

Project : ***Creating an Essential Skills knowledge exchange and innovation network for educators and the workforce***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT

This project arose from the need observed by ACCC to support the efforts of colleges and institutes and their partners to develop Essential Skills to meet the requirements of Canada's workforce.

Colleges and institutes needed to pool their strengths and exchange information among themselves and with partners about their needs, practices and tools. For that reason, ACCC proposed a project to Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), with the primary objective of establishing a network for exchange and innovation on Essential Skills (ES) to provide rapid access to ES resources throughout the college system and drive the creation of missing tools and resources.

This project began on February 1, 2006 and ended on March 31, 2008. It included three major components: form a national steering committee consisting of a lead college for each ACCC region and representatives of Canadian sectors councils; set up an ES resources classification system through a survey of current tools and practices; and, develop a network of participants for an ES Web site.

Several impacts were identified from this project:

- For Canadian colleges and institutes, greater dissemination and greater variety and adaptation of ES practices and tools with more colleges and institutes involved in ES development, especially in Québec;
- For all the practitioners, access to better tools for disseminating and sharing ES tools and to a network of experts, to support development of new interventions and initiatives as well as stronger partnerships in the field of ES between colleges and institutes and their industry partners;
- For Canadian companies, easier access to ES resources of Canadian colleges and institutes and their partners; and,
- For HRSDC, a contribution to its dissemination and integration efforts of CE in the Canadian workforce.

Project achievements include:

- A pan-Canadian survey of 150 colleges and institutes that analysed ES practices and tools and added them to a databank available to everyone;
- A new ES Web site hosted on the ACCC site, used by college and institute practitioners. Close to 270 people from colleges and institutes or partners are members of the users' network;
- The ES network and Website are maintained and facilitated through information and material exchanges, and design of new tools and practices;
- A network of experts and respondents has been established. These experts have become ES ambassadors in their own network and with provincial governments or national organizations.

To keep this network vital and make it an instrument for continuing development, we must continue to rely on existing work and practices, develop a comprehensive vision and approach to facilitate continuity, prioritize the facilitation and support of networks, support ES advances in Québec, recognize differences and harmonize our actions.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

This project originated from ACCC's perception of the need to support the efforts of colleges and institutes and their partners in developing essential skills (ES) to meet the requirements of the Canadian workforce. The field of ES has become so crucial that the pressure felt by companies is now having repercussions on organizations and the educational system.

Colleges and institutes needed to pool their strengths and foster exchanges among themselves and with their partners: discussions of their needs, practices, and tools. The network established by ACCC is rooted in the Association's longstanding tradition of pooling efforts. We can cite as examples the Sectoral Liaison Unit initiative that created affinity groups, the Canadian Colleges Partnership Program, and ACCC annual conferences. Specifically in the field of ES, the projects developed in recent years, especially for interventions with business, have clearly illustrated ACCC's ability to function as a network and in partnership.

ACCC has vast expertise in this type of initiative; gathering and organizing ES data through the network was a new activity. With the cooperation of college practitioners and a validation team, the information gathering begun with an occupational questionnaire was effectively completed. Establishment of the Website posed a challenge in itself, despite ACCC's expertise in this field; in fact, integration of the technical and educational aspects proved much more difficult than expected, as did the technical evolution of the site.

One concern of this project is long term leadership of the network and sustainability of project activities. When the project was designed, the plan was to develop new tools, especially for thinking skills. There is in fact very little material on this point, but these tools can only be produced when real activities take place, as necessity speeds their development. The ability to implement a project in partnership with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in another ES project made this development possible. This is one of the great lessons learned from the work conducted by ACCC these past two years: consideration must be given to the actions conducted as a series of stages in a comprehensive plan, rather than a succession of isolated projects.

The results-based management process that the ACCC team decided to apply to all its ES projects promotes this vision of the impacts and a greater return on investment for the funding agency (and the target clientele, of course!)

Another characteristic of this project is the surprising speed with which the cégeps in Québec became involved in the various activities. This field was virtually unknown in the network of Québec colleges and institutes just two years ago. Pioneering institutions decided to invest, resulting in outstanding benefits for some. Cooperation among colleges and institutes in various regions led to the creation and dissemination of original tools. This activity gave colleges and institutes and their partners better knowledge and appreciation of each other.

Participants in these various activities (experts, practitioners, validation teams) eventually formed a core of resource people dedicated to supporting their colleagues, united around the same cause, open to influences and evolving, because in some cases, the services of these experts in the development of ES were required by their provincial government. Fortunately, this ensured a quality succession, which is one of ACCC's roles.

Finally, we can state that this project was successfully completed, met the requirements of the contractual agreement, had the expected outcomes and, we hope, an impact that will take shape in the next few years through other ES actions conducted by colleges and institutes and their partners in Canada's workforce.

Recommendations

At the end of this project, a number of recommendations were drawn up to ensure the sustainability of the project's effects and facilitate the execution of forthcoming projects.

Recommendation 1: Rely on existing work and practices

to do justice to existing accomplishments, consolidate expertise and enhance efficiency in actions.

Recommendation 2: Develop a comprehensive vision and an approach that facilitates continuity

to reinforce actions, ensure sustainability, anchor practices and optimize investments.

Recommendation 3: Prioritize facilitation of and support for networks

to develop a succession, elicit actions and emulate and ensure that relationships and people take precedence over technique.

Recommendation 4: Support ES advances in Québec

to continue the efforts made, serve Canada's entire workforce, learn about achievements by francophones and mentor French minorities outside Québec.

Recommendation 5: Recognize differences

to respect needs and various degrees of ES expertise, whether in businesses, colleges and institutes and partners, or target clientele.

Recommendation 6: Harmonize our actions

to develop greater understanding among practitioners, become more familiar with existing achievements, and initiate productive partnerships.