Readiness of Information Specialists at Privy Council Office to Meet the Challenges of an Evolving Digital Workplace

Jennifer Woods, Masters in Information Management, Dalhousie University, August 2011

Abstract

This research project assessed the readiness of information specialists in the Records, Scheduling and Disposition Services (RSDS) group at the Privy Council Office (PCO) to meet the challenges of an evolving digital workplace. The resulting recommendations will assist management in creating successful, cost-effective training strategies focused on actual competency gaps of employees and employing training methods that employees feel will be most useful.

Introduction & Purpose

In today's digital economy, technology is affecting the way information is being created, accessed, shared, used, stored, and managed, and impacting the methods and tools required to perform information tasks as they become dependent on technological systems.

The results of this study offers recommendations that will:

• help management create focused, cost-effective training strategies to empower employees to meet the challenges of an evolving digital workplace

• provide Information professionals with developed and enhanced skills, increased self-confidence, improved workplace satisfaction and career advancement potential

• result in improved information services for the organization

Methods

A literature review:

• identified technical competencies for information management and grouped them into general categories of technology tasks

• highlighted the need to assess negative computer mindset which can negatively impact some training methods

• identified technology training methods

An anonymous survey completed by information specialists:

• identified the technology tasks of most importance to develop

• assessed computer mindset by describing interactions with computers

• identified preferred learning and development methods

Of the 26 potential participants, 12 indicated that they were willing, and of the 12 surveys emailed, 9 responses were provided.

Results

TECHNOLOGY TASKS - The majority of participants indicated that:

• the most important tasks concern *basic use of IM technology* for IM operations such as applying file plans, using keywords and metadata effectively, and conducting search strategies for retrieval of relevant paper and electronic documents

• the least important tasks concern the *use of technology that is not IM specific* that support the worker and workplace such as using Microsoft Office tools, blogs and wikis

• tasks for *advanced use of IM tools* such as cleaning up data and documents in systems and shared drives, *supporting the use of IM technology* such as coaching clients or colleagues in its use, and *following technology trends* are somewhat important, but only the tasks that support initiatives currently impacting their work, such as scanning projects and migrations to new systems.

These observations are consistent with the most important aspects of the work of the information specialists in RSDS at PCO.

General Categories of Technology Tasks
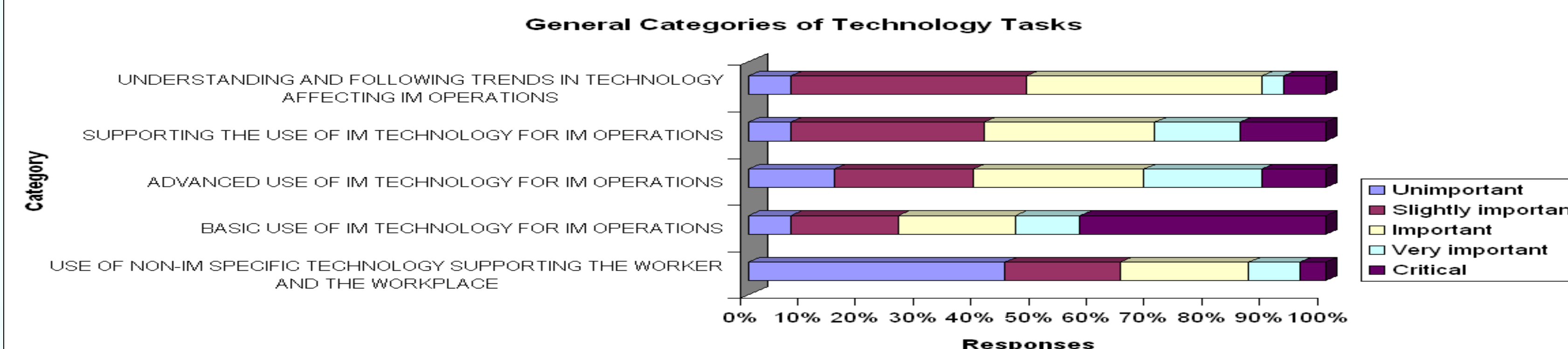
COMPUTER MINDSET - 100% of participants do not find computers complex or confusing; do not feel that computers are intimidating; do not feel apprehensive about using computers; like learning about new technologies; and feel very comfortable using computers. There was some negative computer mindset concerning learning new applications, which will need to be addressed when the employees migrate to a new records management application.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT METHODS - 78% to 89% of respondents prefer training in small group or one on one environments that is hands-on and practical, such as work experience and coaching from a trainer or colleague. This is consistent with the principles of adult learning.

Learning and Development Methods
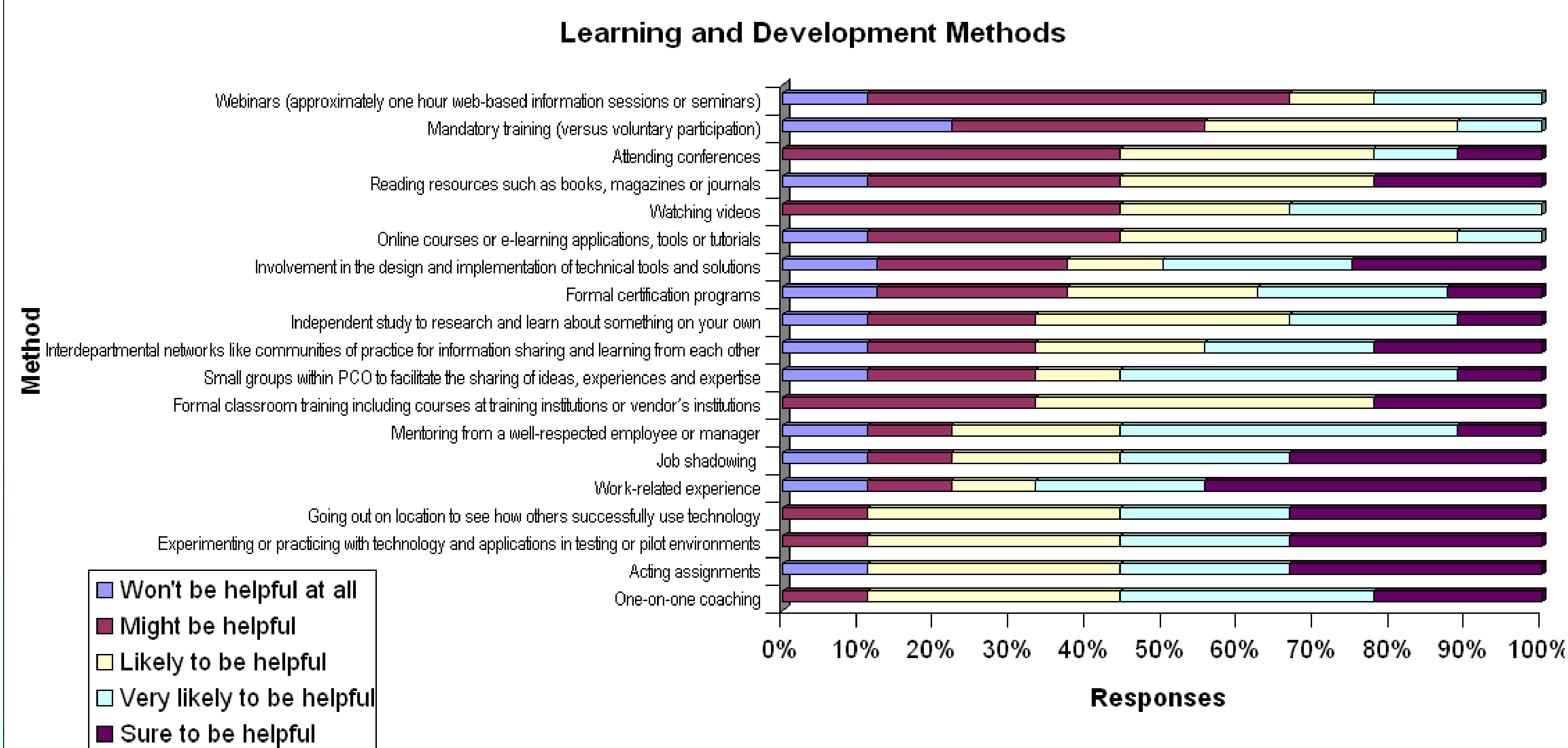
Conclusion & Recommendations

Overall, the readiness of the information specialists to meet the challenges of the evolving digital workplace is good. In order to fully empower employees to use technology to meet the information needs of the organization and maximize their own self-confidence and workplace satisfaction, management should develop training strategies that:

• targets all tasks related to the basic use of IM technology for IM operations

• targets tasks related to the advanced use of IM technology, the support of IM technology and following technology trends that directly relate to current and upcoming initiatives such as the migration of the records management application and digitization of paper records

• addresses some resistance to learning new applications

• Is conducted in small group and one on one environments

• Is based on practical, hand-on exercises

Contributions of the Research

The literature review compared core IM competency profiles and grouped the technical competencies into the general categories of technology tasks. These categories may be useful to organizations for describing tasks and work positions, clarifying position classification, facilitating performance measurement and informing professional development planning.

This study also offers a repeatable methodology for organizations to research the readiness of their own information specialists to meet the needs of an evolving digital workplace. It provides a tool for engaging employees in a change management initiative for understanding the changing nature of their work in a digital environment, and for collecting data about the gaps in required IT competencies and preferred methods of learning, that management can use in the creation of efficient and cost-effective training strategies.

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
Inspiring Minds

Government of Canada
Privy Council Office
Gouvernement du Canada
Bureau du Conseil privé