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Cover Page Footnote

Research Abstracts (Refereed for Presentation at Symposium)

Facilitators: One Key in Implementing Successful Experience-Based Training and Development Programs

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An increasing number of corporate experience-based training and development (EBTD) programs are being implemented in both the profit and nonprofit sectors throughout the United States, and a host of other countries. In a survey recently published in *Training and Development Journal*, Wagner, Baldwin, and Roland (1991) found that 13% of U.S. Training Directors reported that their organizations currently used some form of experience-based outdoor training and development. The qualitative and quantitative data that have been generated to date on EBTD have indicated that individual and group behaviors appear to change positively after subjects have participated in these training programs. One key reason that has been given for this positive change is the skill level of the facilitator—both in the "hard skill areas (e.g., equipment set-up, activity rules, safety guidelines) as well as the "soft" skill areas (e.g., group process, human behavior, debriefing). An assumption that the development of facilitator competencies in soft skills will lead to improved program outcomes has led to an increasing emphasis on the acquisition of soft skills over the last few years. However, there is a scarcity of empirical research to support this assumption. A two year evaluation of a major experience-based training program involving five in-house facilitators, 38 separate training groups, and over 300 individual participants has allowed us to make some empirical assessment dealing with this important issue. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was first completed to determine if significant differences in key organizationally desired behaviors (individual and group) could be attributed to who facilitated the group's program. Results indicated that a significant amount of variance could be attributed to the facilitator. For the first year's program (13 groups) facilitator training consisted primarily of modules in the hard skills area. Before the start of the second year's program, (25 groups), the same five facilitators were given three days of extensive training in soft skills, especially with regard to group process and human factors. A multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was done to compare the first year's program with the second year's program. Results indicated the experiential program was significantly more effective during the second year. The findings support the importance of soft skills training for facilitators and raise the following questions:

1. Facilitator training programs are commonly 3-5 days in length. Is there an ideal hard skill/soft skill ratio?
2. What are the consequences as well as ethical dilemmas when a trainer does not have a sound soft skill expertise to offer?
3. Wh has the better opportunity for program success, the facilitator who begins his/her EBTD training with established soft skills competencies, or the facilitator who began with hard skills competencies?
4. What about the internal validity of field studies like the one described?

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