



THE EFFECTS OF “7 HABITS” TRAINING ON PERCEIVED CHANGE AT CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

**Doctoral Dissertation by Joyce A. Hanley
Summarized by Dean W. Collinwood, Ph.D.**

In 1997, California University of Pennsylvania (CAL U) started a series of training sessions in FranklinCovey's *7 Habits* course on individual and organizational effectiveness. The course was based on Stephen R. Covey's best-selling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Initially, some 35 top and mid-level administrators and union leaders attended the sessions taught by FranklinCovey consultants. Over the years, additional faculty, staff, and students received similar training by certified in-house trainers until, by 2003, some 450 people on campus had completed the *7 Habits* course. In 2004, doctoral candidate Joyce A. Hanley launched a study to determine what effect, if any, the *7 Habits* principles were having on individuals and the CAL U campus culture. Specifically, she wanted to know if the faculty, staff, and students were able

to perceive individual changes as well as changes in campus life as a result of *7 Habits* training. CAL U is a public, state-supported comprehensive university, which, at the time of the study, had a headcount enrollment of 6,540 (mostly undergraduate) students, 244 faculty members, and 363 employed staff. The university is a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and is located about one hour south of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., in a small, rural community.

Methodology

Hanley, who was a doctoral student at nearby Indiana University of Pennsylvania, arranged to have members of the CAL U faculty, as well as administrators, staff, and students, take a 42-question Impact Analysis survey designed to assess perceived change. The survey included before-and-after questions, agree-disagree statements, and open-ended questions to elicit written comments for content analysis. Included were such questions as: “Do

employees communicate more than they did three years ago across vice-presidential areas?" "Compare 'before' and 'now': 'I have a list of work goals, which have definite completion dates.'" "Have employee interactions changed as a result of the *7 Habits* training? Please explain."

Hanley wanted to determine if respondents felt that, as a result of the *7 Habits* training, they had changed behavior with respect to: (1) being proactive instead of reactive; (2) being more goal-directed; (3) prioritizing work; (4) valuing and incorporating the views of others; (5) being effective listeners; (6) being supportive team players; and (7) regularly renewing oneself. In addition, Hanley also investigated perceived change in three other characteristics that were taught as part of the *7 Habits* training: competence, character, and trust. Competence was defined as perceptions of consistently producing high-quality work; character as perceptions of using language and behavior that encouraged others; and trust as the perception of being able to trust top management while feeling free to give feedback.

One hundred twenty people returned the Impact Analysis survey, but seven respondents did not fully or accurately complete the survey. Thus, the resulting 113 respondents included: 29 males (26%); 84 females (74%); 36 managers/administrators (32%); 34 staff (30%); 22 faculty members (19.5%); and 21 students (18.5%). Age categories were: up to 25 years, 17 (15%); 26–52 years, 65 (58%); and over 52 years, 31 (27%). Originally, 450 people had undergone the training, yet only 113 were included in the assessment survey. The reason for the decay in the respondent pool was largely because many of the original trainees were students who had subsequently graduated or left the university. A few faculty and staff had also left employment. Thus, the 113 respondents represented almost all of those left on campus in 2003 who had been formally trained in the *7 Habits* course. Both individual behavior and key organizational change initiatives were investigated.

Findings

Hanley found "a statistically significant [$p < .001$] perception of positive change by individuals" for each of the seven behaviors taught in the *7 Habits*

as well as for the traits of "character" and "competence." The trait of "trust" was not found to have been significantly influenced by the *7 Habits* training, an anomaly Hanley surmised might have been caused by the timing of her study at the moment when both faculty and staff labor unions were in contentious contract negotiations with state officials.

The core finding held across all of the demographic categories; that is, both male and female respondents reported statistically significant perceptions of positive change as a result of *7 Habits* training, as did respondents of all ages, with the exception that older respondents (over 52 years old) were less likely to claim that the *7 Habits* had impacted their proactivity or their level of prioritizing. Likewise, regardless of organizational position, respondents, whether faculty, administration, staff, or students, reported statistically significant perceived positive changes in all measured categories, with the exception that faculty were less likely to claim that their level of proactivity had been influenced by the *7 Habits*.

Conclusions

Hanley found that, while the training was not a panacea for all organizational problems, trainees did perceive both the organization and their own behaviors as positively changed as a result of the *7 Habits* training course. In addition to these measurable perceived benefits, Hanley reported that "learning a common language/vocabulary in the training resulted in enhanced communication throughout the organization" (Hanley, 288).

Sources

Stephen Burd, "Hard Times for the Working Class," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 9, 2006.

"CAL U Fact Sheet," California University of Pennsylvania at www.cup.edu, accessed March 29, 2007.

Joyce A. Hanley, "The Effectiveness of the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Training Program: Perceptions of Change for Training Participants in a Public State-Supported Higher Education Institution," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, December 2005.