| understanding roles = compliance and quality | efficiency = quality and productivity | clear messages = achieving key objectives | learning culture = innovation | understanding learners' skills = effective training |

FIVE GOOD REASONS

making the case for core skill development and improving workforce quality and productivity

ISC INDUSTRY SKILLS COUNCILS

Creating Australia's Future

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About this resource

Core skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening, along with understanding and using numbers effectively (numeracy) – are linked to many work activities, particularly learning and communicating. In fast-moving, technological societies like Australia, these skills are becoming increasingly complex.

Employers, managers and trainers often understand the impact of core skills on workforce safety, compliance and productivity, but it can still be difficult to make a convincing case for your organisation to invest in training or procedural reviews that will improve worker core skills.

This resource provides 'five good reasons' that you can use when making your case for core skill training:

1 **Efficiency = quality and productivity**

2 **Clear messages = achieving key objectives**

3 **Understanding learners' core skills = effective training**

4 **Learning culture = innovation**

5 **Understanding roles = compliance and quality**

The resource will also help you focus on what can be done in the workplace to make sure you have the processes in place to help workers with language, literacy and numeracy issues to achieve their potential, remain safe, and meet your compliance and productivity targets.

The information in this resource, in combination with your broader consideration of workforce development needs, can also help you develop an integrated approach to dealing with language, literacy and numeracy (core skills) in a workforce development plan.

1

Efficiency = quality and productivity

Being able to communicate well improves quality output and business productivity and profitability. It will help workers to understand instructions, do key tasks well, and provide feedback on workplace processes.

Raising a country's adult literacy by just 1% leads to a rise in productivity of 2.5%[1]

Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills are core skills that affect productivity and influence workers' ability to understand their job role. To do their job properly, workers need to understand what they must do. It's as simple as that.

Ask yourself the following questions to see where language, literacy and numeracy might be getting in the way of people doing their jobs properly.

Ask yourself	Things to consider	What you can do
➡ Are workers able to complete the key tasks in their job role? ➡ Can they understand verbal and written instructions? ➡ Can they provide feedback to you about what could be done better?	How do workers learn the skills they need in their job role? Through spoken language or something they have to read? Example: Where workers don't have English as a first language, are you giving out documents that outline procedures? It's quite likely that people won't 'get it' unless you give them translations or visual representation of key information.	Help workers build skills through mentoring or specific language, literacy and numeracy support training. Access WELL[2] funding to assist workers to build their LLN skills. Offer translations of key information or visually present the information.
	Are workers making mistakes that are easily corrected? Are they providing you with feedback on what works and what doesn't? If not, what support might they need to do this? Could language, literacy and numeracy be contributing to absenteeism, accidents, and low retention rates?	Build a culture in the workplace that allows workers to easily provide feedback or ask for help. Make sure that workplace information, like standard operating procedures, is in plain English. Build the communication skills of your supervisors and managers. Make sure that trainers are aware of the support workers with LLN issues need, and are given opportunities to build their skills in giving that support.

1. Literacy scores, human capital and growth across fourteen OECD countries, Statistics Canada, 2004
2. For information on WELL (DEEWR's Workplace English Language and Literacy program) visit www.deewr.gov.au/well

Clear messages = achieving key objectives

Effective workplace communication helps organisations achieve key business and training objectives.

Trainers are sometimes brought in to the workplace to help build workers' reading skills so that they can read standard operating procedures. However, it often becomes apparent that while the workers' reading skills do need some help, the issue is more that the standard operating procedures are badly written. Communication is a two-way process.

Good communication is about being able to convey information clearly so that it is easily understood. It improves work relationships and, in most cases, contributes to greater productivity. The need to improve workplace communication skills does not only affect people with low levels of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) – someone with high levels of LLN can still not be a good communicator.

Ask yourself the following questions to see where language, literacy and numeracy might be getting in the way of workers' ability to understand workplace documents and communicate.

Ask yourself	Things to consider	What you can do
➡ Do the people who are writing or conveying key information to others in your organisation have effective communication skills? ➡ Do those who need to understand workplace information, like standard operating procedures, have support if they need it?	Are standard operating procedures in plain English? Are they supported by visual prompts? What in-house training is available to support the development of workplace communication skills?	Provide workshops for managers, supervisors and trainers about their LLN skills, and the impact they have on business and training objectives.
	Do the key people responsible for conveying information have the skills to do so?	Build the communication skills of your managers and supervisors.
	What are the skills needed in their roles? For example: Does the person writing standard operating procedures in your organisation have the right skills to present the information clearly and simply?	Access WELL funding[3] to help workers to build the LLN skills needed in their roles.
	What procedures are in place for sensitively checking that workers understand workplace information?	Don't just rely on workers reading workplace information – be prepared to provide verbal and visual explanations. When information is developed, make sure that an evaluation strategy is built in to allow for trialling and redrafting if necessary.

3. For information on WELL (DEEWR's Workplace English Language and Literacy program) visit www.deewr.gov.au/well

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Understanding learners' core skills = effective training

A good training culture makes sure that the mode and level of training meet the skill needs of participants. Language, literacy and numeracy issues may prevent a worker from participating in training, which hampers effective up-skilling in your business. Knowing the skills that workers have, their language, literacy and numeracy challenges, and whether they are confident as learners can help focus training plans and strategies.

In an effort to help a number of workers experiencing difficulties with the numeracy demands in a training course, XYZ introduced a self-paced online training program. Course completion rates dropped even lower.

The problem was that many of its workers were over 50 and had rarely or never used a computer.

Sometimes the things we think of as a solution don't actually meet the needs of workers we're trying to get to buy in to that solution. Language, literacy and numeracy issues, which are often hidden from employers, may be barriers to that buy in.

Ask yourself the following questions to see where language, literacy and numeracy might be getting in the way of successful training outcomes.

Ask yourself	Things to consider	What you can do
Are the training courses you provide successful in meeting intended outcomes?	Are they suited to the language, literacy and numeracy skills of your workers? Do you build ongoing evaluation of outcomes into your training programs so that you can be sure they're fit for purpose? Do your workers have the opportunity to practise the core skills from their training in their job role?	Build a mentor system into training programs that you think might represent significant challenges for learners with core skill issues. Make sure the communication channels are open between trainers and workplace supervisors so that learners have opportunities to put learning into practice.
How do your employees react to suggested training?	Do employees avoid or resist participating in training? Do your training courses deliver too much information too quickly without appropriate support or follow up, which may overwhelm workers and make them fearful of failure?	Consider running a WELL training program[4] that allows for workers at risk to experience learning success and develop their confidence.

4. For information on WELL (DEEWR's Workplace English Language and Literacy program) visit www.deewr.gov.au/well

Learning culture = innovation

If you have identified problems with your workers' ability to develop new skills and adapt to change in the workplace then language, literacy and numeracy issues might be restricting progress and innovation in your business. Improving communication and addressing language, literacy and numeracy can overcome a workplace culture that is resistant to change or to developing new skills and open the way to innovation.

A medium-sized food retailer speaks of his business having grown as a result of him having provided his largely casual staff with training so that they would be up to speed with changing technology in the supply chain.

"We wanted to go past our three franchises, but we needed our staff to grow with us."

New ideas and positive change in an organisation can result in innovative practices. New technology, systems, equipment or clientele may require new language, literacy and numeracy skills to meet the changes required.

Ask yourself the following questions to see how you can support an innovative work culture.

Ask yourself	Things to consider	What you can do
➡ What are the new skills and knowledge required by workers to help you implement new ideas or changes? ➡ What support do you provide to workers to learn them?	For a whole organisation to take on new ideas there is often an increase in the amount, type and complexity of workplace information and communication. Introduction of new technologies often brings with it a training challenge. Workers may need training support to read or hear about the changes, as well as to address the LLN skills that these new technologies require.	Convey key messages clearly, in plain English, and in a stress-free environment. Consider a WELL training program[5], timed to support any change management training underway. Consider organisational strategies for supporting staff with LLN issues to cope with the changes underway.
➡ How are emerging needs communicated to workers?	Many people are fearful or nervous of new technologies and may require support during or after the main training session.	Introduce a buddy or mentor system to help build learners' confidence.
➡ Is new technology or equipment being introduced into your organisation's work practices? If so, what language, literacy and numeracy challenges do you see in implementing it?	Don't assume that workers will have the capacity for completely self-directed learning or online learning.	Use a WELL training program to support workers in developing basic IT skills.

5. For information on WELL (DEEWR's Workplace English Language and Literacy program) visit www.deewr.gov.au/well

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Understanding roles = compliance and quality

Businesses need to make sure that their employees have the skills they need to clearly understand their job role, the company focus, and relevant laws and regulations to ensure compliance and quality outcomes.

Improving communication and addressing core skills in the workplace can bring significant business benefits, including:

- the successful introduction of quality processes

- a safer workplace

- better compliance with legislation.

If you have identified problems with your workers' ability to understand legislative, safety and quality requirements then language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) issues will probably be adversely affecting the sustainability of an organisation.

Ask yourself the following questions to see how you can help build workforce capability and commitment to quality processes.

Ask yourself	Things to consider	What you can do
⇨ How are compliance requirements communicated to the workforce? ⇨ What are the core skills needed to understand and apply these requirements? ⇨ Do workers have the LLN skills to understand these requirements (e.g. will they need to read or complete more complex documents)? ⇨ How do you support workers' understanding of compliance policies and processes?	Compliance information can be written or verbal, so it's important to convey that information clearly and in plain English.	Conduct an audit of workplace LLN demands and workers' LLN skills. This valuable exercise will help identify the types of compliance information that workers in each job role might need to understand or communicate, as well as whether they have the LLN skills to do so. Where workers have English as a second language, provide additional support or check for understanding. Consider alternative ways of conveying key messages (e.g. translating into workers' first language)
	Effective training processes build sustainable in-house solutions to LLN issues. Up-skill in-house trainers and assessors to increase their capacity to assist learners with LLN issues.	Up-skill in-house trainers and assessors to increase their capacity to assist learners with LLN issues. Encourage trainers and assessors to complete an LLN qualification in TAE10 Training and Education Training Package.
	Workers need to be clear about the messages they are responsible for understanding as well as generating in their job role. Encourage a mentor or buddy system to allow ongoing or incidental support for workers with LLN issues.	Encourage a mentor or buddy system to allow ongoing or incidental support for workers with LLN issues. Build the communication skills of your staff, including managers and supervisors.

Contact information

WELL

For information on the **Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL)** program, please contact your state or territory WELL officer.

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