

Discussion Paper

People &

Performance

Building Alberta's Future Construction Workforce



The Skilled Trades Ad^vantage.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this discussion paper are those of the author and do not reflect official policy of the Building Trades of Alberta or its member unions.

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Highlights

This report presents ideas from a review of global construction industry research about how to better link people and performance. The purpose is to identify leading thinking and promising practices in the areas of skill development, work organization, and human resource management in the construction industry. A key finding is that **lasting solutions to labour shortages in Alberta's construction industry require creative ways of linking people and performance.**

This report was commissioned by the Building Trades of Alberta (BTA). Alberta's building trades unions play a vital role in the supply of skilled labour. Looking into the future, innovative approaches to workforce development are more likely to be successful if unions support, and in some cases initiate, these changes.

There is a wide range of workforce development options presented in this report. The path forward involves paying attention to all pieces of the workforce puzzle, including new ways to retain workers, better ongoing development and use of their capabilities, more effective project management, and the use of specific practices that help to create a more productive and high-quality work environment.

The report takes a close look at "high performance", and shows that the global construction industry is improving performance through the better organization, development, use, and leadership of people.

The common goal in Alberta's construction sector should be: **Working smarter together.** Achieving this goal will improve the existing knowledge and skills in the workforce, as well as contributing to improvements in quality, cost reduction, and efficiency. A key conclusion is that the future of construction depends on having systems in place that focus on people and not on the technical systems. Without the former, the latter will never perform at optimal levels.

Construction industry employers seem to lag behind other industries in how they conduct their people practices. This gap must be closed, otherwise recruitment and retention of employees will remain chronic problems, and performance will not improve.

The report identifies a number of practical workforce planning and development suggestions for building trades unions, employers, and other industry stakeholders. The recommendations are intended to stimulate a discussion within BTA, its member unions, and their major partners – especially contractors, clients and government – with the goal of finding solutions to the workforce issues they face.

Key Recommendations

Recommendations for skills development

ACTIONS UNIONS CAN TAKE

- Educate members and stakeholders about the advantages of high-skills paths to workforce development.
- Coordinate training initiatives by BTA member unions to more efficiently and effectively meet changing skill needs.
- Create a short survey for assessing members' future skill development and training needs, and the quality of their current formal and informal training. This information can be used by unions, employers, and training institutions to plan future improvements in training and apprenticeship programs.

ACTIONS CONTRACTORS CAN TAKE

- Adopt proven training evaluation methods and integrate them into existing training programs to calculate return-on-investment and learning outcomes.
- Review new initiatives, such as mentoring and leadership development, using best-practice training evaluation techniques.

ACTIONS ALL INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS CAN TAKE

- Develop a common framework that describes a "high performance workforce" and the actions required to achieve this goal, focusing on the factors that influence both the development and the use of skills.
- Develop rigorous evaluation criteria and measurement tools for assessing the impact of any changes to apprenticeships. The effects of these changes on workers, employers, and the construction labour market should be measured.

The future of construction depends on having systems in place that focus on people and not on the technical systems.

Without the former, the latter will never perform at optimal levels.

Recommendations for project management

ACTIONS UNIONS CAN TAKE

- Initiate multi-stakeholder discussions of the role of trust in project success. Building high-trust relationships needs to be a priority for major contractors, clients, and construction trades unions. This can only be achieved if all parties are committed to fostering trust.
- Use the information in this report as a basis for identifying 3 or 4 ways that unions can add value to the project management process. By doing this, unions will contribute to better communication, integration, and coordination at all phases of projects in which their members are involved.

ACTIONS CONTRACTORS CAN TAKE

- Ensure that communication and trust-building is part of project management training.
- Partner with university researchers to document the costs and benefits of lean construction applications in Alberta, including human resource implications.

ACTIONS ALL INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS CAN TAKE

- Identify and distribute the best practices of construction project management within Alberta.

Recommendations for human resource management

ACTIONS UNIONS CAN TAKE

- Identify ways to include teamwork competencies in training programs for members.
- Document how unions contribute to reducing contractors' hiring and turnover costs.

ACTIONS CONTRACTORS CAN TAKE

- Incorporate team leadership and mentoring competencies in training programs for supervisors.
- Document through case studies examples of unionized contractors who use best-practice human resource management, and communicate the practical lessons throughout the construction sector.

ACTIONS ALL INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS CAN TAKE

- Define the teamwork abilities that are required to create motivated, committed, and productive teams that take pride in their work.
- Develop a worksite "safety culture" model that can be widely applied in the sector and that supports positive and productive people practices. Use case studies of successful safety cultures that reflect this model.