CHOOSING THE MOST APPROPRIATE TRAINING METHODS FOR MANAGEMENT TRAINING PROGRAMMES

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Abstarct. Training is very important for an organization, does not metter its size and field of activity. Therefore, the approach of that activity must be done in a systemic and systematic manner. After de identification of the training needs and establishment of the programme objectives, one may choose the most appropiate training methods to assure a greater efficiency of the whole process. Based on author's extanding experience as a trainer, the paper presents some principles for selecting teaching and training methods used in training programmes for managers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Not to much time ago, the palette of methods used in human resource training was fairly small. Practically, the case-study method is the only method with a real participative character used as a supplement to classical, academic methods.

The training and father development of managers is a very complex process, the academic education, the practical experience and training having its own important role. The management training must take into account all the factors that influence the operation of an organisation in the actual economic environment. Therefore, the content, the layout and the methodology of management training programmes must be improved and adapted on a continuous base [2].

During last decades, a large number of methods were developed, tested, combined and adapted to different training situations. Some of them became irreplaceable tools for professional trainers and academic staff while others are not so used. Some of them are completely new while others are old. Some of them are simple and easy to use by any professor or trainer while others need additional preparation time for both professor and trainees. Thereby, the training became a process in a continuous change, having a strong innovator character.

There is no miraculous method applicable in any situation having maximum efficiency. Each training method has benefits and inconveniences. Consequently, a good professor or trainer will be concerned in finding and using the most efficient training methods suitable with the training objectives and with the specific conditions, that training programme will take place.

2. SELECTION CRITERIA FOR TRAINING METHODS

The main factors to be considered during the selection process of the training methods are the human factors (trainer, trainees), the programme topic, the available time and facilities [2].

The trainer. During a training programme, trainer's knowledge, experience in management and training, and personality are the main factors that affect the communication process between him/her and the trainees. If that communication is quickly and easy established then a well chose training methods would stimulate and facilitate the learning process. However, if there is no communication between the trainer and the

trainees, the training process will not match the learning objectives, no matter the chosen training method.

Even if the trainer has a lot of information sources regarding the training methods (e.g. training directors, more experienced colleagues, special "train the trainers" programmes, books, manuals, etc.) is totally his/her responsibility to choose the most appropriate method for each particular case. Therefore, the trainer must be capable to evaluate his/her skills and to adopt those methods that will enhance the impact he/her want to have over the trainees. For example, the role-play needs psychological knowledge, a great experience in dealing with different human problems that may appear during the management process, and the ability to react quickly during the discussions. If the trainer does not have those qualities and also an analytical mind and experience in solving business problems, is better to use case studies.

The trainees and there environment. The training methods must stand on the intellectual and education level, the age and the practical experience of the trainees, and on the social and cultural environment, they come from. For example, during the training programmes for meddle management and small entrepreneurs, the lectures must be substituted by short discussions using the visual aids as much as possible, together with practical examples and simplified case studies.

As regards experience, the trainer must differentiate between young people who have no or very small management experience and learn about management for the first time in school, and the participants who have practical experience as managers or specialists in one of the functional departments.

In the case of academic education, the most information is new and is relatively hard to refer to previous experience. Still, young people have open minds and, many times, susceptive to new ideas. On the other hand, during the training programmes for experienced people only the information additional to that experience will be assimilated. Therefore, is very important the trainers will invoke the trainees' experience. In such groups, there always be individuals that "know better" and is relatively hard to change that attitude and to emphasize on what is necessary to learn to better fulfil there tasks. In those cases, the focus must be on practical topics, case studies, discussions and simulations that will help the trainees to identify the missing knowledge and skills to be covered through training.

The complexity of that problem is more emphasized by factors regarding the social and cultural environment the trainees come from. The trainer must take into account that the most part of participative methods were developed in USA therefore, they must be adapted to the local conditions.

The training objectives. Generally, the training needs and the learning objectives of a training programme in management must be formulated in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills change for improvement of management actions. Consequently, a preliminary analysis of those needs that will allow the identification of specific learning objectives is necessary. Based on that analysis, the trainer can choose the most appropriate methods to satisfy the needs, and, therefore to meet the learning objectives. [4]

For example, if the trainer wants to underline the necessity of using the experts' knowledge and experience to substantiate complex management decisions, the most appropriate approach will be to use activities that imply team working, business games and projects. Participation, involvement in such activities will allow the managers to receive more feedback from the rest of the participants then years spend in a management position. [3]

During the establishment of the objectives of a training programme and the selection of the training methods to used, the trainer must take into account that the skills, aptitudes, knowledge interconnect and, many times, refers to solving multifunctional situations and interdisciplinary problems.

The training topic. Each management domain (e.g. finance, human resources, general management, etc.) has its own characteristics. Consequently, a trainer has the possibility to choose from a number of methods appropriate for the topic or to use a mix of methods.

During the training programmes for management, the trainer must *explain* the relation between organisation's functions, *underline* the complex character of the management process, *help* the trainees to avoid the simplified approach, based on only one point of view of multidimensional situation, and *emphasize* the general skills necessary to a manager. In fact, that represents an interdisciplinary approach of management and a combination of management functions.

In order to do this, the methods with strong participative character are of great help. For example, a training programme for top management may start with a complex case study that requires solving a business situation from different perspectives. This will stimulate the trainees' interest in using certain methods and techniques which, integrated in a proper way, will help them to act correct in a specific situation. Then the trainees will analyse in depth those methods and techniques. Finally, they will integrate specific knowledge into the management process by using business games, case studies or, if possible, through a project that needs an interdisciplinary approach.

Time and material factors. The decision on the training methods to be used during a training programme is strongly influenced by different factors like time, financial resources, etc.

The time for preparation, that influence the expenses with training material, vary based on the chosen training methods. As a rule, complex case studies and business games need a longer and more expensive preparation which include testing and doing the all the necessary corrections and modifications.

The length of the programme determines the methods to use. As long as the programme will be as much trainer may use business games, complex case studies, and project. That does not mean that participative methods should be drowning out from short training programmes. Is simply means that one may use those methods that are not time consumers and transmit the message as quickly as possible.

The training period during the day is much more important that one may think. For example, during afternoons is better to use attractive methods that need active involvement.

The training facilities may be a serious limitation. In order to choose the most appropriate training methods, the trainer must know in advance elements like number of available room for small groups' discussions or accessibility to audio and video aims. [3]

3. RELATIONS BETWEEN EFFECTIVE LEARNING PRINCIPLES AND TRAINING METHODES

Like other training programmes, the training programmes for management will fulfil their role only by creating a situation that will encourage the learning process. In other words, the efficiency of those programmes depends on putting in practice the basic learning principles. [1]

The usage of one or another of the training methods will not ensure the efficiency of those principles but will dramatically influence it. Following, some aspects regarding the relation between the learning objectives and the training methods are presented.

Motivation. The motivation to learn is stronger if the presentation of training materials is interesting, underline there applicability, and emphasizes the benefits on using them in practical situations. [4]. The most part of the participative methods depends on using theoretical knowledge in real situation. The trainer may reduce the fatigue of the trainees by using them in a certain order or in different combinations.

Active involvement. The bases development of all the participative methods is the active involvement principle. As a rule, as strong as the trainees' involvement, as higher, there motivation will be and, as a result, they will retain more knowledge and will be capable to apply what they learned. However, the usage of a certain training method cannot guarantee itself the involvement of al the trainees. That depends on the ways the case studies are organised, the training sessions are conducted and on other factors. The passivity of some trainees may be a result of the fact that they consider the quality of the training materials or the way the trainer perform beneath there own professional level.

Personalized approach. On-the-Job training is a method based on individual training needs related to current and future job requirements. Anyway, this method has its limits. The trainer must take into account that the trainees have different learning capabilities and styles, different ways to apply the knowledge. Therefore, the training programmes must allow not only working in small groups but also offer opportunities for reading, thinking, practicing and applying the knowledge on individual bases.

This may be assured through additional individual homework, usage of training tools for individual study like audio and video tapes, PCs, etc.

Feedback. During the learning process, the trainer must provide different types of feedback on the level of trainees' competence and behaviour (as the rest of the trainees, by the trainers or by the person him/herself perceive them), the level of learning and the ability to apply the knowledge.

Speaking of behaviour, the role-play and business games sessions provide the most powerful feedback. In the same time, the practical exercises and the projects give information about the practical application of the new knowledge.

Transfer. This principle assumes the fact that training must help the trainee to transfer the knowledge to real situation. Some of the most efficient methods from this point of view are simulation and practical projects.

The examination of the training methods from the learning principles point of view shows the necessity of a certain consecution or combination of different methods to assure a greater impact of learning. [1]. That explain why some methods that have a strong motivational character and transfer capabilities are more interesting. This does not mean that the rest of the methods must be unvalued or to overrate the impact of a particular method that may achieve its goal only in combination with other methods.

4. ACTUAL TRANDS IN USING TEACHING AND TRAINING METHODS

The majority of the training programmes directors and the trainers themselves agree that must pay a greater attention to different factors previously presented, which play an important role in choosing the training methods. Even so, there are important differences from this point of view between various training organisations. [1]

There is no consensus between training experts regarding the best methods used to achieve different objectives of such particular programmes, although the trends in professionalizing management are obvious and the standards in management training and education ameliorate on a continues base.

The different concepts regarding the training and the education in management and by different appraisals of the value and the potential of each training method generate diversity of opinions in using participative training methods.

The first time *the case study method* was an empirical approach of the management process, the emphasis being on studying some typical cases of previous practical experiences. The trainers continue to pay a great attention to this method while today the majority of them consider that this method is not a panacea for training and education in management.

The methods based on simulation (business games, exercises, role-plays, etc.) had a remarkable development in the last 20-25 years. At present, they are in the middle of the attention of the trainers and professor in management thanks to usage on a large scale of PC in management education and to development of the operational research techniques in solving complex business and management problems.

Some of the training programmes in management have introduced *projects* and *consultancy* as training methods, in order to emphases the practical character of the training programmes and to be sure, that the trainees will learn to solve practical management problems [1]. Nevertheless, the projects as training methods will meet the professional standards only if are based on the necessary knowledge. More over, if the programme intends to approach management from different angles is indispensable to use also other methods to insure the necessary knowledge, aptitudes, and skills the project method could not provide.

Conclusions

During the actual period, defined by rapid changes, the emphasis must be on training programmes for top managers. However, the simple attendance to such programmes is not enough. Managers must learn on a continue basis in order to be able to foresee and understand the changes, to take the right decisions in brand new situations. That has to be the most important skill of a manager related with a distinctive attitude – life long learning. Although this requirement is important for any managers, no matter his/her area of control and the position on a hierarchy it is a fortiori for higher managers.

Therefore, the academic and training programmes in management must not bombed the attendants with huge quantities of detailed information (that quickly become absolute) but help them *to learn how to learn*. In such programmes, the attendants must face new situations that characterize a changing environment. They must analyze the new situation, identify the real problems, formulate and implement original solutions. That implies the use of participative methods, especially project, exercise and simulations methods, case studies and other group methods that need the combined experience and knowledge of all the members of a group.

The two main features of academic and training programmes in management – the relevance to real situation in a changing environment and the emphasis on learning the way of learning – became the determinants in selection, use and development of teaching and training methods. Each of such methods has both benefits and disadvantages. Therefore, the must appropriate approach to training programmes in management consists of mixing the training methods based on there potential estimated by the trainer and, sometimes, the usage of particular methods as the core of the whole programme.

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