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Effect of training, financial incentive and attitude on treatment frequency and mortality rate of growing pigs

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This is an ongoing study being sponsored by the Minnesota Pork Producers Association and Pfizer Corporation. The University of Minnesota's College of Veterinary Medicine and the Carlson School of Management are working together in conjunction with three production systems in Minnesota to address two main objectives:

Objective 1 - to determine whether financial incentives, training interventions, and employee attitudes individually or in combination have a significant effect on swine production outcomes (mortality rate, medication per pound gained, and employee quit rates).

Objective 2 – to determine the independent and joint effects of financial incentives and training on psychological withdrawal and quit intentions and other job-related attitudes including job satisfaction, procedural justice, distributive justice, and commitment.

In this study, we aim to make progress in understanding the effects of financial incentives on performance quality, job attitudes, and withdrawal. We intend to demonstrate conceptually and empirically that the relationship between financial incentives and these outcomes (performance quality, job attitudes, and withdrawal) can be strengthened by using task-specific forms of training.

There are two primary reasons to expect this result. First, the relationship between financial incentives and measures of performance quality may be contingent on factors that relate to individual motivation levels. One such factor is the presence of appropriate and task-specific employee training. From the perspective of individual motivation theories (e.g., Lawler, 1971), the provision of training may increase perceptions of self-efficacy, heighten perceptions of instrumentality, and clarify the line of sight between employee behaviors and quality-related performance outcomes. After conducting a meta-analysis of training program effectiveness, Arthur, Bennett, Edens, and Bell (2003) concluded that optimal effectiveness would be found when there was alignment of training with task type ("…cognitive, interpersonal, or psychomotor…"; p. 236), but also with other aspects of the human resource management system. Second, perceptions of control over outcomes (instrumentality) are key facets of motivation levels, but research also shows that they relate to positive affect, job and life satisfaction (e.g., Ayres & Malouff, 2007). By enhancing perceptions of control over work-related outcomes, training may enhance effectiveness of financial incentive programs by increasing positive affect and improving job attitudes. In essence, the combination of financial incentive and training should improve self-efficacy and sharpen line-of-sight and thereby increase motivation and performance quality. This combination should also result in higher overall levels of positive affect which in turn should increase job satisfaction and commitment and reduce turnover (see Schaubroeck, Shaw, Duffy, & Mitra, in press).

One component of this study is a series of employee surveys designed to capture the employee's attitudes and perception about training, financial incentives, job satisfaction, organizational justice and commitment. The specific questions on the survey have been validated through research within many other industries (financial services, manufacturing, transportation, retail, etc.). At this point in our study, we have preliminary results from the administration of two waves of employee surveys from within the three Minnesota production systems. We will share those results.

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