



Case Study *December 2002*

Learning for Life Employee Literacy at Honeywell Limited

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

OVERVIEW

Learning plays a critical role at Honeywell Limited—it drives business success. Honeywell's desire and ability to learn faster and learn more than its competitors gives the company an advantage in the global marketplace. Through its commitment to workplace learning and developing literacy skills, Honeywell has become a highly productive and innovative organization. Developing talented and skilled people, linking learning to results and personal development, and creating an environment where learning is naturally built into working together have helped Honeywell achieve success.

Honeywell Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Honeywell Inc. Honeywell is a leader in controls technologies that enhance comfort, improve productivity, save energy, protect the environment, and increase

Effective practices case study in providing training and supporting workplace literacy

Name of Program

Learning for Life—Staying Contemporary at Honeywell

Date Established

1990

Skills Developed

- Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Team-building skills
- Technical and job-specific employability skills

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security and safety. Operating in Canada since 1930, Honeywell employs 2,800 people in more than 50 locations across Canada. Learning is a part of the corporate culture at Honeywell, and employees are expected to complete at least 40 hours of training each year. Learning keeps Honeywell employees contemporary, so that they can apply the latest practices and techniques within their jobs, while giving them lifelong abilities. Honeywell employees want to improve their skills; they demand career development and they like to learn.

This case study looks at Honeywell's Scarborough factory and its Learning for Life workplace literacy program. The factory in Scarborough, Ontario, employs 400 people and is a Honeywell Centre of Excellence in the production of valves and actuators.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Learning for Life program are:

- to build critical skills and knowledge in all employees;
- to accelerate learning and knowledge-sharing across organizational, global, and cultural boundaries; and
- to commit to values of total quality, and to build quality relationships with suppliers and customers.

TARGET GROUPS

- Recent hires and current employees

ACTIVITIES

At Honeywell, learning and work are synonymous. The preferred way to learn at the company is through challenging on-the-job work assignments—whether on the factory floor, at a work station, or in the field in collaboration with co-workers, supervisors, professional trainers, and "process improvement" coaches.

To further accelerate the company's learning and self-improvement culture, Honeywell offers:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) training—offered in cooperation with Humber College.
- Executive coursework opportunities at top universities.
- Classes in Six Sigma Plus strategy development and implementation, developed through the 1999 merger of AlliedSignal and Honeywell, both long-time leaders in applying modern methodologies to meeting customer needs. Through Six Sigma Plus,

Honeywell empowers its employees with the skills and tools necessary to create more value for its customers, improve its processes, products, and services, and grow the company, by capitalizing on the power of the Internet through e-business.

- Seven Habits training—effective habits for effective people, developed by Stephen Covey.
- Team-building and other self-improvement programs.
- Honeywell's Pathways program—a special "fast-track" program that attracts top MBA and advanced degree graduates and provides them with the practical skills and business acumen they need to take on leadership roles in the company quickly. Pathways participants demonstrate their leadership skills while working with top-level Honeywell leaders; they learn the key elements of Honeywell's total quality, business excellence, and Six Sigma Plus programs; they participate in learning activities that revolve around industry knowledge and business skills; they benefit from mentoring; and, they receive regular feedback, via performance reviews, from program supervisors.
- Rigorous, in-house, evaluation processes that measures employee achievement based, in part, on fulfillment of educational goals.

LEARNING FOR LIFE PROGRAM

One of the most successful literacy programs at Honeywell's Scarborough factory has been its Learning for Life program. Developed in 1990, Learning for Life offers employees the opportunity to enhance their skills and knowledge and to be more productive and innovative participants within the company's ever-changing work environment. Focused on the use of emerging technologies in the workplace, and the implementation and adaptation of new work processes and structures, the Learning for Life program offers employees fundamental employability skills at various levels, as well as basic courses like English as a Second Language, Mathematics, and Learning to Learn. Today, the program has expanded to include community college level courses, at the request of employees registered in the Learning for Life Program. It includes courses in personal computing, business writing, personal finance, interpersonal skills, public speaking, law, French, and Spanish. Business courses, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Production and Inventory Control are also offered.

RESOURCES

The Learning for Life program is a voluntary education initiative held immediately after working hours at the Scarborough factory. Courses are taken on the employee's own time (immediately after work), but are fully funded by Honeywell.

OTHER RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- Classrooms dedicated to training
- Class instructors, training facilitators, and guest lecturers

INNOVATIONS

Initially, the Learning for Life program relied on instructors from the Scarborough Board of Education and the Toronto Metro Labour Board. However, in 1994, Honeywell established a partnership with Humber Community College to deliver the courses, using their professional instructors in classrooms at the factory site.

Other innovative approaches used by Honeywell in the Learning for Life program include:

- Soliciting ideas from employees on possible course offerings.
- Having employees take courses on their own time, with full funding from Honeywell.
- Holding classes immediately after work, in on-site classrooms.
- Introducing, in 1997, the opportunity for students to attain Grade 12 equivalency through the General Educational Development Tests (GED).

BARRIERS

- Time, money, and content focus restrict the literacy programs Honeywell offers to its employees.
- Another barrier is that employees often find it difficult to commit to the training program. The day-to-day pressures of work and life outside work often limit the time that the company and employees can devote to the Learning for Life program.
- Ensuring that the content reflects the strategic needs and growth areas of the organization is something that Honeywell must monitor, to maximize the return on its workplace literacy investment.

Although the costs associated with designing, running, and maintaining the Learning for Life program are fairly high, Honeywell regards the investment in its people as an investment in the company.

SOLUTIONS/KEYS TO SUCCESS

- The program is designed to meet the learning needs of employees, as well as the needs of the company.
- Employees and their union (CAW Local 80) support the learning programs.
- All levels of the company support the workplace literacy program.
- Honeywell does what it takes to make the learning process readily accessible and available.
- Individual lessons mirror the short- and long-term needs of the company.

OUTCOMES

Honeywell has gained considerably from its investment and commitment to the Learning for Life program. Some of the outcomes include:

- Employees are empowered to suggest ways to increase productivity and improve the quality of products, and to implement their suggestions.
- Employee and company morale have improved.
- The relationship between Honeywell and the union is more of a partnership.
- The working environment is a positive, empowered one.
- Employees are more accountable for their own actions and quality assurances. They now take responsibility for an entire product and process, and are accountable for the quality of their work, with no policing by inspectors.
- Employees are educated, multi-skilled, and self-directed workers.
- Employees have the opportunity and wherewithal to suggest and implement improvements in cost, quality, and delivery.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

There have been huge productivity gains at Honeywell, through improving employee skills and restructuring the organization to produce more of a team environment. Here are some of the results:

- Factory throughput is up by 180 per cent.
- Product quality is up by 92 per cent.

- Cycle times have improved by 98 per cent.
- Time lost, due to accidents, has dropped by 70 per cent.
- Absenteeism rates are down by 54 per cent.

USE AS A MODEL

The Learning for Life program, coupled with other in-house training programs, contributes greatly to the competitiveness of Honeywell's Scarborough factory.

Companies seeking to improve their quality, productivity, and employee work ethic may wish to consider using this example as a benchmark for their own development plans. Honeywell's focus on learning benefits not only the company, but also the individual employee.

Our thanks to Joe Baker, and others at Honeywell, who provided comment and resources.

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, resource requirements, achievements and outcomes, benefits, innovations, and keys to success and challenges.

This case study is one of a series addressing workplace literacy and basic skills development. The series is part of the *Overcoming Barriers* research project on workplace literacy being undertaken by The Conference Board of Canada and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada.

Learning for Life—Employee Literacy at Honeywell Limited
by *Doug Watt*

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