



CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY INSTITUTE

CONTINUING SUPERVISORY EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Construction Industry Institute

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Continuing Supervisory Education: An Overview

**Prepared by
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Continuing Supervisory Education Research Team**

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Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
Executive Summary	v
1. Introduction	1
2. Research Findings	4
3. Supervisor Selection Process	10
4. Implementation Program	14
5. Conclusions and Recommendations	19
References	22

Executive Summary

CII member companies are actively seeking methods to improve the quality and reduce the cost of capital projects. An increase in the quality of supervisors is one way to achieve both of these goals. Research indicates that the construction industry lags benchmark companies in training supervisors as well as in using to pre-select and prepare personnel to be effective supervisors.

Although CII companies spend an average of 1.7 percent of payroll on training, this is below the three percent spent by highly successful organizations and American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) benchmark companies. Furthermore, analysis of “expert supervisors” from CII companies indicates that technical capability is the overriding selection factor for promotion to supervisory positions. Conversely, an aptitude for people skills is not necessarily considered when selecting a new supervisor.

The construction industry has demonstrated its ability to produce an order-of-magnitude improvement in critical programs such as safety and project planning. Similar improvements in productivity and work quality can be expected through the use of the recommended Continuing Supervisory Education Program. The basics of this program are presented here. A more detailed presentation is available in CII Implementation Resource 40-2, *A Framework for Continuing Supervisory Education*. This straightforward, seven-step development program can be implemented by any organization to improve supervisory effectiveness. These steps will provide for a logical supervisor selection process coupled with an education program that is designed to meet individual needs.

1

Introduction

The Business Roundtable Construction Industry Cost Effectiveness (CICE) Project produced two documents, which along with other industry literature highlight the large payout available from supervisory education. Survey results, however, show only 13 percent of contractors provide any supervisory training before candidates become supervisors.

The CII Continuing Supervisory Education Research Team was established to provide information to the industry that would help: (1) to establish appropriate levels of resources for supervisory education; and (2) to produce a program that will improve the performance of supervisors.

Research Activities

In order to accomplish the objectives, a number of research activities were accomplished. These included:

- A general literature search that uncovered a large volume of primarily theoretical work on this topic.
- A review and evaluation of training programs used by a number of “best practices” companies. These were companies that the research team selected based on their financial success, professional reputation, and leadership in personnel development and training.
- A workshop to evaluate today’s “expert” supervisors in the construction industry. This was a day and a half session to interview and test successful supervisors who work at CII member companies. Group workshops, questionnaires, and various personality profile instruments were used to collect data.

- An evaluation of training activities and annual expenditures of CII member companies.
- The study of curriculum development techniques as a tool in preparing an educational program that can be easily used by industry.

Is There A Payout?

The research team was interested in designing a program that was based on hard data collected from successful programs now in use by industry. It soon became apparent that such data from repeatable test cases was not available. Many companies do not even keep reliable information on money spent on training, much less attempt to quantify the cost impact of specific personnel training. A substantial body of data strongly suggests, however, positive results come from supervisory training.

One of the strongest indicators was from the research team's study of the "best practices" companies. These companies were selected based on financial performance and reputations for strongly emphasizing education. Detailed studies of these companies revealed that each had an active training program, strongly supported by senior management, which was regarded as a major factor in the companies' success. Other literature sources cited cases where supervisory training was the probable cause of significant improvements in a "best practices" company's activities.

The data available is substantial enough to assume that properly developed and focused supervisory training programs will result in real savings through productivity improvements at reasonable levels of expenditures. A second factor strongly related to supervisory improvement, deals with identification of the best candidates. The workshops analysis of construction industry "expert" supervisors, including those from owner companies, showed personality traits

significantly different than those expected in effective supervisors. Primarily, supervisors in our industry had a low aptitude for dealing with people. It is reasonable to assume that in a technical industry, those people consistently selected for promotion have superior technical skills rather than high marks for interpersonal skills.