

The value of 'bottling' applied psychology for welfare to work and careers organisations

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engagement, value for money, scalable impact, sustainable job outcomes, attitude and self-esteem, positive careers psychology

A call to action

Welfare to work support and careers guidance delivery has been under the 'cosh' for some time. Occasional media coverage paints a damning picture, politicians criticise the impact and value of what has been delivered, and there are frequent changes at a policy level to confound the picture.

In the context of 2011 there are rising levels of unemployment and fewer available job opportunities. Couple this with the new work programme initiative and the plans to reduce the welfare spend.

This backdrop calls for key questions to be addressed about the place and role of advice, support and careers guidance:

- **Are we getting the best outcomes for jobseekers and clients?**
- **What are the best and most efficient methods to support and engage jobseekers to realise their potential and make a full contribution?**
- **Are we delivering value for money?**
- **How do we harness new technologies that engage and are meaningful to clients?**

Challenges for providers

Providers of the work programmes are grappling with the challenges of delivering success. Sustainable outcomes are key not least to cash flow and funding, but this raises questions of what contributes to this. Proving value add and demonstrating impact (partly through high quality MIS) therefore is a constant call and raises issues of what can provide compelling evidence and how this can be gathered in smart ways that does not add administrative burden.

Other structural relationship issues are also bound up in this e.g. effective collaboration between primes and secondaries in contract delivery (e.g. suppliers and stakeholders; experts).

Staff skill levels are also an important consideration. How can impact be maximised? And what skill levels, tools and methods are most effective?

How advances in applied psychology can contribute to better outcomes:

- Strengths based positive psychology suggests that to achieve higher impact we should be considering a shift of focus towards what people “can do” and away from an over focus on barriers and “can’t do”.
- Understanding how people can thrive (or otherwise) in a technological world of social networking, information access and knowledge sharing will be important, suggesting a move towards self directed job-search and away from expert models of assistance.
- Emotional intelligence research shows that self esteem and attitudes are changeable and are critical core factors of productivity and sustainable behaviour change
- Neuroscience increasingly demonstrates that being cognisant of how the brain functions and functions best is an important component of human performance (including learning and communication) and wellbeing.
- In this light diagnostic assessment needs to strongly consider how to achieve client engagement and how to tap intrinsic motivation, particularly through expectations and their management.
- Enhancing and changing the role of assessment so that it acts as an enabler for clients articulating themselves to the market and employers articulating their offer and requirements.

A new careers psychology to deliver better sustainable outcomes

Old paradigm	New Paradigm
Assess and tell	Engage and motivate
Medical/expert model	Self directed/facilitated
Quick outcomes	Get ‘right’ job
Linear career path	Work purpose and contribution
Matching	Creating
Chronological CV	Functional or achievement CV

Implications for improving service effectiveness

- Build new forms of objective assessment to deliver “more for less” efficiencies and “triage” clients to most suitable support/resource. Utilise IT systems and new media to develop higher engagement with both job seekers and employers
- Utilise evidence based psychology to support improved methods and interventions. Enhance adviser skill sets and client engagement skills to deliver higher levels of impact e.g. training as mini occupational psychologists
- Define and measure sustainability: which outcomes are sustainable, why and how.

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