



A NEW DEVELOPMENT IN TRAINING BY CORRESPONDENCE — MANAGEMENT TRAINING BY TELETUITION

PART II

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THE STUDENT

An indispensable requisite for the student group is that it should consist of members with heterogeneous backgrounds. In constituting a group, the School brings together people with

various academic backgrounds, business experience and management positions in different concerns, with varying ages and different home languages. The motivating principle of this heterogeneous group composition is the maximising of exchanged experience and academic knowledge. For the most efficient functioning of the group, a division of labour is also important, because the body of work is too much to be managed by independent study techniques.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES

As I have already said, our aim is the group's integration of theory and practice into the cycle of the learning process. To develop the synthetic learning loop we use different teaching techniques such as case studies, business games, project studies, individual students lecturing to other members of their particular group, group assignments, and research proposals. In case studies we try to train the student to use a theoretical framework together with his practical experience, for diagnosing problems and indicating all the alternative solutions. This is conducive to observation, interpretation and planning in the learning process.

The group submits (as a group assignment for evaluation and comment) a written record of its independent discussion of a case study. Copies of the two best answers submitted, as well as the marks of all groups are sent to each group. Over three years the groups submit 46 case study answers — an important technique

designed to give the students exercise in written communication.

In the business game, or as it is sometimes called, the dynamic case study, the learning loop is completed with a continuous movement — by observing, analysing, interpreting, planning and acting.

Study groups take part in business games for the first three years of the degree. In the course of these three years this technique is, wherever possible, interrelated with the written lectures and workshops. The students are also required to consult reference books extensively in working out their assignments accompanying the business-game reports. The business game also introduces a strong competitive element between groups and is of tremendous learning value, owing to its sensitive simulation of the business environment.

Closely related to the business game is a project study and planning exercise, consisting of a series of integrated exercises using modern management techniques. This is used to prepare the students for the business game, since all the information to be analysed comes from the game.

Mutual lecturing within the study groups is a very successful technique stimulating students to develop insight into the principles of management. A series of topics is sent to the different groups. A student selects a topic and lectures on it to his group. They evaluate him and send a mark to the University, while the student lecturer elaborates his lecture in written form and submits it as a work assignment. At the residential training period the students write a test consisting of questions selected from the topics on which they have received lectures from their fellow-students.

Group assignments are also used, for example, to answer a list of questions on case studies to be discussed during residential training periods. This prepares the students for the case-study discussions during residential training periods.

A new development is the research proposals that students have to submit as group assignments before the final examinations in the third year. After deciding on his topic in con-

sultation with his study adviser, the student prepares the first draft of his research proposal, with the aid of reference material obtained in the library. He discusses it in his group, whereupon it is submitted as a group assignment. After the third-year examination he uses it as a basis for his dissertation, in which the integration of theory into practice is emphasised. The average time devoted to a dissertation is one year. Valuable information on business practices has already been gathered through dissertations submitted by students.

Continuous research on teaching techniques, such as case studies, business games etc., is essential because it is all too easy to distort the operation of the study group as a learning cell, if a balance between the time required to use these techniques and the student's available time for participating in group activities is not maintained.

CONTENTS OF COURSE MATERIAL

The last resource, equal in importance to the other two resources, is the content of the course material. Possibly we have here the weakest link in general management training. We must bear in mind that in a graduate degree the course content should be of a high quality. The purpose of the written material is to give the student a frame of references to be used in analysing business problems. We follow a systems approach and limit the contents of our lecture notes to basic theory — the principles of management. We deliberately leave out most of the descriptive material and force the student to discover for himself from various references — books and journals — the necessary additional reading required to assist him in his problems.

Our students are already in management and thus dispose of considerable discretionary power in decision-making. The theory must therefore provide a framework and a philosophy to diagnose the problem, identify alternatives and make a choice. In our system of procedure the knowledge required to be memorised is limited but essential; for a student must have memorised that limited body of knowledge before he is ready to utilise it.

As I mentioned earlier in dealing with student lectures, individual assignments concentrating on theory are required from our students. These papers demand research and are intended to develop the student's insight into the principles of management.

Correspondence training in general frequently suffers from an excess of descriptive material in lecture notes, which sometimes tend, moreover, to be too elementary. Frequently gimmicks are introduced to disguise a low standard of lecture material. Lecturers are apt to expatiate on theory which transmits knowledge only for the sake of knowledge, forgetting how little time most students have at their disposal. We must remember that the final aim of theory in management is practice. Our system makes high demands on the staff. Only well-trained staff, continuously doing research, can produce study material of a high standard. Our lecturers are in an excellent position to do research in business practices. Many of our students are in senior management positions and constantly feed back their practical experience and their evaluation of the knowledge transmitted to them by their lecturers. I am proud to state that our lecturers have already produced study guides of a high standard, some of which are at present under review for publication.

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF A STUDY GROUP

The deployment of resources to attain objectives and goals is possible only in a well-organised system embracing a number of sub-systems. The study group is a system on its own and at the same time a sub-system of the total system. The policy and regulations for the operation of study groups must be familiar to all the members. For each group assignment, whether it be a case study or a business game, a group must have a Chairman and a Secretary, the former to preside and direct, the latter to record the group's responses. These appointments, together with the allocation of lectures, topics and lecture dates assigned to group members, must be worked out in detail for a group at the beginning of the year. Thereafter the programme is submitted to the School. This

method allows each group to work out its own programme within the scope of its possibilities. Some groups, for example, meet on Saturday mornings, others on certain evenings in the week. They also decide on the venue of the meetings.

The group members evaluate both their chairman, in the case of each group task, and a student lecturer in respect of his lecture. The evaluating marks are then sent to the School. This method keeps students up to the mark and makes it imperative for them to be well prepared. The School contributes its own marks, both for the quality of the assignments and for the manner of presentation.

A very important organisational requisite is good communication between the School and the study groups. At present the letters, the telephone and telex, combined with regular visits by lecturers are the communication channels. In the AEP the different student groups are organised in classes. Once every three weeks they have one entire day of lectures. This system may still be introduced into the MBL especially for the quantitative subjects. We estimate that one year the staff travelled 95,000 miles to visit study groups. An investigation of a system of telelectures is nearing completion, and for this system it is our proposed aim not to make use of lectures on the telephone, instituting instead a regular period of question-and-answer between the School and groups. This will improve the feedback system. A system of computer terminals at the different centres connected with University's computers is envisaged for the near future.

At head office the administration controls the inflow and outflow of written case studies, business games, reports, work assignments, comments on assignments, etc. A problem confronting us is that at one end the groups tend to be slow in submitting their assignments, while requiring a speedy feedback service to evaluate their own progress; and at the other end the lecturers prefer to have all the assignments in before starting on their marking. This then is the crucial difficulty in the study-group system; to maintain a balance between flexibility and chaos. Most of the students are already

in middle management and their work commitments cause constant obstruction and distortion in their study programmes. Coping with this problem requires flexibility; but an excess of flexibility results in chaos in the administration. A not-too-well-chosen work assignment once caused the work inflow to lag for a month, leading to bottle necks, which frustrated the students, lecturers and administration. It was well-nigh impossible to complete the whole prescribed programme that year.

THE SCHOOL'S HEADQUARTERS

The School consist of staff headquarters, decentralised semi-autonomous study groups and students.

An efficient organisational structure is required to integrate the student, the study groups and the staff headquarters into one corporate body with one corporate personality. Whereas the operating and learning takes place at the student's home and in the decentralised semi-autonomous study groups, the planning and most of the control must be done at the School's headquarters. The School thus requires a strong management function to attain its purpose and objectives and to assist study groups to attain their own group purpose and objectives, which again must accord with those of the School. To achieve this end an efficient communication system between groups and staff headquarters is indispensable, but this is not enough to form an integrated corporate body. Therefore students are required to visit headquarters regularly for short residential training periods — a week at the beginning and two weeks at the end of the year in the MBL, and a week at the beginning and four weeks at the end of the year for the Advanced Executive Programme. DBL candidates attend seminars nearly every Saturday morning.

RESIDENTIAL TRAINING PERIOD

The purpose of the residential training period is, first, to train students to function autonomously in study groups.

Most of the teaching techniques for use in the study groups are introduced during the residential training period. The main contribution of the individual lecturer is to transmit his knowledge to the student; and the residential

period is the most favourable occasion for developing a relationship across the interface between student and lecturer. Because of the limited available time, these residential training periods are increasingly used for open discussions on certain theoretic concepts and approaches. Another purpose of these periods is to determine how the students progress, by giving them, for example, open-book examinations in the different courses offered. This prepares them for their final examinations, which too are open-book examinations. In the course of these periods students are also introduced to senior businessmen, bankers and civil servants. A hostel complex with lecture rooms will soon be essential to our system, for we already have different student groups for 13 weeks of the year at headquarters, and this number will increase to 18 weeks in 1973.

CONCLUSION

We have now to face the question: does the Business School achieve its purpose? Internally, we have the evidence of marks obtained by our students for individual assignments and group work, about 35 sets of marks a year per student, marks for participation in case-study discussions, marks for 21 examination papers, consisting of papers on the principles of management and written case study answers (all done according to an open-book system of examination and the mark for the dissertation)

We are happy to say that on the evidence of reports from our external examiners mainly professors of other universities and senior businessmen, we maintain a high standard. An analysis of reports from senior business managers on our students employed by them, and the excellent progress of our students in senior management positions in the business world, enables us to say that we are already playing an important role in creating, as part of the learning process, present and future South African managers with developed faculties for solving problems and making decisions within the organisational system.

I conclude by re-affirming that the School of Business Leadership as evolved in the University of South Africa is a training institution that lends itself ideally to true full-time training.