

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Working on behalf of the Export Sector Partnership Steering Committee 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 export manufacturing sector in the province and devise strategies for human resource and training planning.

The Export Manufacturing Sector Partnership Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from the industry, training providers, associations, government agencies and departments, and Aboriginal groups.

Human Resource and Training Needs Assessment

Sixty-six companies were interviewed by telephone concerning their training needs. Those surveyed were asked a series of questions concerning their current level of employment and their five-year employment projections by occupation. In addition, issues such as training availability, access, recruitment, and retention were included in the scope of the survey. Respondents were given the opportunity to identify the most pressing human resource and training issues in the export industry.

Companies interviewed report that the occupations that will experience the most growth in the next five years include:

- Labourers in processing, manufacturing and utilities
- Machining
- Metal working
- Woodworking and related machine operations
- Supervisors
- Marketing and sales
- Clerical staff
- Metal forming
- Printing press operators
- Data processors
- Accountants and accounting clerks
- Welders

None of the survey participants indicated that there would be a decrease of any significance in any positions, but a number of positions were expected to remain constant.

Respondents indicated that occupations such as supervisors, information system and sales and marketing personnel, engineers, and welders are in the most need of training. Supervisors require more 'people' skills, computer training and need to develop customer relations skills. Information systems personnel as well require more 'people' and customer relation skills. The companies with engineers on staff indicated a need to update their skills to match technical changes in the workplace, in addition to developing customer relations and people skills. It was indicated that employees in sales and marketing will need to develop strategies and techniques to promote increased sales, and increase their knowledge in export techniques. The export companies who employ welders indicate general skill updating, upgrading to journeyman status, product familiarity, knowledge of company policy and procedures, training in 'MIG' welding and light materials are all necessary in today's export environment.

Occupations that will see major changes in training over the next five years include supervisors, information systems personnel, engineers, sales and marketing staff and welders. Prospective changes include how supervisors manage their staff, and what information systems personnel will need to learn regarding new computer software and technology. Engineers employed in the manufacturing industry will need to upgrade and learn more about CAD operations. Sales and marketing teams will need to keep up with technology, develop strategies, and respond to changes in company size and react to sales and product upgrades.

Barriers to training include lack of time, location, and the costs involved with training employees. Difficulties revolving around employee recruitment are often due to the geographical location of the business. Companies also report it is often difficult to find technically skilled and experienced people to hire. In addition to needing an experienced, skilled recruit willing to work in rural Saskatchewan, often employers do not have the resources to compete with the pay and benefits offered elsewhere.

The most prevalent reason for an employee to leave a company is outside opportunity. The companies surveyed hire experienced employees who are frequently willing to move between different jobs and geographical locations. Other factors include the amount of pay and benefits companies can offer, and the drawback of seasonal or unstable employment opportunities.

The most pressing human resource issues identified are lack of qualified people, wages and lack of exporting knowledge. Solutions to meeting the industry's demand include better access to training, seminars, apprenticeship and ISO programs, as well as better wages and direct industry input. In addition, ensuring educators clearly understand industry requirements will go along way to ensuring new recruits have the training today's export industry is looking for.

The most pressing training issues involve locating training, and finding the time and money involved to provide it. Keeping up with technological changes is a pressing training issue in today's export environment. Resolution of these issues involves the ability to use local training and increased awareness by the industry of training availability. In addition, having some measure of control over the training provided would resolve some of the training issues the Saskatchewan Export Manufacturing industry faces today.

Discussions of the human resource and training needs assessments were conducted with the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was presented the results of the telephone survey, where they had the opportunity to provide their response to the results and direction for further research.

The original intention of this project was to conduct focus groups, which generally contain individuals from a number of companies. However, difficulties arose when companies were approached to participate. The majority of the companies involved in export manufacturing are small to medium sized enterprises and were unwilling to suffer the lost production time. Trimension Group developed a different strategy, which was more conducive to the companies time constraints and still allowed for direct input from employees. Four 'Toolbox' sessions or on-site discussion groups were conducted with Export Manufacturing company employees to validate the results of the survey. Using the survey results, the Steering Committee formed a series of recommendations, which were presented to employees. Participants had the opportunity to comment on the existing recommendations and add their own thoughts and ideas. There were four to six employees present at these hour-long sessions.

Using information that was gathered in the literature review and the survey, a database of training providers and relevant training courses was compiled as well as other topics such as cultural sensitivity training and essential or employability training. This database can be used by industry members to identify training programs that are required by employees.

Working with Lou Charlebois and Kerry Finucan from SIAST, Trimension Group developed a Train the Trainer Pilot program to address the specific training needs of industry. To insure industry relevance, Gerald Mushka of USF Watergroup worked closely with SIAST in the development of the program that took the form of a one-day workshop. The workshop was conducted in Regina on Jan 14, 1999. The program was designed to be delivered by an outside provider or an in-house trainer. The content of the course covers all aspects of teaching a specific task, or set of tasks to a learner. The pilot program was delivered to four companies involved in the Sector Partnership. These companies include USF Watergroup, Leon-Ram Enterprises Inc., Thomson Meat Ltd., and Big Quill Resources. The training program and accompanying program binder are currently available through SIAST.

The Export Sector Partnership

The Export Manufacturing Sector Partnership Steering Committee is currently exploring ways to continue the Partnership. Research has revealed some interest in the Partnership and some level of support. Individuals in the ‘tool box’ sessions were very positive about the current work of the Committee and participants indicated an interest in becoming more involved. Participants interviewed also see a need for training providers and industry to work together to address current issues.

Thus far the Partnership has articulated the issues facing the industry and confirmed this information with a variety of groups using a variety of research methods. These issues have been communicated to the Steering Committee, which has developed strategies to address these issues. The second stage of the Partnership would encompass refining and implementing these strategies.

Steering Committee Recommendations

The Export Manufacturing Sector Partnership Steering Committee developed a series of recommendations based on Committee discussions and research conducted by Trimension Group. The recommendations will serve as a guide for future Committee deliberations and activities. As the Partnership continues, the Committee will refine and prioritize the recommendations and implement the strategies.

The recommendations are divided into four key areas: recruitment, training, retention, and the Sector Partnership. Below is summary of the recommendations.

RECRUITMENT

Recommendation: Increased Aboriginal Participation

Recommendations: The Steering Committee has suggested that there needs to be increased awareness and participation by Aboriginal groups in the Export Manufacturing industry.

Recommendation: Promote Youth Participation

The Steering Committee recommends a campaign to attract youth and the development of partnerships between high schools and industry to better promote the careers in the manufacturing industry to high school students.

The Steering Committee recommends exploring avenues for communicating with the Department of Education as well as other appropriate authorities, in order to understand the secondary school system and provide suitable career and curriculum information.

Recommendation: Promote Careers to Underrepresented Groups

The Steering Committee recommends that initiatives be developed and implemented to promote the career opportunities in the industry to groups that would be potential labour force for this sector. Many of the strategies for recruitment are the same for each group. In these cases, joint approaches should be undertaken to create efficiencies.

TRAINING

Recommendation: Explore Alternate Methods in the Delivery of Training

The Steering Committee recommends that alternate methods of delivering training be explored, particularly for current employees.

Recommendation: Train-the-Trainer Programs

The Steering Committee recommends that industry promote the on-the-job training workshop that was developed as a part of the sector partnership for Export Manufacturing. This program was developed to give companies a means to develop their own capacity to deliver in-house training in a more effective, efficient manner.

Recommendation: Employability Skills Training

The Steering Committee recommends that the importance of essential or employability skills, particularly communication, teamwork skills and personal management skills, which include attitudes and behavior as well as responsibility, be stressed to employers as a need and be made available to new as well as experienced employees.

Recommendation: Supervisory Training

The Steering Committee recommends that effective supervisor training be made accessible to industry members.

Recommendation: Skills Upgrading

The Steering Committee recommends that the importance of continuous skills upgrading in all occupations be stressed to industry and training providers.

RETENTION

Recommendation: Industry Participation and Cooperation

The Steering Committee recommends communication with industry concerning solutions to turnover as well as further exploration of how industry can work together to address issues of retention.

SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

Recommendation: Continue the Sector Partnership

The Steering Committee recommends the continuation of the Partnership between industry, training providers, government, Aboriginal groups, and labour with a mandate to refine and implement these recommendations and continue efforts to identify and address future issues.

Recommendation: Enhance Communication among Stakeholders

The Steering Committee recommends that industry, training providers, government departments and agencies, and employee and other groups should work together through the Sector Partnership and other agencies to ensure full communication.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Action Plan

An action plan was also developed to offer suggestions regarding the next steps for the Sector Partnership. The future plan includes:

- The proposed development of an industry association that would allow effective communication between industry members. An important aspect of the continued success of the Partnership is industry buy-in.
- The Export Manufacturing Sector Partnership will require the support of established industry associations to ensure its continuation. The Partnership will need to strengthen existing relationships with Industry associations such as Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board, Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership and Provincial Exporters Association.
- An important feature of the Train the Trainer program is availability to industry. An area that needs to be investigated further is where the program can be housed so that industry has easy, economical access to it.
- Development of an ‘instructors manual’ for the train the trainer program that would allow industry to give the workshop using their own trainer.