

Workplace Literacy Organizational Needs Assessments (ONAs)



Laubach Literacy Ontario



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1. Introduction

There are many ways to conduct an Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA). Perhaps the most important thing to understand when beginning the process is that it will not be linear. When building a relationship with employers there are many factors impacting their needs, including sudden changes to the business cycle. After all, for-profit industries and not-for-profits must respond to different changes in their environment. Understanding these differences when you enter the ONA process will serve you well.

Overall, these are the steps involved in conducting an ONA:

1. Learn about the company.
2. Determine the employer's needs.
3. Review their past experiences with training.
4. Share what workplace training can do.
5. Discuss the "L" word (Literacy).
6. Paperwork (collect authentic workplace documents)
7. Clarify the employer's training expectations.
8. Perform an in-depth GAP analysis.
9. Determine different training options.
10. Prepare the ONA report.

Is Workplace Literacy Right for You?

Before we examine the ONA, it is worth asking: Should every adult literacy agency in Ontario participate in workplace literacy delivery?

Our answer is no. Instead, we offer those who are interested in workplace literacy a series of steps to engage employers in skills development and training delivery based on their needs and goals.

If you decide to take the step toward engaging with workplace literacy, consider how Literacy and Basics Skills (LBS) and workplace literacy differ.

Comparing LBS to Workplace Training

| LBS | Workplace |
|--|--|
| Goals set by Learner related to 5 goal paths identified by the funder (MLITSD) | Goals set by Employer |
| Learners identified/referred | Employees identified/referred |
| Learners assessed initially | Employees assessed initially |
| Learners trained | Employees trained |
| Learners assessed ongoingly | Employees assessed ongoingly |
| Learners assessed at end of training | Employees assessed at end of training |
| Report to MLITSD | Report to Employer |
| Evaluation of learner/LBS service provider | Evaluation of employee/training provider |

In this module, we will investigate the needs assessment process by learning how to identify the employer's training needs and goals. In our experience, once you produce a comprehensive ONA, you will set yourself up to develop and deliver an outstanding training program that will serve the needs of employers and their employees.

2. What is an Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA)?

An ONA is a document that assesses the training needs of an employer. When conducting an ONA, the goal is to learn from employers and their staff what training will improve overall job performance and effectiveness.

When conducting an ONA, it is necessary to build trust with the employer, establishing an understanding that they and their employees know what is required to be effective on the job. You can approach the employer and their staff as expert clients retaining your services to put their ideas and insights into practice.

The ONA process allows LBS professionals to talk to employers about the work their staff performs and how to improve that performance through skills training. LBS professionals can meet with employees and learn what skills (or professional) development they want to receive to become better at their jobs.

ONAs are about collaboration and ensuring that both the employer and employees accept or “buy-in” to the skills training you are proposing.

How to introduce an Organizational Needs Assessment

When meeting with employers, you can tell them how you are there to make their jobs easier. Since “Organizational Needs Assessment” sounds like a complex concept, you should present the assessment process as determining the type of professional development employers want for their employees. You can reassure the employer that you bring a value-added approach to employee training. It also presents an opportunity to tell them that the ONA process is a chance to include employees in a conversation about how they can feel more professional at their jobs.

Since employers are almost always busy, you can explain that they do not need to be directly involved in the ONA process. One way to make them comfortable is to show that your role is to:

- Define the training the employer wants.
- Review workplace documents and procedures connected to the training the employer seeks.
- Talk to employees about their jobs.
- Observe employees at work.
- Meet with employees, one-on-one, to talk about their skills and how they want to grow on the job.

You can inform the employer that you will share your ONA with them so they can approve your training recommendations. It is wise to tell them you are there to give them a training package that will satisfy their training needs and ensure employee satisfaction with the proposed training.

Using an Employer-Centred Approach

When LBS organizations adopt an employer-centred approach, they adopt the language of employers. Instead of using words like “literacy,” they focus their discussion on “skills training,” “skills development,” and “professional development.”

The goal of an employer-centred organization is to learn the language and expectations of the employer. An excellent way to do this is to pay close attention to the language employers use to describe their business, their management-employer relationships, and how the employer and their Human Resources department talk about “culture” in the workplace.

LBS assessors should research the company’s public profile by visiting their homepage. They can explore how the employer presents themselves, their culture, and their product to the world. The assessor should explore any biographical information and company history the employer places online for public viewing.

Who to Bring to Your Meeting with Employers

When you set up your first meeting with the employer, talk about bringing a third party with experience in workplace literacy training. You can tell the employer that you want this person to attend because they have delivered on-site employee training and understand the process of designing a curriculum that produces results.

We suggest contacting a specialist in Continuing Education and Contract Training from a local college. These specialists have extensive experience designing, developing, and delivering workplace training. They bring a perspective to the conversation that can help you ask targeted questions to employers. These specialists are adept at assisting the employer in expressing what they want training to achieve.

Talk About Retention

Right now, Ontario faces a tight labour market with more jobs than employees, and labour market analysts expect these conditions for several years. To remain competitive, employers know they must attract and retain excellent employees. Since there is a labour shortage, employers may have to hire people who lack the skills and experience they need to perform at their jobs. As a result, employers want to introduce training programs that ensure they have a skilled workforce.

Since training is time and resource-intensive, employers want to ensure their employees will take the training, apply it successfully to their jobs, and stay at the company. When employees have more options in the job market, they will look for opportunities with better wages, benefits, and work hours. Employers respond to this by creating worker-friendly workplaces where employees can grow. In other words, employers are vested in offering employees an opportunity to become professionals who can earn internal promotions.

Retention has many faces, including workplace training and employers helping employees receive services offsite (“community wrap arounds”) that provide them with a higher quality of life. Retention can include:

- Helping employees file their taxes.
- Receiving immigration paperwork support if they are new Canadians.

LBS providers can also help employees receive learning support confidentially. Confidential “Skills Conversations” can help with this.

Skills Conversations

Skills Conversations are an excellent way for LBS providers to meet with employees privately. When conducting a Skills Conversation, you can meet with the employee confidentially to learn whether they have any special learning needs or disabilities. If they do, you can refer them to an outside LBS provider who can provide them with the training they need to feel more confident at work and/or help them continue their pursuit of secondary or post-secondary training.

We have included a Skills Conversation script in Appendix 1.

ONA Step by Step

As you conduct your ONA, plan to spend a month completing the steps involved. However, the ONA process is not a set one. You can expect that it probably will not be linear. You should anticipate holding several meetings, tours, interviews, and conversations with the employer. Each business you work with will have a different approach and a different level of experience with workplace training. Some employers might be new to workplace training, while others are familiar with assessing the skills of their employees.

The following steps can guide you. Feel free to improvise the process as you move forward.

Step 1: Set up a meeting with the employer to discuss their training needs.

Step 2: Invite a third party with workplace training experience.

- Step 3:** During the meeting, discuss training needs and priorities, and determine where training will take place.
- Step 4:** Request and review authentic workplace documents employees use on the job.
- Step 5:** Take a tour of the facility to help you understand the physical layout, shift schedule, and workday rhythms. A tour will help you familiarize yourself with the language the employer and their staff use at work.
- Step 6:** Draft an in-depth GAP analysis and share it with the employer. Ask for written or verbal feedback.
- Step 7:** Determine training options and share your ideas (verbally or in document form) with the employer. Allow them time to offer feedback.
- Step 8:** Take the feedback you receive and request one-on-one meetings with employees (a.k.a. “Skills Conversations”). This process will allow you to conduct skills assessments that can include informal assessments such as:

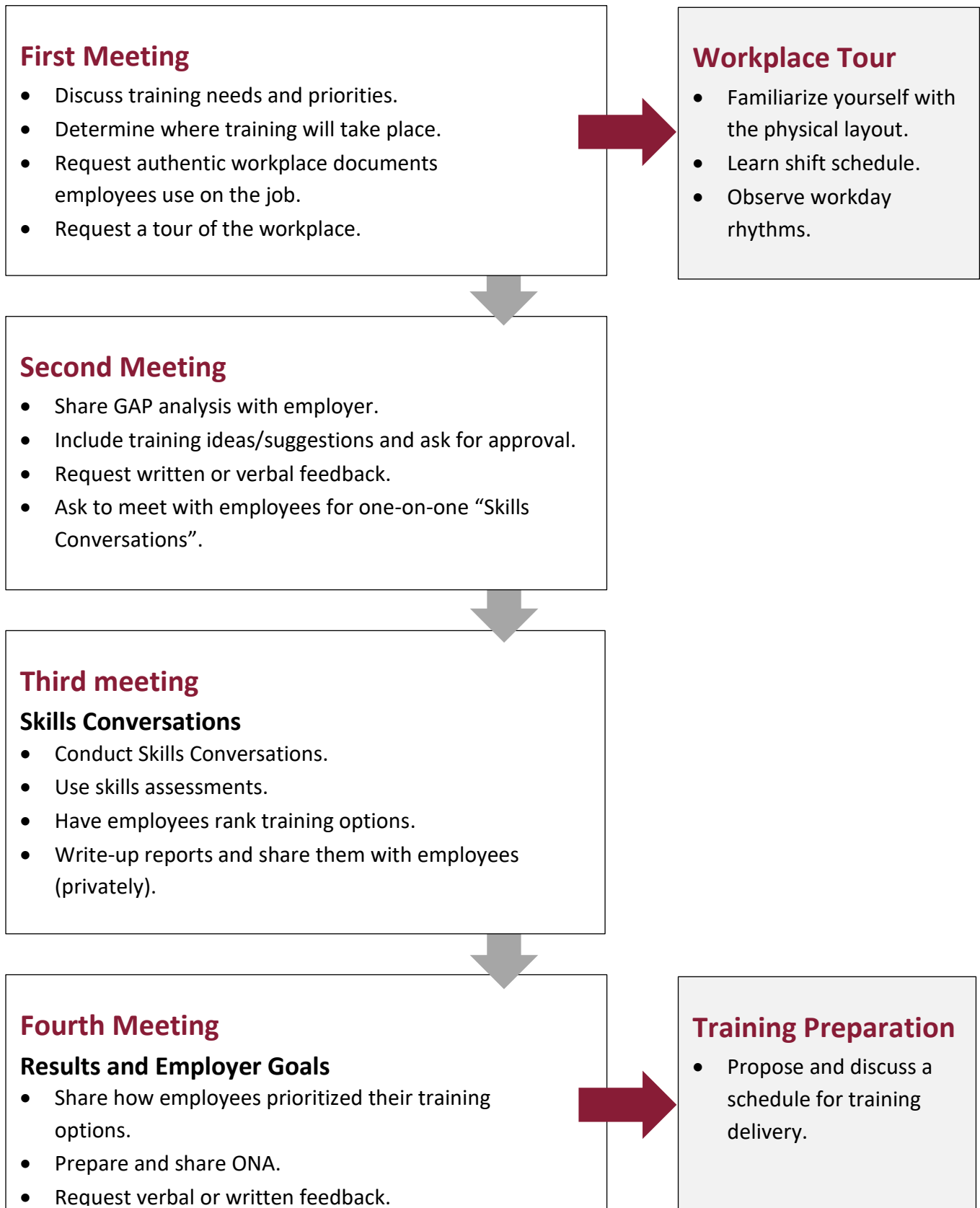
- Soft Skills Assessment
- Learning Styles Assessment
- Digital Skills Assessment

You can present each employee with a list of proposed training options and have them rank each one in order of preference.

- Step 9:** Prepare a short write-up of your conversation and assessment findings and send it to each employee participant. It is advisable to keep these reports private, sharing them only with the employee. These conversations are an opportunity to make learner referrals to your local LBS agency.
- Step 10:** Inform the employer about how the employees prioritized their training options.
- Step 11:** Prepare an Organizational Need Assessment and share it with the employer. Ask for written or verbal feedback.

The following Conversation Chart provides an illustration of what these steps could look like.

Conversation Chart



3. ONA Tools

GAP Analysis (What is it?)

A GAP analysis is a tool you can use to determine why an organization is not achieving its goals. Forbes magazine describes a GAP as considering “where you are, where you want to be and looks for the reasons preventing your success. With that information, you can create an action plan that closes the gaps” (Leonard, 2022).

There are different forms of GAP analysis. One of the most useful when performing an ONA is the **Skills GAP Analysis** which “is sometimes called an HR GAP analysis because it looks at the company’s personnel resources to determine whether it has enough people with the right skills to meet the goals of the company. The gap would be the makeup of the current workforce versus the workforce needed to succeed” (Leonard, 2022).

There are four steps involved in performing a GAP analysis:

1. Identify the important metrics you want to look at
2. Create S.M.A.R.T. goals
3. Evaluate the gaps between where you are and where your goals should take you
4. Establish a plan to address the gaps

You can connect this four-step plan to the Conversation Chart included in section II of this guide.

Change Management (CM)

Change Management (CM) is “a structured process for planning and implementing new ways of operating within an organization.” While you perform your ONA, you can think about how the employer wants to make change happen.

A primary goal of the ONA process is to take what the employer tells you and see how their intentions intersect with the realities you witness while observing how their workplace operates. This includes talking to employees and supervisors, and assessing how the employer’s training goals match or challenge the needs and goals of their staff.

One useful way to map out the CM process is to look at “*Kotter’s 8 Steps to Change Management.*” This process can help you think about (and structure your approach):

1. **Create a sense of urgency.** Rather than simply presenting a change that’s going to happen, present an opportunity that helps the team see the need for change and want to make it happen.
2. **Build a guiding coalition.** This group of early adopters from among the diverse many will help communicate needs and initiatives to guide change.
3. **Form a strategic vision and initiatives.** Draw a picture of what life will look like after the change. Help everyone see—and long for—the direction you’re headed, rather than focusing only on the steps in front of them right now.
4. **Enlist volunteers.** You’ll need massive buy-in across the organization to effectively implement change. Use your coalition to keep up the momentum on the sense of urgency and continue to communicate the vision.
5. **Enable action by removing barriers.** Learn where employees face challenges to implementing a change because of structural issues like silos, poor communication or inefficient processes, and break them down to facilitate progress.
6. **Generate short-term wins.** Keep up the momentum and motivation by recognizing early successes on the path to change. Continue to recognize and celebrate small wins to keep everyone energized and aware of your progress.
7. **Sustain acceleration.** Lean into change harder after the first few small wins. Use those successes as a springboard to move forward further and faster.
8. **Institute change.** Celebrate the results of successful change. How do changed processes or initiatives contribute to the organization’s overall success? How do they continue to help employees contribute to the mission they care about?

(Miranda, D. (2022, August 8). *The Four Principles of Change Management.* Forbes Advisor.)

Ultimately, your responsibility is not to implement the changes the employer wants, but to present them with a plan that:

1. Identifies their training goals
2. Illustrates where those goals need to be met
3. Shows how to achieve those goals through curriculum and training

ONA Timeline(s)

When you begin the ONA process, it is helpful to remember that the scale of the employer will impact the time it takes to complete an ONA. Some employers have small workforces where you can take a tour, observe employees at work, and interview staff in fairly short order. But for larger companies, this process can be far more time consuming, especially if the company has numerous departments they want trained. This is why it is a good idea to think about your ONA in two ways, what we call Short and Long ONAs.

Short ONA

The “Short” ONA involves conversations with the employer’s Human Resources (HR) team. The HR team can provide the LBS assessors with training priorities they want to be implemented among their staff. The HR team is familiar with what upper management wants and what supervisors and floor staff see among staff members.

When LBS assessors meet with the HR team, this is an opportunity to document what HR believes is the most realistic path forward for skills training. HR can synthesize the needs and goals of management, floor supervisors, and floor staff. An LBS assessor can meet with HR and determine what areas of training LBS can provide and learn the broad demographics of the employer’s workforce.

After the LBS assessor meets with the HR team, they can produce a Short ONA document within two to three weeks. Once they complete the ONA, they will share their findings with the HR team and ask for feedback to ensure they have produced a document that accurately reflects the employer’s needs as expressed by Human Resources.

Long ONA

A “Long ONA” is a continuation of the conversation whose first phase ended when the LBS assessor presented the HR team with the ONA document. At this point, the assessor can talk to the HR team about coming out to observe and talk to employees.

Often, HR departments want to ensure “buy-in” from employees. In many cases, they will allow LBS assessors to come to the workplace to learn how tasks are performed and ask employees and supervisors questions about different job functionalities. The information that LBS assessors collect will inform what they say to the curriculum developers and instructors who will come in and deliver training.

Ideally, the LBS assessor will conduct a “Skills Conversation” with employees (a topic we cover below). This strategy involves talking to employees about the following areas:

1. Their time on the job.
2. Their interest in professional development (PD).
3. The skills employees need to succeed and be promoted.

The “Skills Conversation” may include a series of short assessments covering:

1. Digital Skills
2. Learning Skills
3. Employee comfort with reading, writing, and numeracy.

The LBS assessor can use these conversations and their results to develop targeted curricula and training that will meet the expectations of employees, the HR team, and management. These conversations continue the ONA process because each meeting with employees provides data that deepens the LBS assessor’s knowledge of the organization’s training needs.

We will now explore Skills Conversations in greater depth and their connection to Tandem Training.

Skills Conversations

We have mentioned the importance of Skills Conversations. These conversations are a significant part of the ONA process because they offer you a chance to meet with individual employees and learn about their educational and work histories. As with educational interviews, a Skills Conversation is a confidential discussion about challenges individuals experience at work. By conducting a conversation with employees outside of their employer’s presence, you can learn two relevant pieces of information:

- Does the employee have a learning disability?
- Does the employee desire outside support to continue their education and/or to improve their confidence and performance at work?

By offering the employee a space to speak privately about their experiences, abilities, and concerns, you can make referrals to LBS agencies on their behalf. You can also establish if there is a need to bring in two providers (tandem training) to company employees.

Skills Conversations and Retention

Skills Conversations are valuable for retaining employees. When employees receive a referral to LBS training outside of work, they are more likely to feel confident in their ability to gain the skills and support needed to succeed at work. Confident employees are likely to stay on the job and feel capable of progressing professionally. Additionally, they do not have to be afraid that their employer or co-workers will know that they have a learning disability or lack confidence in aspects of their work.

It is wise to discuss these benefits with employers when conducting an ONA.

Tandem Training

Employers with a large workforce and many training participants can benefit from “Tandem Training.”

Tandem Training involves hiring a team to provide workplace training. The team you hire can include instructors from a college accustomed to delivering workplace or corporate training and a community-based LBS agency that works with learners individually.

Two or more college instructors can deliver the module while a community-based LBS instructor “floats” around the training room to support learners with additional literacy needs. Since many employees do not want to let their supervisors and colleagues know they have literacy challenges, the presence of a community-based LBS “tandem trainer” will ensure employees who need learning support receive it.

Employees are never a homogeneous group of learners. If an employer has new hires or wants to deliver workplace training for the first time, they will likely have employees who need learning support. By bringing in trainers from a local college and a community-based LBS agency, you can provide a range of learners with the assistance they need to complete the training successfully. An advantage to this approach is it can enable employees to absorb the training and achieve the designated learning outcomes.

Benefits (capacity-building in LBS)

Tandem Training is an excellent way for community-based LBS providers to increase their workplace literacy capacity. It provides them with an opportunity to connect with individual learners and make referrals to free LBS services. Tandem Training illustrates for the employer what wrap around LBS supports look like in their community.

Is the Employer Ready for Workplace Literacy?

Now that you have completed your ONA, you can evaluate whether the employer is “ready” for workplace literacy. This checklist can help you make your decision.

Checklist

- ✓ The employer is focused on employee retention.
- ✓ Management is willing to support workplace literacy training.
- ✓ HR has identified a skills gap among employees or is willing to bring in an LBS agency to conduct a skills assessment.
- ✓ HRS has identified the digital skills level of its employees to assess whether hybrid training is an option.
- ✓ HR will let an LBS agency conduct an Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA).
- ✓ The employer has identified skills they want upgraded or will allow an LBS team to assess employee skills.
- ✓ HR has the support of supervisory staff.
- ✓ Supervisors will promote employee buy-in.
- ✓ HR will share authentic workplace documents with an LBS partner.
- ✓ The employer accepts the need for an employee to speak confidentially about their skills when working with an LBS assessor or instructor.
- ✓ The employer is willing to provide employees with some degree of paid time to attend workplace training.



4. Know What You Can Provide

Before we explore some Case Studies, let's pause and reflect upon what LBS agencies can bring to employers.

LBS practitioners are professionals at teaching math, writing, reading, digital, and soft skills training. When you meet with an employer, you can tell them how your agency has worked with adults to improve their skills in these areas.

You can also talk to employers about the “wrap around” supports you can offer. These might include:

- Making confidential referrals to LBS agencies for employees
- Connecting employees to English as a Second Language (ESL) training
- Bringing in a local Community Service organization that can help employees with Newcomer and Immigrant and Settlement Services

LBS agencies bring tremendous value to any relationship with employers. Many businesses want to know how they help improve the quality of life of their employees, and LBS is poised to offer connections, assistance, and expertise in this area.



5. Case Studies

As you can imagine, designing and implementing workplace literacy training and practicing it is different. The following Case Studies offer examples of workplace literacy in action. Below, you will find two Case Studies illustrating the implementation of an Organizational Needs Assessment. The Case Studies provide the reader with a look at how LBS practitioners can build relationships with employers while they develop and execute workplace ONAs.

We use two Case Studies because no employers are alike, even if they appear similar and come from the same sector. For instance, you could talk to two employers, both in manufacturing, and discover that the demographics of their workforce are different. Knowing the demography of each workplace is essential to deliver a targeted and successful training program. The following Case Studies illustrate this point.

Case Study 1: Employer A

Employer needs

A local axle manufacturer (Employer A) with a large workforce of approximately 180 employees recently hired personnel who lacked manufacturing experience. Employer A hired these “lower-skilled” employees because of a “tight” labour market where workers were scarce. They made employee retention their top priority because of the labour shortage. Employer A wants their staff and the community to know they offer excellent wages and benefits and emphasize on-the-job learning as part of a “culture of learning” at their workplace.

As a result of these priorities, Employer A is eager to explore training opportunities for employees to ensure they will excel on the job. They recognize that training is necessary to ensure that new hires perform at the required level. The HR Department has identified four main training priorities:

- Reading (Standard Operating Procedures, company policies)
- Writing (filling out forms, writing short activity reports)
- Applied Math (fractions, decimals, imperial/metric conversions)
- Financial Literacy (reading a paycheque, budgeting, understanding interest)

Since Employer A has never provided their staff with this type of skills training, they instructed their HR Department to work with the local Adult Literacy Network (ALN) to develop a plan of targeted skills training for their staff.

How to talk about Literacy and Skills Development

The ALN staff knows that the word “literacy” often is misunderstood. People may think that literacy means illiteracy and that people needing literacy training lack education and skills. To avoid this misunderstanding, ALN staff avoid using “literacy” to describe the skills training they can provide to employers. At their first meeting with the HR Department at Employer A, they referred to their skills training programs as “professional development.”

Present at the first meeting were the head of HR and a plant supervisor. The ALN staff asked them to explain how professional development in the four areas they identified would benefit employees and the company. The HR head and plant supervisor informed ALN staff that employees needed reading, writing, and applied math skills to succeed.

Employer and Employee needs

Employer A’s head of HR and plant supervisor set out their training rationale. They said that employees who can read Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), fill out forms, provide short synopses of their shift activity, complete basic fractional calculations, and work with metric conversions would not find their job difficult. The head of HR emphasizes that employees who feel confident in these areas will learn their job more quickly and enjoy increased confidence in their performance. The head of HR said that the company wants to retain its employees and promote them internally. They feel that employees who receive skills training in reading, writing, and math and who also possess a strong work ethic will be eligible for a promotion.

The head of HR also said that their department wanted employees to receive financial skills training to achieve financial stability at home and to help them plan for the benefits of home ownership, retirement savings, and educational savings for their children. Human Resources believes that employees with strong financial skills will enjoy a healthier work/life balance.

The ALN staff were enthusiastic about Employer A’s commitment to the well-being of its employees. They recognized how Employer A’s investment in training their staff would create a “culture of learning” in the workplace. It would also ensure a higher level of staff performance, reinforcing the belief that the employer offers those with a strong work ethic and openness to acquiring new skills a chance to prove their capabilities and to grow professionally and personally. The ALN staff see that “professional development” is a phrase that strikes a chord with the HR team because their investment in the literacy skills of their employees is evidence of a commitment to growing professional staff.

Introducing a “Skills Conversation”

The head of HR and the plant supervisor stressed the importance of employee “buy-in”. They did not want staff members to feel that skills training was being “dropped on them,” so they decided attendance was optional. Both thought it would be wise for ALN staff to meet with employees to discuss the proposed training and to learn about their educational experiences, work history, and training interests. The ALN staff felt this was an excellent idea. The head of HR, the plant supervisor, and the ALN staff agreed that the record of those conversations should remain confidential. Employer A would not need to know what ALN staff learned from their employees.

ALN put together a “Skills Conversation” packet that allowed them to meet with staff members, interview them about their interest in training, and discuss what training would cover. The packet included a set of short assessments the ALN staff member would conduct with each employee to learn about their existing skills and comfort with acquiring new ones. Those assessments included:

- Learning Styles Preference
- Digital Skills
- Soft Skills Assessment

ALN staff asked interviewees to rank the training subjects in order of personal preference to learn what was most important to employees.

In addition to learning about employee attitudes towards learning and training, the ALN staff wanted to find out if any employees aspired to return to school to continue their education as a form of career advancement or to improve specific skills to aid them in their personal lives.

During the interview process, ALN staff discovered that several employees were concerned about their ability to read, process what they read, and handle basic math. More than one employee asked if ALN staff would share the results of the Skills Conversations with their supervisors or other company hire-ups. The ALN staff said that the conversations would remain confidential. Several employees described themselves as dyslexic and struggled to read Standard Operating Procedures. ALN staff informed those employees that they could refer them to local programs to work with a trained adult education professional in a one-on-one setting. They let the employee know these programs were free and they could find one close to their home for greater convenience.

ALN staff members tracked referrals to local LBS programs. They also followed up with these programs and learned that, in several cases, the employee was now working with an LBS instructor.

Case Study 2: Employer B

Institutional needs

A local recycler (Employer B) with over 150 employees has many new Canadians on staff. Most of their recent hires have limited English language skills and have never worked in Canada. Employer B faces a tight labour market and wants to retain its employees. Like Employer A, they are committed to remaining a competitive workplace that offers employees excellent wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Employer B believes that on-the-job training is necessary to encourage a “culture of learning” at their workplace. They have many employees, including native English speakers, for whom they want to provide skills training.

The HR Department believes that employees must be encouraged to learn new skills and ask questions if they do not understand how a process works. Their focus is supporting on-the-job training and creating a learning culture that will not only boost employee morale but improve performance and reduce waste. To reinforce learning, HR must encourage employees to ask supervisors questions and train supervisors to support employee growth.

The HR team recognizes that they have three tasks to perform. 1.) They need to help their new employees improve their English language skills; 2.) They need to provide skills upgrading to all staff members, and 3.) They need to provide soft skills training to supervisors to improve their interpersonal and mentoring skills.

How to Talk about Literacy and Skills Development

Employer and Employee Needs

At their first meeting with the HR department, the Adult Literacy Network team learned Employer B’s HR team selected three areas of skills training for their employees:

- Reading (Standard Operating Procedures, company policies)
- Writing (filling out forms, writing short activity reports)
- Applied Math (fractions, decimals, imperial/metric conversions)

The HR team believes that their staff’s performance will improve by concentrating on these three areas. The HR team is less confident about the areas of English language training and soft skills for supervisors.

Working with Employer A taught the ALN team how to discuss skills training with employers in a tight labour market. They know that “professional development” is the proper term for describing (and packaging) skills training to HR departments and employees. The ALN team knows that their language must focus on individual development and never imply that a workplace has low-skilled or unskilled staff.

The ALN team assured HR that they have adult education partners who can develop curricula and deliver it on-site to company staff. They told HR that this is what adult education providers do on a regular basis and that they specialize in targeted skills training in reading, writing, and numeracy. The team added that soft skills training is another area education specialty, and they can easily collaborate with their partners to deliver training.

Employer B’s HR team wanted to know what ALN could do to help them with English language training. The ALN team indicated that this is an area of skills training requiring English as a Second Language (ESL) educators. Fortunately, ALN works with cultural and community resource centres that offer ESL training. The ALN team suggested bringing in staff from a community resource centre to provide a presentation about ESL programs, their availability, and who is eligible for free and fee-based classes. ALN mentioned that a community resource could inform the new Canadians on their staff about the services they provide to help newcomers earn their permanent residency and manage the paperwork involved in getting established in Canada. The HR team liked the idea and agreed to coordinate a presentation. The community resource member would come to Employer B’s headquarters and deliver their presentation to employees.

Introducing Tandem Training

Unlike Employer A, Employer B did not feel the ALN team needed to come to their job site to meet with employees. The HR team said that all skills training sessions would be mandatory for employees, so they were not concerned about “buy in.”

The HR team was more concerned with the challenges of creating a training schedule. They anticipated four cohorts of learners, with each averaging ten employees. The challenge for HR was to fit this into the shift schedules at the plant. The HR team did not need ALN’s assistance with scheduling but asked to preview the curricula ALN’s partners developed. When ALN provided Employer B with a training proposal and course descriptions, the HR team decided to drop the soft skills module and focus instead on reading, writing, and applied math. They did not explain their rationale for dropping the soft skills training, and the ALN team did not inquire.

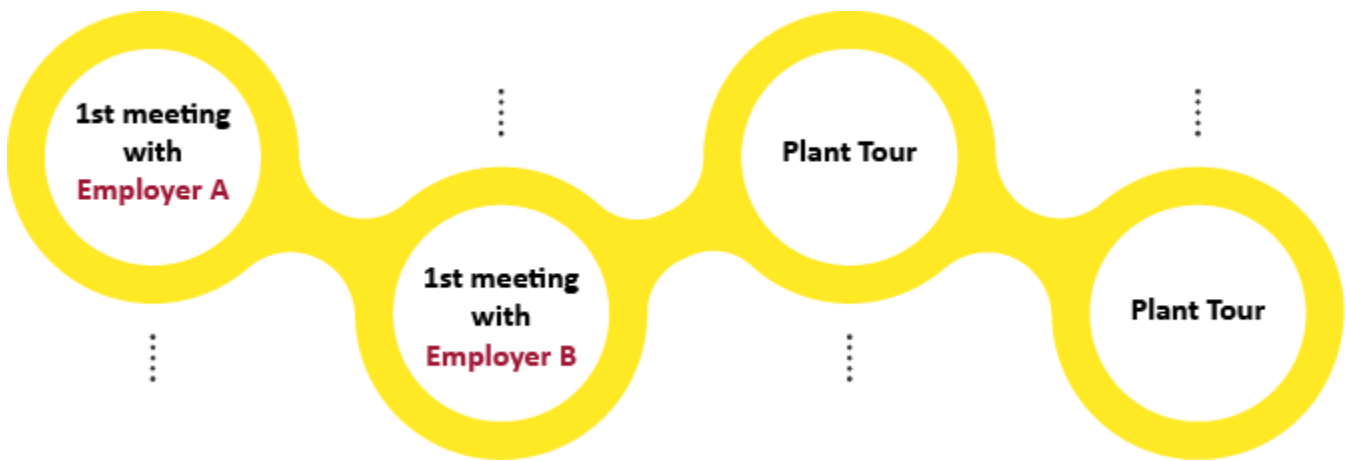
The HR team took more than one month to determine a training schedule and once they presented it to the ALN team, ALN met with two of their community partners who expressed interest in delivering the training. The first partner was a college that had a staff of three trainers who would deliver the training modules. The second partner was a community-based LBS provider who would send one

instructor to act as a “floater,” who would assist learners who needed additional one-on-one instruction.

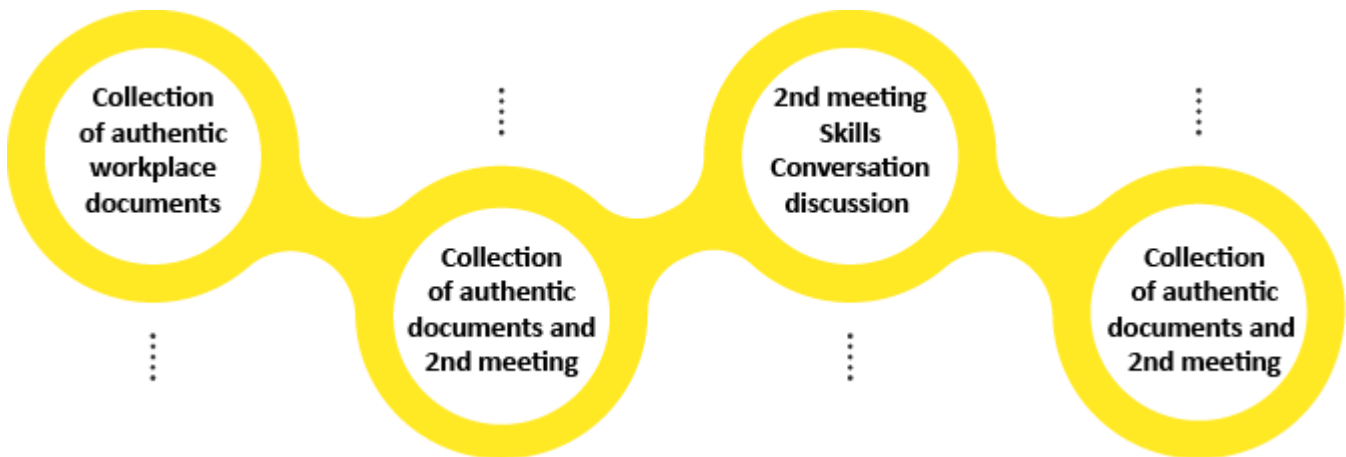
6. Case Study ONA Timeline

As you now know, the ONA process can unfold differently with different employers. To illustrate this, we have provided a condensed timeline illustrating the differences between the ONA process for Employers A and B.

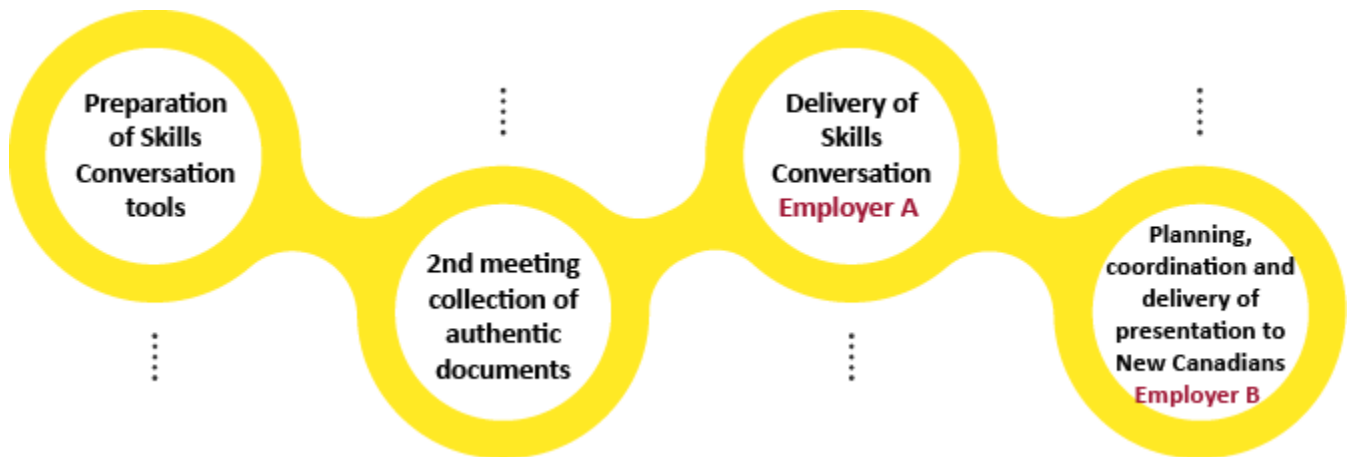
Week 1



Week 2



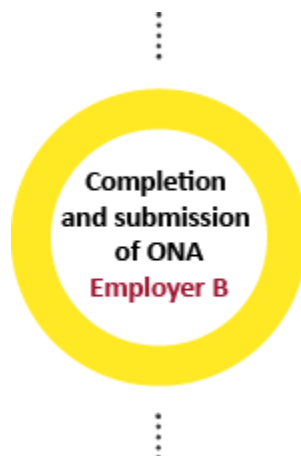
Week 3



Week 4



Week 5



7. Attendance

We found that mandatory attendance at training is beneficial. It ensures that all employees will receive the same training and the benefits of an equal investment by the employer in their professional and skills development. We also found it beneficial to spread training across departments to ensure everyone receives equal attention and that no employees feel singled out for any reason.

For example, one manufacturer delivered Teamwork, Creative and Critical Thinking, and Problem-Solving skills training to their supervisors, floor staff, human resources representatives, and accounting staff. Attendance was mandatory, which ensured that there were full sessions. Feedback from participants was positive.

It is up to the employer to decide whether attendance is mandatory. But we found that when training was part of the workday and employees were paid for their time, they were more likely to attend than when sessions happened outside of work hours and remained optional.



8. Soft Skills

Soft Skills have become essential in recent years. Employers are asking LBS providers and adult educators to focus on these with potential employees. Employers want to retain employees, and maintaining harmony on the floor or in the shop is essential to fostering a healthy (and pleasant) workplace. Many employees are not familiar with Soft Skills and how they connect to employment.

When meeting with employers and conducting an ONA, it is wise to raise the topic of Soft Skills and connect it to retention. Employers might not use the term Soft Skills, but they will have ideas about the type of employee behavior they look for and what a harmonious working environment looks like.

Discussing Soft Skills is also an excellent way to incorporate the Skills for Success into your ONA and curriculum and training proposals. We have included a Soft Skills Assessment Tool in Appendix 3.

9. The Skills for Success

Workplace training is an excellent opportunity to introduce the Skills for Success.

The Skills for Success, formerly known as the nine Essential Skills, are the backbone of job descriptions in the National Occupational Classification (NOC) system. The Essential Skills were:

- Reading Text
- Writing
- Document Use
- Computer Use
- Numeracy
- Oral Communication
- Thinking
- Continuous Learning
- Working with Others



The federal government redefined these skills in 2022 which you can see in the chart below.

| Essential Skills | Skills for Success |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Reading | Reading |
| Writing | Writing |
| Document Use | Numeracy |
| Math/Numeracy | Digital Skills |
| Computer Use | Communication |
| Working with Others | Collaboration |
| Continuous Learning | Problem Solving |
| Oral Communication | Adaptability |
| Thinking | Creativity and Innovation |

There are many ways to discuss the Skills for Success with employers. A helpful approach is to relate the skills to specific job-related tasks that employers have identified as areas they feel their employees require additional training.

For example, many employers recognize the need to introduce **Digital Skills**. Since these skills are essential in many employment sectors, you can discuss with employers how offering digital skills training can address existing skills gaps among staff. You can also illustrate how digital skills connect to many other skills that make for a more efficient workplace.

Since many tasks must be performed online using computers, or involve computerized report writing and data sharing, many employers will understand that digital skills training also involves other Skills for Success including:

1. Communication
2. Collaboration
3. Reading
4. Writing



As you know, employers have focused on retaining their workers in this tight labour market. You can suggest offering digital skills to help employees use online banking and different programs and Apps which can help them better understand their paycheque, benefits, remittances, and how to balance their monthly budget. In this way, digital skills also incorporate Problem Solving and Numeracy, two more Skills For Success. Employers often like providing employees with skills that help them balance their work and personal lives.

10. Learning Outcomes

Once you have reviewed this guide or applied it to performing an ONA, you will have achieved the following outcomes:

- You learned about the employer by researching their company and speaking to them about their specific market-based employment needs.
- You reviewed their past experiences with training, learning from them what worked, what did not work, and why.
- You discussed with the employer what workplace training does by using examples from your research and conversations with colleagues.
- You discovered how to discuss literacy (the “L” word) with employers, helping them to understand literacy training as it pertains to developing professional skills among their employees.
- You collected and reviewed authentic workplace documents and established the connections between those materials and the proposed training.
- You clarified with the employer that the proposed training meets their needs and expectations.
- You performed an in-depth GAP analysis to determine employer and employee needs and used it to offer different training options.
- You prepared the ONA report.

11. Hitting the Pause Button: Are You Ready to Conduct an ONA?

Now that you have looked at ONAs and how to deliver them, you can pause and decide whether you feel ready to conduct one.

As you know, the purpose of an ONA is not only to assess an employer’s training needs; it is also to design a curriculum and deliver training. If you sign on to do an ONA, you are pledging to help an employer meet their training needs.

So, it might be wise to ask yourself these questions:

1. What would your agency do with the ONA information you collect?
2. Would you be prepared to develop a curriculum package based on the skills needs you have identified?
3. Would you be prepared to deliver training programs based on the curricula you developed?
4. Are you prepared to partner with another agency (if necessary) to develop a curriculum and deliver training?

There are different ways to develop and deliver training. Partnering with a local college and a team of adult educators experienced with workplace training could be a valuable way to “learn by doing,” helping your agency build its curriculum development and workplace training capacities for the future.

12. Personal Reflection

Now is also a good time to reflect on what you have learned and consider any remaining questions you might have.

Here are some sample questions to consider:

1. Are you comfortable approaching employers to have a conversation about skills training?
2. Are you clear about what you feel LBS can offer to employers in a business setting?
3. Can you visualize the ONA process?
4. Are you comfortable distinguishing between a “short” and a “long” ONA?

Appendix 1

A Skills Conversation with Employees

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We are talking to staff about the skills they use on the job so we can learn more about you and discover if we can assist you in pursuing your educational and professional goals.

1. How did you learn about job opportunities at _____?
Was it word of mouth, a job posting online, or a friend or neighbor?

2. Are you interested in learning how professional development training can advance your career?

3. If they answered **yes**, ask the following:

- a.) What skills do you think you will need?

- b.) What will you do to get these skills?

4. We are now going to complete a short **digital skills assessment**. This assessment is to discover how comfortable you are using digital devices like computers, tablets, and cellphones. I will ask a series of questions, and I want you to answer with "Yes," "A little," or "Not yet." If you have any additional comments, let me know.

5. We are now going to complete a **Learning Skills Self-Assessment**. The purpose of this assessment is to find out how you learn best. Everyone has a different way of learning, and our

goal is to learn from you what approach to learning works best. This assessment will show whether you prefer to learn by **seeing, hearing, or doing**. When we complete the assessment, I will score it and share the results with you.

6. I want to discuss your reading, writing, and math skills. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very strong and 1 being very weak, how would you rank your math skills?

1 2 3 4 5

Why?

7. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very strong and 1 being very weak, how do you rate your reading skills?

1 2 3 4 5

Why?

8. On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very strong and 1 being very weak, how would you rank your writing skills?

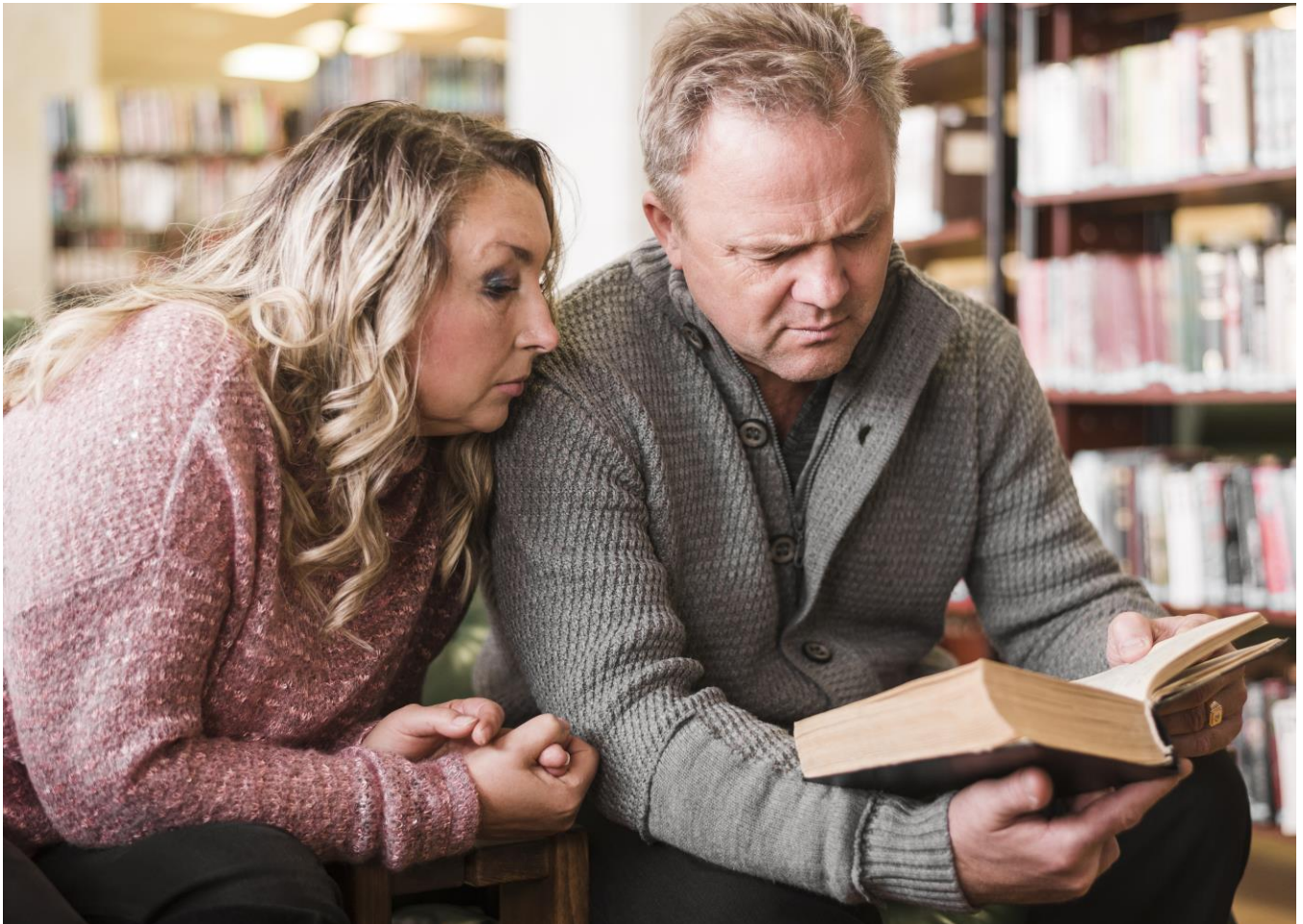
1 2 3 4 5

Why?

9. When you were in school, did you have (or notice) any special learning needs (for example: did you have an IEP or work with a resource teacher)? If so, what grade were you in?
-
-

10. Have you ever thought about returning to school for any reason? If you have, for what?

Do you have questions?



Appendix 2

Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA) Report

The ONA meeting on _____, was an opportunity to continue a conversation with _____ that began at our first meeting (via Zoom) on _____. The Project Team followed up with the employer about possible skills-building opportunities, _____, Human Resources manager, identified as benefitting their employees. The ONA provided the Project Team with a chance to further explore those skills-building needs with the employer and begin to determine possible training programs and supports the project can offer. The following suggestions are a result of that ONA conversation.

Proposed Activities

1. Leadership Training

Target Audience: Supervisory staff and lead hands

_____ believes that supervisory staff and lead hands will benefit from Leadership Training focusing on the Soft Skills of Communication and handling “difficult conversations.” They have identified conflict management as an area for professional development that will enable staff to grow their supervisory skills. _____ sees great potential in their supervisors and lead hands which is why they are focused on leadership training.

Proposed training

The following skills-building tasks can be considered a part of the leadership training:

- Communicating with different audiences, having “difficult conversations”
- Soft skills related to providing constructive feedback to employees.
- Improv Training to simulate workplace scenarios, engage in conflict resolution, and build personal resiliency.

Human Resources is supportive of using improv training to simulate workplace scenarios.

Rationale for the proposed training

- Supervisors and lead hands are experienced workers identified for their high level of competency and leadership potential. They possess the Soft Skills to grow in their leadership roles.
- _____ recognizes Soft Skills training as an excellent way to cultivate leadership skills among supervisors and lead hands. Excellent training builds a strong workplace culture that maintains and grows _____ reputation as a competitive employer with a positive and supportive workplace culture.
- Soft Skills training is an investment in supervisors and lead hands that can help them maintain a healthy work/life balance. _____ has identified the well-being of its staff as a priority.

Anticipated number of participants: 15 supervisors and lead hands

(12 from _____ plant, 3 from _____ plant near _____)

2. ESL Training for New Canadians

Target audience: new Canadians seeking their permanent residency

Proposed training

The Project Team can recommend an assessment of workers' language skills to determine their current level of English mastery. ESL training can be designed to meet the specific language needs of participating employees. The training can

- Focus on English language skills for permanent residency.
- Support conversational English to help employees communicate at work.

Rationale for the proposed training

_____ hired many new Canadians who are learning to speak English. Currently, they have employees who rely on their phones to communicate with supervisors and other staff. _____ is invested in helping these employees learn English to enable them to speak with their colleagues and supervisors and provide feedback at staff meetings. New Canadians also need English language training to gain permanent residency, and _____ wants to support them on their journey to settle in Canada.

_____ believes employees will perform better with improved English skills. An employee's ability to speak English will help them grow in their job and access opportunities for internal promotion. _____ wants to retain its employees.

Anticipated participation: While we do not have a numerical figure, _____ anticipates a high degree of buy-in since permanent residency and language mastery are top priorities for new Canadians. They expect 80% participation among those in need of English language training.

3. Reading, writing, and math skills

Target audience: non-supervisory staff

Proposed training

_____ will propose a curriculum that includes:

- Applied math including, measurements, conversions, fractions, and arithmetic (_____ shared a _____ arithmetic workbook with _____, and they felt it was a good fit for skills-building in math)
- Reading comprehension exercises (Health and Safety, Standard Operating Procedure, reading reports)
- Report writing, filling out forms

_____ recommends holding this training off-site for greater buy-in. They also suggest referring to this skills-building as "professional development." They want to respect the self-esteem of their employees and do not want to present skills-building as a form of remediation or schooling. The Project Team mentioned that an advantage of developing relationships with local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers is employees will learn about local free programs where they can build their skills away from work.

Rationale for support

_____ wants employees who can provide detailed reports and verbal feedback during staff meetings. They value communication skills and employees who can document, share, and explain data. Employees skilled in verbal and written communication and who demonstrate strong arithmetic skills can "career build" within the company.

_____ wants its employees to feel valued, and by investing in reading, writing, and mathematical skills-building, the company is demonstrating a commitment to the growth and development of its workforce.

_____ also values plant safety, and the Thorndale site recently won a company-wide safety competition. _____ recognizes that reading, writing, and communication skills are vital to following Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and safety guidelines. They are proud of their achievements in Health and Safety and want to continue to excel in this area.

Anticipated participation: _____ believes that with buy-in, 30-40% participation is possible among an overall production staff of 135-140.

4. Other training options

The Project Team mentioned digital literacy and financial literacy as additional training options.

_____ wants a training menu supervisors can share with their staff.

Program Timing and Location

Due to the nature of their business, the best time of year to provide training to _____ staff is November-January. Training should be delivered on and off-site with a schedule to be determined. _____ employees work continental shifts, and management is mindful of the time commitment with completing training on top of working full-time.

Next Steps

_____ will consider the results of this ONA and develop a detailed work plan to present back to the employer. The Project Team informed _____ this would happen in the latter part of July 2022.

_____ Human Resources department will consider the work plan and offer feedback to ensure the proposed activities fit their needs and expectations. Company supervisors will bring a training menu to their staff before receiving the Work Plan to determine which training options employees prefer to encourage buy-in.

Additional Comments

_____ is invested in its staff. They believe in internal promotions, and want to see hard-working, capable, and diligent employees rewarded for their performance. They recognize that many new Canadians are highly educated and bring expertise and experience to the job even though their credentials are not recognized in Canada.

_____ wants to utilize the talent and potential of their staff. They appreciate that their company is an entry point for new Canadians seeking their permanent residency. They want to facilitate this process and support the settlement of their workers.

_____ is pleased to develop a relationship with local Literacy and Basic Skills programs that can assist their employees in building their reading, writing, mathematical, and Soft Skills and recognize the opportunity to establish long-term relationships with adult educators.



Appendix 3

Soft Skills Assessment Tool

Read each statement below. Think about each statement and whether the statement is true or false for you. Circle the number which is most like you.

- If you circle a “1” you feel the statement is false and not like you at all.
- If you circle an “8” you feel the statement is true and is like you.
- You can circle any number between “1” and “8”.

Be as honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers.

| | | FALSE | | | | TRUE | | | |
|----|---|-------------|---|---|---|---------|---|---|---|
| | | not like me | | | | like me | | | |
| 1. | I plan well and do not leave things to chance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 2. | I am open to new ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 3. | I am generous and helpful with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 4. | I am adaptable and flexible in my thinking and ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 5. | I am resourceful in difficult situations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 6. | I manage the way I use my time well. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 7. | I am successful in social situations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 8. | I use good sense and reason when making decisions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 9. | When working on a project, I do my best to get the details right. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. | I am punctual and do things on time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 11. | My actions are well organized using reason and facts. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 12. | I change my thinking or opinions easily if there is a better idea. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 13. | I am an effective team member | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 14. | I do things when they should be done and do not put them off. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 15. | I know I have the ability to do anything I want to do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 16. | I communicate well with people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 17. | I try to do the best that I possibly can. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 18. | I maintain a positive and productive attitude when things go wrong. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 19. | I plan and use my time efficiently. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 20. | My personal organization is good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 21. | I like to be busy and actively involved in things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 22. | I work well with people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 23. | When applying myself to something I am confident I will succeed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 24. | I am flexible and adapt my thinking easily when plans change. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |

For more information on this Soft Skills Assessment Tool, visit [here](#).

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