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THE MANAGEMENT SABBATICAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Management development is a rather general term which applies to many kinds of learning presumably aimed at increasing managerial competence and, ultimately, organizational effectiveness. The learning may involve cognitive and intellectual skills which are relatively easy to modify through traditional classroom methods or programmed learning techniques. In recent years administrators have become concerned about change and development at deeper levels of the personality, and have begun to claim that the development of more creative personnel, or the increased ability to adapt to change are appropriate goals for management development. This paper addresses itself to the entire range of managerial learning and is primarily a comment on the process and conditions of effective development.

A concern for inculcating technical skills has historically been the central focus of most management education. Theorists such as Likert and McGregor have been among the chief architects of a trend toward concern for deeper personality development, and have suggested that the manager or administrator should view the personal growth and development of subordinates as a part of their routine duties.¹ Miles refers to the trend as the human resources model of leadership and suggests that "the manager's basic task is to create an environment in which his subordinates can contribute their full range of talents to the accomplishment of organizational goals. He must attempt to uncover and tap the creative

¹See Rensis Likert, The Human Organization (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), and Douglas McGregor, The Professional Manager (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

resources of his subordinates." ² Other goals similar to creativity which are subsumed under human resource development programs include self-actualization, improved potential for adaptation, or increased ability to test reality; all these terms refer to personal growth and the ability to use knowledge as opposed to the mere acquisition of technical or intellectual knowledge.

In a sense, these goals are similar to those prescribed for the counselor, the psychotherapist, or the psychiatrist. The difference is that the psychotherapist deals with "unstable" people whereas the administrator is working with "normal" people, but in a rapidly changing or unstable environment. Several authors have pointed to the need for improved adaptability among normal people under conditions of rapid social and technological change. ³ Thus the administrator's role of facilitating personal development and adaption will become even more critical in a future characterized by an accelerating rate of change. As Schein suggests, one of the primary objectives of training and development is to prepare the manager to deal more effectively with an uncertain future and to cope with job demands which have not yet been created. ⁴

²Raymond Miles, "Human Relations or Human Resources," Harvard Business Review, July-August 1965, p. 151.

³See Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, 1970), and Warren Bennis, Changing Organizations (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

⁴Edgar Schein, Organizational Psychology (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

Developmental Theory

The question then arises: How can the organization foster programs which will lead to increased personal competence and creativity among the firm's human resources? From developmental psychology we know that the most significant and profound learning occurs during two periods in the individual's life. The first period is referred to as the latency period; the second is adolescence. The latency period occurs between ages six and ten, and involves rapid learning of cognitive skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. During adolescence, rapid learning in terms of personal identity takes place. Of critical importance to these periods is the establishment of two moratoriums.⁵ During the latency period the child must suspend his instinctual development; he must place a moratorium on his desire to follow his impulses, otherwise he will never develop the discipline necessary to acquire cognitive skills. For example, if the child always follows the urge to play he is not likely to learn to spell or read because both abilities require sustained periods of concentration and effort. During adolescence, another moratorium is put into effect in the sense that the growing person experiments with adult behavior but the responsibilities of the adult role are temporarily suspended. The adolescent can act like adults, but he or she is not really judged by the same criteria as adults. This suspension, or second moratorium,

⁵David Moment and Abraham Zaleznik, Role Development and Interpersonal Competence (Boston, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963): 156-74. Also, Eric Erickson, "The Problem of Ego Identity," Psychological Issues 1, No. 1 (1959): 101-64.

is necessary in order that the adolescent can experiment and "find" himself so he will be comfortable in later adult roles. The changes and learning that occur during adolescence are profound and sometimes radical. Junior high school teachers (as well as parents) are often astounded by the changes in maturity and personality that occur in students between the seventh and eighth grades, or between the eighth and ninth grades. Moment and Zaleznik conclude that "It is significant to note the correlation between the existence of these two types of moratoriums and the rapidity of experimentation and learning. It is significant also to note that the moratorium of the adolescent period is the last fully sanctioned period of experimentation. Beyond adolescence any dramatic developmental experience will depend on an individual's self-declared moratorium."⁷ The critical aspect is suspension of the person's usual responsibilities and evaluations. A moratorium is a "protective umbrella" which allows psychological growth and change to occur.

Even physical and biological growth and change are intimately associated with protective environments. Indeed, human life begins with a nine month moratorium which is the ultimate in protection. And it is precisely during gestation that the most dramatic developmental changes occur in the organism. Even after birth, the protective umbrella is maintained while the individual continues to develop. Thus, human change and growth, whether physical or psychological, is fundamentally

⁷Moment and Zaleznik, Role Development and Interpersonal Competence, pp. 165-66.

associated with nurturant, protective surroundings. The phenomenon is summarized well by Walter Guzzardi, Jr., who observes that, "Renaissances require lengthy periods of gestation."⁸

Implications for Management Development

The implications for management development involve an organizationally supported learning moratorium of long duration for the manager. The usual two week executive development program is not likely to provide the participant with enough time to take full advantage of this type of environment. A program of several months duration for executives would be analagous to the academic practice of sabbatical leaves. Indeed developmental theory provides the psychological rationale for sabbatical leaves in academia. The notion of long departures for executives is not new, but it is not clear that many executives understand the fundamental rationale in terms of the relation between moratoriums and learning.

There is an underlying dilemma when one considers whether most businesses today would be willing to place protective umbrellas over a very large number of their managerial personnel for very long periods of time. Someone has to attend to the present pressure and problems of the firm. The manager himself may come to resent too long an absence from his organization and family. Furthermore, the attitude with which the manager enters a development program is of major importance. If he defines himself as just bringing home the usual good grades, he may miss

⁸Walter Guzzardi, Jr., "The Second Battle of Britain," Fortune, February, 1968, p. 108.

the chance for development at deeper personality levels. He must define himself as willing to experiment with new ways of conceptualizing problems, planning, making decisions, and relating to others. The moratorium has to be self-declared as well as organizationally supported.

The dilemma is even more problematical when considering an entire department or organization. How many companies could go to their board of directors, stockholders, suppliers, and customers and say, "Look, we just want to experiment with some new organizational forms. We don't know for sure what the outcome will be, but we would like you to place a protective umbrella over us for a year or so and suspend evaluation of us until after our experiments are over." I suspect such a proposition would not be enthusiastically received. Furthermore, any investment in the human side of the enterprise should be subjected to some cost-benefit analyses. As Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, and Weick suggest, "...this means that the time a manager spends in a training session must be demonstrated to be worth more in terms of the organization's goals than a similar period of time spent on some other activity (e.g., working)."⁹ While it is unlikely that managerial development programs can be evaluated strictly in terms of dollars and cents, some evaluation of the merit for both the individual and organization should be made. The ideal approach to this problem would probably

⁹ John P. Campbell, Marvin Dunnette, Edward E. Lawler III, and Karl Weick, Jr., Managerial Behavior, Performance, and Effectiveness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 269.

involve a long-term evaluation effort with an experimental design which could sort out the effects of the developmental experience. At a minimum, an experimental group of persons who took leaves of absence, would have to be compared to a control group of persons with similar backgrounds and jobs who did not take leaves.

In addition, a last dilemma is internal to the individual; when we propose that someone change at deep personal levels, we are in effect asking that person to become someone else. This may precipitate an identity crisis of such proportions that it impedes change. Thus there is the real question of whether change will be successful unless the original stimulus for change lies within the individual himself.

These observations regarding the effects a moratorium has on learning are likely to apply to all types of programs regardless of the course content. In a notable, long-term effort to evaluate the effectiveness of some thirty-nine university management development programs, Andrews provides data which indicate more changes are likely to occur in individuals attending the longer programs.¹⁰ Most of the programs cited in the Andrews study covered such topics as financial management, economics, business policy and human behavior. The programs varied from two weeks to slightly over four months. Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of the study was the conclusion that even in courses which were primarily technical and intellectual, certain kinds of personal changes occurred which were highly significant for many of the managers involved. Self-confidence, increased acceptance of self,

¹⁰ Kenneth R. Andrews, The Effectiveness of University Management Development Programs (Boston, Mass.: Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1966).

and increased concern for the ethical responsibilities of business were ultimately judged as some of the most powerful changes learned. Andrews notes that "The direction of change is from internal to external and from small to big, from a changed impression of identity, for example, to a changed view of the world at large.... We are, in effect, told once more that the results can be appraised in terms of change in individuals' perceptions of themselves rather than vocational utility in solving the technical problems of business." ¹¹ Thus it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the learning of strictly intellectual and technical material from changes in values, attitudes, and self identity, all of which are important components of managerial competence.

In any event, it appears probable that the most adaptive and creative organizations of the future will be helping large numbers of executives establish long moratoriums for personal development if they are to meet the demands of increasing technological and social change. Bennis, in an attempt to predict the nature of organizational life in the future, notes, "There will be more legitimation for leave taking and shorter tenure at the highest levels of leadership." ¹² Schools and universities also will have to change their outlook to increasingly longer associations with executives if the challenge is to be adequately met. The future may well be characterized, therefore, by additions to the current form of executive development programs both in industry and academia which could best be described as "management sabbaticals."

¹¹ Andrews, The Effectiveness of University Management Development Programs, pp. 161-63.

¹² Warren Bennis, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Future," American Psychologist 25, No. 7 (July 1970): 606.