THE ADVANTAGES A WORKPLACE LEARNING CENTER MAY HAVE ON COMPANY A AND COMPANY A'S EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

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The Advantages a Workplace Learning Center May Have on Company A and Company A’s Employees

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Improving workplace basic skills benefits the entire nation. To be more competitive, businesses in every part of the country require employees with better workplace basic skills (Bloom and Lafleur, 1999). Employers have the opportunity to educate employees on workplace basic skills through the use of an on-site learning center.

The state of Wisconsin offers companies the opportunity to open an on-site workplace learning center through a two-year grant program. First year costs are paid at 75% through the grant and second year costs at 50%. The goal at the end of the two-year grant is to have a workplace learning center that can function without state funding. Any company that is interested in opening a workplace learning center will work with a local area technical college to write the grant. Classes are taught based on specific needs of each individual company.

This study examines the advantages a workplace learning center may have on a Company A and Company A’s employees. Review of current literature shows little
research on workplace learning centers. Most of the knowledge exists in the minds of the instructors who teach at the learning centers and the employees of the companies who support the learning center. With the continuing changes in technology, workplace organizational structuring and diverse employees, employers must adapt workers to these changes through education. Workplace education is vital to succeed in today's workplace.
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Chapter I

Introduction

The state of Wisconsin offers companies the opportunity to open an on-site workplace learning center through a two-year grant program. First year costs are paid at 75% through the grant and second year costs at 50%. The goal at the end of the two-year grant is to have a workplace learning center that can function without state funding. A company that wants to pursue the grant opportunity works with a local technical college to write the grant, select the instructor and purchase any needed equipment and resources. The types of classes taught at the learning center will vary depending on each company’s specific needs.

A steering committee, consisting of a diverse group of employees, provides direction for the workplace learning center. The steering committee will monitor the progress of classes and will identify potential training needs for employees. The steering committee members act as ambassadors for the workplace learning center, answering questions from employees interested in taking courses.

Once the steering committee is in place and an instructor has been selected, a needs analysis and a Workplace Educational Skills Analysis (WESA) must be completed for writing the grant. The needs analysis is a survey given to associates to determine possible training gaps and to determine the types of courses employees would like offered. The WESA is an analysis of a promotional position or any position employees may aspire to and is completed by the workplace learning center’s instructor.

After the state of Wisconsin approves the grant, the steering committee may begin planning the design of the workplace learning center. The steering committee will focus
on initial courses and meet periodically to keep the learning center in line with the company's objectives. Each learning center is unique to each company and success is defined as meeting the objectives a company outlines.

**Company A Overview**

Company A is a manufacturing facility located in Marathon County and employs 180 people, 52 being Southeast Asian. One of Company A's largest training needs exists with the high number of Southeast Asians that speak limited English or no English at all.

In the summer of 2002 Company A applied for and received a two-year grant from the state of Wisconsin to open a workplace learning center. After the learning center instructor was selected, a steering committee was assembled and several meetings took place to determine which classes would be offered.

The steering committee assembled a list of ideas for classes which included: English as a second language (ESL), spelling, reading, speaking, work tag training, ruler reading, math, Hmong language, conflict resolution, stress management, caliper training, active listening and introduction to computers. Company A's employees expressed interest in introduction to computers, math, active listening, reading, writing, measuring, Hmong language, conflict resolution and ESL.

ESL classes began immediately followed by introduction to computers. New courses were offered as the curriculum for each class developed.

Instead of a pass or fail system individual competencies are used as the grading tool to determine if students successfully complete courses. In order for an employee to move on to additional classes, certain competencies for each course are identified at the beginning and must be met at completion. Students needing additional time to meet
required competencies for a course may continue to work on curriculum in the learning center until the competencies are met. The workplace learning center instructor maintains all employee records.

Once the first semester was completed the instructor reported the list of classes and the number of students in each class as follows:

- Introduction to computers – 8
- ESL – 11
- Hmong – 14
- Math – 5
- Listening – 6

The numbers revealed that close to 24% of Company A’s employees were utilizing the learning center. Most companies show utilization around 10% of the workforce.

**Statement of the Problem**

Several companies in Marathon County have workplace learning centers. There is limited research on workplace learning centers and the benefits that may come to companies and companies’ employees that have them. This study will examine the advantages a workplace learning center may have on Company A and Company A’s employees.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to interview associates at Company A about the workplace learning center that opened in August of 2002. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Determine the advantages a workplace learning center may have on
Company A.

2. Determine the advantages a workplace learning center may have on Company A’s employees.

3. Determine what, if any, disadvantages there are to having a workplace learning center.

Significance of the Study

There is limited written research on workplace learning centers. Most of the knowledge exists in the minds of the instructors who teach at the learning centers and the employees of the companies who support the learning center. By studying workplace learning centers, an opportunity for increased awareness and knowledge will exist for future companies to pursue.

Limitations of the Study

The following are limitations of the study:

1. Company A’s workplace learning center has only been open for one year.

2. Company A’s employees recently learned the plant was closing. This may negatively impact the study.

3. Results are specific to Company A and may not reflect what could happen at another company.

Definition of Terms

*Competency* – A competency comprises the specification of the knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation or industry level to the standard of performance required in employment (Prince, 1992).
Work tag – Purchase order requests from the customer order showing manufacturing buildable requirements.

Methodology

The research will be gathered through a qualitative process. Interview questions were designed to ask the positive outcomes, the impact, how Company A and Company A’s employees have benefited and the advantages and disadvantages of having a workplace learning center.

Chapter Two examines previous studies of workplace learning centers along with other literature used for the basis of this study.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used for this research and the selection of human subjects.

Chapter Four shows the study’s results and the interpretation of those results.

Chapter Five discusses the conclusion of the study and recommends future studies.
Chapter II

Literature Review

Research on the following topics included in the literature review for this study: previous workplace learning center research, literacy in the workplace, benefits of workplace education and English as a second language.

Introduction

In a time of dramatic changes in technology and work organization, systems must be in place to provide workforce training and retraining opportunities as part of a lifelong learning process. Vocational training should include: broad based core skills, generic industry skills, enterprise based job skills and on-going developmental skills. Education and training are pivotal to economic growth, international competitiveness, increased productivity, the mobility of the population and to the level of standard of living. It is important to ensure that training is broadly accessible and that structures support on-going development of skills leading to career paths and eventually formal recognized qualifications (Prince, 1992).

Previous Workplace Learning Center Research

Improving workplace basic skills benefits the entire nation. To be more competitive, businesses in every part of the country require employees with better workplace basic skills. Global competition, the diffusion of technology and the emergence of knowledge-based industries have created a workplace skills gap within America’s workplaces that threatens the country’s competitiveness. Addressing the skills gap is an essential strategy for improving the overall capacity of America’s businesses to grow and compete on the world stage. Improving workplace basic skills is also a key for
individual employees who want to achieve greater personal success at work (Bloom and Lafleur, 1999).

In a recent study of workplace education programs, Bloom and Lafleur (1999) list the benefits for employers and employees under basic skills, job-specific skills, the ability to work smarter and better and new attitudes.

Basic Skills

- Improved capacity to solve problems
- Improved capacity to cope with change in the workplace
- Improved capacity to use new technology
- Increased capacity to handle on-the-job training

Job-Specific Skills

- More employees participating in job-specific training
- Improved results in job-specific training
- Quicker results in job-specific training

Ability to Work Smarter and Better

- Increased quality of work
- Increased output of products and services
- Reduce time per task
- Reduced error rate
- Better health and safety record
- Reduced wastage in production of products and services

New Attitudes

- Improved employee morale/self-esteem
• Reduced absenteeism
• Increased retention of employees
• Better team performance
• Improved labor-management relations
• Improved ability to cope with change in the workplace
• Positive attitude to lifelong learning

Literacy in the Workplace

The subject of literacy has in the past few years gained the attention of business and the government alike in the conjoined term workplace literacy. In this context, literacy describes a set of skills – written and oral, cognitive and behavioral – thought to be essential to America’s competitive edge. Included are those basic skills necessary to practically all jobs – reading, writing and computation. But the term workplace skills also encompasses higher order skills: problem solving, critical thinking and reasoning with data. And workplace literacy has grown to include some fairly broad work behaviors, such as having a good attitude, cooperating as a team member and being dependable (Bernhardt, 1992).

Hays (1999) states as much as 20 percent of the American workforce may be functionally illiterate. In everyday work life, this deficiency translates into secretaries who can’t write letters free of grammatical errors, workers who can’t read instructions that govern the operation of new machinery and bookkeepers who can’t manipulate the fractions necessary to compute simple business transactions.
Developing a more highly skilled workforce first requires a job analysis and skills assessment to help identify and close the gaps in reading, math, communication skills and other areas (Hays, 1999).

Workplace literacy training must meet not only company needs, but also the needs of employees. According to the National Alliance of Business, there are a number of key points to consider when developing a workplace literacy-training program.

- Involve management, supervisors, employees and union in the development stage. Successful programs should be supported by every department in the company.
- Align the program with company objectives, practice and job requirements.
- Whenever possible, workplace literacy skills training should be linked with other training required in the workplace.
- Be flexible about when and where classes are held, and provide incentives for participating employees.
- Allow for self-paced learning. Employees will come to the training with widely divergent skills and learning abilities.
- Use a variety of instructional methods and media, from self-paced computer programs and workbooks to one-on-one instruction.
- Provide ongoing feedback to help employees gauge their own progress.
- Ensure employee confidentiality (Hays, 1999).

The Conference Board of Canada states workplace basic skills include literacy skills and other important skills, attitudes and behaviors that are essential to workplace success and high performance. Gaining basic skills also has a positive impact on employees’
attitudes and behaviors. This is often just as valuable to employers as the skills gains themselves. Workplace basic skills include:

- Understanding and ability to use prose (such as reports, letter and equipment manuals)
- Communicating effectively
- Understanding and ability to use documents (such as safety instructions, assembly directions, maps)
- Understanding and ability to use numbers by themselves or charts and tables
- Thinking critically and acting logically to solve problems and make decisions
- Using computers, technology, tools and information systems effectively
- Ability to build and work in teams
- Positive attitude toward change
- Willingness and ability to learn for life

Benefits of Workplace Education

A survey of firms with worker education programs reveals that the programs have many benefits. Writing in the May 1995 Monthly Labor Review, researcher Laurie J. Bassi reports that non-manufacturing firms perceive worker education as having a moderate to substantial impact on workers’ communication on the job, morale, self-confidence and customer satisfaction. Manufacturing firms perceive it as having a moderate to substantial impact on workers’ self-confidence, mathematics skills, morale, communication on the job and ability to solve problems. Firms also report a wide variety of more modest but important benefits, ranging from ability to work in teams to quality of output (“Workplace Education Pays Off”, 1995).
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College lists the following benefits for workplace learning centers on its website.

Employees who participate in learning center training:

- Improve their basic skills and are prepared for company training programs – cross training, retraining and upgrading for the year 2000 and beyond.
- Develop computer literacy to meet technological changes.
- Cultivate a desire and willingness to pursue additional learning.
- Increase self-confidence and success and jumpstart their learning potential.
- Build communication, team and group skills and prepare themselves for job changes and advancement.
- Develop commitment and initiative.

The Conference Board of Canada says employers gain higher profits and a host of other bottom-line benefits from improving employees’ literacy and basic skills. More skillful employees save employers time and money and improve performance and productivity. Other benefits include:

- Reduced error rates
- A better health and safety record
- Reduced waste in production of goods and services
- Increased customer and employee retention

The Conference Board of Canada also lists benefits to employees of improving workplace basic skills:

- Ability to complete the same tasks faster and more accurately
- Improved morale/self-esteem
- Ability to work better with coworkers or in teams
- Improved reading, writing, numeric, communication and problem-solving skills
- Greater chance of being promoted or transferred into new positions
- Increased pay or responsibility

**English as a Second Language**

Although non-English-speaking employees are nothing new in the United States, the vast amount of skills and knowledge required for them to be successful has never been greater. Years ago, a nonnative speaker could operate a machine or provide a service with little or no formal English required. Today, that same worker may have to identify safety procedures, support cross-functional teams or participate in the company’s ISO 9000 registration. The requirements of these improvement programs are almost always conducted in the language of the workplace: English (Kavanaugh, 1999).

When employees gain new English language skills, employers reap the benefits. One of the greatest obstacles to workplace success is the sense of isolation that comes from not knowing how to speak the language of the workplace. As employees learn to understand and speak English, they gain an immediate appreciation of the nature of the business, what is going on and why it is happening. They feel that they are more a part of the organization and as a result are more committed to it (Bloom and Lafleur, 1999).

Bloom and Lafleur (1999) go on to state that ESL can also teach managers and supervisors how to train better. Managers and supervisors learn how to take complicated concepts and break them down so they are easier to understand. When intercultural and diversity training classes are associated with ESL the benefits are increased. Supervisors
who are made more aware of the needs of employees and more sensitive to cultural
diversity became attuned to how to make their employees perform effectively.

Kavanaugh (1999) believes blending traditional ESL techniques with a skills-
driven, competency-based curriculum is the key to improving employee productivity
while teaching functional, job-specific English words and phrases. Learning the English
names of the supervisor, the machines and the company’s products won’t reduce defects,
rework or waste. Employees need job-specific, timely information to learn to indicate an
unsafe working environment, a wasteful process or a personal problem.

Summary

The literature review reveals the need for continued research on workplace
learning centers. Previous research shows a positive impact workplace education has on
employers and employees. With the continuing changes in technology, workplace
organizational structuring and diverse employees, employers must adapt workers to these
changes through education. The need for an educated workforce is vital to a company’s
success.
Chapter III
Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methods used to identify the advantages a workplace learning center may have on Company A and Company A’s employees under the headings of Research Design, Participants and Method of Analysis.

Research Design

Because workplace learning centers are highly personable, the researcher selected Merriam’s approach to the interview process as the methodology to the study. Merriam (2002) states interviews range from highly structured, where specific questions and the order in which they are asked are determined ahead of time, to unstructured, where one has topic ideas to explore but neither questions nor the order are predetermined. Most interviews fall somewhere in between. Questions were designed based on Merriam’s structured interview to inquire about the impact, benefits, advantages and disadvantages Company A’s workplace learning center has on the company and the company’s employees.

Introductory comments before beginning the research:

The research being conducted will identify the advantages a workplace learning center may have on Company A and Company A’s employees. You have been selected to participate in the study and have completed a consent form. Any personal information that could identify you in any way will be kept confidential. Before beginning the interview, I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary. At any time during the
interview if you feel uncomfortable and want to end your participation in
the study, you may do so.

1. What positive outcomes have there been from having an on-site
   learning center?

2. What type of an impact has the learning center had on employees
   here?

3. Where has the most improvement been?

4. How has the company benefited from the workplace learning center?

5. How have employees benefited from the workplace learning center?

6. What are the advantages of having a workplace learning center are?

7. What are the disadvantages of having a workplace learning center are?

Participants

The researcher selected nine participants for the interviews. The researcher first
grouped participants as follows:

1. Steering committee members

2. Members of management

3. Employees that took courses in the learning center

4. Employees that did not participate in any courses in the learning center

5. Workplace learning center instructor

Once employees were placed into one of the five groups, names were written
down and put into a box. The workplace learning center instructor randomly selected
two names from each group. The eight individuals selected plus the instructor gave the
researcher nine individuals to interview. The individuals were asked to participate. All
participants were given a detailed description of the research being conducted. Each participant signed a consent form before being interviewed. All participants were aware that participation was voluntary and each could have ended participation at any time.

Interviews were held in a separate office from the researcher’s office. The researcher recorded all interviews on audiocassette.

Method of Analysis

Once the researcher completed the interviews, the answers participants gave were written out verbatim for analysis. The researcher used Merriam’s (2002) analysis of placing data collected into categories or themes. Themes were pulled from the answers one through seven and are discussed in Chapter Four.
Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The results of this study are specific to Company A and the opinions of the participants are specific to the learning center at Company A. While other companies may have similar results, this study is specifically identifying advantages a workplace learning center may have on Company A and Company A’s employees.

Communication, cultural differences, quality, productivity, learning and opportunity are examples of themes that participants discussed during this study. Each of the seven questions will be discussed below tying in the themes revealed.

Results

1. What positive outcomes have there been from having an on-site learning center?

Having an on-site learning center brought opportunity to the employees of Company A. Not only an opportunity to learn and expand horizons but an opportunity to learn and understand co-workers. Employees that would not consider going to school are beginning to show an interest in higher education because of courses at the learning center.

The learning center helped in breaking barriers between cultures, specifically the barriers between Hmong and Caucasian employees. Hmong employees improved English skills and began speaking more English to Caucasian co-workers. Caucasian employees took Hmong language courses and not only learned to speak Hmong, but gained a greater understanding of the Hmong culture. One participant said, “Involvement between Hmong and American associates I think has increased. People are able to
identify with each other a little bit more. With us as English speaking people learning Hmong, I got very positive feedback from the people who went up and started to learn the Hmong language. They said, ‘I get to go to class today’. They started using some of the words to intermingle a little bit better with the Hmong associates.” By removing the barriers, communication improved and employees began to connect with one another between Hmong and Caucasian cultures.

2. What type of an impact has the learning center had on employees here?

The learning center is being seen as a positive influence on employees at Company A. “I think it’s been very positive for the people that have used it. They seem very open with it. I think it’s been a very positive influence on our associates.” Employees are learning skills to use at work and at home such as active listening, communication, English, math, measuring and basic computer skills. Supervisors and shift coordinators are noticing quality improvements. Questions are being asked because a greater understanding is occurring.

The learning center is opening up opportunities for employees. “I’m learning stuff I wouldn’t have learned otherwise. I mean it’s there and it’s not costing me anything. There is not a fee. You just go there and you can do it.” Employees who may never have thought of going back to school are taking advantage of free education. Employees are more self-confident. “I thought I would like to learn Hmong and I went up for a couple of classes. I decided it’s not my thing. I’m not good at it. It maybe shows you what you can do and what you can do with your life.”

The learning center helps employees learn about technology. Many of the plant employees at Company A are not familiar with computers. “The computer ladies who
were scared to death of a computer, had a computer in their house and never touched it and now they say, ‘can I do my resume next week’ and one came to me today, ‘well I did this chart’. Another came and said, ‘well I typed a letter today and did it all myself’.” Employees are working together to learn. “There’s another one that’s taking the class (computers) with me and we work together on it. And its like ‘how did you do that’ and ‘what did you do?’ And then it’s like you’re working together. You’re just helping each other.”

3. Where has the most improvement been?

The most improvement has come from the ESL students. Hmong employees that took English classes are beginning to use more English words and phrases on the production floor. The ESL group is asking more questions and showing more awareness in production work. This group of employees is learning what acronyms mean on work tags and are gaining a better understanding of the work tag as a whole. “A lot of them are paying more attention to the work tag. More people are saying, ‘hey I never knew this about the work tag. I never knew this was the abbreviation for this,’ so they are paying a lot more attention to the work tags.”

Several participants are noticing more interactions between employees with different cultures and between employees on different shifts. Employees are functioning like a team instead of as individuals. Employees are helping each other during class time and this is leading to the production floor. “I think the way the Hmong speak and their communication as far as in their culture if somebody says thank you, they don’t do the “you’re welcome” thing. It’s um…it’s more yes, no problem type of thing. I only took a few of the Hmong classes but that was a cool thing that I learned because now it makes
sense. Every time you say thank you to one of the Hmong, they just kind of nod their head and now it makes sense.”

4. How has the company benefited from the workplace learning center?

Communication was one of the main themes for this question. Communication improved between employees on different shifts and from different cultures. Better communication is leading to an increase in productivity and more awareness for quality. Employees feel comfortable asking questions and are comfortable expressing ideas and concerns for the product. “It has given them more ideas and they are more open now to see the big picture of how things are being done and why it’s being done a certain way.”

The workplace learning center is a resource Company A can use to raise the skill level of employees. Classes in measurement, caliper reading, computer use, math, work tag comprehension, reading and writing all contribute to an employee’s skill set. “We have associates who don’t understand what an acronym is that is being placed onto the work tags. I think by going over that information those people are able to understand what that acronym meant and do their jobs better. Not that they didn’t know where it was before but they actually knew only what a small portion meant. Now they are able to read it better.”

Employees that can learn and understand about Company A can perform more tasks adding value to the company. “Every time you invest in your people, you are going to get returns. The more people can do the more valuable they are so I would think that just raising the skill level of people and raising the confidence level are benefits.”
Benefits such as financial gains and turnover cannot be discussed due to the short time the workplace learning center has been open. “I don’t think we’ve had it around long enough to see an absolute positive benefit.”

5. How have employees benefited from the workplace learning center?

Employees are using the learning center as a bridge to continuing education especially since the announcement of the plant closing. The workplace learning center instructor is not only a teacher, but also a liaison between the local technical college and Company A’s employees. Employees are making connections and are striving towards personal improvement. “First of all, people started thinking about their own education. I’ve given out lots of brochures and I’ve gotten phone numbers and names of counselors to people and they say, ‘Oh I’ve always thought about going,’ and I’ll encourage them; so to be able to encourage people and connect them with NTC.”

Employees are not only learning about the company they are also learning about co-workers. The gap between Hmong and Caucasian workers is beginning to narrow and understanding and communication are filling where the gap once was. “The intermingling of different cultures. I think it all comes back to communicating whether it’s learning Hmong or learning the computer.”

Once again communication was a recurring theme. Classes offered are useful to employees at work and at home. “Things like the conflict management class. You can use that in your home life or your future work life. You can use it here. Most people wouldn’t go to the library and check out a book on how to deal with people when I have this problem.”
Employees have a sense of belonging, increased self-esteem and a boost in morale. "I think increased self esteem works in on their everyday life and they come back and they’re feeling a stronger more positive person." Employees feel more empowered. "I think that it’s always hard to find something positive in the work place. I think that having a learning center on hand helps people be positive because when you learn more, you feel more empowered to go out and do things."

6. What are the advantages of having a workplace learning center?

The workplace learning center at Company A gives employees a place to learn and grow both professionally and personally. Together employees learn about the company, co-workers, cultural differences, language, self-confidence and empowerment. "I guess one of the advantages is it gives the people the opportunity to learn. Not just to learn English but to learn about their company and what they need to concentrate on like measurements and communication." Most importantly employees learn to communicate with each other and work as a team. "I think the biggest thing would be teamwork. Everyone that participates helps others to learn. In a way they all get together and in a way it’s making it easier for everybody to understand each other." The learning center at Company A encourages employee education and gives people skills to advance in work and life.

7. What are the disadvantages of having a workplace learning center?

The participants felt the disadvantages of a workplace learning center were minimal compared to the advantages. Two themes came from this question. The first was workflow issues and the second was overtime.
When employees leave the production floor for courses offered during working hours, production may be interrupted. A department may have workflow issues if several people are missing for a period of time. Employees had to rotate taking courses and sometimes had to skip class if production was behind. Employees also had feelings of guilt during class time because of being off the production floor while knowing that workflow issues may arise with the absence of workers.

Supervisors are reluctant to have several employees from one area taking a class at one time. There was little disagreement between supervisors and employees on this issue. Once the issue was brought to the attention of the steering committee, future classes were offered at different times to give all employees a chance to attend class.

Overtime also plays a role in determining if employees attend class. One department is working ten-hour days. Employees have fallen asleep during class or do not show up due to exhaustion. Once again employees experience guilt when leaving the production floor to go to class knowing worker absence may put production behind further and increase the amount of over time.

There was some disagreement between employees that participate in classes versus employees that do not participate at all. The employees that do not participate feel as though they have to pick up extra work because of the workplace learning center. It is a matter of involvement. Employees that do not want to participate in learning center at all seem to have more negative feelings. “I think everything that we’ve done and set up and put out has been very positive. It’s whether the people on the floor want to be involved in it or not. They’re the people who take it upon themselves to be positive or negative.”
Another disadvantage is having a mind-set that a learning center will be a quick fix to major problems or will cure all problems. “One disadvantage and this is what a company has to be careful with; they think the learning center is going to cure it all because people really don’t understand how ESL works or how language is learned. They think well, if you come in and you give them 20 hours of ESL, they are going to know all the shoptalk and they are going to talk as fast as the shift coordinator. ESL doesn’t work this way. Language isn’t learned that quickly.”

Summary

The results of this study show the workplace learning center at Company A is having a positive impact not only on the company, but on the employees as well. Previous research also indicates a positive impact workplace learning centers have on employers and employees.

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College and The Conference Board of Canada list several benefits that were the same as a result of this study. Outcomes of this study included: improved morale or self-esteem, ability to work better with coworkers, improved communication, team and group skills and computer literacy. The literature review in Chapter Two revealed some of the same benefits.
Chapter V
Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The state of Wisconsin offers companies the opportunity to open an on-site learning center through a two-year grant program. First year costs are paid at 75% through the grant and second year costs at 50%. The goal at the end of the two-year grant is to have a workplace learning center that can function without state funding. In the summer of 2002 Company A took advantage of the grant and opened a workplace learning center with courses beginning that fall. This study examined the advantages a workplace learning center may have on Company A and Company A’s employees.

The researcher selected eight participants for this study. Participants included steering committee members, members of management, employees that took courses in the learning center and employees that did not participate in any courses in the learning center. Interviews were conducted asking participants seven questions about the impact, benefits, advantages and disadvantages of Company A’s learning center.

Communication, cultural differences, quality, productivity, learning and opportunity are examples of themes that participants discussed during this study. Communication and cultural differences emerged as the leading themes in this study. Participants felt Company A’s employees, specifically Hmong and Caucasian employees, are communicating more and have a better understanding of each other’s culture. Hmong employees are increasing the use of English words and phrases on the production floor. Quality awareness is improving and productivity levels are increasing.
Conclusions

Although Company A’s workplace learning center has been open just one year, employees have already seen definite advantages. Barriers between Hmong and Caucasian cultures are beginning to dissolve and there is an increase in communication. The increased communication is leading to employees asking questions and giving input for quality issues and work processes.

Company A’s workplace learning center has brought value to the company and the company’s employees. Employees participating in courses are increasing skill sets and are adding value to current positions.

Workflow and overtime are two disadvantages of the workplace learning center. When employees leave the production floor, especially during busy production or during overtime, workflow can become interrupted.

Impact to Company A’s turnover or financial gains are not measurable at this time due to the short amount of time the learning center has been open.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends any company to investigate the possibility of opening an on-site workplace learning center based on the positive results outlined in Chapter Four. However, before a company opens a learning center, consider the following:

1. Funding for the workplace learning center must be entirely supported by the company once the two-year state grant is complete.

2. What are the learning gaps in the organization?

3. Is there sufficient space to house an on-site learning center in a quiet area, which is conducive for learning?
4. Will a workplace learning center work for a particular company? How does the company make it work?

5. Is there company support?

6. How does a company get employees to the learning center?

7. Have local technical schools identify organizations with successful workplace learning centers and benchmark them.

Another recommendation is to minimize the issue of workflow and overtime. Having supervisors closely monitor class schedules and employee sign-up can minimize workflow and overtime. If several employees from one department are taking a class, the supervisor and the workplace learning center instructor should work together to ensure participation in the class and coverage in the department. The workplace learning instructor can offer several days and times for a popular class.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Learning centers are a wonderful tool for a company to build its employees skills set and give employees morale and confidence. The researcher recommends further study on the benefits of workplace learning centers. Financial gains/losses and turnover would be two excellent areas of study because of limited research.
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