

RECOGNISING AND ADDRESSING UPCOMING CHALLENGES AND TRENDS IN THE LABOR MARKET

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Abstract

Emerging technologies are unquestionably changing the nature of the labour market. The Future Ready Framework attempts to assist EDPs in identifying new trends and challenges. This paper summarises the discussion that took place at the 2019 Ontario Economic Development Conference that was held in Toronto. First, the paper will explain the Future Ready Framework concerning skills and talent. Second, the paper will discuss the impact of housing and transportation on the labour market. Third, the paper will discuss the labour shortage in specialised skill sectors. Fourth, the paper will discuss the concept of survival jobs and the impact on the labour market. Last, the paper will discuss the ways EDPs to mitigate these challenges.

Introduction: The Future Ready Framework

The Future Ready Framework attempts to address the upcoming key issues for Economic Development Organizations (EDOs), and the different level of influence and control they can address these issues at. The first level referred to as 'Control' represents Economic Development Organizations. The second level referred to as 'Influence' represents the community in the EDO's sphere of influence. The last level referred to as 'Awareness' represents the larger national and international forces at play. The Future Ready Framework identifies seven key areas in which change is arising; Economy, funding, governance, demographics, environment, talent and skills, and technology. This paper will only focus on the theme of 'talent and skills'. The framework for talent and skills are as follows:

Control: Skills Gap and/or Shortage of Human Resources

Influence: Higher Education and Workforce

Awareness: Human Capital

The 2019 Ontario Economic Development Conference that was held in Toronto attempted to explore these topics through a discussion session. This paper will discuss the key issues that were brought up during the discussion on the emerging trends and challenges.

Emerging Trends and Challenges

Housing

A re-occurring theme within the discussion was the need for affordability and diversity in housing. An EDP from Chatham Kent identified the difficulty in retaining employees within the area due to the shortage in housing. She identified the need for diversity in housing, as the current types of houses in the market does not match the current housing needs in the area. When asked to elaborate more on the concept of diversity in housing, she stated it is the need for modern housing. This shortage in housing is now directly affecting the labor market. For example, Chatham Kent is currently experiencing a shortage in physician and family health care professionals. In an attempt to address this shortage, the municipality is actively welcoming international students to fill these positions. The students, however, are also finding it difficult to adjust to the community due to the shortage in housing diversity.

Additionally, a challenge faced in Chatham Kent is the shortage in Engineering. It was identified that if more engineers chose Chatham Kent, the shortage in housing diversity may be addressed, however, the lack of housing and transportation is blocking engineers from choosing Chatham Kent as a place of residence and opportunity.

Transportation

Transportation is an integral part of the socio-economic wellbeing of Northern Ontario communities. It enhances commercial prospects, improves regional connections, offers access to vital health and social services, and enables the flow of people and goods. Yet, the lack of transportation into and within Northern communities is very visible.

The means of transportation plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of accepting a new job offer. An important question employees often ponder is how their commute to work will look like. While cities such as Toronto struggle with over exhaustion of their transit systems, rural communities struggle with attracting employees with no means of transportation into the area. As rural communities attract employees from surrounding areas to fill employment opportunities, commuting to work becomes challenges due to the lack of transportation.

Labor Shortage in Specialised Skills Sectors

As identified in the Future Ready report, there seems to be an emerging labor shortage in specialized skill sectors. These include job opportunities in manufacturing, engineering and technical jobs such as HVAC engineering. At a time when organizations are facing the lowest unemployment in 40 years, most of the jobs in demand that are growing are mid-skilled roles that require post-secondary training, although not necessarily a full university degree. Skilled trade workers (electricians, welders, mechanics), sales representatives, drivers, engineers, and technicians have consistently ranked among the top five difficult roles to fill in Canada since 2010.

Moreover, the Future Ready Report identifies the affect of automation on the trucking industry. The opportunity of having self-driving trucks is creating a labour shortage in the trucking industry. The explanation is that individuals are less likely to enter a work field that may be unavailable in the upcoming years.

Conclusion: Navigating these Challenges

The second half of the discussion focused on possible ways to mitigate negative impacts that may arise through these challenges. The question began with “where do we begin?” Often time professionals and researchers tend to neglect the important role parents play in shaping the future workforce will look like. It was suggested during the discussion that parents must stray from encouraging children to only pursue careers in the liberal arts. Parents must look beyond the conventional careers and encourage their children to explore the various careers in the skilled labor sector. Second, guidance councilors need to play a critical role in encouraging students to explore careers in technical skill labor. Through early intervention by parents and guidance councilors it may be possible to shape the future work force according to the needs of the job market. During the discussion it was revealed that schools often tend to promote only a few types of careers that may then lead to an imbalance of available workforce in the future. Hence, its critical that parents and guidance councilors understand the ways in which they impact the shaping of the future availability of the work force.

Furthermore, colleges must increase their bridging programs for newcomers and for individuals who are pursuing a different career path. As mentioned above, it is no longer the time where individuals remain in one industry their entire career. Today, individuals are pursuing different profession midway into their career. Hence, Colleges should also create programs that will ease the process of pursuing a new profession for those individuals who already have experience in a different field.

Works Cited

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- Statistics Canada. “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables.” *Table 1.a Proportion of Workers Commuting to Work by Car, Truck or Van, by Public Transit, on Foot, or by Bicycle, Census Metropolitan Areas, 2011*, Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 1 Nov. 2017, www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/imm/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=21&Geo=01.