

Why Business Leaders Need to Take Canada's Unemployment Seriously in 2021

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COVID-19 has changed the world of work. Here are 5 recommendations for Canadian CEOs to fill the network gap and the skills gap.

As 2020 comes to a formidable end, business leaders across the country are setting strategic goals for the new year. Yet according to an IBM Institute for Business Value study, only 41 percent of global CEOs say they have the people, skills and resources required to execute these business strategies. COVID-19 has exacerbated this, and in their present state, plans are being developed against a backdrop of economic uncertainty. There is a lot of work to be done, but we have a strong and resilient ecosystem in Canada to move the dial. Academia must instill the need for soft, professional skills and hard, more technical proficiencies, corporate Canada should adopt inclusive hiring practices that drive a sense of life-long learning and all levels of government need to build wrap-around supports that can enable this ecosystem to thrive as evidenced by the Government of Canada's [\\$1.5B investment](#) to help Canadians develop the skills they need to find good jobs.

Last week, I was joined by four industry experts: Pedro Barata, Executive Director at the Future Skills Centre; Shelly Hagan, Reporter at Bloomberg Ottawa Bureau; Lekan Olawoye, CEO and Founder of the Black Professionals in Tech Network (BPTN) and Daniele Zanotti, CEO of the United Way Greater Toronto to discuss the skills gaps our country is facing. One thing is clear, the blueprint for 2021 will need to look a lot different, if we want to not only recover, but ultimately emerge stronger as a country.

Here are [five key insights](#) from my conversation that Canadian business leaders should consider as they do a retrospective and plan their business strategies for the new year to ensure they have the skilled workforce needed to succeed.

1. Adopt Continuous Learning: Partner with businesses that offer micro-credentials, digital forms of certification for employees to upskill, reskill and adopt lifelong learning with or without a traditional degree.

2. Design with Intention: Collaborate with non-profits to create programs designed to help disproportionately impacted populations (racialized communities, women, veterans) return to the workforce.
3. Consider long-term partnerships: Work with school boards and advocate for [P-TECH schools](#) or consider becoming an affiliated industry partner of an existing school to help students understand how their learning relates to the jobs of the future.
4. Prioritize [soft skills](#): Encourage critical thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution as a means of preparing employees to learn hard technical skills and technology that may not exist yet.
5. Fill the Network Gap: Hire people outside of your network and take steps to diversify your community.

Getting Canadians Back to Work: Upskilling and reskilling for a post-pandemic economy

According to [Statistics Canada](#), by 2031, 80 per cent of all new jobs in Ontario will require skilled workers, while only 66 per cent of the province's labour force will be able to offer the necessary skills. We discussed how COVID-19 has accelerated this, and with technology at the forefront of almost every industry, employers are increasingly looking for technical capabilities like data analysis, software proficiency and technical writing. When it comes to skills development, we need to expand the networks we hire from, bringing supply and demand closer together. Whether it's digital skills or complex problem solving, all panelists agreed that lifelong learning and resiliency will take centre-stage as Canadians look to upskill, reskill and replace lost jobs.

As you watch the full discussion [here](#), you'll hear from panelists that the COVID-19 crisis has exposed many vulnerabilities in our economy. One area often overlooked is geography and where a person lives, as this can dictate which individuals have access to the tools, resources and opportunities needed to gain skills and obtain employment across industries in Canada. Panelists were forthcoming in sharing innovative approaches to addressing this skills gap and persistent unemployment.

The United Way's Inclusive Local Economic Opportunity (ILEO) Initiative

ILEO is a program initiated in 2018 by United Way Greater Toronto and BMO Financial Group that brings together the private, public, and community sectors to find innovative ways to reduce gaps in economic prosperity in the Greater Toronto Region, and to create lasting inclusive economic vitality at the neighbourhood level. This year, IBM joined the ILEO Leadership Table to support a centralized, demand-driven skills development initiative for marginalized job seekers requiring technical training.

Along with Toronto Employment and Social Services, Metcalf Foundation, ACCES Employment and Sunlife Financial, IBM is working to match Scarborough's Greater Golden Mile (GGM) residents' talent with in-demand jobs, both in and beyond the neighbourhood. The pilot will build skills and leverage untapped talent among residents, while meeting employers' talent needs and helping them to hire for jobs with recruitment and/or retention challenges.

Through [IBM Service Corps](#), a group of four IBM employees are adapting a workforce development model from West Philadelphia and creating a customized playbook to utilize this model in the GGM. The model will be first utilized in a pilot with Sunlife.

What's Next?

In the next three years, nearly 120 million workers in the world's 12 largest economies may need to be retrained as businesses adopt AI and intelligent automation technologies. And as we prepare for this new world, COVID-19 has both halted and

accelerated our progress. Over the past nine months in my role as President of IBM in Canada, I have interacted with fellow business leaders and industry partners to strategize and lend our expertise. I am grateful for the support and meaningful dialogue our partners have engaged in during this difficult time.

I am committed to continuing this important conversation with fellow industry leaders, government partners, employers and Canadians planning to enter or re-enter the workforce. We have a collective responsibility towards addressing Canada's skills gap. I see it as a tremendous opportunity to prepare Canadians for digital jobs. If we are able to work together to achieve our goals, we can emerge from this crisis stronger than ever.

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IBM offers a number of platforms to support employees and community members in their quest to upskill and reskill for the jobs of tomorrow and careers of the future.

Learn more about [SkillsBuild](#) and [Open P-TECH](#).



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