A MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM BASED ON THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Management Development programs have been viewed by many managers as learning experiences where the primary emphasis is the acquiring and remembering of ideas and concepts. Many people have said "the theory is nice but it does not work in the real world. To address this concern, a management development program based on an experiential learning model was developed and implemented in a large computer service organization.

The main purpose of the program was to provide the organization and the individual members of the management team with an ongoing management development model. An important feature of the model was the assessment process which used a diagnosis method designed by Marvin Weisbord (1) along with a session in which the data collected through the assessment process was reported back to the members of the management team who directly participated in the development program.

FIGURE ONE
MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT-OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The development of management personnel is essential to continued growth within the computer service industry. With the increasing size and complexity of CASC, a necessary concommitment to their growth, they have a greater need for qualified individuals to assume management responsibilities. It is unrealistic to believe that the external human resource market place can provide all of their managerial needs. It is important for CASC to strengthen its management capabilities through the implementation of a program to develop its employees.

The effective utilization of employees and realization of their growth potential rests primarily on the shoulders of those with management responsibilities. Success or failure of the management development program depends largely on those who, in receiving the common economic purpose of the organization, are involved with day to day coaching, counseling, appraising and planning learning experiences of their subordinates. Their effort to promote the development of subordinates so that organizational objectives and personal needs are met, should be recognized and encouraged by top management.
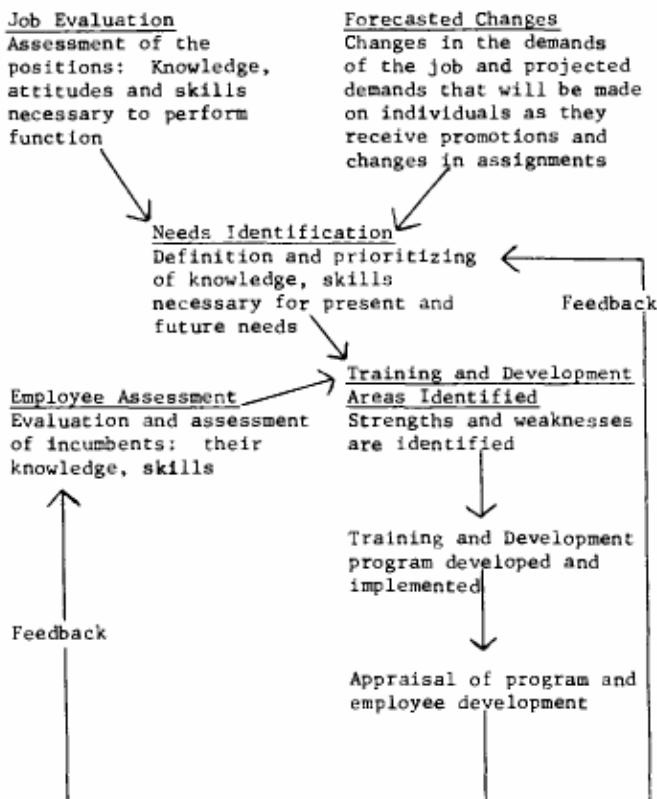
The successful management development program utilizes a number of approaches, and in their integration, provides the means for a more effective utilization of human resources.

COMPANY BACKROUND

CASC was founded in 1961 to provide software and consulting services. From this, CASC evolved into a highly technical service company that has gained recognition for the technical excellence of their work. The division of CASC in which the assessment was conducted in INFIT, which was formed in 1969 to provide a remote computing service network. The division has grown into a network that is one of the top firms in the industry in respect to technology and revenue. The structure of INFIT is functionally headed by a district office having authority over seven branch locations. The concentration of the assessment was the district office and one of its branch locations.

The district office is headed by a district manager whose responsibility is over the branch offices in administration, coordination, and development of the necessary leadership to continue INFIT as a viable force in the computer industry. The district support manager is responsible for handling technical problems within the district which others cannot handle. If he cannot answer any particular problem it is funneled to the proper source for corrective action. The district administrative manager has responsibility for handling the administrative functions of the district which include budget, personnel, collections and establishment of new accounts. The responsibility of the district instructor includes the training of customers and coordination of district level internal education.
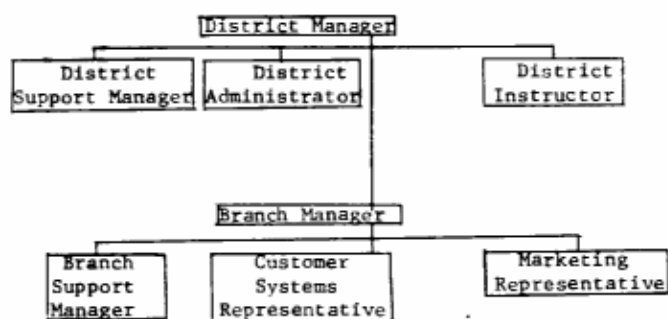
Figure Two shows a partial organization chart of CASC.

The branch office is headed by the branch manager, whose responsibility it is to coordinate and administratively handle all functions within his branch as to sales and technical support of computer services to the customers.

The branch support manager is responsible for handling the technical support of the branch. This support is given to all customers of INFIT. It is his responsibility to see to it that all new and existing accounts are receiving proper attention. The customer systems representative has responsibility for providing a high level of professionalism and technical expertise, both in new account marketing effort and in the support and development of existing customers. The marketing representative is responsible for marketing the product and services of CASC/INFIT. He works toward assigned business objectives, control of expenses, and researching business opportunities.

FIGURE TWO
PARTIAL ORGANIZATION CHART-CASC

ASSESSMENT METHOD

Organizational data was collected from company documents, interviews of management personnel, observation of the company, and the completion of a instrument by all management personnel. The documentation obtained included an employee handbook, job descriptions, sales forecasts, monthly reports, presentations made by the corporate C.E.O, personnel development review forms, organization charts, and annual reports for the past five years. Individual interviews were conducted at all levels of management and revealed that strong formal and informal relationships existed between:
-the district manager and the branch manager
-the district instructor and the branch manager
-the district support manager and the branch support manager
-the district administrator and the marketing representative

Observations of the organization were made by the author and focused on how the human resources of the organization were being and/or not being effectively utilized. The instrumentation was used to gather information from management personnel as to their perception of the characteristics of the organization.

A summary of the instrument can be seen in figure three. Management personnel were asked to respond to a series of statements which attempted to identify management development needs in the organization. The managers were asked to respond to each statement on a scale of zero to five as to how they actually saw the organization. They were then asked to respond to the same questions as to how they would like to see the organization (the ideal).

FIGURE THREE
ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT SUMMARY

For each statement listed, circle the number which best describes the extent to which it is a characteristic of your organization under two sets of conditions:
1) actually, as it currently is, and
2) ideally, as you desire it to be.

Your choice should correspond to one of the following responses: (2)

0   Does not apply to this organization

1= Not at all a characteristic of the organization

2   Not very characteristic of the organization

3   Moderately or Fairly characteristic of the organization

4= Quite characteristic of the organization

5= Very characteristic of the organization

ITEMS	ORGANZATIONAL RESPONSES (n=52)	
	Actual	Ideal
1. Manager/staff understand what is expected of them	3.55	4.56
2. Production/output	3.35	4.50
3. Grievances, complaints resolved	3.32	4.12
4. Assignments clear	3.03	4.53
5. Member's work involvement	3.03	4.32
6. Innovative in meeting member's needs	2.53	4.01
7. Staff meetings	2.62	4.35
8. Workers/boss working together	3.15	4.21
9. Organization communication	2.79	4.44
10. Work recognized/rewarded	2.74	4.74
11. Subordinates ideas bought/used	3.00	4.35
12. Superiors aware of subordinate problems	3.00	4.3B
13. Decision making/motivation	2.47	4.12
14. Interpersonal conflict	1.97	1.47
15. Discuss purposes/priorities	3.35	4.21
16. Employees committed to organization purposes	3.21	4.29
17. Member/work freedom	2.79	3.35
18. Encourage use of uniform procedures	3.62	3.94
19. Employees use good judgment	3.44	4.18
20. Evaluating procedures of staff performance	3.41	4.44
21. Review/evaluate individual goals	2.85	4.18
22. Managers act without consulting others	2.79	1.53
23. Written policies/procedures of little value	2.65	1.79
24. People "put out fires"	2.94	1.50
25. Employees evaluated with different standards	2.79	1.71

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

The assessment process revealed that CASC *was* a functional structured organization in which managers acted independently of each other. It became apparent that managers lacked an awareness of their individual

responsibilities and were not at all sure of their level of authority.

Managers stated that they found it very difficult to document and understand the source of many of their management problems. The assessment also pointed Out that managers spent more time then they felt should be necessary In "putting out fires. Management personnel at all levels of the organization found themselves spending a majority of their time using their technical skills as opposed to management skills. Managers found themselves doing their subordinate's tasks as opposed to directing their subordinates in completing the necessary function.

The assessment pointed out that CASC had difficulty getting information to flow down through its formal communication channels. Communication in the organization was more informal than formal. Much of the information was communicated on an individual, one to one basis instead of in formal groups and/or at staff meetings. Formal communication between departments was found to be very poor.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The information collected during the assessment process indicated a need to strengthen the skills of the managers at CASC. It was believed that an effective management development program must first focus on managers becoming aware of their individual management styles and the way their styles affect the organization's operation. After this basic foundation is formed, additional management development modules are designed that maintain a climate in which management personnel can continue their professional development.

In order to insure consistency and commitment to the development program the objectives were established collaboratively by members of the management team of CASC (both participants and non-participants of the initial development series) and by the author. The established objectives of the development program were to:
- develop awareness of a manager's own management style
- develop awareness of the methods that can be used to become a more effective manager
- develop awareness that management requires meeting company's objectives as well as achieving employee commitment
- develop awareness that participants need to take personal responsibility for their own learning
- develop an environment in which the participants can use their creative capacities
- develop the participant's thinking and problem solving skills

PROGRAM DESIGN

The program at CASC divided the fifty-two participating m8nagers in to three randomly selected groups. Each of the groups met once a week for a period of seven weeks. The sessions were three and one half hours in length and used a laboratory approach to learning which encouraged the managers to look at the process issues involved in the situation along with the task to be accomplished.

A major consideration in designing the experiential program was the development of experiences which focused on "the what and the how' of each experience. As Schreier (3) states, it is necessary to develop exercises that
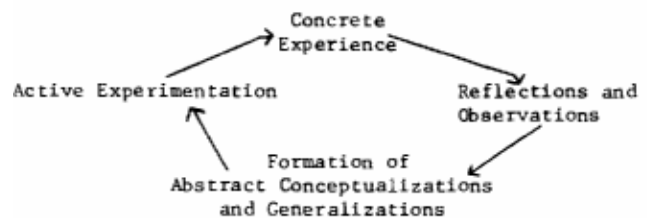
are relevant to the participants so that the process issues are not hampered by the irrelevant nature of the task. All experiences were developed so that the participants could relate what happened in the laboratory setting to a similar situation back on the job. The participants begin to recognize that management is not only getting things done but also is looking at "how" the results are accomplished.

PROGRAM MODEL

The development program at CASC uses the experiential learning model which was designed to place emphasis on involved learning (4) . The program is designed so that learning becomes an integrate and explicit part of the manager's work life. The learning by doing" approach used in the development program was implemented so that the learning and application of the new knowledge would occur during the program and continue for the manager back in the work place.

Concrete Experience

FIGURE FOUR
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

The experiences were designed to focus on the management development needs identified during the assess- ment process. Active involvement in all the lab experiences are essential for the participants to get the most out of the developmental workshop sessions.

The program objectives became key elements in the development of relevant learning experiences. The exercises were designed to include elements from the work setting. The exercises moved the participants from experiences that were relatively straightforward and simple to experiences that became very complex and required focus on both process and task issues.

Reflections and Observations

This very important phase of the learning model is the point at which the participants discuss the experience just completed along with the process that was used to complete the task. Time is spent focusing on the completed task and how the participants worked with each other during the experience. Participants are made aware of how the process used had an effect on the results achieved.

Formation of Abstract Conceptualization and Generalizations

In this phase of the experience the participants are able to develop a theory base for what went on during the experience. Focus is put on showing how the theory developed from the experience can be transferred to the work place. It is important that the participants are allowed to develop a concept which they see as relevant

to their management responsibilities in the organization. The program facilitator monitors the flow of the discussion and is careful not to force his/her own conceptual ideas on the participants.

Active Experimentation

In this phase of the model, participants are encouraged to apply the concepts just developed to the next workshop experience. One of the basic "ground rules of the program at CASC is to encourage people to use the program as an opportunity to experiment with new ways of handling management situations. The lab setting provides the participants with a relatively risk free environment to explore new and creative ways of becoming more effective managers.

PROGRAM SESSIONS

The management development series at CASC began with an "open session" attended by all program participants. The purpose of the open session was to feedback and discuss the assessment data and share the program objectives with all people participating in the developmental program.

In the "open session participants were asked to complete the LEAD instrument developed by Hersev and Blanchard. The instrument was used during the first session of the developmental program to help participants focus on the established objective of developing an awareness of one's own management style. Participants were informed that the results of the LEAD instrument are their own self-perception of the way they would handle certain management situations. To get a more complete picture of their Individual style, participants are encouraged to solicit feedback from one another, during the development program and back on the job, about the way they impact others in certain management situations.

All development sessions began with a concrete experience, one which was designed for the specific management development needs of CASC, and moved through the experiential model. Throughout the program, emphasis was placed on fulfillment of the program objectives by focusing on both the 'how" and the "what" of each experience completed in the program.

During the last session of the initial program series, the participants developed an action plan. This action plan placed emphasis on implementation of significant learnings. Three to four months after the initial sessions were completed, a follow-up four hour session was conducted for each group. This session was designed to feedback the parts of the action plan that were successfully implemented and those parts of the plan that were not successfully implemented. During this session, additional management development needs were identified and recommendations for future programs were initiated.

SUMMARY

The success of any management development effort requires a commitment from the organization along with the willingness of the program participants to be open to new ideas and concepts.

The experiential based management development program conducted for CASC placed emphasis on the transfer of learning from the workshop setting back to the work situation. This was accomplished by getting the
program participants actively involved in the learning process. The development program involved the participants in situations that gave them an opportunity to explore

various methods of handling management issues in a low risk environment and implement newly acquired management skills in the work place.

REFERENCES

(1) Weisbord, Marvin R., Organizational Diagnoses: A Workbook of Theory and Practice (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

(2) The complete instrument and analysis of the instrument are available from the author upon request.

(3) Schreier, James W., "Issues in Organizational Application of Simulation and Experiential Material", Organizational Applications of Simulation and Experiential Materials, Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Association of Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, pp. 107-111.

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