

The Role of OMD in the Management Development Process

by
Bob Larcher

Introduction

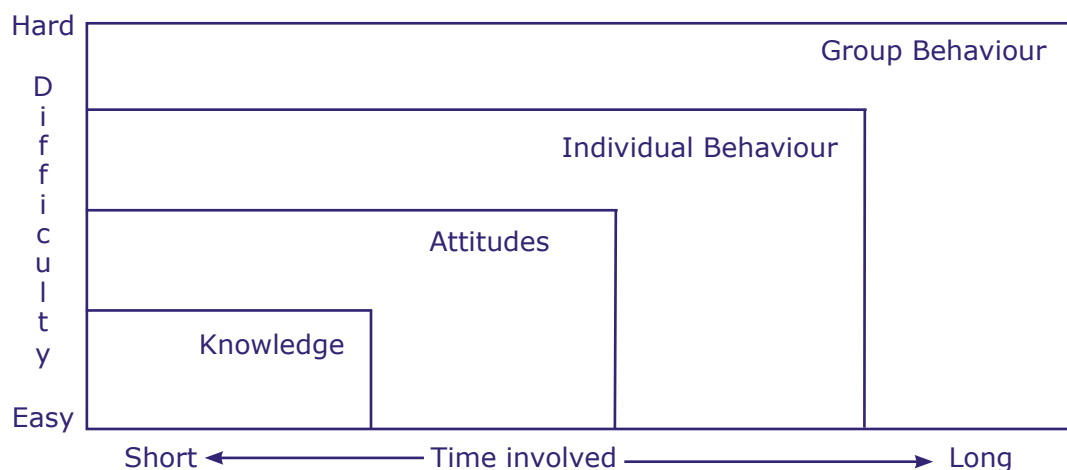
This article has been prompted by discussions with a number of senior managers who have either participated themselves or who have sent people on Outdoor Management Development (OMD) courses. Comments such as “we didn’t learn much about management, but it was good fun”, “I sent people for a break from work”, “we were supposed to learn about managing, but we were all young, fit and motivated, it was easy”.

This article has been written with the intention of identifying when, where and how OMD fits into the management development process. The article is based on a mix of “academia” and personal experience.

What do we mean by change?

All management development programmes have one thing in common, the ultimate aim is to change the way individual (and ultimately) groups of managers behave.

According to House⁽¹⁾ change can take place at four levels: knowledge changes, attitudinal changes, individual behaviour changes and group or organisational behaviour changes. The relationship between the time and the difficulty of making each of these levels of change is illustrated in fig. 1, below.

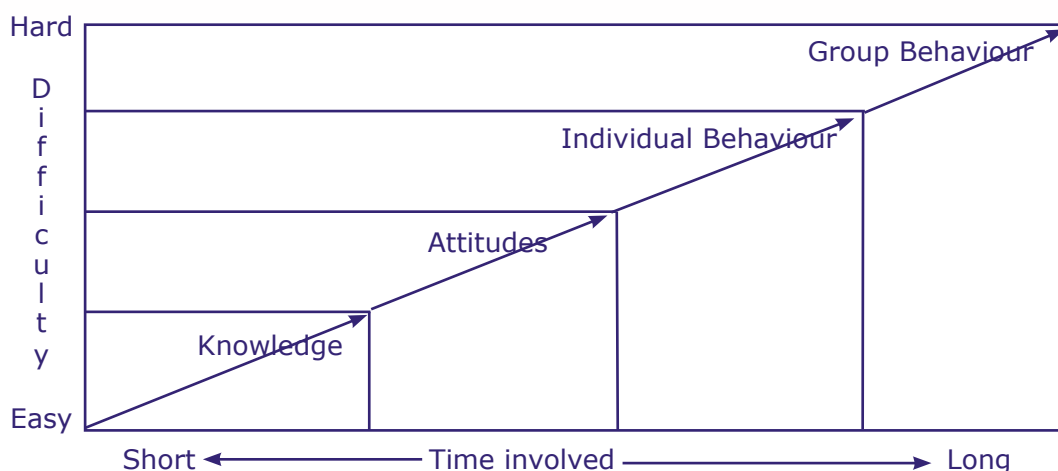


Changes in knowledge tend to be the easiest to make, they generally come from reading or hearing something new, or in this context participating in a “management skills” programme. Attitude changes tend to be more difficult and take longer due to the emotional element of having “to change the way of thinking”. Changes in individual behaviour are significantly more difficult and take longer than the previous two levels of change. For example, managers on a management development programme may have been exposed to situational leadership ⁽²⁾ and may even believe that adapting their management style to the level of readiness ⁽³⁾ of their team members would be a good thing, and yet they are reluctant to actually try it out. This discrepancy between knowledge, attitude and behaviour is often due to an unwillingness to let go of patterns of behaviour that they feel comfortable with. While individual behaviour is difficult enough to change, it becomes even more complicated when trying to implement change within groups or organisations, at this level you are fighting against values, traditions and customs that have developed over years.

Approaches to change

There has traditionally been two approaches to achieving group or organisational change, a participative approach and a directive approach⁽⁴⁾.

The participative approach starts by making new knowledge (management theory/models, new ways of working etc.) available to individuals. The intention being that the individuals will appropriate this new “learning” and develop a positive attitude and commitment in the direction of the desired change. The next step, significantly more difficult to achieve, is to transfer this commitment into actual behaviour “back at work” hoping that if sufficient individuals (the “critical mass”) change, then the group or organisation will change. This participative approach is shown in the diagram below.



Participative change

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Directive change starts with a change being imposed on the total organisation, with individuals being forced to behave and interact in new ways. The behavioural changes are often initially superficial, with individuals "playing along" with the new change. These new behaviours and interactions create new knowledge, which (it is hoped) tends to develop a positive approach to this new change, and hence a "real" change in behaviour. The hope is that "if people will only have a chance to see how the new system works, then they will support it." This directive approach is shown in the diagram below.

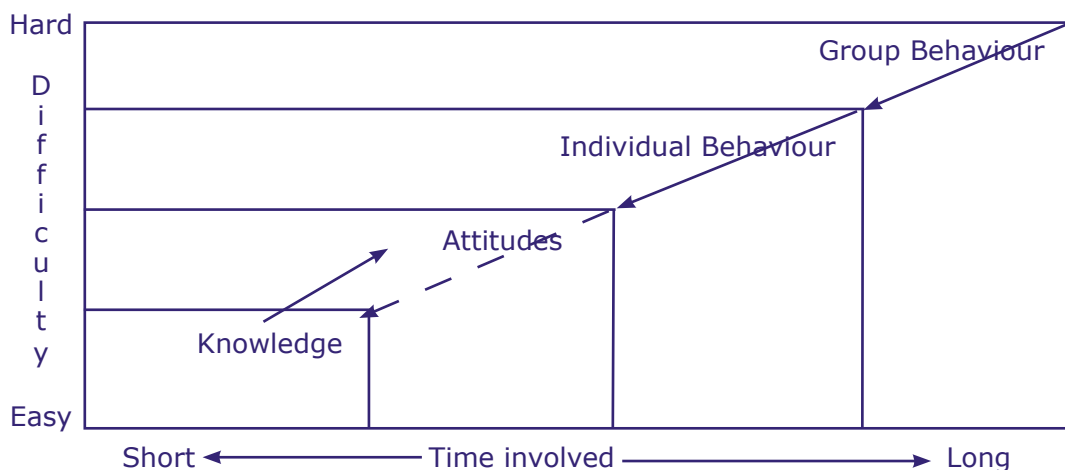
In fact, today, most organisations use a combination of both directive and participative change. Directive in the sense that it is generally the senior management team that decide that the organisation, and hence management, needs to behave differently and participative in that the implementation of the change process takes place through a management development programme.

OMD is often billed as "a powerful method for changing the way managers behave," in my opinion it is but one of a number of methods, that if used correctly and at the

"right time" within the change process will contribute to effective behavioural change.

For many years in the late eighties, early nineties I was involved in running a significant number of Development Training programmes for companies such as Rolls-Royce, Ford, British Airways etc. The general aim of these programmes was essentially the same, "to enable managers to understand their current way of working and to develop more effective management practices". What we were actually very good at was the first part of the previous statement. Through experiential learning scenarios with intense debriefings, feedback and exchanges of perceptions, we were able to achieve major attitudinal change, participants went away with the desire to "do things differently" what they lacked were the tools and behaviours to perform differently.

In the mid-nineties I started running management skills programmes in France. The French had at that time, and still do to a certain extent, a more traditional approach to management development, concentrating more on "giving knowledge". Here the outcomes were completely different, managers



Directive change

went away with a toolbox full of management techniques, but less desire to do things differently. In Schein's⁽⁵⁾ terms, the programme failed to "unfreeze" old behaviour patterns.

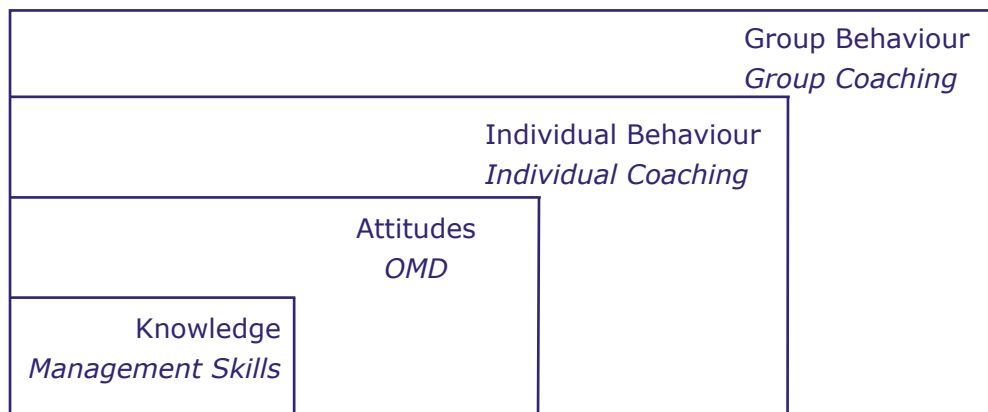
Today I am involved in management development programmes that mix OMD and management skills development with both individual and team coaching. OMD is used to achieve the attitudinal change required to take on board new ideas and methods, that is to say that in terms of the change process outlined earlier we start in the middle. Management skills interventions (case-studies, role plays, etc) are used to provide participants with opportunities to practice new ways of behaving. Individual and team coaching are used to help participants to traverse the "I think it's a good idea, but I'm unsure about actually doing it" barrier.

Conclusions

Firstly, for those "promoting" the use of OMD, be it the Institute of Outdoor Learning or more commercial organisations: it is true that OMD is "a powerful method for changing the way managers behave," however, it should not be presented as a "stand alone" panacea. OMD will only achieve its full potential, in terms of long term management development, when it is used in an integrated approach, together with other, complimentary, methods and approaches.

Secondly, for those "facilitating" OMD – trainers, consultants, instructors, etc: if facilitators want to be effective, they need to be as close to their client's "problems" as possible and ensure that the learning they are creating during an OMD experience is truly transferable and can help managers to behave differently in their workplace. We (I put myself in the facilitator category) need to understand the complex business issues and challenges facing managers – the era of outdoor specialists living in centres, completely cut off from the world of business is over! I spend more of my time in the corridors and offices of companies such as Airbus and EADS than I do running and debriefing OMD events, and this contributes enormously to making the learning applicable and transferable.

Finally, all those involved in the use of OMD need to be aware of the problem of creating, within participants, the desire to change, without necessarily equipping them with (or planning to equip them with) the new behaviours – thus potentially, leading to frustration and disillusionment in OMD. ■



Types of change and associated interventions

References

1. R. J. House. *Management Development: Design Implementation and Evaluation*. University of Michigan, 1967
2. P. Hersey. *The Situational Leader*. 1985.
3. Ibid
4. P. Hersey and K. Blanchard. *Change and the Use of Power, Training and Development Journal*, January 1972.
5. Edgar Schein. *Management Development as a Process of Influence, Behavioural Concepts in Management*, 1968. (see also the work Of Kurt Lewin)

Author Notes

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