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Valuing Employee Community Involvement

Practical guidance on measuring the business benefits
from employee involvement in community activity

**The
Corporate
Citizenship
Company**

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SECTION ONE

Study findings

Introduction

The aim of this report is to show how companies evaluate the community involvement activity of their employees, particularly in developing their skills. It presents the practical experiences of a group of 18 leading British companies, all members of Business in the Community, which have worked together over two years, to share best practice and make public their findings.

It comes at a time when many sections of society in Britain - companies, government and individuals themselves - are realising the importance of learning and developing skills, and of making this a continuous life-long process. Agencies such as training and enterprise councils are increasingly working with companies to develop transferable skills and encourage flexibility in the context of local labour markets.

This report concentrates on the skills which can be developed through a wide range of community activities. Nearly 400 employees have taken part in systematic evaluation to record the competencies which are best enhanced through the differing types of community involvement activity. Their experiences are described in the set of six case studies presented in this report, featuring nine of the companies.

The report presents the main conclusions from this data and shows how evaluation techniques can be used to assess both the competency development by the individual and the consequential benefit to the business. It represents the largest ever systematic study in the United Kingdom of competency gain from community involvement.

The group of companies came together in 1995 to respond to the publication of the report *Employees and the Community: how successful companies meet human resource needs through community involvement*, which was written and researched by Michael Tuffrey of PRIMA Europe/The Corporate Citizenship Company. For the first time this assembled the available hard evidence of the benefits companies are gaining in human resource management and devised suitable techniques to assist employers in evaluation.

Main findings

Employee community involvement is found to be a flexible and effective tool in developing competence, provided the process is managed properly: first identifying individual training needs, then structuring an appropriate involvement option, and finally building in evaluation of the outcome. Employee community involvement is sufficiently flexible that almost any skill can be enhanced through a carefully chosen and structured project.

All the projects evaluated in this study showed positive changes in competency levels. The projects ranged from directed activity in paid time to volunteering largely in the employees' own time but with support and encouragement from the company. Some 375 employees from eleven companies were involved in two types of evaluation. Those staff who measured their competency gain with a 'before and after' self-assessment showed an overall improvement of 17%. For those simply making a personal assessment of the overall effectiveness of their activity as a development tool, the weighted average score was 72 out of a possible 100 maximum points. Both findings compare favourably with traditional training outcomes.

However self-assessment by individuals can over-state the apparent development gain, so corroborating evidence was sought from line managers and, in some cases, work colleagues. They were more 'realistic', discounting the gain by about one-fifth on average, but a boost to skills even at 80% of the level assessed personally is still very significant. Indeed one beneficial side effect over and above competency gain, which this more positive rating by employees themselves demonstrates, is the increased self-confidence about their own ability.

The study also evaluated the specific competencies which show most development gain. Skill in communication emerges as the favourite, being in the top three most developed in all the projects evaluated. Next came skills related to working together, such as collaboration, influencing and team work. Many employee community involvement projects are people-centred, so it is intuitively correct that these skills show most improvement. The third area which featured strongest is creative thinking, perhaps reflecting the challenging nature of many community projects. Other skills showed particular gains depending on the nature of the individual assignment.

Some evidence emerged that more 'junior' staff show the strongest competency gains, but caution is needed as the sub-sample sizes are small. It may be that more senior management staff have already had greater opportunities in their careers to use and develop a broad range of skills; they may use employee community involvement to develop a specific identified need. In contrast, clerical and administrative staff, typically younger and with a narrow range of duties at work, may show bigger gains when given the opportunity to develop across the broad range of skills which many community activities allow.

Techniques to assess competency gain

The main evaluation tool to identify development gain is the self-assessment questionnaire which helps the individual to assess the gain experienced in specific competencies, identified at the outset. Ideally completed before undertaking the assignment and again afterwards, this assessment is then corroborated by another observer: for an activity undertaken in company time or with strong support from the company, corroboration will normally be from the line manager but can be extended through 360 degrees to include work colleagues.

Staff from among the 3,000 involved with the **NatWest Face2Face** with Finance programme in schools say their proficiency increased by 17% as a direct result, with gains especially in communication skills and the planning and implementation of projects. Their line managers agree that there was a gain overall and in those skill areas, but assessed it slightly lower, at 14%. These gains came in skills areas identified as important to the business. Evaluation is based on a matched sample of 73 NatWest staff and managers, selected at random from those involved in the programme. (Case study 1)

Business benefit from competency gain

Competency gain alone does not constitute a benefit to the company. That comes from the individual applying the enhanced skills back at work, linked to the appraisal process. Many companies have now devised a set of core competencies, skills identified as essential if the business is to succeed. Provided these training needs are essential to business performance, then a gain in a core competency can be assumed to produce a real business benefit.

The **Halifax** runs an annual programme of Community Development Circles, involving 500 staff. These aim to develop core competencies whilst also benefiting the community, building teams and enhancing morale. The Halifax evaluated a random sample of 114 participants, using self-assessment questionnaires corroborated by line managers: those staff find it a good way to develop competencies and on average they rate the benefit to the company at 7.3 out of a maximum possible score of ten. Their line managers agree, judging that a development gain of 18% overall is attributable to the programme. (Case study 5)

Where a core competency has not been researched and defined in this way or if the direct commercial benefit needs to be evidenced, then a further stage of evaluation is possible. The simplest process to identify the commercial payback is to ask a series of questions of the individual concerned, seeking corroboration where possible:

- is the enhanced competence relevant back at work?
- is it actually being used back at work?

- is it contributing to an enhanced performance of the work unit or team?
- is that producing a commercial benefit now or will it do so in the future?
- if so, can this benefit be quantified?
- does this benefit outweigh the costs of achieving it?

Under some circumstances it may be possible to put a monetary figure on the benefits from the development gain, such as enhanced sales or reduced costs. More practical is a cost comparison, comparing the alternatives for achieving a similar competence gain, although care is needed to compare like with like.

Thresher, part of Whitbread, wished to fill a management position and was seeking possible candidates from within the audit department. Rather than develop the necessary skills through a week long residential training course, at a cost exceeding £1,000 each, it offered the option of a 100 hour community development assignment. The process was managed by Business in the Community for a fee of £850 each. Although more time was spent away from work, this was spread flexibly over a three month period and the loss of productive time was not significantly different. The alternative of recruiting and inducting a new manager, rather than developing an existing employee, was costed at around £5,000. (Case study 2)

As with all evaluation, it is very much best to define in advance what constitutes 'success', at both individual and business levels. The staff member must set out his/her objectives in advance, then assess competency levels before and after. The unit and whole business must also define their goals and objectives, and identify how individuals can contribute to achieving them. These techniques are explained more fully in the original report, *Employees and the Community*.

Wider business benefits

Most companies find that the benefits of employee community involvement go considerably beyond competency gain. For example, staff active in the community with company support improve local relations and enhance the corporate image. They themselves have a much better understanding of the community and its needs, a skill important for personnel in direct customer relationship roles. Staff will also have a better attitude to their employer and a more positive and productive approach at work; absenteeism can be reduced and staff retention increased.

BT found modest gains in skills levels from its Roots & Wings school mentoring programme, but bigger increases in pride in the company and in job satisfaction. Line managers reported improvements in skills levels, customer awareness and staff

morale. Overall they rated the programme beneficial to BT, taking into account time away from work and cost, scoring it 6.2 out of a maximum possible ten points. The evaluation was based on a random sample of 48 staff and 27 line managers with 55 students being mentored. (Case study 3)

Possible problems - and practical solutions

For most companies, the goal is to put in place evaluation methods that simply yield enough information to reassure staff of the benefits to them, to keep employee community involvement effective, and to justify the allocation of scarce company resources to this relatively new area of human resource management. Few companies will want to evaluate in detail every single community involvement activity. Indeed the pace of change in companies is now so fast and the need to stay focused on commercial objectives so acute, that over-ambitious evaluation methods are not sustainable and may be counter-productive.

Most of the companies engaged in this project encountered practical difficulties in setting up and carrying their evaluation projects through to completion. Problems included: delays, lack of understanding in middle management tiers, and corporate restructuring mid-programme. They persevered and from this practical experience can offer advice:

- encourage staff to take personal 'ownership' and make a commitment to their learning: for example, **BT's** mentoring projects are part of its "... *for a better life*" culture change programme which encourages employees to take greater responsibility both at work and in their home lives;
- try to make it part of mainstream HR practice, for example by concentrating on skills deficiencies already identified in appraisals: managers in **Allied Dunbar** use the month-long community assignment programme in India, funded by departments from their training budgets, to develop staff with specific identified needs;
- as part of mainstreaming, build on existing practices: the **Halifax** adapted development circles, an established tool for teams to work together on projects, when it wanted to support employee community involvement;
- don't intrude on an individual's personal volunteering activity: **IBM** has developed a computer-based volunteer management service, Volbase, to publicise opportunities to staff, but the firm does not claim 'credit' from personal choices outside work time;
- but do insist on company involvement commensurate with the level of company resources invested, such as paid time off: **Thresher** requires comprehensive evaluation and full line manager involvement in its programme of development assignments;
- competency development is important but not the only benefit to the company: **GrandMet** finds that improved morale and self confidence, along with changes in attitude, come from its support for volunteering

SECTION TWO

Case studies

Summary

The following six case studies feature the activities of nine companies and over 300 of their staff. The competencies which showed the most development are summarised in the table below. Each of the detailed case studies contains the following elements:

- a description of community activity undertaken;
- details of the staff involved;
- the evaluation techniques used;
- a summary of the results achieved in competency development by the individuals and in benefit for the company;
- detailed findings of the gains in individual competencies and, where evaluated, the business benefits;
- where possible, a cost/benefit analysis.

Summary of case studies

	TYPE OF ACTIVITY	MAIN COMPETENCIES DEVELOPED	COMPANIES INVOLVED
1	Education liaison	team working planning and implementation communication	NatWest Group
2	Development assignments	communication project management influencing skills	Marks & Spencer Allied Dunbar Thresher/Whitbread
3	Mentoring	maximising performance influencing skills communication	BT (Personal Communications Division) Sun Life
4	Volunteering	collaboration communication customer focus	Grand Metropolitan IBM UK
5	Community development circles	team working communication and listening skills managing change	Halifax
6	Practical activity	leadership influencing skills communication	NatWest Group

Case study 1

Education liaison: NatWest UK

Summary of community involvement activity

NatWest runs an education liaison programme, *NatWest Face2Face with Finance*, to foster financial literacy in schools as part of the curriculum. It is undertaken in paid time by staff members largely from local branches. The main activities undertaken are classroom exercises, supervising work experience and managing teacher placements. The focus is strongly on staff development opportunities. Since the programme was launched in 1994, over 3,000 staff have been involved. In the sample analysed below, nearly two thirds were clerical or support staff, and just over a quarter supervisory, with the balance being managerial.

Evaluation method

A sample of 300 participants were randomly selected for a telephone survey, with 105 agreeing when contacted to take part (most of the others had not yet undertaken sufficient activity in the schools for meaningful results to be apparent). Subsequently the views of line managers were sought and 73 obtained; this matched sample of 73 is analysed below. Data were obtained on the level of proficiency in competencies both before being involved with *Face2Face* and again afterwards, together with an assessment of the importance of each competency to the individual's current role. Overall competency was subdivided into seven separate competencies, assessed on 25 component behaviours (practical applications of the skills). Line managers were also asked what benefit the business obtained from the individual undertaking *Face2Face* activity, how they identified it and what the evidence was.

Summary of benefits to the individuals and the company

Overall individuals felt their proficiency had increased by 17% as a result of their *Face2Face* activity, with greatest gains reported in team working, planning and implementation, communication and information gathering. These biggest gains were in the skill areas with the lowest proficiency beforehand, so one effect of the activity was to produce more broadly competent staff members.

Managers agreed that there was a gain in competency overall, but assessed it at a lower level than their staff had, at 14%. Highest gains, according to managers (broadly in agreement with individuals' own assessments), were in communication, information gathering, and planning and implementation. These were among the skills most highly rated by managers

as essential for their current roles, so the biggest benefit came in the most sought-after skills.

In fact nearly three quarters (71%) of managers said there had been a business benefit from the individuals' involvement in community activity, with a third citing increased confidence levels in addition to competence gain.

Detailed findings

Individuals and line managers assessed the proficiency level, before and afterwards, on a scale 1 (not proficient) to 5 (fully proficient). A total of 25 behaviours supported the seven competencies. The detailed findings on the increase in proficiency (expressed as a percentage) and the importance accorded to the role (score out of ten), as assessed by individuals and their line managers, are shown below.

NatWest Face2Face with Finance				
	Competency gain		Importance	
	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Line managers</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Line managers</i>
	%	%	Rating /10	Rating /10
Overall average	17	14		
Decisiveness	14	13	7.9	7.7
Communication	19	16	7.9	7.7
Information gathering	19	16	7.9	7.8
Quality orientation	11	12	7.8	7.6
Problem solving	16	14	7.4	7.1
Team working	20	12	7.3	6.8
Planning and implementation	20	15	6.7	7.0
<i>N = 73</i>				

Line managers were questioned in detail about the benefit to the business resulting from the individuals' involvement in *Face2Face*. Nearly three quarters (71%) identified some such benefits. Specific examples are given in the table below (proportion citing each, expressed as a percentage of those noting any business benefit).

NatWest Face2Face with Finance	
<i>Business benefits reported by line managers</i>	(%)
Increased confidence	33
New business generated	27
Increased profile in the areas	21
Improved reputation and community links	21
Better communication skills	19

Case study 2

Development assignments:

Marks & Spencer, Thresher and Allied Dunbar

Summary of community involvement activity

Marks & Spencer uses 100 hour part-time secondments to community projects as one of the range of training and development options open to staff. Staff identify their own training needs and a community assignment is designed and chosen to challenge them and help meet those needs. The 100 hour assignments are completed over three months, normally one day a week. In the sample evaluated, 30 individuals, drawn from managerial, supervisory and administrative grades, undertook projects in community organisations such as a marketing plan, a review of business strategy, a feasibility study of possible project expansion and the development of a mentoring programme.

Thresher, part of Whitbread, uses various development methods, appropriate to the needs of the individual. This study was used to trial development assignments as an addition to the range of options available. Six audit team controllers attended a development centre to help identify their readiness for promotion to a management grade and subsequently three agreed to undertake part-time community assignments lasting around 100 hours. These included a survey of training needs, a feasibility study for a self-funding cafe and a business growth plan.

Allied Dunbar's India Programme enables high calibre staff with specifically identified skills needs to develop them on projects that build the capacity of Indian non-governmental organisations. Lasting one month on full time secondment, the projects undertaken by the four individuals in this sample included a strategic review and IT systems plan for a development centre, and a team building exercise for a research centre. The staff were at professional and managerial grades.

Evaluation methods

The **Marks & Spencer** sample completed a self-assessment questionnaire, before and after the assignment, as did their line managers. This measured the change in 11 specific core competencies used by Marks & Spencer, broadly similar to the standard list developed for the original report *Employees and the Community* and used in this study.

Having already identified competence development needs, the **Thresher** assignees discussed and agreed with their line manager their existing competence level in each of the 13 standard competencies used in this study. At the end of the assignment they made another self-assessment.

The **Allied Dunbar** staff and their line managers completed self-assessment questionnaires, to identify the extent to which competency was developed during the assignment. Allied Dunbar used ten core competencies, similar to the standard thirteen.

Summary of benefits to the individuals and the company

The **Marks & Spencer** secondees reported an average competency gain of 29%, based on before and after self-assessment, and their line managers agreed. Both identified communication, project management and customer service as the skills most developed. Overall Marks & Spencer believes that the business has benefited from these assignments, as the increased skills came in areas highlighted as requiring improvement.

The **Thresher** assignees reported extensive competency development, assessed overall as a 27% improvement, particularly in creative thinking, influencing skills and project management. All the competencies specifically identified as needing development showed an improvement. Their line manager agreed that the three had developed and that this was evident in their work, although he felt the individuals had somewhat overstated their gains (it was too soon to give an exact score). Thresher compares the £850 cost of each 100 hour assignment favourably with a cost in excess of £1,000 for an equivalent three to five day residential course. Recruiting and inducting a new manager, rather than developing an existing employee, could cost around £5,000 per person.

The **Allied Dunbar** assignees assessed the extent to which a competency was developed on the scale 0 to 6: their overall rating was 4.6, equivalent to 65%. Their line managers were more cautious, assessing the development as 48%. Communicating and influencing skills were most developed.

Detailed findings

The table below sets out the effect on competencies from short term development assignments, measured as the percentage gain for Marks & Spencer and Thresher, and the percentage developed for Allied Dunbar.

Developing assignments: competency development

	Marks & Spencer		Thresher	Allied Dunbar	
	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Managers</i>
	<i>% gain</i>		<i>% gain</i>	<i>% developed</i>	
Overall average	29	29	27	65	48
Adaptability	-	-	29	71	36
Communication	50	50	29	75	61
Teamwork	25	25	24	-	-
Creative thinking & innovation	26	35	33	64	53
Influencing	26	20	33	75	50
Decision-making	26	30	29	68	53
Leadership	13	20	24	50	68
Project management	50	40	38	70	50
Developing others	26	20	-	-	-
Maximising performance	-	-	29	50	29
Customer focus	50	50	24	-	-
Continuous improvement	-	-	14	-	-
Business awareness	15	25	19	-	-
Technical skills	10	10	-	-	-
<i>N =</i>	<i>30</i>		<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	

Case study 3

Mentoring: BT and Sun Life

Summary of community involvement activity

BT's Personal Communications Division takes part in the national 'Roots & Wings' mentoring initiative, an element of its "... *for a better life*" culture change programme. This seeks to encourage employees to take greater 'ownership' and responsibility both in work life and beyond. In this sample, staff members from three locations acted as mentors for school students, typically spending between 15 and 30 hours of work time and 5 to 10 hours of their own time. Activities included meetings, visits to the school and the workplace, outings and other events, and telephone calls to the students they were mentoring.

Sun Life's External Mentoring Programme is also part of 'Roots & Wings'. Staff get involved in education projects, for example with GCSE and A Level students and adult returners to education, or with a wider range of community groups. Over a six month period, typically they meet their mentees about 10 times.

Evaluation method

The **BT** sample involved 55 students and 48 mentors, with 27 line managers (some responsible for more than one staff member). The mentors were drawn from junior and middle management grades. The programme was evaluated by detailed before and after questionnaires completed by the students, mentors, line managers, teachers and parents.

In the **Sun Life** sample, 13 employees were evaluated, with before and after self-assessment questionnaires, and line management corroboration sought. The staff were mainly managers, team leaders and front-line administrative personnel. The questionnaire used a list of 13 competencies and a scoring system of 0 to 6 to assess the level of competency before and then after, the difference being the development gain, expressed as a percentage.

Summary of benefits to the individuals and the company

BT staff found the experience of being a mentor very positive, giving a rating of 6.9 on a ten point scale (where ten was 'very satisfying' and zero 'very dissatisfying'). They reported gains in their skills, particularly in setting goals and solving problems, as well as increases in confidence levels. **BT** mentors also reported a big increase in their understanding of the community the school serves (+94%). Mentors who completed more sessions (seven or more) found the benefits on all the attributes assessed were greater.

Evaluation among **BT** line managers found the experience beneficial to BT overall, rating it 6.2 out of 10, even after taking into account the time and cost incurred. They reported improvements in skill levels, customer awareness and staff morale. Some experienced minor operational difficulties, caused by several people wanting to be away at the same time, but most reported a positive effect in the workplace.

The **Sun Life** staff experienced an average 4.3% gain in their competency levels as a result of the mentoring activity, with the most gain in the specific competencies of maximising performance, influencing skills, communication and creative thinking. Their line managers agreed that competency levels had increased, indeed they thought mentors demonstrated greater skills gain than the individuals themselves, with a 6.1% competency gain overall. The gain was greatest in specific competencies: collaboration, communication and maximising performance.

Detailed findings

The average competency gains reported by the 48 **BT** staff included:

- ability to set goals +6%;
- ability to solve problems for yourself +6%;
- increase in confidence to mentor a colleague if asked +55%.

The **BT** mentors also reported a beneficial impact on factors other than competency gain, such as:

- 14% increase in pride in **BT**;
- 41% increase in understanding of telecom needs and opportunities among teenagers (potential future customers);
- 8% increase in job satisfaction; and
- 4% increase in positive attitude to work.

Among the benefits highlighted by the 27 **BT** line managers were (scores on ten point scale):

- impact on morale of individual mentors: 7.3; and on the whole team: 5.3;
- development of self-confidence and interpersonal skills: 6.7;
- ability to clarify goals and solve problems: 6.1;
- development of greater customer awareness: 6.1;
- effectiveness in meeting culture change objectives: 1.1.

The development gains in individual competencies reported by **Sun Life** staff and their managers are set out in the table below.

Sun Life mentors: competency gain (%)		
	Mentors	Assessors
Overall average	4.3	6.1
Adaptability	0.0	3.6
Communication	6.0	16.1
Collaboration	4.3	17.6
Creative thinking & innovation	6.0	2.3
Influencing skills	7.7	8.0
Decisiveness	4.3	3.6
Leadership	5.1	0.9
Project management	4.1	2.6
Maximising performance	8.9	12.5
Customer focus	0.0	0.9
Excellence & continuous improvement	1.1	2.3
Business awareness	5.4	4.4
Technical/professional skills	3.3	4.4
<i>N = 13</i>		

Case study 4

Volunteering: Grand Metropolitan and IBM UK

Summary of community involvement activity

Grand Metropolitan encourages its staff to volunteer at all levels in the organisation. The volunteers included in this evaluation were senior managers in human resources, the legal department and brand management. They were involved in supported education projects, such as KAPOW (Kids and the Power of Work) and the Careers Awareness Programme, and as trustees on management committees of local charitable organisations.

IBM UK has developed a computer-based volunteer management service for employees and retirees, Volbase, which matches individuals' interests with opportunities available in community organisations. So far around 500 IBMers and employees from other companies have found community activity through Volbase. Activities undertaken by the individuals in the sample evaluated below included fundraising, counselling, financial and IT consultancy, and providing practical help to people with a disability.

Evaluation method

GrandMet directly interviewed on a one-to-one basis a sample of eight volunteers. This assessed the effectiveness of the volunteering activity in meeting development needs, based on a list of 13 competencies, using a scale 1 (not met) to 5 (greatly exceeded). The interview also covered whether the activity was part of a formally identified development need through a training plan drawn up with line managers. Line managers' views were not sought as volunteering was conducted in the individuals' own time and was not company initiated.

IBM asked a sample of 13 individuals to complete a self-assessment questionnaire on their competency gain from volunteering; line management corroboration was not sought as the activity is seen as the person's own initiative and not necessarily done for competency gain.

Summary of benefits to the individuals and the company

GrandMet found that, overall, the volunteering activity was successful in meeting the development needs of the individuals: the volunteers reported an average score of 3.5, where a score of 3 meant the project was judged 'effective' and 4 meant it was 'more than effective'. Competencies most affected by the volunteering experience were customer focus, collaboration and creative thinking.

IBM also found that volunteering achieves gains in competency levels, with volunteers reporting an overall gain of 46% of the total possible development. Those competencies most developed were communication, collaboration and creative thinking and innovation.

Neither companies made an assessment of the direct benefits to the business from the activities of the volunteers. However **IBM's** internal assessment is that volunteering has helped some individuals develop their skills and those have then been used back at the workplace. Where a group of staff has volunteered, team building has been a benefit. Overall volunteering helps to foster better balanced individuals with a broader perspective on life, more confident and creative in the workplace.

GrandMet believes that business gain from volunteering is not only in skills development, but also in fostering pride in the company and self confidence.

Detailed findings

For this evaluation, both companies used the standard listing of 13 competencies developed for the original *Employees and the Community* report and documented in Section Three below.

GrandMet used a score rating of 1 to 5 and asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of the project in meeting their development needs; **IBM** used a scale 0 to 6 and asked respondents to record the extent to which a competency was developed by the community activity. Translated into percentages, the detailed results for each competency and overall are set out in the table below.

Volunteering: effect on competency (%)		
	Grand Met	IBM
Overall average	70	48
Adaptability	60	48
Communication	77	66
Collaboration	80	56
Creative thinking & innovation	80	52
Influencing skills	65	49
Decisiveness	55	47
Leadership	75	43
Project management	75	37
Maximising performance	57	46
Customer focus	85	47
Excellence & continuous improvement	77	-
Business awareness	70	38
Technical/professional skills	50	43
<i>N</i> =	8	13

Case study 5

Community Development Circles: Halifax

Summary of community involvement activity

For more than six years, teams of Halifax staff drawn from different grades and sections of the business have come together in Development Circles to plan and undertake activity in the community, often fundraising for charity. Conducted mainly in employees' own time but with paid time available if necessary, the purpose is both to encourage skills development and to help the community. Each team is evaluated on its success on both objectives, with the national final awards ceremony led by the group chief executive to recognise the best performers. Around 500 staff take part each year.

Evaluation method

A sample of 114 participants, comprising 34 team leaders and 80 individual team members, were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire. This was completed at the end of the programme, with corroboration sought from line managers. Questions covered the practical management of the programme as well as the benefits to individual staff members and the company.

Summary of benefits to the individuals and the company

Overall staff reported that Community Development Circles provided a good opportunity to develop their competencies: they rated it between 'good' and 'very good' as a development opportunity, scoring it 7.5 out of a maximum possible score of 10. Among specific competencies assessed, the best development gains were found in team work, communication and listening skills, and managing change.

This gain in competence was confirmed by line managers (or work colleagues or team leaders where necessary): they assessed the overall competency gain as 18%, with the 80 individual team members particularly benefiting (assessed at a 21% gain), while the 34 team leaders showed a lower level of gain (at 14%).

Individual staff members reported that the benefit to the Halifax as a company was considerable, rated as between 'good' and 'very good', scoring 7.3 out of a maximum possible score of 10. Senior management confirms that Community Development Circles are a good way for staff to demonstrate management skills and exercise personal judgement.

Detailed findings

Team leaders and individual members were asked to assess the effect of participation on their competence, looking in detail at nine specific competencies, assessed on six options from 'very poor' through to 'excellent'. Translated into a score out of 100, the detailed findings overall and for each competency are set out in the table below.

Halifax Community Development Circles: effect on competency (%)

	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Leaders</i>	<i>Members</i>
Overall average	72	72	73
Task coordination skills	72	73	71
Planning skills	72	74	71
Communication and listening skills	76	75	76
Self motivation	71	70	72
Team work	76	74	77
Decision-making	68	69	68
Problem solving	69	69	69
Managing change	74	70	76
Presentation skills	74	73	75
<i>N =</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>80</i>

Case study 6

Practical activity: NatWest UK

Summary of community involvement activity

NatWest works with the charity, Back-Up, whose aim is to support the reintegration and rehabilitation of spinally injured men and women through practical and adventurous activities, ranging from 'outward bound' type programmes in the Lake District to snow skiing in Switzerland. Under the scheme a NatWest 'buddy' works as part of a team doing activities over one week whilst helping the spinally injured person to undertake activities they may previously have thought impossible. As well as living together, activities include abseiling, canoeing and sailing. Staff nominate themselves and must have their line manager's support, having identified a specific development need. The week is in paid company time and around 40 staff take part each year.

Evaluation method

A sample of 12 staff members undertook a 360 degree assessment process before commencing their community activity. The exercise was repeated four weeks after they returned to their office to identify whether any behavioural differences were evident. The sample group was requested to assess the current level of proficiency in 24 behaviours (four each for the six competencies being assessed, identified from previous research). They also assessed the level of proficiency required in the behaviour to be effective in the job which they currently undertake. Line managers, peers and colleagues who reported to the individuals in the sample assessed the participants in the same way. A software package, Synchrony, was used to analyse the results.

Summary of benefits to the individuals and the company

Taking the views of individuals, their line managers, peers and colleagues together, the total average change across all competencies showed an improvement of 11%: managerial participants showed an improvement of 5% while clerical participants improved 13%. The greatest competency development was seen in leadership and influencing skills.

Individuals had a higher assessment of their own gain in competency - 14% overall - than their managers or colleagues, rating their gain highest in leadership and communication. Assessment by managers showed an overall competency gain of 9%; assessed by peers, the gain was 11%; the highest gains were in leadership and problem solving.

NatWest believes that the business has benefited from this practical activity not only because competency levels have been enhanced but also because the minimum required proficiency level for job effectiveness has been exceeded. An additional benefit from the increased motivation of the individual on return to work was also observed.

NatWest believes that the value of the programmes compares favourably in cost/benefit terms with other comparable training options. The cost to NatWest for the week of activity is £600, which covers both the NatWest employee and the person with a spinal injury.

Detailed findings

The detailed changes which were recorded in competency levels, expressed as a percentage and averaged from the four separate behaviours under each competence, are set out below.

NatWest practical activity: competency gain (%)

	Overall average	Individuals	Line managers	Peers
Overall average	11	14	9	11
Communication	8	16	3	8
Influencing skills	12	14	11	12
Information gathering	10	12	12	8
Leadership	14	19	12	13
Problem solving	11	9	12	14
Collaboration	9	12	5	11
<i>N</i> =	45	12	13	20

Overall the assessment of business benefit is made not just on competency development but also on whether the minimum required proficiency level has been exceeded. Individuals, managers and peers assessed the level of behaviour required in the job to be effective; they then assessed the actual level before and after. If the individual showed proficiency gains in the aspects of their jobs requiring that skill afterwards, then provided the original assessment of required proficiency was accurate, performance at work will have increased.

NatWest practical activity: proficiency levels (%)

	Level required	Assessment before	Assessment after
Overall average	80	71	9
Communication	81	71	3
Influencing skills	76	67	11
Information gathering	82	71	12
Leadership	78	70	12
Problem solving	79	68	12
Collaboration	83	79	5
<i>N</i> = 45			

SECTION THREE

Practical help

Types of employee community involvement

The range of different types of employee community involvement is enormous: some activities take place in company time, others in the employee's own time; some are driven by the employee while others are led by the company; for some, the type of involvement varies as the project develops. However, to help evaluation, the original report, *Employees and the Community: how successful companies meet human resource needs through community involvement*, devised a menu of community involvement options categorised, as follows:

- **full time, long term secondment** – for example, a one year career break carrying out a general function in a charity, with continuous employment and a guaranteed return to the employer;
- **full time, short term secondment** – for example, a three month break to undertake a particular task, with continuous employment and a guaranteed return;
- **part time project assignment (individual)** – for example, release for 100 hours during working time over three months to undertake a specific project in a community group, often contributing a specific skill;
- **part time project assignment (team)** – for example, as with an individual assignment, but with a group of staff doing various elements of a large project, often contributing specific skills;
- **work-place community activity** – for example, acting as a guide to a visiting group of school children or supervising a work-experience placement;
- **management committee / trustee positions** – a wide variety of non-executive positions such as school governor, TEC director, charity treasurer;
- **one-to-one support** – for example, working with individuals such as school children or young ex-offenders, as a personal mentor, advocate or tutor;
- **team volunteering ('challenge' events)** – for example, a team of staff working to achieve a specific exercise, such as collecting food and clothes for homeless people or undertaking an environmental project;
- **individual volunteering** – for example, any personal voluntary activity in the service of the community, often contributing time although sometimes a specific skill too.

Generic competencies

To maximise the benefits from competency development through community activity, companies and individual employees should aim to integrate evaluation into existing appraisal systems, using previously defined competencies. For those without their own set of core competencies, the original report developed a set of thirteen standard competencies.

A competency was defined as:

the set of behaviour patterns that the individual needs to bring to a position in order to perform its tasks and functions effectively.

Individual competencies were defined as set out in the table below, categorised between those related to:

- **personal effectiveness**, essentially an individual's own skills and his/her ability to relate to others;
- **management effectiveness**, essentially skills to lead and organise others, and
- **business effectiveness**, essentially the factors relating to overall business success, including specific skills not included elsewhere.

Table of generic competencies

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY	DETAILED DEFINITION
Personal effectiveness	
adaptability	maintain effectiveness in different surroundings and with different tasks, responsibilities and people
communication	communicate clearly and concisely with a wide range of people and listen actively
collaboration	work openly, sensitively and in cooperation with others, whatever their backgrounds or status, to achieve common goals and overcome problems together
creative thinking and innovation	analyse main elements of a problem, evaluate all relevant options, propose solutions, identify new opportunities and welcome initiatives from others
influencing skills	influence and persuade others, resolve conflicts and negotiate agreed solutions

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY	DETAILED DEFINITION
Management effectiveness	
decisiveness	exercise judgement and be ready to make decisions even though they may be difficult or unpopular, having identified the problem, gathered information and assessed the risks
leadership	take responsibility for a task, give direction, provide structure and give responsibilities to others
project management skills	set priorities, define targets, plan work so results are achieved on time and within budget
maximising performance	set individual performance goals, coach and counsel, provide training and development, evaluate performance
Business effectiveness	
customer focus	see issues through the eyes of the customer, meeting his/her individual needs
excellence and continuous improvement	carry out tasks to the highest standard possible and continually improve on previous performance
business awareness	understand the context in which an organisation operates, the mission/vision and external constraints
technical / professional skills	have wide and detailed technical knowledge relevant to the task in hand, such as marketing, finance, project management, process improvement, IT consultancy, quality improvement and management consultancy

Project examples

As noted previously, the range of possible community involvement options is very broad. Often employees will have a good idea of the sorts of projects or the types of people they want to help. However, for those starting with a desire to develop their skills and seeking a suitable project, the table below highlights examples of how particular tasks and activities can focus on a specific competency, although it is important to note that most projects will develop several skills at the same time.

To maximise the development of skills, careful thought at the outset helps to ensure a successful outcome. Key questions to address, preferably by documenting the answers, include:

- what is the objective?
- how will this be achieved? and
- what evidence is needed to ensure it is?

Then as the activity progresses, evidence of a competency gain can be noted, so that a learning log is built up.

Table of community project examples

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCY	EXAMPLES OF TASKS AND PROJECTS OFFERING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
Personal effectiveness	<i>Activities mainly by one individual, but liaising with others</i>
adaptability	Volunteer for a task or a project that is complex and changeable - assignments with features which fall outside the 'comfort zone' can develop self-confidence: some challenging youth projects or school-based activities can provide this.
communication	Write a report or a newsletter, give a talk/presentation or even just use the phone - anything that requires taking unfamiliar information, distilling it and ensuring the recipient understands; Volunteer to be trained as a counsellor, to help listening skills.
collaboration	Undertake Challenge-type team events, achieving a task by a deadline, to help build team working; Volunteer with projects with people from different cultural or racial backgrounds to break down barriers of misunderstanding.
creative thinking and innovation	Take a tricky problem facing a community organisation, look at the options and propose solutions; Facilitate a problem-solving task group, to involve others.
influencing skills	Help with fundraising; Lobby outside agencies for support; Sit on a staff appeals committee, to help resolve conflicts; Operate in a different culture.
Management effectiveness	<i>Activities where the individual leads and organises others</i>
decisiveness	Coordinate a project which requires assessment of options and final decisions; for example, a feasibility study for a move to new premises.
leadership	Chair a voluntary organisation's management committee; Lead an internal team on a fundraising or volunteering project.
project management skills	Plan an event involving others, such as a Challenge; Supervise an on-going task or project.
maximising performance	Be a mentor, perhaps to a young person, head teacher or charity manager; Supervise a pupil on a work experience placement; Prepare a staff training plan for an organisation.
Business effectiveness	<i>Activities which relate to the successful functioning of the whole organisation</i>
customer focus	Do a project which involves understanding the organisation's clients, perhaps an expansion plan or a survey of opinions.
excellence and continuous improvement	Facilitate an organisation's annual review; Develop a quality assurance programme.
business awareness	Write a strategic plan or business plan; Prepare a fundraising plan.
technical / professional skills	Undertake a task which exercises or develops a particular practical skill: such as computing, marketing, financial planning or legal investigation.

Examples of materials

The companies involved in this study used various forms and questionnaires to help them and their staff evaluate the benefits from their community activity. Often these were simply adapted from existing personnel forms and procedures. Three good examples are described below.

Barclays - materials developed for the part-time secondment programme of development assignments for graduate management trainees include:

- briefing paper for regional personnel managers
- Form 1: self-assessment prior to undertaking the community assignment;
- Form 2: self-assessment afterwards, involving line managers;
- Form 3: for host organisation review.

Allied Dunbar - the India programme in which one month full-time secondments (defined as development assignments) are fully integrated into normal appraisal systems, with additional materials then added:

- definitions of core competencies;
- personal profile questionnaire, identifying training needs;
- daily learning log;
- assignment review form.

GrandMet's Pillsbury subsidiary in the USA - the 'development through voluntarism' Employee Volunteer Program has prepared a booklet introducing the concept of volunteering and containing checklists and forms to complete, helping the individual to select the right project to develop skills:

- worksheet to identify skill areas requiring development;
- a listing of examples of volunteering activity matched against skill areas;
- a project commitment form to facilitate discussion with the voluntary organisation;
- an overall evaluation form;
- the employee development map, used to summarise the benefits from volunteering.

These and other examples are available from Business in the Community and The Corporate Citizenship Company.

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