

PART THREE

INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

In his book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler (1970) observed that the future is unfolding and complicating our lives at an accelerating rate. Therefore, he said, if we are to cope successfully with a more complex future, we must all learn to learn better, think better, and relate better. Chapters Thirteen through Seventeen all cover those three areas in slightly different but related ways.

CONTENTS OF PART THREE

Chapter Thirteen, the single chapter in this part and the training portion of Module 3, begins the book's coverage of individual and team problem solving and decision making by initially discussing the basics in terms of an individual's use of the analytic approach.

HOW PART THREE FITS INTO THIS BOOK AND THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Not everything involved in effective think-work can be discussed at once. Because effective management largely depends on think-work, Chapter Three began a discussion of how to better analyze situations and plan. Having covered the basics of motivation and behavior in Module 2, it is both advisable and beneficial for program leaders to do several things simultaneously at this point in the program.

First, even though this chapter discusses individual problem-solving and decision-making concepts and principles not previously covered in Part One, instructors should refer to what

participants learned in that part in order to make this chapter more understandable and meaningful. By doing so, they will also reinforce much of what was learned in Module 1.

Second, instructors or facilitators should reinforce what participants learned in Module 2 by having them use behavioral concepts and perspectives in a personal problem-solving situation. After covering individual problem-solving and decision-making concepts, principles, and practices in the first half day, set aside the second half day of this module for each individual to (1) analyze a particular work-related problem that he or she faces, (2) formulate solutions, and (3) decide what he or she should do. For example, ask participants to use the socio-technical factor checklist in Table 3.1 (page 52) to analyze how some of those factors are affecting their motivation, attitudes, behavior, interactions, and performance. Then ask them to determine what they might do to bring about improvements in areas that they can at least influence, if not control. Possible improvements might involve (a) their job; (b) their working relationships with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates; (c) their social relationships; or, possibly, (d) the work flow or workload in their area.

By covering the basics of the analytic approach to problem solving, Chapter Thirteen also prepares students and seminar participants for Chapter Sixteen on team think-work processes. So do Part Four's Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen, which cover concepts and practices for improving interpersonal relationships and interactions, better resolving conflicts, and more effectively communicating—all of which are important knowledge and skill inputs to conducting more effective group think-work processes. What is learned in Chapter Thirteen about the analytic approach is also used and reinforced in Chapter Fourteen, which discusses an analytic approach for resolving interpersonal conflicts, and, of course, in Chapter Sixteen on team think-work. In addition, because problem solving is a major mode of learning, the concepts and practices involved are also mentioned and reinforced in Chapter Seventeen on individual and organizational learning. In other words, the analytic approach can and should be applied in several important contexts.

At this point, some management trainers might take issue with the sequencing of chapters. They might suggest putting all the behavioral materials together—that is, following Chapters Eight through Twelve with Chapter Fourteen on interpersonal relations. Or they might suggest putting all the think-work materials together—that is, follow Chapter Thirteen on individual problem solving and decision making with Chapter Sixteen on guiding and participating in team think-work processes. We would agree if this were only a management training program. But it is not. It is an integrated MD/OD program, wherein participants are developing knowledge and skills in a cumulative manner and are systematically and methodically applying those inputs in order to deal with socio-technical influences on their performance—one group of factors at a time. If, for example, all behavioral materials in Chapters Eight through Twelve (which are presented fairly early in the program) were immediately followed by Chapter Fourteen on interpersonal relations, participants would very likely not remember much of the behavioral material when they need to apply it later—for example, in Part Five on team think-work. Therefore, we purposefully alternate chapters between think-work concepts, practices, and skills (in Modules 1, 3, and 5) and behavioral concepts, practices, and skills (in Modules 2 and 4) in order to keep an organization's participants thinking about, using, and reinforcing both types of developmental inputs throughout a nine-to-twelve-month (or longer) in-house MD/OD program. This helps them improve their team think-work and interpersonal knowledge and skills in a mutually reinforcing and upwardly ratcheting fashion.

SUPERIOR-SUBORDINATES DISCUSSION, OD APPLICATION, AND TEAM-BUILDING SESSIONS

These sessions are conducted once everyone involved in the program has completed the training portion of Module 3. Since Chapter Thirteen is the only chapter in Part Three, immediately following it are the recommendations for OD consultants or facilitators who are conducting this module's series of superior-subordinates sessions. As before, these recommendations cover general information, objectives, preparation steps, discussion topics, commitments to actions and results, facilitation of sessions, evaluation of sessions, and follow-up.

