

The Canadian Sector's Talent Pipeline

Career Development Maturity Matrix

Research Brief #3

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 Canadian sector's capacity by spotlighting its talent pipeline.

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.

"The talent pipeline is non-existent. Staff are not onboarded or acclimated to the profession or sector. They are hired and thrown into the pool to see if they can swim."

The findings are clear. First, capacity and its four dimensions are recognized as effective indicators for articulating a robust career development sector. And, second, the Canadian sector falls short in each of these dimensions.

- Canada has few post-secondary career development degree programs (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD), with offerings in French but not English.
- The Canadian sector has no national certification to ensure competency standards and accountability.
- Sector governance and regulation falls to provinces and territories, creating uneven capacity levels across the country.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) needs to be built into the talent pipeline to ensure both the strength of the sector and the quality of services provided to clients.

The Sector Benchmark **CAPACITY**

Professional Standards

Career development professionals are certified based on clearly articulated competency standards for effective and ethical practice.

Training and Professional Development

Career development professionals complete robust training and professional development aligned with professional standards at entry, mid-career, and leadership levels.

Talent Pipeline

The career development profession has a strong pipeline of new entrants, professionals, and leaders that reflect the diversity of clients served.

Research and Innovation

The career development sector is informed by rigorous research and innovative theories, tools, and approaches.

Where do we go from here?

Guidance for the Sector

Canada's career development sector is complex and heterogeneous: in practitioners and clients, institutional knowledge and practices, services provided, geographic areas covered, and more. These are, without a doubt, key sector strengths, but they also make mobilizing cohesive action and advancement more difficult. The talent pipeline may suffer as a result, with initiatives to improve it becoming stalled as the challenge of accommodating all this complexity and heterogeneity comes to be seen as insurmountable—especially in the absence of support or buy-in from policymakers and funders.

The sector knows the diversity of clients being served and the wide variety of expertise required to serve them well. However, the absence of a robust talent pipeline leaves the sector without a formal, structured mechanism for attending to how career development professionals' own careers can and should progress. It also makes it difficult to identify the next generation of sectoral leadership. Consequently, a range of national, provincial and territorial, and municipal initiatives—including policy, education, service delivery, and community needs—are informed by other disciplines but not career development. Canada misses out on the rigorous, applicable models and solutions that exist in the career development sector to address some of today's most challenging workforce issues.

Conversation Activator

Consider the following questions as ways of sparking creativity and innovation, as well as combatting sector inaction: Can you think of other sectors with internal complexity and heterogeneity that do have formal, structured talent pipelines? What can the career development sector learn from these examples? How might the sector approach different elements of the talent pipeline—new entrants, professionals, and leaders that reflect the diversity of clients served—and what resources would be needed to begin?

“People are hired to do the work with no formal training, and it's the luck of the draw if they get access to quality training at the beginning or during their work in the field.”

Guidance for Policymakers

The positive impacts of a strong talent pipeline are plural and relational. For example, incorporating qualified career development professionals into primary and secondary education systems has been found to [reduce demand](#) for in-school social work/mental health supports. Improving the talent pipeline will create rewarding educational and employment opportunities for Canadians interested in the profession itself. It will also prepare young people to enter the world of work, no matter their profession of choice, and help adults fulfill their career aspirations. In turn, this will contribute to Canada's prosperity at all levels—municipal, provincial and territorial, and national.

Career development is not simply a subject that needs to be included in school curricula. It is a professional field that requires specialized knowledge of theories, tools, and approaches. Canada currently has no post-secondary level path to 1) attract, train, and retain the next generation of career development professionals; 2) contribute to the advancement of research and innovation in the field; or 3) foster and develop world-class leaders. Because career development is situated at the intersection of individual Canadians, labour markets, and work dynamics, it's not sufficient to import models, tools, and knowledge

from outside Canada. The sector needs Canadian-based research, education, professionals, and practices that are evidence-based, responsive to changing conditions, and connected to the unique qualities and characteristics of Canadians and their work.

Guidance for Canadians

Young Canadians and their support systems (family, educators, etc.) must view career development as a viable and rewarding career path. Across the country, there are hundreds of career development professionals providing career education and guidance to Canadians, developing evidence-based practices and theories, shaping Canada's employment and labour ecosystem, and more. The challenges facing the world of work—today and tomorrow—require the attention, commitment, and innovation of talented Canadians of all ages and backgrounds.

Regardless of their chosen profession, Canadians must also view career development as a lifelong activity rather than a single course taken during high school, an infrequent visit to a guidance counsellor's office, or an intervention sought out only during employment disruptions. The need to help Canadians of all ages navigate a shifting world of work and the subsequent impact it has on identity will continue to increase. It has never been more important for Canadians to recognize the value of quality professionals, as well as to have access to them at all career stages. A valuable example of this type of access is [Skills Development Scotland's career management skills framework](#), which supports learning and training providers, businesses and organizations, and government policymakers in the planning, management, and delivery of lifelong career learning and services to every Scottish citizen. The stronger Canada's talent pipeline is, the better Canadians' access to lifelong career development support will be.

[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.