



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 21

*A core product of the
Employability Skills
Forum, National
Business and
Education Centre*

Program

*Investment in employee
education and
training*

Date established

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Name of Program

*Core training and
curriculum
development*

Skills Developed

- Academic
- Personal management
- Teamwork

Developing employees' management and leadership skills to support corporate strategic directions

CANADA POST CORPORATION'S LEARNING INSTITUTE

Building Leadership Skills Throughout the Organization

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1999

Canada Post Corporation's Learning Institute is developing the generic employability skills of all of its employees and improving employees' job performance by increasing its emphasis on education and training and aligning the Corporation's learning programs with business strategies and culture.

Overview

When Canada Post Corporation envisaged where it wanted to be in the future, it recognized that it is in the business of serving customers and generating repeat business with them.

To support their corporate mission, Canada Post set corporate goals, including the development of a customer service culture that responds to changing customer requirements and meets their expectations in an age of fast paced change in information and communications technology.

Next, Canada Post developed a strategic plan focusing on the development of a positive and productive culture that engenders customer loyalty and leads to long term financial viability and growth.

The Corporation believes that a true customer service culture entails having

employees who fit the Corporate Leadership Profile, in other words, employees at all levels who:

- Understand how their job is linked to corporate directions
- Demonstrate customer service orientation
- Model leadership
- Build diverse and effective teams
- Practice articulate and open communications
- Demonstrate sound business acumen
- Develop direct reports
- Lead change
- Empower decision-making at every level
- Practice employee feedback and recognition
- Assess and take calculated risks

Canada Post's Learning Institute employs a new model of learning, in which work and learning are connected. The Learning Institute supports formal learning within the organization aimed at providing more direct enhancements to employee learning on the job. Canada Post also sponsors employee learning outside the organization for skills improvement opportunities pertaining to their career development in current or

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NBEC Mission

We help business and education leaders work collaboratively to promote the development of a learning society that will prepare Canada's young people for a changing world.

future jobs. The Learning Institute regards its proactive role in developing Canada Post employees' generic skills as preparing them to create business opportunities for Canada Post and take advantage of career opportunities for themselves.

To develop employees' skills, the Learning Institute employs principles of adult education to achieve business relevant results. To ensure relevance, individual employee skills development is squarely situated in the context of the competencies they need to demonstrate in their own jobs.

These competencies embody aspects of all three classes of generic employability skills: academic, personal management and teamwork.

The academic skills of critical thinking and problem solving, for example, are clearly included in the following performance criteria drawn from a broad sample of Canada Post job competency profiles:

- Evaluates new ideas logically
- Finds new solutions to problems

Further, such key personal management skills as planning and managing time, money and other resources to achieve goals are easily seen in such typical Canada Post performance criteria as these:

- Ensures work is within budget
- Revises plans for changed circumstances

Finally, such important teamwork skills as planning and making decisions with others and mobilizing a group for high performance are readily apparent in the following generic Canada Post performance criteria:

- Decides in conjunction with others
- Encourages faster rate of work

Groups served

- All of Canada Post's 55,000 employees. The Learning Institute differs from functional training groups within Canada Post in that it serves all of the organization's employees.

Objectives

- To equip all Canada Post employees with the combination of generic employability and job specific skills they need to contribute to the corporation's success
- To develop employees' understanding of the link between their individual successes on the job and corporate success
- To promote the formation of a culture of continuous individual, team and organizational performance improvement and lifelong learning
- To help functions within the Corporation achieve their business goals: employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and revenue gain

Activities

The Corporate Learning Institute currently develops Canada Post employees' generic and job specific skills in 10 core programs:

Knowing Our Business
Business Management
People Management
Managing at Canada Post
Finance for Non Financial Executives
Project Management
Computer Training
Language Training
Process Management
Orientation

Details of selected programs follow:

Knowing Our Business

- Introduces the idea to all 55,000 full-time employees as well as to new hires that the workplace is a learning environment that can be used to improve customer service.

People Management

- Enables managers to encourage employees to focus on corporate objectives and to empower employees to make decisions and improve their operations.

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www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec

The Employability Skills Forum Mission

We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

This study was made possible through funding by members of the Employability Skills Forum.

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Business Management

- Enables managers to contribute more effectively to business growth and financial viability.

Managing at Canada Post

- Gives managers an appreciation and understanding of how their job fits into the larger corporate structure.

Finance for Non-Financial Executives

- Helps senior managers in all areas of the Corporation to understand and use financial information, which drives strategic planning and decision making.

Project Management

- Helps project managers develop concepts, define the scope of their projects, plan and execute required actions and work within time and budgetary constraints.

Computer Training

- Helps employees use computers and software to advantage within the organization.

Language Training

- Equips employees with language skills in English, French and other languages required to enable them to interact with customers.

In 1999–2000, the Learning Institute plans to extend its generic skills development programming into the areas of business ethics, quality and diversity.

Resources required

- Canada Post invests \$55 million in training 55,000 employees, which amounts to \$1,000 per employee.

Achievements/Outcomes

In February 1998, the Mail Operations Supervisory Development Program graduated the first 18 of more than 1,500 Canada Post employees who are expected to participate in this generic skills development program over the next three years.

In 1997/98, the Learning Institute delivered 16 generic skills development training programs to more than 150 groups within Canada Post, comprising half of the corporation's management and provided job specific training to more than 40,000 employees

Benefits

Employees

- Understand connection between their own skills and Canada Post's fiscal performance
- Feel that they are doing something worthwhile when they are encouraged to think about how to do things better
- Build their self-esteem and self-confidence so they believe they are working at Canada Post by choice and not because there is nothing else they are qualified to do
- Take responsibility for corporate performance by enhancing their employability skills
- Receive reimbursement for tuition fees they incur in taking courses, even if the subject content of these courses are not directly related to their job
- Project positive image of the Corporation to customers

Innovation

Mail Operations Supervisory Development

- This program is innovative in five ways. First, it combines in-class instruction for supervisors with on-the-job practical assignments. Second, it employs coaches to support supervisors in training to help them apply their new skills and learn from their experience. Third, the program moves away from flat-footed approaches to cost cutting and increasing productivity towards more dynamic approaches that emphasize building relationships with employees and between employees and customers. Fourth, it involves executives in

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discussions with supervisors about how systems work in practice as a way of getting them to think systems through in relation to people and jobs. Fifth, and finally, it replaces supervisors who embark on training relating to the fundamentals of people management and business management and to the technical aspects of working in Mail Operations with staff who have already completed this training to maximize the impact of supervisors' training on their employees.

Project Management

- This program is innovative in its successive and progressive approach to introducing Canada Post employees to project management. It offers a range of project management courses, from a 2 day course to raise awareness of the importance of project management, to a 5 day course for directors or managers to give them the skills they need to manage smaller projects effectively, to a 35 day course for senior project directors to sharpen their skills to enable them to better manage large cross-functional projects. The program is also innovative in its commitment to excellence in education. The Learning Institute is encouraging universities to count training in the 35 day project management course towards the requirements of graduate degrees, which demonstrates to Canada Post employees that they are building transferable skills not just getting job specific training.

Keys to Success

- Getting employees to understand how their job impacts on their fellow employees and on the business
- Understanding that employee skills development is essential to ensuring corporate competitiveness and growth
- Having a corporate vision that incorporates a service profit chain model that links enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty and increased corporate profit with building

employee skill development and satisfaction

Greatest challenge

- The success of every good skills assessment and development program can be measured by the challenges that still remain to be surmounted. The Learning Institute faces challenges on both a people and a process level.

On the people side, the Learning Institute is striving to develop good team players who are also comfortable working on their own. It is also trying to help personnel managers who have a good rapport with the employees they manage to measure their employees' performance in quantitative terms. Further, the organization is seeking to cultivate innovative employees who apply their innovative capacity to solving problems and do not make impetuous decisions, as well as good people managers who also make the bottom line. Finally, the Learning Institute would like to see an organizational culture develop within corporate functions, who manage the training money, that values and funds generic skills development on an organization-wide basis.

On the process side, the Learning Institute faces challenges in benefiting from an organizational funding model that supports the Institute's infrastructure, program development and the cost of delivering generic skills development training programs across the organization. The Learning Institute would also like to move from observing cause-effect relationships and correlations between delivering skills development training and enhancing leadership behaviours to tracking return on investment dividends from generic skills development training programs. Finally, innovation creates its own challenges. The Learning Institute is trying to co-ordinate training, including eliminating duplication and ensuring consistency between new and existing programs and rolling out programs fast enough to produce change so as not to discourage newly trained supervisors.