

Building Skills
Building Business

Bringing Education into the Workplace
Information Kit

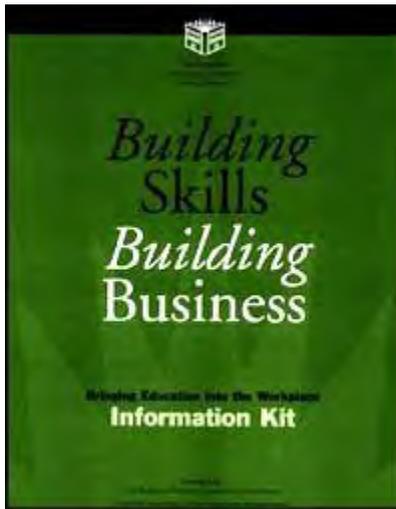


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The Year 2000

It is the year 2000. The Canadian business climate has changed dramatically.

Seventy percent of the technology being used in the year 2000 had not even been created five years ago.

There has been, rapid technological progress and innovation requiring 79 percent of the workforce to have education and training beyond the Grade XII level. Fifty percent of the required workforce must have more than 17 years of education.

The global marketplace continues to expand and competition has become more intense.

The workforce has changed. The number of younger workers entering the labour market is declining and the workforce has become more middle-aged. The greatest influx of new workers are immigrants.

Labour costs have risen dramatically as the dwindling number of workers possessing adequate skill levels command premium wages.

Is Your Organization Preparing For The Year 2000?

What is Workplace Education?

Workplace Education focuses on the need for basic skills in the areas of reading, writing, math, problem solving, critical thinking and communication. These skills enable an employee to function more effectively at work and relate to:

- reading and understanding instructions and manuals
- following directions for the use of hazardous materials
- measuring materials
- using charts and diagrams
- giving clear and succinct directions
- explaining delays to customers
- interpreting printouts or using a computer terminal to order parts or to check inventory

Workplace Education is becoming an increasingly important issue. Historically, companies have valued machines as an investment and treated people as a cost. Therefore little has been spent on training and education in the workplace. Employers have been able to "buy" skilled workers. However as Canada shifts into a new

millennium employers will be faced with a smaller labour pool and the need for a workforce with higher skill levels. In the future, employers Will no longer have the luxury of being selective. To meet the demands of increasing technology and competitiveness, employers and organizations will have to invest in workplace education to upgrade their workforce.

This Information Kit will help you assess your organization and determine how your organization can prepare itself to meet the changes that will occur as the year 2000 approaches.

Section One

What are the Business Issues?

Safety...

A Saskatchewan healthcare worker was nearly asphyxiated when he mixed two highly incompatible cleaning agents. He could not interpret the warning messages on the bottles.

Productivity...

A construction worker with more than 15 years experience was given a \$140,000 piece of equipment to operate, along with an operating manual. Within one week, the machine was destroyed. The operator was too embarrassed to tell his foreman that he could not read well enough to understand the manual.

Service...

A Saskatchewan office recently found that 20 percent of their total staff time was devoted to collecting or correcting required information from their clients. The language on their company forms was extremely difficult to understand, resulting in frequent errors and delays in servicing their clients.

These are real-life examples of the difficulties that employees and employers face every day. Often these problems are overlooked, misdiagnosed or misunderstood. Competency in the basic skills of reading, writing, numeracy, critical thinking and problem solving are factors that ensure that an employee is able to be a productive asset to an organization. The inability of a worker to function at the level required by an organization, due to deficiencies in basic skills, costs business real dollars. Industrial accidents caused by poor reading skills alone cost Canadian Business over \$1.6 billion each year.

Overall, the cost of low literacy and low basic skill levels cost Canadian business more than 4 billion each year in lost productivity.

The most recent figures from The Conference Board of Canada survey on literacy found these results:

- 70% of companies find functional illiteracy a problem in some part of the organization.
- 40% reported literacy-related errors in production processes
- 26% said problems with reading and writing skills have slowed down the introduction of new technology
- 33% said illiteracy is hurting productivity

A recent survey of Canadian and American firms by the Olsten Corporation found that the need for good workplace literacy skills jumped from 34 percent to 51 percent. The survey also discovered that the need for "good" workplace literacy skills is having a strong impact on recruiting practices. Fifty-three percent of companies said they have improved their screening procedures and 41 percent have raised their minimum entry-level standards for workplace literacy.

Myths Surrounding Literacy

"Our organization does not have a literacy problem. Most of our employees do not have positions that require reading and a lot of paperwork. "

Fact.. Workers on average read 97 minutes a day and read everything from labels and printouts to manuals.

"Our organization does not have a literacy problem because we only hire people with a Grade XII education. "

Fact.. Recent findings indicate that many people with a Grade XII education do not possess the basic skills required to perform effectively at work.

"Literacy is not the responsibility of business. "

Fact.. The labour market is aging, and the majority of the workforce in the year 2000 is already out of the public school system. Aging workers will find themselves forced to retrain for new jobs, perhaps as many as five times during their careers. Therefore business has a key role to play.

"If there was a problem in our organization we would know about it. "

Fact.. People with literacy problems become expert at hiding their inadequacies. An employer will not necessarily realize there are literacy problems. It becomes necessary to look for signals, such as frequent errors in paperwork (see page 5).

"If people have a literacy problem it is their own fault. "

Fact.. There are many reasons why people have literacy problems. Reasons range from poverty, to learning difficulties that went undiagnosed and continued into adulthood, to geographic isolation and a lack of resources. Reasons for illiteracy can also stem from problems at home, or being forced to quit school at an early age.

Section Two

A Checklist for Your Company

Workplace Education is becoming an increasingly important issue. With technological advancement and an expanding marketplace, it is crucial that Saskatchewan has a skilled workforce that is able to continually change and upgrade in order to remain competitive.

Employers often assume that their workforce has all the necessary basic skills, yet this is not always true. Helping your workforce to acquire these basic skills is the key to a more productive workforce and a more successful organization.

The following checklist will help you determine your organization's need for workplace education.

Has your organization:

- significantly changed methods of production or service delivery in the last two years?
- changed skill requirements for entry level jobs?
- increased or decreased in size in the last two years?
- conducted new skills training in the past that did not produce the results you wanted?
- conducted new skills training or re-training for entry level staff?
- increased quality standards?

Has your workforce:

- experienced an increase in the average age?
- increased in diversity?
- had a high turnover rate?
- been required to do more reading and decision-making now than in the past?

If you answered yes to two or more questions, your organization may need workplace education.

Workplace Education will benefit your organization by:

- **Making your organization more viable in the long-term**

As competition intensifies and the markets become more globally focused, it is imperative that the Saskatchewan workforce be prepared. Currently, the amount of training in Canada ranks far behind every other industrialized country.

- **Helping your organization effectively manage change**

Technological advancement and global opportunities are making it essential that Saskatchewan has a skilled workforce that is able to change and upgrade on an ongoing basis in order to stay competitive. Workplace education can:

- reduce turnover
- increase productivity
- increase the independence of employees in making operational decisions
- improve morale and teamwork
- improve the effectiveness of supervisory staff
- **Creating a higher quality of customer service**

Employees with strong communication skills will be able to provide better customer service by effectively interpreting and responding to concerns, complaints and requests.

- **Investing your money in the most crucial area of your organization ... your employees**

Studies indicate that the workforce is dwindling. The majority of the available workforce in the year 2000 is already out of the public school system. The responsibility, therefore, falls on business to educate the existing workforce in order to stay productive and competitive.

- **Improving Health and Safety in your organization**
 - fewer work-related accidents
 - clearer understanding and a higher pass rate in health and safety courses
- **Improving Employment Equity**

Increasing the basic skill levels of visible minorities will improve their access to employment opportunities and in turn, help your company meet employment equity standards.

(Adapted from: Employer Kit, ABC CANADA)

Identifying the Need

Identifying your organization's need for workplace education is not as easy as one might expect. In fact, in several organizations where Workplace Education programs have been implemented, the employers and supervisors commented that they were unaware of specific problems. The signals were there, but were difficult to detect. Some clues to literacy problems include:

- frequently needing to go outside the organization to fill new jobs
- frequent errors on paperwork
- resistance to new management approaches
- low employee participation with in-house projects, such as Health & Safety, Employment Equity and Job Evaluation committees
- high rate of work-related accidents in the organization
- introduction of new technology that requires more time, effort and cost than expected
- high staff turnover
- excessive waste, low productivity, too many or too frequent mistakes
- employee apprehension around independent decision-making
- disproportionate amount of supervisory time spent dealing with basic activities

Section Three

Implementing the Program

The following outline will help guide the implementation of a workplace education program

1. Form the Team

It is essential that the team is representative of employees in all levels of the company and includes management, supervisors and union representatives to ensure that all ideas and views are brought to the table.

2. Complete a General Needs Assessment

Discuss general objectives and areas that need to be addressed. The team should determine how literacy will fit into the organization. Skills upgrading should be worked into the long-term strategy of the organization. Setting objectives should be viewed as the first step in an ongoing process.

3. Get Support

Commitment is needed from all levels of management, the union and employees. If support is not solid, problems may occur with:

- employees not being able to get time off from work during their scheduled class time
- supervisors who may undermine the program
- management deciding not to help and even interfering with program implementation

4. Choose a Workplace Education Consultant

A Workplace Education Consultant should:

- be flexible in regards to time and the site of delivery
- have the ability to tailor programs to the needs of your organization
- have training and experience with Workplace Education programs or have an appropriate Adult Education background
- believe in a firm network of support from all levels in the organization
- believe in voluntary participation and confidentiality for the individuals who are participating in the program

Workplace Education Consultants may be:

- In-house trainers
- School Boards
- Community Based Literacy Organizations
- Labour Organizations
- Community/Regional Colleges
- Technical Institutes
- Non-profit organizations
- Private Trainers and Consultants in Saskatchewan

5. Complete a Detailed Needs Assessment

Collect information by interviewing the employees. This is called a **Organizational Needs Assessment** and will enable the consultant to determine all areas of need within the organization. The interviewing process may be done one-to-one or in small groups.

6. Develop and Design the Plan

Depending on the information that has been collected during the **Organizational Needs Assessment**, you may decide to offer specific literacy programs, integrate basic skills/literacy into regular training or rewrite print material in clear language.

7. Determine how to Evaluate the Program

This process should involve anticipated benefits that meet the outlined objectives determined through the **Organizational Needs Assessment**.

8. Promote the Program

A key factor in the success of the program, time spent promoting the program will help to:

- increase the understanding of employees
- decrease the level of suspicion on all levels
- increase acceptance by promoting skills upgrading as opposed to "literacy" programs
- increase employee participation
- increase the level of support from all levels in the organization

Promotion may be done through:

- Informational sessions
- Distribution of informational literature
- Conversations with key stakeholders and management
- Sending information in pay envelopes

Interest may be created by:

- Emphasizing employee confidentiality
- Emphasizing the possibility of employee advancement

9. Implementation

Get agreement from all stakeholders as to:

- Selection and training of facilitators
- Evaluation criteria and process
- Course content
- Place and time
- Company sponsored hours off work
- Definition of decision-making process

Implement and monitor. Be sure to get regular feedback from participants, supervisors, union and management on a continual basis.

To increase the level of success of a workplace education program:

- Offer paid time off work to attend classes. Typically a 50-50 arrangement is worked out
- Pay for workbooks and materials
- Offer an on-site location
- Provide child care support
- Dedicate more dollars to training and skills upgrading
- Vary class times if the organization has different shifts
- Be flexible with shifts and hours
- Try to show a direct correlation between the course content and the individual employee's job

10. Evaluation

Evaluation is necessary to:

- determine if the program is meeting objectives
- determine educational areas that were not included in the original program
- decide whether to continue providing the program, whether it should be expanded, enhanced or redesigned

Evaluate the objectives and the side benefits. Do not evaluate the competency levels of employees, as confidentiality is essential to employee participation.

(Adapted from: Employer Kit, ABC CANADA)

Section Four

Methods for Instruction

There are three main program structures for Workplace Education programs. Each working environment is different and so are its needs. This section identifies and describes the various methods of instruction and discusses the advantages of each. These characteristics will help your organization make the best possible choice. Outlined are Peer Tutoring, Group Instruction, and Cooperative models.

How to Select a Program

As you read the following Methods of Instruction, keep in mind that the program/method of instruction that you select for your organization should:

- be able to be adapted to fit the specific needs of the organization.
- have a process for evaluating the objectives and side benefits without compromising the confidentiality of the individual participant's results and progress.
- promote involvement from all levels of the organization.
- always emphasize the input from employees and not be based solely on the ideas of management.
- be sensitive to cultural differences. A program that is culturally sensitive can avoid biases that could influence the results.

Group Instruction

This is the most traditional method of instruction, as it most closely resembles training course instruction or public school instruction. Course content is built on workplace needs and involves materials used in day-to-day job tasks. It can be very basic or advanced, depending on the needs of the workplace. This type of program may be offered on-site or off-site, whichever is most suitable.

Advantages

- Learners benefit from interaction with co-workers in a collaborative learning environment
- Professional instructors
- Instruction can be integrated with existing training programs to promote lifelong learning
- Curriculum can be designed to support skills required at work
- Evaluation is easier because the curriculum is formally designed and includes established goals

"Group instruction works very well. Students work dynamically together and feed off one another. "

-- Facilitator, medium-sized organization

Peer Tutoring

This type of structure uses co-workers as facilitators. A coordinator is hired to recruit and train facilitators, set-up a learning site, develop course content, implement the program, monitor the process and evaluate. A formal classroom set-up is not essential and venues such as the workplace training room, staff room or community facility are often used.

Advantages

- Different levels and needs of workers can be accommodated
- Instruction time is flexible
- Confidentiality is offered
- Continuous intake is possible
- Strong employee ownership
- Program start-up dates are earlier
- Learning pace accommodates learner needs
- Content can support skills required by other job training courses

"Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's WEST program worked out very well. Further education for your employees only makes them happier and a happy employee is better employee. "

-- Human Resources Manager, large manufacturing company

Cooperative Instruction

This type of structure involves a cooperative effort between same or similar sector companies, often in the small business sector. Generally small business employers lack the resources to provide programs on their own. When it does not make economic sense to develop and offer programs to one or two employees, cooperative programs offer the opportunity to pool funding and make workplace education a reality.

Cooperative programs also work well in more isolated areas where organizations may have comparable needs but are not necessarily in the same sector. This method of instruction is financially appealing and can be designed to meet the needs of the various partners.

The best setting is a designated learning centre in a neutral environment. Instruction may vary depending on the needs of the organizations involved. Administration may be through a college, trainer or one of the employers.

Advantages

- Ability to provide workplace education, which in most cases would be prohibitively expensive for an individual, smaller organization
- Participants are able to learn more about their industry
- Participants increase their knowledge of employment opportunities in their industry

"Cooperative Education works well. We are using the same workforce so cooperation makes sense economically and logistically. "

-- Manager, large company

(Source: Keeping Alberta Competitive: A Framework for Providing Literacy Development in the Workplace, Keyano College and Lethbridge Community College.)

Section Five

Saskatchewan's Unique Business Climate

Small Business

Saskatchewan's small business sector makes up 85% of all workplaces in the province. This sector faces different challenges when trying to upgrade their employees' education and training skills.

Small businesses with a staff of 5 people or less, often find that spending time, money and energy on upgrading employees is a huge obstacle. There are ways to make workplace education work for small companies. Offering some type of upgrading for one or two people is too costly for many small operations. However, there is an alternative available.

Cooperative programs have provided the best success and results for companies in the small business sector. Cooperative programs may be arranged through a business association, through a group of similar companies in your area, through a union or through a small group of businesses which are located in your town or neighborhood which have a similar need for basic skills education.

Cooperative education programs can be developed to suit the needs of a particular industry (I.e., bakeries), or a particular need (i.e., basic math skills), or can encompass a more general education field.

Cooperative education is a good way to meet the needs of small companies. Although very successful in large organizations, cooperative education programs are perfect for smaller businesses, rural communities, and small and large associations. Cooperative education can make the difference in your organization.

Arrangements for cooperative programming may be more time consuming, but there are organizations in the province which are able to provide more information on developing a cooperative workplace education program. The Workplace Education Consortium has information in this area. It is able to provide the names of businesses that have implemented workplace education programs in the past and is willing to answer questions from groups interested in developing their own cooperative programs.

Rural Areas

There are many benefits from implementing workplace education programs in Saskatchewan's rural areas. The benefits can not only effect businesses' bottom line, but may affect the entire community in a very positive way.

A better equipped staff can produce more, work more effectively and may even lead to creating more jobs, which in turn will increase traffic, create more job opportunities and increase the population of small town Saskatchewan.

In rural areas cooperative programs work very well. A group of individuals from several different businesses may want to start a program. Programs may be customized to meet everyone's needs. The "soft" side benefits of increased self-esteem, increased confidence and more enjoyment from everyday activities are factors that will be felt throughout the entire workplace and in the community.

Workplace Education can be provided in all areas of the province and can be arranged to accommodate various working schedules. A list of workplace education instructors is available through the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan office.

Section Six

Workplace Education in Saskatchewan

There are several businesses, consulting firms, organizations, institutes and regional colleges who are able to provide workplace education services in Saskatchewan. The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan has a directory of service providers in the province.* If you would like to find out more about what is available in your area, please contact:

The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan

P.O. Box 2311

Regina, Saskatchewan

S4P 3Z5

306/777-6013 Fax: 3061777-6100

The following organizations are able to provide additional information about Workplace Education in Saskatchewan:

Saskatchewan Literacy Network

P.O. Box 1520

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

S7K 3R5

306/653-7178 Fax: 306/933-6490

Saskatchewan Federation of Labour WEST Program

103 - 2709 12th Avenue

Regina, Saskatchewan

306/924-8574 Fax: 306/525-8960

Regina Public Library's Business Literacy Project

210 - 2505 11th Avenue

Regina, Saskatchewan

306/777-6013 Fax: 306/777-6100

* If you would like to be included in the provincial directory of workplace education service providers, please contact the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan's office.

Additional Sources of Information on Workplace Education

ABC Canada: 1450 Don Mills Road, Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2X7; 416-442-2292 Fax 416-442-2293

Chisman, Forrest, P. (1992). *The Missing Link*. Washington DC.: The Southport Institute for Policy Analysis.

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National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1K5; 819-953-5568 Fax 416-953-8076

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Statistics Canada (1995). *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey*.

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Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board. (1995). *Challenges in a Changing Workforce*.

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Taylor, M., Lewe, C. R. and Draper, J.A. (1991). *Basic Skills for the Workplace*. Toronto, Ontario: Culture Concepts Inc.

United States Department of Education. *America 2000: An Education Strategy*.

Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan founding members:

Regina Public Library's Business Literacy Project
Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment
Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology
Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board
Saskatchewan Literacy Network
Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council
Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

The Workplace Education Consortium Saskatchewan

Funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan's mandate is to further develop workplace education in Saskatchewan. Representatives from education, business, labour and literacy organizations will work together to determine the level of need for, and raise awareness of, workplace education. In addition, the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan will decide on a collective provincial strategy for delivery of information about workplace education.

The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan will assist in forming a provincial network for information regarding workplace education and will provide a liaison between business and Workplace Education Consultants.

The Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan is administered by the Regina Public Library and can be contacted through the Workplace Education Consortium in Saskatchewan Office:

2311 12th Avenue
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