



Case Study December 2005

Developing a Community of Employees Through Team Time at Teleflex Canada

OVERVIEW

Teleflex Canada Ltd. is a Richmond, British Columbia-based company with a reputation as a world leader in the design and manufacture of hydraulic and thermal technology products for industrial and marine use. A recent focus on developing cost-effective solutions has resulted in a dramatic expansion of their customer base to include most North American boat and bus manufacturers; many truck-accessory, engine and marine distributors; as well as the United States and Canadian military forces. The Teleflex Canada workforce is over 300 strong and represents diverse cultural backgrounds and ages. Employees must bring together the right mix of skills, experience and technological know-how to cost-effectively design and manufacture products that meet customers' needs.

Learning has always been part of the corporate culture at Teleflex—senior management recognizes the benefits of a well-trained and skilled workforce. Initial training programs included English as a second

The Education and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and lifelong learning programs and initiatives. This case study addresses workplace literacy.

Name of Program
Team Time

Date Established
October 2000

Skills Developed

Literacy
Numeracy
Problem Solving
Teamwork
Leadership
Computer
Communication

Contact

Tracy Defoe
Workplace Education
Consultant
Teleflex Canada
3831 #6 Road
Richmond, BC V6V 1P6
Tel: 604-270-6899
Fax: 604-303-2899
E-mail: tdefoe@teleflex.ca

language (ESL) classes, academic upgrading, and the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. However, management soon realized that although employees were participating in training, they were not using their new-found skills in their jobs. Concerned, senior management turned to workplace education consultants for advice. The results led to the complete transformation of training at Teleflex into “Team Time,” a model based on the full participation of manufacturing teams working together on real challenges and changing understandings of their work. The Team Time training model evolved into a series of topic-specific modules for learning “lean manufacturing,”¹ teamwork and related skills.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Team Time training program are to:

- develop a training model for essential skills that best suits a lean manufacturing work environment;
- foster improved skills in problem solving, communication and team building;
- support production group leaders to be co-trainers;
- build the case for workplace learning for manufacturers, businesses and other partners and workers; and
- describe the economic advantages (including return on investment) by measuring operational improvements in the changing business environment.

“What we’re trying to do is shift the culture. Team Time isn’t just a training program, it is part of us shifting our culture in the organization and a way of involving employees in ways that we’ve talked about before from a theoretical perspective.”

—Senior Manager, Teleflex Canada Ltd.

TARGET GROUPS

Teleflex recognizes the importance of training for its workforce and therefore includes all workers in the Team Time training program.

ACTIVITIES

One of the key recommendations from the workplace education consultants was to transform some of the abstract concepts of the manufacturing industry directly into hands-on training. This transformation has been a great achievement of the program. At Teleflex, the focus of training is to help production teams solve their respective work challenges. Team Time training modules addressing specific machine or data source issues allow production teams to solve problems using actual workplace tools. These hands-on, real-life activities are well suited for the production team work model at Teleflex.

At Teleflex, the focus of training is to help production teams solve their respective work challenges.

Training is organized into regular production team meetings, which usually last 60 minutes. Team leaders are responsible for facilitating each module and covering the material. Team leaders must also assemble the required learning materials. There are 15 modules, with new modules being developed continually. Modules cover topics such as the purpose of Team Time training, how Team Time learning works, customer needs, how to add value, and information systems.

Pilot modules were initially designed by training course developers with special knowledge of the topic and by a volunteer production leader. They were joined by workplace education consultants who were experienced in curriculum design and in integrating essential skills training with job-specific content learning. The module development group determined the learning objectives, the lean manufacturing content, and learning activities for each pilot module. As modules were piloted, additional stakeholders were drawn into the development and revision process. Senior managers, production managers, leaders, shipping and receiving personnel, materials handlers, shop floor workers and quality assurance staff all participated. Module development also benefited from the involvement of manufacturing engineers who took part in pilot sessions, leader development sessions and meetings. The patience and

dedication committed to drafting the training modules is one key success factor in aligning training development practices with delivery.

Literacy and basic skills components are embedded directly into the modules and address:

- numeracy through chart reading, and drawing information from data;
- reading, by incorporating workplace reading material into the training, as well as providing job-relevant information on the company’s intranet site;
- writing, via electronic communication and reporting; and
- computer literacy through job-specific tasks and training.

If employees experience difficulty with the level of literacy that is needed to fully participate in Team Time training, workplace instructors are available for one-on-one tutoring. Many employees also benefit from one-on-one training in ESL, and basic literacy and computer skills.

As modules were piloted, additional stakeholders were drawn into the development and revision process.

RESOURCES

All training is done on the employer’s time as part of the production team meetings. This facilitates training by eliminating scheduling conflicts, and improves team cohesiveness, internal communication and working relationships.

INNOVATIONS

Teleflex recognizes the importance of continuously measuring the impacts of training in order to determine the program’s worth. However, it is often difficult to correlate direct business improvements, such as dollars saved, to training initiatives. Since the company makes many concurrent improvement efforts, it is a challenge to attribute specific improvements in productivity to training alone. Nonetheless, Teleflex does use the measures of increasing on-time product delivery and decreasing quality costs as indicators of training success.

Training Day

To accelerate learning lean manufacturing, the company and developers organize and deliver an annual *Training Day* on Inventory Day. Rather than having employees count inventory, management out-sourced the task and now uses this time to provide a full day of training for its employees. The development team recruits up to 30 people from different departments to be peer trainers for these modules throughout the day. The Team Time modules and model make this easy and cost-effective.

Training Day aims to bring everyone up to a minimal level of lean manufacturing training. In its four years, Training Day has covered modules such as:

- Who are your customers, what do they want, and how do we measure it?
- How do we learn in groups?
- What do we mean by pull?
- What is Continuous Improvement all about?

In addition, industry-specific modules on understanding quality and accessing the quality system using the company intranet have also been facilitated.

One innovative feature of the company’s measurement of its investment in training is the development of personalized scorecards. On Training Day, participants self-score both before and after taking part in Team Time training. Progress against the detailed goals of the modules delivered is partially determined through the use of the scorecards.

For universal access and to encourage the use of learning technologies, Team Time has its own website (www.teamtime.ca) to provide team leaders and other facilitators with practical information on how to conduct a successful and meaningful training session.

Teleflex recognizes the importance of continuously measuring the impacts of training.

CHALLENGES

Changes in managers have necessitated continuous evaluation of the training program. The benefits of training were often re-examined and needed to be “re-sold” to executives, managers and other decision-makers.

Initially, team leaders were not always eager to take on the added responsibility of being co-trainers. Taking on the new role of a trainer for one's co-workers was daunting for some, and required these individuals to commit to extra preparation time.

The training was originally scheduled as a fixed and chronological set of modules that manufacturing teams of workers were required to move through, at the team leaders' discretion. However, this stable model of Team Time training was not suitable, as the members of the working groups changed often.

Dissemination of the training model outside of the company was a challenge, as no one was tasked with sharing it with other companies or industry sector partners.

SOLUTIONS

Well-documented successes of the Team Time training program helped keep management informed of the benefits of training. The program's achievements speak for themselves whenever it is necessary to obtain buy-in from executives, supervisors or other decision makers.

Team Time training modules were adapted into a flexible set of potential activities and content pieces that team leaders could choose as appropriate for their groups' needs.

Team leaders were involved in the piloting of the program and in developing and assessing the training modules, and thereby became very familiar with the training material. Training others then came as a natural progression in their program involvement, and did not require as much preparation effort or time as was initially projected.

A more flexible approach was taken to address staff turnover and the issues of unpredictable and changing work teams. Team Time training modules were adapted into a flexible set of potential activities and content pieces that team leaders could choose as appropriate for their groups' needs.

Senior managers from Teleflex Canada were leaders in the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME)–BC Division. Through this connection with the manufacturing sector, Team Time materials (since trademarked as

TeamTime™), facilitation notes and workshop materials have been made available to CME member companies.

OUTCOMES

Through the Team Time training initiative, the reading, writing and numeracy skills of employees have improved significantly. Specific outcomes of training include the following:

- The training program has influenced the company to present its newsletter and corporate data in “plain language.”
- On-time delivery of finished products has increased from 65 to 90 per cent.
- Inventory turnover in a given time period has increased from four times to more than seven times.
- Parts shortages have been significantly reduced.

"Team Time has played a very significant role in developing a community within the workforce. It's also changed the way I approach issues from 'Do this!' to group participation and co-operative learning."

—Operations Manager, Teleflex Canada Ltd.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

One of the greatest accomplishments of the program has been the number of people involved in its development, piloting and maintenance. More than one-third of the workforce at Teleflex had a role in developing Team Time—many more than had been anticipated. Specific impacts and benefits include the following:

- More effective change management—employees, managers, engineers and production leaders are becoming change agents within the organization.
- Employees are better able to adapt to new products and manufacturing processes.
- Cross-functional communication has improved on the shop floor.
- Smoother job transitions are facilitated through the training.
- Communication skills and problem-solving skills have improved within work teams; and
- The training program scores helped Teleflex Canada achieve a designation as a “Lean Manufacturer” in 2002.

USE AS A MODEL

The Team Time training model, materials and inclusive approach would be useful to Canadian companies that use a lean manufacturing approach. Team Time facilitates training of groups or working teams, and is highly suited to developing communication and problem-solving skills of employees and supervisors.

Companies in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have already expressed interest in learning more about Team Time. Team Time consultants and team leaders are working to pilot the Team Time training program in new companies, and will provide group information sessions and one-to-one coaching for the pilots.

1 "Lean manufacturing" is a manufacturing strategy that seeks to produce a high level of throughput with a minimum of inventory. Lean manufacturing seeks to provide optimum quality by empowering employees in the belief that those closest to production have the greatest knowledge of how the

production system should work. www.wisageek.com/what-is-lean-manufacturing.htm?referrer=adwords_campaign=leanmanufacturing_ad=003001&_search_kw=lean%20manufacturing.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to Tracy Defoe and others at Teleflex Canada Ltd. who provided comments and information.

About the Education and Learning Case Studies

The Education and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and learning programs and initiatives. The case studies provide in-depth analysis of the methods used to develop, assess, implement and deliver education and lifelong learning in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and communities. They focus on goals, activities, resources requirements, achievements and outcomes, benefits, innovations, and keys to success and challenges.

This case study addresses the theme of workplace literacy and is part of the Securing Literacy's Potential research project on workplace literacy being undertaken by The Conference Board of Canada and supported by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Developing a Community of Employees Through Team Time at Teleflex Canada by *Alison Campbell*

About The Conference Board of Canada

We are:

- A not-for-profit Canadian organization that takes a business-like approach to its operations.
- Objective and non-partisan. We do not lobby for specific interests.
- Funded exclusively through the fees we charge for services to the private and public sectors.
- Experts in running conferences but also at conducting, publishing and disseminating research, helping people network, developing individual leadership skills and building organizational capacity.
- Specialists in economic trends, as well as organizational performance and public policy issues.
- Not a government department or agency, although we are often hired to provide services for all levels of government.
- Independent from, but affiliated with, The Conference Board, Inc. of New York, which serves nearly 2,000 companies in 60 nations and has offices in Brussels and Hong Kong.

