OpportuNext

Empowering Career Development Practitioners with Labour Market Information

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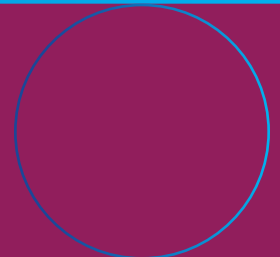
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Changing the game of changing careers

Career development practitioners (CDPs) play a pivotal role in guiding Canadians through career transitions, whether they are helping students plan their future or seeking ways for mid-career individuals to upgrade their skills or change sectors. Despite their critical role, CDPs face barriers to accessing reliable and understandable labour market information (LMI).

According to a 2018 survey of 873 CDPs by the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), only 60 per cent find LMI easy to understand and only 43 per cent have received training in accessing or interpreting such data. This lack of accessible information is particularly evident in relation to international recognition of qualifications, job prospects, work environments, and transferability of skills, particularly at the local labour market level. As a result, CDPs sometimes have to rely on word-of-mouth sources.

CDPs need to personalize data from a variety of sources to ensure the data is relevant to their clients, merging data from federal and provincial government websites and job posting platforms. For example, wage information is readily available on job boards and in occupational profiles published by provincial governments. Unfortunately, the lack of localized detail in certain data sources or occupational profiles significantly reduces their usefulness. To effectively assist their clients, CDPs need data that is up to date, easy to navigate, and sourced from reliable channels.

In response to this need, The Conference Board of Canada, with the support of the Future Skills Centre, launched OpportuNext in 2021. This is an innovative platform designed to provide a freely available and easy-to-navigate LMI tool to help CDPs and their clients make informed career planning decisions. Since its launch, OpportuNext has been used by thousands of Canadians, human resource departments, educational institutions, and career development organizations. It facilitates seamless career planning decisions by providing easy access to data based on occupation, education level, location, and other key metrics, and caters to individuals at various stages of career development, from students to those seeking an alternative career pathway.

This issue briefing explores the LMI needs of early- and mid-career planners, drawing on insights from Donald Super's theoretical career planning model that is described in his paper "A Life-Span, Life-Space Approach to Career Development." We link these needs to the wealth of information available on the OpportuNext platform. By bridging this gap, OpportuNext equips practitioners with pertinent and easily accessible LMI, enabling them to effectively guide individuals on their career paths.

Understanding LMI needs

Donald Super's research paper presents a model based on the concept that careers evolve over the course of an individual's life stages. His theory posits that as individuals move through different life stages, they take on different roles, such as child, student, worker, and parent, each of which provides valuable insight into their values and career aspirations. Based on these roles, the life span is divided into five sequential career stages that individuals progress through as they age. (See Table 1.)

The LMIC extended and modernized Super's model in 2021. (See Exhibit 1.) The model now encompasses a diverse range of LMI users, reflecting the expanding range of roles that individuals assume today.

Table 1
Life stages in Super's model

Life stage	Developmental tasks
Growth	Develop interest in one's vocational future; acquire appropriate attitudes and behaviours toward work
Exploration	Narrow occupational choices; form tentative decisions about needs, interests, and abilities
Establishment	Keep and advance in one's job; become an organizational citizen
Maintenance	Gain new skills to avoid stagnation and remain competitive
Decline	Disengage from work; plan for retirement

Sources: Labour Market Information Council, Building a Decision-Based Framework to Understand LMI Needs; The Conference Board of Canada.

Exhibit 1
LMIC's transition map
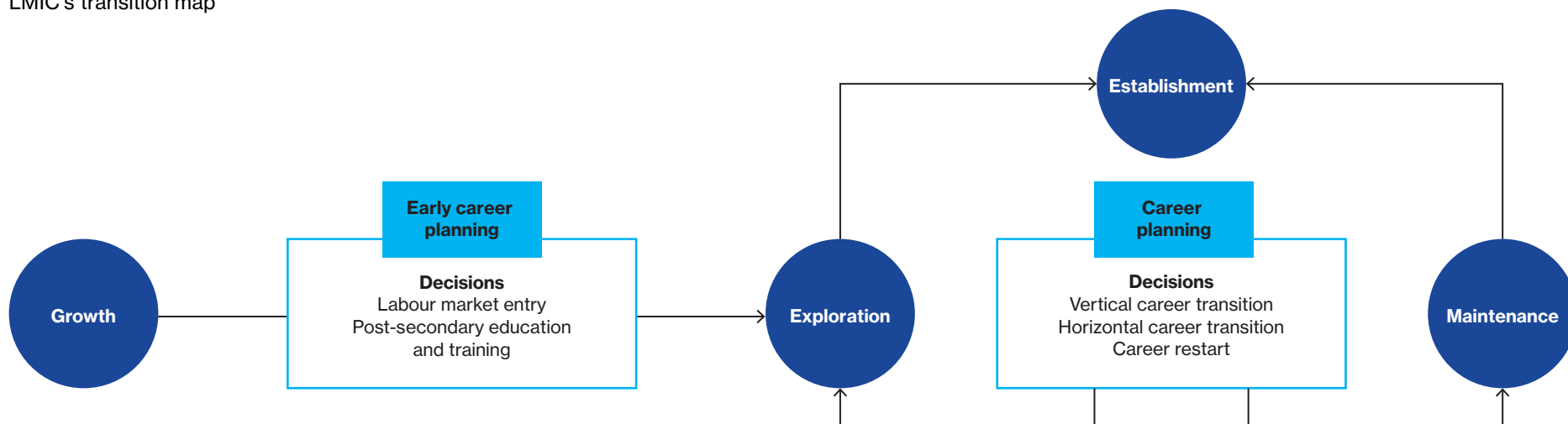
Sources: Labour Market Information Council, Building a Decision-Based Framework to Understand LMI Needs; The Conference Board of Canada.

In the updated model, transitions between life stages are seen as the key drivers of career-related decisions. For example, individuals moving from the growth phase to the exploration phase enter the early career planning phase, which is associated with decisions about education, training, and initial entry into the labour market. Individuals would also enter the career planning phase during the transition from exploration to establishment, but in this case, decisions revolve around career advancement or vertical career mobility. It's also now possible to map multidirectional career transitions. For instance, transitions from maintenance to exploration are possible. In this case, decisions revolve around re-establishment in a similar or adjacent field or around horizontal career transition.

The need for tailored LMI

While the map describes the type of career decisions, it does not provide the contextual details in which this information is needed. For example, a mid-career worker looking to transition to a new industry or a newcomer to Canada exploring opportunities may need similar data, such as wages, job openings, and skill requirements, but the relevant LMI will be contextualized differently, tailored to the specific decision at hand. A manufacturing worker looking to change careers will need LMI tailored to their situation, focusing on skill requirements in emerging sectors that match their expertise. Conversely, a recent immigrant seeking to quickly reskill for employment opportunities in Canada needs LMI on job openings, projected job growth in various occupations, available reskilling programs, and potential funding options. In both cases, contextualized LMI plays a critical role in guiding individuals toward appropriate career pathways.

LMI needs for early- and mid-career planners

Early career planning, from growth to exploration

Early-career planners, such as high school or graduate students, are in the process of exploring their future career paths. They need customized LMI to guide their decisions and narrow their career choices, such as salary or wages, skill requirements, or current job openings. With access to such information, early career planners can make informed decisions that align with their interests, needs, and aspirations, and build a solid foundation for their future endeavours. To effectively plan their educational and career trajectories, these individuals require comprehensive LMI, such as:

• **Career path:** What jobs will be available based on different levels of education and/or fields of study? This includes, for example, job descriptions or required skills in different industries or occupations.

• **Education and training requirements:** What education and training are required for different occupations, such as college degrees, vocational training, apprenticeships, or certification programs? This information helps early-career planners understand the steps they need to take to pursue their desired career paths.

• **Labour market trends:** What are the job prospects in their ideal occupation and how much competition are they likely to face when entering the labour market? This includes information on in-demand industries, emerging occupations, average wages by industry or occupation, and projected job growth or decline.

Understanding these trends can help early-career planners align their education and training choices with areas of high demand in the labour market.

• **Earnings:** How do wages differ depending on such things as occupation, field of study, and location? This information will help them better understand the affordability of a chosen career path.

• **Local job opportunities:** What industries operate in their region? Early-career planners need information that is tailored to the individual's local area or region, so they can understand the labour market dynamics in their community or identify potential regions where job opportunities exist.

• **Skills:** What skills do they need? Early-career planners find it challenging to translate their understanding of skill needs into concrete decisions about education, training, and careers. LMI should include elements on technical and social and emotional skills and their relevance for different career pathways. The mastery of specific skills is essential for success in any career and should be emphasized in career readiness initiatives that focus on career pathway selection. This information will help early-career planners learn about transferable skills and to know which skills are most at risk of becoming obsolete in the future.

Mid-career transitions, from exploration to enhancement

Mid-career planners have moved beyond the early stages of career exploration and are now focused on maintaining and advancing in their careers. They recognize the importance of upskilling to avoid stagnation and to remain competitive in the ever-evolving job market. Additionally, at this stage, they may be considering either vertical or horizontal transitions based on their personal interests or external factors (e.g., automation). Mid-career planners need LMI that addresses their evolving needs and aspirations as they advance or realign their career. This LMI may include:

- **Occupational and industry trends:** How are current and emerging trends impacting job opportunities in their field and related industries? Information on growth projections, emerging trends, and wage levels can help them make informed decisions about their career paths that align with their interests and goals, and understand where they can leverage their existing skills and experience.

- **Career transition:** What alternative career paths and industries are available that leverage their skills and experience? LMI should provide information on transition pathways. While certain specialized or high-paying occupations may be a good skills and interest match, they may have limited or no attractive transition pathways. Individuals seeking to move into or out of these roles will need information on training or upskilling.

- **Skills development:** Which skills and competencies are in demand in the labour market and what skills are needed for horizontal or vertical career changes? This LMI helps mid-career planners identify areas where they may need to upskill or reskill to remain competitive and advance in their careers.

- **Geographic mobility:** Where are the best opportunities? For those seeking to relocate for career advancement, LMI should include information on job opportunities, wages, and cost of living in different geographic regions and at different levels of granularity. This will help them make informed decisions about where to pursue employment opportunities.
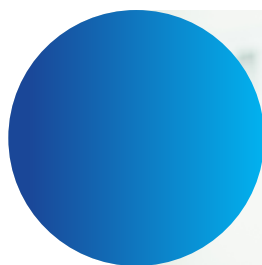
Relevant and reliable labour market information

OpportuNext was designed to provide CDPs and other users with comprehensive, relevant, useful, and easy-to-understand data tailored to the specific needs of early- and mid-career planners. OpportuNext makes it easy to explore data by job title, education, and geographic region. This resource empowers CDPs, career counsellors, and employment service providers to help Canadians at various stages of their careers make informed decisions about their career paths.

Powered by a sophisticated skills-matching algorithm, OpportuNext leverages four extensive data sources with over 13 billion data points.[1] The platform allows users to explore alternative career paths, which are ranked based on how similar the skill or education requirements are and how close they are to the user's existing skills. Only careers with comparable or higher salaries are considered. Additionally, the platform provides data on wages, skills, education requirements, and career growth prospects for over 30,000 different occupations.

Beyond its highly detailed economic data and sophisticated algorithm, the platform's main advantage lies in its simplicity. What sets OpportuNext apart from other LMI data sources is its user-friendly interface, which makes it easily accessible in both English and French. It is a freely available online resource with a clear and straightforward interface, complemented by an embedded video and PDF walkthrough guide for additional user support.

Career planning across life stages with OpportuNext

OpportuNext enables CDPs to help **students and early-career planners** identify a viable career path by providing insights into job prospects based on education or job title, salary comparisons, and broader career opportunities associated with acquired skills. For example, students can use OpportuNext to compare job opportunities or earnings between bachelor's and master's graduates in their field. The platform also helps users translate skills into concrete decisions about education, training, and career paths.

Mid-career transitions involve moving to adjacent occupations or embarking on new career paths. OpportuNext addresses the challenge of understanding transferable skills and provides insight into the retraining or upskilling required for meaningful career change. For example, recent immigrants can use the platform to understand the Canadian job market based on their education or work experience, explore in-demand career options, and make informed decisions about career paths in Canada. Similarly, mid-career professionals considering a career change can use OpportuNext to assess the viability of transitioning to a new field. Using the platform's data on growth prospects and required skills, they can compare different career options to learn about skill gaps, skill transferability, and potential salary changes in different fields.

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1   For more on the methodology behind the platform, see The Power Behind OpportuNext.

Organizations are already leveraging OpportuNext

eCampus Ontario

The provincially funded not-for-profit organization eCampus Ontario launched a micro-credential portal in late 2021 to provide users with information about short-term and industry-relevant learning programs available across Ontario. The portal is designed to help individuals retrain or upgrade their skills, with a focus on addressing specific labour market needs. As part of a pilot project, eCampusOntario used OpportuNext to enhance the portal's metadata by incorporating standardized occupational and skills data. This enhancement allows users to receive personalized program recommendations aligned with their current or past job titles, helping them make decisions about micro-credential programs.

Mohawk College

The Insurance Training Program at Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology trains individuals to meet the requirements for the Registered Insurance Brokers of Ontario licence. Using OpportuNext, the college is exploring the skills needed to transition into insurance broker roles. Initially, it identified roles with skill profiles similar to key insurance occupations. Among these roles, collection agents and administrative assistants stood out for having very similar skills to insurance positions, despite being characterized as being at high risk of displacement due to automation and with limited options for movement. A transition to the insurance sector could offer new and successful career opportunities.

In addition to identifying common skill sets, Mohawk College conducted a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing individuals' decisions to transition into insurance careers. Semi-structured interviews with insurance professionals and job seekers revealed optimism about successful career transitions, particularly for those with basic transferable skills. The college used this information to promote its program and meet recruitment goals, resulting in a mutually beneficial outcome for both students and the institution.

Wood Manufacturing Council

The Wood Manufacturing Council used OpportuNext data to identify specific occupations in non-wood sectors that could potentially transition into the wood manufacturing industry, with a focus on moving individuals from lower-wage, at-risk roles. In addition to assessing potential transition and informing recruitment strategies, the project aimed to increase awareness and recruitment capacity within the wood manufacturing sector. By using OpportuNext's skills-matching approach, the project helps job seekers explore new career opportunities that are both viable and desirable. This project is an example of how employers can use OpportuNext to find innovative ways to address skill shortages by identifying potential workers in similar occupations and fostering talent acquisition and sector growth.

Take the next step with OpportuNext

Are you ready to revolutionize your career development strategies? Help your clients navigate alternative career paths and make informed decisions.

By providing personalized and relevant LMI that aligns with an individual's aspirations and goals, OpportuNext is a testament to innovation in career planning. We will continue to refine OpportuNext and to consider integrating other innovative LMI tools and programs to ensure that OpportuNext continues to be relevant and effective. By collaborating with partners who have similar goals in the career development space, we believe we can help improve the wide variety of tools that Canadians and career development practitioners can use to address their ever-evolving labour market questions.

Visit our platform at opportunext.ca to learn more and improve your career services today.

Acknowledgements

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