

CONNECTING TALENT AND OPPORTUNITY

Canada's Foremost Economic and Social Challenge

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing workforce skills gaps, current processes to connect talent with opportunities remain inefficient. Too many students fail to see relevance in their studies to future work roles. They don't know how to identify local employers who need their unique talents. Thus, they lack motivation to optimize learning opportunities public education and local training providers offer. The fastest growing youth cohorts tend to be the poorest-served. At the same time, most adults are not in jobs that engage them emotionally. Too many are unemployed, underemployed, or marginalized. Employers have no efficient mechanism to identify future talent in their own community. They insist schools are not producing graduates with the employability and applied (soft) skills, character and attitude they need. So employers cast their talent nets across the country and around the globe. Using ads, the Internet and headhunters, they seek to find and re-locate the talent they need. The expensive and time-consuming process of sifting responses often results in few good prospects. With students dropping out of school in the employer's community, and adults yearning for meaningful opportunities at home, employers import outsiders. Of those who are enticed to come many will move on to other employers, in other communities, before long. Immigrants face credential recognition challenges, and may not qualify for jobs for which they have training and experience. All in all, the process of matching talent to opportunity is hit-and-miss, and there are vast economic and human consequences. This paper suggests alternatives that increase ROI for governments and employers by billions of dollars annually, and increase prosperity for individuals, families, communities and the nation.

Note: This paper builds on previous papers by this author, including : *Talent Opportunity: Prosperity Requires Connecting the Dots; A Nation at Risk: The Economic Consequences of Career Indecisiveness; and The Career Management Paradigm Shift: Prosperity for Citizens, Windfalls for Governments.*

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The Pipeline Leaks

The majority of secondary school students are not satisfied with what they are learning in school and they do not feel prepared for employment or for post-secondary studies.¹ According to the National Center for Education Statistics² in the United States, only 28 percent of U.S. students believe schoolwork is meaningful and only 39 percent believe it will have any bearing on their success later in life. No wonder many students are bored and cynical about education, and about 30% nationally drop out before completing high school. Some groups fare worse than others. For example, the majority of aboriginal students in Canada do not complete grade 12 within 6 years of entering grade 8 for the first time.³ Most high school graduates do not have career goals to which they are emotionally committed. About a third go on directly to university or college without clear workforce goals, hoping to discover their "calling" through further study. Too few select apprenticeship, trades or technology training to meet current and projected demand. Over one third of post-secondary students change programs or drop out by the end of their first year. Of those who eventually graduate, 50 percent will not be in jobs directly related to their program of study two years after graduation.⁴ Considering how badly our workforce now needs the right talent in the right place at the right time, today's "talent pipeline" has far too many leaks.

Many adults go through their entire working lives without ever making fully intentional, fully informed career choices. Many "land" in jobs through happenstance rather than informed choice, then spend 50 percent of their conscious hours in work settings they don't particularly like. In a recent U.S. Gallup survey seven in ten adults (69%) report that if they were starting their careers over they would try to get more information about job and career options than they got when they began their working lives.⁵ In the same survey more than five times as many people indicated that they entered the workforce by chance rather than by a choice influenced by a career development professional. Many people eventually find their way to satisfying and fulfilling work roles, but far too many never do. Those who feel trapped in inappropriate work roles are less productive than their satisfied counterparts. The Gallup Organization estimates that as many as 25 million U.S. workers (19% of the U.S. workforce) are "actively disengaged" from their jobs, and that this is costing the U.S. economy \$300-\$350 billion annually.⁶ The loss of productivity and waste of human capital are palpable, whether measured in training costs or unrealized human potential.

¹ Lifelong Learning for the City of Vancouver – Discussion Document, January 2006.

² Condition of Education 2002. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, D.C.

³ Ibid

⁴ Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, *School Leavers Survey*, 1997.

⁵ National Survey of Working America, National Career Development Association and The Gallup Organization, 1999.

⁶ Gallup Management Journal, March 2001.

Economic Consequences

Canada invests heavily to support individuals, groups and regions in need, accepting higher taxes than many countries to “level the playing field” and ensure a higher quality of life for more citizens. Even minimal losses on these huge investments can cost governments, corporations and communities dearly. Fallout from gaps between people’s skills and workforce needs reduces the return on investment we rightly expect from education, health care and social services investments. Moreover, it cost governments lost revenues and businesses lost competitiveness, thus reduced profitability.

Productivity According to a 2009 study by the Conference Board Research Group, only 45% of Americans are satisfied with their work, down from 49% in 2008.⁷ This is the lowest level ever recorded in the 22 years of studying this issue. The study goes on to report that the drop in workers happiness can be partly blamed on the worst recession since the 1930’s, but worker dissatisfaction has been on the rise for two decades. Fewer and few workers find their jobs satisfying, stifling innovation and negatively impacting competitiveness and productivity.

“We are sitting on a huge potential boom in productivity – if we could just get the square pegs out of the round holes.”⁸ A 1 percent increase in Canada’s productivity would result in an increase of \$13 billion in goods and services each year. Better mechanisms for helping people connect with work that truly suits them, and at which they are fully engaged and excel would have profound ramifications for businesses across Canada, and yield standard of living gains in communities from coast-to-coast.

Education A recent survey ranks Canadian students as 2nd among 32 OECD countries in Reading Literacy, 5th in Mathematics and 5th in Science. Clearly, our \$91 billion⁹ investment in education by all levels of government is paying dividends. Nonetheless, too many students are unclear why they must learn what they are being taught. Too many change programs, underachieve or drop out. Some extend their education because they are reluctant to move on. Few students fully understand the diversity of work roles that align with their academic skills. Many graduate with heavy student loan debt and unclear career prospects. Too few master the skills of career and life management they will need beyond graduation to become adept, confident, self-reliant and resilient navigators in constantly changing workplace and societal waters. The bottom line is that Canadian taxpayers are not getting the return on their enormous annual investment they have a right to expect. An analogy would be paying for years of concert tickets for someone who dislikes concerts, thus sleeps or daydreams through one performance after another. We must continue to pay for students to be in their classes, but if more students saw the relevance of their classes to their adult lives more would be motivated to perform at high level, thus increasing ROI on the massive annual investment Canadians make in education.

⁷ “American job satisfaction falls to record low.” Associated Press. January 5, 2010

⁸ Po Bronson, “What Should I do With My Life? The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question.” Random House, January 2003.

⁹ Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, December 2008

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Health Those who are unemployed or in work roles they dislike are subject to increased stress, have increased likelihood of unhealthy lifestyles, and are more prone to substance and physical abuse. Good jobs foster good mental health whereas poor jobs cause distress (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991)¹⁰. In a September 2002 Ipsos-Reid survey for the *Globe and Mail* and CTV¹¹ one in six adults surveyed (17%) said there have been times they were under so much stress they considered suicide. The main causes of stress cited were work (43%) and finances (39%). It is estimated that workers with depression cost US employers an estimated \$44 billion yearly in lost productive time.¹² About \$115 billion¹³ was invested by all levels of government in Canada in 2008 on health care. If only 1 percent of health expenditures are due to work-related stress the potential saving in helping more people find satisfying work is over \$1.1 billion, each year.

Social Services: Nearly \$148 billion¹⁴ was invested by all levels of government in Canada in 2008 on social services, including social assistance and welfare. Fewer recipients would need assistance if more had the skills to find and keep suitable work. A modest 1 percent improvement would save nearly \$1.5 billion annually.

Protection, Prisons and Corrections: Just over \$49 billion¹⁵ was invested by all levels of government in Canada in 2008 on "protection of persons and property," including policing, prisons and correctional services. A 1 percent improvement in helping more detainees acquire career planning and management skills, become realistically hopeful about their future and more self-reliant in getting and keeping jobs they love could save \$430 million annually.

Government Revenues: Over \$591 billion¹⁶ was collected by all levels of government in 2008 in income taxes (individual and corporate), property taxes, consumption taxes, health premiums, social insurance contributions, etc. If more Canadians were able to find suitable work, revenues would increase for all levels of government. A 1 percent improvement would generate over \$5.9 billion per year in government revenues each year. Five percent would yield over \$29 billion annual windfall for all levels of government.

A miniscule 1 percent improvement in increased government revenues and productivity, and decreased social costs, such as the examples above and others, represents over a \$20 billion annual windfall for Canadian individuals, organizations and communities.

¹⁰ Savickas, M, 14 Facts Career Specialists Could Assert in Debates about Public Policy Regarding Workforce Development and Career Guidance, For International Career Development Policy/Practice Symposium participants, Vancouver, May 2002.

¹¹ Canadians and Stress: A Special Report, Ipsos-Reid, September 2002

¹² Stewart, W., Ricci, J., Chee, E., Hahn, S., & Morganstein, D. (2003). Cost of Lost Productive Time Among US Workers with Depression. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 289 (23), 3135- 3143.

¹³ Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, December 2008

¹⁴ Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, December 2008

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, December 2008

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Consolidated federal, provincial, territorial and local government revenue and expenditure, December 2008

The economic consequences of having too many citizens in the wrong job, or no job, are staggering. The human consequences are higher. Too many Canadians are simply not enjoying satisfying, purposeful and fulfilling lives. Some are so unhappy with the way their lives and careers have unfolded that they will neglect their health, possibly abusing one substance or another to escape their reality. Indeed, lack of career management skills can be life-threatening. What's more, this isn't just the individual's problem. It profoundly affects relationships with family and community. Families, communities and society in general all lose when individuals are unable confidently and effectively to manage their careers.

Shifting Paradigms

For too many Canadians the traditional career choice paradigm is not working. It expects youth, possibly with help from a counsellor, to make an informed, long-term career choice in middle school or high school. Yet, few adults are now doing what they expected to be doing when they were in school. The evidence suggests that only a small minority of young people can identify a "calling" in secondary school, despite strong pressures to do so. Young people now entering the workforce will likely have 10 to 15 or more jobs, in several different occupations, in multiple industry sectors during the span of their working lives. How can they confidently answer the question, "What will you be when you grow up?"

The industrial age career choice model was about helping people make an informed occupational choice, as follows:

1. Explore one's interests, aptitudes, values, etc.
2. Determine a "best fit" occupation by matching personal traits to occupational factors
3. Develop a plan to attain the prerequisite education and training
4. Graduate, choose a secure job, climb the ladder
5. Retire as young as possible on pension as a reward for decades of service.

Steps 1 through 3 apply in contemporary workplaces, although the terms work role, cluster or industry sector may be substituted for occupation. In knowledge societies, however, these steps are now *recurrent*, dramatically increasing the need for information and support services at all ages. Step 4 is no longer assured. Even senior executives are not secure in their positions. Step 5 will only occur for those who learn and successfully apply personal financial planning skills. Increasingly, people either cannot or do not wish to stop working at a fixed date.

The career choice paradigm emphasizes provision of career, learning and labour market information to enable citizens to make good career choices. Consequently, world-class information resources from government and community agencies, industry sector councils and private sector providers are readily available to Canadians in print, video, computer and Internet formats. Indeed, an OECD report on a survey of 36 countries noted that Canada is a global leader in the provision of labour market information.¹⁷ Good information is essential, but it's insufficient.

¹⁷ Watts, A.G., Sultana, R.G., (2004). Career Guidance Policies in 36 Countries. OECD. October 2003.

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The new *career management paradigm* is not about making *the* right occupational choice. It's about equipping people with the *competencies* (skills, knowledge, attitudes, character, emotional intelligence – “soft skills”) to make the *myriad* choices with which adults are confronted, in all aspects of their lives, lifelong. “While technical and job-specific skills sufficed in the past, it is increasingly being accepted that the worker of the future will need a more comprehensive set of *meta-competencies* that are not occupation-specific and are transferable across all facets of life and work. The economic value, to the individual and the nation as a whole, of a workforce equipped with these *meta-competencies* cannot be underestimated and their development cannot be left to chance.”¹⁸ The key in the workplace, and in life, is not *finding* the perfect job, friend or life partner: it's *becoming* the best possible worker, friend or life partner.

In the career management paradigm the question,

“What do you want to be when (you grow up/graduate/aren't unemployed, etc.)?”

is replaced by:

“Who are you now, and what do you love to do?”

“What are your unique assets, talents, skills and predispositions?”

“What types of situations, people, environments and roles appeal to you?”

“What types of organizations need what you can offer?”

“What innovative work arrangements will suit you and potential employers?”

“What do you want to do *first* when you graduate? Then what?”

“What competences do you need to focus on to increase your options?”

“What will success look and feel like?”

The object is to find satisfying work, in the process of constructing a fulfilling career, with purpose, meaning and authenticity. The pervasive assumption that money is the shortest route to freedom and happiness is flawed, as so many over-stressed adults have discovered. In fact, “the shortest route to the good life lies in building confidence that you can live within your means doing work you truly love.”¹⁹

“People don't succeed by migrating to a 'hot' industry. They thrive by focusing on who they really are – and connecting to or creating work that they truly love (and, by doing so, unleashing a productive and creative power that they never imagined). Companies win when they engage the hearts and minds of individuals who are dedicated to answering their life question.”²⁰ People who love what they do are more productive. In the words of Yahoo chief solutions officer Tim Sanders, “Over and over again, I've discovered that the businesspeople who are busiest, happiest, and most prosperous are those who are the most generous with their knowledge and expertise.

¹⁸ McMahon, M., Patton, W., & Tatham, P. *Managing Life, Learning and Work in the 21st Century*. Issue paper explaining why the new Australian Blueprint for Career Development is modeled on Canada's Blueprint for Life/Work Designs. 2003. Perth: Miles Morgan Australia Pty Ltd.

¹⁹ Po Bronson, “What Should I do With My Life? The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question.” Random House, January 2003.

²⁰ Ibid.

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People who love what they're doing, who love to learn new things, to meet new people, and to share what and whom they know with others: these are the people who wind up creating the most economic value and, as a result, moving their companies forward."²¹ Workers now, more than ever, are seeking meaning, purpose and opportunities for growth through their work. A new book from Harvard Business School Press exploring ways employers can beat the coming skills gap crisis by attracting and keeping motivated workers notes that, "Work that enables me to learn, grow, and try new things" ranked third among ten basic elements of the employment deal...It ranked higher than more pay, more vacation, flexible schedule, flexible workplace, work that is personally stimulating, and even (by a small margin) a workplace that is enjoyable.²²

Competency Frameworks

Tests and computer systems seldom answer people's life questions, and career professionals are not exclusively qualified to ask them. The career management paradigm puts control, and responsibility, in the hands of the individual, not in tests, computer systems or specialists. To be fully in control of their own lives, people need to learn career management competencies just as they learn math, science, language or technical skills. Career management must be a lifelong learning process for all rather than an occasional counselling process for the few "who need help." Career practitioners and human resource specialists who understand the new paradigm become pivotal players in the paradigm shift in their organizations. They play vital coaching, mentoring and coordinating roles. Those not attuned to the new paradigm are being relegated to the periphery, in declining numbers.

Two competency frameworks are needed to harmonize efforts to help citizens connect with opportunities and employers connect with the talent they need. The first is a framework of the competencies all citizens, of all ages, ethnic groups and regions, need to find and keep good jobs, and to self-manage their careers. The second is a framework of the competencies educators, career practitioners and human resources specialists need to: 1) help youth and adults acquire the competencies they need; and 2) help them connect with suitable learning and work opportunities; and 3) help employers connect with the talent they need.

Building on pioneering work by the U.S. National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee on the National Career Development Guidelines²³, career and workforce development experts across Canada have collaborated over the past 10 years in creating, testing and implementing the *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs*. The Blueprint (www.blueprint4life.ca) is Canada's national framework of career management competencies needed by all citizens (see below).

Parallel to the Blueprint development was the creation of the Standards and Guidelines for Career Practitioners (www.career-dev-guidelines.org). Led by the Canadian Career Development Foundation, this decade-long national initiative has

²¹ Tim Sanders, "Love Is the Killer App: How to Win Business and Influence Friends." Crown Business/Random House, February 2003.

²² Harvard Business School Press from Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent. Copyright 2006 Ken Dychtwald, Tamara J. Erickson, and Robert Morison.

²³ See: www.acrnetwork.org/ncdg.htm

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engaged professional associations of career and workforce development and human resources specialists at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels, from the public, private and non-profit sectors across the country in developing a competency framework for professionals. Provinces and territories are now moving towards certification of career practitioners based on this national framework.

Increasingly, the Blueprint and the Standards and Guidelines are being adopted across a broad spectrum of agencies, from educational and training institutions, public and private, through government, business and community-based organizations across Canada. Both have been adopted by other countries seeking to harmonize their talent-opportunity matching processes. Indeed, both were cited as model national infrastructure elements in the OECD report cited earlier that examined promising practices in 36 countries²⁴.

To help more citizens master career management skills, career practitioners, counsellors, educators, workforce developers and human resources specialists need programs and resources based on career management learning objectives and performance indicators. They need ways to accurately determine students' or clients' prior career management learning (PLAR) and to select programs, resources and services based on clients' actual needs (gaps). Using the Blueprint and Standards and Guidelines, organizations in the career and workforce development "business" can now develop new and more effective service delivery and accountability mechanisms.

Blueprint for Life/Work Designs

The *Blueprint* identifies core career management *competencies* with associated *performance indicators* at four levels across the lifespan. The core competencies are the basis upon which career management programs can be designed. The performance indicators, which are organized by *learning stages*, are used to measure learning gains and demonstrate program effectiveness. The Blueprint competencies are arranged in three *domains*:

A. Personal Management

1. Build and maintain a positive self-image
2. Interact positively and effectively with others
3. Change and grow throughout ones' life

B. Learning and Work Exploration

4. Participate in life-long learning supportive of life/work goals
5. Locate and effectively use life/work information
6. Understand the relationship between work and society/economy

C. Life/Work Building

7. Secure or create and maintain work
8. Make life/work enhancing decisions

²⁴ Watts, A.G., Sultana, R.G., (2004). Career Guidance Policies in 36 Countries: Contrasts and Common Themes. For Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap, a conference organized by OECD and the Canadian Government in collaboration with the European Community, the World Bank and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Toronto, October 2003.

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9. Maintain balanced life and work roles
10. Understand the changing nature of life and work roles
11. Understand, engage in and manage one's own life/work building process

Included are employability, essential and emotional skills, and character traits employer groups suggest are lacking in too many prospective employees, particularly youth. In fact, work habits and attitudes strongly influence early adult earnings, so educational and training programs need to emphasize work behaviours as much as they emphasize job skills.²⁵ Self-reliance grows out of the acquisition of these skills. Traditional career development practices have focused largely on *information acquisition* (competency 5) and job search (competency 7). The assumption has been that with access to appropriate information, and guidance as needed, people can choose the right occupation. Then they acquire the appropriate education and training and, with job search skills, find the right job. The reality is that even with good information and job search skills, if a person expects to fail again (competency 1), has poor communication and teamwork skills (competency 2), complains about change rather than embracing it (competency 3), is not open to learning and innovating (competency 4), and cannot balance life and work effectively (competency 9), even if they land a job they probably won't keep it long. Moreover, they will likely not find satisfaction and fulfillment in the job, and their employer is not likely to benefit from high productivity from this employee.

When career development becomes widely viewed as a quest to acquire and hone the competencies needed to construct a purposeful and fulfilling life, rather than a point-in-time choice of "the right career," everything changes. Now we are helping young people connect with their passions and purpose, and learn how to make the most of every day for the rest of their lives. From this optic, character elements such as respect, responsibility, honesty, integrity, empathy, fairness, initiative, perseverance, courage, optimism, and resilience become the foundation pieces, rather than career and labour market information or tests. One cannot maintain a positive self-image (competency 1) and earn genuine self-respect if one is dishonest, lacks integrity, etc. One cannot interact positively and effectively with others for long (competency 2) without being empathetic and fair. One cannot change and grow (competency 3) without courage and resilience. Helping students master these career and life building competencies will help them find and maintain jobs they find satisfying and fulfilling. It will also help them to be better friends, parents and citizens. Economic success buys comfort, not genuine happiness. If the next generation of youth master these competencies, the nation will enjoy not only increased economic prosperity, but a resurgence of the core human values and character upon which it was built.

The Blueprint recognizes that people at different ages and stages learn differently, and that even young children can learn and appreciate these competencies. In fact, attitudes toward work are formed early in life, so workforce and career management policy must take a developmental perspective. Vocational psychologists such as Super, Crites, Gribbons, and Lohnes have each concluded from

²⁵ Savickas, M, 14 Facts Career Specialists Could Assert in Debates about Public Policy Regarding Workforce Development and Career Guidance, For International Career Development Policy/Practice Symposium participants, Vancouver, May 2002.

their longitudinal studies that playful competence in early adolescence relates to more realistic educational and vocational choices, occupational success, and career progress.²⁶ For this reason, the core competencies are defined at four developmental levels: *Level 1*: Primary/elementary school; *Level 2*: Junior high/middle school; *Level 3*: High school; *Level 4*: Adult, including post-secondary. To view the entire framework, with nearly 500 performance indicators sorted by developmental levels and learning stages visit: <http://blueprint4life.ca/competencies.cfm>.

Comprised of *skills, knowledge* and *attitudes*, career self-management competencies cannot be acquired entirely through traditional academic teaching modes. For instance, one could read about basketball rules and techniques for a lifetime (*knowledge*), even successfully pass exams on the subject, without ever acquiring the *skills* to dribble, pass or shoot. One can have *knowledge* of a range of occupations, without having the skills to perform any well. And even the best skills and knowledge are nullified by bad *attitude*.

Career self-management competencies can only be mastered through *experiencing* them. As the old adage goes, "Experience is the best teacher." One way to experience competencies is through simulations. Airlines use flight simulators to hone pilots' competencies. Commercial pilots are regularly required to react to situations in simulators, from extreme weather to equipment failure, to develop competencies they will need should potentially catastrophic events occur in reality. Business schools use case studies. Medical and law schools use internships. Apprenticeships use shop time. The military uses training exercises. All use classroom instruction as well, but consider it insufficient to achieve the learning needed.

Pre-schools use games. Play is the most natural form of experiential learning. At early ages children play house, doctor/nurse, soldier, professional athlete, fireman, rock star, etc. They are intrigued with what the future and adult life may hold. The power of imagination is a potent resource in mastering career management competencies. Like sunlight, the imagination is pervasive, subtle, immediately present and available²⁷. And like sunlight it is naturally catalytic and transformative. Anticipatory realities are what make individuals and groups cohere, they help transform *what if* into *what is*.

The Real Game Series

New research from the University of Michigan²⁸ demonstrates a link between schoolwork, grades and the vision kids have of themselves as happy, successful adults. It suggests that rather than berating them for bad grades, it would be far more productive to help them shape that vision and understand the direct connection between effort today and success tomorrow. "Kids are much like adults: They're not going to work hard unless they envision some sort of payoff." These are primary outcomes of all programs in [The Real Game Series](#)²⁹.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Getting Serious Play: Life Span Career Education. S. Jarvis & H. B. Esbin. January 2006

²⁸ <http://www.miller-mccune.com/culture-society/motivating-students-via-mental-time-travel-15122/>

²⁹ <http://www.lifework.ca/lifework/therealgame.html>

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With all programs in The Real Game Series students learn career management competencies by applying them in role-playing simulations that take them to the future and back.³⁰ And like Marty McFly, the hero of the 80s film, they return to the present with enhanced career management competencies and a better appreciation for how they can realize their dreams. Bill Barry, a Newfoundland writer and teacher was inspired to create these programs when his daughter Mara, then 12, observed she couldn't see the connection between school and her career aspirations. The *Real Game*, as Barry aptly called it, provides students with an opportunity to make that connection through highly engaging life and career simulations. Players play the role of a character (freeing players by taking ego out of the learning equation) who acts out adult work roles and related lifestyles. Players create their own business cards, purchase homes and cars, settle into neighbourhoods and establish communities, budget money and time, juggle work, home and leisure responsibilities, plan business travel and vacations, deal with the unexpected at work and home, and much more, always linking future adult realities to their school subjects. They also learn the impact of character traits and attitude on their character's success. They see, for example, what happens when their character demonstrates honesty, courage, respect, empathy, perseverance, integrity, etc., or lack thereof.

The Real Game Series was cited in the OECD report referenced earlier, with the Blueprint and Standards and Guidelines, among the most promising practices in the 36 countries studied.³¹ There are four Real Game Series programs available for students in Grade's 3 through 12, and a program for adults. Each program is played a few hours weekly over two to three months. Barry's original educational experiment is now played regularly in nearly half of Canada's primary and secondary schools, and in thousands of schools in the United States, United Kingdom, and several other countries. The Real Game Series helps players understand that their very realities are mediated through their individual and shared imagining. In the final analysis, the power of imagination in the game of life is everything.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Watts, A.G., Sultana, R.G., (2004). Career Guidance Policies in 36 Countries: Contrasts and Common Themes. For Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap, a conference organized by OECD and the Canadian Government in collaboration with the European Community, the World Bank and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Toronto, October 2003.

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Canada's education system is more successful than most in helping young people acquire academic and technical skills. It is less successful in equipping students with the competencies they need to manage their career. Too few students see the relevance of their school experience to their future and, thus lack motivation to excel in school. In fact, school is their first job beyond home. It can be the perfect "starter job" in which they can acquire academic knowledge that will serve them well in the future, and hone the habits, skills, attitudes and character needed for success in school and all future life roles.

Increasing skills gaps and too many adults in work that undervalues their talents are causing Canadian productivity and competitiveness to slip. Employers urgently need to find future employees with the right skills and, equally important, the right attitudes. While employers need more talent, too many young people, and adults, are languishing in unemployment, underemployment and marginalization. New, more effective and efficient mechanisms are needed to connect talent with opportunities across Canada.

An all-out national campaign is needed to help connect more Canadians, each with a unique set of talents, with employers crying for talent and offering opportunities. Commitment to action will be needed from government, business and industry, labour, educational and community organizations. This paper has highlighted promising components of this national campaign. Each of the following not-for-profit resources was initially developed with federal and provincial government support, but each requires additional, non-monetary support in on-going, widespread implementation:

1. The [Blueprint for Life/Work Designs](#) to help many more citizens purposefully acquire career and life management competencies.
2. The [Standards and Guidelines for Career Practitioners](#) to ensure professionals in education, training and workforce development settings have the competencies they need to help individuals.
3. [The Real Game](#) is now available in digital format which students can access from home to supplement classroom learning, engages students' imaginations and motivates them to work harder and smarter in school to prepare for success as adults.

These are but examples of an array of resources that must be brought to bear to ensure many more Canadians with unique talent sets are connected with employers offering a vast array of opportunities. The result will be windfalls in increased program efficiencies for governments, increased productivity for employers, and greater prosperity for individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

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