



The Conference Board
of Canada

CASE STUDY 23

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

Program

Core employee training

Date established

1990

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Name of Program

*Survey Skills
Development Course*

Skills Developed

- *Academic*
- *Personal management*
- *Teamwork*
- *Science literacy for world of work*

Developing employees' employability skills to retain talent and build a flexible workforce

STATISTICS CANADA'S FLAGSHIP SURVEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT COURSE

*Developing Teamwork Skills through Learning
about Survey-Taking*

BY KURTIS KITAGAWA

February 1999

Statistics Canada is developing the generic employability skills of its officer-level employees by providing them with hands-on, real-life training experiences. One such training experience, the Agency's flagship survey Skills Development Course, enhances their academic, personal management and teamwork skills and develop technical and job specific skills related to the agency's core business.

Overview

As we approach the new millennium, Statistics Canada, like so many other organizations, is facing a number of demographic and fiscal challenges:

- An aging workforce
- Volatile budgets coupled with an increasing demand for a variety of products
- Technological change

The average age of middle and senior managers at Statistics Canada is increasing to the point where the agency expects to lose 30% of its middle and senior managers over the next 15 years, assuming today's replacement rates. Statistics

Canada realizes that it can only ensure that it prepares a sufficient number of replacements through a concerted approach to the recruitment, development and selection of future managers.

Volatile budgets coupled with an increasing demand for a variety of products has created a requirement for staff who have the potential and versatility to adapt to, and succeed in, several job changes during their career. Statistics Canada recognizes that it needs to invest heavily in the selection and development of highly generically skilled flexible staff who can help the agency navigate fiscal uncertainty and rising expectations for quality products.

Technological change and the increasingly high standards Statistics Canada sets for its professional work have changed the composition of the agency's workforce. Over the past 15 years, the need for non-technical support staff has been cut in half, while the need for technical staff has risen by 41% and the need for professional staff has increased by 71%. Statistics Canada appreciates that in order to increase productivity and avoid redundancies, it must enhance the

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technical skills (notably, facility in informatics) of support staff.

Statistics Canada offers its Survey Skills Development Course to its officer-level employees as part of its overall approach to human resources development, which is built upon three cross-cutting principles:

- A commitment to retaining and developing employees
- Making line managers responsible and accountable for developing the organization's employees
- Building a sense of "pulling together"

Statistics Canada's Survey Skills Development Course represents the agency's human resource development strategy in microcosm.

Groups served

- Officer-level employees
- External customers

Objectives

Through its flagship Survey Skills Development Course Statistics Canada aims to advance the three organizational objectives the agency has set in its human resource development strategy:

- Develop and maintain a cadre of employees with the mix of generic and technical and job specific skills they need to meet current work requirements and with the potential and versatility to adapt to changing work requirements
- Foster a positive work environment designed to promote best efforts and retention
- Promote a sense of corporate cohesion and line management ownership of the Human Resource Management function

Activities

Statistics Canada's Survey Skills Development Course is a 6-week intensive training course for officer-level employees at Statistics Canada. This course provides employees with an opportunity to acquire knowledge about the nature of survey-taking and to develop a range of generic and technical

and job specific skills by designing and carrying out an actual survey under real-life conditions.

Employees participating in the course work in teams (each member of the team serving 1-week stints as chief - responsible for managing group activities and acting as spokesperson for the group at 3 joint weekly progress meetings and in correspondence with the other groups - and as secretary, responsible for recording important group activities and decisions) in daily "lab" sessions to develop all aspects of their survey. Team activities include:

- Meeting with survey sponsors to identify and clarify their information needs and the uses to which they intend to put the information collected
- Developing statistical table outlines that conform to the information needs of sponsors
- Developing a sample design
- Developing a questionnaire, collection and processing specifications
- Writing and testing computer programs
- Developing cost estimates and a schedule for the project
- Managing the activities of the group

Participants receive classroom instruction in the morning interspersed with lab sessions in the afternoon during the first four weeks of the course relating to the principles and practices of survey-taking they need to know to design their survey and to more general issues in survey methods not directly related to their survey.

During the last 2 weeks of the course, all participants take part in implementing the survey in a small city or rural county in Ontario or Quebec. During this phase of the course, participants:

- Conduct interviews at selected households
 - Capture and clean data, weight samples and assimilate data
 - Review data and write a report
- By taking the course, employees develop central employability skills. Survey designers must ensure they:
- Share a common understanding with survey clients of the terms and

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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.

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phrases the survey clients use to specify their data requirements

- Translate these terms and phrases into clear, unambiguous questions on the questionnaire and into clear, unambiguous instructions for the interviewers
- Interviewers, in turn, must clearly and unambiguously transmit these questions to respondents and receive and record clear and unambiguous responses.

Interviewers must also establish a rapport with survey respondents, which involves showing empathy, demonstrating good listening skills and projecting a professional image that reflects the interviewer's knowledge and self-confidence.

Finally, all participating employees develop strong teamwork skills, including the ability to:

- Set, understand and contribute to clear objectives
- Show leadership when appropriate
- Create and maintain a positive working environment built on a foundation of mutual respect and open communication
- Support the aims and purposes of the team other team members when appropriate
- Solve problems collectively
- Define roles and responsibilities clearly
- Seek and provide constructive feedback to enable the group to learn from its mistakes
- Come up with new ideas and follow through on good ideas
- Develop good working relationships with members of other teams

Resources required

- Statistics Canada invests over 3% of its overall budget in training its employees
- Individual divisions pay the salaries of their employees while they take the Survey Skills Development Course
- Instructors' time and direct costs associated with the course (direct costs amount to \$50,000 per course) are paid out of Statistics Canada's overall training budget

Achievements/Outcomes

Statistics Canada is looking at the possibility of integrating basic statistical training packages, including the Survey Skills Development Course, currently mandatory, which focuses on dealing with survey taking among individual householders, with their optional 4-week Survey Skills Enterprise Course, which focuses on survey taking among business customers and their intensive 6-week Data Analysis and Presentation Course.

The Survey Skills Development Course has had the strategic benefit of standardizing employees' thought processes across the organization with regard to Statistics Canada's approach to survey taking and the organization's overall expectations with respect to its core business.

Employees

- Gain a practical understanding of how to work with others in an interdependent framework toward a common objective
- Learn how to communicate effectively with clients and co-workers
- Learn how to represent the organization to the public
- Develop successful interviewing skills, including having self-confidence and projecting a professional image, showing empathy and establishing a rapport with respondents
- Develop and practise good listening skills
- Acquire project management skills - e.g. developing a survey proposal in consultation with a customer, estimating resources required and producing a critical path for carrying out the work
- Learn the basic skills of survey-taking through examples and illustrations garnered from hands-on practical experience rather than by theory and algebraic expressions
- Acquire a knowledge of survey methods and procedures
- Discover resources they can go to get help when they need to apply technical knowledge they learned in the course

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Our grateful thanks to our interviewees:

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Hank Hofmann
Scott Murry
Lee Reid
Eve Simpson

- Build a network of friends and colleagues within the organization they can go to if they have a question
- Develop an awareness of the policies, principles, issues, complexities and inter-relationships inherent in the design and implementation of a statistical survey, which is the core business of the organization

Statistics Canada

- Develops a flexible workforce with connections and experience across organizational functions
- Engenders a sense of corporate identity in its employees
- Builds employee satisfaction by equipping its employees with the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs better
- Builds its employees' technical abilities relating to its core business

Sponsors

- Acquire a body of useful data gathered and presented to meet their own specific information needs
- Contribute to the development of Statistics Canada employees' employability skills

Innovation

- Deliberately developing its employees' academic, personal management and teamwork skills while delivering core technical and job specific training

- Using training and development to enhance employee effectiveness and retention
- Understanding and capitalizing on the linkages between having good generically skilled employees and increasing efficiency and productivity within the organization

Keys to Success

- Getting first-hand feedback on the quality of the work participants have done in the office - in practice a survey designer does not do interviews in the field and get feedback directly from respondents on the survey
- Doing a real survey for a real client, e.g. provincial health units, municipal police departments, municipal planning departments
- Repeating key points
- Having a sense of humour
- Having department support behind you
- Greatest challenge
- Finding people to take the course - many sign up 6 months in advance but drop out 2 or 4 weeks before the start of a course because of changing work commitments or family responsibilities
- Teaching aspects of survey discipline to people who have no experience in them
- Having a critical mass of 23 or 24 participants - not having enough participants increases the workload of individual participants and limits sample size
- Finding new clients

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NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Understanding Employability Skills (Apr. 99)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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