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Project Insights Report

Scale Learning Lab

👥 PARTNERS	📍 LOCATIONS	💲 INVESTMENT	📅 PUBLISHED	✏️ CONTRIBUTORS
Scale Hospitality Group	Across Canada Ontario	1,535,489	September 2025	Gabrielle Dark

≔ Executive Summary

The Scale Learning Lab was developed to address the hospitality sector's ongoing talent shortages through an innovative, industry-led training model. By combining digital learning and hands-on training, the Learning Lab provides hospitality professionals with the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving sector. This Learning Lab was created in response to key workforce challenges, including high turnover rates, shifting consumer expectations, and the growing demand for digital-based service delivery.

KEY INSIGHTS

1 Scale offered five online courses, designed and led by industry experts, all developed to align with eCampus Ontario accreditation standards.

2 The rapid training format has emerged as the preferred approach for both participants and industry partners, allowing trainees to enter the workforce within 90 days.

3 The Scale Learning Lab identified the need to align its training schedule with peak industry hiring cycles in April and October, increasing the number of training sessions per week during these high-demand periods.
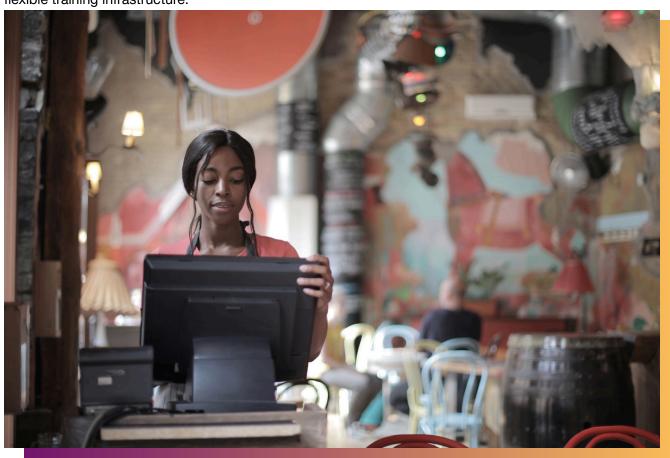

▶ The Issue

The hospitality sector is known for its dynamic labour market, including a wide range of roles from back-of-house staff to senior management. A consistent challenge in this sector has been high turnover rates and increasing demand for skilled workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a large share of talent transitioned to sectors providing more job stability. As a result, Canada's hospitality sector faced a structural talent shortage that extended beyond typical economic cycles.

At the same time, evolving consumer expectations have altered service delivery. The demand for digital interaction, contactless services, and increased cleanliness and safety standards has increased the need for digital literacy, advanced customer service skills, and a greater focus on enhancing the guest experience within the workforce.

Another challenge for the hospitality sector is perceptions of limited long-term career opportunities. Hospitality jobs are often viewed as temporary or supplementary rather than viable long-term career paths. The Scale Learning Lab aims to address this by creating career pathways and equipping workers with essential soft skills.

Through conversations with industry leaders, Scale has emphasized the need for an adaptable workforce that can respond to market shifts and seasonal fluctuations, highlighting the importance of a robust and flexible training infrastructure.

🔧 What We Investigated

The Learning Lab was developed to address the hospitality sector's persistent talent shortage through an innovative, technology-driven training model. The project involved implementing a live broadcasting system for rapid workforce training programs accessible nationwide, alongside industry-led asynchronous training modules. A key focus was engaging with industry leaders to identify essential skills for training, retention, and talent attraction. Additionally, the project leveraged labour market information to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data, helping to identify emerging skills needs and supporting career planning.

The Learning Lab's Training Kitchen aimed to provide real-word operational experience to trainees while supporting approximately 20 restaurants in Toronto's entertainment sector. They offered five online courses designed and led by industry experts, all developed to align with eCampus Ontario accreditation standards.

The training model integrates hands-on experience in both Front of House and Back of House roles to ensure participants gain practical knowledge in a live restaurant setting. The Back of House training program begins with asynchronous learning before transitioning into an intensive three-day in-person session at the Learning Lab Training Centre, where small groups of 6-8 participants completed hands-on training in kitchen line management, the use of technology in order processing, special requirements, and inventory control. Front of House training followed the same structure, combining online learning with in-person sessions that focus on guest interaction, service quality, and customer experience.

In addition to service training, both Front of House and Back of House trainees received in-depth instruction on critical restaurant management technologies, including reservation systems, order placement tools, and order delivery systems.

✔ What We're Learning

Several overarching insights have emerged from this work. The hybrid learning model has proven highly effective in improving knowledge retention and skill application. Flexible training schedules have allowed the Learning Lab to respond to industry needs in real time, while increased instructor availability has directly improved educational outcomes. The rapid training format has emerged as the preferred approach for both participants and industry partners, allowing trainees to enter the workforce within 90 days, rather than 6 months in other programs.

The integration of industry feedback has been vital in ensuring that training remains relevant and responsive to changing market conditions. One of the most impactful changes throughout this project has been the reduction of in-person class sizes from 8-10 participants to a maximum of 6, allowing for more personalized instruction and improved learning outcomes. The Lab has also identified the need to align its training schedule with peak industry hiring cycles in April and October, expanding from 2 to 4 training sessions per week during these high-demand periods. This responsiveness ensures that seasonal fluctuations in skills demands can be met.

⭐ Why It Matters

The Learning Lab combines real-world experience with structured education, creating a scalable, industry-led training model that addresses ongoing talent shortages in the hospitality sector. The training model combines digital learning and hands-on training to provide hospitality professionals with the skills needed to succeed in this sector.

This approach is particularly important as the hospitality sector continues to face workforce challenges, including high turnover rates, shifting consumer expectations, and the increasing role of technology in service delivery. By providing a structured, adaptable learning pathway, the Learning Lab not only enhances the employability of workers but also strengthens the sector's long-term resilience.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report
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