



AOMi's stance on management development

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Introduction

This short paper provides our thoughts on:

- Optional routes for management development.
- Creating the right environment.
- Models of change and the implications for management development.

Optional routes for management development

There are many pitfalls typically associated with management training. In the past, large scale training interventions have often disappointed as they promised a lot more than they delivered – leaving companies wondering if they truly got value for money.

The root of these failings often lay in the assumptions that management performance could be improved either by “fixing management attitudes” or by “filling the knowledge gap”.

In the former case, motivational training, team building and workshops to explore the company vision and values often characterise the intervention. Unfortunately this approach has tended to stray too far from the real world as perceived by managers, who find the training does little to help with 'here-and-now' problems – serving only to increase their awareness that things ought to be better than they are.

In the second case, the assumption is made that managers can translate new knowledge into new behaviour. The training focuses on case study and theory – relying on managers to turn the theory into practice. This approach often falls at the first hurdle. Managers return from the training event with new knowledge but into an old situation (made more pressing by their period of absence on the training). They immediately revert to old habits to solve the problems, finding little time or space to explore ways of applying the theory.

Ideally, the above issues can be addressed by designing development interventions that are altogether more pragmatic and focus more directly on supporting changes to management behaviour. Solutions which organisations could adopt could include the following.

- *The use of simulation-based training.* The simulations used could be of generic management challenges, or more directly geared toward client-specific issues. Either way, the emphasis is on providing managers with time and space to practice required skills. Not only is this a more action-oriented approach (which tends to fit with the learning style of many operational managers), it is also the safest way to give managers room to experiment – without betting the business on the outcome. Furthermore, a simulation is a powerful way of underlining the role definition and requirements for a group of managers.

AOM has extensive experience of using “off the shelf” simulation packages to train large managerial populations in Operations Management, General Management and Project Management. We have also designed, developed and delivered a number of bespoke events in which some part of the management process has been simulated.

- *Coaching and mentoring.* Some of the best development for managers will happen outside the classroom. The advantages of coaching and mentoring are numerous. For example it:
 - Provides an opportunity to deal with real problems/ issues in real time.
 - Allows for timely interventions giving managers the skills when they need them.
 - Focuses directly on behaviour – with just enough theory to explain why they should behave a certain way.
 - Directly engages more senior managers (whom we believe should be the coaches) ensuring the clear message that development is seen as important.

AOM has been involved both directly in coaching senior managers and in coaching managers to coach others.

- *Networking, and learning from others.* Creating formal and informal networks can be a means of helping managers to learn from their peers. Correctly structured and facilitated, these can have a very practical focus, dealing with real problems faced by managers. Without structure and facilitation, they can lack direction and become big consumers of time.

Learning from other organisations can also be extremely powerful – although it often requires an experienced coach to help managers to interpret the experience in a way that will help the manager to put the root idea into practice, and not simply mimic the other organisation.

AOM has a large network of clients who have successfully solved many of the problems facing organisations. We have in the past arranged study tours for clients – often running follow-up sessions to help extract the lessons learned and to plan how to apply them.

Creating the right environment

Perhaps one of the greatest areas of weakness in large scale management development programmes in the past has been the perception that senior management were not fully committed. This has manifested itself in various ways. For example:

- Although senior management say they are committed – even allocating big budgets – the reality is often that training is the first activity to get cut under pressure, and often the senior managers themselves are not involved.
- The training may happen – even get a high profile and senior management involvement – but then there is no follow-through. Managers do not perceive that rewards or sanctions are linked to any change in their behaviour. They may even feel that behaving in the “new way” carries greater risk of penalty than carrying on as before.

For these reasons, we believe it is important to pay explicit attention to designing the process for managing the development activity. Key themes would include:

- Ensuring Personal Development Plans have real, measurable outcomes associated with development areas.
- Establishing the principle of a development contract between the manager in question, their boss and the trainer/coach (a key dimension of this contract being that the boss will provide time, space and support to help the manager put new behaviour into practice).
- Enabling managers in turn to coach their own subordinates and embed 'developing management practices, capability and performance' as the core part of the role.
- Putting clear metrics in place which link completion to development activities to improved operational performance and delivery of important projects and programmes.

Models of change and the implications for management development

There are many ways in which a ‘change model’ can be described and particular areas emphasised. We set out below a brief indication of some of the areas of thinking that can be introduced and worked upon through management two-day workshops. These areas are by no means exhaustive but collectively give a good representation of the potential scope to choose from for the future workshops.

The potential models of change to be covered in the workshops could include:

- *Strategic Planning and Visioning Facilitation* to create the organisational vision and strategy, ensure alignment throughout all organisational levels, clarify personal visions and values, and develop a plan to reach the desired goals.

- *Leadership Development* to assess executive capacity to coordinate and implement change, while helping leaders to acquire needed skills.
- *Assessment and Planning* to determine the organisation's current capability to change, identify major change enablers and barriers and develop strategies and action plans.
- *Individual Learning and Development* to define required skills within a level or position, assess individual capacity in those areas and design necessary development priorities. Key requirements in this area could be influencing skills, dealing with ambiguity, working within an environment of continuous change and treating your work as a series of projects.
- *Managing Individual Transitions* to shape a programme that allows individuals to adjust to the new way of working within the organisation. This would include the creation of Individual Tracking and Assessment tools.
- *Agents of Change* to shape the future state and be key brokers in distilling and mobilising key individuals across the new organisation.
- *Communication Planning* to define methods for reaching appropriate audiences, tailoring key messages and managing feedback.
- *Organisational Effectiveness* to assess your current organisational design, develop recommendations for improvement and help implement those recommendations.
- *Human Resources and Performance Management* to assess, redesign and implement the strategy, structure, processes and technology of your HR function, as well as design and implement processes required to support the change initiatives.

Our partners have extensive experience of running such management development workshops.