

Management Training in Russia - Some Even More Critical Remarks

The greatest mistakes Western authors make in describing the system of management training in Russia is the limitation of a phenomenon to a few cases of foreign individuals and foreign firms operating in Russia. Indeed, the foreign trainers, like foreign cars on Russian streets, represent a visible, but a very small portion of the real internal market for such services. Today, the very incomplete directory of trainers and training institution in Russia contains thousands of names, including university professors, professional trainers and devoted practitioners. A great bulk of the modern Western management literature is translated annually. Recently, the gap between the first American print and the Russian edition have been narrowed in some cases to several months. Moreover, a totally new phenomenon has emerged. For example, myself and some of my Russian colleagues have participated in special training seminars for Scandinavian expatriates who worked in Russia. The local business weekly "Compania" raised in its Christmas issue the problem of the brain-drain of Russian managers into world headquarters of multinational companies. In general, an insider who has the knowledge of both Russian and, for example, American markets for management training may observe that the Russian markets for such services has reached the state of near maturity, perhaps much faster than any other markets of business services.

However, in one aspect the management training in Russia is still immature. Neither Western trainers nor Russian university professors can imagine the real harshness of the problems Russian companies face like chaotic and criminal business environment, obsolete equipment, the miserable working conditions and inadequate remuneration. As a result, Western and Russian managers alike tell more how things "should be" instead of "how to make them happen." The more dangerous consequence of such a situation is the deep frustration of managers back from training courses, when they face the unchanged business conditions and feel themselves powerless to make the real changes in their companies. Therefore, we may talk about the visible changes in managerial attitudes as the result from training, but without visible changes in behaviour. Several large-scale surveys of trainees, for example, implemented at the end of 1998 the survey of 1400 Russian trainees confirm that observation.

Therefore, in assessing the real effectiveness of various management training programs and the whole national system of management training we should stress not the inadequate content, methods and trainers, but inadequate or completely lacking mechanisms for absorption of newly acquired knowledge and skills. In Harvard Business School a special course is given, advising students about the problems the fresh Harvard graduates will face in their new jobs overcoming the negative attitude of their "less elite co-workers." It seems