BBO: Report Summary

Training organization: Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society

Project dates: December 2016 to May 2019

Deliverables: Training to reach 40 supervisors and 60 front-line employees in food-processing

Resources: On-line course – Starting Your Career in the Food Processing Industry

Face-to-face training – Language and Skills for Careers in Food Processing

Train-the-trainer workshop – Managing Culturally Diverse Teams

<https://www.awes.ca/what-we-offer/tools-publications/>

# Project summary

AWES proposed the Bridge to Better Onboarding project to help immigrants in food processing attach to the workforce earlier, helping to contribute to greater productivity for employers. AWES has identified that immigrants often fail to excel at the workplace in virtually every sector.

The overall project outcomes were to:

1. Accelerate the integration experience for new immigrant hires through developing language, essential skills and intercultural competence contextually related to orientation and onboarding, increasing confidence, productivity and teamwork.
2. Give employers, managers and supervisors the skills and resources to contribute to developing, promoting and retaining staff.

The project activities took place between December 2016 and May 2019 (after being granted an extension. The training reached 60 immigrants and 67 managers and supervisors at food-processing plants in Alberta.

# Proposed process

AWES proposed to conduct research into industry needs of food-processors and write tailored curriculum for immigrants and supervisors/managers. Working with employers strategically, through an industry association, to gain an understanding of their needs and challenges typically serves two purposes: it allows AWES to write curriculum serving the needs of industry and it acts as a means of engaging employers in the training process one the curriculum is developed. For Bridge to Better Onboarding, the process was not straightforward given the number of issues and challenges employers face including:

* difficulty releasing immigrants from the floor
* timing regarding plant shut-downs
* lack of communication infrastructure within the sector
* low profit margins
* pressure to meet production quotas (one company could not release immigrant employees from the work-floor due to the impact it would have on the “cows per head” metric reported daily to corporate headquarters

Because employers were unable or not willing to schedule training on company time, it because untenable to pursue this implementation model with immigrants having multiple other commitments outside of the job, including second and third jobs, and trying to schedule training to fit with complicated production schedules.

AWES implemented the process successfully with one food-processor and provided all elements of the training - face-to-face, on-line, and pre and post assessments and focus groups and evaluations - to 14 front-line staff. We also provided supervisory training to 67 supervisors, but after facing the multiple challenges from the other employer partners, decided to open the training to employed and unemployed in a mixed setting hosted by AWES.

# Revised process

Requesting a change of scope and an amendment to the timelines, AWES had to begin a new marketing strategy to promote the project. We also had to revise the curriculum to work for a broader interest group. We had to change the way we were offering assessments and on-line learning. By the completion of the project AWES had succeeded in training 60 immigrant participants.

# Training statistics

### Pilot sites for face-to-face training

1. McCain Foods (Coaldale), 2017 (16 participants),
2. Lethbridge (Read On as partner) 2018 (8 participants)
3. Calgary 2018 (6 participants)
4. Sunterra Foods (Trochu), 2018 (3 participants)
5. Taber (TDCALA partner), 2019 (4 participants)
6. Edmonton, 2019 (12 participants)
7. Edmonton, 2019 (11 participants)

A total of 60 people attended the seven workshops, fulfilling the proposed deliverable.[[1]](#footnote-1)

### Pilot sites for train-the-trainer workshops

1. Calgary (October 27, 2017) – 17 participants
2. Edmonton (November 3, 2017) – 21 participants
3. McCain (November 16, 2017) – 10 participants
4. Calgary (December 7, 2017) – 19 participants

# Outcomes

## Supervisor pre and post survey results

Sixty-seven supervisors indicated that they felt the training would decrease the workplace problems in the following situations except those highlighted in yellow below:

* How often do your immigrant workers indicate they have understood something you’ve said (e.g. by nodding), but it is evident later on that they have not understood?
* How often do you need to repeat instructions?
* How often is production affected because employees have not understood instructions?
* How often is production affected because employees have not understood instructions?
* How often do you need to talk to employees about showing more initiative?
* How often do you notice underlying tension or deal with conflict because of different cultural backgrounds?
* How often do you need to deal with documents being completed inaccurately? (e.g. lot codes, timesheets)
* How often do you need to deal with food or workplace safety issues with employees as a result of language?
* How often do you have to solve problems that you think should have been solved by the employee(s) on their own?

### Interviews and focus groups evaluation[[2]](#footnote-2)

The evaluator conducted five in-depth interviews to gather data on how the training impacted the organization.

**Supervisors**

**Pronunciation**

Workers are trying to adjust their pronunciation so that others can understand them more easily. Clear speech is critical because much of the communication occurs over the radio between quality control operators and production line workers. Communication is quicker because speakers don’t need to repeat themselves. This effort to speak slower, to use more pauses between ideas, and to be clearer has heightened the awareness of some supervisors. In turn, they are making an effort to speak slower in plainer language so that workers can understand them as well.

**Taking initiative to solve problems**

Supervisors from quality control noted that the participants are more confident to take the initiative on various issues that they would have previously left to a supervisor to a coworker with stronger English skills. For example, one of the four production lines shut down during a night shift. The computer had not adjusted to the change in daylight savings. The participant tried to solve the problem by herself first, and then when she had exhausted the procedures, she phoned her supervisor who helped her fix the issue. The supervisor noted that in the past, the worker would have asked someone else to find a solution and phone for help.

**Better workplace relationships**

Supervisors commented that some workers are making an effort to share with teams about their cultural backgrounds. They want to get to know people outside of their own cultures at work.

**Asking for clarification**

They said that some workers are asking questions more to gain clarification, and to learn English terms.

For example, a participant asks for explanations about idiomatic and slang terms, and how to use them with her team members.

## 

## Front-line participants face-to-face training

### Participant pre and post surveys

**Confidence scale**

Participants indicated increased confidence in all areas except feeling like they belong in Canada. That number stayed the same.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Pre-survey results** | **Post-survey results** |
| **Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement** |  |  |
| I have the confidence to speak up and ask questions. | 3.8 | 4.4 |
| I am comfortable taking initiative at work. | 3.9 | 4.3 |
| I try to solve problems on my own first before I ask my supervisor. | 3.8 | 3.9 |
| I know how to work safely. | 4.1 | 4.4 |
| I want to grow in my career and learn more challenging duties. | 4.3 | 4.7 |
| I work well with coworkers from other countries. | 4.3 | 4.5 |
| I feel like I belong in Canada and in my workplace. | 4.4 | 4.4 |

**Frequency scale**

Participants indicated they felt they would experience the problems listed in the survey less frequently after the training. This table represents the data from seven cohorts, 60 people.

|  |  | Once a month or less | A few times a month | A couple of days a week | Almost every day |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| When I do not understand instructions | Pre | 42% | 36% | 16% | 6% |
| Post | 50% | 34% | 13% | 3% |
| When I find it hard to keep up with the work | Pre | 46% | 32% | 15% | 7% |
| Post | 65% | 19% | 11% | 6% |
| When there is tension or conflict between people from different cultural backgrounds | Pre | 66% | 30% | 4% |  |
| Post | 87% | 13% |  |  |

### Interviews and focus groups evaluation[[3]](#footnote-3)

Five course participants at McCain’s answered the following interview questions.

**Course participants**

**Pronunciation**

Participants noted that pronunciation was one of the most important parts of the course that they are implementing in the workplace with positive results.

**Contributing ideas**

Participants noted that they have more confidence to speak up and share their ideas with their teams and supervisors. The intercultural elements of the course have helped them have a better relationship with their supervisors instead of feeling hesitant to interact with them. The communication elements of the course have boosted their confidence. They feel that they don’t have to have perfect English skills before they share a good idea with their teams.

**Asking questions**

Participants commented that they have more confidence to ask questions when they don’t understand instructions from a supervisor. They noted that many supervisors speak too fast and use too much slang or idiomatic language.

**Working with other cultures**

Participants noted that the intercultural elements of the course were very useful.

**Document use**

Participants commented that they found the document use section very useful because they want to grow in their careers. New opportunities to cross-train and increase responsibility come with increased document use skills.

### On-line materials

Participants commented on what they liked and how they would apply the on-line learning. The most common comments were about helping to read documents, having an understanding of other cultures, using the communication skills, and having all the topics relevant to food processing.

## Innovative approach learnings

* When creating online videos, or any online learning, it is better to create them in short units so that there are no issues with size of the files impacting a participant’s ability to watch them on a smartphone. The videos were created in segments that were too lengthy to be useful. Most immigrants do not seem to have reliable access to computers and tablets so rely on their phones.
* Knowing the full capacity of an online learning platform to collect data on how participants are using content is very important.

## Final learnings

* Working with industry provides challenges. We have learned that no matter how committed an employer is at project start, production pressures and deadlines are difficult to schedule around. Creating centralized training where a few employees at a time can be sent for training is more likely to meet the needs of food processors if they want to train new employees.
* Completing an ONA with an employer creates engagement at the outset and is therefore not only a necessary research tool, but also a great marketing and educational tool.
* Partner organizations may have internal issues that are not apparent until the work begins.
* The learner evaluations as well as the anecdotal reports from the participants prove that there is a need for resources that integrate language, essential skills and intercultural workplace development for newcomers.

1. Note that the data collection methodology for this project required that supervisors fill in CAJG forms. AWES did not collect the data during training and tried to collect it retroactively. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Please note, this level of data collection was only achieved with the McCain’s group for reasons previously mentioned; the proposed training implementation had to be revised. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Please note, this level of data collection was only achieved with the McCain’s group for reasons previously mentioned: the proposed training implementation had to be revised. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)