

BOOK REVIEWS

Learning from Others in Groups: Experiential Learning Approaches by Gary L. Cooper. Associated Business Press: London, 1978.

Books are mostly printed from cover to cover, rarely written from cover to cover, and should scarcely ever be read from cover to cover: so runs the advice given to freshmen students on the first day of a training course in study techniques. Cooper's book, a compilation of his papers (with some junior authors) first published between 1969 and 1978, clearly wasn't written from cover to cover and, due to a number of lacunae in editing, this is apparent when one attempts to read from cover to cover. For example, reference in Chapter 2 to issues first presented "in an earlier article" is confusing when one notices the earlier article's appearance in the present volume as the concluding chapter. Yet exceptionally, to read from cover to cover is very well worth while, particularly if one is a member of the target audience of "training officers and personnel specialists in industry and the public sector" and wishes to expand an initial awareness of experiential training group methods. Whether the book is quite as useful to members or the remaining audience: "teachers and students of group work" is debatable, depending partly on their access to the original journals and texts, among which are *Human Relations*, *Psychological Reports*, *British Journal of Social Work*, and *Interpersonal Development*.

The book begins with a very short account of the objectives of T-groups and other forms of experiential learning methods; the absence of detailed examples of each (as was done usefully in Lieberman et al.), probably limits the helpfulness of the book to those who have participated in, or have previously read something about, such learning experiences. (Chapter 7, which presents an interesting case study of particular relevance to managers as part of a four-chapter description of occupational applications, conveys the flavour of only one kind of experience).

The second chapter, possibly the most important in the book, outlines the values implicit in experiential groups, societal, organisational, trainers own, participants' own, (and emergent) and explores issues relating to value conflicts and value themes: important partly because groups in themselves are meant to provide an opportunity for reappraising one's own values when participating, and partly because empirical research on groups emphasises the centrality of trainer personality, style and values in determining participation outcomes. A careful multivariate study on this latter theme is included as Chapter 4. One finding of interest to the training manager is that few adverse effects are reported by participants assigned to experiential training involuntarily: although Cooper is quick to indicate the dangers of inadequate screening of potential trainees' readiness and training needs. A further research report outlines the importance of the participants' own perception of the trainer, rather than the trainer's *actual* behaviour, in determining attitudinal outcomes for participants: with a trainer perceived as "attractive", participants identify: perceived as "self-congruent", participants change towards self-congruence: a nice vindication of Kelman's social influence theory.

A number of environmental issues are discussed in chapters 11 to 13: comparisons between trainer and participant personality, and general population norms (US edition of Cattell's 16 PF test); physical contact and its impact on self-disclosure; and the influence of degree of structure (prestructured exercises of the Pfeiffer and Jones variety versus the unstructured, non-directive T-group style) on "psychological disturbance" as assessed by personality inventory and peer rating. This chapter offers a timely caveat to the training officer wishing to introduce experiential methods into the organisation: although in absolute terms "disturbance" was minimal with both varieties of structure, the deceptively easy-to-use and programmatic Pfeiffer and Jones exercises tended to produce greater disturbance than the unstructured T-group. The training manager would most commonly employ a consultant to lead a T-group: here is an argument for a similar arrangement even when the safer-appearing structured exercises are contemplated, if only because the consultant can provide a better articulated learning situation in which participants may retain that control over learning goals and self-exposure, for which Cooper, in agreement with Argyris' views, argues.

A concluding chapter attempts to predict the future development of the experiential group movement, taking cognisance of the main influences on the movement's development: the Anglo-American orientation in advanced capitalist economies, with characteristic age and class structures. Change any of these sets of variables, and a number of values central to current thinking in the movement must themselves change if the movement is to survive: we might, for example, see experiential groups in the public service sector, for underprivileged social groups, stressing social commitment rather than individualistic values. An intriguing prediction in the current climate of concern for the social changes liable to occur with the expansion of the new microprocessor technology. If ASTMS employed a T-group trainer, what would the group experience be like?

If one were to conclude by offering the potential readership some steering advice: "training officers and personnel specialists in industry and the public sector", read it from cover to cover if you know a little about experiential training methods, but Chapters 7 to 10 first if you don't; 'students of group work': read it in parallel with Cooper and Mangan, and Cooper's "Theories of Group Processes"; 'teachers' (T-group trainers): if you haven't encountered this material in its original article form, better late than never."

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Manpower Training and Development — by Kenney, J. Donnelly, E. & Reid, M. 2nd Edition. IPM 1979.

Originally published in 1972, this introductory textbook, aimed at practitioners and students, has been revised to take account of changing philosophies, legislation and institutions in training and development of the 1970's.

The authors strongly argue the case for systematic training and describe the practical steps by which training needs can be assessed at the organisational and individual levels. Early in the book an attempt is made to clarify the difficult distinction between training and education, a problem often faced by practitioners and students, not to mention training agencies and educational institutions.

A large part of the book covers specific areas of training — operative, office, sales, craft, technician, technologist and management. In each area the authors describe the education and training framework and provide examples of course design and content. The personnel or training manager moving to a new industry or extending the scope of training within the firm may find these specialist chapters a useful starting point.

An interesting addition to this second edition is the chapter on the transition from education to work. This deals with the E.E.C.-wide problem of youth unemployment; vocational guidance; government sponsored youth programmes; further and higher education; and induction training. The authors examine government policy and the role the training officer may play in easing the young person into his or her first job. It is disappointing that the authors ignore the growing problem of the career expectations of school leavers differing considerably from the job opportunities available within industry. Moreover, little attention is paid to the positive role that managers might adopt in attempting to meet this problem, such as going out more into schools and colleges to describe the career opportunities available in industry, and providing facilities for students to visit companies and where possible to experience temporary work placements.

Another useful addition to the book is the chapter on national training policy, which describes the impact of legislation and explores problems and trends in training. The increasing influence of E.E.C. guidelines on national policies is brought out, as is the relationship between other government policies, such as industrial subsidy policy, and the training function.

Whilst the book is written in the British context, many of the principles and philosophies outlined are relevant to the practitioner and student in Ireland. For those studying for the professional examinations of the IPM the book is essential reading.

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Continuous Studies for Managers — by Gordon Wills: M.C.B. Publications Ltd., Bradford, England, 1981.

Power in Organisations — by Jeffrey Pfeffer: Pitman Publishing Inc., Mass., U.S.A., 1981.

These two books arrived as I was hurriedly clearing my desk to set off on summer vacation. As I put them into my briefcase, I had little idea that such disparate titles would have so much in common. While absorbing the beauty of the Borromean Islands, the powerful linkage between theory and practice which is evidenced in these two books, became strikingly apparent.

Professor Wills' book, which was written as a treatise for the Open University, is an extremely explicit case history of his attempts to describe, against Bolam's conceptual framework for the analysis of innovation and change in educational activities, the many exciting and new ideas in manpower development attempted at the Cranfield School of Management in the five years prior to 1980. Professor Pfeffer's book, on the other hand, outlines from the theoretical perspective, the analysis and understanding of power phenomena in organisations. Such a viewpoint, which the author largely postulates from a sociological base, is a new and long overdue phenomenon in text books dealing with organisational behaviour. Power and organisational politics are uncomfortable topics for many people. As Pfeffer says, "Power, influence and political activity all exist. Pretending they do not exist will not make them disappear. For those who will spend their lives working in, buying from, and being served by organisations — and that includes all of us — a knowledge of power is important". Amen!

Perhaps the unease engendered by discussion of power and politics in administrative activity is explicable in terms of ideological association, but its virtual absence from management textbooks to date, is inexcusable. Gordon Wills' book is a "cry from the heart" of an entrepreneurial educator, who is concerned with the vision of a University Business School in the service of industry, as well as the individual. His vivid and open analysis of personal experiences explore the relationships between changes agencies, local and national user systems and the innovative ideas. It is little wonder that some of Gordon's colleagues have been known to refer to him as "Flash"! He would have found much in Jeffrey Pfeffer's book to console him, as will any change agent who is attempting to exercise entrepreneurial flair in bureaucratic organisations. Read Wills' book to see how a host of activities and ideas go to progress education and training at various levels of success and failure. Read Pfeffer's book to attempt to understand why!

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