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## PROBLEMS OF TEACHING LEADERSHIP SKILLS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL TECHNIQUES

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### ABSTRACT

Experiential learning provides a useful method for leadership training. For the training to be effective, however, specific feedback must be given to participants for use as a basis of behavioral change. Assessment center techniques with the use of videotape present a way to provide this feedback. As a result of using this approach to leadership training, participants better understand their leadership behavior and are able to develop a program of change towards more effective behavior.

### INTRODUCTION

Training leaders has been an important concern for organizations for many years. Leadership training is difficult, and many skills required are beyond those that can be learned from written material. Experiential learning has aided in the training of leaders by allowing trainees to participate firsthand in situations requiring leadership. Unfortunately, most of these situational exercises fail to provide the kind of feedback that is necessary to acquire leadership skills.

Though leadership training abounds, there are few indications that there is much success at training leaders. This lack of success is primarily due to the fact that behaviors need to be changed in order to improve leadership style. In order to effect behavioral change, the trainee must not only know which behaviors to change, but also must have a desire to change those behaviors. The feedback provided through the debriefing of exercises does not usually provide enough specific information for the trainee to act upon.

### PROVIDING USEFUL FEEDBACK INFORMATION

Assessment center techniques with the use of videotape provide a useful method for giving specific feedback about performance during a leadership exercise. Using the assessment center approach, the leadership trainee is first taught to observe and record the behaviors of others. Emphasis is placed on teaching the trainee to accurately view a participant's behavior and the reaction of others to that behavior rather than on judging that behavior to be good or bad. This emphasis allows feedback to be more useful and acceptable to the participant. Frequency and intensity of a behavior are also recorded to aid in understanding the use of the behavior. At the conclusion of the exercise, information on observed behavior is given to each participant.

Videotape adds three dimensions to feedback. First, it allows

the observer to watch specific behaviors as many times as necessary, thus improving the accuracy and comprehensiveness of observation. Second, videotape allows the leadership trainee to view his or her own behavior. Careful, private viewing of the exercise can increase the participant's acceptance and understanding of the feedback. Videotaping a series of exercises provides information on common behaviors and reactions, and over time can provide feedback on behavioral change and improvement. Third, the videotape allows the trainee to observe effective behaviors used by other participants in the leadership exercises. Effective behaviors can then be used as model behaviors in any change process.

The use of videotapes to provide feedback for leadership training was used successfully by the authors in NBA leadership training courses over a two year period. Participants were formed into primary groups of 8 to 12 members. Primary groups were then broken into diads for each leadership exercise. Each member of the diad was responsible for observing, recording and providing critical observations to the other members on their performance in the exercise. Participants were provided training on observation and feedback skills supplemented with written materials on analyzing and developing an effective leadership style. This training, supported by experiential learning and videotape feedback, was successful in enabling participants to recognize ineffective leadership behaviors and develop a desire to change those behaviors. This desire was evidenced by the participants developing and completing a behavior modification plan for effective leadership behavior.

### CONCLUSION

Feedback adds an essential element to the use of experiential learning in leadership training. Assessment center techniques with the use of videotape provide clear and comprehensive feedback allowing participants a degree of self-evaluation. The combination of these tools provides the participant the specific, behavioral information he or she must have in order to change behavior. Assessment center techniques provide the important motivating element of having seen one's behavior and wishing to change it. Such techniques have been successfully tested at the graduate business school level.