Pathways to Jobs: Microcredentials, Work-Integrated Learning, and Labour Market Information

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) Community of Practice (CoP) is a pan-Canadian network for skills and workforce development stakeholders across diverse sectors and industries to connect, share, and learn from each other. As part of the CoP, Research Impact Canada (RIC), in collaboration with FSC, hosts themed Peer Learning Groups to facilitate open discussions among peers on relevant topics.

On April 24, 2025, Research Impact Canada and the Future Skills Centre hosted a Peer Learning Group called **Pathways to Jobs: Microcredentials, Work-Integrated Learning, and Labour Market Information**. The goal of the peer learning group was to facilitate an open discussion among participants in an informal, safe, shared space.

In this session, Jean-Pierre Giroux, President, Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium, discussed how learning in the workplace is not just for individual professional development, but can also be about connecting to the organization's overall goals. Attendees shared initiatives at their own organizations where learning has also been connected to their work. Participants were invited to join small breakout groups for free-flowing moderated discussions, responding to the question:

> **What are examples of successful initiatives or experiences your organization has had in implementing applied learning in the workplace? In today's environment, where learning is shorter and more targeted by skill, how do you achieve that?"**

WHAT WE HEARD

Prioritizing training in the workplace begins at the leadership level. Participants discussed how an organization may need a dedicated team to prioritize employee learning, including buy-in from the leadership and management levels. The organization's culture should recognize that its employees deserve to keep up with the ever-changing labour market by allowing dedicated time and resources to upskill themselves. Suggestions include creating a community of practice for employees to meet monthly to discuss advancing their professional development goals while aligning them with the company's goals and having different departments learn from each other by job shadowing and/or working collaboratively.

Harnessing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for learning. Participants also discussed the influence and use of AI in helping organizations upskill their employees. For instance, how does it affect organizational performance when AI can pull out the data statistics, benchmarks, and analysis, but not the interpretation? In addition, is there an opportunity for AI to "digest" the content associated with microcredentials and make it more accessible to learners with different learning styles? The answers will become clearer as more AI-related projects are conducted in the workplace.

There is a need to close the gap between formal learning institutions and entry-level work experience. Concerns were raised that not enough is being done to help new graduates gain the necessary entry-level work experience to land jobs in their industries.

Participants suggested that, similar to learning in the trades, work-integrated learning should start earlier, whether in high school or during post-secondary education, rather than waiting till the end of graduation. A feasible WIL time period would be six to eight weeks for the students to gain exposure and acquire some skills. Other suggestions to help close the gap include calling on the government to incentivize new graduates to join junior-level roles in certain sectors, such as information and communications technology (ICT), formal education institutions to embed workplace skills into the curricula, and introducing more apprenticeship-style training.

The workforce can respond much quicker to industry needs and market demands than educational institutions. Polytechnical institutions have found that while they can create programs tailored to the current market demands, develop curricula with relevant skills training for the job market, and implement work-integrated learning for their students, the pace is still comparably slower than when organizations offer microcredentialing to their employees. In the workplace, employers are often at the frontline of seeing labour market trends, political shifts, and industry needs and challenges. As a result, employers can respond much faster by pivoting against or towards those changes as needed. It further underscores the need for workplaces to prioritize training at the forefront rather than leaving it up to individuals to take courses on their own time off.

WHAT WE HEARD

Lifelong learning is seen as necessary for an aging workforce. Participants discussed how workplaces cannot afford to neglect the upskilling of their employees, especially as members of the workforce continue to live longer lives and, as a result, stay working in the workforce longer than previous generations. Employees have recognized that they cannot afford to stay stagnant in their careers. The same should be true for employers in recognizing and supporting lifelong learning for their employees. Employers should be part of the ecosystem of helping to equip their workforce with the necessary skills and resiliency to negotiate changes in the political climate and the prevalence of artificial intelligence technology in the workplace while ensuring sustainability and inclusiveness.

Industry must inform the training. Participants noted that the industry would be best positioned to inform employees, job-seekers, and students of the needed knowledge and skills relevant to today's labour market. From an educational standpoint, having industry involved in designing the curriculum, meeting the students, and building strong mentorship opportunities and business skills through work-integrated learning placements would go a long way in closing the theory-practice gap. Ensuring the relevancy and practicality of the learning and matching it to core competencies would also help lead to meaningful outcomes and productivity. One of the participants mentioned a program where an industry-informed project resulted in a three-week training session

where industry professionals came in to support job seekers as part of the learning. The result was a 50% hiring rate after the training.

Training should be tailored to the audience. Questions also arose that once training is provided to employees, it is important to understand the target audience and tailor the delivery format to meet their needs. For instance, one participant said that when upskilling a segment of the aging population in the organization, some employees did not feel comfortable learning from online course materials. By allowing those employees to print the learning materials on paper, the company noticed a 25% increase in employees who completed the training. Other participants suggested that memorization may not be the best way to retain new information.

Training should be provided through an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) lens. Participants discussed that training should be inclusive of all populations, including the most vulnerable. Some examples include microcredentialing programs for domestic violence survivors and those who left school early by creating targeted programs for them to integrate or upskill into the workforce. Other participants discussed reaching populations in non-city centres of Western and Eastern Canada (e.g. Manitoba and Nova Scotia) where jobs are difficult to come by. Another participant noted that certain groups may face systemic barriers in the workforce and programs and strategies should be designed to remove such barriers.

RESOURCE COMPILATION

Here are some of the resources shared by the participants during the PLG.

AI and Learning
 "How AI is Blowing Up Corporate Learning Market: The Whole Story" (Podcast Episode): There is no doubt that AI has become a part of everyday life in the education and workforce sectors. In this podcast, Josh Bersin (Founder & CEO, The Josh Bersin Company) explains the history, the new role of AI, and the ten top implications for Learning and Development, training professionals, human resources (HR) teams, and employees worldwide.

"How AI for Training and Development is Transforming Corporate Learning Strategies": This article discusses six key use cases for companies using AI to make training and development more engaging and valuable.

The OECD Artificial Intelligence Policy Observatory: As AI rapidly permeates our economies, societies and environments, it also brings tremendous opportunities, but there are risks, too. No single country or economic actor can tackle AI-related issues alone. The OCED believes the world needs to coordinate responses to the use of AI-based on international, multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder cooperation to ensure that the development and use of AI benefits people and the planet.

Work-Applied Learning
Global Centre for Work-Applied Learning (GCWAL): GCWAL empowers managers and their teams and organizations to implement change and to undertake practitioner research using the Work-Applied Learning (WAL) model. Learn more about the WAL model and the different types of programmes available.

RESOURCE COMPILATION

[The Training Industry](): This website provides information, insights and resources to help organizations more effectively manage the business of learning. They serve as an expert resource for learning professionals seeking information about best practices and innovative approaches for developing effective training and creating trust and information-sharing environments.

[Thompson Rivers University (TRU)'s Credit Bank](): TRU has an amazing [microcredential project]() that is working on assessing up to 50 microcredentials for possible academic credit. This includes provincially funded and independently developed micro-credentials. The project is expected to create new options for lifelong learners and it meshes with the labour market demand, meaning there are opportunities to put that learning to practical use.

Making Places More Learner-Friendly

["Good practices in Europe for supporting employers to promote skills development"](): This [report]() examines a framework that supports investment in skills development by employers by developing a policy package including financial and non-financial measures. The report is one intermediary output in the framework of the project and aims to describe good practices in other European countries for supporting employers to promote skills development.

[Cities of Learning: Embedding regenerative lifelong-learning in place":]() The Royal Society for Arts (SA), Manufactures and Commerce is a global network of changemakers working to enable people, places and the planet to flourish in harmony. Cities of Learning is a movement of people and places committed to nurturing, validating and connecting learning across towns, cities and regions to support a regenerative economy. The RSA supports local leaders with digital infrastructure, learning-systems design, and a national network of peers to transform learning eco-systems towards better outcomes for people, places and the planet.

Upskilling Your Workforce

["Strategic Workforce Planning: Unlocking Future Capabilities"](): Strategic workforce planning is an essential discipline that helps businesses map out what they need in terms of people and organization to deliver their strategy. This brief ebook explains what strategic workforce planning really is, how it differs from operational workforce planning, and why so many organizations struggle to make it work.

["Return on Investment: Industry Leadership on Upskilling and Reskilling Their Workforce"](): This report provides an overview of how some Canadian companies are creating a culture of continuous learning to ensure employees have the skills they need using case study examples from AT&T, Scotiabank, TD Bank, Accenture and Walmart are retraining their workforces.

["Rapid 'On-The-Job' Employee Upskilling for In-Demand Skilled Jobs: Higher Productivity, Retention and Career Pathways"](): The *Insights Report* looks into a collaboration between Future Skills Centre (FSC) and the [Work-Based Learning Consortium (WBLC)]() that focused on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of upskilling in several streams of work. The project also sought to gain additional insights and test new methods of AI learning, blended modes of training and the scalability and portability of their approach to new sectors across Canada.

["State of Skills Report: Effective Employer Engagement in Skills Development: From Rhetoric to Solutions"](): This report explores what effective employer engagement in skills development look like.

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