

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPERVISOR TRAINING: ONE YEAR FOLLOWUP

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This study used an experimental design to compare three groups that received supervisor training with a control group that received no training. A total of 403 supervisors were randomly assigned to one of the four study groups and tested immediately after training and one year following training. Supervisors who received training showed increased knowledge of the EAP ($p < .001$) at one-year followup as well as more consultations ($p < .05$) with and referrals ($p < .01$) to the EAP compared to the control group. However, only those supervisors who received previous training showed a significant increase in their referrals to the EAP ($p < .01$). This study provides empirical support for the efficacy of EAP training for supervisors. In addition, these data suggest that supervisor training should be viewed as a "process" in which multiple training sessions are necessary for supervisors to transfer knowledge to on-the-job behavior.

INTRODUCTION

For more than twenty years Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) have developed and implemented supervisor training programs in the workplace to the extent that supervisor training has become recognized as a "Supporting Technology" for EAPs (Roman & Blum, 1988). A recent report on a national survey of 94 EAP directors (Schneider, Colan & Googins, 1990) found that supervisor training has become quite standardized across most EAPs. The overall goal of virtually every training program is to teach supervisors how to identify troubled employees and refer them to the EAP. In particular, most training is designed to instruct supervisors on the definition of a troubled employee, company policies,

services available at the EAP, the criteria used to evaluate job performance and the steps of supervisor intervention. Over 90% of EAPs surveyed use EAP staff to conduct supervisor training even though this often places time and financial constraints on the EAP. Typically, training methods consist of a stand-up presentation, a question and answer period and often the use of a film or video. Finally, most EAP directors believe that training is effective in achieving a variety of goals including increasing supervisors' knowledge of the EAP, improving attitudes toward troubled employees, increasing supervisors' ability to identify troubled employees and increasing EAP utilization rates.

Several other studies have explored

supervisor training practices and supervisor attitudes towards troubled employees (Gerstein, Eichenhofer, Bayer, Valutis & Jankowski, 1989; Googins and Kurtz, 1981; Trice & Belasco, 1968). However, only one study has looked at the effectiveness of supervisor training using an experimental design (Trice & Belasco, 1968). Unfortunately, this study focused exclusively on attitudes about and projected behavioral predispositions towards hypothetical alcoholic employees and did not include supervisors' on-the-job behavior as an outcome measure. Therefore, there is virtually no empirical data to support and guide EAPs when training supervisors. This lack of knowledge is not confined to EAP training. Several reviews of the training evaluation literature (Campbell, 1971; Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler & Weick, 1970; Goldstein, 1980; Wexley, 1984) have concluded that few well designed training evaluations have been conducted. One cumulative study (Burke & Day, 1986) applied meta-analytic procedures to the results of 70 managerial studies. Overall, different methods of managerial training were found to be moderately effective in improving learning and job performance. However, the authors concluded that the relationship between managerial training and the acquisition of managerial skills is still unclear. Given the considerable resource constraints which many companies and EAPs now face as well as demands on EAPs to provide additional kinds of training, studies which address the efficacy of training are clearly warranted.

This article will present data which were collected during the second phase of a study, funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse, to examine the effectiveness of EAP training for supervisors. Results for this paper are based on information collected from first-level supervisors immediately after receiving training and one year following this training. A control group which did not

receive training is used as a comparison group using measures of knowledge, attitudes and behaviors as outcome variables.

This study also explores the question of whether it is necessary for EAP staff to conduct EAP supervisor training. While there are no current empirical data on this subject, many EAP directors feel that their own staff can best reflect the company's culture and better develop the personal connections necessary for successful referrals. However, it may also be that use of outside trainers provides EAP directors with greater flexibility regarding their use of staff time and function. These and other issues regarding the use of outside trainers to conduct EAP training have been discussed elsewhere (Schneider et al., 1990). The present study addresses this question by comparing in-house EAP trainers with external, contracted trainers while both groups employed a standardized training program.

Finally, this study examines the use of an alternative training program and format. While most EAP training programs for supervisors have incorporated a standard curriculum and format, no empirical data has yet been collected to test the efficacy of such an approach. Moreover, as demands for EAP training steadily spread to cover other areas, such as drug testing, AIDS and wellness (Googins, Schneider & Colan, 1991), more economical training strategies may be necessary. To begin exploring this question, a final group of supervisors was trained using a 30-minute video training format. This format did not require any EAP staff time and, therefore, offered the potential for increased cost-effectiveness.

METHODS

Sample

A total of 403 supervisors from 71 worksites within a single company volun-

teered to participate in the study. The company used as a study site is a large, multi-site utility company located throughout the Northeast region. Supervisors were divided into strata based on geographic location (Metropolitan Boston, northern suburbs, western suburbs, southern suburbs), job types of supervisees (phone, service, office, technical) and size of worksite (less than 200 employees, greater than or equal to 200 employees). A stratified sampling procedure was then used to create the three experimental groups and the control group. This initial group was comprised of 117 supervisors from the in-house trainer group, 114 supervisors from the external trainer group, 112 supervisors from the video training group and 60 supervisors from the control group. A total of 234 supervisors completed the followup questionnaire one year later. This constitutes a successful followup rate of 58%. Of this final sample, 61 supervisors were from the in-house trainer group, 66 supervisors from the external trainer group, 57 from the video training group and 50 from the control group. The total sample was 50% male with an average length of employment of 19.5 years. The average number of years in a supervisory position was 9.2 and the average number of supervisees was 12.9. Of the total sample, 61% had previous training in managing troubled employees and 51% had previous experience with the EAP.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected from supervisors in all three experimental groups immediately after training and one year following training. Questionnaires consisted of demographic information, employment data, training history, ratings of the training and trainer, the Employee Assistance Knowledge and Attitudes Survey and the Behavioral Index of Troubled Employees (BITE) (Bayer & Gerstein, 1988). The initial ques-

tionnaire was administered and collected by a research assistant after the trainer had left the room. Approximately one year after training supervisors were mailed a followup questionnaire and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return mailing. If subjects did not return their surveys within two weeks, a reminder letter was sent. Subjects were also contacted by phone and urged to complete the questionnaire. Similar data were collected by mail for the control group within the same time frame as the experimental groups.

The Employee Assistance Knowledge and Attitudes Survey is a 10-item questionnaire that produces two factors: Knowledge of the EAP and Attitudes Toward Managing Troubled Employees. This survey was developed specifically for use in this study. The method used to develop the Employee Assistance Knowledge and Attitudes Survey is described in detail elsewhere (Schneider & Colan, in press) and was based on Dawis' (1987) recommendations for scale construction. Figure 1 displays the instructions, survey items and scoring instructions for the Employee Assistance Knowledge and Attitudes Survey.

The Behavioral Index of Troubled Employees is a 23-item survey that measures a supervisor's ability to identify behaviors displayed by troubled employees. The four behavioral patterns it focuses on are the following: Industriousness, Resistance, Acrimoniousness and Disaffection. Factor analyses of the 23 BITE items using data from the present study produced virtually identical results with the original factor analyses for the Industriousness factor as reported by Gerstein et al. (1989). Though these analyses also produced a four factor solution, the other three factors originally reported by Gerstein et al. (Resistance, Acrimoniousness and Disaffection) were not reproduced. These results suggest that additional research must be conducted on these factors before their validity can be estab-

Figure 1
Employee Assistance Knowledge and Attitudes Survey

DIRECTIONS: Listed below is a series of statements about your company's EAP and working with employees who have job performance or personal problems. Go through the items and rate each one according to how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement. On the scale to the right, circle the number which best represents the strength of your opinions.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree			
1. I am very familiar with the service of the Employee Assistance Program	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I know very little about the company policy regarding problem employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am very knowledgeable about the process of referring problem employees to the EAP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The EAP can really help me as a supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. The EAP can help employees keep their jobs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. People at the EAP really know what they're doing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. All employees have personal problems at some point in their lives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Sending employees to the EAP is part of my job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I am not sure at what point to send problem employees to the EAP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I would feel badly if I didn't offer a problem employee a referral to the EAP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring Instructions:

Knowledge of the EAP = Sum of #1, #2 (reversed), #3 and #9 (reversed)

Attitudes toward managing troubled employees = Sum of #4, #5, #6, #7, #8 and #10

lished. Pending this additional research, analyses in the present study were restricted to the Industriousness factor. While Industriousness would seem to focus on positive employee behaviors, it is really the absence of Industriousness that supervisors use to identify troubled employees. Therefore, supervisors with higher scores on this measure have a greater ability to identify the absence of industriousness as indicative of a trou-

bled employee. For purposes of brevity, this measure will be referred to in the following text and tables as "Ability to identify troubled employees." (For more information on the content, scoring and use of the BITE, contact the authors).

Description of the Trainings

Once the groups were formulated, a total of 36 trainings were conducted

during a six-month time period. Two of the experimental training groups utilized a similar curriculum and format. The training consisted of a two-hour stand-up presentation and discussion. The training curriculum, based on the results of a national survey conducted in the first phase of the study, had five components. In the introduction, the overall goals of the training program were outlined, a definition of a troubled employee was given, and reasons for an EAP were outlined. Then, the purpose of the EAP was discussed as well as the services available, company policies, eligibility, routes of referral, and rules regarding confidentiality. The third component of the training focused on the role of the supervisor. Specifically, this section detailed responsibilities of the supervisor, the impact which troubled employees have on co-workers and the goals of intervention. In the fourth section, ways to identify troubled employees, document job performance difficulties, engage the employee, monitor troubled employees and refer them to the EAP were outlined. Finally, a case example was presented and participants discussed how they would handle an employee in job trouble.

The only difference between the first two experimental groups was the type of trainers. In the first group, both trainers (a man and a woman) were staff members in the company EAP; and in the second group the two trainers (also a man and a woman) were not EAP staff members. All trainers were selected for their similarity in training experience and skill level. None of the trainers had been formally trained in training techniques prior to the study. The goal here was to make the study as relevant as possible to the "average" EAP practitioner by using trainers who were neither experts nor novices. All trainers received a standardized, 3-session preparation course conducted by a professional trainer. This course consisted of learning presentation

skills, the use of handouts and charts and the standard training discussed above. Each trainer also conducted a mock training session and received feedback from the training coordinator.

The third experimental group utilized a different format and focus. For this group, a 30-minute training session was conducted during which an 18-minute video was shown and information on the EAP was distributed by a research assistant. No attempt was made to discuss the video or answer questions about the EAP. Instead, supervisors were instructed to call the EAP directly if they had any questions. The video was constructed primarily for use in the study. Like the curriculum employed by the trainers in the stand-up presentations, the focus of the video emphasized information on the EAP, the role of the supervisor and a job performance model of problem identification. It differed, however, in one major area. Instead of training participants in the steps of constructive confrontation, the video emphasized a "supervisor consultation" approach in which supervisors were instructed to call and consult the EAP whenever they had concerns about an employee.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the group comparisons on all independent variables included in the analyses. There were no group differences on the following variables: previous training in managing troubled employees, length of supervisory experience, and number of supervisees. There were significant differences among the groups on sex, length of employment and previous experience with the EAP. Specifically, the external trainer group had a higher percentage of female supervisors ($p < .001$) and the video training group had less previous experience with the EAP ($p < .01$). The control group also had a higher average length of employment