Achievement training: A re-assessment of the technique and its impact on the development of supervisory and managerial talent in Southern Africa

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Introduction

One of the most crucial challenges facing the nations of Southern Africa to the 1990s is the need for developing an adequate quantity and quality of managerial and supervisory material — particularly Black material — to run, sustain and grow the business and governmental processes which underpin the economic growth of this sub-continent.

That business in South Africa is more than aware of this need is apparent from the visible effort presently being exerted in this direction and is further reflected in the findings of the report on ‘The Manpower Analysis for the PWV Area to the Period 1984’ UNISA (1980). A preliminary analysis of its findings indicate a five-fold increase in effort in this regard during the next five years. That business has not been unduly excited by the results obtained so far is more than apparent from the findings of the studies by Nasser, Motspe and Lenamile (1980), Nasser and Tabane (1981) and Hofmeyr (1982).

Typically management has been less than satisfied with the results achieved to date. Too little new supervisory and managerial talent has emerged from the diversity of training and developmental efforts — particularly among Blacks — and this has only tended to cause extra strain on an already over-extended span of control.

As is apparent from Figure 1, the manager in South Africa (and the same applies to other Southern African countries) is grossly overloaded, and this only serves to aggravate the existing problems inherent to the already overtaxed workplace.

It was in looking at these complexities and the accompanying poor track record for developing managers and supervisors — particularly Black managers, — that I became interested in trying to determine what specific solutions could be found for this specific problem.

While recognizing the impact of variables such as corporate culture, attitudes, educational inadequacies, psychological distance from the free-enterprise system and socio-political constraints, I was more concerned about the role and nature of personal motivation patterns in causing managerial growth.

The work of Harvard professor David McClelland became a natural point of focus as the search for a solution continued.

Figure 1 An international comparison of manager to worker ratios (Sadie, 1979)
McClelland’s (1958) three-band theory focuses on the needs patterns of individuals and hence reflects the accompanying motivation and behaviour patterns that accompany these.

The three-band theory

McClelland’s (1958) three-band theory classifies the needs patterns of individuals as:

(a) need for Affiliation — n Aff;
(b) need for Achievement — n Ach;
(c) need for Power — n Pow.

In attempting to define these needs in relation to the specific issue at stake the concentration will be on the need for Affiliation (n Aff) and the need for Achievement (n Ach) and those elements which are most relevant to the free-enterprise system specified for this system.

n Aff characteristics:
- group minded,
- dependent,
- high on support,
- goals dictated by others,
- follower behaviour,
- evasion of obstacles,
- lacks tenacity.

n Ach characteristics:
- individualist,
- independent,
- self-starter,
- moderate risk-taker,
- problem resolver,
- high on decision-making,
- leader behaviour,
- high tenacity.

The research on the incidence of these needs and their significance for economic growth is very substantial. The more eminent works of McClelland (1958, 1961, 1973, 1975); Rosen (1959); Atkinson (1966); Winter (1973) and Willers (1983) point out two major features of this need structure:

(a) the dominant need which emerges in a given nation is a product of the socio-cultural make-up of that nation e.g., n Ach is dominant in northern Europe;
(b) there is a direct significant relationship between the incidence of n Ach in a nation and the economic growth of that nation. The higher the incidence of n Ach, the more economically prosperous is that nation likely to be.

By examining the characteristics of n Ach, it is more than apparent that good management/supervision and n Ach go hand in hand. From the abovementioned research it would also appear that the economically more prosperous nations have averaged a 15% n Ach: 85% n Aff mix (i.e. 15% leaders/innovators and 85% followers). Broad observation by the author Nasser (1978) and others; Nasser, Lenamile and Tabane (1980), Tabane (1981), Thopane (1982) has indicated that the picture for the South African population is approximately 3% n Ach and 97% n Aff. Hence, there is a major bias towards n Aff with only a very small incidence of n Ach. The reasons for this skewed distribution is the subject for another discussion. But the implications for developing core managerial material are more than obvious. There are far fewer natural managers, leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators per population in Southern Africa — when compared with American and European norms, — than is required for the dynamic sus-
environment. Such syndicate assignments are then presented at
the next classroom session.
Overseeing the whole process are the designated Mentors — preferably the first-line managers. The impact of these men-
tors has been substantial and according to Nasser and Buiten-
dag (1983) provide an important additional dimension for the
individual’s development.
This whole process lasts approximately five months and is
totally interactive in nature.

Results from the original programme
Since the inception of the Achievement Programme in 1978,
some 2 985 prospective managers/supervisors — 1 964 being
Black — from 71 organizations — representing every sector
from Mining to Banking — have been involved in this train-
ning process. A careful screening procedure using the Rotter
IE Scale — and Ghisellis’ SDQ — was utilized in identifying
those candidates most likely to benefit from this training
process.
The impact of the training was measured both
(a) psychometrically for a shift in n Ach and self-esteem, and
(b) by immediate-boss ratings on the following dimensions;
- Self-sufficiency,
- Attitude,
- Creativity and Problem Solving,
- Decision-making,
- Time keeping,
- Work Accuracy,
- Work Rate,
- Productivity,
- Handling of interpersonal relationships,
- Control of subordinates.

Based on immediate follow-up and longitudinal data, where
available, the following picture emerged for the trainee group
as a whole:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>% Improvement six months after programme</th>
<th>% Improvement eighteen months after programme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-sufficiency</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and problem solving</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time keeping</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work accuracy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work rate</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Handling of interper-
  sonal relationships | 14                                      | 41                                        |
| Control of subordinates | 17                                      | 43                                        |

Naturally there were substantial differences from organiza-
tion to organization and group to group with an approximate
7% who showed no or negative improvement (retrogression).
However, the figures make it more than apparent that the
trend is substantially forward, and in the direction of the kind
of behaviour required from supervisory/managerial personnel.
Furthermore, the impact seems to be lasting and escalatory —
providing the corporate climate is supportive of the new
behaviours acquired and demonstrated by the n Ach trainees.
The most notable follow-up research in this regard is that
reported by Nel (1983).

Regarding the career progress of this group some 69% of
the participants were promoted within their organizations.
When compared with the matched control groups in 26 of the
organizations, this promotion index was significant at the 5% level.

Of the promoted group
57% — moved up 1 position in the organizational ladder,
21% — moved up 2 positions,
18% — moved up 3 positions,
4% — moved up 4 and/or more positions,
during the period June 1979 – December 1983.

This movement is regarded as very substantial by any stan-
dard, particularly when one takes into account that 72% of
the promotions were for Black participants. It can therefore
be stated in definite terms that the programme has not only
produced an improved employee behaviour but furthermore
assisted in causing some 69% of the participants on this
Achievement Training programme to climb the corporate lad-
ter towards the supervisory and managerial ranks.

A critique of the present programme
Although by any training and development standards the
results have been substantial, there is much room for improve-
ment in the design and hence operating efficiency of the
programme.

There has been a real need for the re-evaluation of the course
content, and this research is being completed at the time of
this article going to press. The major emphasis is on improv-
ing the impact of the newly learned skills into on-the-job
behaviour, particularly in relation to the individual motiva-
tion for acquiring more and better skills.

To this end the following re-structuring of the course
elements is suggested:

(a) Understanding motivation,
(b) Orientation to achievement motivation,
(c) Planning process,
(d) Leadership.
(c) Communication,
(f) Problem analysis and problem solving,
(g) Handling and developing subordinates,
(h) Managing interpersonal relations,
(i) Teamwork,
(j) Managing change and resistance to change,
(k) Productivity,
(l) The Pygmalion effect.

Of particular significance has been the discovery that the
training of Mentors for the mentoring process will considerably
enhance the impact of Achievement Training in terms of
organizational climates — support and enhance its basic philosophy
— i.e., selected employees can be taught to become more
achievement-oriented and this will lead to more positive at-
titudes and improved job behaviour. This can only happen
if the newly acquired enthusiasm and behaviour are encouraged
and rewarded by specific managerial recognition for improv-
ished performance.

Conclusion:
This research has attempted to provide a possible solution to
help alleviate the critical shortage of supervisory/managerial skills in Southern Africa.

From the overview of the results it is apparent that the Achievement Training process has achieved two objectives: (a) it considerably enhances on-the-job behaviour as assessed by the immediate line manager; and (b) it has assisted in causing upward mobility for 69% of the programme participants, — many of whom have been moved into supervisory or managerial positions.

That the training process is organic and needs therefore to be constantly reviewed cannot be denied. Already substantial research has been completed into making this training process even more dynamic by aiding the growth of both the managerial skills and the economic wealth of Southern Africa.

References


