

Public Awareness & Policy in Canada

Career Development Maturity Matrix

Research Brief #2

The Career Development Maturity Matrix is a benchmarking tool designed to map and spark strategic conversation about the foundational elements that the career development sector requires for its structural integrity and advancement in the years to come. Created by the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) and Challenge Factory, the Matrix identifies and measures the maturity of four sector benchmarks: quality, capacity, cohesion, and access. This brief explores the sector's cohesion and, specifically, its strategic influence on public opinion, the media, and government policy/programming in diverse areas—including employment and labour market issues, education, health, and socioeconomic well-being.

The Pilot Study

We asked experts in Canada's career development sector to rank 1) how important each Matrix benchmark is to the sector's structural integrity, and 2) how Canada measures up against each benchmark.

"I don't think that Canadians even know what career development is."

The findings for the cohesion benchmark are unambiguous. Canadian career development thought leaders underscored the critical importance of the benchmark and noted that the Canadian sector currently falls short across all three associated indicators. There is much to gain by improving Canadian ratings against this benchmark, and much to lose by failing to do so.

- A growing body of evidence exists in Canada and internationally that points to the positive impact of quality career development on educational, labour market, and health outcomes.
- Canada is out of step with other OECD countries in its failure to use this evidence to inform policy and raise public awareness of the far-reaching benefits of career development.
- While the skills agenda has recently captivated Canadian politicians and dominated public discourse, other countries around the world are taking a broader approach informed by career development.
- The career development sector was purpose-built to help Canadians navigate shifting educational demands, a turbulent labour market, and unpredictable disruptions. Yet its solid theoretical foundations, thought leadership, and evidence base remain relatively untapped.

The Sector Benchmark **COHESION**

Professional Identity

Career development professionals see themselves as part of a strong, unified, and vibrant profession.

Awareness

The public understands and sees the value of career development.

Influence

The career development sector informs public opinion, the media, and government policy and programming in diverse areas (including employment and labour market issues, education, health, and socioeconomic well-being).

Where do we go from here?

Guidance for the Sector

The career development sector is a case study in failed marketing. Most Canadians are unaware that the sector and its services exist. Those who are aware often harbour negative views of the sector based on less-than-life-changing experiences with a guidance counsellor or career-related course in secondary school, which they mistakenly equate with career development as a whole. Canadians, both within the sector and beyond, lack a consistent understanding of the scope and benefits of career development.

At the same time, the evidence base demonstrating the positive impacts of quality career development services is extremely robust. Career development professionals can be a rich source of intelligence on Canada's educational and labour market pain points and a key contributor to proactively addressing them. Internationally, recognition of the value of career development is on the rise—and this trend has been accelerated as career development becomes part of the strategic recovery plan in response to labour market disruptions due to COVID-19. It is time for the Canadian career development sector to both literally and figuratively come out from behind its office doors. It is time to speak out as experts on educational and labour market issues, and to proactively offer evidence-based and innovative solutions to governments and other key stakeholders working to move our country from disruption to recovery, from holding on to taking charge.

Conversation Activator

The [*ParticipACTION*](#) campaign successfully mobilized our country to get off the couch with a few simple facts about Swedes. What career development facts might captivate Canadians? What if the average Canadian understood, at a deep personal level, the value of career development? What if the public demanded policies informed by career development expertise and evidence? How would that change our systems, structures, and collective socioeconomic health?

“Never before in human history has career [development] been more important.”

Anthony Mann, Senior Policy Analyst in the OECD's Education and Skills Directorate

Guidance for Policymakers

Many Canadians struggle to navigate learning, work, and transitions in today's turbulent world. The costs of this struggle are significant. COVID-19 has exacerbated the pressures faced by Canadians. The skills agenda may help some Canadians pivot in the short-term, but it does not provide the innovative thinking and sustainable approach needed to mend our educational and labour market systems. The evidence base clearly points to the value and benefits of quality career development as a key ingredient to Canada's pandemic response and its capacity for sustained growth.

While the Canadian career development sector has been under-resourced and under-professionalized, it remains internationally renowned for its research and thought leadership. Engage with the Canadian career development organizations that are producing this research and leadership; they can help craft smart policy solutions.

Guidance for Canadians

If you're like most Canadians, you visit your dentist for an annual check-up and bring your car in for regular tune-ups. You understand that this kind of maintenance is critical for the long-term health of your teeth and smooth running of your vehicle. *Do you invest in the same kind of regular maintenance for your own career development?*

Think about it. We spend more time in learning and/or work than any other activity, yet we leave the decisions about what we should learn and where we should work largely up to chance. Career development is the lifelong process of managing learning, work, and transitions across the lifespan, and a career development professional can help you develop the skills and strategies you need to take charge and create the future you want. Find out about what professional career services are available in your community. If they are lacking, talk to your local politicians. Quality career services enable Canadians to succeed in learning and work, and every community should provide access.

[Sign up](#) on our project page to receive updates from CCDF and Challenge Factory about the Career Development Maturity Matrix.

Why now?

COVID-19 upended labour and employment across Canada in 2020, making career development more important and urgent than ever. As Canadians face unprecedented struggles in the world of work, the career development sector must not only step in to help, but also intentionally ensure its own structural integrity. Just as a sector like healthcare cannot effectively execute its duties to Canadians without being properly prepared in the areas of quality, capacity, cohesion, and access, so too must the career development sector actively prepare itself to face the challenges ahead. [Career development professionals have adapted](#) with innovation and commitment to the challenges and new needs of their clients. Now is the time to build on that momentum and use it to strategically push forward the Canadian sector's maturity.