

A Description and Analysis of Work Term at SaskPower

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To Mr. Kevin O'Brien, Academic Coordinator, Arts Cooperative Education Program,

The work term report that follows was prepared exclusively as a work term report and has not previously been considered for academic credit. It was prepared during and after the summer 2007 work term semester and all the information was gathered during the work term at SaskPower.

This work term report may be viewed by University of Regina faculty members, employees, and students. I also give permission for quotations to be taken from the report for promotional purposes and my name may be identified as the source on the quotations.

Sincerely,

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Executive Summary

The Training & Development (T & D) Centre is a branch of SaskPower where the development of training and training occurs. My position at the T & D Centre was content coordinator. This was my second work term at the T & D Centre, and the majority of my time was split between two major projects: the Standard Protection Code project and the Standard Operating Procedures project. My main duties included: the management of an online collaboration tool, documentation, project manager, and liaison between project groups for communication and planning. During the work term, I had the opportunity to gain a variety of knowledge, skills, and perspectives; including: improved verbal and written communication skills, the importance of communication, increased computer application knowledge, a better understanding of how a corporation operates, and project management within corporations. I also received a higher level of responsibility and independence during this second work term.

Specific university courses, as well as the overall university experience enabled me to better perform my job. Social Studies 201, 203, and 306 which were statistical and quantitative research courses helped me in developing, distributing, collecting and interpreting results from questionnaires. Other skills that were very important in the job such as: reading, writing, research skills, time management, organizational skills, and team work, were all honed while attending university.

However, there were some aspects of my job that I could have performed better if I had more experience, particularly through university. Two main skills that would have been beneficial to learn during my schooling were class presentations and project management.

There are many skills that I improved on during the eight months at the T & D Centre which will be beneficial in my schooling, my future career(s), and in other aspects of life. The work term has opened many doors for me for future employment with SaskPower, as well as other established companies. I will actually continue working on the Standard Operating Procedure project as an independent contractor. Having this opportunity to continue to grow as an employer and individual will benefit me in whichever career/life path I choose in the future.

Analysis and Discussion

Elements of the Work Term

The Organization

SaskPower is a provincial Crown corporation and is the principal supplier of electricity in Saskatchewan. Its mission is to “deliver power in a safe, reliable, cost-effective and environmentally responsible manner”¹. SaskPower has 2,425 permanent full-time employees who are employed in three business units, eight corporate groups and three wholly-owned subsidiaries². The business unit I was employed by was Transmission and Distribution, and I worked at the Training & Development (T & D) Centre in Weyburn. The T & D Centre houses a diverse team, including project managers, coordinators, business, adult education, information technology and multimedia specialists. There are approximately 15 employees working at the T & D Centre.

Work Term Duties

This was my second consecutive work term at T & D Centre, where my position was content coordinator. Over the work term I had a variety of duties some of which included: the management of an online collaboration tool, documentation, project manager, and liaison between project groups for communication and planning. While much of my duties remained the same from the first work term, my responsibility grew and the projects I was apart of changed.

There were two main projects that I was apart of during my work term at SaskPower. The first was the Standard Protection Code project which I had played a large role in from the beginning of my first work term in January. The Standard Project Code was released to

¹ SaskPower Website

² SaskPower Website

SaskPower on May 1, 2007 and there was much preparation and planning necessary to roll-out this major project. After the project was released, there was also work to be done to ensure the performance and continuous improvement aspect of the project was successful. I helped organize, facilitate and document the debriefing of the project and later compile the information gathered during the debriefing. I was also a part of planning and documenting the Standard Protection Code ongoing training process chart (appendix A).

The second major project at the Weyburn Training Centre was the Standard Operating Procedures project. The goal of the project is to document procedures on the process of creating, distributing and maintaining standard operating procedures. Standard operating procedures are necessary to document processes within the corporation in order to capture current employee knowledge and skills. The goals are: workforce planning, knowledge transition, and supervisor succession planning. I became the project manager of the project of documenting the process and was the main documenter. Appendix B illustrates one of the process charts created for employers to better understand the process of creating standard operating procedures.

The Work Experience

Knowledge/Tools, and Skills Required

There was an array of important knowledge, tools and skills that were necessary to perform the job. It was mandatory to possess knowledge of Microsoft Office applications as well have a good understanding of other computer application skills. Strong written and oral communication skills were also essential to the job. Time management skills as well as organizational and document management abilities were also important. Having project management experience was also an asset to the job, as well as skills that relate to project management.

A Learning Experience

My learning experience continued with the second work term with SaskPower, as I had the opportunity to gain a variety of knowledge, skills, and perspectives. These include improved verbal and written communication skills and understanding the importance of communication, increased computer application knowledge, and a better understanding of how a corporation operates and project management within corporations.

My verbal and written communication skills were greatly improved during the work term with SaskPower. Participating in meetings, being a communication liaison for several project groups, taking meeting minutes, writing communication documents and documenting procedures all contributed to my communication growth. I also learned the importance of having clear verbal and written communication in all aspects of a corporation. For example, while working on the Standard Protection Code project, communication was essential in distributing information to employees across the province. Communication was not always clear during this phase of the project which had consequences, and was discovered during the Standard Protection Code debriefing.

Another key attribute to a successful corporation is planning for the future and the workforce turnover which is inevitable in Saskatchewan's economy. I learned the importance of this while participating in the Standard Operating Procedure project. Having a proficient project manager is also fundamental in the success of projects. During the Standard Operating Procedure project I was privileged to work with two amazing project managers and witness them in action. I also later got to be a project manager in a sub-project of the Standard Operating Procedure project.

There were also other experiences during the work term that were interesting to

participate in and will be beneficial for my future. I was able to plan and participate in the annual T & D Centre meeting and retreat to Kenosee. It was great to witness an annual meeting; full of business strategies, goals, and budgets for the year. It was also great to participate in the employee appreciation aspect of the corporation. I felt especially lucky, as Co-op students have never participated in the annual meeting. I also got to accompany my boss and help interview the Co-op students who applied for the job at the T & D Centre for the fall semester. I also got to conduct the reference checks for the students we interviewed. It was interesting to be on the other end of the interview process and was a great learning experience.

Relation of University Experience to Work Term

Reinforcement

The work term with SaskPower did have some relation to my sociology degree and my overall university experience helped me greatly while performing my duties as content coordinator.

Although it is often difficult to see the relation between a sociology degree and the work I performed on the job, there were some things I learned in sociology classes that helped me as content coordinator. The T & D Centre often creates and distributes questionnaires to individuals they have trained to better understand any deficiencies or attributes to the training. Several times throughout my work term I was able to create, distribute, compile and interpret the findings of questionnaires. This was something that I actually had experience with from sociology classes. Social Studies 201, Statistics for the Social Sciences, helped me in tallying the results and knowing what mathematic procedures were appropriate. Social Studies 203, Social Science Methodology, helped in the creation and distribution of the questionnaires. Social Studies 306, Applied Methods: Quantitative Approaches, helped in all the tasks. In Social

Studies 306 we helped create a questionnaire, distribute the questionnaires, collect the data, interpret the findings and come to conclusions based on the results. Having this hands on experience from university helped me when completing this task.

Strong reading and writing skills, which are very important for Arts programs, were very crucial in the position. At the T & D Centre, many of my tasks involved a variety of documentation, which was made easier by my experience at university of writing numerous essays and taking notes. Strong summarizing and writing skills which are developed through university were also helpful on the job when picking the key points from meetings.

Many other skills acquired at university helped me on the job. Time management, organizational skills, and team work are all honed while attending university. Time management helped me on the job so I knew how much work I could accomplish in the day and the importance of prioritizing tasks. Organizational skills were important while being the project manager of the Standard Operating Procedure project. Team work was also mandatory for the job as I worked in several project teams as well as with the employees at the T & D Centre. All these skills were also necessary when I had to schedule, document and often facilitate the weekly T & D Centre team meetings.

Contradiction

While my university experience was helpful in many aspects of the job; there were several skills and knowledge that would have been beneficial to learn in university before the work term. Two main skills that would have been beneficial to learn during my schooling were experience with presentations and project management.

While working at the T & D Centre, I had to do a presentation to Corporate Information and Technology of SaskPower on the online collaboration tool (QuickPlace) that we were

piloting. It would have been easier for me if I would have had more experience in presenting to a group of people. I have been in few sociology classes that promote team work and have presentations; I believe that enforcing students to do this in class will help to make them more comfortable in the work place especially when doing presentations.

Another area where I felt it would have benefited me to have some experience in was the business/administration area, especially in regards to project management. Having very little knowledge of business processes and project management, I often felt a little behind than the other employees. In particular, while working on the Standard Operating Procedure project as project manager I often felt overwhelmed and under qualified for that position. However, having the opportunity at the T & D Centre to be a project manager, and be a part of many projects will help me in the future when in similar situations.

Conclusion

Aspects of Work Term Applied to Future Education & Future Phases of Career

I believe the work term at the Training & Development Centre has provided me with an invaluable amount of knowledge, skills and experiences that will help me in my remaining year of university and in my future career. All of the knowledge, skills and experiences from the work terms have created a confident, experienced individual who has a strong resume and is (almost) ready to join Saskatchewan's work force!

The work term with SaskPower has opened many doors for me for future employment with SaskPower, as well as other established companies. My work term ended at a crucial time in the Standard Operating Procedure project, with deadlines looming and a shortage of employee resources. I proposed to my boss for me to work part time on the project, which has actually evolved into reality. I am currently an independent contractor who has been hired to complete

this project as well as contribute to other projects. This work term has opened many doors for my future career!

Bibliography

SaskPower Website. <http://www.saskpower.com/aboutus/corpinfo/corpinfo.shtml>. About us, Corporate Information. 2007.