

UNSOLVED PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF TRAINING LABORATORIES IN JAPAN

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Training laboratories have become too far advanced in empirical activities and lagged behind in theoretical examinations. This paper is designed to identify its problem areas, while reviewing its present status in Japan. The following six problems will be addressed in the process. 1) The effects produced through the first experience with training laboratories, 2) the effects of the participants' cognition that they are allowed to participate in training laboratories as a special favor are not definitely distinguished from the overall effects of training laboratories. 3) The effects of techniques and tools employed for training laboratories are not fully analyzed. 4) There are few studies in which control groups are used. 5) Laboratory experiments are not conducted as often as they should be. 6) Most of these studies are not carried out by integrating those already existing group interaction theories.

The T-group, first started by Lewin, et al. in the 1940's, has developed, as human relations in modern society have become increasingly complicated, and the problem of "human alienation" resulting from the sophisticated technological innovation has reached crucial proportions, and thus a number of studies have been made on the subject. Thus, the T-group has since reached the point of practical applications. In Japan, it was first adopted mostly by industrial organizations, and it has since come into frequent use for the training of case workers, nurses as well. Thus, training laboratories have been commonly used, and people now have better understanding of them. Preoccupied with the specific and immediate objectives like the development of human sensitivity and leadership ability, people have developed the tendency to use them for practical purposes to the exclusion of adequate theoretical analyses and the development of programs based thereon. In this connection, Lieberman, Yalom, Miles (1972) who analyzed the impact of encounter groups on participants, stated, "The use of encounter groups for personal growth and the application of encounter techniques in the large variety of settings has mushroomed so rapidly that the gap between what is done and what is known has widened alarmingly".

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The purpose of this paper is to review, against the above backdrop, the present status of training laboratories and check into its problem areas in Japan. By training laboratories, we mean not only T-group but also Encounter-group and Human-relations training. In this paper, we will deal with those problems involved in both practical applications and theoretical analyses. Incidentally, the chapters in this paper are not based on any systematic considerations, and therefore the sequence of these chapters has no particular significances.

1. *The existence of effects produced by the first experiences*

When an attempt was made to study a change in human attitude or behavior, their stock in trade was to give new knowledge through lectures. Seminars and workshops held by industrial organization were made up of programs revolving around lectures by specialists in the respective fields. As exemplified in the study of group decision making by Lewin, et. al., however, it became clear that mere lectures aimed at giving knowledge were not enough to cause a change in attitude and behavior, and with the spread of T-group, group-centered or participants-centered workshops came to be adopted. Thus, those participants-centered training programs gave fresh influence to the participants long inured to lecture-centered trainings. That the effects of training were allegedly recognized in not a few programs may well have been attributable to that fresh influence. To accelerate learning through new experiences is necessary to increase the effect of training, to be sure. But the question arises if one tries to attribute the effect of training only to the "first experience". Because most of the non-technical trainings held by industrial organizations in recent years are participants-centered, and very few of them are based on lectures alone. Therefore, in the future, participants in training laboratories will not regard the empirical training method as something particular new. Thus, the participants will not be satisfied with any training unless it comes complete with some kinds of tools or techniques based on some theoretical considerations, and thus one can not expect changes in their attitude or behavior. As mentioned before, the effect of the first experience should be utilized to the extent possible, but at the same time it must be separated from the effect produced by the theory and method of an individual training.

2. *The existence of the effects of the participants' that they are allowed to participate in training as a special favor*

There is no denying the possibility of the existence of the so-called "special favor effect" in training in Japanese industrial organization. As is particularly found in the case of training for first-line supervisors, the participant develops a sense of motivation even before the beginning of the training in the belief that "The company regards me with great expectations and that is why it lets me participate in the training". Many of the first-line supervisors in Japanese industries and businesses have risen from the ranks by dint of their long experience as well as on the merit of their own abilities. They have reached the highest position they could ever reach. They have developed a tendency to assume that the younger employees under their

command would be at a loss as to what to do during their absence. They are proud of having worked to the best of their abilities. They are proud of the companies they work for. Many of the first-line supervisors were educated before World War II, and they are very loyal to their companies and dedicated to their jobs. Since they are sent to participate in the training on company time and at company expense, they feel dutybound to make the most of the training and feel a guilty conscience if they fail to do so. Such a psychological effect makes itself felt in the outcome of the training. Based on our past experience, it may be safe to say that such an effect is felt most strongly among the first-line supervisors, and the higher position they hold and the younger they are in age, the less strongly they feel about this. The younger people seem to take it for granted that they have the right to participate in training. As in the case of what was discussed in the preceding chapter, this psychological effect is an important factor in making any training program successful. Even in cases where the so-called "special-favor effect" can not be expected, it significantly affects the outcome of any training to give the participants a sense of purpose and thus heighten their motivation in advance (Adler, Goleman 1975). In analyzing the overall effects of the training, however, the effects of their pre-training psychological factors must be handled as a separate matter.

3. *Techniques and tools for training programs and their effects*

People or groups of people are the objects of analyses in what are called T-group and Encounter-group. However, for human-relations trainings, role-playing and other various techniques and tools are employed. We must try to determine whether these techniques and tools are actually helpful in making trainings effective, and if so, in what way they affect changes in the participants' attitude and behavior. We also have to determine in which part of the program they should be used in order to make the maximum use of them. In many cases, however, they are used according to the empirical judgement that they will probably turn out to be helpful. Now, let us mention the example of lectures given for the purpose of providing fundamental knowledge and information during the course of training programs, although these are somewhat different from techniques and tools in nature. When lectures are given at first in a training program designed to promote human relations, those "terms" used in the course of the lectures are usually taken in a rhetorical sense. For instance, they give a lecture on group decision making, the participants, at the end of the discussion, end up drawing a conclusion like something to the effect that "We can resolve the problem through group decision making". In this case, the idea of group decision making has not been empirically understood, but the term "group decision making" has become something like a "positive slogan". To be sure, it is necessary to properly orient the participants on what to discuss. But detailed lectures could end up giving the participants some standardized concept. Therefore, lectures should be given within a given frame of reference as a means to sort out and consolidate whatever has been left unresolved during the course of discussion. The above is an example of lectures used as a tool. The same goes to for an intervention by the trainer (facilitator) in T-group and Encounter-group. The trainer inter-

venes to give proper meaning to the participants' responses or to interpret a given situation as needed. In this case, the trainer could go too far in providing an interpretation, thereby orienting the participants in too specific away for them to have any freedom of action. Of course, there are times when intervention is necessary, but utmost care must be exercised in determining when and how it is done.

4. *The problem of control groups*

To review those studies designed to measure the effects of training laboratories, one finds that no control groups were used in many of them (Campbell, Dunnette, 1968, pointed out this matter in their review on training laboratories). They analyzed the participants' responses before and after the training, and presumably some of the variables that reportedly underwent changes did not necessarily change because of the training. Particularly in the United States, we hear that many of those who participate in T-group or Encounter-group are volunteers. Therefore, it is dangerous to regard those changes which took place among these particular people as if they were the results of the training and make them seem applicable to people in general. Many of those training in Japanese industries and businesses are so arranged that their participants are made to participate on a half-compulsory basis. That makes the Japanese situation different from that in the United States. In any event, it is necessary to set up control groups made up of people who do not participate in training, if the effects of the training are to be accurately analyzed.

5. *The lack of laboratory experiments*

To look at the reports on studies in this field, one is struck by the fact that there have been so few experimental studies. As pointed out in chapter 3, laboratory experiments are indispensable in order to accurately analyze those phenomena which arise in the course of training as well as the proper use and the effects of techniques and tools. It seems that the idea of training laboratories has only grown out of the process of trial and error in which various methods have been tried. This is one reason why some people criticize by saying that practice has far preceded theory. Under these circumstances, there is no guarantee that a result obtained from one study can also be obtained from another, and thus there are as many trainings as there are studies. Although these studies have been reported under the same theme of "the effects of training laboratories", they widely vary from T-groups to Encounter-groups to trainings by means of tools (these tools vary from one study to another). It is deemed necessary to carry out conditional analyses through laboratory experiments by finding common variables.

6. *The necessity of integration of the already established theoretical frameworks*

In training laboratories, they use those special terms which have never been used before, among them trainer and facilitator. A group development or an individual growth is focused on its peculiar dynamics in the form of "in T-group". However, these groups are inter-personal ones and whatever arises there is an interaction among those individuals. Many studies analyzing group interaction have been made from the old days. Foremost among them is Bales' one. It seems

necessary to analyze the situations of training laboratories as something that has a "peculiar climate", while at the same time trying to analyze those phenomena which arise there through the already established theoretical frameworks.

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