

Human Resource and Training Needs Assessment and Strategies Report

PIMA Sector Partnership

September 1999

Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working on behalf of the PIMA Sector Partnership Steering Committee, TDR Human Resource Services Ltd. and with the Saskatchewan Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, Trimension Group conducted research to identify the human resource and training needs of the agriculture implement manufacturing sector in the province and to devise strategies for human resource and training planning.

INTRODUCTION

In order to develop and implement the most appropriate strategies for a proactive human resource plan for the industry, the PIMA Sector Partnership undertook a survey of PIMA members to identify human resource and training needs of the current and future requirements of the industry in both the technical and non-technical areas. This report presents the results of this research.

METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument was developed by Trimension Group in consultation with the PIMA Sector Partnership Steering Committee. A copy of the survey appears in an appendix to this report.

Respondents were drawn from the PIMA Membership Directory, specifically the list of regular members. Respondents will be restricted to only those 79 regular member companies in Saskatchewan. Interviewers were instructed to survey human resource or personnel managers, or in their absence the general manager. In total, 41 companies were interviewed.

Key findings from the survey were discussed by the Steering Committee to develop recommendations. In addition, key findings from the telephone survey and the recommendations developed by the Steering Committee were presented to employer and employee groups at PIMA member companies for discussion. Each group was asked the same set of questions. In total, two employer groups were held in Saskatoon and Regina and two employee groups were conducted in Saskatoon between February 1 and 12. At each of the employer groups three companies were present. Within each employee group, there were a variety of occupations present at the discussion groups. In addition, the findings from a similar discussion for the Export Manufacturing Sector Partnership were incorporated into the results.

The training curriculum phase of the project involved the following steps:

1. Identify any gaps in training offered compared to training needs in the industry.
2. Identify courses/ programs required for each area.
3. Make curriculum recommendations.
4. Identify processes for certification.

The recommendations regarding training and human resource issues were developed by the Steering Committee and were further refined in consultation with industry at the discussion groups with employers and employees.

KEY FINDINGS

Through the course of the research and discussions a number of key findings arose. The following summarize the more important ones:

- There is a relatively young workforce employed in the industry with almost two-thirds between the ages of 16 and 34.
- Although there has been a recent slowdown in the industry due to the agriculture commodity prices and the Asian economic meltdown, companies indicated they did anticipate growth in employment for the next year.
- Occupations where this growth is expected include welders, machine operators, labourers, painters, sales and front-line supervisors.
- Trends that are affecting companies as it relates to training needs are computerized technology changes, specialized skill requirements to operate the new computer controlled equipment and the need to expand to markets other than just agriculture.
- On-site company specific training is by far the most common approach companies undertake when it comes to skill development of their employees.
- Cultural diversity training for non-aboriginal employers and employees and preparing the workplace for aboriginal people are two initiatives that are very quickly requiring attention.
- The use of technology in the workplace will be increasingly important for companies in this industry due to competitiveness and productivity.
- Human resource planning within companies will be a requirement, in order to deal with things like change in workforce demographics, use of new technology, improved productivity, reduction of turnover, improved recruitment, and diversification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the results of the research and developed in consultation with the Steering Committee.

Training Needs

Companies in the industry generally support on-going training of their employees, mainly in job-specific skills, safety, and computers. Training accessibility is an issue and most companies prefer on-site and on-the-job training, and many use their own employees to deliver the training. Other improvements needed include having up to date equipment at training institutions and instructors with relevant industry experience. Research showed many employers are not aware of available training programs and funding sources; more effective communication is required.

Companies in the industry expect to see a growth in the number of people employed, especially among welders, labourers, machine operators, front-line supervisors, painters, and sales. Overall, companies reported few skill deficiencies and most of the skill areas focus on computer training and using new techniques and equipment.

Timing of training courses offered at training institutions emerged as an important factor as to whether or not companies decide to send employees.

Companies in general see the need for cultural diversity training as depending on whether Aboriginal people are employed in their company. Many felt that they currently have no strong need for such training as they have no problems or few Aboriginal employees. However, this will be a factor that needs to be dealt with in the very near future.

Recommendation: It is critical that PIMA and the industry continue and nurture the partnership with training institutions and providers and work to ensure there are adequate training spaces, programs and courses for employees entering employment and for existing employees. Where training does not exist, industry and training institutions must work together to develop these training programs.

- Strategy: In order to better plan training for the industry, companies must endeavour to use more human resource planning practices in terms of anticipating employment. Better planning would allow industry to continue to work with training providers to ensure there are enough graduates in related programs to meet their needs. PIMA must work with its members to develop this capability.
- Strategy: The database of available training programs must be kept current and available through PIMA to members.
- Strategy: PIMA should complete detailed job analyses for the various occupations in the industry. This information could be provided to SIAST and other training providers to determine if there are already training programs that exist or if programs need to be developed or brokered through another training institutions.
- Strategy: The research and gap analysis undertaken in this project identified the need for more formal industrial paint application training, thus building on these findings, a formal training program in industrial paint application should be developed and delivered on an as-needed basis, and coordinated through PIMA. This could be delivered either in-house using company staff as trainers or through an outside facilitator provided by PIMA, SIAST, other training providers, or through the regional economic development authorities.

Additional development would need to be done at this time to bring the curriculum up to a state where all the courses/modules in the program can actually be delivered.

This course should include modules in: orientation to industrial coatings applicators; interpretation of contracts, specifications, and legislation; selection and use of surface preparation methods; selection and use of application methods; recognition of safety and environmental obligations; math modules; use of equipment; quality; and powder coating. In addition, modules on WHMIS and Occupational Health and Safety may be included as prerequisite or follow-up training.

- **Strategy:** Additional courses currently available through other related industry associations should be investigated and offered by PIMA, such as the training program and performance assessment plan developed by the Association of Rotational Molders. This program includes:
- Methods to determine current skill levels, identify deficiencies, training methods, and training required for a variety of occupations, from maintenance personnel to process/machine operators and supervisors.
 - Basic competencies required to prepare, start-up, and shut-down a rotational molding machine in a production environment
 - Documentation about the basic process involved in rotational molding.
 - Basic competencies required to take over, run, and monitor a rotational molding machine in a production environment

Recommendation: Industry should work with training providers and government to ensure information about training programs and funding is easily accessible to companies and maintained in a database.

- **Strategy:** Information on training programs and funding should be readily accessible to all industry members in the form of a centralized information source and regular promotion. PIMA serves a critical role in researching, housing, and distributing information to members about training programs and funding in a database.

A database of all relevant training available for PIMA members was researched and developed through this sector partnership. PIMA will serve as a central contact for providing this information to members about training and funding programs. This information will be made available on paper and electronically in a database form, and made available through the Internet.

- **Strategy:** Tax credits and initiatives for companies offering training should be researched by PIMA to enable small and medium sized companies access to provincial training incentives.

Recommendation: Industry should continue to focus on developing and delivering in-house training programs. Training programs that can be delivered on-site address the issue of training accessibility. Encouraging internal training would address the need for trainers with industry experience and using up to date equipment as companies would be offering training using their own employees on their own shop floor.

- **Strategy:** Companies should implement training programs during slow periods to help with employee retention.
- **Strategy:** PIMA should partner with SIAST and other trainers to investigate and consider options for offering train the trainer programs for companies providing their own internal training. The existing workplace (OJT) training program offered by SIAST Woodland

Campus needs to be studied to determine relativity and appropriateness for adaptation to PIMA's needs.

- Strategy: Training should be more formalized by providing accreditation through the most appropriate agency. PIMA could serve as a certification body for companies' internal training programs by providing checklists of required skills for different jobs. These checklists should be developed by PIMA, industry, and training providers. The checklists could be used as a basis to provide structure to on-the-job training currently being provided by industry. In addition, training would be considered as certified by PIMA providing employees with recognition. These checklists could be used as a basis to determine whether the training can be accredited by SIAST.
- Strategy: PIMA must contact all the training providers identified or mentioned in this project to ensure their name and a contact is on the Association's mailing list so they can receive vital information about needs identified and to open the lines of communication even more.

Recommendation: The process of identifying aboriginal issues has been started through this project and although there has been no issues identified at this time, PIMA and members are aware there are potential for issues in the industry in the future and they will need to be vigilant and prepared to respond when necessary.

- Strategy: PIMA will work with training providers to gather information about training courses or seminars on cultural diversity and Aboriginal issues. Information should be provided to members and distributed through their newsletter.
- Strategy: PIMA will need to meet with and develop partnerships to exchange information with Aboriginal groups and agencies.
- Strategy: First Nations and Métis leaders must emphasize the importance of employability skills to Aboriginal peoples by incorporating courses on these topics within their training programs.
- Strategy: Industry and Aboriginal organizations and training institutions, such as the Dumont Technical Institute and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology, must work together to address training and human resource issues and ensure that their training programs meet industry needs. This can be achieved through on-going and open dialogue between PIMA and Aboriginal organizations.

Recruiting and Retention

Some companies have difficulty recruiting because of rural location (housing) and competition from other companies in industry, as well as there being a lack of skilled people available. One issue of concern to this industry is that young people may not be attracted to the industry and prefer working in an office or similar environment as opposed to outdoors or on a shop floor.

Companies with retention problems cited poor employability skills, their rural location, and competition from other industries (money and location). Most just accept turnover as part of doing business and address it through recruitment or by offering better pay, benefits, and trying to improve the work environment. Companies are having difficulty in recruiting skilled welders, journey persons in some of the other trades (especially maintenance), engineers, machine operators, painters, and accountants.

Anticipated changes in the Saskatchewan labour market such as more women working, more Aboriginal people entering the workforce and a rural to urban shift are issues for companies that can be overcome. They feel that their hiring policy of selecting the best person for the job addresses these challenges.

Companies expressed their difficulties in attracting and keeping skilled labour in Saskatchewan, especially rural Saskatchewan, when many skilled, young people are moving away. Many employers cited the high personal income tax and sales tax as being a major issue.

Younger and new employees may be lacking employability skills. Another related challenge is that they are highly mobile and they may be unwilling to stay in the Province when they can go elsewhere for more money. Some may not be attracted to life in a rural community. This, combined with the cyclical nature of the industry, leads to challenges in retaining a skilled workforce.

Recommendation: Courses or support in employability skills training should be offered to current employees, as well as using better recruiting practices.

- Strategy: Employees must be made aware of the importance of employability skills in the workplace.
- Strategy: PIMA should develop an outline of employability skills as well as practical guidelines for employers to use when recruiting and selecting employees to ensure those they hire do have the skills needed to be successful at work.
- Strategy: SIAST and other training providers should ensure life skills or employability skills component be included in technical skills training.
- Strategy: PIMA will work with industry to develop a generic orientation checklist that would assist members in the orientation task. The orientation should be provided to new employees and be included in an employee handbook. Companies need to explore the use of mentoring more formally in the workplace.

Recommendation: Companies need to be more proactive in competing for labour in Saskatchewan. This includes anticipating changes in terms of demographics and adapting recruitment policies to fit the situations. Industry must also look for ways to encourage retention of employees.

- Strategy: PIMA should promote the industry overall through a public relations campaign to generate overall awareness of the industry.
- Strategy: PIMA must promote the industry to the high schools and youth by making career information readily available to high school guidance counsellors and through involvement with the schools at career fairs. The industry should be promoted as highly technical and advanced.
- Strategy: PIMA should work with training institutions to offer co-operative education, work experience practicums or summer employment in those occupations for which they have difficulty recruiting in this way it could address their needs as well as attract young people into the industry.
- Strategy: Recruitment needs to be focused more on attracting Aboriginal people and women in the workforce.
- Strategy: There needs to be innovative approaches to promote living and working in rural communities. We should learn from the successes of companies who have achieved this. These companies could serve as role models for other companies facing this challenge. PIMA could profile their successes in the newsletter and during their annual conference or when members visit a work site.
- Strategy: When recruiting, companies should advertise the benefits of living and working in their community. This way they will attract individuals to their community that would be interested and informed about the merits of this lifestyle and may be more inclined to become permanent residents.
- Strategy: Retention strategies need to be researched by our Provincial government that will promote the benefits of staying in the Province. This could include stressing higher costs of living in other regions due to costs such as that for health care and insurance.
- Strategy: PIMA should continue to work with the government in a consultative manner to develop a solution for this long-term issue of people leaving the province. Joint discussion and cooperative ventures are the best solution.

Communication Strategy

Recommendation: The results of the training and human resource needs assessment and the recommendations of the Steering Committee should be publicized.

- Strategy: PIMA will provide an executive summary to members through the newsletter and at the annual convention.
- Strategy: The media needs to be contacted to publicize the findings of the study as a way of promoting the industry.

Sector Partnership

Employers and employees feel companies should continue to work together to address training and human resource issues for the agriculture implement manufacturing industry. PIMA should provide information on these issues to industry.

Recommendation: Industry should continue to work together to identify and address training and human resource issues.

- Strategy: PIMA has a role to play in terms of providing on-going co-ordination to the Sector Partnership.
- Strategy: Individual companies should continue to participate in addressing training and human resource issues through the Sector Partnership Steering Committee, by being requested or asked to provide input into what's happening in the industry and meeting at least annually to discuss developments, issues and needs.

Next Steps

The research and the work of the industry Steering Committee has revealed many relevant recommendations and strategies by which to consider. PIMA in consultation with the Steering Committee now needs to take these key recommendations and strategies to the next level, which is implementation. Those recommendations which are deemed most important are the ones which should be undertaken as the next steps. Those that were identified by the Steering Committee are as follows:

- PIMA will continue discussion with the Steering Committee and industry in nurturing and developing a strong partnership with the training institutions, especially SIAST, the regional colleges, DTI and SIIT by:
 - Making available and keeping current the training database of all courses and programs offered through these institutions; and
 - Identifying in the planning process ways to address issues such as training for new employees, retraining existing employees, addressing skill shortages, accessibility and better workplace training methods.
- PIMA will circulate back to the industry the results of the study and the on-going work of the Steering Committee through:
 - Publishing articles in the monthly newsletter “The PIMA Pulse”;
 - Raising items of importance at such venues as the PIMA annual conference; and
 - Preparing a news release on the highlights and key findings.
- PIMA will start discussions with industry on aboriginal participation in the workforce and work with aboriginal organizations and training providers/consultants in gathering and publishing information on causes and seminars on cultural diversity and workforce participation.
- PIMA will work with SIAST and the regional colleges to attain the necessary standards and certification of the Industrial Applications and Rotational Molders training programs, as well

as other courses and programs that will become necessary as jobs change and new technologies emerge.

- PIMA will work industry and the Steering Committee to develop an outline of the employability skills necessary for employers to use when recruiting and selecting new employees.
- PIMA will work to develop a generic orientation checklist which will assist companies during the orientation process of new employees. This orientation is to be provided to all new employees and if available, the checklist should be included in the company's employee handbook.
- PIMA needs to continue to explore and facilitate opportunities and research methods by which companies can implement the use of technology in the workplace.