

Reflections: The PLAR Process

In spring 2007 a follow-up was undertaken with selected companies and organizations which had worked with WPLAR.

The intent of the follow-up was to better understand the outcomes of the work – both intended and unintended and what now exists in terms of the PLAR process.

In order to undertake this follow-up, the WPLAR Coordinator identified three individuals to be interviewed and 11 individuals to be sent a link to a web survey. The web survey was completed by 6 of the 11 individuals.

Questions focused on the influence participating in PLAR have had on these individuals and their organizations.

Both the semi-structured interview and the web survey were developed by Proactive Information Services Inc. in close consultation with the WPLAR Coordinator.

Individuals are **very positive** regarding their experiences with PLAR.

All are **currently using** the PLAR process.

Changes have been made in how competencies, skills and knowledge are identified/determined.

Those engaged in training indicate their involvement in **PLAR has influenced** other training decisions and/or Human Resource practice.

There were **unanticipated outcomes** resulting from involvement in PLAR.

Individuals **do/look at things differently** when making judgments about competencies, skills, and knowledge as a result of their involvement in PLAR.

There is a belief that **value has been added** to their organizations as a result of their involvement in PLAR.

Using the PLAR Process.

The process was described as documenting existing and new employees' essential skills and giving credit for prior learning. Competencies have been developed and detailed records of training are kept, "as a competent workforce needs documentation."

Employee learning is matched to essential skills to ensure their competency. While this process helps the organization, it is also beneficial to the employee as skills are transferable to other settings.

Pieces of PLAR Process Currently In Use (Web Survey)	
	Number
Criteria linked to competencies	5
The capability to document and track worker skills	5
The practical/authentic competency based assessments	5
The identified updated and verified job competencies	4
Learning activities linked to competencies	4
The process for external recognition of employee skills	2
A process for individuals wanting to challenge the competency	2
An accreditation process	1
Portfolios	1

One interviewee explained the process has evolved since originally implemented as it was intended for a cadre of employees to "gap fill." An "internal standard" was created which had to be met.

Identifying/Determining Competencies, Skills, and Knowledge - Changes Since PLAR

What Has Changed? (Web Survey)	
	Number
More systematic – we now have benchmarks/criteria	5
Better specificity in learning outcomes	4
We take a broader view of what constitutes formal pre-requisites	3
"other" – It's clearer for clients, partners, and ourselves/can demonstrate competencies have been acquired and/or mastered	2
"other" – We have returned to the 'basics' to understand what is required to start the whole process	1

A 'standard' has been developed and standards are higher and much more objective. "We raised the bar ... now it is clearer and much more objective." The requirements are now more "clear for the employees."

"[We are] thinking outside of the box more. ... There is more of an emphasis on what knowledge and skills individuals bring to the job and how they align with the needs of the organization."

Influence on Training and Human Resource Practice

University courses were brought in-house to provide employees easier access to required courses. *“It is incumbent upon us, if we develop a standard we have to make courses accessible.”*

There is a greater emphasis on essential skills training. We *“build on the skill set they [the employees] need here ... more in-house programs on essential skills. ... It has helped us realize that new employees will have gaps and need training ... so they can be successful.”*

Influence on Other Training Decisions and HR Practice. (Web Survey)

	Number
<i>More systematic – we now have benchmarks/ criteria</i>	6
<i>Better specificity in learning outcomes</i>	5
<i>We take a broader view of what constitutes formal pre-requisites</i>	5
<i>“other” – The practical assessments can be incorporated into pre-employment assessments</i>	1
<i>“other” – We use all to suggest to employers ways to recognize learning</i>	1

Unintended Outcomes

“The ways of measuring Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing – very amazing.”

“We were amazed what we learned about our members/employees ... what stage they were at and just as importantly, what stage we were at in regards to training and skills.”

“Assessing of people’s knowledge ... to provide more focused training. ... We didn’t see that things outside the workplace could impact [skills].”

“There was a bit of a battle as some assumed seniority was learning.”

What Is Done Differently

“For the first time we are recognizing prior learning in a production environment and gaps associated with that. Employees are trained and supported on these gaps.”

“We are much more conscious of making clear what the standard is, defined in academic and/or behavioural terms. When it is too grey it is frustrating for the employees.”

“It gave us the tools to measure people’s skills and education – practical skills and knowledge.”

What Do You Do/Look At Differently? (Web Survey)

	Number
<i>We never assume anything anymore. We assumed our employees were very knowledgeable about the process we had in place. Through PLAR we discovered many of them worked by rote rather than process.</i>	1
<i>PLAR allows for a range of assessments. It also forces people to think about defining competencies and how to assess when people reach them</i>	1
<i>Recognizing job skills and work experience now counts for something</i>	1

Value Added To Organization

“The company understands how important these skills are and validates their knowledge. It allows us to look at things they bring to the job from outside the company.”

“It is a tool that got us to the end in mind. We have new standards and an objective way of evaluating whether employees meet the standard. I am not sure if we would have done it without it [the PLAR process].”

“Being able to have a clear, justifiable process and a way in which to assess registerability in Manitoba. ... We have a policy about equity in the profession ... and we are fulfilling that through the PLAR process.”

Value Added To Organization As A Result of PLAR Involvement (Web Survey)	
	Number
The identified updated and verified competencies	5
The criteria linked to competencies	5
The practice/authentic competency-based assessments	5
Linking the learning activities to competencies	5
The process for external recognition of employee skills	5
The capability to document and track worker skills	4
Increased employee morale	4
Increased our ability to quickly respond to customer/ client	3
The accreditation process	3
Increased reclassification of employees/better flow between job classifications	2
Fewer incidents related to safety	2
Better communication between supervisors and employees	2
Portfolios	1
Decreased absenteeism	1
Fewer grievances	1

Other Comments

“Very proud of it and it works!”

“The university structure is not congruent with the PLAR process. ... as it is hard to get out of professors what the standards are.”

“We do this because it adds value to the business. The concepts of PLAR and building on this, documenting this is of business value to us.”

“If the PLAR initial funding and support had not been available we would have created something but it would have been less objective than what we have. I am glad for the guidance up front.”

Other Comments (Web Survey)

“PLAR applies the same principles as good workplace training practice. My initial hope was that educational institutions would utilize this methodology and begin providing credit to adults for the skills and knowledge they have acquired in the workplace.”

“PLAR has been instrumental in helping us to assess and recognize the value of our members/employees and their prior skills and most important their ability to learn new ones as well. The amount of upgrading we thought would be required was less than expected.”

“Understanding of PLAR especially different ways to recognize learning both internally and externally are ways for industry to retain its workforce in times of skill shortages.”