Competency Models In Action:

Industry Partnerships Develop Career Ladder Model

December 2010

Introduction

The Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Investment Board (WIB) formed a partnership with other northeast Pennsylvania WIBs to coordinate training and workforce development programs and attract quality employers to the region. The partnership developed a career ladder model that demonstrates pathways within the local logistics and transportation industry. The model uses the Employment and Training Administration (ETA)'s competency model framework to combine a tiered competency-based approach with a career pathway. By providing information about the skills, education, and training needed for success in each path, the model serves as a resource for workers, employers, and workforce development professionals. In addition, high schools, vocational schools, colleges, and universities can use the model for career guidance and curriculum and education program development.

The Workforce Challenge

The logistics and transportation industry in northeast Pennsylvania has experienced significant growth over the past few years. As new companies are established and existing ones expand, employers need to hire new workers. However, many employers, report that identifying, training, and retaining qualified workers constitutes a major challenge, one that limits the growth of their companies.

Solution: Develop a Career Ladder Model

The partnership decided that a career ladder model would be a useful tool for addressing this challenge. Web-based research uncovered several resources to support the project, including reports from the Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics Career Clusters, the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) database, and the industry competency models sponsored by ETA. Recognizing the importance of foundational competencies, the partnership decided to use the tiered framework of the ETA competency models in developing the logistics and transportation career ladder.

Results

Core skills and competencies form the foundation of the model, ensuring that workers have the right skills to move through each step. By showing how employees can accumulate job experience and training to move up to new positions, the model provides a picture of the possibilities for upward mobility. Employers can use the model as a recruitment tool to advertise and promote careers within the company. Employees who understand their opportunities for career growth have an incentive to stay on the job, reducing turnover.

Career Ladder Model for the Northeast PA Logistics & Transportation Industry Partnership.
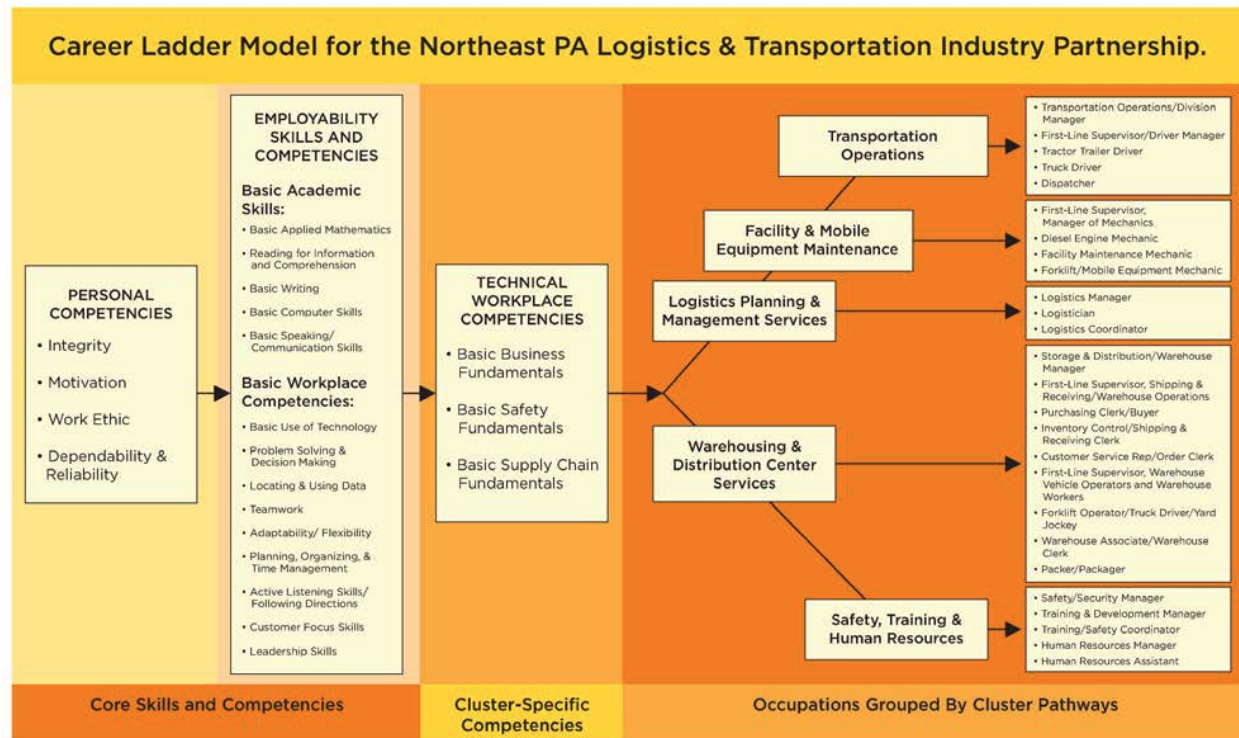
Participants in the model's pilot program enhanced their skills and advanced their careers, while earning certificates and college credits – credentials that make upward mobility possible. Feedback from participants indicated that they regularly applied what they learned on the job. Several participants received promotions as the result of their training, and 80% of participants have received or anticipate wage increases.

How They Did It

Formed a Partnership

In Pennsylvania, the *Job Ready* program is the governor's strategy for addressing workforce challenges by fostering a workforce development system that is efficient and responsive to worker and employer training needs. The program provides training and education grants for improving industry image, recruiting and retaining workers, and identifying skills gaps. The Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Investment Board (WIB) secured a *Job Ready* grant to form the Northeast Pennsylvania Logistics and Transportation Industry Partnership, which includes the Lackawanna Pocono, and Northern Tier WIBs, economic development organizations, employers, and local colleges.

One of the first efforts undertaken by the partnership was to research and analyze local industry makeup and skill needs. Two reports document the findings. The Logistics and Transportation Industry Analysis contains the results of employer surveys establishing the labor market and economic snapshot of the industry. Representatives from 90 local companies provided input relating to the availability, quality, and cost of labor in the region; the quality of the region's training resources; future labor demand; and associated costs of various distribution operations.

The Training Needs Assessment of the Logistics and Transportation Industry of Northeast Pennsylvania report discusses the needs of local employers and aggregates the results in an attempt to reduce training costs. These research projects have opened a dialogue with employers providing a means for them to share ideas and experiences.

Developed a Model

The interviews with employers indicated that many potential entry-level workers lack basic workplace competencies. As a result, the partnership knew the value of emphasizing foundational skills in the career ladder model. The finalized model identifies *Personal Competencies* and *Employability Skills* as *Core Skills and Competencies* that provide the foundation for workplace readiness. The next section identifies *Technical Workplace Competencies*, which include industry-specific concepts that are important for workers in the logistics and transportation industry. The final section identifies five pathways of focus and the major occupations within each pathway. The model is supported by a report and tables that provide additional detail, such as: specific skills and competencies, wages, and education/training requirements for the critical occupations in each cluster.

Implemented the Model

The partnership secured additional funding from the PA Department of Labor and Industry to implement a pilot project for the model. The pilot was structured to demonstrate the use of career ladders/pathways and how they meet employer and employee needs. Implementation focused on two key industry pathways: *Facility & Mobile Equipment Maintenance* and *Warehousing & Distribution Center Services*, chosen based on the demand for occupations in those pathways and the availability of local education programs.

The partnership formed a team to run the pilot, including a project manager, career coach, industry representatives, workforce development system representatives, and a project consultant. Pennsylvania State University/Wilkes-Barre Campus and Luzerne County Community College were selected as education providers. Employers selected incumbent worker participants based on qualities such as reliability, trainability, motivation, willingness to learn, and commitment to the training program. Workforce professionals from American Job Centers identified dislocated workers based on the same criteria.

The pilot followed a comprehensive career exploration plan including:
- a WorkKeys® job skills assessment to identify participants' foundational skills,
- career coaching sessions, and
- participation in the Overview of Supply Chain Management course, designed to provide an introduction to the logistics and transportation industry.

Feedback indicated that the overview course provided useful general industry knowledge and helped participants – some of whom had limited experience with post-secondary education – feel more confident in moving forward with the job-specific education programs. All of the participants successfully completed the course and were determined to be ready to move to the pathway and occupational specific educational programming.

Based on employee and industry needs, the pilot team proposed four educational pathways from which the participants could choose:
- Supervision Essentials,
- Customer Relations,
- Warehouse Management Distribution, and
- Diesel Engine Mechanic Training.

Participants selected a program and attended courses provided by the local education partners. At the end of the pilot, the partnership developed surveys to evaluate the pilot program's achievements. Survey results showed that employees and employers viewed the program as a positive experience.

By combining competency approach with a career ladder, and by brining together education, workforce development, and industry, the Career Ladder Model helped the Northeast PA Logistics and Transportation Industry Partnership work towards its goal of identifying and training a qualified workforce. Refer to the Related Links below for additional information about the challenges, lessons learned, and suggested best practices for development and implementation.

Related Links

Northeast Pennsylvania Logistics and Transportation Industry Partnership
http://nepapeopleonthemove.org/jobscareers/

Competency Model Clearinghouse
https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/