

Regional Differences in Work Experience

In 1987, a New Jersey lighting manufacturer learned the hard way what the impact of local training differences could be. "It never occurred to anyone, including me, to look at the work experience of the labour force", confesses the marketing vice-president. Company representatives made a preliminary trip to Monterrey and Juárez and failed to note a crucial difference between the two sites. On the basis of this brief look, they chose Juárez as the site of their new plant.

Unfortunately, most workers in Juárez are assembly workers with little or no experience in skilled manufacturing jobs. Many had received only abbreviated training in basic assembly-line procedures. The lighting company, by contrast, is a fully-integrated manufacturing operation with many high-tech processes. Soon after the move to Juárez, it became clear that the new staff there would require considerably more training than the company expected before it could become fully productive.

Vitro Corporation

A growing cadre of skilled engineers and trained workers is allowing Mexican companies not only to master basic assembly technologies but also to compete effectively with advanced technology. Vitro Corporation is one of Latin America's largest privately-owned companies, with annual sales exceeding \$2 billion. It is one of many Mexican companies capable of working on an equal footing with the world's most sophisticated enterprises. Glass production is Vitro's major business, although the 37,000-employee company has integrated vertically and diversified into other businesses.

One of its subsidiaries, FAMA, makes Vitro's glassmaking machines and molds and increasingly sells to outside companies. The company has become a global player, while building a solid base of human resource skills and substantially increasing its communications and technical capabilities. Today, more than 50 percent of FAMA's managers and white-collar workers have technical degrees, and almost 10 percent have a graduate technical education. To buttress and promote these skills, FAMA has established cooperative relations with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the University of Texas, and the Tecnológico de Monterrey (Mexico's most prestigious technical institution). In addition, the company has forged technology-sharing links with Owens-Illinois, Westinghouse, and Yamazaki.

Figure 2.4
Enrollment by School Level

Level	1988-1989	1989-1990	1990-1991
Initial	100,817	104,397	105,201
Preschool	1,688,561	1,662,588	2,734,054
Primary	14,656,357	14,493,763	14,401,588
Secondary	4,355,334	4,267,156	4,190,190
Intermediate	427,686	413,481	378,894
High School	1,642,785	1,678,839	1,721,626
Bachelor College	126,676	118,501	108,978
Undergraduate	1,085,164	1,094,325	1,097,141
Graduate	45,102	45,889	45,889
Subtotal	25,128,482	24,879,945	24,783,588
Training	439,958	436,168	413,587
Total	25,568,440	25,616,117	25,197,167

Source: *The Mexican Agenda 1990-91*.

In addition to formal educational programs, technological, professional and business training courses are offered by the country's leading academic centres and by businesses working in conjunction with educational institutions. Over 3,000 companies have established their own employee training programs. These represent a determination to keep up with the fast pace of technological progress as well as with new managerial techniques that have been introduced as part of Mexico's drive toward modernization.

The low average age of Mexican workers makes them exceptionally willing to learn and implement new systems. As a result, the productivity of the Mexican labour force has increased steadily over recent years. An example of this is the number of international quality awards won by Mexican automotive divisions of U.S. car manufacturers.