



EVOLUTION OF APPRENTICESHIP

By Roland T. Ramsay, Ph.D.

History

At Clairton Works of U.S. Steel Corporation in 1966, I was supervising an apprentice program for a facility of 4,700 employees with four unions, a coke plant, a chemical plant, several rolling mills, and a manganese blast furnace. There were several hundred apprentices receiving classroom-related instruction and 600 receiving on-the-job training. This was a time-based program and apprentices became journey level craft persons as long as their grades and performance were satisfactory.

In the early 1970s, the Coordinating Committee Companies (management) and the USW (union) agreed to a competency-based program with Knowledge Questionnaires (KQs) and Performance Assignments (PAs). These remained in place, along with consent decrees concerning race and gender litigation under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In the late 1980s, some of the metals companies began using a Trainee system wherein persons who could show education or experience and pass tests at given levels could receive advanced standing in apprenticeships. Some companies also required "hands-on" tests ranging from one-half day to three days.

The Trainee model enabled some organizations to reduce the lengths of apprenticeships from four years to two years in length. Some organizations were able to reduce the number of maintenance workers when using these competency-based programs rather than time-based programs.

In the recession of 2008, many organizations ceased their apprentice programs. In many instances, when plants were closed, qualified maintenance workers were able to find work at other employers.

About the author: Roland T. Ramsay, Ph.D. is the President of Ramsay Corporation, a Human Resources Consulting Services company that specializes in the development of knowledge, skills, and aptitude assessments for skilled and technical workers. Ramsay Corporation has serviced over 4,000 clients including 1/3 of the Fortune 100 companies and is the market leader in test development for skilled workers.

Dr. Ramsay is also a licensed psychologist and a Diplomate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology. He is the author of several guides to hiring and management and has more than 30 years of human resources work experience.

Recent Developments

Beginning in 2015, many employers have begun new apprentice or trainee programs. They tend to be of 2 – 3 years in length and allow for credit for work, training, or qualification (job knowledge) tests. Their programs may or may not use hands-on measures. Vistakon, a division of Johnson & Johnson, used a 100-item qualification test and a 6 station hands-on work sample. For several hundred persons, the work sample was correlated at .65 with the qualification test and for another similar group, the work sample correlated at .75 with qualification test scores. They then decided to eliminate the hands-on element because of the close correlation with the job knowledge tests.

The use of basic skills and aptitude measures for entry into apprentice and training programs has improved retention and progression in training. The use of job knowledge tests has resulted in accelerated completion and better work performance by graduates.

Please visit www.ramsaycorp.com to see how you can use qualification tests to predict success in your apprenticeship programs.