

MODULE 3: Communication and Terminology for the
Workplace

TOPIC 1: Some Current Workplace Practices

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- ◆ identify and define the acronyms of some current, common workplace practices
- ◆ identify features of a “high-performance” and “traditional” company
- ◆ participate in a meeting at a manufacturing company experiencing a decrease in productivity and quality control
- ◆ evaluate their own participation in the meeting

TOPIC	SKILLS	CLB COMPETENCE AREA	COMPETENCIES	PRE-TASKS	TASK	POST-TASK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Some Current Workplace Practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Listening/ Speaking ◆ Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ exchanging information ◆ suasion ◆ social interaction ◆ informational texts - analysis and evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ gain familiarity with expectations of employees in a high performance organization ◆ use a variety of expressions to show agreement and disagreement in the workplace ◆ understand and apply current workplace practices to a business situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ distinguish between Quality Control and Quality Assurance ◆ discuss issue of employee motivation in the workplace ◆ categorize characteristics of a high-performance and a traditional organization ◆ identify and define acronyms of some common workplace practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ role-play a particular role at a company meeting using a variety of functional language while representing a particular point of view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ do a self-evaluation of participation in a group discussion.

Facilitator's Notes for Module 3

Topic 1: Some Current Workplace Practices

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Content

This lesson focuses on some "New Economy" management practices of "high performance" companies. It is important for engineers to be familiar with these practices because many associated acronyms are found in engineering job ads. In addition, knowledge of these workplace practices can enhance an individual's suitability for progressive positions.

It is possible for the facilitator to prepare to deliver this lesson solely using the facilitator's notes. However, facilitators can enhance their understanding of the topic by reviewing any or all of the articles listed below. (It is expected that participants will cover similar information in the Sector Orientation and Overview workshop.)

Sage, S. "Impacts of the New Economy on Learning Needs." In *TESL Talk: ESL in the Changing World of Work*, Edited by Esther Podoliak. v. 21, pp.65-87. Ministry of Citizenship, 1993.¹

Young, P. and J. Young. "Workplace Literacy: The Road to Quality Improvement." In *Workplace Education: The Changing Landscape*, edited by Maurice C. Taylor, 163-78. Toronto: Culture Concepts Inc., 1997.

These two volumes are available from AlphaPlus Centre. Located in Toronto, this organization serves individuals and organizations working in literacy throughout Ontario. The AlphaPlus library catalogue is available on their Web site: <http://alphaplus.ca>. AlphaPlus will mail books to borrowers anywhere in Ontario.

Beck, N., and J. Connolly. "Jobs with a Future: An Engineer's Guide to the New Economy." In *Engineering Dimensions*. Jan/Feb 1995: 24-30.

¹ For those who are interested in an alternative context for this kind of subject matter, we recommend the article by David Cooke, "Just Add Power", that follows Sage's in the same *TESL Talk* issue.

Delivery

As many copies as necessary should be made of the following handouts:

- ◆ Handout 1 Questions about Motivation
- ◆ Handout 2 This handout should be cut as indicated and the slips of paper should be placed in an envelope (one envelope per pair is sufficient). The instructions can be taped to the envelope.
- ◆ Handout 3 Participant Answer Sheet for Pre-Task 2
- ◆ Handout 4 Matching Activity
- ◆ Handout 5 Expressions for Agreeing and Disagreeing
- ◆ Handout 6 Situation for the Task
- ◆ Handout 7 Participant Self-Evaluation

Terminology List (optional)

Materials needed: overhead projector and OHT 1 and 2, chart paper and markers

Prepare the list of workplace practice terms on chart paper (see Pre-Task 3) for easy reference.

Methodology***Introduction***

- (10 minutes)** 1. Explain that in the last decade, many workplace practices have developed in order to help companies become high-performance organizations. This came about as Japanese products became increasingly competitive with North American products. Most Canadian companies are committed to balancing improvements in quality while reducing costs. One method of improving product quality is to adopt the concept of Quality Assurance rather than Quality Control. Ask the class what they think the difference is between Quality Control and Quality Assurance (the latter emphasizes prevention, while the former emphasizes detection after the fact).

- (10 minutes)** 2. Ask the participants how this emphasis on prevention affects management practices (i.e., relationships in a company's production or service processes, and

communication channels). Explain that there are four main workplace practices that focus on improving quality and efficiency in the workplace (show OHT1). Explain that acronyms related to these practices are often found in job ads. Indicate to the class that today's lesson focuses on identifying some aspects of workplace practices, especially in light of today's business and technological changes.

Pre-Tasks

(20 minutes) 1. Start the lesson by dividing the participants into groups of three. Distribute Handout 1 on motivation and have them discuss the questions. Explain that they should write down any ideas from their discussions, because these will be important later in the lesson. Elicit some responses to the last question of the handout.

(30 minutes) 2. Elicit from the participants any information they have learned about Canadian workplaces as compared to those in their country of origin. For example, participants should mention: management techniques, expectations of employers, the role of training and teamwork, and hiring policies. Explain that there have been many changes in Canadian companies such as shifts in management, production practices, and technological changes. These changes have a direct impact on workplace communication and demands on employees. Explain that participants will be given an opportunity to compare traditional and high performance work organizations

Distribute an envelope with characteristics of both kinds of work organizations written on slips of paper (Handout 2). Explain that participants should first categorize each characteristic as typical of either a "traditional" or "high performance" workplace. Each characteristic should then be matched with its opposite. Have participants work in pairs and then compare their lists with another pair. Have a whole-class discussion to ensure understanding of terms and expressions. (Note that "customer" in this context refers to an internal employee who relies on the services/duties of another employee.) Distribute Handout 3 for reference.

ENGINEERING TERMINOLOGY WORKSHOP

- (15 minutes)** 3. There have been many studies done on the needs and demands of companies in the “New Economy.” Elicit from the participants what they think are the four main requirements of companies today. (Answer: employee performance, company productivity, product quality, company profitability). Divide participants into groups of four and have them identify/brainstorm some answers to the following question: How can companies achieve these goals? (Refer participants to the first pre-task for ideas.) Have each group present their ideas to the class.
- (15 minutes)** 4. Explain that some workplace practices have been developed to achieve these goals. Acronyms for these practices often appear in job ads for engineers. Show OHT 2 for a selection of ads that show ISO, JIT, TQM, SPC. Refer participants’ attention to a list of workplace practices on chart paper:
- ◆ Total Quality Management (TQM)
 - ◆ Self-managed work teams
 - ◆ Job Rotation
 - ◆ Statistical Process Control (SPC)
 - ◆ Just in Time Inventory Management (JIT)
 - ◆ International Standards Organization (ISO)
- Have the participants work in groups of three and discuss and write definitions for these practices. They should be familiar with some of them and may benefit from an opportunity to discuss what they know. Leave OHT 2 on the screen so that they can see the acronyms in context.
- (20 minutes)** 5. Distribute Handout 4 to the participants. Have them read the descriptions and choose the workplace practice to which they refer. Participants can also compare their group’s ideas to the descriptions on the handout. Take up as a whole-class activity. Participants may have questions about these practices; however, they should understand, that this is only an introduction to some concepts and they can explore them more on their own if they are interested.

Task

- (15 minutes)** 1. The task for this lesson is a role-play of a meeting at a small, non-unionized manufacturing company experiencing quality-assurance problems. There are four people in the meeting: the owner of the company, an employee representative, a manager, and an engineer. Explain to the participants that they will be working in groups of four and simulating a meeting where some company problems are being discussed. Each participant will be assigned a role in the meeting. The purpose of this discussion is for the group members to agree on the best ways of improving the employees' working conditions in the factory. An important point to keep in mind is that all members should take part in the discussion. In order to help broaden the expressions for agreeing and disagreeing, distribute Handout 5 and go over some common and polite expressions.
- (10 minutes)** 2. Distribute Handout 6, which outlines the situation in this company. Read the situation as a whole class and check for understanding.
- (10 minutes)** 3. In order to prepare for the role-playing exercise, ask the class how employees' working conditions can be improved so that ultimately production and quality will increase, from the management point of view. Try and raise the following points:
- ◆ communication between workers and management (number of meetings? number and kind of memos? suggestion box?)
 - ◆ working hours (number of hours? flexible hours?)
 - ◆ breaks (number and length of breaks? facilities for breaks?)
 - ◆ days off (length of vacation? number of paid holidays, sick days, and personal days?)
 - ◆ education and training (in-service training? paid tuition? time off for classes? financial rewards?)
 - ◆ working environment (music? lighting? noise?)
 - ◆ increase in responsibility with a corresponding increase in "perks"

- (20 minutes)** 4. End the whole-class discussion and organize the participants into groups of four. Have participants make their own list of specific solutions. Then, have them select the best ideas for each role. They can be generally divided into two categories: employees and management (the latter would include the engineer). After each group has done this, assign the roles for each group member. They are now ready to start the discussion. The groups should discuss the topic for ten minutes. The purpose of the discussion is not to reach a final decision, but to participate in a meeting.

Post-Task

- (10 minutes)** 1. Distribute the participant self-evaluation (Handout 7). Have each person fill it out. Explain to the class that in more and more workplaces, all employees are expected to contribute to the growth of the company. Communication is becoming very important, as quality assurance and standardization of workplace process for ISO 9000 membership is becoming increasingly advantageous and profitable. How much do they feel that they contributed?

OHT 1

- **Self-directed Work Teams:**
Supervise their own work and make decisions about work organization
- **Job Rotation:**
Including rotation within a shift or rotating jobs every few months across divisions
- **Problem-solving Groups or Quality Circles:**
Often meet during downtime or at the beginning or end of the day
- **Total Quality Management:**
Uses communication, feedback, and teamwork to control quality. Often includes statistical process control

Handout 1

What motivates people to work harder?

Consider these factors:

- ◆ ownership of company shares
- ◆ increases in pay linked to the achievement of targets
- ◆ frequent training courses
- ◆ opportunities for promotion
- ◆ the threat of redundancy
- ◆ being given more responsibility

Which of these factors would motivate you to work harder than you usually would?

Compare your answers with your group.

Can you think of some other practical ways in which staff motivation could be improved in a workplace?

Handout 2

Cut along dotted lines and place in an envelope (one envelope for two participants). Tape the instructions to the outside of the envelope.

Instructions

Work with a partner. Decide which description describes a traditional workplace and which one describes a high performance workplace. After, match each description with its opposite. For example, a traditional workplace has a focus on repetition, while a high-performance one has an emphasis on problem-solving.

Management treats workers as “partners in prosperity”:
people with solutions, who deserve respect.

Work performed on an assembly line, by individuals
working on task alone.

A worker’s job is to continuously improve his/her part of
the process in relation to the whole, to better meet the
needs of customers (next step in production process).

Premium on worker reliability, steadiness,
willingness to follow directions.

Emphasis on repetition.

Workers are expendable, interchangeable.

Participatory management style.

A worker’s job is to follow the same procedure at an
established pace.

Fewer layers of management

Multiple levels of management necessary.

Chain of command hierarchy.

Management functions as “coach.”

Work done in self-managing work cells, by individuals working in teams.

Cost is the driving factor; therefore, workers fear that improvements will lead to elimination of jobs.

Worker is not a whole person (check your brains at the door).

Worker is a whole person (head and hands).

Management functions to control workers, maintain the status quo.

Management treats employees as “hands.”

Emphasis on problem-solving.

Workers respected as equals with managers, valued according to contributions.

Premium on workers inventing new ways to eliminate waste, do job more efficiently.

Improvement is the driving factor; therefore, workers rewarded for improvements.

Handout 3

Traditional Work Organization	High Performance Work Organization
<p><i>Chain of command hierarchy</i></p> <p><i>Multiple levels of management necessary</i></p> <p><i>Management functions to control workers, maintain the status quo</i></p> <p><i>Management treats employees as “hands”.</i></p> <p><i>Worker is not a whole person (check your brains at the door).</i></p> <p><i>Work performed an assembly on line, by individuals working on tasks alone.</i></p> <p><i>A worker's job is to follow same procedures at an established pace.</i></p> <p><i>Emphasis on repetition.</i></p> <p><i>Premium on worker reliability, steadiness, willingness to follow directions.</i></p> <p><i>Workers are expendable, interchangeable.</i></p> <p><i>Cost is the driving facto; therefore workers fear that improvements will lead to elimination of jobs</i></p>	<p><i>Participatory management style</i></p> <p><i>Fewer layers of management</i></p> <p><i>Management functions as “coach”.</i></p> <p><i>Management treats workers as “partners in prosperity,” people with solutions, who deserve respect.</i></p> <p><i>Worker is a whole person (head and hands)</i></p> <p><i>Work done in self-managing work cells, by individuals working in teams.</i></p> <p><i>Worker's job is to continuously improve his/her part of the process in relation to the whole: to better meet needs of customer (next step in production process).</i></p> <p><i>Emphasis on problem solving</i></p> <p><i>Premium on worker inventing new ways to eliminate waste, do job more efficiently</i></p> <p><i>Workers respected as equals with managers, valued according to contributions.</i></p> <p><i>Improvement is the driving factor; therefore workers rewarded for improvements.</i></p>

Source: Stein, S. and L. Sperazi. *Workplace Education in Context: A Chart Comparing Traditional and High Performance Work Organizations*. Massachusetts Workplace Initiative, 1987-1991.

OHT 2

AEROSPACE MANUFACTURING

Donlee Precision is a leading manufacturer of aircraft engine shafting, helicopter rotor masts, and other high precision machined components. We have an immediate opening for the following position:

Manufacturing Engineer

The successful candidate must have a minimum of 10 years experience working as a manufacturing engineer in a machine shop background. Candidates must have a strong process design/planning, tool and fixture design and job estimating background with experience in CNC machining. Experience with CNC programming would be beneficial. Must be a hands-on problem solver with a strong sense of urgency and the ability to work with shop personnel as well as directly with customers. Experience with continuous process improvement, T.Q.M., S.P.C., and ISO implementation is desired. A professional designation would be an asset. We offer a comprehensive benefits package and competitive salary. Please fax/mail resumes to:

Donlee Precision
9 Fenmar Drive
Toronto, Ontario Canada
M9L 1L5
Fax: 416-746-8998

Quality Professional

You possess a degree in an Engineering or Business discipline, coupled with at least five years' experience in quality management, including experience with quality assurance programs and TQM systems. You excellent verbal and written communication skills combine well with your strong presentation and facilitation abilities. Knowledge of PCs is required while knowledge of quality management and ISO 14000 along with software quality audit experience would be definite assets.

We offer competitive compensation and exceptional opportunities for professional advancement. If you are seeking a positive, supportive environment in which dedicated people work together in innovative surroundings, forward your resume in confidence to:
Betty Salmon, Human Resources Manager, Brock Telecom Limited, 100 Strowger Boulevard, Brockville, Ontario K6V 5W8. Fax (613) 498-3608.

**QUALITY ENGINEER
(Temporary Position)**

You will assist in directing activities that support the Quality needs of a two plant J.I.T. manufacturing complex. Processes include metal stamping, heat treating and metal finishing. Assurance of highest product Quality will be one of your key objectives, as will be the successful launch of new components.



Qualified candidates will have a BSEEA or BSME (other BS degrees in Engineering will be considered). A technical Master's degree and/or Quality Certification (CQE) are desirable. These positions require a minimum of 2 years of automotive, manufacturing, tools & equipment, materials, metallurgy or quality experience, demonstrated problem solving skills, well developed interpersonal and communication skills, and the ability to operate within a team environment. Working knowledge of FMEAs, SPC, AQP, root cause analysis and other quality tools is desirable. Candidates should be available for travel and various shifts.

Source: *Globe and Mail.*

Handout 4

Read the following descriptions of workplace practices and decide which one it describes

SPC	JIT	ISO	TQM
Job Rotation	Self-Managed Work Teams		

1. This workplace practice requires that employees strictly monitor the quality of output or production. It is considered to be one of the most effective forms of quality assurance. Employees record data on production charts and shifts, trends, and changes in quality are recognized. Such monitoring helps reduce unacceptable deviations and ensures conformity to specifications. _____

2. This workplace practice is a strategy to improve performance. Its goal is to reduce process waste (steps in production), down time, overproduction, unnecessary movements, transportation (of product), scrap inventory (product you can't sell), and re-work (doing the job again). It refers to both production and service industries. _____

3. This is the name of a non-government organization dedicated to promoting standardization to help in the global exchange of goods and services. The standard is applied to industry world wide and it is not legislated. Organizations will meet the standard because it is good for business. By the end of 1995, over 2,200 Canadian companies were registered in this organization. _____

4. This is a business philosophy that focuses on satisfying the customer, empowering the employees, and using statistics to find out where and when to make changes and improvement. One important goal is to increase employee involvement and responsibility in the workplace processes. All members are given a chance to voice their opinions. _____

5. This form of company work organization is becoming very popular. It is a more horizontal approach to management, where employees work together for short projects or longer periods of time and report to each other on progress of a project. Communication and interpersonal skills are important to the success of this kind of company organization. _____

6. Within technology-based environments, employees are cross-trained to perform multiple tasks. Employees work in several jobs according to a schedule. _____

FACILITATOR'S NOTES**Answer Key to Handout 4**

Read the following descriptions of workplace practices and decide which one it describes

SPC	JIT	ISO	TQM
Job Rotation	Self-Managed Work Teams		

1. This workplace practice requires that employees strictly monitor the quality of output or production. It is considered to be one of the most effective forms of quality assurance. Employees record data on production charts and shifts, trends and changes in quality are recognized. Such monitoring helps reduce unacceptable deviations and ensures conformity to specifications **SPC (Statistical Process Control)**
2. This workplace practice is a strategy to improve performance. Its goal is to reduce process waste (steps in production), down time, overproduction, unnecessary movements, transportation (of product), scrap inventory (product you can't sell) and re-work (doing the job again). It refers to both production and service industries. **JIT (Just-In-Time Inventory Management)**
3. This is the name of a non-government organization dedicated to promoting standardization to help in the global exchange of goods and services. The standard is applied to industry worldwide and it is not legislated. Organizations will meet the standard because it is good for business. By the end of 1995, over 2,200 Canadian companies were registered in this organization. **ISO (International Standards Organization)**
4. This is a business philosophy that focuses on satisfying the customer, empowering the employees and using statistics to find out where and when to make changes and improvement. One important goal is to increase employee involvement and responsibility in the workplace processes. All members are given a chance to voice their opinions. **TQM (Total Quality Management)**
5. This form of company work organization is becoming very popular. It is a more horizontal approach to management, where employees work together for short projects or longer periods of time and report to each other on progress of a project. Communication and interpersonal skills are important to the success of this kind of company organization. **Self-Managed Work Teams**
6. Within technology-based environments, employees are cross-trained to perform multiple tasks. Employees work in several jobs according to a schedule. **Job Rotation**

Handout 5

Phrases and Expressions for **Agreeing** and **Disagreeing**.

Giving an opinion

In my opinion, _____.

As far as I'm concerned, _____.

Personally, I think _____.

It seems to me _____.

I believe _____.

Asking about agreement

Do you agree?

Wouldn't you agree?

Don't you agree?

Don't you think so?

Agreeing

Yes, that's true.

I agree with you

That's right.

I definitely agree with you.

You're right.

I completely agree.

I think so, too.

That's a very good point.

That's a good idea.

Disagreeing

I don't really agree with you.

I don't think so.

I'm afraid I can't agree with you.

I'm not sure I quite agree with you.

That's not how I see it.

Yes, that may be true, but _____.

Well, you have a point there, but _____.

I can see your point, but _____.

I see what you mean, but _____.

Handout 6

Situation

The owner of a small, non-unionized manufacturing company has noticed an increase in absenteeism and lateness among workers in the factory. Furthermore, the workers have been complaining a lot lately, but there doesn't seem to be one specific cause of their dissatisfaction. At the same time, there has been a slight decrease in productivity, as well as a decline in the quality of factory products. Unfortunately, there is not enough money in the budget for pay raises, but the owner would like to improve the current situation. The owner has called a meeting to discuss this issue.

Handout 7

Participant Self-Evaluation

After you participate in a discussion, answer the following questions:

1. Do you think you spoke $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{about the right amount?} \\ \text{too much?} \\ \text{not enough?} \end{array} \right.$

2. Did you ask $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{some questions?} \\ \text{no questions?} \end{array} \right.$

3. Did you use $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{some phrases?} \\ \text{no phrases?} \end{array} \right.$

4. Did you have any problems during the discussion? Check any of the following that apply to you:
 - _____ a. I didn't understand the topic.
 - _____ b. I had problems with vocabulary. I didn't know the words in English to say what I wanted.
 - _____ c. I had problems with grammar.
 - _____ d. I haven't had enough practice in speaking English and I just couldn't get the words out.
 - _____ e. I didn't have enough ideas.
 - _____ f. I had to think too much about trying to use the phrases.
 - _____ g. I felt nervous or shy.
 - _____ h. I couldn't understand the other speakers.
 - _____ i. The other speakers didn't give me a chance to talk.
 - _____ j. The other speakers didn't say enough, and I couldn't just talk to myself.
 - _____ k. _____
 - _____ l. _____

5. How can you solve each of the problems that you checked?

6. Overall, how do you rate the discussion? Use the following scale to rate the discussion:

4	3	2	1	0
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
excellent	good	average	weak	failing

7. How do you think you can improve the next discussion?

Source: Mathews, C. (1997) Business Interactions. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc.

Terminology List

- ◆ Traditional work organization
- ◆ High-performance work organization
- ◆ Participatory management style
- ◆ Chain of command hierarchy
- ◆ the customer (next step in production process)
- ◆ Total Quality Management (TQM)
- ◆ Self-Managed Work Teams
- ◆ Job Rotation
- ◆ Statistical Process Control (SPC)
- ◆ Just-In-Time Inventory Management (JIT)
- ◆ International Standards Organization (ISO)
- ◆ redundant