

Manager as a Trainer, a Coach, and a Mentor

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Executive Summary

This paper argues that for effective development of managers, training programmes are far from sufficient. The major development of managerial capabilities, in fact, takes place not so much as a result of training programmes as on the job. But this development can be directed or undirected and one of the important tasks of a senior manager is to make sure this development is directed and effective.

The development of junior managers by senior managers is a vital activity in a learning organization. In today's fast changing environment, the only organizations that will survive will be learning organizations. Competitive advantage is not static. Organizations cannot place themselves in particular strategic postures in an industry and stay there for all time to come but have to evolve and adapt to new situations. This ability to adapt depends on the amount and kind of learning that takes place continuously in the organizations and how effectively managers can apply these learnings in their jobs.

Formal training programmes can be useful and effective not by themselves but through effective coupling to organizational situations. This linkage is often lacking which is the prime reason for the apparent lack of effectiveness of such formal programmes. But building such linkages can hardly be done by academic institutions or consultants; they need to be ultimately done by the managers of the organizations themselves.

As a general rule, most managers are aware of this role but have neither the time, energy nor incentive to do the development and training of their junior managers. They also lack a framework to do this systematically. This article suggests a possible framework.

The role of senior managers as trainers varies with the stages the junior manager is in his career:

- as the first boss of a new manager, the senior managers have to shape the values and develop the ability in the new manager to prioritize and set goals for himself
- for the middle level managers, the senior managers have to act as trainers capitalizing on the experience the junior managers would have had thus far and integrating them with the training programmes they might have been deputed to
- for senior managers, they must act as disseminators and enablers of dissemination of new ideas
- for all levels, mentoring is very important.

Not all managers can make effective mentors; and for those who have the aptitude, training programmes for mentorship can be useful. Ultimately, the role of the senior managers as trainers, coaches, and mentors is to enable the junior managers to learn effectively and help them in their self development. ♡

KEY WORDS

Mentor
Organizational Learning
Training Programmes
Disseminator

Training, coaching, and mentoring are not the activities most likely to come to one's mind when one talks about a manager's job. Managers are more likely to be seen as 'action people'—setting goals, inspiring vision, motivating, rewarding good performers, building teams, managing the environment, and, above all, pursuing the sacred quest of enhancing shareholder value. Can we imagine a manager as a trainer? Is not training what academic institutions and consultant trainers are supposed to do?

However, if we consider the present scenario, the requirements of the job of a manager are changing very quickly and the jobs are themselves becoming incredibly complex. What was true ten years back may not be true today and few general principles hold for any length of time. In this situation, good managers need to learn and help other managers learn continuously. Further, they have to learn new things and also be willing to unlearn what they had learnt earlier. Most of the time, organizations leave their managers to learn on their own, to decide what to learn, and how to learn. It is essentially a 'sink or swim' approach and organizations do not contribute adequately to the learning of their managers in a systematic way.

It is against this backdrop that we argue in this article that organizations must squarely assume responsibility for the training, coaching, and development of their managers. While external trainers can be effectively utilized to fit into this activity, the real learning comes from within the organization itself and on the job. Senior managers must be made responsible for not only the performance but also the learning of their junior managers. The way the managers in an organization take charge of the learning and development of their juniors and of themselves will have an important bearing on the performance of the organization.

People differ enormously in their capacity to learn, in their efforts at self development, and in leveraging their experiences into effective new insights. Some people are curious and are like explorers in new situations—they can interact with a wide variety of people, judge people and situations well, and assimilate and integrate a multitude of ideas and viewpoints (Argyris, 1991). On the other hand, there are people who tend to become dogmatic and opinionated and refuse to learn further. They tend to interpret new events in the old frameworks that might have been valid in the past but are no longer valid. These people (some of them with good track

records), as a general rule, receive little or no help from their organizations and reach the limits of their competence. They constitute a huge waste of talent for the organizations.

Organizations try to help managers by sending them for various training programmes. These programmes are meant to expose them to different ideas and situations, stimulate peer interaction, and broaden their perspectives. However, the impact of such training programmes, particularly those attempting behavioural modifications, is limited, especially when the programmes are delivered in the 'classic' mode including lectures, case discussions, simulation exercises and so on. In his interaction with managers, Conger (2004) found that the feeling that formal education and training had a relatively limited impact on how managers actually acquired leadership skills was fairly widespread. One reason for the limited impact of these programmes is that they offer little time and scope for *reflection* and *assimilation* of the ideas learned. As a result, these learnings do not have long-lasting effects.

It is not that these programmes teach wrong theories or are delivered incompetently—far from it. But, the fact remains that the learning that takes place in such programmes is what we would call 'passive learning,' i.e., it does not relate to the work situations of managers. Typically, these programmes, especially those conducted exclusively for a company, tend to be so packed with cases, readings, and home work, so as to get 'the maximum value for money' that there is little time for reflection and self development. Even programmes focusing on self development—where self diagnosis questionnaires are administered and participants are given counselling on the basis of their profiles to improve on their weak areas—may not result in self development or major changes in behaviour in the long run. This is because concurring to the conclusions arrived at by a consultant is not the same thing as coming to *one's own conclusions* after reflection. Hence, these learnings are not internalized and, as a result, there is little commitment on the part of the participant managers for change or improvement. Most managers, therefore, revert to their own old selves in a short time when they revert to their work.

After conducting and teaching in numerous training programmes for practising managers as well as for MBAs, and reflecting on my own experience as a manager for over two decades at the receiving end of such programmes, I have veered around to the tentative view

that effective development of managers cannot take place in training programmes at B-schools or those conducted by consultants. Organizations must assume the prime responsibility for the development of their managers. To discharge this responsibility, they will have to stop looking towards B-schools and consultants and make their own managers the main trainers, coaches, and mentors of the managers below them. The most effective trainers are the managers themselves—they can train their colleagues, their subordinate managers, and themselves.

I have broadly identified four areas where a manager plays a major role in developing other managers:

- as the first boss of new recruits
- as a coach and a trainer of managers at middle levels
- as a disseminator and an enabler of dissemination of ideas within organizations
- as a coach and a mentor to managers below them at all levels (including very senior levels).

THE FIRST BOSS

The first boss in a person's career occupies a special place. To the new recruit in his first job, his boss is *the* organization. It is the boss who gives him the first assignment, the first feedback, the first encouragement, and the first rebuke. More important, it is the boss who helps the new entrant set his goals, outlines the path to reach that goal, and helps him to set priorities. In retrospect, these may be seen as routine to seasoned managers but for a person in his first job, it is anything but routine. He needs support in distinguishing between what counts and what does not; in setting priorities; discovering what works and what does not; and in facing disappointments and adversities. Above all, the boss introduces the recruit to the value system of the organization (McCall, Lombardo and Morrison, 1988). Hill (2004) found considerable evidence that the first managerial assignment was a pivotal developmental experience for future executives. It is at this stage that an executive's philosophy and leadership style are developed.

Thus, the first boss has a very special role as a trainer in a manager's career. The lessons learned in the first job will stay for long in the recipient's mind. Subsequent ideas—especially those gathered in regular training programmes—tend to get evaluated for their 'feasibility' against these first ideas. The boss, therefore, has to devote time to new recruits and young managers in a

very different way as compared to more experienced managers. Ideally, he should give the new recruit challenging assignments, watch carefully as he struggles in carrying out the assignment, decide when to intervene, and give constructive advice, all in the midst of his own job. He should help the new manager to frame problems in broader and more holistic ways (Hill, 2004) and in ways different than the accepted way in the organization. This is a task that only a few managers are equipped to do satisfactorily.

It then follows that organizations must pay attention not only to the quality of the new recruit but also to the quality of his first boss. In fact, it would help organizations to keep a list of 'effective first bosses'—bosses who can function effectively to mould and shape the young manager recruited at a great cost or get reports on the performance of the recruit and of the boss towards coaching him.

TRAINING AT MIDDLE LEVELS

Soon the young recruit gives way to younger recruits and starts getting formally 'trained.' In well-managed organizations, the HR department assesses his 'training needs' and sends him for seminars, workshops, and programmes meant to 'develop' him. In less effective organizations, training is meant to keep HR managers busy and enable a budget to be spent. Surprisingly, the results in both the cases are not too dissimilar. In fact, there are no tangible results.

Typically, the young recruit attends a good programme in a reputed B-school and comes back with new ideas. There is nothing wrong with these ideas but organizations are terribly hostile to new ideas and his colleagues and seniors who have not had the benefit of such training can neither understand nor appreciate such ideas. Hence, none of them gets implemented. This results in frustration and cynicism.

For ideas to work, they must be put to work. Hill (2004) corroborates this view from her research: "The process of becoming a manager was largely a process of learning from experience. New managers could only appreciate their new roles and identity through action, not contemplation." It is here that the boss has a role to play as a follow-up trainer and as an integrator who links the abstract ideas learnt in the school by his juniors to the realities of the workplace. One very effective way to do this is to relate it to specific assignments. These assignments need not necessarily be linked only to train-

ing programmes; they can be also linked to new ideas generated from time to time in meetings and in in-house workout sessions. But the assignments must

- *test a certain aspect of a manager's competence and potential.* The organizations must be clear as to what is being tested. It could, for example, be the ability to lead a team without formal power by creating a leadership situation in a peer group (where no one is formally a leader). It could be a turnaround situation where the manager needs to motivate, inspire, and lift the morale of the employees and produce quick results
- *give enough autonomy for the manager* to enable him to take decisions
- *be 'stretch' assignments* where the manager under test is to deliver a difficult-to-attain result.

The selection of these assignments is to be done by the boss who should be careful not to simply give assignments that suit *him* the best. Before formulating the assignment, there has to be a candid dialogue between the manager and the boss about what the strengths and weaknesses of the former are. If 360 degree feedback system is prevalent, those inputs can also be given. The important thing about this dialogue is that it should lead to a clear identification of the competencies of the junior manager that need improvement and those that are not clear and can only be revealed through carefully chosen assignments.

The process of how the protégée is mentored by the boss at this stage is critical. The boss's role is to assist in the self development of the protégée. This is a tricky business: the boss must continuously monitor and make decisions to intervene; he must give enough freedom to his junior, yet retain overall control; he must give feedback that is candid but not demotivating. The feedback is to be both on the actual outcomes attained as well as the process employed. In order that this action learning avoids what Mintzberg (2004a) has so aptly described as 'mostly action and little learning,' the boss needs to discuss not only the results and outcome (as is done regularly in organizations) but also the learning that has taken place. As Mintzberg (2004b) observes, "Learning is not doing as much as reflecting after doing."

Managers must help their juniors to discover themselves, their identities, values, strengths, and limitations. The lower middle management is where much of this understanding takes place and the quest for an

answer to the question, 'Who am I?' arises. Effective managers can help their junior managers in finding this answer.

At this stage in life, the young manager (in contrast to the new recruit) is likely to have accumulated some experience. It is a fallacy that experience is a good teacher. People do not always and automatically learn through experience. As McCall (2004) has observed, people could come out with a great deal of learning after each experience or only some part of what they could have learned or no learning at all, or, in the worst case, could even have learnt all the wrong lessons. It is for this reason that the boss-trainer's role is important: he must not only make sure that some learning takes place from experience but also that the right lessons have been learnt.

Similar experiences over time tend to observe the law of diminishing returns with respect to learning. A compounding difficulty is the tendency of many people to see similarities in quite dissimilar situations. Thus, a situation involving a bad experience with a colleague from, say, the finance department may lead the manager to see an obstructive role of finance in *all* future situations as well. Therefore, the boss needs to ensure that dissimilar experiences are given and the nature of dissimilarities is kept in mind.

The kind of experience that the senior manager should impart to his junior also depends on the strategy of the organization (McCall, 2004). For example, in an organization growing through mergers and acquisitions (M&A), appropriate experiences in M&A will need to be passed on to the promising young recruit. Similarly, if the organization is growing through international expansion, experiences in different countries need to be emphasized.

Learning happens not along a continuous trajectory but in fits and starts. This is because it usually takes place by relating to past experiences in similar situations (McCall, 2004). Hence, the boss-trainer will need to help the manager to relate the new experience to the old experiences and draw meaningful lessons. It is critical to 'catch' the right old experience and relate it to the present experience to derive the maximum learning. The boss must be sensitive enough to realize when an experience is leading to a potentially significant learning and help the manager to capitalize on it.

MANAGERS AS AGENTS OF DISSEMINATION OF IDEAS

A powerful device for management development, especially at senior levels, is structured dissemination of the learning to a larger audience of company managers. The key to this is the leveraging of past experience to new ideas that are linked to future experiences. The senior managers can both be disseminators and encourage dissemination by others. This dissemination can be through informal, in-company (or smaller group) seminars or structured classroom sessions. It would be a good idea to organize such sessions each time a manager returns from a training programme with the objective of sharing ideas and to *show how they can be put to use*. Teaching is a wonderful way to learn and the managers organizing the classroom sessions must 'properly' prepare by carefully going through the materials they received during the training programmes and supplementing them with their own effort. Alternatively, the managers could simply share a new book or a paper they might have read. Such a system of weekly seminars is prevalent in the Aravind Eye Hospitals (headquartered at Madurai) (Manikutty and Vohra, 2004) where the managers and the staff at different levels share the additional knowledge that they are expected to have gathered due to their own effort. Reflections and learning from peers have been found particularly helpful (Raelin, 2004) and collective reflection, especially when set against the context of experience, enhances the learning of all participants to a degree not possible with virtually any amount of individual reflection.

Managers can enhance the value of their junior managers if they can spare time to attend as observers some of the programmes or some sessions of those programmes to which their junior managers are deputed to attend. They can even depute somebody else as an observer. The idea would be to force the participant-manager to come out with concrete ideas emanating from the programme. They can then have 'workout' sessions in which concrete ideas are discussed and decisions taken. Readers familiar with GE's famous 'workout' sessions will find the similarity (Bartlett, 2004; Welch and Byrne, 2001).

Another possibility for companies would be to tie up with academic institutions or consulting firms engaged in training who could send their contact faculty (who might have taught in the programmes organized for the company) to sit through the in-company training

programmes and give instructions to the company executives on how to conduct classes, review the classes, give supplementing inputs and so on but not conduct the classes themselves.

Based on his research, Raelin (2004) offers a number of suggestions on how to make work-based learning more effective. The key points in his approach are:

- learning in the midst of action
- knowledge creation and utilization as collective activities wherein learning becomes everyone's job
- a 'learn-to-learn' orientation that forces learners to question the underlying assumptions of practice.

The senior manager adds value not so much through his direct inputs (valuable though these may be) but through encouraging active reflection. In this sense, he acts as a true teacher whose contribution would be to enable students to discover more knowledge on their own. Good teachers (and good managers on their role as teachers) would teach them not what to think but how to think.

A very useful role a manager can play as a coach and a trainer is to consolidate ideas and reinforce them through repetition in different contexts. Research evidence suggests that the best practice companies in leadership development, as compared to a random sample of organizations, seem to differ not in the leadership development practices employed *per se*, but in the sheer quantity, frequency, and intensity of their disseminations (Fulmer and Conger, 2003). They simply do more of the same interventions and perform them with greater rigour and consistency.

ROLE OF MANAGERS AS COACHES AND MENTORS

In any organization, the normal interactions between bosses and managers working under them are limited to their respective roles as managers in a hierarchical mode: setting of goals, review of performance, consultation on what needs to be done in a specific situation and so on. But, as a mentor, the boss needs to extend his role beyond this level. For leadership development, especially, this interaction needs to be more intense and personal (Zaleznick, 1977). Zaleznick has argued that leaders are intense people and tend to establish close ties with a limited number of persons and are willing to be 'developed' by them. Hill (2004) also found that managers found it easier to learn from experience when they had strong developmental relationships with peers

and superiors. This relationship does not stop at junior levels: even senior managers need mentors to ensure continued development. As Kanter* has put it in her inimitable style: "People want to believe that there are corporate stars 'who walk on water' — celebrities. But if we looked beneath the surface, we would see large boulders holding up each individual, such as personal experiences and mentors."

In order that a mentor-protégée relationship is successful, it is necessary to ensure that there is a good 'chemistry' between them. This means care in choosing a mentor for a person (especially at junior levels; senior managers could find their own mentors) and if there are problems of compatibility, it would be necessary to find another mentor. The mentor must be willing to devote the time and effort needed to develop the junior and the junior must be willing to be subjected to constructive criticism that may, in turn, at times be harsh, and in the process also learn from the experience.

The requirements of a good mentor are not easy to fulfil. The mentor must be able to give frank and constructive criticism yet be sensitive to the individual learning habits of the protégée and also be willing to learn from the protégée. It may be noted that a mentor is not necessarily a 'nice chap'—he should be a critic dedicated to the development of the protégée and taking pride in it. As Thomas (2001) points out, coaches and mentors set high standards, provide supportive autonomy, adopt a joint problem-solving approach when inevitable mishaps occur, and encourage their protégée to reflect on and consolidate the lessons of experience (Tichy, 1997).

The development of these qualities in mentors may call for formal development programmes for them and on-the-job coaching by their mentor. In formal programmes, the inherent ability of different persons to effectively discharge their role as mentors needs to be mapped first and those who can make good mentors need to be identified. Secondly, what is expected out of them in this role needs to be clarified. Thirdly, they would have to be given regular training in the behavioural as well as the non-behavioural processes of mentoring. To our knowledge, no organization seems to have formalized such programmes for mentor development.

Ultimately, incentives matter. The motivation for

*Presentation made on March 14, 2002 at a leadership conference at Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and quoted by Hill (2004).

being a mentor will depend upon overall performance appraisal and rewards for the mentors. Development of subordinates is now increasingly recognized as an important function of a manager but it needs to be formalized and integrated into a person's overall appraisal.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

For effective development of managers, training programmes are far from sufficient. In fact, major developments take place on the job. But this can be directed or undirected and the important task of a senior manager is to make sure this development is directed and effective.

The development of junior managers assumes a central place in a learning organization. In today's fast changing environment, it is only the learning organizations that will survive. Competitive advantage is not static — organizations cannot just place themselves in particular strategic postures in an industry for all time to come but are ultimately dependent on how they can evolve and adapt to a new situation and also how innovative they are. This, in turn, depends on the amount and kind of learning that has taken place continuously and how effectively these learnings can be applied.

Formal training programmes can be useful and effective not by themselves but through effective linkage to organizational situations. It can hardly be done by academic institutions or consultants; it needs to be ultimately done by the managers themselves.

As a general rule, most managers are aware of their role but have neither the time, energy nor incentive to do the development and training of their junior managers. This needs to be done continuously and systematically with the senior managers playing the central role as trainers. Organizations can perhaps do without external training programmes provided there is an effective internal programme of development for the managers. However, without an internal programme of self development, external inputs are not likely to have any major impact.

The role of a manager as a developer of junior managers varies with the level of the managers being developed. Exhibit 1 summarizes the discussion showing the relationship between the senior and junior managers at different stages, the main development needs of the junior managers at each level, the main tasks to be addressed by the senior managers, and the main

mechanisms that may be employed.

Ultimately, all development is self development but most of this development takes place in the work context and senior managers play a decisive role in shaping this development. Leadership is not bringing about change

by oneself; it is what Hill (2004) calls 'collective genius.' Leadership is about creating a context for learning and change and managers at all levels have to discharge their roles as trainers, coaches, and mentors by creating this context. ♡

Exhibit 1: Role of a Senior Manager in Developing Junior Managers at Different Levels

	Level of Managers to be Developed			
	New Entrant	Middle	Senior	All Levels
Relationship	Hierarchical	Hierarchical	Collegial	Mentor relationship
Main development needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Getting the managers to understand the managerial roles Knowledge of management concepts as applied to actual work situations Understanding the value systems of the organization 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Leveraging experience to new concepts Learning from experiences of colleagues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Dissemination and assimilation of new ideas Ability to become a coach and teacher oneself Application of new ideas to new unstructured situations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Getting a continuous learning and sharing orientation Ability to leverage on one's experiences and those of others
Main tasks of a senior manager	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure the right lessons are learnt by the new recruits Expose them to right experiences by giving challenging assignments Check and give feedback on the learnings Set the new manager on the path to effective self development 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Choose the right training programmes for exposure Give assignments to test specific attributes, competencies, and potential of the managers Give effective feedback Providing a variety of experiences and challenges Help the managers to discover themselves 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provide for acquisition of right experiences and new ideas through interaction with academics, peers, and managers from other industries/fields Getting managers to effectively share through teaching and constructive result and decision-oriented 'workouts' Consolidation of ideas through reinforcement by relating them to experiences 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a close mentorship with junior managers who 'jell' Give free, frank, and constructive criticism Watch the development of the protégée
Mechanisms that may be employed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Induction Assignments Review and feedback 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Focused training programmes Assignments to link ideas and test competence and potential 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Broader training programmes Peer interaction Dissemination and 'work-out' sessions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Close and dedicated mentoring process

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*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not; Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton, blow his wreathed horn.*

William Wordsworth