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Project Insights Report

Bridging Psychometrics and Competencies in a Technology Supported Youth Employment Pathway – Project Integrate

PARTNERS
Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC)

LOCATIONS
Alberta
British Columbia
Nova Scotia
Ontario

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Executive Summary

As the employment services ecosystem in Canada evolves, a more effective, streamlined approach to adopting and using technologies could support young job seekers and employment service providers. Service providers encounter a huge array of digital tools that could support their work but may feel hesitant or unequipped to use them. Job seekers are entering a world where non-linear careers are becoming more common, and young people may not be aware of all the options available to them.

The Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC), together with MaRS Discovery District and First Work, developed Project Integrate to enhance the employment service ecosystem for youth in Canada. It took an ecosystem approach to understand technology use among employment service providers and explored the idea of a single technology-enabled employment and training pathway for youth.

A project survey showed that more than 350 digital tools were in use among providers, a number that has likely increased. The barriers and enablers to using technology were highlighted at the individual, organizational and system levels. A field test of two digital tools—a psychometric assessment and a career laddering platform—increased knowledge and motivation among the majority of the 850 job seekers who tried them. Working with employment providers across the country, a career pathway with five distinct phases was identified.

The project findings suggest that the use of technology to support employment for young people may be enhanced if the barriers to use are addressed and service providers understand the benefits and are better equipped to navigate the tools. Additionally, the career pathway that was developed may serve as a framework to streamline and identify the most appropriate tools and services based on the phase the job seeker is in.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Of the 850 jobs seekers who used a psychometric assessment and a career laddering platform, more than 80% reported greater knowledge about their own abilities and interests, and 85% had higher motivation toward their career journeys.

2. An employment pathway with distinct phases may serve as a framework for service providers to select and offer more tailored tools and services relevant to each job seeker's phase.

3. Equipping employment service providers with the skills to navigate the array of digital tools while addressing barriers and enablers to their use may support the adoption of technology.

The Issue

The current and future realities for the employment services ecosystem present both challenges and opportunities, particularly for young job seekers. Federal initiatives and funding programs have sought to address skills-related challenges across the country. However, the system remains largely a patchwork in relation to youth needs and technological abilities. Various studies have highlighted the need for a more unified and comprehensive approach to employment services. Another challenge is that employment service delivery occurs at the local level, operating in a complicated, layered network.

Non-linear career paths are becoming more common. Young people seeking jobs may not be aware of emerging work opportunities or be able to recognize their own transferable experience. This is particularly true for youth interested in careers in tourism and hospitality.

The effective use of digital tools and a solid understanding of individual, organizational and systemic barriers could enable a more systematic, integrated approach. The combination of digital tools within a well-established training pathway could provide a more streamlined, personalized approach to employment services that addresses current challenges while enhancing the career exploration process for young people in Canada.



What We Investigated

Project Integrate explored the potential impact and feasibility of a single technology-enabled employment and training pathway for youth. Key participants included OTEC, First Work and MaRS Solutions Lab, as well as employment service providers across Canada. The target audiences were employment service providers and young job seekers.

The project sought to gain insights into how digital tools could support the career decisions of young people in Canada and facilitate the work of employment service providers. Working with employment service providers across Canada, the project investigated:

- the current landscape of digital tools used in employment services;
- barriers and enablers to technology adoption among providers;
- the perceived value of two specific technologies among job seekers.

One technology the project investigated was ALiGN, a psychometric assessment to explore personality traits and interests. The other was planext, a career laddering platform that identified potential job opportunities and career paths, the skills and experience needed to pursue these opportunities, and links to relevant training. ALiGN was offered by OTEC, and planext was developed by MaRS and Google.

What We're Learning

The surveys, field tests and engagement with employment service providers yielded a number of findings relevant to the employment services field. The survey found that employment service providers use more than 350 different employment tools. In fact, project coordinators noted that the number of tools likely increased dramatically during and after the pandemic.

In the first phase of field testing, 300 job seekers tried either ALiGN, the psychometric assessment, or planext, the career laddering platform. In the second phase, 850 job seekers used both tools. Among this group, 82% said they gained knowledge on their personality strengths, on career paths aligned with their interests, and on planning for career pathways. In addition, 85% felt more motivated in their employment journeys.

Barriers and enablers to technology use

For individual users, the key barriers to use were unclear value of the tool and higher administrative burden. The key enablers were relevant technology and user-friendly systems. At the organizational level, misalignment and fear of automation were barriers, while management commitment and consistent communications were important enablers.

Five stages of the youth employment journey were identified: discovery (planning), development (skill development), positioning (resume, networking), application (job search), and matching (interviews, employer engagement).

In relation to these findings, several key lessons were highlighted:

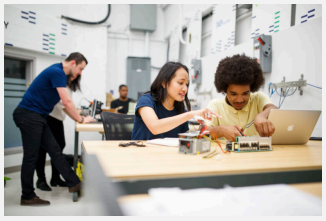
- identifying how the benefits of technology outweigh risks will enable wider adoption;
- being aware of the pathway to employment may enable more tailored use of tools and training;
- equipping employment service providers with the skills and knowledge to explore new technologies will support them in adopting the right tools.

Why It Matters

As technological advances continue and the employment landscape continues to evolve, an approach that integrates both of these considerations will continue to be relevant to employment services programs and policies.

The lessons underscore the need for ongoing learning and adaptation within the employment services sector. The abundance of digital tools available requires a systematic approach to their selection and use by employment program planners. Ongoing training and support for staff must equip them with the skills to apply effective and relevant technologies that address changing job market demands. The successful adoption of any digital tool will depend on addressing barriers to use and promoting enabling factors such as a user-centric approach to its design and implementation.

From the job seeker's perspective, the opportunity to use multiple digital tools—backed by evidence of their effectiveness—at different phases of their career pathway increases knowledge and motivation. Employment services planners can also take this into consideration.



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

Employment prospects and labour market outcomes of youth (typically considered aged 15 to 24) are highly cyclical in nature, i.e., during economic downturns employment among youth is disproportionately negatively affected compared to adults.

Read Thematic Report

What's Next

The learnings and findings from the project have informed FSC's thematic State of Skills Report. That report reviewed findings and early lessons from a wide range of projects that tested the effectiveness of digital skills training targeting a specific population of learners from various fields, including mid-career workers, students, young workers and adults with low digital literacy.

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

How to Cite This Report

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