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IN-COMPANY SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

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RESUME

Cet article décrit une expérience d'auto-apprentissage en entreprise. Les structures et données globales sont suivies d'une analyse du programme "par apprenant". Les résultats semblent confirmer l'hypothèse que la plupart des apprenants atteignent un plateau dans leur capacité d'apprendre après sept séances en moyenne avec leur conseil.

The in-company self-directed learning scheme offered by C.R.A.P.E.L. resembles the S.A.A.S. (ABE et GREMMO, 1981) and various institutional self-directed learning schemes (MOULDEN, 1985 ; MINER, 1985) which C.R.A.P.E.L. has developed over the past years. It differs from the institutional systems in that the interviews take place at a time and place fixed in advance by the learners and last as long as necessary. Also, the learners generally have more specific needs and fewer objectives imposed on them. It differs structurally from S.A.A.S in that interviews are generally conducted on the company's premises (although some learners have preferred to escape from their offices), the advisor is a native speaker of English for reasons of flexibility, and whereas the S.A.A.S learners may have an unlimited number of interviews in the three months they enrol for, in the in-company system the firms buy a certain number of hours and can renegotiate the contract when those hours have been used. The content of the interviews follows the same pattern as the S.A.A.S. and institutional systems, that is an examination with the learner of her/his needs, objectives, materials, methods and techniques and evaluation procedures, but may differ when the learners decide they would prefer the advisor to take on a more directive role, or when they have an urgent report or translation to write.

The reasons behind the firms' buying a certain number of hours rather than having a certain time limit are, for the most part, financial. Enthusiastic learners, those who are yearning to learn, could have placed a strain on C.R.A.P.E.L.'s resources by requesting a large number of interviews and those learners unexpectedly called away on a business trip would not have been able to profit. Also, the company can introduce new learners into the scheme quickly, know immediately their "credit status" as regards the number of hours used, and the number of hours training each employee has had.

The firm can also use the advisor for other functions such as translating, interpreting etc.

Regarding materials, the learners do have access to the university's sound library, but since most of the companies who have opted for this system are based some distance from C.R.A.P.E.L., it is usually the advisor who supplies most of the material the learners ask for. While this has posed no problems so far, there are several drawbacks ; a relatively long delay between the learner defining the material she/he would like and discussing the suitability of the material ; the possibility of the material being unsuitable ; the lack of development of criteria and procedures the learner can use to select materials, which may result in work becoming task orientated rather than objective orientated ; an increased workload for the advisor since she/he has to find the materials asked for.

The learners who chose the self-directed structure did so for two main reasons : time and content. Regarding time, there were those who often had unforeseen commitments, meetings, trips abroad and such like, as well as those who wanted their work to coincide with the times when they would have a greater need of English. As for content, some were interested in looking exclusively at the specific English which concerned them in their particular job, and some, having several different objectives, wanted to be able to switch subjects as and when the need arose. Some

employees, initially attracted by the scheme, decided not to take part after hearing more about what it entailed, the main reason being that they felt they needed the stimulus of a group or that they didn't have any time to devote to learning English outside work.

To illustrate what happens during the operation of such a scheme, below are the time sheets of interviews with learners at Philips Eclairage. As all communication between this factory and others in the group, based in Holland, Germany and Italy, is in English, the learners there have a wide variety of needs. The learners' names have been replaced by letters for ease of reference and not to protect the innocent. Where there are two or three times on the same horizontal line, the learners attended an interview together.

DATE	TOTAL HOURS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
14/1/88	1h20	1h20	1h20									
19/1	1h50			30'								
20/1	2h50		1h									
28/1	3h15			25'								
28/1	4h15				1h							
2/2	4h50								35'			
2/2	5h10							20'				
2/2	5h20						10'					
4/2	6h25			1h05								
4/2	7h25				1h							
4/2	8h15	50'	50'									
9/2	9h30				1h15	1h15						
9/2	10h20						50'					
11/2	10h50							30'				
11/2	11h25								35'			
16/2	11h45							20'				
16/2	13h15				1h30							
16/2	14h25	1h10	1h10									

16/2	14h35								10'			
3/3	15h55						1h20					
3/3	16h10							15'				
8/3	17h25			1h15								
8/3	18h00		35'									
8/3	18h50								50'			
9/3	19h50				1h							
9/3	20h25							35'				
9/3	21h35						1h10					
10/3	22h50				1h15							
15/3	23h30							40'				
15/3	24h55						1h25					
17/3	25h05			1h10								
17/3	26h05								1h			
17/3	27h05	1h										
22/3	28h20				1h15							
22/3	29h05		45'									
24/3	30h00							55'				

DATE	TOTAL HOURS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
24/3	31h15			1h15								
24/3	31h40								25'			
29/3	33h15				1h35							
31/3	33h50								35'			
31/3	34h55			1h05								
31/3	36h00	1h05	1h05									
12/4	37h30						1h30	1h30				
14/4	38h40					1h10						
14/4	39h40			1h								
18/4	41h00				1h20	1h20						
18/4	41h40	40'										
21/4	42h40						1h	1h				
21/4	43h15								35'			
21/4	44h15			1h								
28/4	45h15				1h							
28/4	46h35						1h20	1h20				
5/5	47h40				1h05							
5/5	48h00									20'		

DATE	TOTAL HOURS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
5/5	48h20										20'	
5/5	49h15			55'								
5/5	50h15						1h	1h				
9/5	51h15									1h		
9/5	51h45								30'			
9/5	52h25										40'	
16/5	53h25				1h							
16/5	54h25			1h								
16/5	55h40						1h15	1h15				
19/5	56h45									1h05		
19/5	57h10								25'			
19/5	57h50										40'	
24/5	58h55				1h05							
24/5	59h20		25'									
24/5	60h10							50'				
25/5	61h20										1h10	
25/5	61h50			30'								
25/5	62h15								25'			

DATE	TOTAL HOURS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
3/6	63h20				1h05							
3/6	64h15									55'		
3/6	64h35										20'	
3/6	65h00								25'			
9/6	66h30		1h30									
9/6	67h30						1h	1h				
20/6	68h50									1h20		
20/6	70h00				1h10							
20/6	70h30								30'		30'	30'
20/6	71h45		1h15									
20/6	72h40						55'	55'				
27/6	73h40					1h						
27/6	74h55				1h15							
27/6	76h40								1h45		1h45	1h45
27/6	77h40							1h				
1/7	78h50								1h10		1h10	1h10
5/7	80h20								1h30		1h30	1h30
5/7	81h50						1h30	1h30				

- A and B both had an upper - intermediate level of English and the same need ; to improve their report writing skills. They decided to work together, time permitting, on a commercially available course. In fact it was not always possible for them to work together, but this posed no problems. By his fifth interview B had found a method of working that he felt was satisfactory. The reduction in interview times is due to the fact that less time was spent discussing methods and techniques and only a short time needed to discuss the linguistic problems he had encountered. A reached this point at his sixth interview. There then followed a period during which neither requested an interview, with B surfacing to discuss linguistic problems (interview 8) and then deciding that he needed to improve oral presentations of aspects of his work (interviews 9 and 10).

- C had an elementary knowledge of English and needed to improve his comprehension of the reports he received. Starting with material prepared by the advisor on modals, noun groups, vocabulary etc. he found that he was not making the sort of progress he wanted. Interview 3 was spent examining other possibilities, during which it was decided that he should prepare a section of one of the types of report he commonly received. In the subsequent interviews C found that the ideal method for him was to translate selected parts of his reports in front of the advisor as he discovered that he needed to have a very detailed understanding of the reports and was better able to pinpoint areas of imprecision. He could also discuss the techniques he was using, or try out new ones suggested by the advisor, immediately.

The gradual decrease in interview time is due to C's becoming more proficient, and by the 12th interview he felt he had acquired sufficient skills and no longer needed help.

- D had been following a self-directed scheme for several months beforehand, during which he had selected a commercially available course, and was working happily on that. He had a lower - intermediate level and needed to improve his oral comprehension and expression as his job entailed increasing contact with his opposite numbers abroad. He wanted to use the interviews primarily for conversation since he found that his biggest problem was not the meetings he attended but the lunchtime conversation that followed and other social interaction. Other more job specific subjects, such as telephoning and letter writing were discussed, but generally the interviews followed a pattern of talking about his last meeting and the problems he had encountered, conversation about a subject he had chosen, practice of grammatical structures during the conversation, linguistic questions about the course book and cassette he was studying and finished with his and the advisor's evaluation of his performance that day.

- E had an intermediate level of English and had also followed a self-directed course for several months beforehand. She needed English to communicate with the visitors to the factory and their families whom she looked after. She used the interviews to discuss matters arising from her study of a commercially available course, or for conversation practice, occasionally teaming up with D for this.

- F and G's levels and needs were similar to those of D, but they chose to follow a course that had a high proportion of accompanying grammatical and structural exercises. At first they worked individually, teaming up later to come to interviews together. Before teaming up F had less interviews than G, although they were considerably longer. Whereas F was happy with the approaches suggested in the book, and spent a lot of time discussing the linguistic problems she had encountered, G talked relatively little about content and became more and more concerned with developing and trying out new techniques on the course and other authentic material, hence the gradual increase in interview time. As both progressed in their work, they decided to concentrate more on oral expression and to come to interviews together to practise this.

-H and J had elementary levels and no specific need for English in their jobs. Although working separately on improving their oral comprehension, both followed a similar pattern in that their interviews were comparatively short and concentrated on content, happy with the techniques they were using until the 4th interview which was spent examining different methods they could use when working on their cassettes. It was when they both wanted to move onto oral expression that they decided to try a more teacher-directed formula and form a small group together with a colleague, K.

- I left Hungary to live in Austria before coming to France. Her objective was to improve the presentations of the results of her research to her Dutch colleagues during meetings. The advisor's objective was to ask as few questions as possible about her note taking in Hungarian, her use of a German English grammar book, her fluent Russian and to concentrate on discussing, in English, possible techniques for improving her presentation skills.

All of the learners here preferred regular contact with the advisor : generally once a week, commitments permitting, all saying that they felt more motivated when they knew they had an interview to work for. Also, very few appointments for interviews were cancelled, those that were were due to unexpected business trips or departmental crises. The majority of the learners who needed to improve their oral comprehension and expression did not feel a need to orientate their work towards their specific job situation and wanted to work on "general" English for social situations, as they were in constant contact with their specialist vocabulary and often in situations in which they used it. Even telephoning was not perceived as a problem, since the majority of calls were routine and backed up by telex. This differs markedly from other companies following a self-directed scheme, where the learners wanted to concentrate on situations they would meet in their jobs and the specialist vocabulary associated. This was because they were not in constant contact with English in the course of their jobs.

Initial results seem to confirm Holec and Gremmo's (1987) observation that, judging from the number of criteria a learner uses when talking about her/his work, there is a peak in the learner's acquisition of his/her ability to learn around the seventh interview, where the learner has acquired sufficient skills to deal with the particular type of work she/he is doing at that moment. Among those who have continued

seeing an advisor after reaching this peak, it has been observed that new criteria emerge sporadically, with learners concentrating on acquisition of language rather than acquisition of ability to learn, returning to the latter when their learning skills are found to be insufficient (in the case where new needs are felt and objectives changed) or can be added to to increase performance.

Whether or not the learner's increased ability to learn means that, where language is concerned, she/he will be better able to cope with the constantly evolving conditions of her/his work and have less need of language instruction, is difficult to assess. However, during the operation of the scheme, the companies involved were satisfied with the increased job performance of their employees, and appreciated a structure which could deal with a number of people with different needs and levels in English and varying constraints on their time.

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