PROJECT *INTEGRATE*
Exploring Future Employment Pathways

Does One Size Fit All?

Diversity in Digital Training, Employment, and Career Navigation Platforms

June, 2021

Acknowledgements

A Time of Change

While it's been said there's no greater constant than change, it seems change has never happened faster. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally hastened the transformation of Canada's labour market and digital economy. It has exacerbated systemic issues in society, enhanced the pace of digitization and altered the workforce and career paths in ways that will continue to be explored for years.

Youth in Canada

While technological advancements and trends in the job market have changed over the past decade, Canadian demographics have also evolved. The current generation of youth entering the workforce is the most digitally connected and diverse generation the country has ever seen. According to Statistics Canada, 27 per cent of the 7 million youth across the country identify as members of visible minority groups, and nearly 100 per cent of youth between the ages of 15 and 30 use the internet daily.[1] According to the United Nations, today's young people are an extremely heterogeneous group with multiple elements of identity that inform their experiences. [2]

Diverse youth are often also facing multiple systemic barriers and are more vulnerable to unemployment, underemployment and underrepresentation in the labour market. Historically, youth, workers with less recognizable transferrable skills and racialized communities have been disproportionately affected during economic downturns and the current circumstances are no different. Moreover, despite their increasing access to technology, not all youth can appropriately utilize employment-related platforms. There is an opportunity for widely-used digital training, employment and career navigation platforms to champion practices that support and empower underrepresented youth.

There is an opportunity for widely-used digital training, employment, and career navigation platforms to champion practices that support and empower underrepresented youth.

PERCENTAGE OF PERSONS WHO BELONG TO A VISIBLE MINORITY GROUP

Age 15 to 30   ☐ 1996   ☐ 2016   Age 65 or older

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 and 2016 Census.
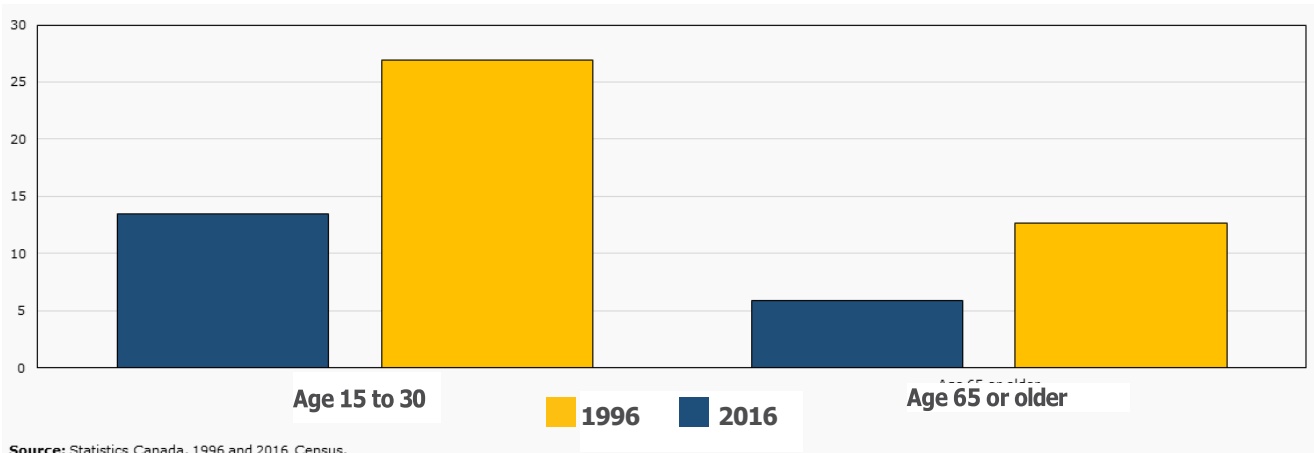
Statistics Canada. (2019, May 8). A Portrait of Canadian Youth: March 2019 Updates. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2019003-eng.htm
United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2020). 2020 World Youth Report: Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 Agenda. United Nations.

Digital Training, Employment, and Career Navigation Platforms

Career pathways are no longer linear. There is no rulebook to success and everyone has a different journey to a fulfilling career. Digital workforce development platforms are using data-driven approaches to enhance youth's ability to mobilize, understand their interests and skills, navigate career opportunities, interact with like-minded peers and connect with employers.

Project Integrate, a multi-partner coalition, explored the potential of a single, technology-enabled employment pathway for youth. The initiative aimed to help youth, and those entering the Canadian workforce, navigate the labour market in more personalized, responsive and targeted ways. Project Integrate mapped how technology-enabled employment pathways can enhance youth's outcomes and improve their career navigation experience. Therefore, it's essential to identify best practices of employment-related platforms that boost support for users and cater to the needs of minority and underrepresented communities.

Inclusive digital platforms provide an avenue for underrepresented communities to actively and confidently take charge of their career journey.

How digital workforce development platforms can level the playing field

Digital employment, training and career navigation platforms can play an important role in making the workforce development landscape more inclusive and accessible. These tools provide an avenue for underrepresented communities to actively and confidently take charge of their career journey. Customizable features such as self-paced learning and multi-language services can help newcomers, individuals facing multiple barriers to employment and other vulnerable groups to maximize their experience within platforms. The **ALiGN** Assessment and Job-matching Platform, for example, provides psychometric-based talent-to-role fit assessment and job-matching services in more than 16 languages. Some platforms also provide options for limiting sensory detractions, which make them accessible for many.

Digital platforms are increasingly becoming specialized and more targeted, catering to diverse youth, professionals and employers focused on equality, diversity and inclusivity. In the digital learning, employment and career navigation landscape, platforms tailored to the needs of underrepresented groups are an emerging area of focus. Therefore, Project Integrate has compiled and assessed a snapshot of 60+ digital workforce development platforms that are targeted towards underrepresented and minority communities. These platforms, included in the Appendix, are aimed at delivering targeted training, networking, job matching, entrepreneurship and virtual collaboration services to minority and underrepresented youth and professionals.

The platforms explored in this snapshot tailor their services to underrepresented groups including women, visible minorities and racialized individuals, newcomers including refugees and immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community and individuals with disabilities. It is important to note that these platforms do not represent all specialized products available today, nor are they inclusive of all categories, minority groups, or phases of the employment pathway.

Project Integrate's assessment showed that these platforms explore themes specific to the target demographic, such as security, empowerment, community development and accessibility. By understanding the importance of intersectional identities, interdependencies and the realities of life for diverse youth and professionals, these platforms strive to make digital learning, employment and career navigation accessible, convenient and realistic for many.

Key Learnings from Digital Tools and Platforms that Serve Underrepresented Groups

Project Integrate conducted extensive consultations on the enablers and barriers to technology adoption among employment service providers. Engaging 240 employment service provider staff through a primary research and consulting with more than 160 staff from the sector across Canada, the initiative explored how technology-enabled employment pathways and platforms can enhance youth employment outcomes. Understanding that youth from minority and underrepresented communities often face additional barriers, the initiative has also identified more than 60 specialized platforms that tailor their services to these communities.

We learned that algorithms embedded in data platforms have led to vulnerable groups often not represented or their skills and experiences not adequately recognized. Some labour shortage occupations and employment opportunities were not recognized or did not show up in searches. However, a sector focus that encourages ownership of their own issues could lead to further fragmentation of the ecosystem, when it may be argued that players should be coming together and plugging in to a consistent ecosystem. It is key that digital platforms be designed to be "sector agnostic", while still allowing responses to sector-specific priorities. It is critical that platforms recognize all occupations and job seekers are exposed to all opportunities and navigational tools so they can take short term opportunities and record their skills as a way to contribute to resilience. In the ultimate analysis, ensuring 'Specialization without Fragmentation. Exposure without Vulnerability.'

Project Integrate identified various key learnings from minority communities serving digital platforms. The initiative found that these digital platforms prioritize features that are often overlooked by widely-used platforms, as they disproportionately affect underrepresented communities. The platforms help bridge the gap between broad career exploration and career-matching for underrepresented groups. They offer community and occasionally provide specific, targeted advice such as how to speak, dress and interact in professional settings. The following are some overall themes and key learnings:

Monitoring employers with friendly policies: A variety of platforms targeting women, the LGBTQ+ community and visible minority groups incorporate resources such as metrics or member verified lists of employers that have inclusive policies and practices. **InHerSight** and **myGwork** are examples of platforms that monitor women, LGBTQ+ and ally friendly employers.

Enhanced information sharing: Some platforms encourage greater transparency and information-sharing among those underrepresented in the workplace, sector, or leadership roles by creating an outlet for "taboo topic" discussions. Topics include salary discussions, negotiation strategies and targeted networking. **Career Contessa's** salary project, for example, is built to encourage salary transparency among women.

Safety and security: Platforms that predominantly tailor their services for women often incorporate safety, confidentiality and anti-harassment protocols and policies. Mentoring Her, for example, has an established screening process for all new users to limit misrepresentation and misuse of the platform.

Inspiration through representation: Digital platforms provide an outlet where individuals who may never naturally meet have the chance to connect and share stories. Some platforms use this as an opportunity to amplify the voices of diverse leaders who represent their target demographic. Platforms such as **Career Girls** allow individuals to share their unique journeys to inspire the next generation of leaders.

Building long-term labour pipelines: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) has been an important topic of conversation over the past year. Many employers are trying to develop responsible and accountable long-term DEI strategies. Therefore, building pipelines through which youth from underrepresented communities can learn and grow has been an area of investment. Platforms such as the **BYP Network** are strengthening the workforce and empowering youth intentionally and thoughtfully.

Working towards end-to-end success: Digital platforms are enabling young and diverse entrepreneurs to connect to a plethora of resources to help them along each stage of their journey, from concept development to product launch. Platforms such as **Woken** and **Women Entrepreneurship Platform** are connecting individuals to investors, mentors, learning opportunities, market information and connecting them to ecosystems that will enable long-term innovation.

Sector-specific Platforms: Sectors such as computer science and technology have invested in platforms that connect historically underrepresented demographics to the sector. Platforms such as **Diversify Tech** and **Code Your Future** provide labour market resources, learning and collaborative opportunities for inexperienced, underrepresented youth in STEM, to actively diversify the sector and inject fresh ideas.

Connecting Skilled Workers to Opportunities: It is not uncommon for non-profit and civic organizations to host job boards that feature organizations seeking skilled, diverse candidates. However, digital platforms such as **Jopwell, Recruit Disability, 70 Million Jobs**, and **iHispano** have created large-scale, easy to access, user-friendly ways for skilled workers from underrepresented communities to search for jobs confidently.

Greater Community Focus: Various platforms, as part of their offering, focus on nurturing and building up entire communities. These platforms often aim to build a sustainable ecosystem by facilitating collaboration, co-creation and large-scale information sharing among users. Platforms such as LadyLab and **Women Who Freelance** are built to encourage collaboration to achieve collective success.

Recommended Best Practices for Large-scale Adoption

Project Integrate explored potential future youth employment pathways that are more personalized and trusted. The initiative identifying best practices and mapped a blueprint for digital employment services for youth. The key learnings from the previous section represent an opportunity to embrace best practices that cater to the needs of underrepresented youth. Therefore, based on the 60+ platforms assessed, the following best practices are recommended for large-scale adoption. These best practices not only support underrepresented communities and help diverse youth access career opportunities, but they can also play a role in creating safer and more personalized digital spaces.

Establish and enforce safety, confidentiality and security practices within platforms to ensure user comfort and reduce the incidence of harassment within platforms.

Users with varied life experiences should feel safe and comfortable sharing their interests, needs and skill levels. Clarifying and enforcing security and confidentiality guidelines can help provide a more robust experience for diverse youth.

Take job matching a step further to include employer-worker fit.

Many job-matching platforms and job boards allow users to create profiles so their skills and interests can be matched with open roles. However, there is an opportunity to expand the matching criteria to include factors such as organizational policies and practices, social impact, culture and values.

Enhance collaboration and entrepreneurial features within platforms

There is an opportunity for platforms to integrate features such as professional networking with in-platform collaboration and co-creation. Without further integration within the employment, career navigation and training pathway, important ideas and opportunities for collaboration are often lost in translation. This is especially important for youth who are still building their skills, professional networks and exploring career options including entrepreneurship.

Take a systemic approach to workforce development and ensure users, employers and other partners are a part of the conversation.

Employment-related platforms have an opportunity to incorporate labour market information, key players in the workforce development landscape such as investors, incubators, thought leaders, advisors, as well as employers, youth and other stabilizing support partners in the conversation. This robust approach could enhance user experience and deliver long-term labour market outcomes.

Widely-used workforce development platforms should develop resources, recommendations, and metrics to support employers in creating more inclusive workplaces.

Develop thought leadership to set industry standards and address systemic issues.

Widely-used workforce development platforms should develop resources, recommendations and metrics to support employers in creating more inclusive workplaces. These resources highlight the values and practices of a sustainable employment ecosystem and is an opportunity for platforms to lead large-scale change.

Incorporate enablers such as scholarships and events into platforms to help users connect with opportunities seamlessly.

Training, career navigation and employment platforms should consider connecting learning opportunities to available scholarships or loans, connecting job opportunities to open houses, internships and events, connecting professional networking groups with related hack-a-thons or in-person opportunities. These community, needs and interest-specific supports would enhance user confidence and success, as well as promote continued professional development.

Create spaces for users to develop and share content.
Various widely-used platforms already incorporate this feature. However, there is an opportunity to continue to build spaces within platforms where users can share original content and resources. These spaces provide an opportunity for users to discuss non-technical aspects of the employment journey such as how to dress and speak during interviews. These spaces also provide professionals and youth an avenue to share their ideas and advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion-focused policies and practices in the workplace.

Develop interest-based communities to enhance collaboration and targeted professional networking.
Many professional networking platforms are built around the concept of connecting individual professionals. However, there is an opportunity for these platforms to develop tools and spaces where interest-based groups and communities can connect, share ideas, opportunities and advice. This community approach could help individuals from diverse backgrounds engage with others and build professional relationships in a more casual, less intimidating context.

Connect employers and users to develop stronger, diverse labour pipelines.
Many platforms engage users and employers with a recruitment or job matching goal. However, very few widely-used platforms take a long-term, pipeline development approach to employment. To build more inclusive and diverse organizations in a transparent, responsible and accountable way, it is important to ensure long-term skills pipelines that engage diverse candidates, are being developed.

In Conclusion

Canada's youth are not only diverse with regards to their backgrounds, identities and experiences. They are also innovative thinkers. However, many young people face intersectional discrimination and systemic barriers. Digital workforce development platforms are beginning to play an equalizing role in allowing youth to interact with the labour market in an empowering and comfortable way. As employment-related platforms become more integrated and advanced, it is important to use an intersectional lens and embed best practices that deliver for *all* Canadians.

APPENDIX

The following platforms, aimed at delivering training, employment and career navigation services to vulnerable and underrepresented communities, were analysed for this whitepaper.

2050

70 Million Jobs

AbilityJobs

Aleria

AllBright

Asianhires

Basta

Betterteam

Black Career Network

Black Career Women's Network (BCWN)

Black Female Founders

Black Jobs

Black Tech Jobs

Black Tech Pipeline

BYP Network

Campus Pride

Career Contessa

Career Girls

Circa Jobs

Code Your Future

Corporette

disABLEDperson

Diversify Tech

Ellevate

Ethnic Jobsite

Evenbreak

eWomenNetwork

Fairygodboss

Freelancing Females

Freelancing Gems

Girl Boss

iHispano

include

InHerSight

Jopwell

Kiron

LadyLab

Latinas in Tech

LatPro

Mentoring Her

myGwork

Out Buro

PDN Recruits

Pink Jobs

Plum Alley

Power to Fly

PWN Global Women's Network

Recruit Disability

RefugeesWork

Rise

SheWorx

Techqueria

The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)

UNIDO

United Latino Job Bank

Upwardly Global

WeLearn

Woken: Career Exploration Platform

Women in Data

Women Who Freelance

Womeneur

WomenTech Network

Workeen