

Business Value Assessment for Workforce Development Organizations

CASE EXAMPLE

The [Jane Addams Resource Corporation](#) (JARC) is a nonprofit, community-based organization serving the Chicago area with with a strategic mix of industrial retention, training and educational initiatives centered on the [metalworking industries](#). While participating in the learning group that developed the Business Value Assessment methodology, JARC used business value measurement with three Chicago-area manufacturers. Each of these assessments yielded results that were useful for JARC and the business customer, and through multiple attempts at business value assessment, JARC improved its capacity for outcomes-based services and fortified relationships with business customers.

Defining and measuring subtle training effects. JARC approached [S&C Electric Co. \(S&C\)](#), a mid-sized business specializing in manufacturing and services for electric power switching and protection, to conduct a business value assessment for a math skills training. S&C believed that math skills improvements would result in efficiency gains and reductions in waste, because workers would better be able to do adjust machine settings, troubleshoot machine malfunctions, and perform other precision tasks.

JARC and S&C initially thought about using a [supervisor questionnaire](#) so that supervisors could rate the training's effect on employees' work skills. However, the questionnaire was not used, because supervisors commented that it was a "blunt" method for assessing subtle on-the-job skills improvements that are likely to show up incrementally. By **consulting the right people on the job site before deciding on the assessment method**, S&C did not risk valuable resources and time that might in the end not have been able to elucidate the impacts of the training.

Instead, JARC and S&C input production data in the [Excel Tool](#) to analyze whether the training resulted math skills improvements that translated to efficiency gains and reductions in waste. The Excel Tool revealed several aspects of efficiency and scrap rate improvement. However, while S&C initially thought it would be easy to obtain production data for each of the math skills students, it took tremendous effort. For JARC, this experience reinforced that in future assessments they should deliberately **confirm the effort it will take a business customer to provide the necessary data, before concluding that a business value assessment is warranted.**

The experiences JARC had with S&C would prove valuable for assessing trainings for [Folding Guard Corp.](#), a manufacturer of mesh storage, safety and security products. Folding Guard wanted vocational ESL (VESL) training for workplace safety, expecting to see a reduction in accidents and related savings on insurance premiums and regulatory fees, and expecting that the VESL instruction would also lead to efficiency increases. JARC benefited from what it learned with S&C about trying to assess the subtle results of training, and determining the appropriate method for tracking results. JARC was concerned whether safety or ESL courses would result in noticeable efficiency gains, and asked Folding Guard to consider whether efficiency was a primary assessment objective, and whether they could track safety incidents and costs through Folding Guard's internal tracking system, rather than going the extra step to use the Excel Tool.

Sometimes there are unanticipated disruptions to the assessment process. In the end, after in-depth discussions about the business value of the training, and despite their strong intent to assess these trainings, Folding Guard and JARC had to abandon this business value assessment because the plant was scheduled to relocate to another site in the community. Any efficiency gains from the training would surely be overshadowed by the relocation.

JARC's third experience with trying to assess subtle training results came through the "Communications for Quality" VESL classes they conducted for among almost 200 employees of [Dudek & Bock Spring Manufacturing Co., Inc.](#), one of the largest spring and wire form manufacturers under one roof. The VESL training was focused on improving workplace communication, and affecting employees' ability to perform better on tasks that require communication in English, for example, communicating with managers, requesting clarification for job asks, communicating suggestions for productivity, and understanding procedures. JARC used a retrospective supervisor [questionnaire](#) to assess **on-the-job improvements in communication**.

Supervisors overwhelmingly responded that, as a result of the training, they see improvements in the employees' soft skills and communication, and that their perception of their own job and the overall work environment is much better. According to Jeff Kopacz, human resources manager:

It may not sound all that dramatic, but the change is quite remarkable. I find myself having to spend less and less time on routine tasks because I don't have to pull a bilingual worker off his job and ask him to come to my office and translate what another [maybe Polish-speaking] worker is about to say. That makes a world of difference.

In terms of evaluation methodology, this is an example of how **oftentimes you can only expect to get an imprecise measure of business value**. On the other hand, supervisor satisfaction may be an important value to your business customer.