

Findings

Workplace Based Distance e-Learning Business Need Assessment Survey

Fielded June 10 – 26, 2013

By:



Funding by:

US Department of Labor Grant #EA-21931-11-60-A-53

Through:

Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board

Workplace Based e-Learning Project

Contract #13-ABZ-217

Background

AWB Institute is the 501(c)(3) affiliate of the Association of Washington Business (AWB.) Founded in 2001, AWB Institute focuses primarily on workforce development, education and, economic development issues.

Organized in 1904, AWB is Washington state's oldest business association. It is both the state chamber of commerce, manufacturing and technology association. AWB is one of only two state chambers in the country [accredited with distinction](#) by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. AWB currently has more than 8,300 members employing 700,000 workers in every business sector including Boeing, Microsoft, Starbucks, Weyerhaeuser, Costco and many more of the state's largest businesses. However, slightly more than 60 per cent of AWB's membership is companies with fewer than 10 employees making AWB Washington states premiere business advocate.

Executive Summary

Based on recent studies done by AWB Institute on the workforce needs of the manufacturing, health care and, transportation sectors, a listening tour in partnership with the 11 state community and technical college Centers of Excellence and anecdotal evidence provided by various AWB members it is clear that a skills gap does exist in the state of Washington. It was also clear that the state's business community recognizes that at least part of the responsibility for closing that gap rests with them. ASTD reported that employers (nation wide) spent \$125 billion on employee training in 2011, \$87.5 billion on internal training, \$21.9 billion for tuition reimbursement and \$46.9 billion on external training services. The question is, "What is the most effective and cost efficient way to do it?"

On-the-job training has been a staple of employee development since the beginning of the industrial revolution. However, in the age of "Lean" where companies in all business sectors (not just manufacturing) are trying to encourage every ounce of productivity out of fewer employees, companies are finding it harder to release their most productive employees to train the new hires. Employers are also aware that given the speed of technological development and even "leaner, Lean" processes means the highly skilled, veteran employees need training to maintain or upgrade their skill levels as well.

Off-site training poses different challenges. Sending an employee to off-site training increases hard-dollar costs for travel, lodging, and expenses. Even if the company is utilizing the local community or technical college, travel time increases the lost time the employee spends from her workstation.

Quality control is also a concern for employers. Over the year's they have become keen consumers of employee education and training programs. If the company is paying for the training, they want to make sure that the training is first rate, tailored to their specific needs

and delivered in the most effective manner possible by trainers or educators who are subject experts. (This fact was verified by Dr. Andy DiPaolo in his presentation to the Workplace Based Distance e-Learning stakeholders at their meeting on June 25, 2013:

“Companies want to work with colleges and universities who know how to teach students to transfer learning to industry applications.”

One solution to this may be credentialing. Employers have been slow to embrace credentialing but faced with a retirement Tsunami in the near future, the emergence of more credible, employer developed credentials such as the [NAM stackable credential](#) and the increasing cost of making [bad hires](#) more employers are seeing credentialing as a loss prevention strategy.

The hope is that Workplace Based Distance e-Learning as outlined and demonstrated in this project can as Lindsey Woolsey noted in her report dated June 25, 2013:

Bring education and training to where working adults are every day, the workplace. That this model can:

- Meet the real-time needs of companies for workers with the right skills and education
- Bridge physical, financial and mental gaps between working adults and education and training they need to keep themselves and their employers competitive
- Provide alternatives for businesses and their employees to participate in credit-bearing courses

Survey Results

A brief (five-question, see below) email survey using Survey Monkey was developed to gauge the attitudes and potential need of AWB member employers about the specific aspects of Workplace Based Distance e-Learning as it was piloted in this trial. The survey was active, on-line, from June 10 through June 26. AWB members were advised of the survey and asked to participate through AWB’s weekly e-newsletter, Fast Facts and AWBI’s monthly e-newsletter Industry Insights. In addition, members of AWB’s Human Resources committee and the Education and Training committee were specifically asked to participate.

Survey introduction: Workplace-based Distance (e-Learning) is an education model that brings education to where working adults are every day, the workplace. Employers benefit because workers are provided job-relevant education that improves their quality of work; workers benefit because they receive college level (credit) education and training during working hours that they otherwise would not be able to access.

Survey questions and responses:

Q1. Do you currently utilize Workplace Based Distance Learning for employee Training		
Response	Percentage	Number
Yes	13.95%	6
No (Go to Q.4)	86.05%	37
Total Respondents	100%	43
Q2. If Yes to Q1 Do you currently include any of the following components?		
Worksite learning space? (computer labs, classrooms?)	60%	3
Employee Learning Time? (During normal hours or early Release?)	80%	4
Other (Please specify)	20%	1
Formal partnership agreement (that brings job-relevant college curriculum to the place of work and provides the opportunity for workers to earn college credit) with local community or technical college?	0	0
Assigned mentors (experienced staff) to each participant responsible for advising, listening, (engaging in conversations with participants about their career futures?)	0	0
Incentives for completion/ (Wage increase, promotion or other benefits)	0	0
Total Respondents	83.3% of Yes to Q1	5
Q3. Would you consider adding any of the components above to your Workplace Based Distance Learning employee training programs?		
Formal partnership	66.67%	2
Assign mentors	66.67%	2
Work site learning space	0	0
Employee learning time	0	0
Incentives for completion	33.33%	1
No, I would not include any of the components	33.3%	1
Total Respondents	60% of Q2	3
Q4. If you answered NO to Q1 Would you consider Workplace Based Distance Learning as described below to your employee training programs?		
Formal partnership	38.1%	8
Assign mentors	33.33%	7
Work site learning	33.33%	7
Employee learning time	76.19%	16
Incentives for completion	42.86%	9
Total Respondents	57% of No to Q1	21
Q5. Please indicate your industry		

Health Care	2.5%	1
Energy	2.5%	1
Manufacturing	35%	14
Retail	10%	4
Business Services	10%	4
Technology	2.5%	1
Other	37.5%	15
Total Respondents	93%	40

Survey Analysis/Recommendations

The email survey and the follow-on conversations with selected AWB board members indicates that there is definitely a need for meaningful and effective employ training the Workplace Based e-Learning model as demonstrated in the pilot program is a new concept to employers. Most employers indicated the many of the components of this model were attractive once explained. This is a similar finding from the Woolsey report: From a participant, “I know my co-workers want this; they just don’t know about it or understand it.”

Recommendation: Utilize the talent and resources of the stakeholder group to develop an aggressive marketing plan and materials to explain the model (how and why it works) to both employers and employees.

- Develop this model into a brand and market it as such
 - Develop common terminologies to identify and explain the program
 - Create a visual identity for the program (logo)
- Include ROI models, indicators, or calculations
 - Work with policy makers/legislators to make this model eligible for Job Skills Grants, Customized Training, or develop other tax incentives for employer participation.
- Consider developing a website similar to WorkforceCollege.com to reach out to both groups
- Site success stories from employers and employees

Two components of the model are being utilized and have wide acceptance among employers:

- Work site-learning space. Most employers acknowledge that employees currently utilize the computers on their desk. While this is perfectly acceptable for individual learners it is not effective for group learning.

Recommendation: Explain the value of group or cohort learning. Encourage employers to set aside a space with multiple learning stations to accommodate them.

- Employee learning time on the job or early release to attend training is considered standard practice for most employers.

Two components of the model are not being utilized, but were of great interest to employers:

- Formal partnership agreement (that brings job-relevant college curriculum to the place of work and provides the opportunity for workers to earn college credit) with local community or technical college
- Assigned mentors (experienced staff) to each participant responsible for advising, listening, (engaging in conversations with participants about their career futures)

Recommendation:

- The stakeholders group develops a partnership agreement template that can be used by any of the states community or technical colleges. Using one format will simplify and standardize the process. This will be of particular value in those situations where more than one college is involved.
- The Workforce Board with input from the stakeholders develop a “Mentors Training Program” to assist employers in identifying the right employees to serve as mentors and provide them with the skills needed to be successful including but not limited to:
 - Active listening skills
 - Facilitation skills
 - Counseling skills
 - Career guidance skills

The final component of the model, Incentives for completion; Wage increase, promotion or other benefits was not well received by employers. Many small employers commented that “guaranteeing” promotions could be difficult due to the size of their company and the general lack of upward mobility. Larger companies, particularly those with organized employees cited that they are bound by their collective bargaining agreements. All of the employers we spoke with did indicate that any special training, skill development, or credentialing is given heavy consideration in discussion surrounding promotion, wage increases, and other benefits.

Recommendation: Continue to suggest that once training is complete that those employees who were successful should be considered for promotion or incentive but to not make it a requirement for participation.

Conclusion

The pilot demonstrated conclusively that the Workplace Based Distance e-Learning model can produce results for low-skilled, low-educated workers in a cost effective and efficient manner. There were no fatal flaws observed in the pilot however, if the final product is: overly complicated (to explain or administer,) if difficulties arise in reconciling or recognizing credit vs. non-credit learning, or if requirements become too restrictive the program will not be accepted by business. In turn, the low-skilled, low educated workers that this program is designed to serve will continue to be low-wage as well.

Appendix A: Industry Insights – Survey request



*Economic &
Workforce Solutions*

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The AWB Institute needs your help! Please take a moment to fill out a brief, five-question [survey](#) about the effectiveness of distance training for employees.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

For the past two years, the AWB Institute has been collaborating with the Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, the state's community college system and select employers to bring distance learning into the workplace.

We believe distance learning is a win for employers and employees alike. Employers benefit because workers receive job-relevant education that improves their quality of work. Employees benefit because they receive college-level education and training during working hours that they otherwise would not be able to access.

Please take a few moments now to fill out our [survey](#). For questions, please contact Mike Hudson at MikeH@awb.org or by phone at 360.943.1600. **This survey will close next Friday, June 28.**