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FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCEPTANCE AND RESISTANCE TO

ELEARNING IN SMALL- TO MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

BY

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A thesis submitted to the

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The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Athabasca University Governing Council for acceptance a thesis "FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCEPTANCE AND RESISTANCE TO ELEARNING IN SMALL- TO MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES" submitted by "LYNNE RABAK" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION.

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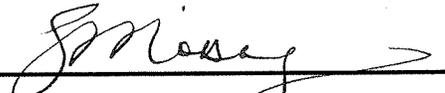
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Andre for his unwavering support of my efforts, his understanding of my need to achieve this milestone and most importantly for his love. To my children, Shannon, Garrin and Thomas who have patiently shared Mom with her studies over the years and whose love and affection have sustained me. May you all continue to enjoy and cherish the joy of learning throughout your lives.

ABSTRACT

The increased sophistication of telecommunications technology during the past decade, especially with the incorporation of the use of the Internet into the mainstream of Canadian society, has resulted in a convergence of focus for the training and business sectors. The purpose of this study was to investigate what influences acceptance and resistance to a corporate elearning initiative provided by X Company to its dealer network to identify the factors affecting participation. The research used a survey design to gather both qualitative (interview instrument) and quantitative (questionnaire instrument) data to examine the factors affecting learner interest in, and resistance to, training and elearning. The results provided insight into the attitudes and perceptions of X Company employees about the training and identified areas for further attention to facilitate a 'best practices' approach for increasing participation.

The research question explored was: "What barriers and enticers emerge regarding elearning in a group of employees offered an elearning training opportunity." Lewin's Force Field Theory was used to examine the driving and restraining forces that influence an individual's 'fields' and was used as the framework to apply the findings to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that supported or detracted from participation in this elearning initiative. Lewin suggests that consideration of what encourages learners to embrace new methods for learning is important but equally, the factors that cause resistance to learning must be thoroughly examined. If an employee, in this instance, is motivated to try new

methods of learning then participation will be high however, if they are resistant to learning their level of participation will be low.

Supporting factors for elearning in this study indicated appreciation for being provided with work related training, with increased product knowledge and stronger customer service skills that were formally recognized by the employer, being the others. Detractors which appeared to cause resistance were insufficient time to complete the lessons, insufficient coaching and support, incentives that did not hold meaning and, in some cases, lack of remuneration for lesson completion. Additional detractors were inadequate technology (server freezes, incompatible plug-ins, inaccessible links to testing, inability to access using dial-up connections) and no practical assessments of learning on the store floor after lessons were completed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

<u>Background</u>

The increased sophistication of telecommunications technology during the past decade, especially with the incorporation of the use of the Internet into the mainstream of Canadian society, has resulted in a convergence of focus for the training and business sectors. "Statistics Canada's 1999 workplace and employee survey found a relationship between rates of computer technology adoption and higher levels of computer-related training. Upgrades to technology drove computer-related training: 51 per cent of workplaces that adopted computer technology also provided formal or informal computer-related training." (Conference Board of Canada, 2001, p.5)

Canada's workforce development needs are concentrated on the new knowledge-based economy, business-to-business e-commerce and retaining a competitive advantage in the global economy. The new way business is conducted requires that work skills be continually upgraded through lifelong learning strategies that allow the work force to 'earn while it learns'. Training that uses the Internet as a delivery mechanism, typically called online learning, Web-based learning or elearning, is capable of meeting this requirement. Garrison and Anderson (2003) state that, "broadly defined, e-learning is networked on-line learning that takes place in a formal context and uses a range of multimedia technologies." (p. 2). Ally (2004)

suggests that it is difficult to define online learning since it is used interchangeably with several other terms including elearning and Web-based learning. His definition of online learning is, "the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience." (p.5). Rosenberg (2001) does not use online learning and elearning synonymously but rather defines online learning as 'an essential part of the total e-learning strategy' (p. 62).

There do not appear to be definitive definitions for the terms elearning, online learning and Web-based learning in the literature, leaving it unclear which is best to be used. For the purposes of this report, the working definition used for the term elearning is individual, self-paced Internet courses (learner/content interaction). Online learning indicates group-based instruction (three types of interaction – learner/learner, learner/content and learner/instructor) and Web-based learning describes characteristics of both.

With respect to workforce development, "elearning has the potential to increase the level and breadth of support by employers and the participation in workplace learning by employees". (Murray, 2001, p.5). The flexibility of this type of education and training can be especially appealing for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for several reasons. Benefits include:

- employees learn new skills without taking time off the worksite for training or upgrading

- the technology used for learning is the same as that used in day-to-day work activities therefore results in increased competence

- curriculum can be targeted to specific topics (modularized)

- flexibility - appropriate time and place (Just-In-Time learning with 24/7 access)

- can be individualized to the learner's needs

- centralized coordination but dispersed learning; doesn't require space on each learner's PC for access

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that, "46 per cent of small businesses are having difficulty finding qualified labour and there are 250,000 to 300,000 vacant jobs among this country's million or so small and medium-sized employers (Murray, 2001, p.4).

Canada's economy is being driven by small- and medium-sized enterprises, some of which recognize that the new knowledge-based, global economy requires today's workers to continually upgrade to keep the country competitive. With telecommunications technology prices having reached reasonable levels of affordability, smaller-sized businesses can now be equipped, on a lesser scale, with technology similar to that used by the large multinationals, increasing their competitive advantage. Additionally, this same technology provides access to the newest type of training opportunities, online learning. SMEs can benefit from the investment in and scalability of the elearning solutions developed by the larger corporations that have proven to be effective in staff development. Osgoode identifies that best practices typically centre on large multinational companies

however, "as the cost of technology and elearning solutions decrease, small and medium sized organizations have an opportunity to create their own effective practices", bearing further research. (2000, p. 15).

It appears that the concept of using online learning is catching on for a variety of reasons. This type of learning can provide more flexibility of access, as it is available 24/7, can be modularized to provide 'just-in-time' learning and uses the same technology as that used on the job. Elearning may be more affordable as well if, for instance, scalability is possible, materials are retained in electronic form and updated regularly and the cost of sending someone off the work site for training is prohibitive.

According to Murray, "while 47 per cent [of employers] currently use the Internet/Web-based training, 82 per cent indicated that they plan to use it."(2001, p.11) however, important factors in the equation for both employers and employees are the costs and benefits of elearning.

In Niagara, projections indicate that as many as 50,000 new workers will be required over the next 10 years to replace retiring workers and to fill new positions resulting from economic growth. Many local employers are already indicating that they are having difficulties with the skills gap (NETCorp, 2000). Research into the use of elearning by Niagara-based SMEs would be useful for providing strategic options for other area employers facing similar challenges. In some sectors, such as construction, the busiest time for operations is the tourist off-season (late fall, winter and early spring) to minimize the inconvenience and maximize the aesthetics of the area to visitors. This is typically the time when local college and adult learning

centres offer upgrading courses. For workers in this sector, elearning would bridge the training gap. Additionally, because of the seasonal nature of many sectors (agriculture, hospitality, and transportation/shipping), and overall staff shortages, employees may work longer hours each day in the busiest times. The 24/7availability of elearning would mean that the learner would have more flexibility in accessing their training when it suited their schedules. The Niagara region has a large rural component with fair distances to training centres – increasing costs for transportation and child care, not to mention up to a potential of two hours return trip travelling time – all disincentives for upgrading skills. Elearning could be a viable option for learners in this situation.

Statement of the Problem

Industry Canada, the federal government department with the mission of fostering a growing competitive, knowledge-based Canadian economy, is involved in research and support of initiatives that will keep Canada economically strong. This department has invested significantly in the collection of information about elearning and its viability as an option to ensure that the Canadian labour force remains globally competitive. The Advisory Committee for Online Learning, one Industry Canada funded project, recommends that elearning be the focus for delivery of skills-based training because of its relevance to the global market and its flexibility, availability and affordability.

The Committee's report states that, "Online learning will be central to fostering the lifelong learning culture that will be essential to sustaining a civil and prosperous society in 21st-century Canada. But these benefits will only be realized if

the quality and accessibility of the elearning experience are top priorities." (Advisory Committee for Online Learning, 2001, p. 28). An important factor to consider from the report's recommendations, and where research is lacking, is whether there is a clear understanding by employers in SMEs of the barriers and benefits of elearning, especially when investment in training typically consumes a larger proportion of the overall operational budget. It may not as affordable as the committee suggests. "SMEs employ 6 out of 10 working Canadians and have a huge overall impact on the economy. Yet current research on elearning for SMEs is limited." (Murray, 2001, p. 6).

<u>Research Question</u>

As innovative training methods or strategies such as elearning are developed, the enthusiasm and resulting hype about the benefits in order to 'sell' the product may overshadow the realities for effective implementation. There is no doubt that elearning is here to stay. However, employers need to be strategic in its implementation as there are many factors, including employee perception and motivation that can contribute to the success or failure of a corporate elearning strategy. Barriers to the successful implementation of a corporate elearning strategy have a direct impact on the benefits for employers therefore an examination of this area is essential "for optimum investment to be achieved." (Roffe, 2002, p.43).

Lewin's Field Theory examines the driving and restraining forces that influence an individual's 'fields', and identifies a multitude of interdependent factors that can influence behaviour. He suggests that consideration of what encourages learners to embrace new methods for learning is important but equally, the factors

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that cause resistance to learning must be thoroughly examined. If an individual is

resistant to learning it stands to reason that their level of participation will be low.

Conversely, the argument can be stated that 'the lower the level of resistance, the

higher the level of participation'. Figure 1 illustrates this concept.

Figure 1. Participation versus Resistance Paradigm
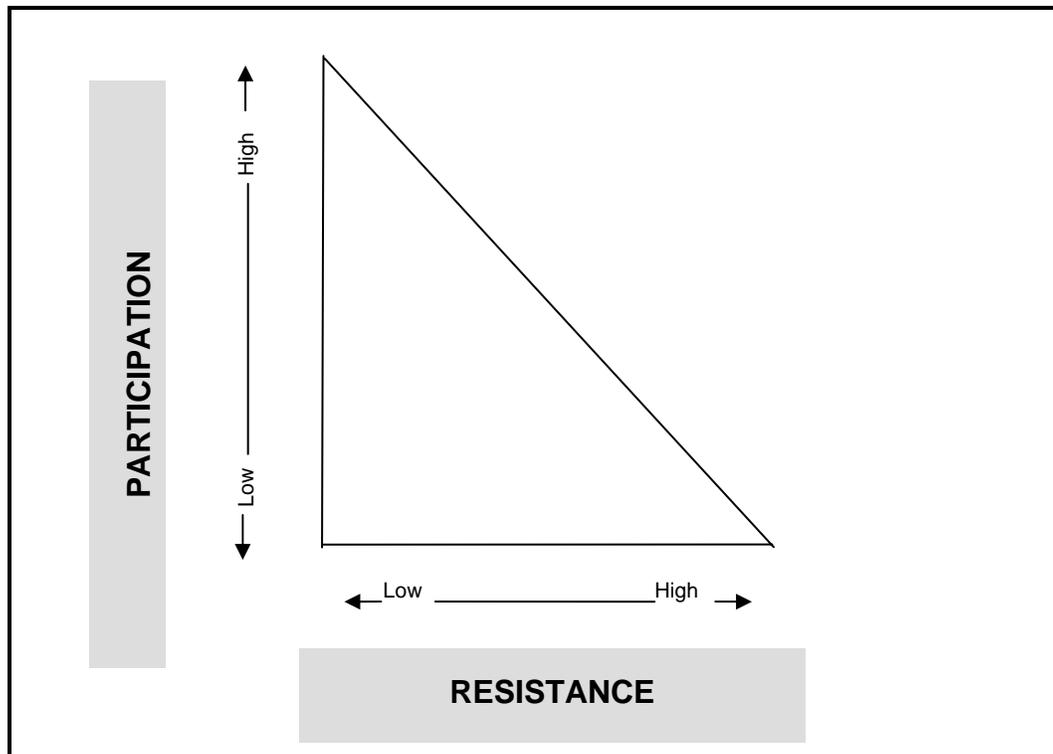
Because resistance exists it was essential to answer the question, "What

barriers and enticers emerge regarding elearning in a group of employees offered an

elearning training opportunity."

With research limited in the use of elearning by SMEs in Canada, conducting

a study of a Niagara-based organization already involved in elearning, using Lewin's

Field Theory, will contribute to an increased understanding of the factors which

support participation or cause resistance and provide insight for the development of

a successful elearning strategy. By identifying and addressing the factors causing learner resistance before implementation, employers will be able to develop and implement a more successful elearning strategy. Ideally, the results would form a part of a larger body of accumulated knowledge contributing to the national strategy for positioning Canadian businesses in the global market.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations. SMEs in Niagara have staff complements of up to approximately 300 people and with elearning being used as a new training method only one type of organization was purposely chosen for an exploratory study. The results may not be representative of other retail sector elearning enterprises. Moreover, because the findings are related to a retail environment, they may not be generalizable to other corporate elearning initiatives. A second limitation was the scope of the research that emphasized the participants' perspectives of barriers to elearning rather than including data of any significance on organizational factors that influence and cause resistance to corporate elearning.

Delimitations. Recently, X Company Corporation (the company's name has been protected), a company with a national profile, introduced customized elearning to the employees of the dealer network (all SMEs) and was claiming favourable results (favourable enough to include in media advertising). The company has embarked on research into the benefits of this initiative and was very amenable to an independent inquiry with its dealer network staff. Training coordinators have expressed their willingness to provide specific information helpful to this research project. This was due, in part, to the reduced cost of evaluation (with respect to the

budget) and broader scope by having a graduate student involved - Barker (1999)

mentions that, "4-5 percent of the overall training and HRD budget should be

adequate for comprehensive ROTI [Return on Training Investment] processes."

(p.5). Additionally, their endorsement for this project lay in the corporation's

philosophy of supporting learning beyond the parameters of their employee base.

There are nine independently owned dealerships in Niagara consequently the

sample was a large enough number of employees exposed to elearning

opportunities, in a SME, to get a sound initial look at participant-based barriers to

elearning.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms apply to this discussion.

Attitude. An opinion or a way of thinking based on beliefs.

dot.com downturn. Point in time when grossly over-valued stocks for Internet-

based companies lost all or most of their value resulting in eroded faith in technology

and technology-based products.

Elearning. Individual, self-paced Internet courses.

Dealer/owner. Person who owns an X Company retail store.

Digital divide. The gap between those with access to and knowledge of

information communications technologies and those without access or knowledge.

Extrinsic motivation. Performing an activity because it is believed to be

instrumental in achieving valued outcomes that are separate from the activity (Liaw,

2002, p. 140).

Intrinsic motivation. Performing an activity purely for enjoyment of the activity itself. (Liaw, 2002, p. 140).

Labour force. (*see Workforce*).

Lewin's Field Theory. Driving and restraining forces that influence an individual's life space, or "field". Considers a multitude of interdependent factors with respect to behaviour.

MySQL. Programming language used for creating Web-based databases.

Online learning. Group based instruction using the Internet for communication.

Participation. Engaging in an activity.

Perception. Act of perceiving. An understanding of, insight and/or knowledge based on senses.

Resistance. Held back, hindered, blocked from participation for a variety of reasons.

SME. Small- to medium-sized enterprises. This will vary based on the geographical location in question i.e. SMEs located in metropolitan areas will have a larger staff component than lower-population based areas in this category.

Workforce. Members of society engaged in employment-related activities for remuneration.

Web-based Instruction. Includes characteristics of both elearning and online learning.

Web server. A computer connected to the Internet that processes Internet traffic and stores electronic data.

Conclusions

Learning on the job, especially through the use of computer technology, is being considered more and more as a valuable means to improve workplace competencies, blurring the lines between learning and work. Elearning has been identified as a key training strategy for workforce development to keep Canadian companies globally competitive and supports the concept of lifelong learning. The knowledge economy requires technical competency through the use of information communications technologies; the same used for delivering elearning. Demographic realities also dictate that individuals cannot be removed from the labour force to attend training away from the work site as many juggle the priorities of family and work and cannot afford to stop earning a pay cheque. Additionally, there are fewer people entering the labour force to offset those exiting through retirement.

Studying a locally based organization in Niagara that was involved in elearning may potentially assist other area businesses experiencing a labour shortage by providing an example of elearning's efficacy in the local context. Because elearning was in the early stages of implementation at X Company stores in Niagara an excellent opportunity existed to examine staff participation and sources of learner resistance to this new initiative.

By identifying the factors that cause resistance the opportunity exists to lessen their influence and increase participation in a very effective strategy for staff development.

<u>Thesis Structure</u>

This thesis will present a review of the literature regarding corporate elearning and its relevance to a knowledge based economy. Effective integration into corporate training paradigms is discussed and the issue of learner motivation is explored with the focus on how learner resistance can impact elearning's acceptance as a viable method of training delivery. Specific attention will be paid to the issues of resistance factors and drivers of acceptance, using Lewin's Field Theory.

Subsequent chapters first present the methods used to recruit the subjects, and to collect and analyze the research data. An examination of the results from the questionnaire and interview instruments form a separate chapter. The final chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the data analysis and the recommendations for improved practice in delivering elearning and for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review examines the issues of workforce development, effective elearning implementation and factors influencing learner motivation. The linkages in these areas will form the basis of this study and guide the research to examine the use of a workplace elearning initiative as the vehicle for skills upgrading and for workforce development.

Context for Elearning and Workforce Development

Businesses, in order to survive in the knowledge economy, have had to adapt quickly to new ways of conducting their day-to-day activities with innovations such as just-in-time service and delivery, e-commerce and the integration of computer technology into daily operations. Consequently, it has become imperative that businesses keep abreast of continuous change in the workplace and keep employees learning continuously.

The Advisory Committee for Online Learning (ACOL) report (2001) reviewed the current status of workforce skills and suggested that it is critical for the Canadian labour force to continually upgrade these skills in order to keep the country globally competitive and to keep unemployment rates down. The Committee recommended that elearning be the focus for delivery of skills-based training because of its relevance to the global market i.e. both shared platforms of information communications technology, as well as its flexibility, availability and affordability. Latchem and Hanna (2001b) similarly acknowledge that elearning has its place in

providing the required upgrading/training to meet competitive demand. "Faced with

the need for economy in upgrading the knowledge and skills of larger numbers of

employees, sometimes over great distances and with high employee turnover, and

to ensure uniformity of content and delivery, many providers are adopting online

some mix of Web-based and instructor-led training strategies." (p. 5).

The ACOL report recommends that large-scale investment in elearning

research and development is necessary to attain world leadership in the global

market. "Such an effort is also crucial to ensuring that educators at the post-

secondary levels are in a position to take advantage of this new medium of elearning

and make sure it provides quality learning opportunities to Canadians." (p. 55).

Recommendations in the ACOL report for further research (results-, issue-

and problem-oriented) include examining both traditional and online learning to

determine:

- Strengths and weaknesses of both modes of learning

- How to remodel learning and teaching to take advantage of delivery

  modes for effective teaching and learning for different kinds of learners

  and content

- How people learn*, how they engage in learning and how it is effectively

  imparted* [italics added]

- The process of learning throughout the life span

- The learning requirements for different disciplines relative to these issues

This report presents very persuasive arguments on the need for quality

elearning through more elearning research. Larger corporations have moved into the

elearning arena to take advantage of its many benefits, including the economy of scale. With this type of training moving into the mainstream the advantages may also be realized in smaller organizations. Murray (2001) lends support to the above arguments for elearning with specific emphasis on its benefits for employers "…elearning offers small and medium-sized enterprises an unprecedented opportunity to improve their economic performance and is a potential solution to Canada's digital divide." (p. 6). The digital divide represents the gap between those who have access to information communication technologies and/or those who do not or are not interested.

In the global picture, Roffe (2002) indicates that Europe is facing a similar situation where SMEs especially are looking to elearning to provide solutions to address performance needs. In 2001, Fry predicted that by 2003 the corporate elearning market will have 70 per cent of instruction conducted outside of the classroom and the corporate elearning revenues alone in the United States would increase by a compound annual growth rate of 83 per cent from 1998 – 2003. (p. 235). While Fry's prediction did not anticipate the 'dot.com' downturn in the technology sector, elearning is coming into its own despite this. "While spending for corporate training remained flat in 2003, elearning expenditures rose by a striking 22 percent…funding for elearning will rise by an average of 27 percent over each of the next five years." (Mullich, 2004, p. 51).

It would appear that elearning has definitely become a viable option for training and the debate on its efficacy is becoming moot. "Like the personal computer, the Internet and elearning are not going away – to think otherwise is

foolhardy." (Rosenberg, 2001, p. 236). However, elearning from the past is not how it is predicted to look in the future, and probably for the better. "Analysts are quick to add…that the elearning of 2005 will be nothing like the version that crashed and burned with the dot-com implosion…elearning initiatives now tend to be far more modest and targeted." (Mullich, 2004, p. 51).

<u>Effective Workplace Integration</u>

There are many issues to consider when elearning is introduced into a corporate strategy for workforce development. Change can often be perceived as threatening within an organization therefore it is important to implement elearning using careful planning and transparency of intent. Moreover, employers should ensure that the implementation of elearning aligns with the strategic plan of the organization and that employees understand the rationale for its use. For effective adoption of any new initiative, inculcation into the corporate culture is essential. "Change processes have to address multiple points of inertia and resistance and have to be systemic rather than piecemeal. They call for clearly articulated and commonly accepted learner-centred teaching goals and values, and a matching of these to policies, procedures and resources." (Latchem & Hanna, 2001c, p. 41).

One of the roles of the leadership in an organization is to maintain market share while implementing changes. This occurs by preparing employees to embrace new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things. Elearning is both a new approach itself and the mechanism through which continuous change in business practices will occur. Latchem and Hanna (2001b) suggest that "…leaders and managers need to inculcate a new work-learning ethic, become more aware of what

open learning can achieve, increase the employees' sense of ownership in work-based learning…" (p.6). Frankola (2001b) states "company managers must supervise elearning the way any other important initiative must be managed." (The social factor, para. 7).

Acknowledging and addressing the forces that can impede or support this initiative allows employers to be proactive in implementing an elearning approach to employee training. Rosenberg (2001) states that, "In order for elearning to prosper in a business – to be sustainable – a strong learning culture is required…elearning cannot thrive without careful attention to the "four C's: a *Culture* of learning, *Champions* who will lead elearning efforts, *Communications* that position elearning's value, and an integrated *Change* strategy to bring it all together." (p.180). For example, traditional thinking regarding learning, work and training (i.e. the difficulty in equating learning with work) can be one source of resistance to elearning and may cause its value to be misunderstood or even distorted.

Businesses faced with a traditional mind-set will need to use a comprehensive change management strategy in order to implement elearning in their organizations. Employees may be resistant to change and perhaps do not equate learning with work. Frankola (2001a) stresses that it is important for employers to consider the 'human capital' (value of human resources) of an organization and to provide motivation and support towards the development of a commitment to lifelong learning by employees. Rather than lose valuable staff in an ever-tightening labour market it is essential to integrate elearning in a way that builds momentum. Leadership by example can never be underestimated as a primary

motivator for staff. Frankola (2001a) suggests, "If senior managers and business unit managers take and complete the online courses in a reasonable time, employees feel that they can do it, too." (Hold managers accountable for the success of their employees, para. 1)

Essential to effective implementation of an elearning initiative is to evaluate its effects on the organization. According to Bloom (2003), high-level evaluation is not being done in most organizations. Bloom indicates that, "there is an inverse relationship between the level of evaluation undertaken by an organization, and the need to be convinced of elearning's effectiveness versus other modes of training." (p. 10).

Learner Motivation

Learners want to know that they will benefit from workplace training initiatives in their jobs. As Rosenberg (2001) states, "People embrace learning when they see direct relevance and benefit for them and when they sense support from the firm." (p. 189). Brown and Ford (2002) uphold this line of reasoning. "To date, research strongly supports the contention that learners who believe that their efforts will pay off in learning, and that their learning will pay off back on the job, will gain more knowledge and skills than learners who do not hold these beliefs." (p. 199).

A crucial factor for the success of an elearning initiative is learner/employee motivation. "Corporate elearning is particularly susceptible to high dropout rates. A student who voluntarily enrols in an online course because she's hoping an advanced degree will land her a better job is a much different learner than someone who is told to take an online course at work. If a corporate e-learner isn't internally

motivated, a company will have to step in." (Frankola, 2001b, Motivation from within, para. 1).

For SMEs to take advantage of elearning and the opportunity it presents, it is essential to develop an understanding of how to get employees engaged in the process and the challenges to overcome in doing so. "Corporate e-learners also face the same challenges all online students deal with. Some of the major reasons given for dropping online courses are fairly obvious: technology problems, lack of support, poorly designed courses, and inexperienced or incompetent instructors. Individual learning preferences also come into play." (Frankola, 2001b, Motivation from within, para. 2). Even with well-designed courses, competent instructors and stable technology, the other factors that she identifies, *lack of support and learning preferences* [italics added], have a direct impact on the employee's acceptance and participation in elearning.

Lewin (1997) states that, "learning as related to change in motivation deals either with a change in needs or a change in the means of their satisfactions." (p. 228). Lewin's Field Theory examines the driving and restraining forces that influence an individual's life space, or "field", and considers a multitude of interdependent factors with respect to behaviour. It is important to consider not only what encourages learners to embrace new methods for learning but also the factors which cause resistance to learning. According to Lewin, "The action of the individual depends directly on the way in which he perceives the situation." (p. 103). Olgren (2000) suggests that, "Using technology for education and training offers many

challenges, but perhaps the greatest is to focus not on the technology itself but on the learner and learning." (p. 7).

External factors are more within the control of the employer whereas internal factors, the beliefs and values that have a direct impact on a person's willingness to participate – the intrinsic drivers of learner acceptance and the restraining forces that lead to resistance to elearning – are at times difficult to discern. Without a better understanding of these restraining forces, it will be difficult to implement effective strategies to encourage participation, leaving many potentially capable individuals lacking in skills and businesses to suffer. Table 1, developed from the literature and the researcher's experience shows both types of internal forces to illustrate how learner perspectives and beliefs can impact training outcomes.

Table 1. Internal Forces Affecting Elearning in the Workplace

Restraining forces	Drivers of acceptance
Low self confidence	High self confidence
Fear of technology	Embrace technology
Fear of failure	Success orientation
Resistant to change	Positive view of change
Unsuccessful in previous training	Successful in previous training
Lack of self direction	Self directed
Lack of long-range career goals	Identified long-range career goals
Concern about employer monitoring	No concern if employer monitors progress
Need for face-to-face interaction	Does not require face-to-face interaction
Training not valued	High value placed on training
Feeling of being too old to learn	Age irrelevant to learning capability
Long period since last training taken	Continuously learning new things
Does not equate learning with work	Equates learning with work
Feels training is irrelevant to work	Feels training is relevant to work

Restraining forces	Drivers of acceptance
Believes that learning won't pay off	Believes that learning will pay off
Ability can not improve	Ability can improve
Job duties don't require new skills	Job duties can require new skills

One can posit from this that the more items identified by the learner from the left-hand column of the table, the higher the level of resistance and conversely, the more items selected from the right-hand column the higher the level of participation.

The challenges of learner persistence and engagement in the learning process are especially important issues to consider for corporate elearning initiatives as the employer is making the investment in the training (purchasing the training product, covering salaries, providing the technology) rather than the employees.

Employers who wish to successfully implement elearning for workforce development need to work towards reducing the restraining forces and increasing the drivers of acceptance in order to support their employees in their participation in the elearning initiative. Liaw (2002) suggests that, "Despite the realization that information technology is key to the success and survival of organizations in a highly competitive environment, the potential benefits of the World-wide Web as aids to learning and training may not be fully realized due to poor acceptance by users." (p. 137).

Gaining insight into the reasons for resistance requires an individualized examination of learner perceptions. Olgren (2000) states that, "Each individual is complex and unique and enters into a learning experience with a variety of backgrounds, attitudes, skills, and motivations." (p. 7). Burge (2000) suggests that employers consider, "Rather than asking 'How do I motivate a learner?' it is more

appropriate to ask 'What am I or others doing that is blocking the learner's intrinsic motivating drives?'" (p. 90).

Summary

This chapter has been a review of the literature regarding the issues of workforce development, effective elearning implementation and factors influencing learner motivation, which is the focus of this study.

The research indicates that elearning may play a significant role in keeping businesses competitive in a global economy. However there are many factors that influence a person's intrinsic motivation that can affect the successful adoption of elearning by the learner/employees in the organization. Factors like low self-esteem, fear of failure, disinterest in learning or perception of irrelevance are resistors that must be understood and addressed.

Effective workplace integration requires a strategy that includes a comprehensive change management approach that takes these factors seriously. Despite the best effort of employers, employee resistance to elearning is still commonplace and because it is a costly venture to implement, especially for SMEs, it is prudent to understand and mitigate the causes of resistance, which should result in an increase in participation.

This study will examine factors that both support and cause resistance to elearning in several Niagara-based SMEs with the intent to provide recommendations for improved practice, ideally to not only save the implementation costs for SMEs but to improve the elearning experience of employees. As Frankola

concludes, "…engaging and satisfying the e-learner will always be crucial." (2001a,

Launch a communications campaign, para. 5)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

<u>The Survey Design</u>

This study used a survey research design to gather both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) data to examine the factors affecting learner interest in, and resistance to, training and elearning. One-on-one confidential interviews with a smaller proportion of participants supplied the in-depth, richer detail regarding individual beliefs and perspectives on the elearning experience and augmented the data obtained from the questionnaire. The questionnaire, chosen for its anonymity and ease of use for both respondent and researcher, provided the generalizable data that represent the broader view. Both a Web-based and pen and paper version of the questionnaire was provided however all but one respondent chose the latter method.

<u>Sampling Process</u>

The target population for this study was the approximately 700 employees of X Company Corporation independent dealerships in Niagara. X Company's financial services division has its national headquarters in Niagara and possesses a highly regarded reputation for being a leader in innovative staff training and development. A member of senior management at the financial services office, known professionally to the researcher, was approached to determine if elearning was being used as a method of training in the organization. Although this type of training

was not being used in the financial services arm of the corporation, the corporation had recently developed and introduced elearning for the employees of the X Company retail stores across Canada. All of the retail outlets are independent dealerships with nine located in the Niagara region. The dealers (who are also the owners and these terms will be used interchangeably) of the nine stores were contacted about the project by telephone and consent was obtained to approach their staff.

Due to the day-to-day operational realities of the retail sector, and in order to obtain and receive ongoing support, it was prudent to allow the owners to determine how their staff was approached. The dealers were interested in having the elearning initiative evaluated since it was an added cost of doing business and the corporate division was pushing them into achieving a measurable level of staff participation.

Initially, it was hoped that the employees of two stores would provide enough data to examine the causes of resistance to elearning, however, because the owners preferred to make participation in the survey voluntary, response was low. Eventually, it became evident that to collect enough information all nine stores would need to be surveyed to obtain a reasonable sample. Dealers indicated before delivery of the questionnaires the number they felt that were needed. In most cases, the owners designated the elearning administrators in their stores, those responsible for its implementation, to continue with communications relating to the research.

The group surveyed included those employees who have, as well as those who have not, participated in the elearning training provided by the employer. The number of lessons taken out of a possible 30 per module determined participation

versus non-participation status; fewer than 16 lessons completed constituted non-participation (no courses completed or 'light users') and 16 or more indicated participation, based on the levels of achievement set by the corporation. X Company Corporation elearning developers implemented standards of Bronze, Silver and Gold as benchmarks of completion – a grade of 80% or higher on each lesson's test and established numbers of compulsory and elective topics. To achieve the basic level of Bronze, an employee needs to complete 16 lessons (12 compulsory and 4 electives; the Silver, 22 lessons (Bronze plus six more electives); and Gold, 30 lessons (Silver plus eight more electives).

By comparing the data across levels of participation it was hoped that patterns or trends would emerge that would identify the factors causing resistance. Assessing perspectives before and after participation in the elearning experience was important as well as examining perceptions about training in general, and elearning specifically, to get a more complete picture.

Interview candidates were selected from the questionnaire sample and had provided consent to be interviewed (Appendix A). Criteria used to select the interviewees included their elearning participation, comments provided (when available), contradictory information (e.g. indicating no participation at all but rating the elearning courses as interesting), and atypical responses. For expediency, and to meet the requests of the owners not to interfere with operations, 10 interviewees were chosen. This choice proved practical, as it became evident by the tenth person that no new information would be forthcoming.

The original concept for the questionnaire (Appendix B) was to offer both Web-based and pen and paper versions. The Web-based version was programmed, using MySQL, to allow only one access per person thus eliminating the possibility of multiple entries by a single individual that could skew the results. After consent was received, access information (user name and password) was created to ensure that no one would enter the system as someone else. The username was devised using the numerical equivalent of the first letter of the last name followed by the last two letters of the family name and given name (and was also used as the coding in the final database for anonymity). The password remained constant for everyone. This information was confidentially provided to the employees of the first two stores who had consented to take part in the survey. As well, a stockpile of paper versions of the questionnaire, in case the preference was not to go to the Web-based version.

The questions in the questionnaire were developed to capture the issues identified in Table 1 from the literature as supporting or detracting from participation. Additionally, specific information was gathered about employment-related details, computer skills and demographics to round out the data and allow for more comparative analyses of potential factors affecting participation.

To ensure that the questions in the questionnaire were clear and free from ambiguity, a pilot group tested it for functionality in paper format. This formative evaluation was intended to eliminate any instrument glitches and to allow the study's participants to complete the questionnaire without incident. The pilot study group consisted of eight participants whose feedback indicated that only minor revisions to

the wording for clarity were required (which didn't affect the overall feedback) before the questionnaire could be released to the general sample population.

The questionnaire included four sections, labelled A-D. Section A gathered information on the respondent's training and employment backgrounds using ordinal categories; Section B used a 12-item, 4-point Likert-type response rating importance; Section C a 15-item, 5-point Likert-type response rating agreement levels and Section D captured basic demographic data. Sections B and C also included open-ended comment sections to allow for additional responses to the Likert-type response statements. To minimize response bias, item statements were mixed as much as possible to ensure that the respondents read each item before responding.

Interview Instrument

Consultation with the owners or their designates from several X Company stores indicated that while they were amenable to staff being interviewed one-on-one at work in a private area, the maximum allowable time was 30 minutes off of the work floor. This time frame acted as the guiding principle for the number of questions used. Fifteen open-ended questions (Appendix C) were developed allowing for approximately two minutes, on average, per question. The questions were designed to probe into the interviewees' perceptions and understanding about the elearning initiative in the following areas:

a) its relationship to, impact on, and importance to their jobs

b) the challenges, and positive and negative aspects of elearning

c) learning preferences

d) incentive programs for participation

The first two candidates interviewed were able to comfortably answer the questions in the allowed timeframe therefore the interview questions required no revisions or reduction in number.

Data Collection Processes

Questionnaire. Initially, two stores were contacted in late 2002 and early 2003 with the idea that the sample would be large enough (a potential $\underline{N}$ of approximately 150 people) for the purposes of this study. Each owner was provided with copies of the consent form and letter of request (Appendix D) along with the draft questionnaire. One owner volunteered to have a small contingent of his staff (eight in total) perform the pilot study of the questionnaire.

Once the responses were collected and minor revisions made, consent forms and letters of request were provided for distribution to staff in the two stores. The option was given to complete either the paper or electronic format. Only one store was able to get the questionnaires completed for return. The other store's response was slow (the owner had transferred responsibility to a designate that did not place the same priority on the study that the owner had).

Since the results were not sufficient for a representative sampling, and the participation of one store was questionable, a broadening of the study's scope was undertaken to include all of the stores in Niagara, starting in May 2003. The seven other owners were contacted to garner support for the project and were provided with a sample of the questionnaire and consent form to illustrate the nature of the survey before receiving consent. Rather than contacting all of the dealers at once,

they were approached in groups of two or three to facilitate the management of data collection (Niagara is a fairly large region) and ensure that the process worked efficiently. All but one store (the slow-to-respond store) indicated that the pen and paper format would be best to use for simplicity in administration.

Once agreement to participate was received from the dealer and the number of questionnaires determined, a package was dropped at the store. Each package included the consent form attached to the questionnaire, the letter of request, return envelopes and a large envelope for accumulating the returned forms.

A follow-up call was made approximately one week after the forms were delivered to determine if the completed package was ready for pick-up. Second and third follow-up calls were made, when required, to ensure the data were collected. Once it was confirmed that the completed questionnaires were ready, they were retrieved.

The store that opted to use the Web-based form (since April, 2003) still did not have any participants that had entered their data into this database (after an extended period of time and delays). The paper format was then dropped off for completion and the responses eventually received in early September. This was auspicious as the Web server crashed (without apparent backups in place) shortly thereafter and some time was required to retrieve the data (the paper-based responses had already been entered manually by the researcher to this database). By early October 2003, all of the information was entered into an Access software database that had been converted from the MySQL version used on the Web.

The final response was an <u>N</u> of 123 (<u>n</u> = 79 females; <u>n</u> = 44 males) out of the approximate 700 employees (staff numbers fluctuate because of seasonal demand in the retail sector).

Interviews. Candidates were selected for the interview portion of the research based on the responses given in the questionnaires and if they had provided consent, using the essential factors identified above. Extra interviewees were selected before contacting the owners or their designates (in case some respondents were no longer employed with the organization – and this did turn out to be the case for several). From the selection, 10 interviews were scheduled and conducted at convenient times to accommodate business flow. The interviews were conducted individually, face-to-face in a private area at the work site.

For the interview portion of the survey design, which was started in November 2003, one store was selected to start the process and ensure that the questions worked within the time parameters and yielded the data desired. As the busiest season of the retail sector's year was approaching it was recommended by this store's representative that the remaining interviews be conducted starting in mid-January 2004. Contact was made with each store regarding this strategy, which received total unanimity, and the interview process started up again according to plan.

Interviews were taped to ensure that all information provided in the answers was captured. Transcripts were typed and delivered to the interviewees, for review and signature, in sealed envelopes with transcript overviews (Appendix E) and an additional envelope to seal the document after signing, for confidentiality. The

interviewee was encouraged to make changes to the transcript if they felt their comments were taken out of context – none requested that a revised transcript be provided prior to approval.

Data Analysis Processes

Quantitative. The quantitative data were converted to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the respondents' orientation to training in general and their attitudes and perceptions on elearning and more specifically, workplace elearning. Summary data (nominal and ordinal) and bivariate relationships were examined for significance using symmetrical analysis. Measures of association were used instead of correlational coefficients to identify the bivariate relationships. Therefore, existing relationships were identified but not the strength of those relationships. For each level of analysis – attitudes and perceptions towards training, elearning and workplace elearning – there were several findings of significance that were examined.

Qualitative. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using theme identification and coding categories. Through a constant comparison method across respondents, data were summarized in relation to attitudes toward training and perceptions of elearning in the workplace. Themes are codes were:

- Course Specific – lesson content and structure, technology, learning

- Cost/Time – completing lessons, staff coverage, students and part-time workers, re-certification

- Elearning Benefits – product knowledge, customer service, competitiveness, consistent approach to staff training

- Rewards/Recognition – incentives/motivation, performance reviews, salary

These data provided the insights into the quantitative findings and provided richer detail on the issues that employees felt were most relevant to the elearning initiative.

Summary

This approach in this study used a survey research design, using both questionnaire (quantitative) and interview (qualitative) instruments to gather learner perceptions of a X Company corporate level elearning initiative. Participants were employees of independently owned X Company retail stores. Of a potential group of 700 employees, 123 responses were received resulting in a response rate of approximately 18%. Data analysis included the preparation of descriptive statistics and a test of correlation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter will present a review of the purpose of this study, describe the

participants and findings and discuss the results of statistical tests performed. For

clarification, the terms 'courses', 'lessons' and 'modules' will be used

interchangeably in the discussion and should be considered synonymous.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate what influences acceptance and

resistance to a corporate elearning initiative to identify the factors affecting

participation. The results provided insight into the attitudes and perceptions of X

Company employees about the training and identified areas for further attention to

facilitate a 'best practices' approach for increasing participation. The research

question explored was "What barriers and enticers emerge regarding elearning in a

group of employees offered an elearning training opportunity."

The X Company elearning modules were developed to provide basic

customer service training and to ensure that current product information was

available to staff for each of five departments within the stores (auto parts and

service, sporting goods, outdoor living, hardware and house wares, and retail

support). The research assessed the elearning modules for their adherence to

quality instructional design principles. The modules effectively used graphics, text

and animations and incorporated orientation to the elearning environment, presented

information in logical progression and manageable 'chunks', provided non-threatening practice with feedback quizzes and a final assessment of learning using multiple choice and true/false responses.

Perceptions are defined as the insights, intuition or knowledge gained by perceiving through the senses, often referred to as 'understanding'. Attitudes are opinions, feelings and ideas, which help to form judgements. This study compares perceptions and attitudes between two identified groups of employees: participants and non-participants. To distinguish between the two groups the following rationale was used: the non-participant group includes those individuals who have identified themselves as having taken no courses whatsoever to those who were light users and had only successfully completed some of the modules (up to 15 with an 80% passing grade). Those who have achieved the Bronze level, by completing a minimum of 16 lessons, through to those who have finished 30 and have achieved Gold status (and perhaps have even gone beyond to achieve Gold for more than one department) are considered to be participants for the purposes of this study.

Considering that the majority of the respondents (63%) belong to the participant group, and that the lessons have been available to X Company employees for approximately two years, it can be assumed that there are factors influencing the lower-level involvement of those individuals who fall into the non-participant group. The supporters and detractors (Lewin's 'forces') affecting participation will be explored through an analysis of the relationships of the sample's perceptions and attitudes and through qualitative data collected from one-on-one interviews.

This study is involved 123 employees of Niagara-based X Company retail stores, considered to be a sample of convenience as those who participated did so on a voluntary basis. The sample represented both those who had actively participated in the elearning training and those who had not or had engaged on at a minimal level. The group was comprised of 79 females and 44 males as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Gender

	n	%
female	79	65
male	44	35

(N = 123)

There was a somewhat balanced response from all age groups with the highest representation of participants coming from the 35-44 and 45-54 age range as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Age Ranges.

	n	%
18-24	19	15
25-34	26	21
35-44	31	25
45-54	32	26
>55	13	11

(N = 123)

Forty-three percent identified their highest education level achieved as being Grade 12 and 48.3% indicated that they had taken education beyond this level - 77% of this group indicated they had completed skilled trades or post-secondary diplomas or degrees. Details of the breakdown are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Education Levels

	n	%
< Grade 12	11	9
Grade12	52	42
Some skilled trade	3	2
Skilled trade complete	7	6
Some post-secondary	19	15
College	22	18
Under-graduate degree	4	3
Grad/Post-Graduate degree	4	3

(N = 122)

The majority of respondents are longer-term employees of X Company. As shown in Table 5 65% of the respondents indicated that they had been employed four years or longer with X Company.

Table 5. Years Employed at X Company

	n	%
< 6 mos.	6	5
6 mos to 1 yr	11	9
1-3 yrs	26	21
4-7 yrs	31	25
> 7 yrs	49	40

(N = 123)

Interviews were conducted with 10 members of the respondent group (n = 7 females and 3 males) to probe for the richer detail on employee perspectives about elearning. These 10 members were selected as a cross-section of the sample, representing both non-participants and participants. Two people were managers, two were supervisors and six represented the retail and cashier level of staff. The following list identifies the characteristics of the interviewee group:

Interviewee 1. Female, 45-54 years of age, 1-5 modules taken, College level education, employed at X Company 4-7 years.

Interviewee 2. Male, 45-54 years of age, 0 modules taken, Grade 12 level education, employed at X Company 4-7 years

Interviewee 3. Female, 25-34 years of age, 11-15 modules completed, Grade 12 level education, employed at X Company 1-3 years

Interviewee 4. Female, over 55 years of age, 11-15 modules completed, less than Grade 12 level of education, employed at X Company 4-7 years.

Interviewee 5. Female, 35-44 years of age, over 20 modules completed, College level education, employed at X Company over 7 years

Interviewee 6. Male, over 55 years of age, 0 modules taken, Graduate/Post-graduate level education, employed at X Company 4-7 years

Interviewee 7. Male, 25-34 years of age, over 20 modules taken, some skilled trade level education, employed at X Company over 7 years

Interviewee 8. Female, 18-24 years of age, over 20 modules taken, some post-secondary level education, employed at X Company 4-7 years

Interviewee 9. Female, 45-54 years of age, 1-5 modules taken, Grade 12 level education, employed at X Company over 7 years

Interviewee 10. Female, 45-54 years of age, 0 modules taken, Grade 12 level education, employed at X Company 6 months - 1 year

The interviewees were asked 15 questions that provided the added insight to areas identified as being significant from the quantitative data.

<u>Findings</u>

The findings identify detractors and supporters, as per Lewin's Force Field Theory, for X Company's elearning initiative. The data were measured at the nominal and ordinal level; measures of association were used instead of correlation coefficients to identify the bivariate relationships. Because of this, the associations identify where a relationship exists but not the strength of that relationship.

Initially, employers indicated that elearning was offered to the retail staff and Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) to the trades people in the garage. The questionnaire included both types of distance learning to account for this difference. However, very few respondents indicated having taken IDL therefore the value of the information that was provided was insufficient to identify relationships. The dealers have also indicated, since the research started, that they are no longer offering IDL because of its expense and employees' criticism of its efficacy. References to IDL from this point forward will only appear in the tables where the original questionnaire statements are listed.

The two areas of focus in the statistical analysis were attitude and perception towards both training and then, more specifically, elearning.

<u>Orientation to Training</u>

It was important to assess first the employee's perspectives about training in general to establish a starting point for the analysis of the findings. If no orientation to training presented itself then logically there would be no interest in elearning either. In Section A of the questionnaire (Appendix B) the data captured illustrated

two things, whether the respondents had taken any career related courses, or had completed some or all of the courses and the length of time since career related training had been taken, if at all. This information was cross-tabulated with both the attitudinal statements (Section B of the questionnaire) based on importance and the perception statements (Section C of the questionnaire) based on level of agreement. There were many instances of significance in the data when comparing the attitude and perception categories to the orientation towards training.

Career Related Courses Taken. Table 6 outlines the breakdown of participants' involvement with career related training. Thirty-seven percent of the responses fell into the 'none' or 'start/not finish' categories, which is noteworthy.

Table 6. Career Related Training Participation

	n	%
none	37	30
start/not finish	8	7
start/finish some	38	31
complete	38	31
Total	121	98
Missing	2	2
Total	123	100

Length of Time. The other data that were important to consider relate to the length of time since career related training was last taken. As seen in Table 7, 41% have not taken any training of this type for over one year.

Table 7. Time Frame Since Last Career Related Training Taken

	n	%
none	32	26
>7 years	2	2
4-7 yrs	5	4
1-3 yrs	10	8
6 mos-1 yr	13	11
<6 mos	59	48
Total	121	98
Missing	2	2
Total	123	100

Attitude. Section B of the questionnaire gathered responses pertaining to employee attitudes toward training. Table 8 illustrates the breakdown of the responses and provides the framework from which to understand the cross tabulations of attitude and training and subsequently of perception to elearning.

Table 8. Employee Attitudes toward Career Training

ACTIVITY	RESPONSE							
	Not Important		Somewhat Important		Important		Very Important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. My employer providing training to improve my skills is:	1	1	4	3	43	35	74	60
2. The relevance of the elearning/Interactive Distance Learning training to my job duties is:	1	1	27	22	44	36	50	41
3. Rewards and/or recognition from my employer for taking training is:	9	7	23	19	52	42	37	30
4. Having an instructor face-to-face to provide training is:	28	23	40	33	34	28	20	16

ACTIVITY	RESPONSE							
	Not Important		Somewhat Important		Important		Very Important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
5. Keeping my skills up to date is:	2	2	8	7	51	42	60	49
6. Having time available on the job to participate in training is:	4	3	16	13	54	44	46	37
7. Being able to access training away from work, over the Internet is:	13	11	32	26	38	31	38	31
8. Completing all of the elearning modules / Interactive Distance Learning sessions provided is:	6	5	19	15	59	48	35	29
9. Having a long-range career goal is:	6	5	9	7	43	35	64	52
10. Contributing to a more highly-skilled workplace is:	--	--	10	8	54	44	58	47
11. Being able to provide feedback on the training is:	2	2	22	18	72	59	25	20
12. Seeing improvements to training materials, based on employee feedback is:	1	1	17	14	58	47	46	37

Total <u>N</u> = 123

Career Related Courses Taken. Participation in career related training was cross-tabulated with attitudes toward training. Statements 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 showed a statistically significant relationship with career training participation, as indicated in Table 9.

Table 9. Attitudes toward Career Training x Career Training Participation

	<u>N</u>	%	p. =
1. My employer providing training to improve my skills is:	120	98	.083
2. The relevance of the elearning/distance learning training to my job duties is:	120	98	.140

	N	%	p. =
3. Rewards and/or recognition from my employer for taking training is:	119	97	.088
4. Having an instructor face-to-face to provide training is:	120	98	.711
5. Keeping my skills up to date is:	119	98	.311
6. Having time available on the job to participate in training is:	118	96	.764
7. Being able to access training away from work, over the Internet is:	119	97	.042*
8. Completing all of the elearning modules / distance learning sessions provided is:	117	95	.018*
9. Having a long-range career goal is:	120	98	.014*
10. Contributing to a more highly-skilled workplace is:	120	98	.035*
11. Being able to provide feedback on the training is:	119	98	.040*
12. Seeing improvements to training materials, based on employee feedback is:	120	98	.064

Total $\underline{N}$ = 123   * Statistically significant p. = <.050

Exploring the Significance. Item 7, regarding being able to access training away from work over the Internet, indicated that for 84% of those who had not started or had started but not finished courses, the level of importance was somewhat important through to very important to having Internet access for training.

Item 8, with respect to completing all of the elearning modules, the data indicate that 89% of the respondents who had not pursued any career related training felt completion was somewhat important, important or very important and when including the light users the percentage rose to 91%.

In Item 9, the data demonstrated that 88% of the sample stated that having a long-range career goal was important or very important, even if training had not been pursued or not to any extent.

Item 10, all of the respondents (100%) stated that it was somewhat important, important or very important to contribute to a more highly skilled workplace.

Finally, in item 11, less than 2% of the entire sample indicated that being able to provide feedback on the training was not important. These responses came from the group who had not taken any career-related training.

The responses in each category indicated that the level of participation in career-related training did not affect the level of importance assigned to training. It is telling that those who had not taken, or had taken but not finished career-related training, responded similarly to those who had taken career-related courses and finished most or all. In fact, 96% of the respondents indicated that the employer providing training to improve skills was either important or very important and 92% indicated that contributing to a more highly skilled workplace was important or very important.

During the interviews, there was consensus to support this data. All of the interviewees indicated that it was important to them that their employer provided them with job-related training. As one person stated, "It's extremely important… Training should eliminate the confusion and it broadens our knowledge of the basics."

Perception. Section C of the questionnaire gathered responses pertaining to employee perception about elearning. Table 10 illustrates the breakdown of the responses and provides the framework from which to understand the cross tabulations of perception and training and subsequently of perception to elearning.

Table 10. Employee Perception toward Elearning

ACTIVITY	RESPONSE									
	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. My employer has clearly explained how and why the elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives:	1	1	4	3	9	7	77	63	28	23
2. The management at my store strongly supports the new X Company elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative:	--	--	2	2	7	6	59	48	53	43
3. Elearning / Interactive Distance Learning participation should be factored into my performance evaluation:	5	4	14	11	13	11	60	49	28	23
4. I am a person who embraces change:	2	2	7	6	13	11	69	56	27	22
5. I enjoy using new technology (computers, Internet, diagnostic equipment, etc.):	--	--	5	4	8	7	70	57	38	31
6. When it comes to training, I am confident that I can learn most of what is being taught:	--	--	--	--	2	2	71	58	47	38
7. The knowledge I've gained through X Company's elearning/Interactive Distance Learning project enables me to do my job better:	1	1	4	3	17	14	67	55	31	25
8. I am concerned that I may not pass the elearning /Interactive Distance Learning modules:	36	29	52	42	17	14	14	11	2	2

ACTIVITY	RESPONSE									
	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
9. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning is interesting:	3	2	6	5	16	13	78	63	16	13
10. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning materials are easy for me to understand:	1	1	4	3	8	7	86	70	21	17
11. I am concerned that my employer may monitor my progress without my knowledge:	24	20	55	45	25	21	15	12	2	2
12. Training should be provided away from work in a classroom:	19	15	50	41	32	26	15	12	5	4
13. I am able to learn on my own without an instructor:	--	--	4	3	10	8	75	61	32	26
14. I am at the stage in my life where I am not interested in learning new skills:	54	44	53	43	12	10	1	1	1	1
15. I am past the point of needing training in order to do my job well:	48	39	55	45	9	7	6	5	3	2

N = 123

Career Related Training Perceptions. Participation in career related training was cross-tabulated with perceptions regarding elearning. Statements 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10,13, 14, and 15 showed a statistically significant relationship with training participation, as indicated in Table 11.

Table 11. Perceptions toward Elearning x Career Training Participation

	N	%	p. =
1. My employer has clearly explained how and why the elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives:	117	95	.000*
2. The management at my store strongly supports the new X Company elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative:	119	67	.034*

	N	%	p. =
3. Elearning / Interactive Distance Learning participation should be factored into my performance evaluation:	118	69	.000*
4. I am a person who embraces change:	116	94	.250
5. I enjoy using new technology (computers, Internet, diagnostic equipment, etc.):	119	97	.060
6. When it comes to training, I am confident that I can learn most of what is being taught:	118	96	.050*
7. The knowledge I've gained through X Company's elearning/Interactive Distance Learning project enables me to do my job better:	118	96	.031*
8. I am concerned that I may not pass the elearning /Interactive Distance Learning modules:	119	97	.082
9. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning is interesting:	117	95	.014*
10. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning materials are easy for me to understand:	118	96	.010*
11. I am concerned that my employer may monitor my progress without my knowledge:	119	97	.509
12. Training should be provided away from work in a classroom:	119	97	.793
13. I am able to learn on my own without an instructor:	119	97	.047*
14. I am at the stage in my life where I am not interested in learning new skills:	119	97	.033*
15. I am past the point of needing training in order to do my job well:	119	97	.007*

Total N = 123   * Statistically significant p. = <.050

Exploring the Significance. Statement 1 addresses the perception of the

employee to how the employer has, or has not, clearly explained how the elearning

initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives. Even those who have not

engaged in career related training or have not finished mostly agreed or strongly

agreed (79%) that the employer had explained the corporate objectives and how elearning related to these objectives.

Statement 2, with respect to store management strongly supporting elearning, showed significance as well, with 96% agreeing or strongly agreeing from those who had not taken any, or not completed any, career related training.

Statement 3 assesses the perception of whether elearning should be factored into performance reviews. Support for to this practice was agreed upon by 57% of participants who had not taken or finished any career-related training category.

Statement 6 examines staff opinion on their confidence to being able to learn most of what is being taught in training. Confidence was extremely high as only two people from the entire sample ($\underline{N}$ = 118) chose 'neither' as a response and not one person indicated disagreement. From the group that has not taken career-related or finished any career related training 95% agreed or strongly agreed to being able to learn whatever they were taught.

Statement 7 measures the employees' beliefs about whether elearning enables them to do their jobs better. The results show little disagreement with 77% expressing agreement or strong agreement from the less involved group in career-related training and 14% stating 'neither'.

Statement 9 probes perceptions about the elearning and whether it is considered to be interesting. Again, not having taken career related training or not completing any courses after starting does not appear to influence perception about the training much differently than from the opinions of those who are more apt to

finish training. Seventy-one percent agreed or strongly agreed from the first group that elearning seemed while 53% of the 'neither' responses came from the same group.

Statement 10 gathers opinions on the elearning materials and if they are easy to understand. The data demonstrated that 77% of the group that has not taken career related or not finished career related courses agreed or strongly agreed that the materials were easy to understand.

Statement 13 provides data on perceptions to being able to learn independently without an instructor. A total of 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to being self-directed learners from the group that has not taken or not finished career-related training.

Statement 14 assesses whether a person believes that they are at a stage in life where they are not interested in learning new skills. Seventy-three percent of the group not actively engaged in career-related training disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, indicating that the majority was open to the development of new skills.

Finally, in statement 15, 76% of the respondents with unfinished or no training taken disagreed or strongly disagreed to being past the point of needing training in order to do their jobs.

One of the interviewees provided further insight towards training and its relevance, no matter the skill level of the employee. "Training should be available,

especially for those that are newer to the job and [to provide] the more applicable information for the long-term employees."

      <u>Synopsis of Orientation to Training</u>. This section presented the data with respect to orientation to training in general and several items of significance were identified. The data demonstrated that regardless of the level of past involvement with career-related training most respondents held a positive regard for training. From this initial examination of attitudes towards training and perceptions of elearning, the restraining forces appear to be less influential than the drivers of acceptance. The next section presents orientation specific to elearning.

<u>Orientation toward Elearning</u>

      To determine what the detractors and supporters of elearning are, it was important to first assess attitudes and perceptions about this type of training. A generally favourable opinion of elearning was essential to allow for a subsequent unhindered evaluation of the specific factors causing resistance.

      Approximately three-quarters of the respondents suggested that the relevance of elearning training to job duties was important or very important and 79% indicated that completing all of the elearning sessions was important or very important.

      Table 12 shows the breakdown of participant number who indicated whether they had participated or not in elearning.

Table 12. Elearning Participation Based on Response (yes/no)

	n	%
yes	104	85
no	19	15
Total	123	100

Attitude. Bivariate analysis, shown in Table 13, compares elearning participation (yes or no response) and attitude. Two items of significance were identified in the cross tabulation – items 1 and 8.

Table 13. Bivariate Analysis of Elearning Participation x Attitude toward Career Training

	N	%	p. =
1. My employer providing training to improve my skills is:	122	99	.007*
2. The relevance of the elearning/distance learning training to my job duties is:	122	99	.505
3. Rewards and/or recognition from my employer for taking training is:	121	98	.666
4. Having an instructor face-to-face to provide training is:	122	99	.204
5. Keeping my skills up to date is:	121	98	.364
6. Having time available on the job to participate in training is:	120	98	.489
7. Being able to access training away from work, over the Internet is:	121	98	.492
8. Completing all of the elearning modules / Interactive Distance Learning sessions provided is:	119	97	.029*
9. Having a long-range career goal is:	122	99	.941

	N	%	p. =
10. Contributing to a more highly-skilled workplace is:	122	99	.208
11. Being able to provide feedback on the training is:	121	98	.252
12. Seeing improvements to training materials, based on employee feedback is:	122	99	.093

N = 123   * Statistically significant p. = <.050

Exploring the Significance. Item 1 solicited responses regarding the importance of the employer providing training to improve skills. Ninety-five percent of the respondents, who had not yet taken any elearning courses, indicated that it was somewhat important, important or very important to have workplace training provided.

Completing all the elearning sessions, item 8, showed that 83% of the respondents who had not taken elearning courses had indicated that completion was somewhat important, important or very important.

The majority of people interviewed indicated that there were many positive aspects to elearning such as consistency in approach, improved product knowledge and customer service, and flexibility of access. Comments like, "Elearning trains everyone thoroughly – new employees will never remember everything but it's a good start to their employment", and "Better knowledge of helping customers out – it all has to do with the customers and dealing with various things in the department," support the general sentiment of favourability towards elearning.

<u>Perceptions</u>. Cross tabulations of Section C of the questionnaire and affirmative or negative responses to whether a person had taken elearning lessons are shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Bivariate Analysis of Elearning Participation x Perceptions toward Elearning

	<u>N</u>	%	p. =
1. My employer has clearly explained how and why the elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives:	119	97	.920
2. The management at my store strongly supports the new X Company elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative:	121	98	.550
3. Elearning / Interactive Distance Learning participation should be factored into my performance evaluation:	120	98	.020*
4. I am a person who embraces change:	118	96	.620
5. I enjoy using new technology (computers, Internet, diagnostic equipment, etc.):	121	98	.126
6. When it comes to training, I am confident that I can learn most of what is being taught:	120	98	.347
7. The knowledge I've gained through X Company's elearning/Interactive Distance Learning project enables me to do my job better:	120	98	.000*
8. I am concerned that I may not pass the elearning /Interactive Distance Learning modules	121	98	.084
9. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning is interesting:	119	97	.001*
10. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning materials are easy for me to understand:	120	98	.000*
11. I am concerned that my employer may monitor my progress without my knowledge:	121	98	.049

	N	%	p. =
12. Training should be provided away from work in a classroom:	121	98	.605
13. I am able to learn on my own without an instructor:	121	98	.578
14. I am at the stage in my life where I am not interested in learning new skills:	121	98	.006*
15. I am past the point of needing training in order to do my job well:	121	98	.080

N = 123   * Statistically significant p. = <.050

Exploring the Significance. Items 3, 7, 9, 10, and 14 showed significance from the bivariate analysis.

Item 3 illustrated agreement or disagreement to elearning participation being factored into performance evaluations. Only 37% of the non-participants in elearning disagreed to having their performance evaluated based on participation.

In item 7, which collected data on knowledge gained through elearning enabling the job to be done better, the data indicated that only 6% of the non-participation group disagreed to this statement.

For item 9, which assessed whether the elearning was interesting, 24% of the non-participant group indicated that this was the case.

Item 10 evaluated the responses to the ease of understanding of the elearning materials. In this instance, only 11% of the non-participant group stated they disagreed with the statement that the materials were easy to understand.

Finally, 5% of the respondents of the non-participant group was the total that had indicated they were at the stage in life where they were not interested in learning new skills, in item 14.

A comment about elearning provided by one interviewee was, "I think it's a great asset to the store and the employee. It provides answers to the questions that come up on the job. You can look it up in the elearning if you don't know." Another person similarly stated, "I think it's a great item to have in a retail store, because there's so many products in the store that you need to know about, whether you're trying to sell a bicycle or washer fluid." Both individuals belong to the non-participant group with zero to five lessons completed.

Synopsis of Orientation to Elearning. This section presented the data with respect to orientation to elearning and several items of significance were identified. The data demonstrated that regardless of the level of past involvement with career-related training most respondents held a positive regard for elearning, similar to that for training in general. From this initial examination of attitudes and perceptions of elearning, the restraining forces again appear to be less influential than the drivers of acceptance.

The findings have been illustrated regarding the sample's attitudes and perceptions, first to training and then to elearning. It is important to next focus on the data based on actual elearning participation rates at X Company and the attitudes and perceptions of the sample. These data are crucial to assessing participation and resistance, or, using Lewin's terminology, the motivators or detractors, to elearning.

Orientation to Workplace Elearning

This section will explore the orientation to elearning at X Company, based on participation rates in the program. In Table 15, the data are presented on participation rates by groupings of numbers of modules completed. As established

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previously, those who have taken less than 16 modules are considered non-participants (0-5 lessons completed and light users, 6-15 modules completed) for the purposes of comparison to the participant group. This non-participant group comprises 37% of the sample.

Table 15. Frequencies and Percentages of Elearning Modules Completed

	n	%
0	18	15
1-5	14	11
6-10	5	4
11-15	7	6
16-20	11	9
>20	64	52
Total	119	97
Missing	4	3
Total	123	100

N = 123

Participation and Attitude. Cross tabulations of modules completed and attitude are shown in Table 16. There are two items of significance where a relationship exists, items 1 and 8.

Table 16. Bivariate Analysis of Modules Completed x Attitudes toward Career Training

	N	%	p. =
1. My employer providing training to improve my skills is:	118	96	.005*
2. The relevance of the elearning/distance learning training to my job duties is:	118	96	.170
3. Rewards and/or recognition from my employer for taking training is:	117	95	.622

	N	%	p. =
4. Having an instructor face-to-face to provide training is:	118	96	.125
5. Keeping my skills up to date is:	117	95	.183
6. Having time available on the job to participate in training is:	116	94	.026*
7. Being able to access training away from work, over the Internet is:	118	96	.321
8. Completing all of the elearning modules / distance learning sessions provided is:	116	94	.161
9. Having a long-range career goal is:	118	96	.881
10. Contributing to a more highly-skilled workplace is:	118	96	.227
11. being able to provide feedback on the training is:	117	95	.690
12. Seeing improvements to training materials, based on employee feedback is:	118	96	.342

N = 123   * Statistically significant p. = <.050

Exploring the Significance. Item 1 pertains to the employer providing training to improve skills. The breakout from the non-participant group was 89% of those who had not taken any elearning modules indicated that it was important or very important that the employer provide training. Eighty-eight percent of the remaining light users indicated a similar view.

Item 6 gathered opinions about the importance of having time to participate on the job to participate in training. This was strongly supported as 97% of the sample indicated this time issue was either somewhat important, important or very important. Most notably, 86% of the non-participant group indicated that this was somewhat important through to very important. Of the 3% who indicated that having

time on the job was not important all but one were from the group that had

completed over 20 modules.

       Participation and Perception. The bivariate analysis of participation rates, in

Table 17, based on number of modules completed and perceptions yielded three

areas of significance in items 7, 10, and 13. Item 3 was only slightly above the

probability limit so will be addressed as well.

Table 17. Bivariate Analysis of Number of Modules Completed x Perceptions toward Elearning

	N	%	p. =
1. My employer has clearly explained how and why the elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives:	115	94	.796
2. The management at my store strongly supports the new X Company elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative:	117	95	.582
3. Elearning / Interactive Distance Learning participation should be factored into my performance evaluation:	116	94	.051
4. I am a person who embraces change:	114	93	.933
5. I enjoy using new technology (computers, Internet, diagnostic equipment, etc.):	117	95	.513
6. When it comes to training, I am confident that I can learn most of what is being taught::	116	94	.375
7. The knowledge I've gained through X Company's elearning/Interactive Distance Learning project enables me to do my job better:	116	94	.048*
8. I am concerned that I may not pass the elearning /Interactive Distance Learning modules:	117	95	.156
9. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning is interesting:	115	94	.072
10. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning materials are easy for me to understand:	116	94	.028*
11. I am concerned that my employer may monitor my progress without my knowledge:	117	95	.148

	N	%	p. =
12. Training should be provided away from work in a classroom:	117	95	.709
13. I am able to learn on my own without an instructor:	117	95	.003*
14. I am at the stage in my life where I am not interested in learning new skills:	117	95	.392
15. I am past the point of needing training in order to do my job well:	117	95	.682

N = 123   * Statistically significant p. = <.050

Exploring the Significance. Item 7, relating to the knowledge gained to do a better job, the data indicated that only 6% disagreed from the group that had taken none of the elearning lessons (no one strongly disagreed). While, 41% from this same group agreed or strongly agreed it is noteworthy that 53% chose a neutral position. The larger non-participant group indicated an agreement or strong agreement of 71%.

Item 10 gathered data regarding the materials and whether they are easy to understand. In this instance, the data demonstrated that 90% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that the materials were easy to understand. Of the non-participant group, 81% indicated agreement or strong agreement to this statement. Interestingly, the number of respondents who disagreed to the ease of understanding of the materials came from two sub-groups – those who had either completed over 20 modules or had completed no lessons – in equal measure, at two responses each.

Item 13 examined the ability to learn on own without an instructor. Eighty-nine percent of the sample indicated agreement or strong agreement to this category with

a breakout of 81% of the non-participants agreeing and strongly agreeing to being self-directed learners. In fact, only 3% disagreed with this statement, all of which were non-participants.

As indicated, item 3 was only slightly about the probability margin so warranted consideration. This statement assessed perceptions about elearning participation being factored into performance reviews. Thirty-nine percent of those who had not taken any courses disagreed or strongly disagreed to this practice. Conversely, 39% of the same group agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, with the rest remaining neutral. Of particular interest, in the disagree to strongly disagree categories for performance reviews factoring in elearning participation, the following representation was present: 28% of all non-participants, 10% of the full participant group and most notably, 11% of those who had completed over 20 modules.

As one person stated in their interview, "I think it [elearning participation] should be part of the performance review – if they're working hard and they're trying to better themselves. We all need to learn, no matter how long we've been here."

Synopsis of Orientation to Elearning in the Workplace. This section presented the data with respect to actual participation in elearning at X Company and several items of significance were identified. The data demonstrated that non-participation or participation did not preclude responses to being in opposition.

The quantitative findings have been illustrated regarding the sample's orientation to training, then to elearning and finally to participation in the X Company elearning initiative. The symmetrical analysis did not measure the strength of the

relationships, but rather presented associations and indicated if relationships had significance that could be generalizable to the population. This information will be especially useful to the analysis in Chapter V for assessing the motivators or detractors of this type of employee training, according to Lewin's Force Field Theory

Findings from the Interviews

The employee interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in private. Subjects were reassured that any comments provided would be kept strictly confidential and that their opinions were valuable, regardless of their position on elearning. The responses represent the richer detail of employee perspectives regarding X Company's elearning training and provide further insights into the quantitative data as well as illuminating other issues not captured in that data set. The results can be generalized to the population of X Company, but not to the retail sector as a whole as the study did not draw a multi-organization, random sample.

The qualitative information generated (Appendix F) from the questions was organized into four main themes: course specific, cost/time, elearning benefits, and rewards/recognition. By categorizing the themes and then the codes within the themes, a much clearer picture of the issues and factors became evident allowing for easier analysis of the information. For the themes listed below, the specific codes were itemized and are provided before the full discussion of each.

Course Specific

The majority of the people interviewed indicated a positive regard for the elearning lessons and appreciated that their employer providing them with training.

Most stated that the materials were interesting and easy to understand. Three areas or codes that were specifically identified in this category were lesson content and structure, technology, and learning.

Lesson content and structure. Respondents mentioned several items that made the lessons interesting: animations, new information on a regular basis, good product information, nice use of graphics and a consistent look throughout. This supports what the questionnaire responses indicated, that 89% agreed or strongly agreed that the elearning materials were easy to understand. Perceptions that the content was interesting, using the same ratings indicated that the percentage dropped to 79%.

Criticism included the need for better sentence structure, as the lengthy paragraphs caused the meaning to get lost and required several readings to understand. Another person suggested that navigating into the modules was not straightforward and that a course outline, both online and in paper format, would be helpful; the outline should show the department, then the topic and finally the specific lessons. This person was not interested in the 'news' or 'updates' that were visible before being able to log into the course and felt that the online 'Help' features were not helpful. They continued by speculating that difficulty in navigation could logically lead to frustration and reduce interest and participation in elearning. One comment in the questionnaire (Appendix H) was interesting, "a lot of the materials go into too intensive material. And when not put to use immediately, or at any other time while being employed by CT, it is lost and in my own opinion a waste of time if not able to be put to use. The beginning of each lesson is informative – the remainder is

too intensive." Countering this, another person stated in the questionnaire that, "I find as an employee that has been here a while, some of the modules are a little 'too' easy and the test at the end are more common sense."

Eighty-five percent of the sample indicated in the questionnaire that it was important or very important to see improvements to training materials made based on employee feedback. The developers of the elearning lesson content and functionality conducted beta testing however evaluation at the corporate level is summative, focussed on the metrics of Kirkpatrick's (1997) Level 4 evaluation, return on training investment, rather than on individual formative evaluations.

The dealers have not conducted formal evaluations of the elearning content, preferring to pay attention to participation rates instead. During every interview, comment was made to the researcher about the fact that formal evaluation had not taken place and that this was the first occasion presented to them to formally express an opinion about the elearning initiative.

Technology. The interviewees mentioned that the use of computers, and more specifically, using the Internet with its flexibility of access for learning was a positive determinant in elearning's success. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents in the questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed to having enjoyed using new technology. Issues of plug-ins not being compatible with Windows XP, a sluggish or locked out corporate server and the requirement for high-speed access were deterrents to accessing the course at home. These issues coupled with the difficulty of sufficient time availability at work, discussed later, have caused some interviewees to lose interest in completing the modules. A comment in the

questionnaire that was particularly critical of the technology stated "People who produce elearning programs need to learn they are not producing a program for their enjoyment but to assist others with learning and that these need to be kept simple so that it can be done on almost any computer and not just the mega-computers which they have available."

One respondent suggested that a CD version of the courseware be made and supplied to each store to allow people to work from home without the need to have high-end equipment and access to the Internet.

Some interviewees indicated that they did not possess strong computer skills but that had not stopped them from trying the lessons. One person from the group did give up out of frustration because she lacked the necessary skills to self-direct in this type of learning environment. She did indicate willingness however, to try again and had arranged to have someone teach her, on her own time at home.

Table 18 compares computer skills with participation or non-participation and shows that there was no significant difference in the participation rates based on perceived level of competence with the technology. Approximately two-thirds of the sample fell into the 'participant' category regardless of their stated level of computer skills.

Table 18. Computer Skills Ratings vs. Number of Modules Completed

	Non-participants				Participants		
	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	>20	Total
novice	5	2		3	3	19	32

intermediate	12	8	5	3	7	38	73
advanced	1	4		1	1	7	14
Total	18	14	5	7	11	64	119

<u>N</u> = 123

Other issues included the inability to read the bottom of the screen where the test information was located (even after settings were checked and double-checked) causing some employees the inconvenience spending a half an hour of their time and not being able to complete the lessons.

<u>Learning</u>. When asked about learning preference 70% of the interviewees stated hands-on learning as their preferred method. The others indicated reading and observation as their preferred way to learn. The interesting point of this apparent discrepancy between enjoying and learning from the elearning courses, but preferring hands-on learning, is that none of the respondents stated that elearning should be eliminated rather that it should be accompanied with practice and assessment on the floor. As one respondent stated, "Some people don't like to sit in front of a screen and would rather be taught face-to-face. I think that should be considered."

The elearning is targeted to the employees being able to do their jobs better hence none of the people interviewed indicated a lack of willingness to continue learning. The questionnaire responses demonstrated this as well, with just 2% who agreed that they were at a stage in life where they were not interested in learning new things, and only 7% believed that they were past the point of needing training in order to do their jobs well. In addition, 8% indicated that they did not embrace

change and just 5% did not feel there was any importance to having a long-range career goal. One respondent indicated in the questionnaire comments that "proper training is important in any corner and being able to follow up on what was learned is also a big step in becoming knowledgeable."

Finally, more than one person interviewed suggested that a 'train the trainer' session (for the elearning administrators) and introductory workshops for the staff would be beneficial to facilitate the elearning process.

Cost/Time

The theme of time and costs for elearning was infused in many answers provided during the interviews. The areas of concern or codes centred on insufficient time to complete the lessons, staff coverage, students and part-time workers, and re-certification.

Completing Lessons. The typical time allotted by the course developers to complete the lessons was 30 minutes (except for the Customer Service module, which was one hour). To achieve Gold status a staff person must complete 30 lessons hence each dealer must allow every employee an average of 15 hours learning time. As indicated above, in some cases staff went through a module only to find that they could not complete the test and ended up having to repeat the module. Employers paid their employees in different ways – some paid five dollars per module while others paid wages while off the floor, which was somewhat equivalent in overall cost (at approximately $150 per person). Some interviewees indicated that not all employees were being paid for taking the courses – the

employer had ceased to pay but expected participation. Thus the cost was borne by the employee to spend the time and, often, to use their own computer and high-speed access. A comment submitted in the questionnaire was "elearning is important, but we also need the time to do this and not all of us have computers at home." As one person interviewed stated as their opinion, now that elearning has been around a while, "I know that those who haven't done the elearning, it's mainly because they're too busy working full-time and don't have the time to spend on the courses."

The topic of cost and time also included the paradox of paying for elearning when the budget hours were restricted in the slow periods and not having time to remove staff from the store floor during the seasonably busy periods. As one person stated there is, "always a conflict on whether to spend money on more staff and hope business picks up." Another stated that, "each department has budgeted hours that they use for the week and you can't go 40 hours over, that's a lot of money."

Countering this, one person in management preferred to take the long-term view of return on investment by stating, "we are considering bringing in the part-timers who aren't getting any hours just to do the elearning, to give them their four hours per week, before it gets busy again in the Spring."

Staff Coverage. Part of the difficulty in accessing the lessons is being able to have staff leave the store floor while ensuring sufficient customer support is available. With departments having a set number of budgeted hours there is often not enough coverage to permit someone to leave to work on a lesson, even if they so desired. None of the employers were regularly scheduling staff to take the

lessons while at work but rather leaving that to the employees to determine. There was a reluctance by the dealers to force the elearning on the staff, however, as one manager interviewed stated, "I think we're going to schedule it into their shifts to encourage it since they don't seem to come up on their own. We tell them, 'it's your job. You get paid for it.'" Another interviewee expressed frustration about the issue of coverage. She stated, "The answer I got [when asking for time at work to do the lessons] was I would have to be 'scheduled off the floor while I was working and that's not going to work out'…that's when I got frustrated – they wanted me to do it on my time and I don't have a lot of time."

Students and Part-time Workers. Many interviewees were empathic to the staff that was not scheduled for many hours. The sentiment was that the issue of sufficient time to complete the modules was most difficult for this portion of the staff component. Students were busy with their studies and could not afford to stay late to complete lessons and, because of their scholastic commitments, were unable to come in early as an alternative. As one person put it, "When you're only working four hours a week somewhere, how much is that a part of your life? And how much effort are you really going to want to put into it?"

Part-time staff also worked shorter hours that precluded their opportunities to spend time off the sales floor. Some interviewees indicated that they, too, had other priorities when they were not at work, which prevented them from either accessing the courses from home or extending their work time to complete them. As one individual indicated, "It's hard to get people in to take the training with our shifts the way they're set up (9-5, 10-5). It's hard for the students who are coming out of

school at 3:30, and by the time they eat and get here to work it's almost 5:00 and they don't want to stay after 9:30. During the day, you can have only so many on breaks off the floor. Coverage is an issue." Another put it differently, "the information can be lost if you don't use it. So, elearning may not be as beneficial for them."

Re-certification. This year, all those who have achieved Bronze, Silver or Gold status will be required to re-certify to keep their status. This has caused some to speculate whether people will work towards the milestones once again, at the same levels as before. One respondent indicated that she would only attempt to qualify for Gold status in one department this time (she originally achieved Gold for all five departments). Her reasons, were that, "There would be 500 questions to complete five Gold - I felt enthusiastic the first time but now it's too much.

Elearning Benefits

Generally, the interviewees indicated that the elearning training was beneficial to the employer and employees. Areas or codes identified were product knowledge, customer service, competitiveness and a more consistent approach to staff training.

Product Knowledge. When asked about their understanding of the reasons given for the use of elearning for training 50% of the people interviewed mentioned product knowledge before anything else. Moreover, this was one of the essential factors mentioned when asked about the positive aspects of this training. This was indeed one of the main reasons for the development of the elearning training by the corporation.

Comments like, "It teaches us about new products on the market" and "It was to provide an update for longer-term employees to ensure they know everything

about the products.' As well as, 'I believe they wanted the employee more informed of products – the product knowledge would better serve the customer" indicate the understanding of its benefits. One person who works in the garden centre part of the year indicated that revisiting the modules allowed for a refresher before the season started; she appreciated the convenience of being able to access the information to relearn.

Customer Service. Tied to product knowledge is the delivery of good customer service. In addition to being able to explain the features and benefits of a particular product, the customer service modules also provided essential training on how to communicate with the shoppers in the store to build customer loyalty. Three of the people interviewed indicated customer service as the main reason for the elearning training, and the main benefit. Responses such as, "A lot of customers request a particular staff for assistance because they were the ones that helped them the last time" and "We can provide [the customers] with a lot more information about the products and they will come back to us rather than going to the competition, if the competition doesn't know anything about the products " support this perspective.

Included in the increased ability to provide good customer service, one person said that, "the job gets done faster because of the knowledge the employees have and the customer gets out of the store quicker, which they appreciate."

Competitiveness. Competition is a strategic threat to the retail sector. With 'big box' type stores increasing opening up new operations, a corporation like X Company must position itself carefully to ensure continued sustainability. While none

of the dealers would admit it, with nine stores in the Niagara region they are vulnerable to competition from others within their own company. For instance, the largest city, St. Catharines has three outlets, and Niagara Falls has two. As one dealer stated, 'the smaller towns have a more loyal customer base because of geographical isolation' but the Niagara region is known for its 'leaky' communities where citizens travel from one town to another because of proximity. Repeat business is contingent upon consumer preferences and with healthy competition the best method to build a loyal customer base is through providing quality customer care.

This concept was not lost on the staff that was interviewed. When asked about whether elearning made X Company more competitive, responses were either affirmative or conditional but still reflecting a positive perspective. As one person mentioned, "It is beneficial to customer service and employee knowledge. It will make our service better than say, Wal-Mart, because our staff provide the service and the knowledge to help them [the customers]."

Consistent Approach to Staff Training. Responses to questions about the positive aspects of elearning and the reasons given for its introduction often indicated that the training provided a consistent message to all trainees and a consistent approach to getting new staff orientated. Comments included, "We're all learning the same thing" and " it's a perfect tool for new people…not only do they get an overview of the job but it gives them some specifics."

One person suggested that for new employees who haven't worked in retail before, the elearning "will give them the stuff to work with. I think they should, go into the elearning a week before they go on the floor."

Rewards/Recognition

The quantitative data indicated that 73% of the employees shared the attitude that it was important or very important to receive rewards and recognition for taking training. To qualify this further, some people interviewed indicated that learning was its own reward and their responsibility, therefore whether the employer acknowledged their participation or not, was not essential.

Codes that were identified in this topic area include incentives/motivation, performance reviews, and salary.

Incentives/Motivation. One of the topics that generated much discussion, because two questions focussed on this, was that of the incentives being provided by the corporation and dealers. In fact, eight of the 10 interviewed did not think the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards from the corporation motivated people to participate in the elearning. Incentives were mentioned as negative aspects of elearning as the interviewees felt that some people were working on the lessons just to get the pins, rather than learning the material. As one person stated, "a little Gold pin is not too much incentive." Another indicated, "it appears like they're grasping at straws to get the program off the ground." The corporation offered free trips and entered elearning participants' names into a draw. One person complained that they did not hear anything about the trip for a long period, and that names should not be entered for every lesson completed, but rather after every five modules were completed. It was

perceived to be a disincentive to complete all of the lessons only to lose to someone who completed only one course.

When asked about the dealer's incentives the answers were split equally with supporting what was being done (typically paying the staff for completing modules) to suggesting that the practices in place were not meaningful, depending on where the person worked. In more than one store, for instance, staff is expected to do the lessons on their own time. Salaried staff, in some cases, was not compensated at all, when the hourly staff was. One individual who worked at one of these stores suggested that, "fairness and recognition would be a great incentive…anything genuine and from the heart."

Some respondents indicate that they found a small amount of in-store competition motivating but others opposed this practice. Another comment made by two individuals was that the corporation should help the dealers financially to offset the additional costs of compensating people for completing the modules. Several suggested that rewards could include winning merchandise from the store.

As one respondent who is a manager stated, "If we concentrated on getting everyone to do the elearning to get Gold, it could happen. We could motivate them, no problem, but then if you back off it slides back too." One person's motivation seemed to come from a sense of duty to complete the modules and concluded by saying, "I just hope I can reach Gold pretty soon so I can get the rest of my time on the floor."

Performance Reviews. Some people interviewed did not believe that performance reviews should have elearning participation factored in if the person

had legitimate reasons for not achieving Gold status. Reasons included being too busy already on the store floor, to not having access to the computers, to needing coaching first on how to use the computers to do the lessons. Others indicated that reviews were not regularly done and should be.

Salary. Salary increases were generally favoured for participation in training, but were qualified with whether the dealer had the money or not to award them. As one person said, "it would be nice to be moved up to another salary level, but money is an issue." Another suggested that people be 'compensated equally for their time doing the lessons."

Summary of Interview Findings

The qualitative data provided insight into the quantitative information by adding the more 'human' elements that come from exploring issues at the personal level. By exploring the themes and the codes within and relating them to the quantitative findings of significance certain issues came to the surface. The issue of time to complete the elearning lessons appeared to be an underlying theme throughout the discussions as well as the sense that, generally there was broad support for the initiative and a real understanding of its purpose. Other issues raised were about using meaningful incentives, and performance reviews that factored in elearning participation should carefully consider the reasons for non-participation.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this chapter was to illuminate the findings of significance to identify the factors affecting participation. The results provided insight into the

attitudes and perceptions of X Company employees about the training and identified areas for further attention to facilitate a 'best practices' approach for increasing participation.

Quantitative data was presented with respect to orientation to training in general, followed by orientation to elearning and concluded with orientation to workplace elearning with several items of significance identified. The data demonstrated that most respondents held a positive regard for training and elearning and the restraining forces appeared to be less influential than the drivers of acceptance. Moreover, the data demonstrated that non-participation or participation did not preclude responses to being in opposition.

Interview responses revealed that time to complete the elearning lessons was an underlying theme throughout the discussions and generally, there was broad support for the initiative and a real understanding of its purpose. Other issues raised were about using meaningful incentives, and performance reviews that factored in elearning participation should carefully consider the reasons for non-participation.

This information will be analyzed in Chapter V to assess the motivators or detractors of this type of employee training, according to Lewin's Force Field Theory.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Information communications technology has fundamentally affected Canadian

society and more specifically, the way the business and education sectors deliver

services and training. This sophisticated technology supports a level of

communication and interaction that has spawned new practices, such as e-

commerce and Web-based learning, using similar technological platforms.

Consequently, there has been a convergence of focus for the business and training

sectors. Business methods now require that work skills be continually upgraded

through lifelong learning strategies that allow the workforce to 'earn while it learns'.

One of the main uses of computer technology to meet this workplace requirement is

through elearning. Research on this new method of training is limited especially in

the area of best practices. Elearning is both a new approach itself and the

mechanism through which continuous change in business customs will occur.

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence

participation in elearning in the workplace with the intent to provide valuable data to

an increasing body of knowledge. As supports and barriers to the successful

implementation of a corporate elearning strategy have a direct impact on the

benefits for employers, an examination of this area was useful. Employers should be

strategic in implementing elearning as there are many factors, including employee

attitudes and perceptions that can contribute to the success or failure of the corporate elearning strategy.

A review of the literature points to the increasing use of elearning as a viable means of training staff in the global economy. The technology used to become and stay competitive in today's global market is the actual means in which to deliver this type of training – a dual benefit to employers.

Lewin's Force Field Theory examines the driving and restraining forces that influence an individual's 'fields' and was used as the framework to apply the findings to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that supported or detracted from participation in X Company's elearning initiative. Lewin suggests that consideration of what encourages learners to embrace new methods for learning is important but equally, the factors that cause resistance to learning must be thoroughly examined. If an employee, in this instance, is motivated to try new methods of learning then participation will be high however, if they are resistant to learning their level of participation will be low. Olgren (2000) states, "Learning strategies…are influenced by the learner's perceptions of the task and intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to learn." (p. 8). The question that guided this study was "What barriers and enticers emerge regarding elearning in a group of employees offered an elearning training opportunity."

Review of Research Results

The process of reporting the results evolved from exploring the orientation to training, followed by the orientation to elearning and finally to the participation in the X Company elearning initiative. Summary numerical data identify patterns in

participant attitudes toward training, perceptions of elearning, and the rate of participation. Symmetrical analysis of cross-tabulated data presented associations and indicated if relationships had significance that could be generalizable to the population.

The results from each step of this process follow with an interpretation of the meaning that may be attributed to each finding of significance with respect to employee attitude (Section B of questionnaire) and perception (Section C of questionnaire). An analysis of specific interview data will follow the quantitative portion to illuminate any topics of concern raised that did not appear as findings of significance in the cross tabulations.

Orientation toward Training

 In this section, there were several findings of significance in the bivariate analyses of both attitudes and perceptions in relation to participation in training generally.

Attitudes. Measures of association identified the relationships between two variables: career-related training taken (Section A of questionnaire) and attitudes toward training.

Statement 7 referred to accessing training away from work over the Internet. Eighty-four percent of those, who had not started or had started but not finished courses, indicated that this was somewhat important through to very important. This finding indicates a high level of support for elearning, despite past participation levels in other career related training. Possible reasons include the newer practice of some X Company dealers to encourage staff to work on the lessons from home, with

or without remuneration. Those who work at the stores where no compensation is provided may still be interested in accessing the courses since participation is factored into their performance review. Future research could explore this finding through the breakout of the number of people from this group who would be paid or not paid to see if there was a correlation.

Access to computers in the workplace may also influence this finding. Stores typically have one to two computers from which to access the elearning that must be shared with approximately 30-40 staff to over 100, depending on the store in which one worked. In addition, scheduling time off the store floor to access the lessons was presented as a real concern in the interviews. One person's statement in the Comments area of the questionnaire stated that, "I only do elearning at home because the computers at work are not always available. Do not like to take my work home with me – home time is my time."

Item 8 refers to the completion of elearning modules. The data indicate that 89% of the respondents who had not pursued any career-related training felt completion was somewhat important, important or very important. When including the light users, the percentage rose to 91%. This positive attitude to completing the lessons, when the person has identified themselves as not having previously engaged in career related training, or not finishing after starting, could be the result of their participation being factored into their performance reviews therefore training is seen as valuable. Possibly the financial incentive or reward (Gold status) to complete may also be a stronger impetus to accomplish what has not been seen as valuable before. Peer pressure from co-workers may factor into the responses as

well since training accomplishment is quite visible and therefore highly valued.

Another reason could be due to the quality of the materials there is a perceived

relevance between the materials and job performance – equating learning with work

can be established.

In Item 9, the data demonstrated that 88% of the sample felt that having a

long-range career goal was important or very important, even if training had not

been pursued or not to any extent. The relevance and targeted nature of the

elearning training may tie more closely with the long-range career goals of many of

the staff as 65% of the respondents had worked at X Company for over four years.

Olgren (2000) suggests, "for adults, who are pragmatic about what they want to

learn, goals are an important motivator in…maintaining persistence." (p. 13).

Item 10, asked respondents if it was important to contribute to a more highly

skills workplace. All of the respondents (100%) stated that it was somewhat

important, important or very important to do so. This finding is not as surprising as it

might seem, as undoubtedly those who have not taken career-related training or not

finished still believe that they have gained skills from on-the-job training and

contribute effectively to their work environment. In fact, in a cross-tabulation of years

of employment with ratings of contribution to the workplace, 95% of those employed

four years or longer rated themselves as 'very good' or 'excellent' contributors to

their workplaces. One person interviewed, a long-term employee, strongly believed

that most full-time employees 'go above and beyond on a daily basis' whether they

had taken e-elearning or not.

Less than 2% of the entire sample (responses came from the group who had not taken any career-related training) in item 11 indicated that being able to provide feedback on the training was not important. Recipients of training naturally have opinions about it and most likely have suggestions for improvement. Latchem & Hanna (2001a) support soliciting feedback and stress that "we must treat all of [the learner's] feedback as objective fact if we are to reinforce the positives and excise the negatives." (p. 17). It is a common practice for trainees to be asked for their comments to evaluate training effectiveness, and since 63% of the sample had completed all, or some, of other career related training courses, the likelihood is that they have been polled in the past. It would be natural to expect this practice in the workplace training. Conversely, the reasons for not taking, or not finishing career related training could be tied to past experiences where comments were not gathered either.

To contextualize the attitude towards training, 96% of the respondents indicated that the employer providing training to improve skills was either important or very important.

Respondents in the interviews indicated (mostly before or after the questions were posed) their satisfaction at being asked to provide a formal opinion about the training. One person did suggest in their final comments that, "Perhaps you can provide a copy of your research findings to the General Manager and maybe a committee could be struck to examine the issues identified…If there was a committee and we examined the generic results we could get the benefit of you doing this exercise [research]. Herrmann, Fox and Boyd (2000) suggest that, "it is

essential to seek feedback constantly, both formally and informally, on intended and unintended effects of any course process. Then, it is important to do something about what is found out – acknowledge the learners' help and take remedial action. Adults like to feel ownership in any learning activity." (p. 47).

Perceptions. In this section, there were 10 findings of significance, out of a possible 15, in the bivariate analysis of perception and career-related training. Perception used ratings of levels of agreement.

It is noteworthy that those who had not taken, or had taken but not finished career-related training, responded similarly to those who had taken career-related courses and finished most or all of them.

Statement 1 addresses the perception of how the employer has, or has not, clearly explained how the elearning initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives to the employee. Those who have not engaged in career related training or have not finished mostly agreed or strongly agreed, at 79%, that the employer had explained the corporate objectives and how elearning related to these objectives.

This finding would suggest that the employer has done a great job of explaining the purpose for elearning and how it will benefit the staff, and most importantly, the customer. It was evident in the interviews that people understood the rationale for the training as serving the customer well was mentioned repeatedly as a goal to remain competitive.

Statement 2 asked participants if the store management strongly supporting elearning. When cross-tabulated with amount of training, the relationship was statistically significant. Ninety-six percent of those who had not taken any, or not completed any, career related training agreed or strongly agreed. This closely matched the overall statistic of 93% in agreement or strong agreement. It would appear that store management has succeeded in impressing on most employees their firm belief in elearning's benefits, effectiveness and importance. It would also indicate that employers are making the effort to provide access to the training and providing financial incentives to do so. Some of the interview data did not concur with this supposition as several respondents complained about not being given the time to participate, or not being paid to complete the modules. A few comments were also made about management not 'buying in' and participating in the training themselves. Latchem & Hanna (2001c) suggest that "the leader is essential for conceiving the visions, creating the environment for success, providing the resources, and setting the standards. Senior managers also need to be continuously involved in the change processes, sharing 'the pain' as well as 'the gain'. (p. 43).

Statement 3 assesses the perception of whether elearning should be factored into performance reviews. Support for to this practice was agreed upon by 57% of participants who had not taken or finished any career-related training category. This may indicate that those who have a lower orientation to career related training likely have a strong self-confidence in their abilities to do their jobs well, which would reflect positively in a performance review, despite having no formalized training. A cross-tabulation of contribution with career related training supports this assumption

as 82% of those with unfinished or no career related training rating their contributions as very good or excellent.

Statement 6 examines staff confidence regarding their ability to learn most of what is being taught in training. Confidence was extremely high as only two people from the entire sample ($\underline{N}$ = 118) chose 'neither' as a response and not one person indicated disagreement. From the group that not been inclined to pursue and/or finish career related training courses, 95% agreed or strongly agreed to being able to learn whatever they were taught. Again, in the context of a retail environment, and with 65% of the sample having been employed at X Company for over four years, it is not surprising to see this level of confidence. Employees are always coming across new items of merchandise and therefore are able to pick up new information on products on the job, to a certain degree. As one person interviewed mentioned, "even though the products coming in may be new, most of them are evolutions of products these employees know very well."

Statement 7 measures the employees' beliefs about whether elearning enables them to do their jobs better. The results show little disagreement with 77% expressing agreement or strong agreement from the less involved group in career-related training and 14% stating 'neither'. This association is likely due to the specificity of the elearning training to the job. Although some people have indicated a lower level of orientation to training in general, when the materials have direct relevance to their jobs it is easy to understand why they would agree.

Statement 9 probes perceptions about the elearning and whether it is considered to be interesting. Again, not having taken career related training or not

completing any courses after starting does not appear to influence perception about the training much differently than from the opinions of those who are more likely to finish training. Seventy-one percent agreed or strongly agreed from the first group that elearning seemed interesting while 53% of the 'neither' responses came from the same group. Elearning is targeted to practical information that can be immediately used on the job, which undoubtedly increases interest.

Statement 10 gathers opinions on the elearning materials and if they are easy to understand. The data demonstrated that 77% of the group that has not taken career related or not finished career related courses agreed or strongly agreed that the materials were easy to understand. This finding would indicate that the materials are written well and that comprehension of learning materials is not the reason for this group's lower participation, or lack thereof, in career related training. Only about 9% of the sample did not have Grade 12 level education or higher (a few of the respondents were high school students) so it is safe to assume that the group's literacy levels and the writing level of the materials is in accord.

Statement 13 provides data on perceptions to being able to learn independently without an instructor. A total of 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to being self-directed learners from the group that has not taken or not finished career-related training. Again, this group likely relies more on 'self teaching' than those who prefer to pursue more formalized training opportunities.

Statement 14 assesses whether a person believes that they are at a stage in life where they are not interested in learning new skills. Seventy-three percent of the group not actively engaged in career-related training disagreed or strongly disagreed

with this statement, indicating that the majority was open to the development of new skills. This group's response would suggest that on-the-job training is the principal means they have used to learn, and going back to Statement 13, they likely teach themselves much of the time. Six of the 10 people interviewed stated that their preferred method of learning was hands-on, which would support this line of reasoning.

Finally, in statement 15, 76% of the respondents with unfinished or no training taken disagreed or strongly disagreed to being past the point of needing training in order to do their jobs. Key to this finding is the operational definition of the word 'training', again being specifically tailored to performing the job at hand, it will have importance and those with a lesser orientation towards career related training will embrace it.

Summary of Orientation toward Training

The responses in each category indicated that the level of participation in career-related training did not result in negative perceptions toward training. The findings indicate a positive perception towards training being provided by the employer whether the individual had been actively engaged in career-related training or not. Interpretations of the findings indicate that the specificity of workplace-based training is more favourably received because of its relevance to the job.

The sample's responses illustrate a more positive orientation to training than past behaviour would suggest, establishing the basis for the next evaluation free from underlying negative biases.

In this section, there were several findings of significance in the bivariate analyses of both attitudes and perceptions in relation to participation in elearning.

Attitudes. Attitudes were cross-tabulated for this analysis with responses of 'yes' or 'no' to having taken the elearning training to identify associations.

Item 1 solicited responses regarding the importance of the employer providing training to improve skills. Ninety-five percent of the respondents who had not yet taken any elearning courses, indicated that it was somewhat important, important or very important to have workplace training provided. This finding would indicate that attitude towards workplace elearning is extremely favourable. Interview data clearly illustrated that employees were aware of the importance of providing quality customer service to build customer loyalty in the very competitive retail environment and that increased product knowledge facilitated this. However, the high level of importance given to the training being provided, without participation having happened, would strongly indicate that something is precluding participation from taking place.

Completing all the elearning sessions, item 8, showed that 83% of the respondents who had not taken elearning courses had indicated that completion was somewhat important, important or very important. Again, attitude is supportive of the initiative despite lack of participation; there must be barriers precluding engagement.

It is noteworthy that such a high percentage of non-participants indicate the importance for having the training provided and for completing the courses and yet they have not chosen to start. One person's comments in the interview may shed

light on part of this phenomenon. They indicated a lack of computer skills, and no one willing to train them, as being the reason for lack of participation. Olgren (2000) recommends to "provide well-crafted orientation materials to create comfort in using technology and to trigger planning strategies for how to approach the course." (p. 11). Other reasons could include the issue of time and/or access to the technology, as were expressed in the interviews.

Perceptions. Perceptions were cross-tabulated for this analysis with whether the respondent had indicated 'yes' or 'no' to having taken the elearning training, to look for relationships.

Items 3, 7, 9, 10, and 14 showed significance from the bivariate analysis.

Item 3 sought agreement or disagreement to elearning participation being factored into performance evaluations. Only 37% of the non-participants in elearning disagreed to having their performance evaluated based on participation. If there were valid reasons for not being able to take the elearning it would be understandable that so many disagreed to being evaluated on this factor. On a more interesting note, the majority of the non-participants did agree to have elearning participation factored into their performance review. They were either confident that their actual performance on the job would outweigh their lack of participation or they were not evaluated regularly and believed that they would be engaged in the elearning lessons before it would be an issue. An even more telling finding is that 20% of the 'yes' group who had engaged in elearning did not express agreement to being evaluated on these grounds. This group may be involved in taking the e-elearning but may still be in the 'light use' non-participant group. Another reason

perhaps, is that some people do not like competition in a learning environment, enjoying learning for its own sake. Their perspective of performance reviews may be that it is a measure against other people's performance, rather than the achievement of personal goals and objectives. Unfortunately, extrapolation could not be performed, as the data were not captured to support this assumption.

In item 7, which collected data on knowledge gained through elearning enabling the job to be done better, the data indicated that only 6% of the non-participation group disagreed to this statement. This group would most probably be the staff that is confident that its contribution to the job is excellent. Fifty percent of people this group preferred to remain neutral and indicated 'neither' as their response and oddly, 44% agreed or strongly agreed that elearning had enabled them to do their jobs better when they had yet to participate in it. One explanation for this apparent contradiction is that people did not read the statement properly before responding in the affirmative. Perhaps they held the belief that elearning 'would' help them in their jobs once they started taking the lessons.

For item 9, which assessed whether the elearning was interesting, 24% of the non-participant group indicated that this was the case. This response may indicate that the people who selected 'no' to participation are interested in elearning, despite not having taken the courses. Or, that they have heard peers express that the courses were interesting and are reflecting that sentiment in their responses.

Item 10 evaluated the responses to the ease of understanding of the elearning materials. In this instance, 11% of the non-participant group stated they disagreed with the statement that the materials were easy to understand. These

data could indicate that this group has started a lesson but did not complete it, or attained a failing grade (less than 80%) and were too discouraged to make another attempt. Whether this was due to literacy issues or unfamiliarity with the technology is not clear from the data collected. Olgren (2000) states that "well-structured course materials are particularly important in learning with technology because they support and trigger learners' strategies for managing the learning process." (p. 13).

Finally, 5% of the respondents of the non-participant group was the total that had indicated they were at the stage in life where they were not interested in learning new skills, in item 14. This is a very small percentage of the non-participant group and actually represents only one individual. On balance, there was one person from the participant group who also agreed to not being interested in learning new skills at their stage in life. Interestingly, assumptions cannot be made that these individuals are older workers as both respondents fell into the group that is 35-44 years of age. The probability that this finding is representative of the population is strong because it is such a small proportion of the sample.

Summary of Orientation toward Elearning

Attitudes and perceptions to elearning appear positive. Concerning attitudes, the assumption of barriers to participation is a safe one to make. Perceptions, while favourable, illustrate that some people are not participating perhaps because of underlying issues such as literacy or lack of the required technical skills to access the courses. It is important to understand that, "Adult learners do not just need to revive 'rusty' study skills; most need to develop a whole new set of learning and information literacy strategies." (Phillips & Kelly, 2000, p. 17). Others believe that

elearning participation should not be factored into performance reviews either

because they have been unable to participate for valid reasons, or because of

possible misperceptions about performance reviews. And finally, some may not have

understood the statements to which they were responding.

<u>Orientation toward Workplace Elearning</u>

In this section, there were several findings of significance in the bivariate

analyses of both attitudes and perceptions in relation to participation in workplace

elearning.

<u>Attitudes</u>. Bivariate analysis of attitude with number of modules completed in

the elearning training was used to seek out signs of relationships.

Item 1 pertains to the employer providing training to improve skills. The

breakout from the non-participant group was that 89% of those who had not taken

any elearning modules indicated it was important or very important that the employer

provide training. Eighty-eight percent of the remaining light users indicated a similar

view. One can suppose from the data that despite a positive regard for employer

sponsored training there are other barriers to participation, or this type of training is

not their preferred method of learning to improve skills.

Several people interviewed expressed the desire to have the elearning

knowledge applied on the store floor in a formalized manner. One person mentioned

that, "[you] always need the human relations part of training" and 'I really like it

[elearning] as a tool, if applied properly or it's not going to work. You have to apply

learning."

Item 6 gathered opinions about the importance of having time to participate on the job to participate in training. This was strongly supported as 97% of the sample indicated this time issue was either somewhat important, important or very important. Of the 3% who indicated that having time on the job was not important all but one were from the group that had completed over 20 modules.

Most notably, 86% of the non-participant group indicated that this was somewhat important through to very important. Moreover, 95% indicated their desire to complete all of the lessons and 89% demonstrated their interest in being able to access the training over the Internet away from work. While only 37% of the sample's respondents were classified as non-participants (completing less than 16 modules), the high percentages regarding time would indicate that even to the participant group time is very much an issue. Olgren (2000) supports this by stating that, "Time management can be difficult for adults who have to juggle the conflicting demands of work or family responsibilities and for whom there is no clear division between learning space and work or family space…" (p. 13). This can be attributed, in part, to the recently announced re-certification that will be required of all employees to maintain their status (Bronze, Silver or Gold levels).

The non-participant group's response levels would suggest that insufficient time at work to complete the lessons is an issue and can be assumed to be one of the reasons why the participation rates are lower for this group. Time also factored predominantly in the qualitative findings, as noted in Chapter IV. Time was mentioned more than any other factor when asked about the biggest challenge that X Company faced in getting employees to take elearning. Comments such as, "I

think that the part-time employees probably don't have the time to do elearning", "If I had nothing else to do I would probably do all the lessons for the whole store, but I don't have time" and "the time is the biggest issue – how can you convince them [the staff] that it's worthwhile", illustrate this lament.

Perceptions. Bivariate analysis used perceptions and the number of modules completed in the elearning training to search for signs of relationships.

Item 7, relating to the knowledge gained to do a better job, the data indicated that only 6% disagreed from the group that had taken none of the elearning lessons (no one strongly disagreed). This is to be expected, as it is logical to disagree when one has not gained any knowledge. More interesting is that 41% from this same 'no lessons taken' group agreed or strongly agreed and that 53% chose a neutral position. A partial explanation would again be that the respondents did not clearly understand the statement or they were reflecting that they had seen evidence from their peers that the elearning was increasing knowledge. The 'neither' response rate probably indicates that a person did not feel they were in a position to comment on the efficacy of elearning since they had not yet participated.

The larger non-participant group (which includes the light users) indicated an agreement or strong agreement of 71%. This would indicate that the light users are finding the learning helpful on the job even though they have not taken many courses, which speaks to the effectiveness of the elearning.

Item 10 gathered data regarding the materials and whether they are easy to understand. In this instance, the data demonstrated that 90% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that the materials were easy to understand. Of the non-participant

group, 81% indicated agreement or strong agreement to this statement. The light users are most likely the ones who have been able to comfortably respond to this statement. Interestingly, the number of respondents who disagreed to the ease of understanding of the materials came from two sub-groups – those who had either completed over 20 modules or had completed no lessons – in equal measure, at two responses each. For the former, one can assume that there is a strong drive for task completion despite difficulties. For the latter, one supposes that there are issues of comprehension or literacy which have interfered with getting involved in the training, or that the respondents have attempted the lessons and were unable to complete or pass the first one taken. Olgren states that "although most courses provide some form of syllabus or orientation, they may not include enough information to help learners to feel comfortable with the technology and to relate the content to their own intrinsic purposes for learning. As a result, they may choose strategies just to 'get by' or they may not become invested enough in the course to complete it." (p. 12).

Item 13 examined the ability to learn on one's own without an instructor. Eighty-nine percent of the sample indicated agreement or strong agreement to this category with a breakout of 81% of the non-participants agreeing and strongly agreeing to being self-directed learners. In fact, only 3% disagreed with this statement, all of which were non-participants. Referring back to an earlier observation it would seem that employees are confident in their ability to do their jobs and to learn on the job. The 3% who disagreed with this statement, all non-participants are clearly indicating that they require support to learn.

As indicated, item 3 was only slightly outside the probability margin so warranted consideration. This statement assessed perceptions about elearning participation being factored into performance reviews. Thirty-nine percent of those who had not taken any courses disagreed or strongly disagreed to this practice. Conversely, 39% of the same non-participant group agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, with the rest remaining neutral. This is understandable, as there would be a natural concern that lack of participation would reflect negatively in the review.

Of particular interest, the respondents who disagreed with performance reviews factoring in elearning participation (16% of the sample), represented the following: 63% of non-participants/37% of participants, and most notably, 32% of those who had completed over 20 modules were in disagreement. This last group's response is puzzling and one speculates if this is due, in part, to the perception that learning is to be enjoyed for its own sake and not measured against some other external standards.

With 73% agreeing or strongly agreeing to performance evaluations including elearning participation it would appear to be considered important and has been well instilled into the corporate culture of the stores. As one person stated in their interview, "I think it [elearning participation] should be part of the performance review – if they're working hard and they're trying to better themselves. We all need to learn, no matter how long we've been here."

<u>Summary of Orientation toward Workplace Elearning</u>

Attitudes and perceptions to workplace elearning appear positive. With respect to attitudes, the assumption of barriers to participation is again a safe one to make, based on the importance ratings provided regarding employer sponsored training. Also receiving a high response rate as somewhat important through to very important was the issue of having time on the job to participate, with both the participant and non-participant groups expressing similar views. Interview data indicated a high level of interest for time to be provided on the job as well. Perceptions were generally positive and indicated that the materials were perceived to be easy to understand, the knowledge gained enabled the job to be done better and that people were confident in their ability to learn on their own. The issue of performance reviews showed significance once again, with the non-participant group likely concerned that its lack of involvement with elearning reflected negatively in a review. An interesting response came from the participants who had completed over 20 modules; one third of this group disagreed with this practice. Also, the fact that some people are not participating perhaps because of underlying issues such as literacy or lack of the required technical skills to access the courses appeared to be present again. And finally, reflecting a similar supposition made above, some may not have understood the statements to which they were responding.

<u>Interview Findings.</u>

The bivariate analyses did not identify the topic raised in the interviews concerning the incentives for participation in the elearning courses. Eight of the ten

interviewed felt that the Bronze, Silver and Gold pins from the corporation were not meaningful acknowledgements for completing 16 – 30 modules.

When asked for suggestions and/or recommendations for increasing participation in elearning, better incentives were mentioned again. With respect to the dealer incentives, the responses varied because of the individual practices of the different employers. When staff was compensated for taking the lessons, there was consensus that this practice was fine as it was. However, when the employee was expected to complete the modules on their own time, either at home, before or after a shift or because they were on salary that is when people took exception. In the quantitative data, 93% of the sample indicated that it was somewhat important, important or very important to receive rewards or recognition from the employer.

Recognition can also include being credited for participation in performance reviews. As mentioned, the quantitative data indicate that 73% of the sample felt that participation should be factored into performance reviews. While this percentage is lower than other findings regarding perceptions to elearning it still represents almost three-quarters of the entire sample. Included in this topic is that of salary increases being contingent upon participation. Most interviewees agreed with this practice, but several added the proviso that with the retail sector being so competitive the profit margins were not always conducive to this.

Conclusions

This study examined the use of elearning by X Company for workforce development. In the quantitative findings from the questionnaire, there were several instances of statistical significance in the data when considering attitudes and

perceptions to training, elearning and workplace elearning. Although the sample was

one of convenience, it was large enough to provide a valid representation of the X

Company population. The qualitative data from the interviews provided insight into

the symmetrical measures as well as identified themes that did not present

themselves in the bivariate analysis. This group also represented the X Company

population well as there was representation from all age groups, participation levels

and levels of responsibility.

Lewin's Field Theory examines the driving and restraining forces that

influence an individual's life space, or "field". The intrinsic drivers of learner

acceptance and the restraining forces that lead to resistance to elearning need to be

better understood in order to encourage staff participation. For X Company retail

stores, higher participation levels will lead to improved employee skills and

increased product knowledge, which in turn promotes more effective customer

service. Customer loyalty improves the organization's position in a highly competitive

retail environment by increasing its bottom line. As mentioned in Chapter II, Lewin

(1997) states that, "Learning as related to change in motivation deals either with a

change in needs or a change in the means of their satisfactions." (p. 228).

Applying Lewin's Field Theory to the findings the following supporters and

detractors were extrapolated.

Supporters. The key supporter for X Company elearning is the significant

level of importance (96%) that employees placed on their employer providing them

with work related training. This investment in improving job-related skills

demonstrates the value that the employers place on their staff and it is obviously

appreciated. Other supporters that were identified by employees as essential were, having increased product knowledge, stronger customer service skills and being compensated and recognized for participation in elearning.

Detractors. The key detractor, based on the findings, was the lack of time in which to complete the lessons. Of special note was the consideration of staff that worked on a part-time basis and students. Ninety-seven percent of the sample stated this to be somewhat important through to very important. Of the non-participant group, 86% felt it was somewhat important to very important. Other detractors coming from the results of the data collection, in no particular order, include insufficient support and coaching, the lack of meaningful incentives, and in some cases, no remuneration for completing the lessons. Other detractors include technology inadequacies – plug-ins, server freezes, not having high-speed access or new enough equipment – and no practical assessment of elearning on the store floor.

Based on the findings, and referring to the restraining forces and drivers of acceptance in Table 1, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Attitudes and perceptions about elearning are generally positive reflecting that the sample is 'on-side' to the elearning initiative – most expressed that it was important or very important that their employer provides them with training. Staff believes that this training enables them to do their jobs better and it is important to them that they complete the lessons. They feel that they can learn what is being taught, can learn on their own and enjoy learning new skills, especially hands-on. They also believe that they contribute well to their work environments.

2. The elearning materials are considered interesting, easy to understand and relevant to people's jobs. For those who did not indicate this to be true, restraining forces may be may be self-confidence, a need for face-to-face interaction in learning, literacy and / or comfort with the use of the technology used to access the courses.

3. Staff is very aware that customer service, based primarily on product knowledge, is the essential determinant in X Company's competitiveness in the retail sector. Elearning effectively delivers product information and customer service training. This means that the employers have done a good job at building awareness and support for the strategy and have tied corporate objectives to the strategy.

4. Rewards and recognition are important and should be meaningful. The use of the Bronze, Silver and Gold level recognition should continue as certain employees do attach importance to this measure of accomplishment. Other forms of incentives for participation are needed. Feedback on training and elearning should be sought by the employers, and acted upon. Performance reviews should factor in elearning participation, since it relates to the delivery of quality customer service through product knowledge, however consideration must be given to staff on an individual basis for their levels of success. Individual learning plans with realistic goals and support may be required to mitigate barriers.

5. Proper time management is crucial for staff to complete the lessons and to the success of the elearning strategy as completing the elearning modules is important to employees. Staff participation levels would increase if they were

regularly scheduled to take lessons whether to achieve Gold status or to re-certify.

<u>Recommendations</u>

The following recommendations were developed based on the findings. In some cases, stores have already put in place strategies similar to these suggestions. It would be prudent for the employers to review the items on this list and compare them to current practice for consideration in their strategic planning as a means to increase participation rates.

1. Schedule staff to take elearning during work shifts on a regular basis – determine a workable ratio of lessons to shifts to allow for floor coverage and cost considerations, based on seasonal flows. If staff prefers to take lessons at home, develop clear expectations for a minimum acceptable standard for completion of lessons. Compensate staff for workplace related training equitably.

2. New staff should complete the Customer Service modules before starting on the floor and should be aware of the expectation of achieving a minimum acceptable standard of completed lessons during their probationary period.

3. Assess incentives used and poll staff to discover other ones that have meaning. Broaden the selection beyond the pins and add to the list of options based on the suggestions from staff that are affordable and meaningful. When using draws for trips and other rewards, keep the deadlines reasonably short and the employees informed of the outcomes.

4. Provide formal training to elearning administrators – "Train the Trainer" - on how to implement the elearning in the stores and trouble-shoot technical problems. Administrators should offer periodic workshops in each store to employees on how elearning works and provide one-on-one coaching when necessary and/or could use in-house "Champions" (employees who embraced elearning and are known to be helpful to others with their efforts) for added support to employees. Factor elearning administration into the administrator's job description and provide sufficient time to do this (if not being done already). Provide the elearning administrators from all nine stores with the opportunity to share their experiences on 'best practices' and allow for potential future collaboration.

5. Department supervisors need to assess the day-to-day application of the elearning by staff and act as mentors when required to ensure that the lessons are being applied. Management must lead by example and obtain Gold status, if they have not already done so. This demonstrates the importance of elearning and facilitates its adoption into the corporate culture.

6. Elearning lessons should continue to be written and 'kept fresh' to encourage future participation by the employees already engaged. The rationale for re-certification must be clear to staff and its relevance understood. Ensure that the criteria for re-certification are not too stringent so as not to discourage but rather to maintain or, ideally, increase the level of enthusiasm.

<u>Suggestions for Further Research</u>

The results from this study suggest other areas that future research might address. In the bivariate analysis, there were many areas identified as having relationships of significance. These associations are generalizable to the population of X Company employees in Niagara. To further the understanding of how elearning is being perceived and the attitudes employees hold about this type of training in the workplace, it would be helpful to broaden this research to include:

1. Explore the breakout of the number of people willing to access the elearning training from home, based on remuneration.

2. X Company stores in other geographical regions and contexts, such as large urban centres or more remote rural locations.

3. Perceptions and attitudes with the same group at a future date to make comparisons (especially after the re-certification deadline of September 2004.

4. The retail sector at large.

Elearning is a method of delivering workplace training that is gaining in popularity. Benefits claimed for its relevance and effectiveness include its ability to better prepare the labour force to work in the new knowledge-based, global market and allows people to 'earn while they learn'.

Its effectiveness can be measured as any training can be: through the learner's initial reaction, to assessment of learning through knowledge gained, to demonstration of the new skills or application of knowledge in the performance of

daily work duties and finally through the metrics of return on training investment by measures such as increased profitability, decreased employee turnover, increased staff morale, and increased use of the training itself. By understanding the forces that can impact negatively on elearning participation and eliminating barriers to its effective implementation, employers can benefit from the value of this type of training.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM FOR EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

Consent Form for Employee Participation

I hereby consent to participate in the research project entitled "Factors Influencing Resistance to Elearning in Small- to Medium-sized Enterprises." Lynne Rabak, a graduate student of Athabasca University in the Master of Distance Education will conduct this research. The research procedures used in the project have been cleared through the research ethics review committee of Athabasca University.

I understand that my participation in the study will involve the completion of a questionnaire and may include an interview.

The research project is expected to further the understanding of learner resistance in employer sponsored training using elearning or distance learning.

- I understand that my participation is completely voluntary

- The general plan of this study has been outlined to me, including my rights as a participant

- I understand that the results of this research may be published or reported but my name will not be associated in any way with any published results

- I understand that my comments will be held in **strict confidence** and will not be related in any way to my employment at X Company

Date	Name	Signature

I agree to be contacted for an interview. I understand that my comments will be recorded.

Contact Phone #	Signature

Leave completed form in envelope in assigned area.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

This instrument is designed to provide a clearer understanding about your ideas and current perspectives towards online/distance learning. The following questions will assist in assessing your perceptions about this type of learning. Ideally, the findings will enable your employer to determine what is going well and where improvements can be made with regard to training. *All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and your identity will not be revealed to anyone other than the researcher and research supervisors at Athabasca University.* The term 'employer' refers to the owner of the store in which you work. Corporate level references will always use the name 'X Company' to differentiate between the two. Please complete all pages of this questionnaire. This will take approximately 10 minutes.

Section A.: Please answer the following questions by placing an 'X' in the appropriate response box.

Career Related Training

   1. **Please mark the statement that best applies to you:**
I have not taken any career-related training   •
I started career related training but did not finish   •
I started career related training and finished some courses, but not all courses   •
I have taken career related training and always completed the courses   •

   2. **Length of time since last training of this type was taken:**
Less than 6 months   •
6 months to 1 year   •
1 – 3 years   •
4 – 7 years   •
Over 7 years   •
None taken   •

   3. **Have you taken any of the X Company elearning modules?**
Yes   •
No   •
    If yes, how many have you taken so far?
1-5   •
6-10   •
11-15   •
16-20   •
20+   •

4. **Have you taken part in the Interactive Distance Learning training sessions?**

Yes   •
No   •

   If yes, how many have you taken so far?

1-5   •
6-10   •
11-15   •
16-20   •
20+   •

Work/Skill Related Information

5. **Length of employment with X Company:**

Less than 6 months   •
6 months to 1 year   •
1 – 3 years   •
4 – 7 years   •
Over 7 years   •

6. **Overall, how our your rate your contribution as an employee?:**

Fair   •
Good   •
Very Good •
Excellent   •

7. **Rate the level of your computer skills:**

Novice   •
Intermediate •
Advanced   •

8. **Do you own a computer?**
Yes   •
No   •

If yes:
   a. Do you have Internet access at home?
      Yes   •
      No   •

   b. Would you use the computer at home to access the elearning training?
      Yes   •
      No   •

Section B: Please answer the following questions by placing an 'X' in the appropriate response box.

Activity	Response			
	Not important	**Somewhat important**	**Important**	**Very important**
1. My employer providing training to improve my skills is:				
2. The relevance of the elearning/distance learning training to my job duties is:				
3. Rewards and/or recognition from my employer for taking training is:				
4. Having an instructor face-to-face to provide training is:				
5. Keeping my skills up to date is:				
6. Having time available on the job to participate in training is:				
7. Being able to access training away from work, over the Internet is:				
8. Completing all of the elearning modules / distance learning sessions provided is:				
9. Having a long-range career goal is:				
10. Contributing to a more highly-skilled workplace is:				
11. Being able to provide feedback on the training is:				
12. Seeing improvements to training materials, based on employee feedback is:				

Comments on this section :

Section C: Please answer the following questions by placing an 'X' in the appropriate response box.

Activity	Response				
	Strongly Disagree	**Dis-agree**	**Neither**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. My employer has clearly explained how and why the elearning/Interactive Distance Learning initiative relates to X Company's corporate objectives:					
2. The management at my store strongly supports the new A Company's elearning / Interactive Distance Learning initiative:					
3. Elearning / Interactive Distance Learning participation should be factored into my performance evaluation:					
4. I am a person who embraces change:					
5. I enjoy using new technology (computers, Internet, diagnostic equipment, etc.):					
6. When it comes to training, I am confident that I can learn most of what is being taught:					
7. The knowledge I've gained through X Company's elearning/Interactive Distance Learning project enables me to do my job better:					
8. I am concerned that I may not pass the elearning /Interactive Distance Learning modules:					
9. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning is interesting:					
10. The elearning / Interactive Distance Learning materials are easy for me to understand:					
11. I am concerned that my employer may monitor my progress without my knowledge:					
12. Training should be provided away from work in a classroom:					
13. I am able to learn on my own without an instructor:					
14. I am at the stage in my life where I am not interested in learning new skills:					
15. I am past the point of needing training in order to do my job well:					

Comments on this section:

Section D:

Background Information

1. **Age:**

<18	•
19 – 24	•
25 – 34	•
35 – 44	•
45 – 54	•
55+	•

2. **Sex:**

Male	•
Female	•

3. **Highest Education Level:**

Less than Grade 12	•
Grade 12 Diploma	•
Post-secondary incomplete	•
College Diploma	•
Undergraduate Degree	•
Graduate/Post-Graduate Degree	•
Skilled Trade Incomplete	•
Skilled Trade Completed	•

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation. Your input is a valuable and important contribution to the final results of this research project.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When you were informed about the elearning training what was your initial reaction?
2. How familiar were you with the concept of 'elearning' before X Company introduced it to you?
3. Tell me about your understanding of the reasons given for the use of elearning for training X Company employees.
4. How important is it to you that your employer provides you with job-related training?
5. How do you learn best? Explain.
6. Now that elearning has been around for a while, what is your opinion of it?
7. What do you think about the incentive program that was introduced by the corporation to support elearning (Bronze, Silver and Gold awards)? (Did it change your point of view?)
8. What would you say are the positive aspects of the elearning training?
9. What would you say are the negative aspects of the elearning training?
10. Do you believe that this type of employee training will make X Company more competitive? (Is this important?)
11. What do you believe is the biggest challenge that X Company faces in getting employees to take this type of training? (What's causing resistance?).
12. Is there anything you would suggest or recommend that would increase the participation by you or others in the elearning training? (Quality of materials, timeframes etc.)
13. Explain how you feel about the incentives provided by your employer (the dealer) for participating in the elearning?
14. What are your thoughts about employee performance reviews and/or salary increases being affected by participation in elearning?
15. Do you have any final comments to make about X Company's elearning?

I, _____ have read and agree that this transcript is a true reflection of my comments during the interview with Lynne Rabak regarding the elearning training offered by X Company .

_____   _____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

Dear Employee:

I am a graduate student in the Master of Distance Education degree program at Athabasca University involved in a research study entitled: *Factors Influencing Resistance to Elearning in Small- to Medium-sized Enterprises.* I, Lynne Rabak, will conduct the research process. The purpose of this study is to explore, with a view to ultimately explain the factors that cause employee resistance to elearning/distance learning. The question guiding this research is "What barriers and enticers emerge regarding elearning in a group of employees offered an elearning training opportunity."

The research procedures used in the project have been cleared through the research ethics review of Athabasca University. The data collection procedures are as follows:

- A questionnaire will be used for the collection of evidence of learner resistance. With consent, a questionnaire of fixed-choice and open-ended questions will be provided online, or in paper form, with a request for a one-week turn-around time. This questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. This initial data collection will occur in February and March 2003.

- Follow-up interviews will be asked of some participants in April. Consent will be requested at the commencement of the project. Only those agreeing to be contacted for an interview will be sampled. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

All data provided will be treated in accordance with the guidelines established by the Athabasca Research Ethics Board. It is expected that one or more publications will result from this research.

Your participation is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate in any way. You also have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time.

As a participant in this research, please be assured that your contributions will be kept confidential and your anonymity will be protected. All data gathered during the process of this research will be kept under security for five years, as per norms of professional research practice.

Your assistance with this research will be very much appreciated. Once you have read and understood this letter, please sign the attached consent form and return to the designated area. Please feel free to contact me by e-mail at lrabak@becon.org or by telephone at (905) 295-3351 or by contacting Dr. Martha Cleveland-Innes at martic@athabascau.ca or by phone at 780-675-6426.

Lynne Rabak, MDE student

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPT OVERVIEW

Dear Respondent:

The following is a transcript of our interview regarding the elearning training offered at X Company. Comments provided were often grouped and edited slightly to make the flow more concise rather than using a word-for-word approach.

Please review what I have transcribed and sign at the end of the transcript if you agree that this represents the conversation that we had. If there is anything you feel needs correction, please identify this in the transcript. I will revise accordingly and resubmit it to you for your approval. Please place the transcript in the envelope provided to protect your privacy and I will make arrangements to pick it up at the Customer Service desk in a few days.

To restate the contents of the consent form you signed when you completed the questionnaire portion of this survey design, no comments given to me will be used in any way that would potentially identify you to your employer. I will be interviewing approximately 10% of the people who responded and gleaning the themes that appear to be common amongst you. If quotes are used in the thesis they will be general in nature so as to protect your privacy. Your employer will not view this transcript – all transcripts are kept by me to provide evidence to my educational supervisors that the interviews actually took place.

Again, thank you very much for your participation in my research project. Your input is invaluable and will add to a broader understanding of elearning and how it is perceived in the workplace.

Sincerely,

Lynne Rabak

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW RESPONSES

(Answers mixed randomly and any identifying information removed to protect anonymity)

1. ***When you were informed about the elearning training what was your initial reaction?***

   - I didn't really have any thoughts on it actually. I was open to it.

   - My first thought was, 'I don't have time for that'. The Customer Service module was an hour long and then there was concern that all the modules would be like that. After that they were half an hour long.

   - I was kind of interested because I thought there are probably a lot of things I don't think about and didn't realize how this works. I thought, it's a good thing to learn about the products – I love knowing about the products so I can help the customer.

   - I approved of it. I was a cashier when it came through, and the Customer Service modules seemed interesting. Then I was transferred to Hardware so changed to those modules and started them first. I really enjoyed it because there was more information to help the customers - it's awesome. I really picked up a lot – product knowledge and how to read the packaging. Getting to the exact problem and what the customer needs.

   - Honestly, I thought it wasn't a good thing. It was something else that would take up our time – and we were busy enough. It was not a positive reaction. Lots of us weren't computer oriented. I was thinking that this was going to be really hard. I do e-mailing at home but that was the extent of my experience with computers. We have the program in Customer Service but, that just takes a few minutes to learn. But nothing else about elearning.

   - I was interested in what they were trying to do and how they were going to go about it. The only feedback that we received about its introduction was it was meant to address the high changeover at many stores and the ongoing problem in having people on the floor who were not very knowledgeable about the products. This store has a relatively low turnover in comparison, but there are still new people coming in. Therefore that was apparently what was the driving force

behind the elearning initiative. It was never really hyped. I expected the General Manager to make more of a push with it – it was passed on to an Administrator and they met with everybody, including the supervisors, to encourage it. It never seemed to be hyped at all. That, I found a bit surprising but it may have been partially because of the culture – many people have been here a long while and likely think 'Why in the heck would I want to participate when I've been here long enough? If I don't know by now...' I think for the most part, people are pretty responsible in their attitude towards the customers so you have to give everybody a bit of slack. You have a whole day of people asking you for assistance, so some time must be given in consideration back to the staff [to get the elearning done]. In my observation the people are quite understanding of the customer. They don't necessarily handle it the way I would, but then, is my way the only way? At my age, I've learned that there's more than one way to skin a cat. So what works for one, doesn't work for the other. I was surprised that the elearning was kept to a low level. I expected them to hype it a bit more than they did – not that that's necessarily wrong, that's just what I anticipated, my reaction, if you will. When I worked in my previous job, one kick at it was never the end of it - it was an ongoing process to make sure that an initiative was noted and the people that it was intended for had the chance to recognize it. That's where my background comes in, you never saw the promotion of it [elearning], the ongoing encouragement of it, and then the other thing, has it been a success? It's been noted that the stores that have a strong culture in elearning have noticed an improvement in their sales.

- Same way as when we had all those X Company education programs in the 80's that didn't work too well e.g. dealing with customers, difficult people. I think I learn more with hands-on on the floor. I was skeptical about elearning before but now I agree with elearning because it's one-on-one, more or less. Some of the lessons I went through, although I didn't finish any of them, but I found there are some challenging questions in there. I had one employee who was green about sports and didn't know anything about hockey but she did learn a lot of things about it in the lessons, and she got a pretty good mark on it – so it did help her. So I'm for this, one hundred percent.

- It sounded interesting.

- I thought it would be great. I'd have more information about the products. The customer expect us to know what the products are, how to use them. A lot of young people work here and don't necessarily know a lot of things about the products.

- I was curious as to what it entailed. I was going to take it from there. I'm not very computer literate and had a lower level of experience with them, so I was a bit reluctant. Once I was shown how to work with it, I was fine.

2. ***How familiar were you with the concept of 'elearning' before X Company introduced it to you?***
    - I knew of the ideals of elearning – using computers to learn. I've taken IDL in past so felt it was somewhat similar. I didn't know a lot about it, just the assumption that it involved computers and the Internet. I only got involved with computers in the past two years but I enjoy working with them.

    - Never heard of it before.

    - Didn't know a thing about it. How to set it up I still don't know very well. I'm not used to computers. The young ones today it's just natural for them to work with computers. I'm a bit more old-fashioned.

    - Not at all.

    - Not at all. I knew nothing whatsoever.

    - I was quite familiar with it because it has been done at the college for about 10 years now. It was introduced as a safety net for the students. Some people learn best by doing, some by listening, some by reading. Recognizing the different learning styles of the students. I knew that Athabasca was doing it and it was working.

    - I'd never heard of it before. I was one of the ones brought into the elearning in the beginning to teach this, but I couldn't get the response from the staff. I had people up here [in the training office], and was doing it on my off time until it became too much. In '89 we connected via computer to the Home Office for some training. I did a fair bit of that – it was pretty neat

    - I had no concept of it at all. I'd never heard of it.

    - I had taken online courses at the university level but had never known it to be used for stores [corporate level elearning].

    - Not at all.

3. ***Tell me about your understanding of the reasons given for the use of elearning for training X Company employees.***

- For the new employees coming in it's excellent for that and also for refreshing the old employees on the updated information like warranties and new products that have come in. We don't always get the information to every single staff member – no guarantees that putting it up on a bulletin board that they'll read it. And it's hard to say how long to keep it there for them to read. Service information goes into books we use – some technical information provided in the modules but it's the books we use day to day. The consistency of the information and that all employees are receiving the same message. Old employees should do the new employee orientation for a refresher. Everybody needs to be reminded so that they can step back they'll say, 'you know, I forgot about that' e.g. Customer Service refresher. It can be easy to forget what you're actually here for – not just here to fill a shelf, here to help the customer. Even I forget that sometimes. It's natural - I want to get the tasks done and sometimes when I'm loading a shelf and am interrupted by customer it feels that I won't get the job done. Then I have to remind myself that I'm here for the customer.

- I think it's a perfect tool for new people. Often when they start they're very rushed. They would need to follow someone around to learn all of the 'ins and outs'. This way, not only do they get an overview of the job but it gives them some specifics - elearning won't answer all of the questions but it gives them an idea. The modules are very informative. Elearning also works for those who've been here for a while. It pinpoints some of the more important things and gets them involved in something aside from their little circle in their own department.

- Nothing was given to me. But what I can predict is that they want everybody to learn the same thing. Not one person learning one way and someone else learning a different way. This way if we all know the same things together we can make sure that the output to the customer will be the same. Otherwise, one customer will say, 'well he told me this, or she told me that'. This way we all get it the same way.

- Better knowledge. Helping customers. Getting to know more products. I didn't do it [the lessons] all so it's hard – I don't know all the information yet – sometimes I'm too exhausted at end of the shift. But, it's time to get back into the modules now that Christmas is over. I want better knowledge.

- I believe they wanted the employee more informed of products – the product knowledge would better serve the customer. We employees would have more information on a certain product. Some of the lessons have more customer service packages and that's good for new people, especially the new student employees – they could go on that to learn. I thought it was mainly for product knowledge to serve our customers better.

- I think the reasons given were that we would be better able to help the customer because we would be more knowledgeable about the products in our department. And we could branch to other departments if we wished. The other reason, or fallout, would be if the customer was satisfied then he or she would purchase. Personnel on the floor who could competently answer any questions from the buying public, and tell them the pros and cons of various products, that would translate in more sales.

- That it would be beneficial to the customers as well as the staff because you don't want to feel like a real idiot not knowing the answer to a question that the customer is asking. If you're working in the sports department you should feel that you should know what this hockey equipment is supposed to do. If I were a staff member I'd really want to know everything to do with the products in the job. I'm just the manager of the store and while I think I should know this, too, I think I know well enough already and I can actually learn from the staff, believe it or not. They're always dealing with the catalogues and I don't have the time to get into them. I do read all the flyers to keep up, though.

- To better our knowledge of the store and each department. It helps us to help the customer find the items, how to approach the customer and how to deal with their inquiries. We can direct them to the right department for the service.

- I understood that it was a way to better the staff; to give us more information about the products, about new products coming in and to improve our customer service skills. I really enjoyed the Customer Service modules.

- It was to provide an update for longer-term employees to ensure they know everything about the products. And, for the newer staff, it was to ensure that they provide better customer service. Overall, it comes down to giving the customer a better service.

4. *How important is it to you that your employer provides you with job-related training?*

- Very important – one of the biggest problems that a lot of stores have, not just X Company. Without training it's not going to work.

- It's extremely important. Training can save a lot of time and a lot of trouble – probably a lot of hurt feelings, too, if you provide training. A lot of the time it's assumed that you know what you're doing and that you know what it is that they [supervisory level] want. I can think of myself doing things daily and learning later that it's not the way it's wanted. I'd rather know what's expected. Training should eliminate the confusion and it broadens our knowledge of the basics. It can't but help to know the basics.

- I think it is important – not just to me, I think it's important to everybody. One person just can't go into a job and think 'I know this and I know that I don't need to know anything else.' That's not professional. You've got go into a job to learn more. I like to learn everyday, even if it doesn't all stay in my brain.

- I would say it's important for me – it's helping me. Maybe not for someone else – they don't want to be bothered. I personally *want* to be bothered with it. I want to do the extras that other people don't. I want to better myself in the store.

- I think we definitely need it. I've been in retail since I finished high school so for me I could feel that I probably didn't need this but you *do* need it. I think for new people who aren't used to it, especially if you bring a student in out of high school that probably has no clue about retail work, I think this is a great thing because they're right up on computers. So, if they sit at a computer for half an hour a day I think it's perfect for them – not that it's not good for us – but it's a great knowledge builder for someone who has no clue about retail walking in and having to deal with customers and new products. If you go into hardware, that's a big department to have to get to know, if you have no clue about plumbing, for instance.

- I think it's very necessary. How else am I going to pick it up? I need the information pertaining to my department. How I pick up the knowledge is not the point - the big thing is that I have to acquire it somehow. Sure you bring some knowledge along with it – but for example, the number of cordless drills now is probably close to a dozen, where there were three just a few years ago. That proliferation of goods requires us to know something about all of them – the features and benefits. To me, it seems redundant to have

all these similar items on the shelves, but that's how retail works. The interesting thing is that with our increased knowledge, the customers start insisting on you and you alone to serve them. Despite others being able to assist them, and probably even better. Once a person on staff has the reputation as being knowledgeable, the customer shows a preference for continued interaction with that particular staff person.

- Very important. I'm informed – and I like to be informed.

- I think now it's important. I wasn't too sure about it at first, but the longer I'm here I realize that it helps me to be productive. There was a manual provided for my duties and by following it I've learned well on the job. I haven't done the elearning yet, just the cashier training. I had problems with the computer and got frustrated and stopped. But, I'm going to try it again.

- Very important. I think it's really important with all the competition, since we all sell the same kinds of things - therefore you have to provide something more. If you have better knowledge of the products - the customers will keep coming back if you know what you're talking about.

- I prefer to know what I'm doing. Through your everyday routines you should realize what you need to learn, for example the GPS systems – I knew that I needed to know how they worked, not just from reading the box it came in. Training should be available, especially for those that are newer to the job and for the more applicable information for the long-term employees.

5. *How do you learn best? Explain.*
   - I learn best hands-on. I will remember things hands-on more than I will just reading about it. Reading doesn't always work – I'll visualize it but my visualization is not always the greatest. You show me and the next time it comes up I'll remember it. With the elearning it can't cover everything. I love the seminars that come with it – e.g. paint seminar with the representatives from the paint companies. Always need the human relations part of training. Need to be able to ask for verification – human touch has to be there.

   - By example – someone going through it with you - hands-on. Assumptions can cause the tasks to be done incorrectly. Not everybody responds the same to how information is presented so if the whole picture was presented it would help.

- I learn best, myself, with my hands. Hands-on, rather than reading or seeing something. Mind you the reading is worse on the computer – there's action and even the silly little things.

- By doing elearning and by listening to my manager, my supervisors, even customers teach you all these little tricks. The quizzes at the end of the modules really help – they make you think.

- I am a very hands-on type of person. For example, when we first learned our Return package, our Equity, it was a matter that if you didn't get on the computer and do it yourself, it was too hard for someone to tell you. So for me, it was better to have someone over my shoulder coaching me on what to do. But, to retain something, I think a computer does it for me as far as for gaining knowledge. In the lessons you have to take steps to answer the questions on there.

- Depends on what it is. Some things I'm perfectly happy with reading about and others with hands-on. It's very situational. I don't have one learning style – as opposed to the literature. I do like to gather as much information as I can about something until I'm comfortable with it.

- Hands-on.

- It's two-fold. I like someone to teach me and I like to learn on my own. I find by watching other people do the task I can learn well from that. Then I try it for myself.

- I learn best alone. Reading about things, whether in print or on a computer. Sitting by myself, I can concentrate better. That works better for me.

- I learn best hands-on, rather than by reading. With the GPS example - rather than reading about how it functions on the side of the box, I'd like to be able to take it out of the box and work with it to understand how it works. If it's [elearning] not used right away, it can be lost. It may be my age, but if I don't use if right away, it's gone. It's surprising what a person can remember after a long time if it gets logged into our memory from using it

6. ***Now that elearning has been around for a while, what is your opinion of it?***
    - I really like it as a tool, if applied properly or it's not going to work. You have to apply learning. Within the store – elearning sets

standards for everyone to come up to but the learning has to be applied.

- At first, I found that it became competitive, in a good way. Someone would indicate that they'd completed several lessons and I'd want to catch up and get ahead of them. There were difficulties doing the elearning at home – dial-up problems, the lessons wouldn't load up, and it was really slow. Finally we got high-speed but unfortunately we can't get into all the lessons because of Windows XP (the plug-ins don't come in properly). Caused me to have to come back into work to get the lessons done, as it was too frustrating at home. One time the system was overloaded at X Company's server after I came into work. Some people have come in early and the Internet's been frozen. It's especially frustrating now that we have a deadline set to achieve Gold. And now there's the recertification and I'm not too impressed with that. If you go into a lesson and come back out, you have to wait at least an hour and a half to go back in. There are 100 questions – 10 questions from 10 different categories. I did most about a year ago and have lost some of the information. I have to go back through all those ten modules, make notes and then go again into the recertification modules. So, I'll likely go to Gold certification in my own department; it's too much otherwise. There would be 500 questions to complete 5 Gold (five departments) – I felt enthusiastic the first time but now it's too much. It would require going back through all the orientation modules too. It's not entirely clear if you need overall 80% for each module or overall score. Recertification could cause resistance. And now you've got all these people that are rushing to get caught up and once they find out what's involved for recertification it's not going to go over very well. (Deadline September). Really, it's their own fault – they've been procrastinating. The whole process was passed to the managers and they are just about in as bad a shape since they weren't keeping up with it either. Basically it seems that they can't be bothered and they just let it slide.

- I'm starting to get into it. And I had to redo it because the computer went down. Mind you, I got 100%. I got 80% the first time. I had missed the one question and when I went back in the questions had changed (which is a good thing).

- I just think it helps me.

- I think it's a great item to have in a retail store, because there are so many products in the store that you need to know about, whether you're trying to sell a bicycle or washer fluid. I didn't have a clue before – now I've learned some of the names of the parts of a

bicycle, like the derailer. I've learned them through the elearning. So, I think it's a great learning tool – excellent.

- I think that it could be made a lot more user friendly. That's my critique of it. It is not easy to get to the material for your department. It doesn't take three or four clicks of a mouse. You can't do it. Rather than having it set up with a course outline so that a person can enter the site, then choose their department then the particular topic, it's a very difficult process to get to where you want to go in the lessons. To me, they make it far too extended, prolonged and confusing. I don't want to know 'what's coming up' or 'what's new', just let us get to the courses. In my opinion it's not straightforward; it's not user friendly for navigation through the site. This is not set up for people who are working in retail. They may need their hands held a bit and made simple. In my estimation it's not. I'm not knocking the people who designed it but it appears that they didn't think about the learner in how it's set up. It's not helpful for the learner who has very little knowledge or experience with computers. The online Help features are not a real help at all. If they tidied up the beginning piece that would do it; it's not well set up. I wonder if that's been the cause of the low participation level – they've tried to take the elearning and given up out of frustration. Perhaps they could be provided with a paper flow chart at the computer station – it could indicate how to log in, then say, choose 'X', now go to 'Y' – reconfiguration could encourage participation.

- I think that it's a great asset to the store and the employee. It provides answers to the questions that come up on the job. You can look it up in the elearning if you don't know.

- I'm willing to try it again. Another person is going to help me with my computer [at home] to show me how to get started – what to do and how to make it easier. It looks like I could like it this time around. I was a new employee and wasn't really sure, last time. To be quite honest, I didn't have a lot of introduction to it – no one showed me how to do it. I was handed a paper and was expected to figure it out for myself. So I didn't do very well because I'm not very computer literate. I'm going to try using my daughter's computer since it's top of the line and has cable access and that may make the difference in accessing the courses. This is a slow time of year so is probably a better time to do the elearning.

- I think it's good. Even this year, I'm going to go back to the courses I took earlier to refresh. In the Seasonal department we're getting ready to do changeovers, so for a large part of the year we're not

doing the same thing over again; it's good to look back on it and use the information as a refresher.

- I feel that it's helped somewhat. I've heard comments that a lot of people are doing it just for the money. Many have received their Gold status in my department and yet were unable to answer questions from the customers. It's just not 'clicking' even though they take the lessons. I think it's easier if they focus on one area rather than on the whole store, because if they're not going to apply it on a regular basis it's not going to stay with them. Take the training, but take it for your area. You don't need to know how to mix paint if you're over in sporting goods so how often are you going to do it [after you've taken the elearning on it]? And then, if you do mix the paint, are you going to screw up? It's not retained. Why focus on the Gold status if it's not going to be used? Especially when you consider the money that's being spent on it, it's important to decide if you're going to benefit in the long run. I'm sure it's not just this store, but many people are clueless. They don't even go to the book to look up the information, even though it's spelled out in the elearning to do that. It's nice to have people to interchange departments, but if you start getting into the details and you misguide someone you've got problems. There are certain people in the store that know what they're doing, so send the customer to them. If employees are assigned to a department that they genuinely like, they'll be more interested in knowing the details of the products; it helps to enjoy the job. I know that those who haven't done the elearning, it's mainly because they're too busy working full-time and don't have the time to spend on the courses. The job takes all of your time to keep the department running. It's the dedication to the job, and elearning is important to a point but it gets put on the back burner – customers must be served immediately and elearning gets moved down in priority.

7. ***What do you think about the incentive program that was introduced by the corporation to support elearning (Bronze, Silver and Gold awards)? (Did it change your point of view?)***
   - There was no change in my point of view. The reward to me is learning. Some people need to have the physical rewards to put them on the wall. In my mind I know I wouldn't remember all the stuff I have to learn. It's a lot to learn. I'll remember bits and pieces of it but I'll never remember it all. It's important that the store receives Gold – it's a goal and it's important to have a goal.

   - Bronze and Silver pins may be a waste of money when we're shooting for Gold. I can't imagine that anyone would wear 15 pins [if

they completed lessons for all the departments]. If you were only required to go to Bronze, then buying them would make sense however, there's no point in buying the Bronze or Silver pins if the stores are waiting to go Gold.

- It was instrumental in what I have learned. It was worth it. Now I can go for Silver. Then, Gold.

- I didn't really pay attention to that. I did the elearning for my own personal knowledge. Improving my own skills.

- Don't care. It was never put in front of us as a goal. The management here was concerned that we took the time to learn something that could be passed on to the customers. I put up the poster about the incentives about the pins and the free trip and nobody even asked me about it. People didn't care.

- I think that it shows that at the corporate level that they were trying to entice people to do it. It appeared in one of the newsletters that this was available – I haven't seen that repeated - no follow-up. I don't know how many people have gone for it. I wondered also about the issue of people comparing their achievements – 'I've got a Gold and you've got a Bronze'. You need to have a look at whether it's going to achieve the results you're after.

- I don't think that the awards are too much of an incentive to the employees. It's not clear what they mean. The trip to Toronto to a company related conference isn't going to do it.

- I don't find this to be an incentive. I've never been one for that type of encouragement. I feel good if I do something but I don't need a pin to show it to me. I'm not a very competitive person. I do it and if it makes me feel good, great. I don't need the badge. I never needed the stars in school. If I did it I felt good. There's a real competition here and that's not me. It may be my age I'm not sure.

- I think it's a good way to get people interested in it. There are some people who don't like doing the elearning. It's like another accomplishment in the job. I've done extra courses from other departments to make sure I can answer the questions I get asked by the customers – we're right beside the Sports section and there is some overlap between the Seasonal section and Sports.

- Some people find it great – they're very proud. I've always thought learning was a personal thing, for your own satisfaction. I prefer a pat on the back – I'll know I deserved it and I'll retain it. I could get

my Gold but half of it would be gone in my head very soon. Some people wear all three buttons [Bronze, Silver, Gold] but some of us can answer the questions from the customers. They don't use it and they lose it. It all comes back to focussing on their own areas.

8. *What would you say are the positive aspects of the elearning training?*

- The basics off the start for new employees, before they go on the floor. The new employee orientation program – e.g. customer service, scan gun and the Help inquiry screen – are helpful for new people to understand. They have a basic understanding of the product numbers and how to find items on the floor. Elearning trains everyone thoroughly – new employees will never remember everything but it's a good start to their employment. Old or new – there's always something new to learn. There's always new information coming up on our screens – e.g. shutting off scan gun or it won't charge properly. Recertification – I haven't taken it yet so can't answer on how it reminds you of what you've learned already.

- There's a lot of information and it's interesting. There are parts with repetition throughout - even though it says a half an hour once you get going and do enough of them there are parts you can skip. You're not really tied up for hours and hours on end. The animations are good in the lessons. It's a terrific tool, especially for new people

- The main thing is that you're learning – that's the main thing, I guess. And, we're all learning the same thing. And there are no favours – e.g. this one will get the gold. It's up to us to do it, if we don't do it that's our tough luck. It's giving everyone responsibility.

- Being able to be paid to take the courses at home on my own computer – the General Manager can see how many times we've been on the system and they'll pay us for it. The General Manager is great that way so we're lucky. They're really into this elearning and want to do it – it's like a labour of love for them. Better knowledge of helping customers out – it all has to do with the customers and dealing with various things in the department.

- Knowledge of a product, of a department. I guess that would be it. Learning about what you're selling and what's involved in the warranties. The process of learning about your department.

- Obviously you can do it here or at home, if you can get on (which has sometimes been a challenge), and you can do it in your own time. So that's positive. You can come in early to do the lessons and be paid for taking the lessons.

- Helpful for the staff. Staff can provide immediate answers to questions from customers because of the learning in the courses so it's less embarrassing for them rather than not knowing the answer. Also, the job gets done faster because of the knowledge the employees have and the customer gets out of the store quicker, which they appreciate.

- The knowledge of the departments and how the store actually runs. It gives the bigger picture of the store. It's better production if you can help the customer – if they're satisfied, then you're satisfied. If they leave frustrated you feel frustrated because you can't help them. I like to know what I'm talking about, basically.

- For the customers – we can provide them with a lot more information about the products. They will come back to us rather than going to the competition, if the competition doesn't know anything about the products. And they will feel more confident in buying the product because we know a lot about it. It's all about the customer and it also makes us more confident in doing our jobs, too.

- Full of information. It's a bigger benefit to the newcomer's moreso than for full-timers who have been around for 4 or 5 years. It's there for what you want to brush up on; it's there for your use.

9. *What would you say are the negative aspects of the elearning training?*
   - Doesn't force you to demonstrate what you've learned. For example, a past competition we did forced you to go into the catalogue. It wasn't mandatory but showed you if you learned. Still need the on-floor kind of learning – e.g. in elearning you learn how to read a screen but not how to look things up in the books. In some cases, most information is found in the books from the manufacturer. The tediousness of the repetition in the lessons. I understand what they [the developers] were up to – if you didn't do **all** the lessons it wouldn't be a factor (e.g. only one department's lessons). The courses aren't supported by Windows XP and a lot of people are disappointed in that because they'd take the courses at home. Some people don't have a car so it's hard to get in for the training. Some of the staff are students and have little time to get into the store early between school and work or to stay late.

   - Don't know if there is any. Some people basically stick to one department's lessons. I was surprised how well I did on other departments. The negative factor is the store's response. There's a push on to get Gold [status] – and a little Gold pin is not too much

incentive. We received Certificates and they just went in a drawer. There seems to be something missing – not sure what it is but there needs to be a way to provide a better incentive.

- I wish it would be set to do for an hour, rather than half an hour. And there aren't any examples provided - why does it do this, or that. They put a great big paragraph and then you've got to start all over again to figure out what it is that they mean. I find the way that the way the sentences are constructed, they're hard to understand – I'm not the only one who feels that way. It's almost like a riddle sometimes – you've got to keep reading and focus on exactly what they mean. It would be better if they were to break it down a little bit - put something in brackets to explain what they mean.

- In the modules I have been in, you have to go through the whole lesson again in order to pick up where you left off. It would be nice to be able to save time and go right to the point where you need to start. The computer screen doesn't show all of the page like it does on the computer at home. There is stuff missing on the screens here in the lessons. We're looking into it but no one is sure why it's happening.

- Getting time. Finding time. Putting time into it. Being in management we have to watch our hours – so if I put five employees at half an hour each into the elearning that's my budget gone for the month. My boss has never complained about that. Even my own personal time, trying to find the time to come in and do the lessons. You're here long enough and another half hour to an hour to sit here and you ask yourself, 'Do I want to do this?' The usual answer is, 'I don't think so.' I've noticed some have come in early to do a half-hour lesson, but very few stay late. That's the big thing.

- Access is an issue. I don't know if anybody would feel threatened – do it, or heaven help them. Some people may feel threatened by that. They don't know the management – so they think 'I'd better participate because if I don't it's going to be a black mark'. That's learning under duress, which is not the right way to go.

- There aren't too many negatives. The pins and contests - it appears like they're grasping at straws to get the program off the ground. This is the time of year that they should be really looking at the program – this is when the staff can get into the program and use it. The long-term benefit is that it may cost us now to have staff doing the training, but we gain money later because of their knowledge.

- I think it's the time more than anything. There isn't enough time – it's time consuming. I don't have a lot of free time. Now that the hours are a little bit less than they were, I think I can find a few hours here and there. I asked if I could use the computer here, if I don't get my computer working properly. The answer I got was that I would have to be 'scheduled off the floor while I was working and that's not going to work out' and 'I don't have the extra hours to give it to you later.' I understand they don't have the cash but either way you look at it it's going to cost money. They don't pay you to come in early. Only if you do it at home will they pay you. That's when I got frustrated – they wanted me to do it on my time and I don't have a lot of time. I asked to use their computer on my free time, because mine wasn't working, and if someone could help me with it. They wouldn't do it. I gave up asking.

- I guess it would be negative for the young people, the students, who work here. They're only here in the summer so it's hard to learn all the stuff and then, very soon, they're gone. They're not going to be working 20 – 40 hours a week – perhaps one shift is all they'll get. Even the ones who work throughout the year - a lot of them aren't going to be getting full-time hours. The information can be lost if you don't use it. So elearning may not be as beneficial for them. There's really nothing bad about the elearning otherwise. I think it's a great idea.

- The policies on customer service and warranties in the lessons don't necessarily apply to all levels of the store. For instance, with bicycles there are 30-day warranties and if it's two days after the cut-off – it's not applicable. You have to look at each person individually and for customer satisfaction you work around the policy to keep them happy. You should be allotted a certain amount of time to do the elearning, as a part of your schedule, with your work area covered and then you could get them done.

10. **Do you believe that this type of employee training will make X Company more competitive? (Is this important?)**
    - Competitiveness – judging from other retail stores we're already competitive but this is a bonus. Unfortunately, the customers don't know what the Gold status means. There's no meaning for them – no understanding of what this is all about. They may be thinking, "Great, you're a Gold. Does that mean I get a better deal?" Many companies lose sight of Customer Service – always a conflict on whether to spend money on more staff and hope business picks up but there are costs to hire people. Product knowledge by staff could help increase business if customers knew what the Gold status

meant – would choose to come to XC over another store. Otherwise they will likely think we made up some banner and say, 'big deal'.

- I think so, if it's done in a positive way. However, getting the managers to do them [seems] like pulling teeth and it starts at the top. When you hear your manager grumbling about doing the modules then the workers will do the same thing. It could be a very good tool and could make a lot of difference if it was done differently.

- It teaches us about new products coming on the market. New items – how to do it, how to work with it. Also, it would be good to use other teaching methods as well. For example, videos and hands-on problem solving and learning about new items. Elearning is helping in some ways – knowledge about products.

- It gives us better knowledge to help our customers. And that keeps them coming back. A lot of customers request a particular staff for assistance because they were the ones that helped them the last time. That may be unique in this town.

- Customer service is supposed to be our main objective in X Company. I would say it should. Yes, it should. If we all got on board and we took the new employees and put them on board with this and everybody got involved I think it would make it a better place. If a customer came in to buy a faucet, for example, you want to know how you're going to fill that and the customer will get that kind of service. Yes it's going to make the store a better retail outlet.

- If you have a look at the retail sector, many of the prices are very much in the same ballpark. To my way of thinking, it's only the service provided by the staff that is going to be the deciding argument. The service provided is what the customer is going to come back for. If I provide you with respectable service and show concern and interest in what it is you want and give you information so you can make a good decision, then hopefully you'll come back. You may want to have your hand held, figuratively speaking. I don't know how many of the people on the floor would bother with the Customer Service aspect [of the elearning] as opposed to going straight to the Hardware or the Sports section. They'd be asking themselves, 'Hey, do I know my stuff?' and they might 'wing it' on the other [Customer Service]. The point should probably be made that maybe everyone should look at the Customer Service modules because that's part and parcel of your responsibility, in addition to the products.

- Yes. It is beneficial to customer service and employee knowledge. It will make our service better than the competition because our staff provide the service and have the knowledge to help them.

- Yes. We can build customer loyalty and that's important.

- Yes, definitely, especially with [Y Company] just opening up here in town. And [Z Company] is a very strong competitor. We don't know yet the impact of [Y Company] on our sales.

- To a point yes. Certainly they're better off with it than without it. You can teach an old dog new tricks but it's going to benefit the new people the most. A lot of customers would be happy if staff could tell them where to locate merchandise. Some training is needed in locations I can't tell you how many times a customer has said," Oh, the other girl told me it was here" when I offer assistance.

11. ***What do you believe is the biggest challenge that X Company faces in getting employees to take this type of training? (What's causing resistance?)***
    - The attitude of the employees. It's very common in retail. I believe because retail is looked at as a lower level job overall. The wages cause it to be looked at as lower – it pays less therefore there's less status. So, employees are not as enthused at doing elearning. I'm not sure what all of the challenges are. I think the part-time employees probably don't have the time to do elearning (as mentioned, many of them are students).

    - Getting people to be positive about it. It's seen as a chore. Change can be like pulling teeth around here. The office staff was the first to do the modules. It seems that for everybody else – out of sight, out of mind.

    - The time factor. The young ones, they don't want to be here any longer than they have to. They're looking at their watches all the time. Elearning is especially hard for the part-timers since they're not getting paid for it. We're doing it on our own time now. Maybe that's why some of the younger ones aren't doing it. They don't want to spend any more time than they have to at work.

    - A lot of people just don't think that they need it. My supervisor hasn't started it yet, and I've even joked with him about it. Another lady I work with, who is a bit older, says, 'Nah, I'm not a computer person.' Some people are just happy at what they're doing and they don't want to know anything else.

- Time to do the lessons. It's so hard to get people in to take the training with our shifts the way they're set up (9-5, 10-5). It's hard for the students who are coming out of school at 3:30 and by the time they eat and get here to work it's almost 5:00 and they don't want to stay after 9:30. During the day you can have only so many on breaks off the floor. Coverage is an issue.

- The time is the biggest issue – how can you convince them that it's worthwhile. In my department the other staff have been here for a long time. They've probably forgotten more than I know. Why would somebody like that even bother with it? If all the senior people were in one department, and if you were one of these people, why would you participate? They could probably have acted as advisors to writing the modules. Even though the products coming in may be new, most of them are evolutions of products these employees know very well. So what would they learn in the lessons? Their experience doesn't encourage them to participate. I don't say they wouldn't benefit from it, but the payback would be very minimal. Apart from the heck of doing it. It raises the general question of how you encourage people to take ownership of their job. And to promote themselves so that they become better at what they do. If they become better, then customers will feel better. You're trying to get them to do some self-development. Then, too, when they're being paid not all that great a salary, they may think, 'Why the heck should I do this?

- In our case, getting them up here to the training room to take the courses. I think we're going to schedule it into their shifts to encourage it since they don't seem to come on their own. We tell them,' It's your job. You get paid for it. We are even considering bringing in the part-timers who aren't getting any hours just to do the elearning, to give them their four hours per week, before it gets busy again in the spring.

- If they're going to do this elearning then they have to go all the way, 100%, with it; not just 50%. That's not going to get it done at 50%. If they want me to do it then they have to give us the time and access to do it. That's a part of the frustration. The time and cost factor is a real issue.

- All the budgeted hours. There are a lot of courses and they're half an hour per course, and you're being paid for these courses, which means you can't be on the floor. Each department has budgeted hours that they use for the week and you can't go 40 hours over, that's a lot of money. It's important, but it's a lot of learning and it's expensive. Even learning at home [to eliminate coverage issues

being off the floor] still costs since we get paid per course. I wouldn't do the courses at home because I have so many other things to do. I mean, work is for work. Especially for the students – there's schoolwork to do when you get home. And the others have families, so when you go home that's the time for that. I don't think it's a part of your job to do work at home. It's needed to separate the two – or it can cause problems at home.

- Time. Desire, as well. If I had nothing else to do I would probably do all the lessons for the whole store, but I don't have time. Some people are part-time students – they aren't going to be here for a long time so why should they feel they need to do the lessons? They should go to the owners and talk dollars and cents about the costs of them taking the elearning versus the benefits when they leave in six months. The Customer Service modules could be helpful to them but they're going to pick it up on the floor by interacting with the customers and watching the others more than in the lessons.

12. Is there anything you would suggest or recommend that would increase the participation by you or others in the elearning training? (Quality of materials, timeframes etc.)

- The best way to improve participation is to provide better incentives. People love the prizes - e.g. the free trip, but then nothing was heard about it for a while. Other incentive programs in the past let you pick from a list of five or six prizes and you could win [merchandise] from the floor. We didn't hear anything about the free trip for a long time. No dates or deadlines were given to get people to work towards. It would be better to set a date and the draw will be on this date. I completed the modules almost a year ago and the incentives were up there before that and only now people are finally hearing about these trips. You start to think, 'Is this a hoax or what?' It would be good to tell us who won, too – just their name and store number just like the trade magazines do. Tell us the 'when, why and who'. Where isn't important. Perhaps they could pick prizes from different departments in the store – opening up the selection of what can be won would be so much easier. X Company is limiting what they can offer. Pins cost a lot of money and not everyone likes pins.

- Right now the dealer wants [staff to get] the Gold status and getting it appears to be more of a 'do it for me'. They just got their Gold themselves – they procrastinated too – and the store manager just got their Gold. It appears to be a bit selfish – what they want. Rather than concentrating on the Gold they should be concentrating on the

benefits of it. Everybody sat on it. It has to start at the top – starting at the bottom isn't going to work.

- Sentence structure better done. Time limit increased to one hour. Incentive – to reach bronze, then silver, then gold [works for me]. But there needs to be something else that appeals to the younger ones.

- You can only go so far. I really don't know. Maybe if there was an incentive that worked for them. I don't know what it would be. I do it because I like to learn. It's hard to say for the others.

- You'd have to schedule time for people to do the lessons. It's a personal thing for people to do the lessons – it's not pushed by the boss. It's not forced on anyone.

- What I would like to suggest – why don't they put it on a CD? Some of it could be on a CD and that would address the access issue at times. To me it would be good because you could zero in on a topic and delve into it. They [CDs] would be more user friendly – no need to bother with entering a web site etc. Also, as mentioned before, the incentives need to be meaningful and it should be easier to use. The timeframes to do it are also important to consider.

- Have an online search feature, like 'Ask Jeeves' where employees could quickly look up an answer if they need one from the system. Perhaps at the corporate level they could consider providing salary increments to the dealers (something like an apprenticeship program) where they provide money to give higher wages to the employees who take all the elearning courses. Too bad you couldn't have a more interactive set-up to provide a bit of competition as an incentive, say, between two stores. There are stores out there that do do it from what I understand. If the corporate level promoted what the Bronze, Silver, Gold meant, maybe the staff would get a bigger picture of what it meant and would want to be more involved.

- The time should be allowed to take the lessons – especially when it's slow, like now. They should designate one person who's in charge of the elearning - the person who we could go to for help with the elearning. If you're told that there isn't time to help us to get into the elearning, then they have to expect some of us to be frustrated.

- I definitely think that the corporation should help the owners by contributing to the wages for the elearning. Everyone will do whatever the boss tells them to do – if you're scheduled to do elearning then that's your job for the day and you have to do that. That's what you have to do to get the job done. So, make it a policy

to have the training done. But, then, you can't have a policy if you can't support it. I think that the corporate level could provide an incentive to the owners by helping out with the costs. We have budgets and we do have to stick with them. If corporate helped out the owners then they could offer more hours to do the courses. It's not that a lot of people and owners don't want to do it. I don't think they get the opportunity. And doing it at home again, gets back to my earlier comment.

- I really think that if they weren't to focus on the Gold status and did it by department it wouldn't be too big a mountain to climb. The re-certification will probably decrease participation. Just look at the salary dollars being spent and now with the hours being cut, add in the costs of elearning and it's being thrown in the garbage since they don't retain the information. You add up how much money was invested on getting the Gold status and now they have to re-certify, and they don't know the information. You're going to pay again for them to take the lessons? Where's your money going? You've got to stop and examine this. You have to draw the line somewhere or it's a waste of money. It bothers me to see how the costs are not being considered – staffing hours are cut and the customers can't be served as well as you'd like, and yet the money can be spent on elearning that's getting thrown in the garbage. It's the math. Suggestion: do verbal testing on the 'Golds' and see what they actually *do* know. Just pick two questions out of every category – they'll score zero or very low – the re-certification is proving that.

13. Explain how you feel about the incentives provided by your employer (the dealer) for participating in the elearning?

- Incentives don't drive me but they do for a lot of people. The pins are too expensive causing the dealers to pay too much. They're already paying for the elearning. Three levels of pins adds up to a costly amount especially if a person gets them for all the different departments. Maybe we should offer a Platinum pin if you get all five Gold levels.

- It would be better if all employees were compensated in the same way for doing the modules. Originally, hourly staff were paid for their time to do the lessons at home - paid ½ hour for each and received a lump sum once they achieved Gold – 30 modules). Now, they must do them on their own time. Salaried employees haven't been paid yet – and tracking the time spent is harder. I did all the departments – over and above – and no recognition. Fairness and recognition would be a great incentive. It would be nice to have a pizza supper, or something, once we attain Gold for the store. Anything genuine and from the heart would make a big difference. I

do things because I'm asked to do them – but I've been here a long time. For the new people – real incentives would help to make a big difference in participation.

- Pins are worth it for me because I like them. Probably money would be a better motivator for the younger ones.

- I feel good about being paid for doing the lessons at home. The boss is very helpful with this. If I stay a bit late at work to get them done, there's no problem. They'll pay me for doing them – I don't have to punch the clock as soon as my shift is over. I'm eager to learn the new modules since I've been away from them for a while, with Christmas and doing inventory.

- The dealer has always said that if you take the time to do the lessons I'm definitely paying you more money; if you take the time to do it. There have been some employees that have been really dedicated to it and I was really good at it. We've all taken our turns on it. So the dealer has obliged them with a wage increase. If they do it at home, they get paid for doing it at home, and I've been checking and can see that they've done it. That's been it for incentives. I don't know what else could be offered to get them to do it.

- What I would like to suggest – why don't they put it on a CD? Some of it could be on a CD and that would address the access issue at times. To me it would be good because you could zero in on a topic and delve into it. They [CDs] would be more user friendly – no need to bother with entering a web site etc. Also, as mentioned before, the incentives need to be meaningful and it should be easier to use. The timeframes to do it are also important to consider.

- We've been paying them to take the courses, even from home. Maybe we need to assess that by asking the staff what they'd like. Maybe the social committee could get involved – they do a great job of getting people involved for their activities. We sometimes have fun things like an Easter Egg hunt where someone can win a day off with pay. That is really popular – they jump on that. Maybe that could work for the elearning too. Little in-store contests work well.

- I don't think making the elearning competitive is motivating. If I finish the elearning, it's because it's going to help me be more knowledgeable about the store, not because I'm going to win a $50 gift certificate or a trip. That's not a motivation for me. I just want to know how to do it [the elearning].

- We had a lot of fun last year with the elearning. It was a competition for a while. Each department competed to see who'd get the Gold first. It was great! There's only one computer to use upstairs and everyone was arguing on who'd get the computer first. The competition is gone now. That's when things seemed to drop off [the enthusiasm for it].

- Aside from the $5 per lesson you can get a "WOW ballot" for draws for doing over and above – positive customer feedback, working late etc. Each ballot goes into a draw e.g. for a trip (each elearning lesson completed earns you a ballot). The buttons work for some employees.

14. What are your thoughts about employee performance reviews and/or salary increases being affected by participation in elearning?

- I think that elearning for managers should be mandatory. As a new incentive, in our case, all managers are to receive a bonus when all have achieved Gold. Wage increases – depend on the profits of the store. Not all stores can afford to provide regular wage increases to staff so that's hard to say if it should be factored in. Performance reviews – elearning should be factored in. It's a part of your learning/training and overall your performance.

- All employees should be reviewed on a one-on-one. I don't agree with rate scales where one group makes this much another group makes that much. Should be based on merit. Elearning participation should be factored into performance reviews.

- I don't think about an increase – but I can understand where my employer is coming from because of my experience with business. I'd like to see more performance reviews held – wanted the interview with my employer at the end of three months to see if I was delivering what they were expecting. In a recent review, elearning didn't come up in the discussion. We should have interviews every six months or so and elearning should be a part of it. Not only to recognize the elearning but also to know if I'm keeping up to their expectations.

- Sure helps out a lot taking the modules. The manager looks at everything you do to contribute. You could probably get a raise but you might get more if you do the elearning. If you do the extra, you get that extra. Rewards are there for doing the extra things. I think we should get more for doing the elearning modules. The manager does check to see if we do the modules before our reviews – I was surprised by that, since I do the lessons after hours. I'm glad now

that I started the lessons, but I want to do more on them now that there's time.

- Nobody's taken it to heart. Obviously they don't care enough. They're not worried about it enough – they don't say, 'That's a good incentive. I need the extra money so let's do it.' The majority of the employees are not doing it. They're not even trying. I think it should be part of the performance review – if they're working hard and they're trying to better themselves. We all need to learn, no matter how long we've been here. There are some people who've been here for 35+ years and don't think there's anything to learn. But, things change and sometimes we get stagnant. So what's wrong with learning a little something? No matter how long we've been here, everybody should try.

- It could be used. Overall, you need to have a supervisor who is really aware of the individuals working on the floor – re: customer service etc. A proper evaluation could be done of the individual's performance and then fine-tune your appraisal to what the person needs to be a better employee. On the topic of salary increases, it would be nice to be moved up to another salary level, but money is an issue. At Christmas time the dealer gives out tokens that can be spent in the store. Something like that might be helpful. It's an ongoing issue – how do I reward someone if salary increases are not possible? In my past work experience it was an issue – you can run out of things to do/use to reward someone. If you used the same methods all the time then they lost their impact – there are only so many letters of recommendation that you can write or lunches you can take a person to. And then it begs the question, 'Should you be rewarded for just doing your job?' As human beings, we like tangibles – it's always a challenge.

- I don't agree with performance reviews, never have. I do support the idea of increases for taking the elearning courses along with job performance.

- I don't think it should be. There isn't enough coaching provided to do it. I don't think anyone's salary should be based on that elearning if they don't step up to the plate and do a better job by having somebody there to help you do it.

- That's a definite plus. I think that raises are lower now if people don't take the elearning. It's not the only criteria used but it helps to have it.

- That's a tough one. I'd separate the full-time from the part-time employees. Some people who have been here a while bend over backwards on a daily basis, and you're not going to give them a raise because they didn't have time to learn something that they really haven't been required to know, because no one's asked them? That's a slap in the face, especially the full-timers who go above and beyond on a daily basis. All of a sudden, 'Sorry, you're not worth anything, you're not getting a raise because you didn't take the time to do a lesson.' It hurts. This year it's the one factor considered in order to get a raise. There's always something to pick up but if you've worked in a department for a while it's not 'rocket science'. So, people are doing the lessons just to get a raise. And this year we have to all be 'Gold' by a set month and that won't be a good time of year to get it done.

15. **Do you have any final comments to make about X Company's elearning?**

- I think I've commented on all aspects of the elearning. Recap - Incentives – the employee's name only goes in draws after five modules are completed. Completing one is not work because it's only a half an hour of your life. It's better to reward those who are working hard – someone shouldn't be rewarded for doing only one lesson. This would narrows the field down for the contestants in the draw. It's more important that those people working on the floor take the elearning since they're the first point of contact with the customer. Inspire them to learn with prizes – win a cool prize e.g. jacket. Something meaningful and timely.

- I enjoy doing it actually. It's a lot of fun – the little bit of competition with colleagues made it enjoyable, too. Suggestions – compensate all employees equally for their time doing the lessons. Problems started to arise when it appeared that some were being paid when others weren't. Unfortunately, one of the things about elearning is that in some of the departments it isn't really pertinent. For instance, housewares and hardware should have been divided. Some of the modules didn't pertain to their departments so when trying to go for Gold they found some lessons didn't count – valuable time used without it contributing to achieving the Gold. As well, people in the Receiving department can't understand why they have to do the modules when it doesn't pertain to them and they're feeling pushed into doing them. None of the modules pertain to their jobs; they're doing the hardware and automotive modules and can't understand why.

- I just hope I can reach Gold pretty soon so I can get the rest of my time on the floor. I don't know from there if I have to keep taking

more training. The room where the computer is located [in the store] is cold. I would do the elearning at home if I had a computer – it's the cost and the space (I don't have any room for a computer). At home you can relax and have a coffee and put in a half an hour here, half an hour there. Here at work, it's too hard to get it done in time.

- I just think it's a great system overall, and helps, especially for the new employees coming to work here. The product knowledge and how to speak to the customers is useful. It helps you get down to the bottom line – how to get to the problem. I remember all the steps we learned from the modules and use them when I'm trying to help the customers solve a problem. For new employees that have never worked in retail before it [elearning] will give them the stuff to work with. I think they should go into the elearning a week before they go on the floor. Start with the department they're in – so they have better knowledge before starting. I know you can't force anybody to take the modules before they get on the floor – I don't know if they are told to take the modules before starting on the floor. I'm not even done the plumbing modules myself after all this time. But, I'm planning to start very soon.

- I think, and maybe it's out there, I don't know, but they've given me a job to do to administrate the elearning. I think somebody should come to the store to tell me what I should be doing to help me to make it a better environment for the employees. Or, teach me how to do better with the employees. They sent me to school for Customer Service upgrade and that was good, so how about sending me to school to teach me to be a leader here in elearning? Then I can pass it on. I'm probably in the dark as much or more than the employees are about it. I've got the book and I've read the book on it but sometimes I need the hands-on. It would be nice if somebody came to me and said, 'Here's how you can set it up and this is what you do.' And maybe there is somebody. I haven't looked into it. I don't know. Somebody to come to the store and help out. New computer equipment would be good too. Some of the information doesn't show up on the screen and the employee can't finish the lesson. A person can go through a whole program and when it comes to the test they can't finish it because they can't see the bottom screen. I've made sure the settings are exactly the way we've been told to set them too.

- Perhaps you can provide a copy of your research findings to the General Manager and maybe a committee could be struck to examine the issues identified. The elearning Administrator was handed this and I offered [to help]. They preferred to try it on their own. That's fine – it's an interesting observation that they wanted to

do it themselves. If there was a committee and we examined the generic results we could get the benefit of you doing this exercise [research].

- I hope they continue to do different things with it rather than keeping it the same old, same old. Some people don't like to sit in front of a screen and would rather be taught face-to-face. I think that should still be considered. If we concentrated on getting everyone to do the elearning to get Gold, it could happen. We could motivate them, no problem, but then if you back off it slides back too. The competitive edge would help motivate people – gives an incentive to do the elearning.

- I think I've said it all already. I understand the dealers' frustration if they don't have the dollars. Maybe the corporate level could provide somebody to set up the training to help the dealers train someone here on how to oversee the elearning. They could offer a couple of workshops at different times on how to use it. Then if people want to learn they'll do the workshops and if they don't come in then they really didn't want to learn it.

- I think that I really enjoyed it, it's a great idea and I hope they keep the new information coming. I think one of the factors of resistance here to the elearning would likely come from the young kids. When you're only working four hours a week somewhere, how much is that a part of your life? And how much effort are you really going to want to put into it? It's likely easier for me because I'm actively learning on computers at university. It can be harder for the older ones who aren't used to computers but many had a lot of fun with it. They were nervous at first - I showed a few of them how to get into the courses, how to navigate in the materials, how to click the mouse etc. They learned how to do it.

- Reevaluation of the goal of having everybody achieve Gold by looking at how much it's costing and how it pays off. They should be seeing by the low re-certification scores that it's not getting absorbed.

APPENDIX G

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

Section B.

1. I only do elearning at home because the computers at work are not always available. Do not like to take my work home with me - Home time is my time.

2. Face to face training would help management stress

3. While E learning is helpful, trained teacher courses would be good as well.

4. re:#6 - this proves to be the major detriment in the completion of the Elearning process...

5. I have Windows XP and high speed Internet and cannot access elearning from my system at home. I even hired a computer repairman to reinstall everything on my computer and load all the tools and settings and all I got back was a reply saying that the system may not be compatible and hasn't been tested on XP. I e-mailed the corp about the problem and received no reply, Therefore I cannot elearn at home and I would love to just because I have a new computer. If and when I had my old Windows 98 I used to access it, now I cannot with SP and can't come in on days off often to elearning because of daycare restrictions.

6. I would like to find the time to keep up my elearning, but at work I have far too much to do in my department to take time to sit and e-learn. When I get home I have far too much to do to take time to e-learn. My only elearning took place when I hurt my back and stayed home. I couldn't do anything else.

7. Re: #4 -Having an instructor available for questions and to demonstrate some materials is sometimes needed. Re: #11 - Knowing that other employees may have the same questions and doubts helps to possibly change the structure on a program. Also, you know someone may feel the same way about something.

8. "Have tried but access to site is v. slow or site is not available.

9. Time is always a factor! When to do it!

10. Re: #7 If I had the Internet at home then I would of [sic] answered different.

11. People that work in certain departments should know about *their* products not having to know everything about everything.

12. I have tryed [sic] to do from home but I couldn't get in. I will try again.

13. Interesting questions. Quite complex.

14. I am looking forward to furthering my knowledge with Elearning.

15. I have not yet participated in the IDL sessions. My service manager has not made a point of informing me of their availability unless I accidentally find the notifications he may leave at the service desk.

16. The Elearning was very interesting and brought back quite a few things I forgot over the years.

17. I don't own my own computer, but if I did, I would likely have completed all the elearning modules available. I find them interesting and informative.

18. #6-8 It is wonderful to have the opportunity to learn more in order to up my skills with so many new items, as the retail market is always changing. But I feel a little rushed sometimes as we are allowed time slots. I understand that the younger generation go through it like a breeze as they are born and bred and live computers nowadays. It would be much easier at home so that you can read and read over the materials again at ease to retain more of the information but not having a computer I have no choice but to grasp what I can . Re: #9 – It is important to have any length range career goal in life as you should try and learn something new every day.

19. Elearning is important, but we also need the time to do this and not all of us have computers at home.

20. Although I find elearning important to my job, I think that hands on experience and dealing with actual customers is more important.

21. Proper training is important in any corner and being able to follow up on what was learned is also a big step in becoming knowledgeable.

22. I have just returned from leave. Elearning was introduced while I was away thus, I have not yet had a chance to do anything about it.

23. I would like to be able to print out entire lessons, instead of just selected sections. It would be good to have printed materials to refer back to.

24. (1)Education any type is very important (2)Elearning can be very good because of flexibility re: time and peed of progress.(3)People who produce elearning programs need learn they are not producing a program for their enjoyment but to assist others with learning and that these need to be kept simple so that it can be done on almost any computer and not just the mega-computers which they have available.

Section C.

1. I find as an employee that has been here a while, some of the modules are a little 'too' easy and the tests at the end are more common sense (also easy).

2. A lot of the materials go into too intensive material. And when not put to use immediately or at any other time while being employed by XC it is lost and in my own opinion a waste of time if not able to be put to use. The beginning of each lesson is informative – the remainder is too intense.

3. I would love to be able to e-learn at home...but my XP won't access it.

4. Learning more about products is very important for better customer service.

5. Re: #8 - not concerned, if I pass, good, If I don't then I just keep trying until I do. Re: #10.Some materials are easy; some aren't, which require more thinking and supervisor help. Re: #12 - I did elearning at home-and was more relaxed and paced myself. Re: #11 - makes no difference to me. I do elearning for myself, to improve my knowledge. Re: #13 – most things yes; some which are harder to learn, I ask my supervisor for help.

6. Initial dept meetings emphasized importance of elearning but the message has not been reinforced.

7. For me the e-learn is very good. Just because I was transferred to hardware. I'm learning lots of new plumbing tips. I started on the one. On new employees the e-learn will be great. Finally, somebody found something smart. Thanks. ;-)

8. Once you quote interesting & complex questions.

9. I am not afraid of change, although I do admit if I do not agree with the goal or purpose for the change I will voice my opinion.

10. There is always room for learning and we should do all we can to improve our work skills.

11. I like to learn new things every day. A day without learning something new is a waiste [sic] of a day and my time.

12. You're never too old to learn computer skills.

13. In response to #12-believe there is always more to be learned from a person (e.g. sales rep) than can be put on a computer-personal touch b/w people makes learning easier-just reading about. Computers are a great asset and learning tool but they can never replace life experiences.

14. Have completed all E-I modules-challenge to myself. Work in office so most do not pertain to me-some of them are interesting but some-too basic to be of any benefit-lot of repetition gets boring-good tool for new staff..

15. Re: #5- I am not a computer buff, as I don't know enough about it. Re: #12-that would be very interesting i.e. shop tools courses, electric drills-table saws-scroll saws-reciprocating saws etc., to get the feel of them in your hands and know what makes them tick. Re:# 14- As a woman of 61 I would welcome the challenge very much.

16. We never stop learning, no matter what our age is. Sometimes some people have to be shown more than once, sometimes I need to be instructed, it depends on the task.

17. The only computers I use are at work. Management and other staff members have been very helpful when I run into any problems. I can't say that I embrace change, but do accept it and move on. I work in hardware and know little about plumbing. Elearning has helped me in this area. I can learn on own, but sometimes it's easier to have someone explain or show me how to do something. I enjoy learning about new products and their applications.

18. When I tried to do the e-l-problems with my computer-learned from what I did-no chance to get help or back on our computer-don't think should affect employee evaluation until I get chance to try e-l with some help.

19. For me personally, I feel it should not be factored into my performance evaluation as I was on maternity leave. However, I have made arrangements to begin my elearning.

20. 4) For the sake of improvement not just for the sake of change. 5)-10) I found that too much time was wasted with pop-ups, fancy programming which could have been saved by keeping it simple and making better use of it – <u>time that is.</u>