



MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT: A STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

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Introduction

Many managers are promoted into managerial roles because they exhibited strong performance as technicians. The shift from technical to strategic can be a difficult one, however, and many new managers flounder. Too often organizations provide no formal development program for its new managers—and no "refresher" training for existing managers or high-potential employees.

An organization's managers are its direct link to employees—they have a strong influential role and impact on performance and morale. The business environment is changing at an ever-quickening pace requiring ongoing education. Managerial work has become increasingly fast-paced, less structured and more reliant on strong interpersonal and leadership skills than ever before.

In addition, with a shrinking labor pool, organizations need to take steps to identify strong leaders and provide the appropriate development opportunities for them. Growing talent from within is becoming an increasingly prevalent staffing alternative.

Problems With Management Development

Too often management development is informal and disjointed, rather than part of a strategic training plan. Classes and training are offered or managers are encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities, but the offerings are not part of a formal program that is linked to organizational goals and long-range objectives.

It is not uncommon to encounter resistance from managers when providing management development opportunities. They may be hesitant to admit to areas of weakness—or an implication that they need additional training—and may raise many barriers to participation, most commonly "lack of time." Resistance to change and fear of failure are

natural. By positioning management development as a prerequisite to growth within the organization you can provide an incentive for participation while at the same time developing somewhat of a self-selection process for identifying employees interested in advancement within the organization.

Another problem, common to any training initiative, is the difficulty in measuring the impact and effectiveness of your management development activities. To be effective, clear and specific objectives should be identified and tied to the selection and implementation of training and development activities. Follow up measurement should be designed to directly evaluate the impact of these activities on meeting the stated objectives. When establishing objectives consider specifically how you will measure whether the objectives have been met. Build evaluation into the training process.

What Should Management Development Encompass?

Managers need a broad variety of skills—leadership and supervisory, communication, general business, organizational and technology. They need a solid understanding of the industry in which they operate and the structure and functions of the organization. They need to be familiar and comfortable with finance, marketing and operations—regardless of their particular area of expertise. And they need to clearly understand the organization's culture, philosophies, policies and procedures.

Training and development should be both general and organization specific. Understanding how to prepare a budget is a first step, but without knowledge of how the budgeting process works within your organization that information is not very useful. Clearly identifying the unique industry and organizational issues that managers need to understand can help you tie practice to theory.

Training and development opportunities are available through a wide variety of resources: university courses, seminars, professional associations, CD-ROM, on-line courses, company provided training, informal training (mentoring/ job shadowing), project assignments, involvement in committees and task forces, case studies. Experience is often the best teacher. Provide managers with ample opportunities to apply what they learn in training events or to learn through involvement in projects and assignments.

Establishing a Management Development Training Program

There are a number of steps to take in the establishment of a management development training program.

- Assess where you are currently. Do you have a formalized training program for new managers? Do you have a program designed to develop your existing managerial staff? Conduct an audit of managers to determine how they are currently receiving information and training, how they would evaluate their existing training options and what additional training needs they have.

- Analyze your workforce and project your management needs into the future. Succession planning is an important part of management development and a key to ensuring strong leadership. What are the gaps between current management skills and future needs? What are the areas of potential weakness or vulnerability?
- Determine existing skill level through standardized testing instruments, questionnaires (ask managers to identify their own information gaps and needs), peer and supervisor evaluation, or even vendor and customer evaluation. Compare the existing skills of your workforce to your future managerial needs. Identify the gaps to pinpoint specific high priority training needs.
- Align management development training with your organization's strategic plan. The key is not to just do something—it's to match the needs of the organization to the interests and skills of each manager and then to select the appropriate training and development tools to meet those needs. Develop categories of training needs, clearly identifying both general and specific topics within each. For instance, you may determine that providing effective feedback is a critical need. You may determine that managers need general information on techniques for giving and receiving feedback. In addition, you might include specific training on your organization's performance evaluation process.
- Develop individual development plans for key employees and managers based on their existing skill level and interests and your organizational needs.
- Identify training opportunities based on the categories and topics you developed. These may include university courses, public seminars, conferences, mentoring programs, in-house training, customized training applications, computer-based training, etc. Review each opportunity to ensure that it meets your organizational needs and objectives.
- Recognize that employees and managers also have some responsibility for their own training and development. Involve them in the process. To the extent you can tie objectives to employee interests as well as company needs.
- Evaluate each activity. Establish quantifiable objectives whenever possible. Use the annual appraisal process as one checkpoint—but remember it is only one means of measuring effectiveness. Each training and development opportunity should meet specific objectives that can be measured and evaluated.
- Work with local universities, technical colleges and other sources of training to familiarize yourself with their offerings and to work together to help strengthen those offerings to meet your organization's needs.
- Be honest with employees about their future with the company and need for development. Provide feedback for positive change to occur.
- Finally, recognize that management development is an ongoing process, not a one-time or annual event. Your management development plan should be reviewed regularly and changed as necessary to accommodate industry and organizational changes.

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