

Management Education and Training

THE D.I.T.B. AND THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

by

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The concept of Industrial Training Boards came from a growing realisation that "provision for training based solely upon the perception of individual employers of their own needs and their ability and willingness to meet them led to skill shortages which periodically arrested economic growth". The quotation is from "Training for Skills : a Programme for Action" which is the latest in the long line of proposals which seek to ensure that industrial training is adequate for the needs of both industry and individuals alike.

It is in this context that Industrial Training Boards are charged to look at their responsibilities and duties. To quote again from a guidance document - this time, the "T.S.A. Plan for 1976 - 81" -, the Agency stated that it had unified its aims in the following form "which is intended to stress that the economic and social aims of training are inseparable:

- to promote the development of an efficient national training system which contributes effectively to meeting the manpower needs of the economy and enables all people to have training opportunities consistent with their capacities, desires and employment needs in preparation for and throughout their working lives."

There is no doubt that the Movement, like many other responsible employers, has always laid great stress on both

the training and the personal development of all those who work within the various Societies, both wholesale and retail. Equally, like other human organisations, some parts will carry out its ideals and objectives better than others. But perhaps the new dimension to which Training Boards were asked to devote particular attention, is the needs of the Industry as a whole.

Training Boards therefore have to have something of a split personality. They may impose a levy "to encourage training". Employers have a statutory right to apply for exemption from this levy if their training, as judged by criteria proposed by the Board and approved by the Manpower Services Commission, is adequate for their present and foreseen future needs. To encourage employers to meet these criteria, and to find out whether they do so, evidently involves considerable contact with individual firms and individual employers. Evidently this activity is very employer-centred. But their primary remit, as interpreted by the Manpower Services Commission in the quotation above, is to be industry-centred and people-centred.

Servicing both Industry and People

It is this orientation which contributes so much to making membership of the staff of an I.T.B. a job which is worthwhile in itself. Within any firm or company, training is only one of a complex of managerial activities which contribute to the fulfilment of the firm's objectives, one of the principal of which is evidently to carry on business profitably, or at least to generate an adequate cash-flow. In this context, training cannot be viewed in isolation. If someone is advising a firm on improving its business performance, training is one of the factors - often an outstandingly important one - of which he must take account. But this situation is one that involves internal advice, or external consultancy for the business as a whole. Training Boards were not set up to carry out this function. But if

they were doing no more than advise on carrying out training for the sake of doing training, the task of their staff would be soul-destroying indeed, and difficult, if not impossible, to justify.

It is the wider look to the industry, and the inward look to the individual which enhances the important role of leading firms to match up to the Board's levy exemption standards. However, these standards themselves deserve close examination. The criteria are directed to the needs both of the employer and of the employee. Young people leaving school at 16 are not fully developed mentally, nor fully adjusted to work in the adult world. A responsible employer has a commitment to ease this transition, and the Board specifies entitlement of such young persons to release from work to undertake courses relevant to the development of their careers. But in its preamble, the D.I.T.B. goes further than this. It is stated that the Board accepts the principle that young people up to at least the age of 18 shall be entitled to Day Release or its equivalent. And the Board has especially in mind the educational content of any such course - the desirability of developing the mind, and not just gaining some mental or physical skill.

At its lowest, this should be enlightened self-interest on the part of an employer. The criticism is so often made that today's young school-leavers are not equipped for careers in trade and commerce. But young school-leavers are the only recruits available for many tasks, and the wide employer will find that they can make a better contribution to his business objectives if he assists them to become better equipped.

Other criteria also relate to the needs both of the business and of the individual - participative appraisal, involvement in the preparation of training plans, employees with potential should have the opportunity to fulfil it, and

so on. None of these is solely for the benefit of either the employer or the employee, and both the customer and the community as a whole will gain advantage from them.

But basically the criteria are directed to an employer's "own needs", and this is not a part of the work of a Training Board which should be under-estimated. The Board attempts to obtain the acceptance and the implementation of a sound series of basic training concepts in every firm within its scope.

Social Purposes

Difficulty sometimes comes when the attempt is made to reconcile this important function with the wider responsibilities of the Board. In looking to the industry on the one hand and to the individual employee on the other, the Board is entering an arena where its objectives transcend the needs of the individual employer, or even of an individual organisation as widespread as the Co-operative Movement. It is deliberately seeking on the one hand to obtain a commitment to social purposes - the needs of young people, the disabled, ethnic minorities - where it may be difficult to demonstrate a favourable effect on the cash balance sheet, short-term or long-term. On the other hand, it is looking at needs across the industry, to encourage training in skills needed for the industry as a whole above and beyond the needs of the employer doing the training, to persuade one employer to sow that another may reap.

It is for this purpose that the Board offers its Key Training Grants. It may be sometimes possible to forecast that a given firm will not be able to find employment suitable to their talents and skills if everyone is trained to the limit of their potential abilities. But if the firm or the Society employs people capable of flying higher - and by no means everyone has the ability or the aspiration to do so

- it would be wrong to hold them back. Their potential frustration would not make them better employees, but, more important, there is generally a shortage in the community as a whole of relative high-flyers at every level. The community cannot afford to be deprived of the talents of those with both the ability and the aspiration to make the most of themselves.

But the most soul-destroying thing to have written over your door is "We didn't set out to be a non-profit making organisation; it just happened that way". Carey Street is an ill road even if your feet are shod with the highest principles. The Board realises this as well as anyone else, and often it must do no more than indicate the dangers of failing to develop potential where it exists, and the amount of encouragement it can offer through financial aid is necessarily limited.

This is why it seeks to encourage, in the widest sense of the word, and with a small 'c', co-operative effort. Both Trade Associations and Trades Unions can provide platforms from which better training can be launched with only minimal financial assistance from the Board's financial resources. But the major part of the Board's resources lies in the skill and experience of its own staff advisers. Their task is necessarily to advise and only as a last resort themselves to carry out direct training. There are between 150 and 200 of them, and 2½ million employees in scope, and 150 into 2½ million "won't go".

The Major Role

What then is their major role? Apart from their work in advising and assisting individual firms and Societies to achieve levy exemption, it is to ensure that facilities exist of which individual employers can make use for the benefit of their businesses and their staffs. This is the

most important role of the Board - to make available training aids appropriate to the needs of firms in the industry. They must also do what they can to ensure that external training places are available, as well as those within firms and Societies. It is a most important task of the D.I.F.B. to improve the teaching of distributive subjects at every level.

The Co-operative Union, with its College at Stanford Hall is precisely the sort of establishment which makes such a large contribution to the work which the Board is trying to encourage. The Board has problems in giving financial assistance to any organisation whose courses are not generally open to all comers - the reason for this is self-evident. But the Board benefits from its contacts with the staff of the Co-operative College, and it hopes that these staff find the Board's Training Recommendations, publications and manuals of value. Because, apart from its obligation to assist employers to reach standards which will qualify them for levy exemption, this is what it is all about. The Board seeks to encourage training, it has a duty to ensure better provision for training. A major part of its role is to make sure that those who have the responsibility for carrying out the training are provided with those aids - written, audio, or visual, - that can best enable them to fulfil the common task. And if its aids come up to the high standard which the Board sets itself, it will make a notable contribution to the industry of which Retail Societies, and some sections of the C.W.S. form a part.