

2009

*ACCC Workplace Essential Skills
Training Program Summary*



VANCOUVER ISLAND
UNIVERSITY

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Executive Summary

Purpose

Canada is experiencing labour shortages due to increased retirement rates for those in the “baby boom” generation and diminished numbers of youth entering the labour market. These changing workforce demographics are also leading to skill shortages in workplace essential skill areas. The fundamental skills considered essential for today’s workplace include reading, document use, writing, numeracy, oral communication, thinking, working with others, computer use, and personal management (HSRDC, 2006). To ensure that the labour force has the essential skills needed for success, there is work to be done in facilitating assessment and training to ensure that more workers have these required skills to meet the ever-changing demands of business and industry (Goldenberg, 2006).

The purpose of this project is to assist small business employers in recruiting, training and retaining skilled workers, by identifying key training and development resources for enhancing employees’ essential skills in four, key areas (spoken communication, thinking, teamwork, and computer skills). This study is an extension of the *Small Business Workplace Essential Skills Needs Assessment* that was conducted in June, 2008, in partnership with the BC Chamber of Commerce to investigate the workplace essential skills needs and issues in the small business sector. The current study identifies the current training programs available in the Nanaimo area for enhancing the workplace essential skills of specific target groups, including youth, women, Aboriginal Peoples, and immigrants. It was also conducted to determine how available programs and services might be strengthened to meet the growing demand for skilled workers in the small business sector.

Research Design

An inductive research approach was used to conduct interviews with several

not-for-profit service providers in the Nanaimo area (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). An MBA student completed personal interviews in September-October, 2008, with five service providers who were selected based on their role in addressing the needs of the defined target groups, including: Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, Global Vocational Services Inc, Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Snuneymuxw First Nation, and Nanaimo Women's Resources Society. The interviews included a mix of open and closed questions to obtain specific information about available and needed workplace essential skills training programs within the community. Narrative results from the personal interviews were summarized as background information for the recommendations put forward, and to develop the *Essential Skills Guide for Employers* (attached).

Summary of the Findings

According to the results of the interviews, various training programs are offered by service providers to help participants develop goal-setting, decision-making, and core employability skills. These programs include: English language programs, volunteer tutor programs, and career and employment training programs. Interview results contributed to the development of recommendations for improving current workplace essential skills training programs in the Nanaimo area. The *Essential Skills Guide for Employers* (attached) was also compiled to help employers locate and use resources for addressing the workforce essential skills needs within their organizations.

Introduction

Due to the fact that technology is changing rapidly, skilled workers are in acute demand. According to Mark Goldenberg (2006), Canada is experiencing rising and ever-changing skills requirements in all sectors of the economy and all parts of the country. And with the retirement of many baby boomers and a smaller pool of younger workforce entrants, the shortage of skilled labor in Canada is becoming serious. Therefore, training must be offered on an ongoing basis so that workers' knowledge and skills remain current.

The current study investigates the training programs available in the Nanaimo area for enhancing the workplace essential skills of specific groups of workers, including: youth, women, Aboriginal Peoples, and immigrants in Nanaimo. The research project was specifically designed to meet the following objectives: develop a list of service providers in the Nanaimo area that address essential skills development needs for the targeted groups; conduct personal interviews with identified service providers to collect available curriculum resources and training programs that are designed for these identified groups; provide recommendations based on the results of interview findings; and conduct an Internet search of generic online resources that can be used independently by employers for strengthening essential skills development within their organizations.

The research report is organized into four main sections: 1) Introduction – includes a discussion of the significance and purpose of this study; 2) Situational Analysis – offers an overview of Canada's current labour market and provides a summary of relevant findings from the *Small Business Workplace Essential Skills Needs Assessment Report*; 3) Methods – provides a description of the research methodology used for conducting the service provider interviews, along with the summarized interview results; 4) Recommendations – uses interview results and relevant research literature to make suggestions for improving current training programs to meet the

current and future training needs of workers in Nanaimo's small business sector. The *Essential Skills Guide for Employers* (attached) was also compiled to serve as an independent resource for employers wanting to strengthen the workplace essential skills within their organizations and for the benefit of their employees.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

At least a quarter-million jobs at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Canada are vacant due to a shortage of qualified workers (HSRDC, 2007). Therefore, investing in the skills training of current workers is the key to business success in today's knowledge economy. Essential skills provide the foundation for learning other skills and for enabling people to develop and adapt to workforce changes. Assisting workers to develop essential skills will help employers solve their labour and skills shortages, while also ensuring that their businesses remain competitive and profitable. The current research study was designed to contribute valuable information for recommending how essential skills training programs can remain relevant and flexible toward meeting workers' training and development needs.

Situational Analysis

General Labor and Skills Shortages

Workforce shortages are considered to be a serious threat to Canada's economic health and prosperity. Canada is reported to have one of the most acute labour shortages in the industrialized world, given current and forecasted workforce demographics. According to HSRDC (2007) data included in Tables 1 and 2, skills shortages are summarized as follows:

- Occupations in the oil and gas sectors are facing shortages in skilled workers, mainly as a result of large-scale investments. These pressures are expected to continue due to an expansion of tar sands projects in Alberta.
- Some occupations in the trades, such as home builders and renovators, are facing critical labour shortages.
- A large percentage of Aboriginal Youth is unemployed or under-employment and many small business employers have stereotypic attitudes about their motivation and basic work skills.
- There are huge shortages in the high-technology sector, such as computer engineers and medical specialists. Growth in demand for these occupations has been strong due to rising needs associated with an aging population and increases in government funding for health care. In addition, the technical schools and colleges cannot keep up with demand resulting from expanding businesses.
- Management occupations at the senior level are experiencing shortages because of high levels of retirement.
- Some occupations in the social sciences and government service areas (especially university teachers) are in short supply as a result of retirements.

Relationship to Previous Research

The current research project builds on the results of the *Small Business Workplace*

Essential Skills Needs Assessment that was conducted in the Vancouver Island and Interior/Okanagan Regions (MacFadgen, 2008). The previous study integrated results from the small business employers' survey, key informant interviews, and small business success stories to identify workplace essential skills gaps and challenges that employers are facing in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce. Results from the survey of 121 SMEs involved in retail, hospitality, tourism and construction industry showed that employers consider thinking, oral communication, working with others and personal management skills to be important workplace essential skills that employees need to succeed. In addition, employers identified the following challenges for retaining skilled workers: compensation issues (they cannot afford to offer competitive wages/benefits); skilled shortages (low supply of skilled workers in specific categories); and demographic realities (low supply of workforce entrants and increased retirements). Several of the suggested strategies for addressing these challenges involved creating incentives for providing training, career advancement, and benefits packages. Combined needs assessment results also emphasized the need to "tap" under-utilized segments of the workforce, including older workers, re-entry women, Aboriginal Peoples, immigrants, and persons with disabilities.

This current research extends the results of the *Small Business Workplace Essential Skills Needs Assessment* by conducting specific interviews with service providers about their available training programs for addressing the workplace essential skills for target groups including youth, women, Aboriginal Peoples and immigrants in the Nanaimo area. It will provide helpful information for evaluating current workplace essential skills training programs in the Nanaimo area and for recommending further improvements.

Methods

This research project was specifically designed to identify the training programs available for enhancing the workplace essential skills of target groups including youth, women, Aboriginal Peoples and immigrants in the Nanaimo area. By using informed consent forms, service providers were assured that the information they provided would remain anonymous and confidential. Qualitative research techniques (as outlined by Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007) were used for the personal interviews to explore the current training resources available and needed for developing and/or strengthening employees' workplace essential skills.

Participants

Using web-based service inventories, nine service providers were selected that offered relevant skills training for the target groups of interest. These included:

- ETHOS Career Management Group
- Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society
- Supporting Employment Transitions in Nanaimo
- Nanaimo Youth Services Association
- Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- Nanaimo Women's Resources Society
- Global Vocational Services, Inc.
- Community Futures Central Island

Due to the time constraints of service providers and the scheduling difficulties encountered during the three-week period, interviews were held with the following five (5) service providers:

1. Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society;
2. Nanaimo Women's Resources Society;
3. Global Vocational Services, Inc.;

4. Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre; and
5. Snuneymuxw First Nation.

Interview Process

Interview questions were crafted to obtain specific information about available training programs for improving the workplace essential skills of targeted workers in the community (see below). In total, there were eight interview questions prepared using the inductive interview approach recommended by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007). The interview began with an open-ended question to give participants an opportunity to define and describe their services. Probing questions were used to solicit responses that were of significance to the research topic. And finally, closed questions were used to obtain service provider perspectives on how to improve workplace essential skills training for specific groups of workers.

Open-Ended Question

1. Would you please describe your organization with respect to its mandate and the individuals served?

Probing Questions

2. The purpose of this project is to research the training resources available in the community for individuals to find and retain employment. What types of training programs or curriculum resources do you provide to improve the workplace essential skills of immigrants, women, Aboriginal Peoples, and youth?
3. A particular focus of our study is investigating available training materials and curriculum in relation to four essential skill areas, including spoken communication, thinking skills, teamwork and computer skills. Do your resources address these specific skill areas? Please describe (e.g. program goals, delivery and evaluation details).
4. Your clients may have different skill levels, as well as different cultural and

employment backgrounds. How do you prepare your training programs to address these diverse needs?

5. In your opinion, what is the most important factor for developing successful training programs for clients with diverse needs?
6. What is working well in providing workplace essential skills training programs for your clients?
7. What if any, specific challenges do you face in providing workplace essential skills training programs for your clients?

Closed Question

8. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for improving the workplace essential skills training that is offered to immigrants, women, Aboriginal Peoples and youth in our community?

Interview Results

Interview data are summarized under the following headings: Organizational Description, Current Training Programs, Program Features, and Major Challenges.

Organizational Description

Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)

CVIMS is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of immigrant settlement. The organization promotes the values of equity, inclusion and diversity by providing supportive services to immigrants. They offer English classes, employment and immigrant settlement services, as well as other related services such as diversity programs (CVIMS, 2008).

Nanaimo Women's Resources Society (NWRS)

NWRS is a non-profit organization, based in a central downtown Nanaimo location. The organization offers women's resources, services, and information on a

drop-in, programmatic, and referral basis. Various gender-based issues are addressed, including legal resources for family law, abuse and prevention of violence, women's self-esteem, affordable housing, and family resources (NWRS, 2008).

Global Vocational Services, Inc.

Global Vocational Services, Inc. was incorporated in 1996 and provides individual vocational and employment counselling and career organization workshops to support those in career transition. Clients are offered information on the latest industry trends for their self-directed job search, as well as skills-based job search and career development workshops (Global Vocational Services, Inc., 2008).

Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre

Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre is a non-profit organization, based in Nanaimo since 1965, that is registered as a Post-Secondary Training Institution with the Private Career Training Institutions Agency of British Columbia. The organization creates an environment of justice, fairness and equality for Aboriginal Peoples and their fellow employees with a mission to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal Peoples living in an urban environment. It offers educational and training programs, health and counseling services, social service programs, and a wide variety of special cultural events and activities in the community (Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, 2008).

Snuneymuxw First Nation

The Snuneymuxw First Nation people have lived along the eastern coast of south-central Vancouver Island for an estimated 5000 years. Their population is about 1300 with 65% of their membership living off reserve in the surrounding city of Nanaimo. The Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN) offers community health services (e.g. prenatal/postnatal care, youth and family counselling, wellness counselling and family healing services), housing, daycare and youth centre services, educational workshops, and support groups to protect their culture and assist their members (SFN, 2008).

Current Training Programs

The work-related training programs that are offered by the five, selected service providers are summarized as follows:

English Language Programs

English Language Services for adults provided by Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society offer theme-based language training programs and orientation to Canadian culture. Qualified ESL teachers provide classroom learning, progress testing, guest speakers, and occasional field trips to community resources. Programs are based on Canadian Language Benchmarks Levels 1-5, with Level 5 activity focused on labour market transitions supported by computer training and job practicum resources.

Social Development Programs

Snuneymuxw First Nation assists youth (between the ages of 18 and 30) in transitioning into the work place over a 24 week period. The program provides youth with tools, information, certification, work experience, and supportive counseling to encourage youth to continue with their education and training. The program is broken up into 3 parts: Part 1 (8 weeks Skill Development) – focuses on life skills and the nine essential skills required for the workplace, as well as developing a career plan that identifies training and educational goals (may include certification training); Part 2 (3 weeks Community Work) – matches participants with employers for work-related projects and events that support participants' career planning goals; and Part 3 (12 weeks Nanaimo Work Experience) - participants gain work experience with Nanaimo employers in settings that match their career goals/plans.

Adult Basic Education Level 2 & 3 & General Education Development (GED)

The ABE program is offered by Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre. The Centre provides adult Aboriginal learners with an alternative to attending the ABE program offered at Vancouver Island University, and with the same accreditation. After

completion of the program, students receive an official transcript detailing completed courses and corresponding marks. With this program, Aboriginal students can complete their academic courses, while participating in traditional cultural practices and workshops. The General Education Development Classes prepare students for their GED Certificate, which is recognized as the equivalent of a high school diploma.

The Career and Employment Training Program

The Career and Employment Training Program at Global Vocational Services, Inc. provides a variety of services for those who are seeking employment, or who wish to upgrade their job skills. For example, services include job search and career development workshops, help with writing resumes and cover letters, a lending library with over 1200 titles on job search and career development, and access to 21 computers with high-speed Internet along with fax, telephone and photocopying services for those in an active job search or transitioning to employment.

Building Bridges: Goals, Decisions, Action Program

Nanaimo Women's Resources Society provides a 12- week adult education workshop series, at no cost to women in the community. It is designed to help women develop goal-setting, decision-making, and practical action skills for bridging to more formal employment and continuous learning opportunities. Based on an adult education model, the program encourages participants to consider all aspects of personal, employment and educational planning that will contribute to success. It incorporates supportive systems for assisting participants in developing and realizing their individualized action plans. Emphasis will be placed on positive communication skills, assertiveness training, coping skills for managing stress and conflict, and the identification of achievable goals, objectives, and actions that are based on individual skills and interests.

Program Features

The results of the service provider interviews were used to create a summary of effective training program features for addressing diverse clients' needs. The following program structures and processes were highlighted:

- English language training programs address a range of client skill levels, while also accommodating different cultural and employment backgrounds. Effective training programs include content that is based on Canadian customs and laws. This is an effective starting point for new immigrants, as it helps to orientate them to Canadian society, and to become familiar with Canadian work environments.
- Service providers must be creative and flexible to address individual client needs. Training programs that link skills training to work experience lead to greater client learning and employability outcomes.
- Training programs that address a broad range of workplace essential skills (e.g. teamwork, communication, computer and thinking) are the most effective in building foundational skills.
- The most successful training programs use real-world situations and experiential learning to stimulate clients' interest and to practice workplace essential skills.
- Effective training programs create a welcoming and supportive learning climate with clients and instructors treated as equals. Instructors who share similar experiences and have a common language are particularly effective.

Major Challenges

The following list outlines the major challenges that service providers face when delivering workplace essential skills training programs:

- There is a general lack of awareness in business and industry about what essential skills are and why they are important. This creates a barrier when promoting training programs.
- A lack of sufficient, dedicated funding is one of the greatest barriers to providing

workplace essential skills training programs for clients. Due to limited resources, service providers are committed to meeting basic needs and many are unable to offer workplace essential skills.

- Racism is a problem for employers and many people still have stereotypic attitudes towards Aboriginal Peoples with respect to their motivation and basic work skills. As a result, there are challenges in hiring and training Aboriginal workers.
- Most employers are seeking workers with local work experience, and this presents an employment barrier for new immigrants. Not all service providers can offer training programs that include local work experience.
- In the Nanaimo area, there is no educational institution that can offer certified workplace essential skills training for staff. Service providers must send their employees to Douglas College to obtain credentials, which increases program costs and scheduling difficulties.

Recommendations

Results from the service provider interviews suggest that training programs all have the same goal - to assist unemployed people in developing life skills and workplace essential skills for pursuing further education and work experience. The following recommendations were based on summarized findings:

- Service providers should be willing to review and update their training programs to remain responsive to clients' needs. They need to have a means for soliciting client feedback to assess the relevance of their training programs. In addition, they are encouraged to adopt methods for evaluating client progress to enhance program outcomes. As a result, service providers will need to be flexible about where, when, and how programs are delivered to be effective.
- Textbooks and written materials must be supplemented by interactive workshops and practical exercises to strengthen clients' learning and skills transfer. This will help participants feel more comfortable practicing new skills in the classroom, while enabling them to more readily apply what they learning in the workplace.
- The development of a partnership model is recommended as collaboration between business and industry, Vancouver Island University (VIU), and other educational institutes, to design and deliver customized workplace essential skills training programs. Specialized training programs could be investigated, such as ERIC – Effective Reading in Context that was developed for Syncrude Canada Oil Company, in partnership with Keyano College. This program, which is Canada's first workplace literacy program, could serve as a model for other partnership training programs (Education and Learning, 2005).
- Training programs should address both technical skills used on the job and the foundational skills workers need to apply their technical skills. For example, retail sales managers with excellent sales and marketing skills will not be effective on the job if they do not have strong communication and thinking skills.

- Training programs must use methods for integrating workplace essential skills into existing curriculum. The process model created by Alberta Workforce Essential Skills could be used as a prototype. This model leads people through the steps that are required to incorporate workplace essential skills into existing curriculum and it provides a method for developing new curriculum (Alberta Workforce Essential Skills, 2007).
- And finally, it is recommended that competency-based models be developed for strengthening the leadership skills of service providers to enhance their ability to design high quality training programs and delivery systems that are truly responsive to the needs of today's workforce.

Conclusions

Canada's shortage of skilled labour is a serious problem in today's business and industry, and it is anticipated to become even more acute in the future. Small and medium-sized businesses, which are the mainstay of most communities, need skilled workers who are well-organized and productive to keep up with a fast-paced, knowledge-based economy (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2007). Thus, Workplace Essential Skills initiatives are of paramount importance in ensuring that workers have the required competencies to survive and thrive in a competitive knowledge-based economy. Workplace essential skills training and development programs will not only enhance clients' quality of daily life, but they also provide people with the foundation for continuous learning and an ability to adapt to changing societal conditions. Within this context, service providers have important roles to play in designing and delivering workplace essential skills training programs that are responsive to the needs of the current and future workforce.

The current research project has identified some training program strengths and challenges that will need to be addressed to contribute constructively to Nanaimo's business and economic development. It provides an overview of ways to improve existing training programs and services using current models and approaches for improving workplace essential skills training and development. There is scope for adopting some of these recommendations to ensure that we have a pool of qualified workers to draw on to solve the labour and skills shortages in Nanaimo and our surrounding communities.

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Appendices

Table 1: Occupations Currently Showing or Expected to Show Shortages

**Table 1:
Occupations Currently Showing or Expected to Show Shortages**

Occupational group	Occupations	Currently showing signs of shortages	Expected to face shortage pressures over the next 10 years
Business, finance and administration	Senior management	Yes	Yes
	Human resource managers	Yes	Yes
	Human resources and business service professionals	Yes	Yes
Natural and applied sciences	Civil engineers	Yes	Yes
	Mechanical engineers	Yes	No
	Computer engineers	Yes	No
	Software engineers	Yes	No
Health	Managers in health, education, social and community services	No	Yes
	Physicians, dentists and veterinarians	Yes	Yes
	Optomtists, chiropractors and other health diagnosing and treating professionals	Yes	Yes
	Therapy and assessment professionals	Yes	Yes
	Head nurses and supervisors	Yes	Yes
	Other technical occupations in health care (such as registered nursing assistants, audiology technicians and physiotherapy technicians)	Yes	Yes
	Medical radiation technologists	Yes	Yes
	Nurse aides and orderlies	Yes	Yes
Other aides and assistants in support of health services	Yes	Yes	
Social science education, government service and religion	Managers in Public Administration	No	Yes
	Lawyers and Quebec notaries	Yes	No
	University professors	Yes	No
Art, culture, recreation and sport	Editors	Yes	No
	Professional occupations in public relations and communications	Yes	No
Sales and service	Accommodation service managers	Yes	No
	Real estate agents and salespersons	Yes	No
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	Residential home builders and renovators	Yes	Yes
	Contractors and supervisors trades and related workers	Yes	Yes
Occupations specific to primary industry	Supervisors, oil and gas drilling and service	Yes	Yes
	Oil and gas well drillers, servicers, testers and related workers	Yes	Yes
Occupations specific to processing, manufacturing and utilities	Supervisors, processing occupations (such as in petroleum, gas and chemical processing and utilities, and plastic and rubber products manufacturing)	Yes	Yes

Source: HRSDC, Strategic Policy Research Directorate, Looking-Ahead: A 10-Year Outlook for the Canadian Labour Market (2006-2015), October 2006.

Table 2 Potential Sources of New Labour Supply for Some of the Occupations Facing Shortages

Table 2:
Potential Sources of New Labour Supply for Some of the Occupations Facing Shortages

Occupations	Non-student employment in 2005 (000's)	Unemployment Rate*	Excess demand as % of 2005 employment	Excess demand as % of school leavers and immigrants
All occupations	14,565.9	4.5%	0.1%	1.6%
Human resources and business service professionals	138.6	1.8%	2.4%	58%
Physicians, dentists and veterinarians	82.5	0.2%	2.4%	51%
Optometrists, chiropractors and other health professionals	13.2	0.0%	3.5%	124%
Nurse supervisors and registered nurses	252.1	0.7%	3.2%	70%
Other technical occupations in health (except dental)	108.7	1.2%	2.0%	80%
Assisting occupations in health services	254.6	2.5%	2.1%	63%
Underground miners, oil and gas drillers and related workers	38.0	3.5%	3.5%	172%

* The calculation of the all-occupations unemployment rate does not include the unemployed for more than one year (the Labour Force Survey does not report the last occupation of the long-term unemployed) and the unemployed whose occupations are unclassified.

Sources: Labour Force Survey (Statistics Canada) and HRSDC, Strategic Policy Research Directorate, 2006 reference scenario.

List of Service Providers Interviewed

Carolina Ponsford, Employment Service Advisor
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society
Nanaimo

Cecilia Chong, Immigrant Settlement Coordinator,
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society,
Nanaimo

Lesley Clarke, Operations Manager
Nanaimo Women's Resources Society
Nanaimo

Lesley White, Job Development Coordinator,
Global Vocational Services, Inc.,
Nanaimo

Michele Hillier, Community Development Coordinator,
Snuneymuxw First Nation,
Nanaimo

Tammie Wylie, Project Coordinator,
Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre,
Nanaimo

Research Consent Form

The Potential for Improving the Skills/Training Programs for Employees within the Nanaimo Area

September 2008

Wendy Liu
MBA Student
Vancouver Island University
Wendy8188@hotmail.com

Raimo Marttala, Supervisor
Department of Economics and Finance
Vancouver Island University
Raimo.Marttala@viu.ca

I am an MBA student at VIU. One of the requirements of the program is to complete an Applied Business Project. My Applied Business Project investigates the current training programs offered for small businesses employees to enhance their workplace essential skills and how such programs can be extended or expanded to make them more effective.

For this research, you will be asked to answer questions on your specific training programs, their effectiveness and the possibilities for improvement. Your participation will require approximately 30 minutes of your time.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. The research will focus on the possible improvements to existing programs to help targeted employees including women, youth, first nation, immigrants. In that sense there will be potential benefits to the Nanaimo business community by increasing the employability and retention of employees within the local community.

The interviews will be confidential. The overall results of the research will become a part of the public discussion on improving training programs. However, no individual interviews will be specifically attributed to any individual organization/service provider. The research based on this project will also be used as the basis for an academic report of about 20 pages. This report is a requirement for the completion of the MBA degree.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participation, even if started, may be discontinued at any time without any explanation and without penalty.

I have read and understood the information above. I can also ask additional questions or withdraw from the research at any time. I consent to participate in this research.

Participant's Signature

Investigator's Signature

Independent Contact

Date

Essential Skills: A Guide for Employers

Essential Skills: A Guide for Employers

Introduction to Essential Skills

Essential Skills are the skills people need for work, learning and life. They are the foundation for learning all other skills and the cornerstone of lifelong learning. i In the workplace they are necessary for employees to be productive and to more easily acquire new skills for tasks in an ever changing environment. Adaptable and transferable to all situations, Essential Skills are used in all occupations of all sectors at varying levels of complexity.

Through extensive research, the Government of Canada and other national and international agencies have identified and validated nine Essential Skills.

The Nine Essential Skills

Reading Text

Refers to reading material that is in the form of sentences or paragraphs and generally involves reading notes, letters, memos, manuals, specifications, regulations, books, reports or journals, in print or on computer.

Document Use

Refers to tasks that involve reading and interpreting, and writing, completing, and producing information displayed in words, numbers, icons and other visual means. For example, graphs, lists, tables, blueprints, schematics, drawings, signs and labels are documents used in the workplace. They may occur in print or non-print media (for example, computer screens) and may be used simultaneously.

Numeracy

Refers to the use of numbers and being required to think in quantitative terms.

Writing

Includes writing text, such as reports and letters, and also writing in documents (for example, filling in forms), as well as non-paper-based writing (for example, typing on a

computer).

Oral Communication

Refers primarily to the use of speech and listening skills to give and exchange thoughts, ideas and information.

Working with Others

Refers to the extent to which employees work with others to carry out their tasks. Do they have to work co-operatively with others? Do they have to have the self-discipline to meet work targets while working alone?’

This skill section covers four types of work contexts: working alone, working independently, working jointly with a partner or helper, and working as member of a team. Many employees will have to develop skills for more than one context.

Continuous Learning

Refers to the requirement that employees continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge to keep or to grow with their jobs. This skill includes: knowing how to learn, understanding one's own learning style, and knowing how to gain access to a variety of materials, resources and learning opportunities.

It may also include: training in job-related health and safety, obtaining and updating credentials, and learning about new equipment, procedures, products and services.

Thinking Skills

Refers to the process of evaluating ideas or information to reach a rational decision. The Thinking Skills section of the profile has five main components made up of different but interconnected, types of cognitive functions:

Problem Solving involves problems that require solutions. Most problems concern mechanical challenges, people or situations.

Decision Making refers to making a choice among options. Decision making occurs during problem solving, but not all decision making is part of problem solving.

Job Task Planning and Organizing refers to the extent to which workers plan and organize their own tasks. It does not refer to involvement in the planning function for the organization in which they work.

Significant Use of Memory includes any significant or unusual use of memory for workers in the occupational group. It does not include normal memory use that is a requirement for every occupation.

Finding Information involves using any of a variety of sources including text, people, computerized databases or information systems.

Computer Use

Refers to the variety and complexity of computer use within the occupational group.

Essential Skills in the Workplace - Why do they matter?

Employers face a major challenge in maintaining and generating employees' skills to ensure that they can contribute to their organizations' performance and competitiveness. Employers generally recognize that training and skills development can lead to better business performance.

For business, training may be seen as a tool to effect strategic change and as a means to achieve a competitive edge. Training is increasingly seen as an investment that will provide beneficial returns, rather than a cost to be borne. Investment in the human assets of a company may have the greatest potential for increasing productivity.

The results of the Conference Board of Canada's 2005 Learning and Development annual survey of Canadian organizations indicated that high-learning organizations – those that invested in employee training – enjoyed stronger business performance. High-learning organizations scored higher than their medium and low learning counterparts on all indicators of organizational success, including: retention of talent, employee satisfaction, quality of products and services, productivity, and profitability.

But not all Canadian employers seem to be convinced. According to a Canadian Centre for Learning article of 2007, levels of employer-sponsored training have been stagnant, especially as compared to competitors in other countries. For example, only 29% of Canadian employees participate in job-related education and training as compared to 44% in the U.S. And overall, almost one-third of Canadian workers report unmet training needs relating to their jobs. ii

Successful companies are willing to invest in employees by developing training systems where employees can learn and continually improve individual, team, and operational-unit performance. And a significant return on investment has been demonstrated. An increasing number of Canadian companies are recognizing the importance of lifelong learning and workplace skills training and understand that they are closely linked to productivity, adaptability and innovation.

Benefits to Employers.

The Conference Board of Canada conducted numerous case studies with companies across Canada who implemented and invested in Essential Skills training. Outcomes included: iii

- Safer and more productive workplace
- Zero voluntary turnover
- Reduced overtime hours
- Lower absenteeism
- Improved employee retention
- Employees moved up to supervisory positions
- Employees take more pride in their work
- Teams have improved communications and cooperation
- Employees have improved self-confidence
- Employees show more initiative and become more innovative
- Employees become better at recognizing and solving problems

In summary, employers can improve safety and productivity, assist employees to adapt to workplace change, build a more positive work environment and develop HR tools such as job descriptions, evaluations and training plans while creating a more active learning culture. iv

Being aware of the Essential Skills framework and of the array of assessment and learning materials that have been developed, can assist employers in becoming more proficient at evaluating the competencies and performance of their employees. Once Essential Skills gaps have been identified and Essential Skills training has been developed and implemented, businesses often begin to notice significant changes in their employees in addition to improved business results. This combination equips organizations to better address and plan for future challenges.

Benefits to Employees... and Beyond

Workforce literacy and essential skills are needed to find a job, keep a job, do jobs well, change jobs or get a promotion. It has been proven that Essential Skills help employees to be more productive, have increased self-confidence, work as part of a team, have fewer workplace accidents, solve problems, make decisions, perform better in the workplace and more easily learn new tasks.

And while investing in Essential Skills training produces a whole range of returns to the employer and to the employee, the positive effects of increased Essential Skills can be seen beyond the confines of the workplace, and can have profound effects on increasing the social capital of our individuals, our groups our communities and our families. Employees become more engaged, more adaptable, and better able to learn and to succeed in the workplace and outside of it as well.

Some of the “soft” results than have been noted when looking at those who have increased their Essential Skills include:

Benefits to Individuals

- Believe they are more capable
- Take more pride in their work
- Accept and act on suggestions for personal improvement more readily
- Have improved self-confidence
- Develop a lifelong learning attitude

Benefits to Groups and Community

- Improve communication and cooperation
- Build respect for diversity
- Better identify and leverage contributions of individual team members
- Show more initiative to be involved and become more innovative
- Participate more in voluntary activities and enjoy improved health
- Take on new roles as mentors and peer learning coaches

Benefits to Family and Community

- Better able to help children with homework

- Model a positive attitude to work
- Encourage a lifestyle of involvement and lifelong learning

Case Studies

Case studies compiled by both the Conference Board of Canada and by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges showcase various companies that have worked with Essential Skills to assist in worker development. The studies focused on organizations that wanted to meet their goals through ensuring a stable, flexible workforce with improved skills. The companies' workplace education programs have resulted in a number of positive outcomes.

National Silicates' Chemical found that employees who have the Essential Skills necessary to be effective in the workplace are an organization's best asset and can draw on their skills and abilities to achieve aggressive performance targets. Significant outcomes and impacts of the company's Essential Skills training program include a zero voluntary turnover rate, reduced overtime hours, reduced outside contractor hours, reduced plant down time, more versatile employees, improved efficiency, improved productivity, improved safety and an improved work environment.

The Minas Basin Pulp & Power provided Essential Skills upgrading opportunities that enabled workers to learn new skills more quickly, to teach others more effectively and to contribute more deliberately to the business success of the organization. Minas Basin Pulp & Power has carefully tracked the outcomes and impacts of its Workplace Education program. The company has reported unprecedented operating efficiencies, an all-time low absenteeism rate, and a 13-fold reduction in lost time due to accidents, which justify the company's investments in Essential Skills development for its work force.

Durabelt tracked the impacts and benefits of Essential Skills training. Many related to positive changes in attitudes and behaviours that support performance in the workplace, success in the classroom and positive relationships at home. For Durabelt, enhanced employee self-confidence helps to ensure better working relationships and stronger productivity.

The Kahkewistahaw Gas and Convenience Store has been recognized for outstanding customer service and sales growth, due in part to a commitment to developing employees'

Essential Skills. All employees were assessed at the Regional College using TOWES and began work to increase their Essential Skills in such areas as e-mail etiquette, customer conflict, handling dangerous substances and team work. The result is an award winning operation.

Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. is known for supplying grocery stores with high quality, home-style meals. The company's sales increased 20 percent annually and finding skilled employees proved to be a challenge, so they began hiring those with little or no experience in food preparation. They soon realized that these new employees lacked the basics necessary for success – numeracy, reading and document use. Working with the local college they were able to assess specific skills and develop targeted training to address the gaps. Service Cuisine G.P. Inc. reports that while the introduction of the Essential Skills framework requires time, it has proven to be an excellent investment.

Assessment and Upgrading of Essential Skills

Evaluation and upgrading of Essential Skills can be done by working with local Universities, Colleges and Community Employment Service providers. Many organizations will customize training to specific circumstances or to individual employees.

Alternatively, there are many generic on-line resources that can be used by employers wanting to further explore Essential Skills more independently.

Nanaimo Area Community Service Providers

The following Nanaimo area local organizations can provide training, coaching or information that will assist employers in assessing the Essential Skills of their workforce and in finding solutions that will benefit both their organization and their employees.

Vancouver Island University - Career and Academic Preparation

Phone: 250.740.6425

<http://www.viu.ca/cap/index.asp>

CAP provides literacy level Math and English and basic computer skills, as well as High School equivalency in English, Math and the Sciences.

Students are placed in appropriate classes based on assessments.

Vancouver Island University

TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills)

Phone: Tony Bellavia, 250.753.3245, local 2821

tony.bellavia@viu.ca

VIU is licensed to distribute and administer testing for Essential Skills to local businesses and organizations.

The Career Centre, Parksville

Phone: 250.248.3205

<http://www.careercentre.org/>

The Career Centre, operated by Central Vancouver Island Job Opportunities Building Society, provides employers in the Parksville/Qualicum area with support services to help attract and retain employees. In addition to an on-line job posting service, Hiring Fairs, and educational forums for employers, The Career Centre offers job coaching. A job coach works with employed individuals to help them gain Essential Skills necessary to adapt successfully to the workplace.

Literacy Nanaimo

Phone: 250.754.8988

tutors4literacy@viu.ca

In conjunction with Vancouver Island University, this initiative matches volunteer tutors with adult literacy students – those wanting assistance with basic reading, writing, Math and computer skills.

Ethos Career Management Group

Phone: 250.741-8116

www.ethoscmg.com

ETHOS Career Management Group provides services that enhance workplace culture, productivity and profit. Their “ETHOS Career Compass” program is an internal career development program that helps employees achieve their career goals while developing knowledge and skills valuable to the organization. ETHOS’ career management services include performance

coaching, emotional intelligence (EQ) development, and team building sessions. Please see their website for more information.

SET (Supporting Employment Transitions)

Phone: 250.714.0085

<http://www.set-nanaimo.com/>

SET provides comprehensive career exploration, job search and referral to the unemployed, in addition SET may also provide job coaching to clients with multiple barriers to assist them with the skills needed to attain and retain employment.

Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society

Phone: 250.753.6911

<http://www.cvims.org>

Along with job search assistance and employment placement for immigrants and visible minorities, CVIMS can support enhancement of Essential Skills through Diversity Training for employers, and for employees with assessments, evaluations and skill enhancement in a variety of areas including language, communication and workplace culture.

MISTIC (Mid-Island Science Technology & Innovation Council)

Phone: 250.753.8324

<http://www.mistic.bc.ca/>

MISTIC provides support and information to innovators, entrepreneurs, students, businesses, and organizations involved in the Science and Technology sectors by acting as a conduit to financial services, educational programs, business resources and by providing training, networking opportunities, and events. Business Mentoring Coaching services are available to business owners and entrepreneurs seeking information on business start-up, exporting, financing, marketing, business plans and federal/provincial government grants and services.

On-line Resources

The Government of Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada maintains an excellent website dedicated to Essential Skills. A variety of free and easy-to-use tools have been developed to help employers, learners, and practitioners take action on literacy and essential skills. The tools are categorized into four key areas: Awareness, Assessment, Learning and Training Supports. There are also over 300 profiles that describe how Essential Skills are used in specific workplaces and useful links to research and related websites.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/general/home.shtml

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) offers an online, self-directed

training module on the Essential Skills. The module is designed to provide literacy and other agencies with training and resources to increase knowledge and awareness of Essential Skills. The Essential Skills are closely linked with the work of literacy agencies as they are the foundational skills needed for work, learning, and life. This online training module was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

<http://www.nald.ca/literacybasics/essentl/intro/01.htm>

<http://www.nald.ca/clo/>

TOWES – Canada’s Essential Credential. This site provides information on reliable assessment and training resources available across Canada. Content of site includes: an Occupations Chart of the essential skills requirements for different occupations as determined by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, “Measure Up!”, a free web-based tool that tests your essential skills, and links to a TOWES newsletter and additional Essential Skills related websites. <http://www.towes.com/home.aspx>

National Seafood Sector Council. In 2003 the NSSC embarked on a project called “Essential Skills” to ensure that Canadians have the right skills for changing work and life demands. This website is an excellent example of how sector councils, businesses, labour groups, and sector like organizations can increase awareness and understanding of Essential Skills, by supporting the development of tools, applications, and building on existing research. In addition to excellent explanations of the benefits of Essential Skills training, NSSC has developed assessments and training tools that can be ordered directly.

<http://www.nssc.ca/skills/>

http://www.nssc.ca/eng_home.cfm

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum This website provides analysis of research that began in 2004 to explore an understanding of “The Link between Essential Skills and Success in Apprenticeship Training”. The report details how collectively, all stakeholders of the apprenticeship and skilled trades community have a vested interest in ensuring that apprentice candidates possess the basic and essential skills necessary to successfully complete apprenticeship training and certification; journeypersons carry out their work tasks and duties; and both contribute to a skilled, productive workforce.

<http://www.caf-fca.org/english/eskills/3.asp>

Canadian Council on Learning. This website provides a vast array of research and information on learning in general. For information on Essential Skills and workplace training check the “Work & Learning” section under “Knowledge Centres” and the “Information for Labour and Business”.

<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Home?Language=EN>

article: Canada' biggest economic challenge: Improving workplace learning in Canada This 2007 article, in particular, provides compelling rationale for increasing workplace training. It includes comparisons with competitor nations, excellent case studies of companies such as Staples, Syncrude and Diavik Diamond Mines and excellent links to further information.

http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070315_improving_workplace_learning.htm

Sources & Suggested Reading

Association of Canadian Community Colleges

<http://www.accc.ca/essentialskills/>

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

<http://www.caf-fca.org/english/eskills/3.asp>

Canadian Council on Learning

<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Home?Language=EN>

article: Canada's biggest economic challenge: Improving workplace learning in Canada

http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LinL20070315_improving_workplace_learning.htm

Community Literacy of Ontario

<http://www.nald.ca/literacybasics/essentl/intro/01.htm>

<http://www.nald.ca/clo/>

Douglas College

<http://www.douglascollege.ca/training-community-education/essentialskills.html>

The Government of Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/general/home.shtml

Movement for Canadian Literacy

<http://www.literacy.ca/?q=literacy/literacyprofessionals/eskills>

National Seafood Sector Council

<http://www.nssc.ca/skills/>

http://www.nssc.ca/eng_home.cfm

TOWES– Canada's Essential Credential

<http://www.towes.com/home.aspx>

References

i Association of Canadian Community Colleges

<http://www.accc.ca/essentialskills/>

ii article: Canada' biggest economic challenge: Improving workplace learning in Canada

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iii National Seafood Sector Council

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iv Douglas College

<http://www.douglascollege.ca/training-community-education/essentialskills.html>