



case study

THK Rhythm Automotive Canada

Setting wheels in motion

How a unique approach to essential skills training worked for an automotive parts 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

THK Rhythm Automotive Canada is a parts manufacturing plant located in Tillsonburg, Ontario. At the time of the project, THK supplied parts to 10 countries, 34 customers, and 56 locations. The company makes critical safety parts that must meet quality assurance standards.

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

1. Retention of newer hires – THK understands the costs associated with recruitment, training, and orientations and the other costs associated with continued hiring and would like to stabilize their workforce by increasing retention of new hires. There is also some concern with absenteeism in new hires.
2. Productivity – THK employees need to meet production targets. Productivity impacts not only costs but the other lines. For example, the ball stud line feeds the other lines and if they are not meeting targets, other productivity targets are affected.

Almost half of the training group was over 45 years old, 77 percent of them had at least a high school or equivalent education, and 93 percent identified English as their native language. Thirty-seven team members from THK's assembly and machine operations took the training.

What we delivered

The Skilling UP curriculum designers and trainers developed a 27-hour curriculum and delivered it to mixed groups, so that participants with higher essential skills levels were able to reinforce their own skills by helping those with lower essential skills. The Skilling UP team interviewed nine management and supervisory positions, and 26 team members (assembly and machine operation). To further understand the work done by the team members, they spent time job shadowing to observe how essential skills were used to accomplish tasks during a shift. 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:

1. Document use

- Paper-based and computer documents are interrelated and are connected to production requirements and quality assurance standards. Workers and team leaders indicated that errors or missing information in completing documents was an issue.

2. Thinking skills

- Determining whether a part meets quality assurance standards.
- Determining the root cause of the problem if not meeting standards.
- Making decisions on how to proceed if there are issues.

3. Coaching

- Not everyone has the “people skills” to train new hires so training on how to coach workers and provide information is important in this case.

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 to ensure accountability. Employees’ document use abilities were evaluated before and after the Skilling UP training, and the results showed an overall increase in skill – 70 percent of employees demonstrated a skill gain.

In their post-training evaluations, 95 percent of participants said they would recommend this course to others, and 86 percent reported they could use the skills they learned during training in their workplace.

Comments from participants after Skilling UP training:

“I feel like people can do, and achieve, a lot more with proper training. When understanding things that relate to your job, less mistakes are made.”

“Yes, it has been a good refresher in math, reading, writing, communication, training of others on the job, how to deal with other employees better, and most helpful for decision-making.”

“More relevant than I thought it would be, very good overall.”

Comments from company management after Skilling UP training:

“While employers will agree that time away from the line can be problematic, training while away from the line should be considered an investment, provided that there is evidence that your employees make gains from the training provided. As we were able to customize the training to our own challenges and processes, the employees received real examples from our workplace to improve their abilities and understanding. There is statistical support that our employees benefitted from this training which can clearly justify any and all expense/time away.”

Contact us

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

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