

Labor Management Training and its Transfer to the Work Setting

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In order to increase cooperation between labor and management, 182 shop-stewards and 752 supervisors participated in a joint labor-relations training program. The goal was to obtain more favorable attitudes toward union and management issues by supervisors and shop-stewards, respectively. Attitudes of shop-stewards were more favorable immediately after the training, while attitudes of supervisors were favorable both before and after the training. However, the training effects reversed 30 days after the participants had returned to their workplaces. Reasons for such attitude changes are cited and suggestions are made to prevent these changes in future training programs.

Since the beginning of the current decade, there has been an explosion of interest in cooperative labor relations. Part of this interest has been sparked by the Department of Labor which in 1982 created the Division of Cooperative Labor-Management Programs. The purpose of this division is to "encourage and assist employers and unions to undertake joint efforts to improve productivity and enhance the quality of work life" (Horner, 1985, p. 62). The growth in cooperative programs has reached into both the public and private sectors. There are prominent examples of cooperative ventures at the Federal, State, and local levels (Wells, 1987; Stepp & Bonner, 1987; Labor Relations Today, 1986). The steel industry (Trepanier & Francis, 1987), auto industry (Johnson, 1988), and the construction industry (Martin, 1987) lead the efforts to promote a cooperative environment in private sector industries. Cooperative programs in both sectors have focused on a number of different areas including employee participation programs often called quality circles (Horner,

1985; Warren, 1987; Katz, Kochran, & Cobeille, 1983; Kochran, Katz, & Mower, 1984), gain-sharing programs (Schuster, 1983) and joint labor-management committees (Siegel & Weinberg, 1982).

Even though it is easy to believe in and support cooperation as a general concept, the history of the above efforts demonstrates that it is much more difficult to implement cooperation in the workplace. A history of adversarial relationships is not easily overcome. Moreover, the trust that is necessary to embark on a cooperative venture is usually a sparse commodity. It takes the unified effort of both labor and management to set aside these barriers and to take on the task of overcoming existing distrust.

A major west coast city and the labor organizations representing the city's employees undertook a cooperative program beginning in August of 1983. This program had an unusual genesis in that it began with a particularly bitter dispute between one city department and a labor union. The dispute resulted in a lawsuit brought by the union against the city. The lawsuit ended with a negotiated agreement. Among the conditions, the city and the union agreed to participate in a joint labor-relations training program which would be funded at city expense. The individuals attending the training would be first- and second-line supervisors and shop stewards. The agreement provided that the content of the training would include:

- The Public Employees Collective Bargaining Act in Washington,
- distinctions between the National Labor Relations Act and the Washington Law for Public Employees,
- examples of unfair practices,
- education about the terms of the labor contract, and
- the role of shop stewards. (District Court Stipulated Agreement, 1983)

Shortly after the above settlement, the City reached agreement with the majority of the other labor unions that represented employees in other city departments, to extend the above training to include shop stewards and supervisors not covered by the lawsuit settlement. The

negotiated training provision was placed in the appropriate labor contracts. These provisions were similar to the lawsuit agreement.

Implementation of the cooperative labor relations training program was under the direction of a joint committee made up of the Director of Personnel, a Department Labor Relations Coordinator, the City's Training Manager, a union Business Manager and the President of the Joint Crafts Council. The committee specified that: "The primary purpose of this training course shall be to develop the problem-solving skills of participants in order to promote the spirit of cooperation between labor and management" (Committee document).

An important duty of the trainers was to develop and implement a measurement tool designed to evaluate the outcome of the training. The trainers believed that one measure of the success of the program would be a moderation in what were hostile attitudes. Therefore, one of the evaluation tools was an attitude survey designed to measure the difference between supervisor and shop steward attitudes towards labor relations issues. It was hypothesized that after the training: 1) shop stewards would agree more strongly with statements that are favorable toward management, and 2) supervisors would agree more strongly with statements that are favorable toward unions, as compared to pre-training conditions.

This paper will describe the design and results of the training program. It will conclude with a set of recommendations to improve similar training programs in the future.

METHOD

Program Design

The program was presented in two phases. Phase I covered the training required by the lawsuit settlement. Phase II covered the labor contract agreements and followed Phase I. Between Phase I and Phase II some minor modifications were made in the focus of the program, but otherwise the training method was essentially the same.

The program called for two days of training. Participants (shop stewards and first- and second-line supervisors) were assigned to classes with a maximum size of 25. The design of the program centered on a notebook that each participant received approximately one week prior to the start of the class.² The participants were asked to read the introduction

to the training program. In addition to some background reading material, the notebook also contained a class outline for each of the training days. The morning of the first training day focused on labor law and labor relations. The remainder of the first session and all of the second session emphasized cooperative conflict management skills. The first session included a number of class exercises and simulations. The second session, which was separated from the first by two to three weeks, relied heavily on the use of case studies. The class format throughout was approximately 40% lecture/discussion and 60% classroom activity.

Sample

Forty-seven training programs were conducted; eight preliminary programs in Phase I and 39 in Phase II. A total of 934 employees participated in the training (182 shop stewards³ and 752 supervisors). Of the 39 programs in Phase II, ten were randomly selected for the attitude survey. These ten were randomly divided into two groups of five programs each. Treatment Group 1 was given two pre-tests and one post-test whereas Treatment Group 2 was given one pre-test and two post-tests (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 - Evaluation Design

	Treatment Group 1	Treatment Group 2
Pre-test 1	X	X
Pre-test 2	X	
Post-test 1	X	X
Post-test 2		X

Participants were asked to take Pre-test 1 before they read the introduction in the notebook. Pre-test 2 was administered at the start of the first class session. Post-test 1 was given at the close of the training program. Post-test 2 was mailed to participants 30 days after the program had been completed.

Participants in Treatment Group 1 were 21 shop stewards and 83 supervisors. Completed responses came from 18 shop stewards and 76 supervisors at the time of Pre-test 1. There was no attrition from Pre-test 1 to Post-test 1 for shop stewards. The attrition for supervisors was 13. Participants in Treatment Group 2 were 27 shop stewards and 102 supervisors. Completed responses were given by 24 shop stewards and 88 supervisors at the time of Pre-test 1. Attrition from Pre-test 1 to Post-test 2 was 13 for shop stewards and 25 for supervisors. This relatively high attrition of completed surveys was due to the failure of participants in Treatment Group 2 to return the Post-test 2 questionnaires, which were mailed to them thirty days after the completion of training.

Instrument Description

To measure the attitude changes of the participants, three surveys were designed (see Appendix). Each survey consisted of twelve semantically loaded statements. Subjects were asked to rate each of the statements on a five point scale. The anchors were 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Don't Know or Neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree. About half of the items were reverse scored.

From a pool of 36 statements, 18 pro-management and 18 pro-union, three equivalent scales were constructed. Six items from each sub-pool were randomly assigned to each of the three surveys. Thus, each scale contained 12 statements, six pro-union and six pro-management. The surveys were then administered as Survey A for Pre-test 1, Survey B for Pre-test 2 and Survey C for Post-test 1. Survey B was also administered for Post-test 2 since the participants in Treatment Group 2 did not take Pre-test 2.

RESULTS

During Phase I of the training program, the instruments were pre-tested and some adjustments were made. The scales that were used in the main study had the following properties: factor analyses were conducted for each scale, separately for pro-union and pro-management statements. Each analysis resulted in one main factor. It was inferred from these results that each sub-scale measured "attitudes toward unions" and "attitudes toward management", respectively. Spearman-Brown

reliabilities for each sub-scale ranged from .39 to .74 with a median of .56. The applied nature of this project and the concomitant time pressures did not make it possible to refine the instruments further.

The attitude changes of the participants from pre-tests to post-tests were analyzed with dependent t-tests and are shown in Table 1, separately for shop stewards' responses toward pro-management and supervisors' responses toward pro-union items. Table 1 shows the results for the five training groups that made up Treatment Group 1. As might be recalled, it was hypothesized that after training (1) shop stewards would agree more strongly with statements that are favorable toward management and (2) supervisors would agree more strongly with statements that are favorable toward unions as compared to before the training programs. As can be seen in Table 1, shop stewards agreed with pro-management statements more on Post-test 1 than before the training on Pre-tests 1, $t(17) > 2.01$, $p < .05$, and Pre-test 2, $t(17) > 2.01$, $p < .05$. The difference between the means on Pre-test 1 and Pre-test 2 is not statistically significant. Supervisors agreed substantially with pro-union statements across all three times. These differences were not statistically significant. For Treatment Group 1, the hypothesis was confirmed for shop stewards.

The results for Treatment Group 2 are also shown in Table 1. Shop stewards changed their agreement with pro-management statements significantly from Pre-test 1 to Post-test 1, $t(20) > 2.01$, $p < .05$. A reversal of this change is observed from Post-test 1 to Post-test 2, $t(10) > 2.01$, $p < .05$. With regard to attitude changes of supervisors toward pro-union statements, it can be seen that from Pre-test 1 to Post-test 1, the level remains the same, while a significant reversal took place from Post-test 1 to Post-test 2, $t(62) > 1.97$, $p < .05$. These results indicate that for Treatment Group 2, the hypothesis was again confirmed for shop stewards. The hypothesis for supervisors was not confirmed in either treatment group. Instead, supervisors in both conditions agreed quite highly with pro-union statements at the beginning of the training as well as at the time that training was completed. However, 30 days after the training was completed, they expressed a neutral attitude toward pro-union statements.

Table 1**Means and Standard Deviations of Attitude Scores Before and After Training**

Group	Pre-test 1	Pre-test 2	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Treatment Group 1				
Supervisors	3.5 _a (.50)	3.4 _a (.64)	3.5 _a (.37)	
Show Stewards	3.0 _b (.56)	3.2 _b (.50)	3.5 _a (.44)	
Treatment Group 2				
Supervisors	3.5 _a (.54)		3.5 _a (.45)	2.9 _b (.34)
Shop Stewards	2.8 _b (.47)		3.6 _a (.58)	2.9 _b (.37)

Note: Means sharing the same subscript are not significantly different.

DISCUSSION

As the data in the previous section indicate, training temporarily improved the attitudes of shop stewards toward management concerns. This was not the case for supervisors' attitudes toward union concerns. This lack of improvement for supervisors might be explained by the fact that many of the supervisors in the program had been promoted from union ranks into their present positions. Thus, supervisors were already familiar with union issues and may have been sympathetic toward these issues across all conditions. Shop stewards, on the other hand, might not have had prior experience with management concerns. As a result of the training program they acquired greater empathy towards management issues which is reflected in the results.

On a second level, anecdotal evidence indicates that substantial conflict occurs between upper level management and shop-stewards' supervisors. Indecisiveness and coordination problems on the part of the upper level is perceived by the lower level as a stumbling block to resolving problems with shop stewards. This results in the necessity to defer problems that originate at the work site to upper level decision makers.

An example of this problem was shared by one of the program participants: Each labor contract between the city and the unions outlines a grievance procedure that requires an employee and/or shop-steward to meet with the supervisor and verbally discuss a problem before a formal grievance can be filed. Consequently, the training sessions emphasized the communication skills that would be useful at this initial meeting. In contrast to this procedure, the participant had recently received a memo from upper level management with respect to a particular problem that had developed in his work group. The memo prohibited him from discussing the problem with anyone from the labor union. Any contact by the union was to be referred to upper management. The participant questioned why he was working on labor relations conflict management skills when he was prohibited from talking with the union.

This example demonstrates that changes in the internal procedures of organizations must go hand-in-hand with the prescribed labor relations training. Unless provisions for such changes are made in the organization, at the same time that the training program is administered, the transfer of newly learned conflict management skills is sabotaged. This study indicates that training programs alone cannot successfully change the working relationship between union and management. This conclu-

sion seems supported by the fact that the attitudes of shop-stewards returned to pre-training levels and attitudes of supervisors became worse than pre-training levels after spending time back in the workplace.

The issue of successful transfer of training to the work setting, in general, has been addressed by other researchers. Marx (1982) suggested that the Relapse Prevention (RP) Model, formulated by Marlatt and Gordon (1980) might be applicable for the retention of managerial skills training. The RP Model was first applied to individuals with addictive behaviors. The model attempts to teach former addicts how to cope with critical situations that might lead to a relapse. Marx generalized this concept to a work setting.

For the present study, participants who receive conflict management skills training could be offered an additional post-training workshop. It would provide RP training for their specific situations. Participants would be asked to describe, in detail, relapses by union stewards and supervisors to pre-training behaviors. These examples of relapses would be used as "valued data for prevention of later difficulty" (Marx, 1982, p. 437). The examples could also be integrated in future cooperative labor relations training programs.

In addition to recommending that organizational procedures be changed to complement the conflict management skills training and that post-training workshops be conducted, it is also suggested that union-management training programs include managers and union leaders above the first level supervisory and shop steward ranks. Training that aims to increase cooperation between unions and management can only be successful when it is conducted within a framework of broader organizational changes and with participation from several levels in both hierarchies. While it may not be necessary that all levels be resident in the same sessions, all levels need to be involved simultaneously if the training is to reach maximum effectiveness.

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Footnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Second Biannual Conference of the International Association for Conflict Management, University of Georgia, June 1989.
2. For a variety of reasons a few participants did not receive their notebooks until the start of the class.
3. Under specific statute appropriate in this case, it is possible for a supervisor to be in the bargaining unit and therefore also be a shop steward. This situation occurred five times, and the person was counted as a shop steward.

APPENDIX

Labor Relations Questionnaires

Below are several statements. Each represents a commonly held opinion and there are no right or wrong answers. You will probably agree with some items and disagree with others. Read each statement, then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by marking the appropriate number in the margin.

	1	2	3	4	5
If you:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

PRE-TEST 1

FORM A

- M* ____ 1. All too often, employees are not committed to the goals and policies of the organization.
- U* ____ 2. Compared with union members, managers are paid too much.
- M ____ 3. Management must be free to make personnel decisions solely on the basis of an employee's ability to do the job.
- U ____ 4. Managers are more concerned about protecting their power base than getting things done.
- M ____ 5. Unions should cooperate with management's need for flexibility in operations.
- M ____ 6. Supervisors more than earn their salaries.
- U ____ 7. Most employees would vote for and support a union if not for deceptive employer anti-union campaigns and coercive activities, which violate either the letter or the spirit of the law, or both.
- U ____ 8. Intransigent management positions cause strikes.
- M ____ 9. Compensation rates should be based on the productivity of an employee.

U ____ 10. Employees are underpaid for what they do.

M ____ 11. Frequently the demands on managers and supervisors requires a significant amount of work beyond regular work hours.

U ____ 12. Managers and supervisors generally have much better working conditions than bargaining unit employees.

* M = Pro-management item.

* U = Pro-union item.

- M ____ 1. Unreasonable and unrealistic union demands cause strikes.
- U ____ 2. Management doesn't make personnel decisions on the basis of an employee's ability to do the job – management often plays favorites.
- M ____ 3. An employee should not be required to support a union.
- U ____ 4. Management often tries to eliminate employees by buying new machines.
- M ____ 5. Managers often times go the extra mile to protect the interests of their employees.
- U ____ 6. Employers constantly seek to increase the work without increasing the pay.
- M ____ 7. Managers are generally fair and objective in the treatment of their employees.
- U ____ 8. Whenever management talks about making changes, or experimenting, or innovating, they are really talking about getting rid of employees.
- M ____ 9. The union leaders are often out of touch with the true feelings of the members and their desires.
- U ____ 10. The presence of the union is necessary to force management to make fair personnel decisions.
- U ____ 11. Managers typically get long lunch hours, parking privileges and other unearned perks.
- M ____ 12. Managers and supervisors are often required to take work home at no additional pay.

- M ___ 1. Unions constantly seek more money for less work.
- M ___ 2. Unions usually attempt to block all forms of technological change out of self-protective, shortsighted viewpoint.
- U ___ 3. Managers are more concerned about earnings than customer service.
- M ___ 4. The union has no legitimate role in this organization.
- U ___ 5. Employers often emphasize productivity at the expense of safety.
- M ___ 6. Sometimes a reduction in employee wages and benefits is appropriate.
- U ___ 7. An employee should be expected to support the union that represents him or her.
- U ___ 8. Managers don't plan – they just react to crisis after crisis.
- U ___ 9. Seniority is usually the fairest and most objective criterion for promotion.
- ___ 10. Employees desire security over everything else.
- ___ 11. Unions normally cooperate with management in making change, so long as the change does not adversely affect employees.
- ___ 12. Employees always want more pay, regardless of their productivity.