Professionalizing the Canadian Career Development Sector: A Retrospective Analysis

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Abstract

The Canadian career development sector has worked for decades to enhance the professionalization of career development professionals, with such projects as the original standards and guidelines (S&Gs) launched in 2001. However, to reflect and guide current practice, extensive updates and a new approach were needed. Through research, consultation, development, and validation, the Pan-Canadian Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals, the National Competency Profile for Career Development Professionals, and the Code of Ethics for Career Development Professionals were created. In examining the process of this comprehensive project, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding the complex interconnected systems impacting the sector. Kouzes and Posner's (2003, 2012) five exemplary practices of leadership are applied to explore the actions and behaviours that created purposeful spaces where practitioners, subject matter experts, and theorists could collectively and authentically work together to accomplish extraordinary tasks.

Keywords: Professional, career development, competency frameword, ecological systems theory, leadership

The Canadian career development field has benefitted immensely from the original set of standards and guidelines (S&Gs) that, after prolonged consultation, were originally launched in 2001 and later revised in 2012. However, over time, a comprehensive new competency framework, code of ethics, and approach to certification were needed to more accurately reflect the contemporary range of skills, knowledge, and actions that now frame effective career development professionals, career influencers, career educators, and thought leaders across the career development milieu in Canada. In September 2018, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) embarked on a 36-month project with funding support from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), a department of the Government of Canada to ensure that the career service delivery ecosystem across Canada was equipped to meet this need.

Career Development Professionals (CDPs) help Canadians to effectively manage learning, work, and transitions from school to the workforce and into retirement. They achieve broad employability, educational, and labour market outcomes that are vital to the socio-economic and health/well-being outcomes of Canada. In this way, creating a new competency framework, code of ethics, and approach to certification not only strengthens the career development sector, but also directly benefits all sectors in the Canadian economy as career development professionals serve as the bridge between un/underemployed Canadians and the work they are seeking across varied industries.

In this paper, we provide the historical context of relevant foundational work over the past three decades and then outline how, with coordination and management from CCDF, hundreds of CDPs, educators, and professional association leaders from different provinces and time zones across Canada came together with subject matter experts and a national leader in competency and certification processes based on occupational

standards to respond to this challenge. Through a process of research, consultation, development, and validation, the project launched a new definition of a career development professional, the Pan-Canadian Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals, The National Competency Profile for Career Development Professionals, the Code of Ethics for Career Development Professionals, a piloted certification program, and three micro-credentials for career educators.

Importantly, we reveal that deeply collaborative approaches to highlighting contemporary career development practices were synthesized with empirical approaches to developing competency frameworks in order to fully consider practice and theory as the new standards and guidelines were co-constructed and developed. We apply Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory to examine the interconnections between the complex systems influencing CDPs and their clients. Then, utilizing Kouzes and Posner's (2003, 2012) five exemplary practices of leadership, we explore the series of actions and behaviours that guided the project participants to accomplish extraordinary tasks. These practices included *modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act,* and *encouraging the heart*. Notably, we pay particular attention

to how project structure and management created a purposeful space where practitioners, subject matter experts, and theorists were not only empowered to collectively and authentically build the knowledge required for successful project completion, but also developed and shared an agentic commitment to the ongoing and sustainable project implementation.

Historical Context

Canada is the second largest country in the world by total area, and yet ranks 38th amongst countries for population (Worldometer, 2023); the entire population of Canada, at under 39 million people in 2023, is only about a million more than in the metropolitan area of Tokyo, the most populated city in the world (Macrotrends, 2023). Not surprisingly, this impacts Canada's ability to provide consistent and effective career and employment services across its vast geographic expanse. Canada's political structures also contribute to complexity in career service delivery. Funding for career and employment services comes from multiple sources; at one point most of the public services were funded federally and offered directly by federal public sector employees resulting in some consistency across most of the country. However, over the past few decades, much of the funding has devolved to the various provincial jurisdictions, resulting in considerable regional differences

in service provision. Rural and remote regions of the country are particularly challenging to serve given that many are only accessible by air transportation or seasonal ice bridges and there is inconsistent Internet and mobile phone access (ASPECT, 2022).

Within the Canadian context, professional regulation occurs at the provincial or territorial level rather than federally. Employment within the career and employment services sector is unregulated, except for in Quebec. As a result, career development professionals come from diverse professional and academic backgrounds and there is no specified qualification to enter the field, nor is there a defined career path for growing within the sector (CERIC, 2019a). Much work has been done by provincial and national career development organizations and associations to professionalize the sector. In the following sections, we provide a historical overview[1] of some of the projects and activities that have contributed to strengthening the practice of career development professionals, and through them, enhanced the career development of diverse individuals over the past three decades in Canada.

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[1]   The historical section that follows was populated based on the lived experience of the authors, personal communication with Sareena Hopkins, Executive Director of the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF), and an unpublished summary of the history of the Standards and Guidelines, available through CCDF.

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Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners

To address the acknowledged need for national standards for career development in Canada, consultations began in 1996 at a National Assembly on Career Development Guidelines with key stakeholders from a cross-section of relevant sectors. As a result of this meeting, a National Steering Committee was elected to oversee development of a draft framework for standards and guidelines, along with a model for conceptualizing the scope of career development, and to identify potential uses, benefits, risks, and disadvantages of the standards and guidelines once they were in place. As Canada is officially a bilingual country (French and English), national consultations, surveys, and official documents need to be in both official languages. The process was consultative, involved practitioners in front-line service to clients, recognized existing exemplary practices, and included the breadth and diversity of the roles and competencies that existed at that time within the field of career development field. Using a stewardship model (rather than a representative model), the Steering Committee members presented their own unique perspectives rather than being seen as officially representing any specific organizations or associations. As the group was intentionally diverse, this resulted in multiple voices being heard (CCDF, n.d.).

A series of regional consultations were held in 1997, involving approximately 1,250 participants in 70 groups across eight of the Canadian provinces and in one of the territories. Feedback was overwhelmingly in favour of moving forward with developing standards and guidelines within a framework focusing on what practitioners actually did rather than their education or training. Participants also supported development of a code of ethics as a foundation to the framework.

The following year, in 1998, a second Assembly on Career Development Guidelines was held to debrief Phase 1findings, and to draft a plan for Phase 2. A new National Stakeholder Committee was selected, comprising 50% membership from the original committee and 50% new membership to provide fresh perspectives. A Stakeholder Liaison and Advisory Council was formed to ensure linkages to professional associations and relevant organizations. The specific work of developing and validating the standards was subcontracted to a Canadian firm with extensive relevant experience in preparing competency standards, and certification and assessment to specific industry standards. The contractor engaged in extensive regional consultation with focus groups to develop the standards, competencies for each standard, and specific performance indicators. Concurrently, the Steering Committee focused on

developing the ethical principles, a glossary of key terms, and a communication strategy to ensure the entire sector felt invited and involved. By the end of 1999, a draft, in both English and French, was distributed for consultation across the country. Approximately 600 participants returned feedback forms, with 90% finding that the standards were accurate and comprehensive.

In 2000, revisions were made based on the consultations, followed by a "plain language" edit; by the end of that year the Standards and Guidelines (commonly referred to as the S&Gs) were distributed for endorsement to the regional focus group participants, others who had participated in the consultation process, and the organizations represented by the Stakeholder Liaison and Advisory Council. With overwhelming support, the S&Gs were declared ready for the public and shared widely on CDs at NATCON 2001, Canada's national career development conference.

A third Assembly on S&Gs was held shortly after that, along with a meeting of the Stakeholder Liaison and Advisory Council, where a new Steering Committee was selected for Phase 3 – implementation of the S&Gs. Regional field tests explored various uses of the standards, a self-assessment tool was developed and pilot-tested, the S&Gs were shared on a website to make them freely available to all, and a marketing kit was prepared for the use of associations as they

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introduced the S&Gs to their members. At the end of Phase 3, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) was elected as the voluntary "guardian" of the S&Gs.

Certification and Training

Once the S&Gs had been launched, several professional associations began certification programs for career development practitioners, aligned to the S&Gs and the embedded Code of Ethics; similarly, several training providers aligned their career development practitioner programs to the S&Gs. As one example of an alignment project, Life Strategies Ltd., based in British Columbia (one of the provinces with certification aligned to the S&Gs), voluntarily mapped each of the courses in its Career Management Professional Program, indicating in which course each of the competencies was being developed or strengthened and through which assignments and activities each of the competencies was being assessed. They created a matrix of courses and competencies and used this annually in course revisions to ensure that updates to the program didn't neglect the core competencies that map to the accepted national standards. This matrix was also useful for professional associations as they evaluated whether or not graduates of the program met their provincial certification requirements for training. Sector employers also found the matrix useful to identify training needs and to make

professional development plans for their teams. Many other training providers took a similar approach to mapping their programs to the S&Gs.

Canadian Council of Career Development

By 2008, leaders of three provincial associations with certification programs began meeting to discuss their similarities and differences and to explore the possibilities of an alliance. In 2010, the Canadian Council of Career Development Associations (3CD) was launched, later dropping "Associations" from the title to be more welcoming and inclusive to stakeholders beyond provincial associations, including training organizations, academics, researchers, and other key stakeholders. By 2012, revisions were needed to the S&Gs, particularly to reflect changes in the use of technology and the diversity of the clients that career practitioners were seeing. The career counselling area of specialization also went through a significant revision at that time, using a Venn diagram to illustrate that career counsellors required the core competencies of both counsellors and career development practitioners. During this period, CCDF and 3CD continued to voluntarily serve as active champions and stewards of the S&Gs. Other countries subsequently modelled their own standards and guidelines after the Canadian S&Gs, most notably Australia and Saudi Arabia;

the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) also used them as a foundation for their competency framework.

However, despite voluntary efforts across Canada to professionalize the career and employment services sector, Canadian career development professionals had no permanent national "home." The S&Gs once again needed substantial revision and some provincial associations had begun to make changes to their certification requirements that were inconsistent with the rest of the country. In a presentation to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), a federal government ministry, the CCDF team was informed about a potential pocket of funding designed to support sectors wanting to develop national standards and guidelines. CCDF submitted a proposal entitled *Supporting Canadians to Navigate Learning and Work*, making a strong argument that strengthening the career development sector would actually benefit every other sector in the economy. Funding for a 3-year project was approved in 2018. The process and outcomes of that project will be the focus of the rest of this article.

Revitalizing the S&Gs – The Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals

Recognizing that the S&Gs needed a major overhaul to ensure

that the career service ecosystem in Canada was equipped for changing work trends and labour market needs, the revitalization project focused on lifelong career development, helping Canadians of all ages to manage learning and work transitions. As noted in the final report of the project (CCDF, 2021b):

> This project not only strengthened the career development sector, but also directly benefits all sectors in the Canadian economy as career development professionals serve as the bridge between un/ underemployed youth and adults to work across all industries. Competent and qualified professionals in the career development field are an essential precursor to ensuring intentional learners, supporting successful transitions and fully addressing recruitment and retention issues in all other sectors of the labour market. (p. 5)

The 3-year project comprised four phases, with Phase 1 focused on engaging stakeholders, forming the project team, and conducting an environmental scan. Phase 2 involved extensive consultation across the country (similar to the approach taken with the initial S&Gs as previously described), under the leadership of a consulting firm that specialized in supporting sectors to develop ISO-approved standards. Phase 3 turned the focus to developing and testing a national certification process, and Phase 4 ensured that all components of the project were "finalized, validated, endorsed and mobilized across the Canadian career development service sector" (CCDF, 2021b, p. 5).

The project resulted in numerous outputs and outcomes, as summarized in the final report (CCDF, 2021b). These included the revised fully bilingual standards and guidelines, reimagined as the Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals (CCDF, 2021c); it contained measurable indicators of competency mastery and identified 100 competencies, organized into 26 themes. The competencies are arranged within a framework that includes foundational *Professional Practice* competencies, with recognition that they may be transferable from training or work experience in other sectors or roles. Other competencies were identified as CDP Characteristic (i.e., those that are distinct to CDPs). A group of CDP *Extended* competencies was also identified, those that were common to specialized services within the sector. Finally, *Outreach and Leadership* competencies were identified to reflect CDPs who were not providing front-line service directly to individual clients.

Other project outputs included a new definition of CDP; extensive consultation with front-line professionals, training providers, and other key stakeholders; an online competency self-assessment tool; a national certification standard and comprehensive examination; a new Code of Ethics; a pan-Canadian mobility agreement, signed by all provincial/territorial professional associations for CDPs; outreach to CD sector employers; a communication plan; a sustainability action plan; a performance measurement strategy; and comprehensive progress reports.

The outcomes of the project will be evaluated in both the short and longer term. It is anticipated that the project will result in more service providers assessed as meeting the agreed-upon professional standards and that this, in turn, will improve the training and employment outcomes of youth and other Canadians receiving career services at school, in their workplaces, or in community settings. Within the next few years, it is hoped that this project will stimulate more universities and colleges to offer specialized training in career development as there is currently a lack of advanced training for career development professionals within all but the French-speaking parts of Canada. It is also hoped that there will be more career development education within the K-12 educational system (i.e., for children and youth). There has already been interest expressed by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education to move that forward. Finally, as the professionalization

of CDPs continues, it is hoped that the career development sector will become more attractive to younger workers seeking a professional home. In all, over 6,000 hours of in-kind contributions illustrate the inclusiveness, engagement, and commitment of the entire career development sector which resulted in an ISO-compliant competency framework and certification approach for the career development sector that is unique in the world.

In the next two sections, this project will be retrospectively examined through two different theoretical frameworks. First, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory will be applied to look at the interconnections between the many systems influencing career development professionals and the individuals that they serve. Next, Kouzes and Posner's (2003, 2017) five exemplary leadership practices will be applied to illustrate the importance of effective leadership at each phase of the project to ensuring the project's overall success.

From Process to Praxis: Equipping Competent Career Development Professionals

It was interesting that the title of the project focused on individual clients – supporting them to "navigate learning and work" – and yet the project activities focused on strengthening the capacity of CDPs to consistently and

effectively offer this support. In essence, at the project's core, was an understanding that to support individual change, activating and improving the entire, very complex, system would be necessary. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the interactions of the disparate components of this system (i.e., micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono).

An Individual Example

Publicly funded career and employment services in Canada are intended to support all Canadians, with a special emphasis on increasing employment access and equity for vulnerable members of society (ESDC, 2021). However, as noted, it's important and necessary for CDPs to recognize all the interconnected systems that impact their clients' access to career and educational opportunities. Applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model to a client example can illustrate this.

Saffron (pseudonym) reached out to a local government-funded centre that offers free services to the unemployed; the CDP recognized that Saffron's microsystem comprised more than such personal characteristics as her unique combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Together, they discussed Saffron's immediate

family (e.g., her 3-year-old daughter; her son in Grade 2; her spouse who travelled for work, often without advance notice), her community involvement (e.g., volunteering at church, belonging to a fitness centre), and her recent recovery from addiction to pain medications (which involved work with a medical doctor, naturopath, and psychologist).

Applying Bronfenbrenner's concept of the mesosystem, the CDP and Saffron were able to identify the interaction of several moving parts that would impact Saffron's career possibilities (e.g., due to her spouse's unpredictable travel and work schedule, Saffron needs to be available to drop children off and pick them up within specific timeframes and needs to have the flexibility to be home with the children on days when the school or daycare is closed). Other considerations within Saffron's mesosystem include recommendations from her medical team to help her avoid a relapse. Within the *exosystem* are more distant but influential forces that impact Saffron's possibilities for work (e.g., few daycare options, all with specific opening hours, limiting the shifts she is available for; her spouse's employer requiring unplanned overtime or travel; access to wage subsidies for individuals returning to the workforce). Saffron's culture and values are rooted in the *macrosystem*, as are the many political and economic systems

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that influence her opportunities for education and/or work. Finally, all these interconnected systems are embedded within time, the *chronosystem*. This part of Bronfenbrenner's model accounts for changes across time and, in the context of career planning, helps to explain the need for lifelong career development rather than an approach to career decision-making. In Saffron's case, the age of her children and the immediacy of her addiction recovery are important considerations when planning next steps in her career.

A Career Development Sector Example

Equipping career development professionals to effectively support the very wide range of clients they serve is a challenging endeavour. Saffron's example illustrated the complexity of client's needs and the importance of examining culture, context, and interconnecting systems to increase the "stickiness" of career development interventions. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model can also provide a useful frame for conceptualizing how to more effectively equip CDPs to support their clients to navigate learning and work as they build their careers.

As previously described, Canada had an existing, globally respected, set of S&Gs for Career Development Practitioners (CCDF, 2001) and an accompanying Code of Ethics (CCDF, 2004). The career development sector had

several professional associations and organizations and a number of individuals recognized as sector leaders. All of this could be considered as the professional *microsystem* for CDPs within Canada. The *mesosystem* within which these CDPs interacted included national conferences such as Cannexus; national organizations such as CCDF, CERIC, Career Professionals of Canada, and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's Career Counsellors chapter; and national umbrella associations such as 3CD.

However, sector leaders had long been aware, and surveys had confirmed (CCDF, 2009; Pickerell & Neault, 2012), that there were many folks doing "career work" across the country who would not see themselves as part of the career development sector, nor would they identify as career development practitioners or career development professionals. Within the sector's *exosystem*, some were involved with corporate career development; others were working within schools or postsecondary institutions; still others were working within the criminal justice system or social service settings. Although Canadian career development thought leaders preferred a "big tent" approach to welcoming anyone providing career or employment services under the same roof (CERIC, 2019b), many of those service providers would not have considered the existing S&Gs

or Code of Ethics as applying to them.

This is where the *macrosystem* became an important consideration. First, in the previously described CCDF presentation to individuals within the federal government on the importance of career development to the national economy, a discussion arose about the need to update the sector's S&Gs and the lack of funding to tackle this important project. Someone within the *sectoral initiatives* group was aware of an impending pocket of funding that had a focus on developing standards and guidelines. CCDF responded to the Request for Proposals under this initiative, making a compelling argument that setting appropriate standards for career development professionals would strengthen all sectors of the Canadian economy. In an attempt to be as inclusive as possible, a National Stakeholder Committee was formed, including representation from a cross-section of the sector's *exosystem*. A Canadian organization with expertise in supporting sectors to develop ISO-compliant competency frameworks was contracted; as part of the comprehensive competency-writing process they led the project team through, significant efforts were made to ensure that the existing microsystem of the career development sector would be expanded so that those currently working adjacent to the sector within the *exosystem* would begin to feel welcome and included. The structure of the

resultant competency framework, with the foundational Professional Practice competencies, also acknowledged the transferability of many of the competencies across the exosystem, making a sense of belonging to the career development sector more possible for CDPs joining the sector from other professional backgrounds.

Looking at this from the *chronosystem* perspective, this project reflected a unique moment in time. Shifting from the existing S&Gs to a competency-based framework had recently occurred within one provincial association. Associations across the country had been working together to try to strengthen and standardize certification of CDPs within the sector. The CCDF team had an opportunity to make an important presentation to key decision-makers and, in doing that, learned of a funding pocket that would not otherwise have seemed relevant to revising the existing S&Gs. The project began in late 2018, allowing for over a year of travel that established trust and strengthened relationships amongst team members and engaged the sector in focus groups across the country – opportunities that abruptly ended when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, with both travel restrictions and lockdowns imposed – another example of an unanticipated *macrosystem* influence. With a solid foundation in place, however, the project continued throughout the pandemic, with virtual meetings replacing those requiring travel.

In the next section, we apply Kouzes and Posner's five exemplary leadership practices model to describe how the leadership process of this project exemplified those practices and to evaluate the outcomes of the project through Kouzes and Posner's (2003, 2017) lens.

Evaluating the Project Leadership Process Using Kouzes and Posner's Five Exemplary Leadership Practices

The specific objectives of the project included the engagement of key stakeholders with a mission to ensure that the initiative and final outcomes of the project would be enthusiastically endorsed and fully supported by the pan-Canadian career development sector (CCDF, 2021b). This was similar to the approach with the initial S&Gs project, previously described. To meet this goal, an extensive level of consultation and active engagement with CDPs, employers, relevant associations, and provincial/territorial governments was included throughout the project, culminating in ensuring that, as project deliverables were finalized, they were validated, endorsed, and implemented across the Canadian career development service sector. Such a task was ambitious, and the project leaders intentionally and purposefully created space for the momentum built in the initial stages of the project to deepen and extend sufficiently to sustain the

project to a successful conclusion.

To support a retrospective reflection on this leadership process, Kouzes and Posner's (2003, 2017) five exemplary leadership practices offer a rich and nuanced framework to conceptualize how the leaders of the project were able to inspire and motivate hundreds of CDPs to come together and contribute over 6,000 volunteer hours of their time, expertise, and passion. Indeed, Kouzes and Posner (2003) defined their five exemplary leadership practices, developed through extensive research, as a series of actions and behaviours that serve as guidance for leaders to get extraordinary things accomplished. The practices include: *inspiring a shared vision, modelling the way, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.*

Inspiring a Shared Vison

Kouzes and Posner (2017) understood that creating a common purpose can help inspire a collective of people to strive to implement a *shared vision.* At the outset of the project, the first step involved settling on a new and national consensus for the definition of a Career Development Professional to establish the foundation for the main deliverables of the CDP Competency Framework and National Certificate Program. Creating the new definition was fundamental in uniting CDPs in their common understanding of the scope of their practice

and its impact, as they worked to synthesize the diverse range of career development work undertaken across Canada into a shared definition that all felt was representative of the work they undertook and contributions they made to positive outcomes for Canadians.

With the new CDP definition as the guiding principle, the project moved through an extensive consultation to underpin the development of the CDP Competency Framework. With a focus on obtaining the full engagement of key stakeholders at the outset, a National Steering Committee (NSC) was formed to facilitate the reach into, and commitment of, a diverse range of associated professional associations and other organizations across Canada. At the outset, the project leaders planned a minimum of 30 provincial/territorial consultations in English and French with front-line professionals representative of a wide range of CDP settings and diverse client groups. Ultimately, this goal was significantly exceeded, with 380 CDPs participating in a series of 68 face-to-face and virtual consultations that were held in 40 different communities across Canada (CCDF, 2021b). In addition, the CDP Competency Framework was reviewed by 105 subject matter experts (SMEs) who reviewed components directly related to their areas of expertise, with several leaders of the career development field reviewing the entire CDP Competency Framework. This extended consultation helped ensure that the vision for the project was not only shared across the CDP sector, but that CDPs were energized by the project and deeply engaged in the process of seeing the project successfully meet its outcomes and deliverables.

The development, testing, and refinement of a new National Certification Program for CDPs was a main deliverable for the project (CCDF, 2021b), with project leaders determining that the new certification should be sustainable and pan-Canadian. Consequently, it was extremely important that the voices and perspectives of CDPs representing diverse identities were invited, actively involving individuals from all of the provinces and territories and securing their commitment to the common goal of creating the National Certification. *Inspiring a shared vision* continued with the formation of a National Certification Steering Committee (NCSC) comprising 25 consistent members from across Canada supplemented with a range of subject matter experts who, desirably, each had at least three years' experience in the career development profession, and included diverse identities, services offered, and clients served.

Modelling the Way

As previously described, Canada had built a reputation for *modelling the way* by being the first country to publish competency standards for the career development sector in 2001. The development of the New Competency Framework called for a re-imagined and innovative approach to creating the world's first ISO-compliant competency framework and certification approach for the career development sector. Literature has identified a variety of influencing factors to promote re-imagining and innovative behaviour; these include the need for cognition (Wu et al., 2011), psychological empowerment (Odoardi et al., 2015), creative self-efficacy (Fan et al., 2016), and transformational leadership (Li et al.,2016). To develop the National Competency Framework, CCDF worked in close collaboration with a team of leading professionals in the field of competency development and competency-based certification. This partnership established clear principles concerning standards of excellence, setting meaningful examples for others to follow (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

The Canadian consulting organization actively engaged in *modelling the way* for developing an ISO-compliant competency framework and Industry Standard for certification. Before engaging volunteers from the sector in defining and articulating competencies, they provided extensive formal training on writing standards, using a scaffolded approach that comprised lectures, practice, application, and feedback by experienced members of their

competency-writing team. This process of *modelling the way* continued as the Canadian consulting organization, with their registered psychometrician, led in the development of an Industry Standard that CDPs desiring certification would need to meet. This Industry Standard was reflected in the content of questions developed for the multiple-choice exam, and in the scenarios designed for the behaviour-based performance assessment. This phase of the project was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with its travel restrictions and lockdowns. However, the consulting organization continued *modelling the way*, teaching the process of item writing through training delivered via videoconference to 15 SMEs and each SME was then tasked with developing a set number of case studies and multiple-choice questions. All questions were reviewed by the psychometrician to monitor for quality and to ensure blueprint parameters were met. Following the item development, 20 SMEs were trained by the consulting organization to undertake the item review. The 20 SMEs came together over a series of 16 review workshops, with each workshop facilitated by the registered psychometrician and three to six of the 20 trained SMEs.

Another example of *modelling the way* was with the Code of Ethics (CCDF, 2021a). In this case, the modelling involved a team of volunteers from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), which had recently revised their own Code of Ethics. This team recommended extensive revisions to the existing code, based on the revisions that had been made to the CCPA code; the model they offered informed the subsequent work of the Code of Ethics Working Group which resulted in the comprehensive new Code of Ethics.

Challenging the Process

Through *challenging the process*, the project leaders created a safe environment where all project participants had space to challenge the norms while striving to achieve important outcomes (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). The foundation of *challenging the process* hinges on the ability and capacity to have an open mind where it is acceptable to think creatively in response to tasks and activities. Through the face-to-face and virtual consultations, the focus on building the capacity needed to ensure sufficient consultation and engagement from the range of career development professionals reminded everyone within the project that one of its primary assets was coming together to work collaboratively as a team (Knoke & Wood, 1981). Capacity building occurred through many positive developmental and enabling processes (Cameron et al., 2003), where the NSC, NCSC, targeted Working Groups, and project leadership team worked closely throughout the diverse range of development and

consultation activities, and other forms of learning where all project participants could challenge themselves and their colleagues in a safe and constructive way (London, 2013).

Several innovative tools and approaches were used to safely engage participants in *challenging the process*. For example, one of the first focus groups was held in the evening during a week of career practitioner training in Nunavut, where practitioners had flown in from several remote northern communities. To create safety and demonstrate respect for their time and contributions during a busy week, interested participants were invited to a dinner meeting at a restaurant of their choice. Table discussions provided opportunities for them to challenge our understanding of the competencies required for CDPs; unique regional competency requirements such as comfort with flying in small planes during snowstorms and the ability to live and work in locations with limited hours of daylight surfaced in this meeting, reminding us of the need for flexibility and diversity considerations in building a national framework. In other settings, tools like Mentimeter, an interactive presentation software, facilitated safe opportunities for participants to *challenge the process*. The beauty of Mentimeter is that it preserves anonymity while offering immediate results to a variety of questions with responses presented in graphs,

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word clouds, or in a narrative format.

Enabling Others to Act

When leadership truly is exemplary, all participants are strengthened through collaborative and trusting environments where people feel valued and empowered. When people feel trusted and empowered (Kutsyuruba et al., 2010) extraordinary things happen, and through this process within the project, numerous CDPs became *enabled to act*. It is important to acknowledge the commitment throughout the project to ensure the Competency Framework is freely accessible both via the project website and within an online Learning Management System (LMS) that supports dynamic use of the Competency Framework, Code of Ethics, competency self-assessment tool (Taking Charge), and national certification components. This ensures that everyone across the diverse career development sector can be enabled by the national standard for CDP practice.

Revisiting the Life Strategies example of mapping its Career Management Professional Program to the original S&Gs, as soon as the new Competency Framework for Career Development Professionals became publicly available, the team was *enabled to act*, engaging in mapping courses across their certificate programs to the new framework. This activity revealed several opportunities to address

the new competencies (e.g., 7.4 Maintain health and wellness) and reconfigure which courses primarily addressed specific competencies (e.g., 5.2 Monitor client progress). Several of the new Outreach and Leadership competencies have inspired the team to offer additional courses to meet the needs of a broader range of CDPs.

Another group of educators was *enabled to act*, with a focus on providing career development training to K-12 educators. Although the main intent of the three micro-credentials was on one of the CDP Extended competencies (20: *Career Development in the Educational System*), the team identified refinements to that competency, which were later incorporated into the Framework. In mapping the micro-credentials to the entire framework, they were also able to identify several other competencies being developed that came from all parts of the framework (i.e., Professional Practice, CDP Characteristic, CDP Extended, and Outreach and Leadership).

Encouraging the Heart

Creating an environment where achievements are celebrated, contributions are appreciated, and hard work is recognized is the final practice of exemplary leadership, *encourage the heart*. Kouzes and Posner (2003) asserted that when you want people to give their all to a project, to put their hearts,

minds, and soul into their work, then you must make certain that all participants know what they are supposed to be doing and why. Although this is the final principle to be addressed, it was one of the first principles to be actioned in establishing the National Stakeholder Committee (NSC). At the inaugural meeting of the NSC, an inspiring short video, "Know Your Why," was shown. Subsequently, throughout the project, moments were built in for participants to engage with each other, celebrate shared success, and build a strong and sustained sense of community that *encouraged the heart* and periodically reflected on the need to *know your why*.

Importantly, the role of subjective well-being in productivity has been explored (Honkaniemi et al., 2015), and has been found to affect an individual's ability to drive continuous behaviours such as creativity and innovation, meaning that when individuals have high levels of satisfaction and well-being, they are likely to be more engaged in creative and innovative practices (Hashim & Tan, 2015). In addition, creative problem solving can be boosted by positive emotions (Koveshnikov et al., 2014). Finally, subjective well-being affects how individuals are able to share knowledge (Cheung & Lee, 2007) due to those with high satisfaction levels being more likely to take part in knowledge sharing activities, promoting new ideas and innovative thoughts (Wang & Yang, 2017). All of this

was attended to by the leaders of this project, during each interaction with team members, stakeholders, and consultation participants. *Encouraging the heart* through attending to individual's needs for food, fun, and work that truly mattered was a constant.

Summary and Next Steps

Ultimately, the project produced a new CDP Competency Framework that is comprehensive, reflects current and best practice, and is the first of its kind across the world to include measurable performance indicators. The framework includes both competencies required of all CDPs (the National Profile) and specialized competencies unique to specific roles within the sector. It clearly delineates the national standard for CDP practice, and with launch of the national certification, Canada will hold the only competency-based, ISO-Compliant certification for the career development sector internationally. Every facet of the project was completed with stakeholder engagement and ownership as a significant priority, which resulted in unprecedented numbers of CDPs, training institutions, employers, and provincial and territorial governments being actively involved and excited participants that helped push the project forward to its successful conclusion.

Globally, a significant body of evidence points to how quality career services delivered by qualified professionals leads to a wide range of positive labour market outcomes for clients. Through having a clear national standard for practice, the certification program positions Canada to be an international leader in the delivery of career services that help Canadians to successfully obtain sustainable and fulfilling work outcomes, and provides a road map for other nations who wish to update or implement a national certification program. The increased cohesion that has been brought to the field through a new definition of CDP, renewed Competency Framework, National Profile, Industry Standard, and Code of Ethics will significantly enhance the quality of service offered by CDPs to their clients. The field is united and ready to raise the bar and move to a cohesive model of national certification.

As a direct result of this project, the Canadian career development field is primed and, ready to respond to increased demands and complexities in practice, where the need for a robust and measurable assessment to ensure quality career development services has never been greater. A strong career development sector strengthens all other industry sectors across the labour market by promoting targeted skills development, labour market attachment, and fluid transitions as skill demands shift. The level of engagement across the career development sector was outstanding at every step of the project, and the leadership and quality of volunteerism has brought the field together in so many rich and unanticipated ways. More than 6000 volunteer hours were logged as in-kind contributions, demonstrating the significant commitment the Canadian career development sector has to raising the bar on its praxis. This immense demonstration of volunteerism was truly remarkable and a source of immense pride across the sector. Crucially, this initiative was unreservedly fueled, driven, and owned by the career development sector from across Canada.

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