

# Why management training doesn't work

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Every year in Australia, about four billion dollars is spent on structured training programs<sup>1</sup>. Typically, in Australia, about 29% of training budgets are spent on management and professional training<sup>2</sup>. Organisations do this because they know that organisational performance is dependent on improving the skill set of its managers. What organisations generally do not know, however, is what behavioural changes have resulted from the time and money spent on training. They also do not know what value has been created in the organisation as a result of the training. Management training can add value to an organisation and result in behavioural change in its managers, but here are several of reasons why it probably doesn't work in your organisation.

## 1. The training doesn't address the organisation's key weaknesses.

There are a variety of organisational models that help to describe the different "dimensions" of organisations. The Burke-Litwin model<sup>3</sup> of organisational change is a particularly helpful model. It describes 12 distinct organisational dimensions and their impact on each other. If one of these organisational dimensions is weak it will become a limiting factor in the organisation's performance. If your management training addresses an organisational dimension that is not limiting the organisation's performance, it doesn't matter how good the training was or how much development resulted from the training, it has not addressed what limits your organisation. Therefore it has not added value that translates into organisational performance with the resulting financial gains. Organisations should invest in an organisational diagnostic that highlights their strengths and weaknesses and then plan their development strategy to target those weaknesses. An example of one of these diagnostics conducted by Organisational Development International is shown in figure 1.

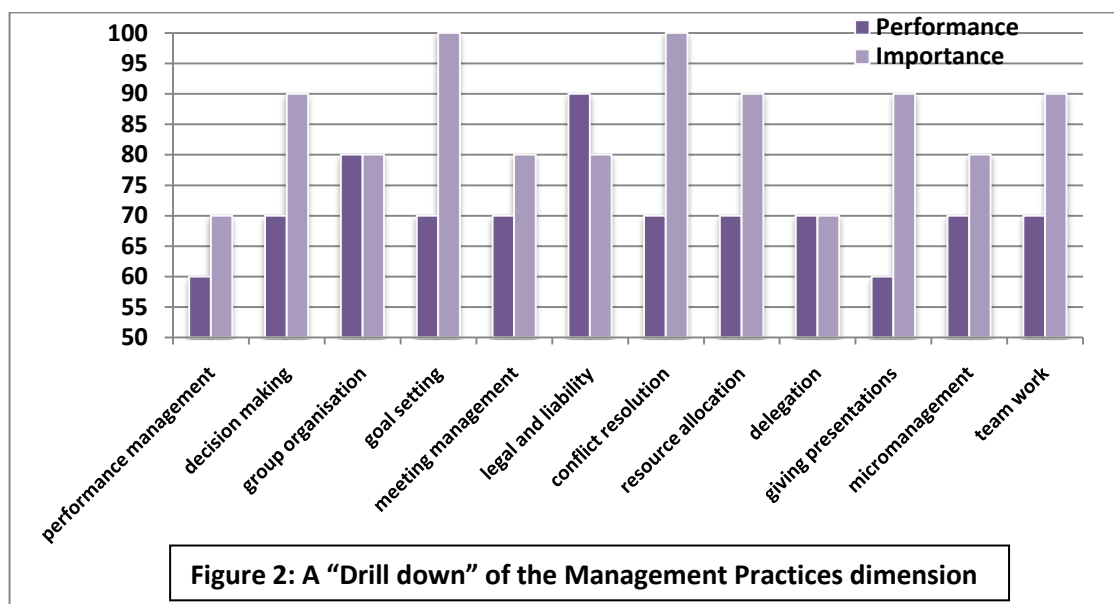


1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Employer Training Expenditure and Practices, Australia, 2001-02
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Education and Training in Australia, 1998
3. Burke, W. W. & Litwin, G. H. (1992). A causal model of organizational performance and change. *Journal of Management*, 18 (3), 523-545.

An “importance” map and a “difference” (Importance minus Performance) map with a similar structure to the performance map in figure 1 shows how important these dimensions are to the people of the organisation. Together, these maps give an overall picture of the health and focus of the organisation. An organisation is then more able to direct their training and development efforts to dimensions of the organisation that need development

## 2. Management training is directed to what the managers want, rather than what the organisation needs

The typical performance review has a section that asks employees what training they want over the next period. These training requests are often used to develop a training plan to cover as many requests as possible. There are several potential problems in this. Firstly, individual employees can base their training requests on personal interests (including being trained for a job in another organisation for which they are about to leave your organisation). Secondly, they are normally limited in their understanding of the range of organisational issues that are at play. Most employees do not have a comprehensive view of what organisational factors are at play. Thirdly, the HR manager may not have the Organisational Development experience nor the time to consider all of the potential areas of development. Figure 2 below is an example of a “drill down” into 12 key aspects of the management practices dimension of the organisation



Understanding the performance, importance, and difference dimensional aspects will help an organisation to strategically plan their training and development efforts

- The “performance” score gives the strengths and weaknesses of that aspect so the organisation can be encouraged or alerted to a potential problem
- The “importance” score gives the value of that aspect to the people of the organisation. It can then be seen whether the organisation’s values are reflected in its people’s values and whether cultural change is needed
- The “difference” score gives the degree of tension that the people in the organisation are feeling about that aspect. It tells you exactly what development the people of the organisation feel is necessary.

The “drill down” of the management practices organisational dimension shown in Figure 2 is drawn from the same diagnostic as the Performance map of figure 1. Similar drill downs of the other 11 organisational dimensions give a comprehensive view of the specific competencies, values and development needs that exist in the organisation. Using these drill downs, a comprehensive training and development plan can be formed that addresses the specific organisational needs with consideration of a larger range of issues than is normally considered, giving more strategic benefit to the organisation.

### **3. The management training is not aligned with corporate strategy and culture**

The issues addressed in points 1 and 2 above give key reasons for management training. Another legitimate reason for management training is that the organisation desires to be stronger in a particular way. The organisation may have a particular strategy or cultural focus that requires specific development. For example, an organisation might have a strategy and a reputation of innovation that it wants to maintain and increase. This organisation needs to have its management training oriented towards being innovative and include training in how to encourage and foster creativity. Whatever the strategic and cultural focus of the organisation, management training needs clear objectives and assessment aligned with particular organisational objectives. To assist this, wherever possible, real work should be taken into the management training sessions to be used as an example where the new learning can be applied.

A disconnect can exist between the senior management team, who direct the strategy and culture, and the training emphasis. This normally results from a lack of communication “downward” on the objectives for the training or communication “upward” on the results of the training.

### **4. The management training is aimed too low in the organisation**

Management training programs cover a range of skills and practices that unfortunately may not be present in middle and senior managers. Organisations can find it difficult to face the fact that its middle and senior managers may not have some the fundamental management skills that their frontline managers are being trained in. Those receiving management training often report that they would like their (middle/ senior) managers to have the skills they are in the management training program. They don't see these new behaviours modelled by their managers and are reticent to put on these new behaviours because it is “not the way things are done around here”. In fact, Senior management can display the exact opposite behaviour to what is taught in the training. The management training participant can consequently experience a hostile re-entry into the organisation with their new behaviours.

## **5. The new management competencies are not incorporated into the performance management or reward systems**

Management training is often not “hard-wired” into the organisation’s systems. Managers receive new skills but there is no direct understanding of any change in behaviour – through evaluation, coaching, counselling or discipline. Managers are not encouraged or motivated in their new behaviours as their managers do not understand what the training has attempted to accomplish. As a supervisor of a participant, you can communicate the expectations from the training (and ask to see their action plan from the training), spend some time with the participant before and after the training (where you incorporate their new skills into their performance management discussions). Management training needs reinforcement – processes are required to bed down new skills.

## **6. The management training is seen as a fix-it for problem people or organisational crises**

A management training program won’t fix a “problem” person or solve an organisational crisis. Training is just one aspect of creating change in individuals and organisations. Problem individuals need ongoing performance management, coaching, rewards, counselling and sometimes disciplinary actions to have a chance of being “fixed”. “Problem” people are often also a problem for the management training program. They usually have poor attitudes and therefore lessen the experience for the rest of the participants.

Management training is only about 10% of the management development process. It is an important 10%, but management training, like all other concentrated training programs needs ongoing implementation by the participant and their supervisor.

Organisational crises may create a poor learning environment as it can seem like the organisation is blaming the participant’s lack of knowledge or skills as the cause of the crisis. This produces a resistance to learning in the participants.

## **7. The management training program is delivered as education and not development**

Anyone who has sat in a MBA program knows that there is a vast difference between education and development. Our tertiary management education programs are populated with lecturers who have not spent one day in a real life business situation. It is well known that great practitioners don’t make great educators. It is also true that educators with no business experience don’t make great developers. They are often unable to distinguish theoretical models from what is actually needed at the coal face, so the student consequently has to figure out for themselves what is important.

Management training needs to be interesting and engaging, but more importantly, like any other training, it needs to be relevant to workplace issues. New concepts that are learnt need to be instantly applied in the training situation for that knowledge to have value outside of the training room. In some organisations, the culture actually resists any development, so a person soon learns not to treat management training as education and not change any of their behaviours

## **8. The time allocated for management training is not considered a priority**

Senior Managers can schedule events that are in conflict with the training that prohibits the right people attending. This not only decreases the value of the management trainer, but also the training participants realise that the senior managers feel the training is a low priority and so it becomes a low priority for the participant. Also, when people attend management training, workloads are seldom reduced for that time. They are often expected to work before, during and after the training. Also, Senior managers who see this training as a low priority do not coach their staff in the new understandings they have. Either coaching doesn't happen or it is delegated to someone else.

Managers can help participants to plan their workloads while they are at the training. They can make sure their work is covered by someone else and devote some of their time to help embed the training.

## **Conclusion**

Is management training important? Yes. It can provide new skills, greater awareness, increased knowledge and a chance to practice. Greater management skill lifts employee productivity, engagement and retention and ultimately an organisation's financial returns. Management training is important but all management training is not the same. It needs to be targeted towards the organisation's objectives, strengthen limiting weaknesses in the organisation and be hard wired into the organisation's performance development processes. If an organisation attends to these things, it will get far greater value out of its management training program

*Organisational Development International ([www.odi.net.au](http://www.odi.net.au)) conducts comprehensive diagnostics for organisation and delivered change management programs that are targeted to specific aspects of the organisation that the diagnostic and senior management team identify as needing attention*

*Management Training Australia ([www.mtaustralia.com](http://www.mtaustralia.com)) conducts public and in-house management and leadership training programs throughout Australia and the Asia Pacific*