

2003 Excellence in Practice Citation

Workplace Learning & Development



Marvin Windows and Doors

Warroad, Minnesota

Northwest Technical College

Bemidji, Minnesota

University of Minnesota, Crookston

Crookston, Minnesota

Northern Lights University

SUMMARY

The lack of educational opportunities, along with double digit attrition rates, and difficulty recruiting to a small, rural community, meant the company had need to find a way to grow their own management, engineering and programming expertise. With the nearest college or technical school over two hours away from this rural community of less than 2000, and where the company employs over 2500, if an employee wanted to pursue higher education they had to travel a significant distance.

To address these needs, the company looked to partner with an educational institution which could provide:

- An accredited degree program
- Professors on site
- An accelerated program
- Easy transfer of previously earned credit

In 1999, an on-site degree program was offered for the first time. Partnering with two separate and competing state university systems a “two + two” program was designed. This allowed employees to enroll in one of two Associate of Applied Science degree programs, Supervisory Leadership or Manufacturing Engineering Technology, or a Bachelor of Manufacturing Management program. At company expense, employees obtain a degree by attending intensive accelerated classes after work. The instructors are professors from both institutions who drive over two hours one way to teach on site.

As a result of this program, 60 employees are currently enrolled in the degree programs. Already 23 have graduated and 21 more will graduate in 2004. A fourth program, AAS in Information Management began in 2003 to meet the company’s need for IS technicians.

BACKGROUND

During the mid 90's, due to being located in a very remote part of the state, the Company was facing many issues regarding employee development and retention. The turnover rate was in the double digits, as employees retired or left to pursue jobs and education in bigger cities. Recruiting professionals to this remote area was also difficult, and current employees who would like to move into higher level jobs were unable to because of lack of degrees, or technical knowledge. In the past, certificate programs and diplomas had been offered to employees and community members through ITV broadcasts from state technical colleges; however the classes offered were limited, and often cancelled due to low enrollment. After receiving a certificate in management that took nearly four years to complete, one of the employees mentioned to the President of the company; "This is great, but what I really want is a college degree!"

With an excellent tuition reimbursement policy, but no college within a two hour drive, it was impossible for the employee(s) to realize this dream. In 1998, Internet based college programs were expensive, very few were accredited and the technology was slow. Additionally, very few in this remote location had home computers and most had limited computer skills making Internet based degree programs not a viable option. The President of the Company challenged the training manager to see if there was some way the company could make employees' dreams of a college education come true. At the same time the company needed to look at its recruitment needs, and what was the knowledge base being lost through retirement and other attrition? Could an on-site college program, help with recruitment, with retention and with development? The only way to find out was to ask the employees.

Through informational focus groups, a company wide survey and individual interviews with former ITV class participants; it was determined that indeed there was an interest from employees who wanted to get a degree. It was also determined that the areas of interest and the company's need matched. The majority of the employees wanted degrees in management, engineering or information systems. With that information in mind, the company set out to find a university to partner with. The company had several requirements that needed to be met, and found that most of the colleges and universities were not interested in partnering. Surprisingly, two schools did respond with a proposal that fit the criteria; and more surprisingly, the two schools that developed this proposal were actually from competing state university systems.

The proposal fit all the criteria and offered:

- Two and four year accredited degree programs
- On site instruction by professors from the college
- Accelerated course work
- Acceptance of transfer credits regardless of age of those credits
- Credit for work experiences
- Classes offered twice per week, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

- Two year degrees in business and/or engineering
- Four year degree in management
- Polytechnic education

In 1999, the first classes of the on-site college program(s) began, with 65 full time students enrolled. Since conception, this program has maintained an average of 65 full time students; and to date 23 have graduated. In 2003, the company added an additional degree program, offering an AAS in Information Management. In total over 150 employees have participated in the college classes and of the 68 fulltime employee/students, 37 have changed jobs and/or received promotions due to their education. Because the company has reached a saturation point in the need for engineering technicians, the engineering program will be changed to an Industrial/Mechanical Maintenance AAS degree in 2005. This stays true to the goal of using the degree programs to help with recruitment, retention and internal employee development.

These programs are open to all full time employees at this location. Currently there are approximately 2700 FTE's, of which approximately 2300 are considered front line workers. About 150 work in some form of management, and the rest in support services. Of the current and past employees participating in this program, there has been representation across the facility, from front line hourly employees through senior level management.

During the needs assessment, request for proposals and evaluation period, one employee worked on this project about half time for six months. Once the college programs were in session on site, the colleges had an on site advisor eight hours per week for the first year. During year two, another training specialist was added by the company to provide additional help with scheduling, advising and working with the professors. In year three the advisor from the colleges was removed and the company training specialist was given total responsibility for advising students and interacting with the colleges. The tuition cost for the program in 1999 was approximately \$195,000.00 and has increased incrementally over the years to an anticipated total cost in 2004 of \$300,000.00. These tuition increases have been due to state funding cuts to higher education, and mandated tuition increases. The company pays all costs associated with the college program up front, and the student re-pays the company the cost of the class if he/she does not receive a grade of C or better. If the class hours conflict with the employee/student's work hours, he/she may take excused time off from work to attend class. Class hours are unpaid; however the employee has the option of flexing their hours if work is available so as not to lose any paid time over the course of a week.

This partnership between a company and two separate university systems is a first in the state. In May of 2002, five employees received Bachelors of Manufacturing Management degrees, in a first of its kind ceremony. In May of 2003, five employees received AAS degrees, and 13 employees received Bachelor's degrees, in a first ever joint graduation ceremony of these two separate university systems. In 2004, 15 employees will graduate with AAS degrees and six with Bachelors degrees.

This program was the first of its kind in this state and has been used as a model in the metro area as well as at other companies out state.

DOCUMENTATION

Needs Identification

1. *Describe the problem or need for which this practice is designed and implemented. How was this problem identified, and how was it determined that this practice is an appropriate response?*

In 1998, 18 individuals who worked for the company received certificates in management, from a company sponsored program provided by a state technical college. The employees who received these certificates stated to the President of the company, that they were happy with the certificate, but they would really like a college degree. The President in-turn asked the training manager to see if bringing a college degree to the company was a possibility.

The real problem was the remote location of the company, which was over two hours away from any university or technical college. Up until then all classes had been offered via ITV, and offered in the evenings from 7:00-10:00 p.m. The schedule for these classes was the same schedule as the on campus classes, so it took the employees who received the certificate in management, four years to complete the 18 credit certificate program. Also, the time that the classes were offered, interfered with half of the company's employees regular shift and took employees who worked the day shift away from their families.

Another issue facing the company was the double digit turnover in the employee base due to a variety of factors, one being the retirement of long term, highly skilled employees. Recruiting new talent to the organization was difficult, again due to the remote location, but the current employees did not have the education, or skill base to move into the more skilled management jobs and/or professional technical occupations. If college degrees could be delivered to this location, more employees would have the chance to stay with the company while getting skills to move up in the company and provide for the company's growing needs.

The first step in the needs analysis was to find out what type of degree programs would be appropriate to the organization. This was accomplished by looking at where the company had specific recruiting needs through staffing analysis; individual interviews with departmental managers; and examining exit interviews for reference to why employees were leaving the organization.

The three major areas of need identified were:

- Management/Business Skills
- Engineering
- Programming

Determining if there was a large enough percentage of the employee base interested in obtaining a college degree was done through a facility wide survey,

informational focus groups and individual interviews. The survey was sent to 2500 employees via an attachment to their check. They were asked the following questions:

1. Are you interested in obtaining a college degree, if one was available at our facility? Yes/No
2. What type of degree would you be interested in obtaining?
 - Technical College, AAS
 - University Bachelor's
 - Other
3. What would you be willing to pay for a degree?
 - Nothing
 - Cost of Books
 - Full tuition
 - Some
4. What would you like to study?
 - Management/Business
 - Engineering
 - Programming
 - Other (write in your choice)
5. When would you like to attend class?
 - Saturday
 - Evenings (after 6:00p.m.)
 - Late afternoon (3:00p.m. to 6:00 p.m.)
6. What are your career goals at this Company? (Optional)

The survey was to be returned to the training department within two weeks. Over 300 surveys were returned with over 200 signifying an interest in college. The majority of the respondents indicated a desire to obtain a degree in the area of management and/or engineering. The write in degrees were mainly around the area of nursing, teaching and/or paramedic training.

In addition to the survey, individual interviews were held with the 18 employees who received the certificate in 1998. They were asked the following questions;

1. Do you wish to pursue further education?
2. If yes, what type education do you wish to pursue?
3. What did you like about obtaining your certificate?
4. Were there any difficulties with obtaining your certificate? (family issues, timing, class registration, etc?)
5. If we were to bring degree programs to our area, what would make it easier for you to obtain one?
6. Anything else you would like to talk to me about?

Of the 18 certificate recipients, 15 said that they did want to continue their education and obtain a degree. Approximately half were interested in a bachelor's degree and half in a technical degree. All indicated that their certificate helped them to advance within the company and all had moved into a new more desirable position, or had been promoted. The following issues were brought out regarding the certificate program process;

- The classes were held from 7:00-9:00 p.m., which interfered with some of the employees' shifts thus resulting in lost wages, and also with family time.
- The classes were taught on the college's schedule; therefore at one class per semester it took almost four years to obtain a certificate.
- The classes were open enrolled on a first come, first serve basis; so if you were late to registration you might not get your class, effectively removing you from the program.
- The classes were all offered via *Interactive T.V.* which occasionally would malfunction, canceling a class, and that interaction between the teacher and participants was limited.
- Tuition reimbursement was not given until after the class was over and a grade card received so employees were waiting to be reimbursed for one class, while having to pay upfront for the next class which caused some financial issues.
- Students were required to pay extra fees which were not reimbursable, such as computer fees, student activity fees, library fees, etc. even though they were not on campus and could not take advantage of the labs or activities for which they were paying.
- Transfer credits had not been easily accepted into the certificate program.
- The employees did not realize that the certificate credits were college credits.

Design Values

2. *Describe how this practice takes into account the best interests of both the organization and the employees targeted.*

Based on the information gathered from the focus groups, individual interviews, staffing analysis and survey, the following assumptions were made:

1. A college degree program on site would be viable, and the company could support at least three cohorts of 20 employees each.
2. More employees were interested in an AAS degree than a Bachelor's degree.
3. The education desires of the employees matched the needs of the company, so degree programs needed to be in the area of management, engineering and/or information systems.
4. Employees preferred classroom instruction with a professor on site to ITV or Internet based instruction.
5. The program needed to be accelerated, to accommodate the employees and the company's need for rapid skill development and change.
6. Tuition needed to be within the current reimbursable benefit, and should be paid by the company upfront, with a payroll deduction plan if the employee received less than a grade of C.
7. Someone needed to be in an advisory role on site to help students with registration, course advisement, etc.
8. Classes needed to be held at times which would minimally interfere with work shifts and family time.

A request for proposals went out to several technical colleges, and universities in the state and adjoining states. In the request it was stated that the following items were necessary from the company's point of view.

- The program must be delivered on site, with instructors on site
- The program must be accredited; the company wanted the same education offered that would be offered on campus.
- The program must be accelerated, and the college must be able to provide at least 12 to 15 credits per year, per cohort.
- The college must provide on site advising.
- The college must commit to continuing the program through graduation for the first cohort, and cannot change program requirements during the course of the cohort.

The accepted proposal delivered all of the required attributes, and was fluid enough to change if company needs changed.

Alignment

3. *How this practice in alignment is with the performance identified as described in question #1?*

College degree programs are now offered on site at the company.

4. *Please describe how this practice integrates other training, learning and performance improvement practices, and aligns itself with organizational goals to achieve the desired outcomes.*

The company has two overriding goals; Profitable Growth and Increasing Customer Satisfaction. Those two goals are accomplished through four areas; Our People; Our Quality; Our Delivery and Our Service. This practice supports the strategies under the area of People. Those strategies include:

- Provide the talent to support long term growth
- Build organizational and personal competencies
- Build a responsive and performance based culture focused on continuous improvement, employee participation and recognition for accomplishment.

In addition to supporting the company's strategic area of People; the practice is aligned to the other goals through the course work taught and the internships that are provided on site. Each student is required to complete a three credit internship before they graduate. The internship is aligned with the needs of the company, while being an academic stretch for the student. Many of the internships have been projects specific to the company's goals. For example, a student worked on a project in the area of delivery; mapping the logistics process for the entire organization; this student went on to lead a company wide logistics study, which provided insight into how the company could increase customer satisfaction through the company's delivery system. The student, who was in the AAS degree program, had been a truck driver when he was tapped for this project leadership role after his internship. Another internship had a student

working on designing a min/max program for production of inventoried items to provide information to produce actual demand for raw materials without producing excessive amounts. This project directly related to a company goal of leveraging lean operations to reduce waste.

5. What evidence is there of partnerships within and outside the organization?

Classes that require lab time, for instance Safety, Fluid Power Systems, AutoCAD, etc. utilize the company facilities and machinery for their lab work. Students bring real time company problems to the class to be discussed and/or resolved. Experts from the company are used as guest lecturers and mentors on projects. Senior Management have participated in panel discussions and have been actively involved in Internships and other project mentoring.

The two university systems providing the degree programs have been active partners, as has the local high school which has provided classroom space for specialized classes such as physics; and their auditorium for graduations.

Evaluation Strategy

6. How is this practice evaluated? What factors are included in your calculations? Are the financial costs of this practice calculated? If so how? How often is this practice evaluated?

Participant Academic Achievement is measured throughout each course delivery by the faculty and administration. Faculty identifies the required learning outcomes for each course and use class activities, projects that apply learning, quizzes, and traditional exams to evaluate student learning. Participants receive feedback about their learning and performance from faculty throughout the course, and formal assessments usually by the 2nd week of an eight week course, at mid-term, and in final grades.

The Quality System (using ISO 9000 standards) was established in 1999 to maximize the success of the educational programs. College administrators worked with the Manager of Training at the company and staff to adapt processes that would meet the company's needs and also ensure student success in the programs. The Corporate College Dean regularly monitors the delivery process for all courses by:

- Coordinating course delivery schedules, equipment, materials and supplies to meet company and participant needs before and during course delivery
- Orienting all new faculty to working in the corporate environment
- Discussing participant performance and any course issues with each faculty member the 2nd week of an eight-week course delivery
- Checking mid-term and final grades
- Reviewing the course evaluations (Participant Satisfaction Surveys). Any composite score below 80% triggers an investigation to identify the cause of the rating and to develop a corrective action.

- Reviewing the Faculty Evaluation Survey to determine any issues that interfered with a successful course delivery.

The Dean(s) regularly communicates with the company training staff to discuss academic and delivery issues that arise.

The financial costs of this practice is based on a per student cost, including tuition and books. Since this is considered an employee benefit, the company has not looked at a return on an investment. The practice is evaluated yearly with consideration placed on cost, retention and movement of students into other more challenging positions.

Results

7. *What specific participant behaviors are observed as a result of this practice, and how do these behaviors contribute to the goals of the practice? Are the impacts of these behaviors short-term or long term? How do these behaviors differ from the results of previous practices?*

Participant attitude changes have been noted by the company, faculty and staff as the program progresses. Although this is not quantifiable, all parties have noted attitude changes that impact the company's goal to create a culture that values knowledge and education.

Participants have often mentioned their belief in the importance of continuing their education for personal and professional reasons. However, two years ago in interviews many of the AAS students stated that they only wanted the AAS degree, but would not continue with the Bachelor's degree. In 2003 the AAS graduates reversed that decision and are committing to continuing their education with the Bachelor's program.

Participants have also reported that they feel prepared to take on additional responsibilities in their jobs because of the projects they have successfully completed in courses. They welcome the extra work! The company and supervisors are asking them to use their knowledge and skills and the students report satisfaction at being asked. It seems that the students value the respect they have earned, and are not as concerned about promotions.

Participants are telling their own children, "Go on to college after high school so you can get an education before you have to start working. It's hard to work 8 hours and then go to class. Don't do it the hard way like I am."

8. *What was the impact on your organization? Are the impacts of these behaviors short term or long term?*

To date there have been 23 graduates; 18 from the bachelors program and five from the Associate of Applied Science program.

Of the 68 fulltime students in the programs over the past five years, 37 have received promotions while in the program or after they graduated. In an informal

poll of the managers who hired these employees all stated the education, and/or the work ethic demonstrated by the employee working toward higher education, was a factor in the employee receiving the promotion. There are currently five students in the program who have identified that the opportunity to get an education while working full time was a direct reason they applied to work for the company.

Unfortunately the company has also had graduates leave the organization after receiving their degree. Of the five who have left the company, three stayed in the area and went to work for other local companies. Two of the three who stayed in the area, stated that a significant increase in their pay was the motivating factor to move. One stated that being able to have a job in his field that did not require significant travel was the motivating factor. Two returned to their home towns to be closer to family. The company is now studying how to better provide career ladders and mentor management in how to counsel employees in the programs regarding career opportunities; as well as provide career counseling to the students. The company has looked into, but rejected the idea of having the employee sign a contract when they come into the program, guaranteeing they will stay a period of time after graduation.

Shared Learning

9. What have been some of the specific lessons learned from designing and implementing this practice for the purposes of continuous internal improvement? Please discuss whether and how this practice might be transferred and replicated both internally and externally to your organisation.

The company and the colleges have collaborated to refine the corporate college enterprise. Every current component of the project has been collaboratively created, reviewed, and revised to improve and support participant learning and program completion. The operational systems and academic delivery models gained from this collaboration have informed other successful corporate college deliveries:

- 21 Headstart workers at a local Indian reservation have received their AAS Degree in Early Childhood Education in September, 2003.
- 19 displaced workers at a closed manufacturing company received a 35 credit electrical diploma in May, 2003
- 40 employees are enrolled in maintenance and supervisory leadership coursework at a regional manufacturer and 11 participants will receive AAS Degrees or certificates in September, 2003.
- Over 150 regional employees completed credit-based courses delivered at their remote work site in 2003.
- Four other large businesses in this state and the neighboring state are currently considering establishing corporate colleges at their sites.

Corporate College operational systems and programming information has been shared by the company and the universities at workforce conferences in the state in 2001, 2002, and 2003. The model was also presented at a national conference

in 2000. This program has been recognized in the annual report of the University system; and given an award from the Governor's Workforce Council for 'smashing silos' in between educational systems and the workplace.

Contact

Peggy Ann Anderholm
Education Manager
Marvin Windows and Doors
peggya@marvin.com