

# NEW APPROACHES TO CHURCH EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP:

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVES

*Kendall O. Price and Kent Lloyd*

*Kent Lloyd and Kendall O. Price, both members of DIALOGUE's Board of Editors, were both until recently on the faculty of the School of Public Administration at the University of Southern California. They are now Director and Executive Director, respectively, of Public Executive Development and Research Corporation, a non-profit educational organization. Kent Lloyd, who has a Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford, has been a bishop and is now special assistant to the Inglewood Stake President. Kendall Price holds a doctorate in Social Psychology from the University of Michigan; he currently serves as M-Men advisor in the Inglewood Stake Mutual Improvement Association.*

The frontier experience of early pioneers is history; even the friendly small town atmosphere enjoyed by their children is all but gone. Today most people live in an "organizational society." In every field modern culture has produced revolutionary changes: atomic fission, vehicles to explore space, the spectacular world of synthetics, recent medical wonders that prolong life and eliminate crippling diseases, cures for both mental and social illness, constitutional democracies in many nations, and countless other achievements that characterize this dynamic world at mid-century.

The high specialization of organizational knowledge that has made these achievements possible, however, has placed the modern executive in a demanding role. It becomes increasingly difficult to lead complex organizations that create these advances without the technical knowledge and skills of the professionally qualified administrator.<sup>1</sup>

In this rapidly changing organizational society modern churches face challenges to develop more effective ways of carrying their message. One challenge facing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today is that of maintaining the principle of lay leadership while still working

to secure the highest organizational effectiveness. A major response to this challenge has been the recent Correlation Program of the Church, that has focused significant executive responsibility on ward and stake priesthood leaders. It seems appropriate, also, that stake leaders would take a leading role among Church administrators in high level executive leadership development of the kind described in this article.

Stake presidents are busy laymen who preside over the 443 major administrative units of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Success in their businesses or professions stamps them with the executive ability that, when combined with their dedication and a calling to Church service, qualifies them for this unusual responsibility. Although they function without Church salary and therefore live between two demanding worlds—competitive professional activities and busy Church schedules—a group of those stake presidents in the Los Angeles area recently demonstrated their concern for effective Church leadership by accepting an invitation to participate in an executive development seminar. Improving executive performance is also an interest of the General Authorities of the Church; a member of this governing body also accepted an invitation to participate in the seminar experience described in this article.

Recent behavioral science research findings indicate that increased organizational effectiveness can be accomplished in four major ways: (1) by modifying the organization, as in the new correlation program when the priesthood executive committee was created on the ward level; (2) by program coordination so that duplication is reduced and activities are channeled through a single unit, as illustrated by the use of the home teacher as the primary representative of the bishop; (3) by utilization of new technology, as with the Church's widespread application of micro-filming and data processing techniques in genealogy work; and (4) by improving the performance of personnel within the organization through better methods of recruiting, selecting, and training Church missionaries, teachers, and executives.

Emphasis on improving the performance of personnel is consistent with the most central concept of the plan of salvation regarding the worth and dignity of all men. The Church program is designed to provide opportunity for individual development through participation in teaching and leadership positions. People selected for Church leadership positions usually have demonstrated their faith in the Church by living

---

This article has been adapted from *The Church Executive: Building the Kingdom through Leadership Development*, by Kent Lloyd, Kendall O. Price, V. Dallas Merrell, and Ellsworth E. Johnson (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1967).

<sup>1</sup>Formal training in administration is now being provided by professional schools of business, public, and educational administration for both younger, full-time students anticipating careers in management and older, experienced executives who return to the campus for exposure to the latest discoveries in behavioral and management science. Further evidence of professionalization is the mushrooming of management associations such as the American Management Association, the American Society for Public Administration, and the American Society for Training and Development and of management journals like the *Public Administration Review*, the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Personnel Administration*, and the *Harvard Business Review*.

the principles of the Gospel, thereby entitling them to the inspiration necessary to carry out the responsibilities of their office. In addition, most of today's ward and stake administrative positions are filled by leaders who reflect previous educational achievement or related professional experience. Thus, to meet the expanding needs of a dynamic Church organization most leadership positions will continue to require people with both demonstrated commitment to Latter-day Saint values and an increasingly high level of technical skills.

Short-term training of lay leaders for specific assignments has characterized the program of the Church since its restoration. Examples of this training include the School of the Prophets, the new Priesthood Correlation Program, recently initiated foreign language training of missionaries at Brigham Young University, teacher training classes, genealogy workshops, and portions of the annual B.Y.U. Education Weeks. Not to be confused with training which attempts to develop skills is the single orientation session given to officers and teachers as they assume their new responsibilities in ward and stake positions. Orientation is usually concerned with information found in manuals and handbooks regarding rules and procedures, authority relationships, required reports, and physical facilities and equipment. An auxiliary or priesthood leader in the Church who complains that those working with him are failing to perform their job effectively may himself be partly responsible, having provided only a brief orientation session in place of an adequate training program. By contrast, the focus of the seminar reported here is on improving organizational effectiveness through executive leadership development involving behavioral science<sup>2</sup> approaches to L.D.S. Church administration.

#### *DEVELOPMENT AND UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE SEMINAR*

In preparing the program described in this article, most of the existing executive development programs in the United States were surveyed. The majority of traditional programs can be characterized by such limitations as: (1) lack of adequate evaluation of program effectiveness; (2) focusing almost exclusively on changing the participants' skills and knowledge, with little attention to changing their values and attitudes; (3) the "smorgasbord" effect, in which various speakers present lectures or lead discussions coordinated superficially by title but not by content; (4) insufficient funds and little time set aside for careful planning of the program and post-session writing and reporting of the results; (5) too much emphasis on training exercises which, while requiring the trainees to participate, are not meaningful in themselves; and (6) little or no discussion by participants of related research findings in the management and behavioral science literature.

Although church and other voluntary organizations have been among

---

<sup>2</sup>Behavioral science is concerned with the application of scientific methods and approaches to human behavior, and when used in this article has reference to psychology, social psychology, sociology, and political science.

the last to engage in executive development, their needs might be among the most acute, because the voluntary and part-time executive often has limited time and resources. He has, at the same time, critical need for highly developed social skills and a broad range of information about interpersonal relations, groups, organizations and communities. There is a good deal of evidence that Latter-day Saint bishops and stake presidents have performed remarkably well in their duties, which may be due partly to the inspiration of their calling and partly to their ability to apply to their Church roles knowledge and experience gained in their professional activities. Nevertheless, it appears reasonable that inspired, talented Church executives with executive leadership development will perform more effectively than equally inspired and talented Church executives without such opportunities.

These points, together with the greater Church-wide emphasis now being placed on implementing the correlation program, convinced stake presidents serving on the Brigham Young University California Center's advisory Executive Committee that the time had come to utilize Center resources in exploring these executive training needs and, if possible, to develop a pilot seminar program for demonstration purposes.

As finally presented, the Church Executive Leadership Seminar was characterized by these eight features: (1) only chief executives, in this case stake presidents, who agreed to attend all sessions and complete seminar assignments personally were admitted as participants; (2) a behavioral science perspective on management rather than traditional business administration or theology constituted the focus of the seminar, although each participant contributed practical illustrations from his own Church administrative experience in ways that enriched all discussions; (3) a three-phase plan was utilized—the first devoted to building support between consultants and the executive committee of stake presidents, the second devoted to the seminar itself, and the third phase including evaluation and compilation of results into a final report of activities; (4) an evaluation of the effectiveness of the program was made, including before-after measures of participants' values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behavior, which could be used for possible modification of future programs; (5) most presentations were made by the authors, thus providing program continuity and eliminating the "smorgasbord" pattern so common in executive programs; (6) there was emphasis on re-examination of basic values and attitudes of participants rather than providing mere information; (7) an attempt was made to capitalize on the capacities and resources of individual group members and the spontaneous development of insights and ideas, thus enabling the seminar to move according to its natural rate of group development rather than according to a highly structured pre-plan; and (8) a teaching approach was used in which it was assumed that effective learning most frequently occurs in non-lecture situations, such as group discussions, workshops, outside reading assignments, role playing, management exercises, sensitivity training, and field experiences in the community.

## SEMINAR CONTENT AND DYNAMICS

Operationally, the seminar was divided into six weekly sessions averaging eight hours of instruction and activities each, for a total of forty-eight hours. It was organized without the benefit of a university appropriation or the official sponsorship by the Church or some other organization. Funds to defray expenses and administrative overhead had to be obtained through fees of \$175 collected from the participants. Inasmuch as the fees had to come from personal funds, or very limited local Church resources, the program was operated on a small budget, which affected the methods used to elicit participation.

As participants, stake presidents were expected to achieve the following objectives during their experience together:

- (1) to obtain *knowledge* about administrative behavior and procedures and the applications of behavioral science to management problems facing Church executives;
- (2) to acquire greater *skills* in interpersonal relations, creative use of executive time, reading, learning techniques, and scientific research;
- (3) to build better Church and personal *relationships* with other L.D.S. stake officials, community leaders, and behavioral scientists;
- (4) to participate in developing and *authoring* part of a seminar report analyzing administrative problems facing local Church executives.

The content of the seminar focused on two general areas—philosophy and ethics of management and behavioral science perspectives on management. In addition, participants developed two written papers in which they applied seminar materials and perspectives toward plans for more effective administration of ongoing Church programs in the Los Angeles area.

On Friday evening, February 11, 1966, the seminar officially opened with a two-day session at a local conference center, where participants registered and were introduced to the authors and each other in ways that began breaking down the usual barriers between individuals. Several exercises were designed to build the trust among participants necessary to effectively utilize group processes in the weekly sessions which followed. Ground rules and expectations of homework and other assignments were established, the over-all plan of the seminar was explained, and evaluation questionnaires were administered. The following morning, participants were introduced to basic concepts of values from a philosophical, scientific, and personal point of view, following which the use of time was examined. Basic foundations of pluralism, pragmatism, and problem solving were discussed, along with concepts from the philosophy of science, and the relationship of these approaches to modern executive decision-making in Church organizations was examined.

During succeeding Saturdays, specific content dealing with behavioral science research on management was presented on four levels of analysis. The first dealt with research findings on the individual and his interpersonal behavior, including such concepts as identity, attitudes, motivation, perception, learning, creativity, interaction, and communication.

The discussion and assigned readings dealing with the second level—group relations—included such concepts as conflict, reference groups and norms, leadership, and group problem solving. The third level dealt with organizational behavior—including recruitment, selection, training, use of organizational authority and power, formal structure, program effectiveness and strategies of planned change. The fourth level focused on such topics as community values, decision-making, current social issues, special interest influences and activities, and the nature of community power and politics.

Midway through the seminar a special field exercise called "Operation Empathy" was conducted to allow the participants to gain new insights into how others feel by acting out another's role. This field exercise began about 4:30 P.M. on Saturday afternoon, when members of the seminar visited the "Skid Row" area of Los Angeles, where they purchased \$3.50 worth of used clothing from local merchants. After returning to the University of Southern California's Civic Center Campus, they changed their clothes and took on the appearance of lower class residents.

On this occasion, a special guest, Father Llewellyn Williams, a Negro Episcopalian minister from the Watts-Compton district, reviewed the history of the Negro poverty area before the 1965 riot in Los Angeles. During the discussion that followed, Father Williams complimented the Church on its activities, criticized its stand on the Negro question, and challenged its members to demonstrate community leadership by getting involved in two of the most critical social issues of our time—poverty and race relations. A number of participants took issue with his stimulating comments and observations in the exciting interchange which followed.

After the presentation by Father William the participants returned to the Skid Row area to mingle with people on the street for a short time and to visit one of the "Rescue Missions" in the area, where they participated in a religious service—singing gospel songs and listening to a fiery sermon. After the service participants joined about two hundred others in the simple meal that was offered. In discussions following this experience, many of the participants agreed that "Operation Empathy" had challenged their beliefs about the poor and the culture of crime and poverty.

#### SEMINAR EVALUATION

A major weakness of traditional professional education programs is the failure to scientifically evaluate their impact on participants. It should be stated at the outset that our attempt to evaluate the impact of this seminar was not altogether successful from a rigorous scientific point of view. Nevertheless, the attempted evaluation resulted in four significant outcomes which can only be outlined in this article. First, the questionnaires administered at the opening session of the seminar gave insights which were invaluable in helping the authors adapt the seminar to the

particular needs of the participants, and yielded information about the personal values of L.D.S. Church leaders in Southern California. Second, the before-after measures gave an indication of changes in values which occurred during the seminar. Third, a critique by participants and consultants gave some idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the program, along with recommendations for future seminars. And fourth, some indicators of behavior change in several participants were reported a number of weeks after the completion of the seminar.

During the first evening five instruments were administered to the participants, including a social background questionnaire, a time distribution questionnaire, the "Survey of Interpersonal Values" by Gordon, the K<sup>2</sup> "View of Man" survey of values by the authors, and a balanced Authoritarian Personality (F) Scale.

*Social Background Questionnaire.* This included information about the background of the participants, their parents, and their spouses, with particular attention to occupation, education, religion, and extra-professional activities such as voluntary organization work, hobbies, and reading (books, magazines, and newspapers). Results showed that each of the stake presidents read a daily newspaper and a weekly news magazine, about half read a professional journal, and most read the usual Church-related publications. Their reading of books indicates a preference for religious, historical, and professional publications, with almost no attention to fiction, other non-fiction, or works dealing with social issues of the day.

*Time Distribution Questionnaire.* Each participant was asked to write out in detail the schedule of a typical week. Results showed that these Church leaders averaged fifty hours on their jobs, twenty-eight hours in Church work, ten hours with their families, three hours on self-development and about one hour in local community activities.

*Survey of Interpersonal Values.* This instrument by Gordon was selected from the variety of attitude instruments available to measure individual values toward support, conformity, recognition, independence, benevolence, and leadership. A comparison of their scores with a variety of other male groups, including physicians, Air Force Academy cadets, gifted high school students, and general adults, indicates that relatively high value is placed on *benevolence*, the desire to share with others and help the unfortunate. Though their scores on *leadership* are slightly higher than the "general adult" category, they are substantially lower than other groups who, like the stake presidents, hold positions of authority over others, such as "department managers" and "infantry lieutenants." They value *independence* less than other groups, even less than groups like the military, whose occupations restrict their personal lives; however, during the six-week seminar there was a statistically significant increase in affirmative attitudes toward this value. Participants also had a comparatively high score on *conformity* when compared with others, and as a group were about average in their need for *support* and *recognition*.

*Authoritarian Personality Scale (Balanced F).* This widely-used six-point

scale was designed to measure interpersonal attitudes toward authority. The higher the score the more the person tends toward being conventional, submissive toward moral authority, and inclined to punish people who violate conventional values. When corrected for religious bias, the average score for stake presidents was 4.2 and dropped significantly during the seminar to 3.6, a lower score than that of most non-religious leaders with comparable organizational responsibilities.

*K<sup>2</sup> View of Man Scale.* This scale was recently developed by identifying major historical and philosophical ideas on the nature of man and society, and adapting them for use in research. There was general consensus by the stake presidents that man was both good and responsible, but less agreement that he was unselfish and rational. They also took a basically conservative position in favor of order, stability, and free enterprise in contrast to innovation and government regulation. Finally, they leaned slightly toward protection of private property as contrasted to protection of civil rights.

### SATISFACTION AND BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

In addition to these attempts at more objective evaluation, a satisfaction survey was taken which showed the usual enthusiastic support for any program in which participants have invested time and money. One unsolicited letter from a participating stake president, however, does show some behavioral changes resulting from the seminar:

The results of a "creative hour" indicate the following changes in my behavior:

- (1) I find the use of such an hour a tremendous help and a great timesaver in planning. The use of such an hour is very spotty at the moment but I am determined to find the time to use it regularly.
- (2) I find the 'use of time' is becoming less of a problem through use of the material taught in the course.
- (3) We have changed the High Council meeting schedule and reporting and accounting procedures to allow for improved communication and understanding between High Council and Stake Presidency.
- (4) I find myself considerably more sensitive to the individual leader, his background, personality, and problems.

A second more personal example has been observed by the authors: a participating stake president has taken these steps during the six months since the seminar was completed:

- (1) he has successfully completed the Evelyn Wood's Reading Dynamics Program and now reads over one thousand words per minute with high comprehension;
- (2) he has appointed a special committee of women to study L.D.S. girls and their marriages to non-members in the area, using certain techniques of survey research;
- (3) he has appointed a behavioral scientist as his special assistant



for executive training of stake high councilmen and ward executives; and

(4) he has sponsored and financed an overnight two-day executive leadership seminar for all six ward bishops and Melchizedek Priesthood leaders at an educational conference center. Subject matter dealt with behavioral science management techniques and methods of improving performance in Church correlation programs and activities at the ward and stake level.

### IMPLICATIONS

Several implications can be drawn from our experience with the Stake Presidents' Executive Leadership Seminar:

(1) Of the classic ways of improving organizational performance by changing organization, programs, objectives, technology and personnel, the first four are largely initiated by the General Church Authorities, whereas improving personnel has been traditionally largely a local responsibility.

(2) Changing people for improved performance can be undertaken in two major ways—by physically replacing the officer or teacher in the organization, or by improving his performance through training.

(3) Executive development is no substitute for inspired leadership; however, when combined they complement each other in ways that lead toward more effective performance.

(4) There are three basic approaches to executive training: orientation sessions in which organizational programs and procedures from official manuals are reviewed for operating personnel; the human relations approach which emphasizes participant satisfaction, novel training techniques, and methods of reducing interpersonal conflict; and the behavioral science leadership development approach characterized by behavioral science research findings related to management, changes in personal values and skills, the use of group-oriented teaching processes, and research evaluation of program effectiveness. The Church Executive Leadership Development Seminar described in this article demonstrates the utility of this third approach.

(5) Most local leaders are not professionally qualified to conduct this behavioral science approach to training, even though they may be highly qualified in terms of their Church commitment and observance of Church standards.

(6) There are in the local organizations individuals who are qualified as professionally trained behavioral scientists with interests in training, who have demonstrated their loyalty to the Church in positions of teaching and administrative responsibility.

(7) Local Church authorities have long recognized the value of using other professionally trained experts such as lawyers, accountants, businessmen, physicians, skilled craftsmen, and musicians where their talents are useful—behavioral scientists also should be recruited and called wherever their talents can be helpful to the Church.

