Training and educational technology

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE

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This article deals with an Organizational Development Programme which started in the Defence Force in October 1976. It highlights the preparation for, and the place of Situational Leadership Seminars and Team Building sessions in this highly bureaucratic organization.

Organizational Development Programmes seek to help an organization adjust to accelerated change, and this is exactly what the South African Defence Force has had to face up to in recent years.

The greater military threat on our borders, technological environmental and developmental changes have all necessitated that we ask ourselves three major questions

As an organization . . . . Where are we now?
Where do we need to be in order to meet the changes facing us?
How are we going to meet these new challenges?

Unless these questions are taken seriously and answered realistically, we will not be able to effectively meet the military challenges, and the demands which these challenges make upon us in terms of the optimal use of our human, material and financial resources.

The actual and the ideal

When one places the question where are we now? Over against the question where do we need to be in order to meet the new challenges? One is left with a stark picture of the many things in the organization which need to be looked at and improved in order to reach the ideal objective of an effective Defence Force. In an organization as large as the Defence Force this list is never ending.

a. THE NEED FOR AN OVERARCHING OBJECTIVE
There has always been competition and rivalry between the three arms of the service viz Army, Navy, Air Force, and healthy competition should be encouraged. Yet, where working in isolation, an unhealthy

win-lose attitude becomes the order of the day. This can only hamper the organization's communications, co-ordination and overall effectiveness.
The Organizational Development Programme would therefore need to highlight this point and seek to help the organization to remove this attitude wherever it existed.
One of the ways to stimulate this type of thinking would be to give the people in the organization an overarching objective for which to work for, emphasizing the need for Mutual trust, co-operation and team work.

b. THE NEED TO RELEASE TOP MANAGEMENT FROM THOSE FUNCTIONS WHICH BELONGED LOWER DOWN IN THE ORGANIZATION AND SO GIVE THEM THE TIME THEY NEED FOR PLANNING IN THE SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG TERM
When the organization was still relatively smaller than it is today a highly centralized organizational structure seemed inevitable; but with the expansion taking place over the years, the coming of more complex technology and the need for greater variety of disciplines within the organization the need to exercise some form of decentralization was necessary. If we trained people to take decisions at the level where the information and action takes place then only would we be able to release the top echelon for their primary function. This however is easier said than done for it is tied up with issues such as the retention of personnel, the optimal use of those personnel in terms of job satisfaction etc; if these cannot go hand in hand this all becomes a mere pipe dream.

c. THE NEED FOR SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP
The changes that have taken place over the years within the Defence Force have placed a much greater challenge up to its

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leadership. No longer can one use one leadership style for all situations and with all people. The demands of a new age require that our leaders be able to diagnose the situation, to evaluate the task maturity of the followers and to adapt their leadership style to the people and the situation at the time. Only this type of adaptability will make it possible for our leaders to meet the new challenges of leadership which they have to face in a more complex, larger sophisticated organization.

d. *THE NEED TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION TO NOT LIMIT THEIR FUNCTIONING BY SELF IMPOSED LIMITATIONS*

The in word for this is 'pro-activity'. In an organization where training is based on a stimulus — response psychology of the Skinnerian variety, this might well seem to be asking the impossible. Yet, at certain levels of the organization one needs to encourage creative thinking, the use of initiative, for the complexity of the task and the decisions that have to be made demand it, and if we fail to help the organization meet this need, its effectiveness will he hampered.

Even co-operation requires planning.

e. THE NEED TO CO-ORDINATE OUR ACTIVI-
    TY TO FULFILL THE OBJECTIVES OF THE
    ORGANIZATION

In a large organization such as the Defence Force it is easy to fall into the traps of so many other bureaucracies. Viz. Duplication of work, working at cross purposes. Therefore in order to control the organizations functioning and to help it move together in the same direction some form of Management by objectives is necessary.

With these thoughts paramount in our mind we employed an outside consultant and a small team of people within the Defence Family (members of Armscor were included in the team), to launch an Organizational Development programme which would hopefully meet some of these needs.

We are not suggesting that these ideas are completely new to the Defence Force or that no one has ever sought to practice them. It was therefore necessary to 'unfreeze' the present thinking patterns and start introducing these new emphases. To do this the team with the outside consultant developed what was known as a Situational Leadership Seminar.

Situation leadership seminar

The purpose of the seminar was to introduce these concepts to about thirty people over a five day period. The method used was that of experiental learning, a method which made much use of group dynamics and team work. Through the various dilemmas in which the groups were placed they were to discover these needs for themselves and then stimulated by this new vision to go back to their part of the organization and put it into practice.

Where do we begin?

The Chief of the Defence Force personally initiated the idea to begin with and wanted the programme to begin with the Defence Staff and Command Councils and then down through the Staff Divisions, our target group being the Brigadiers and Colonels at this level.

The project was given the name KONTAK and at what was known as KONTAK I, II, III, the programme was launched.

During that first year we ran two seminars a month which gave us approximately 720 people who completed this phase. After this we ran one seminar a month because by

October 1977 we had already started on the next important phase of the programme — TEAM BUILDING.

Research on the situation leadership seminars

At the end of 1977 we realized that unless we could evaluate the results of our work on the Situation Leadership Seminars it would be hard work wasted. We therefore embarked on a research programme in which we evaluated the Situation Leadership Seminars' 1/78 — 3/78. This was done by sending out both a pre- and post questionnaire and a follow up questionnaire after the seminarians had been back in the work situation for about four months. The research centred around the Strumpfer and Friedlander questionnaires. The research continues today.

Main finding

That the Situation Leadership Seminars heightened the Sociocentrism of the seminars and reduced their formalism. We did however notice that unless these new behaviour patterns could be consolidated through Team Building within about six months we would lose the initiative that had been gained through the Situation Leadership Seminars.

Because of these and other factors we needed to concentrate on building up the working teams of those who had already been introduced to the new ideas. They also through the Situation Leadership Seminars had learned certain skills which could help them in the team work which they would now be involved in.

Team building

Before speaking about team building as such it is important to realize what the strategy of the internal-consultant was in this respect.

Because we discovered from our Situation Leadership experience that the organization was strongly task orientated and that unless we adopted a very practical down to earth approach in our team building we would receive a good deal of resistance we worked on what Harrison called 'the clients felt needs' and the internal consultant acted in Argyris's term as an intervenor rather than as a change agent.

Basic assumption behind intervention theory

The basic premise says E. F. Huse behind intervention theory and method is 'that the client system contains within itself most of the basic resources needed to change (should change become necessary), and the primary role of the intervenor is to assist the client system in diagnosing its own problems through the use of valid information, making a free choice based on valid information, and obtaining internal Commitment based on valid information and free choice'(E. F. HUSE 1975).

In this spirit we tackled the Team Building phase of the programme. The idea was to get a working team together, away from their environment for three days. We would take a Chief of Staff and say his six Directors.

Procedure adopted before the team building

Before the team building was embarked on the Chief of Staff would be interviewed by the Internal Consultant and one other person. Through both structured questionnaires and in an unstructured form we would seek to discover where the problems lay, what he as the leader wished to achieve.

The next step would be to interview his subordinates and ask them similar questions. From the information gathered we were able to get an indication as to where some of the difficulties lay.

The consultant would then return to base as it were and arrange this material in such a way so that in a number of structured exercises the team could creatively and meaningfully investigate the problem area. The consultant then clears out the programme with the leader and the team attends the team building.

At the team building the consultant only acts as a Catalyst, the leader of the team leads the discussion generated from the exercises. The consultant only comments on the process of the team, introduces another phase in the programme, or comments when asked for his opinion.

At the close of the Team Building the team established action plans that have to be taken to solve or work at the issues that have been discussed. Names and responsibilities and a deadline date are discussed at this stage.
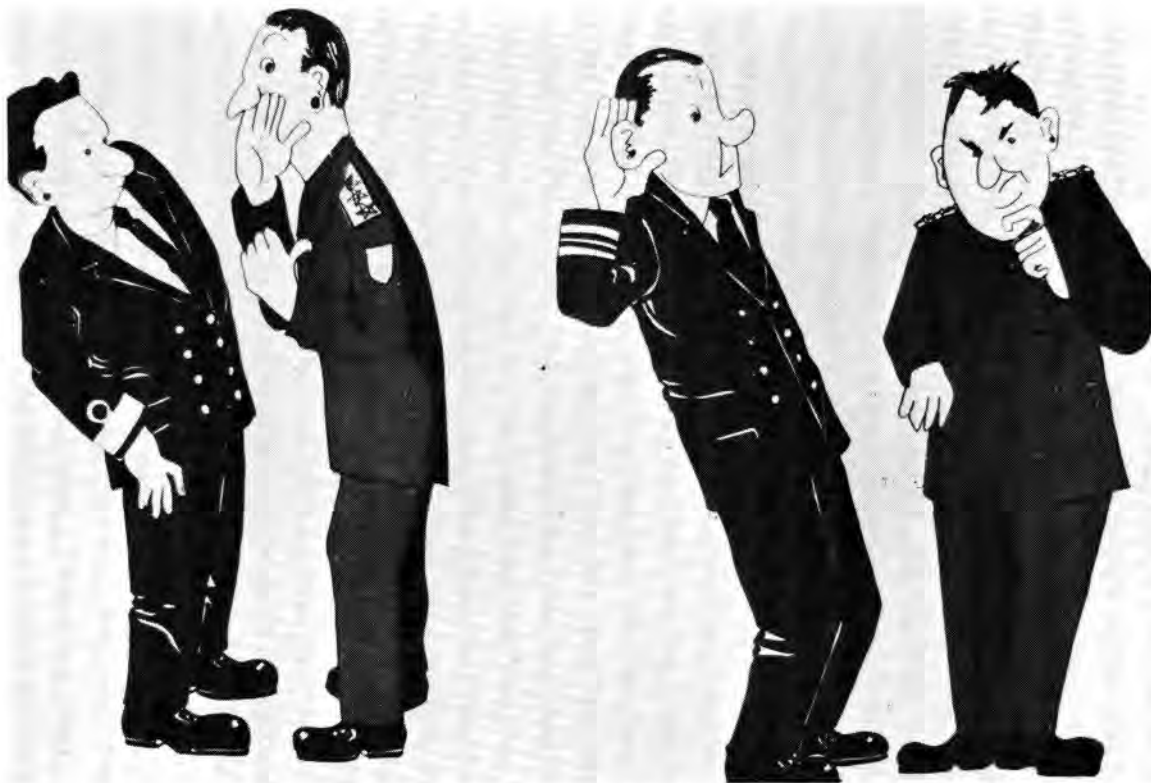
The Senior Leadership Seminar got the organisation thinking about itself.

Phases of Team Building

In most of the staff divisions we have already reached the third team building. In the first round team building we discovered that team members had in a very real sense to get to know each other. Let us not believe that because we work on the same floor and in the same part of the organization that we know each other.

At the first round team building teams asked the same question that I posed at the beginning of the article. They too came up with lists of things that needed to be done and to be improved and this was a good start.

At the second round team building we found that many teams needed to clear out their roles and functions with each other. It was here that we were able to bring in the help of the Organizational Study people. By using their documents and organizational diagrams we were able to work through in an indirect way many of the more personal problems found in the teams.

Some of the problems we have had to face

Like most bureaucracies there is a very high turn over of personnel, and one of our greatest difficulties has been the lack of continuity in some of the teams. In fact in one case the three team buildings held were three teams with new personnel each time.

Because of the size of the Organization Development team we were not always able to hold team buildings soon enough after the team members had done the Senior Leadership Seminars, and therefore we lost something of the advantage that this would give us.

How far have we gone?

At this stage all the Staff Divisions have had at least one round of team building with the Chief of Staff and his Directors. The Navy and the Air Force have had team buildings with their Commanders and the Army have moved into an MBO field and certain Team Buildings which we have not yet been involved in.

Some staff divisions have already taken their team building to the next level down, Directors and Senior Staff Officers, this however is not so in all cases.

There is a great deal more to do but we continually face the problem of more work than we can physically handle. In fact we have now slowed down the Senior Leadership Seminars programme so that the gap between it and the team building will not be too great.

What has been achieved by it all?

From the Senior Leadership Seminar many have been stimulated to carry on the new patterns in the work situation. Others have fallen back into old ways. Yet, one of its real achievements is that it has got the organization thinking about itself and its need for greater effectiveness. The course itself has an element of self development built into it and time and time again seminarians have been grateful for an opportunity to get feedback about themselves as people and they have been encouraged to take a good long look at themselves, their jobs and their place and purpose in the organization.

Within three years one does not expect miracles and some would even ask if any change had taken place? There are three areas that I would like to highlight in which Team Building has played a very real role and I believe has helped the organization as a whole.

Time to think

In a bureaucratic system one finds that people get bogged down in paper work and red tape. Meetings after meeting often makes it impossible to see the Chief, and all these factors affect the morale and the efficiency of the Organization.

Team Building has made it possible for people to withdraw themselves from the hustle and bustle that envelopes them and they get an opportunity to really talk through the vital issues that they very rarely get time to handle in the work situation.

The Chief is also available to his team and many of the issues can be worked through at a team and on a person to person level. The need for recognition by team members is met, because his opinions are listened to and he is given an opportunity to state his case on a much more personal basis.

These three advantages for small teams has also had a rippling effect on the total organisation and without doubt communication and co-ordination is improving and the individuals personal need for recogni-

tion which is so often lost in the system is being heard and giving a more personal touch to what might otherwise be a very impersonal organization.

A good deal still needs to be done and the need to release top management to concentrate on the more important issues of their office will still remain a pipe dream until the organization solves the problem of the retention of personnel and the optimal use of its resources.

In terms of the Management by Objectives, we have only started what I see to be a long term teaching programme, but it has already helped many to give greater thought to direction and priorities; its greatest problem is still its semantic nature. Regarding the size of the organization change cannot be expected overnight.

There is no doubt that Organization Development has come to stay and there are continued signs that its services will be demanded more and more, for this one thing is certain we need and want to be a Defence Force which will be able to meet the challenges of a new age.

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