

ON OUTDOOR TECHNIQUES REGARDING MANAGERS' TRAINING

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ABSTRACT: The out-door system practically means forming/training and developing a person's ability to work in a team and to involve the team in common activities. The adjustment of values alone is not enough. The quality of management and that of a manager, in general, depend on the authenticity/originality of individual behaviour, and thus on the way each individual proves to be able to live and act within and for the team he/she belongs to. This is the key to understand the development of the process of training businessmen (and not only of businessmen) in the outdoor system. Undoubtedly, this formation is able to stimulate, practically, "key values" of the team work: having faith in co-workers (team players); esprit de corps; the feeling that one can really rely on others; the emotional-motivational feeling of success after a team work which is clearly superior to the feeling of personal success.

МЕТОДИ ЗА ОБУЧЕНИЕ НА МЕНИДЖЪРИ ИЗВЪН КОМПАНИЯТА

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РЕЗЮМЕ: По същество тази система означава обучение и усъвършенстване на личността да работи в отбор и да култивира у себе си такива умения. Осъществяването на такава необходимост не е достатъчно. Качествата на мениджъра зависят от автентичността и оригиналността на индивидуалното поведение и начина, по който всеки индивид доказва, че е в състояние да живее и действа в рамките на групата, към която той принадлежи. Това е ключът към обучаване на истинския бизнесмен/ и не само бизнесмена/ при общуване извън компанията. Безспорно това стимулира и развива, ключови ценности, при работа в отбор, а именно: да имаш доверие в партньора; да разчиташ на другите; емоционално и мотивирано чувство за успех при работа в отбор, което е над чувството за личен успех.

Is it possible that only through a theoretical training, even though accompanied by examples, case studies, test-grids, can a manager soak up the necessary elements in order to control the situations he is faced with? Undoubtedly, theoretical training is the primary and absolutely necessary condition which gives the manager not only a strong knowledge base, but also an "additional" psychological capacity which enhances his chances to success (compared to the very many who use their flair, intuition, desire, ambition, and possibly experience when taking initiatives and actions). Based on experience (particularly the western one), the theoretical training of future or current managers is only a necessary condition, which is not enough to succeed as a manager.

As a result, in recent years a great emphasis has been placed also on the practical training, the "out door" training of managers (in general, of leaders of large multinational companies and trusts and of the heads of compartments which deal with the recruitment of new staff within those companies - the term "framework" is used in specialized western literature and practice to designate the managerial staff).

What is, in fact, the purpose of this training? In the first place, the formation and the development of individual abilities to react spontaneously (that is to say the ability to take the immediate decision of accepting or rejecting in a categorical manner) in any practical situation occurred and in any type of

conflictual relationship which is more or less significant between parties.

Cultural and psycho – educational foundations of "out door training

The development of "out door" training started in Great Britain, in 1941. An anti - Nazi German, Kurt Hahn, a refugee in England, noted that in situations of great danger arising on the battlefield, older soldiers who had a greater ability to control and master their emotions and team spirit, managed to survive, while younger comrades were unable to handle the stress and they often made fatal mistakes. Under the circumstances, Kurt proposed to the British generals to create and develop a new system of training young soldiers, a system which enables them to train in order to acquire skills to cope with extreme situations with a psycho - emotional load, occurring on the battlefield.

As soon as the Second World War had ended, Kurt became associate professor at the English College of Gordonstown and created a special department which trained young civilians, future managers and business people. This was "the birth" of a new chain of institutions aiming at the "out door" training system; nowadays, this chain is known worldwide as the "Outward Bound Schools". Subsequently, the "out door" training system had been developed in more countries, the

schools being placed under the license of "Outward Bound School".

The founding postulate of this type of training is the "physical metaphor", according to which "... the great man was, just like you, a small man, but he managed to develop an important skill: to learn to distinguish where and what were the weak points in his thinking and actions."

The qualities, attitudes and the behavior of a leader (regardless of the hierarchical level on which he is placed), demonstrated in a complex and uncertain situation, facing the risk of the unknown, can be summarized stating that the individual must prove his ability to exploit his own potential and not to overestimate it (that is to say, to know his limits), to know how to overcome the temptations they are faced with, and also, to be able to rely on the support and on the impulses offered by his group, thus overcoming the fear generated by changes and by the impact of the new.

If the elements presented above are correct and accurate (as absolutely true), the same qualities, attitudes and behaviors can be grouped into a formative situation in order to make it the object of awareness and of the learning process. The advantages and the limits of indoor skill training and development techniques are well known, based mostly on examples, simulations, case studies, role-playing games. In general, the facts generated by indoor training involve a relatively familiar repetitive environment (table, chairs, walls, video equipment), which is easy to reactivate from psychological point of view (eg. the individual does not experience difficulty in reactivating his mechanisms of self-defense learned and practices in his office, in lecture rooms or in meeting rooms). That certain framework of self-defense (the ability to overcome conflictual situations arising in closed spaces) is, mainly, based on verbalization (expressed in words), over a limited period of time, including individuals often equipped only for this level of responsibility and who are sufficiently well prepared to formulate, structure and make a speech of acceptance or non-acceptance towards a given situation.

From this level on, the following physical metaphor must be created and developed: when they are in an open (outdoor) environment (space), faced with unusual circumstances, "torn away" from their common reference space (offices, meeting rooms), "forced" to involve completely and with total conviction in the new states of fact, these individuals will be at a loss for words, verbal expressions and intentions generated at psychological-intellectual level. In addition, further physical reaction skills must be developed in order to create a systematic feed - back "device" in which success, failure, acceptance and / or resignation can seek immediate physical connection with each individual, increasing his/her chances of memorizing and mastering the experienced behaviors.

In other words, analyzing the causes of failure (eg, through a case study) in a room (office), it will leave fewer marks on the individual's (business man) consciousness, and hence on his ability to develop his memory, as compared to the situation in which the failure has also caused physical trauma (a fall, a hit, it was very cold or very hot, he skipped breakfast, lunch and / or dinner). For example, a discussion carried out over 6-8

hours on the importance of relying on the group (team) will be less meaningful and effective, as compared to a situation where an individual has experienced (supposedly) a fall on the back and he has been saved by the stretched arms of his team colleagues. Or, in another example, a conference on the theme of "taking risks" will generate a less personal impact, compared to a situation in which the individual has assumed the risk to jump from the plane with a parachute or has dared to cross a chasm being suspended by a cable.

In essence, the issue of cultural and psycho - educational foundations of "out door" training consists in knowing, beyond the purely technical aspects, what elements it is made of and what make it successful.

American managerial and sociological literature uses the concepts of "blue collars"(meaning workers) and "white collars"(which refers to employees in general). Few years ago, Robert Kelley proposed a new term, "gold collars" which refers to a new generation, to workers who use the most important resource, brainpower and who have become essential enough to business operations as to rank the companies in the economic competition.

In only eight years, the "gold collars" have come to represent nearly 60% of the active population of the U.S. They work in companies or services that produce, manipulate and distribute information. The unemployment rate for these individuals is about 3%, compared with about 16% (annual average) for other categories of personnel and the cost of their recruitment is extremely high (and obviously confidential). Under the circumstances, the emphasis is placed on reducing their fluctuations, since their leaving from a company or service is equivalent to a "leak" and / or a loss of crucial information. As a general rule, they are contracted "for life" (while, for example, the average period of stability of a manager or of a high level professional within the same company, in the U.S., is only 31 months). Despite all the efforts of American companies to avoid the "leakage" of "gray matter", the (substantial) material benefits offered by competition or by the "big ones" led to an increase of the "brain drain" phenomenon, although regular opinion polls showed that the percentage of those who claim that their "... organization is an appropriate environment to work in" fell from 73% in 1973 to about 61% in 1989. As a result, the "brain drain" phenomenon "managed" to acquire alarming proportions in the USA as well (not to mention its size in the former East European "bloc").

Therefore, it can be concluded that the "gold collars" is a strategic population and at the same time a "volatile" one. The purpose of the greatest managerial efforts made during the recent years is to optimize this important resource: brainpower.

The same problem occurs in Europe as well, even if the percentages of labor mobility are lower. Great Britain has serious difficulties in reducing the "brain drain" phenomenon, particularly amongst engineers who are often tempted to cross the Atlantic, where they can find both technically superior working conditions and higher wages than on the "old island". They are often successful in their extremely easy and quick integration, since they have no language problems (unlike other Europeans). In France, big industrial organizations "attract" super - specialists in finance and IT, in return for

higher wages, making use of the experience and of the hectic activity of "head hunters". And examples can continue.

In general, in Europe, managers of companies control - in the human resource department - two categories of personnel: one including loyal, obedient, extremely "flexible" executives and the one including specialists with "two speeds" (impulses, in fact): a "wage impulse" – they work well for 40 hours per week and a "passionate impulse" – the individual can prove what he is capable of doing outside the company. "Passionate impulse" is, in the opinion of Meignant and Rayer, the one in which really lies the motivation for work and, therefore, the efforts should be directed to reinstate it within the organization (company).

Two American researchers, Bennis and Nanus studied the personal characteristics of 90 managers of big enterprises, trusts and companies, outlining 6 important criteria that they consider to be related to their successful activity:

- The quality of individual work
- The ability to learn
- The sense of belonging to a group
- Skills to work in a team
- The pleasure and the happiness to work
- Correspondence between personal and collective objectives

The last three criteria are, in fact, characteristic to the objectives the "out door" training system. Basically, it is about training and development of the individual's ability to work with and to engage in common activities with his team.

The adjustment of values is not always enough. The quality of management, and generally, the quality of a manager's work depend on the originality of the person's behavior, thus on the way each individual proves to be able to live and work within, with and for the team he belongs to. This is, in our opinion, the "key" to understanding the appearance and the development of "out door" businessmen training (and not only of their training). Undoubtedly, this training is able to stimulate practically "key-values" of teamwork: confidence in employees (team players); solidarity; the feeling that you can, really, rely on others; emotional – motivational feeling of success with a team, clearly superior to the feeling experienced after a personal success.

Finally we shall be placed in a classical learning scheme, taking the following form: stimuli - responses - development and intensification of (professional) inter - personal relationships. Thus, for example, when the person takes part in a situation - the stimulus requires and implies a certain behavior - the response, which, if it proves suitable it will provide each individual with a personal experience, able to develop an emotional reward - strengthening and enhancing inter - personal relationships.

Practically, "out door" training is intended to give a chance to individuals (manager and / or businessman), whose typical behavior is a (self) generator of stress and dissatisfactions, to reconsider their skills by transposing and adapting them to real situations, experienced within their teams, skills which are able to create satisfactions and personal fulfillment as a result of teamwork.

Obviously, the "out door" training system should not be generalized nor should it be considered a unique element in forming managers and / or businessmen. It is, however, and it proves compulsory to complete an indoor training with maximum effectiveness, providing additional psycho - physical strength to the individual, the desire to win and the feeling of accomplishment as a result of success; these are all very necessary in order to carry out successfully the toughest challenges one must face in the business world (and not only).

Human resource development ... outdoors!

Climbing, kayaking, rafting, hiking, these are some of the activities that make us think of extreme sports and of a small group of privileged persons. However, nowadays these terms have a different connotation. Not few companies, and especially multinational companies, call on specific training where these activities are not out of place, namely: experiential outdoor training. The main purpose of these outdoor trainings, which have been used for decades in most developed countries, and which now begin to enter our country, is team formation or "teambuilding".

Managers of big/important companies are well aware of the fact that, besides an appropriate salary, emphasis should also be placed on team spirit, on efficient teamwork and on creating an organizational environment that encourages participation, open communication, the initiative of each employee. A suitable means for achieving these objectives is outdoor training, since it has implications in the physical, mental and emotional level of humans due to its nature, as well as due to depth of experiences. It is well-known that emotions are the ones that leave the deepest marks within ourselves. Outdoor training uses experiential education as a teaching technique, that is to say we can learn from experience (learning-by-doing).

The characteristics of an outdoor training

- it takes place outside
- it has a physical component
- it involves immediate consequences of activities
- it implies extreme challenges and experiences
- it combines classic natural sports, artificial equipment and a wide range of activities to develop confidence and problem solving
- the group or the team is an important promoter of change

Simon Priest, one of the most important theorists of outdoor training speaks about 4 kinds of outdoor programs. The first one, which he called *recreational program* (which is mistaken for the outdoor training by many company managers and human resource managers), is the outdoor activity itself, which produces changes in feelings, but it has no effect on the development of the organization.

The second category, *the educational programs* already involve evaluation, activities are planned according to client's needs. These programs already produce changes in thinking.

The third type of program is *the development program* or the outdoor training, which produces behavioral changes and implies the connection with the every day work.

The fourth type of program, *the re-directional program* is addressed to individuals with dysfunctional behaviour and it is used as a therapeutic method.

Besides challenging activities, which imply especially the psyche - although it is believed the opposite -, in outdoor trainings there are numerous learning exercises and projects, in which the participants have the opportunity to practice and to improve their skills, abilities and the impact of a positive attitude in solving day to day activities in an environment completely different than their place of employment. At the same time it should not be forgotten that a number of failures imply the loss of motivation of participants, which is why it is very important to choose the degree of difficulty of exercises depending on the team skills.

An experiential outdoor training encompasses both simple exercises, which aim at mutual acquaintance and complex projects, which already imply a strategic thinking and a proper management of resources and time, and even an experienced manager can learn something new. This happens because of the fact that an experiential outdoor training can help both the team and the individual to be capable of self-knowledge and self-evaluation. Thus, we can notice an enhancement in the performances of the individual and the team.

Despite the fact that the main activities of an outdoor training are previously established by the trainer in agreement with the customer's representative, it may change during its course, in order to achieve the preset goals. A real outdoor training is conducted with focus on both activities, and on the individual and the team. The problem or the task within an activity can not be solved unless we pay attention to the needs of the individual and the team; not taking these issues into consideration can lead to failure in reaching the target, to the lack of motivation of participants, to the inability to use the conclusions of the outdoor training in the business environment. While assessing activities one may come across some problems, gaps at the workplace (such as the lack of customer orientation, superficiality, communication problems, lack of confidence, initiative), which were not among the objectives of the training, but which must be identified and treated as such, looking for solutions to solve them with the help of the group.

The most important difference between traditional teaching and outdoor training, education or experiential learning, is that the trainer, as the receiver of signals coming from the team externalizes the problems and, as facilitator, he turns the

discussion towards a solution which will be applied in the following activities.

Through practice, solving models can be imprinted in the minds of participants, thus transposing them into the daily professional life. Obeying by the cycle made up of planning, execution, evaluation, implementation, an outdoor training can make sustainable and measurable changes in the behavior and the attitudes of participants. This does not happen during a program of outdoor event.

According to the specific objectives of the program, the results of an experiential outdoor training may be:

- greater individual self-confidence
- quick integration of new employees within the organization
- increased tolerance for other views
- efficient teamwork
- open communication within the team
- deeper attachment towards the individuals, the team and the purpose of the organization
- personality differences are perceived as a value added to the team and not as a lack of homogeneity

Despite the fact that the results of an experiential outdoor training are linked mainly to individual development, to the development of soft skills, it plays an important part and occupies a well-earned place among the courses designed to develop employees in different organizations.

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