

Interaction Management – Development Dimensions International, Inc.

Ever since the seminal work of Goldstein and Sorcher (1974), behavior modeling has been used to train supervisory personnel in a number of different settings. The method is based on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which suggests that people learn in part by observing and then emulating models. One example of this approach is the Interaction Modeling Program, developed and offered by Developmental Dimensions International (DDI). Targeted for managers and supervisors in various occupations (including health care, communications, education, and manufacturing), Interaction Modeling strives to improve supervisory skills in areas such as productivity, handling employee conflict and complaints, employee absenteeism, and overcoming resistance to change. The method does so by teaching positive models of behavior and on-the-job application. The program addresses social and emotional competencies such as accurate self-assessment, adaptability, initiative and innovation, empathy, and communication.

Developed over 20 years ago by William C. Byham, co-founder of DDI, Interaction Modeling involves five central components: “1) Content overview—The facilitator identifies the skills to be learned and presents factual content about the topic; 2) Positive model video—Learners see the skills demonstrated, generally on video; 3) Skill practice—Learners practice using and applying skills in a one-on-one exercise; 4) Feedback—Participants receive feedback on how well they used the skills; and 5) Application on the job—Learners discuss how they will apply the skills in the workplace” (Pesuric, 1996, July, p. 25).

One of the first steps towards implementing an effective program is a competency-based needs assessment, which can be done either by the organization

seeking training or DDI. Based on this assessment, the program planners develop a profile of the competencies vital for success. Then, a needs assessment of the participants undergoing training is performed. Assessment tools include self-assessment of current competence, 360-degree assessment, and interviews to gather data on current job performance issues. These assessments reveal performance gaps that become the focus of the training program.

Based on a system possessing 20 skill modules, each depicting challenging interactions faced by supervisors, the design of an Interaction Management program encourages its participants to choose those modules that seem most relevant to their training needs. Whatever specific modules are chosen, the program begins with an introductory module, which provides an overview of the major themes regarding behavior modeling. Also standard is a review module, which fosters a discussion of how participants have used the skills they learned from the training back on-the-job. The review module also teaches participants how to effectively diagnose challenging situations and select the most relevant skills to remedy the situation.

Interaction Modeling relies on stringent instructor certification requirements to insure that the program is implemented in an effective way. The trainers tend to be managers themselves who possess a wide range of knowledge regarding behavior modeling and how it relates to the roles of managers and supervisors. They are skilled in creating a safe and supportive environment in which participants can explore the various challenges they face in the workplace.

Each module begins with a short, didactic, content-focused presentation. Then, after viewing a video of a positive model performing a desirable skill, the learners discuss

how they understand what has transpired in the modeled demonstration. Sometimes, rather than start with the model video, the trainer has the participants analyze a case that highlights a common supervisory challenge, such as a situation in which a supervisor needs to give feedback regarding an employee's performance problems. Then, using both the group and the material they learned in the content overview, participants discuss how best to approach the case-study problem. Interaction Management programs provide a step-by-step approach for handling each difficult interaction situation. Breaking down problematic situations into critical steps provides the learner with a reasonable and understandable strategy for accomplishing tasks. When the group feels confident about their understanding of the issues, the instructor presents a positive model video that demonstrates an exemplary way of handling the case.

The next step in the process involves extensive practice as the learners try to apply what they have seen and discussed. Each skill module usually includes four skill-practices. In six hours of training, approximately four of those hours are spent in skill-practice related activities.

By incrementally increasing the difficulty of the content and skill challenges, learners build confidence and expand their knowledge. "Internalization of the skills needed to handle the interpersonal situations is achieved when the participants practice handling different variations of the interaction situation in a series of skill practice exercises. In a skill module, each participant gets to practice handling one interaction situation as a supervisor, and gets to see the situation from the point of view of an employee by being the subordinate in another situation. In addition, each supervisor

actively observes, takes notes, and discusses four other skill practice exercises” (Pesuric, 1996, July, p. 32).

Feedback also is an important tool in Interactive Management and other behavior modeling programs. Participants receive feedback on how well they used the skills both in one-on-one exercises with the program instructors and through group discussions with their peers. Since training is usually limited to small groups of no more than 16 people, adequate time is allowed for each participant to practice the skills every session and to receive in-depth coaching and feedback.

Whenever possible, one half-day of training is followed by a couple of weeks back on the job. This provides the participants with time to practice new skills and to receive feedback on their performance and interventions. Participants then can bring those experiences that did not succeed at work back to the training group to discover what hindered the application of their newly acquired skills. By bringing this information back to the following training session, participants are better equipped to practice those skills that are most relevant to their needs. The trainer then has an opportunity to reinforce the proper applications of new skills while troubleshooting any roadblocks that seem to be getting in the way. These review sessions also provide an opportunity for participants to discover alternative perspectives on their problematic situations. Discussing and practicing these skills in a safe and supportive environment helps the participants develop greater confidence to bring their knowledge back to their workplace once again.

DDI sometimes varies the way the program is delivered in order to accommodate differences in participants’ needs and learning styles. For instance, there is a version of

the program in which all of the training takes place in a classroom environment. For participants with little or no experience with behavior modeling, this may be the best option for initial training. Another version is a combination of classroom and self-study, which incorporates on-the-job skill-practice with a study group or a coach to facilitate the learning process outside of the classroom. Finally, a non-classroom option may be employed, where all of the learning takes place through self-study and on-the-job practicing. This option may best suit those managers and supervisors who have had previous training, possess an understanding of key behavior modeling concepts and processes, and desire more follow-up training.

In addition to DDI's Interaction Modeling program, there have been several other behavior modeling training programs that have been evaluated in various ways. In general, the results have been impressive. (Burnaska, 1976; Byham, Adams, & Kiggins, 1976; Latham & Saari, 1979; Moses & Ritchie, 1976; Russ-Eft & Zenger, 1997; Smith, 1976). For instance, in one case the program was implemented with a group of supervisors in a forest products company (Porras & Anderson, 1981). The results indicated that within two months following completion of the behavior modeling program, the trained supervisors had significantly increased their use of all five target behaviors. No comparable change occurred in a control group. Further, most of these improvements maintained themselves or increased during the following six months. Even more impressive, the work groups of the trained supervisors pulled ahead of the controls in several performance and productivity measures, such as increased monthly production, improved recovery rates, and decreased turnover and absenteeism.

In another evaluation study, a major manufacturing firm evaluated the effects of interaction modeling by comparing employees' lost-time accidents before and after their supervisors were trained in interaction modeling. Lost-time accidents were reduced by 50 percent. Investigation of formal grievances and productivity were also evaluated. Formal grievances were reduced from an average of 15 per year to 3 per year. The plant exceeded productivity goals by \$250,000.

Finally, a program evaluation of Interaction Modeling in the transportation industry showed a 51.5 percent decrease in turnover, a 16.7 percent decrease in absenteeism and a 6.8 percent reduction in overtime.

For more information, see:

Goldstein, A. P., & Sorcher, M. (1974). Changing supervisory behavior. New York: Pergamon.

Pesuric, A., & Byham, W. (1996, July). The new look in behavior modeling. Training and Development, 25-33.

Russ-Eft, D. F., & Zenger, J. H. (1997). Behavior modeling training in North America: A research summary. In L. J. Bassi & D. F. Russ-Eft (Eds.), What works (pp. 89-109). Alexandria, VA: American Society of Training and Development.