

The Importance of Essential Skills



BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A COMPETITIVE AND RESPONSIVE WORKFORCE.

The Skills YOUR Employees Need

The 9 Essential Skills:

- *Reading Text*
- *Document Use*
- *Numeracy*
- *Writing*
- *Oral Communication*
- *Working With Others*
- *Continuous Learning*
- *Thinking Skills*
- *Computer Use*

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The Canadian automotive repair and service workplace faces a continuing onslaught of overwhelming competitive pressures and unparalleled technological change.

The intensity of these combined forces have altered long established production practices and procedures. In fact, the one constant within industry today is change and this has placed an unprecedented premium on skills and learning.

Research undertaken by the Canadian Automotive Repair and Service (CARS) Council as part of a recent Essential Skills project points to an alarming gap between what the automotive repair and service sector requires from its personnel in terms of skills and learning

abilities and what it is actually getting.

It is clear from the research that technicians today and in the future will require strong foundation skills — essential skills, to successfully acquire the new skills and knowledge needed to remain effective and productive in an ever changing workplace environment.

CARS has been able to develop Occupational Profiles for key industry occupations. These profiles document the skills and aptitudes required for individuals to be successful including the degree of proficiency required for each occupation in basic skills such as reading and writing.



As will be demonstrated in the following pages, an understanding of essential skills and their importance to training and skills development is critical to owners and managers who want to maintain a profitable bottom line in today's competitive automotive repair and service industry.

Occupational Profiles

The Canadian Automotive Repair and Service (CARS) Council has developed detailed occupational profiles for some 34 key industry occupations ranging from automotive repair technician to parts counter person.

CARS is also continuing to identify the degree to which the essential skills or literacy requirements affect these occupations. The profiles constitute foundation industry

standards against which employees can be assessed in terms of the skills they possess compared to the skills required by industry for key occupations.

The ability for industry to accurately measure employee skills has immense implications in every aspect of human resource management. Whether it be for recruitment and selection of skilled new employees; the training and

development of employees; conducting performance reviews; and, planning measures for the retention of employees and succession planning, occupational profiles and essential skills have a number of practical applications to industry's owners, managers and supervisors.

What follows are brief examples of the relevance of these tools to everyday business.



Essential Skills: the Foundation

Essential skills are the foundation for ongoing learning and the acquisition of new skills.

Without solid essential skills in most of the nine areas listed on the previous page, employees will have a difficult time adapting to changes in production methods, adapting to new technology and participating successfully in training.

This is an important fact that every enterprise must under-

stand. Employers today also need to appreciate that improving essential skills is not just the responsibility of the employee or the education system.

Employers have a huge stake in their employees in terms of the time, energy and money they have invested to provide training, on the job mentoring and refining the skills and knowledge of employees to fit the

requirements of the workplace.

Enabling employees to enhance their foundation skills and to become more productive just makes good business sense.

“Industry needs to attract and retain workers who have strong technical and foundation skills.”

Job Description Development

Occupational profiles containing an essential skills profile component are fundamental to development job descriptions that accurately describe the on-the-job skills requirements.

The essential skills profiles can be used to outline the essential skills requirements of the job in general and individual tasks

more specifically. This supports employees in job performance; aids in identifying performance issues and training needs; and, facilitates selecting applicants with the best fit.

Guidelines are available from CARS that can help employers to identify and rate the com-

plexity of essential skills (scales) not already identified in the existing essential skills profiles.

The job descriptions can be streamlined and authenticated by incorporating essential skills language and scales.



Recruitment and Selection

Essential skills profiles can be an effective research tool when developing new position descriptions by determining the most important essential skills required for position functions and associated tasks.

This is especially useful when recruiting or selecting candidates who lack formal educa-

tional credentials or speak English or French as a second language.

By establishing minimum essential skill entry requirements for new positions, employers are better positioned to create more accurate job advertisements and postings.

Essential skill profiles also contribute to better planning the interview process through the development of more effective interview questions and candidate evaluation.

Training and Development

Ongoing training, continuous learning, is critical to ensuring that the skill levels of today's workforce will be up to the challenges of tomorrow.

And one of the most practical and demonstrable examples of the value of essential skills profiles and skills complexity levels is in the development of training plans.

Essential skills profiles can be used to identify training re-

quirements specific to job functions including the development and delivery of cross training.

The same essential skills profiles can be used in regular revisions to training documents, policy and procedural manuals. These documents can be tailored to the specific needs of the company and the employees.

Building strong essential skills

among employees ensures that they will be able to participate successfully in training opportunities; acquire new skills and knowledge; work more efficiently and productively; and, remain flexible and responsive to a changing workplace environment.



Performance Review

Regular employee performance reviews are an important part of human resource management within any business.

Within an environment of intense competition and rapidly changing technology, such as the automotive repair and service sector, performance reviews are an essential means of measuring employee profi-

ciency and effectiveness.

Here, too, essential skills profiles can be used to identify specific skills to evaluate or measure. The essential skills levels, as rated in the occupational profiles developed by CARS, provide a benchmark for measuring employee performance and in setting personal development goals and

in determining training requirements.

Essential skills profiles provide a proven means of measuring progress and in supporting decisions for employee advancement.

“Industry needs to align training demands with on-the-job skills requirements”

Retention and Succession Planning

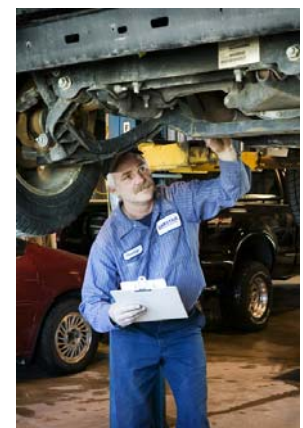
It's a fact that the demographics of the workplace are changing as industry's existing workforce grows older with some of the most experienced employees approaching retirement.

The added challenge for many industry employers is finding new employees with the skills

need to pursue a lifelong career in the industry.

Essential skills profiles can be used to identify and maximize the skills of existing employees and support them in achieving their individual, team and organizational goals. The essential skills complexity levels can provide bench-

marked validation of skills to identify employees for advancement and direct decisions about additional training and development to support their career development.



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WHERE PEOPLE, TRAINING AND TECHNOLOGY MEET

About the CARS Council

The Canadian Automotive Repair and Service (CARS) Council was established in 1988 to develop a national human resource strategy for the industry.

Critical human resource issues had already been identified in an Employment and Immigration Canada study conducted in 1987. The study, entitled *Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Industry – a Human Resource Study*, revealed a number of key issues affecting the industry's ability to attract and retain sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled individuals to meet future labour force needs.

An update study, "Bridging the Gaps", was completed in June 1999 and the recommendations have been the focus of recent project work to address industry human resource and training needs.

Over the past several years, CARS has undertaken projects to address industry identified challenges that fall within the CARS' mandate:

"To address on a national basis the human resource and training development needs of the automotive repair and service industry."

Some Last Words

The Canadian Automotive Repair and Service (CARS) Council has developed a massive body of research on the human resource development needs of the automotive repair and service sector.

Study after study points to the fact that too many of our industry's existing workforce are not as prepared as they should be to handle their current jobs and lack the wherewithal to improve their skill levels. This is a huge issue.

Advanced technology is everywhere in the workplace. The vehicles our employees main-

tain and repair are increasing more technologically advanced; sophisticated electronic diagnostic tools have become essential; electronic and on-line resources are as common as printed manuals; and, the requirement for analytical thinking and problem solving has never been more important.

New technology and new workplace procedures and processes require sound foundation skills — essential skills that have never before been more *essential*.

From an employers point of

view, it is simply good business practice to understand the scope and limitations of an employees level of skills relative to their job responsibilities. Simply put, what skills do employees have; what skills do they need?

CARS has spent considerable effort, working with industry stakeholders and expert essential skills practitioners, to develop effective assessment tools for employers. As part of a 'tool kit', CARS can provide research information; 'how to' guides; and, on-line training needs assessments.



The on-line assessments provide accurate evaluations of employee skill levels, including essential skills, identify any skills gaps and match training requirements to available sources of training.

Contact CARS today to learn more.