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Career Management Paradigm Shift:
Prosperity for Citizens, Windfalls for Governments

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The new knowledge economy is changing the way people work. Recent projections (Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), 1999) suggest that new labour market entrants are likely to experience a succession of work roles, with 12 to 25 jobs in up to five industry sectors in their working lives. At times they may have concurrent part-time jobs, at others no paid work. Work periods will be interspersed with periods of learning, either full- or part-time, while holding one or more jobs. Krumboltz and Worthington (1999) describe a future where “there will be more of a need for worker flexibility as worker requirements change more frequently and new teams are formed to work on specific projects. Workers will increasingly be expected to move from project to project doing whatever work needs to be accomplished, and not merely to fulfill a written job description.” That future is here.

The Changing Nature of Canada’s Workforce

The workplace of the knowledge era is a radically different place at the beginning of the 21st century compared to the 20th century: 97 % of Canadian businesses have fewer than 50 employees and 750,000 have fewer than 5 employees (Shaw, 2002). Self-employment is growing, particularly among aging baby boomers. Even in larger organizations, the notions of self-employment and working for customers and clients have replaced working for a boss. Doing what you are told and following established procedures is now balanced with encouragement to invent new solutions, getting the job done, and better serving customers and clients. Just being responsible for your job has been replaced by pressure to be a good team player and help the team continuously learn and improve. Respect used to be accorded to position. It is now earned by people,

at any level in the organization, on the basis of their contribution, commitment to learning and growing, and their willingness to help others improve.

The very notion of job is shifting dramatically. In most contemporary settings those who say "That's not my job!" won't have a job for long. Workers are increasingly seeking meaning, purpose and fulfillment from their work roles, not just pay cheques. Career is increasingly being viewed as something every human has, for a lifetime (Gysbers, 1997). The concept occupation is an anachronism in many industry sectors, yet it remains the cornerstone of career information systems and databases, guidance processes, and post-secondary education and training offerings. Work is now defined not by occupational titles, but by skills and values. Effective career builders know how to shape and build their careers project by project.

As technologies and skill requirements change, demand for workers changes. Workers need to be able to follow occupational and industrial trends, observe where job growth or decline is likely to happen, and position themselves to adjust to the trends. The fastest growing category of companies is the smallest ones, which have the greatest failure rate. Larger companies are being merged, downsized, split up, re-engineered, or bought out. Job security is no longer a given for anyone at any level in any organization (Carlson, 2002).

To succeed, self-employed workers in atypical, contract work arrangements need to have specialized skills, be aware of their value to specific employers, and be capable of marketing themselves effectively. This demands a high level of self-knowledge and self-confidence, both of which are career management skills. The more education and skills a person has, the greater the likelihood of securing work, earning a good income,

and remaining employed. High school dropouts have an unemployment rate of more than 18 %, compared with 7 % for those with a university degree. Over the next 5 years, occupations that require less than high school education will account for less than 6 % of new job opportunities. More than 70 % of new jobs will require at least some postsecondary education (HRDC, 2000).

Canada needs more highly skilled workers, yet our workforce is shrinking: 50 % of our 2015 workforce is already working. By 2011 immigration will account for all net workforce growth. In all sectors, it is more important than ever that Canadians connect with the best possible learning and work opportunities (HRDC, 2002). Yet too few education and training institutions teach career management skills, and most companies of 50 or fewer workers have no employee training and development or human resources services. As a result, employees typically make career choices unassisted, without the benefit of the career management skills they need to succeed.

The Key: Choosing Wisely

The key is helping Canadians choose education and training programs and fields of work that serve both their needs and the needs of the evolving workforce. The challenge of career development specialists is to: help Canadians learn how to choose wisely, as often as necessary, and be committed to on-going learning to become better, more satisfied, and more fulfilled with their choices, both at work and in their communities. Canadians need good career and labour market information. High quality, current, and comprehensive information is essential, but it is not enough. Canadians also need skills to use the information effectively to make sound choices. They need skills that give them legitimate self-reliance. They need to be able to *focus*, on what they

have to offer and on what is important to them. They need *direction*, knowing their options, what is suitable for them, and what is needed to get where they want to go. They need *adaptability*, the skill of making the best of ever-present change. Collectively, these are career management skills. They cannot be learned solely from printed publications and websites. Human support during the learning process is essential.

A New Career Management Paradigm

The new economy demands a new approach to career development. People need to identify broad industry sector destinations and learn employability and transferable skills to equip them for multiple roles within these sectors. Mastery of career management skills, which include transferable employability and personal management skills, needs be part of mainstream primary, secondary, and post-secondary education programs; employee training and development programs; and remedial programs for adults in career transitions. Acquisition of these skills increases the likelihood of workplace success, and also increases likelihood of success in relationships, family, and community. Therefore, an investment in helping more citizens master these skills provides a multi-faceted return on investment, benefiting both individuals and society.

To illustrate the need for a new career management paradigm, consider the following illustration. A traditional vocational guidance paradigm expected young people to make an informed, long-term career choice before graduating from high school. Yet, ask any group of adults if they are now doing what they expected to be doing when they left high school, and fewer than 10 % typically will raise their hands.

The old vocational guidance model was about helping people make informed career decisions, and went as follows: (1) Explore one's interests, aptitudes, values, etc. (often with tests and professional help); (2) Explore the world of work using comprehensive, current information; (3) Determine a "best fit" occupational goal by matching personal traits to job factors; (4) Develop a plan to obtain the prerequisite education and training; (5) Graduate, obtain secure employment, work hard, climb the ladder; and (6) Retire as young as possible on full pension.

The new career management model is about helping people become healthy, self-reliant citizens, able to cope with constant change in rapidly changing labour markets and maintain balance between life and work roles. The cornerstones of the new career management paradigm are the "high five" principles: (1) Know yourself, believe in yourself and follow your heart; (2) Focus on the journey, not the destination. Become a good traveler; (3) You're not alone. Access your allies, and be a good ally; (4) Change is constant, and brings with it new opportunities; and (5) Learning is lifelong, and that's good. We're most alive when we're learning.

The catch phrase of the old paradigm, "What do you want to be when ...?" loses relevance in labour markets where new workforce entrants can anticipate having 12 to 25 jobs in up to 5 industry sectors (AHRE, 1999). It is now unrealistic, even self-defeating, to expect anyone to choose an occupation for life. Through no fault of their own many educators, spouses, and parents do not fully comprehend the new work world. Inadvertently they create additional pressures for those they are trying to help. For example, many parents feel their children are doing something wrong or failing somehow when they cannot secure a permanent job soon after finishing school.

As Bronson (2003) points out “People don’t succeed by migrating to a “hot” industry. They thrive by focusing on who they really are – and connecting that to 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.”

Society expects people to select an occupational goal then pursue the prerequisite education and training. While preparing to enter the workforce they are graded on acquisition of academic and technical skills, not career management skills, despite constant pleas from employers to teach employability skills. While academic and technical qualifications open doors, life and career management skills largely determine selection, success, and advancement (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). Job seekers who market themselves as skilled in narrow occupational specialties do themselves a disservice. Those who can describe the skills they bring to an organization to help it achieve long-term success, in whatever combination of roles, are in greater demand. The key in the workplace as in life is not just finding the right job, friend or life partner, it is becoming the right worker, friend or life partner. The new paradigm sees Canadians learning a new set of career and life management skills that will enable them to construct personal meaning and plan their lives and careers with confidence and intention.

The new career management paradigm recognizes that career development is a life-long process of skill acquisition and building through a continuum of learning, development, and mastery. This process enables people to be in charge of their own careers, having enough focus and direction for stability, and enough flexibility and

adaptability to allow for change along the way. Career management does not seek to help people make the right choice the first time. It equips them to make good choices, time after time, for the rest of their lives. The aim is to help people become self-reliant, allowing them to provide for themselves and their families, and to contribute positively to our ever-changing workforce.

Why A New Paradigm is Needed

Many workers go through their entire working lives without focus or direction, and without learning career management skills. They fall into the work they do or make do with whatever is available. For them, the old paradigm has not worked. They are spending 50 % of their conscious lives in inappropriate work settings, which impacts the other 50 % of their non-sleep hours. Wherever there is a mismatch between workers' strengths, the nature of the work, and current labour force needs, there are problems. These workers either stay on the job, unsatisfied and going through the motions, or leave. In both cases, there is a loss of productivity and a waste of human capital, whether measured in training costs or unrealized human potential. The fallout from gaps between people's skills and workforce needs includes enormous costs in social spending: on education, health care, social services, protection and correctional services. These are outlined below.

Lost Productivity and Reduced International Competitiveness

Variability in employee productivity influences the economics of an organization. Employers who can select more congruent employees (right person in the right job) have a distinct advantage over their competitors. After conducting a meta-analysis of 85 years of research on personnel selection, Schmidt and Hunter (1998) conclude that

person-job congruence benefits the worker, the company, and the nation. We are sitting on a huge potential boom in productivity – if we could just get the square pegs out of the round holes (Bronson, 2003).

Canada's annualized Gross Domestic Product in the second quarter of 2002 was \$1,138.2 billion (Statistics Canada, 2002a). A modest 1 % increase in productivity through better matching of individuals' skills and workforce requirements would result in an increase of over \$11 billion in goods and services in 2002. Better mechanisms for helping people connect with work roles they like, and in which they excel, would have profound ramifications for Canadian society.

Education Funding

Many students are floundering or unsure why they are learning what they are learning. Many more cannot decide what programs they should be in. Many change programs, underachieve, or drop out. Many students do not fully understand the diversity of work roles that are suitable for the academic and technical skills they are acquiring. Not enough students are acquiring and mastering the skills of personal management, career management, and work and learning exploration, they will need to complement their academic skills in becoming self-reliant citizens. Effective career management programs would help youth develop these skills and gain greater focus and direction. In 2001, \$64.1 billion was invested by all levels of government in Canada on primary, secondary, and post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, 2002b). While we might hope to do better, even a 1 % increase in efficiency through having more students learning what they are motivated to learn, translates to potential savings of \$600 million annually.

Health Care Funding

Those who are unemployed or in work roles they dislike are subject to increased stress, have increased likelihood of unhealthy lifestyles, and may be more prone to substance and physical abuse. Good jobs foster mental health whereas poor jobs cause distress (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991).

Over \$76.9 billion was invested by all levels of government in Canada in 2001 on health care (Statistics Canada, 2002b). If work related problems accounted for only 1 % of the people now availing themselves of health care services, nearly \$800 million annually could be saved by providing people with better career management skills.

Social Services

The term social inclusion has received increased attention in recent years. To be included is to be accepted and to be able to participate fully within our families, our communities, and our society. Those who are excluded, whether because of poverty, poor health, gender, race, or lack of education or skills, do not have the opportunity for full participation in the economic and social benefits of society.

Diamantopoulou (2000) points out that social inclusion makes good economic sense. The European Commission estimates that social exclusion costs between 12% and 20% of the GDP of the European Union member states. If the situation is similar in Canada, these percentages translate to social exclusion costs of \$136 to \$228 billion annually. In addition to the social exclusion costs, \$113 billion was invested by all levels of government in Canada in 2001 on social services, including social assistance and welfare (Statistics Canada, 2002b). Substantial savings could accrue if more citizens possessed the skills they need to be self-reliant, manage their careers more effectively,

and constructively address change. A modest 1 % saving on these expenditures would save over \$1 billion annually.

Protection and Corrections

Over \$15 billion was invested by all levels of government in Canada in 2001 on protection of persons and property, including policing, prisons and correctional services (Statistics Canada, 2002b). One might expect that a contributing factor in the case of some law-breakers and detainees (say a modest 1%) is their inability to connect with appropriate life and work roles. A 1 % improvement in helping more of these youth and adults acquire career management skills, become hopeful about their future and achieve increased self-reliance, could generate savings of \$150 million annually.

Similar arguments to the above could be made for many aspects of Canadian society, such as employment insurance, lost government revenue due to unemployment, and so on. If more Canadians were able to connect with steady work roles they considered appropriate, manage their work and learning opportunities, and move from one work role to another as needed, more Canadians would be working in areas they found rewarding and all levels of government could anticipate increased revenues.

The ability of Canadians to make effective connections to meaningful work is the underpinning of improvement in each of the above areas. Excellent career information and mastery of career management skills can help them make these connections. If even a small percentage of Canadians increase their mastery of career management skills, the savings can be enormous. Consider the impact on the Canadian economy and society of freeing up that amount of money, no matter how it might be redirected!

Moving to Solutions: What is Needed?

How do we attain the improvements suggested above and the savings that come with them? Some of the necessary tools are already in place. What is needed is a concerted effort to use existing tools effectively and in concert with each other, to help Canadians increase their career management skills. We need programs and resources that are based on clear career management learning and performance outcomes, and that are accountable to those who fund them. We need a means by which career practitioners, counsellors, educators, and human resources specialists can easily select resources based on the outcomes they want to achieve with their clients and the skills they wish to build. We need a common framework of career management skills to see the linkages, or overlaps, between programs, and to identify gaps in existing programs and services. We need a common language of career management so there is less ambiguity among those providing services and between them and the public.

Pioneering work on developing a national framework describing career management skills began in the United States in 1988, under the leadership of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and its network of 58 State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees (SOICCs). This resulted in the U.S. *National Career Development Guidelines*. In 1998, the National Life/Work Centre (<http://www.lifework.ca>) in concert with the Canada Career Information Partnership (<http://www.ccip-picc.org>) and with support from Human Resources Development Canada, began adapting the U.S. guidelines for a Canadian context. The result is Canada's *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs*.

The *Blueprint* identifies core competencies, with associated performance indicators for each competency, at four developmental levels across the lifespan. The core competencies are the basis upon which career development programs can be designed. The performance indicators, which are organized by learning stages, can be used to measure learning gains and demonstrate the effectiveness of such programs. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1. Competencies and Performance Indicators in the
*Blueprint for Life/Work Designs***

Area 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

Area 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

Area C: Life/Work Building

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

These competencies include the employability skills that employer groups suggest prospective employees, particularly youth, need in order to be successful. Work habits and attitudes strongly influence early adult earnings, therefore, educational and training programs should emphasize work behaviours as much as they emphasize job skills (Savickas, 1999). Further, attitudes toward work are formed early in life, so workforce and vocational guidance policy should take a developmental perspective. Vocational psychologists have concluded from longitudinal studies that playful competence in early adolescence is associated with more realistic educational and

vocational choices, occupational success, and career progress (Savickas, 2001). The *Blueprint* recognizes that people at different ages and stages learn differently, and that even young children can learn and appreciate career development competencies. For this reason, the *Blueprint's* core competencies are defined for four developmental levels: Primary/Elementary School, Junior High/Middle School, High School, and Adult, including Post-secondary.

Figure 2. *Blueprint* Performance indicators for Competency 5, Level 3 (High School): Locate, interpret, evaluate and use life/work information

Learning Stage A: Acquisition

- 5.3 A1 Explore the educational and training requirements of various work roles.
- 5.3 A2 Discover how key personnel in selected work roles could become ideal information resources and/or role models.
- 5.3 A3 Explore how trends and work opportunities in various economic/industry sectors impact the nature and structure of work roles.
- 5.3 A4 Explore how employment and workplace trends impact education and training scenarios.
- 5.3 A5 Understand how a variety of factors (e.g., supply and demand for workers, demographic changes, environmental conditions, geographic location) impact work opportunities.
- 5.3 A6 Understand how labour market information (profiles, statistics, etc.) should be used when making life and work decisions.
- 5.3 A7 Explore a variety of work alternatives (e.g., full employment, multi-tracking, contracting, consulting, self-employment, entrepreneurship).

Learning Stage B: Application

- 5.3 B1 Use career information resources such as career monographs, occupation classifications systems, labour market information, mass media, computer and Internet-based career information delivery systems to educate oneself to the realities and requirements of various work roles.
- 5.3 B2 Consult key personnel in selected work roles as information resources, role models and/or mentors.

Learning Stage C: Personalization

- 5.3 C1 Determine, according to one's preferences, the advantages and disadvantages of various work alternatives (e.g., full employment, multi-tracking, contracting, consulting, self-employment, entrepreneurship).
- 5.3 C2 Assess life/work information and evaluate its impact on one's life/work decisions.

Learning Stage D: Actualization

- 5.3 D1 Improve one's strategies to locate, interpret, evaluate and use life/work information.

The Blueprint contains performance indicators for each competency, at each level, organized by "learning stages." To illustrate, the performance indicators for Competency 5 at Level 3 are depicted in Figure 2.

The *Blueprint* provides the basis for setting the learning outcomes, establishing performance standards, and measuring success in any public or private sector agency in the career development business in Canada. Many provincial and territorial ministries of education, human resources and employment, community services and others across Canada are adopting the *Blueprint* as the foundation of their career management programs or imbedding its competencies into their own guidelines. Career resources, programs, curricula and services from public and private sector organizations, large and small, are being coded to the *Blueprint* competencies and performance indicators. *Blueprint* Orientation and Leadership Sessions are being offered across Canada to develop local Blueprint Facilitators to teach educators, career and employment counsellors and human resources specialists to make effective use of the *Blueprint* and its support materials (NLWC, 2005).

Conclusion

School-to-work transition and workforce development initiatives are less successful than they could be for many Canadians because career management skills do not receive the curricular focus that academic and technical skills receive. Career theorists provide clear and unequivocal evidence to demonstrate the need to imbed career management skills in all education and training programs and services designed to help Canadians succeed in the employment market of the future. Implementing

career-relevant programs that integrate the *Blueprint* career management skills and accountability procedures will provide many benefits. They will:

1. help more youth and adults become satisfied, fulfilled, self-reliant, contributing and prosperous citizens;
2. bring more motivated and engaged learners to teachers and trainers;
3. provide more qualified and motivated workers to Canadian businesses that are increasingly challenged to find the talent they need to compete successfully;
4. save billions of dollars annually in support of people who have difficulty locating and maintaining suitable work roles; and
5. increase Canada's international competitiveness and improve living standards in communities across the nation.

Momentum for the career management paradigm shift is growing among government departments, educational leaders, community agencies, business owners, career and employment counsellors, and human resource specialists. Their support will help close the gap between workers' skills and employment opportunities, with the attendant economic savings made available to stimulate and sustain this nation's prosperity. With more concerted effort in developing, implementing and evaluating the proposed career management skills agenda, together we can help citizens achieve self-reliance and empowerment in their careers, focus and direction in their current employment, and satisfaction and control in their lives. School counsellors have an important role to play in helping this happen, as we move into the future.

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