



Case Study **May 2002**

Excellence in Workplace Literacy, Medium Business Winner, 2001 Cameco Corporation, Key Lake Operations

OVERVIEW

The Workplace Adult Education (WAE) program began in 1996 as a pilot program with Cameco Corporation at its mine sites in northern Saskatchewan. The pilot was designed to see how best to deliver training to a workforce secluded in a work camp environment.

Nearly half of employees at the sites are northern residents, and a significant proportion is Aboriginal. The fact that employees live one week on, and one week off site means that employees can focus on courses to upgrade their skills during their on-site week. The pilot has evolved into an established training program that now provides benefits for both the company and its employees. It also tested the effectiveness of a joint

government-industry task force in assembling and delivering adult education programs in the workplace.

This program was chosen for the Award of Excellence because of the success it has enjoyed at

Effective practices in providing training and supporting workplace learning.

A core product of the National Business and Education Centre

Name of Program
Workplace Adult Education

Program
Workplace

Date Established
1996

Skills Developed

Fundamental
Personal Management
Teamwork

Contact

Vivian Phelps
Workplace Education Instructor
Cameco Corporation
2121 – 11th Street West
Saskatoon, SK
S7L 3L6
Tel: (306) 884-2100 x-454
Fax: (306) 884-2100 x-527

various locations, and therefore, its viability as a model for other companies working in remote regions.

The training initiatives target employees and long-term contractors at the Key Lake and Rabbit Lake Operations of Cameco, as well as northern Saskatchewan residents and Aboriginals, in particular. The program strengthens the basic academic elements of reading comprehension, writing and fundamental mathematics. From the company's viewpoint, improving these skills allows participants to better complete operating reports, work requisitions, and other job-related documents. This translates into greater productivity, improved efficiencies, and increased job safety awareness for Cameco.

OBJECTIVES

Cameco put a training program into place with the goal of raising the literacy level of its employees, and those who are northern, Aboriginal residents, in particular. The objective of the company's training initiative is to help employees achieve their personal education goals and to help them reach their full potential in their work functions.

TARGET GROUPS

The two largest cultural groups in the workforce at Cameco's Key Lake Operation are the Dene and the Cree. Many Northern Dene employees carry on the traditional lifestyle of trapping, hunting and fishing during their week off, making it difficult for them to continue to upgrade their skills during that time.

Until recently, many communities in northern Saskatchewan did not have high schools. Therefore, a large number of the company's long-term employees only had the opportunity to obtain a grade eight education. Both the Dene and the Cree are often shy in a traditional classroom setting. These cultural issues needed to be addressed, so that all employees would have an equal opportunity to receive the training they needed, in a way to which they would be receptive, and which respected their cultural background.

ACTIVITIES

Cameco's workplace adult education program began in 1996 with an eight-month pilot program in a work camp. A joint government-industry task force was responsible for program assembly and delivery. The

pilot developed into an ongoing learning program for employees.

The company matches one hour of paid time for each hour donated by the employee. The training initiatives address basic skills, pre-apprenticeship, General Educational Development (GED) exam preparation, job-specific skills and computer literacy.

The company's instructor adapts her schedule to the needs of each site, gives tutoring, and assigns material for independent study. Most of the training is given in the form of one-on-one, customized learning programs. At the Key Lake Operation, the union (United Steelworkers of America Local 8194) is supportive of the training programs offered.

Since few northern residents qualify for jobs and promotions with Cameco, based on their existing education, the company develops and promotes employees from within the organization as much as possible. For more advanced training, satellite transmission is used to connect the learners at the Key Lake Operation with distance education courses offered at high school, college and university levels.

At Cameco, a performance management system is used to address performance and team goals. Since over 75 per cent of supervisory positions require a degree, technical or trade certificate, management decided that it would be valuable to put an in-house pre-supervisor training program into place, in addition to the existing literacy and basic skills development programs.

RESOURCES

The workplace education instructor at Cameco is a long-term employee of Northlands College. The company provides for the instructor's flights and board while at the site. At Key Lake, the camp where employees live is two kilometers from the mill, where they work. Classes are held at the camp for easier access since, when the temperature outside is -45 degrees Celsius, no one wants to return to the mill for classes after a 12-hour shift. By moving the classes away from the work environment, learning is offered in a safe, private atmosphere in an attractive, comfortable setting.

The Learning Centre, the primary location for classes and instruction, is located in one wing of a residence

at the camp. Its physical space is equivalent to three residents' rooms. Bookcases made out of closets, and other minor renovations, make the space user-friendly to learners. Computers in each room allow participants the choice of learning with others, or alone.

INNOVATIONS

Cameco's workplace training initiative is the first general program at a northern Saskatchewan mine site to address literacy, basic academic skills, and actual education levels, while recognizing the cultural diversity of the workforce. This training program is also used at various other Cameco mine sites, as they are phased in and out of operation.

Peer tutors deliver some training, especially higher level math skills. The local union also volunteers in this effort. Tutors receive personal training from the instructor, who provides guidance on maintaining discretion and the confidentiality of students.

Since the Key Lake Operation is remote from education resources, distance education is offered to learners via satellite. Employees can access high school, college, University of Regina and University of Saskatchewan's distance education courses through this method. In the case of college and university courses, employees pay costs up front, and the company reimburses them upon successful completion of a course, if the material is related to or benefits their work. Distance education courses are organized for participants through the Learning Centre.

In keeping with its policy to develop and promote employees from within, Cameco is developing a training program for the position of Process Operator. This is currently an academically unrecognized profession, which is highly sought after in the mining industry. It is hoped that certification for this profession will eventually become available throughout many industries and provinces.

BARRIERS

Several barriers needed to be addressed in order to begin the workplace education program at Cameco and to ensure that it would continue. The very nature of a 'work camp' environment makes delivering training to employees difficult. Employees are typically on site for

one week at a time, and then are off site (home) for one week. The mill runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The types of work done at the site can also result in employees being physically isolated from each other. The mill's operations are geographically spread out at a distance of up to three miles from the office.

Due to the cultural background of the workforce, the instructor needed to develop a close rapport with the students in order to be effective. For instance, the students' cultural background caused some individuals to mistakenly assume that if they missed classes, they would not be permitted to return. The lack of higher educational opportunities in most employees' home communities meant that upgrading their education needed to be a long-term initiative. In fact, it was challenging to convince both students and the company that this was necessary.

Once the students accepted the instructor and began to trust her, they often became dependent on her for direction with their personal learning programs. Consequently, when the instructor was on-site, everyone was highly motivated to participate. However, during those weeks that the instructor was off-site, motivation ebbed away, and the participants lost some momentum. Each time the instructor returned to the site, she needed to "re-motivate" the students, before further learning could take place.

Although the company supports the workplace education initiative by providing employees with paid time off for training, this was a source of concern to supervisors; they worried that employees would take advantage of this offer, and abuse the system. Once the training was established, however, they realized that their fears were unfounded. In fact, many participants did not ask for the compensation offered by the company (matching each hour put in by a student with a paid hour), because they felt responsible for missed work.

SOLUTIONS/KEYS TO SUCCESS

A number of factors contribute to the success of training initiatives at Cameco:

- The Learning Centre has a flexible, open-door policy;
- Participants set personal academic goals;
- All training is customized for individual learning paths;
- Principles of adult education, including respect for individuals, are used;

- Students' progress and training programs are kept confidential;
- There is acceptance that learning needs and goals are student-centred and driven;
- Upgrading skills is encouraged for those who apply for posted jobs, but do not win them;
- Training opportunities are advertised around the mine site, with posters and flyers;
- An on-site instructor is able to give guidance and encourage students;
- The instructor attends internal meetings to promote training programs to employees, and especially to supervisors;
- The instructor keeps an irregular schedule to give the impression of a stronger presence; and
- The teaching style is adapted to individual learners' cultures.

OUTCOMES

The workplace education pilot program has evolved into an integral part of company operations. A performance management system monitors operational measures. Specific outcomes for Cameco include:

- Lower production costs due to increased safety, efficiencies, more effective job-specific training and general self-confidence of the workers;
- Fewer errors in written reports;
- Improved communication and teamwork in departments;
- Increased individual responsibilities;
- Greater mobility within the organization for employees;
- Increased ability to adapt to change;
- Employees achieve long-term educational goals;
- On-site classes in the camp make learning accessible;
- Training creates opportunities for apprenticeship, new responsibilities, or new jobs;
- Greater employee satisfaction;
- Participants have new options to move ahead in their careers; and
- Increased participant loyalty and respect for the company.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

While improvements are being made to the quality of education within neighbouring communities, Cameco's training efforts are increasing the availability of qualified job-ready residents. In addition, benefits for individuals, as well as the company, include:

- The company training program provides a window of opportunity for learners;
- There is an opportunity to take part in training that employees might otherwise not have access to, due to the remote locations, family responsibilities and shift work;
- Participants can gain self-confidence and see themselves progressing toward new careers;
- Employees have been able to change their attitudes toward learning, and begin to view it as something of value; and
- The new training program for Process Operator positions will open up a larger pool of talent, benefiting individuals, as well as the industry.

USE AS A MODEL

Mining and other natural resource industries could make use of Cameco's training model. This example demonstrates that workforce development challenges, such as rotating shift work, remote work locations, and diverse cultures can be successfully overcome.

Our thanks to the people we interviewed and others who provided comment, including:

Vivian Phelps, Northlands College
 Cindy Shott, Cameco Corporation
 Wayne Williams, Cameco Corporation
 Tyson Goulet, Cameco Corporation

**THE AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN
 WORKPLACE LITERACY ARE MANAGED
 BY THE CONFERENCE BOARD OF CANADA
 AND SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL
 LITERACY SECRETARIAT, HUMAN
 RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT CANADA.**

Cameco Corporation, Key Lake Operations
by *Alison Campbell*

About The Conference Board of Canada

The Conference Board of Canada is the foremost independent, not-for-profit applied research organization in Canada. We help build leadership capacity for a better Canada by creating and sharing insights on economic trends, public policy issues, and organizational performance. We forge relationships and deliver knowledge through our learning events, networks, research products, and customized information services. Our members include a broad range of Canadian organizations from the public and private sectors. The Conference Board of Canada was formed in 1954, and is affiliated with The Conference Board, Inc. that serves some 3,000 companies in 67 nations.

The Conference Board of Canada
Insights You Can Count On



255 Smyth Road, Ottawa, ON K1H 8M7 Canada
Tel. (613) 526-3280 • *Fax* (613) 526-4857 • *Inquiries* 1-866-711-2262

The Conference Board Inc. 845 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y., 10022-6679 U.S.A. *Tel.* (212) 759-0900 • *Fax* (212) 980-7014 • www.conference-board.org
The Conference Board Europe Chaussée de La Hulpe 130, Box 11, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium *Tel.* (32) 2.675 54 05 • *Fax* (32) 2.675 03 95



©2002 **The Conference Board of Canada***
Printed in Canada • All rights reserved
ISSN 1205-1675 • Agreement No. 40063028
*Incorporated as AERIC Inc.

For more information about this Case Study,
please contact us at the numbers listed above.
Case Studies summarize the key findings of Conference Board
research and outline the implications for member organizations.

www.conferenceboard.ca