

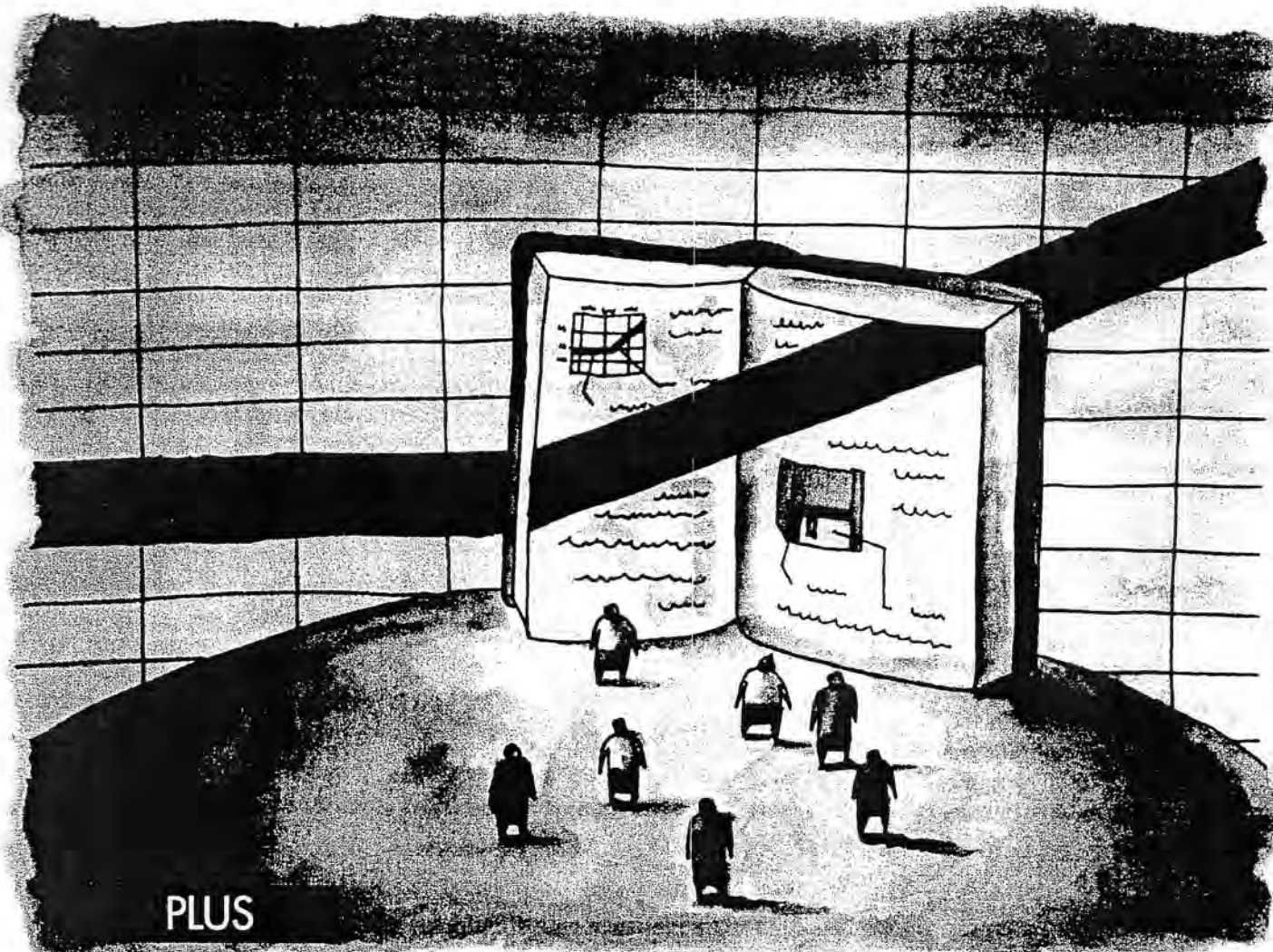
# Work • America



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# WORKFORCE ECONOMICS

## Waiting for the Return on Information Technology Investments



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## Skill Standards Help Ohio Company Take on Global Market

**O**hio-based crankshaft maker Norton Manufacturing is tackling intensifying global competition head-on. Last July, Norton became the first company in the United States to credential employees for national skill standards in metalworking.

Explaining why the mid-size company — which makes crankshafts for automobiles, trucks and race cars — is breaking new ground with intensive skills training, President Rick Norton said: "People are the only thing that makes us different. We can't compete without well-trained, dedicated employees."

For Norton, the road to the forefront of national metalworking standards began in January 1995. The company recognized that as global competition has become more fierce, the auto industry, its suppliers and products are competing in a new environment. The skill standards will solidify their competitive position in the marketplace.

Norton knew its workforce was the key to continued competitiveness, but this knowledge highlighted a critical issue: how to find and recognize skilled, qualified metalworkers.

Norton decided to explore the skill standards developed by the National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA) to benchmark its skill requirements.

The NTMA standards were developed in 1994 by a partnership of companies and trade associations to provide employees with a credential that is portable and nationally recognized. The standards also help the metalworking industry communicate

to educators and trainers the skills and abilities required in workers.

The National Institute of Metalworking Standards (NIMS) was formed as an outgrowth of NTMA's skill standards program to help develop a skilled workforce through a credentialing program. A credential from NIMS certifies that workers have the knowledge and skills required to meet industry standards. NIMS developed the written and performance tests that Norton is using to credential its employees.

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— Rick Norton, president, Norton Manufacturing

Norton's efforts are part of a pilot program launched by a unique partnership that includes several state agencies in Ohio, NIMS, Terra Community College, Vanguard-Sentinel Vocational School, Proactive Technologies and the local private industry council. Together, these organizations developed a program to train and test Norton employees against the NIMS skill standards. Norton also received two state grants to help implement the pilot project.

The training combined classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Employees spent two hours a day in the classroom and another six hours on the job over an eight-week period. A second wave of training for another group included two weeks of intensive classroom training

without the on-the-job component. The training and instruction focused on material handling and job control, quality control, statistical process control, process management and improvement, and safety.

Norton feels the program is a win-win situation, both for the company and its workers. Workers gain training and improve their skills, and ultimately they win an industry-recognized credential that increases their marketability and portability.

For Norton, the skills standards training and the NIMS credential pay off in several ways, including:

- shortening the learning curve and decreasing training costs for employees by clearly identifying the knowledge, skills and abilities they need;
- improving the consistency of training because employees are trained to the same set of standards;
- increasing product quality by reducing scrap rates, defects and rework rates; and
- helping the company benchmark training against its competitors.

For more information, contact Norton's Dick Schaffner at 419/436-5083.

### Share Your Success Story

How is your company helping employees work smarter? If you have a story to tell — and data to back it up — contact Alliance Economist Kenneth P. Voytek at 202/289-2914 or e-mail him at [Kenneth\\_P\\_Voytek@nab.com](mailto:Kenneth_P_Voytek@nab.com).