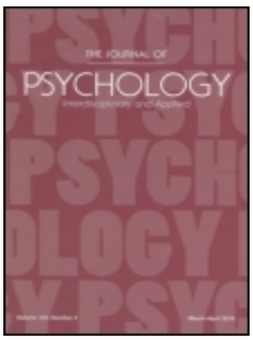

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The Effect of Time-Management Training on Employee Attitudes and Behavior: A Field Experiment

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ABSTRACT. This field experiment tested for the effect of time-management training on 56 employees at an Australian manufacturing company, half of whom attended a 3-day training program and half of whom did not. The training group subjects rated their management of time significantly higher after the program than did the group who did not attend the training program. The diary entries of the trained subjects over a 2-week period after the training program were also rated by three superiors as exhibiting significantly better time management than the diary entries of the untrained group. Given that subjects had been randomly assigned to the two conditions, these results suggest that appropriate training can cause employees to improve how they manage their time at work.

SINCE THE CONCEPT of time management was popularized by Drucker (1966), the idea has been widely accepted as contributing to employee effectiveness. This view has been supported by studies that have shown that employees who are good at managing their time are generally more successful than those who are poor at doing so (cf. Kotter, 1982; MacKenzie, 1978). Largely as a result of this evidence, time-management programs have become widely available and attended by many employees (Lakein, 1991). Employees typically believe that their ability to manage their own time is improved through attending such programs (e.g., Hall & Hursch, 1982); Maher, 1990). However, because of the absence of appropriate field experiments in the area, whether these programs actually cause employees to manage their time better remains unclear.

Prior studies of the impact of time-management training have been concerned only with employee attitudes (e.g., Hanel, Martin, & Koop, 1990; Wool-

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folk & Woolfolk, 1986) or they have had a pretest–posttest single-group design that did not enable researchers to identify whether it was the actual training or something else that was responsible for the observed effects (e.g., Maher, 1990; Slaven & Totterdell, 1993). To overcome these deficiencies, in the present study I randomly assigned subjects to either training or nontraining treatment groups (experimental and control groups) and assessed the effects of the treatment (time-management training) on both attitudes and behavior.

Method

The subjects for the field experiment were 52 supervisors working for a medium-sized Australian manufacturing company. All were doing jobs in which the company personnel manager felt that employee performance would be improved by better time management; hope for such improvement was a major reason they attended the program. The subjects were all told at a specially convened meeting that they would be attending one of two identical time-management programs; half would attend the first program in 2 weeks, and half would attend the second program a year later. With the approval of the subjects, 26 were randomly allocated to the first program (experimental or training group) and 26 to the second program (control or nontraining group) by drawing names out of a box at the meeting.

The time-management program was conducted off site by three experienced trainers and lasted 3 full days. It comprised an integrated mixture of lectures, group discussions, exercises, and role plays especially adapted to meet the needs of these supervisors. Run by three professional trainers, the program was based heavily on Lakein (1991) and Mackenzie (1978). The major topics covered were setting goals, learning time planning, setting priorities for tasks and jobs, dealing with interruptions, using filing systems, using time diaries, and learning techniques for handling incoming information.

Following Wexley and Lathan (1989), we assessed trainee reactions by asking the subjects in the experimental group, immediately after completing the program, whether or not they felt the program had achieved its objectives and how much they had benefited from the program (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*). Because the three trainers agreed that a month was the optimal time for the program to yield evidence of consistently better time management, 4 weeks after the experimental group subjects had finished the program all subjects completed an 8-item scale (alpha = .87) adapted from Distasio (1988) that assessed how well the subjects felt they were managing various demands on their time (1 = *not at all well* to 5 = *very well indeed*).

Total scores on the scale provided a self-report measure of time-management effectiveness. As in the study by Slaven and Totterdell (1993), at the end of each work day of the 4th and 5th weeks back at their jobs, all subjects completed activity diaries that required them to indicate how they had spent each half hour of the

day. These activity diary records provided the basis for the behavioral measure of time-management effectiveness.

The activity diary required all subjects (a) to briefly describe the major activities in which they had been involved each half hour of the day, (b) to indicate for each activity whether it was planned or unplanned and whether it was high or low priority, and (c) to estimate how much uninterrupted time they had each day for important tasks that they needed to do alone. These diaries were examined independently by three managers in the firm, each of whom had been in the program themselves and were familiar with the demands of the subjects' jobs. Each of these manager–judges rated the extent to which the entries in the diaries reflected an effective use of time (1 = *very ineffective* to 7 = *very effective*). The judges were not aware whether the diaries had been written by subjects from the experimental group or the control group. Because there was good agreement among the three judges (coefficient of concordance = .78), the ratings received by each subject were summed to provide a single behavioral measure of how effectively each had managed his or her time over the fortnight.

Results and Discussion

As predicted, the training group subjects rated their own time-management effectiveness significantly more highly ($M = 22.11$, $SD = 5.86$, $p < .01$) than did the control group ($M = 31.06$, $SD = 6.02$, $p < .01$). The mean score of the training group subjects on the behavioral (diary) measure of time-management effectiveness ($M = 15.81$, $SD = 3.26$) was also significantly higher ($p < .01$) than that of the control group subjects ($M = 8.17$, $SD = 2.99$). The self-report measure of time-management effectiveness correlated significantly with this behavioral indicator in the total sample ($r = .44$, $p < .05$).

Among the training-group subjects, those who felt the program had achieved its objectives rated their own time-management effectiveness significantly more highly ($p < .01$) than those who felt the program had failed to meet its objectives ($M = 36.05$, $SD = 5.99$ vs. $M = 26.07$, $SD = 6.04$). The mean score of the former subjects on the behavioral measure of time-management effectiveness ($M = 19.29$, $SD = 3.30$) was also significantly greater ($p < .05$) than that of the latter ($M = 12.33$, $SD = 3.22$). Finally, the correlations between the time-management effectiveness measures and the extent to which the subjects felt they had benefited from the program immediately after finishing it were significant for both the self-report measure ($r = .50$, $p < .01$) and the behavioral measure ($r = .36$, $p < .05$).

These results indicate that the time-management training received by the present subjects brought about an improvement in the extent to which they managed their work time effectively, as judged both by themselves and by managers examining their activity diaries. These self-judgment and manager-judgment measures of time-management effectiveness were also positively related, providing some support for the validity of the measures. However, the effect of the pro-

gram among the present subjects was stronger among those who felt they had benefited from the program than for those who felt they had not benefited, and the effect was stronger among subjects who felt the program had achieved its objectives than among those who felt it had failed to do so, suggesting that employee attitudes toward training programs play an important role in determining whether or not such programs can change behavior (Wexley & Latham, 1989).

The results of the present study suggest that employees can be taught to improve their time-management skills, especially when they feel positively about the particular time-management program (Drucker, 1966). If these findings can be replicated, they could help justify the current wide availability of time-management programs, particularly where there is evidence that ineffective management of time is responsible for poor performance. Research is now needed to identify the conditions that will maximize the potential of training programs, demonstrated in the present study, to improve employee management of their work time.

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