



Best face forward

How a unique approach to essential skills training worked for a cosmetics manufacturer

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Increases in essential skills levels have been shown to improve performance and productivity, reduce waste, and improve safety records, impacting bottom line and competitive advantage.

Performance issues are often related to low essential skills levels. Employees with low levels of essential skills have more workplace safety incidents, lower productivity, and higher error rates. Employees with higher levels of essential skills are more productive, adapt better to new or changing situations, and are better prepared for advancement within an organization. Integrating essential skills into an organization's employee development program allows an employer to address many of the underlying skills issues that can affect organizational productivity.

What is Skilling UP?

Skilling UP is an innovative workplace training approach designed to increase the workplace essential skills of employees in the manufacturing sector. The project was funded by the Government of Canada, through the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES).

Skilling UP offers essential skills training that is tightly tied to workplace procedures and documents determined through the process of an extensive Organizational Needs Assessment. It is aligned to employees' essential skills levels and employers' business goals.

Company goals and challenges

Cosmetica Laboratories operates in Ontario and most of their employees at the time of the project spoke English as a second language. The company has experienced tremendous growth in recent years.

The management team working with the Skilling UP project had two main goals:

1. Increase productivity:
 - Decrease time to complete tasks
 - Increase engagement of employees
 - Improve employees' contributions to manufacturing processes
2. Increase competitiveness:
 - Decrease errors and waste
 - Meet client quality requirements consistently

The company identified that better communication among three critical positions could impact productivity and quality. In 2016, 119 employees were trained, and in 2017, Cosmetica Laboratories added two more positions that they realized would also benefit from the training, and an additional 35 employees took the training.

More than half of the training group was over 45 years old, 96 percent of them had at least a high school or equivalent education, and only 9 percent were born in Canada.

What we delivered

The Skilling UP curriculum designers and trainers developed a 30-hour curriculum and delivered it to mixed groups. The curriculum was based on a comprehensive Organizational Needs Assessment that included interviews with management, employees and supervisors, a visit to the factory floor, and a review of Cosmetica's documents and manuals. The training focused on developing essential skills through the context of the workplace tasks and materials that these employees worked with every day. The essential skills focused on were:

- Document use
- Thinking skills
- Oral communication

The results

Tailoring the curriculum to the skills levels of the employees and the job tasks they perform at the company resulted in employees improving their skills levels. Pre- and post-assessments are a critical piece of the project as they ensure accountability. The employees' document use abilities were evaluated before and immediately after the Skilling UP training, and the results showed an overall increase in skill – two out of three employees demonstrated a skill gain. Most importantly the employer, managers, supervisors, and employees acknowledged the benefits of their participation in the training including the impact on productivity and increased competitiveness.

Ninety percent of participants reported they could use the skills they learned during training in their workplace. Line workers and supervisors noted a wide range of performance improvements following the training. These included:

- Strategies for more accurate reporting
- Improved calculation skills – faster and more accurate completion
- A reduction in re-work
- Improved communications, facilitating better teamwork, and problem solving

Comments from participants after Skilling UP training:

"The Skilling UP training is very closely related to the real working environment."

"I found it to be very useful. Can be used in the workplace, but also at home."

"I can fill out my documents effectively and correctly. I can understand other departments' work processes."

"It was relevant to work; it helps me understand how the whole organization works."

Comments from company management after Skilling UP training:

"The curriculum developers customized our training to the needs of our employees. These components increased the effectiveness and the positive outcomes of the training. In addition, the model included pre- and post-assessments of our employees, which allowed for a concrete measure of their skill improvement, which gave our company real proof of the advantages of the Skilling UP project."

"We saw an impressive level of engagement from our employees, because they could immediately see how this training would help them do their jobs better."

Contact us

To learn more about Skilling UP training and how we can get results for your company, please contact:

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Canada

