

**ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL
DEVELOPMENT**

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Let me start with a narrower definition of the field, with the easier problem of organizational responsibility for the development of its managerial personnel. The quality of management is so critical to organizational performance that one would think that only the most short-sighted of organizations would fail to see that they had a responsibility to themselves to develop their managers. I do not think it is as simple as that. It seems to me that it is only in certain kinds of environments that organizations feel a pressing need to consciously develop their managers.

First let us ask ourselves what management is about.

What is management about? Or not about?

It is about the “decision making under uncertainty”, it is about “control and coordination of subordinates”, it is about “allocation of resources”. But these things could equally well define an airline pilot, a supervisor and economic modeler, respectively. I think it is obvious that we have something more in mind when we speak of managers and management. The primary function of management is not any of these and it is more than the sum of them. *The primary function of management is to control the boundary conditions of the organization.*

Controlling the boundary conditions of an organization is not as simple a concept as maintaining a fence. The boundary conditions are those levels of exchange with its environment which allow the organization to survive and grow.

To ensure the appropriate levels of exchange it is necessary for management to understand and to be able to influence the conditions that give rise to them *so that the actual and potential capabilities of the organization match the actual and potential requirements of the environment*, (i.e. so as to meet the requirements of Ashby’s Law of Requisite Variety).

The setting of organizational objectives, goals or mission is management’s major means of exercising influence over both the organization and selected portions of its environment because it creates the potential to develop and foster special forms of interdependence. The defining of such objectives gives some hope that the organization and those selected parts of the environment will forego some immediate advantages and put up with some immediate disadvantages in order to develop and foster the interdependencies. (Note that organizational goals are not entelechies defined by the inherent nature of the organization itself nor by imperial prescripts).

Some environments, like that of Petticoat Lane, are so chaotic that interdependencies cannot be developed and that ‘the best tactic is the best strategy’; objectives are not needed and neither is management education. Native wit and an attunement to the environment are the prerequisites.

Other environments call for a distinction between tactics and objectives but are so stable that interdependencies, once established, persist over time, even over generations. Organizations in these environments only have to be administered. They hardly see any real need for management education. For them it would quite literally be a frill. Only a lifetime in the business is likely to yield the wisdom needed for subtle and cautious modification of objectives.

In the Australian environment traditional forms of, and bases for, interdependence are changing within decades, not generations, and novel forms emerging. With this change has come a marked increase in concern with defining objectives and with learning how to do it. Something more seems needed of managers than native wit or the qualities bred by years of intimate experience.

In these increasingly turbulent environments we see a burgeoning demand for the development of managers by planned educational means.

However, a great deal of current organizational concern for development of managers is simply reaction to new threats to organizational survival or profitability. It does not imply a new sense of responsibility to the individual. Thus, for instance, an organizational decision to push its managers through the Grid or team-building by T-grouping is not *prima facie* evidence of concern for the managers as individuals.

I think that this spirit of calculated manipulation of individuals is reflected in the kinds of things that have been accepted as essential components of management education. The accepted premises have been that to educate a manager you must;

- a. take him off the job and
- b. hand him over to educational specialists who will
- c. tool him up or re-tool him

The very ease with which the term management *training* slips into discussion of these matters, and into the titles of conferences on these matters, gives weight to point (c). The purpose is generally to skill and only occasionally to educate. Training and education are quite distinct words. We train for skills, as in sports, and we educate for understanding and for development of the person. This is not just a question of short or long term goals. If individual finds that he has a chance to fly into Korea next week he can himself a crash course in educating himself about the country. If he thinks that in four or five years time the promotion opportunities are going to be in the finance department he may steadily skill himself so that he will look good at selection. Between educating and skilling the difference is not in short and long term objectives, it lies in the difference between a more developed person and a more useful tool.

This tooling-up notion is certainly not the whole picture of what management education today is about. In fact it may tell us more about the form of the process

than about its content. The form of the process of educating managers is the content of so-called management education: the mass of disparate analytical techniques that pass as the management sciences. These techniques are so often and obviously non-transferable to the workplace, that one must wonder whether some other purpose is being served.

Other such purposes are that sending people off to management schools is intended to define an elite or intended to reward those who are being removed from the list of hopeful prospects.

It would be difficult to determine how much each of these different alternatives has contributed to the shape of management education today or how far they indicate a responsible organizational attitude. I think it will be more fruitful to come another direction at the question of organizational responsibility for managerial development. In so doing we will find that we can extend the scope of our considerations to non managerial employees.

The emergence of social turbulence has not just made organizations more sensitive to the quality of their management. In a turbulent field organizations are:

- a. more dependent on actively relating themselves to what the rest of the society is trying to do so;
- b. more dependent on the willing involvement and commitment of all levels of their staff.

These two features merge in the growing awareness that the resources that an organization uses for its purposes are not available by way of some god given right. Whatever privileges of access the organization has vis-à-vis others, the resources remain resources of the society and have to be used, conserved and developed as such. The privileges of access derive from the power of the society and are revocable. In turbulent conditions the traditions surrounding such privileges can readily come into question. Organizations that have a considerable history and operate in many societies are well aware of this. Whether they are aware or not, it is a fact of present day life of any organization, public or private, national or multinational, large or small.

What I have said about the social character of organizational resources certainly applies in no less measure to the human resources on which they are built. By this criteria an organization has responsibility for the way it uses, conserves and develops its human resources. The proper use of these resources is fundamental to their continued access to these resources. This is a fact on which societies have acted and probably will continue to act.

In a great many ways our societies have already enforced legislation to prevent organizations from using human beings in inhuman ways. I do not think that we are anywhere near the end of that road. Far from it. I think the new Norwegian

legislation heralds a new definition of organizational responsibility to the individual employee. No longer will it be enough to keep children out of coal mines, provide protective clothing etc. It will become increasingly necessary to provide work that enables a person to grow on the job and go on growing, be he manager or blue collar. This is neither pie-in-the-sky nor the empty threat of unenforceable legislation. The basic criteria for quality of work (work which provides such conditions for personal growth) are specifiable and measurable within the limits of objectivity necessary for a body of employees to convince a body of impartial judges that they are being misused as human beings.

Of crucial importance in inducing higher levels of organizational responsibility is that it serves their interest in a turbulent environment and is fairly readily seen to do so. It is not like trying to legislate for sobriety or virginity. As mentioned earlier, adaptation to turbulent environments requires the involvement and commitment of members to the efforts and purposes of the organization. Without these qualities an organization will fail to be sensitive to and responsive to the changing requirements of it and will surely drift into being obtrusive and obsolete. These are qualities, however, that cannot be commanded and are rarely reliable if bought. They became inherent qualities of an organization *only* when the members are able to participate in deciding what they do and how they carry it out. Involvement and commitment are not going to emerge unless people have good reason to believe that the shape of what they are pursuing in their work is significantly of their making. These qualities are not going to persist unless the individual continues to feel this way about his work and finds it a constant source of challenge and experiences this as personal growth. In these matters I am not talking about just managers or about non-managers; it is relevant at all levels of an organization, even for those who serve on the boards or councils of organizations.

There is a fairly considerable body of knowledge and experience about how participation can be brought into being. It does seem, however, that this adaptation can be a tortuous process unless the board explicitly recognizes the organization's social responsibilities for the resources it uses and the management recognizes the need to be adaptive. In these absence of these conditions we can expect timidity or cosmetics. People lower down in the power structure seem to have no difficulty in getting such messages.

I have tried to trace an emerging (and yet to be fulfilled) evolution of organizational responsibility from simply rolling-up managers to a responsibility for individual development at all levels. This latter level of responsibility cannot be read to imply that, for instance, a foundry should cultivate the musical abilities of a musically gifted employee. It will still have to be up to the individual to ask himself where he can get the development from work that he wants, or to otherwise use the conditions for growth that are made available. Similarly, the employer's responsibilities cannot be more than to provide growth conditions for individuals that are within the possibilities of his technologies or markets. If the society insists on demanding

products or services that cannot be delivered without dehumanizing people, then I think that is a social problem. The wise organization would edge out of such areas.

I have painted a picture of organizations having to take genuine responsibility for the development of the individuals they employ. In this picture we find a somewhat different relation between management education and the development of managers. I do not think that special management education becomes irrelevant but I do think that the kind of management education requires by responsible organizations (ones set on fulfilling their responsibilities to their members) seems to point in the opposite direction to the traditional practice. The aims are:

- a. to develop the person through his work,
- b. for the individuals to carry prime responsibility for educating themselves
- c. to educate rather than just to skill.

Thorsrud and I have described the sort of educational preparation of blue-collar workers found necessary for participative manning of a modern process plant. We also evidenced the continued education that has gone on over the years since the plant was commissioned. (Emery and Thorsrud, 1975, Chap.6).

I can illustrate some of the implications of the new directions for management level education by quoting a short note prepared in April for a very large Indian nationalized industry:

Notes on Proposal for Management College

There needs to be an alternative to the traditional Henley or Harvard type management college. Something which is,

- a. less extravagant in use of resources
- b. less conducive to perpetuating elitist notions
- c. more explicitly based on learning by doing.

This suggestion put forward at Hyderabad were as follows:

1. Short residential courses.
2. Each course constituted as one, or as a set of ‘task forces’ with an overriding group task.
3. The group task to be selected from amongst the problems currently challenging to management thinking.
4. The college thus serves as a ‘think tank’ for BHEL as well as testing out and educating people in the kinds of searching and decision making demanded of top management.
5. The task force reports would be subjected to an all-in critique at the end of the course by relevant visitors as well as staff and other course participants.
6. Good reports that identify the general in the particular to form the basis of College Occasional Papers for circulating at least within BHEL management.

It will be noted that this kind of learning set up has a very high reality content, it leads to relevant criteria for judging competence (including self judgements) and creates no particular problems about transfer of training.

It would require a support system rather different to the usual staffing of a traditional college:

1. Well ahead of participants gathering at the college the staff would have to:
 - a. define the task with top BHEL management
 - b. Select the course members (in conjunction with Personnel)
 - c. Identify special resource people, within and without BHEL
 - d. Brief intended participants and provide them with prior study materials
 - e. Design a course structure that will suit participants, task and resources.
2. The staff itself would probably need to be organized into task forces to manage the 2, 3, or 4 courses that might be somewhere in the pipeline at any one time.
3. Increasingly, the staff would be composed of personnel on secondment; persons who had proven themselves on previous courses.
4. Overtime one would expect that the college and its staff would be requested to provide search conference conditions for management task forces that are primarily concerned with the task, not with education.

It seems likely that ‘management study circles’ would start to grow up around the country centred on ‘graduates’ of the college. These could handle a great deal of the routine skills learning if supported from the college.

This organization of learning makes great demands on the adaptive planning capabilities of the staff. I strongly advise against the rigidities of ‘directorship’ or staff tenure. At most the spokesman for the staff should be the chairman of the faculty and professional responsibility be firmly located with the college of professionals. The very first test for the first faculty should be their ability to set up a hierarchy of measurable objectives that can serve both for future planning and a check on progress. It does not matter if the measures are only ordinal measures.”

This concept still envisages a residential off-the-job setting but presupposed that the managers will bring with them an important piece of their organization’s work and themselves take the responsibility for doing a good job on it.

Thinking along these lines might also help us tackle one of the long standing problems of traditional management education. The problem that I have in mind is that management education does not get through to the great mass of small and medium-sized organizations. Even in the literature it is very rare to find any reference to their problems. It cannot be assumed that because they are small they

have no problem with creating conditions for individual development. We might get management education through these people if, as in agricultural extension, we

- a) take the education to their localities and generally minimize interruption to their business,
- b) gain the support and sanctioning of the kinds of bodies they join and respect e.g. local Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Jaycees,
- c) allow them to effectively participate in designing their learning, curricular and all.

I am conscious that throughout this paper I have been stringing my ideas on the thread of organizational participation. There seemed to be little alternative. If an organization is unwilling to allow effective participation, then the exercise of its responsibilities for individual development will be little other than an exercise in paternalism.
