

Workplace training at the *Black Stump Char-grill*.

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A famous trainer once said “without noticeable, measurable change, training has failed.” And it is this, somewhat basic, interpretation of our cultural training aim, that rules my training department.

An earlier examination of the workplace culture of *Black Stump Char-grill* (Madigan, 2002) notes the hierarchical structure of the organisation: commencing with the Owner/Chairman, through the Executive Management, to the Restaurant Management and finally the restaurant staff. The interaction between the layers of the hierarchy has led to the development of various sub-cultures within the various layers.

The composition of the staff, including the gender balance amongst other things has changed over time. This unplanned change, brought about by external social factors, has affected the cultural composition of our company, and there has been a significant cultural shift over the last 10 years. (Madigan, 2002)

Whilst our company philosophy is to remain “relaxed and informal” it is agreed that the somewhat rigid hierarchical structure is an interesting contradiction to this philosophy, brought about mainly by the size of the organisation. As the organisation has grown over time, the need to put into place structures and procedures to cope with the basic managerial requirements, has resulted in the development of our present structure, however, the basis of managing the company has withstood the pressure to change with the structure.

Interestingly, some will argue that the company philosophy contradicts the company structure, whilst others will argue that it is the structure that contradicts the philosophy. Personally, as one of four people responsible for the executive management of the company, I tend to think they compliment each other rather than contradict, as the two provide a certain balance necessary in maintaining an efficient, harmonious and enjoyable working environment.

This paper is going to address how the very culture of our company has impacted on the training offered within our organisation. And if you think the nature and structure of our company are contradictory, then you should enjoy the challenge of understanding how our 'formal' training systems contradict with the very nature of how we try and run the company.

Black Stump Char-grill is a Registered Training Organisation, accredited with the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB). Additionally, the training organisation is accredited by the Australian Hospitality Review Panel (AHRP) and holds industry recognition through the ACCESS assessor licensing program.

The *Black Stump Char-grill* training organisation has been awarded the Industry Training Award for best Hospitality Training for the last 4 consecutive years by the NSW Restaurant and Catering Association and has been awarded the National Hospitality Training Award for 2 years (1999 and 2001) by the Restaurant and Catering Association of Australia.

But it hasn't always been this way. In 1998, the General Manager appointed, for the first time, a company Training Manager, responsible for developing a training system that will meet the companies needs now, and in the future. The Training Manager function was to be part of the Executive Management and be independent to the Restaurant Managers functions. To give the position credibility, it was preferred that the holder of the post have practical *Black Stump Char-grill* management experience and be able to show knowledge in all areas of the operation. Obviously, the Training Manager would need to meet the Department of Education's minimum standards with regards to training qualifications, to enable development of the training organisation to its full potential.

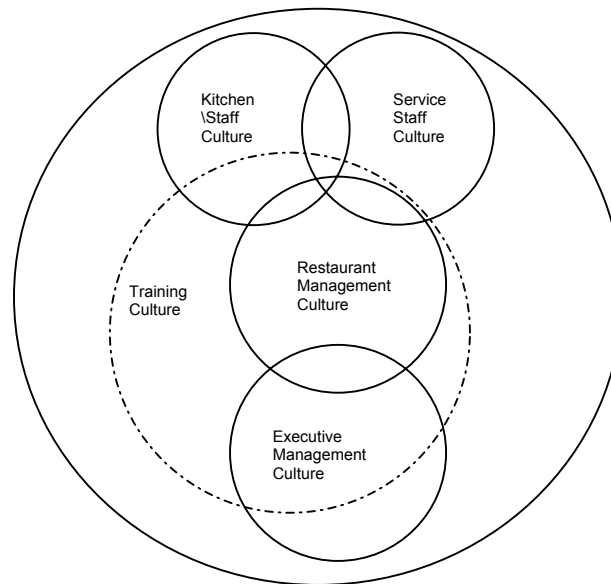
Up until that time, training within *Black Stump Char-grill* had been consistent with the company philosophy, that is, unstructured, unorganised and adhoc.

With the introduction of our training section, a new sub-culture was being injected into our already complex cultural model. The training culture, structured by necessity, result orientated by nature, began to introduce a whole new way of thinking to a system of staff training that had been left basically unchecked for 28 years. A demand was now being placed on managers to show a "noticeable and measurable change" in staff performance, the very measure of successful training.

But it was necessary for this new training culture to be strong enough to ensure the training outcomes were achieved, rigid enough to withstand the scrutiny of the accrediting bodies yet flexible enough to penetrate and influence all four existing sub cultures within the organisation. Re-visiting the Culture

Diagram from earlier work (Madigan, 2002), it is obvious that an additional circle is needed.

DIAGRAM 1.0 – Revised Black Stump Char-grill Culture Diagram



Whilst the training section is obviously influenced by the Executive Management, it is never interfered with. The Executive Management, as a group, sets the companies goals, policies and put procedures in place, and these affect the content of training to an extent, however, once a training need is identified, the training section is left alone to implement a training solution that best fits the circumstances. This freedom is valued by the Training Manager and viewed as a statement of confidence in our training organisation by the Executive Management of the company. Remembering that our training culture is based around the need to see a “noticeable and measurable change”, this very freedom allows training to infiltrate each company sub-culture in a way that will have the greatest result on that area of the company.

The training culture circle envelops the Restaurant Management sub culture entirely. I believe that it is paramount for the restaurant managers to be totally enlisted

in the training culture as, under the new training environment now established within the company, the restaurant managers must show a commitment and dedication towards training and model their work habits around an unquestioned implementation of our training program.

The training culture circle only partially covers the Kitchen Staff and Service Staff culture circles. I believe that the base level staff will bring experience and skills with them from external to our organisation, that can be fed into the training organisation and help to further reshape our company culture as a whole.

Before delving deep into the new (post 1998) training environment within *Black Stump Char-grill*, it is useful to have a look at the system that survived the first 28 years of our company's history.

Our General Manager's philosophy is that our executive management team and associated Head Office support staff must remain as small as possible as this isn't where our money is made. With this in mind, the emphasis placed on training by the executive management team was negligible, and because of this, the restaurant management placed a similarly low importance on training, viewing it as an added burden rather than a necessary resource that would actually make their job easier.

Training was left entirely to the discretion of the restaurant managers who would prefer to throw staff in at the deep end and see what happens rather than train them in their job functions. Any training that was conducted was of an adhoc nature utilising very limited resources and relying solely on the

experience of the managers and senior restaurant staff rather than any real training ability or valid training materials.

The Executive Management, preferring to concentrate their judgment of restaurant performance on sales data and head average, never monitored training. This evaluation wasn't totally invalid but did not ensure that the restaurant manager was realising the full potential of the staff. The emphasis was on what was being achieved not what could be achieved.

The few limited training resources, that were available, had not been updated for many years and had been photocopied so many times that they were of extremely poor quality and somewhat irrelevant to what was happening in the modern hospitality industry.

Some managers who had been with the company many years, had become so complacent with their role within the company structure, that they cared little about their most valuable resource. Bullying often replaced training and staff that didn't have the necessary skills to be productive were simply replaced. Staff were easy to replace in an economy such as Sydney that saw most households relying on a second income to supplement their overcommitted existence.

Hospitality was seen by few people as having a valid career path and was, to most, nothing more than a second job. The staff therefore didn't expect any fancy training and would, as a rule, not bother with it any way. They simply wanted to turn up, do their job, and get paid for it. Their focus was obviously on their main source of income, their chosen career, rather than the 'other job'.

Having painted this dim picture of training within the *Black Stump Char-grill*, I guess the system did have some effect as the chain was profitable and popular, and the restaurants appeared to cope in their daily grind. I often wonder where we would be today if we had had simple and more effective training in place for all those years that could have realised the true potential of the staff.

Our new training system (post 1998) is in direct contrast to the system I have just described. It is totally structured, competency based, and not only utilises, but produces, valid, current and effective training resources.

The Executive Management team constantly monitors the training system and a recording system for all training is maintained in accordance with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards.

Before further explore the new system, it is interesting to establish what bought about such a radical change in thinking.

Our developments in the training environment were not totally voluntary. In 1997, there were 2 major workplace accidents in separate locations within our company. It was found that neither were directly our fault however, under workplace health & safety legislation, totally our responsibility.

The first involved the failure of a mechanical component in an industrial dishwasher's detergent dispensing equipment that allowed the dishwashing chemicals to be sprayed into the air in the form of a mild mist. A staff member inhaled that spray and experienced serious chemical burns to the throat and lungs.

The second involved a pressurised cream gun. The design of the gun meant that the fresh cream was added to the cylinder and sealed. Small gas bulbs were then discharged into the cylinder, whipping the cream and pressurising the contents. After the bulb had been discharged into the cylinder, it was to be removed from the bulb cradle and discarded. 3 separate people had showed the staff member how to use the gun, including the executive chef. On the occasion of the accident, the staff member didn't remove the used bulb after discharge. Whilst using the contents of the cylinder, the empty bulb detached from the cradle under back pressure from the cylinder and hit the employee in the eye, causing him to permanently lose the use of the eye.

In handing down his rulings in the NSW Supreme Court, Justice Hannon stated that "the company failed its duty of care in not having a suitable system of training that would ensure that all employees would be afforded the skills necessary to fulfil their job role and thus ensuring that role is conducted in an atmosphere of total safety."

Justice Hannon had *Black Stump Char-grill's* total and undivided attention. It was at this point that the importance of training in the workplace became apparent to the company, and those words were being turned into action almost immediately.

The training department was established and its first task was to develop an Occupational Health & Safety training system that would fulfil the Justice's statement. Four (4) separate training modules were written to fulfil this brief as follows:

Module A – OH&S for Service Staff

Module B – OH&S for Kitchen Staff

Module C – OH&S for Management

Module D – OH&S for Cleaning Staff

Each module has a comprehensive information booklet, specific to the *Black Stump Char-grill* operations, and an exam that the employee must complete and pass prior to their first shift in the actual workplace. The pass mark for this exam is 90%.

After this project was completed, it was decided that a full training program was to be established for all Management within the company. The training section set about writing a series of written training modules that covered most areas within a manager's responsibility. Each module would have a short quiz that, when completed, would form part of the managers' staff file. The Management modules consist of:

Module M1 – Management Orientation

Module M2 – Customer Complaints

Module M3 – Recruiting Staff

Module M4 – Training

Module M5 – Computers

Module M6 – Labour Control

Module M7 – Performance Appraisals

Module M8 – Food & Liquor Variances

Module M9 – Payroll and Administration

Module M10 – Security

Module M11 – Registers

Module M12 – Kitchen Operations

Module M13 – Dining Room & Bar procedures

Module M14 – Legislation

Module M15 – Forms

Module M16 – Equity & Diversity and Workplace
Harrassment

Module M17 – Coaching, Counselling & Discipline

Additionally, a 5 day Management Training Course was developed for all new management recruits. The course, conducted within the first 3 months of a new managers appointment, the course covers each of the module topics in greater depth and includes role playing, practical exercises and case studies.

After the implementation of the Managers Training System was completed, a similar system was developed for the restaurant staff. A series of self paced modules were written that deal with all aspects of a staff members employment, and depending on what role the staff member is filling within the restaurant environment, depends on what training modules they must have completed. Each module has a short quiz that, when completed, forms part of their staff file. The modules are as follows:

Module S1 – Orientation

Module S2 – Runners Duties

Module S3 – Waitperson

Module S4 – Barperson

Module S5 – Host/Hostess

Module S6 – Safe food handling & Kitchen
Sanitation

Module S7 – Wash-up

Module S8 – Hot Entrée and Cold Larder

Module S9 – Sweets

Module S10 – Grill Cooking

Module S11 – Plate Up Procedures

Module S12 – Responsible Service of Alcohol

Module S13 – Telephone Skills

Module S14 – Handling Customer Complaints

New modules are added to both series as the needs arise. Modules are reviewed at least every 2 years to ensure currency, completeness and accuracy.

Following the introduction of internal courses, it was decided that the training organisation should pursue formal accreditation and offer a series of nationally recognised qualifications that will suit our style of operation and further develop the skills of our employees. At this point *Black Stump Char-grill* set about formalising their training procedures in accordance with the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) and began to develop training modules based on the Tourism and Hospitality Training Package. In May 1999, we sought accreditation and were registered by VETAB following our first compliance inspection. Currently our scope of training includes a Certificate II in Hospitality (Operations) program, a Certificate II in Hospitality (Commercial Cookery) program, a Certificate III in Hospitality (Food & Beverage) program and a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessing program.

In addition to all this, our training organisation offers a number of other internal training courses that are design to supplement and compliment the structured modules for both management and staff. These include:

- a) **Train Small groups course:** conducted as part of the Certificate IV in workplace training and assessing for all management employees and indentured trainees. This course provides these key staff with the basic training skills to conduct on-the-job training.
- b) **Butcher Training Course:** conducted at the Black Stump cutting rooms, this course provides all management and chefs with the basic knowledge of meat cuts, beef

handling procedures, information on ageing and storing meat, as reinforces the Safe Food Handling procedures.

- c) **NSCA OH&S for Managers:** this course is conducted under contract by the National Safety Council of Australia and provides specialised training for all management in the area of OH&S.

- d) **Responsible Service of Alcohol:** All management undergo this Nationally recognised module in order to supervise the service of alcohol within the restaurants.
- e) **Liquor Licensee Course:** All Restaurant Managers are required to complete this 4 day course prior to being issued with a Liquor License by the NSW Licensing Court.
- f) **Kitchen Training Course:** conducted by our senior chefs, involves 2 weeks in the operating kitchen for all management employees to provide them with the basic skills needed to operate a Black Stump Kitchen.
- g) **Fire Training:** This course is conducted by Fire Extinguisher Services under contract by Black Stump and gives all management, chefs and senior staff with the opportunity to put out real fires using the types of equipment fitted in our restaurants, under controlled conditions.

As you can see, the training section offers extensive training opportunities to all staff in a structured training environment.

The change from the 'old' to the 'new' training systems within our company was the single largest structural change to ever have occurred within our company. At first, our restaurant managers established an attitude that formal training was not needed. They had never been involved in such a program and displayed outright resistance to its establishment. For this

reason, the training section spent a great deal of time trying to develop a culture of learning. For the first time, we encouraged managers to employ unskilled labour and provide them with the necessary skills training. We made the training system as easy as possible, highlighting the “noticeable and measurable” changes that soon became obvious in their restaurants as a result of the training programs. The flow on benefits were highlighted for managers, things such as an increased head average being achieved by service staff as a result of better selling skills, which in turn gave them a better weekly takings which provided a lower labour cost (as a percentage) and took the pressure on labour costs off them, that had previously been the focus of executive management.

But it soon became apparent that some managers were adopting an attitude similar to that described in Stephen Black’s paper: “Resistance to the disclosure of teamwork (1997). Black (1999:188) describes a situation he refers to as *resistance within accommodation* where managers publicly accommodate the new procedure while privately resisting it. This was identified early by seeking feedback directly from selected staff in each location, asking about what training had been provided to them and by whom. Some managers were not making training available to the staff or even advising staff that new training was available to them. These situations were dealt with individually, usually by allocating a trainer from the training organisation to spend a week in that restaurant, introducing training to the staff directly, making time to train available to those staff, and working with the manager through the implementation of the programs. Soon Managers saw how easy it was and began to see the results.

In keeping with the company’s philosophy of ‘casual approach’, the training organisation attempts to maintain a

relaxed approach to training. Off-the-job training was initially conducted in a large training room at our Head Office. The Head Office environment intimidated many staff and some management, with the chairman just metres from the training room door, and the forced interaction with the executive management. For this reason, it was decided to relocate the training rooms to an independent location, where training could be noisy and fun without staff being worried about who was watching. Additionally, whenever Off-the-job training is conducted, irrespective of who is involved, casual dress is the order of the day.

As Elaine Roberts (1999), training manager for Queensland Rail describes in her article “The workplace the training place”, Black Stump Char-grill chose to implement a Competency Based Training system into our organisation and also incorporated learning systems into each stage of the organisational framework. As with Queensland Rail, assessment was introduced as part of the training system for the first time, and as Robert’s (1999) states, linking remuneration to attainment of workplace competencies was identified as essential and therefore introduced at management levels, making them competitive in the training field for the first time.

Whilst the implementation of the new training culture appears to have been successful from the company’s viewpoint, this may have been partly as a result of good luck rather than good management. I don’t believe that in planning the implementation of the change, that we were fully aware of the extent of these changes, the effect the changes would have on the company and its staff or in fact, truly understood what the culture of our company was or was about to become. Your

comment in the study guide about the difficulty in judging the difference between rhetoric and actuality may be true in this case also.

And who was the famous trainer who once said “without noticeable, measurable change, training has failed” ? Well, he’s not so much famous, some may even question him being a good trainer, but he believes in what he said. It was me.

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