

The Manager As Educator

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ABSTRACT

Modern management theory is placing increasing emphasis on the role of the manager as a developer of people—indeed, as a teacher. But most managers know about teaching only from their experience in their own schooling. This is *pedagogy*—the art of teaching children. Adult educators have been developing a new body of theory and practice for helping adults learn. This is *andragogy*—the art of teaching adults. This article examines the principles and techniques of andragogy and illustrates their application to the role of manager as educator.

The "role of the manager" has been a favorite object of study of the behavioral scientists now for several decades. And their findings have done much to move management theory away from early conceptions of the managerial role as a simple, mechanical, organizer of work to a more complex conception of the multiple roles of the manager. For when the behavioral scientists studied what effective managers really do, they discovered that they perform a variety of roles—planner, organizer, supporter, adjudicator, coordinator, communicator, listener, operator, and teacher, to cite a few—and that each role requires its own unique set of competencies.

A strong thrust in recent developments in management theory has been the increasing emphasis placed on the last-named role, teacher. For, in the long run, the executive who makes the greatest contribution to his corporation is the one who is able to release and develop the potential of the human resources that are his company's principal asset.

Thus, according to modern management theory, every manager must be an educator, too.

But even those managers who subscribe to this theory find themselves falling short in their practice as educators. Most managers really aren't very good teachers.

The reason for this state of affairs is quite simple: most of what managers know about education they have derived from their own experience of being taught as children and youth. What they know is *pedagogy* (from the Greek "paid" meaning "child"—the same stem from which "pediatrics" is taken), which literally means the art and science of teaching children. This knowledge would be sufficient if it were true that adults learn in the same ways that youth learn, for the learners with whom managers are concerned are adults.

But the fact is that adults differ in certain crucial ways from youth as learners. This is an insight that has emerged only recently from the growing body of research in adult education. Indeed, it is an insight that is rapidly producing a whole new technology that is being given the name *andragogy* (from the Greek "aner" meaning "man"), which is the art and science of teaching grownups.

So it is not enough for managers to be educators. They must be *adult educators*.

Now what does this mean in actual practice?

Let's get at the answer to this question by taking a look at the four most important ways in which adults differ from youth as learners and examining some implications of these differences for the manager's role as educator.

An Adult Is Self-Directing

The first, and by far the most important difference between adults and youth, is in their self-concepts. The child regards himself as essentially a dependent personality for whom the adult world makes most of the important decisions affecting his life—where he will live, where he will go to school, what he will study, how he will spend his time. In adolescence, this self-concept starts changing, as the youth starts testing his own wings and asserting increasing independence. By adulthood most people think of themselves as taking full responsibility for making their own decisions and facing the consequences. In fact,

a person becomes psychologically an adult at the point at which he accepts responsibility for managing his own life.

When this point is reached, there develops within the human being a deep need to be treated as a self-responsible, self-respecting, self-directing organism. So that when an adult finds himself in a situation in which he feels he is being treated like a child—being talked down to, being told what to do, being disrespected—he feels the situation to be in conflict with his self-concept and seeks to flee from it or resist it. How many adults do you know who have left the church, left jobs, left fraternal orders, even left marriages, because they felt they were being treated like children? How many others merely withdrew into apathy! In our culture the ultimate test of adulthood is the ability to run our own lives; and each of us wants to pass that test.

What are the implications of this need to be self-directing for the manager who wants to be a good adult educator?

Certainly one implication, which is subtle but crucial, is the importance of establishing a social climate in which your workers feel respected. I know some managers who give lip service to the "good men" under them, but then prescribe every action they should take. Their men do not feel respected. But I know one manager in particular who publicly states that there is not one of his subordinates who could not perform some aspect of his job better than he, and he means it. In his company you can feel an atmosphere of mutual respect. Incidentally, this latter manager also makes a point of attending at least one major management seminar each year, thus demonstrating by his own behavior the value he places on continuing education. The one surest test I apply as I visit different companies—or different units of the same company—to smell out whether the social climate is one that is conducive to human growth is how mistakes are treated. If a mistake is treated as something to be punished, I can predict that much of the energy of the personnel will be devoted to defensive actions. But if a mistake is treated as something to be learned from, then I am secure about predicting that in this unit the personnel are growing and developing.

Another implication has to do with the way the training needs of the personnel are determined. Traditionally, it has been the teacher (or manager) who decides what the students (or subordinates) need to learn. But when the students are adults,

this approach is tantamount to daring the students to learn; for a self-respecting, self-directing person resists having another person's will imposed on him. According to the principles of *andragogy* the learnings which an adult is most highly motivated to do something about are the ones he diagnoses as needing himself. So the skillful manager finds ways to involve his subordinates in analyzing their own performance and arriving at their own list of "ways I can improve." A part of such an analysis includes, of course, the manager feeding in data about his own observations regarding the performance. I know one manager who holds a weekly "supervisory clinic" with his staff, in which critical incidents that have occurred during the preceding week are role-played, with each supervisor showing how he would handle the incident. By comparing the different approaches and having them critiqued by the whole staff, including the manager, each supervisor can see for himself how his supervisory skills might be improved.

A third implication is the importance of adults having an active part in planning and carrying out their own learning experiences. At Western Electric's Hawthorne Plant in Cicero, Illinois, this principle was applied in pure form years ago when responsibility for all off-the-job training was assumed by an employee-managed organization, the Hawthorne Club. In other companies employees participate in planning through training committees established at the various levels, from the smallest work unit to corporate. It has been my observation that those managers who find some way to involve their workers in sharing responsibility for training get a deeper sense of commitment to it than those who put on training programs for their employees. There is a basic law of human nature at work here: any person tends to feel committed to a decision or activity to the extent that he has helped to shape it.

A final implication is the grave importance, in working with adults, of involving them in whatever evaluation process is undertaken. There is nothing that conflicts with an adult's self-concept of being self-directing more sharply than being given a "grade" by the teacher (or supervisor). But a process of collecting data about possibilities for further development presents less conflict with the self-concept. The appraisal interview is used by many companies as the occasion for a kind of mutual self-evaluation, with both manager and workers sharing data on their performances. But I prefer the spirit of the

"personal development interview" as it is called in one company I know. And Douglas McGregor, in his book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, has some excellent suggestions as to how to use management-by-objective interviews for helping an employee collect objective data about how far he has come in achieving his objectives and what he needs to do to become better.

An Adult Has Accumulated More Experience

Another difference between adults and youth as learners is in the amount of experience they bring with them into a learning situation. Simply by virtue of having lived longer, any adult has accumulated more experience than he had as a youth. But the difference is more than in the amount of experience; there is a difference in the way each feels about his experience. A youth tends to regard his experience as something that has happened to him, whereas to the adult, his experience is *him*. The adult defines who he is, to a large extent, in terms of his experience. Several implications for the education of adults flow from this difference in experience.

For one thing, any group of adults constitute a richer resource for one another's learning than is true with youth. So that in the technology of adult education we tend to make less use of the transmittal techniques (lecture, assigned readings, audiovisual presentations) and greater use of experiential techniques (group discussion, case method, critical incident process, simulation exercises, internship, skill practice, laboratory methods, and the like). An educator-manager will, therefore, seek to help his subordinates grow and develop less by giving them didactic instructions and more by helping them analyze and learn from their own experiences and those of their co-workers.

In addition, as people discover how to learn from their own experience and the experience of others, their attitude toward their daily work takes on a new dimension. In the language of Rensis Likert (in *The Human Organization*) and Abraham Maslow (in *Motivation and Personality*) their work becomes more "self-actualizing," and, therefore, more motivated. One manager I know has institutionalized this learning-from-experience by building into his weekly staff meetings a half-hour session on "What has happened this past week that we can learn from." Another has instituted the practice of having project

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teams meet at the conclusion of each project to evaluate the project as a growth experience for themselves—and their conclusions become a part of the project report.

Finally, a negative consequence of the greater experience of the adult may be that he becomes more set in his ways. He may be less open to new ways of doing things. So some "unfreezing" experiences may be in order. Several corporations use periodic injections of sensitivity training for this purpose, but less time-consuming techniques that serve this purpose include attendance at conferences, field trips to observe new developments in other locations, interdepartmental meetings, rotating assignments, and demonstrations by experts from the outside.

An Adult's Readiness to Learn Is Different

It is well known in schools (and in most homes) that children and youth become ready to learn particular things in a natural sequence. For example, every infant becomes ready according to his own timetable to learn to crawl, then walk, then run. In his early school years he is ready to learn to play according to the rules of the game; in early adolescence, to excel in individual competition; and in later adolescence, in team sports. His readiness to learn is dictated by his developmental tasks—the things he has to be able to do in order to advance from one phase of development to the next. And the point at which this readiness is at its peak is the "teachable moment."

It is less well known that adults have their developmental tasks, too, which produce readinesses to learn and teachable moments. For these changes in the adult years are more subtle, since they are tied less to visible physiological processes and more to social and situational developments. But the principle still holds—that an adult becomes ready to learn those things that are required by his developmental tasks.

The implication of this phenomenon of learning readiness for the manager as educator is that he should be highly sensitive to the sequence of developmental tasks of his workers, and should time his scheduling of educational inputs to coincide with this sequence. For example, one manager I know had for years put his new workers through a standardized orientation program that had been worked out with beautiful logic to move from a history of the company through a review of the policies of the company to a tour of the plant. He became increasingly

perturbed by the number of questions his new workers asked after weeks on the job that he thought had been covered in the orientation program. So a couple of years ago he decided to test his logic by asking a crop of new workers what they wanted to know in order to get started on the job. The sequence of questions came out something like this: "Where will I work," "Whom will I work with," "What should I wear," "Who will show me what to do," and so on. Questions about company history and policy didn't concern the workers until they had been on the job a few weeks. As a result of this experience, he has rescheduled his orientation program to follow the natural questions (developmental tasks) of his workers, and everyone agrees that it is much more effective.

In general, the sequence of a new worker's developmental tasks is first to become secure about his new social relationships, then to master his performance requirements, and then to pursue his economic and occupational advancement. But within these broad developmental phases there is much variation among individuals and situations as to who is ready to learn what when. The best way to find out what a given individual is ready to learn next is to ask him.

An Adult Is Problem-Centered

Youths tend to think of education as the accumulation of a reservoir of knowledge that hopefully will be useful later, when they become adults. Their time perspective is one of postponed application. Accordingly, they have a *subject-centered* orientation to learning, which they see as a process of storing up subject matter.

Adults, on the other hand, tend to think of learning as a way to become more effective in dealing with life problems today. Their time perspective is one of immediate application. Accordingly, they have a *problem-centered* orientation to education.

The educative manager who understands this difference starts with the everyday problems of his workers, not with some logical subject-matter course structure, as the "curriculum units" of his educational endeavors. Whereas traditionally the first step in developing an educational program might have been to select a textbook, under *andragogy* the first step is to conduct a problem census to find out what the workers are concerned about. For example, in one company I know an optional

program on "Principles of Supervision" was offered, but there were few takers. When the manager took the trouble to ask a sample of his workers what problems they worried about as they considered the possibility of becoming supervisors, the overwhelming response was "lack of confidence." When the program was reorganized as "Building Your Confidence To Be a Supervisor," and the methodology was changed from lecture-recitation to role-playing the handling of various supervisory situations, the program was over-subscribed.

Another implication of this immediacy of time perspective is the importance of providing an adult with the opportunity to practice a new learning as soon as possible, preferably under conditions that assure reasonable success. A learning thus reinforced is more likely to be permanent than one that lies unused for a while.

Creating an Educative Environment

What all this andragogical talk boils down to is this: a manager gets better work results by growing better workers. He can do this by providing an educative environment for them to live and work in. And the kinds of things he can do that will create an educative environment are:

- set the standard of continuing self-development by his own example
- respect the worth and potential for growth (while accepting present limitations) of all employees
- treat mistakes as occasions for learning, not punishment
- help employees to diagnose their own needs for self-improvement
- involve employees in planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning activities
- make use of the experience of all employees for his and their learning
- provide opportunities for employees to be exposed to "unfreezing" experiences
- time educational inputs according to the sequence of each employee's developmental tasks and readiness to learn

- build educational experiences around employees' real life problems, not predetermined subject-matter development
- provide immediate opportunities for employees to practice new learnings with a sense of satisfaction

Isn't it fortunate that an educative environment—one in which each individual is experiencing increasing self-fulfillment—is also a productive environment?

ANDRAGOGY AND MANAGEMENT

Because of the growing interest of many industrial corporations and government agencies in the andragogical education process and also the great potential it offers for improving both interpersonal relationships and task effectiveness, Malcolm Knowles has recently turned his attention to the role of the manager as an educator of adults. Knowles (1972)* says:

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There are many opportunities for the application of andragogical learning principles in business, industrial, and government settings. Andragogy may of course be used for training and development, but it may also be used for action research programs aimed at organizational problem finding and problem solving, for team building, and for performance appraisal. In fact, it may be used whenever a situation calls for recognition of the characteristics of adult learning behavior. A convenient management check list like the following may be useful for self-rating the degree to which your own management style complements that of an effective adult educator. You may wish to have a group of your subordinates rate you on these factors and then look with them at any congruencies or discrepancies that may exist.

* From Malcolm Knowles, "The Manager as Educator," *Journal of Continuing Education and Training*, Vol. 2, No. 2. Copyright Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 1972.

Do I create a social climate in which subordinates feel respected?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do I treat mistakes as opportunities for learning and growth?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do I help my subordinates discover what they need to learn?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do I help my staff to extract learning from practical work situations and experiences?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do my staff members have responsibility for designing and carrying out their own learning experiences?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do my staff members engage in self-appraisal and personal planning for performance improvement?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do I permit or encourage innovation and experiments to change the accepted way of doing things if the plan proposed appears possible?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Am I aware of the developmental tasks and readiness-to-learn issues that concern my staff?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Do I try to implement a joint problem-finding and problem-solving strategy to involve my staff in dealing with day-to-day problems and longer-range issues?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 High

Malcolm Knowles (1972) says that managers need to create an educative environment for people to live and work in and intimates that doing so has an important simultaneous benefit: "Isn't it fortunate that an educative environment—one in which each individual is experiencing increasing self-fulfillment—is also a productive environment?"

It is apparent that individuals who are deeply involved in learning more about what they are doing will tend to be much more productive than the apathetic or disinterested.