Chapter XXI

ESPORT Demonstration Project, Canada

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Abstract

This chapter describes the purpose, processes, and effects of an e-learning employment readiness system, ESPORT, currently being pilot tested in Canada. The essential skills portfolio (ESPORT) system is a facilitated and supported Internet-delivered system primarily intended for adults with a high school education or less, intended to assist users to choose an occupation, assess their enabling skills in respect to the chosen occupation, identify and (optionally) remedy skills gaps, and document in a résumé their abilities for prospective employers. While this e-learning project was not complete at this writing, this report describes the piloting process, and some already obvious conclusions regarding ESPORT’s technologies, design, delivery, and support models, and training protocols. As anticipated, both the project’s components and the evaluation design have changed, recognizing pressing issues requiring early attention, and responding to lessons learned.
Background

Workforce development is a priority of the Government of Canada, through the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The evidence that Canada is approaching a workforce crisis is unambiguous: the workforce in many industries is aging, with a large cohort approaching retirement. In many sectors, worker and skills shortages are already occurring.

Two seminal policy papers, *Achieving Excellence* (Canada, Ministry of Industry, 2002), and *Knowledge Matters* (Canada, HRSDC, 2002), have grappled with the approaching crisis. Both advocate, as one solution with both social and economic dimensions, creative and flexible education and training programs to qualify populations now underrepresented in the workforce, including youth, aboriginal people, and immigrants.

Background to these policy papers is the study of workplace essential skills (ES), as perceived by employers and typically exhibited by employees. After wide discussion and debate (HRSDC, 2004a, 2004b), 10 essential employment skills clusters have been identified (Canada, HRSDC, 2005):

1. Document use
2. Writing
3. Oral communication
4. Problem solving
5. Decision making
6. Job task planning
7. Finding information
8. Computer use
9. Reading text
10. Numeracy

The interest of the federal government in ES identification efforts is intended both to help employers match job opportunities to suitable potential employees, and to simplify the job search process for clients of job-search and employment preparation programs. The latter objective is a priority because trainees often receive a stipend or unemployment benefits from the federal government to support them during job-search. Policies within HRSDC and among its clients have evolved regarding the role of technology in the training and search process, so that in recent discussion and planning the proposed use of e-learning strategies and technologies has been regarded favorably. The proviso in regard to technology is that potential users have adequate bandwidth, and that content, as much as is appropriate and economically feasible, be Canadian (Advisory Committee for Online Learning, 2001).

The ESPORT system is being evaluated by HRSDC to address especially the employment preparation needs of previously poorly served targeted populations in Canada. It is hoped that ESPORT, as it now exists or with modifications recommended by project evaluation
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