

**Learning in the New Brunswick Workplace:
A qualitative analysis of small business employers**

By

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ABSTRACT

Workplace learning is a complex concept to understand and to define. The use of interchangeable terms, the inconsistency between definitions and the lack of clarity surrounding the nature of the learning, make it difficult to assess the types, and the overall level of learning that occurs in the New Brunswick workplace. Not to mention, the reports and surveys conducted in New Brunswick failed to offer the employer the opportunity to expand on or to reflect on how they choose to engage their employees in learning or training activities. Through a series of in-depth interviews, this research helps shed light on the experience and on the needs of twelve small business employers in a variety of sectors across the province. Specifically, this research will help address a distinct gap in the literature by offering an enhanced understanding of the experience of small business employers in New Brunswick and uncovering the factors (limitations, opportunities) determining their decisions around investing or not investing in workplace learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing demands of today's knowledge economy means that in the coming years, skills and educational requirements will continue to shift and change. Although Canada boasts the highest percentage of adults having completed post-secondary education among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries¹, a recent report identified “increasing innovation and productivity” as the first of five fundamental challenges (Canada 2020, 2011). In addition to a lag in productivity, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce says Canada's competitiveness is severely compromised by a deep structural problem resulting in increasing skills and labour shortages (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2012, 3; OECD, 2014b). According to its members, the growing skills crisis has been identified as the “greatest impediment to the success of Canadian business” (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2013, 2).

Unfortunately, the situation is likely worse in New Brunswick due to the province's demographic structure. In the coming decades, the province's population aged between 15 and 64 is expected to fall below 500,000, while the dependency ratio (the number of youth under the age of 15 and seniors over the age of 65 compared to those aged 15 to 64) is expected to rise to almost 3 to 1 by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2012, *Focus on Geography*; PNB, 2011, 17). Not to mention, data from Statistics Canada has indicated a reduction in close to 50,000 young people in the last two decades (PNB, 2013, 2). This

¹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Education at a Glance 2011, (see table A1.3a) Population that has attained tertiary education (2009) OECD Statistics. Available from: [Education at a Glance 2011](#) [cited August 29, 2011].

exodus of the youth population is further complicated by the number of new immigrants who also have been found to relocate to Quebec, Ontario and the western provinces for better financial opportunities (Passaris, 2012).

As the population ages and baby boomers leave the workforce; young people and new immigrants leave the province for work elsewhere; improvements in productivity will be essential to curb the pending labour and skill shortage and guarantee the region's future prosperity (CFIB, 2009a; CFIB, 2010a; PNB, 2011; Passaris, 2012). If New Brunswick (and Canada) is not able to retain and grow its working population, it must increase the productivity of those who are left (OECD, 2014b, 114). Although a number of factors can help improve overall competitiveness and productivity, labour and human capital are becoming increasingly more important (Coulombe, 2011, Coulombe and Tremblay, 2009).

Despite its efforts to improve the situation (PNB, 2002; PNB, 2005; PNB, 2009, PNB, 2013), the province must continue to adopt measures and create strategies that will help businesses remain competitive within the current economic context (PNB, 2012; CÉNB, 2011). This said, the province will not only need to attract more qualified people but will also need to improve and develop its current labour force (CFIB, 2010a; PNB, 2011; CÉNB, 2011). One way to do this is through the 'upskilling' or the upgrading of the current labour force's skill set by providing more learning and training opportunities in the workplace (Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2013, 6; 41; Cappelli, 2012).

In Western industrialized societies, work and learning have traditionally been categorized into separate social systems. The emergence of knowledge-based work however, has

brought forth a need for collaboration between the work and learning spheres. With innovation, competitiveness and productivity as economic priorities, learning can no longer be viewed solely as a form of preparation for work (Nieuwenhuis and Van Woerkom, 2007; Jacobs and Park, 2009). The changing economy, increases in out-migration, demographic shifts and the restructuring of traditional sectors have changed the characteristics of the labour market. In Europe for example, structural changes in the industrial sector translated to a loss of more than 730,000 employees in the steel industry since the 70s (Stuart and Wallis, 2007). Not surprisingly, this has had significant implications for skill requirements and for learning.

Many countries in Europe have been adopting policies to help remedy the situation² and to adapt to the changes in the labour market (Scully-Russ, 2005). In Scandinavian countries, efforts to promote new forms of work organization began in the 1960s. By the 1980s, more than 450 organizations were transitioning to ‘learning oriented forms of organization’ (Gustavsen, 2008). In the 1990s, national campaigns like the Swedish ‘Work Life Fund’; the ‘Enterprise Development 2000’ programs in Norway; and the ‘National Innovation Policy’ in Finland were created to boost economic development and productivity.

In his book “Why Good People Can’t Get Jobs: The Skills Gap And What Employers Can Do About It”, Peter Cappelli argues that employers play a crucial role in ensuring

2 See Brine, Jacky. (2006). “Lifelong learning and the knowledge economy: those that know and those that do not-the discourse of the European Union”. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(5), 649-655.

workforce productivity and blames the widening skills gap on employers (2012, 10). He explains that the problems found in modern labour markets are not a result of a lack of skills but actually a gap in employer-led training.

In some European countries early to adopt organizational policies, workplace learning and training have become important pillars of adult education. In Sweden for example, study circles and adult education centers have played a strong role in adult learning since the mid 19th century (Nijhof, 2005). In other countries like the U.K., learning at work has been a feature of its economic policy since the late 1990s (Ball, 2011; Rainbird, 2000).

Reports by the Canadian Policy Research Network however have found that “...Canada has been under-performing in workplace learning in comparison with other countries” (Saunders, Pollack and Brisbois, 2009, 1). Although Canada boasts the highest percentage of adults having completed post-secondary education among OECD member countries³, less than 30% of adult workers in Canada participate in job-related education and training, compared to 45% in Sweden and almost 45% in the United States (Saunders, Pollack and Brisbois, 2009, v; Saunders, 2009; Saunders, 2008c; WLKC, 2007). According to a recent OECD report (2014a), Canada fares even worse when focusing on the number of hours of training when compared to other countries (26). The size of the business also plays a role in their offering workplace learning or training. The OECD report finds “58% of smaller firms of fewer than 20 employees offering classroom

³ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Education at a Glance 2011, (see table A1.3a) Population that has attained tertiary education (2009) OECD Statistics. Available from: [Education at a Glance 2011](#) [cited August 29, 2011].

training” compared to “Over 90% of firms with more than 100 workers” (OECD, 2014a, 26).

In Canada, SMEs play an important role in the Canadian economy and account “for 64% of all private sector employment and between 82% and 90% of total employment in health, construction, forestry, tourism and hospitality sectors” (OECD, 2012, 11).

However most reports indicate increasing challenges preventing them from investing in learning and training (OECD, 2012; CFIB, 2010a; CFIB, 2009a; Goldenberg, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2009; Canadian Chamber of Commerce, 2013, 36-39; Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011a; Saunders 2008-2009).

In New Brunswick, small businesses represent an even bigger part of the economy. According to the Government of New Brunswick’s Regional Profiles⁴, approximately 97% of businesses employ under 50 people and contribute to on average 25% of the provincial GDP (Industry Canada, 2012, 29). However, a closer look at the research shows an average investment of only 10-20 hours per employee per year, or of 5% of overall annual operating costs (CÉNB, 2011; NBCDAG, 2008).

With the literature pointing to the lag in productivity (CFIB, 2010a; PNB, 2011; CÉNB, 2011), the growing skills mismatch and labour shortages (Goldenberg, 2006; Miner, 2012; Education and Learning, 2005; CÉNB, 2011; OECD, 2014a, 22-23; OECD,

4 Government of New Brunswick. Department of Post-secondary Education, Training and Labour. Regional Information: http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/post-secondary_education_training_and_labour/Labour/content/RegionalInformation.html

2014b), to the benefits of learning in the workplace (Goldenberg, 2006; CBC, 2009; CCL, 2009; Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011a, 2011b) and to the provincial policy discourse supporting learning at work (CMEC, 2008; PNB, 2009; PNB, 2012; NB2026, 2012), one can't help but wonder why more employers are not offering learning in their workplace, or if they are- what types of learning are most common?

By conducting a series of in-depth interviews, this research will help shed light on the needs of the province's small business employers. Specifically, the interviews are designed as a follow-up to a preparatory document completed in the fall of 2012 on workplace learning in partnership with the Government of New Brunswick's Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour's (PETL), the University of New Brunswick and the NB2026 Citizen Engagement Initiative on Learning distributed to stakeholders to inform the provincial labour market development strategy (McEachern-Caputo and Haan, 2012). The interviews will focus on formal and non-formal experiential forms of workplace learning and will be motivated by the following research questions: what experience do small business employers in New Brunswick have with workplace learning and what are the factors (limitations, opportunities) determining their decisions around investing in learning programs.

Outline

To explore the field of workplace learning, a review of the literature, blending research from the following three disciplines: Sociology, Education and Business will be presented in Chapters 1 and 2. Here, a number of theoretical perspectives will be considered including work from both the macro and the micro approach. The review will be followed by the identification of a number of gaps in the literature and how this research will address them. The process of data collection and analysis will be described in Chapter 3. This will be followed by a description of the employer interviews in Chapters 4 and 5 and a summary of the findings in Chapter 6. Finally, Chapter 7 will conclude with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to uncover the limitations and the potential opportunities encountered by employers in implementing workplace learning programs and to creating learning organizations, it is important to first dissect the concept of learning at work. This chapter will explore the different types of learning and the employer investment in workplace learning in Canada and in New Brunswick and will highlight key gaps related to the overall lack of detailed, employer-centered, qualitative research.

Workplace learning

To better understand workplace learning in Canada, hundreds of reports, networks, forums and case studies have been commissioned and conducted in the last ten years.

These findings show that although Canada boasts the highest percentage of adults having completed post-secondary education among OECD member countries⁵, less than 30% of adult workers in Canada participate in job-related education and training (Saunders, 2009; Saunders, 2008c; WLKC, 2007). Comparatively, the Canadian Council on Learning's 2011 report found Canadian employers ranked 14th when compared to 24 European countries (see table).

⁵ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Education at a Glance 2011, (see table A1.3a) Population that has attained tertiary education (2009) OECD Statistics. Available from: [Education at a Glance 2011](#).

Table 1. Percentage of firms offering training by country. Countries listed by rank.

Country and ranking	Percentage of firms offering training
1) United Kingdom	90%
3) Denmark	85%
5) Sweden	78%
7) France	74%
9) Czech Republic	72%
11) Estonia	67%
13) Slovakia	60%
14) Canada	59%
15) Cyprus	51%
20) Portugal	44%
22) Latvia	36%
23) Poland	35%

Source: Canadian Council on Learning
 “What is the Future of Learning in Canada?” (2011, 28)

Not to mention, Canada’s productivity levels and growth and have been lower than that of other comparable countries . From 2001-2009 Canada’s annual growth of 0.7% was in the bottom quartile of the OECD (Deloitte, 2013, 18). Today, the Canadian productivity rate is still only 80 % of the U.S. rate (Deloitte, 2013).

Learning, training and the skills they create are known to have an impact on productivity and growth at both an individual and a national level (Coulombe, Tremblay & Marchand, 2004). According to the Conference Board of Canada, while it fares well in the education of its youth, the country must improve its workplace skills training and lifelong education. “Canada’s adult literacy skills are mediocre, with a large proportion of adults

lacking the literacy skills necessary to function in the workplace” (Conference Board of Canada, 2013, 11).

While Canadian companies identify skills shortages as the most prominent barrier to efficiency improvements; they are known to provide one of the lowest levels of training when compared to other countries. Canadian workers receive an average of eight days of training per year, the second-lowest level of the countries surveyed and 25% below the global average (CCL, 2011, 28).

One reason for this could be because education is a provincial jurisdiction, therefore provinces differ in their policies, legislation, financing, research and assessment in the area of adult learning thereby making it difficult to collect accurate and up-to-date information (CMEC, 2012, 5). Not to mention, provincial initiatives can sometimes remain idle since mandates are often revised once a new political party comes into power thereby making it difficult to construct a cohesive and consistent framework for the creation or development of adult learning and workplace learning programs (Pirie, 2000; CMEC, 2005). The Canadian Council on Learning, in its 2011 report “What is the Future of Learning in Canada” referenced the OECD’s 2002 Thematic Review on Adult Learning and found their criticisms were still valid. They explain “OECD pointed out that Canadian adults were foregoing learning opportunities because of a lack of cohesion and planning between federal and provincial governments and between the public and private sectors” and that “the most important step for adult and workplace learning [...] is to set national goals and benchmarks” (2011, 30).

Because of this fragmentation, employers have had to explore workplace learning independently. For small businesses in Canada, this has been doubly challenging since most have limited access to human, financial and material resources (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011a; CFIB, 2010a, 11; Dostie and Montmarquette, 2007, 9). Unfortunately however, a review of the academic literature finds that much of the available research fails to include or to acknowledge the role of the employer⁶ in the development, administration and implementation of workplace learning⁷. A 2012 report published by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council writes:

There is little empirical evidence on the awareness of employers regarding the implications of demographic trends for the labour supply in the region; their current responses to tightening labour markets; and their capacity to make further adjustments... Smaller firms may find it harder to adjust in terms of higher training and recruitment costs because they lack the benefit of economies of scale and the use of specialized human resource staff. A broader and deeper understanding of corporate HR strategies would help policymakers devise better policies to support appropriate adjustments within the workplace (98).

In New Brunswick, a province where almost all businesses employ under 50 people⁸, the only recently available data on learning and training in the workplace come from the New Brunswick Career Development Action Group's (NBCDAG) *2008 Employer Survey* and from the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick's (CÉNB) *2011 Survey on*

6 "Access to Support to Education and Training" (2008), the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) (2013) and the "Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program" (2013) both comment on adult participation in job-related formal learning, thereby placing the focus on the worker and not the employer.

7 Walsh, 2009; Kitching, 2007, 47; Kitching, 2008 are a few examples focusing on the employer.

8 See NB Regional Profiles: http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/post-secondary_education_training_and_labour/publications.html

Workforce Requirements and Skill (which regrettably does not indicate business size in their analysis). Although their findings show relatively high levels of reported training (65% of small businesses in the *2008 Employer Survey* and 79% of all businesses in the *Survey on Workforce Requirements and Skill*), both reports identify a number of significant labour force needs and challenges that put these numbers into question. These will be explored more fully in the next few pages.

Types of Learning

Within an organizational setting, a wide range of factors influence the nature of learning and because of this, views on workplace learning have changed significantly (Fenwick, 2001; Roan and Rooney, 2006; Styhre, Josephson and Knauseder, 2006; Fenwick, 2008; McGuire and Gubbins, 2010). Therefore the literature, not surprisingly, varies not only in learning types⁹, learning styles¹⁰ and learning dimensions¹¹ but also in its definition of knowledge¹² and in theories¹³ of education and organizational learning (Yang, 2003; Poell and Van Der Krogt, 2003; Doornbos, Bolhuis and Simons, 2004).

9 Doornbos, Bolhuis and Simons (2004) and Andersen and Anderson (2007) explore the different types of learning in their articles. See also Raelin (2009) and Corradi and Gherardi (2010) and Billett and Van Woerkom's (2008) concepts of practice-based learning.

10 Berings, Poell and Simons (2005) look at workplace learning styles. Elkjaer also looks at a pragmatic learning theory that combines the "knowledge acquisitions metaphor" with the "participation metaphor" in an organizational setting.

11 See Illeris' (2007) three dimensions of learning.

12 See Yang's (2003) 'holistic theory of knowledge and learning' and Boreham's (2004) theory of 'work process knowledge' for examples.

13 For an extensive list of workplace learning theories, see Fenwick (2001) and Fenwick (2008).

Contemporary literature however, often separates learning into two categories “learning as acquisition” (formal learning) and “learning as participation” (informal and non-formal) and can be discussed at either an individual level (employee agency and identity¹⁴), a collective level (practical organizational work and social interaction) or as a combination of the two (Felstead et al., 2005; Ashton, 2004; Johnsson and Boud, 2010; Li, D’Souza and Du, 2011).

FORMAL LEARNING

According to Human Resource and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), formal modes of learning are structured, intentional learning activities that typically take place in an education or training institution and leads to a certification, i.e., programs that combine multiple courses toward the completion of a diploma, degree, certificate or license (Rubenson, 2007, 21). In much of the research surrounding workplace learning however, the words learning, education and training are used interchangeably (Kazi, 2008). The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) for example uses the term “training” and says “Formal training refers to training provided to employees as they attend seminars, workshops and any classes or lectures delivered by professional instructors” (CFIB, 2009b, 6). They do not however explicitly state whether formal training takes place on-the-job or offsite.

14 Billet and Somerville (2004), Billett, Smith and Barker (2005), Smith (2006) and Rhodes and Scheeres (2004) all give examples of individuals, agency and identity.

Statistics Canada on the other hand, uses both “education” and “training” and writes “Formal education and training consists of structured learning activities that lead to a formal credential, such as recognized degrees, diplomas, certificates or licenses” (2010, 73). Another report by the Canadian Council on Learning however distinguishes between education and training programs and relates education to formal modes of learning; and training to non-formal, structured learning that does not lead to a credential (2010b, 47).

In New Brunswick, both the CÉNB and NBCDAG employer surveys do not make an explicit distinction between learning or training. In the CÉNB report, employers were asked whether they provide training to their employees, to which 79% responded yes and provided an average of 10-20 hours of training annually (2011, 9). While they do mention that businesses favour internal training, continuing education and customized training opportunities, the authors do not define, clarify or contextualize them (CÉNB, 2011, 14)¹⁵. The NBCDAG report explains that 68% (n=2,338) of those who do offer training, offer formal types of training and spend on average 5% of their annual operating costs on these investments (2008, 166). Out of all of the small businesses polled, 44% offer formal learning or training. The types of formal learning are specified here and include training delivered by internal staff (60%), a non-profit organization (27%) or a private training institution (14%) (2008, 166). Formal training is defined as “more structured and typically involves on-site training with an internal or external trainer, or

15 « Les entreprises privilégient la formation à l’interne, la formation continue ou la formation sur mesure » (CÉNB, 2011, 14)

off-site training”. The report does not however distinguish between “general” and “firm-specific” training and does not comment on any barriers that may be preventing employers from offering different types of learning or training opportunities.

The use of interchangeable terms, the inconsistency between definitions and the lack of clarity surrounding the nature of the learning further impedes one’s ability to assess the types, and the overall level of learning that occurs in the New Brunswick workplace. Not to mention, the reports available for New Brunswick do not offer the employer the opportunity to expand on or to reflect on these definitions and how they choose to engage their employees in learning or training activities.

INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING

Formal learning is not the only way to engage employees in the workplace. Because work-related learning does not always follow a formally organized learning or training program, learning can happen within work-related social interactions and sometimes without an educator (Doornbos, Bolhuis and Simons, 2004).

Activities such as mentoring, coaching, observation by a supervisor, job rotation, e-learning, as well as self-guided learning such as reading, researching, problem-solving and sharing resources are in this case all examples of non-formal learning. This type of learning also includes spontaneous learning, deliberate learning, reflexive learning (Beckett, 2001), emotion learning (Bierema, 2008), situated learning (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Shan, 2009), self-directed learning, learning through social interaction, experiential learning, action learning (Scott, Butler and Edwards, 2001; Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2001) and all other forms of activities with the goal of learning (Doornbos,

Bolhuis and Simons, 2004; Illeris, 2007; McGuire and Gubbins, 2010; Cotter and Cullen, 2012; Smith, 2001; Hardless, Malin and Nuldén, 2005). In this sense, although it does not lead to formal certification, non-formal learning supports and acts as a complement to formal learning by providing learners with greater contextual flexibility (Kazi, 2008; CCL, 2010b: 47; Eraut, 2004).

One Canadian study, which used a sub-sample of the Work and Lifelong Learning data set, found that 80% of workers reported participation in informal learning (Weststar, 2009). Another found over 90% are engaged in intentional informal learning activities regardless of prior schooling or further education involvement (Livingstone, 2007).

In New Brunswick, according to the NBCDAG report, approximately 21%¹⁶ of the small businesses polled offered informal training, although the type was not specified (NBCDAG, 2008, 166). Informal training is defined in their report as unstructured, on-the-job training such as coaching and mentoring (2008, 166). The CÉNB report on the other hand does not define informal or non-formal learning or training.

Despite the fact that non-traditional types of learning appear to be pervasive in Canada, there still remains limited discussion of the types of informal or non-formal learning occurring in the New Brunswick workplace. The table included below offers a visual representation of the available definitions.

¹⁶ This number was extrapolated from the following: “Nearly two-thirds of small businesses (65%, n=3,451) have offered some form of informal or formal training to their employees over the past two years. Of businesses that made training available to their employees (n=3,451), 32% (n=1,113) did not offer formal training, while the remaining 68% (n=2,338) made this training available” (NBCDAG, 2008, 166). Therefore the number comes from: Total number of those that did not offer formal training (n=1,113) / Total small businesses (N=5,340)

Table 2. Definitions of workplace learning by types in NBCDAG (2008) and CÉNB (2011) reports.

	NBCDAG (2008)		CÉNB (2011)	
	Definition	Type	Definition	Type
Formal learning	Informal training is unstructured, on-the-job training such as coaching and mentoring, <u>while formal training is more structured and typically involves on-site training with an internal or external trainer, or off-site training.</u>	Internal staff; A non-profit organization / professional association; A private training institution; NBCC or CCNB; Another public educational institution; Private consultant; Manufacturers training/new equipment training; Conferences, trade shows, seminars; Courses offered by government; Other; Don't know	-	Internal training, continuing education and customized training
Non-formal learning	-		-	
Informal learning	<u>Informal training is unstructured, on-the-job training such as coaching and mentoring,</u> while formal training is more structured and typically involves on-site training with an internal or external trainer, or off-site training.		-	

This could be because employers are choosing not to offer these opportunities to their employees, it could also be related to the lack of consistent definitions in the learning or training terminology thereby causing employers to underreport their actions. Given the value gained from education, training and the skills that flow from them, it is important to

better understand the reasons why employers choose to invest or not invest in these opportunities.

Factors that Impact Workplace Learning

According to the literature on adult learning in the workplace, there are a number of reasons why employers choose to invest in learning programs. Offering learning opportunities at work has been shown to improve employee self-esteem and emotional intelligence, their ability to progress, promote greater community involvement, increased organizational skills, instil confidence, overall motivation and contribute to the organization’s learning culture (Schierbeck and Devins, 2002; Clarke, 2006; Unwin, 2008). The table below, adapted by the Conference Board of Canada (Watt and Gagnon, 2005, 12) lists and separates the benefits of workplace learning to both employers and employees.

Table 3. Benefits of workplace learning to employers and employees.

Benefits to Employers	Benefits to Employees
1. Improved productivity and growth - high literacy skills mean a more flexible workforce that can adapt to new technologies and processes quickly and effectively	1. Higher income – there is a strong association between literacy skills and income.
2. Improved revenue per employee	2. Lower incidence of unemployment – improved literacy makes employees less vulnerable to layoff and displacement, and if they are laid off they find it easier to get new jobs.
3. Improved income-a company can increase its income by increasing its output. Changing one of four factors – resources, physical capital, technology, or human capital – increases output.	3. Higher labour market participation- well educated and trained individuals have more and better employment opportunities.
4. Improved product cycle times.	4. Increased job security and enhanced job opportunities – workplace learning programs enable employees to work smarter and better and, ultimately to take on increased responsibilities.
5. Cost savings - through improved efficiencies and a reduction in errors	5. Improved self-confidence – employees who improve their literacy skills gain the ability and
6. Improved sales	
7. Improved product quality.	
8. Improved health and safety records.	
9. Improved employee retention – training	

<p>opportunities can often lead to enhanced employee morale and to a learning culture within a company</p> <p>10. Improved knowledge transfer among employees.</p> <p>11. Better communication – as morale improves due to literacy gains and employees improve their skills, communication within an organization often changes for the better.</p>	<p>confidence to empower themselves.</p> <p>6. More training – individuals with higher literacy skills and/or education are more likely to receive further training.</p> <p>7. New attitudes – employees tend to experience significant positive changes in attitude when they take part in workplace learning programs.</p> <p>8. Broader benefits – employees who gain literacy through their workplace take their improved communication and teamwork home and into their communities.</p>
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Source: Watt and Gagnon, 2005, 12

As is shown here, investment in adult learning not only helps employers and employees to adjust to labour and skills shortages but can also serve as a protection in times of economic instability (Canduela et al., 2012; CCL, 2009, 7; 21). Despite the apparent value in learning at work, the average rates in both Canada and New Brunswick (NB) are not increasing. While a number of Canadian reports identify clear challenges to investing in this form of human capital, the only information available that speaks to employer investments in NB can be found in the CFIB report which cites cost (40.4%), a discouraging and uncertain business environment (36.7%) and the inability to find staff (34.5%) as the top barriers to investment (CFIB, 2010a, 22).

This may be because only one quarter of small businesses have a formal human resources plan (compared to half and three quarters in medium and large businesses) (NBCDAG, 2008). Regardless, this account is not enough to make informed inferences about the reasons why small business employers in New Brunswick invest or do not invest in learning at work.

Gaps in the Literature

Based on a review of the workplace learning literature, a number of gaps have been identified. First, there is a lack of employer-centered research acknowledging the employer's role in the development and implementation of workplace learning thereby posing a challenge to decision-makers seeking to make the appropriate adjustments within the workplace and the labour market. Although the two reports available in New Brunswick do center on the employer, more provincial research is needed (and in particular qualitative research) that expands on the definitions of workplace learning and allows employers to describe the various types of learning or training offered in their respected workplaces.

Second, despite the fact that non-formal learning appears to be pervasive in Canada, there still remains limited discussion of the types of informal or non-formal learning occurring in the New Brunswick workplace. The differences in reported training incidence and investment is reflective of methodological limitations, in other words of the survey's inability to explain the variability of learning and training needs across organizations. This not only skews the reporting but also makes it difficult for policy-makers to understand the scope, incidence and variability in learning that occurs at work.

Third, the scarcity of information leads to a number of important questions related to the nature of learning and training (incidence, type), program evaluation, availability (or lack thereof) of learning and training resources and collaborative opportunities as well as overall opinion of learning at work and throughout the life course. Given the value gained from education, training and the skills that flow from them, it is important to better understand the reasons why employers choose to invest or not invest in these opportunities.

Other problems with the literature on workplace learning include the use of interchangeable terms, the inconsistency between definitions and the lack of clarity surrounding the nature of the learning, which make it difficult to assess the types, and the overall level of learning that occurs in the NB workplace. Not to mention, the reports available for NB do not offer the employer the opportunity to expand on or to reflect on these definitions and how they choose to engage their employees in learning or training activities.

Unfortunately, studies like the ones cited in the review of the literature above are not able to explain the variation between the most effective, most needed and most available types of learning in the workplace. This particular research will hopefully bring clarity to these questions and will help address a distinct gap within the New Brunswick context.

Therefore, a qualitative analysis focusing on the individual employer can offer an in-depth understanding of the New Brunswick experience by providing an “up-close observation of behavior in settings as well as interviewing people in those settings and collecting and analyzing documents and artifacts” (Firestone, 1993, 17). Because its purpose is to describe and understand the definitions of particular settings held by the people in them, a micro qualitative focus (with the individual as a unit of analysis) will be useful (Firestone, 1993, 17). By asking a number of key questions centering on their experiences administering, evaluating and collaborating on learning and training initiatives, this research will not only add to the New Brunswick literature, it will seek to understand the experiences of small business employers and the various factors (limitations, opportunities) determining employer decisions around investing or not investing in workplace learning.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories, frameworks¹⁷, and conceptual models have been used to explain learning in an organizational setting. Because learning at work combines an individual experience in a collective setting, it appears in the school of business, labour economics and human resource management, sociology of education, sociology of training and the sociology of work. After a review of the literature however, the reader will find that “theorisations of workplace learning fall into two main categories- those that focus on learning as a product and those that focus on learning as a process” (Hager and Halliday 2005, 40). According to Hager and Halliday (2005), the two categories can also be understood as human capital theory and social capital theory. Borrowing from their approach to frame this research, the categories are discussed below.

Learning as a Product

Research and policy reports from this perspective focuses on social practices, economic growth, increases in individual earnings, labour market shifts, productivity, skill shortages and organizational changes and finds one of the most efficient ways to guarantee an enhanced skill-set, inspire innovation, maintain competitiveness and stabilize employment is through quality education and training (CCL, 2009; CCL, 2010b; CFIB, 2010a).

¹⁷ Rhodes and Scheeres (2004) frames three discourses of organizational learning: pre-modern, modern and postmodern as a way to of ordering knowledge about organizations and their relationship to learning.

Broadly these theories assume that learning is primarily an individual activity which adopts the ‘mind as container’ metaphor. This implies that the products of learning are relatively stable over time and the learning of different learners is in a sense the same. These assumptions enable formal systems of assessment within educational institutions and indeed formal systems of whole class instruction. (Hager and Halliday, 2005, 50)

These ideas build on the theoretical work of Becker and his research on human capital, a strand of structural functionalism linking organizational performance to individual knowledge and skills (Schiebelbein, 2002). First conceptualized in the early 1960s, human capital theory (HCT) assumes that individuals engage in a cost-benefit analysis to decide on their education, training and other additions to their overall knowledge, skills, values and health (Becker, 1993, 392; Becker, 1992). While human capital encompasses many aspects, formal education is the one most cited by sociologists and economists (Hansen, 2007, 1; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004; Ananiadou, Jenkins and Wolf, 2004). This theory has also been used with regards to learning at work as research shows that employers who invest in workplace learning programs experience a high rate of return on that investment (Saunders, 2009b; WLKC, 2007; Goldenberg, 2006).

Although it was once considered controversial, HCT has become a valuable tool in the analysis of social and economic issues (Becker, 1993, 392). As the world economy became increasingly global “one of management’s responses to increased competition was, and continues to be, the development of initiatives and programs in the workplace that have a learning dimension” (Schiebelbein, 2002).

Linking human capital with earnings, organizational productivity, and overall economic growth however is not the whole story. In fact, critics would argue that human capital

theory places too much emphasis on the structural aspects of education, and on the monetary incentives to learning (Becker, 1992, 92; Bourdieu, 1986; Lou, 2003, 75).

Learning as a Process

Theorisations of learning¹⁸, which fall into this perspective focus instead on the participatory process of learning, are more easily tied to social capital theory and focus on the social or non-economic benefits to learning (Hager and Halliday, 2005, 42). A useful report by Taylor, Kajganich and Pavić titled “Making Sense of Social Capital Theory Through the Lens of Adult Learning” summarizes the distinction between the two perspectives through the lens of adult learning. They explain:

One of the main distinctions between the two types of capitals is that in human capital theory the primary focus is on the individual agent such as the adult learner or trainee. In social capital the focus is on the relationships and networks that these adult learners and trainees form as a result of some type of learning, for instance, at the workplace. (2011, 13)

These ideas build on the theoretical work of Bourdieu and his research on social capital which according to him represents “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group” (Bourdieu, 1986).

Research and policy reports written from this perspective would focus more closely for example on non-market effects of education, improvements in the organizational learning

¹⁸ See Hager and Halliday (2005) for a full description including situated learning theories and activity theories (42).

culture, the benefit to the community, to social engagement and to the individual employee's development and wellbeing to name a few (Riddell, 2006; Billet and Pavlova, 2005; Schierbeck and Devins, 2002; OECD, 2006; Clarke, 2006;). Research from this category also considers non-formal learning styles and practices, an essential component of workplace learning.

Human capital theory, it is believed by some critics, is limited in its understanding of learning as a formalized financial investment (as a product). It is crucial not to ignore the importance and the role of social, organizational and cultural factors in workplace learning. The individual's learning is not a product, extracted from his experience but is instead a process stemming from existing social contexts (Hager and Halliday, 2005, 41).

Theoretical Gap

Unfortunately however, it is not uncommon for research or policy reports using one perspective to ignore the other (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004, 118). However, policy reports have been advocating for more research highlighting the social returns or impacts to investments in education, learning or training and moving in this direction (Taylor, Kajganich and Pavić, 2011; Centre for Literacy of Quebec, 2010; OECD, 2001). The gap between the two can be linked to the long-standing debate on how theorists conceptualize the relationship between individuals and society, also known as the debate between agency and structure (Gimenez, 1999, 19). It can also be interpreted as the debate between the economic and social approach to learning (Blunt, 2004).

While human capital includes the skills and knowledge (the product) acquired by the learner, social capital, created through interactions between people, helps the learner to

apply the new skills and knowledge (Falk, 2000). Although it falls outside the scope of this particular research, workplace learning theory would greatly benefit from a shared understanding of the distinctive advantages and limitations of both approaches (Sil, 2000, 500). While Hager and Halliday do point out that “some significant learning theories reject the assumption that learning has to be exclusively individual or social” (2005, 40), it is critical that research going forward adopts this same approach.

Because of the gaps identified in the literature, an in particular in the New Brunswick context (limited discussion of the definitions of learning, training and education, limited understanding of the types of non-formal learning occurring and the overall scarcity of information) this research will focus on the employer experience. This means providing an opportunity for employers to voice their opinions and share their personal accounts. By exploring their individual experience through a qualitative research methodology (in this case through in-depth interviews), this research will complement existing information¹⁹ while allowing for a detailed account of the unique New Brunswick experience. The qualitative data collected here will then be contextualized in existing quantitative and qualitative research. Locating the employer experiences within specific

¹⁹See PNB 2005, 2009;

Literacy Coalition of NB Essential Skills in the Workplace: <http://www.nb.literacy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Employer-Information-Session-Fredericton-Registration-Form4.pdf>

Essential Skills in the Workplace Learning Event : http://www.nald.ca/moncton_videos

Workplace Skills Moncton Smart Session: www.workplaceskills.ca/download.php?id=81; Allain (2012);

CAPLA Conference 2010: <http://capla.ca/download.php?CC10=2010-11-9> Hollihan

NB2026 Provincial Forum: <http://www.learninginnb.ca/events>

contexts will ultimately contribute to the research's analytic or conceptual depth and integrity (Silverman, 1998, 109-110). This practice of active contextualization will also contribute to the overall quality of the research and will be addressed below in the section on "Reliability, validity and generalizability".

One of the aims of qualitative research is to learn about how and why people behave, think, and make meaning as they do, rather than focusing on what people do or believe on a large scale. In this case, the research will focus on the employer experience and will explore their willingness, ability and reasons to offer (or not offer) learning and training to their employees. More specifically, it will attempt to uncover specific opportunities and barriers to investing in learning and training and to offer an expanded understanding of these within a New Brunswick context. These could include developing human and social capital by increasing individual and organizational productivity, promoting a culture of lifelong learning and improving overall employee wellbeing.

Symbolic Interactionism

In this sense, the symbolic interactionist perspective can be a useful "ontological and methodological starting point to understanding human capital theory (Bron and Schiemann, 2002, 170). Developed by Herbert Blumer, symbolic interactionism is premised on the assumption that one's experience is mediated by their interpretation of experience (Jacob, 1987, 27). According to Blumer, symbolic interactionism consists of three fundamental premises:

The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. [...] The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled

in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (1969, 2).

It also assumes that these interpretations, which are created through interactions with others, are given meaning and are often used by individuals to achieve certain goals (Jacob, 1987, 27). Said differently, these interactions are not "...a one-way process in which the actor received information, but is a dynamic process in which the actor shapes and adapts the information to his or her own needs (Ritzer, 2000, 358). Therefore, this perspective will be useful in understanding the factors (barriers, opportunities) determining the small business employer's decisions around investing or not investing in workplace learning.

According to Jacob,

Symbolic interaction provides models for studying how individuals interpret objects, events, and people in their lives, and for studying how this process of interpretation leads to behaviour in specific situations. (Jacob, 1987, 29)

In this sense, not only could it help to understand human behaviour, but could also help to interpret the educational process (Bron and Schiemann, 2002, 170). While symbolic interactionism can act as the main theoretical perspective for classroom research as in the work presented by Bron and Schiemann (2002), it may also be useful in studying employer-employee relations within a workplace learning context. For example, although it falls outside the scope of this research, a closer study of the individual roles and relationships constructed and conceptualized between the employer and the employee, could be examined comparatively and collectively to better understand the process involved in learning at work.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN

As is shown above, workplace learning is a complex concept to define and to understand. Because of its contextual sensitivity, it is important that researchers, educators and policy-makers move toward a more detailed interpretation. In New Brunswick, research on learning at work is not only scarce but is also inconsistent.

As noted in the review of the literature the only data currently available on learning and training in the N.B. workplace come from the New Brunswick Career Development Action Group's *2008 Employer Survey* and from the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick's (CÉNB) *2011 Survey on Workforce Requirements and Skill*. Although they do make reference to employer learning training, they either do not offer explicit definitions or do not expand on the types of learning occurring in the workplace. Furthermore, Chapter 2 identified a need for a micro-qualitative analysis of employer-centered research to explore the extent of workplace learning in New Brunswick more broadly.

Specifically, this review has identified a need for qualitative research exploring the role and experiences of small business employers across New Brunswick in offering workplace learning and training opportunities for their employees.

This gap will be addressed using the following two research questions:

1. What experience do small business employers in New Brunswick have with workplace learning?
2. What are the factors (limitations, opportunities) determining the small business employer's decisions around investing or not investing in workplace learning?

This chapter will begin by explaining the data collection and analysis process used in this research. More specifically, it will focus on twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews with small business employers across the province of New Brunswick. Participants were asked to meet with the researcher for a formal interview of approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour in length that focused on their experience with different forms of workplace learning (see letter of consent and interview questionnaire in Appendix B and C). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Silverman, 1998, 112). This chapter will also include a brief discussion of the research's limitations, ethical considerations as well as the validity, reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Data Collection

As noted above, this research project aims to explore the role and experiences of small business employers across New Brunswick in offering workplace learning and training opportunities for their employees. Participants were sought by way of three important connections: first by contacting Anglophone and Francophone business community leaders (New Brunswick Business Council and the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick); second, through a provincial government (Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour) contact; and finally through a personal contact working in the business community.

The sampling process began in June 2013 by contacting Executive Directors of the New Brunswick Business Council and of the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick for a list of potential small employers across the province. They were both asked to provide a list of potential participants from their member directories. They were asked to select

participants keeping in mind size of business (under 20 employees). A number of participants were then selected and sent a letter of introduction (Appendix A) via email and invited to participate in the research project. The emails were then followed by a phone call to schedule an interview time.

Because this initial sampling took place in late July and August, at a time where most took vacations, the number of employers who responded to the emails was very small. They were also very difficult to reach by telephone. After several emails, phone calls and numerous voice mail messages, three out of seventeen contacts formally declined the invitation, and three agreed to participate in mid-October (by October, only one was available to meet). Because of the project's timeline, an alternative sampling strategy was explored and the researcher chose to use convenience sampling²⁰ to reach out to two key informant contacts who could recommend appropriate participants.

At the time, the researcher was completing an internship at the Government of New Brunswick's provincial Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour's "Labour Market Analysis Branch". A colleague working in the department who had completed a research project with provincial employers offered to share a small list of potential participants. After receiving the letter of introduction, one participant was available to meet for an interview.

²⁰ "Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which people are sampled simply because they are "convenient" sources of data for researchers" (Battaglia, 2008).

Later in September, a personal contact, working within a small business and well positioned in the business community offered to share and invite a small list of potential participants. This contact, by way of email introduction, invited the potential participants to participate in the research project and encouraged those interested to contact the researcher to schedule an appropriate meeting time. Those who expressed an interest, were then emailed a letter of introduction (Appendix A) and invited to participate in the research project. From this list, eight participants agreed to meet. Interested in interviewing a few more participants, employers were selected again at random from the lists provided by the New Brunswick Business Council and the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick and contacted via email. Here, two more agreed to participate in the research.

A total of twelve participants agreed to be interviewed and each was invited to share the project with any contacts they believed would be suited for the project (snowball sampling). In this case, participants were sought by way of purposive (using specific sampling criteria) convenience (by relying on key informant contacts with ties to the business community), and snowball sampling (by encouraging participants to recommend others)²¹. A list of these interactions and informant contacts is described in the table below.

Table 4. Sampling strategy and informant contacts.

²¹ Participants were contacted and interviewed from August to December 2013.



In qualitative research, data collection and sampling is an iterative process (Curtis et al., 2000). Using a number of approaches to sampling is one way to increase the response rate and to capture a more robust sample. In this particular case, it was very difficult to reach the desired sample. This could be related to the season, as many employers were away from the office on vacation. It could also be related to the very nature of the targeted sample who work long hours in busy environments. In fact, those who declined explained that they simply did not have enough time; one in particular explained that he was already working twelve-hour days. Others who agreed to participate had to reschedule or were adamant about choosing a firm time that they would schedule in their calendars. Thus, a revised sampling strategy using a larger number of key informant contacts was needed to increase the sample size.

Ethics

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB #2013-053. Any risk to participants that might exist does not exceed the “minimal risk” outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2nd edition (TCPS2) and is in compliance with the TCPS2 and the University Policy on Research Involving Humans (UPRIH).

Before agreeing to participate and signing a consent form (Appendix B), employers were emailed a letter of introduction (Appendix A), which outlined the project details. In the letter of introduction, employers were asked to take part in an interview lasting between thirty minutes to one hour that centered on their experience with workplace learning. A copy of the questionnaire is included as an appendix (Appendix C). The letter of introduction explained that the interviews would be recorded and subsequently transcribed.

To ensure confidentiality, it was also explained that the names of the participants would be removed from the transcriptions and replaced by numbers for the analysis and would be given pseudonyms in the final report. The typed transcriptions, as it was explained, are only accessible to the researcher and are kept on a password protected hard drive.

The hard copies are also kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. The informants who aided in the selection strategy were not informed as to whether or not the businesses identified agreed to participate in the study. Finally, those participating were also made aware of the possibility of publication and of the research resulting in a final report (written for provincial policy-makers, and government representatives), a two-page summary (shared with participants) and as a contribution to this thesis. The participants were also informed that they would not be identified by name (personal name or business name) or by city name in any of the published research. In this sense, every attempt was made to ensure confidentiality.

The Interviews

A total of twelve people participated in this research. Participants were asked to meet with the researcher at the location of their choice for a formal interview that focused on

their experience with different forms of workplace learning. Two of the interviews were conducted by telephone, one in a café and the rest in the offices of the participants.

At the start of the interview, participants were asked to introduce themselves and their businesses and to comment on the age, size and type of organization where they worked. Not only did this help provide some context, it also helped establish a rapport between the participant and the researcher. Because they had already read the letter of introduction, some of the participants began immediately sharing their experience of learning and training in their workplace.

An interview schedule however was prepared and was used to ask them to reflect on the nature of learning and training (incidence, type), program evaluation, availability (or lack thereof) of learning and training resources and collaborative opportunities as well as overall opinion of learning at work and throughout the life course. The full interview schedule is included in Appendix C. The interviews lasted between 19 and 63 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Silverman, 1998, 112).

Sex

Four women and eight men participated in this research.

Language

All of the interviews but one were conducted in English, the other in French.

Business type

Three participants were employed in the Non-profit sector; one in Early Childhood Education; three in Arts and Culture; one in Food and Beverage, Processing and

Manufacturing; two in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industry and two in the Business, Finance, and Administration sectors.

Business size

The number of employees employed by the participants ranged from two to 29 with an average of 9 paid employees. These numbers do not include the volunteer staff managed by some of the employers. A few of the Non-Profit businesses interviewed for example employ, and train up to 120 volunteers.

Business age

The participants were employed in businesses aged between one and 26 years with an average of approximately 11 years old.

Limitations

Although the scope of this research is specific, it is not without limitations. The first set of limitations relate to this particular sample. The variability between the types of businesses and their organizational design or work environments for instance, means that some are more comfortable or simply have more experience speaking about learning or training. The size of the businesses, something mentioned more fully in the literature review, also determines whether an organization has the resources (time, money, know-how) to offer learning and training. In addition, because of its focus on employers, this research does not take into account the experience of individual employees who represent the other key part in participating in the learning or training.

The second set of limitations relate to the research design. Silverman for instance wrote about this and explained “some qualitative interview studies may lack the analytic

imagination to provide anything more than anecdotal ‘insights’” (1998, 115). Because the interviews are based on the employer’s experience, to avoid anecdotalism, the researcher must contextualize the interviews as their perspective and situate them within their individual biographical context (Silverman, 2007, 47, 50). Limitations such as these will be addressed in the section below with regards to the validity, reliability and generalizability of this particular research.

Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

VALIDITY

In qualitative research, validity is concerned with the degree to which a research project measures what it intended to measure. For example, Hammersley wrote “By validity I mean...the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers” (as cited in Silverman, 2007, 289). To do this, the validity of this research project will be addressed as follows.

First, close attention is paid to the labeling used to describe particular concepts (Kirk and Miller, 1986, 21). Kirk and Miller say this can be helped by evaluating the theoretical or construct validity, which they explain as a process guaranteeing “...that the theoretical paradigm rightly corresponds to observations” (1986, 22). Here a symbolic interactionist lens is used to situate workplace learning, and acts as a bridge between human capital and social capital theory and was collected by way of in-depth interviews. This way, the labels used in the final thesis are not “spuriously” tied to variables but are based on existing research and theory (Kirk and Miller, 1986, 28).

The practice of interpretive validity, as defined by Altheide and Johnson (1994), is another way to understand this. Here the concept is defined as processes, assumptions, locations, histories and contexts used by the participants to construct their knowledge and activities (487-488). In other words, interpretive validity depends on the researcher ensuring that conclusions and theoretical assumptions are grounded in the research that is collected. By linking concepts (as defined by Kirk and Miller) to existing theoretical assumptions, the reader is offered an expanded account of how the research can be understood. According to Altheide and Johnson (1994):

Such information enables the reader to engage the study in an interactive process that includes seeking more information, contextualizing findings, and reliving the report as the playing out of the interactions among the researcher, the subjects and the topic in question. (494)

Adding to the notion of interpretive validity, Altheide and Johnson highlight the importance of researcher reflexivity and of written accounts of tacit knowledge (1994, 492- 493). They explain “Good ethnographies show the hand of the ethnographer. The effort may not always be successful, but there should be clear “tracks” indicating the attempt has been made” (1994, 493). In this case, an extensive record of the research process (from sample selection, data collection and analysis to a reflexive account of approach, and limitations) is included herein. Although the methods mentioned above and below do not guarantee the study’s truth, they do offer the reader a way to assess “the adequacy of the research process itself” (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, 493; 494).

RELIABILITY

In qualitative research, the adequacy of the research process is also closely related to the project’s overall reliability. According to Silverman (2007) this can be achieved by

offering a detailed description of the research strategy and the methods used to analyse the data (282). Another way to help ensure a detailed method of data analysis is through the use of computer programs to help in "...the systematic analysis of representative instances of data" (Silverman, 1998, 112). In this case, the data collected from the interview recordings was transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVivo 9. The analytic scheme and thematic coding, was also documented, referenced and thoroughly explained to enhance both the reliability and validity of the research. To Silverman, reliability can also be achieved:

...by paying attention to 'theoretical transparency' through making explicit the theoretical stance from which the interpretation takes place and showing how this produces particular interpretations and excludes others. (Silverman, 2007, 282)

Kirk and Miller also refer to this transparency in their description of synchronic reliability, which they argue is the "...similarity of observations within the same time period" (Kirk and Miller, 1986, 42). By this they mean that the emerging findings are conceptually consistent not that observations are identical. Therefore, the reliability of this research project has been addressed in a number of ways. First, a thorough description of the chosen methodological and theoretical positions is offered in Chapters 2 and 3.

Second, verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts are used to complement the overall analysis. This helps to contextualize the observation in question, thereby avoiding a common problem in the quest for reliability as explained by Kirk and Miller:

When the observation is presented stripped of information about how it was collected, the reader is unable to place any meaningful interpretation on it because the status of relevant variables is unspecified. (1986, 52)

When conducting qualitative research, “Reliability depends essentially on explicitly described observational procedures” (Kirk and Miller, 1986, 41). Therefore, the observational procedures, or in this case the interviews will be recorded, transcribed verbatim and stored for reference. The coding scheme used for their analysis will also be explained (Silverman, 2007, 284; Silverman, 1998, 111). In this case, the interviews have also been observed and compared for their internal relatedness and reliability.

GENERALIZABILITY

The research is anchored in a conceptual framework that recognizes the variability in workplace learning research and provides the reader a nuanced understanding of how it has been methodologically and theoretically constructed over time. Although this research offers a qualitative analysis positioned in symbolic interactionism, it does not stand-alone but instead is contextualized in the wider socio-cultural context including information from quantitative work. In this sense, it will not act in isolation but will improve the representativeness of the existing research (Williams, 2000, 221-222).

Said differently, this work will help mobilize “the conceptual apparatus of our social science disciplines” in order to help build useful social theories and ultimately to generalize the research findings (Silverman, 1998, 104). According to Silverman in his investigation of quality in qualitative research, to do this, the researcher can benefit from four distinct types of context sensitivities: historical, cultural, political and contextual (1998, 110).

In this particular case, a consideration of the socio-political landscape by way of government reports and statistics; provincial policies; community and social action

groups and activities (such as the ones listed in footnote 17), are useful to enhance the project's overall conceptual depth.

Contextual sensitivity is also of use when describing, what Silverman would call “apparently uniform institutions” like the workplace, or again to define heterogeneous concepts such as learning, or efficiency since they will inevitably take on different meanings in different contexts. Contextual sensitivity, according to Silverman, also considers the active role played by participants in constructing their own context and that “social researchers should not simply import their own assumptions about what context is relevant in any situation” (1998, 110). Employers are known to play a central role in shaping learning opportunities by balancing the needs of the organization and of their employees (Kitching, 2007, 45; Ahlgren and Tett, 2010). Because of this, not only are they active in constructing their own contextual experience, a central aspect of their social biographies is how they experience the discussion surrounding workplace learning. Because of their unique position as an employer (and also an employee), they have an understanding of the overall learning experience from program development to motivations, barriers and outcomes. A consideration of their biographical context can therefore also play a role in enhancing the quality of this research (Silverman, 1998).

With this in mind, it is also important to consider the limitations inherent in the very nature of interviews. That is, research interviews represent a particular social context and drawing conclusions from them can be somewhat difficult (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 78). Many responses for example could have been rehearsed as part of a shared narrative. For example, when discussing their views on lifelong learning, many employers share the same sentiment and value lifelong learning. However, being aware

of these limitations allows for a closer examination of how each participant interprets or creates their reality.

Data Analysis

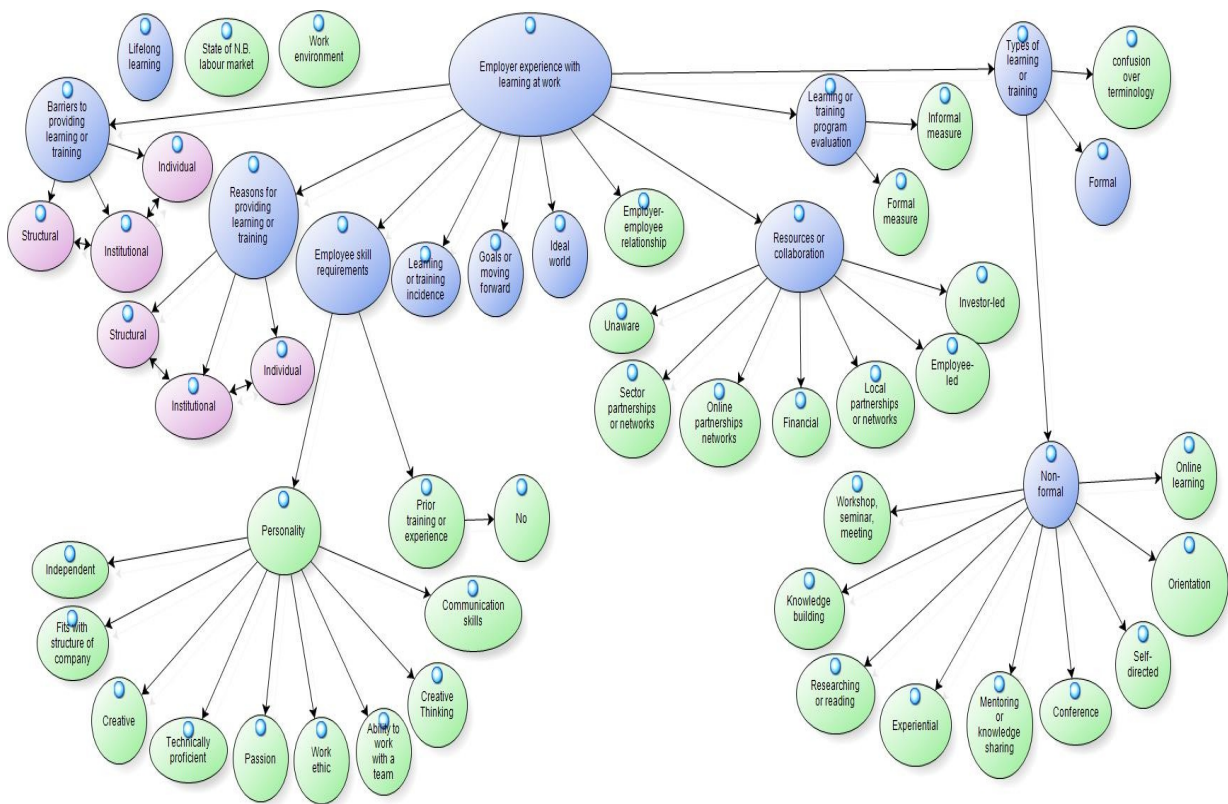
The data collected from the interviews were subject to a process of thematic content analysis and code development. In the interest of simplicity, the terminology will be limited to the language used by Ryan and Bernard (2003) who define themes as “abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects” (87).

The data collected from the interviews was thematically coded using NVivo9, a qualitative data analysis software. Once the verbatim transcriptions are uploaded into the program, the software allows for an effective manipulation of the data and enables the researcher to process the data by cutting and sorting it into relevant codes or themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, 94-96). In other words, verbatim quotes or expressions are highlighted, cut, and with the help of the software, pasted into the desired themes or what NVivo calls “nodes”. Each quote is then linked to its reference, which makes it easy for both identification and contextual purposes. For this research, themes were identified from both existing theoretical constructs (deductive or an a priori approach) and from the data (inductive approach) itself (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, 88).

To begin the analysis, thirteen preliminary themes were generated from the questions used in the interview and from the literature review and used to define the top level of hierarchical coding (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, 88). According to Ryan and Bernard, generating themes from an interview protocol is a common example of an a priori

approach where themes can be deduced from a number of sources including "...the characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, commonsense constructs; and from researchers' values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences" (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, 88). Although it may be argued that this type of theme generation is more sensitive to researcher bias, in this case, because the questions used in the interview were developed following a review of the relevant literature, they acted as a preliminary source of conceptual guidance (Boyatzis, 1998, 35, 37; Blumer, 1979, 68). In other words, this initial coding was a starting point to understanding the data in a systematic and organized way (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 32). These preliminary themes are coded in blue in the graph below and include: employer experience with learning at work; barriers to providing learning or training; reasons for providing learning or training; employee skill requirements; learning or training incidence; goals or moving forward; ideal world; resources or collaboration; learning or training program evaluation; types of learning or training including formal and non-formal learning or training and finally lifelong learning.

Figure 1. Code development through thematic content analysis.



Once the data were sorted into preliminary themes, both observational and manipulative techniques were used to further divide the written text into 34 subthemes. By searching for repetitions, the use of metaphors and analogies, transitions in the text as well as for similarities and differences within and between interview responses, a second subset of themes emerged from the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, 89-94). The figure of speech “throwing them into the deep end” or “throw them in the pool” used by four of the employers interviewed is used to capture the particular image of learning by doing, or learning by teaching, which was appropriately named “experiential learning”. In this case, some of the themes come directly from the participant’s words such as the theme “Communication skills” generated from a participant explaining that “personality and communication skills is always number one” when asked to describe new employee skill requirements. Others were named based on what the informant seems to be referring to or describing. For example, the theme “Experiential learning”, coded as a type of non-formal learning was not used by all the participants to describe learning by doing (Illeris, 2007). This subset is colored green in the graph above.

Following this stage, the subthemes were further organized and collated to reflect the conceptual interests of this particular research (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 36). In other words, themes were created to reflect the existing theoretical concepts and constructs found in the literature. For instance, the reasons why or why employers are not providing learning or training at work have been divided into three themes (“Structural”, “Institutional” and “Individual”) previously used in a report published by the Canadian Policy Research Network (2006). These are coloured purple in the graph above.

According to Blumer (1979, 68) in his writings on concept development “the development and justification of social science concepts is a process which is not readily reducible to simple formulae.” With this in mind, this analysis will be conducted systematically and will be defined based on a “well articulated analytic scheme” (Silverman, 1998, 109). According to Barbour (2001, 1117) in her article on improving rigour in qualitative research, researchers who do not systematically analyze the commonalities and contradictions reflected in the data tend to produce “...an artificially neat and tidy account that is descriptive rather than analytical and which militates against formulating in-depth analyses.” Not to mention, the analysis could run the risk of relying on anecdotal or atheoretical categories and labels (Silverman, 1998, 109). Therefore, by offering a transparent and descriptive account of the thematic coding process, the interviews will not be interpreted as an account but instead as an analysis.

Certain anecdotes, although they are based on a secondary experience, are useful starting points for further analysis. For example, one employer shared his opinions of the New Brunswick labour market more generally, which acted as an analytic point of departure to explore the interviews more fully (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 67).

According to Coffrey and Atkinson “they provide a mechanism for exploring how social actors frame and make sense of particular sets of experiences” (1996, 67). The employer’s narrative can also reveal characteristics central to their career and to their role as an employer (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 68). According to Coffrey and Atkinson, autobiographical stories indicate roles mediated by individual, institutional and structural dimensions (69). One employer explained his difficulty in finding the right person to fill two positions in his office. He explained:

...[There are] so many open positions in, in various regions of the province that...but there's no employees to fill those voids. Like, if you look at the numbers in New Brunswick now, in the north there's like...[for example] there's 3 or 400 jobs unfilled and, but yet there's thousands without, that are supposedly unemployed right. Either the skills don't match, well that has to be it, or people just don't wanna apply for the job (Jared).

Essentially, Jared is saying that this is not only an issue within his workplace but is also related to the situation in his sector and in the province. In other words, this example explores the individual's position within the workplace while also speaking to the role in that particular industry and in the province as a whole. Examples like this one show how individual accounts provide "a critical way of examining not only key actors and events but also cultural conventions and social norms" (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 76; 80).

Finally moving beyond the coding process, the interviews were then systematically explored to uncover meaning as well as conceptual or theoretical coherence (Coffrey and Atkinson, 1996, 46). In other words, they were analyzed using a symbolic interactionist lens and examined in relation to both human and social capital theory in order to confirm, amend or build on its assumptions (Firestone, 1993, 17).

The results of these analyses will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6 and will be divided based on the two primary research questions: (1) what experience do small business employers in New Brunswick have with workplace learning? And (2) what are the factors (limitations, opportunities) determining the small business employer's decisions around investing or not investing in workplace learning? The chapters will begin with a brief synopsis of the findings, followed by a presentation of the data and will end with a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 4 - WHAT EXPERIENCE DO SMALL BUSINESS EMPLOYERS IN NEW BRUNSWICK HAVE WITH WORKPLACE LEARNING?

The following chapter offers an account of the experience of the twelve small business employers interviewed. Key findings include:

- Non-formal learning or training is a much more popular and varied choice. Activities such as mentoring, knowledge sharing, knowledge building, job orientation, experiential learning, online learning, reading, researching, self-directed learning, as well as attending workshops, seminars, meetings and conferences are all examples of non-formal learning or training cited by the employers interviewed.
- The most reported type of non-formal learning or training was mentorship or knowledge sharing, which was cited by every person interviewed.

Prevalence of Workplace Learning Initiatives

When asked whether they engaged their employees in any form of learning or training activities over the years, some were able to define a specific number of hours allocated to professional development. Cindy, an employer in the field of Early Childhood Education said:

Because professional development is so important and I'll keep them up to date. Um, when they sign a contract with me, they have to do 16 hours of professional development a year.

One employer spoke of an allocated budget, another of an estimated training goal. Lisa, an employer in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industry explained:

Our goal as a company is to allow every employee to go somewhere to get training once a year. Um, but we are such a high technology company you know there's learning that happens every day just interacting with each other so you know there's the formal and there's informal.

In fact, half of the employers polled explained that formal training was minimal or rare and most were quick to dichotomize their responses into formalized and non-formalized types of learning or training. Louis for example, an employer in the Non-profit sector said at least 80% of the learning taking place in his business is informal and happens daily:

Ben il y a certains apprentissages qu'étaient plus formels comme les cours de salubrité alimentaire par exemple ou les cours de premiers soins ou des choses comme ça. La majeure partie...au moins quatre-vingt pour cent serait informel. C'est dans le milieu de travail, c'est à chaque jour²².

These examples contrast findings suggesting that organizations are not willing to support or unaware of how to encourage employees to learn informally (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b, 29). They also contrast with provincial research that found only 21% of small businesses offered some type of informal training and because this research did not expand on the types of informal or non-formal learning or training, it is difficult to compare them (NBCDAG, 2008).

Types

The following section will elaborate on the different types of learning or training opportunities reported by the employers interviewed. They were asked questions such

²² Well there are certain types of learning that were more formal like the food safety courses for example or the first aid courses or things like that. But the majority, at least eighty percent would be informal. It's in the workplace, and it's every day.

as “Have you engaged your employees in any form of learning or training activities over the years?” and were prompted with follow-up questions like “Sometimes when businesses expand, (ie. purchasing new technology) they undergo organizational changes and there could be training involved, has this been your experience and if so how did you deal with this?” or “Once they have the skills needed to do the job, do your employees need to recertify, upgrade or keep current their skill set? If so, describe”.

While half of the employers admitted to investing in formal opportunities for their employees, all of them spoke about their experiences with non-formal learning. What was perhaps most surprising was the amount and the variability of non-formal learning examples. The following pages offer a description of the most common types of formal and non-formal learning

FORMAL WORKPLACE LEARNING

Chapter 1 explained how the use of interchangeable and inconsistent terminology made it difficult to assess the level of learning that occurs in the New Brunswick workplace. For example, one of the two reports that did survey employers used the word training to describe formal training as “ [...] more structured and typically involves on-site training with an internal or external trainer, or off-site training” (NBCDAG, 2008). The other report (CÉNB, 2011), which also used the term training listed the types of training but did not offer a definition. Because many of the employers used certification as a way to distinguish between formal and non-formal or informal types of learning or training activities, for the purpose of this project, “formal learning or training” will be explained:

Structured learning or training activities offered to employees delivered in, or outside the workplace that lead to some type of certification (degree, diploma, certificate etc.).

Following this definition, six employers have paid for an employee's formal training. These include courses delivered in the workplace such as Occupational Health and Food Safety training and First Aid training, as well as courses delivered outside the workplace such as college courses, university courses or private-sector courses.

Cindy, an employer in Early Childhood Education for example was keen to support employee learning.

If they were to come to me and say "[Cindy] there's a really great course at the University ... this weekend. I can afford the gas to go down because I'm gonna jump in with a couple of educators but will you pay the \$40 or the \$200 dollar course?" and if I read it and it's amazing then I'll write the cheque just like that.

She also admitted to paying for an employee's education because she would be later reimbursed by the Government of New Brunswick through the Early Learning and Child Care Trust Fund.

Have I offered to pay for them to go to school, yes. I have offered to pay for the course up front, because there is a New Brunswick trust fund where I would get my [money] back.

Like Cindy, employers can support employee learning or training activities in a number of different ways including: providing the training, paying for the associated costs (either directly or by reimbursing the employee), creating a flexible work schedule to allow for time for learning or training, or providing transportation to and from the location of the learning or training program (CCL, 2010b: 47). Michael, in the Arts and Culture industry, supported one employee's ten-week leave of absence to pursue formal training. Jim, an employer in the Food and Beverage, Processing and Manufacturing

sector admitted that although it is rare in his business, they are starting to explore the option of offering private-sector online courses to senior employees.

Now we're starting to offer some of our senior employees, I mean we'll offer - if a course comes up we'll say "Hey maybe you should take this". Or "Would you like to take this?" essentially. "To further what you do." There's very little of that happens in our business.

...

So I've asked, I've sent out to my sort of department heads and [said] "Somebody put their hand up to do this." We want to see if...investigate the costs and see if we can run some of our people thought that and see if we can sponsor some of our...some people at accounts to go through that process.

Mark another employer working in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industry explained that several employees including himself attended private-sector courses outside of the workplace together.

So we've done different programs, there's four of us in the company that have gone through a program ... and that would be described as peer-based learning.

...

So you have a group of peers and then you go and you talk about, they'll bring in speakers, and there's you know sessions where you learn things but the value is peer-based.

In this sense, providing and engaging employees in formal learning or training can also act as a stepping stone for further learning. In the case above, the employer has emphasized the value of peer-based learning. Another employer Lisa explained how formal learning can help prepare employees for future responsibilities.

So one particular employee is really interested in taking on more responsibility here at the company so we've created a formal training program for him over, actually it's through the University. So we're giving him formal training to be able to learn the skills he needs to take on more responsibility um in the future.

A number of Canadian case studies have in fact supported this and shown that formal learning inspires people to continue further learning and vice versa (Kazi, 2008; Salembrier, 2008; Unwin, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

NON-FORMAL WORKPLACE LEARNING

Formal learning is not the only way to engage employees in the workplace. Although this type of learning has taken on a number of different conceptualizations in the literature (some reports use the term informal learning/training, others non-formal learning/training, and some have separated non-formal and informal learning), both New Brunswick reports identified in Chapter 1, do not distinguish between non-formal and formal learning or training. While one report defined informal training as “ [...] unstructured, on-the-job training such as coaching and mentoring...” (NBCDAG, 2008), the other does not make reference to this type of learning or training activity. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, (and to be consistent) I have chosen to use the term non-formal learning which will be defined as:

Structured or non-structured learning or training activities offered to employees delivered in, or outside the workplace that do not lead to formal certification. The learning or training activities can be either intentional or unintentional from the learner’s perspective.

Consistent with the Canadian literature which has found high levels of informal or non-formal learning or training in the workplace (Weststar, 2009; Livingston, 2007; CCL, 2007), according to the employers interviewed, non-formal learning or training is a much more popular and varied choice. Table 5 below offers a visual representation of the non-formal learning types identified in this research and the corresponding number of employers who listed them.

Table 5. Non-formal learning types identified through thematic content analysis.

Types of non-formal learning	Number of employers	Number of references
Mentoring or knowledge sharing	12	52
Experiential	9	18
Self-directed	9	15
Orientation	9	15
Online learning	7	14
Workshop, seminar or meeting	6	14
Knowledge building	6	6
Researching or reading	6	12
Conference	2	3

In this research, all of the employers admitted to regularly engaging in non-formal learning or training activities. For the purpose of brevity, the top three will be expanded.

Mentoring

The most reported type of non-formal learning or training was mentorship or knowledge sharing which was cited by every person interviewed. Some employers adhere mostly to internal mentoring (within the company):

So it's uh ya pretty much rubbing shoulders. I mean you wouldn't come in with a training session; your first day of work would be your first day of work. So there wouldn't be training days and all that sort of things (Jim).

Um, but we're small enough that if the girls need something they come and tell me ... You know something as small as, you know a working implement at their desk or you know do you mind if I leave early because the kids are doing this or that...[Or] Well I need help, I mean this has been great with Marla [the new employee] coming in because the other girl ... that works three days a week, they've been working so much together and they're an awesome team. They're just an awesome team. So they, she's learning and yet they're both achieving a big goal for the client (Tina).

On fonctionne beaucoup plus avec le concept de montrer...puis d'accompagner les gens dans cet apprentissage là...puis souvent on va prendre quelqu'un qui n'a pas nécessairement d'expérience ou de formation pis de, d'essayer de leur montrer à notre façon c'est souvent plus facile et plus efficace²³ (Louis).

Here the emphasis is placed not only on knowledge sharing between workers as Jim mentions in the first example but also between the employer and the employees and on the importance of working towards a common goal as explained by Tina and Louis. According to Louis, this is often an easier and more efficient way to teach or train.

Others engage in external mentoring and have partnered with a network of professionals or with similar organizations to share knowledge and mentoring practices.

But it's mostly been not so much bringing a speaker in but more like peer knowledge sharing so...um for example we work with [companies] in Saint John and Moncton and once a year we bring all of our staffs together and we do like a day or two of just pure learning (Michael).

23 We work a lot more with the concept of showing...and working with people in this type of learning...and often we will take someone who doesn't necessarily have experience or training, and try to show them how our way...which is often easier and more efficient.

Because we run on government funding, and donor funding, we're very tight string kind of run organization so the, the, you know the training...professional training is quite minimal but we do have a source of so many professionals who are network of our volunteers. So we get one-on-one training sometimes...In terms of let's say my finance person right. So she, we are actually better off hiring one of our volunteers for a few hours, have a one-on-one...update her then sending her for 2 days somewhere.... Ya there's lots of mentoring from professionals that's happening (Carolina).

And um, then it became an ongoing process of observation, coaching, feedback uh and exposing him [employee] to others that were doing the same sort of work that he was doing who could share experiences (Gerry).

In these examples, mentoring is extended outside of the workplace. In Michael's case, their organization collaborates with similar companies to benefit from sharing best practices and learning from each other. Carolina on the other hand, working in the Non-profit sector, depends on a network of professionals from various sectors in the community to volunteer their time to help train her employees. In addition to mentoring his employees, Gerry, an employer in the Business, Finance and Administration sector, actively encouraged them to attend presentations and to learn from others in similar fields of work.

Combined, these examples offer a varied description of the types of mentoring taking place both inside such as learning from a colleague or working jointly with a coworker or boss, and outside of the workplace through peer knowledge sharing or from a network of community professionals. Although this level of detail is not offered in New Brunswick employer-centered research (NBCDAG, 2008; CENB, 2011), mentoring is commonly listed as a type of informal learning by early theorists in the field of work-related informal learning as well as in the Canadian National Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b, 10, 23).

Self-directed Learning

The second most highly cited types of non-formal learning was self-directed learning. This was not surprising as it was identified in the literature as a common type of informal or non-formal learning (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b; Marsick and Watkins, 2001, 25; Ellinger, 2004; Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2001). Authors Guglielmino and Guglielmino defined it as “A process in which the learner is responsible for identifying what is to be learned, when it is to be learned, and how it is to be learned. The learner is also responsible for evaluating not only if the learning occurs but if it is relevant to the objective” (2001, 37). This is true for the employers interviewed here who admit this as common practice.

Ya self-directed, self-paid...and we want to be an environment that's supportive of that (André).

And the thing I'm sort of promoting is, even though it's not sort of in-house or during work hours but you know if you go to Chapters or go to a magazine store. Pick up ten magazines, like all different. Like nothing to do...choose some that you don't normally read so they're related to let's just say...decorating or toys or whatever and see what the design styles are through those so that when we get a client that falls into that category, we see what the trends are, you know what's sort of happening with those...so that we're not limiting ourselves to ok corporate design for everyone (Brad).

Like mostly what we do it's like “Ok here's a new product that we want to deliver...go online, research it, figure it out, try it, test it, see if it works” and that's the learning process really. There's no formal “Ok I'm gonna go look for a course” when you can find them online right, just and online introduction to whatever this tool is. And then you pretty much, you're self-taught after that (Jared).

More broadly described as “self-learning in which learners have the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences” in the literature; here, the emphasis is on encouraging their employees to be creative

with learning strategies (Ellinger, 2004, 159). While these can be self-paid (done on the employee's own time and with their own money), as in the examples given by André or Brad, they can also be self-directed through trial and error like in Jared's example.

Self-directed learning is not bound to the employees, André, Gerry and Cindy for example also each ascribe to this practice.

[T]o me personally, I'm doing my Master's degree right...and so it doesn't take too much time off of my daily work...like it's not like I have to take a day off so it's very little commitment from the organization. I believe it's important for me personally. I think society should move more towards that...where people take responsibility for their own...

[P]lus the other thing we'll do is I will, at least a couple times a year, sit in on programs that are given taught by the others. And I'll watch what they're doing and I'm learning as much as I'm able to teach because I'll find that oh I really like the approach that they've taken. It's not what I would have done but it friggin works and you know maybe I'll do some of it next time. [laughs].

[A]nd then I had to come in here on evenings and on weekends to do a payroll book, to budget ... Anyhow so I would call Revenue Canada and say "OK I have no idea how to do a T4 slip but I can't afford an accountant so if you can just give me a rundown or get me somewhere where I can find it...."

In these examples, the employers also admit to engaging in self-directed forms of learning by pursuing post-secondary education outside of work hours, learning from champions in their field, and by researching information on their own time.

Not only does self-directed learning take on many forms, including university courses, online learning, or researching information but also is encouraged and even practiced by the employers themselves. According to Guglielmino and Guglielmino (2001), there are eight factors that contribute to self-directed learning, these include: "openness to learning opportunities, self-concept as an effective learner, initiative and independence

in learning, informed acceptance of responsibility of one's own learning, love of learning, creativity, future orientation, and ability to use basic study skills and problem solving skills" (37). Similarly, the examples above and in others not included here, the onus is placed on the employees who are encouraged to learn be it directly by seeking out relevant training opportunities for example or indirectly by watching others and asking important questions. Supporting this type of learning by encouraging employees to learn both inside and outside the working environment (attending online courses, finding new relevant books and magazines) and offering them the time to do so is another way employers can support learning in the workplace.

Experiential Learning

And finally, experiential learning, described as learning through subjective experience²⁴, is the third most commonly cited type of non-formal learning cited by employers describing the types of activities that take place at work. This finding was not surprising, as the literature listed experiential learning as a common type of non-formal learning (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b, 9,36; Illeris, 2007; McGuire and Gubbins, 2010). According to Illeris, in the last twenty years the term experiential learning has been frequently used to define learning and education throughout one's lifetime (2007). Although its definition is varied, when it comes to learning in the workplace, he explains "it is very much about learning by doing instead of learning by courses and studies"

24 An extensive compilation of experiential learning research can be found here: <http://learningfromexperience.com/>

(2007, 84). This appears to be true here where employers speak of learning by teaching, learning by doing and learning through experience.

Gerry for example said:

Um, most of our training is experiential learning.

He gave the example of his partner, Timothy, who is also his employee, who learned and perfected the skills needed for the position auditing courses, developing a curriculum and teaching clients.

Well the first thing he had to learn was the offerings that already had in way of training. And that was really done by having him audit courses that we were already doing, helps us to develop a train the trainer program. He was learning through teaching.

Cindy, an employer in Early Childhood Education sector also gave the example of allowing a new hire to work with children from different age groups and explained:

She needs to learn that 'cause she's not gonna learn that in school... you don't learn [the differences in age groups and child needs] from textbooks, you learn that from experience.

Jim also spoke of allowing new hires to experience the different positions in the manufacturing shop to truly learn the scope of the work environment. Another employer, Louis working in the Non-profit sector found that taking on a new partnership with an organization in the community allowed his employees to learn new information as well as transferable skills. He explained:

Mais toute cette connaissance là par exemple, toute ce qui se passe en faisant ça, ben notre gérante, elle apprend à connaître les différentes organisations, [...] à

but non-lucratif dans la communauté qui travaillent avec les groupes ciblés ben elle apprend les opérations de ces organisations là, elle apprend...c'est des, des, comment t'appelle ça, c'est des capacités transversales là tsé²⁵.

In this sense, learning through experience is less about the end goal then it is about the process. Tina for example working in the Business, Finance and Administration sector, estimates an approximate six-month learning curve of practice before an employee can fully grasp the nature of the work. She explained:

One of the girls that's out on [maternity] leave as a matter of fact we still laugh about her because, oh it must have been five or six months that she said you know "I don't feel like my speed is there yet" and I said "No you're doing fine" and "It'll come" and I'd just adjust the invoices if I have to and then it was like somebody flipped a switch. And all of a sudden she's just banging them out like that [snaps her fingers]. And they're right and they're well organized and they're well done...

There were many more examples listed by employers, and, although they will not be described in detail here, online learning, attending conferences, meetings, seminars, reading, researching and knowledge building were other non-formal types of learning and training activities occurring in their workplace.

²⁵ But all of that knowledge for example, all that happens by doing that, well our manager, she is getting to know all of the different organizations, [...] non-profit [organizations] in our community that work with targeted groups well she is learning the operations of these organizations, she is learning... it's, it's, how do you call it, transverse knowledge.

CHAPTER 5 - WHAT ARE THE FACTORS (LIMITATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES) DETERMINING EMPLOYER DECISIONS AROUND INVESTING OR NOT INVESTING IN WORKPLACE LEARNING?

The second research question sought to uncover the factors involved in the employer decision-making process regarding investing or not in learning and training activities. Employers were asked questions like: “Why did you offer the training? What did you hope it would bring to your business?” and “In an ideal world, how would you get your employees to where you need them? If time or money etc. was not an issue, what sort of training would you offer?” or “What are in your opinion, some of the barriers to achieving this ideal?”.

Responses were divided into “structural” (concerned with factors that fall outside of the organization itself), “institutional” (related to matters that fall within the control of the organization or the business) and “individual” (factors related to the individual employee), three subthemes previously used in a report published by the Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) identified as barriers for employers’ engagement in basic skills training (2006, 54). The key findings include:

- Employers are not only challenged by a lack of time or money (as some literature may suggest) but are instead facing a number of important structural and individual limitations when it comes to offering learning and training at work.
- One of the primary reasons employers admit to offering learning and training opportunities is to make their employees happy.

Limitations to Offering Workplace Learning

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- Poaching

Despite working in different industries, André, Brad and Jim working in the Non-profit, Arts and Culture and in the Food and Beverage, Processing and Manufacturing industries saw this as a challenge.

The challenge as an employer what I've heard over the years and it's true for large employers and I'm sure it must be more stressful for smaller employers is...I'm gonna spend \$8000 on you getting this certification and you're gonna leave.

And then you always have to be careful in this industry too when you're bringing in new people if they become too visible, too, you know if they decided you know "I'll just leave and start my own".

I mean I could say ok "You can't work here until you have a degree [...] from somewhere...um go get one and come back..." but we wouldn't have any employees. And if I had to invest twenty thousand dollars in an employee that may never come back, that's a little tough too.

These examples help show that employers are concerned not only about other employers hiring their workers but that employees, after having learned, would leave and look for better opportunities elsewhere.

- Lack of information

Michael explained that finding learning and training opportunities in the Arts and Culture sector is challenging in New Brunswick. He said:

There are certain parts of our business where there is no, local, there are no local training opportunities. Like in particular in our technical department, like there is no place in New Brunswick to send a theatrical lighting technician to upgrade their skills.

Jim also shared Michael's concern and explained that there simply is no training for employees working in the Food and Beverage, Processing and Manufacturing sector.

But, but as some formal training becomes available, I mean...we have a guy going for a month to Wisconsin. 'Cause there's not much, I mean it's just not offered in Canada. So ya, we'll do those sorts of things as they come up, they just don't come up that often.

Jared agreed and found this was also an issue in the Information and Technology industry.

Uh, ya it would be great to send someone away to training too but there's no such thing around here. I wouldn't even say in the whole province. No. That's a big issue with us right now.

Not only does there appear to be a lack of opportunities in New Brunswick as explained by Michael and Jared but to Jim this extends to all of Canada.

- The government

Being able to offer learning and training is important to employers. André for example spoke about the importance of smaller companies realizing a need for a certain skill set to improve productivity and offer training at a global level.

And so how do we get more companies to...and smaller companies to come to that realization that...umm. They, they do need people with the skill set to improve their productivity and their...and institutions need to offer that training at a level that is global. [...] I'm sure if you're small for profit, you're a small business I'm sure you can access some government money to go and take those Lean Six Sigma programs, I'm sure there's some...are they all well aware that it's there?

The challenge, he explains in the quote above, is not only related to the lack of training but also to the lack of information related to government funding available to small businesses. Carolina, one employer operating on government and donor funding finds it

challenging to offer training to employees and openly asked where to find specific project grants.

Ok so...because we run on government funding and donor funding, we're very tight string kind of run organization so, the- the, you know the training ...professional training is quite minimal but we do have source of so many professionals who are network of our volunteers. So we get one-on-one training sometimes. You know, but we cannot afford to pay somebody to actually be in school, right. It's just impossible for us. Ya and lots of governments, they don't like to cover you to go be trained, like in a grant...

Investigator: to go away?

Carolina: ...specific project grants, ya. It's hard. So I don't know anything else, so let me know if you do. I'd like to know.

To summarize, the two examples listed above suggest that employers may not be fully aware of the various learning and training programs available to them or even of the funding available to access these programs. They also both express a need for an increase in government assistance. This in itself is a type of structural limitation that impedes their ability to pursue certain opportunities. Another limitation expressed by the employers interviewed extends to the labour market as a whole.

- The labour market

In some cases, employers point to labour market trends as a limitation to supporting employee learning or training. Jared for instance, takes issue with the post-secondary education system.

That's a big issue with us right now. We're trying to work with uh colleges and the high schools. To change their curriculum to the point where it matches what the industry, the IT industry anyways, actually needs. 'Cause there is, from when I went to school, twelve years ago or more... what I learnt in the school then in university has nothing to do with I'm doing. And at the same token, what they're

teaching now, in some respects, don't match up with what the industries want. So, that's where I get the gap when I hire someone I need to train them in the way that I want them to do the work. So it ends up being my time lost trying to get this person up to speed, right.

Finding similar problems with the labour market's supply and demand of skills, André believes the government has a role to play in helping small and medium-sized businesses train internally.

The government should say, they know how many people they need to hire based on who's retiring. And they, now they're saying "We're not gonna replace everybody retiring". But they will have to replace some. And, 'cause I think like every year, like within the next five years, over 30% of people retire [...] and so if the government of New Brunswick said to our universities and community colleges we, 80% of the jobs we will fill require a co-op graduate [...] It becomes the province of New Brunswick saying "This is the way to go, jurisdictions around the world have figured this out. Universities around the world have figured this out. So, we will hire...we will have a higher quality of civil service by hiring experiential learning grads.

In these two examples both Jared and André identify a distinct gap between the post-secondary and the work experience. Because of this, Jared has had to spend time, time that could be spent on other forms of learning or training, getting his employees "up to speed". André on the other hand, believes some of the issues currently facing employers could be helped by government promotion of experiential and co-op learning. This aligns with findings reflected in the NBCDAG report which found that for small businesses "the most common reasons for experiencing difficulty in filling vacancies were potential hires lacking educational/training qualifications (27%, n=437) and lacking experience (23%, n=361), as well as a workforce shortage (21%, n=337)" (2008, 80).

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

- Lack of time

Some employers like Carolina in the Non-Profit sector and Brad in Arts and Culture industry find time is one of the biggest challenges in investing in learning and training opportunities.

Ya and I think it's workload too right. And I mean...like our society is running way to fast, right. Right now. it's like I can barely keep up. like, you know. Ya and to find.... so you try and squeeze in a lot of you know learning here...and get it done with people you know.

But we're just so small right now that we just don't have the funds to do it and don't have the um time to take off just because we're that busy. So ideally it'd be great you know to get to that position and have a larger team that's creative and be able to continually grow, but ya that's just, we're not there yet.

In his example, Brad alludes to the size of the business as another limiting factor involved in providing learning and training for his employees. Although not expanded upon here, Brad explained that because of the number of employees working (3 in total), and their current workload, he could not afford (because of time and money) to offer much learning and training to his employees, especially when it comes to sending them to programs that take place outside of the workplace. This is consistent with the literature which suggests smaller businesses struggle with providing training to their employees and that larger businesses, because they have more resources, have a larger rate of employee participation in training activities or education (Desjardins, 2011; CFIB, 2007; Saunders, 2008b)

- Organizational design

The size of the business is not the only limitation, others like Jim and Carolina explain that the types of positions within a company are not always conducive to learning or training.

It's part-time retail so we expect people to leave. And it's...some of that sucks, but it's part-time retail, what are we gonna do for employee retention really. You know, don't go to university, stay here and...[chuckles] and... work for [us]. [laughs]. I mean, we kinda celebrate usually when our employees move on to bigger and better things[...] And we're not sophisticated enough to have long-term employment contracts linked to training dollars and all that sort of thing.

But my biggest challenge is that you know, my employees are contract based. And if I lose my funding, I have to let that person go and it's so hard to make that investment into training when you are not guaranteed that you have that person at least for a couple of years, you know.

Others like Michael in the Arts and Culture sector and André who works in the Non-profit sector find organizational capacity is a barrier to their overall investment. André explained that the lack of laid-out processes played a part while Michael found:

Well I think it's something that we probably have the capacity, well no we don't have the capacity, we probably have the know how to be able to formulate that kind of bank of resources and so on to more closely match with employees but we just, we just uh don't have the organizational capacity to uh assign it and actually get it done, we just haven't taken the steps to do that yet I guess.

- Financial resources

While time and organizational capacity are some examples of barriers to investing in learning and training at work, a lack of financial resources also appears to be one of the primary limitations for most employers and was mentioned by half of those interviewed.

In terms of let's say my finance person right. So she, we are actually better off hiring one of our volunteers for a few hours, have a one-on one...update her, then sending her for 2 days, somewhere to Nova Scotia and pay for hotel and you know what I mean, it's just all those expenses add up so quickly [...] You know, but we cannot afford to pay somebody to actually be in school, right. It's just impossible for us (Carolina).

And we haven't spent money on a, a course. Like there hasn't been an expenditure on a umm on training. So we're kinda learning as we go... we don't have eight grand to say well we'll hire a consultant that's gonna give us a strategy... like we're learning as we go (André).

Faque, le le désir de le faire est toujours là, les ressources ne sont pas toujours là, les ressources financières ne sont pas toujours là²⁶ (Louis).

...have you know skills sessions where you can go and have a little bit of training so we keep our eye out for relevant um things to train our employees on and also always looking at the cost too (Lisa).

The above examples are just a few of those identified by the employers interviewed related to financial cost being an obstacle to creating or attending a learning or training program.

INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS

Other limitations identified by four of the employers in the interviews were related to the employees themselves.

- Attitude and accessibility

Some employers like Carolina in the Non-profit sector explained that employees lacked the time or motivation to participate in the learning or training activities. Jared, working

²⁶ So the desire is always there, the resources are not always there, the financial resources are not always there.

in Arts and Culture felt that he could not control whether or not his employees seized opportunities to learn.

'Cause I have, I've gotten books for some employees that I've been like ok I want them to learn this and then give them the book. And then I say "Could you learn this over your spare time or whenever?" Like I do it myself 'cause I program too. And, but then they get lost in work and then they don't pick up the book and then they say it's too hard to learn and bla bla. So how else am I supposed to teach them, right? Like I'm not going to sit there beside them.

Michael, working in the Arts and Culture sector also found putting the onus on employees a challenge since not all of them are able to pursue opportunities. He said:

Some employees are more apt to umm find those opportunities and take advantage of it than others and that's kind of, that's, that's kind of incongruent.

Despite having identified limitations on a structural, institutional and individual level, employers also offered an array of reasons why and how they do engage their employees.

Opportunities

STRUCTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Driven by sector or government requirements

Some employers like Cindy, offer learning or training as a retention strategy. She and Jared also commit to learning and training because of sectoral standards or qualifications.

- Contributes to the social or economic structure

Louis on the other hand working for the Non-Profit sector commits to learning or training because he finds it directly related to an investment in the community and in the social economy as a whole.

Mais c'est de faire une entreprise socialement consciente, qui est de la meilleure définition que moi je connais de l'économie sociale et pour faire ça, investir dans nos employés, puis investir nos employés dans la communauté c'est la façon de le faire là²⁷.

INSTITUTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Driven by organizational requirements

In some cases, the reasons for investing in learning or training were related to organizational goals or to the value placed on this investment by the employer. Cindy, Michael and Lisa for example have an annual professional development allocation.

Carolina on the other hand finds she needs to train her employees because of the recent growth in her organization.

And because we [are] growing, our organization grew so much, ummm you know I feel I need some training to deal with it.

Because her company now operates on at least 7 times the funding that it did in the year 2000, she said:

It's a huge change right and we didn't have enough time to adjust. So you know I feel that I could use a lot.

²⁷ But it's to make a business socially conscious, which is the best definition that I know of the social economy to do that, invest in our employees and investing in our employees in the community is the best way to do this.

André instead works to align learning and training with targets outlined in his organization's balance scorecard and strategic map.

Uhh "we will utilize Facebook" or "we will increase our number of likes on Facebook". Which ok, that, that...you're getting a little bit better but ultimately, the staff- whatever training they need - it needs to go and help achieve that. Like, the best type of training, the way I mean in my view...that an employer could offer is training that is based on real work deliverables on an actual task.

Here, after listing a few targets, he tries to show how in his view the training needs should be matched with the organization's priorities. Gerry and Tina also admit to training to match with organizational goals or needs. Mark has also adopted this principle and explains:

It's...the learning isn't the focus...We're trying to achieve this target. And then we pull on the learning to help us do that.

Others like Brad, place more importance on the learning culture and when reflecting on the risks related to investing in employee development, he explained:

But at the same time we wanna be the best that we can be for our clients so it's a risk you almost have to take. Otherwise you're probably just holding your own company back but I don't know you're almost being, I don't know to me you're doing a disservice to your employees too. You have to treat them with, you know, respect as well.

In this case, not only is the focus on the organization but also on the employer, employee relationship as a whole. And further, employers like Louis have connected the two.

Mais c'est aussi des choses comme euh, on va saisir n'importe quelle occasion pour approfond... en approfondissant les connaissances de notre personnel, on grandit les capacités de l'entreprise²⁸.

In this example, he explains that by growing the knowledge of the employees, you are growing the overall capacity of the organization.

INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Driven by the employee

Finally the last common reason why employers invest in learning or training opportunities was in the interest of their employees.

For some like André, Jared and Jim, employees initiate learning and training. Jared, Louis, Jim and Gerry also relate many of these opportunities to personal development.

Michael, Louis and Carolina on the other hand focus instead on career development and take pride in offering their employees support at the start of their careers:

Right so our performance evaluation review process it it as it's a big section of it deals with sort of what additional skills or training might help the employee improve in their performance or to advance them in their career. It goes beyond their existing position. Umm sort of think about think about our participation as an employer in their career advancement whether it's inside our organization or not.

Si que les gens viennent ici, développent leur capacité, leur expérience, leur curriculum, leur euh, le...si qu'ils sont en mesure de devenir plus attrayant sur le

²⁸ But it's also things like, we will seize whatever occasion to deep...by deepening the knowledge of our personnel, we grow the capacity of the businesses.

marché du travail puis qu'ils se trouvent un emploi ailleurs qui peut être plus stable ou plus rémunérant, ben on a bien fait notre travail²⁹.

Ya and I think that's part of my strength that I was able to learn here is to you know take advantage of these people who are at the beginning of their career, pickup their passion. And they work so hard because they want to learn. And you know, they gain employable skills in here. And every single person - my interns who come through here get good jobs.

And finally, Lisa, Brad, Louis and Carolina all admitted to offering these opportunities to make sure their employees were both inspired and happy at work.

Our goal as a company is to allow every employee to go somewhere to get training once a year. Um but we're such a high technology company you know there's learning that happens every day just interacting with each other so you know there's the formal and then there's informal. And in a perfect world it all integrates all the time and everybody...it's more about keeping employees happy and stimulated and wanting to continue working, you know. If they're learning then they're enjoying what they're doing.

And sometimes you wonder how, like is this worth money to send someone there but all of a sudden they come back and inspired or you know invigorated even and they're just like happier. Sometimes it comes down just making sure everyone is happy and enjoying what they do.

Si t'es heureux, tu te sens bien puis tu te sens t'épanouir dans ton milieu de travail à...tout simplement à chaque jour, tu laisses un peu plus de toi même dans cette place là et ça devient positivement...ça devient comme une contagion positive si tu veux...ça, ça ça a des répercussions, ça se multiplie. Ca fait, investir dans l'apprentissage...dans un monde idéale là, on investirait sur l'apprentissage des employée que se soit relié au travail ou pas³⁰.

29 If people come here, develop their abilities, their experience, their curriculum, euh, the...if they are in a position to become more attractive in the labour market and they find employment elsewhere that may be perhaps more stable or remunerating, well then we did our job well.

30 If you're happy, you feel well, and you feel that you are flourishing in your workplace...simply everyday, you leave a little bit more of yourself in this place and it becomes positively...it becomes like a positive contagion if you'd like...it it has

I think training is really important, it gives the employees kind of a new boost, to like...you know new ideas. Kind of just getting away from a job for a couple of days.

In the examples listed above, the reasons for learning or training were not linked to organizational goals but instead were initiated by employees and included boosting employee morale, encouraging individual career advancement both inside and outside their organizations as well as creating an inspired and happy work environment.

repercussions, it multiplies. So, investing in learning...in an ideal world, we would invest in employee learning whether it was related to work or not.

CHAPTER 6 - FINDINGS

Chapters 4 and 5 explored the experience of twelve small business employers in New Brunswick and the factors that determined whether they offered learning and training in their workplace. The following chapter will offer a summary of these accounts.

Learning in a Small New Brunswick Business: The employer experience

According to responses given by the employers, the experience of employers with workplace learning is varied and not to mention quite expansive. With regards to formal types of learning or training, half of the employers have reportedly invested in courses such as Occupational Health and Food Safety training and First Aid training, as well as courses delivered outside the workplace such as college courses, university courses or private-sector courses. This number is slightly higher than the number recorded in the NBCDAG report, where approximately 44% of small businesses admitted to offering these opportunities to their employees.

While some do allocate a specific amount of time for professional development (2) or have specific training budget (1), most (6) explained that formal training was minimal and instead emphasized the variety and regularity of non-formal learning and training happening regularly in their workplace. This is different from results in a provincial report, which indicated 21% of small businesses admitted to offering informal learning, but comparable to national findings that listed employee participation rates of 80 and 90% (NBCDAG, 2008, 166; Weststar, 2009; Livingstone, 2007).

The most common types of non-formal learning or training reported by the small businesses here were *mentoring* or *knowledge sharing*, *self-directed learning* and *experiential learning*. The examples of these types of learning are very different in frequency, in content and in location. In other words, the amount of time spent on these activities, the reasons for them (some related to the job requirements, and some not) and whether they take place inside or outside of the organization differed from one example to the next.

MENTORING

The examples presented above offer a varied description of the types of mentoring occurring both inside and outside of the workplace. These include learning from a colleague and working jointly with a colleague or a boss as well as learning through peer knowledge sharing or from a network of community professionals. Not included in these examples were examples of job sharing (where two or more employees work together as a team), job shadowing (where one employee seeking experience in another area within the organization is partnered with another) and one-on-one coaching.

Although New Brunswick reports do not specify the amount and effectiveness of mentoring occurring in workplaces, mentorship has been identified in Canadian reports like the Canadian Council on Learning's "Overview Report-Workplace Learning in SMEs: Improving productivity and performance" which explained "Some of the most effective SMEs make use of their internal expertise and knowledge— through mentoring, coaching, job-rotations and job-shadowing activities" (2009, 25).

SELF-DIRECTED

Self-directed learning in the examples provided above takes on many forms, including online learning, or researching information. Employers themselves also practice this type of individual learning. In these examples, employees are encouraged by the employers to learn by seeking out relevant training opportunities, ask important questions or to watch and learn from others. The examples provided by the employers and included in Chapter 4 are reflective of examples found in previous Canadian works (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2001; Livingstone, 2003; Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b; Marsick and Watkins, 2001, 25; Ellinger, 2004) but was not included in the New Brunswick research on workplace learning (NBCDAG, 2008 and CÉNB, 2011). Despite the fact that it did not appear in prior provincial work, its presence and potential should not be overlooked. According to Guglielmino and Guglielmino, there are benefits to both the learner and the learned. “The self-directed-learner is the keystone of the learning organization [...] Not only does self-directed learning offer greater efficiency and effectiveness for each dollar spent, but it also lowers the cost of training” (2001, 37; 39).

EXPERIENTIAL

Experiential learning, also known as learning by doing, is the third most commonly cited type of non-formal learning or training experienced by employers. Employers gave examples of employees who learned by developing a curriculum and teaching in the business sector, by working with different age groups in the Early Childhood Education sector, partnering with different organizations in the Non-profit sector or by being exposed to different parts of the manufacturing process. This was consistent with the literature, which found:

To be labeled experiential, learning processes and outcomes must be part of processes of continuity and interaction, they must, at least to some extent, be learner controlled and involve the learner's self, and there must be some correspondence of the learning environment to real environment.
(Illeris, 2007, 86)

OTHER

And finally, other common examples of non-formal learning or training given by employers included online learning (reported by 7 employers); attending conferences (reported by 2 employers); participating in workshops, meetings or seminars (reported by 6 employers); reading or researching (reported by 6 employers); and knowledge building (reported by 6 employers).

It is evident from these examples that non-formal learning or training is much more prevalent within the small businesses interviewed for this research. The examples also highlight the variability in the interpretations of such accounts. Therefore not only does the information contained herein offer an account of the employer experience, it also helps make the case for the creation of a stronger linkage between human capital and social capital theory. As it was mentioned in Chapter 2, some researchers have critiqued human capital theory, because of its emphasis on the structural and monetary aspects of learning, training and education (Becker, 1992, 92; Bourdieu, 1986; Lou, 2003, 75). Whereas the theoretical foundation for human capital theory focused on learning as a product these findings suggest that New Brunswick small business employers are also interested in the process of learning. Specifically in boosting employee morale, encouraging individual career advancement both inside and outside their organizations as well as creating an inspired and happy work environment.

Essentially, these expanded accounts offer a unique perspective on investment in human capital. By contextualizing the qualitative data collected here through a symbolic interactionist lens (and by allowing employers to share their experiences), the responses collected not only help understand human conduct and learning, but also help to interpret educational processes in practice both at an individual and collective level (Bron and Schiemann, 2002, 170). In other words, social actions like learning, can instead be understood not in a binary (formal, non-formal) or limited (traditional models of learning for profit) way but instead as constructions of human interactions. In turn, an expanded understanding of educational processes, or in this case of the learning opportunities in the New Brunswick workplace not only offers a better estimation of the types and prevalence of workplace learning that take place but could allow researchers to evaluate the extent to which an organization might improve the quality of the learning that is taking place and offer a unique perspective on the effectiveness of the workplace as a learning environment.

Authors Fuller, Felstead and Unwin comment on this and argue for more expansive learning opportunities. They write:

Our research indicates that, regardless of the sectoral context or type of organization, and regardless of the grade of employee, learning in the workplace plays a major role in the development of skills and work-related knowledge. It is time to take a much closer look at what is going on within workplaces to identify the factors that facilitate such learning. From this, we should be able to create practical models to help employers and the agencies that support them to find ways of reaping greater benefits from everyday workplace activity.
(*date unknown*, 10)

Here, the authors point out that allowing for a more expansive understanding of the types of learning and training would encourage more of these activities. This not only

applies to research design (by allowing for open-ended responses, employers are encouraged to expand their definitions) but also in practice (employers are empowered by an expanded definition). They also point to the importance of extending beyond our reliance on structure to influence our understanding of human action (in this case learning) which can help make the case for a blended use of both human and social capital theory exploring learning as a product and as a process.

Factors Shaping Employer Decisions To Invest Or Not Invest In Workplace Learning

The second research question explored in Chapter 5, sought to uncover the factors involved in the employer decision-making process regarding investing or not in learning and training activities.

While a number of Canadian reports identify clear challenges to investing in human capital, the only information available specific to New Brunswick can be found in the CFIB report which explains investments in capital and staff are too costly (40.4%), and that employers are discouraged by the business environment and uncertainty (36.7%) or unable to find staff (34.5%) as the top barriers to investment (CFIB, 2010a, 22). These responses provide a much more detailed account of both the opportunities and the barriers experienced than what was previously reported.

Responses were divided into three subthemes “Structural”, “Institutional” and “Individual” previously used in a report published by the Canadian Policy Research Network and adapted to reflect the experiences of the employers participating in this research (CPRN, 2006, 54). A brief summary of the above section is offered below.

BARRIERS

Structural Barriers

- Lack of information

In these examples, employers address a difficulty in identifying learning or training opportunities that are available. More specifically, they speak about being unaware of existing suppliers and programs (including government-supported ones) dedicated to employee learning, training in their particular sectors.

- Poaching

Here, employers express a concern about investing in learning or training and the risk that other employers would hire or “poach” their trained workers or that their employees, after having benefitted from this opportunity, would seek employment elsewhere.

- The government

In these examples, employers describe challenges which are related to government investment in education and training opportunities, and lack of awareness around the availability of government funding to support learning or training in their workplaces.

- The labour market

In this case, employers speak about challenges in the labour market as barriers to offering learning or training in the workplace. Here employers identify issues with the post-secondary education system, a lack of preparedness of new labour market entrants,

identify a need for enhancing apprenticeship and co-op programs, and discuss the changes in labour supply and demand as factors impeding the development of learning or training programs.

Institutional Barriers

- Lack of time

In this case, the lack of time refers to employers expressing difficulty in finding the time to offer learning or training within their workplace. This could include not having enough time to design or implement a learning or training program, search for learning or training opportunities or cope with the absence of employees who are away learning or training outside of the organization.

- Organizational design

The organization's design can pose a challenge to employers seeking to offer learning or training in the workplace. This can include the size of the business or the types of positions available within the organization.

- Financial resources

In these examples, employers discuss financial costs as a key limitation to offering learning or training to their employees.

Individual Barriers

- Attitude and accessibility

In these examples, employers speak of a lack of employee interest or motivation for learning or training. When discussing accessibility, employers have expressed a concern about the unequal access of learning opportunities to some employees.

OPPORTUNITIES

Structural opportunities

- Driven by sector or government requirements

In these examples some employers admit to committing to learning or training in order to fulfill certain sectoral standards or qualifications while others

- Contributes to the social, or economic structure

Here, employers are interested in contributing to the social or economic structure as a whole.

Institutional opportunities

- Driven by organizational requirements

In some cases, the reasons for investing in learning or training were related to organizational goals or to the value placed on this investment by the employer.

Individual opportunities

- Driven by the employee

In these examples, employers invest in learning or training opportunities in the interest of their employees. In the examples listed in Chapter 5, the learning or training

opportunities, according to employers, were not linked to organizational goals but instead were initiated by employees and included boosting employee morale, encouraging individual career advancement both inside and outside their organizations as well as creating an inspired and happy work environment.

A more nuanced interpretation of the various experiences with workplace learning and the factors influencing employer decisions to offer learning or training opportunities helps to illustrate the complexity of learning or training. In other words, it adds complexity to our understanding of why individuals decide to invest in learning or training opportunities in the workplace. According to authors McGuire and Gubbins, the new learning environment has made educators “operate within an increasingly complex web of relationships that includes the state, students, and the labor market and traditional academic freedoms have been powerfully eroded” (2010, 259). Although they are referring to students and educators in higher education, we can see how this can be applied to the workplace where employers are faced with concerns more complex than productivity improvements. According to the Conference Board of Canada, these concerns include improved employee income, improved product quality, improved knowledge transfer among employees, better communications between employees and the promotion of a culture of lifelong learning (2001).

Using symbolic interactionism as a lens, this research is able to blend the concerns listed above and by the employers included here to focus on learning as both a product and a process. Not to mention, it will help uncover the intricacies of non-formal learning, a type of learning under researched in New Brunswick (NB). According to Blumer, symbolic interactionism is “...capable of dealing with what may be defined as molar or

macro societal analysis, [...] and provides the essential viewpoint for understanding human social processes regardless of the setting or complexity of the context under consideration”(Stryker, 1980, 146; Prus, 1996, 74). Further, he explains that instead of accounting for organizational activities or processes, symbolic interaction can help uncover how participants “define, interpret, and meet situations at their present points” (Prus, 1996, 73). In this case, this approach is ideal in order to better understand the current experiences of small business employers in NB, uncover the reasons why they choose (or do not choose) to invest in learning opportunities and create an evidence base that will inform sound policies which encourage learning in the workplace.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

The employers interviewed for this research speak to the challenges currently facing small business throughout the province. Lack of time, lack of information, lack of resources or lack of employee interest are a few reasons why employers find it difficult to invest in learning in their workplace. Despite these challenges, employers are still finding creative, sometimes non-formal ways to encourage employees to learn new skills. Even though research indicates that organizations are unaware of how to support non-formal learning, this research has found substantial employer participation (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b, 29). The most common types reported by the small businesses here were mentoring or knowledge sharing, self-directed learning and experiential learning.

The variability between the types of businesses, business age, the organizational design, individual work environments, cultural or political landscapes for instance, means that employers view and experience workplace learning differently. In his analysis of qualitative research, Silverman refers to this as contextual sensitivity, or “an understanding that participants in social life actively produce a context for what they do” and that “social researchers should not simply import their own assumptions about what context is relevant in any situation” (1998, 110).

The Importance Of Context

Biographical context

For example, the employer’s biographical context can influence their opinions or understanding of workplace learning and affect their individual experience. Some

employers like Cindy, an employer who owns and has operated her business in the Early Childhood Education sector for over fifteen years, is comfortable offering and funding learning or training, whereas Carolina, an employer working in the Non-profit sector has explained that because they operate on government and donor funding, they are unable to offer much professional training but instead rely on a network of volunteers. Other employers interviewed use their personal experience to explain their opinions about how learning should occur in the workplace. André, for example used his experience working part-time towards a Master's degree to explain his belief that society should be moving towards individuals taking responsibility for lifelong learning. And others like Gerry and Cindy admitted to pursuing training and learning opportunities either during work by observing champions in their field or outside regular hours of work by researching information on their own time. These experiences not only support their belief in the importance of learning at work but also influence their willingness to support and to encourage it in their own workplace.

Political context in New Brunswick

Contextual sensitivity is also important when describing what Silverman would call “apparently uniform institutions” like the workplace, or again to define heterogeneous concepts such as learning or training since they will inevitably take on different meanings in different contexts.

In New Brunswick, a number of policy documents released by the provincial government show how it has attempted to approach learning in the workplace in the last decade. In 2005, the provincial government published a policy framework titled “Lifelong Learning: Quality Adult Learning Opportunities” aimed at creating a culture

of lifelong learning in New Brunswick (PNB, 2005). In the spring of 2008, the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick (CÉNB) surveyed its members on the programs offered by the province's Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. The survey found a need for technical and financial assistance from the government for employees to upgrade their skills as well as a need for customized ongoing training and development offered through educational institutions and in the workplace. In 2009, the Government responded with the release of a document called "Working Together for Adult Literacy: An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick". Although the government had an interest in improving literacy rates, it was also interested in solving labour market challenges and furthering economic development. Since then, NB's Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour's Adult Learning and Employment Division has been responsible for the creation and implementation of many adult learning programs and initiatives aimed at improving the conditions of workplace learning. These include: the Workplace Essential Skills (WES) program, priority sector training, digital literacy training, academic upgrading, Personal Learning Programs and GED Preparation Courses. In 2013, the department released "New Brunswick's Labour Force and Skills Development Strategy", identifying three key strategies and 44 action items with the aim to develop and build capacity for the existing and the future workforce (PNB, 2013). While they do not make explicit reference to learning in the workplace, a number of the action items commit to changes within the existing programs as well as introducing new employment programs such as group based training, upskilling and enhanced employer wage incentives for priority group clients.

While the government programs listed above are advertised as “available to employers” for the workplace, the employers interviewed for this research were unaware of their existence (See Chapter 5 “Limitations to Offering Workplace Learning”). They also explained that finding learning and training opportunities in their individual sectors was difficult (Arts and Culture, Food and Beverage, Processing and Manufacturing and the Information and Technology sectors). Unfortunately, although the appetite for adult learning has been growing in the last ten years, businesses are either unaware of existing government programs or have identified a need for more tailored, targeted programs and incentives such as sector specific training or an increase in experiential or co-op learning opportunities.

Limitations

Because of its focus on employers, this research does not take into account the view of employees who represent the other key part in the learning or training experience. However, a contextualized analysis of employer accounts, offers an expanded understanding of the current provincial workplace learning landscape. Because they sit at the crux of organizational and labour market development and individual development, they have an understanding of the overall learning experience from program development to motivations, barriers and outcomes. In addition, a consideration of the biographical and political context can also help enhance the quality of the overall research (Silverman, 1998) and although this research cannot be generalized to the business community at large, the experiences documented here are useful starting points for further analysis.

Recommendations

FOR RESEARCHERS

For researchers, a qualitative analysis can act as a supplement to existing and future research by offering the employer the space to describe their experience and to help expand the definition of learning. A more complete research base would also allow for more comparisons across sectors thereby creating relationships to guide more effective practice and increase the variability of learning and training. Not to mention, it would also help dismantle one-sided positions, which only support the structural advantages to learning or training. For example, it adds variety to the reasons why employers support learning or training in their workplace. Some reasons include offering it as a retention strategy, offering it because of its investment in the community and in the social economy, because it aligns with organizational outcomes and targets or to support employees to make sure their employees were both inspired and happy at work.

FOR POLICYMAKERS

More research is also needed to better understand the experience of small business employers in order to create policies that address or support their efforts. Specifically, uncovering the variability in these experiences can expand the definition of learning and provide a language upon which to build sound policies. Understanding the limitations experienced by employers offering learning and training programs, and how they can be overcome, can be a helpful tool moving forward. Specifically, employers in this research have identified a need for more learning or training opportunities in their respected sectors, more information and access to government funding available to small businesses and a stronger promotion of experiential and co-op learning for post-secondary graduates. This aligns with findings reflected in the NBCDAG report which

found that for small businesses “the most common reasons for experiencing difficulty in filling vacancies were potential hires lacking educational/training qualifications (27%, n=437) and lacking experience (23%, n=361), as well as a workforce shortage (21%, n=337)” (2008, 80). Finally, policymakers may look to creating new and aligning existing programs and services that support mentoring, knowledge sharing, self-directed learning and experiential learning, the most common types of learning identified by the employers. An OECD report titled “Building Flexibility and Accountability into Local Employment Services” profiles a New Brunswick case study which argues not for an increase in flexibility, “but rather a call for ensuring a level of consistency in programming across the province” (Wood, 2010, 52). Therefore, policymakers would benefit from a consistent and coordinated approach to program and service delivery.

FOR EMPLOYERS

The growing labour shortages have placed new emphasis on learning and training throughout the life course and because of this, employers should also feel encouraged to continue growing their investments in these opportunities. This research has hopefully uncovered not only the variability in learning and training but the importance of offering a variety of opportunities to meet the needs of individual employees. Although it falls outside of the scope of this research, previous reports offer recommendations to building a learning organization, a list of best practices for implementing learning or training in the workplace, a list of workplace learning tools and resources and an inventory of New Brunswick initiatives (McEachern-Caputo and Haan, 2012; McEachern-Caputo, Holtmann and Haan, 2013).

To conclude, it is my hope this research will act as a point of reference for employers seeking to diversify their learning or training activities; as a point of departure for researchers to further study this important area; and finally as a point of discussion for policymakers moving forward with employer-targeted projects and policies.

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APPENDIX A - LETTER TO EMPLOYERS

Dear Sir/ Madam,

My name is Sasha McEachern Caputo and I am a graduate student currently pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project examining the employer's experience with workplace learning.

Workplace learning plays a crucial role in skill formation and increasing the productivity in organizations of all sizes. As you may know, in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the responsibility often falls on employers to design and implement workplace learning programs that foster a rich and expansive learning environment. This is especially important here in New Brunswick where small businesses represent 97 per cent of the total business establishments.

With support from the New Brunswick Business Council, the Conseil Économique du Nouveau-Brunswick and the provincial government, this project will explore whether SMEs in New Brunswick have the resources to offer training and learning opportunities to their employees. Although a number of surveys have been conducted in this area, this project will involve interviews with 10 employers to gain a deeper understanding of each unique experience. The interviews, which will take place over the summer months, will be approximately 30 minutes in length and will focus on your experience with different forms of workplace learning.

The results of the research will be published in the form of a research paper and a Master's thesis. I also intend on sharing a two-page summary of the findings as well as a list of best practices with you, should you decide to take part in the project. Your

opinions and experiences will be of great value in guiding employers, and policy-makers to be more effective in the future design and implementation of policies and of workplace learning and training programs.

I would be very grateful if you would accept this as an invitation to participate in this research. Your participation however is voluntary and you would be free to withdraw from this project at any time. The information gathered during the interview will of course remain confidential and only I will have access to the data collected. There will not be any identifying names on the interview transcripts or in any publication of the results. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2013-053. If you have any questions or concerns about the study please contact Dr. Luc Thériault, Professor and Acting Chair of the Sociology department at UNB at (506) 458-7785.

You will be contacted within the next week to set up an interview at a time most convenient for you. I would be pleased to answer any further questions regarding this research project and can be reached by telephone at 506-261-8746 or by email at sasha.caputo@unb.ca.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B – LETTER OF CONSENT



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Learning in the New Brunswick Workplace

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Michael Haan and Sasha McEachern-Caputo from the Sociology department at the University of New Brunswick.

Before agreeing to participate, we strongly encourage you to thoroughly read the following research statement and consent form. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study. Also described is your right to withdraw from the study at any time. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2013-053.

The results of this research project will be presented in the form of a report (written for provincial policy-makers, and government representatives), a two-page summary

(shared with participants) and will contribute to Sasha McEachern Caputo's Master's thesis. The research may also be used in presentations and for other publications.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Michael Haan, Canada Research Chair in Population and Social Policy
Tel: (506) 447-3384
Fax: (506) 453-4514
mhaan@unb.ca

Sasha McEachern Caputo
(506) 261-8746
sasha.caputo@unb.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Workplace learning plays a crucial role in skill formation in organizations of all sizes. In small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the responsibility falls on employers to design and implement workplace learning programs that foster a rich and expansive learning environment. This is especially important in New Brunswick where small businesses represent 97 per cent of the total business establishments. The problem however is that SMEs face significant challenges when it comes to investing in workplace learning.

According to the New Brunswick 2008 Employer Survey, less than half of small businesses offered some type of formal training to employees over the past two years. With regards to literacy, only 21% of businesses with at least one employee

experiencing difficulties in reading or numeracy have programs in place to support them.

With a growing literature pointing to the skills gap, to the benefits of learning in the workplace and to the policy discourse supporting lifelong learning, why aren't more employers supporting learning in the workplace? This project seeks to answer this question by exploring individual employer experiences and by identifying the possible limitations preventing employers from implementing workplace learning programs.

Designed as a follow-up to a preparatory document created on *workplace learning* in partnership with the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (DPETL), the University of New Brunswick and the NB2026 Citizen Engagement Initiative on Learning, the following research will target small business employers across the province.

PROCEDURES

The research will consist of ten interviews with small business employers throughout the province.

You will be asked a series (no more than 10) of open-ended questions related to your experience with the creation and implementation of workplace learning and training programs. The interviews will focus on formal and non-formal workplace learning and lifelong learning and should take no more than one hour (this depends on each individual experience).

The interviews can take place at the participant's place of employment, or at a local coffee shop. A two-page summary, as well as Ms. McEachern Caputo's Master's thesis will be shared with participants.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The interviews and subsequent research will be thematically coded and the results will help to better understand whether SMEs in New Brunswick have the resources (be they conceptual or financial) to offer training and learning opportunities to their employees and how this could contribute to an increase in productivity in New Brunswick's labour market.

Therefore, your response will be of great value in guiding employers, public servants and policy-makers to be more effective in the future creation and implementation of workplace learning and training programs, policies and will help guide future research.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

For the purposes of this research, you are likely to experience "minimal risk". This is defined as research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential and in secure premises.

The interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. During the transcription, participant names and identifying characteristics will be removed from the transcriptions and will be replaced by numbers (only I will know how to identify them). The transcriptions will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor Dr. Michael Haan and will be kept on a password protected hard drive. The hard copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. Your personal names or business names will never be revealed in any publication of the results.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of New Brunswick Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Dr. Luc Thériault
Professor and Acting Chair of the Sociology department
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton, NB
E-mail: luct@unb.ca

Phone: (506) 458-7785

Fax: (506) 453-4659

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “*Learning in the New Brunswick Workplace*” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print)

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness (please print)

Signature of Witness

Date

If:

(a) if you would be willing to be contacted again in the future for a possible follow-up interview, please provide contact information below:

Check those that apply:

_____ I would be willing to be contacted in the future for a possible follow-up interview

Please also provide contact information.

Mailing address:

Email address:

APPENDIX C- EMPLOYER INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction

- Introduce myself, what I am studying, why I decided to pursue this research
- How I got their name
- Do some homework on each business
- Ask some relevant questions
- Let them know that I have a few key questions, main goal is to understand/learn more about their experience
- Admit that I don't know much about your company, can you tell me about your business?

Learning at Work

Going more into specifics, according to the 2008 NB Employer Survey, less than half of small businesses (44%, n=2,338) offered some type of formal training to employees over the past two years. With regards to literacy, only 21% (n=114) of businesses with at least one employee experiencing difficulties in reading or numeracy (n=557) have programs in place to support them. The interesting thing here is that these studies did not answer why this is the case. I have a feeling there are a number of reasons why the number isn't high...one of them I think has to do with some basic barriers. So I guess my first question, to start really broad would be....

Barriers

You are a small business, you have X number of employees...

1. In an ideal world, how would you get your employees to where you need them?
If time or money etc. was not an issue, what sort of training would you offer?
 - a. What are in your opinion, some of the barriers to achieving this ideal?

Employer Experience

So we have talked ideals, now how about where you are now?

2. I am interested in finding out what your experience with workplace learning and training programs has been within your workplace. You are a small business, you have X number of employees...
 - a. What do you look for in a new employee? Is it hard to find/hire people with this type of skill set? Explain.
 - b. How do you make sure your employees have the skills they need to do their job? When you hire a new employee for example, what sort of training or learning do they have to do to prepare for their new position?
3. Have you engaged your employees in any form of learning or training activities over the years (formal ie. Training provided as they attend seminars, workshops, and any classes or lectures delivered by professional instructors ; non-formal ie on-the-job learning/training provided by staff or co-workers, coaching, observation, self-learning)
 - a. Once they have the skills needed to do the job, do your employees need to recertify, upgrade or keep current their skill set? If so describe.
 - b. How did you/do you know when it was/is time to schedule more learning or training?

- i. How do you assess employee needs? (regular or yearly meetings?)
- c. Why did you offer the training? What did you hope it would bring to you business (enhancing employee skills, supporting organiz. Change, retention, increasing sales etc.)
- d. Does this upgrade/recertification happen on a yearly, bi-annual, quarterly, monthly basis?
- e. Sometimes when businesses expand, (ie. Purchasing new technology) they undergo organizational changes and there could be training involved, has this been your experience and if so how did you deal with this?

Evaluating the effectiveness/gains of learning/training programs

- 4. Research has found that although non-formal learning and training are common, there is limited formal evaluation of its effectiveness. Have you and if so how, have you measured the effectiveness of these programs?
 - a. Were you able to achieve what you were hoping with the learning/training you offer your employees? Ie. Has it been effective?

Resources/ Collaboration

- 5. Where do you go for help or new information when it comes to training or offering training to your employees? (publications exploring best practices ie. Workplace Essential Skills Program, Canada Job Grant (\$15,000 per person)

- a. Have you ever collaborated or turned to other businesses, training partners, unions, or even community organizations for help in coming up with ways to train your employees.

Lifelong Learning

Today, education is no longer limited to traditional schooling but is a process that continues throughout one's life course. This process has been aptly named "lifelong learning". In Europe, lifelong learning is defined as "all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence".

6. Some research would suggest that the adoption of this sort of mindset/ideology within the work culture would allow for a more conducive learning environment and would lead to a more effective learning process. What do you think about this?
 - a. How does this apply to your business?
 - b. In other words, the ability to adapt and compete in the workforce does end at school. How have you adapted?

Thank you!

APPENDIX D - CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

Small business:

The size of a business can be defined in a number of ways for example by its annual revenue, by its number of employees or by the value of its annual sales or shipments (Industry Canada, 2012, 5). For the purpose of this report however, the definition of small businesses will be based on the same standards applied in the province's 2008 Employer Survey (NBCDAG, 2008) which in its glossary are defined as having 19 employees or less. Because of the nature of this research however, the interviews and analyses will not include the self-employed in this category. According to the CFIB, who use Statistics Canada data³¹ (N=42,618) approximately 55% of New Brunswick businesses employ between 1 and 19 workers (CFIB, 2010b, 1³²) while according to data from the Government's New Brunswick Regional Profiles³³, approximately 97% of businesses employ under 50 people (See table below).

Table 1. New Brunswick employers and employment by region

	Northeast	Northwest	Southwest	Southeast	Central
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31 This includes all business types and does not distinguish between 'employer businesses' and 'indeterminate' businesses.

32 Source: Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). (2010). "Small Business Profile: An overview of New Brunswick's small and mid-sized enterprises (SME). Retrieved from: <http://www.cfib-fcei.ca/english/article/2227-new-brunswick-s-small-business-profile.html>

33 Government of New Brunswick. Department of Post-secondary Education, Training and Labour. Regional Information: http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/post-secondary_education_training_and_labour/Labour/content/RegionalInformation.html

	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region
Population	158,7414	80,362	172,764	203,837	135,467
Total employers	5,658	3,020	5,436	7,000	4,210
Percentage of small enterprises (1-49 employees)	97%	96.9	95%	96%	95%
Employment rate	45.9%	55.5%	58.7%	61.3%	59.6%

Ultimately, these numbers suggest that small businesses play an important role in the economy. In Canada, they account for more than 30% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Industry Canada, 2012, 3). In New Brunswick, businesses with fewer than 50 employees (including the self-employed) contribute to on average 25% of the provincial GDP (Industry Canada, 2012, 29).

Workplace learning

Workplace learning will be used as an inclusive term to describe the various forms of non-formal and formal learning and training taking place with respect to the individual's workplace.

Formal Learning

According to Human Resource and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), formal modes of learning are structured, intentional learning activities that typically take place

in an education or training institution and leads to a certification, i.e., programs that combine multiple courses toward the completion of a diploma, degree, certificate or license (Rubenson, 2007, 21). In much of the research surrounding workplace learning however, the words learning, education and training are used interchangeably (Kazi, 2008). The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) for example uses the term “training” and says:

Formal training refers to training provided to employees as they attend seminars, workshops and any classes or lectures delivered by professional instructors.
(CFIB, 2009b: 6)

They do not however explicitly state whether formal training takes place on-the-job or offsite. Statistics Canada on the other hand, uses both “education” and “training” and writes “Formal education and training consists of structured learning activities that lead to a formal credential, such as recognized degrees, diplomas, certificates or licenses” (2010, 73). Another report by the Canadian Council on Learning however distinguishes between education and training programs and relates education to formal modes of learning; and training to non-formal, structured learning that does not lead to a credential (2010b, 47).

Because of the varying definitions, for the purpose of this project, the words learning and training will be used interchangeably in order to allow for a more flexible understanding. In other words, my description of “formal learning or training” will be a hybrid of definitions and will be explained as:

Structured learning or training activities offered to employees delivered in, or outside the workplace that lead to some type of certification (degree, diploma, certificate etc.).

Informal and Non-formal Learning

Formal learning is not the only way to engage employees in the workplace. Because work-related learning does not always follow a formally organized learning or training program, learning can happen within work-related social interactions and sometimes without an educator (Doornbos, Bolhuis and Simons, 2004).

This type of learning has taken on a number of different conceptualizations in the literature (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b; OECD, 2007). Again, here the words education, learning and training are used either individually or synonymously. The CFIB for example uses “informal training” to define:

...on-the-job training provided by supervisors and co-workers to fulfill accreditation requirements such as apprenticeship training, to help staff update skills, to transfer knowledge within the firm, or transition new employees into their new workplace. (CFIB, 2009b: 6)

This definition however, does not include workshops, seminars or courses delivered off-site that do not lead to certification. Statistics Canada on the other hand, uses the term “non-formal education and training” to define “... structured learning activities that do not lead to a formal credential. It includes courses that are not part of a program, workshops, and seminars” (2010, 73). HRSDC on the other hand offers a more comprehensive definition and further separates informal and non-formal learning. Non-formal learning, they explain is:

...not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups...Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

(Rubenson, 2007, 22)

This description however does not include courses or workshops provided by an education or training institution that does not lead to formal certification. It also does not speak to the types of courses offered by employers that do not relate specifically to the employee's day-to-day tasks. Some employers may for example hire a consultant to speak to the whole team either in or outside the workplace about social media strategizing. This type of learning activity is structured, intentional, does not lead to certification but is offered by a training consultant.

Informal learning, on the other hand, is described by HRSDC as non-structured learning activities related to work, family or leisure that do not lead to certification and are often non-intentional (Rubenson, 2007, 22). The OECD³⁴ has a similar definition and finds “informal learning is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner's standpoint.” These descriptions however do not address non-structured, intentional forms of learning such as mentoring, role-modeling, or self-directed learning (Salembrier, 2008, 5-6).

Although they may seem superficial, it is important to distinguish between the conceptual characteristics when reading or writing specific reports, datasets or policies especially considering the amount of variability between definitions (Centre for Workplace Skills, 2011b, 9). Therefore keeping this in mind, for the purpose of this project, I will use non-formal learning as an all encompassing term, defined as:

³⁴ See: <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>

Structured or non-structured learning or training activities offered to employees delivered in, or outside the workplace that do not lead to formal certification. The learning or training activities can be either intentional or unintentional from the learner's perspective.

Essential Skills³⁵

Essential Skills are the skills that people need for work, learning and life. They are used in the community and the workplace, in different forms and at different levels of complexity. HRSDC lists the following essential skills: reading, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, thinking, computer use and continuous learning.

³⁵ See HRSDC's full definition: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/tools/awareness/what_are_essential_skills.shtml

APPENDIX E – PSEUDONYMS AND BUSINESS TYPES

1. Cindy, Early Childhood Education
2. Carolina, Non-Profit
3. Michael, Arts and Culture
4. André, Non-Profit
5. Brad, Arts and Culture
6. Jim, Food and Beverage, Processing and Manufacturing
7. Louis, Non-Profit
8. Lisa, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
9. Jared, Arts and Culture
10. Mark, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
11. Gerry, Business, Finance and Administration
12. Tina, Business, Finance and Administration

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Universities attended (with dates and degrees obtained):

St. Thomas University, B.A., 2006- 2011

Publications:

Policy Report

McEachern-Caputo, Sasha. 2014. Learning in the New Brunswick Workplace: A qualitative analysis of small business employers.

April, 2014

Policy Report

McEachern-Caputo, Sasha; Holtmann, Cathy and Michael Haan. 2014.
New Brunswick Labour Market Entrants' Understanding of Post-Secondary Education and Training Opportunities.

April, 2014

Policy Report

McEachern-Caputo, Sasha, and Michael Haan. 2012.
Learning in the Workplace: A Literature Review. Report for NB2026: Citizen Engagement Initiative on Learning.

May - Aug., 2012

Conference Presentations:

New Brunswick Career Development Action Group (NBCDAG) "Should We Stay or Should We Go"

November 26, 2014

Summit on Youth in the Nova Scotia Economy
"Youth Migration, Retention and the Uncertainty of Labour Market Opportunities" by Donna Safatli and Sasha McEachern-Caputo

March 19th, 20th, 2014