Chapter 1
Four Strategies for Remote Workforce Training, Development, and Certification

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ABSTRACT

Companies and organizations are increasingly turning to remote-based teleworkers to fill vital positions. This is due to a variety of circumstances, including increasing difficulty in locating and attracting potential employees who possess the requisite skills required for positions, locating potential employees who reside in close geographic proximity to the corporate facilities, high costs associated with relocating employees across the country or globe, and high costs associated with supporting a large, localized workforce. Therefore, developing and supporting a strong remote workforce becomes a critical business strategy and an important component of the corporate Value Chain. Providing ongoing training, development, and credentialing for these remote teleworkers can be challenging for many companies – despite technological advancements in recent years. In response, many companies are increasingly taking it upon themselves to provide workforce education and certification – bypassing traditional education formats in favor of emerging models for training, development, and competency certification. Four strategies/models are proposed in this chapter for training and credentialing remote teleworkers, including utilization of Open Systems, which are gaining popularity in corporations such as Google, the Khan Academy, and Autodesk; Badging and Open Badging, which are commonly used in corporations such as Samsung, NASA, and Disney; Gamification and 3D Simulation Strategies, which are used in a variety of corporate training; and Learning Support Managers, which are used by companies such as Apple, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the political rhetoric, employment opportunities abound – provided job seekers have the correct skills to match the fluidity in the global economy. While the United States and Europe have struggled with stubborn unemployment levels throughout the past two decades, in other parts of the world workers are in high demand in variety of occupations, including engineering (Japan), information technology (Ireland), sales and marketing representatives (Taiwan and Hong Kong), technicians (China and Brazil), laborers (Netherlands), and even variety of skilled tradesman crafts in the United States (Roberts, 2012). Moreover, critical skill areas in health care, including physicians, nurses, long-term health care providers, and behavioral health specialists are in high demand across the United States (Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

Why are organizations and companies in these countries facing such severe workforce shortages in key occupational areas at a time when unemployment indicators remain stagnant? According to Roberts (2012), 33 percent of companies and organizations indicated they were unable to find the workers they require in close proximity to the corporate facilities. Many cite a lack of worker skills, such as knowledge in information technology and a lack of foreign language facility. Still others indicated a mismatch between job preparedness and employment need. In a society that values a formal higher education preparation, vocational occupation training opportunities often go unmet - creating a skills vacuum in critical service areas. Compounding this challenge, we are preparing students in formal university settings for jobs that are yet to be created, or preparing them for occupations that have very poor employment prospects as they matriculate into the workforce (Singh, 2013).

In order to address this challenge, many companies and organizations are moving their retraining efforts in-house to fill these key shortages or to attract and support a new generation of workers who may be remotely located. As corporations increase their multinational footprint, workers are often dispersed in various settings across the globe. Compounding this problem, employees often do not have the time or money to invest in a protracted university or college degree program in order to reeducate themselves for the occupational requirements. Information technology companies, in particular, may be forced to hire programmers and other technology professionals who are dispersed in multiple global locations. Training, retraining, and certifying these individuals quickly and effectively becomes a critical business strategy. Given that these employees may rarely travel outside their immediate work proximity, this also becomes a corporate challenge. Effectively training and certifying employees in-house or in partnership with other constituents - rather than sanctioning formal education agencies - allows the company or organization to respond rapidly to volatility and changes in the marketplace in order to quickly design, develop, produce, and market products in order to meet consumer demands. Imagine a technology company who produces and launches a new mobile operating system or new mobile applications every few months. They must train and certify programmers spread across the globe in a matter of weeks - not months or years.

ADDRESSING CRITICAL WORKFORCE TRAINING

According to a report from telework.gov (2012):

…the most successful telework programs emphasized training and development for its workforce. The role of education and training should be emphasized and expanded in telework programs - particularly in relation to information technology, security procedures, and maintaining effective communications. Companies and organizations should assess the needs of teleworkers and incor-