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Survey of Logger Training

The objectives of a 1975 FERIC survey were to examine the status of logger training in Canada, and to evaluate the adequacy of current and planned training activities in meeting the needs of the forest industry. Representatives of industry and institutional training programs in most provinces were contacted, as were several training institutions in Sweden.

The report describes the general structure of logger training in Canada, and reviews various Canada Manpower programs which influence training activity. Only one-half of the firms surveyed reported that they made use of Canada Manpower financial support, and only one-third of the courses offered had such support. Better utilization of training funds available from the federal government requires: a) increased awareness among forest companies of funding programs for which they qualify; b) flexibility in governmental regulations so that firms are encouraged to apply.

Training programs seemed to suffer from a lack of communication and co-ordination with people in other, similar organizations. This applied to techniques for trainee selection and evaluation, curriculum development and teaching, as well as access to reference materials and instructional aids. There is a need for more contact and sharing of experience among specialists in logger training (for example, technical seminars, news bulletins). An up-to-date central reference library containing information on training programs and teaching materials would be helpful.

The selection of trainees was identified as a major problem; there are few reliable guidelines for choosing individuals who are likely to be successful in a logging occupation. This helps account for the high attrition rate of training course graduates. Industry data indicated that an average of only 43% of graduates were retained in the forest industry for one year. Canada Manpower statistics showed only 29% of graduates were retained in the forest industry three to four months after completing their

training. Research is needed on aptitude testing instruments (for example, the General Aptitude Test Battery) and counselling instruments (for example, the Canadian Occupational Interest Inventory) to help improve the selection of appropriate candidates.

Another likely reason for poor retention of trained workers is the frequent inattention to placing graduates in jobs. Supervisors in both training institutions and industrial operations have a stake in providing a more supportive environment for the new workers. However, training programs should not be held responsible for turnover of new workers that is attributable to poor job or community conditions, or to better economic opportunities. Solutions to these problems lie elsewhere.

Estimates differ regarding the size of, and trends in, the logging labour force, making it difficult to assess the adequacy of present and planned training efforts. If Canada Manpower projections are accepted (that is, an average of 3,165 new logging employees required annually to 1982), then current forest industry training levels appear about right (9,000 people trained per year, with a retention of one-third from FERIC estimate). However, more efficient selection and training would mean a substantial saving in training resources.

An examination of forest worker training in Sweden provided many useful comparisons. Most impressive were the thoroughness of student preparation in the two-year "forestry line" within the secondary school system, and the co-ordination of programs across the country. There is clear opportunity for the worker to progress through several training levels, in combination with vocational experience. This structure, while admirable, may not be feasible in Canada because of greater geographic diversity and the complexities of the federal-provincial division of responsibility in educational matters. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for adapting to Canadian conditions innovative instructional techniques developed in Sweden.

Further details of this study appear in FERIC Technical Report No. TR 11 entitled "Survey of Logger Training", by D.A. Scott and P.L. Cottell. If you would like a copy of this report, please complete and return reply card.