

Human Relations Training

The first training in emotional and social competence in organizations was called “human relations training.” Between 1950 and 1975 there were hundreds of human relations training programs offered to thousands of managers in American organizations. Most of these efforts were not evaluated, and many were disappointing in their lack of lasting impact. However, one such program stands out as an exception.

The managerial human relations training program described by Hand, Richards, and Slocum (1973) was developed at the Pennsylvania State University. It was an “off the shelf” program conducted by the Continuing Education Division. Through that division, it was delivered numerous times in firms throughout a several state area. The objective of the program was to encourage participants to utilize human relations principles in their dealings with employees. More specifically, the program designers sought to increase participants’ use of consideration and initiating structure. Thus, the program targeted the emotional competencies of self-awareness, empathy and leadership.

The training consisted of 90-minute sessions given once a week for 28 weeks. The first phase of the training was devoted to a discussion of managerial styles. Topics included leaders, leadership, and followership; initiating structure and consideration; and autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire styles of management. This first phase, which involved primarily cognitive learning, lasted approximately 9 hours.

The second phase of the training was primarily experiential in nature. There were numerous individual and group exercises including self-ratings on the managerial grid, an in-basket exercise, a listening exercise, and a corrective interview role play. In each exercise, an individual or group would perform a task while the rest of the participants

observed them. Following completion of the task, the observers would give critical feedback on what they observed. All the participants then would discuss the feedback. Thirty hours were devoted to this experiential learning.

The final phase of the program was devoted to discussion of the motivational theories of Porter, McGregor, Herzberg, and Maslow. It lasted about three hours. The total program involved 42 hours of training.

A rigorous evaluation study of the program occurred when it was implemented in a specialty steel plant located in central Pennsylvania. The design involved both a trained group of managers and a control group that did not receive training. It also involved pre-training, post-training, and long-term follow-up measures of managerial attitudes, leadership behavior as perceived by subordinates, and performance as rated by superiors. The post-training measures were completed 90 days following training, and the long-term follow-up assessment occurred 18 months after the completion of training. .

The results indicated no differences between the two groups at the 90 day post-training assessment, but there were several significant differences at the 18-month follow-up. By that time, the trained managers had become significantly more self-aware and more sensitive to the needs of others in their attitudes. Their subordinates also perceived them as having improved in rapport and two-way communication. The controls, on the other hand, did not change in their attitudes, and their subordinates perceived them as significantly less considerate than they had been at the time of the pre-training assessment. Performance ratings also improved for trained managers working in consultative climates, but not for those working in autocratic climates. In contrast, performance ratings for untrained controls declined over time.

For more information, see:

Hand, H. H., Richards, M. D., & Slocum, J. W. (1973). Organizational climate and the effectiveness of a human relations training program. *Academy of Management Journal*, 16(2), 185-195.