



Case Study December 2002

Literacy Training on Demand Michelin Learning Centres

The Education and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and lifelong learning programs and initiatives. This case study addresses workplace literacy.

OVERVIEW

Michelin North America (Canada) Inc. has manufactured tires in Nova Scotia for over 30 years and has a low employee turnover rate at its three facilities. The company has developed to a team approach, where self-guided teams of employees, with responsibility for all aspects, complete large projects. The new model of teamwork on the shop floor empowers employees by enabling them to assume more responsibility.

Michelin created an on-site Learning Centre at each facility, to deliver its training initiatives in support of the teamwork model. Previously, on the shop floor, individuals performed one task for the entire shift. Supervisors gave close directions and, if an employee finished a task early, he or she would

ask the supervisor for another task. With the new teamwork approach, employees are empowered to monitor inventory, schedule tasks, and assist each other. This, in turn, encourages employees to take ownership of their projects and take pride in their work. The Learning Centres' multi-faceted approach to learning, through many activities and resources, provides the range of training required to help employees learn how to practice the teamwork approach, while providing them with growth and fulfilment.

Effective practices case study in providing training and supporting workplace learning.

Name of Program
Michelin Learning Centres

Date Established
1993

Skills Developed

- Literacy and Numeracy
- Staff Management
- Teamwork

Contact

Susan Stoddart
Learning Centre Coordinator
and Processes Training
Coordinator
Michelin North America
(Canada) Inc.
P.O. Box 5000
Kentville, NS B4N 4M4
Tel. (902) 534-3446
Fax (902) 538-1588
susan.stoddart@ca.michelin.com

OBJECTIVES

Michelin's objectives, in providing training opportunities through its Learning Centres, include:

- taking a holistic approach to employee development, by developing the whole person;
- supporting the changing nature of jobs, from hierarchical to self-guided teams;
- encouraging employees to take on leadership roles in the new team-based work environment;
- improving employees' writing, reading, and math skills; and
- developing the workforce's adaptability, communications skills, and team-building abilities.

TARGET GROUPS

Some shop floor employees, who now work in a team-based environment, required some skills enhancement in order to perform a variety of tasks and to make decisions. New tasks for individuals now working as part of a team may include writing reports and instructional notes for the next shift, and operating new machinery. The Learning Centres are available to all employees and, in response to requests from employees, their spouses.

ACTIVITIES

Training at Michelin incorporates a holistic approach and includes themes and personal interest courses, such as health and home finance. Events, such as open houses for Education Week and educational achievement celebrations, are held to promote lifelong learning and to encourage use of the Learning Centres. Initiatives are supported by all levels of management. Grades are not assigned, and the instructor keeps confidential records. This encourages participation and emphasizes positive feedback. Overall, training enriches and enhances employees' knowledge in a variety of subjects, including, but not limited to, literacy and basic skills.

RESOURCES

Training is adapted from models in other Michelin plants in the United States. At the Waterville, Nova Scotia, Michelin site there is an in-house instructor. All three sites initially used Nova Scotia Community College instructors in their Learning Centres, with funding assistance from the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture, Adult Learning, and Innovation.

These on-site Learning Centres are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to accommodate shift work. Their physical resources include a library with reading area, a classroom, and private computer stations. The computer stations are set up for individuals to take progress tests at their convenience. Michelin's Waterville Learning Centre has a full-time coordinator and instructor available for assistance and one-on-one tutoring, on a flexible schedule. Part-time instructors also deliver one-on-one training.

INNOVATIONS

Since 1995 Michelin has assessed all employees at its three Nova Scotia plants, using the Workforce Skills Inventory. The company-wide inventory allows for a holistic approach to human resources development, both now and in the future, as new technology is introduced or other training needs arise. The inventory was validated with the Canadian Adult Achievement Test, used by the provincial Department of Education. Over 3,500 individuals were assessed, using General Education Development (GED) standards to assess the writing component. Customized training plans were designed in individual follow-up interviews, and the ensuing training (mostly one-on-one instruction), which was voluntary, and was highly encouraged by management.

The company encouraged employees to upgrade basic and work-related skills. Michelin's Educational Reimbursement Program assists employees who are upgrading their skills and enhancing their Manufacturing Professional designation. This designation is common in the manufacturing sector, although it goes by many names.

BARRIERS

At the onset of the training program, some employees required encouragement to participate. Many adult employees had been out of school for some time and were reluctant to return to what they perceived as a formal classroom setting. Finding time for training within a shiftwork environment was also a challenge for both employees and their supervisors.

SOLUTIONS/KEYS TO SUCCESS

Michelin opened its Learning Centres in 1993, as a response to the need to upgrade skills in a changing work environment. The Centres offer literacy training, academic upgrading, GED, general skills upgrading, and computer literacy. In addition to classrooms and private computer workstations, the Centres each maintain a library for employees. The lending library offers books, videos, and cassettes on a variety of topics, including academic subjects, languages, and personal and professional development. The successful operation of the Learning Centres is now an integral part of Michelin's business.

Continuous marketing of training is the key to ongoing success. The Learning Centres periodically publish their own newsletters and contribute articles to the site's quarterly newsletter. Notices on bulletin boards around the plants, flip charts in busy hallways, broadcast e-mail messages, internal TVs, and handouts are all used to remind everyone of the Learning Centres and to promote their activities.

Creating a positive attitude toward learning is a primary objective at Michelin. In keeping with adult education principles, using engaging instructors who encourage employees has increased participation in training. Based on individual customized training plans, education and training is provided through one-on-one tutorials, workshops, workbook home study programs, e-mail home study programs, peer tutoring, and computer-based training. In the Learning Centre's comfortable environment, magazines and periodicals with various reading levels are available for employees to enjoy. Employees who make regular use of the Learning Centres act as "goodwill ambassadors," by promoting them to other employees who may be reluctant.

The chart below summarizes how Michelin matched solutions to its workplace education challenges.

Challenge	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Changing the work approach to self-guided teams required the work-force to upgrade skillsEmployees reluctant to "return to the classroom"Scheduling training around work shifts and priorities was difficult	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide literacy and basic skills enhancement through the Learning CentreThe Learning Centre offers an open-door, comfortable learning environment with a variety of activities and resourcesManagement support for trainingShop floor supervisors were encouraged to be flexible and adaptableContinuous marketing of the benefits of training to shop floor supervisors, as well as individual employeesThe Learning Centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week

OUTCOMES

Managers report that, as a result of the training given through the Learning Centre, they see results on the shop floor. Employees have increased confidence and self-esteem. Those who were reluctant to attempt new tasks or broaden their responsibilities now have the confidence to expand their roles. For example, employees are increasingly involved in communications projects, Plant Health and Safety Committees, and task forces.

With the new model of teams on the shop floor, employees have taken on more responsibility. The training initiative demonstrates to employees that the company cares about them and is willing to put money and effort behind its promises of promoting teamwork. Taking on new tasks has empowered employees to take ownership of their projects. This, in turn, increases employee commitment to the company and the pride they have in the work they do.

IMPACTS AND BENEFITS

Employees who have taken advantage of training offered through the Learning Centre report that they have more self-esteem. They now have the confidence to write memos, participate in meetings, and make decisions. Voluntary leadership positions, called “Spokes,” are offered on a temporary basis to employees within the team environment, and management encourages all employees to become a Spoke when they feel ready. Training, along with opportunities to enhance leadership skills and improve the ability to work with others in a variety of roles, fits with the company’s teamwork model.

Since the launch of the Learning Centres’ skills enhancement training, managers see fewer errors and less waste in plant operations. Because much of the work done now on the shop floor (including forklift operation) involves computers, technical skills upgrading, as well as general computer literacy, was needed. Computer workstations and computer training are available through the Learning Centres.

Employees also report that they appreciate the opportunity to complete their GED. They say that, once they are out of school and working full-time, it is next to impossible for them to go back to school. The informal nature of the instruction given at Michelin’s Learning Centres is non-threatening. The fact that the training is, in part, employer-paid and given on-site is seen as a very good incentive to participate. Improving reading, writing, and math skills has also made it easier for employees to help their children with homework, and improved their appreciation of the value of education.

USE AS A MODEL

Michelin’s non-stop, one-stop Learning Centres achieve maximum flexibility to serve the company’s workforce needs. A relaxed, but proactive, learning environment encourages employee participation. Human Resources, through its Learning Centre, and Operations Management, through its efforts on the shop floor to encourage leadership and team-building, work in partnership at Michelin to produce a successful team-based work environment.

This Learning Centre model can be applied by organizations that must accommodate shiftwork and offer continuous access to learning materials and instruction. The necessary resources include a conveniently located space for the Centre, materials appropriate to workplace learning (such as computers, a library, and teaching materials), as well as teaching or coaching staff who are available, when needed.

Our thanks to our interviewees, and others who provided comment, including:

Susan Stoddart, Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.
Doug Brown, Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.
Jeff MacLean, Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.
Jim Irving, Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.
Randy Brown, Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.

The Education and Learning case studies examine outstanding education and lifelong learning programs and initiatives. The case studies provide in-depth analysis of the methods used to develop, assess, implement, and deliver education and lifelong learning in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, and communities. They focus on goals, activities, resource requirements, achievements and outcomes, benefits, innovations, and keys to success and challenges.

This case study is one of a series addressing workplace literacy and basic skills development. The series is part of the *Overcoming Barriers* research project on Workplace Literacy being undertaken by The Conference Board of Canada and funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada.

Literacy Training on Demand: Michelin Learning Centres
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 0827-1070
ISBN 0-8873-536-9 • 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.