



OpportuNext Launch

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Speakers

- Susan Black, President and CEO, Signal49 Research
- Micheal Burt,
- Pedro Barata, Executive Director, Future Skills Centre
- Alan Richardson, Vice President of Learning and Performance, Royal Bank of Canada

Transcript

SUSAN BLACK 00:36

Welcome, everyone! Thanks for joining us for our virtual launch event today. We're excited about what this innovative new product can do, and how it informs and empowers Canadians who need to explore new career paths. We're always excited when we can put our research expertise to work and help tackle a real challenge. In this case, one that people are facing across our country right now. I hope you'll stay with us until the end of this event because we'll have a live Q and A session to answer some of your questions. Let me start by saying the Conference Board of Canada has never launched a product quite like this before, so some of this is pretty new to us. It's been a lot of hard work, of course, but we've had such a terrific experience working with our partners to get this tool up and running, and so I do want to give a shout out to our partners, Ryerson University and Blueprint, who, along with the Conference Board, are founding partners of the Future Skills Center, and of course our partner FSC, a groundbreaking initiative funded by the Government of Canada, dedicated to helping Canadians gain the skills needed to thrive in a changing labor market, and that's what brings us all here today. Attending this event, we have people from both the public and private sector, government officials, people from job placement organizations, and people from industry. The fact that so many different stakeholders are here today speaks volumes about how



important career transitions are for many Canadians. From my perspective, this tool couldn't come at a better time. For many Canadians, there's a real sense of urgency because of the way the world of work is changing. COVID-19 is having a dramatic impact on our labor force, which obviously is a picture that is still revealing itself. We don't yet know what the long-term impacts will be. The pandemic is just one factor, though. There are many other job market disruptions at play currently, and employment prospects are always shifting. Automation, for example, will almost certainly continue to affect many industries even after significant economic recovery is made. Change is nothing new to Canada's job market, but change at the unprecedented, accelerated rate that we've seen in the past few years is. As a result, many Canadians are in search of desirable long-term employment and looking to transition to new career paths. At the same time, we know that employers are looking for innovative solutions to HR challenges, but shifting careers can be hard. There are a lot of unknowns. How do you know if the timing is right? What are your options? Do you have what employers are looking for? Is more training required? Would salaries be comparable or better? It can be difficult and time-consuming to find relevant information and potential opportunities. While there are many ways to look for new jobs, we, along with the Future Skills Center, recognized that there was a gap in the availability and the accessibility of tools for identifying and exploring new career paths. Looking for ways to contribute to an actionable solution, we recognized that we had access to these incredible amounts of data around employment, if we could find a way to easily connect the dots for people, we could help them find answers. What we wanted to do was equip both workers and employers with a tool that would help them identify and pursue new career opportunities. We wanted to give them a resource that could provide guidance on which skills and retraining can help them make a successful transition. I'm proud to say that's exactly what we've built, and I'm excited for the chance to share it with you today. So, without further ado, we'd like to introduce you to OpportuNext, a new solution for a changing job market. It's an online tool that helps job placement organizations, job seekers, and employers quickly and easily explore viable career transition pathways. It does this by matching a person's existing experience and skill set to those required for potential new careers, and through the support of the Future Skills Center, OpportuNext is available free of charge to all Canadians. Now, I'd like to invite Mike Burt, a member of our executive team, to walk you through how it works and the value it delivers. Take it away, Mike.

MICHAEL BURT 04:54

Thank you, Susan. Let me just start by saying how exciting it's been to work on such an important and timely project. The team is really proud of the work that went into bringing OpportuNext to Canadians. I'd like to talk a little bit about what's behind the scenes, give you a really quick demo of the tool, and then walk through a couple of situations where we know this tool will have a real impact. In order to create OpportuNext, the Conference Board of Canada collected a huge amount of labor market information related to skills, abilities, education, and vacancies by job type in Canada and its regions. The challenge for us was not a lack of information, but the more than 13 billion data points that we had to sort through. In short, how could we use this information to create real insights that people could use? Our first priority was to figure out how we could help people with skills and experience in one area find viable and desirable work in another. To do this, we developed a



sophisticated algorithm that assesses the similarity between different roles. To share the results, we then created an ultra simple solution that anyone with internet access and a web browser can use for free. We didn't want a cumbersome interface that you needed a degree to figure out. Instead, our focus was on ease of use and accessibility. We wanted the results to be powerful, but getting to them to be seamless and invisible. And we wanted users to be able to get some answers within seconds of visiting the tool online. We've managed to hit that target. Let me show you how some of that looks in a short video. Career change can be difficult. What if there was an easy way to explore your options? That's the kind of real-world challenge the Congress Sport of Canada and the Future Skills Center love to take on. Introducing OpportuNext, a free-to-use online tool designed to help job placement organizations, job seekers, and employers easily explore career transition pathways. It's simple. OpportuNext is free, easy to use, and can be opened in any web browser. It's powerful. With just your current job title. OpportuNext leverages over 13 billion data points to provide potential career paths. It lets you explore your options. OpportuNext highlights adjacent careers compatible with your skill set and experience, along with growth prospects and average salaries. OpportuNext helps you identify career paths that are both viable and desirable, and helps you chart how to get there. It's a new solution for a changing job market. So we are balancing our powerful backend with an easy-to-use interface. We're sorting through massive amounts of data to provide straightforward information and insights to inform career decisions. These are important decisions that can have a huge impact in shaping people's lives. So, who can use this tool, and why is it valuable? As we've already mentioned, there are three general groups of people that are involved with career transitions: job seekers, job placement organizations, and employers. Obviously, they're looking for different things, but we've found that available tools were generally falling short for these groups in a couple of key ways. First, most are focused on job listings rather than career pathways, so they're very situational. Second, they lack the flexibility, capability, and accessibility for broad use. For example, they may be difficult or expensive to use, or targeted at a very small group of people. And finally, available tools generally lack a Canadian context. So, if you're a job seeker considering a change, you may be asking yourself, "Where can I put my skills to work and succeed?" Or, "Do I have what it takes to do X, Y, or Z?" If you're an employer looking to fill positions, you want to know how to source potential candidates. Most job ads target specific education or experience requirements. However, by changing your mindset to focus on skill sets that are similar to your open positions, you can dramatically expand the pool of candidates. Our tool is perfect for that. For job placement professionals, you need to be able to do both of these things on behalf of your employer or job-seeking clients. You may find that skill set and career pathway information is spread across multiple resources and tools, if it's accessible at all. Opportunex provides easy, clear access to the full set of information to meet your needs.

MICHAEL BURT 09:34

No matter who's using it, Opportunex highlights alternative careers that are both viable and desirable. We measure viability with a metric we call a similarity score. This score measures whether different roles have similar skills, abilities, knowledge, experience, and educational requirements. Basically, takes the skills needed in your existing career and finds careers. That require similar skill sets. The



desirability of career options is measured through average salary and expected growth prospects over the next five to 10 years. Whether you're looking to make a switch, fill a position, or help others identify opportunities, this is information you can use to make these important decisions. I'd like to encourage you to go out and test Opportunx.ca, go poke around, see what it can do and how easy it is to use, and maybe even consider the kind of impact it can have in exploring or facilitating career transitions. And with that, I'll send it back to Susan to talk about some key partnerships that made all of this happen. Susan,

SUSAN BLACK 10:41

Thanks, Mike. As we've said, this tool couldn't have come together without our partners at the Future Skills Center. I'd like to invite FSC's executive director Pedro Barata to talk more about their involvement in the project. Pedro,

PEDRO BARATA 10:53

Thanks, Susan. It's an absolute pleasure to be here today and to participate in this very exciting launch of OpportuNext, and as you say, I know a lot of work has gone into the R&D of this concept, and it's terrific to be ready to see OpportuNext come to fruition now. The timing couldn't be better, because as we start to look forward to a recovery, it's this kind of tool that will provide invaluable insights into how skills are changing, so that we can build forward-looking systems of training for Canadians. It's breakthroughs like this in how we understand, how we measure and forecast skills, that will bring real value add to our training and workforce development ecosystem, and that's what excites us at the Future Skills Center, this kind of innovation, this kind of breakthrough that builds on many strategies that are in place right now for the here and now, but looks further down the field to help Canadians adapt in what we know is going to be a constantly changing labor market. In two short years, and through our great partnership with the Conference Board of Canada, Ryerson University Blueprint, supported by the Government of Canada and ESDC, we have worked really hard with local organizations, businesses, labor, post-secondary institutions, governments. We have tested tangible solutions that work for the many regional realities that we're currently facing, the population groups that are being impacted and the sectors that are being reimaged as we speak for the future, and I think that the capabilities that OpportuNext specifically, allowing people to explore different employment paths in a fast and really accessible way, is going to be a game changer for how Canadians move forward and succeed in the shifting work environment that we're facing today, and that will continue to come into tomorrow. So we're thrilled to introduce this practical and accessible tool that all Canadians can use to understand changing economy and what skills they will need to get ahead of it. What we're really excited about is creating an accessible and responsive tool to help anyone, whether you're a job seeker or an employer or someone trying to help either group, to figure out not only possible career transition directions that are open and viable and desirable, but also to make sure that the skills and training gaps that currently exist are filled. This tool will make it easier to make the transition over to a new job, to a better job, or to a new career path. And we think that the accessibility component of this tool-the fact that it's free, easy to use, that it provides clear information and options to help define next steps-this is really key for



disadvantaged groups that are trying to reskill or upskill to meet the demands in this job market, it's important now more than ever, especially with the disruption that we're seeing with COVID-19 and the real danger of a K-shaped recovery and its impact on lower-skilled, disadvantaged Canadians. And while skills alone are not going to be the answer to all of the economic uncertainties that many Canadians are facing, good information about skills, access to training programs will be one crucial component of a comprehensive recovery strategy. Projects like this really align with the Future Skills Center's mandate to ensure all of us can contribute to and benefit from an inclusive recovery, and also be part of a future based on shared prosperity. We are really looking forward to continuing to work on this important, practical, solutions-driven project at this critical time. Thanks again, Susan, and I'll now turn it back over to you.

SUSAN BLACK 14:37

Thank you, Pedro. Now that you've heard our perspectives on the tool and what it can do. It's time to hear from someone on the HR side who can foresee using OpportuNext as an employer.

ALAN RICHARDSON 14:49

Hi, my name is Alan Richardson. I'm Vice President for Learning and Performance at RBC. While our economy continues to adapt to a skills-based model, the introduction of new technologies is advancing at unprecedented speed. As a result, we are seeing more disruption to Canadian jobs and the skills our workforce needs to do those jobs. For many Canadian workers, this is significant change, but also brings incredible opportunities. To seek out those opportunities, Canadians will need more access to information about new and emerging career opportunities and how they can leverage their rich skills, both existing and new skills they'll build to transition to future-proof careers. OpportuNext is a great example of these types of tools needed to empower Canadians with facts and data to help make informed career decisions. The strength of Canada's workforce will depend on access to information about skills, what they are, how they emerge and decline, and which skills are in demand by employers. One of the most exciting components of Operation Next is its solid foundations in continuously updating Canadian job and skills data. This design not only ensures that the data and information provided will remain up to date and relevant to users, but also provides Canadians with data relevant to jobs at the community level. At RBC, we look forward to seeing how OpportuNext continues to grow and evolve, bringing more support to Canadians. We are excited to see how we may be able to leverage the tool to support our employees and job candidates in making informed career choices. Thank you.

SUSAN BLACK 16:31

Thanks so much for providing that perspective for all of us. Well, that almost wraps up our program for today. Just want to say one more time how excited we are to share this tool with you. OpportuNext is live and available now. If you want to go explore it, you should see a link on screen now, or you can go to opportunext.ca. Otherwise, we'd love it if you stayed around for the live Q&A session starting right now. Again, thanks for taking the time to join us.



MICHAEL BURT 17:23

Thank you, Susan and Pedro, and I want to say actually thank you to everyone who was a part of getting us where we are today. There were so many people I can't name everybody, but this really was a team effort to get opportunity next up in live, and really looking forward to where we go from here. I also want to say welcome and thank you to all of you who joined us today. It's so fantastic, as Susan said, we've never done anything like this before at the conference boards. To have a live launch event like this is really very exciting. I do see that some of you have managed to find the Q and A feature that's in the On24 platform, and I'd like to take a little bit of time to answer some of the questions that you've already provided, and if you haven't yet had an opportunity to provide questions, I do encourage you to use the Q and A window that you see on the screen. And even if you have questions after you've had a chance to use the tool, please do share them with us. Basically, we will be using the feedback questions that we get from all of you to help us decide where we go next with Opportunity Next, and so there's a variety of different ways you can do that. There's a link on the website itself, and we also, as a follow-up to this event, will be sending out a information to all of you who participated in terms of how you can connect with us. So with that, I am going to have a look at what questions have already come in, and so the first question I'm going to see here is how did we create OpportuNext? If you'll give me a moment, I might digress and actually speak to why we created OpportuNext, and then I'll get to the how. So I think the why is really important. I've been working in labor market information for many many years as part of my career at the Conference Board, and we have two primary ways that we can see labor data in Canada. We can talk about employment in terms of where people work, and we can talk about employment in terms of what people do. So, basically, where they are, where their employers are, what type of industry they're working in, and what their job titles are. OpportuNext allows us to talk about employment from a skills perspective, which is something we haven't been able to do consistently and in systematic way in Canada. So that's really what Opportunity Next is all about. It is the why. In terms of the how, Susan spoke a lot about the different people and organizations that were part of getting us here. I mean, obviously the funding from the Government of Canada, the Future Skills Center, and a variety of other partners were critical in getting us where we are right now. We could not be here if it were not for the participation of all those organizations. I would call out some of the other organizations that were part of giving us feedback early on in terms of methodology. These sorts of things would include things like the labor market. Information Council, ESDC, or Employment Skills Development Canada, Statistics Canada, and one of our partners at FSC, Magnet. So they were all critical part of this. In terms of the tool itself, how did we create it? Basically, we did. We reached out to potential users. So, for example, career development professionals, HR practitioners, and try to understand what types of information they really, really needed on their day to day, and so basically we designed the tool around that those interviews and those surveys that we did, and it's focused on a few key pieces of information. So it would be the wage data, skills, what types of career transitions are possible, and growth prospects. Those are the four key things that you see in the tool itself. If you want to know more about how we calculate things at the similarity scores, there is links in the tool showing you some of the sources for the data. We have a methodology primer. I won't get into it right now.



MICHAEL BURT 20:54

It's a little complicated, but if you are interested, certainly you can dig into what's available there to get help answer some of your questions in terms of how we created the tool. So just go to the next question here. What is the source for the skills information that you're sharing? So there's two key sources of data that drive what's behind Opportunex. The first is called ONET. It's a U.S.-based skills framework, and basically, what we did was we the ONET framework describes job titles or jobs in the United States using a framework of skills, abilities, educational background, that sort of thing, using a crosswalk that we got from Statistics Canada and ESDC, we took that ONET framework and mapped it over to the Canadian labor data, so we now can talk about Canadian labor data using the ONET framework. In addition, we pulled in job postings data. So we worked with one of our partners on this was Vicinity. It's a Canadian outfit that looks does web scraping for job posting data, and basically what it does is it looks at what types of tools, technology, skills, etc. are required in job postings for different roles right across Canada. And so you take those two data sets combined, and what you end up with is basically a about 6000 different descriptors for every job title or role in Canada. We have a wealth of information about skills, tools, technologies that are required for each role, and that's how we calculated our similarity scores that you're seeing. And we share some high-level skills information tool right now. That said, a couple of caveats. Firstly, the data that we have right now is very employer focused, so it's what employers want from their staff when they're doing job postings, for example. People may have different skills than what are required for their chronicles. So we're still looking at other ways of supplementing the skills information that we will have an opportunity going forward. So, for example, ESDC is developing a Canadian skills taxonomy called Oasis. As that's developed, we will be looking at building that into the Opportunex database as well. So, always looking to supplement and build upon the skills information that's in the tool. So, next question: How can someone close the skill the skills gap between their current role and identified similar roles? It's a great question. The tool right now, how it's focused is it's very much focused on this is what you see with one role, this is what you see with a similar role. So we don't necessarily get into how you might close the gap between those two roles. That said, it's a very important area of research for us and for FSC. I know, basically, how do we help people transition from where they are now to where they're going? We actually have a project on the go that's looking at about 100 different roles that we think will have exceptional challenges around automation, weak job prospects, those sorts of things in the coming years, and how do we help them transition to roles where there's good growth prospects? And so, there's a variety of ways people might do that: formal education, degree diploma programs, those sorts of things, or more targeted short training programs. All of this to say, this is a key area of focus for us going forward, as we continue to develop more insights, we will be sharing it through the Opportunex tool. Next question I see here is: Is there any regional information in Opportunex? At present, no, but this is very high in our priority list. The reason why it doesn't have regional information in there at the moment is because the core focus of Opportunex's this initial launch was the similarity scores, and similarity scores don't vary across the country. Basically, if you think about it this way, if you're a chef in Victoria, you're likely to have very similar skill requirements to a chef in



Halifax. So of course your transitions are likely to be very similar from one region to the other. That said, of course, we are very aware that local labor market conditions vary quite widely across the country. Certain jobs may not even be available in your community, or you may have different growth prospects for different businesses, different industries in your communities.

MICHAEL BURT 25:20

So, one of the things we're looking at is building additional regional information into the tool going forward. So this would include things like growth prospects in your local communities for different roles, and things like what types of job opportunities are available in your communities. So that's another key area. Next question I'm seeing here is, can you provide more details on the growth outlooks provided in the tool? So at present, the growth outlooks in the tool come from what's called the Canadian Occupation Projector System. It's produced by ESDC. COPS is the short form for it. If you're familiar with that, basically we're looking at the growth rates in employment. How much jobs will be? How many jobs will be created for each occupation in Canada over those those five and 10 year time horizons? Basically, things we have three broad categories: we have poor, which is below average, average, and then good growth prospects, and so what you expect poor is is you know it may even be a decline in employment if it's certainly well below average growth prospects. Average hopefully is fairly self-explanatory. It's a range around the average for all jobs in Canada, and then finally we have good growth prospects. These are your your high growth occupations, job titles, and Canada ones where we think there will be a lot of job creation going forward. I will note too that we are this is another area we're looking to supplement. It's an opportunity right now. The conference board is part of the work we're doing. The Future Skills Center we're developing what we call the most the model for occupations, skills, and technology, and what that model will allow us to do is first of all provide those detailed regional outlooks that we don't have right now in the OptanX tool. But even more interestingly, it will allow us to forecast skills going forward in terms of what skills we are expecting to see increasing demand going forward, and what skills might be experiencing decline going forward. So that's additional information that we'll be building into the tool in the coming months. So, just looking at the questions here, I think I have time for about one more question. This is probably a good one to end on. So, what's next with Opera Two next? What we alluded to some of this already in my comments, but essentially we're looking at expanding the information that's in the tool. That's the one key thing. So it would be things like the regional data, how people might transition from one role to another. So you know, the additional skills information, that sort of thing. Those are all things we're looking at adding into the tool. In addition, we're also going to be looking at different user profiles. So, for example, if say you're a student right now, the tool may not be best suited to you in the sense that you don't necessarily have a current job you're transitioning out of. So, you might want to know if, given my educational background or self-assessment of my own skills, what opportunities might be available to me, and so so we might be looking at other user groups with the tool, what types of information they might need out of the broader Opportunix database. So those are the the big areas for growth. What I will say, I said this a little bit earlier, but I just repeat it. Your feedback is critical to us in terms of what we do next. We'd love to hear from you. Kick the tires. Tell us what works, what doesn't, what types of information you're interested in, and



that will help us chart out the path over the next couple of years in terms of what additional information is available in the tool. With that, I think we're going to push. Well, send you over to the tool itself. Please have a look. We'd love to hear from you either through the tool itself or through the email address we're going to be sending out to you, which is opportunext@conferenceboard.ca. Thank you, everyone. Really appreciate you taking the time to to join us today.