

## Canada Memo

Date: January 30, 2020  
To: Express Employment Professionals  
From: The Harris Poll  
Subject: Education Revolution Study – Canada

*The survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between December 5 and December 30, 2019 among 630 Canadian employees (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time, part-time, or self-employed and have at least a high school degree). Figures are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, income, marital status, employment, household size, and propensity to be online to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.*

*All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.*

*Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.*

***The majority of Canadian employees believe the education system needs a new approach as it currently does not prepare workers for the needs after school.***

Nearly 9 in 10 Canadian employees (89%) agree an education revolution (i.e., a whole new approach to education, skills training, and learning) is needed to better prepare people for the workforce, with 1 in 3 (33%) *strongly* agreeing with this sentiment. And, this idea is shared across generations as majorities of Canadian employees agree with this statement regardless of their age (Millennials, 85%; Gen X, 85%; Boomers/Seniors, 92%). Perhaps this is due to misalignments between education and the real world as only 39% believe schools are doing a good job of preparing the next generation of workers for what the needs are after school. Further, 4 in 5 say that schools are not preparing students with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace (80%) or that the education system has failed to evolve to meet the needs of the workforce (82%).

***Although Canadian employees see the value of getting job experience while in school, many begin working without having participated in any work experience programs and wish they had more exposure to the world of work while they were in school.***

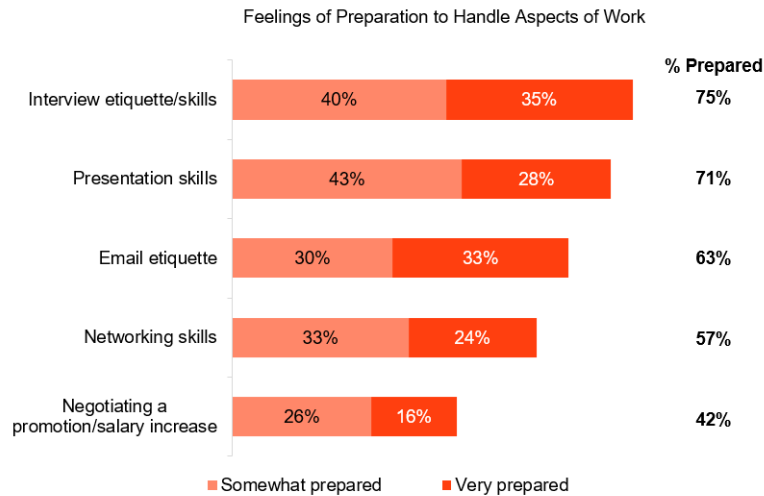
Although the majority of employees in Canada (65%) say they felt prepared entering the workforce after their highest level of education, only 18% felt *very* prepared. Most (87%) believe getting a degree should require on the job experience, not just coursework. However, close to half of Canadian employees (45%) say they did *not* participate in a work experience program like internships, shadowing, apprenticeships, or co-op placements during school. Of those who participated in a work experience program, most (79%) feel it helped prepare them for the workforce. For those who didn't participate in a work experience program, more than 4 in 5 (83%) believe participating in a work experience would have been helpful in preparing them for the workforce.

- Notably, those who participated in a work experience program when they were in school are 2x-3x more likely than those who did not to say:
  - They felt *very* prepared entering the workforce (27% vs. 8%)
  - Their education has been *absolutely essential* to their career (17% vs. 8%)

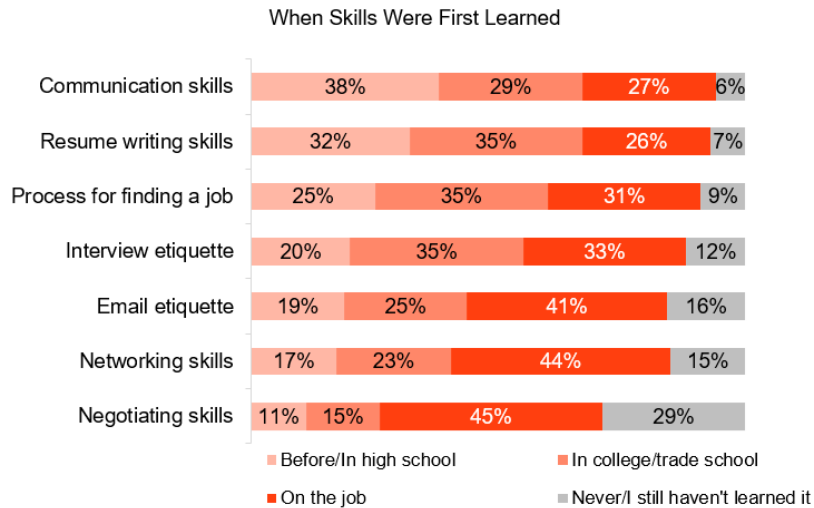
The majority of employees in Canada wish that they had more exposure to the world of work while they were in school (89%) or that they had been better prepared to deal with the transition from school to the workforce (76%). In addition, most employees agree that colleges place more emphasis on grades than on preparing workers for a job (82%) or that society makes it seem like college is the only choice when in reality it isn't preparing workers for the real world (74%). Further highlighting the value of job experience during school, more than 4 in 5 (85%) agree job training certifications do a better job of preparing people for the workforce than college does.

***For many Canadian employees, key skills used to find a job and succeed in the workplace are not being learned until they're already on the job.***

After entering the workforce following completion of their highest level of education, the majority of employees in Canada say they felt prepared to handle various aspects of work like interviewing, presenting, or networking; however, only around 1 in 3 or fewer say they felt very prepared to handle these aspects.



Further, when it comes to job-related skills, fewer than 1 in 3 report learning most of these skills before or in high school, with a significant proportion saying they didn't learn these skills until they were on the job. Some even admit they still haven't learned them.



Given that many Canadian employees do not learn key skills until they are on the job, perhaps it is not surprising that around half wish their high school would've offered interviewing tips/practice sessions (55%) or taught networking skills (48%). In addition, nearly 3 in 5 (59%) wish their high school would've taught them how to handle real-life workplace situations (e.g., disagreements with colleagues, etc.).

***Advanced degrees may be linked to career success or even needed to qualify for future jobs, but many believe they did not gain the necessary skills to get a job or be successful in the workplace from their education.***

Although the majority of Canadian employees (77%) say their education has been useful to their career, only 13% say it has been *absolutely essential*. In fact, more than half (54%) agree an education isn't actually necessary to be successful in their job and 1 in 3 (33%) say their education did *not* provide them with many of the skills necessary to be successful in the workplace. More than 1 in 3 employees in Canada (35%) say they could have gotten their job without the education that they have.

Still, employees appear to equate a college degree with success as 3 in 4 (75%) agree getting any degree is better than no degree at all. Further, around 3 in 5 say that in ten years, advanced degrees (e.g., master's degree) will be the new minimum requirement for many jobs (60%) or that four-year colleges are the best avenue to career success (59%). And, a similar proportion (64%) agree a high school degree is not enough to be successful in Canada. While degrees seem to be perceived as useful, more than 3 in 4 (77%) believe educational institutions give students false hope about climbing the career ladder quickly after school and 84% say it takes skills not typically taught in school to get a job.

***The current school curriculum does not appear to address the needs of the current workforce, as few Canadian employees use their education in their current job, and many never learned in school what they do daily at work.***

More than half of Canadian employees (54%) say they are working in the same field/profession in which they received their degrees or certifications. Yet, only 1 in 3 (33%) say they use a lot of their education in their current job, while 67% say they use a little or none at all. More than 3 in 4 (77%) agree that most of what they do day to day at their job, they never learned in school.

- Notably, Canadian employees whose highest level of education is a trade certificate are just as likely as those with a university/college or master's degree to say:
  - Their education was *absolutely essential* to their career (12% vs. 9%)
  - They felt *very* prepared entering the workforce (20% vs. 14%)
  - They could *not* have gotten their job without the education that they have (69% vs. 68%)
  - They use *a lot* of their education in their current job (40% vs. 35%)

Among those who are not working in a profession in which they received their degrees or certifications, the most common reasons for this are: "no jobs available for my degree", "better money and benefits", and "jobs in the field have become irrelevant".

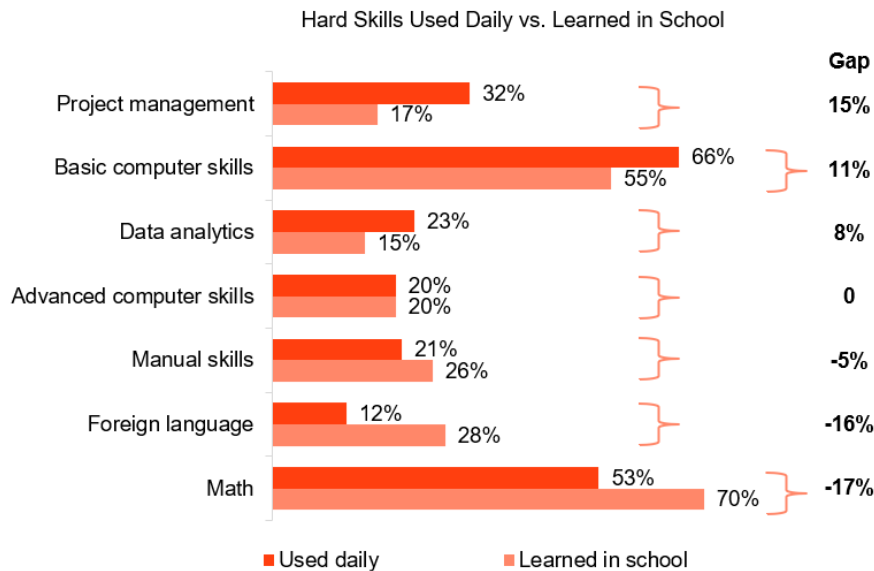
Specific resources that Canadian employees most commonly cite as having been offered in high school or college to help them find their career path include sessions with a career counselor (29%), job fairs attended by potential employers (28%), or access to a career center (24%). Fewer report access to job readiness programs (17%) or being offered a predictive test that said what job would be good for them (15%). More than 9 in 10 (92%) agree there needs to be more of a balance in education to match learning to actual career options.

***Insufficient education on the skills and subjects that Canadian employees perceive as important or use daily at work has resulted in many feeling like the education system has not caught up with the needs of the workforce.***

Thinking about success in the workplace, around 3 in 5 employees in Canada (61%) say that hard and soft skills are equally important. Nearly 1 in 4 (24%) say hard skills are more important than soft skills, while 15% place the importance on soft skills. This varies by generation, with older employees the most likely to say that soft skills and hard skills are *equally important* to a worker's success in today's workplace, while younger employees are the most likely to say soft skills are more important.

- Equally as important: (Millennials, 49%; Gen X, 61%; Boomers/Seniors, 71%)
- Soft skills more important: (Millennials, 25%; Gen X, 14%; Boomers/Seniors, 9%)

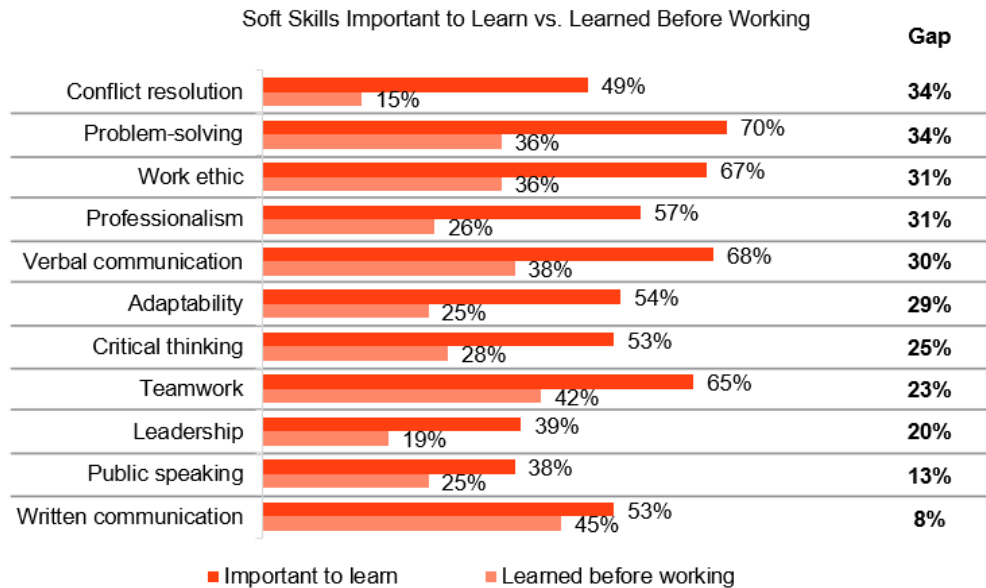
Despite using various hard skills daily at work, few report learning these hard skills in school, with the exception of basic computer skills (e.g., typing, word processing, etc.) and math. Skills like foreign language are more commonly learned in school but not used on the job; meanwhile, employees in Canada say they use skills like project management and data analytics at work daily but did not learn them in school.



About 4 in 5 agree employees in general must refresh their hard skills to stay competitive in the workforce (86%) or say it's important for workers *in their field* to continually refresh their hard skills (80%).

When thinking about common school subjects applied in the workplace, English (e.g., spelling, grammar) (61%) and Math (60%) are by far the most commonly reported subjects used in daily activities at work, while much fewer say they use History (7%), Political Science (6%), or Religion (5%) in their daily work. Perhaps that is why many employees say subjects like Religion (53%), Art (42%), or History (32%) are *useless* in preparing most students for the workforce.

On the other hand, a majority say various soft skills are important to learn before entering the workforce, yet far fewer report actually having learned them before working.



Notably, more than 2 in 3 employees in Canada (68%) say verbal communication is important to learn before entering the workforce but much fewer (38%) say they actually learned it in school. In fact, more than 1 in 4 (27%) say they did not first learn communication skills until they were on the job. Given the wide gaps between soft skills viewed as important and those actually learned before entering the workforce, it's no surprise that 82% agree the education system hasn't caught up with what skills are needed for today's workplace. This may in part be due to an idea shared by nearly 3 in 4 (74%) that schools have limited resources to prepare students for the workforce.

***Education on financial topics is sparse as many employees in Canada enter the workforce without feeling prepared to budget or manage money.***

The vast majority (86%) agree teaching basic economic skills (e.g., budgeting, managing finances) are lacking in schools today. While many (63%) felt prepared to budget their paycheck after their highest level of education, only 1 in 4 (26%) felt very prepared for this. Following this sentiment, nearly 2 in 3 Canadian employees (64%) wish their high school would've taught money management to better prepare them for the workforce. Only 23% first learned basic personal finance before or in high school, while 2 in 5 (42%) did not learn it until they were on the job. Nearly half (49%) wish their high school would've taught them about filing taxes, with the younger generations more likely than Boomers/Seniors to say this (Millennials, 52%; Gen X, 58%; Boomers/Seniors, 36%).

***Advanced degrees are seen by most as not worth it if they don't lead to good career options, perhaps due to the extra money and time required for this additional education.***

When considering who should bear the financial burden of a college education, there is no one clear responsible party. Close to 2 in 5 employees in Canada (39%) believe the government should be responsible for paying for college education, 31% say this burden should rest with the student, and 26% say the student's parents or family members should pay for it. Notably, views on this differ across generations, with Millennials the most likely to say government should pay for college, while Boomers/Seniors are the most likely to cite the student.

- Government: (Millennials, 49%; Gen X, 36%; Boomers/Seniors, 29%)
- The student: (Millennials, 24%; Gen X, 28%; Boomers/Seniors, 43%)

In addition, the vast majority (90%) say they had a job while attending school, with most (61%) saying this was a full-time job. Older generations are the least likely to have worked while attending school (Millennials, 98%; Gen X, 97%; Boomers/Seniors, 76%).

The majority of Canadian employees agree a college degree is worth the cost (69%) or advanced degrees are worth the cost (64%). Still, 2 in 3 (66%) agree you don't need a degree to make a good living. While it's unclear if the price of higher education is worth it, these financial costs may pose a barrier for some. Among those who have not returned to school after entering the workforce, the most commonly reported reason for not going back is that it is too expensive (44%).

Not having the time required for higher education is also viewed as a barrier for 2 in 5 employees in Canada (40%). Still, the majority agree a college degree is worth the extra time it takes (79%) or advanced degrees are worth the extra time (71%). Notably, 7 in 10 (71%) believe getting a degree in your area of interest is not worth it if there aren't good career options available.



***Few employees engage in programs or opportunities to refresh their skills, despite a clear consensus on the helpfulness of continual learning.***

Nearly 2 in 5 (39%) have returned to school after entering the workforce and although another 38% have considered it, a majority (61%) have not returned to school. Among those who have returned to school, the most commonly cited reason for going back to school is wanting to change careers entirely (41%). This is followed by it being required to advance at a job (29%), thinking it would lead to salary increases (24%), and to refresh existing skills (24%). Returning to school may have value as more than half of employees in Canada who have returned to school (56%) say it was absolutely critical or very helpful to their career, with another 25% saying it was somewhat helpful. Still, only a slight majority (58%) have ever completed courses or programs outside of an official college degree program to upgrade their skills for their job, with another 1 in 5 (23%) saying they have not but have considered it.

When it comes to employer-sponsored education, around 2 in 5 Canadian employees (39%) report their employer currently offers courses or programs to help workers expand or upgrade their skills, while half (51%) say their employer does not offer these, and 10% are not sure. Further, nearly 2 in 5 (39%) say their employer does *not* offer employees any opportunities for skill improvement (e.g., sponsoring training certificates, paying for additional education, etc.).

The vast majority (86%) agree anyone who doesn't continue to learn in their career (e.g., staying up to date on new techniques, advancements, etc.) will be left behind in the workforce. Among those who have not gone back to school after entering the workforce, most (82%) think it would be useful, and only 1 in 5 (22%) say the reason they have not gone back to school is because they have already acquired the necessary degrees or certifications for their career.

Close to 3 in 5 employees (59%) say they feel prepared for jobs of the future, though only 11% say they feel very prepared. Further, only with the exception of health sciences, fewer than 2 in 5 say they are knowledgeable about certain areas that may become increasingly common in future work, and less than 1 in 10 feel very knowledgeable about each of these areas.

