



Project Insights Report

# Digital Transformation of Schools and Training Centres



## PARTNERS

ABC Life Literacy  
Canada  
30%+ Club Canada  
Academy for  
Sustainable Innovation  
(ASI)



## LOCATIONS

Across Canada



## INVESTMENT

\$27,359



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## ☰ Executive Summary

This project, co-funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, aimed to address the urgent need for effective digital transformation in educational settings, a need exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project highlighted significant disparities in digital readiness among educational institutions and revealed a need for a strategic approach to the effective integration of digital tools.

The investigation focused on understanding the sources of digital transformation, identifying effective mechanisms and social processes for school leadership, and recognizing factors that could hinder successful digital transformation. Project coordinators conducted a systematic literature review and engaged stakeholders, like school leaders and policy-makers, to document strategies and leadership practices influencing digital transformation. The study also developed tools to help school leaders assess and monitor their institutions' digital transformation capabilities.

The study underscored the importance of fostering a supportive learning culture for successful digital transformation. It highlighted the need for school leaders to mediate effectively between governmental policies and practical applications within schools. These insights can inform educational policies and practices. They emphasize the need for structured training programs in digital competencies for school leaders and suggest that educational policies should support the development of digital leadership skills. Additionally, classifying barriers into first-order and second-order barriers provides a nuanced framework for policy-makers to develop targeted interventions, addressing both external and internal obstacles to digital adoption.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 School leaders with strong digital competencies who actively promoted digital literacy were key to successful technology integration in educational settings.
- 2 Effective digital transformation aligned technology implementation with educational goals. This required strategic planning and professional development for educators.
- 3 School leaders play a crucial role in mediating between governmental digital policies and the specific needs of their schools, ensuring that policies are implemented in a way that addresses local requirements effectively.

## The Issue

In recent years, the rapid evolution of digital technologies has significantly reshaped the education landscape, compelling schools and training centres to adapt swiftly to these changes. This transformation was accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed and widened existing gaps in digital readiness among educational institutions. The urgency for digital transformation became evident as schools struggled to maintain educational continuity amid widespread lockdowns and social distancing measures. This scenario highlighted the critical need for effective digital leadership in educational settings to successfully navigate and implement necessary changes.

Before the pandemic, many schools and training centres were already grappling with integrating digital tools into their curricula and administrative processes. However, the pandemic underscored the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure and competencies across different regions and institutions, revealing a significant disparity in digital preparedness. Prior attempts to integrate digital technologies in education often lacked a comprehensive strategy that included training for leadership roles, which resulted in piecemeal adoption and underutilization of available technologies. These initiatives frequently failed to achieve their full potential due to insufficient support structures for educators and leaders, coupled with a lack of alignment with pedagogical goals.



## What We Investigated

The project focused on the digital transformation of schools and training centres, guided by three main research questions:

- What are the sources of digital transformation in a school setting?
- What mechanisms and social processes should school leadership prioritize for effective digital transformation?
- What factors could hinder the success of this transformation?

Project coordinators conducted a systematic literature review and engaged various stakeholders, including school leaders, educational policy-makers and digital transformation experts. The objective was to explore and document the strategies and leadership practices that facilitate or impede digital transformation in educational settings.

The project also involved developing digital tools to assist school leaders in assessing and monitoring their institutions' digital transformation capabilities. These tools were designed to evaluate digital readiness and track the progress of digital initiatives within schools.

The primary focus was on school leaders who were pivotal in driving digital change within educational institutions. The project aimed to equip these leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage and lead digital transformation efforts in their schools.

## What We're Learning

### **Digitally competent leaders successfully integrate technology**

It was found that schools with leaders who demonstrated strong digital competencies and actively promoted digital literacy among their staff experienced more successful technology integration. These leaders were crucial in bridging the gap between governmental digital policies and their practical implementation in schools.

### **Digital readiness varies between institutions**

A notable barrier was the varying levels of digital readiness among institutions, which affected the pace and extent of technology adoption. Some schools struggled with inadequate infrastructure, which hindered the effective use of digital tools for learning and administrative purposes.

### **A culture of learning aids digital adoption**

Schools that embraced a culture of continuous learning and adaptation were better positioned to leverage digital technologies for educational enhancement. The study highlighted the importance of creating a supportive learning environment and encouraging innovation and experimentation with new teaching methods and technologies.

### **Technology needs to align with teaching goals**

The research further revealed that while digital tools have the potential to enhance educational outcomes, their implementation needs to be carefully managed to align with pedagogical goals rather than being driven by technology alone. Successful digital transformation was characterized by strategic planning, ongoing support, and professional development for educators. This ensured that technology integration was meaningful and aligned with educational objectives.

## **★ Why It Matters**

The findings from this project highlight the need for school leaders to develop strong digital competencies and engage in strategic planning to successfully navigate the digital shift. Given the proliferation of artificial intelligence, this has important implications for educational policy, suggesting that the development and support of digital leadership skills among school administrators should be a priority.

The research also highlighted the importance of fostering a learning culture within educational institutions to support digital transformation. Systemic changes (beyond individual skills development) are necessary to create environments that encourage digital learning and innovation. Policy-makers and educational leaders are advised to implement policies that promote continuous learning and adaptation to new technologies within schools.



### **State of Skills: Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth**

Focus on early career guidance programs to introduce youth to a range of career paths, empowering them to make informed decisions with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility.

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Additionally, the study differentiated the barriers to digital transformation into first-order and second-order barriers, providing a detailed understanding of the challenges schools face. This classification will help policy-makers devise specific interventions that tackle both external and internal obstacles to digital adoption. For example, addressing first-order barriers may involve enhancing technological resources and infrastructure, whereas overcoming second-order barriers could require changing educators' attitudes and beliefs toward digital technologies.

## ► What's Next

Moving forward, the project recommends further research involving school leaders as primary participants, the development of tools for assessing digital readiness, and the creation of educational resources like massive open online courses (MOOCs) to enhance leaders' skills in digital transformation. These steps ensure educational institutions can effectively navigate and implement digital transformations, ultimately improving educational outcomes and operational efficiencies.

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

### How to Cite This Report

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