

Training in basic skills and IT skills: a lesson in social partnership

Summary case study of the ROI Institute methodology in use for programme evaluation

In 2005 the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, in partnership with the VT Shipbuilding division of the UK plc VT, provided training in literacy, numeracy and IT skills for 60 craft workers and supervisors employed in a state-of-the-art facility of VT Shipbuilding using new equipment which required flexible working methods to be fully productive. The training was funded by the Learning and Skills Council through its Trade Union Fund South East programme, and delivered in a learning centre funded by the Union Learning Fund of the Department of Education and Skills. The workers themselves, many of whom had recently been promoted to semi-supervisory positions, had identified the need for the training in order to carry out their new roles in the new facility. They were supported in their learning by Union Learning Reps.

Thanks to a grant from the Department of Education and Skills, the training was evaluated at all five levels of the Phillips/ROI Institute evaluation methodology. Evaluation at level 1 (reaction/satisfaction) highlighted the initial scarcity of opportunity to apply the new learning in the workplace. Accordingly the Trade Union Learning Centre Manager and VT Shipbuilding operational management altered roles in three areas of production. More responsibility was delegated to the newly trained workers, for example for managing budgets, planning and prioritising jobs, reviewing progress against plan and chairing meetings. These changes resulted in operations requiring significantly less time spent by management and by specialist colleagues. The level 4 evaluation of the business impact of the training and the consequent operational changes—using hard data together with management judgments—concluded that £263K was saved over the 12 months following the training. The total cost of the training, including grant funding, participants' salaries, project management and evaluation was £109K. Thus the return on investment (ROI) was 140%. Many intangible benefits were identified including enhanced communications and health and safety, and improved career progression for those who had been trained.

The excellent outcome resulted from the commitment and collaboration of the Trade Unions, the participants, VT Shipbuilding's management and the external evaluation consultant. This case study highlights the role that evaluation can play in delivering business results: it was only after evaluation of the reactions to the training that operational changes were made to fully exploit the benefits of the training.