

REPORT ON A NOVEL APPROACH TO TRAINING FOR INSTRUMENT/ELECTRICAL SUPERVISORS

BACKGROUND

This report examines some of the important different concepts contained in this novel training programme. As well as the traditional problems of technical training, attempts were made to introduce new training initiatives which ultimately had a significant effect on the course structure. Perhaps it is appropriate to use the words of one of the participants during the review when he said, "It wasn't really a course, more of a learning experience". There had been throughout the programme, a conscious effort to transfer the responsibility of learning to the trainee, they were not being 'taught' they were involved in 'learning'.

In trying to establish a structure that allowed: a) self-learning, b) skills sharing and c) dual discipline training, to be integral parts of the programme, several distinct issues were considered, these were:

- 1) Was it possible to form a pair from Instrument and Electrical disciplines who would share experiences and work effectively together?
- 2) Can we achieve a sensible balance of training by alternating the trade subjects?
- 3) Could the group's attendance, interest and enthusiasm be sustained over a long period with the proposed format (work and political pressures)?
- 4) Could the group's practical needs, be satisfied via "discovery learning" techniques?
- 5) Could the provided technical information that formed the basic course material be used later as reference data?
- 6) How would the group respond to testing and assessment as a regular feature of the programme?

SOME FINDINGS AND COURSE OUTLINE

Success of some of the major issues required the co-operation and support of the trainee group. This was met to some extent by the pre-course briefings in which fears were dampened and enthusiasm to contribute were heightened. The effect of these briefings was to involve the group from the outset, they felt and were in fact pro-active in giving final shape to the course programme – co-owners".

Generally, the course pattern and programme was a mixture of "in-centre" training (both theoretical and practical) interspersed with periods where trainees had the opportunity to relate their experiences to plant situations or, if they felt it was appropriate, some self or open learning activity. Training periods in the Centre were preceded by a written test, which reflected the previous training periods content with the whole programme being concluded by a final examination.

Although the question of "testing" was one of particular sensitivity (not attempted with adults in the E.T.C. before) it was found that it had a most positive effect on the participant's enthusiasm and importance they attached to the subject matter. Also their personal contribution took on quite a different significance. The marks of each

test (which were good) were not of major importance to the tutors but the acceptance in principle of testing and the impact of increased levels of personal earning were extremely important. It is true, the activity did increase pressure on the individual but this was far outweighed by the sense of achievement and satisfaction gained when the participants were able to display their “mastery” of a subject.

A key feature of the programme was ‘hands on’ practical experience. The participants were given an outline of an exercise or experiment by the tutor, but the end results and system design were the responsibility of the pairs. An interesting observation was the “bonding” that seemed to develop; each partner eagerly assuming the lead for training the other, when his subject was in focus. At times it was seen that individuals went to great lengths to make sure that his partner had grasped the topic and a pride developed with each successful stage of the programme being completed. It could be said that at some stages the course had 4 tutors to 3 trainees, a very favourable trainer/trainee ratio. The group as a whole were competent and mature supervisors, with a good trade knowledge in their own areas and this tended to increase the subject depth. It also helped to evaluate information being discussed, which was particularly useful in establishing a ‘pace’ for the programme.

CONCLUSIONS

From the experience gained we are confident in putting forward the following views for future integrated skill training needs:

- a) Pairs working and skill sharing does work in practice and provides a natural and very effective method of information transfer. Some thought regarding participants and pairings at the selection stage is important to the process.
- b) Testing, although approached with some trepidation served to stimulate the group and individuals. Group opinion was that testing was an essential feature of the programme.
- c) Developed and controlled ownership for the learning helped transfer some of the responsibility and increase the participant’s capacity for absorbing the new information.
- d) The learning process, even with mature participants can be accelerated, provided that the conditions, format, preparation of participants and material and presentation are given appropriate consideration.
- e) Throughout the programme participants were working within a novel and challenging framework for training with an emphasis on helping to learn. It is felt that if this enthusiasm were harnessed and the approach adopted in a broader sense it would be a powerful influence on attitudinal change.

In our opinion the course was very successful with many of the initial objectives being usefully met. The format could be easily modified with different subject matter which could produce a similar impact on the participants.