



**Canadian  
Manufacturers &  
Exporters**

Ontario Division



Human Resources  
Development Canada  
National Literacy Secretariat

Développement des  
ressources humaines Canada  
Le Secrétariat national à l'alphabétisation

## Business Results Through Literacy



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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While there are too many people to thank individually, there are some whose contributions do merit special acknowledgement. CME accepts the responsibility for the final products, but we would like to express our gratitude for the contribution, dedication and commitment of the consultant who helped us steer the initiative; Ian Cambell of IJ Campbell & Associates. CME would also like to thank our partner, NLS, particularly Brigid Hayes, NLS Program Manager and Vivian Antunes, NLS Program Officer.

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Ian T. Howcroft  
Vice President, Ontario Division  
Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters



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# Guidebook Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>Page</u>
Overview	1
Literacy in Canada Today	4
<u>Part I – Literacy: The Business Case</u>	
1.1 Literacy and Canadian Business	9
1.2 Literacy Success Stories	15
<u>Part II – Literacy: Assessing Your Business Opportunities</u>	
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 Raising Awareness	22
2.3 Identifying Signs of Literacy Issues Worksheet	25
2.4 Getting Help	33
2.5 Evaluating Your Future Literacy Needs Worksheet	35
<u>Part III – The Business Case for Your Business</u>	
3.1 Overview	41
3.2 Developing Your Business Case Worksheet	42
<u>Part IV – Literacy Program Implementation: Planning &amp; Organizing</u>	
4.1 Overview	49
4.2 Literacy Training and Workplace Skills Development	50

4.3 Literacy Programs: Learning from Others	52
4.4 Program Planning	56
 <b><u>Part V – Literary Skills Development: Program Implementation</u></b>	
5.1 Implementation and Evaluation	63
 <b><u>Part VI – Summary</u></b>	
6.1 Summary	67
6.2 Essential Skills Program – Key Success Factors	68
 <b>Appendices</b>	
A. Plain Language Guidelines	71
B. Sources of Help	75
C. References	81

# Overview

Canadian business is in a race with other countries to:

- Maintain international competitiveness
- Improve international competitiveness
- Retain markets at home
- Retain markets abroad
- Increase markets at home
- Increase markets abroad

The world has quickly shifted towards an information-based industrialized economy. These changes are threatening the success and, in some cases, the very survival of Canadian manufacturers. We must develop the ability to win in the very tough markets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The skills and productivity of our employees are a key factor in our ability to win. Employees today are expected to play a broader, more responsible and self-directed role than ever before in the production system. To do this, they need new and more varied skills than was considered necessary in the past.

More than ever, most employees must be able to:

- Understand written materials
- Complete reports
- Have a good grasp of math
- Operate equipment
- Operate computers
- Have good logical abilities
- Have good problem-solving abilities
- Communicate with fellow team members

Rapid advances in product, material, production, and information technologies around the world are putting pressure on companies to keep up and strive for breakthroughs of their own.

Managers need greater awareness of global competitive and market developments. They have to become comfortable in doing business in new countries, often in foreign languages. They must be innovative, and stretch their skills in marketing, finance, and business structure.

## **Are Your Employees Ready?**

**Traditionally, literacy has been defined as “the ability to read and write”. Today, the definition of literacy also includes the ability to understand and use written information.**

Sadly, although a high percentage of the population can meet the traditional definition of literacy—they can read and write—almost one half lack the skills to understand and be able to use written information necessary in today’s world.

According to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), nearly 25% of all adult Canadians have serious problems dealing with printed material. A further 25% can only deal with simple reading tasks.

The unemployed and “those out of the workforce” (e.g. those not looking for work) have lower literacy levels than those employed. Still, of those employed in manufacturing, about 20% have serious difficulties. A further 12%–20% can only cope with simple reading tasks. All age groups are affected, although a significantly larger percentage of persons over the age of 45 have literacy problems than those younger.

You may not be fully aware of the issues in your workplace. People develop remarkable coping skills to overcome their literacy problems. They have developed the means to carry out their current jobs. However, they have difficulty in adapting to new or changing conditions. They have difficulty growing in their jobs. They are more likely to resist change. They are less likely to be able to cope with change. Many of these are valued employees with good skills in their current jobs—but ill-prepared for the future.

Part of the problem, of course, can be attributed to new immigrants to Canada for whom English, or French, in the case of Quebec, is a second language. Citizenship and Immigration Canada recently noted that 47% speak neither English nor French. Employers in areas with a major immigrant population are well aware of the challenges of adding persons into the workplace who do not understand the language. However, our future success depends on rapid and effective mixing, so that all employees have the skills to maximize their contribution to their organization.

## **The Purpose of This Guidebook**

This guidebook is designed to:

- Raise awareness of the potential for employee literacy issues to impact an organization’s productivity, and ability to change and adapt
- Help organizations understand why addressing and improving employee literacy can lead to shareholder value, improved operations, and better bottom line results
- Allow organizations to evaluate where they are now
- Allow organizations to identify the business benefits of improving employee literacy levels
- Provide guidance and tools with which employers and others can conduct self assessments to identify current literacy levels and needed improvements

- Assist organizations in the development of action plans to help and encourage employees to improve their literacy levels in a way that adds to improved business results

This guidebook is about improving business results and ensuring a successful future. The world of tomorrow will see strong demand for technological know-how. There will be little demand for unskilled labour. Employees will need to be skilled, and able to learn and adapt to new and continually changing processes. A commitment to lifelong learning will be vital. The workforce will need to be literate and technologically advanced. Are your employees ready?

### Definition of literacy

Three types of literacy were tested by the IALS:

- (a) *Prose literacy* refers to the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, poems, and fiction.
- (b) *Document literacy* refers to the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and graphics.
- (c) *Quantitative literacy* refers to the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials, such as balancing a chequebook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form, or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.

In each of the three literacy domains, tasks of varying difficulty were placed on a scale from 0–500. The range of scores corresponding to each level are as follows: Level 1 (0–225); Level 2 (226–275); Level 3 (276–325); Level 4 (326–375); and Level 5 (376–500).

The literacy tests covered the three domains of literacy—prose, document, and quantitative.

- **Prose literacy** required participants to read, understand, and use information from written texts such as stories and editorials.
- **Document literacy** required participants to locate and use information from texts such as job applications, transportation schedules, and maps.
- **Quantitative literacy** required the ability to find, understand, and use mathematical operations embedded in texts—weather charts found in the newspaper, for instance, or loan and interest calculation charts.

# LITERACY IN CANADA TODAY

## The International Adult Literacy Survey

During the 1980's it was realized that the traditional measures of literacy no longer met the needs of modern society. The fact that a person could read the words of written material did not mean that they understood or could use written material effectively. To discover what true levels of literacy existed, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was developed to measure the ability of a person to understand and use written material.

Literacy is normally taken as a “given” for most adults in our society—few adults are unable to read at all. The IALS does not challenge this reality. But it does question whether most adults can read well enough to give the correct answers on test items that represent the range of difficulty found in tasks that they encounter in their daily lives. The ability to carefully and critically read printed materials while looking for key pieces of information is an essential skill. Thus, the IALS calls into question the very meaning of a “literate adult” in modern society.<sup>1</sup>

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was a seven-country (Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States) cross-sectional research initiative conducted in the fall of 1994. Subsequently, 15 other countries also used the survey. Its goal was to create comparable national literacy profiles, by testing literacy skills with complex measurement methods using materials from the real world. The Canadian survey sample size was 5,660.

## The Results<sup>2</sup>

The results of IALS are shown in the following chart. A person who reads at Levels 3, 4, or 5 can handle normal day-to-day requirements. A person who is at Levels 1 or 2 will have difficulty meeting daily requirements. As can be seen from the chart even among people who are employed, more than one person out of every three has difficulty meeting daily reading and quantitative requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> Literacy Utilization in Canadian Workplaces, Harvey Krahn and Graham S. Lowe, Statistics Canada August 1998

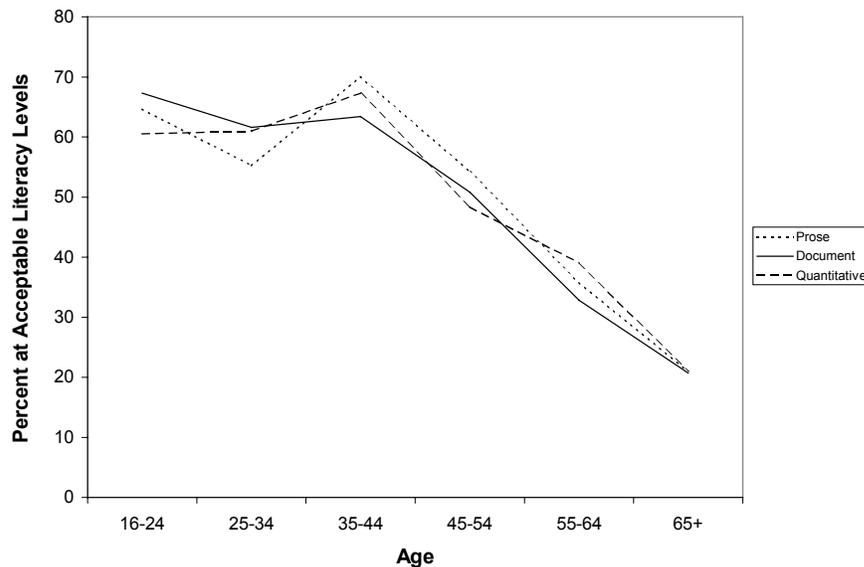
<sup>2</sup> More information on IALS results can be found at the IALS website:  
<http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/introduc.htm>

**Levels of prose, document, and quantitative literacy, Canadian adults aged 16 and over and employed population, 1994<sup>3</sup>**

Literacy level	Total adult population			Employed population		
	Prose	Document	Quantitative	Prose	Document	Quantitative
		%			%	
Level 1	21	23	22	12	12	12
Level 2	26	24	26	25	24	25
<b>Total Levels 1&amp;2</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>
Level 3	33	30	32	37	35	36
Level 4/5	20	22	20	26	29	27

**Literacy by Age Group<sup>4</sup>**

Age is also a factor in literacy results. There is a particular decline in literacy levels above age 45. Although conclusive research has not been done, one factor may be that the levels of education are lower in older persons compared with younger. It is also thought that there is a “use it or lose it” factor in literacy.

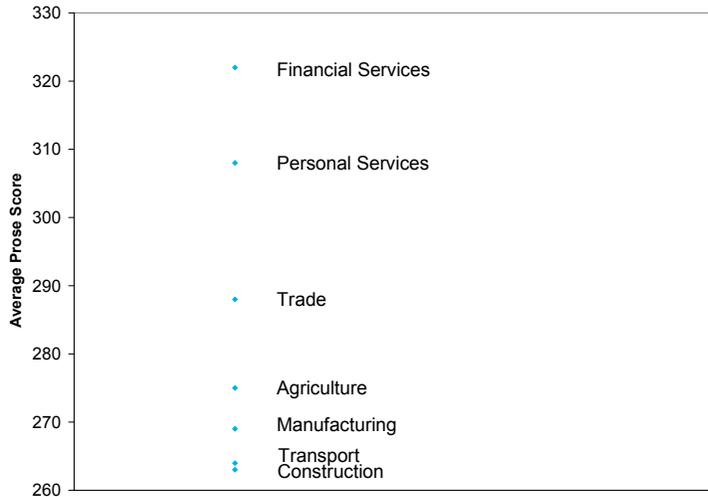


<sup>3</sup> Literacy Utilization in Canadian Workplaces, Krahn & Lowe, Statistics Canada, 1998, Pg. 17

<sup>4</sup> “At Risk: A Socio-economic Analysis of Health and Literacy Among Seniors, Page. 51, Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 89-552, no.5

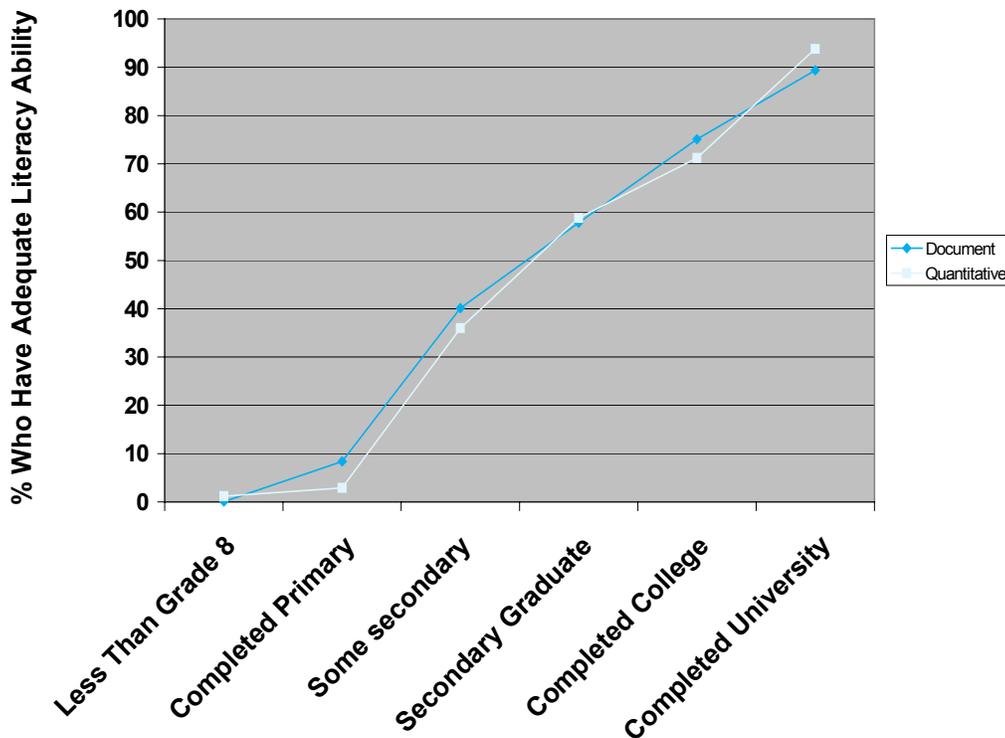
## Average Literacy Ability By Industry Sector

The average literacy levels of people employed in various industry sectors also varies. The average literacy level of people employed in Construction, Transport, and Manufacturing sectors is significantly lower than those employed in Financial or Personal services.



## Literacy and Education Level

Very few adults who have only completed Grade 8 or less have adequate literacy ability. Less than 40% of adults who have some secondary school education, but who have not graduated, have adequate literacy levels. Even some college and university graduates lack adequate literacy skills.



## Facts About Persons With Low Literacy Levels

1. Low literacy does not mean a person cannot read. In most cases, they can read words and sentences. However, they may not understand what they are reading, or how to use the information in their daily life.
2. People with low literacy levels develop coping skills and are very adept at hiding their literacy shortcomings. For example, they may always use cash in order to avoid dealing with cheques. They may have trusted friends who will protect and cover for them. They may avoid activities where reading is needed.
3. People with low literacy may be good performers in their current job. They have learned their jobs by example, through experience and instinct. They have developed their crutches and coping skills. However, they are likely to be slower to respond to new developments and change. They will have difficulty with situations requiring reading skills, such as training exercises, problem solving, computer skills, using charts and graphs etc.

## Employer Myths About Literacy

### 1. We do not have a problem in our workplace

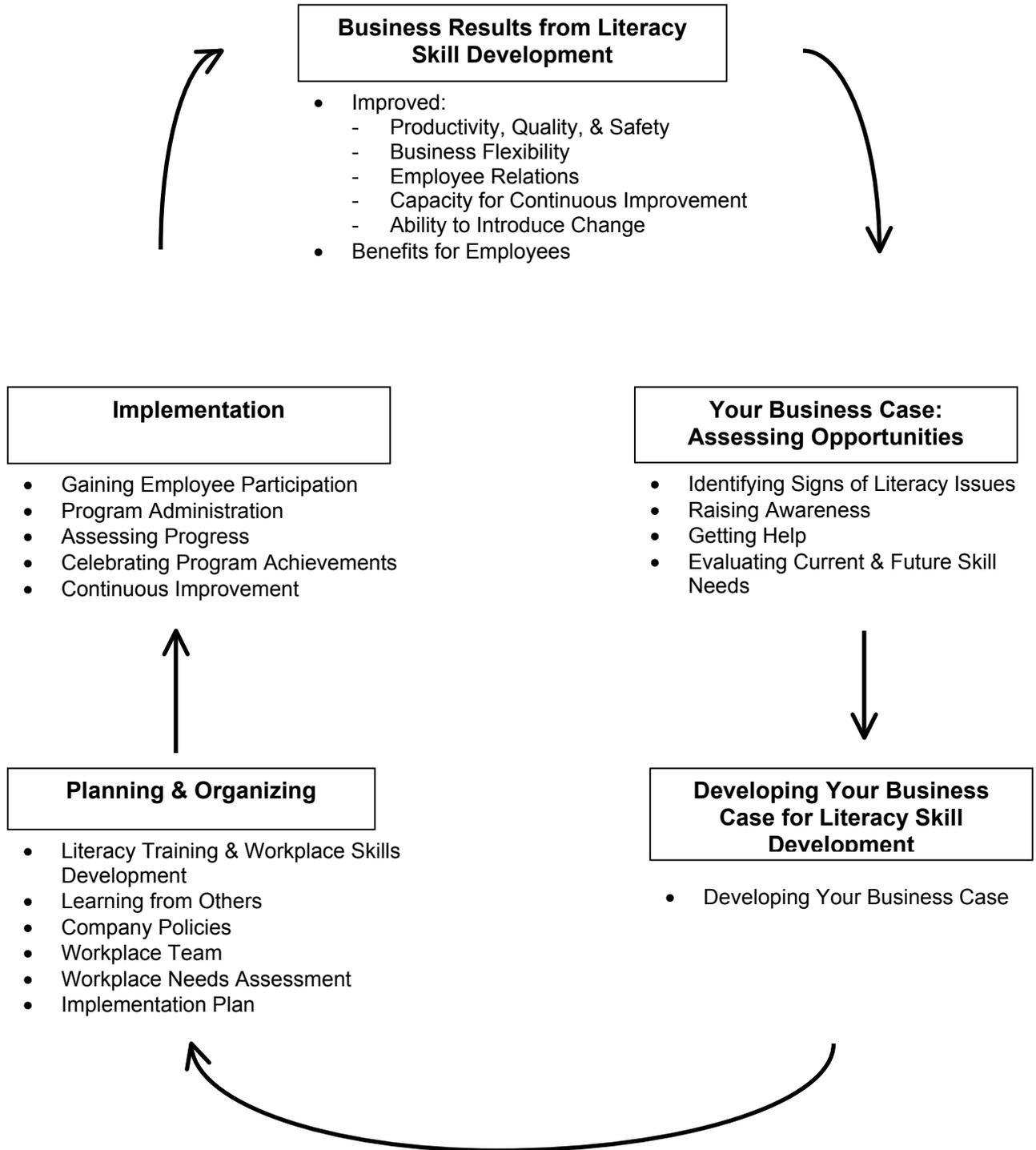
For the reasons noted above, literacy issues may not appear to be an issue in a workplace especially if the nature of the jobs are traditional and repetitive, and job content is stable. However, literacy issues may surface with the introduction of organizational change, new technologies, and efficiencies through delegation of responsibility. This can be a difficult time for organizations who have not:

- Assessed their organization's literacy capability well in advance of the introduction of changes
- Taken steps to ensure that their employees are equipped to take on the new challenges

### 2. We will lose employees if I invest in training

Employers may be concerned that investing in improving employee skill levels will result in employees leaving for better jobs elsewhere. This is often a potential risk. However, along with other employee relations policies that build mutual respect and trust, assisting people to improve their skill levels and ability to contribute, will be viewed positively by most employees, strengthening their commitment to the organization.

# Guidebook Process Overview



# Part I

## Literacy: The Business Case

### 1.1 LITERACY AND CANADIAN BUSINESS

#### The Issue

*“Canadian industrial community is at a crossroads—it must continually improve its competitiveness or face extinction. While many Canadian businesses are world leaders, Canada’s industrial performance as a whole lags behind that of our competitors in developing and commercializing new products, processes, skills, and technologies.*

*Innovation is critical to sustaining business competitiveness and in improving productivity. Improving innovation in Canada is both complex and fundamental to the quality of life for all Canadians. It is the foundation of our economic growth and jobs for our future.”*

– The Business Case for Innovation – Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters

*“In 1917, Forbes created its first list of the 100 largest companies in the U.S. Seventy years later, in 1987, Forbes republished its original list, and compared the 1987 list to the 1917 list of top 100 companies. Sixty-one of the companies had ceased to exist altogether. Only 39 companies survived the 70-year period from 1917 to 1987. Only 18 companies had managed to stay in the top 100. But that’s not the most telling part of the story. What’s incredible is to look at what’s happened in just that last 13 years since 1987—when the rate of innovation and technological change has accelerated so dramatically. In the 13 years between 1987 and 2000, the company turnover rate on the Forbes list increased nearly five-fold. Only 39 of the top 100 companies in 1987 were in the list in 2000.*

*In other words, it was five times harder to stay on the top 100 list in the 13 years between 1987 and 2000 than in the 70 years between 1917 and 1987. Five times harder to stay on top, to stay among the best, to continue to be a great company.*

*The velocity and volatility of change required even more robust strategies, choices, and priorities; even better execution and operational excellence; and even better leadership than at any other time in the history of private enterprise.”*

- A.G. Lafley, President and Chief Executive, Procter & Gamble Company

**Is your company a survivor? Will it be flourishing in 2010 and beyond?**

## The Role of Employee Skills

As customer expectations, technologies, and business processes change, people's skills, knowledge, wisdom, and expertise, become the most valuable assets for our businesses. Employee capabilities and motivation are major factors in productivity and innovation.

Job literacy requirements are continually increasing in most workplaces. Concerns that require literacy, and have become important issues over the last several years include:

- Computer skills
- Working with automated equipment
- Operating complex equipment
- Meeting safety requirements
- Keeping records
- Understanding training
- Understanding manuals and written instructions
- Problem-solving skills

In CME's 2001–2003 Annual Management Issues Survey, 63% of members identified the availability of skilled and expert workers as their most important issue. Canadian manufacturers face difficulties in finding employees with the technical, business, problem solving, and communications skills they need.

In the current survey, 47% of companies identified problem solving and interpersonal skills among those in greatest need of improvement. This was followed by:

- Communications (35%)
- Work ethic (25%)
- Technical (21%)

These percentages have not changed over the last few years.

In a February 2002 literacy survey among CME members, while 77% said literacy levels among their employees were adequate for current job requirements, 43% of respondents said their employee literacy levels were not sufficient for future company expansion and development.

This is backed up by a 1997 OECD report that told Canadians that our future competitiveness depends on raising literacy and learning levels in our society.

**Leading organizations are taking action today to build employee skills and capabilities.  
How are you planning for your employee skill needs in future years?**

## How Companies are Responding to the Literacy and Skills Challenge

Companies innovate by upgrading skills, developing new knowledge, and building the experience of their employees and business partners. As companies focus on problem solving and custom solutions, they become learning organizations where new forms of knowledge are key to driving competitive success.

Leading companies expect to maximize the performance and contributions of all employees. Employees who were hired years ago for their physical abilities are now expected to use their minds instead. The capacity of an organization is expanded through building multiple skills, handing over supervisory tasks to employees, and expecting more from individual employees.

The good news is that 60% of respondents to the February 2002 CME survey said they now take steps to improve the literacy of their employees. These steps include such measures as:

- Screen tests
- Utilizing literacy assessment tools
- Sponsoring literacy skills programs
- Working with community groups

However, CME's Management Issues Survey identified the following four issues as the most significant constraints on performance improvement: resource limitations, cost, organizational culture, and lack of qualified personnel. At the same time members recognized that key to overcoming these constraints is the need to change the corporate culture, changing employee skills sets, enhancing technology, and redeploying resources.

Our vision of education must be one in which learning is a lifelong commitment, and in which education is seen as an important part of a continual growth leading from early childhood through productive employment and retirement.

The success of this vision depends on an effective partnership of students, educators, government, and the business community. There is also a need to ensure that training programs are ongoing.

Most Canadians believe that training is critical to the continued success of their organizations. At the same time, many Canadians feel they are not getting enough training to enable them to meet the challenges of technological and competitive change. They would like to see business playing a more central role in providing that training.

Unfortunately that is not happening. Again CME's survey points out that 48% of Canadian companies spend 1% or less of payroll budget on education and skills development and 71% spend less than 2%.

There is a need for business to develop leadership, trust, and a set of goals that employees can commit to, join in, and help achieve. People are the key to organizational and individual achievement.

## **Business Benefits of Improving Literacy**

Employers and indeed, employees, are concerned about the ability of today's workforce to take on new and more complicated assignments. Poor literacy levels are a barrier to making changes and improvements needed to compete in today's world. Let us be clear:

### **Improving the literacy levels of employees will:**

#### **Improve productivity, quality and safety**

- Employees will be better able to understand and use training
- There will be fewer mistakes caused by not understanding instructions—reduced scrap and rework
- There will be reduced accidents and injuries because of improved understanding and communications
- It will be possible to delegate higher level of tasks
- More communication will be understood and able to be acted on
- Employees will be better able to problem solve
- Removal of the need for “crutches” (such as use of an interpreter)
- Employees will be able to fully use computer and other technology

#### **Improve flexibility**

- Employees will be better able to take on broader responsibilities including multi-skilling
- Responsibilities requiring more literacy skills can be delegated
- The opportunities for employee growth are enhanced
- It will help with the introduction of team-based work systems

#### **Improve employee relations**

- Employee self-confidence and morale will be higher
- Communication throughout the organization will be better
- There will be reduced employee fear, and suspicion of management
- Employee retention and loyalty will improve
- Team skills and morale will increase

#### **Improve the capability for continuous improvement**

Continuous improvement processes depend on being able to:

- Document a best practice
- Standardize use of the best practice
- Update (improve) the best practice to establish a new standard for use

Effective use of this type of process requires good documentation and the ability of employees to follow the documented procedures.

- The ability to use documentation will improve
- The ability to standardize procedures will improve
- It will facilitate all employees joining in continuous improvement processes

### **Improve the ability to introduce change**

- Employee fear of change will be reduced
- Improved self-confidence will result in less resistance to change
- The ability to absorb training will improve
- It will speed up start-up of new processes by reducing the learning curve and errors

### **Result in major benefits for employees**

Employees will:

- Have greater self-esteem and self confidence
- Be more positive and less defensive
- Be happier, and able to participate more fully in the organization
- Have improved advancement and earnings prospects
- Benefit from better job security
- Experience an improved family and personal life

## **Business Case Drivers**

Most essential skills initiatives are driven by organizational needs and other initiatives. These needs and initiatives can be classified as follows:

### **Quality and Safety Systems Driven**

Training and paperwork requirements of quality, safety, and other alike systems require a literate workforce who can read and understand written material, and can participate in written reporting and control systems.

### **Technology Driven**

Broad use of computer systems, use of e-mail, the ability to understand and use control charts and similar processes, the ability to use equipment manuals, etc., may drive the need to upgrade essential skill levels.

### **Qualification/Certification Driven**

The need for employees to be formally qualified or certified for their job to meet regulatory requirements or organizational standards may be the driver to implement an essential skills program.

### **Organizational Driven**

The driver may be the need to meet organizational goals and/or expectations for:

- Participation in teamwork systems
- Reporting and accountability processes
- Greater delegation of responsibilities
- Facilitating written communication in the organization

### **Promotion of a Learning Culture**

This responds to the need to have an organization that is able to:

- Institute change quickly
- Accept and expect change
- Encourage participation of all employees in increasing the knowledge of the organization
- Encourage participation of all employees in applying knowledge to continuous improvement of the organization

## 1.2 LITERACY SUCCESS STORIES

### **Dofasco – Hamilton, Ontario**

In the early 1990's, Dofasco became aware of a literacy issue during a re-organization. In spite of broad communication by the company about the re-organization, some employees were surprised by it. "You never told me" was the heartfelt response by some. Preliminary research among those who conducted training at Dofasco, provided enough feedback to take further action. With very strong support from John Mayberry, Dofasco president and CEO, and using the resources of the Workplace Basic Skills Program, an initiative at the time of the Ontario Government, a pilot needs assessment was carried out in the Plant Services Department. In 1997, a workplace team including both employees and management was established in 1997 initially meeting weekly.

The result is a program now called "Essential Skills", which has the objective "To provide the opportunity for employees to learn the basic skills needed to make the best contribution they are capable of in the workplace, at home, and in the community". Essential skills include reading, writing, and computer skills. Approximately 90 employees per year participate in this program. Dofasco is committed to using community providers—the Adult Basic Education Association is a key partner who does employee assessments, designs courses, and provides instructors from various community partners.

### **Palliser Furniture – Winnipeg, Manitoba**

With a workforce that is about 70% immigrant workers, English as a Second Language (ESL) is a key concern. Palliser started ESL classes over ten years ago, and has added literacy, math/numeracy, computer, and leadership programs since. In 2002 there are 14 classes currently running. Almost 500 people complete courses each year, and many continue taking courses. Several of the new initiatives have been partly funded by two Manitoba government departments, Industry Training Partnerships, and Adult Language Training.

Participation by employees is voluntary, although employees are encouraged to participate if recommended by their supervisor. Programs run at different times to make them flexible enough to meet varied schedules. Employees are paid at their hourly rate for 50% of their time in class while the other 50% of the class is on their own time.

Employees who have completed language training are better prepared for cross-training, and employee retention levels are much higher. More skilled and flexible employees help meet a Palliser goal: to avoid layoffs as much as possible.

## **Honeywell – Toronto, Ontario – Learning For Life**

Following the successful delivery of ESL courses through Humber College over a decade ago, Honeywell identified a need to create a “learning for life” culture within its organization that encouraged employees to value learning, whether it be for personal or professional growth.

Twice a year, a diverse range of courses is offered to all Honeywell employees on sign-up days in Honeywell’s cafeteria. Courses include business related topics such as:

- Business Writing Skills
- Language Skills
- Leadership Skills
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Computer Software and HTML
- Ontario Management Development courses

General interest courses are also offered, including:

- College Prep and GED
- Countries and Cultures Around the World
- Canadian Law
- French/Spanish
- Nutrition
- Yoga
- Self-Defense for Women

This workplace development program, which is an educational partnership between Honeywell Ltd. and Humber College in Toronto, is run on a fee-for-service basis by Humber, and is entirely funded by Honeywell Ltd. Courses are suggested by Humber, based on an understanding of Honeywell’s strategic priorities, and the needs and interests of the employees. After the sign-up, courses with enough signatures are delivered on Honeywell’s premises by instructors contracted through the College. As there are two shifts at Honeywell, past groups have attended classes either before or after their shift.

More than 60 different courses have been offered through Honeywell’s Learning for Life program, many of which have been repeated several times to accommodate the huge interest in the topics. Over the last twelve years, hundreds of Honeywell employees have become active continuing education students.

Two years ago, Humber and two of Honeywell’s senior managers went to Ottawa to accept The Conference Board of Canada’s Award for Excellence in Workplace Literacy for the Learning for Life program. Honeywell Ltd. has also won two of the National Quality Institute’s most prestigious awards under the quality category—the Certificate of Merit in 1998, and the Canada Award of Excellence in 2000. These achievements profile a company with great foresight to find an effective way to encourage training and a willingness to sustain the activity over a considerable period of time.

*"We began the Learning for Life program several years ago to prepare our people for dramatic changes in technology, processes, and structure, including the introduction of self-directed work teams. The company recognizes that enhanced literacy skills and subsequent training programs over the last decade have contributed greatly to major improvements in productivity, quality initiatives, and cost reduction. Improved communication skills help our people on the shop floor at Honeywell as well as in every other aspect of their lives."*

Joe Baker, CHRP, Manager, Human Resources  
Scarborough Manufacturing Operations, Honeywell Ltd.

## **Teleflex Canada – Richmond, BC**

Teleflex Canada has integrated literacy training into its skills upgrading program as part of implementing its Lean Manufacturing vision. In partnership with the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (B.C. Division), the company has developed a program called Team Time Training. This program is designed to increase the knowledge of all employees in Lean Manufacturing methods, and increase participation in developing new organizational structures, procedures, and techniques throughout the organization.

As technical and organizational training is developed, literacy needs are identified and literacy training is integrated into the training package. Both the literacy and other skills development are tailored to the specific need and delivered to be used right away. This training program is supporting a successful change towards Teleflex's Lean Manufacturing vision. To date Teleflex has achieved:

- 90% on time delivery, up from 65%
- 7+ inventory turns, up from 4
- Cell lead time 2–3 days, down from 2 weeks
- Fewer parts shortages

## **Boeing Canada Technology (Winnipeg Division)**

Boeing Canada Technology Winnipeg Division, is a part of the Fabrication Division for BCA and manufactures composite parts, in competition with other Boeing composite operations worldwide. The workforce's skill level and its ability to operate efficiently is a critical issue. The company has committed to offering its 900 employees with essential skills courses in:

- Math
- Speaking (oral communication)
- Reading
- Writing

In the early 1990's, the company offered:

- General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation training
- English as a Second Language (ESL) training
- Effective Communication training
- High school completion courses
- Individual tutoring, and "at home" study packages

- Assistance with college courses

Over the years, workplace specific courses, such as Aerospace Oral Communication, were added. In 1995, a broad workplace skill needs assessment identified the need for essential skills training in both Reading and Mathematics. The essential skills program began in 1995.

In 2000, two courses, Essential Skills Reading and Essential Skills Mathematics, were developed. These courses take into account the range of training that is required in a diverse workplace. The technical skills that are needed within self-directed work teams (continuous improvement and self-inspection and assessment) must reflect the personal learning styles and skills of all workers. Using Boeing workplace specific documents in course material, and being sensitive to the language and cultural needs of the learners have been key success factors. The most innovative example of addressing cultural diversity is the American Sign Language (ASL) translation of the Mathematics course and the video development for the Deaf (Boeing Winnipeg has 24 deaf employees).

Opportunities are provided for employees to join in programs within the workplace and employees are paid their regular salary for time spent in the classroom.

Since 1995, Boeing Winnipeg has delivered an estimated 23,000 hours of workplace essential skills and communication training to over 1,000 employees and spent approximately \$1,000,000 on these programs.

### **Results and Achievements**

These programs have shown very positive results—both in successful certification outcomes as well as improved self-esteem and pride in the workers who have taken the courses.

A very high percentage of employees, both deaf and hearing, who have taken the Essential Skills Reading course, now pass the annual regulatory certification exams. Many of these employees had struggled in the past with these certifications. Likewise, a very high percentage of employees who have taken the Essential Skills Mathematics course now successfully complete the Boeing Mathematics test.

A very visible achievement is that deaf and ESL employees now hold positions as Lead Hands and in higher management. The far-reaching effect on self-esteem and life skills is vast.

The cooperation and community effort of Boeing employees, both deaf and hearing, the larger deaf community of Winnipeg, management and CAW Local 2169 in the development of these programs have given each of these groups a deeper respect for one another.

Boeing takes a deep pride in the full successful integration and training of a diverse workforce that reflects the multicultural mosaic that is Canada.

## **Diversified Metal Engineering Ltd. – Charlottetown, PEI**

*(Extracted from: The Conference Board of Canada – Insights You can Count On Case Study May 2002, Excellence in Workplace Literacy, Small Business Winner, 2001 Diversified Metal Engineering Ltd.)*

Diversified Metal Engineering manufactures products, such as five to sixty barrel stainless steel tanks for the brewing industry, and for the food and beverage industry. Well-informed, skilled, and flexible staff are considered key to meet the competitive challenges of the changing marketplace.

In conjunction with Workplace Education PEI, a program for continuous learning has been put in place at Diversified Metal Engineering. A project team guides the learning initiatives. Workers are consulted on the type of training to be provided. Initially, math and communication skills training were offered to shop floor workers. Shop workers also requested meeting facilitation training and the company agreed. In the second year, training focused on obtaining welding certification for workers. Administrative staff also requested training geared to their needs, and this was agreed to by the company as well.

Two-hour classes were scheduled two times per week during the day. Employees donated one hour of time for each two-hour class. Maintaining production schedules and rescheduling of people required extra effort, patience, and cooperation of the shop foreman and workers. The boardroom was used for classes, and the shop floor for hands-on problem solving. Students had a say in the selection of the instructor. Student progress and results were confidential. Only attendance was reported to management.

Some of the benefits of the training have included:

- Decreased time and waste
- Increased production
- More logical thinking—a better understanding of why and how things are done
- Improved listening skills
- Improved communication on the shop floor
- Lower staff turnover
- Improved teamwork functioning: cooperation, transfer of training
- Improved confidence for participants to try new things
- Barriers broken down between management and workers
- Personal benefits for participants:
  - increased self-confidence
  - ability to help children with homework
  - positive changes in attitude
  - training showed employees that they were a respected part of the company

*Further information on the Diversified Metal Engineering program and other examples of successful Canadian Workplace Literacy initiatives may be found on the Conference Board of Canada website at:*

[www.conferenceboard.ca/education/best-practices/case-studies.htm](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/best-practices/case-studies.htm)



# Part II

## Literacy: Assessing Your Business Opportunities

### 2.1 Introduction

*A major Ontario company realized that there was a significant literacy problem during implementation of a downsizing project involving voluntary early retirement offering. Although there had been considerable written correspondence within the company—notices posted and letters and material sent to each affected employee's home for some employees—this came as a total surprise when individual discussions took place.*

*Almost all of the growth in the workforce in Canada for the foreseeable future will come from immigration. How is this impacting your organization today, and in the future?*

What is the level of literacy in your workforce today? What are the signs that might indicate that literacy issues are affecting your organization today? How will your business be different in five years? How will skill requirements change?

What changes to your current organization would make it more productive and effective? For example, are there opportunities for delegation of responsibilities, more teamwork, multi-skilling?

What is limiting you from moving forward with these opportunities?

Too often, organizations have introduced new technology, or organizational change, only to discover that some of their employees lacked the basic skills to be able to handle the new job requirements. These were valued employees with many skills important to the business—but whose job in the past did not require reading, writing, math or communication skills needed in the new work environment. This discovery can:

- Create a crisis
- Cause delays
- Lessen the expected results
- Cause the change to fail

Regardless of how the crisis is resolved, the solution takes a lot of time and can be very costly. Taking action two to four years in advance of likely changes is not too early to ensure that employees are ready for the new needs.

This part challenges you to explore the role that literacy, or lack of literacy, plays in limiting your opportunities to become more productive and able to implement change to meet future needs.

## 2.2 Raising Awareness

The purpose of this first phase is to provide a framework for starting to consider literacy as an issue in your workplace.

There are four activities in this section to help you and your organization understand the literacy issue better, how it may be affecting your current operation, and the potential for literacy to affect your future plans. The activities do not need to be labour intensive. The effort put forth should match the size and complexity of the organization. The activities may be carried out in a different order than presented. You may want to contact a literacy resource (see Section 2.4) before taking any action. You may want the people who will be involved in identifying signs of literacy issue to have some education on the literacy issue first. Do what works best for you and your organization.

Senior management needs to be brought on board early in the project. Important steps include:

- Education of management on literacy issues and potential impact in the workplace
- Agreement to this first assessment
- Giving management a chance to provide input into identifying potential signs and the plans for further action
- Appointing a project sponsor and project champion/manager
- Agreement to starting phase two

Buy-in and commitment by senior management, and integration of the initiative into the organization's over-all goals and workplan are essential for success.

The outcome of this phase may be a decision to proceed with a more in depth assessment of your literacy needs and the development of a business case for implementing a literacy improvement program.

### **Preliminary Investigation Activities**

#### **1. Identify Signs of Literacy Issues in Your Workplace**

One of the places to start is to look for signs of literacy issues in your workplace. This search will probably be quite informal, and will look for anecdotal evidence (examples) rather than quantitative (measured) evidence. Some of the signs may be fairly clear, e.g. employees who have poor English (or French in Quebec) oral skills. Other signs may be more subtle.

A worksheet is provided (see Section 2.3) to help stimulate thinking as to how literacy issues may be affecting your organization today. It is key that information be collected

from people who have close working relationships with the employees in their areas of the business.

It is best practice to:

- Select a cross-section of people to assist completing the worksheet
- Include input from employees
- Complete the worksheet individually, then discuss as a team
- Be prepared that some feedback may be critical of management practices. Accept all input. Feedback is a gift.

## 2. Contact a Literacy Resource

There are literacy organizations, schools and colleges, and private sector organizations across Canada who can help you with your literacy initiative (see Section 2.4 and Appendix B). Contact and a consultation during this phase will help you gain further perspective on literacy issues, community resources available, costs, and potential courses of action. In this phase, they may also be able to:

- Provide education on the literacy issue
- Help organizing your literacy plan/program
- Help in identifying signs of literacy issues
- Help identifying future skill needs

**Section 2.4** contains information on “Getting Help”.

## 3. Educate Management and Others Involved on Literacy

You will want to begin to raise the awareness of your management group as to the literacy issue and its potential impact on your organization. This Guidebook is one resource. Literacy organizations in your area may also be of assistance.

## 4. Analyze Future Skill Needs for Literacy Concerns

In addition to signs of literacy issues in your current business, it is key to consider future developments in your business. Technology, organizational changes, and increasing performance expectations are factors that may require higher literacy skills. Your current employees most likely have critical knowledge and skills essential to your business success. However, they may require some help to adapt to future expectations. Upgrading of skills takes time, especially if there is need to upgrade basic skills.

This activity challenges you to review the vision for your business and your strategic plan, and to identify your changing skill requirements. **Section 2.5** contains a worksheet to assess future skill needs and skill development needs. Again, it is best practice to have broad input and to develop the answers through group discussion.

*If you already have enough information from the first three activities to know that you will be moving ahead with a more in-depth assessment and development of a business case, you may want to leave this*

*activity for the Business Case Phase. Completion of the “Workplace Needs Assessment” described in the Business Case phase prior to analyzing future skill needs, will increase the accuracy and value of the future needs assessment.*

Completing the above activities will give you a better picture of your current literacy situation, and ability to meet upcoming needs. If the first study shows that there is the need for further action, a more in-depth assessment and the development of a business case for implementing a literacy improvement program may be the next step. The activities for the Business Case Phase are covered in Part III.

## 2.3 Identifying Signs of Literacy Issues Worksheet

### Instructions

This worksheet may be used to identify signs of literacy issues and their impact on operations in your workplace. It is only intended to be the first step in seeing the literacy issues that may be affecting your organization. This assessment may be used along with the other worksheets in this section to develop a basis for taking action, which would include a more thorough workplace literacy needs assessment.

1. Input should be collected from a cross-section of people in the organization who manage or supervise, conduct training, are involved in health and safety or quality processes.
2. Input from employees through focus groups or similar means is desirable. If a workplace committee has been established it should be part of the planning.
3. Information should be collected from persons who have direct working knowledge of a group of individual employees. For example, it is better to get input directly from manufacturing employees, their supervisors, and others who work directly with them, rather than only get input from the manufacturing vice-president.
4. Be careful not to identify specific employees either by name or association. Maintaining the trust of employees will be key to the success of a following literacy initiative.
5. *The presence of a sign is only an indication of a potential literacy issue. There are many dynamics and factors involved in workplace environments. For example, employees may have difficulty understanding manuals and printed instructions because the manuals or instructions have been poorly written, are inaccurate, or the instructions cannot be physically executed as written. The purpose of the worksheet is to invite further investigation and understanding if there are issues.*

## Part I – English/French as a Second Language

- |   | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. Do you have employees with poor oral English/French language skills?   |            |           |
| 2. Do you need to prepare instructions, signs, communications, etc., in a language other than English/French?   |            |           |
| 3. Do you need to use employees to interpret instructions for others?   |            |           |
| 4. Is a language other than one of English or French regularly used for workplace business communication?   |            |           |
| 5. Are there employees who regularly communicate business matters in a language other than English (or French, if that is normal workplace language)? |            |           |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you answered “yes” to one or more of the above questions, what is the business impact of the English/French as a second language issue on productivity/cost, quality, safety, capacity for change, problem solving, employee relations, customer service, etc.?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

English/French as a second language is a:

Major issue

Moderate issue

Little or no issue

## Part II – Signs of Potential Literacy Issues

### Training

Yes

No

6. Are there employees who have difficulty with training material/exercises—when the majority of employees do not have problem?
7. Are there employees who avoid training sessions, or who do not participate well (join in)?
8. Are there employees who need another employee to explain material to them?
9. Are there employees who have difficulty understanding workplace signs?
10. Are there employees who have difficulty understanding charts and graphs used in the workplace?
11. Are there employees who have difficulty with the math parts of their jobs (e.g. doing arithmetic calculations correctly, understanding charts or graphs)?

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Quality/Safety

Yes

No

12. Are there employees who are careful, but make unexplainable mistakes following written instructions, when the majority of employees do not have problems?

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Work Habits**

Yes

No

- 13. Do you have employees who must always be with a buddy?
- 14. Do you have employees who make excuses when faced with written material (e.g. I left my glasses in my locker)?
- 15. Do you have morale or absenteeism problems that might be linked to the ability to handle essential skills requirements?
- 16. Are there communication problems among staff (e.g. problems with employees following up on shift change notes)?

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Adjusting to Change**

Yes

No

- 17. Do you have turnover problems because people cannot do the job?
- 18. Do you have employees who have an unusually high level of unwillingness or fear of new job requirements?
- 19. Do you have employees who are unusually slow to adjust to new needs/requests involving written material?
- 20. Do you have employees who are very slow (compared to other employees) to adjust to new math job requirements?
- 21. Do you have employees unwilling, or unable, to accept the change to use of computers—when the most make the change successfully?
- 22. Is management unwilling to introduce change because of concerns about employees being able to respond to the new needs?

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Recruiting**

Yes

No

- 23. Are you having problems recruiting employees with all the skills you require?
- 24. Are you having problems developing people to fill more senior positions?
- 25. Are would-be recruits having problems meeting/passing entrance requirements?
- 26. Do you look outside your organization because current employees do not have the skills to fill more senior positions?

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you answered “yes” to one or more of questions 6 to 21, what is the business impact of these signs of literacy issues on productivity/cost, quality, safety, capacity for change, problem solving, employee relations, customer service, etc.?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The business impact to our business of the signs in this part (questions 6–25) is a:

- Major issue
- Moderate issue
- Little or no issue

### Part III – Other Factors

#### Education

Only about 40% of persons who have not completed high school have necessary literacy skills. Answering “yes” to the question below does not indicate that you have an issue, however, this is a higher risk population and may be a factor in the signs identified in earlier questions.

- |   | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 27. Do you have employees who have not completed high school or equivalent? |            |           |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Management Issues

Sometimes the above signs may not be due to employee literacy skills, but rather due to some aspect of how they are managed. It is important to recognize where the issues are, so that the right actions can be taken to improve the situation. The following questions deal with identifying management issues, which may appear to be employee literacy problems:

- |   | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 28. Do written instructions use clear, specific wording that is easy to understand, describes both the performance standard and actions needed to maintain the performance standard, and can be followed in practice? |            |           |
| 29. Is there a process that includes and involves employees in the writing and updating of instructions and practices?  |            |           |
| 30. Is employee feedback respected and are actions taken to address employee concerns?  |            |           |

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





## 2.4 GETTING HELP

You will need the help and expertise of people educated in literacy development. One of the first steps in your plan should be to contact the right organizations / agencies to obtain the expertise you will need.

### **Why Use Outside Help**

Confidentiality can be maintained through contracting with a neutral third party to manage employee contact, assessment, and placement in courses. The third party may be an individual or an organization.

### **The Literacy Provider Community**

There are many different organizations and individuals in Canada involved in the literacy field. The primary groups include non-profit organizations, coalitions, and networks; educational institutions including colleges and local schools; labour organizations; private organizations; and freelance individuals. In addition, some provincial governments are directly involved.

The missions and strengths of the organizations vary. Some of the different activities include research, advocacy, literacy training and development of skill assessment processes, pre-employment skills development, community-based literacy training, and workplace literacy skill development.

As an employer, in most cases, you will want assistance from a provider, or providers who have:

- Knowledge of workplace skills development processes
- Experience in working effectively in a business or industrial environment

Not all providers have these skills and experience. Selection of a literacy provider is an important contributor to the success of your plan.

### **Skill Sets of Literacy Providers**

In addition to experience in workplace literacy skill development, varying provider skills and experience will be required for your program. Some of the different skill sets include:

- Overall Program Management & Group Process Facilitation
- Inspirational Motivation
- Needs Assessment
- Individual Assessment
- Course Development
- Instructor
- Program Evaluation

It may be necessary to contract with more than one provider to obtain the necessary skill sets for your program.

### **Characteristics of a Good Literacy Provider**

The necessary or desirable skills and traits of a literacy provider will depend on the job a provider is being contracted to do. You should assess the skills and traits on this basis. In the initial stages of developing a project, it is likely that you will need someone who has vision, can conceptualize workable processes, can do project development and management, and is a facilitator. As you move through the project the provider(s) will need skills in workplace assessment, individual assessment, course development and course delivery, and program evaluation. In all cases providers should have the following traits:

- An understanding of how workplaces function and of workplace cultures
- Ability to accept and work with your workplace culture
- Ability to work with many different types of people and able to relate to all levels of the organization
- Good understanding of business processes (e.g. quality systems)
- Good listening skills (i.e. ability to listen to the needs of the organization)
- Good problem solving skills
- Ability to work with different workplace interests (e.g. management, employees, union, etc.)
- Ability to draw sound conclusions and take action based on the conclusions
- Creativity in meeting both employer and employee needs
- Flexibility in thought and schedule
- Knowledge of different models of adult learning

### **Where to Find Help**

Appendix A lists some primary non-profit organizations to contact. These organizations can be a good place to start. Some of these organizations offer workplace literacy services directly, others may be referral organizations that can provide you with the best contacts or choices of contacts.

In some provinces, some financial assistance or support may be available from a provincial government agency.

Other potential sources of literacy providers include:

- Local Colleges
- Your local school system (School Boards etc.)
- Your Labour Union
- Private Sector Consultants and Individuals
- ABC CANADA

## 2.5 Evaluating Your Future Literacy Needs

### Worksheet

#### **Instructions**

Your employees are a key factor in what makes your organization different and better from your competition. The ability of the organization to meet the challenges of competition is affected by the skills, productivity, and motivation of its employees. This worksheet challenges you to look at your future skills and needs, compare them with current, and assess how literacy levels may be affecting your ability to change.

The first part asks you to describe your business vision for five years from today.

The second part asks you to identify the new employee skills and abilities that will be necessary to deliver the vision. Be sure to include:

- Expected technological, organizational, and operating method changes
- Expectations for higher employee performance especially for issues such as:
  - problem solving
  - ability to function in a team environment
  - ability to accept more responsibility
  - ability to handle change

The third part gives a chance to identify barriers to having the literacy and skills in place to deliver the vision, and potential solutions for the organization to get the required literacy and skills in place.

This is a chance to gather broadly based input. Often real learning will take place when people used to focussing on day-to-day issues have a chance to discuss the future, and what is needed to get there. Group discussions can be a valuable means of:

- Stimulating thinking
- Uncovering the future needs
- Identifying barriers to achieving the vision
- Finding solutions to delivering the vision.



**Part II: Future Skills and Abilities Requirements**

A. Considering the expected business and technology changes, how will the skills and abilities of employees need to change?

Business Change	New Skills and Abilities Required
1) New Products, Services and Markets _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
2) New Technologies, Processes and Methods _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
3) Automation, Computer Usage _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
4) Productivity Improvements _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
5) Quality and Process Improvements _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
6) Other Issues _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____

- B. Organizational changes and changing employee job expectations may require new skills and abilities. Some of these may have been identified in the previous section. However, you may want to consider these issues separately. This section may be used for that purpose.

Organization Change	New Skills & Abilities Expectation(s)
1) Multi-skilling	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
2) Team Participation	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3) Greater Delegation of Responsibility	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
4) Improved Problem Solving Ability	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
5) Improved Employee Communication and Interpersonal Skills	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
6) Better Employee Ability to Handle Change	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
7) Other	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

**Part III: Literacy and Skills Barriers to Reaching Vision, and Potential Solutions**

A. What challenges do you see in ensuring that the necessary skills and abilities are in place to address current and future needs?

Some potential problems may include the following:

- Management has not considered the skills development issues.
- There is no plan to address the issues.
- Training and skill development is not a priority for the organization.
- Employees are not admitting their lack of literacy skills.
- If a strategy is to hire the needed skills, are/will qualified applicants be available? Is the organization willing to pay higher rates to be able to obtain higher qualified candidates?
- As your experienced people retire, how will you transfer their skills?

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B. What are potential solutions to the literacy and skills needs in order to deliver the vision?

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# Part III

## The Business Case for Your Business

### 3.1 OVERVIEW

This part contains a worksheet for putting together a statement of your business case for starting a literacy improvement program in your organization.

The information compiled in the worksheets in Part II may provide the basis for completing the Business Case Worksheet that follows.

Some organizations may want to base their business case on better data than is made by the worksheets in Part II. If this is the case, then these organizations may want to do a Workplace Needs Assessment using outside literacy resources before preparing their business case. The Workplace Needs Assessment is described in Part IV – Organizing and Planning. It normally needs to be done before starting a training program, so if you are fairly certain that you will be proceeding with starting a program, doing the Workplace Needs Assessment at this point is not a bad idea. If you go this route, you should ensure that employees who may be potential participants in a training program are consulted and included in the planning process. Usually this is done through their being part of a workplace planning team. The Workplace Needs Assessment involves having employees fill out surveys, interviewing employees, and watching how jobs are carried out in the workplace. You will want to make sure that you have a good communication strategy in place. This will position it with management and employees before proceeding.

## 3.2 DEVELOPING YOUR BUSINESS CASE Worksheet

### Instructions

This section provides a worksheet for you to identify your business case for starting an essential skills program for your organization.

1. Use the results of your evaluations from the two previous worksheets: “Identifying Signs of Literacy Issues” and “Evaluating Your Future Literacy Needs”.
2. It is recommended that this business case be developed using broadly-based input from people in your organization.

**We have the opportunity to improve our current business performance through starting an essential skills development program. Our performance will improve in the following areas:**

1. Improved Productivity, Quality, and Safety (identifying improvements and cost savings):

Reduced scrap, rework

Fewer injuries and lost time

Reduced workers’ compensation costs and less equipment damage

Reduced start up/learning curves

Reduced communication rework

Improved flexibility through cross-training, delegation of responsibilities, etc.

Reduced equipment downtime

Other

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2. Improved Employee Relations:

- Improved employee self-confidence and morale
- Reduced fear and distrust of management
- Improved communications
- Improved employee retention (less turnover) and loyalty
- Improved employee participation

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3. Improved Capability for Continuous Improvement:

- Improved use of documentation
- Aid in creating standard procedures
- Aid in employees participating in continuous improvement processes
- Improved employee problem solving

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4. Improved Ability to Introduce Change:

Reduced resistance to change

Improved ability to absorb training

Improved management's confidence in proceeding with change efforts

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5. Benefits for Employees:

Improved self-esteem and self-confidence

Improved earnings and advancement opportunities

Improved job security

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## Literacy Skills Terminology

Different companies, organizations, and agencies use various terms to label literacy skill needs. Some of the terms include “essential skills”, “basic skills”, “foundation skills”, and “workplace literacy skills”. Further, some groups apply a narrow definition to a term, others may use the same term, but apply a broader definition.

In this Guidebook, we will use the following terms as defined below. The definitions may be interpreted either narrowly or more broadly. The choice is up to the individual organization.

### Definitions:

**Basic Skills:** The general literacy skills needed for day-to-day functioning in the workplace.

**Essential Skills:** The literacy skills needed for a specific job.

A narrow definition would include only reading and math skills. A broader definition may include other “basic” or “essential” skills such as oral communication skills, computer skills, interpersonal interaction skills, problem solving skills, etc.

Each of these terms covers a broad range of skills. All persons are somewhere in the range. Every job has basic and essential skill requirements that are somewhere in the range.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) has defined nine essential skills: *Reading Text, Writing, Document Use, Numeracy, Thinking Skills, Working with Others, Computer Use, Continuous Learning, Oral Communication*. More information and sample occupational profiles of essential skills requirements can be found at the HRDC Essential Skills website:

<http://www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/Employer.asp#EssentialSkills>



# Part IV

## Literacy Program Implementation: Planning & Organizing

### 4.1 Overview

Success in implementing a basic skills program will require effective planning, commitment and involvement. As with any other business project, it will require an investment of time and resources to produce the expected returns.

Successful initiatives to improve literacy in workplaces are the result of good leadership and management.

- Section 4.2 discusses approaches to literacy training in the context of workplace needs and lifelong skills development
- Section 4.3 identifies issues, and outlines actions for addressing literacy training that have been successful in other workplaces, and
- Section 4.4 identifies planning and organizational issues that will help a successful implementation.

The following leadership and management principles or practices are key factors to success:

- 1) Management Commitment
- 2) Involvement of Employees
- 3) Planning
- 4) Communication
- 5) Effective Execution
- 6) Continuous Improvement

Many organizations have undertaken literacy improvement initiatives. Some have been successful, others have failed. This section stresses learning from others, to help you succeed.

## 4.2 LITERACY TRAINING AND WORKPLACE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

### **Literacy, Skills Development, and the Individual**

In the past literacy was often considered to be an on/off situation, either a person could read and write or they could not. However, the International Adult Literacy Study (IALS) redefined literacy to describe a range of skill levels. Some people have fewer literacy skills, others have more. Everyone is somewhere in the range.

Job literacy requirements have increased for most in the workplace and are likely to become more demanding in the future. As well, other skill requirements are increasing rapidly. These include literacy and skill requirements for managers and supervisors as well as those employees carrying out the simplest of tasks. All employees and management are affected.

The primary questions for an employer are:

- Is a person at the appropriate literacy level?
- Does he/she possess the skills for his/her current job?
- Is skill development underway to meet future needs?

Every person is going to be at a different point in his/her abilities and development. However, every person needs to continue to develop his/her abilities.

Leading employers have realized that ongoing development of all employees is critical to their future success. Every employee has a training and development plan that is individualized to meet his/her needs. In this environment, it is not unusual for employees to have a literacy component to their training plan that will move them further along the literacy scale. When development is expected for the full organization, individuals with the highest needs are more willing to participate.

### **Effective Workplace Training and Skills Development**

Experience has shown that training for adults in the workplace is most effective when it is:

- Focused - The employee needs to see the training as relevant
- Usable - As soon after the training as possible. Otherwise the person forgets.
- Individualized - Adults have different bases of knowledge. If the starting point of training is too low, the person is turned off. If the starting point is too high, the person will not understand the training.

### **Curriculum vs. Goal-Directed Based Training**

Curriculum-based training is training which is credential-based. High school graduation is an example of curriculum-based education. Graduation is as a result of completing a specified curriculum. The graduation diploma is a person's record of having achieved a certain educational standard.

Goal-based training depends on defining desired outcomes for the training and then providing the training to deliver the outcomes. As applied to the workplace, it means training that is designed to give people skills that are directly usable in their jobs. Skill development is aimed at skill gaps; it is not broad education.

Curriculum-based training is easier to administer and deliver. Standardized courses can be developed and given. Completion of a curriculum may give an individual knowledge of specified techniques, and statistically the person has a greater chance of undertaking work and thought processes at a higher level than someone who has not completed the training. Curriculum-based courses, however, may not be seen as relevant by the learner, probably will not be directly usable, and may be too easy or too hard for an individual's experience.

On the other hand, goal-based training for employees in a workplace requires defining specific skill requirements for individual jobs. It requires assessing the skill gaps for individuals in fulfilling their current or future jobs, and it requires developing training that is designed to provide the skills to remove or address the gaps. The training should also use examples and situations related to the workplace, and be applied in the workplace.

It is a common approach for an employer looking to upgrade the qualifications of its employees to encourage them to complete grade 12 or GED qualification. This may or may not be successful, and may or may not obtain the expected results. It may be more successful to adopt a goal-based approach with outcomes that are usable in the workplace.

*Take the time to understand what training requirements are needed and where your employees are. Teach to the task. This may result in less training time, and less cost.*

## 4.3 LITERACY PROGRAMS: LEARNING FROM OTHERS

### **Understanding the Employee with Literacy Challenges**

Literacy is a very sensitive issue for those with low literacy skill levels. Often, there are feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. People want to hide their lack of literacy. Many have well-developed coping skills. For example, they may deal only in cash. Many have close friends, perhaps a fellow employee, who will cover for them. Many will do anything to hide their lack of skills. Many will carry bad memories of their school experiences and classroom learning situations. They may measure their personal literacy by the old definition: they are able to read words and write. The problem is they do not understand and cannot apply the information they are reading.

This situation creates a challenge to introducing a successful workplace literacy program. The following are learnings from successful programs.

### **Literacy as Part of a Bigger Picture**

Innovative organizations are developing the skills and abilities of all employees. This is part of their strategy for survival and prosperity in the future. Innovation and productivity comes from knowledge: these companies invest in their employees to develop a more capable organization. Still, even innovative organizations have literacy issues—and they address these issues as part of an overall skills development program.

In most organizations, this part of their skills development programs is called “Basic Skills”, or names such as Dofasco’s “Essential Skills”. Honeywell’s “Learning for Life” conveys a broader and bigger picture. Given the sensitivity of the issue for the individual, the word “literacy” alone should not be used.

### **Involve Employees Early in Project**

Early and major employee involvement and participation in the planning and carrying out of the plan can be a key factor in a successful workplace program. Many organizations form a joint employee and management committee to oversee the program. Participation fosters ownership, improves credibility, and committee participants can become promoters for the program. Include potential participants and cynics on committees, and help them get on board early. Consult and get your union (if any) involved early. Some unions have basic skills training within their organizations.

### **Focus on the Needs of the Employee**

Many companies have experienced difficulty gaining the participation of those who need basic skills training the most. Often they have found the best success when they can tap into a personal need of the employee. The real drive for an employee to improve literacy may come from a personal dream or desire, not job needs (e.g. to be able to read stories to grandchildren).

Skilled instructors make sure course outcomes will result in skills that are transferable to workplace tasks.

Participation in literacy program should be voluntary and confidential. Normally, individual assessments, individual course enrolment and individual outcomes are kept confidential from management. Combined data is shared. Usually, companies use third party providers to assess and teach employees. Sometimes, basic skills courses are held off-site. In some cases, one-on-one tutoring is provided in the employee's home, as resources allow.

Successful programs work to remove barriers to participation. There is flexibility in scheduling classes around work schedules and employee personal needs. Support for childcare may be provided. Where participation is known, action may be taken to adjust shift schedules to permit class participation.

### **Partnering with Outside Resources**

You will need help in starting and running a program. Contact and build relationships with a third party literacy provider early. There are many resources to help to make a successful program. A later section discusses these in more detail, but they will:

- Help to organize and position the program
- Provide professional expertise in workplace literacy needs assessment
- Prepare or recommend courses
- Provide instructors
- Manage the student/learning interface
- Provide progress evaluations

### **Costs**

Different organizations use different strategies on the costs of programs. Many organizations have shared cost/time policies. For example, one organization pays instructor/course costs and pays the employee one hour of wage for every two hours of instruction. Instruction time is outside of the normal working hours so that normal work or shift time is not disrupted. Some organizations have gone as far as paying for one-on-one tutoring in the employee's home, while in other cases, community-based courses and assistance may be available at little or no cost to the organization or employee.

Costs will vary considerably, depending on the extent of the program and how the program is organized. Some of the outside costs that may be incurred include:

- Program consultation: Hourly basis \$40 to \$50 per hour
- Needs assessment: For an organization of 100 employees, a needs assessment may cost \$2,000 to \$4,000
- Classroom space: Space will need to be rented if classes are held off-site
- Pilot project: Average \$3,000 to \$6,000 if a course(s) delivered on-site
- Single session program: 10–15 week session (30–45 course hours), 5–15 students  
- 1 session, 1 instructor: typical cost: \$10,000

- 1 session, 4 courses (each 30–45 hours) up to 60 students: 4 instructors: typical cost: \$30,000
- Multiple session programs: - average cost ranges from \$40,000 to \$70,000 based on e.g. 2–3 sessions per year, 1–4 courses per session

In some provinces, some financial assistance may be available. Check with the appropriate agency listed in Appendix B.

It has cost one large Ontario employer who has assisted 300 employees in basic skills development (reading, writing, math, and computer skills) over the last five years, approximately \$600 per employee helped.

### **Be Realistic**

Improving employee literacy is only one part in achieving your workplace goals. However, failing to improve literacy levels may be a barrier to achieving the goals. Understanding how improved literacy will add to your overall improvement plans will help position your plan for success.

Also, be realistic about the progress and rate of progress that an employee may be able to achieve. For example, it is not realistic to expect that an employee with a grade 6 education to be able to complete requirements for the General Education Development (GED) certificate (high school equivalency) in six months. Good progress can be made, but it is important to review with your literacy provider(s) rates of progress that can be reasonably expected.

### **Innovative Practice**

Dofasco, as part of its Essential Skills undertaking, has initiated a program of employee-to-employee tutoring. Dofasco employees volunteer (unpaid) to work with employees participating in the essential skills program on a one-to-one basis outside of company time. This program has been well received, both by the volunteers and the participants. Costs to Dofasco are minimal. Volunteer screening and placement is done by the Essential Skills instructors. Again, confidentiality of essential skills participants is kept—except to the mentor.

### **New Immigrants**

Most recent immigrants, if not already skilled in English, will welcome help in improving their language skills. In addition, many recent arrivals will benefit from classes to help cultural integration. Many will have come from countries where business is conducted differently, and relationships between employee and management have been different. Many will welcome a chance to understand aspects of integrating into the community and society. Topics such as the school system and their role in helping in the education of their children, the meaning of statutory holidays, and many other topics will help speed their integration. This fairly small investment by an employer will pay off with increased employee respect and loyalty.

## **Another View**

There must be strong management commitment to make a literacy program work. An organization may only get one chance. If you decide to proceed with an essential skills program—do it well and show the same energy, enthusiasm, and skill as you would in introducing a new product innovation! Remember: although the organization expects to see benefits, the real customer is the employee. Consider the role of the customer in your product development, marketing, sales, and service. Do you listen to your customers? Do you respond to their needs? Do you adapt and change your products to meet changing needs? Do you make it easy for them to purchase your products? Keep these views in mind when you are designing and implementing your essential skills program.

## 4.4 PROGRAM PLANNING

The purpose of this phase is to develop the plans for implementing a workplace basic skills program. As there are many details as well as cost impacts of varying strategies for implementation, this phase will require a good understanding of the basis for management agreement, and communication with senior management during the development of plans.

Activities may include:

- Developing the objectives and goals for the program
- Assigning roles and responsibilities
- Informing employees about the program
- Creating a workplace committee involving employees, the union (if any), and management
- Contracting with an outside resource for help in developing and carrying out assessments, course requirements, sources of courses and instructors, employee evaluations, and program evaluations
- Conducting a needs assessment
- Defining the skill areas and success expectations to be included in program
- Determining employee relations policy on confidentiality and voluntary participation, and how these will be protected.
- Determining where classes will be held, who will be responsible for obtaining instructors, contractual plans for the training portion, etc.
- Development of the implementation strategy including consideration of an initial pilot project, marketing, and promotion
- Determining organization policy for course costs, course scheduling, pay, and other employee supports
- Ensuring management agreement/support

Further details on these activities follows:

### **1. Establish the objectives and goals for the program**

Your objectives will be drawn from the needs as determined by your business case. They should be a strategy in delivering your longer-term vision, and be part of your strategic plan. Specific goals will include defining measurable outcomes to help focus action steps and being able to assess progress and success. Preliminary goals at this point will help focus the planning process and development of action plans.

### **2. Establish roles and responsibilities**

As with any business project, ensuring a sound organization for the project will help to ensure success. This is a time when it is important that key roles are filled and responsibilities assigned. Two key roles include:

**Project Sponsor:** This is typically a member of senior management. In a small company, it will typically be the owner or general manager. In a larger organization, it will typically be a senior manager with a committed interest in the project and its success.

**Project Champion/Manager:** In successful projects, this person has come from a number of different sources. A member of the Human Resources Department is one source, but leadership may come from a line department, from union leadership, or from an outside resource as other examples.

If the worksite has a union(s), you need to determine how it will be involved. Several of the unions have basic skills development programs for their members and may be able to provide leadership in encouraging employees to join.

### 3. Letting the employees know

Do:

- Include the literacy project with other skill development programs
- Connect the project to business and job skill needs
- Stress skills development
- Include how employees will be involved in the planning

Don't:

- Use language like “literacy” or “basic skills”
- Single out employees in terms of their need to upgrade basic skills
- Promise promotions or job security on the basis of individual results from a program

### 4. Establish a workplace committee involving employees, the union (if any), and management

Many organizations have found that early and continuing employee participation in the planning and running of a basic skills program is essential to the success of the program. One of the first steps in the planning has been to create a management/employee workplace team.

Employee members can:

- Help identify issues and root causes
- Assist in the plan to address the training needs
- Assist in the selection of service providers
- Assist in the promotion and marketing strategy to other employees
- Be effective ambassadors for the program
- Help to develop workplace buy-in and ownership

Management needs to:

- Be receptive to employee input
- Listen and respond to employee concerns

The planning (and implementation) team should be prepared to listen, listen, listen, and adapt, adapt, adapt. The issues and the right course of actions may not always be what management thinks.

Membership on the team should:

- Reflect the diversity of the workplace
- Include employees who will be potential possible users of the program.

You will need to decide what the role and responsibilities will be for the committee.

Consider:

- How much time will membership on the committee require, and how will this be accommodated in work schedules?
- Who will provide leadership for the committee?
- Will the team be self-directed, or will it require a facilitator?
- What specific tasks will the committee work on?
- What team training and team building will be required?

#### **5. Contract with an outside resource for help in developing and carrying through assessments, course requirements, sources of courses and instructors, employee evaluations, and program evaluations**

Most organizations have used outside resources for many parts of their programs. There are two basic reasons for doing this:

- The organization does not have the necessary expertise in-house.
- The organization has adopted policies that keep the confidentiality of the individual assessments and other aspects of individual employee participation in the program.

Professional resources may be needed to:

- Conduct an essential skills needs assessment
- Do assessments of the essential skill levels of individuals
- Provide courses and instruction
- Provide individual tutoring
- Do program evaluations

In addition, depending on organizational needs other outside professional skills may also be needed.

Recommendation: Have the workplace committee participate in the selection of outside resources.

## **6. Conduct a Needs Assessment**

A skills needs assessment done by a skilled assessor will help to confirm the actual skill gaps that exist or could exist based on anticipated workplace plans. A typical needs assessment will document workplace essential skills needs.

The assessor will do this by:

- Analyzing workplace tasks and documents
- Interviewing employees for their background and abilities
- Documenting and measuring attitudes and expectations around education and training
- Investigating other aspects of the organization that relate to essential skills

The assessor may also use an employee survey, and/or a focus group(s) to obtain input. Normally, a sampling of employees and jobs will be involved.

Recommendation: Have the workplace committee participate in determining the scope and contents of the needs assessment.

## **7. Establish the skill areas and success expectations to be included in the program**

These should be based on the skills needs assessment.

Recommendation: Plan in conjunction with the Workplace Committee.

The needs assessor and/or the employees may have viewpoints that vary with management's viewpoint. Be open and receptive to the feedback. For example, management's perception may be that the reason employees do not do what management expects is that employees are lacking basic skills. The assessment feedback may be that management practices are a source of difficulty. It may be a sign that managers and supervisors would benefit from improving their management skills. The organization and its goals are best served by addressing all training needs positively, whether for employees or management.

## **8. Determine how individual training needs will be addressed**

Recommendations:

- Design training to address the specific gaps that have been identified (teach to the task).
- Include essential skills training in other skills training plans and schedule so that skills learned in training can be practiced/used very soon after training.
- Develop individual training plans for each person, based on his/her specific skills gaps.

**9. Determine employee relations policy on confidentiality and voluntary participation, and how these will be protected.**

Include input from the workplace committee. It is critical that once a policy has been established, it be kept. In some organizations, although there is a policy of confidentiality, there has been pressure from supervisors for the status and progress of one or more of his/her employees. The employees' confidence and willingness to participate in the program will stop if confidentiality is not kept.

**10. Determine organization policy for course costs, course scheduling, pay, and other employee supports**

Decisions made on costs, scheduling, pay, and other supports will reflect management commitment and the strength of the business case. Successful programs have generally been cost- and time-shared. Typical levels of support include:

- A. Course Costs
  - Paid for by company.
- B. Scheduling
  - Courses are scheduled to be convenient for employees.
  - Employees are consulted for best scheduling.
  - Typically courses may be scheduled before or after shifts.
  - Course schedules are worked out to be compatible with shift scheduling.
  - Supervisors support individuals in working shift scheduling conflicts/issues.
- C. Pay
  - It is common for the company to pay an employee one hour of regular wage rate for every two hours of courses attended. (Note: One way to do this is to schedule courses one hour on company time, and one hour on employee time. If this is done at the beginning or end of a shift, employees from two shifts may attend the same course.)
- D. Other Supports
  - Some programs offer to pay for childcare costs for an employee on a course outside of normal working hours.

**11. Determine where classes will be held, who will be responsible for obtaining instructors, contractual arrangements for the training portion, etc.**

The following outlines different approaches, with pros and cons to starting literacy and other skill development programs. As noted in the section "Getting Help", service providers may include: local colleges, local school system (e.g. school boards), voluntary

literacy organizations, literacy professionals/freelancers, and labour organizations.

Training Approach	Pros/Cons
1. Use of standard credit courses (high school or college)	Pro: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowest Cost</li> </ul> Cons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inflexible Schedule: May be difficult for employees to participate</li> <li>• Curriculum-based: Fixed course content – normally no tailoring for organization or individual needs</li> </ul>
2. Use of community-based literacy classes	Pros: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classes are free</li> <li>• Flexible access</li> </ul> Con: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not related to specific company needs: No company influence on program design, etc.</li> </ul>
3. Custom-designed courses or literacy supplier tailored courses	Pros: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility in content, timing, and location of course delivery</li> <li>• Greatest chance for success if material is focused, (specifically) applicable to the learner, and immediately usable</li> </ul> Cons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much more organization involvement</li> <li>• Higher cost</li> </ul>
4. Establish a Learning Centre	Pro: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy, convenient access for employees</li> <li>• Easier to offer individual programs</li> </ul> Cons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires allocation of space</li> <li>• Staffing considerations</li> <li>• On-site location may be deterrent for some participants</li> </ul>
5. Individual tutoring	Pro: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers greatest flexibility and ability to respond to individual needs</li> </ul> Con: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour intensive</li> </ul>

**12. Develop the implementation strategy including consideration of an initial pilot project, marketing, and promotion**

- In a very large organization, consider a pilot project in one or two departments to start.
- How the program is introduced to employees will affect its success. In developing your process consider:
  - a) A name that will convey the vision for the program, and encourage participation.
  - b) Tying in to, and building on other skill development programs. Can you bring them together under one umbrella program?
  - c) How your initiative can include development for people at all levels of the organization.
  - d) An event that lets people know they can learn and grow.
  - e) How will initial notification be made to employees.
  - f) Building fun into your kick-off.

### **13. Ensure management agreement/buy-in**

Before proceeding, ensure that the management team is kept in the loop. Successful programs require cooperation, active support, and effort by all managers and supervisors. There needs to be commitment at all levels. Each manager and supervisor needs to understand what is expected of them, and their buy-in secured. For example, a supervisor may need to schedule a person's shifts around training times. If the organization is doing some of the training on company time, then that needs to be worked into the schedule. Making a plan work will require everyone's support and commitment.

# Part V

## Literacy Skills Development: Program Implementation

### 5.1 Implementation & Evaluation

This phase implements the results of the organizing and planning phase. It is recommended that the workplace team assume a leading role in making decisions for the implementation phase. Activities may include:

#### 1. **Selling the program and gaining employee participation**

A plan may be necessary to develop interest and secure employee participation in an essential skills upgrading program. There are many factors that may influence people not to participate. The implementation plan should address possible barriers to participation, and have plans to overcome these barriers.

Some of the barriers may include:

- **Lack of Employee Interest**

The employee may never have thought about upgrading their literacy skills. They may consider that they are too old. The employee may be in denial that he/she has a problem or some may have developed coping skills that in their mind overcomes the problem. The employee may have come from a family or cultural background, or a community that has not valued “academic” skills. The employee may not understand the economic impact of his/her current abilities.

- **Fear, Anxiety, and Nervousness**

There may be fear of the unknown, anxiety about starting something new, and not knowing what to expect. The employee may be concerned about the nature and content of the training experience. Some may recall bad experiences—frustration and humiliation from their school days. There may be concerns about being centred out, concerns of not being able to do what’s expected, or concerns about showing a weakness.

- Scheduling and Personal Life Conflicts

Classes scheduled outside of the normal working hours may cause conflicts with personal life issues and responsibilities. Some of these may include childcare issues, transportation issues, family responsibilities, or unsupportive partners.

- Not Enough Drive to Take Action

The employee may not see a need to improve literacy skills. They may feel that higher literacy skills are not necessary for their job or personal life. They may also think that at this stage of their life, improvement is not worth the effort. Others may realize that they need improvement, but lack enough willpower to do something to improve. Taking steps to improve is making a change in their lives. This means taking a risk to make the change, and for some, the benefits do not seem to be worth the risk..

- Receiving Mixed Signals from Management and Fellow Employees

The employee may receive mixed signals about participating in the program. While senior management and human resources personnel may strongly support participation, the employee's supervisor, or even fellow employees may discourage participation if this creates other difficulties for them. The supervisor may give verbal or other signals of the problems created in having to schedule around the employee's absences from the workplace. Fellow employees may signal their unhappiness at having to pick up extra work. Lack of support from the employees' closest contacts in the workplace may be a large barrier.

Some actions that will help to overcome barriers include many of the recommendations contained in earlier sections such as:

- Involve employees actively in the design and implementation of the program.
- Listen to employees and make the design responsive to their concerns.
- Work hard to ensure agreement and support throughout the organization.
- Design training to be closely related to the employee's job or to his/her personal life, hands on, and usable very shortly after training.
- Employ instructors who have a real interest in the employees, and who can relate to the employee's jobs and personal lives.
- Ensure training uses adult education principles.
- Continue to work "barrier" issues, be flexible.

- May need a "hook":

*For many employees, school and formal learning situations may have ended many years ago. There may be a reluctance to volunteer for formal learning events or courses—particularly if school experiences were frustrating. Dofasco designed a course for all employees entitled "Learning to Grow" that put a positive and stimulating light on learning. This course introduced and promoted the concept of lifelong learning*

*and the need for all employees to continually build their skills and capabilities. This was coupled with a learning fair to stimulate employee interest in building their skills and capabilities.*

- For an individual employee drive to become involved in basic skills development may come from a non-work source.
- Success will breed success. A limited training event (both in selection of employees and in length) done well, can help build a core of believers who will spread the word. A second event, also done well can reinforce the positive experience. Events that are fun, non-stressful, and useful can start to break down the barriers and encourage participation.

## **2. Conducting individual assessments**

Employee basic skills assessment should only be carried out after a person has volunteered for skills development. The purpose of the assessment is to determine learning goals and course placement for the employee. The assessment should be completely confidential to the employee. In leading organizations, assessments are carried out by a third party assessor, and no individual results (only total results for a significant number of employees) are shared with anyone in the company. This confidentiality is needed to obtain and retain the confidence and participation of the employee.

## **3. Fine tuning actual course design and schedules**

It is recommended that the assessor and the workplace team work together to determine the best way to meet the needs identified through the individual assessment process. The key objectives will be to determine the best instructional methods (e.g. classroom, one-to-one, or peer tutoring). The workplace team should then be involved with the selection of the instructor(s), and the development of courses. Course material, if possible, should include actual workplace material. The workplace team can help facilitate with identification of materials and processes that would be suitable to include in the course(s). Scheduling of courses and individual training schedules needs to be done in conjunction with affected managers and supervisors, and participating employees, working conflicts and issues in a cooperative manner.

## **4. Running of classes**

The responsibility for logistics and communication of physical arrangements needs to be assigned and the person accountable:

- To make sure that classroom locations are determined and scheduled
- That support equipment, materials, etc., are available

Continued management support during this phase and ensuring that supervisors are supported and their issues are worked out is critical.

The workplace team can play a key role in monitoring the process, listening for issues, and assisting in the solving of issues as they arise.

## **5. Course evaluation**

Each course should have an evaluation including input from the instructor and participants. This can be a responsibility of the workplace team. This evaluation could include:

- Input from the instructor and participants
- Input on course related issues from supervisors and others affected
- Feedback from participants who did not complete the course

Learnings and improvement opportunities should be documented and used for continuous improvement of the program.

Be sure to thank participants and others who provided feedback.

## **6. Celebrating individual progress**

Individual assessments need to continue to be confidential, but recognition of completion of a course, and celebrating success, are important motivators, both for participants and others. Certificates and a presentation ceremony will recognize the success.

## **7. Program evaluation and continuous improvement**

Successful programs have processes in place for management to regularly review progress towards goals. These processes help:

- Hold those responsible to be accountable
- Demonstrate to the organization management's commitment
- Provide the opportunity to make changes to keep the program on-track

Do not forget to celebrate success as program goals are achieved!

Course evaluations and overall assessments of the program will provide input to make improvements and establish new expectations and goals. A regular review of the Key Success Factors in Section 6.2 as well as course reviews and other feedback received, will give insight for continuous improvement of the program and its success.

# Part VI

## Summary

### 6.1 Summary

Today, more than ever, business organizations need to increase their competitiveness. Innovation is the key to becoming more competitive. The skills and abilities of your employees are vital to your ability to innovate and keep a competitive edge. You need the participation of all your employees to make this happen.

The skills needed today may be very different than those required when your most experienced employees were hired. Further, the necessary skill sets will continue to change. These new skill sets usually require higher literacy skills: a good ability to read and understand written materials and documents, and the ability to understand and use sophisticated math and numeracy principles. Yet 30% to 40% of employees employed in manufacturing in Canada have difficulty in functioning at needed reading and numeracy levels. Many of these are experienced employees who possess valuable and difficult to replace knowledge of your business.

This Guidebook challenges you:

- To understand the situation in your organization
- To understand the impact literacy has in your organization, and the business case for taking action to improve the literacy skills of your employees

Leading organizations are making the investment in their employees. Often, they are finding that it is an investment that starts the organization on a path of ongoing learning and skill building that continues to build the strength of the organization, and ability to innovate and compete. It lays the foundation to:

- Improve problem solving
- Improve the ability to introduce and handle change
- Introduce new technologies
- Improve employee relations and confidence of employees
- Improve productivity, quality, and safety

The following pages summarize key factors of many of the successful literacy programs. They may be useful as a checklist for your program.

## 6.2 Essential Skills Program – Key Success Factors

### 1. Management Commitment

- Employee skill development is part of the strategic plan for the organization
- Roles for leadership and management of skill development are defined and responsibilities assigned
- Program goals and action plans are developed
- Management regularly reviews program progress, and makes changes when needed
- Enough funding is provided to manage program
- At least part of training time is on Company time and employees are paid for this time
- Management works scheduling issues to ensure employees can attend courses
- Management throughout the organization visibly show support for the program and employee participation

### 2. Employee Involvement

Employees are involved as partners in the planning and running the program. Employee input affects all aspects of the program, including:

- Development of goals and action plans
- Communication plans and communications with employees
- Selection of consultants, assessors, instructors, etc.
- Planning and doing needs assessments
- Course design
- Company policies on confidentiality, voluntary participation, etc.
- Course scheduling
- Program evaluations and recommendations
- Program changes and evolution

### 3. Planning

- Essential skill development is part of an overall plan for developing skills and capabilities of all employees.
- A formal needs assessment has been carried out and used for skill development plans. The needs assessment is renewed on a regular basis.

- Persons with (appropriate) expertise carry out the workplace needs assessments.
- Employee input is used along with the needs assessment to develop training plans.
- Policies on confidentiality and voluntary participation are in place.
- Procedures for individual assessments are in place.
- Training plans are goal-based and focused on job or personal needs, usable on the job, and individualized to participants development needs.
- Strategies are in place to reach out and encourage employee participation.

#### **4. Communication**

Effective strategies to management and employees are in place for:

- Letting employees know
- Communicating process and involvement in the workplace needs assessment, and communicating results of the workplace needs assessment
- Promoting employee participation in the program
- Communicating ongoing status of the program
- Celebrating success
- Communicating changes, improvements, etc.

#### **5. Effective Operation of the Program**

- Instructors and other persons are qualified and effective for their role and responsibilities
- Instructors are enthusiastic and hands-on, who show a genuine interest in the employees' jobs
- Instructors “teach to the task” using materials and examples from the workplace
- Policies on confidentiality and voluntary participation are enforced
- Conflict issues are worked through and resolved

#### **6. Continuous Improvement**

- Processes are in place to listen and to change the program in response to employee and management issues and concerns
- Process is in place for regular program evaluation and identification of improvement opportunities
- Action is taken to develop and implement agreed next steps



# Appendices

## Appendix A. Rules for Writing Plain English

Adapted from: How You Can Write Plain Language by Just Following These Thirty-Nine Steps, by William Lutz, and input from Jane Tuer, Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington

### **The Writing Process**

- 1 Know your reader, and write with your reader's viewpoint in mind
- 2 Organize your text:
  - (a) in a logical sequence
  - (b) with informative headings, and
  - (c) with a table of contents for long documents
- 3 Use short sentences
- 4 Say only what you have to say, avoiding too many messages in a single sentence, and omitting surplus words. Avoid using “and” when you can use a “.”
- 5 Keep equivalent items parallel
- 6 Avoid unnecessary formality
- 7 Give an overview of the main idea of the text
- 8 List conditions separately
- 9 Arrange your words with care
- 10 Punctuate carefully
- 11 Use an average of 25 words per sentence
- 12 Put most of your messages at the subject-predicate position
- 13 For variety or emphasis, invert your sentences
- 14 Use the art of subordination to smooth out choppiness
- 15 Avoid disrupting your sentences with thought-stopping gaps
- 16 Tabulate particularly complex information
- 17 Get rid of compound prepositions
- 18 Rewrite the adjective, adverb, and noun clauses to other structures satisfying the same functions
- 19 Use phrases to smooth out the choppy noun-noun modifier
- 20 Be fair and non-sexist, but don't be stupid

## Usage

- 21 Prefer the active voice
- 22 Use simple, "everyday" words
- 23 Use words consistently
- 24 Use familiar, concrete words
- 25 Use small words...try to keep to less than three syllables, unless you are dealing with common endings (e.g. -ly, -ing, -ment)...compound words with each separate word containing one or two syllables are considered "easy"
- 26 When listing ideas/points do it in bullet points rather than in paragraph format
- 27 Repetition...if you must use larger or uncommon words...repeat them often within the first few paragraphs of use. The more one can read them in context, the better the chances of understanding what they mean
- 28 Avoid using words that have many meanings
- 29 Avoid multiple negatives
- 30 Avoid nouns created from verbs
- 31 Use action verbs; avoid the verb "to be"
- 32 Use personal pronouns
- 33 Avoid noun strings
- 34 Avoid [whiz-deletions\\*](#)
- 35 Avoid language quirks

## Presentation of Material

- 36 Make the document attractive and designed for easy reading
- 37 Use white space in margins and between sections
- 38 Use ragged right margins
- 39 Do not use all caps
- 40 Use highlighting techniques, but don't overuse them
- 41 Use a larger font: at least 12 point type for text
- 42 Choose a clear font
- 43 Avoid lines of type that are too long or too short
- 44 Avoid strings of symbols

### **\*Whiz Deletions**

Subordinate clauses are often introduced by such words as "which is," "who was", "that are", etc. Deleting these words (the relative pronoun and linking verb) is known as "whiz-deletion". For example:

1. The supervisor wants the report, which was written by the Purchasing Office.

With a whiz-deletion we get:

1. The supervisor wants the report written by the Purchasing Office.

The whiz-deletion makes sentence too ambiguous. Does the supervisor want the Purchasing Office to write the report, or does she want the report that the Purchasing Office has already written? Generally, it's a good idea to avoid whiz-deletions.

Source: <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/Resources/lutz.htm>



## Appendix B. SOURCES OF HELP

Alberta	<p><b>Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Steering Team (AWES)</b></p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 780-427-5717</p> <p><b>Alberta Association for Adult Literacy</b>          332 6 Ave. S. E., #605          Calgary, AB T2G 4S6</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 403-297-4994  <b>Fax:</b> 403-297-6037  <b>Email:</b> office@aaal.ab.ca  <b>Website:</b> www.nald.ca/aaal.htm</p>
British Columbia	<p><b>Literacy BC</b>          601-510 West Hastings Street          Vancouver, BC          V6B 1L8</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 604-684-0624  <b>Toll free in BC:</b> 1-800-663-1293  <b>Fax:</b> 604-684-8520  <b>Email:</b> info@literacy.bc.ca  <b>Website:</b> www.nald.ca/lbc.htm</p>
Manitoba	<p><b>Workplace Education Manitoba</b>          200-800 Portage Ave.          Winnipeg, MB R3G 0N4</p> <p>Contact: Sandi Howell          Advanced Education &amp; Training, Industry Training Partnerships,          Manitoba Government</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 204-945-1682  <b>Fax:</b> 204-945-0356  <b>Email:</b> showell@gov.mb.ca  <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.wem.mb.ca">www.wem.mb.ca</a></p>
New Brunswick	<p><b>Literacy New Brunswick Inc.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Place 2000          250 King Street          P.O. Box 6000          Fredericton, NB          E3B 5H1</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 506-457-7323  <b>Fax:</b> 506-453-3300</p> <p><b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.anbi-lnbi.nb.ca/English/LNBhome.htm">www.anbi-lnbi.nb.ca/English/LNBhome.htm</a></p>

	<p><b>New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy</b>  944 Prospect Street  Fredericton, NB E3B 9M6</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 506-457-1227  <b>Toll free in NB:</b> 1-800-563-2211  <b>Fax:</b> 506-458-1352  <b>Email:</b> nbcl@nbnet.nb.ca  <b>Website:</b> www.nald.ca/nbclhom.htm</p>
<p>Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</p>	<p><b>Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland &amp; Labrador</b>  PO Box 8174, Station A  St. John's, NF A1B 3M9</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 709-738-7323  <b>Toll Free:</b> 1-800-563-1111  <b>Fax:</b> 709-738-7353  <b>Email:</b> dcoish@literacydevelopmentcouncil.nf.net  <b>Website:</b> www.nald.ca/nfldlit.htm</p>
<p>Nova Scotia</p>	<p><b>Nova Scotia Department of Education</b>  Marjorie Davison, Manager, Labour Market Programs,  Skill Development &amp; Training  4th Floor, 2021 Brunswick St., P.O. Box 578  Halifax, NS B3J 2S9</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 902-424-5191  <b>Fax:</b> 902-424-0489  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:davisome@gov.ns.ca">davisome@gov.ns.ca</a></p> <p><b>Nova Scotia Federation of Labour</b>  Linda Wentzel, Workplace Education Coordinator  PO Box 1750, Lunenburg, NS</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 902-634-4501  <b>Fax:</b> 902-527-8648  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:linda.wentzel@ns.sympatico.ca">linda.wentzel@ns.sympatico.ca</a></p> <p><b>Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia</b>  Margan Dawson  33 Old Mill Road, Hammonds Plains, NS B3Z 1K3</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 902-835-7949</p> <p>The Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition  P.O. Box 1516  Truro, NS  B2N 5V2</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 902-897-2444  <b>Toll Free:</b> 1-800-255-5203  <b>Fax:</b> 902-897-4020  <b>E-mail:</b> nsplc@truro.nsc.ca  <b>Website:</b> www.nald.ca/nsplc.htm</p>

Northwest Territories,  
and Nunavut

**NWT Literacy Council**

Box 761  
5122-48th Street  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N6

**Tel:** 867-873-9262  
**Fax:** 867-873-2176  
**Email:** [info@nwtliteracy.ca](mailto:info@nwtliteracy.ca)  
**Website:** [www.nald.ca/nwtlc.htm](http://www.nald.ca/nwtlc.htm)

**Workplace Education:  
Consultant, Literacy Support Services  
Literacy & Adult Education**

Colleges & Careers Development  
GNWT Department of Education, Culture and  
Employment  
P.O. Box 1320  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

**Tel:** 867-920-8816  
**Fax:** 867-873-0237  
**Email:** [nwtliteracy@gov.nt.ca](mailto:nwtliteracy@gov.nt.ca)

## Ontario

For general advice and routing to regional organizations, colleges, schools, and other providers contact:

**Ministry of Education and Training  
(Ontario Government Training Hotline)**

**Tel: 1-800-387-5656 or  
416-326-5656**

or the

**Ontario Literacy Coalition**

**Tel: 416-963-5787**

365 Bloor Street East  
Suite 1003  
Toronto, ON M4W 3L4

**Fax:** 416-963-8102  
**Email:** [olc@on.literacy.ca](mailto:olc@on.literacy.ca)  
**Website:** [www.on.literacy.ca](http://www.on.literacy.ca)

### **Regions Organizations:**

Adult Basic Education Association of Hamilton	<b>Tel:</b> 905-527-2222
Literacy Network of Durham Region (Oshawa)	905-725-4786
Literacy Link of Eastern Ontario (LLEO) (Kingston)	613-389-5307
Literacy Network Northeast (Timmins)	705-267-5663
Literacy Link Niagara (St. Catharines)	905-937-8887
Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) (London)	519-681-7307
Literacy Northwest (Thunder Bay)	807-622-6666
Literacy Ontario Central South (LOCS) (Peterborough)	705-749-0675
Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML)	416-961-4013
Mid North Network for Adult Learning (Sudbury)	705-560-4774
Ottawa-Carleton Coalition for Literacy	613-233-3232
Peel/Halton/Dufferin Adult Learning Network (Mississauga)	905-812-3533
Project READ Literacy Network (Kitchener)	519-570-3054
Quill Network (Walkerton)	519-881-4655
Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network (Barrie)	705-730-1414
Tri-County Literacy Network (Chatham)	519-355-1771

<p>Prince Edward Island</p>	<p><b>Workplace Education PEI</b>  P.O. Box 3254  3 Queen Street  Charlottetown, PEI C1A 8W5</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 902-368-6280  <b>Fax:</b> 902-368-4844  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:workpei@pei.sympatico.ca">workpei@pei.sympatico.ca</a>  <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.nald.ca/wepei.htm">http://www.nald.ca/wepei.htm</a></p> <p><b>PEI Literacy Alliance</b>  11 Queen Street, 1st Floor,  P.O. Box 400  Charlottetown, PE C1A 7K7</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 902-368-3620  <b>Fax:</b> 902-368-3269  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:peiliteracy.alliance@pei.sympatico.ca">peiliteracy.alliance@pei.sympatico.ca</a>  <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.nald.ca/peila.htm">www.nald.ca/peila.htm</a></p>
<p>Quebec</p>	<p><i>English:</i>  <b>Literacy Partners of Quebec</b>  4855 Kensington Ave.,  Montreal, Quebec H3X 3S6</p> <p><b>Tel.:</b> 514-369-7962  <b>Fax:</b> 514-489-5302  <b>LEARN Line</b> 514-369-4447  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:jbrandeis@nald.ca">jbrandeis@nald.ca</a>  <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.nald.ca/lpq.htm">www.nald.ca/lpq.htm</a></p>
<p>Saskatchewan</p>	<p><b>Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board</b>  202-2222 13th Avenue  Regina, SK S4P 3M7</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 306-352-5999  <b>Fax:</b> 306-757-7880  <b>Toll free</b> 1-800-394-3899</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:sfdb@sfdb.com">sfdb@sfdb.com</a>  <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.sfdb.com">www.sfdb.com</a></p> <p><b>Saskatchewan Literacy Network</b>  206-220-3rd Ave. South  Saskatoon SK S7K 1M1</p> <p><b>Tel:</b> 306-653-7368  <b>Fax:</b> 306-653-1704  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:saskliteracy@sasktel.net">saskliteracy@sasktel.net</a>  <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.nald.ca/sklitnet.htm">www.nald.ca/sklitnet.htm</a></p>

Yukon	<b>Yukon Learn</b> 308 Hanson Street, Whitehorse, YT Y1A 1Y6  <b>Tel:</b> 867-668-6280 <b>Toll Free:</b> 1-888-668-6280 <b>Fax:</b> 867-633-4576 <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:learn@yukonlearn.com">learn@yukonlearn.com</a> <b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.nald.ca/yuklearn.htm">www.nald.ca/yuklearn.htm</a>
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# Appendix C. References

## Organizations

### ABC CANADA

ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation is a national, registered charitable organization committed to promoting literacy to the general public and to the private sector. It is a partnership of business, labour, educators and government. ABC CANADA focuses on public awareness programs and creates and conducts national literacy awareness campaigns, provides promotional support to local literacy groups, and conducts research to further the development of a fully literate Canadian population.

ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation  
1450 Don Mills Road  
Don Mills, ON M3B 2X7

Tel: 416-442-2998 in the greater Toronto area, or 1-800-303-1004  
Fax: 416-442-2987  
E-mail: [abc@corporate.southam.ca](mailto:abc@corporate.southam.ca)

Website: [www.abc-canada.org](http://www.abc-canada.org)

### The National Adult Literacy Database Inc. (NALD)

The National Adult Literacy Database Inc. (NALD) is a federally incorporated, non-profit service organization that fills the crucial need for a single-source, comprehensive, up-to-date, and easily accessible database of adult literacy programs, resources, services, and activities across Canada. It also links with other services and databases in North America and overseas.

**National Adult Literacy Database Inc.**  
Scovil House, 703 Brunswick Street  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 1H8  
**Tel:** (506) 457-6900/**1-800-720-NALD (6253)**  
**Fax:** (506) 457-6910  
**E-mail:** [contactnald@nald.ca](mailto:contactnald@nald.ca)  
**Website:** [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)

### Conference Board of Canada

Website: [www.conferenceboard.ca](http://www.conferenceboard.ca)

## Literacy in Canada

*The International Adult Literacy Survey* website: <http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/introduc.htm>

*Reading the Future: A portrait of Literacy in Canada*. Starts at [www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsreps/ialsbk1.htm](http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsreps/ialsbk1.htm)

*Breaching The Barriers to Workplace Literacy, Phase I Report*, Conference Board of Canada, January, 2001. (<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/pdf/barriers.pdf>)

*Nonparticipation in Literacy and Upgrading Programs, A National Study*, by Ellen Long, Leanne Taylor, Doug Hart, 2002. Published by ABC CANADA, 333 King Street East, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5A 4N2

## Literacy Program Implementation Guidance

*Workplace Literacy Central*, Conference Board of Canada:  
([www.conferenceboard.ca/workplaceliteracy/default.asp](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/workplaceliteracy/default.asp))

*Workplace Education Program Implementation Models: The Roles of Companies and Literacy Networks in Workplace Education*, by Paul Leegsma, Dale Iljow, and Paula Kent-Kuchmeyer, published by Adult Basic Education Association of Hamilton, 22 King St E. Hamilton, Ont. L8N 1A3.

*Workplace Literacy and Basic Skills*, Sue Folinsbee, published by National Literacy Secretariat, Ottawa K1A 1K5, 1990, updated 1994.

*Good Practice in Use – Guidelines for Good Practice in Workplace Education*, Mary Ellen Belfiore, published by Ontario Literacy Coalition, September 2002.

## Workplace Training Modules

*Team Time Training*      Contact: Workplace Education Consultants  
Tel: 604-270-6899 local 246  
or  
Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters  
BC Division  
Tel: 604-713-7800



Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME)  
5995 Avbury Road - Ste.900  
Mississauga, ON L5R 3P9  
905-568-8300  
[ontarioinfo@cme-mec.ca](mailto:ontarioinfo@cme-mec.ca)