How to determine the training needs of your supervisors when they’re spread across the map

by Patrick J. Germany and C.W. Von Bergen, Jr.

Training competent managers and supervisors is a vital and important task, especially in a growing organization. And we all know that those early training programs begin with a useful, systematic assessment of needs. Yet how do you assess management/supervisory training needs—efficiently and effectively—in a geographically dispersed organization? Here’s how we did it.

D. Kirkpatrick, in Determining Supervisory Training Needs and Setting Objectives (Training and Development Journal, 1977), summarized various methods:

1. Analyzing the supervisor’s job.
3. Asking the supervisors themselves.
4. Asking the subordinates.
5. Testing knowledge and/or skills.
6. Observing supervisory behavior.
8. Conducting exit interviews.

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10. Using an advisory committee. A combination of several of these methods—an approach Kirkpatrick endorses—is often the most effective way to determine needs; and it is the approach taken by the training department of The Western Company of North America.

In 1978, the training staff decided to undertake a supervisory/management needs analysis to determine if existing training programs reflected actual training needs and to identify areas in which additional training might be required. The needs study was structured to include numbers 2, 3, 4, and 10 of Kirkpatrick’s methods.

FIGURE 1. NEEDS ANALYSIS FLOWCHART

Training staff selects target audiences.

Task force assembled needs analysis questionnaire is developed.

Training staff and task force members analyze questionnaire.

Training staff and task force members develop structured interview guide.

Questionnaire method to gather data.

Task force conducts interviews.

Questionnaire data summarized by raising staff.

Training staff extracts data from questionnaire interview data.

Training staff develops feedback, test, and follow-up program.

The need analysis revealed a thorough list of needs without being overly confining and time consuming.

The largest audience in this case was 40 middle-level managers, 55 foremen, and 170 first-line supervisors. These people were requested to develop a questionnaire and appointing an advisory committee (Figure 1). After a review of literature in various training-related publications, a 78-item needs analysis questionnaire was developed by the training staff. The questionnaire asked the frequency of tasks engaged in by supervisors. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of a task on a three-point scale from high to low and the frequency of a task on a four-point scale from often to never.

Halt from the task force

While the questionnaire was being developed, the training staff and the regional vice-presidents appointed managers from each of five geographical regions to serve on the analysis task force. The objectives of this group were to evaluate the questionnaire and the supervisors in each region to identify expressed training needs, to review all data collected by the training staff and making recommendations concerning any training which might be needed in the future, and to work closely with the training staff to review the results of the needs analysis to develop a structured interview form.

November 1983  •  Training/HRD 55
Supervisory training needs

The first (Figure 1) was considered important, in that it would be helpful for supervisors to understand the nature of the training needs of their subordinates. The second (Figure 2) was relevant to the study because it was expected that supervisors would have some knowledge of the training needs of their subordinates. The third (Figure 3) was relevant to the study because it was expected that supervisors would have some knowledge of the training needs of their subordinates.

The results of the questionnaire were used to improve the training program of the company. The training program was improved by providing more training opportunities for supervisors and by providing them with more training materials. The results of the questionnaire were also used to improve the training program of the company. The training program was improved by providing more training opportunities for supervisors and by providing them with more training materials.
hold to analyze the findings and make recommendations concerning future training programs. At the same time this was the time that the results of the questionnaires differed somewhat from those of the structured interviews. For instance, although 70% of the supervisors said that they engaged in frequency and detailed training, the interview was not mentioned as a single interview. Since training was men- tioned frequently in interviews but the questionnaires, by virtue of its design, enabled the interview to be identified by the task force was able to deal with the additional importance by allowing discussion at a decision based upon the staff's knowledge derived from the questionnaires and actual training programs and the experi- ences of the supervisors. In the main parts, the questionnaire results were compatible with those of the interview.

The group developed a list of areas of need, and these were compared to those identified in existing training programs. In many cases additional attention included training in human relations, finance, planning, and safety.

A new program, advanced management, was developed to include the following human relations training: effective group interaction, group goal setting, effective problem-solving, planning, effective discipline and handling employees and conflict resolution.

Two existing programs were revised to increase from seven to nine hours, and one hour a week for six months in planning and finance for supervisors.

The program was taken as a group development, that existing training in these areas was insufficient. The analysis pointed out that much more management and supervisors needed to attend safety training sessions and that more management people needed to attend at least one hour a week in planning and finan- cing programs in order to better support the new program.

This mode analysis design proved to be a useful, well-structured approach to evaluate existing training and iden- tify needs for change. One important advantage of the approach was the time of the task force as serving as consultants to monitor new and existing training to see if each reflects a specific training need.

This approach could be used by other organizations. It is recommended that those groups are encouraged to undertake such an approach, to be applied with minor modifications, to a large manufacturing organization on one site.