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## The Evolving World of Work

### **Information Sheet** **Overview of the Evolving World of Work**

- The world of work is in constant flux. Work and occupations are not created out of the ether. They are created out of needs for goods and services. Over time, needs shift and change. New technologies, global influences, changes in demographics of the population and spending habits of families all affect the number and type of occupations in countries and in communities.
- Ask parents to think about occupations that they have seen disappear over their own lifetime (e.g., telegraph operators, bank tellers [practically], personal secretaries). As they disappear they are replaced by new occupations (e.g., financial advisors, software developers, radiology specialists). In another 100 years, people will be doing work we can only dream about now.
- Most of us aren't concerned about the next 100 years—at least it does not preoccupy our daily thoughts. We do care, however, about the next five or ten years as it relates to our own career futures and those of our children.
- As we look at the global economy at the beginning of the 21st century, what do we now see? Global trends include
  - highly competitive trade—easy movement of people and products globally
  - increased deregulation and privatization of industry
  - information technology is a dominant force
  - multinational companies moving to all parts of the world
- As we focus more specifically on Canada, we can identify areas where demand is expected to be high. These include
  - the information technology sector—huge growth but for a relatively small and specialized number of people
  - business, financial advisory, and personal services—significant growth for much larger numbers of people as organizations contract out services, and families buy needed services now that two-income earners have become increasingly the norm
  - health and education—predicted to be on the rise after a long period of decline
  - skilled trades people—in demand
  - tourism—large growth as baby boomers age and have disposable incomes
  - small business—huge growth here and in the services small business needs to survive
- These are general across the country. One needs, of course, to look in one's own province and region to see which of these trends is growing fastest at home.

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## The Evolving World of Work (2)

- There has been a lot of doomsaying about the future of work and a lot of speculation about a jobless future. Many studies are now showing that there is little substance to these predictions. Predicting the future of work is risky business and a very inexact science. This is why we need to place so much emphasis on personal research. There are no certain answers—only signposts along the way.
- We know that while some areas of work disappear, others are created. And many suggest that the future workplace will be more challenging, more competitive, and less accessible for unskilled people and/or those with outdated skills who do not upgrade and pursue training to stay current. This has huge implications for our teens.
- The labour market outlook for youth is always particularly challenging. Youth unemployment has long been significantly above the adult unemployment rate and remains a national concern. There are important work challenges and difficulties for youth in Canada now. If we understand some of these, we can begin to think about how to “inoculate” our teens insofar as we can and how to help them manoeuvre cleverly, understanding where the vulnerabilities are and preparing themselves accordingly.

So let's start with the bad news first, remembering that these are only trends and not necessarily facts!

- There is a growing polarization in the Canadian labour market affecting both youth and adults—a gap between who gets work and who doesn't, who is rich and who isn't.
- In a 1990 survey, one in six Canadians described himself as poor; one in 20 as wealthy; the rest clustered in the middle. In 1995, over 20% of those who had been “better off” reported being less well off; 64% of the “poor” were also less well off.
- The youth share of the Canadian population was 13.4% in 1996 but their unemployment rate was 25%.
- Young people who do not have training beyond Grade 12 face significant obstacles in accessing good jobs and making enough money to live above the poverty line. While there are jobs for unskilled workers, they are most often low pay, low security, and “dead-end.” Youth need the tools to do well in entry jobs, learn from them, and move forward. Some of these tools are attitude and the capacity to move cleverly and strategically; another key tool is training.
- Many youth can expect delayed entry to adult roles. Youth are staying in school longer (which is good). They lack work experience (which is not good). The time it takes for them to access work that provides sufficient income to let them leave home is longer. In 1996, 44% of males between the ages of 25 to 29 were living at home; 33% of females were as well. There are many implications of this trend for families, parents, and youth.

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## The Evolving World of Work (3)

- Among youth, an important issue is underemployment. We need to be very concerned about this. As we emphasize education, we imply that if youth complete schooling successfully, there will be challenging interesting work that is “big enough for their spirit” waiting for them. In a 1992 survey, 31% of high school graduates and 20% of university graduates reported being overqualified for their jobs seven years after graduation. While university graduation still remains a good insurance policy against unemployment, those in non-professional faculties (e.g., humanities and sciences) tend to find work, but not necessarily in their field and not using their talents and skills to their full potential. Many, indeed most, do eventually find work in their field but it takes longer—and it takes effort. For those in professional faculties (e.g., engineering), this is much less the case. This points to the advantage of post-secondary training in a profession or skilled trade area, at least in the short term.
- The issue of “quality work” for youth is also a serious concern. Government policies have focused on creating entry-level jobs and on raising the employment rate for youth. There has been much more of a focus on increasing the quantity of jobs than on what Graham Lowe calls “quality jobs.” Yet survey after survey indicates that youth want quality, not just quantity. Quality jobs are those that offer enough challenge, interest, decent people to work with, reasonable compensation, and some level of security. Youth need to understand quality, know how to seek it out and become their own quality control managers. This is critical to manoeuvre. Part of this is to become clever and strategic about terms like “flexible” and “just-in-time” workforce. These can offer huge advantages for those who know how to manoeuvre; for those who do not, however, they can benefit only the employer who can get their work done, provide low wages, no training, no benefits, and let youth go “just in time.”

So that is the bad news. There is also good news . . . and a good amount of it!

- The work that is being created seems to be distributed across levels of training and education approximately equally—30% requiring university; 30% requiring post-secondary training and skilled trades training; 30% requiring grade 12; and 12% less than grade 12. Most jobs still require “moderate” levels of skill to enter. This is not what we tend to hear in the media where technology hype makes it sound like all workers need to be technological wizards. High skill jobs in the information technology sector remain a relatively small percentage of the overall workforce. Interestingly enough, a majority of Canadians have more computer ability than is actually required for the jobs they do. The vulnerability of the 12% who do not complete secondary school (and even those who do complete it but do not pursue additional training) is a concern for certain. Both need to learn to be clever and to manage their learning in order to progress. With the right skills and strategies, it is possible.
- Youth seek and want quality jobs. They want challenging and meaningful work, AND they have a strong work ethic when the work “matters.” Again this is contrary to how youth are often depicted.

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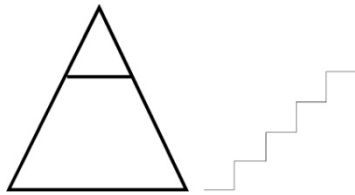
## The Evolving World of Work (4)

- Small business is a huge growth sector in Canada and presents enormous opportunity for youth with an entrepreneurial spirit and/or who want to work for entrepreneurs. Small business needs most of the services of big business, just on a smaller scale. So, whether youth want to manage their own small business or service an existing one, there is opportunity.
- Finally, by 2010 demographics should work strongly in favour of youth. By then, there will be fewer youth entering the workforce and many baby boomers will have exited. Workers are expected to be in high demand and youth may become hot commodities. When commodities are hot, there is competition and employers must invest in training and incentives to attract good people. We already see this now in the high tech sector. We are beginning to see it in other sectors as well, even the retail sector. So demographics will help.

## The Evolving World of Work (5)

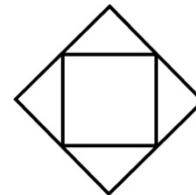
### Information Sheet The Pyramid and the Diamond

#### Traditional Pyramid



- lots of opportunities to enter at the bottom; lots of possibilities to stay there too
- more people at the bottom, less at the top
- opportunities are mostly hierarchical
- knowledge and decision making are mostly in the top triangle—opportunity for the patient and loyal ones
- skill requirements are clear—specialists abound
- considerable differentiation between “blue collar” labourers and “white collar” professionals
- focus is on occupations/job titles

#### Emerging Diamond



- constricted base means limited opportunity for low skill/inexperienced—assumption of basic skills
- more people in the middle, less at the bottom and top
- opportunities are mostly lateral
- knowledge and decision making are mostly in the big square—lots of opportunity for self-starters and risk takers
- transferable skills become necessary—generalists who are transferable/mobile and with ongoing learning skills and attitudes will mostly succeed
- crumbling differentiation—“aqua collar” workers are emerging as tasks expand and distinctions blur
- focus is on skills and sectors