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ABSTRACT

The subjects were boys in two vocational high schools who had been rated by their teachers as responding favorably or unfavorably to supervision. Small groups were shown one film daily over a period of five days and discussed the role behavior of the supervisor shown in the film. In one group of experimental subjects, positive attitudes toward Structuring Expectations and Production Emphasis, and negative attitudes toward Consideration and Tolerance of Freedom were reinforced. For a second group of subjects the opposite reinforcement conditions prevailed. Control groups did not see the films. The experimental group of poorly adjusted students that received negative reinforcement of Consideration and Freedom, and positive reinforcement Structure and Production was rated several weeks later as responding significantly less favorably to supervision than the control group of poorly adjusted students. It was concluded that for this group of subjects, attitude reinforcement worsens behavior. Previous research with the movie indicated that discussion of the five roles without attitude reinforcement resulted in significant improvement in response to supervision. (Author)

RESPONSE OF VOCATIONAL STUDENTS TO SUPERVISION

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Industry spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually in an effort to help managers and supervisors understand employees. Little has been done to help employees understand supervisors. But this might be a worthwhile approach to the solution of problems in supervisor-employee relations. When considering possible methods for investigating the subject, my first thought was to have small groups of employees engage in role playing and then discuss the role playing interactions. My second thought was to make a motion picture of the role performance so that each group of trainees would be discussing the same role performance and the same set of reactions to the supervisory role. In trying to decide what kinds of role the supervisor should play, it occurred to me that the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire provides a set of roles that we know quite a bit about. Why not use the items of a subscale as a basis for writing a scenario that depicts a supervisor acting out the various behaviors described by the items in the subscale?

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A playwright was recruited to assist in writing the scenarios. We found several men who were active in local dramatic productions to act out the role of the supervisor and the roles of the people supervised. The performances were filmed.

The five roles - Representation, Consideration, Structuring Expectations, Tolerance of Freedom, and Production Emphasis -- are defined on Page 1 of the handout. Each film shows a supervisor and two assistants or employees in a factory office. There are no plots in the films. Instead, each film presents a series of incidents in which the supervisor exhibits the various behaviors that are characteristic of the specific role that he is playing. Each film is about 7 to 10 minutes in length.

Our first use of the films was in three vocational high schools. Teachers were asked to rate all the students in their classes on a behavior rating scale. The items describe various responses to supervision. Two examples of these items are:

Has a chip on his shoulder.

Resents being told what to do.

Low scores indicated a high frequency of the behavior. Students receiving low scores were regarded as responding poorly to supervision. Those receiving high scores were regarded as responding well to supervision. Students receiving the lowest and those receiving the highest scores were divided into experimental and control groups. The control groups did not see the films. The experimental subjects were divided into small groups of 6 to 10 students, composed equally of low scoring and high scoring subjects. These small groups were shown the films, one film daily over a period of five consecutive days.

After seeing a film, the group discussed the behavior of the supervisor for a period of 40 to 50 minutes. The junior member of the research team acted as discussion leader. In our first experiment, students were encouraged to take the initiative in conducting the discussions. The leader asked questions when discussion bogged down. However, no attempt was made to build up a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward any of the supervisory roles. The questions were designed to help the students gain insight into the motivations and consequences of different patterns of behavior. The most talkative students tended to influence group attitude toward the different roles.

Due to the free and undirected discussion, different groups arrived at different perceptions and evaluations of the same role.

Eight to ten weeks after showing the films, we asked teachers again to rate all students in their classes on adjustment to supervision. The only group that showed a significant gain in adjustment to supervision was the poorly adjusted experimental group -- the one that saw and discussed the five films. This was the group that we wanted to assist. We concluded that discussion designed to facilitate insight and understanding tends to result in a more favorable response to supervision. Since the different groups had built up diverse attitudes toward the same supervisory role, we wondered whether we might not obtain still more favorable results if we were to reinforce a favorable attitude toward one set of roles and an unfavorable attitude toward a different set of roles.

In deciding which roles to reinforce, we were guided by the Argyris and McGregor hypothesis that supervisory consideration and tolerance of freedom facilitate the satisfaction of employee needs for autonomy and self-actualization, while supervisory structuring and pushing for production are supposed to exert inhibiting effects on the satisfaction of these needs.

We decided that for one set of subjects we would reinforce positive attitudes toward Consideration and Tolerance of Freedom, but negative attitudes toward Structure and Production Emphasis. For a second set of subjects, the opposite reinforcement conditions would prevail. That is, we would encourage favorable attitudes toward Structure and Production while encouraging unfavorable attitudes toward Consideration and Freedom.

Boys in two vocational high schools served as the subjects. The small groups were made up equally of students with high and low ratings on adjustment to supervision. After showing a film, the discussion leader asked questions or made comments designed to encourage a favorable attitude toward one pair of roles and an unfavorable attitude toward the other pair of roles. The fifth role, Representation, was not reinforced in either direction.

It may be seen in Table 1 that the experimental and control groups were well matched on adjustment ratings before the research began. Table 2 shows the post-test means for the experimental and control groups. The well adjusted (Hi) experimental groups, under both experimental conditions, were rated somewhat higher than their control group on the post-test. The differences are not statistically significant. The poorly adjusted (Lo) experimental groups,

under both reinforcement conditions were rated lower than their control group. The difference for the group that received positive reinforcement for Structure and Productivity and negative reinforcement for Consideration and Freedom, was significant at the .01 level. In other words, both reinforcement conditions depressed the adjustment of the low scoring group -- the positive reinforcement of Structure and Production combined with the negative reinforcement of Consideration and Freedom -- to a significant degree.

It may be seen in Table 3 that the differences between the before and after tests were not large or significant for any of the experimental groups. The poorly adjusted (Lo) control group, however, was rated significantly higher on the second evaluation than on the first. It would appear that both reinforcement conditions prevented the poorly adjusted experimental groups from gaining as much on the second rating as their control group did.

Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for the four experimental groups under the two reinforcement conditions. Differences between the means are not statistically significant. The low experimental group that received positive reinforcement of Consideration and Freedom along with negative reinforcement of Structure and Production was rated 6.38 points higher in

adjustment to supervision than the group that received the opposite reinforcement. Due to the small number of cases and large variance in ratings, the difference is not statistically significant.

In summary, we found that the well adjusted and poorly adjusted groups responded differently to reinforcement. The well adjusted groups improved slightly in comparison with their control group. The poorly adjusted groups did just the opposite. They reacted adversely to both forms of reinforcement.

Both the well adjusted and poorly adjusted groups responded more favorably to the positive reinforcement of Consideration and Freedom along with the negative reinforcement of Structure and Production than to the opposite reinforcement combination. This part of our initial hypothesis was supported. We need, however, to account for the adverse effects of attitude reinforcement on the group that we wanted most to help.

Immediately after the five movies had been shown, we asked the subjects to state their preferences for the five supervisory roles seen in the films. Preference for each role shifted significantly in the direction of reinforcement for all the roles except Consideration. This was a highly preferred role and preference for the role was not reduced by negative reinforcement. This finding may provide a clue relative to the effects of reinforcement.

It would appear that the negative reinforcement of a highly and positively valued attitude meets with resistance. In the case of subjects who were already maladjusted, the resistance was expressed in a still greater degree of behavioral maladjustment several weeks after the experiment. It seems reasonable to believe that the subjects, through prior experiences at home and at school, had built up a resistance to all forms of persuasive and motivational approaches to behavior change. It would appear that our well intentioned efforts toward attitude reinforcement were reacted to as if we were using some previously experienced form of well intentioned persuasion.

Results of the study raise some interesting questions concerning the relationship between attitude change and behavior change. Do we really know what we are doing when we assume that only good can come from the reinforcement of socially desirable values? In regards to the present study, we have found that attitude reinforcement produces effects that are just the opposite of those that we desired. In previous research with the same films, we found that discussion designed to increase understanding resulted in improved response to supervision. Results of the two studies combined suggest that insight, rather than attitude reinforcement, is the more effective factor in

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Definition of five supervisory roles:

1. Representation - The supervisor speaks and acts as the representative of the group.
2. Consideration - The supervisor looks out for the comfort and welfare of the group members.
3. Structuring Expectations - The supervisor lets group members know what he expects of them and what they can expect of him.
4. Tolerance of Freedom - The supervisor tolerates and encourages freedom of decision and action on the part of group members.
5. Production Emphasis - The supervisor encourages and attempts to stimulate a high rate of productive output on the part of the group members.

Five films depicting the above roles are distributed by the Department of Photography and Cinema, The Ohio State University, 156 West 19th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43210

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Table 1. Average Pre-Test Ratings of Adjustment to Supervision
for Experimental and Control Groups

Group	School A		School B	
	M	N	M	N
Experimental - Low	33.64	25	36.75	19
Control - Low	33.88	25	36.73	19
Experimental - High	51.00	25	54.90	19
Control - High	51.08	25	54.42	18
Total No. Ratings	48.42	322	50.74	163

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Adjustment Ratings
for Experimental and Control Groups on Post-Test

Group	Experimental			Control			$M_1 - M_2$	p
	N	M_1	SD_1	N	M_2	SD_2		
Hi; C&F+; S&P-	16	54.19	6.27	34	51.38	7.23	2.81	ns
Hi; S&P+; C&F-	20	51.85	6.75	34	51.38	7.23	.47	ns
Lo; C&F+; S&P-	16	40.63	8.27	31	42.03	7.78	-1.40	ns
Lo; S&P+; C&F-	12	34.25	8.26	31	42.03	7.78	-7.78	.01

Table 3. Before and After Means and Standard Deviations

for Adjusted Ratings of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Reinforcement	N	Before		After		$M_2 - M_1$	p
			M_1	SD_1	M_2	SD_2		
Exp-Hi	C&F+; S&P-	16	53.25	3.50	54.19	6.27	.94	ns
Exp-Hi	S&P+; C&F-	20	52.60	3.73	51.85	6.75	-.75	ns
Exp-Lo	C&F+; S&P-	16	36.81	5.71	40.63	8.27	3.82	ns
Exp-Lo	S&P+; C&F-	12	35.50	6.39	34.25	8.26	-1.25	ns
Con-Hi	none	34	52.32	3.93	51.38	7.23	-.94	ns
Con-Lo	none	31	35.45	4.46	42.03	7.78	6.58	.01

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Experimental Groups

for Two Conditions of Reinforcement

Group		Reinforcement Condition				$M_1 - M_2$	p
		C&F+; S&P-		S&P+; C&F-			
		M_1	SD_1	M_2	SD_2		
Exp-Hi	Before	53.25	3.50	52.60	3.73	.60	ns
Exp-Hi	After	54.19	6.27	51.85	6.75	2.34	ns
Exp-Lo	Before	36.81	5.71	35.50	6.39	1.31	ns
Exp-Lo	After	40.63	8.27	34.25	8.26	6.38	ns