Round Table on Creating a More Efficient Labour Market in Canada Hosted by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards: Second Session - Promoting a More Efficient Labour Market Through Better Labour Market Information

PRINCIPAL:     Elaine O'Reilly, Canadian Career Development Foundation


Moderator:              Yes, okay, that's good.  Thanks very much for those comments.  Our third speaker is Elaine O'Reilly from the Canadian Career Development Foundation.  Elaine.

**Elaine O'Reilly:**     Thank you. Noah has said there will be better worker/job matches, that is the matches will be more accurate, they would be made faster and they would be made with a built-in flexibility to ensure uninterrupted adaptation to changes as they happen in the workers and in the work to be done.

How can LMI be used to enable this increased efficiency?  From the perspective of career practitioners, labour market information is part of the career information that enables people to make plans and decisions to move into and manoeuvre their way through the labour market.  Whether the required information for informed decision-making exists, is accessible, how accurate and relevant the information is and whether the users know a process for applying the information to their own situation will directly impact the efficiency of the labour market.

Several years ago at a gathering similar to this, I compared looking for labour market information with a visit to the local dump. It is not a place for the faint of heart.  It wasn't easy to sort through everything that was left at the dump and find something useful.  I described what I thought at the time would be an improvement.  My vision of improved access was a well-organized warehouse with all the information easy to reach, neatly packaged and well labeled.  At that time I was very impressed with the information and all the data we had access to that was formerly out of reach.  When the excitement cleared, disillusion with stand-alone information took its place.

The compilation of information had little value in and of itself and needed to be consolidated into knowledge to be useful.  Many businesses and industries have learned this through experience.  Data gathered by data workers will sit forever until a knowledge worker finds a way to apply it.  As Joanne Bolsby, the creator of Explorer and Career Tour in the States says, "Information, information everywhere and no one trained to think."  I, along with the other would-be LMI users quickly woke up to the fact that even though there had been progress and the LMI had made its way from the dump to the big organized warehouse, there emerged a major challenge in making it useful.

And the key challenge for my organization and for others who work in career and employment development is enabling end users to use the LMI warehouse. It's only an elite few who know where to go and what to find in the boxes of LMI in that warehouse. They're the economists and the statisticians who pack and store the boxes. The person who is entering the warehouse, even if it's well stocked and well organized, may spend a long, long time searching in the aisles and the shelves for the box she thinks she needs.

Eventually some users may find certain boxes with content that seems to fit their need, but that's not the end of it and most users don't know this. Even though the client on their own, or with some guidance, has located what seems to be an appropriate information box, she may not realize that more times than not the box contains data that is yet to be turned into knowledge. Without wearing a knowledge worker's hat she might perceive the piece of information to apply to an entire population whereas the producer knows that large amounts of the data in the warehouse are averages. Expertise is needed to recognize what is missing. The client may not realize when her needs are unique or when the data is unique.

The key challenge of enabling end users is based on two fundamental issues.

**Issue one**

There's a very distinct separation between production and distribution of LMI and the delivery of service, and that is a hindrance to many clients. A good deal of LMI lacks user guides and training that would enable HR personnel or career employment practitioners to get the most out of, and to make valuable this information to the clients. In order for a worker to make career plans and decisions related to their own needs and to the labour market needs the process of finding relevant information needs to be integrated into their learning for use throughout their career. The service side of LMI is a part that allows the information we are so copiously developing to be used effectively. It needs to be connected to the information side. In other words, the producer can't stock the shelves and leave a forklift at the front door of the warehouse for the customer.

**Issue two**

Gaps in LMI interfere with efficiency and career planning and career decision-making. One of the most asked for pieces of LMI by the average person who goes in to find some information from practitioners is local work opportunities. What companies in the community are hiring, and what skills are employers in those companies looking for. Clients can't find this information and practitioners can't find it for them. It's only a very select client group who are able for themselves to analyse and understand their own skill sets and observe and analyse skills in the market. Even fewer can find a way to get skill specific

training fast.  In other words if you want an efficient labour market we can't give out rain checks to the customer for empty shelves.

**What can we do?**

The following will help us with our key challenge of enabling clients to plan and make career decisions for themselves and for the labour market,
- We need data providers and service providers to work together to ensure customers can not only find but also interpret and use that LMI.
- We need to train workers and students to move from data to knowledge and to identify their own specific needs for information and to use diverse research strategies to gather questions and validate what they find.
- We need to support companies to work with their own local communities, the boards of trade, chambers of commerce, to provide specific up-to-date information for publication for all the community members.
- We need to find a way to support business and educational institutions in providing specific skill building opportunities for employee upgrading outside of the institutions focussed on whole program delivery.
- And when developing a common language, we need to remember the importance of plain language as well.

Together these steps will contribute to an increase in targeted, quick, adaptable responses which would enable better worker job matches or a more efficient labour market.

Moderator:      Thank you very much.