

Thriving in
Change and
Complexity

Rising to the challenge in
Continuing Education

CAUCE CONFERENCE 2026
HALIFAX | MAY 13-15

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Employer Demands and Learner Needs: Designing CE for the GenAI+ Workforce of Tomorrow

Anne-Marie Brinsmead, The Chang School TMU
Melanie Hains, WatSPEED UW

Session overview

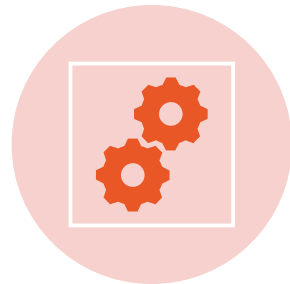
By the end of the session, participants will be able to:



Use Labour Market Information (LMI) and employer personas to identify employment advancement gaps and Gen AI+ upskilling opportunities.



Build learner personas that reflect motivations, barriers, and career trajectories.



Design CE programming that includes Gen AI skills and anticipates emerging industry needs

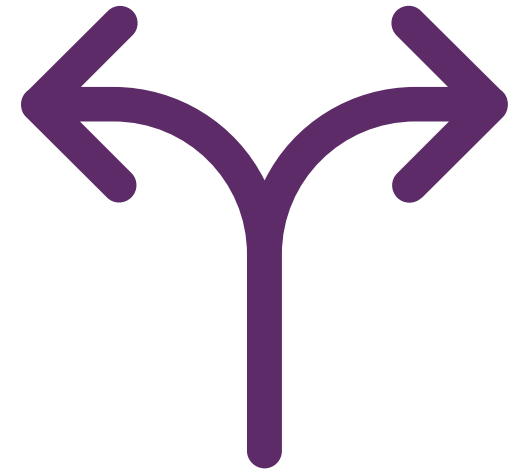


Identify effective AI-infused channels to influence learner decision-making.



Why CE is at a crossroads

- AI adoption is accelerating across sectors, aka GEN AI+ occupation-specific skills required by employers
- Employers report an “experience gap,” not just a skills gap
- Youth unemployment rising despite job vacancies
- Workers want to reskill but face cost & time barriers



The strategic shift for CE

Old model

React to demand

New model

Anticipate demand before learners articulate it, based on employer demand in real-time

Framework:

LMI → employer personas → learner personas → program design
→ outreach strategy



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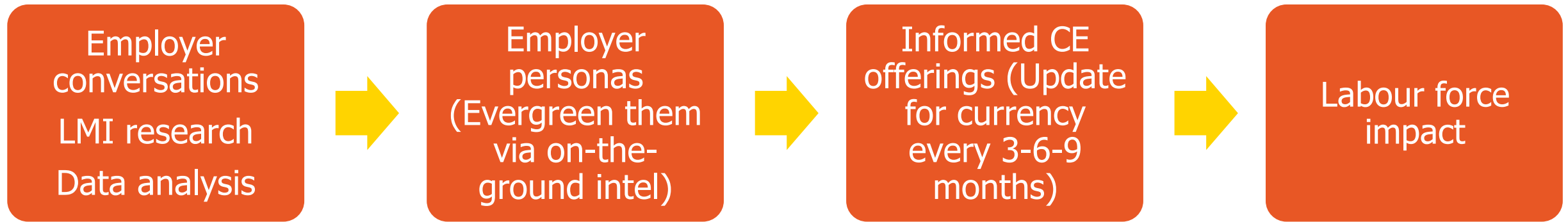
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Employer personas - their fast-moving Gen AI+ workforce needs and demands



Employer personas-the 'how'

01

Gather street intelligence

02

Corroborate with monthly research and data analysis

03

Rinse and Repeat; update crisply for currency



Role Play 1 - CE- Employer engagement at the level of on-the- ground “street intelligence”



People discussion by Suncheli Project from <https://thenounproject.com/browse/icons/term/people-discussion/> (CC BY 3.0)



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Learner Personas: Gen Z & Millennials

- **Who:**

- Adults aged 20-49
- Scope: Entering, navigating or re-entering the workforce.

- **Socio-economic Context:**

- Applying for entry level salaried jobs or embarking on a new career.
- Entry level salaried jobs are nil; mid-career to senior roles are plentiful.

- **Persona Attributes:**

- Facing career stop-out after earning a higher education credential (Bachelor, Master, MBA, Doctorate) or after being downsized.
- Need industry-required '*skills upgrading*', including *GEN AI+ skills*, to pass employer hiring tests and land higher career roles with in-demand, occupation-adopted GEN AI+ skills.

- **Motivations:**

- CE: Build them using LMI, social listening, AI Shopping sentiment, and behavioural insights. Translate the data into learner personal motivations, career goals, and learner *employment advancement gaps*.



Example persona

Competent Claudia



| | |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| 👤 Age | 30 |
| 🏠 Location | Toronto, Ontario |
| 💼 Occupation | IT professional/software dev |
| 💰 Income Level | \$55,000 per year |

📁 Background

IT professional looking to add ML to their skillset. Looking for advanced topics to develop practical, applied skills and stay competitive.

📚 Preferred Courses

- Python for ML
- Supervised ML
- Neural Networks

🎯 Goals

- Stay competitive in evolving tech landscape
- Move toward ML Engineer or Data Scientist roles

🗨️ Pain Points

- Wants advanced topics without committing to a full degree

Hands-on projects for portfolio building

Outcome oriented: prioritizes advanced topics

Trial before commitment

Seeks accreditation

Community engagement: values networking

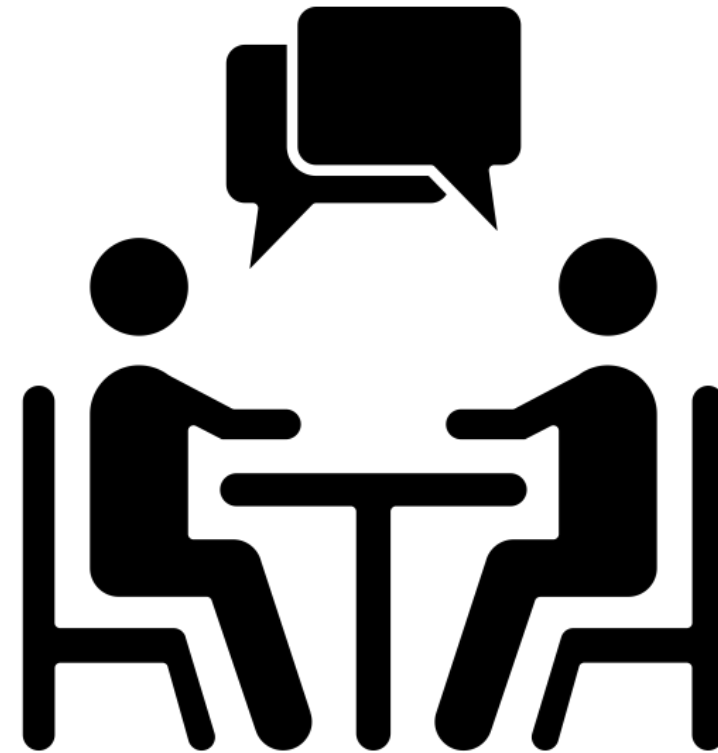


Translating personas into program design

- **Employer persona**
 - Required competencies (ALL SKILL types)
 - Performance expectations (Real-World, Project-Based Capacities)
- **Learner persona**
 - Program format & pacing
 - Both AI & Human (Industry Expert) tutoring
 - Credential value signals
 - Barriers to enrolment
- **Design outcomes**
 - Job-ready, AI-enabled programs
 - Clear value for employers hiring & learners



Role Play 2 – CE learner and CE program advisor



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CE visibility strategy: identifying where learners find career- relevant credentials

**It is no longer your institution's websites
Learner's go to's are:**

- YouTube
- Reddit, Substack, Discord
- TikTok, Instagram

Even google searches have changed

- AI-fueled shopping
- GEO (generative engine optimization) replacing SEO

The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the query "what is the best course to learn to use powerBI". The AI Overview section provides a summary of the best resources, mentioning Microsoft Learn, DataCamp's Power BI Fundamentals, and Maven Analytics. Below the text is a video thumbnail for "Power BI FULL COURSE" by Luke Barousse, featuring a man in a plaid shirt and a bar chart. To the right, a list of search results is visible, including a Reddit post and a ZoomCharts article.

More on GEO

GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) is the practice of optimizing your course content so that it is surfaced, cited, or recommended by AI-driven search tools such as:

- ChatGPT
- Google Gemini
- Microsoft Copilot
- Perplexity

Unlike traditional SEO (search engine optimization), which focuses on ranking on Google results pages, **GEO focuses on being referenced inside AI-generated answers.**

| Traditional SEO | GEO |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Goal: Rank on Google | Goal: Be cited in AI answers |
| Methods | Methods |
| Build backlinks | Context and structured authority |
| High volume keywords | Trusted citations and clarity |
| Meta tags | Clear program descriptions |
| Page load time | Structured FAQs |



How learners actually choose CE programs

They start with signal, not price

They often avoid 'quick and dirty' training

Their real discovery channel is not your website

They will invest in rigorous CE that leads to salaried career mobility



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Activity-Map your discovery channels

- What are your primary learner personas?
- Where do they seek advice?
- Who do they trust?



Debrief and next steps

Let's reflect on how all our learner personas (our target audiences) may choose CE to upskill for AI+ ready jobs:

- What are our potential communication channels?
- What are some new outreach strategies?
- Let's go back to our CE units and use and adapt!



Q and A



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Role Play 1

Employer (Mel):

- Good morning! I've been looking forward to our conversation.

CE Leader (AMB):

- Hello (VP/CEO/CIO/Director). Thank you for taking the time as CE is adding credentialled offerings that are Gen AI-occupation specific, industry-adopted skills based (CBE), including industry adopted open source Gen AI tools.

Employer(Mel):

- I'm relieved to know you're providing university level credentialled upskilling offerings, particularly to Gen Z and Millennials with an undergrad degree in any academic discipline, MBA or grad degree! The key to CE creating these upskilling offerings is that they are professional education offerings that must be kept up to date. CE will need to do major revisions every three to six months to ensure learners have the employer-sought currency of skillset for the talent that I need to hire and promote them. Things are changing so quickly these days. Secondly, CE needs to make certain that it hires expert practitioner professionals who work in industry and understand our needs, not just the academic perspective. I want my employees to be taught by those who have the most current industry, Generative AI specific skillsets to impart. At the first stage of the interview or promotion process, we test our workers in applied Gen AI, occupation-specific competencies required currently for our industry. We do not train in house. And our skill requirements change frequently.

CE Leader(AMB):

- So just to confirm, you're saying that you hire university education-credentialled talent with applied Gen AI industry-specific skills? Does that include their needing to be current on the emerging and everchanging regulatory and data security compliance when it comes to Gen AI operations?

Employer(Mel):

- Absolutely. CE needs to teach workers how to keep up-to-date themselves monthly on the latest governance and compliance frameworks, not just in Canada/N. America but also in Europe and the Pacific Rim because we are an inter(national) company. Again we do not invest in training in house to keep our workers up to date we don't have the resources to dedicate to this.

CE Leader(AMB):

- For our prospective university CE credentialled offerings we're developing, what are the types of authentic assessments and Real World applied projects you want to see as google pdf dgs in their job application cover letters, resumes and eCareer portfolio, validating that your job applicant has the demonstrated competencies and skills to fulfill your company's Gen AI job accountabilities?

Employer(Mel):

- For an ML/AI Analyst role, real work projects we'd like to see are automating workflows with large datasets. For Full Stack Developers, real work projects we'd like to see are robust web redesign work. For Python Coders, real work projects we'd like to see are really taking a business problem and using python to solve it. We need people who can use predictive analytics to make accurate recommendations for the future of our business.

CE Leader (AMB):

- Thank you very much for connecting regularly and looking forward to actioning your acumen and insights as we design and update for currency our university CE credentialled programming!

Role Play 2

CE Learner (Mel):

Thanks for meeting with me! To be honest, I am tired of taking courses and I don't want to work very hard to upskill, but I want a salaried job. And the only type of credential that I'll go for is one that will upskill me in Gen AI specific to the available mid-career job roles that suit my educational background. I am a recent university BSc grad, and I'm not getting any responses or job interviews to my job applications. It is so frustrating!

CE Advisor (AMB):

To be honest, you'll need depth and breadth of hands on proficiency in Gen AI occupation-specific skills in multiple knowledge areas, as well as transformative skills, soft skills, and power skills.. You'll need to be able to be tested and succeed using industry-adopted, open source, industry adopted, Gen AI-specific tools with precision and application, to pass employer tests at the first stages of the job interview process.

CE Learner (Mel):

Oh. I had no idea, that's so much! . I guess I'll have to put in the elbow grease. Are there human tutor drop in sessions PLUS AI tutor availability to keep me motivated so I won't stop out of your CE Program? I want reminders from my educator to attend zoom sessions, to reach out early and often if I need help with my course required assignments and my Real World course project. I guess with this much competition they have to be high quality, so I can put them in my e-career portfolio, and as google pdf docs in my cover letter and resume to validate I have achieved the competences for job roles for which I'm applying.

CE Advisor (AMB):

Yes. You'll have weekly Zoom drop-in tutor sessions with a human. The jury is out right now as to the efficacy of most AI tutors on the market. However, the human tutor will point you in the direction of the latest learning effective AI tutors for the skills you're acquiring (e.g., Khan Academy's AI Math Tutor for learning Artificial Intelligence-enabled Machine Learning or AI Marketing Analytics). There are pitfalls and downsides to AI tutors because they hallucinate, mislead, conflate and therefore are often not accurate.

CE Learner (Mel):

What career wraparound support is provided free of charge as part of this upskilling program? I thought I would find a good job a lot faster after graduation and now I feel lost and I need help navigating all of this.

CE Advisor (AMB): (AMB to describe the support)

CE Learner (Mel):

When can I access the career wraparound support and for how long?

CE Advisor (AMB): (AMB to give the answer)

CE Learner (Mel):

Okay, thank you so much for your help.