



Proven advantages: for workers, employers, governments

Learning at work: it's our right • L'apprentissage au travail : c'est notre droit

Time and cost are the most common barriers to education and training that workers face. Literacy is a right. But for that right to be meaningful, workers must have access to upgrading programs in their workplaces.

The advantages of workplace programs for workers

Shift workers, workers forced to take more than one job to make a living, and those with family responsibilities are not usually able to access literacy programs in the community.

Workplace programs allow access:

- workers are already in the workplace
- they have already arranged transportation and childcare
- they are part of a social community within the workplace

Reaching people at work, while they have the dignity of a job and a paycheque, helps ensure success. Participation in workplace programs improves when paid time during working hours is provided for people to attend classes.

Programs that are centred on the needs of workers ensure that workplace skills are part, but not all, of program content. Worker-centred programs are sensitive to

workers' needs and aspirations and value their experience and prior learning.

Literacy programs can help workers gain access to further workplace training. They can contribute to job security, opportunities for promotion and successful participation in technological and other workplace change.

The advantages of workplace programs for employers

There is a strong business case for workplace literacy. Employers identify significant gains resulting from workplace literacy programs, including:

- increased ability to do on-the-job training
- better team performance
- increased quality of work
- increased productivity: reduced time per task, increased output, lower error rate
- better health and safety records
- reduced wastage, cost savings
- better employee and customer retention
- increased profitability

"Everything equates to dollars and cents. There are lots of hidden costs and ripple effects of low literacy, such as more administration and supervision."

Ed Thomas, past Union Chair of the Joint Education Committee, City of Hamilton



- increased participation and communication
- improved problem-solving, decision-making and capacity to work independently
- increased worker confidence
- improved workplace morale

The advantages of workplace programs for governments

The majority of adults with low literacy skills are employed. Government efforts to improve adult literacy skills are more successful when programs take place where people are: in the workplace. Workplace literacy is an important part of a well-balanced literacy strategy that includes community literacy, family literacy, and other streams.

Literacy partnerships in the workplace

Implementing workplace programs pose challenges to employers and unions:

- developing an effective, worker-centred program
- finding quality programs, instructors and materials
- paying for program planning and delivery
- scheduling and work coverage

Government programming with public infrastructure and financial support is essential to successfully meeting these challenges. Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Quebec and PEI all have provincial programs and funding for various aspects of workplace literacy programs.

Joint labour-management committees are also critical for success. Joint committees permit the employer and the union to overcome challenges and create effective programs. This model is central in the partnership between CUPE and the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA). Joint committees are also integral to the workplace project team structure in Nova Scotia and Manitoba.

“An investment in workplace learning programs pays off – in a better-skilled workforce, improved quality of work life, and employees who have an increased commitment to the organization.”

Simon Farbrother,
past President,
Canadian Association
of Municipal
Administrators

“Higher literacy can boost the economic and financial success of individuals and the economy as a whole. It can reduce poverty, improve health, lift community engagement and lead to a higher standard of living. In fact, it is hard to identify any other single issue that can have such a large payoff to individuals, the economy and society.”

Craig Alexander,
Vice-President & Chief
Economist, TD Bank
Financial Group