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Cover Letter

Overall, I would say that this project went well. When first starting out I was a bit overconfident, but I soon saw that this was going to be a lot more work than I initially thought.

Starting out, the observations went great. I was able to learn quite a bit about my work environment, and I was able to think about work in a way that I had never done before. Throughout work on Wednesday of observation week, I let myself slow down a bit and, finally, take in the environment around me. I noticed many things, but it was the lucky timing of the observation that led to my study. On the day of observation, my Walmart had just happened to bring in some new people and the methods of training was brought back to my attention.

Moving into finding articles was a shaky time for me. I have never been the greatest at find articles especially because I didn't know what I wanted to focus on. I mostly tried using Ebsco because of my familiarity with it, and I was able to find five articles, but in the end, I used only two of my initial articles. After writing and revising my research questions, I found that finding articles became much easier. I had a focus and I tried Google Scholar instead of Ebsco.

When starting my research questions, I got a bit off course because I wasn't thinking about writing. Once I returned to writing as my focus, I was able to create my broader initial question quickly. I had four decent but broad question that had piqued my interest. I then shifted towards trying to create my tool and realized that I had too many topics to create a solid tool. To

counter this, I choose two of my questions and wrote everything based on these. I wrote out my tool, and when it came time to write out my research questions for my portfolio, I realized that more questions could be answered from my tool. With this in mind, I was able to expand from two questions to five question without changing my tool at all. Speaking of research tools, I felt that my tool came together relatively quickly. I have always had a strong imagination, so the creation of the tool was putting into words the study that I had been imagining during my free time.

With this project, I believe my biggest struggle was finding articles. When starting my search, my brainstorming of ideas was a bit underwhelming, and I feel that if I had taken more time to think things through before just hoping into searching, I would have had an easier time. The part of this project that I feel went the best was the creation of my research tool. As I said above, I have a good imagination, and I am very science minded. This let me design a tool that not only answered one question, but multiple questions. If I had a chance to do this project over, I believe that I would have taken the first couple of weeks a bit more seriously. I did all the work during those weeks, but I only put in enough effort to get the discussion board done. This led to a lot more work during these later weeks.

Observation summary

The main things that I noticed while observing work was the environment and limited text. The environment was what stood out to me as it was bland and had very little color to it. The text in the backroom were limited to a whiteboard, where daily tasks are written, and handhelds, where product information is stored. On the sales floor, handhelds are still present, but the most important text are the shelf labels that help guide where products are placed. The other text that is present are the computers back in the office. These computers are used for training and accessing the employee portal. The only real communication that went on at Walmart as a discourse community were associate-customer conversations, casual conversations between associates, and more serious conversations between an associate and their lead.

Overall, I noticed that text, while present, were not the center of attention. One item that stuck out to me and ended up guiding the rest of my project was the training that I noticed in the backroom. Every employee at Walmart starts with one to two days on the computer watching training videos. Also, the communication and presence of leads seems to have a rather strong effect on associates. These two items are what led me to create my tool.

Annotated Bibliography

Cox, Elaine, and Claire Patrick. "Managing Emotions at Work: How Coaching Affects Retail Support Workers' Performance and Motivation." *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, vol. 10, no. 2, Aug. 2012, pp. 34–51.

The focus of this article is to test how emotional control training affects retail workers. This is done by having the researcher lead the group in sessions to help emotional awareness and control.

This article would be useful because it focuses on both aspects of my study. It focusses on training and helps to lend support to a more hands-on and personal training and has the researchers guiding the groups like the leads in my study. The focus on emotion is not the same as my more impersonal study but it should be useful in introducing the topics that I want to cover.

Kumar, Kakumanu K, and Chandra S Patro. "THE VALUE OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ON EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE IN ORGANIZED RETAIL." *EPRA International Journal of Research and Development*, vol. 3, no. 9, Sept. 2018, pp. 80–87.

This study focused more on the satisfaction of the employees during and after their training. A questionnaire was given to a group of retail employees, and it was used to gauge how employees reacted to training and if there was a correlation between satisfaction and the perception of training.

The use of this in writing a research paper is harder to see at this moment. I believe this would help tie into the focus group discussion that I wish to use at the end of my study. Since the focus group is about how the participants felt, this article should introduce training satisfaction and my research can build on how training affects emotion during work.

P. Siebers, U. Aickelin, H. Celia and C. W. Clegg, "Using intelligent agents to understand management practices and retail productivity," 2007 Winter Simulation Conference, 2007, pp. 2212-2220, doi: 10.1109/WSC.2007.4419856.

This article does not use hands on approach but uses a model simulation to test the effects of training. The article called this Agent-Based Modeling and Simulation, and it involved programming agents to interact with customers. This created a virtual retail environment with sales personal with differing training.

I can use this article because it focuses on training and employee empowerment when the models were running. Instead of differing training levels, I am looking at differing training techniques and work aspect but having their data should be useful in introducing my study's view on training.

Rosen, Ellen Israel. "Life inside America's Largest Dysfunctional Family." *New Labor Forum (Routledge)*, vol. 14, no. 1, Spring 2005, pp. 31–39. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/1095760590900983.

This article focuses on the problems within Walmart itself. It discusses and mentions many things that have to do with corporate communication to individual Walmarts.

This is the article that I am fairly certain is not research, but its implication in my discourse community is too important to ignore because one aspect of my study is the communication between the participants and the leads. One major issue that this article brings up is over communication. This article brings to light the facts that Walmart management must break rules just to stay in line because of the constant watching from corporate. If I want to look at lead participation, I needed to mention pressures from people above the leads as a possible deviance from my study.

Research questions

1. What is the effectiveness of computer-based learning on new retail workers productivity?
2. What is the effectiveness of hands-on training on new retail workers productivity?
3. How does computer-based learning and hands-on training compare to one another?
4. How is computer-based learning and hands-on training viewed by the trainee?
5. How does having a lead or manager present to offer guidance affect new retail workers productivity?

When starting my research tool, I had only the first and last question written down, but as my ideas grew, I realized that I had a lot more going on in my study than I first realized. Without meaning too, I introduced the second through fourth questions, and it wasn't till I took a step back and reviewed my study, that I realized that I had looked at more questions than I had initial thought. This is the main reason that I decided to expand on my questions.

I choose the training questions because I have personally noticed some trends when it comes to Walmart training. The training seems short, rushed, and focuses mostly on computer-based training. I have seen my fair share of training videos, but their effectiveness and comparability to a more old-fashioned hands-on training has really piqued my interest during these last few weeks. I added the last question because it has interesting applications in the retail environment. At Walmart, the shift towards teams, instead of departments, has opened the door to have leads that can guide a team. The lead is there to help guide and direct the flow of work, but I want to know how effects productivity.

Research tools

Because I am interested in the effects of training and leads, this study is set up to show how different training and management styles affect productivity through comparisons to similar groups. To begin this procedure, I will need to bring in 6 groups of 6 people. I then want to set up a mock retail environment. This mock environment could be a tent in a park or renting a small building space. I am not as worried about where it is, but how the groups complete tasks and get the job done. The six groups that I am creating will be split based on the style of training and how much communication there is between the workers and the lead. Two of the groups will be trained strictly through computer-based training videos (CBL) while the other two will be trained by an experienced individual. Inside of each training split, each group will be explained the tasks at hand, and then one group will be left to their own devices through the length of the study while the other group will have 2 leads to help guide the task and answer any questions or concerns. One lead will be on the sales floor and the other will be in the backroom. The last groups are baseline groups. They will receive no training and as before one will be left alone while the other has leads guiding their task. The task they are given will include some basic tasks that retail workers have. For example, running carts and pallets, cleaning up the area, and zoning the area (pulling products to the front of the shelf for customer ease and neatness) would be a few tasks that should be expected of new retail workers.

GROUP #	TRAINING STYLE	LEAD PARTICIPATION
1	CBL	Active
2	CBL	Inactive
3	On-site training	Active
4	On-site training	Inactive
5	None	Active
6	None	Inactive

For each group that is receiving training, I would like to have them come in for two days before observations truly begin. In these two days, they will receive their training. After those two days, the group will be shifted from training to completing tasks (Groups 5 and 6 will join in during this phase of the study). To not interfere or cause extra stress, the setting up of security cameras to watch and record would be helpful. This allows for the ability to watch group activities during and after the study is over as well as some reduction to the observation effect.

Survey

The questions for my initial survey to help find and narrow down participants would include:

- What are your name and age?
- If comfortably answering, what is your gender?
 - For the best results, groups need to be equal in the number of males and females, if possible 3 to 3 would be nice, but it is not required. The split would be dependent on applications and availability.
- If comfortably answering, what are your race and native language?
 - At my Walmart, there are a handful of people who speak other languages on top of English. From what I have gathered, it seems that their first language is not English. If possible, I would like to add an individual whose native language is not English to each group.
- What are your previous work experiences?
 - Looking for people with minimal to no experience in the retail industry. This will allow for a study of how well each training method helps new workers/associates learn the different tasks.
 - Some experience would be acceptable, but I would need to find multiple people with similar experience to still see training effectiveness.
- Have you seen or participated in the backroom of a retail store?
- If comfortably answering, do you have any health conditions that affect your physical abilities?

The reason I choose to start with a survey is that I am hoping to get a variety of people when choosing who joins each group and narrowing down the participants. The best format for this survey would probably be google forms. This would help keep all the responses together and make filling out the survey easier. Getting the survey to people would be as easy as hanging up fliers with a QR-code that leads directly to the survey or putting the survey on social media.

I think a survey has many benefits to this study. For this study, 36 people need to be found that have little to no experience in retail. Gender and race are also important points to keep track of and having to go through meeting people just to narrow it down would be hard to do in-person. A major limitation is that truthful answers and who responds to the survey would be uncontrollable. Overall, this tool is not meant to find information, but to find people that are willing and able to participate in the next phases of the study.

Observations

For starters, workplace productivity is how much work is completed in some time interval.

While training is taking place, some preliminary observations would be possible.

- How many topics are being covered over a period?
- How is each person reacting to the training at hand?

- Body language
- Questions/responses
- Facial expressions
- Do participants seem confused at the conclusion of each topic?
 - If applicable, what part of the training confused them?
- How confident does each participant look while participating in training?

While each group is working and completing their tasks, I would look for,

- When stocking how many times do they leave and return to the same area?
- How long does each task take to complete?
- How did each group split up the six participants?
 - The leads will most likely affect this aspect significantly.
- How did each participant respond to customer questions?
- How much “dead air” does each group leave between tasks?
- [Not sure what I would look for without truly being about to see it]

For this study, observation seemed to be the best fit for seeing the benefits of training. This study is very hands-on and focuses on how well participants complete the tasks. This is best seen through watching how each person handles a situation. One major benefit is that the results are less personal and focus more strictly on how well the work is done.

The benefit of losing personal feelings and focusing on an impersonal view of how well the work is done is also a limitation of this tool. While one method might teach a task more clearly, it might not be the best when it comes to participants’ emotional states. Workers’ emotions help to increase or decrease productivity, but emotions are not always easy to observe. The focus strictly on how well training prepares them for a task can be useful, but it could also come with added stress that could affect work down the road. This is the purpose of the focus group.

Focus group discussion

- How prepared did you feel when starting the task?
- Did any task feel more difficult than the rest?
 - Timewise I want to keep training equivalent between the groups that are receiving different methods of training. This could lead to glossing over of certain tasks for the sake of time and this is an important point to account for.
- Now that the test is over, how do you feel about the training and work you completed?
- Differing question depending on if they had leads helping
 - Have- did the guidance of the lead help keep you focused?
 - N/A- What method did you guys use for staying on task.

The focus group discussion is there to help wrap up the study. Its main use is to gauge how well each group felt while completing tasks. While getting the work done is important, participant

enjoyment and well-being are also of vital importance. In a retail environment, mood helps to fortify work ethic. So, if one group is more stressed or felt ill-prepared, this could be an important factor to watch for.

The main benefit of this tool is that it helps gain back some of the personal connection that is lost during the observations. I want these discussions to focus more on what cannot be truly gauged through observations. One limit that I see is that it is all based on how well the group discusses their feelings and how open they feel. Because the leads are the ones who will be training and getting to know them, I feel that they would be best for running these discussions. Having them run the discussion will hopefully alleviate some of the stress that comes with talking to a stranger.

Overall results and limits

The reason that I choose this method of research is that this style of experiment should allow for many different findings depending on which groups are compared. If all are given the same task, comparing different training methods can be seen by comparing the groups will similar management strategies and looking at the groups with different training experiences. My hoped-for results are to be able to compare data from different groups to find how well different aspects of retail work affect productivity

The results of this study would have many implications for the work environment. In my experience at Walmart, I spent roughly one shift watching computer-based training videos and then spent probably less than an hour receiving in-person training. I hope that this study could shine a light on how well CBL prepares workers for the work expected of them, especially when compared to hands-on training. Another hope is that I can see how the presence of leads plays a role in helping workers complete their tasks. I am also hoping to see how well leads can guide their workers through communication. To look strictly at communications, the leads will not be allowed to actively help in any task. They may offer advice and guidance, but to keep the number of workers and experience similar, they must play a passive role. I hope to see if leads can help lower confusion and increase productivity.

One limitation to this strategy is that work ethic, prior experience, and work speed can play a major role in how much gets done. That is why I believe that a survey should be implemented during this experiment. A survey before can help in finding people of similar experience. The main limitation to this tool would be time. Because each group must be ran over multiple days, this would not be a quick and easy task. Depending on the size of the space, more than one group could possibly be ran at the same time, but it would be extremely dependent. The best plan to alleviate some time would be to have a computer-based training group be watching their training videos while another group is being observed. Another limitation is that each person will need to be compensated for their time. The type and style of the compensation would depend greatly on funds available during this study.