

A Summary of
Making the Case:
Demonstrating the Impact of Career Services

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By
Dr. Roberta Neault, CCC, RRP, GCDF
Deirdre Pickerell, Med, CHRP, GCDF

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www.lifestrategies.ca

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Within the career and employment services sector, we know it is important to conduct effective research. However, with the constantly changing needs of individual clients, the organizations that employ them, and regional/global economies, we can't assume that what worked in the past will work equally well today or in the future. We need to measure and document our successes and also what isn't working so well, to inform the design and development of leading-edge programs and services. The purpose of this brief summary is to present highlights of a paper that was written to inform front-line career and employment service providers, funders, and policy-makers about the limits of some research currently being conducted in our field and to present practical strategies for more effective research practices.

The Context

Career Development and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap (OECD, 2004) report noted

- "longer-term evidence [of career guidance] is quite weak and obtaining it will require more and better longitudinal research" (p. 8)

Pan-Canadian symposium, in 2003, also identified the need for research

- Policy-makers and funders demanded evidence for the successes that career practitioners and service providers claimed they were achieving

Canadian Research Working Group (**CRWG**) on Evidence-Based Practice in Career Development

- Pooled the resources of researchers from six Canadian universities
- Drafted a comprehensive framework for evaluating career development services

Changes, perhaps significant changes, expected as devolution occurs in BC

- In anticipation of these changes, **BC Career & Workforce Development Alliance** formed

Research 101

The challenge

- How to best document the impact of career programs and services
- Key players aren't trained in research design or evaluation procedures
- Causality is difficult to prove, raising the question: **How can service providers prove that their specific programs and services, and not some other unmeasured variable, actually contributed to the success of their participants?**

Strategies and Frameworks

Due to the lack of standardization and complexity of client change, it is challenging to assess the impact of career services. Improvement in *how* services are measured and *what* is being measured is needed by policy-makers and service providers. **Any evaluation framework must be accessible and easily understood.**

Recent projects provide a good starting place (e.g., Hughes, NCD, ACRN)

The CRWG conducted preliminary research in 2004 and has recently published results of that research in the July 2007 issue of the Canadian Journal of Counselling.

They developed and tested a comprehensive framework, comprising three elements: **inputs, processes, and outcomes.**

This framework could provide a more meaningful assessment of long-term client changes and offers a more complex program evaluation design.

This is in contrast to the current measurement of Employment Benefits and Support Measures, (EBSMs), where program effectiveness is primarily measured by savings on an active EI claim.



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“The Summative Evaluation of Employment Benefits and Support Measures under the Terms of the Canada/British Columbia Labour Market Development Agreement - April 2004” is the most recent evaluation of these programs available on the funder’s website, implying that today’s funding decisions are perhaps being informed by data collected in 2000-2001. This is a significant concern, given that negotiations are currently underway for a full devolution of the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) within BC. Highlights are presented here of our SWOT analysis of this report.

Summative Evaluation Report and Response¹: A SWOT Analysis

- The Summative Evaluation
 - Measured what it set out to measure, providing an extensive evaluation of EBSMs
 - Included a cost benefit analysis (CBA)
 - CBA considers a variety of benefits and costs (both tangible and intangible), assigns them a dollar value and then calculates the ratio between costs and benefits
 - Outlined several items for further study
 - e.g., “return to work” isn’t always the appropriate outcome to consider
- However, the CBA approach to evaluation is not without contention
 - Difficult to assign a dollar value to non-monetary benefits/costs
 - Evaluation is missing the three elements of the CRWG framework
 - Only short-term results were considered
 - Long term impacts (i.e., attachment to labour market) weren’t measured
- Going forward, our analysis of the Summative Evaluation presents some opportunities
 - The evaluation acknowledged the importance of ongoing research
 - Using the CRWG’s framework, service providers can
 - Demonstrate the efficacy of their programs and services
 - Experiment with ways to contribute to workforce development
 - The evaluation identified target groups not well represented in survey data
 - Research specific to underrepresented groups is required
 - The evaluation noted a discrepancy in success rates for active vs. former claimants
 - This suggests that individuals with longer periods of unemployment or less stable attachment to the workplace require more comprehensive services
 - Geographic location seemed to influence the impacts of EBSMs
 - BCCDWA well-positioned to facilitate research across geographic regions
 - Finally, the evaluation highlighted a lack of strong connections to employers, presenting an opportunity to capitalize on existing connections to the employer community and/or serves as a reminder to get connected
- However, we did identify some threats in our analysis
 - Employers are unaware of our services or don’t see them as addressing their needs
 - This is particularly concerning as Economic Development is leading negotiations in BC
 - Many of the measured services used considerable funds but didn’t result in significant improvements in employment status
 - Data collection remains a concern (even with the introduction of Contact IV)

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

1. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en%5Ccs%5Csp%5Chrds%5Cevaluation%5Creports%5Csp-ah-666-04-04%5Cpage04.shtml>

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Call to Action

The career and employment services sector must demonstrate the efficacy and effectiveness of their work in language that funders, policy-makers, and employers understand and accept.

If not, funding may be at significant risk!

The CRWG framework provides a comprehensive model to measure the impact of career services.

If career service providers want to shape the future direction of the sector, and if policy-makers and funders are to make sound, informed decisions, rich data is needed to stimulate thoughtful debate and discussions.

Getting Started

Begin with the end in mind—Stephen Covey, 1990

1. Identify desired outcomes
2. Plan a process to reach the outcomes
3. Identify inputs required to get the process underway



4. Provide services
5. Evaluate services

Lalande, V., Hiebert, B., Magnusson, K., Bezanson, L., & Borgen, B. (2006). *Measuring the impact of career services: Current and desired practices*. Retrieved October 27, 2007, from http://www.natcon.org/natcon/papers/natcon_papers_2006_e5.pdf

For More Information

Web-Based Resources

Background:

Summative Evaluation of Employment Benefits and Support Measures

<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/5Ccs/5Csp/5Chrsd/5Cevaluation/5Creports/5Csp-ah-666-04-04/5Cpage04.shtml>

Value-For-Money Analysis of Active Labour Market Programs

<http://www.evaluationcanada.ca/site.cgi?s=4&ss=21&lang=en&article=22-1-001>

Research Design and Creative Approaches:

Career Guidance and Public Policy

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/45/34050171.pdf>

Career Management Skills: Keys to a Great Career and a Great Life

http://www.crccanada.org/crc/files/Communication_Strategy_No.8_Jarvis716_2.pdf

Creating Evidence: Building the Case for Career Development

http://crccanada.org/crc/files/Communication_Strategy_No.15_Hughes818_2.pdf

Developing an Accountability Framework for Career Development Practices

http://www.crccanada.org/crc/files/Communication_Strategy_No.16_Lalande&Huston827_2.pdf

Is Your Program Working?

<http://home.earthlink.net/~sagesolutions/Evaluation%20Resources.pdf>

Measuring and Evaluating Performance

http://www.natcon.org/natcon/papers/natcon_papers_2005_e10.pdf

Measuring the Impact of Career Services

http://www.natcon.org/natcon/papers/natcon_papers_2006_e5.pdf

Print Resources

Career Development Quarterly, Volume 52, Issue 1 and Volume 53, Issue 4

Canadian Journal of Counselling, Volume 41, Issue 3