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ABSTRACT

Manitoba, Canada, workplace stakeholder groups were interviewed to determine the issues they faced and their awareness of, and ability to deal with, workplace basic skills issues. Interviews collected the opinions of 78 employer representatives, 121 employees, and 5 union representatives in the 6 emerging economic sectors of health care products, environmental industries, aerospace, agri-food products, tourism, and information and telecommunications. Findings indicated that most interviewees lacked awareness with respect to the nature and scope of workplace basic skills. Most employees and employers did not consider basic skills to be a workplace issue. Funding policies of small businesses (92% of all companies in Manitoba, Canada) were not flexible enough to accommodate lost revenue from production during employee training. Many employers could list some effects of basic skills deficiencies on the workplace but remained largely unaware of their effect on human resource issues. Unions had the greatest awareness of the nature and scope of basic skills issues. Screening for basic skills proficiency at the entry level had been increasing steadily over the last 5 years. Workplace training programs were largely initiated by employers when they related to company or job-specific needs. Questions arose as to the effectiveness of workplace training. The objectives and evaluation criteria of each stakeholder group reflected their different needs and priorities. (YLB)

L i n k a g e

A Manitoba Survey of Basic Skills Awareness in the Workplace

Workplace Education Manitoba
KEEPING PACE WITH CHANG

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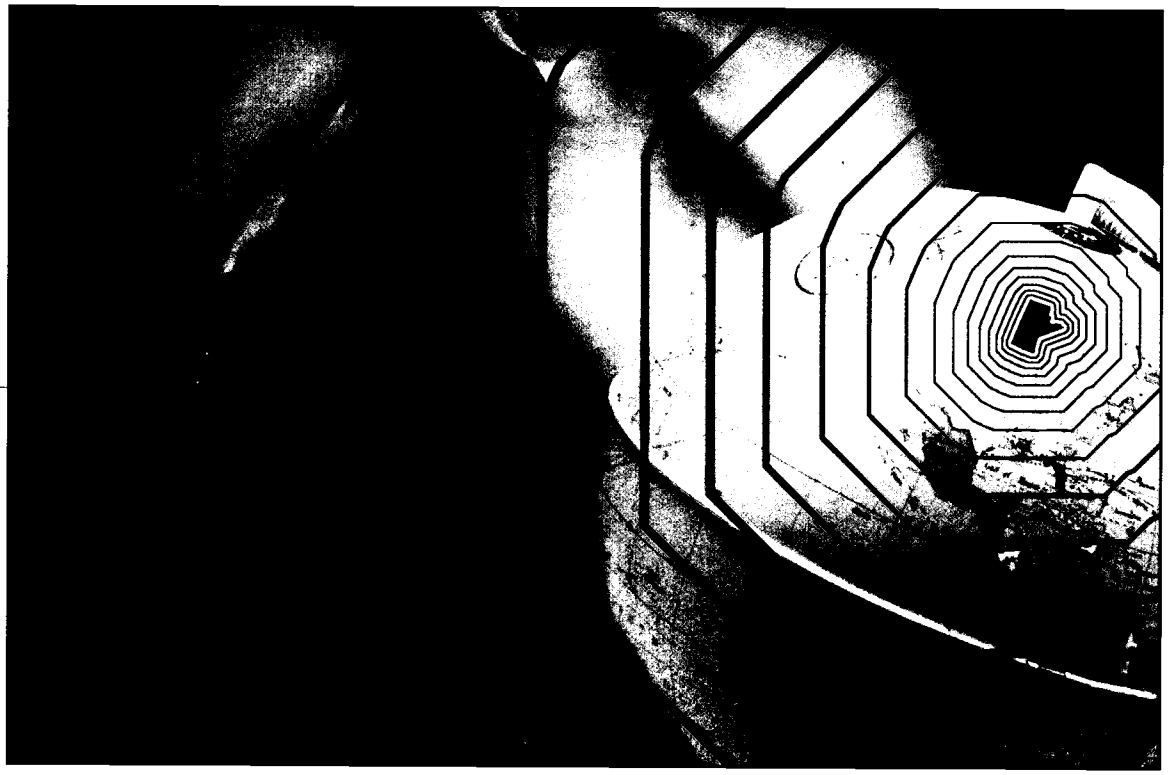
Workplace Education Manitoba

Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM) , an initiative of Manitoba Education and Training, began in October 1991 with the hiring of a coordinator by the Province of Manitoba Literacy and Continuing Education Branch. WEM was created to respond to basic skills needs within a rapidly changing Manitoba workplace profile. Many companies in Manitoba are not only restructuring to respond to global markets and economies, but are also faced with technological and internal structural change. A major factor in successfully meeting new conditions is the ability of the workforce to adapt to change which requires adequate basic skills functioning.

Following the direction of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), a tripartite steering committee was created with equal representation from business and labour, and a staff member from the Province of Manitoba, Training and Advanced Education, who provides the coordination. One of the main roles of the committee is to sensitize industries, including management and labour, to basic skills issues within the workplace.

Another mandate under NLS funding is to create innovative models of provision to be developed and delivered according to industry sectors. Since 1991, the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC) has created many projects which are not only unique to Manitoba but to Canada as well.



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Executive Summary

"Skilled workers are becoming the single most important factor in production." (Economic Development Board, 1993)

Manitoba's economy, mirroring the world's, is shifting from an industrial-based to a knowledge-based economy. To remain competitive, this shift demands that companies make better use of skills, knowledge and technology, versus using traditional strategies such as cheap labour.

Today's workplace, facing new technology, participatory management methods, quality initiatives, just-in-time strategies, global competition and customer service orientations, requires workers who have a broader set of essential or basic skills. No longer confined to the *three* Rs, workplace basic skills training has become a multi-faceted initiative: the bedrock allowing employees and employers to compete successfully in the 90's.

The resulting challenge to all workplace stakeholder groups - employers, employees, employer associations, unions and government - is to determine the required areas of training and foster a culture of lifelong learning within the workplace.

Once considered to be the sole responsibility of employers, workplace training is becoming increasingly characterized by partnerships between government, employers, employer associations, unions and employees. As such, the profile of workplace training is shaped by the perspectives of many stakeholder groups.

Through the Linkage Project, Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM) decided to interview various stakeholder groups in order to determine the issues they face and their awareness of, and ability to deal with, workplace basic skills issues. This was accomplished by interviewing different stakeholder groups throughout Manitoba in the six emerging economic sectors of Health Care Products, Environmental Industries, Aerospace, Agri-food Products, Tourism, and Information and Telecommunications.

For the purpose of the survey, basic skills was defined to participants as being the reading, writing, numeracy, oral communications, learning and problem-solving skills required to function in the workplace, from a very basic level to management level such as report writing and oral presentations. In the six sectors chosen, the opinions of 78 employer representatives, 121 employees and five union representatives were collected and the highlights of the results are contained herein.

Principal Findings

- **Most employees, employers, employer associations and government** departments lack awareness with respect to the nature and scope of workplace basic skills.
- Most employees and employers interviewed do not consider basic skills to be a workplace issue.
- 92 per cent of all companies in Manitoba are small businesses (less than 50 employees). Funding policies are not flexible enough to accommodate lost revenue from production during employee training, making this issue a significant inhibitor to implementation of training.
- Many employers can list some of the effects of basic skills deficiencies on the workplace - such as mis-communication - but remain largely unaware of their effect on such human resource issues as resistance to change, morale or absenteeism, and the resulting detriment to business performance.

• Of all shareholder groups interviewed, unions have the greatest awareness of the nature and scope of basic skills issues.
• Screening for basic skills proficiency at the entry level has been increasing steadily over the last five years. Many employers indicate an intent to increase screening in the near future but currently lack an adequate system or tool for doing so.
• Training characteristics and needs are often sector-specific and dependent on company size. Where restrictive policies and funding exist, both the focus and implementation of training are inhibited.
• Workplace training programs are largely initiated by employers, who will do so only when they can clearly be shown to relate to company and/or job-specific needs.
• The issue of the short- and long-term evaluation of training and indicators of program success continues to be problematic, both from the perspective of different stakeholder groups and what constitutes success for them, and from the aspect of an adequate system of capturing gain. This continues to be a barrier to all training initiatives, as "clear" justification is demanded.
• While participatory management strategies are reported to be in use, decisions about training are largely made by management. As clear evidence of divergent perspectives between different stakeholder groups was found, questions arise as to the resulting value and effectiveness of workplace training.
• The objectives and evaluation criteria of each stakeholder group reflect their different needs and priorities. Because each stakeholder group's orientation toward training is shaped according to their perspective, successful training designers address this factor during planning.

Background

The Issue

"Today there is a whole range of new skills that employers want in the people they hire."
(Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want, 1988)

In general, there is considerable discussion about the necessity, purpose and nature of workplace basic skills training. Just as new technology, participatory management initiatives, customer service, quality enhancement strategies and global competition have changed the workplace environment, so too is the very definition of workplace basic skills being changed.

The actual level of basic skills required in a workplace varies greatly according to the workplace activity and an individual's job classification. In general, though, employees must have a strong foundation in basic skills which will enable them to function effectively and productively and to learn on the job. In addition, to be able to adapt to economic and technological changes, employees must be skilled in problem-solving, listening and negotiating.

But the individual needs and priorities of each workplace stakeholder group - employers, employees, employer associations, unions and government - are diverse and at times contrasting. So, while it's clear that an evolving workplace requires workers suitably grounded in basic skills, the challenge lies in defining these basic skills and how they may best be delivered.

In noting these developments, the inevitable question ensues: *"What is the awareness level of various stakeholder groups with respect to basic skills issues and what is their ability to deal with basic skills training in the workplace?"*

It was this question which led to the creation of the Linkage Project.

The Approach

To explore the issue, in 1994 Workplace Education Manitoba created the Linkage Project. Designed as both a promotional and research effort, the aim of the eight-month study was to ascertain and raise awareness of basic skills issues in the Manitoba workplace and determine the most appropriate future direction for basic skills training. The research was conducted by project coordinator Sandi Howell, B.A., M.Ed., a training consultant for WEM.

Targeting what the provincial government has identified as being Manitoba's six emerging economic sectors - Aerospace, Health Care Products, Environmental Industries, Tourism, Agri-food Products, and Information and Telecommunications - the project coordinator interviewed 78 companies, 121 employees, and representatives from 10 government departments, 5 unions and 12 employer associations from throughout these sectors.

Participants were asked, through written questionnaires or in-person interviews, for information designed to answer the project's two main questions:

i. *What is the current capability of various stakeholder groups in assessing the need for and delivering workplace basic skills education?*
ii. *Through what model(s) could workplace basic skills education best be delivered?*

A number of areas needed to be explored in order to answer these questions, including human resource and change issues, demographic differences, stakeholder differences, sectoral differences, basic skills activities and awareness, and appropriate types of training activities. For the purpose of the survey, basic skills

was defined to participants as being the reading, writing, numeracy, oral communications, learning and problem-solving skills required to function in the workplace, from a very basic level to management level such as report writing and oral presentations.

Because of the small sample size once employers and employees are divided into economic sector, the results are interpreted as being indicators of trends only. More in-depth study would have to be conducted in each sector to be conclusive.

Provincial View

In Manitoba, the provincial government has placed great emphasis on developing a training culture in the workplace. Its policy paper *Framework for Economic Growth* (1993) declares that partnerships with government, industry, labour and educational institutions are the key to developing an education and training system that will increase productivity and lead to more high paying jobs.

WORKFORCE 2000 was initiated by the Province of Manitoba, Training and Advanced Education, to aid in promoting this training culture. Designed as a catalyst for the private sector, the program trains deliverers - as well as governments - to identify training needs, develop basic skills, implement programs, and link skill development with economic planning. In addition to WORKFORCE 2000, the Literacy Branch, Training and Advanced Education, has a coordinator for Basic Skills Training in the Workplace programs.

Clearly, then, the provincial government recognizes basic skills as an important factor in workplace training.

Several recent studies performed in Manitoba also support the idea that basic skills is a key issue. An employment and training needs survey conducted in 1992 by the Electronics Industry Association of Manitoba found that recruitment of suitably-skilled employees was a major concern, with recruits seen to be lacking in the necessary practical skill sets. In 1993, the Manitoba Environmental Industries Association of Manitoba conducted a study called *Human Resource Study into the Training Needs of the Environment Industry in Manitoba.* Two problem areas identified were a need for improved communications skills for all levels of employees and the growing number of sales and management employees drawn from the technically-skilled who require training in general business skills.

And in 1994, the Information Services and Telecommunications Advisory Panel (ISTAP) of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce (in cooperation with Human Resources Development Canada and WORKFORCE 2000) conducted a study of the education and training gaps for software workers in Manitoba. Three main gaps identified were re-skilling the existing workforce in technical and related topics, human resource planning and programming, and building core skills in recruits at the post-secondary level.

Previous Research

A review of past studies focussing on workplace basic skills training highlights a number of issues relevant to the Linkage Project's design and execution.

Anchoring the review of contributing literature is *The Impact of Employee Illiteracy on Canadian Business*, a report issued in 1990 by the Conference Board of Canada. Among its findings was that over 70% of the 600 businesses responding felt that there was a functional literacy problem in their workplace, meaning that employees

were unable to perform their duties at an acceptable level because of basic skills deficiencies.

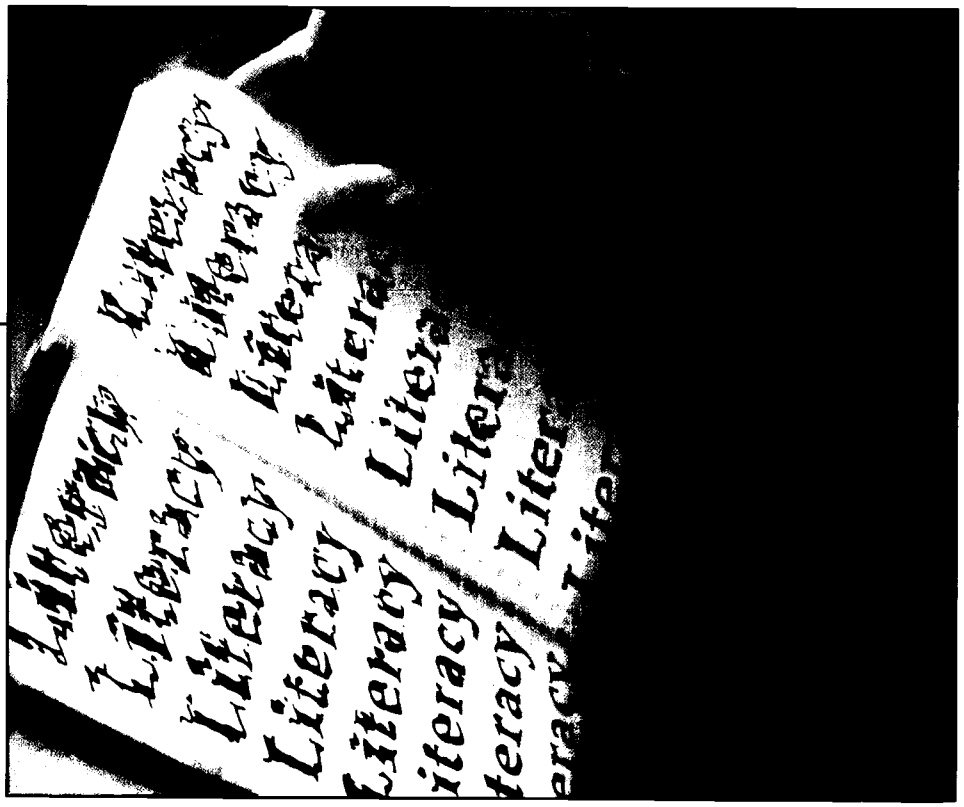
The report concludes that literacy deficits have come to the attention of companies because of their impact on production, quality and productivity.

On the whole, there is considerable discussion in the available literature revolving around the objective(s) of basic skills training, effective training in general, and evaluation. The repeated concern is that these are often situationally defined according to the particular stakeholder group.

To illustrate: on the issue of objectives it's said that employers are oriented to production and profitable operation, while unions are oriented to serving the workers' needs *(Worker Centred Learning: A Union Guide to Workplace Literacy, 1990).* Expanding on this distinction, S. Waugh notes in *An Organizational Approach to Workplace Basic Skills (1992)* that company training is initiated for reasons including change such as technological advance, implementation of management philosophies such as customer service, employment equity planning, and safety and health issues. Unions, however, will introduce training to enhance employment security, to advance safety and health issues, to increase member self-esteem and self-confidence, and to improve employees' understanding of rights.

Finally, on the subjects of effective training in general and evaluation, some authors suggest that, in order to enhance the marketing potential for workplace literacy training, an aspect which needs to be emphasized and developed is a system of evaluation which shows a return on investment in these programs.

However, believes Waugh, due to the different indicators of success used by different stakeholders, measuring program outcomes is a very complex task. As an example, she suggests that most employers are oriented to profit as an indicator of success. But calculating economic payoffs for workplace literacy programs is difficult because of the many factors which influence profit levels at any given time.



Conclusion Recommendations

At the time of this study, a significant majority of employers and unions in Manitoba were not conducting basic skills training.

For employers, this was found to relate to both their awareness of the impact low skill functioning has on the workplace and their ability, both financially and educationally, to address it. For unions, it was largely a question of funding.

Based on the Linkage Project's findings, basic skills initiatives can best gain legitimacy within workplace training when all stakeholders have acquired a better understanding of their nature, scope and accruable benefits.

The findings also clearly showed a need expressed for a commonly-accepted system of defining and measuring the success of basic skills training. It is imperative, therefore, that a dialogue be established among stakeholders as to what constitutes gain for whom, and how is this gain to be captured and expressed.

In addition, for the main initiators of training - the employer - basic skills programs must be clearly linked to the companies' objectives and needs. And since employees were found to be just as unaware of basic skills issues as employers, they must also be educated as to issues and gains.

Based on the results of the Linkage Project, the following recommendations are offered:

- Create an in-depth educational campaign that includes government, employers, employees and sectoral associations, particularly those with a major training function. It should be individually tailored to each stakeholder group and should aim to expand and elaborate on the definition of basic skills and their potential impact on the workplace.
- Create a pre-and post-type of assessment tool for a range of skill areas, including communication and problem-solving.
- Create a service which provides employers with short-term workplace training advice.
- Create a broad-scoped, in-depth system of evaluation for workplace basic skills training. Include formative and summative evaluations, with a six-month follow-up.
- Increase partnerships between apprentice and other government branches for the purpose of including basic skills concepts in their endeavours, including needs assessments and testing.
- Revise funding structures to include the needs of small companies, incorporating an element of production costs, capital purchases for training needs and location requirements. In addition, funding for all should include the cost of producing clearly-written documents and, where required, the cost of translating these documents.
- Increase basic skills training partnerships with unions, who clearly see a need for basic skills training.

For workplace training initiatives to achieve their quite-considerable potential they must become more situationally responsive. Any workplace training policy or funding scheme, then, must have in its design an element of flexibility that allows for the widest possible range of indicators of need to be situationally addressed.

Within the promotional aspect of the Linkage Project, it became very clear that awareness-raising produced an immediate impact on stakeholders. It is awareness and understanding which will allow everyone to adequately address this issue in the workplace.

The following are snapshot descriptions of the six sectors surveyed throughout Manitoba. Statistics for 1995 were supplied by the Economic Innovation and Technology Council, Province of Manitoba.

Information & Telecommunications

Number of Employees 2 500*
Number of Companies 250

** Not included in this figure are the 4,000 employees of the Manitoba Telephone System*

Companies in the Information and Telecommunications sector in Manitoba are engaged in: information processing, microcomputers, software systems, specialized OEM, electronics and instrumentation, point-of-sale solutions for a wide range of business, electronic meter-reading for utilities and cable television, microwave distribution systems, presentation graphics and telecommunications.

Environmental Industries

Number of Employees 2 000
Number of Companies 300

Companies in the Environmental Industries sector engage in two main activities: production of products required for environmental enhancement and protection, and services required for environmental enhancement, protection and information.

Tourism

Number of Employees 50 000
Number of Companies 4 000

Companies in the Tourism sector in Manitoba are engaged in the following main areas of activity: tour operators and travel agents, transportation services such as charter flights, taxis, riverboat tours and bus tours, hotels and accommodation services, fishing and hunting lodges and services, food and beverage sales, recreation and entertainment services, manufacturing of recreation products, souvenirs and novelty items, sporting events, equipment, vehicles and boat rentals, conventions and meetings, and retail sales.

Aerospace

Number of Employees 3 000
Number of Companies 40

Companies in the Aerospace sector in Manitoba engage in two main areas of activities: metal and composite aircraft components, electronic systems and rockets, repair and overhaul; and aeroplane and helicopter airframe, engine and accessory maintenance and overhaul activities.

Health Care Products

Number of Employees 1 535
Number of Companies 110

Companies in the Health Care Products industry in Manitoba engage in the following major activities: high-tech health care services such as medical research

and development, facility design and engineering; and medical devices, pharmaceutical, aging and rehabilitation products, informatics, and environmental health.

Agri-food Products

Number of Employees 6 200

Number of Companies 230

Companies in the Agri-food Products sector are engaged in the following main areas of activity: food and beverage processing, non-food processing (pharmaceutical, alternate fuels), manufacturing and service activities.

Issues/Characteristics

The following chart contains a summary of issues and characteristics by sector.

Issues/Characteristics	*Info./Telec.*	*Health Care*	*Agri-food*	*Tourism*	*Environ.*	*Aerospace*
Human Resources						
Internal Structural Change	3	1	2	1	2	3
Market Change	3	3	1	1	1	3
Training	3	1	1	1	2	1
Recruitment	1	3	2	1	2	3
Technical Skills	1	2	1	1	2	3
Basic Skills (also ESL)	2	2	3	1	3	2
Certification Requirements	1	2	1	1	2	2
Training						
Cost	3	1	1	1	2	2
Production Schedules	2	3	3	3	2	3
Cross Training	2	3	3	3	3	3
Company Size	1	1	1	1	2	3
Diverse Job Needs	2	2	1	1	1	2
Custom vs. Off-the-Shelf	3	3	2	2	2	2
Govt. Resources Desirable	3	2	2	2	3	2
Basic Skills						
Company Adapts to Level	1	1	3	3	1	1
Company Responsibilitity	2	2	2	2	2	3
Govt. Responsibility	2	1	2	3	2	1
Screening at Entry Level	3	3	2	2	1	3
Employees Show Concern w. New Tasks	2	1	1	1	1	3

Affirmative Responses
3=50%+of companies interviewed
2=30%+of companies interviewed
1=less than 30%+of companies interviewed

Figure 1 Sector Specific Characteristics and Issues

Issues Common to All Sectors

In general, few employers had an in-depth understanding of basic skills issues and their impact on the workplace. However, they clearly voiced a dissatisfaction with the basic skill levels of potential employees, particularly those recently graduated from universities, high schools and community colleges. While most companies prefer to hire individuals with adequate basic skills, many would assume some responsibility for training an employee who was considered to be valuable.

Change, versus human resource issues, was the biggest motivator for initiating training.

Defining specific objectives and determining whether or not they are met - both short and long-term - is a critical issue. And while definitive company objectives are considered to be important with respect to training, few connections are drawn between company objectives and basic skills training objectives and outcomes. In addition, while basic skills training is often initiated in response to change issues or anticipated future needs, there is little connection made to long-term company objectives or mission statements, potentially creating unsatisfactory long-term evaluation.

Costs of training are not as simply calculated as the cost of the trainer and the location. More importantly for a lot of companies - small companies in particular - costs include lost production, replacement workers, time required to set up training, and the time required for administration and coordination.

While employers expressed mixed feelings about government responsibilities for basic skills training, 40% felt that the government has some responsibility in this respect. Although not necessarily interested in government funding, employers did indicate a desire for flexibility in funding structures, short-term educational expertise, better skill assessment tools, short and long-term evaluation mechanisms, and a consistent, easy-to-find, reliable source of government information.

Economic Realities

Most small companies (less than 50 employees) face certain economic realities with respect to training, particularly when the company is under ten people. As one employer outlined:

"For me, training means that I have to take the time to train someone. That means that I am losing revenue from the work that I should be doing. This stops me from hiring someone else, meaning that I don't take on new contracts. I can't afford to! Also, for additional training for myself, it is not only the course fees but, again, it means I lose revenue from work that I should be doing while I am on training. I can't afford to do that either."

Therefore, the cost of training in-house can include not only the employee who is being trained, but also the one who is delivering the training. For many of these employers, lost revenue is not a viable option.

Even for large companies the costs of training are affected by the logistics of production schedules, lost production time and peak periods of activity driven by customer service concerns. Most companies stated they were not prepared to incur this type of cost unless clearly necessary.

Many companies also cited the time required to set up training as being a problem, including the time required to find information on training and funding. In several cases, this factor alone prevented the initiation of training.

Interestingly, costs ascribed to the administration and coordination of training were rarely included as part of a training budget. Therefore, although this was considered to be an obstacle it was not conceptualized as being a significant part of the training culture.

Company need extended into the area of short-and long-term program evaluation, as many employers indicated they could use assistance in the areas of needs assessments, evaluation (particularly long-term), effective training and sourcing for training.

As a consequence of generally-shrinking budgets, training has to satisfy a clearly-identified need and thus be practical in nature. In terms of defining effective training, companies reported that the issue of defining specific objectives - and whether or not they had been met - was by far the most important consideration. While there was some division as to whether the objectives needed to be tailored to the companies' general needs or to job-specific needs, this seemed highly-related to the degree of specialization associated with jobs, with those companies having jobs of a specialized nature being oriented toward job-specific training.

Interestingly, although money was reportedly scarce, funding was not necessarily the biggest issue with companies in terms of desired government supports. Awareness of the availability of government programs or funds was very clearly reported as an insufficient reason - by itself - to initiate training. Again, there had to be a clearly-recognized need in the company.

Support of a variety of types was a need identified to varying degrees in each sector. Of those who were open to new types of programs and funding sources, not all were open to the idea of creating partnerships for training.

In sectors where companies actively engaged in partnerships, such as Aerospace and Health Care Products, were found those companies most willing to consider partnerships. Companies in such sectors tend to be more government-regulated, require testing for certification and have a high degree of specialization. With particular reference to the latter, specialization training costs are often prohibitive - frequently requiring out-of-province travel - and training partnerships reduce these costs.

Basic Skills Awareness and Ability to Assess Need

Few employers demonstrated a good understanding of workplace basic skills functioning. To begin with, the definition of basic skills largely was restricted to simple skills at a low-functioning level within selective job categories. Many simply defined it as illiteracy and placed few of their employees into that category.

Most employers could identify some commonly-associated effects of lower skills functioning, such as miscommunication, rework/error, poor written work or incomplete work, poor math, poor self-confidence, an inflexible workforce and inefficiency. Few included other signs such as absenteeism, high turnover, hostility, lack of participation in the company or teamwork, resistance to change, lower productivity, low morale, poor customer relations (internal and external), poor interpersonal relations and poor problem-solving ability as potential signs of inadequate basic skills. However, with companies that had offered basic skills courses, many of the above factors were readily cited as being improved.

Additionally, most companies had little awareness of how much secrecy or covering up was occurring with respect to basic skills functioning. One company representative gave the following example of how basic skills functioning could be misunderstood.

" Late in the eighties we went through a growth stage and we created a number of satellite warehousing operations in the province. We hired many new employees to be shippers and receivers and trained them. A couple of years ago we changed all our packaging and invoicing at the same time. Suddenly, orders were being shipped incorrectly all over the place and many orders went missing. We had no way of tracing them as the employees kept no written records in addition to the pre-prepared written orders we had sent them and we had to re-ship everything. We discovered that at many of these locations, the employees were largely illiterate and they could not understand the changes we had made. They simply shipped what they hoped was right and were unable to indicate what they had done. We were shocked as these were long-term employees who had functioned well in the past. We had no idea!"

In addition, many did not draw a strong connection between employees' uneasiness or resistance with regard to new tasks and their level of basic skills functioning. Such responses were often interpreted as being attitudinal or simply a resistance to change rather than employees' attempts to protect themselves from discovery of inadequacy.

When asked about indicators of basic skills deficiencies, some companies reported English as a Second Language (ESL) situations. For these companies, this was clearly the most problematic area with respect to basic skills. They cited miscommunication and resulting errors, inflexibility, and inability to promote (in a few instances), as major indicators.

Many companies responded by adjusting their system to work around these employees, seeing this as the most cost-effective solution. Company awareness of basic skills deficiencies was often limited to the easily-identified ESL employees.

Many companies reported that in the last five years they had increased their screening for basic skills and many more indicated an intent to do so. For the most part, though, this is not done in any type of systematic fashion and is often restricted to writing and math skills, despite the clear indication that oral communication and problem-solving is highly desired in recruits. A few employers used a pre-packaged screening mechanism but many simply made their own estimation of ability.

Some reported that there was a period of time in the '80's when little screening occurred because of a shortage of appropriate employees. As a result of hiring "what they could get", a body of workers was created who do not have the basic skills required to function in the 90's workplace.

In addition, a commonly-held perception among employers was that employees who had recently graduated from universities, high schools and community colleges were lacking basic skills. Employers ranked as critical the need for employees to come to the workplace well-prepared in this area. One employer stated:

"We like to hire employees who are well educated in basic skills and who can function in this area. We will train for the job-specific aspects. This should be the government's role - to make sure that people have the basic skills."

There was no strong connection drawn between basic skills functioning and the direct benefit to production or bottom-line indicators. Employers showed greater orientation toward equipment or process factors and human resource factors such as motivation, resistance to change and technical or job-related skill level as often affecting the bottom line.

Basic skills were more likely to be included as an important aspect of the work-place in larger companies, where teams direct training decisions. However, many companies identified that when employees were promoted from within, for example from production lines to supervisory positions, there was a gap with respect to basic skills. Occasionally, employers addressed this through short-term training.

A significant number of companies reported a willingness to assume some responsibility for basic skills training if the employee was generally considered to be valuable.

Most stakeholder groups considered management and supervisors to be lacking in basic skills. Production or technician areas were the second largest groups identified as lacking skills, although it was believed that the skills often were not needed to perform the job.

Basic Skills Initiatives in Relation to Company Objectives

In general, responses showed there was no clear connection drawn between basic skills training and company objectives. In fact, basic skills were largely viewed as being fringe issues or luxury-types of training. Companies showed a tendency to be more willing to provide basic skills training if it was connected to change issues and, for the most part, defined effective training as training specific to company objectives or job-related needs.

Basic skills training is often initiated because of clearly existing functioning problems - such as the inability to pass ISO certification - or to specifically address a future need, such as anticipated changing job duties. This narrow focus means that a direct relationship to overall company short or long-term objectives or mission statements is rarely defined, thus creating the potential for unsatisfactory long-term evaluation.

In terms of measuring effectiveness, in provincial workplace basic skills programs there is traditionally a set of criteria used for summative evaluation that is directly tied to the instructor's ability or the use of educational principles. But many companies indicated that they would not judge the success of the course in the same manner, thus creating a potential for disparate evaluations and judgements.

Also reported was a growing concern for long-term evaluation and follow-up: some suggested six months after the course finished. At that point, signs of change as a result of training would constitute a clear indication of success for many companies.

HR Strategies

As mentioned previously, increased screening at the entry level was reported as being a major strategy.

Recruitment based on the need for a certain skill base or experience was considered a problem for some companies. And where skill deficiencies were identified in current employees, many companies said the most cost-efficient response

was to adjust the system to accommodate the deficiencies. For example, where the writing of instructions or responses created problems, they switched to a verbal system.

Certain sectors were found to have a higher commitment to training than others. In general, sectors with a higher commitment to training were regulated to varying degrees by government or had a high degree of job specialization. These sectors also tended to have a higher degree of mandatory training, again as it related to certification requirements.

Internal testing was also directly related to certification demands. Few companies who did not require official proof of skills or knowledge performed any types of testing.

Most companies preferred custom-designed programs versus off-the-shelf types, but also listed the cost of custom designing as one of the prohibiting factors. And employers declared a clear preference toward training employees for narrowly-defined company purposes, including specific job-related objectives.

Very few companies discussed the long-term employability or welfare of employees either within or outside of the company. Where training perspectives were clearly more holistic, at a few companies associated with very large-sized organizations, the benefits for these companies were reported as being - rather than high turnover - a more stable and flexible workforce.

Motivational Factors for Companies

More than human resource issues, change issues was seen as one of the biggest motivators for initiating training, and there was a natural orientation toward technical skills in this respect. But there was little indication that companies even considered whether or not their employees had the basic skills required to make the most effective use of technical skills training. As one employer realized:

"I just conducted a major needs assessment for the types of technical skills training that we need. I never even stopped to consider that some employees may not be able to learn effectively or efficiently. Oh no, I may have made a major mistake!"

Companies expressed a great deal of concern over the ability of employees to use the training in a practical fashion. However, there was rarely any discussion mentioned as to whether or not employees had the basic skills needed to transfer learning to other situations.

Another motivation for training voiced was government regulations and associated testing. If employees cannot pass internal tests and the company cannot prove that they are following regulations, then they are in direct threat of being shut down until the problem is rectified.

While some listed technological change as a reason for the delivery of training, others cited the increase in export markets, new marketing strategies or new market demands. At times, these changes require certification of new products and processes, any of which could require training on some level.

Perceived Responsibilities by Stakeholders

Approximately 40 per cent of respondents in each sector felt that the government was clearly responsible for basic skills training - preferably in a pre-employment scenario - and for funding in-house remedial types of initiatives. While 20 per cent felt that the best thing the government could do would be to get out of the area of training and reduce impedimentary legislation and certification requirements, an equal number declared their belief that all possible government support and initiatives for training would be beneficial.

While most employers indicated that costs should be shared, with funding contributions seen as a sign of commitment and responsibility, there was also a strong feeling that it was imprudent for the government to spend any more in any area.

Training partnerships in general were found to be on the increase, though few had been formed with unions in the sectors studied. Many companies have adopted the philosophy that training is a partnership agreement between the company and employees. As the employees' contribution is often their time, this has the effect of resolving production schedule problems as training held on the employees' time doesn't impede production.

Training partnerships between companies in non-competing market areas were also said to be increasing. This was said to be particularly beneficial for job-specific training when a company did not have enough employees to make a dedicated session cost-effective.

Perceived Needs of the Workplace

In addition to a funding component, employers reported the need for more flexibility in the funding structures themselves. For example, some employers indicated that at times the only available training was out of town, resulting in prohibitive travel costs unless funding subsidies could be made available.

For small companies, an adequate funding structure was clearly identified as one incorporating the element of replaced production costs. In addition, some small companies mentioned the need for capital purchase funding for training equipment such as overhead projectors.

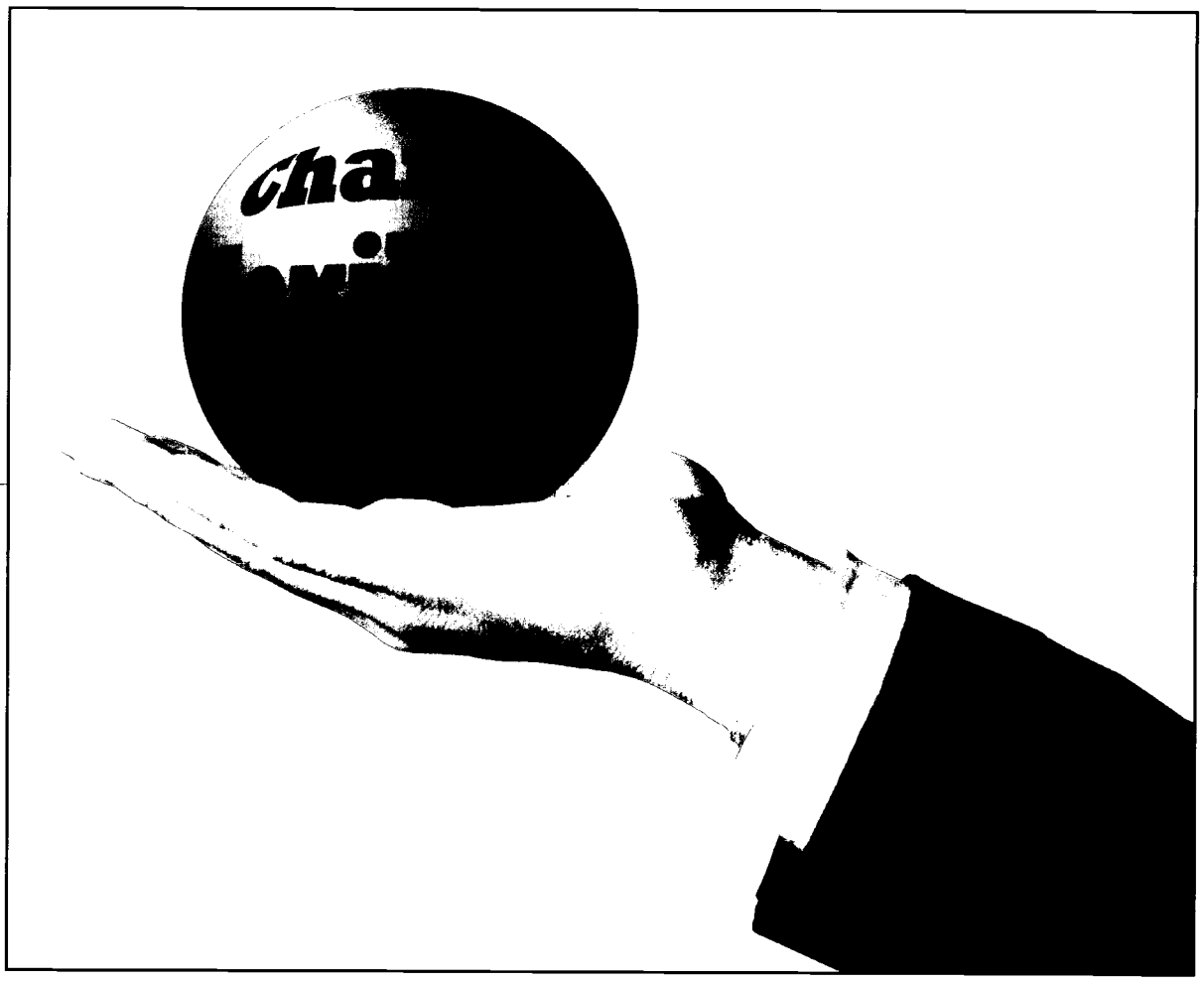
Some employers noted the need for short-term educational expertise. This encompassed training needs assessments, short-term and long-term training plans, and training evaluation both while the course was occurring and six-months later. In addition, some employers required better assessment tools for estimating employee basic skills, both at the entry level and for internal promotion.

The general but growing concern surrounding accountability was summed up by more than one respondent as being: "Companies need to know that training is working." Not surprisingly, though, few suggestions were forthcoming on how to measure this.

In many cases the training was simply considered successful if, after the course, employees were seen using the skills. However, on a more long-term basis there was often no established system for making this evaluation six months later. Some company representatives admitted it was difficult to discern if employees were even using the skills and to what extent. Others could sense improvements but were unable to explain how or why and so were unable to create a rationale for additional expenditures.

Still others were able to identify gains in such areas as increased self-esteem or motivation but were unable to rationalize further expenditures on these types of indicators.

Many companies said they would make use of a consistent, easy to find, reliable source of government information, as this perceived deficiency has stopped employers from even inquiring about training options.



Sector-Specific Issues

Representatives of 78 Manitoba companies from six industry sectors were interviewed in person: 11 from Information & Telecommunications, 22 from Tourism, 6 from Aerospace, 8 from Health Care Products, 12 from the Environmental Industries and 19 from Agri-Food Products.

In those sectors in which there is greater job specialization, there is a greater emphasis on training in general. In addition, companies with certification requirements tended to focus more on basic skill levels, obviously in response to the need to deal with the certification process.

In sectors in which there was little job specialization and little skill requirement in terms of recruiting, there was less training in general, with the philosophy that it was easier to structure the company and its processes around lack of skill rather than to train. The companies in these sectors could often identify a lack of basic skills but were also clearly reluctant to take this on as an issue.

In sectors in which there was greater job specialization, and possibly certification requirements, training in general had a tendency to be more job specific versus company specific. If basic skills were an impediment to job functioning and the attainment of certification, companies tended to initiate basic skills training. This was often related to change issues such as restructuring (internal) and marketplace (external).

It should be emphasized that, in all sectors, screening for basic skills has increased in recent years, with many additional employers declaring an intent to initiate this procedure.

Information & Telecommunications

Roughly half the companies in the Information and Telecommunications sector said that training was a major issue, prompted by the rapid and ongoing change in the industry and the specialized nature of many of the companies.

Also singled out for training was internal structural change, variously attributed to changing markets and ownership or management changes. Most companies were initiating training in response to change issues, while other strategies included focusing on good communication and utilizing an outside change agent.

With respect to basic skills awareness, a majority of the companies did not focus on the basic skills levels of employees, although many indicated they would assume the responsibility for basic skills training if there was a need. And while a majority felt that employees showed concern when faced with new types of basic skills tasks, they nevertheless believed that basic skills functioning did not impede internal movement in any way.

In terms of government supports, a significant number of companies were in favour of some kind of funding. In addition, a majority believed increased government initiatives to be attractive and were open to the idea of stakeholder partnerships.

For many, effective training in the Information and Telecommunications sector meant that objectives should be specifically tailored to meet company needs, and most companies were oriented to practical indicators of program success.

Tourism

In Tourism, companies emphasized that employees were often selected for their communication skills, and singled out oral communication as being the most important basic skill required in many of these companies.

Most companies surveyed in this sector indicated that they had not focused on basic skills issues. Of note are the many who reported that while some staff were ESL, the system adapted to their functioning level. As one employer stated ***" Basic skill levels are accepted and understood within certain job functions. We just work around it."*** Therefore, for a lot of companies it was considered completely unnecessary to address basic skills functioning.

In addition, as there was great emphasis on communication skills as being the most important job-related skill, in many job classifications in this sector a high degree of screening was found. While nearly half the employers would not assume any responsibility for this type of training, just as many said they would.

Most of the companies surveyed in the Tourism sector did not have a formal policy on training or basic skills training and only half expressed a high commitment to training. Many companies indicated that - as training was provided to management - it was simply expected that knowledge would be passed down to employees from management.

It was also reported that management performed the bulk of the planning and decision-making with respect to training, most training was voluntary, and half the companies did not have a training budget. A majority of employers indicated that they engaged in cross-training.

Many companies would appreciate some type of funding assistance, while support for consideration of new government initiatives was divided equally.

In Tourism, effective training was defined as being short-term, job-specific and delivered by trainers using sound educational principles. Fully half those interviewed were oriented to affective indicators of program success, while a major secondary indicator was evidence of better customer service.

Aerospace

Recruitment was declared a problem to varying degrees throughout the Aerospace sector, based on skill requirements and given that government regulations directly affect employees' tasks. Many companies responded to these issues with internal certification and testing, and tests at the entry level, including those for basic skills.

Many companies indicated that they were affected by such change issues as growth, new markets, and quality initiatives to the extent that they created internal culture shift changes. They responded by initiating training.

Many of those interviewed had focused on the basic skills levels of employees, and indicated that there was an ESL component to be addressed as evidenced by communication skills deficiencies and failure to pass internal tests. A majority said they would assume the responsibility for this type of training. Half felt that there was employee secrecy about basic skills levels and concern over new tasks.

A strong partnering element existed between companies for training initiatives in Aerospace, with the Manitoba Aerospace Human Resources Coordinating Committee (MAHRCC) as a coordinator and additional funding source. The biggest factor affecting companies' ability to deliver training as reported by all companies was production schedules.

While most had a formal policy on training, formal policies on basic skills training were a rarity, with plans and decisions regarding training largely performed by human resources or training departments. A high degree of commitment to training was reported throughout the sector, promoted in a sense by a strong mandatory element.

Nearly all those surveyed had a training budget but, as was found in most sectors, it was rare to find the costs of implementation associated with the budget. Opinions on custom-designed versus general training programs were almost equally divided. Cross-training was popular.

Most Aerospace companies would like to see assistance for the coordination of training partnerships, were willing to consider new types of government initiatives, and would enter into stakeholder partnerships.

When asked what they believed constituted effective training, most offered it was that which was tailored to specifically meet job needs, while many also declared that the training must be measurable. There was a strong orientation toward practical indicators of program success found sector-wide, with a great deal of awareness as to affective indicators.

Health Care Products

Recruitment was a major issue for employers in this sector, largely due to specialization. Another element raised was the number of ESL employees, identified as an issue with respect to their basic skills level. This was related to two factors: those employees recruited from outside North America because of their technical or job-related skills; and internal certification standards and related testing accentuated the lower skill functioning of these employees.

Internal testing was present in half the companies interviewed and this directly related to certification requirements. Most employers used an initial screening mechanism for basic skills and technical skills, and several indicated that screening for basic skills at the entry level was being increased.

Most companies centred on growth when asked to identify major change issues they had to contend with; to which they had responded by initiating training or - to a lesser degree - by undertaking deliberate communication initiatives.

Only half the respondents indicated that they directly focused on basic skills awareness. Many said that they deliberately screened for basic skills at the entry level, thus avoiding the need for that aspect of training. And when asked about the assumption of responsibility for training, one employer said his company did ***"..to a degree, but only as needed to get the product out the door."***

Because of the degree of specialization in this sector, pharmaceutical companies are willing to develop partnerships for training purposes. Often this is accomplished through their main association, the Health Care Products Association of Manitoba. Most companies reported that the biggest factor affecting their ability to deliver training was production schedules.

More than half those surveyed did not have a formal policy on training and none had a policy on basic skills training. Interestingly, while a majority of companies indicated they held a high level of commitment to training, an equal number did not have training budgets.

Planning and decision-making as it applied to training was found to be largely done by management, supervisors, quality assurance and human resource departments. There was a strong mandatory element to training reported, based on certification requirements. A majority of companies felt that custom-designed programs were the most suitable, again because of the specialized nature of the sector, and many companies engaged in cross-training.

For Health Care Products companies, effective training meant that training should be specifically tailored to company needs. Other important elements were that it should be measurable, short term, employee-focused and affordable. Most companies were oriented toward practical indicators of program success.

There was little support for government funding found in this sector with some explicitly stating they wanted nothing in the way of government support, preferring complete independence. New government initiatives were only attractive to half the companies, with equally divided opinions voiced for partnerships with stakeholders.

Environmental Industries

Roughly half the employers in the Environmental Industry sector indicated that the skill base of employees and related training was an issue, although nearly the same amount said there were no real human resource issues occurring. Also close in numbers was the division between those experiencing recruitment difficulties based on skills and experience as opposed to those for whom recruitment was not an issue While all tested for certification, most performed no testing at the entry level.

A large portion of the Environmental sector companies said that they had focused on basic skill functioning; most citing poor communication skills as their reason. Many were giving training for basic skills and half declared they would assume some responsibility in this area.

A high level of screening for basic skills or the intent to do so was reported. As one employer noted: "We would rather hire the skill than train the skill." More than half the representatives reported that there was no secrecy about basic skills functioning and no covering up. Few were aware of any employee concern over new types of basic skills-related tasks. The most commonly-reported factor affecting companies' ability to train was cost.

Few companies had a formal policy on training and fewer had a specific policy for basic skills training. Half the companies expressed an average or low commitment to training, and only a handful indicated that they were highly committed.

While planning and decision-making regarding training was largely done by management, supervisors or human resource departments, nearly half encouraged employee input and some took a team approach.

Most of the companies surveyed in this sector indicated that custom-designed programs were more suitable than off-the-shelf types, while the same proportion also engaged in cross training.

In terms of government supports for the Environmental sector, funding was the biggest issue. Many expressed that they would like funding, although some preferred a cost-shared arrangement, and a few declared that only the company should pay. Although many said government resources for new programs would encourage them to begin new training, a significant number said clearly it would not. A majority of respondents were willing to develop partnerships with stakeholders.

Effective training in the Environmental sector included objectives being specifically tailored to company needs or job-specific needs. Companies in this sector were mostly oriented to practical indicators of success, although there was also a strong affective element.

Agri-food Products

In the Agri-food sector, the largest unified response to queries about human resources issues was that there were none.

A majority of companies also declared an absence of recruitment difficulties and that they were not affected by government regulations or certification requirements. As a result, most companies had no formal assessment at the entry level and performed no other types of assessment or testing at any other time.

On the subject of basic skills, many employers were screening at the entry level and more than half said they had focussed on basic skills issues in some way. Many also said that they were not experiencing basic skills problems, but this did not necessarily mean that employees had good basic skills functioning. More likely, companies structured their systems to accommodate low functioning; therefore, there was no longer a problem. As one employer stated:

"These skills are not required. We don't consider them to be a problem for the company. It's really about who it's a problem for, not if it's a problem."

Not surprisingly, then, opinion was split equally between those who would and those who would not assume responsibility for basic skills training. And while a majority of those interviewed said that there was no secrecy on the part of employees about basic skills functioning, nearly half indicated that employees did cover up for themselves or others. Most also said that employees showed concern about new types of tasks.

Sector employers said that production schedules were the biggest factor affecting the companies' ability to deliver training.

Most companies did not have a formal policy on training and even fewer had a policy on basic skills training. Half expressed a high commitment to training while a significant proportion indicated a lower-than-average commitment.

Planning and decision-making was reported to be performed almost exclusively by management, and there was little testing associated with training. Nearly half the companies indicated that custom-designed programs were more suitable to their needs, and a majority reported that they used cross-training.

With respect to government interaction, many companies indicated that no support of any kind was required and, although some would like educational support, a few explicitly stated that the company should always pay.

Supporters of the idea of new government initiatives were slightly outweighed by detractors, and half the respondents indicated that stakeholder partnerships were unacceptable.

To Agri-food employers, effective training meant that objectives should be specifically tailored to company needs and that good trainers and educational principles be employed. Practical indicators, including bottom-line effects, were listed as indicators of success, with affective indicators almost equally as important to employers in this sector.

Small Companies

As approximately 92% of the businesses in Manitoba are small businesses (defined as having less than 50 employees), it is appropriate to shed some focus on issues as responded to by small business stakeholders in particular. Thirty-four small companies in Manitoba were surveyed across the six sectors, broken down as: four in Information & Telecommunications; nine in Tourism; three in Aerospace; two in Health Care Products; eight in Environmental Industries; and eight in Agri-food Products.

For small companies, the issue of production schedules was heightened, as often there were no replacements for those attending training and no funding to compensate for their absence or to allow the cessation of production. In addition, the costs of delivering training and the logistics of the time - and therefore the cost - of setting up training was an impediment to even beginning.

In some sectors there was a high degree of job specialization and training meant out-of-town travel; again with an associated cost that was at times prohibitive.

Desired government assistance for small companies was mentioned in terms of funding, information on funding sources and educational expertise

Information & Telecommunications

The majority of the companies surveyed in this sector were specialized in nature and privately-owned. None of these companies were regulated in any way.

All were using quality initiatives and team-based decision making, but none of the companies had training budgets and, as such, training issues revolved around the availability of courses locally and the costs of sending employees away for training.

Half the companies indicated that change issues focussed around rapidly-changing markets and responded to these issues primarily by training their employees. None of the companies performed testing at the entry level or at any other time, although it should be noted that most employees within these companies had post-secondary education, sometimes at a substantial level. As a result, there was little focus on basic skills.

All of the companies would like funding support for workplace training and half reported a need for educational expertise assistance.

All companies indicated that training must be practical in nature and directly relevant to company or employee needs. In addition, an indicator of success for all companies was defined as the ability of employees to apply the skill with some immediacy.

Tourism

Most of the respondents indicated that government budget cuts and changes in government legislation had a financial impact on them, as they were less able financially to absorb these types of changes than larger companies. A majority expressed some recruitment difficulties with respect to the required skill base.

A majority of the companies focussed on the government as an information source and, as has been reported previously, indicated that this was a major impediment to any initiative that they undertook. Respondents further indicated they were inclined to need educational expertise and were receptive to partnering in new types of initiatives.

The biggest factor impeding training initiatives was workloads as there often is no way of leaving work for training. Effective programming for these companies means that it is short-term and possibly conducted during non-working hours. One company discussed the desirability of a take-home type of course with tutorial assistance.

Aerospace

There were no significant change or human resources issues voiced by companies in this sector. A majority were not affected by government regulations.

A majority of respondents did not test at the entry level and none tested at any other time during employment. As well, a majority had not focused on basic skills, believing it to be a non-issue in their company.

Small Aerospace companies had, in general, a tendency to express more barriers to training than their larger counterparts, with those surveyed indicating that their small size was definitely an impediment to delivering training. In addition, a majority indicated that production schedules and specialization were also factors which affected their ability to deliver training.

None of these companies had a formal policy on training, but one used a strong participatory approach to decision-making for training. All engaged in cross-training.

A majority indicated a need for educational expertise in terms of support, were open to new initiatives and would partner with stakeholders. One company clearly stated it would not.

Most respondents felt that effective training meant that it would be specifically-tailored to a job and would be measurable. While all were largely oriented to affective indicators of program success, they also cited practical - including bottom-line indicators - as being important.

Health Care Products

All small Health Care Products companies listed growth as a major change issue and had responded with increased communication. All reported government regulations as affecting what workers did, but none tested in this respect and only half screened at the entry level.

All companies indicated that cost, production schedules and specialization were factors that impeded their ability to train but were nevertheless highly-committed to training.

One company had focused on basic skills and felt that while its single employee showed concern over new tasks, no covering up was taking place.

With respect to government supports, funding was a major issue for all companies. Half indicated a willingness to partner.

Environmental Industries

Less than half the companies in this sector cited internal change as an issue with the same number reporting no recruitment difficulties. None of the companies tested at the entry level, and while half were affected by government regulations few tested in this respect.

It was largely expressed that the costs of training were the major impediment to initiating training. As well, half the respondents indicated production schedules created difficulties with respect to training.

Most did not have a formal policy on training and did not require testing with their training initiatives. Half indicated that custom-designed programs were more suitable to their needs than off-the-shelf types.

Half reported that funding was an issue, with some saying they preferred a cost-sharing arrangement. While a majority declared themselves to be interested in new types of initiatives, few would consider stakeholder partnerships.

Respondents were divided about what constituted effective training. They cited factors such as evaluation and stakeholder input and commitment being equally as important as specific objectives. They were equally divided between practical and affective factors as being indicators of success.

Agri-food Products

Despite the fact that most of the companies in this sector were rural, location was not voiced as a training issue.

Only a small number of respondents indicated that there were major human resource issues and a few also cited structural change as an issue. For the most part, change prompted the initiation of training. Most companies said that there were no recruitment issues and did not test at any point.

More than half the companies felt they did not have a basic skills issue in-house. However, nearly the same number indicated that they were aware of covering up taking place and some said that there was some secrecy about basic skills functioning. Some respondents also said that they were aware of employee concern over new tasks.

Half the companies reported that they did not conduct any training at all. Five companies conducted cross-training. Three rural companies indicated that there were no factors impeding the delivery of training while only two companies indicated that production schedules were problematic.

Two companies clearly felt that there should be little or no government support and they would not consider new initiatives or enter into stakeholder partnerships.

Employees

121 employees were surveyed on a variety of issues designed to elicit their awareness and understanding of basic skills in the workplace. Specifically, what did employees believe constituted workplace basic skills; did they believe there was a workplace basic skills problem in their own workplace and, if so, was it being addressed; and what did employees believe were indicators of success in a workplace training program.

Due to the random selection methodology used for the employee survey, reporting in this section was widened to include the four additional sectors (Agriculture, Education, Government and Health Care) that emerged. Responses which did not fall into any of these ten sectors were grouped as Other and included in Part I only, in order to provide a broader view of employees in general.

A further refinement to the data will be noted with the additional breakdown of employees into general population (101) and a group of employees (20) attending workplace basic skills training classes at the time of the survey. However, while it is tempting to make assumptions based on these divisions it should be remembered that in addition to the variables influencing any survey, the relatively small sample size of those surveyed means that these responses should be viewed as trend indicators only.

Nevertheless, this breakdown resulted in an interesting set of response differences between groups. While the findings appear to indicate, overall, a relatively low understanding of workplace basic skills by employees, the employees attending basic skills classes generally express higher response levels on most issues as compared to the general population employees.

Part One Cross-sectoral

Employment Characteristics

General Population (GP) Employees. There were a total of 101 general population employees surveyed, and Figure 2 shows their average length of employment while Figure 3 shows employment totals according to sector. In addition, roughly two-thirds of employees indicated they worked for unionized companies, worked for small companies, and used some kind of quality initiative in their workplace.

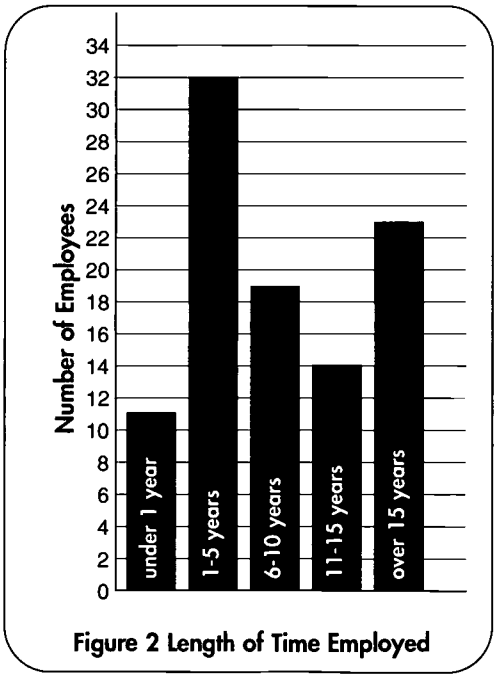


Figure 2 Length of Time Employed

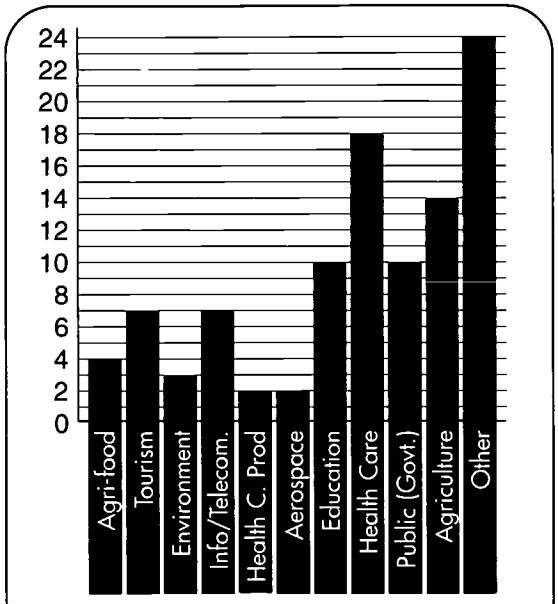


Figure 3 Number of Employees per Sector

Basic Skills Class (BSC) Employees. An additional 20 employees surveyed were attending basic skills classes at the time of the survey. Two-thirds of this group had been employed for less than 15 years and most worked for large, unionized companies. Nearly all indicated that their employer used some type of quality initiative.

Human Resource Issues

The following are the top five issues reported by GP employees:

1) employee morale
2) government legislation
3) training new employees
4) employee absenteeism
5) worker/management relations

Of the 20 employees in basic skills classes, the following are the top six workplace problems reported:

1) lay-offs
2) employee morale
3) employee absenteeism
4) restructuring
5) low productivity
6) basic skills of employees

Basic Skills Awareness

Very few employees in the general population declared basic skills to be a human resource issue. Of those who did, half indicated that co-workers showed concern when faced with new types of basic skills-related tasks.

Of perhaps greater interest is that of the large majority of GP employees who indicated that basic skills was not a human resource issue, half reported that co-workers showed concern when faced with new types of basic skills tasks. Of these, another one-third indicated that co-workers did cover up basic skills deficiencies and a few said that lack of basic skills was restricting their own internal movement.

In contrast, fully half of the BSC employees considered it to be an issue. Of those who did, a strong majority also reported that co-workers showed concern when faced with new types of tasks. One third of the BSC group reported that co-workers covered up basic skills deficiencies and a few indicated that basic skills functioning was restricting their own internal movement.

A majority of BSC employees indicated that employees showed concern when faced with new types of basic skills tasks but that it was not a human resource issue. Of these, more than two-thirds indicated that there was covering up and another one-third believed that basic skills deficiencies were restricting their own internal movement.

When asked to indicate which skills were in need of improvement, Figure 4 shows the responses for those that considered basic skills to be a human resource issue, those that indicated that co-workers covered up deficiencies but that it was not a human resource issue, the total group, and those who were attending workplace basic skills classes.

As can be seen, the responses from the BSC employees show higher levels of perceived need for improvement in almost every category. Of particular interest is the response column for Basic Skills, in which BSC employees reported a need for improvement that was three times that of the general population.

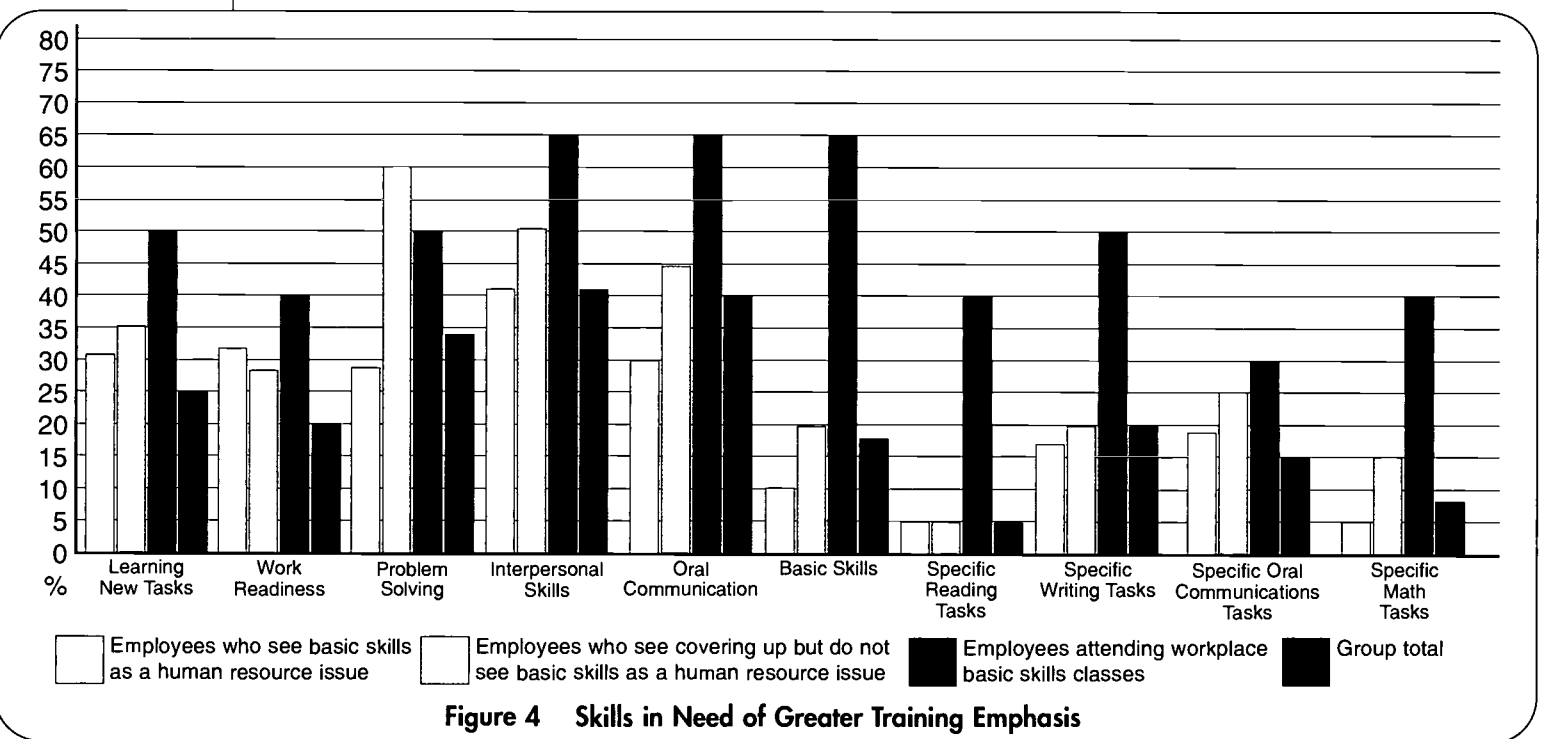


Figure 4 Skills in Need of Greater Training Emphasis

When asked about the types of basic skills used on the job, the following answers were given:

- 86% - oral communication
- 75% - reading
- 74% - writing
- 70% - problem solving
- 68% - learning
- 62% - math

As shown in Figure 5, GP employees were also asked about which job classifications were in need of basic skills training in their companies.

Job Category	Somewhat	Fair Amount	Great Deal
Management	25%	12%	24%
General Office	26%	15%	11%
Skilled Labour	19%	21%	12%
Unskilled Labour	20%	12%	7%
Production	12%	14%	4%
Professionals	11%	13%	15%
Supervisors	13%	18%	10%
Sales	10%	18%	10%
Other-Computer	1%	12%	1%

Figure 5 Job Class in Need of Basic Skills Training

For the 20 BSC employees, Figure 6 shows the responses for the same question. Note that, while the BSC employees reported higher percentiles than the GP in almost every category, both groups ranked Skilled Labour's need highest in the Fair Amount column.

Job Category	Somewhat	Fair Amount	Great Deal
Management	30%	35%	20%
General Office	20%	30%	10%
Skilled Labour	10%	60%	20%
Unskilled Labour	25%	25%	15%
Production	20%	40%	25%
Professionals	15%	25%	15%
Supervisors	10%	40%	25%
Sales	10%	30%	30%
Other-Computer			

Figure 6 In-class Results for Job Class in Need of Basic Skills Training

Training

Most employees indicated that their company had a formal policy on training, while only one-third of GP employees reported that their company had a policy on basic skills training. Half the employees said there was cross-training occurring at their company.

Figure 7 shows how employees expressed their employers' commitment to training.

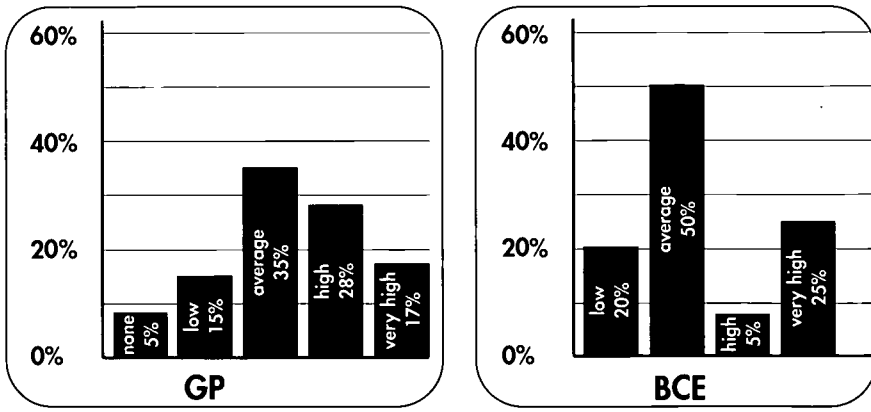


Figure 7 Employer Commitment to Training

Almost all BSC employees said that their companies had a policy on training, with half indicating that they had a policy on basic skills training. Just over half reported that their companies engaged in cross training.

More than half the GP employees indicated that production schedules were not a problem with respect to training. More than half indicated that there was no testing with training and most said that all employees in their companies were allowed to have training.

Of BSC employees, half reported that production schedules interfered with the delivery of training and roughly two-thirds said that there was no testing associated with training. Most indicated that everyone in the company is allowed to have training.

Both groups were more inclined toward affective indicators of training success, with BSC employees showing higher levels of preference. Of the three main indicators preferred, both listed greater confidence, with GP employees then choosing greater motivation and using new skills/ knowledge, while BSC employees selected greater desire for further training and greater communication.

Part Two Sectoral

Sectoral View

In addition to the six designated sectors for this survey, employee responses were found to fall largely within four additional sectors for a total of 10 sectors. The four additional sectors include Agriculture, Education, Public and Health Care. Responses that did not fall into any one of these sectors (Other) were selected out of the data.

Of the 20 employees taking workplace basic skills classes, eight were in the Aerospace sector (one class, large company) and 12 were in Agri-food Products (two classes, one large and one small company).

The following is a reporting by sector of the responses which differed substantially from the previous results.

Human Resource Issues

Figure 8 shows the major differences in human resource issues according to sector. In general, three groups - Aerospace In-class, Education and Public - expressed response levels on the issue of Morale that were significantly higher than the total surveyed. In particular, the Aerospace In-class group indicated higher response levels than any other group; particularly high levels with respect to Morale - double the total group's percentage - and Layoffs, where they expressed more than three times the total group's percentage.

Issues (Group Response %)	**Sectoral** Response						
	Agriculture	*Agri-food*	*Info. Telecomm.*	*Education*	*Public*	*Aerospace (In-class)*	*Agri-food (In-class)*
Morale (42%)			57%	80%	80%	100%	
Govt. Legislation (41%)		25%		60%	70%		
Training New Employees (36%)		75%					50%
Employees Absenteeism (36%)		50%	57%		60%	63%	50%
Worker/Management Relations (31%)				50%		63%	
ADDITIONAL ISSUES							
Basic Skills (23%)	36%					75%	
Restructuring (21%)			57%				58%
Lay-offs (27%)				60%		100%	75%
Wasted Material (22%)						75%	
Error (19%)						75%	
Productivity (22%)						88%	

Figure 8 Sectoral Differences in HR Issues

Basic Skills

Of the 22 employees who answered that basic skills was a human resource issue, 18 were in the ten designated sectors. There were no employee responses of this type from Health Care Products or Aerospace. With these exceptions, the previous description of sectoral employee responses can be said to be typical of the sectors. None constituted a large number of responses in any sector.

Of note is that while half the Agriculture employees surveyed expressed that co-workers showed concern when faced with new types of basic skills tasks, they did not consider it to be a human resource concern.

Of those employees in class, three-quarters in the Aerospace sector identified basic skills as a human resource issue. Sixty-three per cent indicated that employees showed concern with new tasks. Fifty per cent reported that covering up was occurring and 38 per cent indicated that lack of basic skills was restricting internal movement.

With respect to the types of skills used on the job, all ten employees in Education responded unanimously to all skills. Health Care employees also responded with large numbers to all skills, the least frequently-used being math and learning.

Figure 9 shows the substantially different sectoral responses for the skills needing greater training emphasis.

Skills	Group Total	Agriculture	Public	Education	Health Care	Agri-food	Tourism	Environment	Info.Telecom	In-class Aerospace	In-Class Agri-food
Learning New Tasks	26%	14%	40%			50%					
Work Readiness	19%	7%	40%					0%			
Problem Solving	34%			60%		50%	14%				75%
Interpersonal Skills	41%	7%	60%	60%		25%	14%	66%	57%	5%	63%
Oral Communication	38%	0%	60%							5%	
Basic Skills	16%	7%	30%					66%	0%		
Specific Reading Tasks	5%							33%		50%	
Specific Writing Tasks	20%		50%			0%				50%	
Specific Oral Tasks	16%	0%	40%	30%		0%	0%	66%			
Specific Math Tasks	8%	14%					0%				

Figure 9 Skills Requiring Greater Training Emphasis.

With respect to job classifications considered to be in need of basic skills training, the following frequency chart shows those sectors which differed substantially from Figure 4.

Job Class	Agri-food			Education			Health Care			Public			Agriculture		
	S	FA	GD	S	FA	GD	S	FA	GD	S	FA	GD	S	FA	GD
Management					10%	40%	17%	17%	33%	20%	10%	40%	21%	21%	
General Office					10%	60%									
Skilled Labour					10%			10%		20%	30%	10%	29%	29%	14%
Unskilled Labour	60%			40%	10%										
Production															
Professionals						50%						30%			
Supervisors					20%	40%	27%	11%	16%						
Sales															

S = Some FA = Fair Amount GD = Great Deal

Figure 10 Job Classification Needing Basic Skills Training

Training

Training Policy. Only 36 per cent of employees in Agriculture indicated that their employer had a policy on training, along with only 25 per cent in Agri-food. Public sector employees indicate a significantly higher number at 80 per cent. For those in-class, 83 per cent in Agri-food had a training policy, along with all those in Aerospace.

Basic Skills Policy. Employees in the Education (70 per cent) and Public (70 per cent) sectors indicated they had more policies on basic skills than the norm (39 per cent), while those in Agriculture had substantially less (21 per cent). For employees in-class, both sectors indicated a slightly higher rate (50 per cent) of employers with a policy on basic skills training than the norm (39 per cent).

Cross Training. Employees in Agri-food (75 per cent) and Aerospace (100 per cent) had a tendency to cross-train more than the group average (49 per cent). Of employees in-class, those in Aerospace cross-trained less (30 per cent) and those in Agri-food more (75 per cent) than the group average.

Additional Training. In Tourism (42 per cent) and Information and Telecommunications (54 per cent), less employees than the average (85 per cent) responded to the idea of acquiring further training. However, in terms of the type of training, only Information and Telecommunications (30 per cent) was above average (15 per cent) for those requesting technical skills. Agri-food (75 per cent), Education (80 per cent), Health Care (85 per cent) and the Public (90 per cent) sectors were higher than average (60 per cent) in requests for computer training, while Tourism (28 per cent), Environment (30 per cent) and Information and Telecommunications (28 per cent) were lower.

For in-class employees, both sectors (60 per cent) were higher than the group (15 per cent) with reference to technical skills.

Basic Skills Training. Of the in-class employees, 16 per cent in Aerospace and 30 per cent in Agri-food showed interest in further basic skills training. No other group of employees indicated a desire for basic skills training.

Production Schedule Inhibits Training. With a response of 60 per cent, production schedules were clearly a problem for the Public sector. For in-class employees, it was an issue for Agri-food.

Testing. With respect to testing, in Information and Telecommunications 60 per cent of employees and 63 per cent in the Public sector indicated that there was testing associated with training versus the group response of 30 per cent.

Availability of Training. Only 33 per cent of employees in Environmental Industries were allowed to have training versus 62 per cent in the group.

Success Indicators. In Aerospace (80 per cent) and Education (81 per cent), employees were clearly more oriented toward affective indicators of program success than the group (69 per cent).

Unions

This segment of the survey was completed in-person with four union representatives and one training director of an educational institute associated with a union. With each union functioning for well over 30 years, collectively they represented approximately 12,250 workers in Manitoba.

In general, the responses showed a wide range of concerns. Where they did overlap tended largely to be in areas reflecting the shared characteristics of the unionized workforces they represented. Frequently-voiced issues included apprenticeship certification, the seasonality of their members' employment, the number of rural members (impacting heavily on training delivery costs) and the changing demographics of their memberships.

Human Resource-Related Issues

A unanimous concern voiced by the representatives was the ability of members to certify with the Apprenticeship Board, described as an issue having three main components.

First was that the basic skills level of some of the members is at times low, which is largely seen as irrelevant to the trade skill but nonetheless jeopardizes their ability to take the test.

Second, the actual construction of test questions and language levels were also questioned. It was suggested that even the type of assessment tool used could itself be a problem, as it is often limited to being a written multiple-choice test only, with no practical element. At times, multiple-choice tests discriminate with respect to academic training and language level.

Third, uncertainty was expressed as to the appropriateness of the tests and certification process, with respondents wondering how current the content of the tests was and how well the content related to provincial standards.

There was some feeling that workplace training of employees was an issue, outlined as being a problem when members were trained to company-specific versus industry-wide requirements.

As a result, when laid off, the previous training of these workers often turns out to be too narrowly focussed, with further training required in order to gain new employment. In addition, the educational levels and length of time away from formal education of some of the members makes training and re-employment difficult.

Also voiced as a problem was the way in which seasonality and rurality of memberships affected the ability to deliver workplace-related training. Difficulties were described in trying to provide long-term training for seasonal workers, while delivery to rural memberships generally means higher costs.

Aging memberships were also seen as a potential problem area. Some representatives noted that a significant proportion of their members would soon be retiring and there was uncertainty as to who would fill the positions.

Change Issues

There was some discussion of a new role for unions as being a major change issue. This was described as including increased partnerships, community activities and an increased focus on holistic types of training agendas aimed at the welfare of members from a well-rounded perspective.

Another issue reported was that increased de-regulation would allow more individuals into the trade while, at the same time, increased computerization was altering workers duties. All respondents pointed to training as a solution to change issues.

Basic Skills Awareness

A majority of the representatives indicated that their organizations focused on the issue of basic skills, with some already conducting training in this area (largely in the non-attached trade memberships).

There was near-unanimous agreement that unions were prepared to accept some responsibility with respect to basic skills training, with the idea that it should involve a joint effort with employers and, in some cases, with government. Largely, it was felt that basic skills training should be an ongoing and long-term effort, elements of which could be incorporated into trades training itself. This included the concept of clear writing principles, which was seen to be an integral part of the basic skills issue and one which, it was felt, should be included in funding and policy structures.

It was strongly reported that secrecy exists in the workplace and union halls related to basic skills functioning. Just as emphatically reported was that, where a lack of basic skills existed, internal movement was definitely restricted.

In terms of the effects that this can have on members a highly holistic perspective has been used, with unions quick to point out the costs in terms of members' self-confidence, self-esteem, safety and re-employment.

Training

Almost all representatives stated a very high commitment to training, with all expressing a participatory approach to planning and decision-making, often by surveying members directly in a formal or informal manner. Some union organizations had formal training policies - one of them a formal basic skills policy - and clearly promoted the benefits of training.

Very strong support was shown for custom-designed training as being the most suitable approach. For cross-training, however, there was only meagre support shown, with the majority believing that it deskilled employees and had the potential to reduce employment totals.

The biggest factor cited with respect to barriers to the implementation of training was the rural memberships and the costs of delivering training to them.

As well, a majority reported some element of seasonality as a barrier, factoring in short layoff and re-employment notices and mobile worksites. Some also reported that their membership's diversity made it difficult to deliver specific trade-related training

All reported some degree of funding availability as an issue. And while nearly all unions represented had a training budget based on a fund which allocated a percentage of union dues per member, most did not associate the costs of the coordination or implementation of training within the budget.

Government Interactions and Partnerships

In terms of government support, it was felt that training should involve more partnerships between unions, government, members and employers. It was also suggested that the apprenticeship system should be revised and that more partnerships were required to achieve this.

With regard to the apprenticeship system's testing mechanism itself, it was advised that there be analysis and revisions made with respect to the appropriateness of the type of test administered, the currency, and the relevancy of test content to the provincial regulations involved.

Training in general, it was agreed, should be long-term in nature, reflecting a life-long learning perspective which would include basic skills.

It was also felt that the government should be more flexible and responsive in terms of funding conditions, thereby allowing basic skills training to be adapted to the specific needs of a union and its membership, including materials development and translations. In addition, there was some agreement that government should promote a training culture to employers and promote the image and required skills level of trades to the public.

Again, as with employers, there was negative reference made to the need for a consistent, quick and reliable source of government information.

Effective Training and Indicators of Success

When discussing effective training, most felt that training should be member-focused with lots of learner participation, input and discussion. While one opinion held that training should be taught only by tradespeople, another approach focussed on the overall necessity for good course material written at an appropriate level.

In general, however, it was suggested that training should be enjoyable, socializing and politicizing. It was also felt that it should be a no-fail system and have the promotion of self-esteem factored into its design.

All unions cited increased self-confidence, motivation and self-esteem as being the biggest indicators of program success. Second to that would be the use of new skill and, with some, the ability to pass the trade certification exams.

Enticingly, it was further predicted that there would be a correlational increase in union participation.

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