

Collaborative
Needs
Assessment:
*A Handbook for
Workplace Development
Planners*

by
Sue Folinsbee
Paul Jurmo

AN **ABC** PUBLICATION

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Collaborative Needs Assessment

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Authors

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Sue has authored several documents on workplace basic skills education, including *An Organizational Approach to Workplace Basic Skills: A Guide for Literacy Practitioners*.



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Since 1991 Paul has run Literacy Partnerships, a consulting firm based in East Brunswick, New Jersey. He specializes in the collaborative planning and evaluation of literacy efforts, especially in the workplace. This participatory model is designed to help create a new kind of economy and society that is both more efficient and more equitable.

His current projects include development of collaborative workplace education curriculum models and several electronic mail networks linking adult educators.

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ABC CANADA supports the development of an educated, flexible, and fulfilled workforce through fostering lifelong learning. ABC CANADA raises awareness of literacy issues, encourages workplace literacy programs; represents the private sector in public policy relating to basic skills, and supports local literacy organizations across Canada.

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Sue Folinsbee
Paul Jurmo

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Glossary

action plan	A description of tasks to be accomplished in order to carry out a strategy. Usually includes a timetable for review and reporting, and specifies the responsible parties. It may also include a budget.
brainstorming	A technique for generating ideas, usually by a group, in which all suggestions are written down without comment or discussion.
collaboration	The involvement of all interest groups.
continuous improvement	A management philosophy whereby every product, service, or process within an organization is subject to continuous scrutiny and improvement.
cultural interpreter	A person who not only can translate language but also has an in-depth understanding of the primary cultures of both parties in an interview.
ethnographic interviewing	A way of eliciting information from people that respects the cultures from which their own experience is drawn, rather than the culture of the interviewer.
evaluation	A formal process in which the elements of a workplace development initiative are examined and interpreted to determine how well the initiative is meeting its goals. Ongoing evaluation allows an organization to plan improvements to the current initiative and to plan future initiatives. It allows decision makers to make informed decisions about support.
funder	A person, agency, or organization that provides money for a specific purpose. Such funds may or may not be subject to conditions agreed to by both parties. (Note: We use this word, despite its not being defined in any of the better-known dictionaries. It's a useful word that has come into fairly common usage, especially for programs carried out by the non-profit sector.)
goals	What we hope to accomplish through a workplace initiative.
key contacts	Designated representatives from management and the union or other employee group.

key findings	Information that is collected by a planning committee and considered to be particularly important.
Learning organization	enhance their capacity to create what they truly desire to create. This is likely to involve not only new capacities, but also fundamental shifts of mind, individually and collectively. (-from Peter Senge, who coined the phrase)
open-ended questions	Such questions demand information; they can't be answered with a simple <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i> . The questioner hopes to elicit thoughtful, in-depth responses.
organization	A general term we use to describe a conglomeration of people and various resources that work together for a common purpose. In reality it could be a company or a division of a large company, a hospital, a government department, a co-op.
planning cycle	A series of steps for carrying out a workplace development initiative. (Refer to the planning cycle diagram .)
stakeholder	A term that is used by some in the workplace education community to refer to groups or individual people who have an interest in workplace development. We prefer <i>interest group</i> .
statement of purpose	A concise explanation of the reason for an activity — in this case, the WNA.
strategy	A planning term that describes a range of steps necessary to realize a goal or objective. Reaching a goal can involve one or more strategies.
systemic discrimination	Practices that treat some members of a workforce unfairly or unequally with respect to others. Such practices result from the way the overall system works, rather than from individual actions.
workplace development	Everything that is done to improve the ability of an organization and its employees to meet their goals.
workplace development initiative	A planned set of activities that respond to workplace needs and issues. Includes workplace education and training and other change-related activities. Often referred to in this handbook simply as the <i>initiative</i> .
workplace education	A generic term that encompasses a variety of basic skills training and education programs that might be offered to employees in the workplace. Programs can include, for example, job-specific basic skills courses, work-related

**workplace needs
assessment**

and personal development courses, grade 12 equivalency, study and test-taking skills courses.

(WNA) A systematic way to identify all workplace needs, not just those that require an educational response.

Introduction

This handbook is for educators, managers, and union leaders who have the responsibility for workplace development. It will be especially useful to those of you who will facilitate a Workplace Needs Assessment (WNA). We will take you step-by-step through planning and conducting your own WNA. (1)

A WNA will appeal to organizations that:

- Are involved in technical) cultural) or organizational change.
- See basic skills such as reading, writing, math, oral communication, using computers, and problem solving as integral to the whole training and education continuum in the workplace.
- Are concerned about issues of equity and diversity.
- See training and education as just one component of work- place development that must go hand-in-hand with changes to policies and practices.

You will learn:

- How to get commitment to a WNA.
- How to set up a planning committee for the WNA.
- How to ensure sensitivity to workforce diversity.
- How to customize the needs assessment to the committee)s own workplace.
- How to conduct interviews and focus groups.
- How to analyze workplace documents and procedures for clear language and bias.
- How to analyze findings from the needs assessment.
- How to make recommendations for workplace education and organizational change.
- How to write a needs assessment report.
- How to pass on findings from the needs assessment.
- How to develop an action plan based on findings from the needs assessment.

We have designed this handbook to be easy to follow — whether you are experienced or not — with clear steps for each phase of the assessment. Many of the steps have specific activities that you will be encouraged to do, some on your own and others with the planning committee. You

Note: Changes to policies and practices can include such things as developing clear language policy and making training more accessible.

How will this handbook help you?

* For information on ordering other handbooks in this series, see [Ordering Information](#).

will also find case studies and examples that illustrate the text.

Values and assumptions

We consider certain values and assumptions to be the foundations of a solid assessment. You will want to make sure that they fit your own philosophy and that of your organization.

Workplace change

- Many workplaces are undergoing change (or must undergo change if they are to survive and continue to provide employment).
- Workplace and workforce change can be successful only when all levels of an organization are involved in identifying needs and determining actions.
- Training and education needs, especially those involving basic skills, cannot be isolated from other workplace issues, such as labour-management relations or downsizing. Often, education programs are expected to shoulder too much of the responsibility for improving a workplace, when other changes may also be required.
- Workplace education and training are only part of managing change. Education programs must go hand-in-hand with changes to organizational policies and practices.

Partnerships

- In unionized workplaces, management and labour need to be equal partners in achieving change.

Lifelong learning

- Workplace needs — both those that have an education component and those that involve organizational change — demand a long-term strategy, not a quick fix.
- Everybody is a potential learner in a workplace committed to the principles of the learning organization and continuous improvement.

Equity

- Any workplace development must respect workforce diversity, and seek to identify and eliminate systemic discrimination.
- Upgrading basic skills at the workplace is both an economic issue and a social justice issue.

Note: To see where a WNA fits into the planning cycle, have a look at the highlighted sections of the diagram on the following page.

What is a workplace needs assessment?

A WNA⁽¹⁾ is a systematic way of identifying all workplace needs, not just those that require an educational response. It documents how basic skills and other needs fit into the big picture. A WNA helps give appropriate weight to the educational component of a workplace development initiative.

The purpose of a WNA is:

- To identify an organization's overall education needs, with a focus on basic skills.
- To identify other workplace needs resulting from ongoing organizational change.
- To specify a range of activities that will help employees and organizations fulfill identified needs.

The WNA involves getting input from a sample — taken across all levels — of the workforce, as well as examining selected policies and practices within an organization.

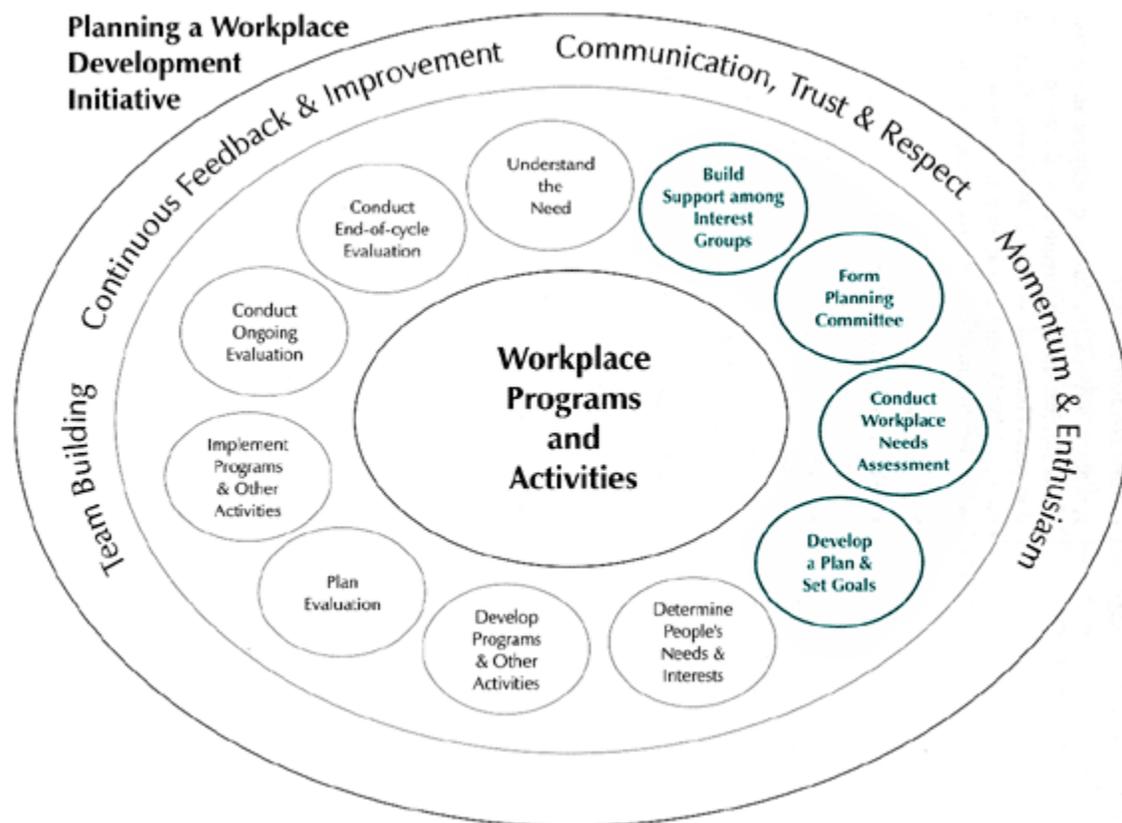
In performing a WNA, we do not assume that meeting stated needs lies only in upgrading the job skills or basic skills of workers. A WNA is not an assessment of anyone individual's needs or skill level. Nor is it a mere analysis of the basic skills needed for different jobs. However, a basic skills task analysis of certain jobs could follow from information collected in a WNA.

Why use a WNA?

Because it provides information on which to base all other decisions relating to employee education, a WNA is critical to the success of workplace development. There are several important reasons for taking the time to do a comprehensive assessment at the outset of a workplace development initiative.

To gain support

1. Gain support and commitment for change from all levels of the workforce. People are more likely to get involved if you ask them about educational and other needs. When you consult all interest groups, you get a fuller, more accurate picture of needs and concerns than if you consult only one group or don't consult anyone at all. You will also learn how effective various responses to identified needs will be.



from Workplace Education: A Planning & Information Seminar 1992 ABC CANADA

Including everyone is useful in other ways.

- No individual groups or people are threatened by singling them out as having a need for basic skills upgrading.
- No segment of the workforce is excluded; we recognize that every segment might benefit from basic skills upgrading or other training and education opportunities.

To get the lay of the land

2. A WNA can help you get the lay of the land. It can determine the extent of basic skills needs vis-a-vis other training, education, and workplace issues. It reveals what kinds of programs and workplace changes people want and what barriers must be removed for those programs and changes to become a reality.

To identify different perceptions

3. Identify similarities and differences in workforce perceptions. The WNA clearly identifies how each interest group sees workplace issues, including basic skills needs.

Differences in perceptions can point out gaps in communication and understanding. These gaps have to be narrowed for the organization to achieve worthwhile change.

**To analyze
readiness for
change**

4. Analyze organizational readiness for change. A WNA reveals both the ideal values (from written policies) and operational values (those that are actually practised) of the workplace culture. It can reveal attitudes toward learning, management style, management-labour relations, communication style, equity issues, etc. This will be critical information when developing an action plan that takes into account the organizations readiness for change.

**To support
workplace practice**

5. A WNA can enhance and support what is already happening in a high-performance workplace culture. Our collaborative approach to needs assessment is consistent with the philosophy of organizations and workplaces that are truly working toward participatory and democratic decision making. Learning organizations and those with total quality or employment equity programs may find that a WNA fits very well with their philosophy and principles.

**Make a case for
financial support**

6. A thorough and well-presented WNA summary can persuade a CEO and others to commit enough money to respond to identified needs.

Phase 1

Laying the Groundwork for a Workplace Needs Assessment

As facilitator for the WNA, you will play a key role in making it work. It doesn't matter whether you are from inside or outside the organization. You will need to prepare for the many tasks that lie ahead.

To begin, read through the entire handbook. Where appropriate, do a mental or actual dry run of the activities. This will help you prepare to facilitate each step of the WNA.

In Step 1, you work with management, unions, and workers to ensure agreement on how to assess workplace needs.

In Step 2, you organize the planning committee that will guide the WNA.

In Step 3, you orient planning committee members and build team spirit. The committee will develop a statement of purpose and a communication strategy.

In Step 4, you work with the committee to determine the who, what, where, when, and how of the WNA.

Step 1: Get all interest groups committed to the workplace needs assessment

Your first step is to make sure that there is commitment for conducting a WNA from senior management and union or other worker representatives. You'll need to have a meeting with representatives of all interest groups.

Activity (on your own): Plan a meeting of workplace interest groups

Make agenda

In preparing an agenda for the meeting, consider the following questions for inclusion in the discussion.

1. *What current workplace issues concern each interest group? What do they feel could be done about those issues?*

2. *What impact do the current issues have on both the*

employees and the company?

3. What is a workplace needs assessment? Why is it important? What should it focus on? What are the steps for carrying it out? What happens next?

4. What might these groups see as benefits from a WNA? What concerns might they have about it? How can their concerns be alleviated?

5. What focus and procedures for the WNA might these interest groups be able to agree on?

6. If key people agree on a concept of the WNA, who else needs to support the needs assessment? Who will approach them to get their support?

7. What financial and human resources are available to conduct a WNA?

8. Who could be on a committee responsible for planning the WNA?

9. What are the next steps?

Workplace interest groups are likely to make a commitment to the WNA if they see clear benefits for themselves and their constituencies.



The following case will give you some ideas about getting commitment for the WNA.

Case study: Getting commitment

Identifying the need

Although for several years plant personnel had been discussing the need to offer workplace basic skills programs, the idea never got off the ground. There was some fear about approaching the issue the "wrong" way. They also couldn't agree on a definition of basic skills or how to initiate workplace education programs. Furthermore, some people were not convinced that the workplace was the place to deal with basic skills.

Changes in technology and management style were forcing the issue. The company brought in an outside facilitator to work with key management and union decision makers.

Understanding and agreeing on the issues

Toward a needs assessment

The facilitator helped them tackle their fears and concerns about the sensitive nature of the issue. She helped them broaden their attention — from a focus on basic skills — to include the larger issues of employee relations and cultural and racial diversity. Considering these other issues would be essential to achieving needed change. The facilitator also helped them understand the benefits of a needs assessment for both management and union personnel.

The decision makers then undertook a clear plan of action, which included getting commitment from other interest groups. Once that support was secured, senior management committed employee time and money for a consultant to conduct the WNA.

Representatives from management and the union were asked to be on a planning committee, and an outside consultant was hired to work with the committee to plan and carry out the WNA.

Step 2: Organize a planning committee

The planning committee is critical to the success of the WNA. It must be a group of committed and enthusiastic people who represent the entire workforce.

Equally important is your role as facilitator for planning the WNA. As a facilitator, you must:

- Be acceptable to management and workers.
- Be able to work well with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Have good facilitation and intercultural communication skills.

Activity: Select committee members

With key contacts, select employees who could or will be invited to be on the committee. The following guidelines can help you choose.

1. Members should represent all interest groups (for example, workers, managers, supervisors, and union representatives).
2. The committee should reflect workforce diversity of age, gender, ethnicity, race, experience, shift assignments, etc.

Note: It's certainly useful to have some practical experience with needs assessment. However, if you don't, this will be a great learning experience.

Note: To review WNA purpose, see [The purpose of a WNA](#).

3. Committee members should be dedicated to the purpose of the WNA.
4. Members should be respected by their peers and willing to work with others from different interest groups.
5. Members need time to come to meetings and carry out specific tasks.

Step 3: *Plan and hold initial committee meetings*

Note: It's important to understand that not everyone on the committee will feel entirely comfortable, especially in the early stages. Silence is natural, and is to be respected, just as voices are.

Be aware that, in many cases, you will be asking people to participate in collaborative decision making — something they may not normally do. Some potential members could be confused or feel intimidated at the prospect. Talk with them about this, to get their concerns out in the open. You want to resolve concerns as early as possible.

Emphasize the need to respect and trust each other and to be willing to work with others.

Activity (on your own): Anticipate the committee

Think about the diversity of people on the planning committee. How can you ensure that they will all feel part of the group and be able to participate and use their talents to the fullest?

Ask yourself some questions:

- *What can I do to make sure that everyone's ideas get heard, given different communication styles, experience, positions of power in the company, and perhaps language abilities?*
- *How can I build respect and trust between myself and the group? . . . among the members?*
- *How can I make sure that people are asked to do tasks that are suitable to their experience and skills?*
- *How can I help members grow and develop confidence and new skills?*

Some ideas

Here are some answers that we have found helpful.

- Develop group guidelines based on what each person needs to operate comfortably as a group member.

- Have people work through team-building activities that build on their common experiences while respecting their differences.
- Always encourage a spirit of respect, in which everyone's ideas are listened to. Having one person restate the key points will bring out and help to avoid any misunderstandings. Some people need time to reflect; give it to them.
- Always give people choices in how they participate in activities. Don't assume that a person will feel comfortable writing on a flip chart or being a spokesperson.
- Design activities so that people who are reluctant to speak out in a group can shine in other ways and can develop confidence to speak in the group.
- *Be prepared to change your agenda at any time to deal with issues and concerns that come up in the group.*



Activity: Hold the first planning meetings

There are a few important things to do in your first few meetings.

Build...

1. Build a common understanding among committee members about what the WNA is, why it's important, and how it will be planned and carried out. Explain that their WNA will be tailored to their own workplace.

Brainstorm...

2. Brainstorm with them reasons for conducting a WNA and how it can benefit both the company and individuals

Clarify...

3. Clarify the role of the committee. That role can include:

- Developing a clear statement that explains the purpose and goals of the WNA.
- Planning for the WNA.
- Telling the workforce about the needs assessment and how it will work.
- Answering questions that co-workers may have about it.
- Making recommendations from the WNA findings.
- Putting together an action plan to guide decision makers in following the recommendations.
- Communicating the findings.

- Establishing the decision-making power of the committee within the organization.

Elicit...

4. Elicit any concerns or questions that committee members have about the WNA or their roles on the committee.

Identify...

5. Identify who else should be on the committee if anyone present does not have the time to do it.

Help...

6. Help the committee gel as a working unit and help members feel comfortable working with one another, by using team-building activities.

Create...

7. Create guidelines for working together.

Develop...

8. Develop a statement of purpose and a way to tell the workforce about it. Your communications must appeal to both the workforce and the specific culture of your workplace. You need the support of all interest groups.

Note: This will be one of the first tasks of the planning committee.



The following case deals with the initial meetings of a planning committee.

Case Study: Building group spirit — the first meetings

In the beginning, some committee members were suspicious and unsure about the goals of the WNA, not to mention their own roles in the process. But once their concerns were out in the open and discussed by the group, they were much more supportive and ready to guide the WNA. The committee then came up with its own list of reasons for conducting a WNA — reasons that took into account both the employees and the company. A useful team-building activity involved committee members working in pairs, preferably with unfamiliar partners, to discuss their best and worst learning experiences. They then presented their partners to the group. This brought the group closer together, as there were common themes in their individual experiences.

The facilitator was able to draw from those themes in the "best" category some principles of effective adult learning. In turn, those principles would serve as a basis for learning within the committee, the WNA, and any resulting plan.

Using common experience

Guidelines for communication

The group developed some guidelines for working together.

- The group will make decisions by consensus.
- Tasks will be shared among members.
- Members will be respectful of others' opinions even if they don't agree with them. That way, people can say what's on their minds.
- Committee members will give out a clear and consistent message regarding the WNA.



Activity: Develop a statement of purpose

Have the committee work together to develop a statement of purpose for the WNA. It should be no more than two or three sentences, written in clear language.

Sample statements

1. The purpose of the organizational needs assessment plan is to make short- and long-term recommendations that will respond to upgrading needs and basic skills issues in our workplace. The information we get from the assessment will help us develop programs that allow people to build on the skills they already have, and that will give them the opportunity to learn and develop new skills.

2. We will conduct a workplace needs assessment to find out the training and education needs — especially those involving reading, writing, math, and language — of all employees. The needs assessment will also identify ways to improve communication and promote equal access to employment opportunities for all members of our multicultural, multiracial workforce.

It generally takes an hour or two to develop and refine the statement. Although the process is time-consuming, the success of the WNA depends on having a statement of purpose that everyone can agree with and communicate clearly to others.

Some ideas

Here are some ideas that will help you work with the committee to develop your statement of purpose.

1. Have the committee brainstorm some key words, phrases, or ideas that should be included in the statement.

Hint: If you are pressed for time, you could ask for volunteers on the committee to take a stab at a first draft using the ideas from 1.

2. Allow enough time for committee members working alone or in pairs to attempt to write a statement.
3. Write down what people have come up with.
4. Work with one statement that the group agrees on and refine it, using ideas from other statements and new ideas, until it is in a form that everyone can live with.
5. Look at it carefully. Is it written clearly?
6. Decide with the committee who else could give useful feedback, just to make sure you're on the right track.



Activity: Plan a communication strategy

Once the planning committee has developed a statement of purpose for the WNA, you need to decide how to tell the workforce about it.

This can take a number of forms, such as:

- Enclosing with pay cheques, a letter that includes the committee's statement and is signed by the company and union presidents (if there is a union).
- Putting the statement in company or union newsletters.
- Having committee members talk about the statement in various workplace meetings, and by one-on-one exchanges with other employees.

A comprehensive communication strategy will include a combination of methods.

When you have decided how to spread the word about the WNA, you can proceed with the next steps.

1. Ask for volunteers to draft the letter for feedback at the next committee meeting.
2. Decide if the letter should be translated into any other languages of the workplace.
3. Decide if the same information can be submitted to company and union newsletters.
4. Make a list of any already scheduled meetings at which

Spreading the word

Informing the workforce about the intent of the WNA is important, at this early stage, to prevent confusion and suspicion. Details — how the needs assessment will be conducted, how people can participate, how confidentiality will be maintained, dates, etc. — can come later.

Step 4: Design the workplace needs assessment

You and the planning committee will be responsible for designing the WNA. This means establishing:

- The sectors to be explored.
- Who and what will be sources of information.
- How information will be collected.
- The specific questions to ask of WNA participants.
- What workplace policies, practices, and documents will be analyzed.

Activity: Determine subjects for study in the WNA

A WNA typically seeks answers to the kinds of questions outlined below. Your committee can decide whether they might be adaptable to your situation.

1. What goals do the organization and individual workers have for developing the potential of all employees?

- *What changes are going on in the organization?*
- *What impact do those changes have?*
- *What are resulting education and training needs, including basic skills?*
- *What new policies and practices will be needed?*

2. What is already in place to help meet goals related to employee development?

- *What training and education programs are now offered through the company and the union?*
- *Who uses these programs?*
- *How are participants chosen?*
- *What needs assessment and evaluation practices are in place?*
- *What is the organization training policy and how well does it meet needs?*
- *What are the results of programs to date?*
- *How might programs be improved?*

3. What barriers prevent meeting goals for employee development?

- *How responsive are hiring and promotion policies, etc. to diversity and equity issues?*
- *How well do labour-management relations support employee development?*
- *How well does the economic climate support employee development?*
- *How well does the management style support employee development?*
- *How effective are communications?*

4. What new or revised programs and activities can help meet the goals of individual people as well as the organization's goals?

- *Consider basic skills programs; other training and education programs; new and revised policies; ways to ensure that barriers are eliminated; ways to improve communications.*

Example:

The *who, what, where, when, and why* of workplace needs assessment.

Department	No. of employees		Sample size		How?	When?	Where?	Documents to examine
	Salary	Union	Salary	Union				
Operations					Choice of confid. interview or focus group	Week of June 17 1994	Third floor meeting room	Employee handbook Selected memos Safety signs Process training manual
Production	30	450	8	80				
Ship/receive	26	38	4	4				
Eng./maint.	20	36	3	15				
Sales	58		5					
Finance	15		2					
MIS	39		6					
HR	15		3					
Other	30		6					
Total	233	524	37	99				

Some ideas

The following activities can help you get the information you need to answer those questions.

- Review workplace documents, such as policies, notices, training materials, and operating procedures.
- Talk with employees.
- Observe what's going on (in cafeteria, work areas, training programs).



Having developed a framework for your needs assessment) you will now get into the nitty-gritty.

Activity: Determine the who, what, where, when, and how of the WNA

The committee, as a group, should work through a chart that documents the following.

Note: An example is shown above.

Who...

1. Who will provide information for the WNA (workers, managers, union representatives, etc.)?

Committee members need to work out how they can ensure a representative sample, taking into account gender, age, race, ethnicity, experience, different positions and departments, etc. At the same time, you must make sure that interest groups are fairly represented. In large workplaces, 10 to 15 percent of the workforce should be big enough. In smaller workplaces, a higher percentage may be better.

Participation is voluntary. It is important to include everyone who would like to participate.

How...

2. How will opinions and information be collected?

The committee, with its knowledge of the workplace culture, will be able to determine the best methods to gather information. Confidential interviews and focus groups are the most common ways to get input.

Note: See following two pages for a discussion of the pros and cons of interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires.

What...

3. What documents, practices, and policies will be examined?

You can help the committee select:

- Workplace documents to be analyzed for clear language and bias.
- Workplace procedures to be examined for their responsiveness to the workforce, and how well they meet company and employees' goals. (For example, scheduling training only during the day when three shifts are involved is not responsive.)

Where, when...

4. When and where will the WNA take place?

It is important to set dates for the WNA. Equally important is a quiet, comfortable, and private location suitable for interviews and focus groups.



Techniques for collecting information

Confidential interviews

1. Confidential interviews are best done face-to-face, in a private place.

Focus groups

Advantages

- The privacy provides a degree of comfort.
- Interviewers are able to establish rapport with interviewees; they can probe for further information and clarify statements.

Disadvantages

- It takes a lot of time to conduct, summarize, and analyze them.
- They can cause anxiety for people who prefer to participate in groups.

2. Focus groups are interviews in which a number of people give their ideas and opinions on the same topics that would be probed in an individual interview. A focus group should not include more than fifteen people, and should not mix people with their managers. The focus group is often split up into smaller groups, which report discussions back to the larger group

Advantages

- Some people feel more secure giving opinions in the company of co-workers.
- They take less time than interviews.
- They can reveal similarities and differences in perception of issues between small groups within a larger group.

Disadvantages

- It could be hard to get everyone together for two hours.
- Some people prefer to give opinions privately.
- They limit the quality and depth of information you can get from individuals.

Questionnaires

3. Questionnaires

Advantages

- They are easy to distribute to large numbers of people.
- They are easy to analyze.

Disadvantages

- People may feel uncomfortable for many reasons, including difficulties with language.
- Return rate may be low.

- They limit the quality and depth of information you can get.
- People can't ask for help if they don't understand a question.



You are now ready to develop a set of specific questions for each of the broad areas the committee has decided to examine in the WNA.

Activity: Develop questions for interviews and focus groups

To save time, you could provide some sample questions. Committee members can then adapt or add to them. Questions should be open-ended in hopes of getting in-depth responses.

Some sample questions

1. *What reading, writing, speaking, computer; and math skills do you and people you work with use on the job? Please give specific examples.*

2. *In what situations do you think employees here, including supervisors and managers, might need to improve these skills? Please give specific examples.*

3. *What reading, writing, speaking, computer; and math skills do people who work for you have to use? Please give specific examples.*

4. *In what situations do you think these employees need to improve their skills a) now; and b) in the future?*

1. *What makes technical, safety, quality, or other kinds of training hard for people?*

2. *What suggestions do you have for making such training easier and more comfortable for people?*

3. *What new programs that focus on reading, writing, math, computers, and speaking would you like to see offered here?*

4. *What would encourage workers to get involved in them?*

Note: See [guidelines on ethnographic interviewing](#).

General basic skills needs

Note: You can reword questions to suit different groups (as in questions 3 & 4, which are for supervisors and managers).

Training & education programs

Communication & other issues

1. *What changes have you seen in communications across the company?*

2. How could communications and human relations be made better; given all the different cultures, races, and languages in this workplace?



The committee also has to decide how to invite a representative sample of the workforce to be part of the WNA. Employees should be told about the WNA in detail — when it's happening, its purpose, and how they can take part. This information, like the introduction to the WNA, can go in a letter to employees and in newsletters. Committee members can also talk directly to potential participants.

People appreciate choices. Give them the option of having an interview or being in a focus group.

Activity: Invite employees to participate in the WNA

Ask for volunteers on the committee:

- To draft a letter to go out to the workforce.
- To draft key points that committee members can use when - they are talking to people.
- To distribute the letter to members for their comments before your next committee meeting.

Get feedback from members on both the letter and key points. Then:

- Decide whether the letter will need to be translated into other languages.
- Prepare a final version in clear language.
- Distribute the letter.



Note: A sample letter follows this activity.

Sample letter to employees

To: All Employees

We invite you to take part in a project — "Talk About Skills." "Talk About Skills" is organized by a committee of our employees with the support of our union [name]. The committee will ask for employee input about the skills and training required to meet the challenges we face every day at work and in the community. The focus will be on speaking, writing, computer, and mathematical skills for all employees. Two outside agencies, [names], will be assisting us with this project.

Participation will be voluntary and completely confidential. Committee members will be looking for volunteers to "talk about skills" during the week of June 13-17. There will be group discussions and individual interviews.

The company, together with our employee committee and union, is committed to this project and asks for your support. If you would like to volunteer, or if you require further information, please fill in the attached form and put it in the drop-off box in the cafeteria or at the security desk by June 5.

Thank you,

CEO

Union president

Phase 2

Carrying Out the Needs Assessment

In Step 5, you prepare to conduct the assessment through scheduling and testing interviews and focus groups. You also review the principles of ethnographic interviewing.

In Step 6, you conduct the interviews and focus groups, while in Step 7, you gather information from other sources, such as documents and observation of workplace practices.

In Step 8, you organize the collected information.

In Step 9, you analyze selected documents for clarity and content.

Step 5: Prepare to gather information

Ideally, the person(s) responsible for carrying out the WNA will be from outside the organization — someone neutral who has no stake in the results. An insider may be more inclined to impose a personal interpretation on the data or not to probe as deep as an outsider would.

Activity: Schedule interviews and focus groups

Once you have designed the WNA, and have a list of people for interviews and focus groups, it's time to develop a schedule. We have found that interviews should be 45-60 minutes long, with some time between interviews to review notes.

Focus groups will take approximately two hours. We advise you not to schedule more than two a day.

Activity: Prepare the interview and focus group formats

Interviews and focus groups will have three parts — introduction, body, and closure

The introduction

Be sure to include the following as you start each interview and focus group.

- State who you are and what organization you are from.
- Go over the purpose of the needs assessment.

- Assure the interviewee of confidentiality and anonymity. (In focus groups, get a show of hands to ensure that what is said will not be repeated outside the room.)
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Set a time limit.
- Ask if you can take notes (for interviews).

The body

1. Warm-up

As an ice breaker, ask people non-threatening questions. In interviews, you could ask people about their jobs, how long they have been at their jobs or the changes they have seen on the job. In focus groups, make sure that people introduce themselves and describe what jobs they do.

2. Needs, issues, and ideas

This is where you ask your main questions: What do people see as education and other organizational needs and issues? What are their ideas about dealing with them? In focus groups, you can break into small groups to answer questions and report back to the larger group.

3. Wind-down

You might ask if people want to add other comments about things that have not been covered.

The closure

- Reassure people of confidentiality and anonymity.
- Thank them for their valuable input and time.
- Tell them how the results will be used.
- Ask if they have any further questions.



Activity: Test the interview and focus group formats

Members of the planning committee will make good candidates for testing both formats. Try out the interview and focus group questions on committee members. You can then make necessary adjustments to the wording, timing, and delivery.



Activity: Review principles of ethnography

Whoever is conducting the needs assessment should review the following guidelines for ethnographic interviewing. The guidelines apply to conducting focus groups as well.



Ethnography

Ethnography is the work of describing a culture — the way a group of people live, work, interact, etc. The principles of ethnography can help us learn about the culture of a workplace or community. This enables us to record information from the participants' point of view rather than our own cultural translation of that perspective.

Ethnography demands that, as researchers, we start from a position of ignorance. We assume that participants have something to teach in their own way (that is, their own perspective and their own words and ideas). We need to start by thinking: *I don't understand the world of people in workplace X.*

Ethnographic methods are useful for interviews and focus groups in which WNA participants do not necessarily share the same cultural background with one another or with the facilitator. The methods are designed to elicit the interviewee's story, feelings, ideas, and suggestions.

Ethnographic principles⁽²⁾

1. Start from ignorance

Be aware of your own personal biases, and put aside assumptions. Resist the temptation to appear knowledgeable and to give your interpretation of interviewees' comments.

2. Start without hypotheses

Patterns emerge from the data you collect. Those data will not necessarily prove pre-conceived ideas.

3. Learn by gradually building up a picture

Listen to the language of interviewees; understand their framework for explaining and describing. Use their language, not yours, in probing further.

Ethnographic interviewing

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for effective interviewing.

- Create an unbalanced conversation, in which the majority of talk time is for the interviewee.

**How to use the
principles of
ethnography in a
WNA**

- Repeat back to clarify and verify what you have heard. Encourage elaboration by restating ideas and phrases, using interviewee's words.
- Express ignorance and interest rather than display knowledge.
- Replace judgment with curiosity.
- Adjust pace to interviewee. Allow time for the interviewee to think, reconsider, formulate an answer.
- Avoid interrupting and quick topic shifts.

Your aim in ethnographic interviewing is to generate a trusting atmosphere, engage the interviewees, and enable them to explore topics, make connections, and possibly discover new ideas.

1. State the purpose of the interview: Be explicit, and repeat throughout the interview if needed.

2. Explain procedures in the WNA: Explain the scope of the WNA, the steps, and who is involved. Assure the interviewee of confidentiality and anonymity.

3. Ask questions:

To get descriptive answers, using verbs such as *describe, explain, tell me about, expand, and handle a situation.*

- With a worker: *You said there were changes taking place here. Can you tell me about some of them?*
- With a manager: *You said there were plenty of situations in which employees could use training. Could you describe those situations for me?*

To get answers that categorize tasks, experiences, situations.

- With a union representative: *What actions have you taken already to ensure that your members' training and education needs are met?*
- With an employer: *What kinds of situations alerted you to the need to respond to changes at your workplace?*

To get contrast or similarity or rating.

- With a worker: *Is the technology in the new section of this plant similar to that in the old?*
- With an employer: *Do workers in [one department] get promoted in the same way as those employees*

in [another department]?

- With a union representative: *Give me some reasons why your local would be interested in offering workplace basic skills programs to members? How would you rate them in importance?*

To get reasons why...

- This provides an opportunity for interviewees to talk at length; but early on in the interview, these questions can be threatening. Make sure that you have developed some rapport with an interviewee before asking the hard ones.
- Be careful not to put answers in the other person's mouth by asking leading questions. (*You said you are finding the new work hard. Was that because you didn't have very good training?*)
- Instead, ask open-ended questions. (*Could you tell me why the new work is hard?*)

4. Listen creatively: If the interview is not routine and predictable, then listening takes no effort. Give interviewees freedom and autonomy to explore their own ideas.

5. Respond to individuals:

- Show interest — with gestures, comments.
- Express empathy — a willingness to "stand in another person's shoes." Show that you accept and respect another person's expressions whether or not you agree with the content.
- Allow them enough time to pause and reflect, as long as interest is maintained.

6. Encourage expansion and elaboration by using interviewees' own words or phrases in follow-up questions. Repeat explanations, purpose, and questions whenever necessary to ensure understanding and momentum.



In workplaces with diverse language and cultural groups, many people may feel uncomfortable participating in the WNA in English or French. Ideally, in these cases, you should bring in a trained cultural interpreter. This person would normally not be a co-worker of the interviewee.

There are problems asking someone at the workplace from the same language group to act as an interpreter.

Cultural interpretation

Definition: A cultural interpreter is a person who not only can translate language but has an in-depth understanding of the primary culture of both the

Cultural roles determined by gender and power relationships, among other factors, may make it difficult to get frank and accurate information.

Step 6: *Collect information through personal interviews and focus groups*

At this point you are ready to conduct your interviews and focus groups. Here are some tips.

Interviews

1. Organize your space for interviewing so that participants have a choice of where to sit. Some people will feel comfortable sitting across a desk from you, and others will prefer something more informal.

2. Offer refreshments before starting the interview. This goes a long way toward making people feel comfortable.

3. Be flexible with your schedule if people are not able to come when they said they could. This often happens when your participants have to deal with last-minute situations.

4. Be flexible with your questions. Adjust the order and format as necessary.

5. Take notes during interviews. Do not ask to tape interviews. Taping can intimidate participants.

6. Rewrite your notes and read them into a recorder either between interviews or later the same day.

Focus groups

1. Have some committee members introduce the session.

2. Have two people — a facilitator and a recorder — conduct focus groups. This way, you capture all the information that participants provide.

3. Even though it's a group situation, ask people to keep what is said within the room confidential.

4. Give people lots of options for participation. For example, a person may not be comfortable with note-taking or being a group spokesperson. You could ask for volunteers to report on the small-group discussions. Or, you can offer to record their discussions rather than ask them to do it. How you handle a focus group will depend very much on the participants and their comfort levels.

5. Write up notes from focus groups the same day.

Step 7: *Gather information from other sources*

Note: See the [Who, What, Where. . . activity](#).

While you are conducting interviews and focus groups, you will also be gathering information from other sources. This will involve going back to the lists you developed in Step 4.

Activity: Analyze workplace documents

You can review selected workplace documents for different types of information.

1. Company and union documents that describe the organization's goals and existing and planned development activities.
2. A sample of workplace documents that were suggested by the committee to examine and analyze for clear language and bias. You will wind up with such things as policies, statements, letters, notices, manuals, and training materials. This is by no means a complete list. Your final collection will depend on the workplace.



Activity: Observe workplace practices

Tour the workplace informally several times.

- Observe how people work (in teams or alone; what jobs they do; how they communicate).
- Observe how people spend their breaks. (Do they sit with their own ethnic or racial groups, or with others from their own departments, or are groups mixed?)
- Study signs and notices that are posted in the workplace. (How clear are they? How relevant are they?)

Sit as a participant observer in training sessions or meetings.

- How do people communicate?
- Observe how basic skills needs and issues of workforce diversity are handled. What communication skills are needed?
- What barriers are there to full participation?
- What barriers are there to full participation?

Step 8: Organize your information

Having collected information through talking to people, through document review, through observation, and through the planning committee, you will need to summarize it according to key issues or questions that you set out to answer.

Activity: Summarize interview and focus group responses

In summarizing responses, look for similarities and differences in how different interest groups perceive key issues. Your summary should reflect, as clearly and honestly as possible, the viewpoints of all those who provided responses, but not your own interpretations of the data.

You can organize information according to each question asked. For each question, summarize what different interest groups said.

- Note how interest groups were similar or different in their responses to given categories.
- Note the frequency of responses for different categories.
- Maintain objectivity by not interjecting your own interpretations at this point.
- Respect anonymity by not naming people or including information or details that could identify who said what.



Activity: Summarize workplace observations

Write only about what you observed, not your interpretation of what you saw, from 1) your informal workplace tours, and 2) the training sessions and meetings you attended.

Step 9: Analyze selected workplace documents

You have collected, with the help of the committee, workplace documents to be analyzed for 1) clear language and evidence of bias, and 2) the organization's goals and development activities. Your analysis for language and bias will be useful not only to trainers, but also to anyone responsible for writing anything for the

company. It will also help create awareness of the kinds of barriers to understanding that can appear in print material. You can suggest ways to remove them.

Your analysis should consider both the strengths and weaknesses in each document, and make suggestions for improvement.

You can compare what the documents say about the organization's goals and activities with what you learn from other sources.

Activity: Analyze workplace documents for clarity and bias

Use the categories that follow as a framework⁽³⁾ for analysis. Follow this procedure for each document. Where documents are hundreds of pages long, we suggest analyzing a sample of each.



Clarity and bias in workplace documents

Suitability for target audience

- Is the material written in such a way that all users can understand it easily?
- Is it free of cultural, racial, gender, or other bias?

Appearance (layout and design)

- Is there enough white space?
- Is the type easy to read?
- Do pictures and graphs help get the message across?
- Is there good contrast? (consider paper, colours, screens, type)
- Is the design simple and clear?

Organization of the information

- Is it easy for the reader to find out what is important?
- Are there titles and headings to break up the text and tell the reader what's important?
- Are main ideas clearly stated near the beginning?
- Is information structured and easy to follow?

Language

- Is vocabulary common and easy to understand?
- Are abbreviations (including acronyms) explained?

Sentence length and structure

- Is language culturally, racially, and gender sensitive?
- Can you make sense of what's being said on the first reading?
- Are sentences to the point, with one idea per sentence?
- Is writing personal and easy to understand, using the active voice?

Tone

- Is the message written in a positive, friendly, encouraging tone?
- Is the tone appropriate to the message?

Cultural, gender, or other bias

- Are racial and cultural minority groups and women portrayed in positions of authority, and not only in supportive roles?
- Do materials reflect the equal participation of all cultural, racial, gender, age groups, etc.?
- Do they use accurate and acceptable names to describe members of cultural and racial groups?
- Do they avoid words that portray race, gender, age, and class stereotypes?

Activity: Analyze workplace documents for content regarding goals and activities

You will also want to study workplace documents to understand 1) how the organization has defined its goals and what development activities have been implemented, and 2) where there may be barriers or inequities that prevent the organization and people from reaching their goals. This will go hand-in-hand with the information from interviews, focus groups, and your own observations. For example, you could look at training, hiring, and equity policies to determine how well they contribute to meeting goals.

Summarize from various documents (an annual report, for example) the organization's goals and the development activities implemented to date. Note to what degree those activities seem to contribute to meeting the goals. Also note any changes you think could be made in those activities, and any additional activities that might be undertaken to help meet the goals.

Phase 3

Interpreting and Reporting

In Step 10, you interpret the findings, and make recommendations.

In Step 11, you write a report of the findings, an executive summary, the committee's interpretations, and recommendations for action.

In step 12, the committee presents the report to selected audiences.

Step 10: Interpret information

Now that you have collected, organized, and summarized the information from focus groups, interviews, documents, and observation, the next step is to interpret it. To save time, you may want to do some initial work on your own. You can then present the summaries and your conclusions to the planning committee, and members can add their own interpretations.

Activity: Interpret findings and make recommendations

Read through the summaries of your information from various sources. For each question or section, write down 1) your interpretations, 2) your recommendations, and 3) any questions you have.

This is where you begin to make judgments about the information you have spent so much time collecting and summarizing.

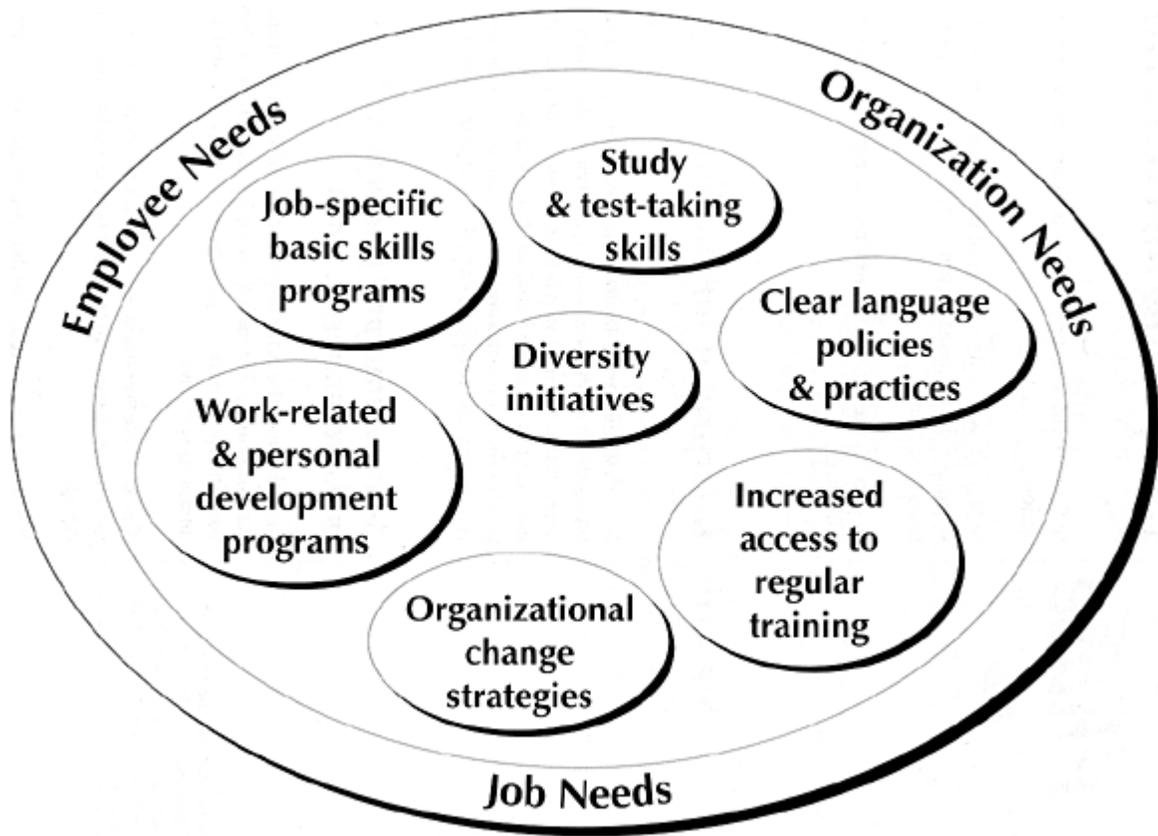
It is important to recognize that you come to the interpretations with your own biases. That makes it all the more important to get feedback from the committee.

Activity: Get agreement on short- and long-term recommendations

Circulate the written summary of your key findings to the committee members. Ask them to write down their comments at the end of each section of the summary. In addition, ask them to make a list of short- and long-term recommendations based on the findings.

Note: The diagram on the following page will give you some idea of the kinds of activities and programs that could be recommended as a result of your assessment.

The kinds of activities and programs that could be recommended as a result of an assessment.



from Workplace Education: A Planning & Information Seminar 1992 ABC CANADA

In your next meeting, compare the recommendations, and try to agree on short- and long-term recommendations for each section of the report.

Step 11: Write final report

You now have a detailed summary and analysis of information from interviews and focus groups; observation of workplace activities; and the review of documents.

Activity: Write draft report

As you write up the WNA report, keep in mind the guidelines for clear, unbiased language outlined in this handbook.

Your report will include the following.

- Acknowledgment of the planning committee members, those who contributed information, other key contacts, and funders.
- An introduction, which explains the purpose of the WNA and the procedures that you used.
- Summaries of the findings, with the committee's interpretations.
- Short- and long-term recommendations.
- Appendices with interview and focus group questions, a list of documents analyzed, and the questions used for observations.

You will also need to write an executive summary, which should contain the highlights of the findings, as well as the short- and long-term recommendations. The executive summary will be at the front of the report.

Circulate the draft report to the committee members for their feedback on both the content and the format. At the next meeting, get their feedback. Revise the report accordingly.



Following is an outline for an existing executive summary. Each heading would typically have a paragraph or two of succinct information, or possibly a list in point form. (Notes in parentheses indicate what sort of information may be useful.)

Example: Executive summary

Introduction

- Background (brief history of WNA)
- Goals of WNA

Findings

- Overview (useful in large, diverse projects to introduce what follows)
- Issues identified by participants about training and education and workplace practices
- Programs identified by participants

Committee recommendations

- Introduction
- Short-term
- long-term (altering or enhancing existing practices & programs; new programs)

Summary statement

- Future action following from the WNA

Step 12: Report the findings

Working with the committee) you need to figure out how best to present the report to your intended audiences. Some audiences will want to read the full report and discuss it with you. Others will want only the executive summary.

In the spirit of collaboration) all employees should have access to the full report or the executive summary.

Activity: Identify audiences and design an approach for each

Work with the committee to make a list of audiences for the report. It might include:

- Senior management.
- Other managers and supervisors.
- Union or other worker representatives.
- Workplace committees (such as health and safety plant operations).
- Individual employees.

For each audience, determine the best way to present the findings. For some, you could make the full report or executive summary available. For others, you may want to do a full-scale oral presentation after people have had a chance to read the report.

The oral presentation will be particularly important for senior management. You and the planning committee will need to persuade this group to commit sufficient financial resources to the actions recommended in the report.

To facilitate this exercise With the committee) 1) divide a flip chart into two columns titled APPROACH and SCHEDULE) and 2) fill in the chart for each audience identified by the committee.

For the Approach, will you send out the report or the executive summary only? Will you include background information with the report for the benefit of those not directly involved in the assessment? Will you present the findings orally with discussion?

For the Schedule, who will take responsibility for preparing a presentation? Who will do what parts of the presentation and discussion? Who will ensure that reports are sent out to the various interest groups and that all employees can have access to them if they wish? Who will do a cover letter for the report? If people have questions about the report, who should they contact?

Finally, enter dates and times for each item.

Activity: Make the presentations

Elements

The committee has agreed who will do presentations. You will need to work with members to help them prepare the various elements of their presentations. Those elements will include:

- Logistics for the presentations (when, where, how long?).
- Visual aids, such as overheads.
- Oral presentations, including speaking notes and handouts.
- Discussion questions to keep the presentations focused.

Preparation

Hint: Committee members may need some coaching for the presentation. You could do a dry run.

Here are some questions to consider when preparing your presentations.

- *What do we hope will happen as a result of the presentation?*
- *Who will chair the meeting?*
- *Who will speak for the committee?*
- *What supplies and materials will we need?*
- *Who will take notes?*
- *What will be the next steps (especially after meetings with decision makers)?*

Action

Once you have prepared the presentations, carry them out according to your plan.

After each presentation, evaluate it according to what worked, what didn't, and how it could be improved.

Phase 4

Deciding What Happens Next

In Step 13, the committee puts together an action plan, taking into account your presentations to various audiences. You also get commitment for financial and other resources to carry out the action plan. Then follow up.

The final step is a self-evaluation by the committee. What worked well and what could be improved?

Step 13: Develop and get commitment for an action plan

The planning committee will need to put an action plan into effect. It will be based on recommendations from the WNA report and feedback from the presentations in Step 12 to key interest groups.

Activity: Draft an action plan

You won't be able to cover all the needs and issues at once. We advise you to develop a one- to two-year plan using the following guidelines.

1. Offer those programs that meet the majority of participants' interests and are clearly headed for success.
2. Tackle policies and practices that need an overhaul.

Example

It became clear to one workplace planning committee that issues of racism and intercultural misunderstandings would have to be overcome before a third of the work force would feel safe enough to take part in workplace education programs.

3. Basic skills should also be integrated into any existing education and training strategy. A comprehensive strategy will cater to a continuum of needs, and weave basic skills throughout all existing training and education.

4. Figure out how to finance new programs on an ongoing basis. In unionized workplaces, this may be done through training trust funds and collective agreements. Other work- places may invest in a part-time instructor. Still others may find creative ways to use publicly funded programs in the community.

Definition: a *training trust fund* is a common practice in which funds contributed jointly by the company and employees are managed by a joint committee and used for training.



Once the planning committee has agreed on an action plan, you will need to meet with senior management or senior union leadership to get their approval and financial support. This is one of the most critical steps in the whole plan.

Activity: Get commitment for the action plan

Here are some questions you can ask yourself as you develop a presentation for decision makers.

- *Are all committee members in agreement with the action plan?*
- *Have we developed a rationale for the action plan?*
- *What are the key pieces of information that decision makers will want? It may help to make a list.*
- *How much time will we have to make the presentation?*
- *Which members of the committee will share the responsibility of making the presentation for maximum impact?*
- *Has the committee developed a budget to support the action plan*



Once you have received financial commitment for the action plan, develop a timetable of activities and figure out the next steps.

Activity: Decide on the next steps

Those steps will include:

- Deciding where programs will be offered. Do we need new space?
- Developing criteria and selecting education providers for programs included in the action plan.
- Putting other elements of the action plan into effect.
- Planning an evaluation to monitor programs and activities when they start, and to document outcomes and needed program improvements at the end of a cycle.
- Informing employees what will be offered, and getting them involved in learning opportunities.



Hint: A well developed presentation that answers the needs and concerns of decision makers, and that is supported by all planning committee members, will go a long way toward getting approval.

In the spirit of continuous improvement and reflection, the planning committee should evaluate its own activities.

Step 14: Evaluate the workplace needs assessment

You could conduct a focus group with the committee, using the questions that follow to get their feedback. Circulate the questions to the committee before the focus group so that they can think about them ahead of time.

- *What was the committee trying to find out in the WNA?*
- *Did they find out what they needed to know?*
- *What worked well in planning and carrying out the WNA?*
- *What could be improved?*
- *What did you personally get out of being on the committee?*
- *What did you like about how the committee worked?*
- *What didn't you like?*
- *How can the committee improve how it works together?*
- *Are members willing to continue working together to carry out their action plan?*

Summarize the responses, or get a volunteer member to do it. At the next meeting, decide how the members could change the way they work together for carrying out the action plan.

ENDNOTES

1. The WNA was formerly known as the Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA). The ONA was originally developed through the Multicultural Workplace Program (MWP), now under the Ontario Training and Adjustment Board (OTAB).
2. Compiled by Mary Ellen Belfiore from Ethnographic Interviewing (National Centre for Industrial Language Training) and Conflict Resolution: Dealing with Interpersonal Conflict (Justice Institute of British Columbia).
3. We found Clear Writing and Literacy by Ruth Baldwin of the Ontario Literacy Coalition to be a useful guide.

SUGGESTED READINGS

— AN ANNOTATED SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following documents provide food for thought for those interested in collaborative methods of workplace development. Most of them make strong arguments for non-traditional approaches to workplace education. Some have a more traditional perspective, but suggest a need for new ways of defining goals and measuring outcomes. Several, going beyond theory, describe practical steps that workplace educators can take to create new, collaborative programs.

Trends and issues

Draper, J.A. 1991. "Understanding Values in Workplace Education" in *Basic Skills for the Workplace*, edited by M.C. Taylor, G.R. Lewe, & J.A. Draper, 85-106. Culture Concepts, Toronto. Summarizes five philosophies of adult education (liberal, behaviourist, progressive, humanist, and radical) and challenges adult educators to clarify their own philosophies — individually and in dialogue with others. With a clear set of principles, we can avoid being pushed into forms of practice that violate our personal principles.

Evaluation Research. November 1992. *Workplace Education: Voices from the Field*. Proceedings of National Workplace Literacy Program Project Directors Conference, September 1991. Washington: Division of Adult Education and Literacy, U.S. Department of Education. Representatives of 39 U.S. federally funded workplace education programs give feedback on such key components as partnership building, curriculum development, staff development, assessment, evaluation, and recruitment. This was a rare opportunity for practitioners to speak directly to federal policy makers.

Gowen, S.G. 1992. *The Politics of Workforce Literacy: A Case Study*. New York: Teachers College Press. This study of a functional context program for hospital workers shows that the workers in many cases found the curriculum to be un motivating and irrelevant. Questions the assumptions underlying the functional context approach.

Hull, G. *Hearing Other Voices: A Critical Assessment of Popular Views on Literacy and Work*. Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education. Argues that, if workplace education is to prepare workers to take initiative, solve problems, and work in teams on the job, it needs to involve participants in shaping program goals and running the education program itself.

Imel, S. and Kerka, S. 1992. *Workplace Literacy: A Guide to the Literature and Resources*. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Cites key focal points in workplace literacy research to date and points to an emerging literature that questions the functional context thrust of earlier writings.

Johnston, Wendy E. 1993. *Workplace/Workforce Literacy: Trends and Issues in 1993*. Presentation at Workplace/Workforce Literacy: A Conference, held in Mississauga, Ontario, February 12-13, 1993. Questions many assumptions underlying current workplace education efforts, including the mismatch between worker abilities and job demands and literacy's impact on competitiveness. Challenges adult educators to rethink whether and how to get involved in workplace education, to avoid well intentioned but misguided efforts.

Jurmo, P. April 1994. "Education in the New Workplace" in *Literacy at Work*, 9:4. Describes a new, "collaborative" perspective on workplace education in the u.s. Collaborative programs involve a broader range of stakeholders in setting goals and running the program.

Jurmo, P. 1994. *Workplace Education: Stakeholders' Expectations, Practitioners' Responses, and the Role Evaluation Might Play*. East Brunswick, NJ: Literacy Partnerships. Begins with an overview of purposes for and approaches to workplace basic skills education. Then analyzes the current state of evaluation in workplace programs. Then profiles a number of projects that support the creation of a new, "collaborative" approach to workplace education. Concludes with recommendatons for workplace educators, employers, unions, funders, and learners.

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Sarmiento, T. and Schurman, S. April 1992. *A Job-linked Literacy Program for SPC: Are We Talking about Worker Training, Work Reorganization, or More Equitable Workplaces?* A paper prepared for the Work in America Institute. Analyzes workplace education programs that focus on narrow job-related skills and don't deal with other factors that inhibit worker productivity.

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Evaluation and needs assessment

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Mikulecky, L. and Lloyd, P. 1993. *The Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs: A New Model for Evaluating the Impact of Workplace Literacy Programs*. Philadelphia, PA: National Center on Adult Literacy. Summarizes issues and options facing evaluators of workplace education programs and presents sample instruments for monitoring program impact. Suggests going beyond focusing solely on changes in decontextualized skills and/or job performance. Evaluators might instead track 1) impact on learner beliefs about literacy, self, and education; and 2) improved literacy practices at work and elsewhere.

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