

Perfect Storm To Hit Job Markets

Whole-Community Approach to Career and Workforce Development

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INTRODUCTION

Massive natural systems periodically converge in extraordinary ways to create unusually destructive hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes or tsunamis. On the workforce front, four labour force megatrends are now converging to create a perfect storm in job markets across Canada. The first storm indicators are now apparent. Job prospects for young and old alike will be impacted profoundly for decades to come. Like major climactic events, this perfect storm brings peril to the unprepared. It also brings opportunity for those equipped to weather the storm and prosper. The four megatrends are:

MEGATREND 1: THE GREAT RECESSION

The global economy and communities across the country have just weathered the worst economic down-turn since the Great Depression nearly a century ago. Despite massive economic stimulus, recovery is slow and faltering, fiscal deficits are at record levels, budgets are being slashed, and the economy in most regions is vulnerable.

MEGATREND 2: AGING POPULATION

The first baby boomers turn 65 in 2012. Many have already retired and an annual tsunami of boomers will retire over the next 16 years. This mass exodus of knowledge, talent and experience will create a void that new labour force entrants won't be able to fill under any foreseeable circumstances. Birth rates have declined over the past 4 decades. Young people are now having fewer children, later. Even factoring for immigration, Canada's projected worker shortfall of over 300,000 in 2012 will grow to close to 3 million in 2031.¹

MEGATREND 3: UPSKILLING OF JOBS

Accelerating technological advances have rendered many jobs obsolete, raised the skill requirements of jobs in all sectors, and are producing new jobs at an unimagined rate. More formal education, technical training, and "soft skills" are now demanded of workers in all sectors, especially in new and emerging careers. In addition to academic and technical credentials, employers need people who can problem-solve and innovate, communicate and collaborate effectively with others of diverse backgrounds, have a thirst for learning, are responsible and dependable, and are fully committed to their employer's success.

A February 2011 report from the Harvard Graduate School of Education entitled *Pathways to Prosperity* observes, "over the past third of a century *all* net job growth in America has been

¹ Rick Miner, February 2010, People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People (Figures projected nationally from Miner's Ontario medium growth projections)

generated by positions that require at least some post-secondary education.” Many 21st century jobs require some level of specialization in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM careers). Accordingly, President Obama has challenged all Americans to acquire at least some post-secondary education and encouraged them to consider STEM career options.

We are entering a prolonged era during which increasing numbers of people without jobs will co-exist with an even larger number of jobs without people.² Even now, employers across the full spectrum of industry sectors are challenged to find the talent they need to meet emerging market opportunities and fill jobs vacated by retiring boomers. While this should spell a “buyers market” for job seekers, employers with vacancies typically need people with more education and skills than the unemployed possess. They will have to “upskill” to qualify.

The economic consequences of having too many citizens unemployed or underemployed are staggering. Lost productivity and reduced competitiveness impact employers. Lost tax revenues, social assistance, corrections, stress-induced health costs alone run into \$billions annually for all levels of government. The human consequences are higher. With the coming perfect storm, helping as many citizens as possible connect with fulfilling, family-sustaining 21st century careers has become an economic imperative. The only way governments can unburden themselves of debt and companies can get more competitive and grow is by getting the best possible people in the right jobs, fully engaged in creating economic prosperity.

On the upside, this may be the best period in the history of the world to be imagining and preparing for a career, or a career transition. In our increasingly “flat world,” more career options are available than ever. Moreover, one can now work for any organization in the world, and vice versa. Young people and adults who know themselves and understand their assets, are aware of emerging career opportunities, have a sense of direction and purpose, and are prepared to do what it takes to acquire the education, skills and attitudes employers need, will have employers competing for their talents.

MEGATREND 4: UNPREPARED WORKFORCE

The primary source of new workforce talent is the education and training system. Canada has a higher post-secondary participation rate than most countries. Nonetheless, we have a long way to go to equip students for success in 21st century job markets. Canada’s national high school graduation rate in 2011 was 79%.³ Even so, job prospects for the 1 out of 5 students who drop out are bleak. About 60%⁴ of Canada’s high school graduates immediately register for post-secondary programs (vocational, technical, trade, college, university), bringing a 79% graduation

² Miner, 2010, People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People

³ Education Indicators: An International Perspective, 2011, Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education of Canada

⁴ King, 2009, Who Doesn’t Go to Post-Secondary Education?

rate down to a 47% post-secondary admissions rate. Of these, 25% drop-out before the end of their first year, and a similar percentage change programs⁵. 60% of those who register in post-secondary programs will eventually graduate, the majority now taking longer than the prescribed program period.⁶

Bottom line: Of 100 students in the educational pipeline in grade 9 fewer than 30 will graduate *without interruption* with a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree. Yet, almost all 21st jobs require at least some post-secondary education. Thus, far too many young people will begin their career carrying large student loans, without the knowledge, skills and credentials employers need, and without a clear idea of their career goals. At best, their early career years will be a rough ride, and companies starving for new talent will not find what they are looking for.

In explaining why the United States now has the highest post-secondary dropout rate in the industrialized world, the Harvard Graduate School of Education concluded that “Too many students can’t see a clear connection between their program of study and labor market opportunities.”⁷ This holds true in Canada, and not just in post-secondary programs. Far too many students, at all educational levels and settings, see little personal relevance in what they are expected to learn, and can’t visualize real jobs and a career at the end of the educational pipeline.

Many educators see education itself as the objective. With enough education the future will take care of itself. It did for them. However, they are in the only profession that enjoys 16 or more years of “work experience” before choosing to remain in the same setting lifelong. Students, parents, and employers see education as preparation for success in life and career. Students who cannot picture themselves in a classroom lifelong become increasingly anxious about what they will do when they graduate. Supportive teachers and parents with high expectations help them stay engaged. However, lacking an appealing vision of their future prospects, many students see no point in fully engaging in school, thus underachieve. That *may* have been tolerable in the industrial era, but today’s students need academic success and a broad spectrum of employability skills more than any cohort before them.

CAREER PARADIGM SHIFT

An out-of-date, industrial-age career choice paradigm is putting Canadians of all ages at risk of being casualties of the perfect storm. A new 21st century paradigm of career navigation and workforce preparation is needed.

⁵ Miner, 2010, People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People

⁶ Parkin, Baldwin, 2009, Research Note #8, Persistence in Post-Secondary Education in Canada: Millenium Scholarships

⁷ Pathways to Prosperity, February 2011, Harvard Graduate School of Education

<p>Old Paradigm:</p> <p><i>Career Choice</i></p>	<p>New Paradigm:</p> <p><i>Career Management</i></p>
<p><i>Choosing:</i> At some point in time we must decide “what we will be when we grow up.” Then we simply select the best educational or training pathway to our destination, graduate, and enjoy lifelong career success.</p>	<p><i>Lifelong Learning:</i> Change is constant in the workforce as in society. Some of us will never discover one true “calling” and most of us will make multiple career transitions. Career management is a lifelong quest to balance work, learning, leisure to optimize happiness and fulfillment.</p>
<p><i>Occupation:</i> The career challenge is to find <i>the</i> occupation that will satisfy us for life.</p>	<p><i>Skills:</i> Everyone has unique gifts and abilities and could do many occupations. If we purposefully develop our skills (emotional intelligence, competencies, character, attitudes) lifelong we can find meaning, fulfillment, and happiness in diverse career and life roles.</p>
<p><i>Work:</i> Career is the work we do.</p>	<p><i>Life:</i> Career is the life we construct for ourselves, intentionally or unintentionally, including our work and all other life roles.</p>
<p><i>Information:</i> With enough information people will make the right career choice.</p>	<p><i>Imagination:</i> Einstein said “imagination is more important than information or knowledge,” and it’s “a preview of life’s coming attractions.” Information is essential, but insufficient. When we can visualize ourselves in appealing future scenarios (vacation, relationship, career), a spark is ignited. We become purposeful and intentional in the present to create the future we want.</p>
<p><i>Lists:</i> Computer systems are highly effective in identifying potentially suitable occupations, education and training pathways, and more.</p>	<p><i>Relationships:</i> Career plans don’t become “real” until people with informed dreams meet people who can help them test and realize their dreams (mentors, trainers, employers). Effective career planning all comes down to establishing personal relationships.</p>

The new paradigm takes much of the anxiety and stress out of career planning, especially for students. We don't, at any point in our lives, have to find one perfect career. Job one, lifelong, is finding oneself. With ever-deepening self-knowledge, we need to seek opportunities lifelong, in work and life, to do what is personally meaningful, satisfying and fulfilling.

Any job, whether we like it or not, can be a stepping-stone to a better job in the same organization or elsewhere. The secret is to bring everything we have and are to making it as good an experience as possible. The ultimate trump cards in career and life success are character and attitude. If we make honesty, perseverance, initiative, responsibility, courage, integrity, empathy, optimism and respect hallmarks of our relationships, at work and elsewhere, these qualities come back to us from those around us. If the job is simply not the right one, we need to have the courage and career navigation skills to move on, as many times as necessary, lifelong.

The basic building blocks of this new paradigm, exemplary career navigation and workforce development resources, already exist. However, they tend to be used in fragmented fashion in educational and community settings, and are largely underutilized. Consensus on "best practices" suggests a core of 5 foundation resources should be in place at all levels of education. They include:

1. Experiential programs at all primary, middle, secondary and post-secondary school levels that help students imagine the future they want to create, and make career and educational planning "real" for students;
2. The most comprehensive Internet-based career exploration and planning system available;
3. An exemplary electronic portfolio system that follows students through all educational levels and out into adulthood;
4. A course planner system for students, teachers and parents that integrates individual learning plans based on informed career goals with local course offerings, nomenclature, and graduation requirements; and
5. A world-class networking system that introduces motivated students with informed dreams to real people in educational and training institutions and companies seeking immediate and future talent. These relationships can result in work experience, mentoring, job shadowing, co-op, volunteer, and part-time job opportunities that allow employers and job-seekers to "test the fit."

SCENARIO

A 9th grade student hates school. He can't wait to reach his 16th birthday so he can drop out of school and follow his passion for tinkering with engines full-time. He "experiences" adult life and career scenarios in class and is motivated to use the online career information system available in his school. His passion for things mechanical becomes evident as he develops his e-Portfolio. He receives educator-mediated online invitations from three companies to visit their operations.

He follows up and likes what he sees and hears. He learns that if he graduates high school and further job-specific technical training with good grades there could be a job waiting for him in one or more of the companies. His attendance and grades improve. He now has a reason to work harder in school. Over the next three years he has access to a mentor, does occasional job shadowing, and has summer jobs at one of the firms. He is as proud as his parents when he graduates. Having developed a relationship with the young man over three years, the company knows they want to hire him. They pay his tuition for the additional technical training they require him to complete. When he successfully completes the training he is hired full-time, loan-free, with a company he knows and likes. He is proud of himself, and excited about building a life on a foundation of work he loves. Despite the perfect storm he will prosper.

Without *all* of the five foundation resources above this student:

- would likely have dropped out of school or continued to underachieve;
- would have continued to feel resentful and inadequate as a student. He would not have found pride in educational success or realized how valuable his unique gifts are;
- would not have found his eventual employer or completed post-secondary education; and
- would very likely have become a victim of the perfect storm.

With the five foundation resources, similar scenarios can play out with virtually all students from middle school onwards, and adults, irrespective of the career pathway or sector they imagine themselves entering. Entire communities need to be mobilized in support of these foundational career navigation and workforce development resources, including:

- all teachers, counsellors and administrators in all primary, middle, secondary and post-secondary institutions, public and private
- parents and significant adults
- community agencies, enterprise incubators, economic development agencies, town councils
- public and academic Libraries
- government agencies
- chambers of commerce, boards of trade
- employer and industry organizations
- Junior Achievement, service clubs, scouts and guides, big brother/sister, faith-based organizations

The leading versions of these 5 foundational resources are available from Career Cruising. One or more of them have been implemented in over 75% of Canada's schools. They are, however, underutilized because career planning is not accorded a sufficiently high priority in most educational settings.

"It takes a community to raise a child." With these resources implemented in a whole-community approach, all students can develop informed dreams of the future they want to create, and every teacher, parent, and businessperson can help them build the relationships they will need to make their dreams come true. The same resources work for unemployed and underemployed adults. Communities that pull together to make career dreams come true will prosper despite the perfect storm.

Career Cruising (www.careercruising.com) welcomes opportunities to partner with educational, business and community leaders to implement a whole-community approach to career and workforce development.

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