INTRODUCTION TO INTERNET WORK

Case: News service

LAHTI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
Degree programme in International Business Orientation
Thesis
Autumn 2010
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KEMPPAINEN, ANTTI-JUSSI : Introduction to internet work
Case: News service

Thesis in Human resource management orientation, 45 pages

Autumn 2010

ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on introduction to work in an electronic environment and it aims to provide information on the current methods used in the case company and also improvements that should be implemented to improve the introduction process.
The methods used were theoretical background from literature and the practical background from the work author did for the target company. Thesis is conducted as a primary source research.

The original introduction process had several shortcomings. The main one was the lack of start level evaluation. In the developed version the each new employee are taken as individuals with different levels of skill.
The following improvements are the main results of this thesis. The start level evaluation for new employees, more defined structure on the process of introduction and clear steps to create midway goals for the process. Also proposals for the further development of the process are included.

Keywords: E-work, electronic work, web based learning,

Lahden ammattikorkeakoulu
Koulutusohjelma

KEMPPAINEN, ANTTI-JUSSI: Introduction to internet work
Case: News service

Kansainvälisenkaupan koulutusohjelma, 45 sivua

Syksy 2010

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä opinnäytetyö keskittyy työhön perehdyttämiseen sähköisessä toimintaympäristössä. Tarkoituksena on tarjota tietoa case -yrityksen nykyisistä toimintamalleista ja esittää parannusehdotuksia joilla voidaan parantaa perehdyttämisprosessia.

Käytetyt metodit olivat kvalitatiivisia, sisältäen teoriapohjaa kirjallisuudesta ja käytännön pohjaa itse työstä. Kirjoittaja suoritti työharjoittelunsa case -yritykselle.

Alkuperäisessä perehdyttämisprosessissa oli useita ongelmakohtia, näistä suurimpana työntekijän alkutietojen arviointi. Kehitetyssä versiossa jokainen uusi työntekijä huomioidaan yksilönä joilla kaikilla on eri alkutiedot.

Seuraavat parannukset ja parannusehdotukset ovat opinnäytetyön tärkeimmät tulokset. Jokaisen uuden työntekijän alkutiedot arvioidaan yksilöllisesti ja perehdyttämisprosessin rakenteen kehitys ja selkeytys sekä selkeät välitavoitteet prosessille. Lisäksi opinnäytetyö sisältää ehdotuksia tulevia tutkimuksia varten.

Avainsanat: Sähköinen työnteko, oppiminen sähköisessä ympäristössä, etätyö

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

This thesis aims to provide basis for new employee introduction in a company that operates in an internet environment, specially focusing on a company dealing with news services. These objectives are reached with the help of theoretical and practical means.

The company providing the basis for this thesis by supplying practical training place for the author is the case company. The company is a producer of internet services. This thesis focuses on the still under-development site which offers news services on a worldwide basis.

To clarify the thesis subject, news service as a word needs to be explained. These types of internet news services are called information aggregation services. “Information aggregation is a service that gathers relevant information from multiple sources to provide convenience and add value by analyzing the aggregated information for specific objectives using Internet technologies (Hongwei, Z. et all. 2001).”

In information aggregation the service does not generate new content, news or etc. themselves but merely takes the existing information and reorganizes it into a form that is suitable for the service.
In this thesis the phrase ”news service” is more descriptive of the end product and is thus used.

1.2 OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

In the thesis the author aims to provide a look into the introduction of new employees in an internet environment. The end result will be a guide that will help the reader to better understand the challenges that are present when work, and moreover the introduction to this work, is done in an entirely electronic environment.
Especially the end result will benefit the case company. For them it provides a look at a subject that is new to the company and needs development.

Main research question is to bring out the challenges that the supervisor or other foreman faces when engaging in an internet work.
Main sub questions under the main research question are the following:

-How does learning differ between the conventional office environment and the internet-based working environment?
-How does the supervisor give feedback and keep up employee motivation?
-How can the supervisor be certain that the new employee has understood the operating models and practices of the work?
-What does the supervisor need to take into account so that the introduction starts from a level suitable for the individual employee?

The findings presented in this study are based on internet work carried out by the author and on theoretical sources. This thesis is limited to providing answers, questions and insight to internet based work.

1.3 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Theory includes the two parts. The first one defines the introduction itself and learning process that is tied with that. Second consists of information on the specific tools and methods used on internet work. On the aggregation of information and especially news services the written sources are scarce. In electronic form, most of sources covered aggregation in general not in relation to news services.

The main source of information for the theoretical part was a selection of books on the topic. Also electronic sources where used, which included internet sources and the company documentation. Main source for practical information was observation.

1.4 METHODS

The authors methods can be divided into two categories: theoretical and practical. The theoretical part consists of study of theoretical sources both in paper and electronic form.

Practical part consists of the activities the author has executed as the Content Manager for the News Service. From beginning of April until the end of June.

Research methods are qualitative as human resources are a science of qualitative nature. The sample size is small and background practical information is collected from one source; author. Naturally, the theoretical sources are more diverse.

1.5 STRUCTURE

The structure of this thesis consists of theoretical and practical part. First there is the description of the theories used and the explanations of those theories
In between these parts there is a closer look at the company at hand. The practical part consists of the findings done by the author while in practical training. The theories are then connected to the practical findings done by the author.
The conclusion at the end the different parts of this thesis are brought together to give the answers for the research questions presented in the sub chapter 1.2.

LEARNING PROCESS AND INTRODUCTION TO WORK

2.1 DEFINITION OF INTRODUCTION

For the beginning introduction as a word needs to be defined. By the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) introduction is:
“the act of bringing something into use or existence for the first time”.
By this definition the introduction phase of work can be also called a preliminary learning phase because in this first phase the employee learns the majority of the concepts that are needed to start the work, and preliminary because the act of learning continues throughout the work.

2.2 LEARNING CYCLE

Learning is the basis from which all activities of introduction sprout from. Thus to give definition to learning a quote by Peter Senge (1990):
“Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life.” (Megginson 1999, 55)

In the process of introduction that was the basis for this thesis the author used the learning-cycle model.

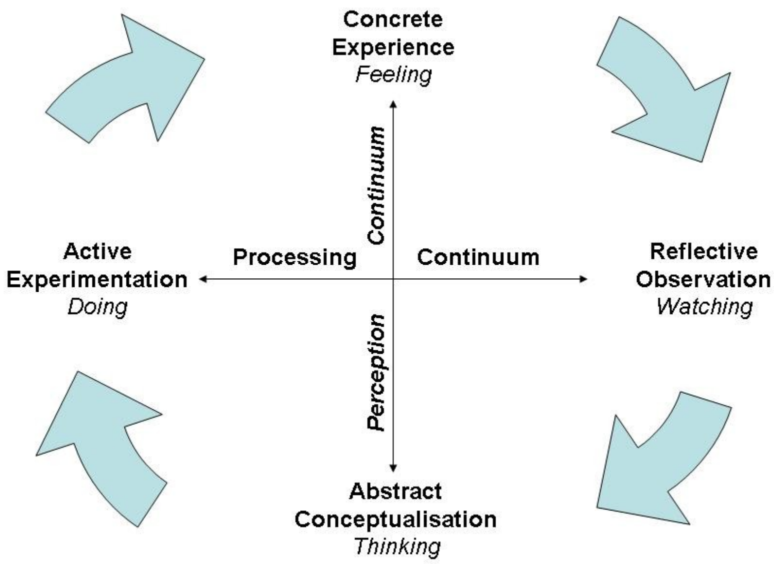

Figure1: Learning Cycle. (Clark, D. R. 2004)

Concrete experience consists of the actual experiences that the employee has had prior to the current work. But also the experiences acquired during the introduction phase as the learning-cycle is ever continuing process (Clark, D. R. 2004).

In reflective observation the employee follows the introduction and takes in the information. In this phase the foundation in which the previously learned and newly introduced is combined.
Thinking though the absorbed information is called abstract conceptualization. This connects to the experience by adding more to the experience gained (Clark, D. R. 2004).

The tools needed to break down the observations are gained by experience thus linking the two opposites even more profoundly.
Finally in the active experimentation part of the learning-cycle the employee acts according the mix of newly learned skills combined with the employee's previous experience. Thus gaining even more experience.
This also enhances the observations as the executed actions either support or contradict with the observations (Clark, D. R. 2004).

2.3 LEARNING PROCESS

The other theory behind the learning experience used in the Company is straightforward concept of Stimulus → Response → Reinforcement. This is a "*relationship, where behavior is shaped and maintained by its consequences." (Megginson 1999, 68)*
Through reinforcement the employee receives feedback needed to perform the task better. Through the feedback that can be seen as better performance the employee is also motivated as the tasks are easier with more information and the goals easier to reach.

In the following sub chapters on learning, the learning is described as a cognitive process which has a clear start and finish and a clear and straight path that is followed.
It must be remembered that learning seldom is a process that always follows the same paths. Even the end results may vary between different teachers and pupils although the subject of learning is the same (Alamäki et all. 2002, 96-97).

Thus it is important to remember silent learning as a method to convey information on the subtle nuances that together form the social knowledge of the work, task and the workplace.
Through silent learning the people learn the everyday methods of interaction and the tiny details which ensure smooth operation of the company's social communication (Alamäki et all. 2002, 96-97).

2.4 INFORMATION OVERLOAD

During the introduction or preliminary learning phase the employee is bombarded with a vast amount of information concerning the company itself, its policies and above all about the requirements of the work and of the work itself.

Thus "*it's no wonder that new employees fail to absorb all of the important information. New and stressful situations aren't always the best place to listening and learning, and HRM realizes that although new employees may appear to absorb a lot, important information should be follow up with written reminders.*" (DeCenzo 2010, 188-195)

There are several possible mediums to convey the important information. Written guides are the most traditional but their creation places HRM in a difficult situation. Thus there is couple of questions the HRM manager needs to answer. First, what of the information should be written? And how is this decided? Just by mere feeling or is there some theoretical basis for the selections (DeCenzo 2010, 188-195).

Second, where to draw the line when it comes to the size of the written guide. Too much text and the guide loses its function as no one uses it and too little information only raises more questions which the guide cannot answer. Although employee should always be encouraged to ask questions, a guide that raises more questions than it answers give the employee an uncertain picture of the company. “How should I be able do my job if the management does not know what they want me to do?”
(DeCenzo 2010, 188-195)

Bulletins that convey the same message as guides but in a more compacted form can also be used, whether in an electronic form as email or in a bulletin board messages for all the company to see.

Usually these types of bulletin boards are used in labor intensive sectors where it is cost effective to place bulletin boards to the main walkways of the employees.

From there they are for all to see and fast to glance through. But like guides, bulletins also have their limitations. First rising from their inherit nature, a bulletin is a short message about important news. Thus the news must be crucial, in either case the employees are bombarded with bulletins that are not important and the important ones get lost in the mass. And thus make the employees ignorant about them (DeCenzo 2010, 188-195).

Weekly or monthly newsletters can be also used but the use of them as an introductory tool for a new work is inadvisable as they cover the result of last weeks or months work and glance into the coming week or month. In this sense they are similar to bulletins as they present important information in simple and concise form. In general weekly or monthly reports show the key figures of production or sales and the budgeted figures for the coming period (DeCenzo 2010, 188-195).

2.5 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The process of introduction goes through the same learning-cycle process as the employee during the introduction. This continues constantly to ensure that the introduction process meets the requirements of the ever changing and developing company it serves.
Thus during the introduction process the superior or peer giving the introduction be it in a traditional office environment or in a more modern internet environment faces the same steps as the new employee (DeCenzo 2010, 188-195).

By introducing a subject or a work activity to a person previously unfamiliar with the subject can and should the person in charge learn from the process at hand or from the work introduced.

If the person in charge finds that there are no possibilities to learn new points on the process of introduction or the work introduced should the person in charge re-evaluate the situation. The main reasons behind the lack of learning are the lack of ambition and/or lack of interest. These are important questions which the person in charge should take seriously and act accordingly (DeCenzo 2010, 188-195).

The motivation of the superiors or the persons in charge, although important matter in any field of business, are not the key issues, nor the focus in this thesis but raise important questions for future research.

3 INTRODUCTION TO INTERNET WORK

3.1 SPECIAL FEATURES OF INTERNET WORK

3.1.1 Forms of internet work

While this thesis focuses on internet based work the following chapter describes the different forms of telecommuting work. Although internet work can be used to describe several forms of remote work in case the phrase telecommuting work has to be used.

Telecommuting work can be divided into four main categories.
-Work that is done partially or entirely in the home of the employee or in some other location selected by the employee.
-Work done in telecommuting centers.
-Mobile telecommuting
-Self-employed (Helle, 2004. 49-55).

When talking about telecommuting work what is usually meant is the first of the definitions. This is where the employee works from home or any other place of the employees choosing. The quantity of telecommuting work varies as the employees might also perform portion of their work at the actual offices of the company.

Telecommuting centers provide office spaces for people from different companies performing telecommuting work. The offices provide personnel place to work without interruptions, if the employees home does not provide suitable office space (Helle, 2004. 49-55).

Centers also provide room for interaction between personnel which is especially important for persons conducting large portion of their work without face-to-face contacts (Helle, 2004. 49-55).

Mobile telecommuting is the work performed on the commute to and from work and/or the work performed outside of offices during the work day. In these types of situations the employee uses the office as a base where to head out to meetings with clients but also performs the work at the office. The ratio for the work between mobile and traditional office work varies between companies and employees and also on a day to day basis (Helle, 2004. 49-55).

The work performed on commute to and from work can be in some cases calculated to be part of the work day and thus enable for the company to employ personnel further away. For example an employee traveling from Lahti to Helsinki daily could use all in all hour and a half of the commute time to perform work and thus shorten the time spent at the offices. This keeps the work day a reasonable length although the distance to work is great.
The self-employed persons include freelancers and different types of consults who sell their expertise and work but seldom have more employees but themselves. They work in a similar fashion than the so called normal telecommuters (Helle, 2004. 49-55).

From this point onward the phrase internet work is used as it is more suitable for the subject matter of this thesis.

3.1.2 International aspects

In a modern internet work environment which focuses more and more on internationalization, the management needs good language skills and tools to manage personnel around the world.
The differences in language, culture and ways of practicing business form an entity which cannot be handled in separate portions but a one multifunctional whole (Humala 2007, 143-147).

The main challenge of managing people and teams around the world is the a fore mentioned differences in cultural aspects. The cultural differences that need to be taken into account are still there although the personnel managed are not seen. Subordinates still have their preconceptions on the Finnish manager and vice verse.

It is crucially important for the manager to identify the differences that can be used to gain more from the interaction and thus bring more value to the activity. On the other hand the differences which, if handled poorly, pose an obstacle to the entire interaction must as well be identified and dealt with (Humala 2007, 143-147).

Important thing to remember is that these aspects are usually the same and the end result is based on the management's abilities to harness the differences in culture to produce more value instead compromising the entire operation because of hurt feelings and misunderstandings (Humala 2007, 143-147).

The cultural aspect include:
-The different expectations of efficient team behavior and different communication styles.

-Culturally different management styles.
-The quality of language used.
-The cultural identity of each member of the team and the level of which each member acts as their cultural norms state (Humala 2007, 143-147).

Organizational aspects bring an addition to the culture in the form of work culture that the employees have had and accumulated from their previous workplaces. Thus it is unique to each of the personnel.
The organizational differences include:
-The position of different cultures in the organization. Where do the managers come from and the stereotypical assumptions of the managers by the employees and vice versa.
-The geographical location of each employee.
-The differences in professions. An engineer versus a manager of sales.
(Humala 2007, 143-147)

The combination of the different cultural and organizational factors requires that all of the participants, be it managers or employees, function well together.
All of the members of the team must be made aware of the differences and the challenges that they bring so that the differences can be turned into a asset instead of them forming a barrier to daily operations and development of the company (Humala 2007, 143-147).

3.1.3 Tools of internet work

The tools used to perform internet work can be divided into two categories: communication and the work activities themselves.

The tools used for communication:
-Email.
-VoIP services.
-Instant messaging.
-Telephone.
-Mail.

Email is used to inform personnel on the larger changes and deliver tasks. Its nature varies with the contents and the relationship of the sender and receiver. The employees can have several email accounts, usually one that is the company's own email and another personal email.
Voice of Internet Protocol services such as Skype able people to contact each other around the world with no costs. VoIP services also have an instant messaging feature to chat with personnel online. This feature is also available in some of the email services, such as Google's Gmail.

Some bigger companies use their own internal network to relay phone calls made from outside of the network to VoIP services. This enables the company to have greater security on the connections and a cost benefit over the regular phone calls (Lattanzi 2006, 97).

Telephone is still used to contact people instantly and receive instant answers to questions that inhibit the progress of the work.
But as mentioned above the calls can be redirected and used to several different actions. Regular mail and courier services deliver the important documents that need to be in paper form (Lattanzi 2006, 97).

The tools used for the work itself vary greatly according the work performed. Person in charge of the company's finances has a completely different set of tools than the person responsible for designing marketing brochures. Thus it is not beneficial to study those more closely in this thesis.

3.2 FEEDBACK AND MOTIVATION

In the following chapter the feedback and motivational methods are explained in more detail. As well as the reasoning behind them.

3.2.1 Feedback

In any work environment the feedback should be direct and it should include positive and negative aspects of the results. The main purpose of feedback include:
-rewarding – reinforcing the positive activity/behavior
-informing – providing information and support
-motivating – supporting and encourage to continue on the current track
-guiding – keeping the actions and behavior on the right direction
-teaching – guiding improvement (Humala 2007, 45)

Feedback gives one of the two main basis for the learning process as pictured in chapter 2.3.

In the internet environment the importance of feedback grows as the important part of the conventional communication, that are, facial expressions are not seen. To convey feedback and the feelings tied to these the feedback should always be clear and concise.

Otherwise the feelings and gestures are hidden and do not convey to the employees (Humala 2007, 46-47).
As the communication is open in both directions, the feedback can and should be part of the everyday communication in a similar way as it is in an office environment. This means that the communication with the employee is both constant and spontaneous. When the spontaneous communication is impossible, that is, outside office hours, the feedback should be given in the form of advices. On the other hand the giving of feedback can and should be clearly separated from the communication process so that the superior and the employee can clearly concentrate on the feedback itself and thus learn from it (Humala 2007, 46-47).

Especially the negative feedback should always be given face-to-face. As this is almost impossible in an internet environment the feedback should be private and given in a situation preserved for the feedback.
While giving negative feedback the points mentioned above should be remembered and the negative made into an educational process, not a situation where the employee’s shortcomings are the main focus (Humala 2007, 46-47).

The so called hamburger-model (Yli-Kokko 2005) in which the base or the bottom bread of feedback is the positive on to which the rest of the feedback is built on. The meat is the negative feedback in between the positives as the top bread gives the employee support and encouragement to continue onward despite the negative feedback as it is there to teach, not to punish.
When giving feedback, and be it in any type of communication situation, the superior and the subordinate should remember that openness and honesty in communication are the cornerstones on to which all good communication and thus also good feedback are build on (Humala 2007, 46-47).

3.2.2 Motivation

Motivation is first and foremost an endogenous process, but in this process the influences from outside can make the difference between success and failure. The things that motivate people in the office environment are exactly the same as in the internet environment, as the people and their needs as humans do not change while the medium changes. These motivational things include:
-the interest towards the task/goal
-opportunity to succeed in the task
-the joy of work itself
-positive attitude (Humala 2007, 38-39)

Through internet work the employee has more control over their actions and timetables. Although the basic motivational lines are the same as in the office environment has the internet worker the greater control over the large portion of the actual execution of the work. This itself is a great asset (opm.gov, 2006).

To motivate people well in an internet environment the superior needs to upkeep a constant dialog with the employees. Even more so in electronic environment than in the office as the feelings and attitudes conveyed by facial expression and body language are not visible.
The constant dialog and interaction are the tools that the superior uses to communicate with and inspire the employees. This also makes possible the splitting of the one grand goal into smaller and more tangible ones. The splitting of goals into more defined portions is one of the ways for the superior to control the entity as a whole (Humala 2007, 38-39).

The small portions also give the employees goals that are easily reached. This is even more important in the internet environment than in the office as in the office the common goal can be seen or communicated during coffee conversations or in daily meetings (Humala 2007, 38-39).

4 CASE COMPANY AND INTRODUCTION TO WORK IN CASE COMPANY

4.1 CASE COMPANY

The case company was founded in thelate 90's and specializes in producing internet services. The company headquarters are located in the city of Oulu. At their offices works administrative staff and management that handle the daily operations of the company.

The products the company offers are produced in an electronic environment aiming the internet user. Thus the company uses network work in all of its activities, from communication between employees to delivering and receiving work assignments.
Large portion of the workforce are students performing their practical training or earning some extra for their studies. Thus the main bulk of the workforce is basically free for the company.

All of the services are advertisement funded and thus free for the end user to use. At the moment the company operates one and develops two new services.

4.2 NEWS SERVICE

The news service that will operate on a global base. The service collects news from national and international sources and connects them usually to their country of origin but also connects international news to the country in question.

The service consists of country specific sites which have different language sites. At least the main official language is used and in most cases there is also English language site.

The service does not generate news on their own but collects news from different sources and then organizes them to country specific whole.
The specific news themselves are not collected but the feeds that the source pages generate.

These RSS or Atom feeds are then added to the system, and then the system automatically updates the service page when the source feeds are updated.

4.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

The following chapter is based own authors own experiences of the work and the processes involved.

The employees' work consists of three main activities. First one is checking of existing feeds, updating them if necessary, removing corrupt ones and adding new ones. The feeds have clearly stated requirements they must meet so that they qualify for the service.

Second the checking of the public side of the service to ensure the service meets the standards required. And thirdly keeping a journal of the changes made to the system. The activities as a whole are described as information processing.

The work is independent and performed entirely in an electronic environment. The employees use three main sites in their work. There is a project management site which performs as source for tasks and as a server where the backups are uploaded. Secondly there is an hour tracking site and thirdly the service itself.

The following describes the process as it was when author started his practical training.

4.4 STEPS OF INTRODUCTION PROCESS

The introduction process as a process was relatively crude when the author started. It consisted of three parts as seen in the Figure 2.

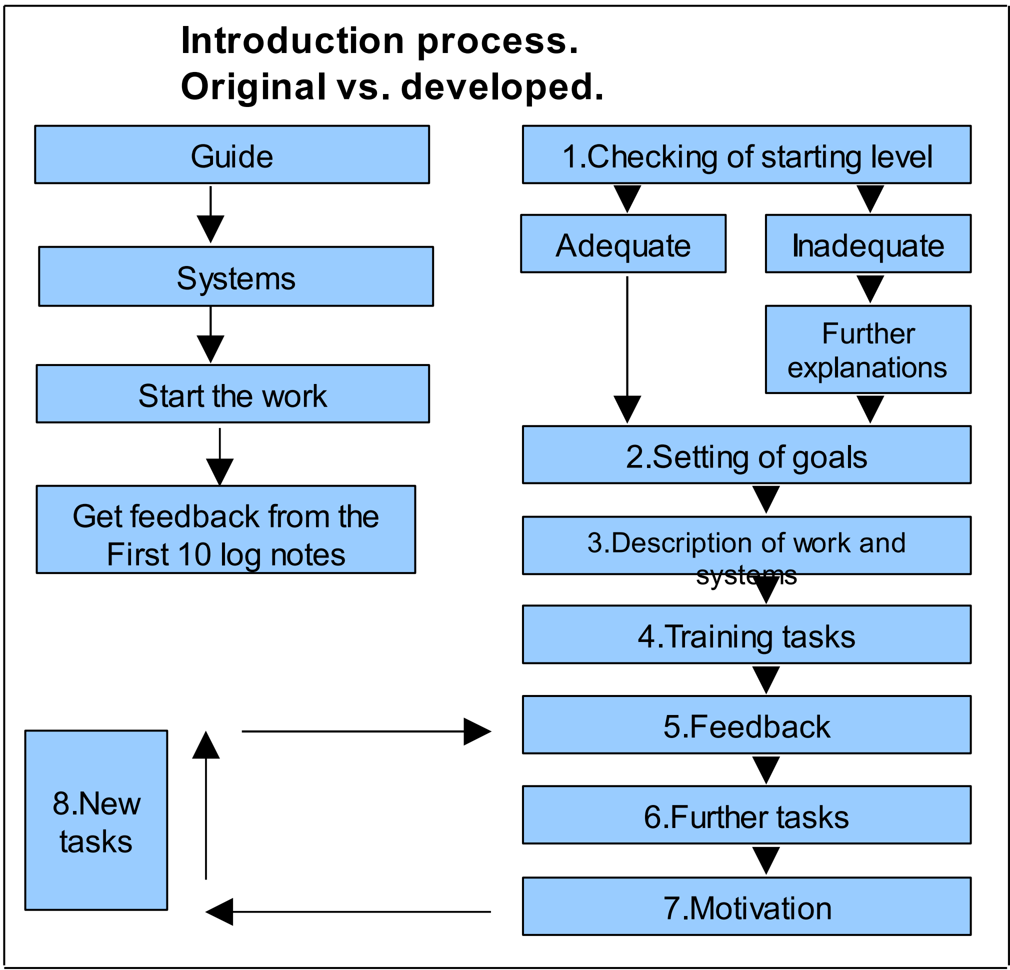

Figure2: Introduction process. Original vs. developed.

First the new employee read through the content guide of the service. The guide explained what the service was about. The main bulk of the content guide was the description of what kind of content there should be and in what order with information on the work practices.
After the new employee had read the content guide the superior would explain the systems used. With the systems author found that the explanations given were general and aimed for more technically oriented person.
MyHours.com was covered reasonably well but the project management site received little attention considering the importance it played.

After the short look at the systems the employee started to check the feeds. For a person not that familiar with the internet technologies the starting would be difficult. This was the case for the author.

The superior provides assistance for the first feeds to make sure that the employee understood the main idea.
After which the employee continued checking the feeds until 10 or so log notes were completed.
After the superior has checked the log notes the employee had just made would the superior then give the employee feedback on the notes. Both of the actions made which are of main importance but also on the appearance of the log.If there where corrections needing to be done the employee would make them and then continue own with the task. The superior would then later on check that the corrections were made right and that the process was developing and advancing according to the given guidelines and parameters.

4.5 TOOLS FOR THE SUPERIOR AND SUBORDINATE

The main tools for the superior and the subordinate were Google Chrome, Apple Safari, Skype, Email and Notepad.

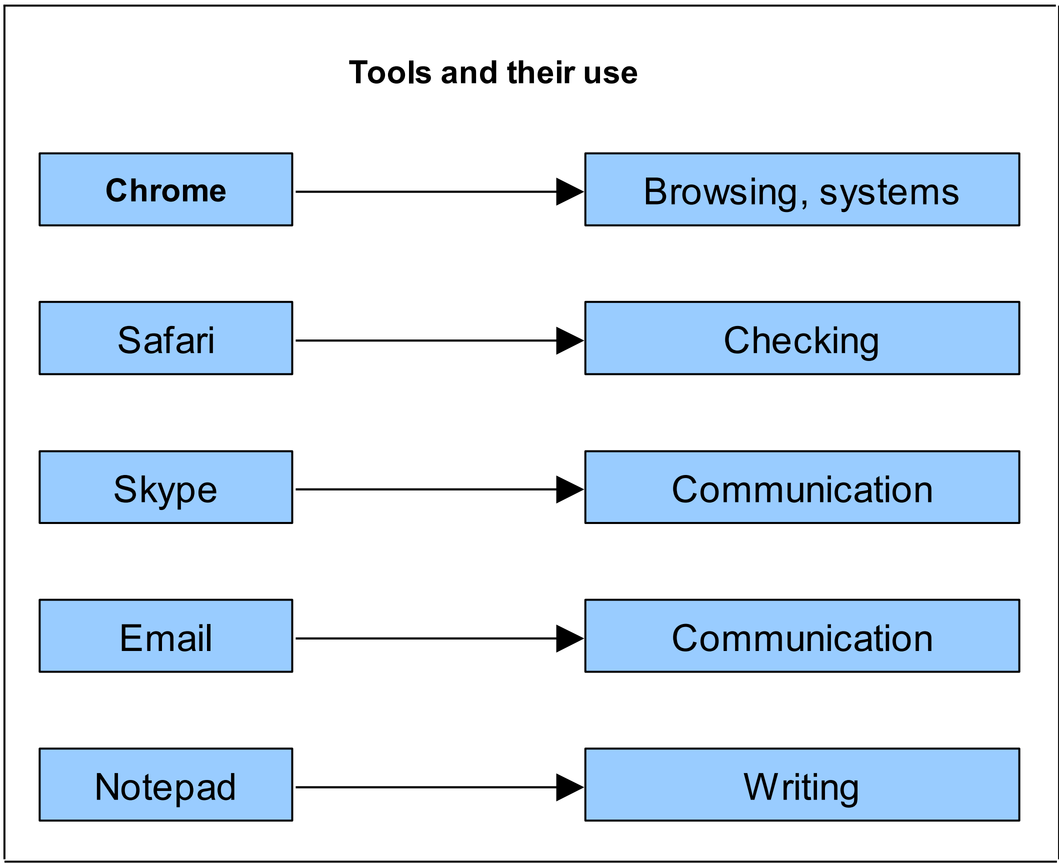

Figure3: Tools and their use

Google Chrome and Apple Safari are used for browsing the sites and accessing the systems. Chrome is used as it is shows the code of the RSS -feeds and not the actual XML site. This enables faster work as the source information can be seen from the code with one glance without having to check all of the individual news from the feed.

Google Chrome is as a program easier to use, less prone to crash than the main competitors and is has a translator inbuilt.
Safari on the other hand is used to check the appearance of the site. Safari shows errors well and thus is ideal for quality control.
As internet tools there were the services main system, project management site and an hour tracking site called MyHours.com.

Through MyHours the superior can access the notes and timetables of the employees to check their progress.
Project management site provided a portal for the employees. To this portal the employees would upload their log files and other documents related to the company. From the project management site the employees could also check the log files of other persons to see the comments of the superiors and thus develop their actions through those.
Different new projects where available from the project management site.

The Skype is used as the basis for communication as the program has both an instant messaging service and a VoIP -service. The program is available for multiple platforms and it is free to download and in its basic form also free to use.
Email is used to convey important but not urgent information.

Mainly used to inform about password modifications and to collect information from the employees. For example the author used email to collect MyHours.com data from the employees to form a table of their activities.

4.6 FEEDBACK

The superiors checked the logs the employees made and checked the modifications and editions from them. This is similar to the actions described in 4.4.

As the required actions for different flaws and additions were noted in the content guide the employees had a basic help available at all times. The superiors made sure the actions were according to the guidelines given.
The superiors noted their comments to the files and then the employee made the required modifications and naturally asked explanations from the supervisor if needed.

EXPERIENCES OF INTRODUCTION TO WORK IN CASE COMPANY

In the following sub chapters the original and the new version of the introduction process are compared and explained. This chapter focuses on the new version. The original version is depicted in the chapter 5.

While working for the case company the author first performed the task of information processing as described in 5.1. After getting familiar with the tasks, the authors commenced on teaching new employees. These introductions and the guides done on the base of the information gained from the introductions are the basis of this thesis, as mentioned before.

5.1 FINDINGS

As we can see from the figure 2 and from 4.4 the original introduction process was a to-the-point view of an introduction with a low degree of variability.
The developed version the process comprises of more components, as seen in figure 2, but not because more is better, but out of necessity, to ensure that the employee's meet the standards required. When talking about the quality of work and the speed of which it is performed, must the employees have a common starting place for their jobs.

5.1.1 Starting level and goals of the introduction

The next sub chapter focuses on the points 1 and 2 on the figure 3.
The introduction process started with the author first finding a common level of understanding. This happened with the help of couple of questions:

1. What is your idea of this work? What do you think you will be doing?
2. What background do you have? IT or business?
3. Have you read the content guide for the work? Any questions about it?

The answers for these questions varied between the employee knowing nothing of the work to be done and having almost no knowledge on how to perform the task to the future IT-engineers with a high enough skill level needed to create the entire system from bricks if needed.
For these employees the point two was skipped over so that they would not feel bored over matters already familiar and also to speed up the entire process.

In some cases the employee had understood the job requirements correctly by reading the content guide and were more than familiar with internet based programs and services thus the employee jumped to point four and started the feed checking straight away.

The questions gave the author a clear starting point from which to start from. Most employees needed some assistance to grasp the idea of the work, not that the concept was difficult, but in their simplicity the tasks seemed too easy. And thus some new employees felt like they did not understand them fully.

It is important to notice that the tasks were described in this point only in theory, not through actual assignments. These will come in the point 3.

The actual goal setting of the point two was in most cases integrated into the answers the author gave to the employees who did not have that must experience on the subject matter. This is something that could be improved as it would help the employee to better understand an unfamiliar subject matter when having a goal to aim for. The goal could be in the line of a skill level or possibly in the form of a greater level of independence on the selection of countries to work with.

Other important matter concerning the start is to remember to actually start from where the employee's skill level requires. In some cases author had difficulties in grasping from where to start and thus the process had to jump back and forward between the points of introduction thus disrupting the logically advancing process.

5.1.2 Description of work and systems.

The second main part of the introduction session included the description of tasks and the explanations of the work to be done. These varied considerably depending on the starting level of the employees.

Some of the employees had a technical background and their studies were tied directly to internet services and as mentioned in 5.1.1 they proceeded straight to point four. On the other hand some of the employees had very limited information and experience on internet based operations, outside of regular internet use.

The main task for the employees to perform was the checking of feeds in the system and adding new ones. Employees checked the feeds for operation, update time, validity and the overall quality of the news.

The same set of criteria applied for the new additions.
With the checking and adding the employees were required to log every change or addition made to the system.

The systems of the work of 4.5 were explained through showing them to the employee. The very first thing the employees did was to get familiar with MyHours.com. For most this was done by another person than the author and thus this part is left out.

The first system the author explained for the employees was the project management site. The employees downloaded log files to use them as examples and at the same time got familiar with the site itself.
After seeing the project management site the focus was turned on to the news service site itself. After receiving their identifications and passwords for the site the employees would get familiar with the outlook of the site and see the actual feeds themselves.
For most this proved out to be the introduction they needed and thus commenced with the training tasks. For some the different pages on the site would require detailed explanations.

On some cases the employee had difficulties understanding the task requirements. In these situations the employee and the author stepped back on the introduction process to find the point where the employee lost track of the process.

In most cases the difficulties for the employee to understand the job requirements and/or the systems became evident after the training task. The main reason for the understanding difficulties in most cases were language related, but in some cases also the differences in cultures caused misunderstandings.

These cultural differences became evident with employees from Asia. The reluctance of raising questions if one does not understand the described matter proved to be somewhat problematic at times, but never the less a valuable source from which to learn to acknowledge the differences. This also pointed out the fact that the introduction process can have a universal core, a sort of spine, but the muscles and nerves connecting to it have to be able to bend and vary in order to adjust to the individual differences.

5.1.3 Tasks as training tools

The point four on the introduction process included the first tasks a new employee was given. These tasks were the same as the actual work the employee were to perform.

The task given required the employee to start checking the feeds with the help of the criteria given and then make the correct modifications. After 10-20 log notes the employee informed the superior on the progress made.
To follow up on the employee's progress and to make sure the employee had understood the introduction correct, superior checked the log file together with the employee to make sure the employee understood the feedback. Feedback included the corrections on the mistakes that in most cases were due to misunderstandings and encouragement to continue on.

Whether the development was fast or slow the encouragement was important as it showed the employees that they had done their job well despite the mistakes.

5.1.4 Feedback and motivation

From the beginning learning was part of the introductions process. The learning goals are quite clear. This can be achieved because the learning goals meaning the tasks the trainee will do are quite simple. The description of tasks usually was enough information for the trainees to understand their tasks.

To aid in the reaching of the goals the finding of the common place to start proved out to be crucial. This enabled the author to start from the level suitable for the trainee. As mentioned in 2.2 the learning cycles concrete experience form the basis from which we learn new things. Thus it is important to know the starting level.
Also the fact that the employee can be bored and he or she can lose interest if the teaching is too easy or on the other hand to difficult.

The author found the availability of support important and a crucial point which should not be pruned but maintained and developed. The constant availability was crucially important in the starting phase of the training as the tasks although simple were new to the employee and the lack of written guidelines to the actual work could potentially hinder or even prevent progress.

The feedback given to the employees is very important as it forms basis for the reinforcement of the learning process as described in 2.3.

Feedback had two main ideas which varied in importance depending on the level of the employees skills. Feedback either taught and rewarded or just rewarded. Pointing out the mistakes and teaching of them together with the encouragement about the work done well can be considered the content in all cases. The difference in emphasis ensured that the message went through to the employee.
It is difficult to make clear differences between the actions concerning feedback as they are part of the same tree and although they can be looked as different branches is the basis still the same.

For Finnish people in general the feedback is assumed to be negative and thus for a Finnish manger the author also focused on giving positive feedback despite the fact that the author himself received very little feedback from the subordinates or from the COO.

5.3 DEVELOPING THE PROCESS

One crucially important place where development is needed is to have clear cut objectives for the learning. As mentioned in 5.1.1. although the structure and goals of the learning process now exist in the mind of the company heads and the superiors conducting the training should these main targets be in a written form to serve as a goal to which the introduction process aims to reach.
The development of the learning cycle would greatly benefit from the usage of oral communication. As mentioned in 5.3 most of the communication was conducted through VoIP services was the communication in written not in oral form.

The use of oral communication would make the conversations more natural and fluid. Naturally the levels of language skills between the employee and the superior play more crucial role in the oral communication than in the written.

This would of course challenge both superiors and employees to use as neutral and understandable language than its possible.

The cultural differences that would come across more and thus give more to the process as the differences would enrich and bring new perspectives to the same matter. And thus diminish, but entirely avoid the challenges different cultural backgrounds bring.

Through oral communication the employee’s reactions and the nuances of his/her voice tells to the superior if the employee has difficulties in understanding the subject or is the explained matter already familiar.

To combat the language and cultural misunderstandings a clear and concise written guide would benefit the process greatly.
Although author created the guidelines with the given parameters the guides still lack reflection and need further development.

Especially the description of the systems used should be emphasized more. Part of the guides given to the employees should contain a straightforward list of content and operations possible and obligatory for each system would help the process greatly.

The guides should include detailed descriptions of the buttons and functions the news service and project management sites have.

Equally important reason to have guides is the fact that to most of the employees there was too much information to comprehend and remember at once.

As described in 2.4 the information overload can be quite easily counteracted with the help of guides that explain the needed matters in a detailed but still compact way.

As a motivational tool the employer could use a reduction of hours required. For example when an employee is a swift but precise worker that produces above average results he/she could be rewarded with a 8-24 hour reduction of work time needed to finish the training.

The motivational side has greater challenges than the regular paid work. For the employee, finding the motivation for something that you must spend a great deal of time on and in some cases also a great deal of effort on without any salary can be extremely challenging.

The short period of work can work in two ways either rising of reducing the level of motivation. This is more people specific.

All in all the development of the introduction process should be a process itself, a constant and ever developing process.

SUMMARY

The basis and start point for this thesis process was the practical training done by the author in the spring and summer of 2010. During this training the author conducted introductions to people who were just starting their work for the case company. With the company's news service project, the employees worked with a internet news service. In the course of the introductions the author found that the process used to introduce the employees to the subject did not meet the requirements. As a result of this and as part of the job the author created a basis for the introduction process with the parameters issued by the case company. Creation of this guide for introduction process was the main aim of this thesis. This happened with the help of the following questions.

-How does learning differ between the conventional office environment and the internet one?
-How does the supervisor give feedback and keep up employee motivation?
-How can the supervisor be certain that the new employee has understood the operating models and practices of the work?
-What does the supervisor need to take into account so that the introduction starts from a level suitable for the individual employee?

The methods used were qualitative and based on both literature sources and on the authors own experiences working for the case company.

As mentioned before, the main objective was to offer a guide for the company for the introduction process. The author feels that this was met in some level but not in all.

The thesis points out weaknesses in start level evaluation and in taking into account cultural differences.
For these weaknesses there are also improvements available.

The main strong points are the entire start level evaluation, together with the entire step by step process. The usefulness of the step process was seen in the speed of introduction and in the limited number of misunderstandings.

The guide form the author aimed at was not met. The end result was a series of improvements, not a guide per se. Thus one of the goals was not met, but still the answers found are useful for the case company.

The level of detail was in some cases too limited, this lead to over-generalization. On the other hand the sources from the company were limited with the authors own activities being the main source of information, this lead to generalization as well.

The answers were given and the end result was a reflection on the present process with the suggested improvements for the future. Also new questions for future research emerged.

-A short questionnaire for the employees about the work and introduction.
-Development of the motivation. How to motivate persons working without pay?
-How should the development of the introduction process be organized?
-Does learning actually differ with the environment?

All in all the process of introduction improved throughout the course of the authors training. Mainly through trial and error, but nevertheless the end result was a guide that would form a new base from which to continue to develop the process of introduction and the whole superior – employee communication.

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Guides from the case company.

Interviews:

Interviews mean in this case the interactions between author and the mentioned persons.

Interviews with the case company COO

Conducted on multiple occasions between 6th of April and 2nd of July 2010.

Introduction sessions with 21 new employees.

Conducted between 23rd of April and 25th of June 2010.