



Office of Legislative Oversight

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

100 MARYLAND AVENUE, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850 • 301 279-1932

### M E M O R A N D U M

June 4, 1981

TO: County Council

FROM: Andrew Mansinne, Jr., Director, Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: Manager Development in the County Government

Introduction and Purpose. During its four years of operation, the Office of Legislative Oversight has conducted a series of evaluations and studies on a wide range of County government programs and activities. Each of these evaluations offered an opportunity to observe managers in the performance of their duties and to evaluate employee attitudes toward management. Appropriately, the Office began to assemble material on management policies, practices and development and to participate in a variety of activities relating to manager and management development. Each member of the Office attended the Basic Supervisory Training Course. In addition, I attended a stress management and a communication skills workshop and the pilot presentation of a course on executive and mid-level management of productivity. Some conclusions from this four year effort are presented in this memorandum and represent my personal observations and opinions concerning the County government's activities in the area of manager development.

My reason for presenting these opinions at this time are three fold. First, the County Executive has indicated in his FY 82 Budget Message to the Council that the FY 82 budget was designed to "Further increase the productivity of the government through efficient management of its resources." I believe there would be agreement that the County employee is our most important resource and it is important that we manage this resource in a highly efficient and effective manner. Second, the County government has recently initiated a program of instruction on methods and techniques of improving productivity in government and the quality of work life and is investigating the adoption of quality control circles (groups of employees periodically meeting to identify, analyze and solve work related problems). It is my belief that if we are going to move into these and other specialized management programs it is critical that our managers first be firmly grounded in the basic management skills. Finally, I believe it was time that the broad subject of manager development be brought forward and discussed.

Essentially, this memorandum will demonstrate that there is a demand within County government for a vastly expanded and improved manager development program, a program which, as presently constituted and funded,

is wholly inadequate to satisfy recognized needs. This memorandum should not be interpreted as a criticism of any individual manager or class of managers; rather it represents my personal conclusions that the County government lacks a deliberate, systematic and coordinated program of manager development.

Definitions. There are as many definitions of management and classifications of managers as there are writers. For the purpose of this memorandum I offer the following broad definitions:

--Manager. One who plans, organizes, directs and evaluates the completion of assigned tasks and the achievement of defined objectives through the service of others. Most management literature subdivides managers into three basic classes or levels of management: immediate or first-line, middle and top.

--First-line Manager (Immediate Supervisor). The immediate supervisor or first-line manager is responsible for the performance of a specific group of operations or activities by rank-and-file employees. By title, the immediate supervisor is the one whom the employee will be in the most direct and frequent contact. The four general responsibilities of the immediate supervisor are common to all levels of management, varying only in degree. These responsibilities are: to plan (the tasks to be accomplished by the employees); to organize (the employees, the work area and the resources to accomplish the tasks); to supervise (the whole range of employee activities to include motivating, communicating, training, disciplining, etc. by which the tasks are completed; and to evaluate (employee performance). The immediate supervisor usually carries out these responsibilities through direct one-on-one communications and is usually located in the immediate work area with the supervised employees.

--Middle Manager. This is an imprecise term for the broad range of managers who interpret and execute policies. While responsible for the same broad managerial tasks of planning, organizing, supervising and evaluating within his/her management area, the middle manager must also be expert in the skills of the other two manager classes. Like the top manager, the middle manager has to be skilled in delegating and working through others, and must also participate in a direct, one-on-one relationship with subordinate first-line supervisors. The middle manager is in the unique position of acting as a buffer between employees/first-line supervisors and top managers; in putting into perspective the directions that come down "from the top"; in filtering the rumors that seem to grow at the working level and spread; and in interpreting the feelings and sensitivities of those above and below the middle manager level.

--Top Manager. A top manager is also responsible for the same broad management functions of planning, organizing, supervising and

evaluating. Obviously, the degree and methods of execution of these four functions differ considerably from those of the immediate supervisor and middle manager. For example, a top manager usually is responsible for broad policy, long-range planning and overall direction. Top managers almost always supervise by delegation through middle managers and first-line supervisors, and, except for their immediate staff, seldom directly supervise rank-and-file employees.

--Manager Development. For the purpose of this memorandum, manager development is the sum total of the various activities and methods used to select the employee candidates and develop their individual skills, competence and potential as managers at any of the three levels of management. The range of methods and activities to develop effective and efficient managers are many and varied. Included are: psychological testing, job rotation, performance evaluation, formal classroom training, on-the-job training and the many other actions directed at improving the human relations skills of managers to enable them to get the job done through others.

Discussion. I believe that the overwhelming majority of the employees like working for the County government. The reasons most often cited by employees (and one must remember that managers are employees too) for liking to work for the County government are the pay, fringe benefits, job security and working conditions. However, I have perceived numerous signs which, despite an overall satisfaction with County government as an employer, indicate that employee morale and, correspondingly, performance do not reflect employee job satisfaction. Not surprisingly, these signs are usually manifested in employee attitudes toward management and management's response to these employee attitudes. Among the signs I have perceived are:

--An open and vocal distrust of managers in general and top managers in particular. This distrust was most recently manifested during discussions surrounding the movement of the Employee Relations Office and a plan to give deferred compensation to some top managers. Additionally, this distrust appears to linger on despite management attempts to convince employees that corrective action has been taken.

--The growing movement by employees to organize or to seek other buffers between themselves and management such as an Ombudsman or an employee advocate.

--Apparent lack of employee confidence in the credibility of the various systems used to annually evaluate employee performance and to

select recipients of extraordinary performance awards.

--A repeated employee allegation that there is little upward mobility and, where job openings occur, pre-selection too often is involved.

--The over-reliance on a formal grievance procedure which stresses formal tracks and specific channels of written communications while discouraging informal problem-solving through open discussions between employees and managers.

--Current employee (and some manager) suspicion over new procedures relating to processing adverse actions to include written reprimands and disciplinary actions.

--Finally, the often heard complaint from employees (and, again, some managers) that employee morale is low, communications is one-way (top down) and that management "doesn't care."

Presently, the County government has fragments of a manager development program. These include a 40-hour Basic Supervisory Training Course, a number of specialized courses and workshops (stress and crisis management, communications, EPPE training) a pilot course in productivity improvement and the quality of working life, and an examination of quality control circles.

While these efforts may qualify as components of a manager development program they are, in my opinion, less than effective because they are uncoordinated, fragmented and unsupported. For example, the Basic Supervisory Training Course established in late 1978 is supposed to be a mandatory course for all County first-line supervisors and middle managers. The course is presented on five consecutive Tuesdays or Thursdays and is a sincere effort to present basic management skills and orient attendees on personnel management policies and practices (performance evaluation, employee selection, grievances, affirmative action, etc.). The course is presented with dedication and with a sensitivity for the varied management experience of the attendees. However, it is next to impossible to structure a class which can satisfy new inexperienced supervisors, middle managers with deep rooted (and sometimes questionable) management traits and occasionally top managers. The drawn-out scheduling (over five weeks) coupled with the inability to follow through and reinforce the material presented in class works to the disadvantage of the course objective, which is "...to help them [supervisory personnel] maximize the productivity and work satisfaction of the individuals they supervise..." Thus, despite the limited resources, an inability to classify attendees by experience and structure the course accordingly, and the lack of any control over employee attendance, the Organization Development and Training Division

County Council  
June 4, 1981  
Page 5

manages to do a creditable job with the basic supervisors' course. My complaint is that it could be so much better if it were part of an overall County government program of manager development.

As for the new initiatives to improve productivity and the quality of working life and to establish quality circles, I seriously question if any of these specialized programs will be effective. This conclusion is based on my opinion that too many managers will be unable to motivate the employees to carry them out. As an example, how does a manager at any level increase employee output if the employees, through rumor, misinformation or fear, believe that increased productivity will eventually result in a reduced work force? It appears to me that managers must first master the fundamental skills of communication, motivation, training, counseling, evaluating and the other critical interpersonal relations before hoping to have success with any program designed to improve productivity. In fact, its more probable that "...the most promising route to greater productivity is more effective management" (Improving Productivity in State and Local Government, Committee for Economic Development, p.40).

Summary: According to the April 7, 1981, Affirmative Action/EEO 310-1 Report, approximately 815 employees or 18% of the full time work force of County government are supervisors/managers. While many of these managers may be highly efficient and effective in carrying out their management duties, it is my personal view that these 815 supervisors/managers have no deliberate, systematic and coordinated program dedicated to their professional development as managers.

There will undoubtedly be many who will not agree that we have a problem in manager development; and there will probably be even more who will argue that, if there is a problem, it is not critical. I believe we have a problem and that the problem is critical because it has the potential of affecting the successful accomplishment of every County government program. If this memorandum does nothing more than initiate debate on the subject of manager development, then it will have accomplished its purpose.

Council may wish to have the Office of Legislative Oversight follow up on this matter and develop statistical data and options.

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cc: County Executive  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Director, Personnel Department  
Chief, Division of Organization, Development and Training  
Director, Council Staff