

## Project Insights Report

# Success@Work Skills: Preparing Workers and Systems to Navigate Change



### PARTNERS

Manitoba Institute of  
Trades & Technology



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Manitoba



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\$933,415



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## Executive Summary

Indigenous youth are confronted by disproportionately high unemployment rates, a challenge that was significantly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's economic disruptions hit Indigenous communities particularly hard, amplifying pre-existing barriers. Moreover, during the pandemic, a number of postsecondary institutions were slow to respond to the emerging labour market challenges.

In 2020, the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT) piloted Success@Work Skills, a rapid customization training program designed to support the long-term well-being and career success of 40 Indigenous youth. Developed in response to the challenges amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, the program combined competency-based microcredentials, culturally relevant curricula, and wraparound supports to empower participants with the skills and confidence to thrive in their chosen fields—while also helping meet evolving workforce needs.

The six core skills underlying MITT's Success@Work Skills are professionalism, adaptability, initiative, problem solving, communication and collaboration. The program focused on these six because they are transferable across occupations if job demands fluctuate and employer needs evolve.

The project demonstrated that a rapid, systemic approach with coherent and interconnected components can yield benefits for both Indigenous youth and employers. The success of the project was a result of a number of critical factors. First, the delivery method and curricula design, which focused on methods appropriate to Indigenous youth (e.g., emphasis on understanding of self), improved program outcomes. Second, the training content was designed and validated by employers, ensuring that they would receive the skills they needed. MITT enabled this by building strategic partnerships with local industries and employers facing workforce gaps, creating a responsive link between training and job opportunities.

## KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Designing training content and delivery that was tailored to Indigenous youth (e.g., embedding Two-Eyed Seeing and deeper understanding of self in the curriculum) improved training outcomes and fostered greater collaboration.
- 2 Wraparound supports for both learners and employers improve employment outcomes of training.
- 3 Skills-based, demand-driven microcredentials help validate and formalize soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—that are often seen as difficult to assess or prove. By providing structured, transparent criteria for evaluating these competencies, microcredentials lend greater credibility to skills that are critical but frequently overlooked in traditional qualifications.

## ► The Issue

Competencies and skills such as communication and collaboration are becoming increasingly essential. This was particularly evident during the pandemic, which fuelled major changes in the skill requirements of jobs. Indigenous youth bring valuable strengths, perspectives, and lived experiences to today's evolving workforce—and a shift toward more inclusive, skills-focused training and hiring practices can help unlock and recognize these assets.

While postsecondary educational institutions tend to maintain that core skills of this nature are embedded in all their programming, they have by and large not taught soft skills in a deliberate way. The need for postsecondary educational institutions to respond swiftly and effectively to a rapidly changing labour market is becoming increasingly urgent. There is a greater need for educational programs to be highly customized to meet the specific needs of individuals with unique barriers to training and employment as well as diverse industries and evolving job roles.

Customizing curricula is crucial for effective employability skills training. However, previous attempts at creating curricula with transferable skills often failed to meet the specific needs of employers and learners. There is a pressing need to understand how to ensure core skill curricula are both relevant and engaging. By aligning material with employer expectations and tailoring content for specific groups or industries, educational programs can significantly enhance learning outcomes.



## What We Investigated

To address this gap, this project tested how to explicitly embed the Success@Work Skills of professionalism, adaptability, initiative, problem solving, communication and collaboration into training programs to make them, on the one hand, customizable and scalable, but also responsive to emerging employer demands.

In 2020, 40 Indigenous youth participated in a pilot program designed to support their career development and long-term success: Success@Work Skills, developed by MITT. The initiative aimed to create a more meaningful and culturally relevant learning experience by combining competency-based microcredentials, wraparound supports, and customized training. Through this pilot, MITT explored how a rapid customization process could better reflect the aspirations, strengths, and realities of Indigenous youth—while also responding to evolving labour market needs.

In particular, MITT's six Success@Work Skills were integrated into their Construction Labourer Certificate. The certificate is MITT's only program with 100% Indigenous enrolment.

To measure the overall success, coordinators conducted interviews, and analyses and validated proposed changes. The post-implementation interviews with staff helped coordinators determine whether the program was effective and efficient.

## What We're Learning

### **Program adaptability can increase use**

The preliminary results of the Success@Work Skills program were encouraging in terms of their potential scalability and efficiency in responding to shifting demands in the labour market. The modular Success@Work Skills curricula were designed for flexibility, allowing them to be delivered as stand-alone programs or integrated into other courses, such as technical training. This adaptability ensures that the curricula can be quickly customized to align with evolving industry requirements, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of training across various college programs.

### **Integrating industry into design boosts program usefulness**

The customized training, developed through thorough needs assessments with employers, addressed both the skills gaps identified by industry and the specific needs of individuals. Moreover, the Success@Work Skills training is formalized with a skills-based, assessed and credentialed system that meets industry standards, helping to boost its credibility.

### **Prioritizing Indigenous culture in training improves outcomes**

For Indigenous youth, a delivery method and training content that were culturally appropriate led to improved outcomes. For instance, the inclusion of material focused on Indigenous community and family, along with concepts like Two-Eyed Seeing and locus of control, were pivotal. The presence of frequent role-model speakers, including Elders, contributed significantly to the success of the program. These methods foster a greater understanding of self and others, promoting better collaboration.

### **Wraparound supports for employers and learners**

The project also underscored the importance of wraparound supports for both employers and Indigenous youth. For employers, efforts to support them in creating diverse, inclusive and respectful workplaces has proven effective in increasing the hiring and successful retention of Indigenous youth. And for Indigenous youth, additional customized supports were foundational in improving retention and employment outcomes.

## **★ Why It Matters**

As the world of work continues to evolve, core transferable skills that form the basis of the Success@Work Skills are becoming increasingly vital. The rapid pace of technological advancements and shifting job requirements necessitate a workforce that can adapt and work effectively in diverse and dynamic environments.

To address this need, it is crucial to integrate these core transferable skills into existing educational programs. This integration should be done in a way that aligns with employer needs. By layering these skills into pre-existing programs, educational institutions can ensure that students not only gain technical knowledge but also develop the interpersonal competencies required in the job market.



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To be effective, however, postsecondary and other training institutions will need to evolve to meet the challenges posed by these shifts. They must foster partnerships with industry stakeholders to keep educational offerings relevant and effective. By doing so, they can prepare students more comprehensively for the future demands of work and support continuous learning throughout the students' careers.

Canada needs to address long standing shortages of skilled tradespeople to advance policy priorities around decarbonization, affordable housing and transforming industry to add more value to what we produce.

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Training content and delivery must also align with the needs of individuals, as highlighted by the unique approach this project took to training Indigenous youth. Together, a coherent and integrated system can ensure that training programs not only address the skill gaps of individuals but also contribute to the broader goal of workforce development. By working together, stakeholders can develop solutions that enhance job readiness, support career advancement and ultimately drive economic growth and social progress.

## ► What's Next

MITT is working to build upon the Success@Work Skills initiative and to develop a modular, customizable curriculum of core skills that is based on a recognized competency framework. Efforts to evaluate and create a suite of assessment tools that can capture and validate the acquisition of core skills are underway.

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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