

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 10, 1983

MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM 1982

Lane Kelley, University of Hawaii
Gail Hutchinson, University of Hawaii

ABSTRACT

We conducted a survey of the management department in American business schools to ascertain the current direction and emphasis in their program, in regards to the instruction of three management skills: behavioral, technical, and conceptual/problem solving. Special attention was given to OB, MIS, teaching methods and the concept of behavioral labs.

INTRODUCTION

If we categorize the manager's job, we might define it in terms of three functions/requirements--behavioral skills, technical skills, and problem solving/conceptual skills. Most business schools have traditionally emphasized the second function, technical skills. This is obvious when we examine the curriculum for the breadth of "technique" courses offered--accounting, data processing, business math, calculus (in the business school:), managerial economics, statistics, operations management, et cetera.... These courses in general, study the management function as though it is a mathematical function that can be reduced to an equation. A recent article in a popular national magazine quoted a famous professor who alluded to "operations management" as the way to salvation for American management. Similar to the 1960's, we can all see the resurgence of the claim that the computer--MIS, DS, etc. as the way to salvation. Remember, in the 60's many organization theorists hypothesized (dreamed?) that the computer would eliminate middle management and organization structure would resemble an hour glass. If the lack of "technical" skills are causing the demise of American management, it follows that probably Germany, Japan, Korea and others have better "technical" managers than U.S. organizations. But wait, the American business schools and American texts supposedly constitute the standard for business technical education. In order to ascertain the current emphasis in the management curriculum we sampled the management department in 100 U.S. business schools. The management department was selected because it typically includes courses covering, 1) behavioral skills, 2) technical skills, and 3) business policy--the three aforementioned management function

A total of 31 department of management chairpersons responded. The survey is not conclusive but the data certainly provides adequate information to indicate the current direction in the department. The responses are divided into two groups; schools with undergraduate bodies of less than one thousand and schools with a thousand or more undergraduates. When appropriate we will examine the two groups to determine if curriculum or teaching method might be correlated to school size. Seventeen larger schools responded (graduate student enrollment up to 2500 students) and fourteen smaller schools responded (graduate bodies ranging from 50 to 800 students). A summary of the questionnaire findings follows.

THE CURRICULUM

During the past three decades or so management theorists have come to realize organizations display certain "climates" and behavioral patterns that correlate with overall effectiveness. Reflecting this discovery, business schools developed "organizational behavior" which synthesizes elements of psychology, sociology, and industrial relations. This new discipline investigates such functions as: individual's interaction, conflict management and interpersonal communication, to name a few. Of particular interest in this present study is the number and depth of OB courses offered at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The responses reveal that smaller schools generally offer more OB courses than the larger schools, however both offer an average in excess of three different courses. The course content ranges from the introductory theoretical principles to the very specific, for example, stress management. A myriad of complex issues is addressed such as conflict resolution and cross-cultural organizational behavior. Organizational behavior is the most emphasized field of study in the management department in a remarkable 51% of the smaller schools. At the larger schools, departments are more divided on their emphasis: a technical course, operations management, is most frequently emphasized, 26% of the time, while personnel management and OB are stressed: each 21% of the time. On the other hand operations management, is identified as the least stressed course at the smaller schools, while business policy teaching conceptual skills is the least stressed at the larger school, less than 2% of the time. Of further interest, this study poled the management department's involvement in instruction of information systems, a very contemporary rapidly, changing, technical skill. The decisive conclusion is management information systems are not stressed in the management department. MIS is emphasized in only a slim 6% of either school size, and actually singled out as being the least emphasized in close to 30% of the smaller and 33% of the larger schools. In this age of computers we must ask ourselves how well are we preparing our future business leaders? At one business school surveyed the respondent notes that a separate department had been created for MIS, (perhaps, staffed by "numbers" people as opposed to "management" people?). Apparently management departments shun active involvement in instruction of systems management.

TEACHING METHODS IN OB COURSES

Teaching methods are a means to an end and styles evolved reflecting changes in attitudes as to the most efficient means. For example, at one point, lecture in constituted the way to teach. Now, of course, we have enlarged our horizons to recognize the advantages of student participation and thusly enlarged our repertoire to incorporate participation. Involving students in behavioral classes makes sense since they learn from their own behavior and that of their fellow classmates', Organizational behavior theory subsequently

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 10, 1983

readily lends itself to innovative teaching methods. The questionnaires reveal that all schools employ a spectrum of teaching methods: lecturing, cases, discussion and experiential exercise. Interestingly enough though some respondents reprimanded their faculty as being "foot draggers" in the evolution.

Not surprisingly, professors in schools with undergraduate student bodies over a thousand lecture a little more frequently than those in the smaller schools (38 vs 33% of class time respectively) the remainder of the time lecturing, cases and discussion are utilized in even proportion.

Experiential Methods

Experiential exercises have gained popularity in all the management departments schools--only one chairperson replying exercises are not utilized. About 18 to 20% of classtime is spent practicing these exercises. They allow the students to role play and actually experience for her/himself how she/he reacts in a given situation. Furthermore, the exercises provide the opportunity to observe how other individuals react. When the chairpersons were questioned about complaints from the students regarding this avant-garde learning experience the overwhelming response was that there are none. Most chairpersons do point out, however, occasionally a few faculty members criticize or find some fault with the experiential approach to learning.

Behavioral Labs

Some chairpersons feel that eventually business schools will provide behavioral labs where students can have "hand on" opportunity in developing behavioral skills such as leadership, group decision making, and communication. Equipped with elaborate video systems, one-way glass, and audio recorders the labs would provide abundant pertinent feedback for the participants. Asked why these labs are not already established at our nation's business schools the consensus is 1) lack of funding, and 2) lack of available space. Very few respondents indicated a lack of interest to the prospect.

Where labs are already in use, the respondents are very enthusiastic. Are behavior labs a wave of the future? Will more schools be able to provide this learning device to their students? The chairpersons are divided on their predictions. Some feel that neither adequate space or funding will become available and moreover, that there is an absence of trained faculty to staff such labs. Furthermore, a very few professors are repulsed by the "touchy-feely" image of the labs, claiming they are not in keeping with the rigors of business school. Nevertheless, many respondents acknowledge existing student demand for behavioral labs and predict such labs are the wave of the future.

CONCLUSION

This brings us again to ask what are the educational goals of the management departments and which teaching methods are the best means to the end? What are our objectives? It appears that we are split in two directions - organizational behavior and production or operations management. It also seems that the experiential method has been accepted in the organizational behavior courses not as an alternative but as a supplement to the traditional lecture. Furthermore, the responses indicate high acceptance of this method by students, and that if there is a barrier, it is being created by other faculty. Interestingly, it is acceptable for those who

experience it and criticized by those who don't experience it.

Our chairpersons feel that behavioral labs have real credibility but won't come about because of the financial squeeze in their departments. This means that we have a selling job to do - not only to the students but to other faculty. It means that we have to be able to state very explicit objectives for our experiential classes and then evaluate them whether they are cognitive, behavioral, or attitudinal. We have to confront the "touchy-feely" image. Looking at the "American" management style, our organizational behavior courses will continue to be needed, but their successful implementation appears to be dependent upon our salesmanship.