usually formally encouraged but seldom accomplished. A personal visit was then made to 26 campuses to gather more in-depth information about the labs.

TABLE 1
OVERALL SURVEY RESULTS

	n	%
Business Schools Surveyed	516	-
Schools Using Labs:		
Within Business School	42	8
Outside Business School	10	2
Total Reporting Labs	52	10
Lab Schools Visited	26	5

Lab Utilization

Overall, research, not teaching, was found to be the major

behavioral lab activity. As indicated in Table 2, research was the only activity for 25 percent of the labs and was the primary activity in another 67 percent of the labs. Teaching was found to be the primary activity in only 8 percent of the labs and it was never found to be the only activity. Thus, research dominated lab use in 92 percent of the behavioral labs.

TABLE 2
UTILIZATION OF THE 52 BEHAVIORAL LABS

	n	%
Research is the only lab activity	13	25
Research is the primary lab activity	35	67
Teaching is the only lab activity	0	0
Teaching is the primary lab activity	4	8

Lab course is required for graduation:		
Undergraduate	0	0
Graduate (MBA)	8	15

Regularly scheduled lab periods:		
Undergraduate	4	8
Graduate (MBA)	2	4

Have lost lab space due to		
Underutilization	32	62

Even when the labs were made available for teaching activities, the level of student exposure to the labs was found to be minimal. None of the schools surveyed required a behavioral lab experience for all baccalaureate students, and only eight of the 52 schools required a lab experience as part of their master's programs.

Furthermore, lab scheduling was usually on a "spot- need" basis, as regularly prescheduled lab periods were found in only eight percent of the undergraduate programs and in only four percent of the graduate programs.

One significant finding was the 52 labs were poorly utilized and, as a result, 62 percent of the 52 schools had already lost lab space which the administrations had reassigned to other uses such as lecture space, student advising, office space, and storage space.

Learning Exercises

Another significant finding was the lack of commonality among the various experiential exercises used in the labs. It seems that no specific exercises have emerged as "standards" or "stars" that are used by a number of teachers. There was a greater commonality among the decision-making exercises used in operations management and business simulation. Although a few professors use large games that last a full semester, most professors preferred the use of shorter games, each dealing with a different type of decision-making problem.

Proponents of the shorter games base their preference on two points: (1) in longer games, students tend to

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become indoctrinated around one factor or variable and fail to achieve an overall understanding of all factors; and (2) in shorter games, the make-up of student teams can be varied, giving each student the opportunity to learn to work with different kinds of people.

The most common uses for labs for student behavioral learning were in communications and sales presentations. Several schools had programs whereby tapes of student presentations can be studied in special viewing rooms. At four schools, viewing carrels were also used to view selected presentations by either students in order to study examples of special techniques. These same carrels were also used to view tapes of selected lectures and films/tapes, such as "Biznet," transmitted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

One school developed two unique interviewing programs: (1) The Career Interview Program (CIP), by which the student learns interviewing techniques for the interviewee; and (2) The Simulated Interview Program (SIP), by which the student learns interviewing techniques for the interviewer.

A number of tips were offered on improving student learning in labs: (1) within student teams, students may get by with little effort or involvement, unless special steps are taken by the facilitator to draw that student out; (2) in some of the more complex business simulation games, slower students must play the game a second time in order to fully grasp the learning objective; (3) students are more comfortable participating in front of a camera than a two-way mirror; and (4) students who have seen the observation room tend to "perform" for the mirror more than students who have not seen the observation room.

Lab Administration

The overall direction of the labs was accomplished by a professor in 85 percent of the cases, by a technical staff person in eight percent of the cases, and by a graduate assistant in eight percent of the cases. The scheduling of the lab facilities was done by a professor in 19 percent of the labs, by a technical staff person in 12 percent of the labs, and by a secretary in 69 percent of the cases.

Staff support appeared to be poor, as 12 percent of the labs had a full-time secretary, 60 percent had to do with part-time or shared secretarial services, and only 15 percent had full-time technical staff. Finally, 85 percent of the labs had an average of 1.2 graduate assistant positions.

Maintenance of equipment was not perceived to be a problem, because most of the modern equipment is fairly maintenance free. Maintenance is performed by a central university department in 85 percent of the cases, by a business school technician in 12 percent of the cases, and by outside commercial firms in four percent of the cases.

Only three schools provide faculty and other users with a formal and extensive "User's Manual" that stipulates operational rules and clear instructions for the use of the facilities and equipment. Few schools have developed specific procedures and forms for the administration of the labs. Those schools have found that the forms are best filled-out by a trained staff member based on oral inputs from the potential user. A graduate student is then usually assigned to each approved request to coordinate the operation and to assure that all materials and equipment are properly available. Chargebacks can then be used to allocate the costs

to the appropriate departmental budget.

Lab Facilities

For the 52 labs, the average facility consisted of five activity rooms and two observation/control rooms. As shown in Table 6, 62 percent of the labs use separate observation/control room while 23 percent use controlled hallways for this purpose. Thus 85 percent have observation stations with two-way mirrors, and 15 percent have no mirrors and no observation stations. Two-way voice communication is found in 85 percent of the labs, while the other 15 percent have complete voice networks linking all the rooms. Video recording is done in 88 percent of the labs, and 46 percent have video play-back facilities. Computer terminals were found in 46 percent of the labs. Three schools had formal boardrooms for making presentations. Several schools had special research facilities such as Focus Group Rooms, Consumer Panel Rooms, and Tasting Labs.

Lab Operational Problems

One of the most common problems reported is that the lab rooms tend to become hot and stuffy. The smaller the room, the worse the problem. Window-mounted air conditioners can relieve the problem but make sound recording difficult. Overall, 90 percent of the labs reported heat problems, 63 percent reported sound problems, and 57 percent reported problems filming through two-way mirrors. Directional mikes are essential, and quality sound recording demands excellent sound-proofing in walls and ceilings. Soundproofing is improved by the use of smaller two-way mirrors. Observation rooms need dim light for video work and bright light at other times. Activity rooms need very bright light for video recording. Thus, all rooms should have adjustable lighting. Flat monitors provide the best view of all participants. The best filming comes from portable or tripod-mounted cameras taken into the activity room. Permanently mounted cameras need remote auto-telephoto zoom capacity with wide-angle lens. Most schools are changing from the old 3/4 inch to the new 1/2 inch VHS equipment. The new hand-held mini-cameras are most popular. Additional equipment includes a film editor and a graphics generator. Security and equipment control can be expensive, especially if frequent rekeying results from "lost" keys. The best security system uses the electronic lock cards, such as those used in modern hotels, wherein lock access can be changed with ease and at a low cost. Most schools have too little storage space and recommend that all open wall space be filled with shelves, which also keeps costly equipment off the floor.

Other suggestions are: (1) every room should have a chalkboard; (2) every room should have extra plugs, phone jacks, etc.; (3) every room should have a red warning light at each exit to denote that equipment is on; (4) every room should have an off/on switch at each exit; (5) the control room needs a red warning light to identify each piece of "on" equipment in every room; and (6) the lab area needs red warning lights at each entrance to inform outsiders that a lab session is in progress, during which time, access is through a buzzer system.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Concern must be expressed over the fact that only 52 of the 516 deans surveyed represent schools that use behavioral labs. It is assumed that deans from

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schools that use labs would be certain to report that activity. The suggestion here that only about 10 percent of U.S. business schools utilize behavioral labs is somewhat disconcerting. Equally disturbing is evidence that too many deans are not well informed about the existence of labs in their own schools. The follow-up portion of this study found that there were no labs in schools whose deans reported the use of labs. Similarly, labs were found to exist where deans said there were no labs. These discrepancies are assumed to result from a combination of semantics and a lack of understanding on the part of some deans with respect to the true nature of behavioral labs.

Another serious concern exists over the fact that even when labs are available, they are poorly utilized. In fact, 62 percent of the labs studied report that, because of poor utilization, the administration has converted expensive lab space to more routine use such as student advising, graduate assistant offices, and even storage space. Perhaps some of the poor utilization can be traced to the fact that, in many cases, the labs received poor support in terms of critical items such as technical staff, secretarial staff, etc.

Since most of the labs are located at large doctoral-granting universities, it is not surprising that these labs are used almost exclusively for research. Most of the lab directors were outwardly negative about using the labs for any kind of student learning activity, arguing that students disrupt the research environment, mistreat equipment, and leave facilities in a state of disarray. Overall, teaching/student learning accounts for only about 10 percent of the behavioral lab activity. Even worse is the finding that the degree of student exposure to the labs is, at best, minimal. For instance, none of the schools require a behavioral lab experience as part of the undergraduate requirements.

Therefore, if the AACSB thrust is to require a behavioral learning experience as part of the CBK, little or nothing has been accomplished to that end. Perhaps, one of the barriers to getting faculty to use the labs is the perceived difficulty of revising the syllabus and incorporating experiential exercises, with which the faculty person may not be familiar. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of commonality found among the many exercises that are used. There does not seem to be a group of "standard" exercises that faculty can be encouraged to try, for starters, at least. One could argue that organizations such as the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning (ABSEL) might do a better job of facilitating the adoption of experiential learning. However, this study found that many deans know nothing about ABSEL and give a low priority to ABSEL participation. This suggests that the inclusion of behavioral lab learning in the curriculum needs vigorous support from the more traditional professional associations such as the Academy of Management, the American Marketing Association, the American Institute for Decision Sciences, etc. These organizations could sponsor special tracks/awards in experiential learning at their national and regional conferences. They could also sponsor special meetings for the sole purpose of addressing the behavioral lab issue.

Overall, the findings of this inquiry suggest that American business schools have done little to meet the AACSB/EFMD challenge to incorporate affective noncognitive learning in their curricula to assure that the managers of the future will possess these essential skills. Much needs to be done. However, some business schools have done an outstanding job of pioneering in this area and provide excellent role models for the rest to follow. They are to be commended for their outstanding efforts.

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