



Learning at work

Jari Toivonen, Assistant, HRD
Finnair



Finnair is one of the oldest operating airlines. Finnair services approx. 7.4 million passengers annually, focusing its operations to routes between Northern Europe and Asia. Established 1923, the company has seen many changes and challenges throughout the years. Strategic planning and adaptation to the changes in the business environment is crucial part of the day to day business in the aviation industry. With 500-1000 new employees per year, the Human Resources Development plays an important factor in the company's success. Competent staff is the key for meeting the strict regulations in aviation and managing the growing demands for safety and security. Finnair spends 20 million euros annually for staff training.

What challenges an international airline faces today in staff development?

The number of our personnel is circa 8000. Almost 800 professions are represented in the staff, working

together on the ground and during the flight. The airline has identified 300 key competences needed to run the operations. With reference to validation, most of these competence areas include the possibility to recognize learning from experience. A learning profile is created in the HRD database for each employee. However, learning at work is not recorded in the database.

Recognition of prior learning is of great interest to Finnair. What benefits do you see in creating a system of validation?

Recognition of prior learning can lead to a more comprehensive view on the current competencies and areas of improvement. Understanding the prior education and learning at work can lead to a more focused provision of education and training. Creating personal career paths can increase motivation and commitment to work. At the same time we see that not all competences can or need to be recognized. The benefits of a validation system in a company should be measurable also in economic terms.

How can companies and universities cooperate in validation?

In companies we need to study more carefully what the graduates know and are able to do. It is not always clear what the competences of a person with a specific degree or diploma are. In developing a validation system, we should identify what procedures are common for companies and education institutions. In the process of professional development, we should have more discussion in the company on the roles and responsibilities between the individual and the HRD department. Setting up a system of validation is a task where there is clearly a need for cooperation between companies and education providers.

– International seminar on the 19th and 20th of May 2011 in Naantali, Finland.

Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning

The aim of the seminar is to explore how learning from experience and from studies in adult education can be recognized in formal education. Speakers from Europe, United States, Canada and Australia will share their experiences in the presentations and discussions.

The focus of the seminar is on two topics, the various

ways of adult learning in different social contexts and the assessment of this kind of learning. We shall also take a look at the pedagogical approaches in the supervision of adult learners.

This newsletter contains two interviews of the speakers of the seminar and also a short summary of the NVL meeting on RPL research in Stockholm in April 2011.





Quality of validation

Joy Van Kleef, Director
Canadian Institute for Recognizing Learning (CIRL)

You provide training and consultation on educational policies and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) in Canada and internationally. What are the theoretical foundations of good quality practice in RPL?

There is a tradition of alignment between RPL and learning theories that emphasizes the contribution of experience to the educational process. Experiential learning theorists have long contended that experience is the most valuable means of gaining knowledge and skills. However, some researchers have recently challenged experiential learning theory as the only way of looking at RPL and have begun to explore the possible consequences of such a limited approach. In addition, few researchers or

commentators have investigated the literature base on assessment theory. As a result, assessment experts and their ideas are not well represented in the RPL community and our knowledge and use of assessment methods and tools have remained relatively static since the introduction of portfolios in the 1980s. In order to develop good quality practices in RPL we need to explore additional theories such as those that inform competency-based assessment, situated learning and communities of practice.

What can institutions do to ensure the quality of their RPL assessments and their outcomes?

There are many strategies that an institution can undertake. It can establish a principles-based foundation for RPL implementation that is directly linked to the organization's mandate. It can develop RPL-specific policies and procedures that reflect those principles including quality-specific policies and procedures on assessment methods and tools. In many cases, it is not enough to just integrate RPL into existing quality assurance mechanisms. The quality criteria for assessment tools needs to extend beyond the traditional concepts of validity and reliability. Guidance for assessors on what to look for in a candidate's prior learning (e.g. breadth, depth, currency, sufficiency and authenticity) helps to clarify responsibilities. My experience in the field has also taught me that RPL candidates' likelihood of success is greatly enhanced when advising services are an integral part of the process. Assessors trained in RPL and support materials that help them perform are also essential, especially when assessments rely heavily on assessor judgment.

What practical things add value and trust to quality measures in RPL? How can we make sure also people outside the organization trust on the quality?

Implementing RPL is not rocket science. But it does involve social and political complexities and tensions that come with organizational change. Trust in the process is critical; it can be fostered through meaningful engagement of relevant stakeholders from the outset, and evidence that their interests are understood and taken into account through consultation and transparent decision-making. Tracking people who have undertaken RPL reduces skepticism about RPL's efficacy with hard evidence and also promotes innovation.



NVL meeting on RPL research in Stockholm, April 2011

The Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) organized a meeting for those interested in research on RPL. The participants of the meeting including representatives from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Finland gathered in sunny Stockholm. The purpose of the meeting was to create a study group for searching and bringing together publications written on RPL research in the Nordic countries.

The study is a part of a project by the NVL's Expert Network for RPL which aims to produce a collection

of RPL case studies from the Nordic countries. The special focus of the case studies will be on the job enhancing qualities of RPL.

The participants presented their views on the RPL research in their countries. It became clear that most of the RPL related research material has been published in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The participants agreed to start exploring RPL related research publications as well as RPL related statistical data and present them to the study group by autumn 2011.

Read more from the project website:
<http://ahot.utu.fi>