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Latest research • Current policy priorities • Good operational practice

Dialogue and debate from the employability sector

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A note from the editor



**Patrick Hughes FIEP
Guest Editor**

I have always held employability professionals in high regard. In this Journal they have excelled themselves. We are increasingly a community and that matters in good times and tough times. And we have such sad news about the passing of Deborah Tillett FIEP. Do read the appreciation of her in this issue - it captures the essence of a very special person.

In this Journal we offer you over a dozen stimulating and entertaining articles. They reflect on lessons learnt over the years, they consider what needs to change right now and what we should do to be more resilient in the future. They examine themes around leadership and the behaviours we need to display in our challenging world and they have a lot to say about the future shape and values of the employability sector.

You will also notice two abiding themes across this edition. The first is collaboration - how do we join up better across geographical and functional boundaries. The second is never forgetting our customers - their needs and their aspirations. As several of our contributors say this is about dialogue. No one writing for the Journal claims to have the full answer, but we want to be the vehicle for debate so if something here catches your eye send in your letter for the next edition - or indeed write an article. We want to hear from you.

But for now, get reading and to sharpen your appetite here's three questions:

- what's the Zoom watercooler and does it have a future?
- if we are all on the same ocean what type of boat is your customer today?
- and what role should Joe Wicks have in our sector?

Patrick Hughes FIEP



Going forward but not without looking back



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Employability and skills providers are as diverse as the clients they serve. Public, private and voluntary sectors are all involved. They can be regional, national or even international but many only operate in a small local area. Their services can be broadly based going well beyond just skills and employability or they may be specialists addressing just a small group of clients facing very specific challenges to gaining and retaining employment. And this is now the army that must be mustered to tackle an unprecedented risk of large scale unemployment in a labour market that could take a number of years to recover and the shape of which, in terms of skill requirements, working environments and job security, is hard to forecast.

When I considered the challenges of the next few years, I wondered if there was any relevance in thinking back over my experiences during the two decades since I entered this market in 1997. My conclusion was that dusting off successful programmes from the past and reworking them would often prove a mistake, my original training as a physicist suggested that it is the principles behind past programmes that endure best. Three closely linked lessons amongst many I have learned, often the hard way, stand out:

Co-operation outperforms competition

I recall two particular examples of innovation. My earliest operational experience in employability came in 1998 leading Manpower's delivery of Private Sector Led New Deal in the Welsh Valleys. It was unique in terms of the twelve contracts awarded because instead of displacing the local Employment Service we actually delivered through their own people working out of their own offices. This demonstrated that any improvement in results was less about who delivered

“...dusting off successful programmes from the past and reworking them would often prove a mistake.”

and more about giving the public employment service the same flexibilities and freedoms as the other eleven contractors.

By 2000 I was a founding director of Working Links, a public/private joint venture, which was awarded nine out of the fifteen Employment Zones in the Government's second major commissioning programme to tackle long-term unemployment. One of our Zones was amongst the most memorable, the Brent Employment Zone. We all believed that getting people back into work was something you did with them not to them but the team in Brent also believed that the environment was a key factor. An office was too similar to a job centre or employment agency so the Brent Zone was based in what had been a private house, not an office. Sofas and coffee tables replaced desks and chairs.

These two examples show innovation but I recognise that innovation is often seen as a way of gaining competitive edge. In practice fresh ideas develop faster and are implemented more effectively through sharing across competitive boundaries - and more clients benefit. Sustainable competitive advantage is better achieved through the quality and consistency of delivery.

So what I hope we will see in the coming months, both nationally and regionally, are open forums to discuss and share best practice. I want to see Government and lead organisations like the IEP, L&WI, ERSA and AELP coming much closer together and pooling resources, rather than competing for airtime and recognition. In this way we can instigate, foster and grow an effective

“In practice fresh ideas develop faster and are implemented more effectively through sharing across competitive boundaries - and more clients benefit.”

united response to the huge employment challenge facing our society.

Public service values must outweigh the profit motive

I looked back on nearly half a dozen large and successful providers I knew well. Their leaders demonstrated strongly held values and a genuine commitment to the public they served. I could identify the point at which those leaders stepped back and shareholders or owners began to pay more attention to accountants and investors. The quality and originality of what they delivered steadily declined.

Our market rightly provides commercially viable opportunities but suffers when unduly populated by organisations where profit is the main driver. For the market to work effectively it must be profitable to participate but investment in our clients and employees together with a strong sense of social purpose must not be undermined by senior executives and shareholders looking for the same level of return seen as appropriate in other consumer-led and B2B markets. It is no coincidence that voluntary sector providers are a key component in so many supply chains taking on the sort of specialist challenges many of our future clients will face.

I want to see commissioners, backed by our lead organisations, focusing on service quality and actively discouraging price led bids that deny a fair return to their supply chains, limit adequate investment in their people and processes and ration levels of support to the unemployed people they have contracted to support.

Contracts need management, commissioning is about leadership

Long before the New Deal of the late 90s I realised the important distinction between management and leadership. Successful organisations need to be well managed, for example goals need to be set, performance measures put in place and people made accountable for those outcomes that are their responsibility. But success also depends on leadership, communicating a clear vision and organisational purpose, constantly reinforcing the organisation's core values and setting standards by personal example, through actions rather than just words. It is much the same with contracting and commissioning. Good contracting requires a clear definition of purpose,

a comprehensive template for the input required, firm guidelines for the evaluation and reward of performance and so on. But that contracting process is best positioned within a strong commissioning strategy that considers wider goals, identifies the sort of market development and provider network that will be needed and determines how best to address under performance. Such a strategy requires much more than performance monitoring and verifying compliance. There needs to be continuing and active engagement with providers building a strong working relationship based on mutual respect. Shortfalls in performance should be tackled jointly not just by requiring a PIP and threatening termination. In that way commissioners will secure better outcomes at lower overall cost and create a long term provider market that matches their needs.

So I want commissioners to take a stronger leadership stance, seeing their relationship with providers as a mutually beneficial partnership, not just a legal and financial transaction. The public sector has the skills and experience to offer constructive support to providers and their supply chains and many experienced providers in both the private and voluntary sectors will be very willing to contribute to a strengthening of the whole provider network. Once again we need our membership bodies to take a united approach, actively promoting more constructive commissioning strategies.

So that is a brief insight into my vision for the way forward as we all try to shape a future with a strong economy providing a vibrant labour market with genuine equality of access and opportunity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR


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Keith has held senior roles in Manpower, became a founding director of Working Links and worked with Government on design/delivery of New Deal. Sitting on boards and enquiries for public, private and charitable bodies he championed employability, skills, public/private partnerships and the role of business in communities.

Employability must start with accessibility



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With the potential for 6 months of partial lockdown ahead of us, the adaptations made to the UK's business infrastructure to remain operational seem set to be with us for some time. To get to where we are now, we've lived and worked through a technological gold rush that was required to keep employees connected and businesses trading. Alongside this has been a hard lesson in humility and humanity that, coupled with our newfound affinity for tech-enabled workspaces, may prove to be the most advantageous of the changes from which there should be no going back.

Flexibility and profitability

As many of us juggled childcare, caring responsibilities, or simply managed our diaries differently at the risk of going stir-crazy amongst the solitude of full lockdown, there has been a near nationwide embodiment of flexible working. What once seemed reserved for third sector organisations and trendy start-ups can now be hailed as one of the reasons that the UK economy has been able to tread water, up to now.

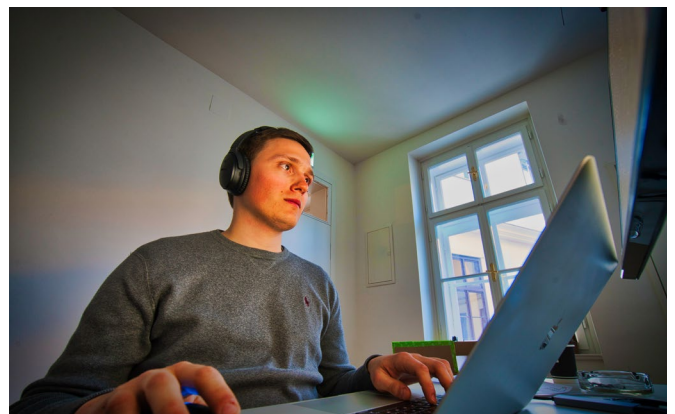
With this new world order also came a new found empathy; extended to those who had previously suffered that sideways glance as they sloped off sheepishly from their 9:5 at midday to pick up an ailing child from school or nursery, or attend to an ageing parent. With everyone stuck at home, the dichotomy of life and work has been blurred beyond recognition. There's no denying that we are now all human, with entire lives that exist outside of our 'work persona'. As seen in many live news broadcasts, there is no meeting, or person, important enough to ignore the extended hand of a toddler or the words "Mum/Dad can I have...".

“There's no denying that we are now all human, with entire lives that exist outside of our 'work persona'.”

Before buy-in from businesses was required as a matter of safety, [flexible working has been proven to have a positive impact](#) on recruitment, productivity, retention and inclusion – not to mention the potential for costs saved on office space, parking, security and other sundries associated with maintaining a physical workplace. For staff, the feeling of autonomy of your own work/life balance is emboldening. And, with so little control of our lives as we once knew them, this is an important luxury that we cannot discount as essential to our continued mental management of this ongoing crisis.

The future of diversity and inclusion

An additional benefit of a flexible workplace with a digital-first approach is the capacity for enhanced inclusion that has yet to be realised on a scale as grand as the current situation presents.



“Utilising technology has helped to dismantle barriers to employment for those who may have a disability or a chronic illness.”

Utilising technology has helped to dismantle barriers to employment for those who may have a disability or a chronic illness. Up to now, this may have prevented those individuals from applying for a job role, or caused them to take sick or unpaid leave to manage their symptoms when a physical, or inflexible, workplace has not allowed them to do so without negative repercussions.

The strides which we have made during lockdown towards flexible working have been long campaigned for by disability rights groups. Now, painfully late for many, businesses are signing up in their droves to implement a flexible working policy to keep their staff on the payroll and their heads above water. What will also transpire from this newly popularised working pattern is the opening of more doors than ever before to a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

The challenges of creating an inclusive workforce

With the mention of such huge strides towards a tech-enabled work environment, it would be easy to forget the elephant in the room which is our straining economy and jobs market. Up to now, the government’s furlough scheme has bolstered unemployment figures. Until the scheme’s eventual curtailment as we transition toward [The Jobs Support Scheme](#), we won’t know the full extent of the damage coronavirus has had on jobs. Predications of [a peak unemployment rate stand between an upside scenario of 9.7% and a downside scenario of 13.2%](#). Alongside this, [disabled people are](#)



[more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people](#), threatening an even greater disability employment gap.

So far, the [greatest increase to unemployment has been seen in young people](#) who have left education or some of the worst affected industries, like retail and hospitality, with few opportunities available to them. For them, the government’s recent cash incentives for employers provide a beacon of hope and it’s important that when used, these measures are inclusive of young people with a range of abilities, wherever possible.

“..disabled people are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people, threatening an even greater disability employment gap”.

Many organisations will be using the [Job Retention Bonus](#), a one-off payment of £1,000 for every employee that was previously eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, and for which they made a claim, so long as they remain employed until 31st January 2021. It’s very likely that businesses may choose to use this bonus to alleviate the pressure of that person’s salary as they return to work against a backdrop of reduced profit margins, however, this bonus can be used at the employer’s discretion. This gives those employers with the financial freedom the option to invest in other areas such as reasonable adjustments, training, technology, or other interventions to allow that member of staff, or indeed others, to be better supported at work. This could be due to a pre-existing health condition or disability, or something that may have been triggered or exacerbated by the pandemic, such as mental health issues. Similarly, the [Cash Incentive Bonus for Apprentices](#) can be spent on anything to support an organisation’s costs. This could include facilities, travel, or indeed some of the interventions mentioned previously that could make it easier for a young person with a disability or illness to access an apprenticeship.

Unfortunately, this fiscal flexibility does not extend to the Kickstart scheme, for which there are more stringent terms on how this incentive can be spent. However, a recent step in the right direction toward inclusivity for young people with disabilities is that [SMEs have now been invited to apply for funding](#). Previously, only businesses employing 30 or more placements would be eligible for this scheme. This



is an important move as it will allow the support of a wider range of young people with differing needs. The Kickstart scheme needs to be seen as a programme of learning for all young people, focused on valuable employability skills and the opportunity to be exposed to workplace practices, irrespective of how different they currently look. Access to employers with the resources to support them - i.e. time and human resource, rather than huge profit margins and the space to employ 30 new faces - is imperative for young people with disabilities or chronic illnesses. The widening of the scheme is good news and will help them gain access to the opportunities such a programme will afford.

The future of accessibility and employability

Although the unfolding crisis presents a universal uphill struggle as sectors strain under the pressure and businesses begin to make efficiencies to their workforce to manage the financial constraints, this needn't have a disproportionate effect on people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

The ability to work from home and use technology supports employers to ensure that employees, and prospective employees, aren't put at an unfair disadvantage. To revert to how we once thought the workplace needed to operate would be a damaging backwards step. It would slam a door in the face of those most marginalised who, through the changes needed to support industry during lockdown, have been granted the flexibility they have found so hard to win.

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For industry, it would be equally destructive, as it would close again the huge pool of talent that is available, if we continue to take steps to encourage it.

Amidst collapsing sectors, there are new and emerging opportunities, businesses, and sectors. We have seen businesses previously bound by process, structure and sign-off move in a direction that was never thought possible to cope with coronavirus. For them, there is no going back, for new businesses, there is no excuse.

If employers aren't putting flexibility and accessibility at the heart of their employment strategy, they will fall behind, both morally and in profitability. Now, more than ever before, we need a resilient and adaptive workforce and to exclude anyone from that would be to the detriment of our economic recovery.

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Dan has over 10 years' experience in the employability and skills sector, currently leading Skills Forward, an online assessment and eLearning specialist. Committed to employability and social mobility, Dan is also the Operations Director for Learning for Work at educational charity, NCFE and judge for the BAME Apprenticeship Awards.

The Rise of Digital: Reflections of a Business Development Director



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The last few months have had a profound impact on everything we do, so I wanted to share a few of my own observations in the context of my role leading the growth effort at Maximus, one of the largest providers of employment support services to government in the UK. I have focused my thoughts on what I see as being central to many of my experiences of late – remote working and the use of digital.

The scale of the move to remote/virtual activity has been the most significant change to the way we work in living memory. This clearly isn't unique to Business Development, as it is something, I know huge swathes of society are currently dealing with, but in the context of how we have historically operated, has been a significant shift.

Here are 3 key areas of consideration based on my experience, which I feel will have long lasting implications:

Embracing Change

I have always embraced digital technologies, I saw virtual meetings as a secondary option to getting together in person. The current pandemic has made me think differently, to the point that I don't really ever see us going back. The fact that everyone was in the same position has helped to force the agenda. Rather than me trying to convince the team that this is something we should try to do more of, it was through necessity that everyone embraced the approach, set up their home working environment as best they could and got up to speed with Zoom (other video calling options are available!). This move to digital has been hugely positive for many, including myself. No more do I need to be out of the house at 4am to get the early morning train to London for a meeting, but can now join from the relative comfort of my home office, having walked my children to school, something that would have been inconceivable in days past. Most meetings can now occur effectively remotely, with the team joining

from home and contributing to any discussion that is needed. However, there are still times when, in the middle of a bid, it would be useful to come together 'in-real-life'. Video calling is no substitute for a good in-person workshop when you need to thrash out the principles of an approach or do some detailed storyboarding with a large group of people. This is something I certainly missed during a recent complex bid, and with it looking unlikely that we will be back into the office any time soon, is something we are going to need to consider more pro-actively as we plan future projects and collaboration - Video calls work well, but a 4 hour workshop to thrash out a complex problem may need a different approach.

Managing the Intensity

The use of digital has certainly helped remove seemingly unnecessary or inefficient activities such as travel but has brought with it other challenges. Travelling to the office or from one face-to-face meeting and the next, whether it be by train, car or other means, forced periods of down-time between sessions. I used this time to contemplate more important strategic aspects of a bid or respond to emails or cover off other actions on the to-do list. Removing the need to travel combined with the relative ease of setting up video calls, means the prevalence of meetings has increased, with one video call seemingly flowing straight into the next. Before you know it, the whole day has flown by, having barely left my chair and with my to-do list barely touched. So, working late into the night and weekends to catch-up have become increasingly common, blurring the line between home and work and making it difficult to switch off. This is a highly inefficient way to operate, as whilst it may be sustainable over short periods of intensive bidding, it is not something that can be managed over a longer term and may degrade the quality of the team's work. So, it's critical that we all take a more proactive approach to managing this intensity and protecting thinking space, or risk burning ourselves and our teams out. This could include setting aside time on certain days each

week which, while it may initially feel like an inefficient use of time, should actually lead to us being far more productive. We also need to be more considerate in the creation of meetings, to confirm it's definitely needed, the attendees are all essential and the outcomes well defined. This is not a new discipline by any means but is one that I feel is much easier to overlook when you aren't asking people to travel hundreds of miles to attend. Finally, as leaders, it's essential we understand the pressures we are putting on our teams and managing that ask.

Missing that Watercooler

The final area for consideration as we all work increasingly remotely, and the thing that caught me most by surprise, was the lost value of just being around my team and other colleagues. When taken in isolation, those micro-interactions as you make a cup of tea in the kitchen or pass each other in the office don't seem like much, but they are actually hugely significant, both in terms of team productivity and wellbeing.

Within Business Development, I don't think I had appreciated just how much is achieved through having a brief conversation in the office. Being able to have a chat with the finance team to understand what a particular cost line means, or sitting down with the bid writers to check how they were feeling about a particular response were great ways of covering relatively small items off quickly, but which are no longer available to us in the same way. Quick calls or instant messages are a reasonable substitute but are easier to dismiss and never quite feel like an adequate alternative.

Most significant for me, is the lack of opportunity to decompress as a team. After a tough bid, sharing thoughts over a coffee in the morning or over a beer in the pub at the end of the day, was a great way to collectively come together as a group and re-establish bonds, as well as informally think about things we could do differently moving forward. This option disappeared overnight and is the most difficult thing to 'engineer' into this new world of remote working.

We have tried to come up with solutions to this, such as setting up calls at the end of the day to give people space to just generally catch up, but it does feel like the element that may take the longest for us to nail down an adequate solution and ensure that cohesion, which is so desperately needed for any high functioning team, is not lost.

The Future

Whilst the future and how things may look for teams remains opaque, the one consistent truth that it feels we can all get behind, is that things will be different so we need to adjust our thinking to suit. In summary, I believe we need to:

1. Stop thinking about 'interim' or 'short-term' solutions in light of the current situation, and plan for

long-term change. Only by embracing the situation and developing sustainable strategies to enable teams to engage in digital working, in the same way we would consider the requirements of working from an office, will it allow us to embed robust solutions that create the right conditions for success – however you measure it.

2. Maintain discipline in how we structure our working days and engage with colleagues. Protect your thinking space, consider meeting etiquette and establish collective 'ground rules' that everyone can get behind. This will avoid burnout and ensure a respectful and resilient team.

3. Find ways to maintain those social interactions. As human beings, we are naturally social animals but over the course of a busy day, it's easy to see those less 'productive' areas as the first to cut. In reality, with the fine margins we are all working to, it's those engagements that can make the difference between winning or losing. A team that is effectively engaged will want to go the extra mile, not because 'the business' asks them to, but because they want to do what they can for their colleagues. Technology and working as dispersed teams are going to have long lasting and significant impacts on the way Business Development and bidding process are run in the future. The opportunities afforded by the use of digital tools are extensive, and I am extremely excited to see how this develops into the future. However, it's critical that we retain our focus not just on the tools that aid 'the bid', but on those that aid 'the people', as they are our best assets.

"As human beings, we are naturally social animals but over the course of a busy day, it's easy to see those less 'productive' areas as the first to cut. In reality, with the fine margins we are all working to, it's those engagements that can make the difference between winning or losing."

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Ayden Sims MIEP is the Director of Business Development at Maximus UK.

Ayden is responsible for setting the strategy and driving commercial growth for the business. A medically retired Pilot in the RAF, Ayden has spent over a decade in the sector in a variety of roles, aiming to support others that have experienced disruption in their lives. Ayden has held a role as Board Member of the IEP for the last 3 years and is Chair of Governors at an 'Outstanding' SEN School in Birmingham.

The heart of employability services and why technology hasn't transformed services.....yet!



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The world is changing. I want to look beyond the immediate impact of Covid-19 and share some left-field thoughts on what future employability services might look like.

The views expressed are all my own opinions. I will be deliberately speculative and in some cases provocative. You may violently disagree with me and think I have got it completely wrong. That will be a good thing; we need to encourage more constructive dialogue and disagreements!

I started my employability career seventeen years ago as an employment adviser working on the New Deal programme in West London. It was a job I absolutely loved – working closely with my caseload of clients to support them back into work. I often described my role by using the analogy of a personal trainer (PT). A PT works with their client towards a goal. They set out a plan to reach the goal – but it is the client who ultimately has to do the hard work. The PT works alongside them to motivate them, encourage them, and holds them accountable to keep them on track. I was like a PT for my clients, except I didn't have a six-pack and I helped them get a job rather than get fit.

Looking back at that time it was a different world. There were no smart phones, no social media platforms, and very little online shopping. There was no Uber, no social media influencers, and no big-data driven algorithms that automated the choices that you made. No Netflix, no podcasts, no Zoom calls, and no giant Amazon warehouses. I was new to London and I had to navigate my way round the unfamiliar streets with a well-thumbed London A-Z, which I carried everywhere.

The world has changed a lot over the intervening period, but has the world of employability changed much? Is the role of an employment adviser much different today to what it was when I was doing the role in 2003? Has technology revolutionised the employability sector in the same way it has with so many other sectors?

In my view the answer to both questions is 'no'.

Why have things not changed and how are they going to change? To answer both questions I want to start by setting out what I think the foundations of an effective employability service are and are not. I will then explain why technology hasn't made a significant impact to date on the delivery models, the cost of delivery or the level of performance that is achieved.

Much of the focus in the sector for the last five years seems to have been on localism and integration with other local services. I think this is a red herring. I don't think local approaches will lead to better performance or innovation in the sector. In fact, I think it is likely to lead to stagnation in both regards.

Over my career I have delivered services in every single English region and across the whole of Scotland. In every locality I heard the same thing - 'our clients are different here'. This statement was often followed by the assertion that they were more difficult to help into work. I visited and worked alongside employability services in France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, the US and Australia and heard exactly the same thing.

The reality I have observed is that there are far more commonalities than differences, and very strong similarities in the services that were high performing. What are these common themes?

- A dedicated and consistent personal adviser that has a great relationship with their jobseekers

“Over my career I have delivered services in every single English region and across the whole of Scotland. In every locality I heard the same thing - ‘our clients are different here’.”

- A focus on motivation, engagement and goal-setting rather than mandating actions
- Practical training and guidance on the process of finding work - having a realistic job goal, dedicating time to job search, accessing vacancies that are not massively oversubscribed, submitting quality applications, performing well in an interview
- High levels of activity that are focused on finding work
- A work alongside model that supports jobseekers to take ownership and control of their own lives
- Practical problem solving support to address barriers to work

Human psychology and motivating behaviour change are the key ingredients that underpin these common themes and are the most important elements in an effective employability service. Psychological and behavioural principles are universal, not locally specific. Local labour markets, culture, language, benefit systems, education systems and employment laws may vary from place to place, but are secondary and can be more easily learned and adapted to.

I think this explains why the employment advisers of today are still working in a very similar way to how I worked almost twenty years ago. The personal adviser model is effective because the personal relationship is key to building motivation and affecting behaviour change. The technological innovations in the past fifteen years haven't addressed this or come up with tech-enabled solutions of doing it better. Consider some of the technological innovations that have been tried in employability with little impact:

Automated job matching: The reason most people don't have a job is not that there are not jobs to apply for – even in the depths of a recession there are jobs to apply for. Presenting someone with jobs they are not motivated to do, don't have the tools to submit a good application for or which are going to be highly competed, hasn't significantly shifted the dial on performance.

Self-service portals: Most self-service portals make no difference because people only use them once or twice. To be effective people will need to use them daily.

“The personal adviser model is effective because the personal relationship is key to building motivation and affecting behaviour change. The technological innovations in the past fifteen years haven't addressed this or come up with tech-enabled solutions of doing it better.”



For that to happen they have to be more engaging than Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Netflix, and everything else that people access via the web or their smart phone.

Data analytics: This hasn't made a significant change yet, but it has the potential to do so. Why has it made little difference so far? For data analytics to be effective you have to collect high quantities, of high quality data. In the employability market data is gathered across multiple instance of systems, so although there is a lot of it, there isn't enough of it in a single system to offer much insight.

“Presenting someone with jobs they are not motivated to do, don't have the tools to submit a good application for or which are going to be highly competed, hasn't significantly shifted the dial on performance.”

So how might employability services of the future be different and how might technology fundamentally change how services are delivered? I will share just two thoughts, but I would love to hear from others about how they think the employability sector might be fundamentally altered by technology.

During lockdown Joe Wicks became the nation's PE teacher – could we see the emergence of social media fueled employment advisers with giant caseloads? Personal trainers historically relied on a personal relationship and were limited by the number of people they can physically spend quality time with in a week.

The same can be said of employment advisers. Social media has allowed Joe Wicks to build a relationship of trust with millions of people through his numerous videos, without having to meet them in person. People see Joe so often they feel like they know him, they trust him, are motivated by him. They engage with his content and crucially they change their behaviours.

“While technology will change the way services are delivered, truly great employability services rely on uniquely human abilities which technology will be able to enhance but not replace.”

You could argue that an employment adviser role is more complex and varied than that of a PT. However, in a single year an employment adviser will repeat some activities and sessions dozens if not hundreds of times a year. Delivering that content either in live streamed or pre-recorded sessions that are posted on social media channels could allow employment advisers to work with many more people.

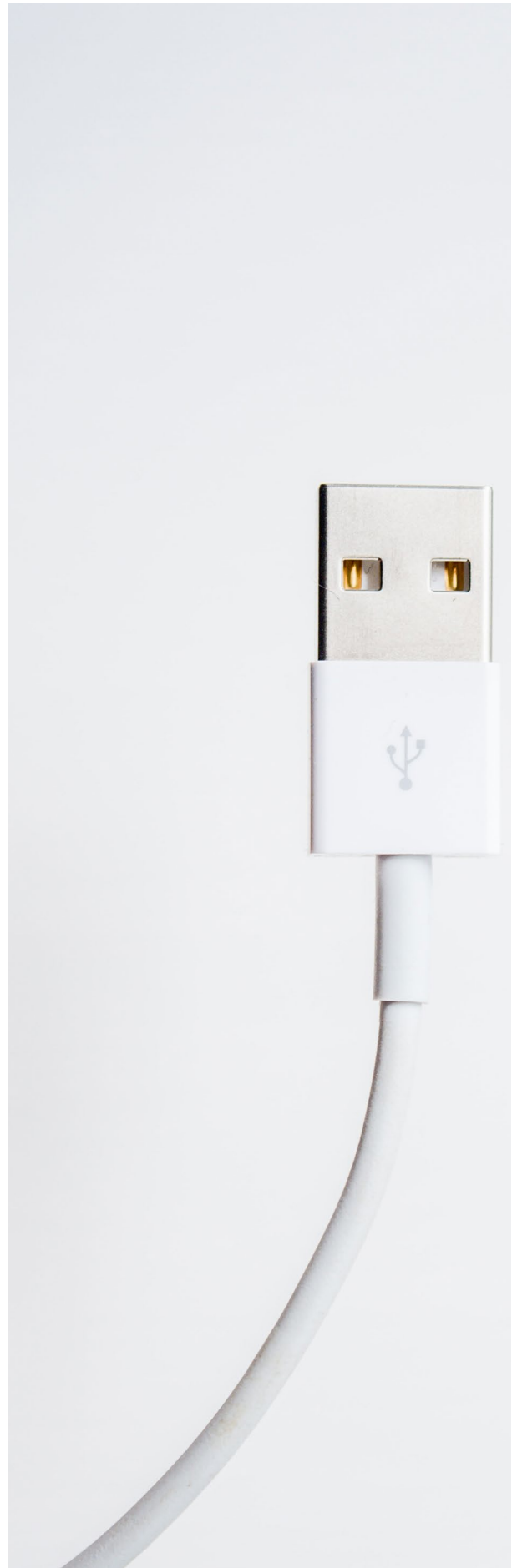
Data is the new oil, and constant innovation is the road to improvement. We know the case management approach broadly works – but we don’t really understand the granular detail of what works. Do particular interventions work for particular groups? Do particular advisers have much better success with particular customer groups? I believe that there is significant potential to improve the effectiveness of employability services if we collect the data properly and use it to provide real-time feedback on what works and what doesn’t and adapt services accordingly. What if Google or Amazon commissioned employment services on behalf of DWP? One thing is certain – we would have much richer data on what actually worked and what didn’t and we wouldn’t be designing inflexible programmes that are the same in year 5 as they are in year 1.

The future is uncertain, but one thing that is certain is that sooner or later technology will fundamentally change the way employability services are delivered and in ways that are unexpected. While technology will change the way services are delivered, truly great employability services rely on uniquely human abilities which technology will be able to enhance but not replace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Blackwell MIEP is the Founder and CEO of Purpose Led Performance.

Chris started his career as an employment adviser at Ingeus in 2003 and progressed to be their COO. He was UK Managing Director for MAXIMUS from 2012 - 2016. Chris subsequently worked in CEO roles in the criminal justice and education sectors. In 2019 Chris Founded Purpose Led Performance, which supports medium sized organisations with performance and growth.




Employment Transforms Lives



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These really are unprecedented times. Nowhere will this be felt more acutely than in our sector as unemployment rises to maybe 4 million.... possibly even more. As we face that very daunting prospect we need to ensure we are ready to meet this huge challenge and the impact it will have on the lives of individuals, their families and communities up and down the country. We know only too well the negative impact unemployment can have and we also know well how the impact of the right support can be so positive in turning things round again.....employment can and does transform lives.

17 years ago I was standing outside an Employment Zone delivery office situated in a shopping centre in an area with high levels of very long-term unemployment. It was one of those centres where the security guards wore stabproof vests and the main high street names steered well clear. As I went to go back inside a tall, well-built man in his late thirties came striding towards me shouting "Oi - hold on a minute!" With some trepidation I awaited his arrival not entirely sure what to expect next.

"So are you something to do with this lot in here then" he said pointing to our office. My suit and tie was something of a giveaway given the place I was in! I said yes and explained I was visiting for the day to see how things were going, spend time with the team and to get some feedback on our service from some of the people we are supporting. "I was one of those" he said and then proceeded to tell me his story.

He had been unemployed for over 7 years although admitted to doing "a bit on the side here and there". He had given up hope of finding a job and lived on benefits and some "ducking and diving"...I didn't explore what that involved but without doubt it would have included things that were the wrong side of the law.

He got referred to us and only came in because he would have lost his benefits otherwise. In his words he was a "bolshie, aggressive nightmare" for the first few weeks he did all he could to make life difficult for our team. Then he said one day something just 'clicked' and the Adviser who had been supporting him and trying, despite his behaviour, using every angle to move him forward suddenly achieved a breakthrough. After that he said they got him focussed, sorted his CV, found him some work experience, sorted help for his drink and drugs problems and even got him on some anger management support sessions with a local organisation. Eight months after he started he finally got a job – "nothing special" but it was a start and the wages meant he could afford to come off benefits. Wind on just over 12 months and he had since been promoted twice and now managed a sales team of 10.

Having shared his story he then said to me "It is fair to say that you lot did a lot more than just get me a job. I changed as a bloke and found some pride and self-respect that I hadn't accepted I had lost. My missus said I was a changed man and she had got back the one she married and my kids were no longer scared of me anymore and instead had a proper dad" At this point tears rolled down the face of this tough, slightly scary looking guy and I am not too proud to admit they ran down my face too. He then gave me the biggest hug, bellowed "Thanks mate, thanks a million" in my ear and with that headed off. Took me 10 minutes to compose myself before I went back into our office.

"We know only too well the negative impact unemployment can have and we also know well how the impact of the right support can be so positive in turning things round again."

“Building effective 1-1 relationships with each individual jobseeker still remains critical for success – a truth that has definitely stood the test of time.”

Although I knew it long before it was this experience that showed me loudly and very clearly the simple truth that what we do really does have the power to transform lives. Awesome stuff and the question is what is it about what we do that is so powerfully transformational.

For me it all boils down to 3 pretty simple things:

The power of relationships. Building a strong, trusting, honest, professional and supportive relationship with each individual is key. Everyone is different so what will ‘click’ for one person will be something very different for someone else. The very best performing advisers/consultants/coaches, call them what you will, are able to do this and find jobs for even the most challenging of jobseekers. Building effective 1-1 relationships with each individual jobseeker still remains critical for success – a truth that has definitely stood the test of time.

The power of leadership. I have seen some amazing leaders over the years who inspire, focus, drive and enable teams to maximise impact and potential. I have also seen some terrible leaders and the huge damage they can cause. As we look to meet the coming challenges it will be essential to ensure we have great leadership right across the sector – nothing less will do.

The power of information. In my experience the very best organisations harness the power of information to ensure they can deliver the best possible service to each individual and the best possible results.

Everyone needs to know clearly and accurately how they are doing, why, what is working and what isn’t and why, who is the best performer and why, where are the challenges and why, how do we continuously improve, what is the best practice, what can I learn – the list is endless but having a strong, clear, accurate focus on data of all kinds and using that to inform and drive what we do is essential for maximum success.

So, as we move forward and start to deliver programmes and services to meet an unemployment challenge like no other we have faced we simply must ensure we fully harness these 3 powers.



Underpinning all 3 is the other essential for working in our sector.....passion. What we do is far more than just a job - we deliver services and support to people often at their lowest ebb, feeling on life’s scrap heap with hope gone and scepticism rife. Passion for what we do is essential for enabling us to have the drive, determination and unrelenting focus to maximise the impact we can have on the lives of others.

After 38 years in the sector my own passion remains undimmed along with real pride in what we have done and can continue to do regardless of how big the challenge might be. I see that same passion in so many other people across our sector and for me it is the engine that needs to drive all we do.

As I said at the start.....employment transforms lives. Never has the need for us to do that for so many people been greater than now – so let’s all ensure we rise to the challenge like never before!

“Passion for what we do is essential for enabling us to have the drive, determination and unrelenting focus to maximise the impact we can have on the lives of others.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Milton FIEP is the Managing Director of Rostrum Search.

Andy has been involved in the employment and skills sectors for 38 years and is a recognised employment Subject Matter Expert. He has extensive successful experience of bidding for and delivering publicly funded employment support programmes and has worked in the public, private, third sectors and for a groundbreaking PPP.

'Kickstarting' single parent employment



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We are all reeling from the impact of the pandemic, but single parents have been particularly hard hit. If you are running an employment programme you are going to be coming across a lot of single parents as the recession and its impact bites. It is time to think about their unique situation and what good support for them has to look like if we are to avoid a child poverty catastrophe.

The organisation I chair, Gingerbread, has worked for over one hundred years in the interests of single parents and their families - giving practical support and lobbying for systematic change. We were instrumental in the repeal of the Bastardy Act and the closure of the workhouses. Today our mission is no less critical – ensuring a fair deal for single parent families.

So, let's get a handle on the size of the considerable challenge single parents face. In 2019 there were 2.9 million lone parent families accounting for nearly 15% of families. 3 million children live in single parent families. Most single parents (86%) are women. Even prior to the pandemic 47% of children in single parent families lived in relative poverty compared to 24% in coupled families - with less than half of single parents receiving the child maintenance payments they are entitled to.

Before the crisis over 70% of single parents were working but 68% of them worked in the three lowest paid occupation groups. Since March a 'perfect storm' created by: the disappearance of part time work; mandatory furlough; the shut-down of whole sectors and massive gaps in (formal and informal) childcare provision, has left 58% of the UK's single parents claiming Universal Credit (compared to 10% of coupled families). The situation is dire and single parents and their children are suffering disproportionately. An already parlous situation has been worsened by the DWP redeployment of Child Maintenance Service personnel elsewhere during the crisis meaning that payments are not being pursued.

Today single parents are on a fast track to unemployment. It is no coincidence that the spike in unemployed single parents has coincided with the largest decrease in employment in over a decade and the biggest fall in hours worked since records began. Both of these factors are driven by part time workers becoming unemployed and single parents, of necessity, favouring part time jobs. Single parents have been further marginalised and disproportionately impacted by government policies that are out of touch, and cruel, like the benefit cap.

Emergency support is needed for single parents who have lost their jobs due to the crisis. Parents are having to make stark choices: cutting back on food; struggling to pay bills and to pay for school uniforms; borrowing money from pay day lenders; and maxing out credit cards. Whilst the Government has put in place measures to assist the economy to "bounce back" it has been curiously blind to the travails of single parents and their families for whom relatively simple policy implementations, such as a £20 a week boost to the child element of UC and child tax credit, would make a considerable difference.

Just prior to the pandemic Gingerbread published research with the Learning & Work Institute, ('Untapped Talent') highlighting the challenges working single parents face – challenges which have only been exacerbated by the economic repercussions of the pandemic.

A lack of flexibility forces many single parents to work fixed hours in order to balance work and childcare commitments. This lack of flexibility means single parents are not only unable to work additional hours, but they are also blocked from training and socialising at work.

Single parents are more likely to be working part-time in order to balance their caring responsibilities. Working part-time means that single parents are frequently forced to work below their skill level to achieve the flexibility they need.

We have all had to adopt different ways of working. This is an ideal time to embed flexibilities into our employment systems that work with, rather than against, single parent workers. This is a once in a generation opportunity to get this right.”

Single parents tend to have fewer educational qualifications than the working-age population as a whole, typically limiting single parents' rates of progression.

There is a lack of affordable childcare preventing many single parents from seeking better paid roles and blocking in-work progression. 41% of single parents struggle to afford childcare, compared with 14% of parents in couples.

Being consistently in work helps people to escape low pay. Time out of the labour market means single parents were more likely to have 'work gaps'.

The plight of single parents justifies an imaginative and life-changing response. We should utilise the post-pandemic recovery period as a springboard to dramatically improve single parent employment opportunities and their families' life chances. We have all had to adopt different ways of working. This is an ideal time to embed flexibilities into our employment systems that work with, rather than against, single parent workers. This is a once in a generation opportunity to get this right.

Such an opportunity would require action from several different government departments and collaboration between them. Let's start by:

Increasing the availability of part-time and flexible work:

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) should introduce a duty on employers to publish flexible working options in job adverts and give workers the right to take up the advertised flexibility from day one.

Employers should open up more senior level roles with part-time and flexible hours allowing them access to an untapped pool of single parents who have previously been unable to move out of low-paid work.

Providing cheaper and more accessible childcare

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should loan the upfront costs of childcare for single parents including deposits and the first month advance payment, so that single parents do not need to cover this substantial upfront cost.

DWP should review the operation of childcare payments under universal credit around evidence of payment and the monthly payments being made in arrears.

The Department for Education (DfE) should reconsider the current operation of the 30 hour childcare offer to make it more compatible with the realities of working life including offering this provision throughout the year.

The DfE should urgently review the childcare cap which limits the total amount that parents can receive. This level has not kept up with rising childcare costs and prevents the promised 85% support for childcare under Universal Credit.

Offering fit for purpose careers support

The DWP should target career support and advice to single parents at key stages of their children's lives, when their youngest child begins primary or secondary school.

Numerous jobs will no longer exist post pandemic and several sectors will look very different. New jobs will be created. DWP and DfE must ensure that targeted career support and skills training is made available to single parents so that they can take up these new jobs.

The Government Equalities Office (GEO), BEIS and employers should set up networks for single parents to access information and support in different work sectors and at different levels of roles.

In addition a mentoring programme, which includes single parents as a priority group, should be piloted and evaluated by the GEO along similar lines to their returners programme.

Will the Government grasp these opportunities and make good on this untapped talent? We hope so. It will be a massive, and hugely unfair, omission if it fails to.

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Fran Parry FIEP is the Chair of Gingerbread, the charity for single parents and their families.

Fran has many years experience in the Employability Sector. She is most proud of the work she undertook in the creation of both ERSAs and the IEP, chairing both, and raising the profile of youth unemployment during her time as Director at CESI, where she curated the Youth Employment Convention.

Navigating the Storm – How Do We Stay Afloat?



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Metaphors ahoy for a nautical tale of our customers, the current pandemic and unlocking. For the sake of context, let me state that it's mid-September 2020 and we are still waiting to see how the Covid-19 pandemic plays out. Does a second lockdown await us? How will the virus survive, or even thrive, through the winter months? And what's life going to look like on the other side of the pandemic?

What is clear to us all is that everybody, barring a patient in a coma and a hermit living up a mountain, has been impacted by the virus and/or lockdown. But how we've been impacted, how we're dealing with the situation and how our futures look are very personalised factors. This is my favourite quote of the moment:

"We are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat."

Just 16 words, but that one sentence perfectly encapsulates the current situation. Look at it from a professional angle – some of us have spent the last 6 months working from our decent sized, suitably occupied homes, converting a spare room into an office. Others have had to try and get their job done in crowded accommodation, with small children to home-school whilst wrestling with a Wi-Fi signal that always seems to play up at the worst possible moment.

Some people have been furloughed and loved every minute, devoting time to family, the garden and that DIY list that's finally getting sorted, whilst others have found furlough an incredibly lonely place, with a massive hole in their life where their work duties usually sit.

"It's imperative that we understand the environment that our customers are living in, and having to expose themselves to, if we are to fully empathise with their situation."

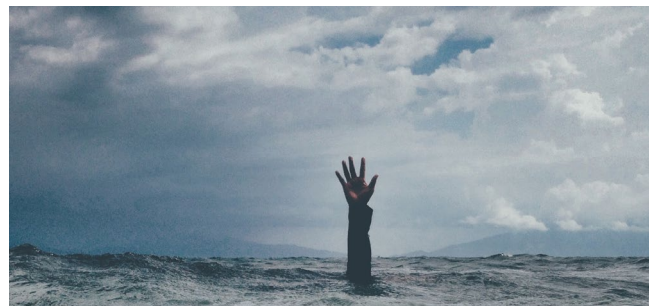
"We are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat."

And if we consider our customers, we should expect to see the same. In a spectrum that sees people enjoying their positive home life at one end, and having to endure a living hell, perhaps involving domestic violence, increased substance misuse or worsening mental health issues at the other. Same storm, different boats.

So, indulge me while I stick with the nautical metaphors to explore what this means for us as service providers. How do we understand what lockdown has done to our customers, and how can we help them to sail through whatever comes next, still afloat when the storm finally passes?

1. Understand the storm.

Yes, we're all in the same global situation. The storm is the same for everyone, but the damage that it does depends on the environment that it's in. Strong winds have a greater impact on tidal waters than lakes, and so the pandemic hits hardest in areas in which it can thrive. People living in shared accommodation are at more risk than those living alone. If customers have to use public transport to carry out their responsibilities, they're at greater risk than those who can fully self-isolate. It's imperative that we understand the environment that our customers are living in, and having to expose themselves to, if we are to fully empathise with their situation.



“If we can see hope where the customer can’t, if we know of help that they don’t, then let’s introduce those to their lives and help keep the ship afloat.”

2. How storm-proof is their boat?

In considering the previous point, two people could have identical circumstances yet cope (or not) in very different ways. We need to think about our customers’ resilience, risk factors and protective factors.

Resilience is a mindset – a determination to survive, bounce back and thrive. And different people can do this to varying degrees – so let’s ask how customers are feeling about the future – what hope can they see, what help can they access? If we’re not ‘feeling it’, then we should be exploring this further – hopelessness and helplessness are two big risk factors for suicide. If we can see hope where the customer can’t, if we know of help that they don’t, then let’s introduce those to their lives and help keep the ship afloat.

Risk factors are everywhere right now. An increasingly competitive job market, severe strains on the health system, news channels forever pumping out doom-laden stories, each of these has the potential to cause a leak in the hull and start that ship sinking. It’s essential that we’re aware of what risks a customer faces, and we’re being proactive in helping plug those leaks.

To keep the metaphor going, let’s think of protective factors as ways that we can strengthen the hull, increase buoyancy and steady the ship. And I’ll give you 10 suggestions here to plan support around.

Firstly, Kylie Henderson wrote in the previous issue of Jahoda’s 5 latent benefits of work – the incidental mental health benefits that working brings us: time structure; regular activity; social status/identity; collective purpose and social contact. How can we help customers to have these in their lives? Each brings a mental health boost that can contribute to the person feeling valid, positive and productive, and none are only achievable through employment.

Secondly, there’s the 5 Ways to Wellbeing – research suggests that each of these is good for the mood, and as you see them you’ll notice that: they don’t need to cost anything; they’re doable during lockdown; and they can be combined into a single activity. They are: connect with others, be active, take notice, keep learning, give. Lastly on protective factors, we need to be proactive in identifying ones in a customer’s life that they may not be currently accessing – good friends that they’ve lost contact with are a great example here.

3. Strengthen their sails.

Finally let’s ask ourselves how, to stretch the metaphor one final time (honest), we’re helping customers to plot their voyage through these unpredictable waters. We want people to have goals and plans, we always have. But in these times, we need to make sure that those goals remain valid in unprecedented times and plans are adaptable to unforeseen changes.

Answer me this: How much of retail has **forever** shifted to online and what consequence will that have on jobs in retail outlets? Here’s another – will businesses ever return to their inner-city premises and if not, what does that mean for people’s target employers? May they now be able to work for a company that they couldn’t have commuted to before? Last one; will conferences, training courses and schools go back to how they operated before? Nobody knows yet, and this is such a significant factor in what vacancies will exist, where they can be done from and even how the job gets done. On that last point, if homeworking really does become the norm for some roles, what amazing opportunities might that offer someone with a health condition/disability who can now genuinely work from home?

We need to be all over local labour market information, listening closely to local employers and ahead of the game in knowing what work can be done where and by whom. Job goals need to be validated, challenged and/or set according to the world that evolves around us.

So, there you have it m’hearties, uncharted waters, an unpredictable storm and everyone in their own, unique boat. Good luck in supporting your customers on their voyage and remember – the coastguard is only as effective as the boat in which they sail, so check in with yourself in all three areas and, above all else, keep yourself buoyant.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kevin Moore FIEP is Co-Founder of Big Dog Little Dog CIC.

Kevin is one of our sector’s success stories. Having been an electronic engineering apprentice, police officer, security specialist and publican, in 1995 he experienced a nervous breakdown and spent seven months living with severe depression. Following his 6-month JSA review, he was sent on a back-to-work course and, 2½ weeks later, was recruited by the provider as an I.T. trainer. In the 24 years since then, he has run a national provider’s London operations, created his own provider and, in 2017, formed BDLD - a social enterprise that specialises in mental health and employment training - with co-founder Bob Kitchin.

Delivering the potential £40billion prize for boosting youth employment, education and training in the UK



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This time last year I was sitting in a packed café with Joe Montgomery, Chair of the newly established Youth Futures Foundation, discussing our shared vision for the organisation. I had recently accepted the post of CEO and we were keen to start working together to create a society where all young people have equitable access to good quality jobs. With youth unemployment at 750,000 and young people from Black, Asian or ethnic minority backgrounds experiencing worse outcomes than their white peers, we were – and we remain – committed to supporting young people towards and into good quality, secure work with clear progression pathways.

Little did we know then, how dramatically the landscape was about to change. Fast forward twelve months and the world looks very different. Today Joe and I only talk online, and the scale of the crisis has grown exponentially. The number of young people not in education, employment or training could increase by 50%, reaching a total of 1.1 million by the end of 2020.^[i] This scale of youth unemployment would represent a political, economic and moral crisis.

Young people in this country are being hit by a perfect storm of weak demand in the economy and high competition for available jobs - particularly in 'shut-down' sectors.^[ii] The latest ONS data shows that employment among those aged 16 to 24 was around 155,000 lower in May to July compared with February to April this year. We anticipate that it will fall further when the furlough scheme ends and could remain below 2019 levels for up to eight years.^[iii]

Youth Futures' Board Member, Alex Morawski, has struggled to find work since he graduated from Warwick University a year ago.

"If you're not living in the city or a prosperous area, it's particularly challenging for young people. Jobs in retail

or hospitality, like bar staff, can offer the opportunity of gaining work experience in the short-term, but in places like Barnsley these are often life-long jobs for people. I've been unemployed for a year and unless you have the social capital and resources to move away, there are few prospects. It's not just about how many jobs are available; in deprived areas there are huge cultural barriers to overcome."

Rising youth unemployment will lead to rising levels of inequality. It is harder for young people who face disadvantage or discrimination to access and retain employment, even in a strong labour market. Growing up in poverty is itself a huge driver of disparity, with disadvantaged young people around 50% more likely to be NEET than their similarly qualified but better-off peers.^[iv] COVID-19 is also having a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) workers, as BAME individuals are 14 percentage points less likely to be furloughed and 13 percentage points more likely to be unemployed than non-BAME individuals.^[v]

A young person who experiences a period of unemployment will, on average, lose up to £50,000 in earnings over their working life when compared to their peers.^[vi] There is clear evidence that young people who have repeated or long-term spells of unemployment are much more likely to be out of work later in life, to be in poor quality work and have lower earnings, with research using LEO data showing that few people 'escape' from long-term NEET.^[vii]

Through matching the pre-Covid NEET rates of 20 to 24-year-olds in Germany, the UK could increase its GDP by around £40 billion.^[viii] Youth employment levels have a significant impact on UK economic growth now and in future. Ensuring young people can get into work, and stay in work, will be vital to our national recovery and growth prospects. The biggest financial and social returns will be gained through improving outcomes for young people facing multiple barriers to their success.

“Youth employment levels have a significant impact on UK economic growth now and in future. Ensuring young people can get into work, and stay in work, will be vital to our national recovery and growth prospects.”

To secure good employment outcomes for young people facing discrimination or disadvantage, we need a collaborative, joined-up, ‘systems-based’ approach to improving skills and enrichment opportunities, incentivising and equipping employers to hire and retain young people, and addressing the barriers faced by young people in their daily lives. This means taking a coherent view across employment schemes, education, skills and social security - and beyond to consider the impact of policing, criminal justice, housing, health and social care - to ensure no young person is left behind and all can benefit from participation in meaningful work. The Youth Futures Foundation will invest at least £90 million to achieve this aim, but in the face of a global pandemic, we cannot do this alone.

We are calling for partners and Government to work with us to create a society where all young people have equitable access to good quality jobs:

- Equal employment outcomes for young people who face discrimination or disadvantage
- Reduced number of young people outside the labour market or in insecure work
- Improved progression pathways for young people

This can be achieved through adoption of the Youth Futures model: Inform, Invest, Initiate:

- **INFORM** stakeholders about ‘what works’ by developing a world class, global evidence base to empower UK Government, employers and practitioners to lead the way on youth employment
- **INVEST** in evidence-based approaches and ‘good practice’ to ensure young people facing discrimination or disadvantage have access to high quality, sustainable jobs
- **INITIATE** change by catalysing ‘big ideas’ that transform society, equipping employers to recruit and retain diverse talent and empowering government to carry out evidence-based policymaking.

Consequently, we are calling for Government to adopt three key recommendations from the Youth Futures Foundation to deliver these three goals

RECOMMENDATION 1: The Treasury should coordinate a cross-government investment into a national network

of virtual and physical ‘Youth Hubs’ located in youth clubs, community centres, schools and colleges, to put young people at the heart of growing an economy that is creative, innovative and works for everyone. This will ensure that all young people – particularly in deprived, low employment and rural locations – can access the services they need to successfully transition from education to secure and sustainable jobs.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The apprenticeship levy should be reformed because young people are increasingly missing out on apprenticeships due to the incentives created by the levy. In addition, the Treasury should make a further investment to fund 50,000 entry-level apprenticeships aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds and increase the ‘employer incentives’ for recruiting younger apprentices.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Traineeships and the ‘Kickstart’ programme should form the basis of a new preventative approach to supporting young people at risk of long-term unemployment. Additional funding should be provided to DWP to expand and sustain Kickstart to ensure it can support young people who face discrimination or disadvantage.

Taken together, these recommendations will bring about the change needed to ensure all young people get the support they need and deserve during this challenging time and beyond.

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Anna Smee is Chief Executive of Youth Futures Foundation.

Anna began her career in asset management and financial services, before joining the Young Foundation as Director of Ventures. Her recent work at UK Youth has seen her emerge as one of the leading voices for youth opportunities and employment in the UK. She is a powerful advocate both in Whitehall and with employers and has developed an extensive knowledge of youth provision across the country.



Deborah Tillett FIEP

30th August 1979 - 16th September 2020

It is with great sadness that I find myself writing (21st September 2020), in memory of Deborah. Debs/DT/ Deborah (we all had a special name for our chum) came to the UK from South Africa in 2002 and started working at A4E on her student visa as a temp, working in Mary Cripps' team. She was totally thrown in at the deep end and she swam! (More about the swimming later!). Mary persuaded A4E to apply for a sponsorship visa for Debs and, although she was deported for a while, she found her way back and moved with Mary to CDG. The first time I ever came across DT was when Carley Consult were awarded the Merlin Assessment contract. There was a prestigious launch event and Deborah did the most incredible, persuasive presentation and I was immediately inspired by her. Jim Carley FIEP remembers how much people loved her ability to make things real and uncomplicated. In the early days of Workpays DT wrote all of our policies, processes and procedures - her legacy remains as we are still following many of the examples of good practice she instilled.

Deborah was always committed to professionalising our sector and was one of the first people to join the IEP, delivering the very first ERS induction and Award to staff at TBG. Her learners absolutely loved her enthusiasm and passion for the sector because she taught with honesty, knowledge and understanding. They also loved her humour, forthright delivery and intolerance of nonsense. It was whilst working delivering the ERS qualifications to staff at New College Nottingham that she first met Richard Alberg. He thought she was pretty amazing too and was so delighted when able to offer her a role years later at Corndel. I spoke with Richard this week and he shared stories of Deborah's ability to understand complex issues then explain them in accessible ways to others and of course her generosity.

It was only when she fell from her horse in 2013 and had to have a MRI scan on her head that doctors found the first tumour which they thought had been there since she was a child. Debs loved the fact that falling off her horse saved her life. Inevitably work became difficult through the period of diagnosis, surgery and recovery, but she was not to be defeated!

Through reputation and hard work Debs was resurrected and went on to make a difference at Interserve and most recently at Corndel. Debs was very grateful to Chris Peel (then at Interserve) for giving her the chance to contribute and she did not let him down, playing a huge part in the turnaround activity happening at the time. She often doubted herself and her amazing abilities, waiting for someone to tell her she wasn't good enough and it was all a joke - this is partly what drove her to constantly do the work of three people I'm sure.

Debs had so much more to give. In our last conversation she was planning the next phase of her life, considering new qualifications and development opportunities. Sadly, she has not been able to see these plans through. Less than six weeks ago Deborah received the devastating news that she had another tumour. Doctors operated quickly but were not able to achieve the results we all hoped for and with typical bravery she chose not to continue treatment when the quality of her life was impaired.

The first time we met socially was at the Liverpool Street Station Shelter Sleep out. She turned up with the most delicious chocolate brownies! It was Fran Parry FIEP who'd brought us together to sleep on the street and we went on to share regular trips as the 'Fabsters', helping Debs achieve some "bucket list" trips. We've had a lot of fun, wherever we went Debs priority was planning daily sea swims (which Helen McAnally promised to go on but always chickened out "because it was too bloody cold!"). In January this year you'd have found Debs swimming in the freezing Atlantic in Madeira whilst the rest of us found a warm Café and huddled over cups of coffee. Her other loves, her dog and her horse, whenever it got too much always made her smile.

As a friend Debs made us all feel valued and loved even at the very end when she was feeling terribly unwell herself and we will all miss her enormously. Our sector was, and is, so very much the better for having her amongst us.

Helen Richardson FIEP

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

If you or your network of professionals have any influence over the forthcoming round of back to work schemes and plans can I urge one word to be considered, or preferably shouted – Flexibility?

Since I can remember, and my 'experience' goes back to the days of New Deal, the commissioners in their wisdom have introduced rules, regulations, referral must haves, and referral must not haves etc etc. All of these served to stifle delivery, and dilute common-sense solutions, in my humble opinion.

In the times ahead we will need flexibility more than ever to find ways through potentially the biggest financial crisis to hit the UK. What we don't need is someone saying, "Ah since you work more than 16 hours you can't do.....", "Oh you claim that benefit so that means you are ineligible to join that programme...."

Rough sleeping was an entrenched, and unfortunately common sight in London – then during Covid the government simply announced that "nobody could be a rough sleeper anymore" – and overnight almost every single person was found some type of temporary accommodation. The solution that couldn't be solved, was. Flexibility was introduced. The rules were flexed, the budgets were flexed and suddenly we solved the unsolvable problem.

So please let's promote flexibility – real flexibility that allows people to use good old common sense and innovation to solve the problems we will/are facing in relation to unemployment.

Simon Newberry FIEP
Managing Director | Purple Compass Limited



Dear Editor

Why employability providers should be careful about the overuse of technology. In this era of the connected world and the Internet of Things (IoT), it is often overlooked that we have a growing problem of 'digital exclusion'. Whilst smartphone ownership and access to broadband has reached an all-time high, recent studies show that efforts to move services online are particularly disadvantaging low-income groups, older people and those with disabilities.

According to a recent report from NHS Digital, 11.9m people (22% of the population) do not have the digital skills needed for everyday life in the UK and by 2030 it is predicted that 4.5m people (8% of the population) will remain digitally disengaged.

As we are all acutely aware, Covid-19 and the resulting lockdown measures, are resulting in a significant increase in unemployment and the claimant count, this is set to increase dramatically over the coming months and well into 2021. Those of us who worked through the introduction of 'payment-by-results' have our fingers crossed that funding for these new programmes will allow for greater investment in quality and direct support but it is clear that technology will need to play a role. The question is, how can we avoid technology for technology sake?

Self-service, whilst efficient in reducing resource time & cost, and improving access to information and services, should be used with caution. Equipping the adviser with tools to manage their caseload effectively will deliver the best results for jobseekers.

When you take a look at all the research, good customer experience is achieved by a mix of technology and human interaction; users like the speed of response, consistency and 'ease of use' of self-service but this must go hand in hand with traditional people-centred services when dealing with what, for many, will be the most worrying period of their lives so far.

As a company that has promoted the use of technology for over 35 years, spanning periods of high unemployment and high employment, CogniSoft believe in the use of technology to enhance delivery, not to drive it. It is clear to us that it is the Adviser that should be at the forefront of the solutions the sector employs and that there is a responsibility for the sector to be cautious in how it deploys technology.

Steve Thorpe MIEP
Head of Sales and Marketing | CogniSoft Ltd

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

Looking over the first Issue of the IEPJ, and thinking about recent programme evaluations, I think I see a divide in opinions about 'what works' efforts in employability services.

On the one hand, there are those who focus on contracting arrangements, supply-chain management and payment procedures.

On the other, people (myself among them) who identify the frontline advisers, their behaviour, skills and constraints as the defining element.

Granted there is a strong linkage between the two; that it is difficult to measure the impact of advisers' work separately from the constraints they work under, and acknowledging the value of programme evaluations, I still feel we don't pay enough attention to the relations between clients and advisers.

My impression is that the variable results from programmes, the frequent changes and inconsistencies in their designs are due, partly, to us not getting close enough to the point of delivery to see what is working well. Researchers looking at the frontline have often tended to look for broad generalities ('holistic joined up services' being a frequent offender) rather than measurable behaviours.

In other fields (CBT for example) it is accepted that the quality and impact of front-line advice can be researched alongside the institutional setting. In medicine, it would be unthinkable that efficaciousness of an intervention would be measured by looking at the management style of the hospital. And Dr Jo Ingold's work on the quality of relationships with employers has lately shown that it is possible to bridge this gap.

Could the IEP, with ERSA and the profession generally, press for more effort on research, and a greater focus on the frontline?

David Imber FIEP
Principal | the good employability company



Dear Editor

Is Covid causing a she-cession as well as a recession? In the early part of 2020 the Government was trumpeting the fact that more women than ever were in the labour market. But the pandemic has put paid to that.

Family responsibilities are central to women's employability. The fact that in most families women still earn less than men and in the no-man's land between lockdown ending and schools opening it often made financial sense for fathers to go back to work and mothers to continue to home educate and care. Even when schools re-opened, women with young children who did want to go back to work found social distancing has meant that fewer childcare places were available, and in some cases the childcare they used was no longer financially viable.

The dynamic of Covid has also contributed. Large sectors like retail and hospitality are now under threat due to the need for social distancing and just as they had been the first to be furloughed many women are now facing redundancy as the threat of a second wave and possible school closures makes them less employable.

What can we do to challenge this - Caroline Noakes MP, a former DWP minister, has suggested that the beauty industry should be supported with a 'Treat-out to help-out' alongside the 'Eat out to help out' programme




I have been monitoring these issues -and want to start to develop the debate in the sector if you are interested keep in touch on Twitter @BelinaLiz

Liz Sewell FIEP
Director | Belina GRoW

Collaborative working – the key to getting through this crisis



Teresa Scott OBE FIEP
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When I was Founder/CEO at Kennedy Scott I was tasked to come up with a one-liner, to really crystallise what the organisation was about. Thus I coined the mantra and “Share the Challenge and Secure the Future” was born. It summed up so well what I had always believed - that no one person or organisation can be successful alone. I have no idea if this mantra is still used by the new owners but what I do know is that it is more pertinent than ever now.

So come bang up to date and throw in the Covid 19 pandemic and its devastating impact, the fallout of weeks of lockdown. Not to mention those poor people who, on top of months of remote working under the threat of redundancy, have subsequently now lost their job through no fault of their own and we have a mammoth task ahead. So I am convinced that merely preparing customers for work is not what the next tranche of Employment support should be about. The bulk of these customers are well prepared for work, what they are NOT prepared for is losing their jobs in a market that six months ago was booming, despite Brexit.

So how do we solve this mounting problem of escalating unemployment? No-one has a crystal ball but one thing I believe which is vital to getting through it and out the other-side, is not trying to fix the problem alone or in isolation?

A prime contractor, however huge their turnover and keen they may be to take on these escalating numbers, cannot possibly achieve this alone and now more than

“Share the Challenge and Secure the Future - this is more pertinent than ever now.”

“The crisis facing our industry now desperately requires good collaborative working to maximise job opportunities for customers that are unemployed or newly redundant.”

ever our industry needs a collaborative approach! You may also be interested to learn that there is even an organisation dedicated to promoting exactly that: - The Institute of Collaborative Working (ICW)* whose mission is:-

‘To support people, organisations and business to understand the value of collaboration and the benefits achieved through collaborative working’.

And how the experts define collaborative working is so applicable to the huge challenge before us now: - People working jointly on an activity or project to achieve a common goal. Especially where this involves co-operation between several teams, departments and/or different organisations to achieve an agreed objective.

In a nutshell the crisis facing our industry now desperately requires good collaborative working to maximise job opportunities for customers that are unemployed or newly redundant.

The current mounting unemployment alongside further expected job losses over the coming months also requires a shared responsibility. We need to see programme design, which includes within it, a representation from industries which are still growing, and there are still some that are booming as a result of the pandemic. Amazon for example has seen its business quadruple since lockdown, with very many other on-line services (and not just groceries and retail) springing up to meet this challenge.

“IEP is at the forefront of collaborative working to meet the rapidly increasing demand for well prepared front-line staff.”

We need to see Amazon at the table sharing its future strategy for growth and planning it alongside those providing the people to enable and facilitate that growth. Our very own industry is booming with huge numbers of Work Coaches required by Jobcentre plus, matched only by their counterparts in the provider community who have just started to recruit frontline staff to meet the sudden increase in their own through flows. And (at the risk of being accused of a shameless plug) our very own IEP is at the forefront of collaborative working to meet the rapidly increasing demand for well prepared frontline staff.

Collaborating with Employers

Good examples of collaborative working can often be found in past pre-employment programmes but given the high employment rates of the last few years (pre covid) these have not been as popular with commissioners as they were ten-fifteen years ago. However lessons learned are as applicable today as they ever were. A successful and sustainable collaboration is illustrated in the collaborative delivery model for the Metropolitan Police Pre-Employment programme commissioned by DWP, which I was fortunate to lead on in the heady days of Employer-led programmes.

The aim was to increase under-represented BAME groups, along with better recruitment of women, within the Met Police. What was great about this collaboration, and it was successful on many levels, was the very clear understanding of each partners' respective roles and a respect and appreciation of the other partners' responsibilities, within this intensive process.

DWP commissioned the work and Jobcentre Plus managed the usual processes alongside the provider who delivered the training. The programme was marketed in conjunction with the Met Police, running open days in local community centres such as the Stonebridge Park estate on the outskirts of Wembley. Collaboration with the Met meant that a strong Police presence at these open days was a huge advantage in some less than welcoming parts of London.

Customers were voluntary and had to undergo a five-stage selection process, including a telephone sift and an induction assessment before they were even admitted to the programme. The programme ran for two years and was extended for a further two years, giving a 4 year collaborative working project and consistent recruitment for the Met Police. Well-prepared, highly motivated candidates, from a wide range of backgrounds, were coached to meet the growing demand for civilian type roles within the Met

Police across London and consisted of a full-time pre-employment training course, over four weeks, covering the 5 x key competences necessary for the Met.

The working relationships on the ground were a huge part of this effective process and necessitated good on-going and open communications and clear, concise administrative processes between Tutors, the Met Police College administrators at Hendon Police College, the Met Police training and recruitment department, Police officers, some civilian administrators and Jobcentre Plus. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, coupled with a flexible approach to what works is, in my opinion, the recipe for success in working collaboratively to achieve a shared goal.

The result of this programme was that hundreds of new PCSO's, deputy detention officers and even traffic wardens were recruited from local communities, across a range of London boroughs, successfully increasing the Met Police BAME recruitment from an average of 15% on a general Met Police recruitment drive, to 70% recruitment from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups. These were well paid jobs with excellent career prospects and I wanted to highlight this now, not least to point out that collaborative working is nothing new and has been an effective delivery model with employers in the past. It is still pertinent now when targeting opportunities and tailoring provision.

A Collaborative approach for Commissioners

I would also argue that a collaborative approach should be at the heart of commissioning to meet increased unemployment in the coming year and employers should be consulted at every stage, including prior to going out to tender new provision.

Digital service providers - and we are talking the big guns; Google, Microsoft, Apple, not to mention booming UK Fintech companies and big Gaming companies should all be sitting alongside DWP policy makers and commissioners to directly inform the programmes we need for the future. For example, at the time of writing ARM, an innovative Cambridge based digital technology company providing apps and IP security, have just signed a deal with US based Nvidia with a pledge to maintain jobs in Cambridge and further recruit 100's of software engineers across the UK in the coming months. Digital recruitment remains a buoyant industry and the Gaming market is still booming, (recruitment colleagues confirm), which is to be expected given that we are all spending more time at home rather than out socialising.

It's easy to get sucked into the doom and gloom of the pandemic pandemonium, but there are opportunities now and there is hope out there, so we need to be the catalyst to finding it and working collaboratively with employers to prepare unemployed customers to meet these new challenges.

Employers are to be Prized

Employers also desperately need a coordinated approach rather than individual providers, in competition with each other, promoting their own customers, even if they are inappropriate for the roles in question. Employers will become very quickly disenfranchised with the employability community if they are inundated with inappropriate candidates from multiple providers. A job opportunity, or better still multiple opportunities, needs to be given due respect with regard to preparing the right candidates but this requires a more fundamental shift from customer-centred provision to a more balanced perspective, which takes better account of employers. I would always advocate that the employer is the prize in this process and whatever you do – keep them happy!

They must be given a professional and supportive service, providing appropriate candidates from one coordinated source, to ensure repeat opportunities are still fed through in future. However, and this bit might be contentious for some, if you don't have the right candidates, if you don't have enough choice or selection in your own customer base, then please share your vacancies with others who do. This ensures the employer is kept happy and will return with further opportunities in the future, moreover it critically maintains credibility for the employability industry moving forward.

Finally, I would like to leave you with some food for thought: Future commissioning should work in tandem and in collaboration with employers to provide a comprehensive, nationally coordinated, and effective, up-to-the-minute 'Track and Trace' of growing employers, and short-medium term growth industries, along with national and local job opportunities for newly unemployed, jobseekers..... but perhaps that is another discussion entirely.

Reference ICW - <https://instituteformcollaborativeworking.com/ICW-Awards>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Teresa Scott OBE FIEP is the Founder and CEO of KSTD Consulting.

Teresa founded award-winning Employability specialist, Kennedy Scott, which she led for 30 years. Now a consultant specialising in Leadership/Performance/ Employability & Employer-Led initiatives, she holds a number of Board Directorships, was the ERSA Lifetime Achievement award winner in 2016 and was awarded the OBE in 2018, for Services to Entrepreneurship & Employability.



Employability in the ‘new world’



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Recap - Not many years ago, UK employability professionals led the world, along with colleagues in countries like Australia, America and Holland.

Underpinning remarkable labour market resilience, tens of thousands of unsung professionals helped millions of socially disadvantaged jobseekers and precariously employed workers to progress in life and work.

Then an implosion happened. Political mud slung at the ‘flagship’ Work Programme stuck, and tabloids told employability professionals that their work was ‘worse than doing nothing’; damaging staff morale, hindering customer recruitment and disengaging employers.

As a consequence, instead of correcting the programme’s commercial flaws and building on its really very successful performance, the government cut employment services by around 80%.

Within around five years we went from having 70,000+ outsourced employability professionals, to close to 15,000; there was an outpouring of talent and expertise that compounded the effects of Local Authorities having to cut their employment teams, and there was a shift to more reliance on Housing Associations and Skills Providers to take up the employability agenda.

Beneath the headlines

Yet, despite an apparent ‘jobs miracle’, unemployment (and economic inactivity) hadn’t actually been solved: there were still troubled estates and generational unemployment hotspots; half of ‘NEET’ young people didn’t engage with Jobcentre Plus (JCP), remaining ‘hidden’; BAME groups and lone parents remained less likely to be in work; numbers of people with no qualifications and low skills stayed stubbornly high; productivity kept falling; precarious employment kept climbing, and: the government’s own target to support one million extra disabled jobseekers into work had to be extended over ten years.

“Within a week or two of the first lockdown starting, it became clear that we were in for a massive increase in unemployment and would urgently need to rebuild the sector. But could we see this as an opportunity to rebuild it even better than before?”

Some curious policy decisions also complicated matters: the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) stopped JCP performance reporting, so that outsourced and government run services couldn’t be compared (like-for-like); government expanded JCP, investing heavily in virtual nationalisation of much of the sector, and we heard no more of the DEL/AME switch, the departmental budget mechanism enabling performance-related reinvestment in employment services.

Coronavirus

Then, Covid-19 happened.

Within a week or two of the first lockdown starting, it became clear that we were in for a massive increase in unemployment and would urgently need to rebuild the sector. But could we see this as an opportunity to rebuild it even better than before?

Employment Response to Coronavirus

In July 2020, DWP launched its tender for a nationwide Commercial Agreement for Employment and Health Related Services (CAEHRS), notified to be worth £7.5 billion over 5 years. This accompanied some extraordinary measures, including: furlough schemes; a promised ‘Kick Start’ programme for younger people; a national digital employment programme, and other short-term commissioning responses.

The DWP Commercial Strategy was also almost

“After more than a decade of ministers talking about it, wholesale integration of employment and skills services might finally be realisable.”

simultaneously released, stating that: ‘(DWP) will work with the other government departments, employers, colleges and skills suppliers locally on an ongoing basis (to) develop alignment between the employment and skills systems.’ A really significant statement. After more than a decade of ministers talking about it, wholesale integration of employment and skills services might finally be realisable.

A few days later, a pipeline notification was also announced, for a new, £1 billion employment programme, to help long-term unemployed jobseekers into sustained employment.

These were welcome announcements. Concerned sector leaders had recommended them in the report ‘Employment Response to Coronavirus’¹.

Employability in the ‘new world’

Digital, telephone, video and online working practices expanded dramatically during the lockdown, and ‘social distancing’ measures produced seismic changes in how we live and work.

However, I’d like to consider a couple of approaches that also have potential to powerfully reset employment services for the post Covid-19 world:

First, DWP works in more clearly defined partnerships with the Department for Health (through the Work and Health Unit), ESFA, Mayoral and Devolved Authorities, Combined Authorities, and LEPs to design, commission, evaluate and coordinate post Covid-19 employment programmes through CAEHRs.

There is a huge opportunity now, to make devolution meaningful for employment services, and subsidiarity real. But, without DWP engaging in deeper partnerships, we are unlikely to see meaningful engagement of Devolved Authorities with the CAEHRs framework, where there is most scope to integrate and align national and local employment services.

A good start would be for DWP to replace its Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) with directly commissioned, local services. Smaller providers struggle to register on the BASWARE system and to operate the DPS, and although more Flexible Support Funds are needed (especially for Sector Based Work Academies, Rapid Response to Redundancy provision and targeted

support for disadvantaged groups) JCP could buy these directly, without the cost and bureaucracy of the DPS.

Using a simplified third tier of the CAEHRs Framework to call-off local programmes would allow employment funding to be better targeted, and eliminate system duplication, bureaucracy and unnecessary costs for both commissioners and providers.

Second, commissioners and providers find ways to coordinate funding for support related to employment, health and skills services, delivering them through combined ‘Personal Employment Accounts’.

If solutions were well designed, well delivered and carefully monitored, they would give individuals the freedom and flexibility to buy the right services at the right time for them, in their journey towards sustainable employment.

Key Workers (especially Employability Professionals) would help individuals to decide what they need; whether vocational training, Microsoft certification, a CSCS card, driving license, travel fares, childcare, work clothes, or help with other reasonable cost items acting as barriers to work and learning.

There are plenty of precedents for this. For example for skills (Individual Learning Accounts), Mental Health services (Personal Health Budgets²), employment support for homeless people (see beam.org) and disabled jobseekers (through innovative models like Kennedy Scott’s ‘Circle of Support’).

Employability isn’t delivered in isolation, so we need to go beyond ‘just employability’ programmes, and bring all of this together, even at scale.

According to Freddie Shepherd, “ministers should devise a comprehensive ‘Covid-19 Mental Health and Wellness Package’ to cope with the extra burden caused by the virus... with a more person-centred focus on the individual citizen.” This is a great suggestion, but Covid-19 necessitates going even further. More comprehensive reform is needed to allow diverse services to work flexibly and responsively together and meet peoples’ and employers’ fully situational needs, especially during these complex and challenging times.

If the main funding streams were aligned, blended, accessible and controllable at the frontline, then we might even dare to dream of an end to ‘intractable’ barriers to employment.

“Employability isn’t delivered in isolation, so we need to go beyond ‘just employability’ programmes, and bring all of this together, even at scale.”

“DWP needs to match its rhetoric with coordinated action. There is a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to recreate an integrated employment, health and skills system that is genuinely world leading.”

Now and the Future

DWP needs to match its rhetoric with coordinated action. There is a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to recreate an integrated employment, health and skills system that is genuinely world leading.

DWP working more collaboratively with other parts of government (especially in a more devolved way) can produce better results than ever before.

Multiple funding streams that are currently disjointed and complicated to commission, administer and deliver, could all be marshalled together to meet front-line, individual and employer service needs far more effectively. Innovative delivery models like Personal Employment Accounts can comprehensively address employment related problems by working with real people at the level that they occur.

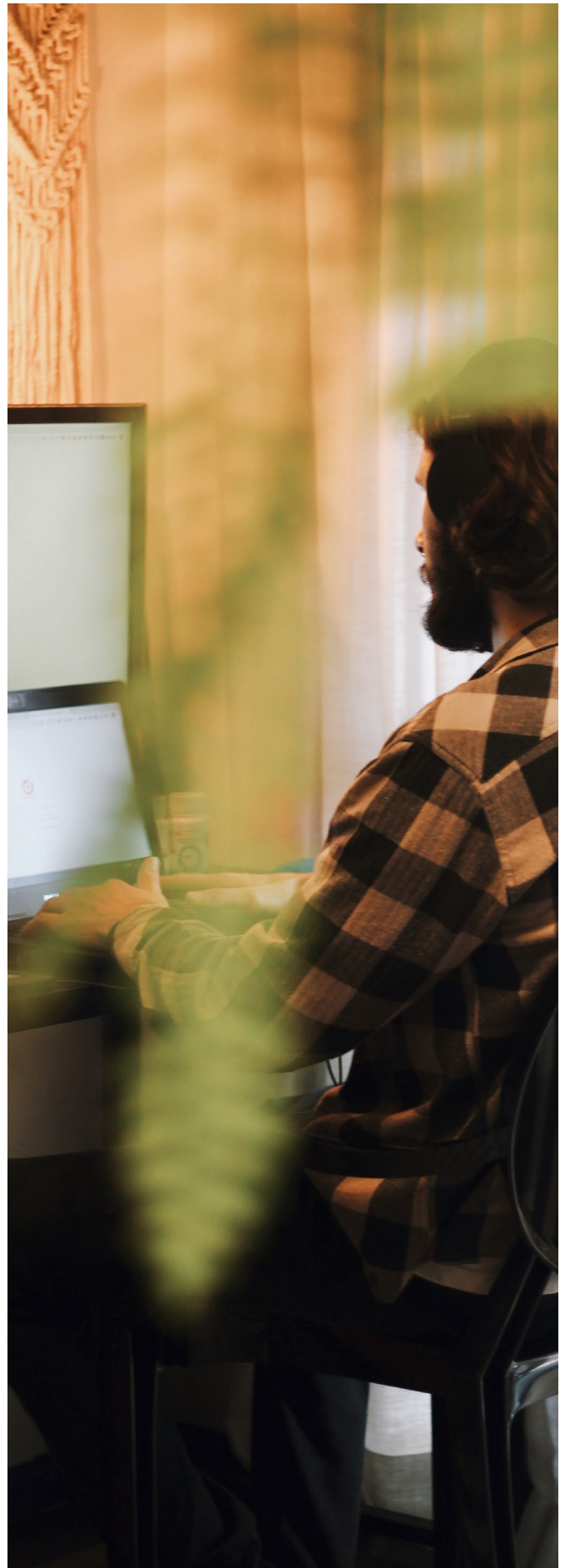
Notes

1. Employment Response to Coronavirus, Cosens, 2020 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FUSnadVZVypwdb8QG9vOcvCmGSKlqfvH/view>
2. NHS Personal Health Budgets for Mental Health <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personal-health-budgets/personal-health-budgets-for-mental-health/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark David Cosens FIEP is the Founder of Cosens Consult.




Mark is an independent consultant, specialising in tender-related services and research; primarily for employment and training. He is interested in reform. Through experience, he believes that (especially since Covid-19) employment services need to be designed, commissioned and delivered in more relevant ways and with greater clarity of coordinated purpose.



How can we better integrate employer engagement into service delivery?



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When it comes to business engagement with employment and skills programmes there are two uncomfortable facts. Firstly, the majority of UK businesses do not interact with employment and skills programmes. Secondly, businesses experience a sliding scale of service quality from providers.

Almost every penny in this industry is spent on the supply side of the equation. Services to participants shouldn't be compromised but surely there is benefit in thinking about how investing in sensible, progressive business engagement would benefit more participants by enabling businesses to hire and progress their staff? But we need to recognise the conflict of interest this creates when programme providers deliver business engagement on behalf of other (competing) providers. Provider agendas will supersede business need.

It's not employment and skills providers 'fault' per se, but rather reflects a commissioning and funding environment that rarely considers businesses as stakeholders in product and programme design. This creates labour markets awash with programmes, providers and products that vie for businesses' attention. Managers don't tend to wake up one morning thinking, 'I really need a traineeship,' or, 'today I'm going to help halve the disability employment gap.' Instead, they wake up worrying about revenue, overheads, HR challenges and issues relating to the day-to-day running of their business. But the majority of programmes - be it apprenticeships, programmes for the long-term unemployed, for NEETs and the hundreds of other similar programmes - require input and collaboration from an employer, whether a job, work placement, in-work training etc. So why are there scores of

programmes within the same labour markets, which result in people on the ground banging on the doors of businesses trying to sell products that businesses don't understand, let alone want? It seems bonkers, doesn't it? Businesses are consistent in their feedback that they don't want to receive numerous 'cold calls' from multiple organisations pushing incomprehensible products. This creates employer engagement, not employer engagement.

A couple of years ago a major UK airport group faced a predicament that is all too common. Between themselves and the other businesses on their site they employed 30,000 people and they struggled to recruit, retain and upskill employees. Yet, the main challenge for them was the volume of inbound calls from over 40 local training and employment providers offering a range of siloed and competing products. The HR team at the airport asked for a group of these providers to come together to collaborate on business needs across the airport, but organisational agendas and egos prevented effective collaboration, meaning the providers missed a huge number of vacancies and training opportunities. Madness.

We believe that improvements that can be made to benefit all stakeholders (government, individuals, providers and employers). And herein lies the big opportunity. Businesses have needs, worries and want help and employability organisations and training providers have a collective expertise that is of huge value to the business community. Understanding their need provides a chance to address the need, establish a relationship and make use of your expertise (or the expertise of collaborators) to help that business. There are some great examples of how collaboration and

well-designed business engagement strategies can operate. Southwark and Lambeth Local Authorities have both commissioned brokerage models that aim to 'fit' the local business needs with the statutory services available in that area. For example, an independent business-focussed service (broker) engages local businesses to gain an understanding of their business requirements. The broker, who is fluent in all local provision on offer, will then triage the business and craft a bespoke proposal that involves one (or many) of the available services in order to meet the business need in the best possible way. This is a needs-led approach rather than a product-led approach. ['How can I help you?'](#) rather than 'Please can you help me?'

So here's the thing; in an environment where providers must meet their contractual obligations (sometimes at the expense of local competitors with an eye on performance tables) collaboration through goodwill is limited to the best interests of the provider and their programme participants. 'What gets measured gets done.' When business needs are placed on an equal footing (and never at the expense of participant need) we can create a truly transformational environment: more businesses using employment and skills programmes for their recruitment and training needs and coming back time and again because their experience was so good.

There are real gains to be made here. If we accept that business awareness of employment and skills programmes is low, engagement is low and business needs are high, we have a perfect storm to create more opportunities for participants, increase business [partnerships](#) with the sector and improve the efficacy of services to businesses through investment and collaboration. Rather than providers scrapping to increase their share of the pie, the real goal is to increase the size of the pie for everyone.

The recently-published [DWP Commissioning Strategy](#) references DWP's desire to see ['coopetition'](#) between providers in the market. Whilst details are yet to be finalised (and input from practitioners is key), an obvious area of collaboration could be the shared destination of the myriad of programmes, i.e. the businesses we are all seeking to engage. [Kickstart](#) is already creating a worrying bun fight (again) for employer attention, pushing a good idea wrapped up in industry language with the assumption [that businesses 'must want free money to take on a young person'](#).

The truth is that DWP and similar commissioners have an excellent array of services for employers. But they are poorly promoted and rarely integrated to create a compelling suite of services – think Access to Work as a prime example. Businesses also do not want things for free if they a) involve significant transaction costs for them to engage and b) do not see the business benefits.

Since the start of 2020, we have been engaged in a [project](#) to address some of these issues to increase business involvement in employment and skills programmes and improve the service businesses receive. The response from providers within the sector has been tremendous. Providers understand that businesses face challenges when trying to engage with the ecosystem of providers in their local area and some excellent practices have been evidenced along the way. This demonstrates that, while commissioner behaviour is an important part of the puzzle of employer engagement, there is still much that employability practitioners can do on the ground to improve business engagement.

Here is a suggestion; an independent, business facing service that helps bridge the gap between the complex and confusing employment and skills landscape, that will triage individual business requirements and bring these effectively into the provider/programme community to best meet the needs of business. We'd like DWP, devolved regions and other commissioners to recognise that the current landscape is not designed around businesses but there is the potential to try a model where everyone gains. We are only at the beginning of the economic challenges brought about by COVID-19 and the tried and tested approaches are not going to make the difference to support unemployed people and the businesses required to take them on. Let's truly come together to create a system where everyone benefits.

"This creates employer enagement, not employer engagement."

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Employability from a futurist's perspective



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The current pandemic has only fast-tracked the inevitable. There is no better a time than now to make employability the centre stage of education, careers and corporate planning.

Educational systems, irrespective of geography, have been unable to keep up with the changing nature of work. Hence it is common to hear dissatisfied employers telling you that they are struggling to find the 'right people' for the role. This is usually attributed to the lack of skills and competencies of potential candidates in spite of having qualifications from credible and often expensive institutions including Colleges and Universities.

A McKinsey survey of young people and employers in nine countries revealed that 40 percent of employers said a lack of skills was the main reason for entry-level job vacancies. Sixty percent said that new graduates were not adequately prepared for the world of work. There were gaps in technical skills such as STEM subject degrees but also in soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and punctuality.

Clearly, educational institutions have to somehow make sense of and leverage the data they already capture from students during admissions such as aptitudes, hobbies and statements of purpose and couple it with tools such as psychometric assessments and continuous assessment (formative, summative etc.) data to produce a customised employability roadmap and personal development plan for each learner. The resources for such exercises already exist and we do not have to reinvent the wheel. The role of Career Counsellors has to be more involved in certain countries, while in developing countries some minimum standards have to be introduced to qualify someone as a Career Counsellor.

As a foresight practitioner and futurist, I am intrigued with how the future of a particular event or industry might turn out. When you track the signals centered

around employability, it becomes immediately evident that the future holds fewer JOBS and EMPLOYMENT opportunities for individuals, but EMPLOYABILITY should increase for people due to numerous and diverse free-lance and ad hoc opportunities on projects.

Collaborative economy platforms are reinventing capitalism as we know it today. There is a reason why I wrote the words: jobs, employment, and employability in capital letters earlier. Routine conversations that I have with fresh graduates, teenagers and people currently employed in organisations reveal that almost all of them have somehow come to relate employability with being able to always be employed with an employer. The occasional training or workshop that is attended by most of them is supposedly meant to compensate for the years of neglect of personal development and will result in the improvement of their overall employability.

Jobs and employment have come to mean working for someone while the illusive dream of the opposite scenario is termed as entrepreneurship. Little do they realise that employability, in the words of Lee Harvey, is not a set of skills but a range of experiences and attributes developed through higher-level learning and thus employability is not a "product" but a process of learning. It is this PROCESS of learning that has become so inefficient, cumbersome, biased, expensive, and incongruent. Couple this with the general global lack of awareness about employability and the advances in technologies like AI, RPA, IoT, Blockchains and UAVs/ Autonomous Driving and you have a disaster waiting to happen.

According to a McKinsey Global Institute briefing note, research on the automation potential of the global economy, focusing on 46 countries representing about 80 percent of the global workforce, has examined more than 2,000 work activities and quantified the technical feasibility of automating each of them. The proportion of occupations that can be fully automated using current technology is actually small—less than

5 percent. An additional important finding is that even if whole occupations are not automated, partial automation (where only some activities that make up an occupation are automated) will affect almost all occupations to a greater or lesser degree. The impact will be felt not only by factory workers and clerks but also by landscape gardeners and dental lab technicians, fashion designers, insurance sales representatives, and even CEOs. The research also found that about 60 percent of all occupations have at least 30 percent of activities that are technically automatable, based on current technologies. This means that most occupations will change, and more people will have to work alongside technology.

PwC Australia's Consulting Partner, Amanda McIntyre acknowledges that she too is facing an ever changing (and somewhat volatile) future work environment. Her key to staying relevant and employable? Continuously updating your skill set to suit future work needs. "Like everyone, I face a future career in which the nature of work will change significantly. It is important to understand the key skills employees in both the private and public sectors will need in the future... If we are to succeed in our future careers, we need to ensure we are equipped with the skills that will be valuable."

And those are golden words of wisdom. Continuous personal and professional development (recall earlier that I said employability = experiences), is the key to remain relevant and valuable.

Finally, there are a range of skills and competencies that will become more desirable and valuable to have in the future. For example, the top ten skills the World Economic Forum have identified to be of increasing value to future workplaces include:

Creativity - is predicted to become a key desired skill in the future. Before you say – but I'm not a 'creative' person, remember that creativity is not the exclusive domain of those in the arts. If you're able to connect the dots with seemingly disparate information and throw all the ideas together to present something 'new', then you are a creative person.

Emotional intelligence – It's that intangible 'something' that helps us tune into the kaleidoscope of human emotions, and measure how adept we are at adjusting our behaviour depending on the mood of a colleague, or even our own internal feelings.

Complex problem solving – The ability to 'solve novel, ill-defined, multi-dimensional problems in complex, real-world settings.' Think climate change, terrorism, and poverty.

Judgement and decision making – In the future, given the speed at which volume of data can be generated and accessed, there will be a growing need to analyse the numbers, find actionable insights, to inform

business strategy and decisions.

Cognitive flexibility – the mental ability to switch between thinking about two different concepts, and to think about multiple concepts simultaneously.

Critical thinking – Being able to use logic and reasoning to interrogate an issue or problem, consider various solutions to the problem, and weigh up the pros and cons of each approach.

People Management – It is vital that in the future, managers and team leaders know how to motivate their teams, maximise their productivity and respond to their needs.

Coordinating with others – This involves strong communication skills, an awareness of other people's strengths and weaknesses, and being able to work with a range of different personalities.

Service Orientation – This is all about actively looking for ways to help people and shining a spotlight on end users, consumers, or citizens, and anticipating what their needs will be in the future.

Negotiation – People in purely technical occupations will soon be expected to show greater interpersonal skills, and being able to negotiate with your colleagues, managers, clients, and teams will be vital.

"It is important to understand the key skills employees in both the private and public sectors will need in the future... If we are to succeed in our future careers, we need to ensure we are equipped with the skills that will be valuable."

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Hassan is a futurist, thought leader, facilitator, coach and writer who collaborates with individuals, institutions, and organisations to sift through the noise and identify signals which will eventually shape the future of the topic or issue being explored. Hassan then comes up with forecasts, strategies, and action plans to capitalise on the opportunities identified.

Beyond boom and bust: how can we build resilient employability services across the economic cycle?



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With unemployment poised to soar, the employability sector is being called to action. The focus will be on how to best support those affected back into decent, sustainable work. But the coming investment also represents a generational opportunity for the sector to put itself on a more sustainable footing, beyond the next economic cycle. It must not be wasted.

The countercyclical nature of employability services poses familiar challenges. The economic boom-bust cycle leaves the sector hollowed and de-skilled at the start of the downturn, just when it is most needed. It creates traumatic redundancies, business disruption and loss of performance during the upturn, as contracts wind down.

But while the cycle is inevitable, the damage need not be. How can the sector manage the cycle better to improve responsiveness, limit uncertainty for businesses and employees, and maintain quality service delivery?

Part of the answer is a new approach to planning. In this article we show how long-term scenario planning and innovative thinking can create a more responsive and resilient sector.

“The coming investment represents a generational opportunity for the sector to put itself on a more sustainable footing, beyond the next economic cycle. It must not be wasted.”

Scenario planning improves responsiveness to commissioning changes

Scenario planning in industry has been around for more than 50 years. It famously guided Shell to gain early access to Russian oil fields when few others imagined that the USSR would disintegrate.

Employability providers and commissioners may not have to imagine the disintegration of a nation but identifying scenarios that go beyond the coming downturn – and genuinely incorporating these into strategic and operational planning – is a powerful tool to build longer-term resilience and sustainability. Using scenario planning, leaders develop detailed visions of potential futures, then use these for decision-making during uncertainty. Scenario planning balances the task of predicting the future with reacting to the immediate context.

External drivers inform future scenarios

Local, national and global phenomena can all effect the employability sector and individual providers. Exploring these enables the sector to design meaningful but provocative scenarios. It is important to consider the many drivers that could influence the sector:

POLITICS AND POLICY DIRECTIONS – The post-referendum era has revealed the spectrum of politics and policy possibilities is much wider than we imagined previously. Devolution, centralisation, nationalisation and further outsourcing in employability and related services are all realistic for future commissioning. With the work and health agenda prominent, and a focus in public services on holistic assessment and

“The nature of work will continue to change, with portfolio careers, flexible working, and lifelong learning likely to remain, if not accelerate.”

social determinants, we could see further integration of contracts or supply chains across traditional sector boundaries.

THE NEW ECONOMY – Ongoing changes in the broader economy will influence both the nature of employability services and the labour market in which jobseekers are engaged. In the medium term, the post-crisis scale of unemployment and underemployment will be critical. But deeper shifts are equally important.

The economy’s response to climate change will drive investment swings across geographies and industries with increasing pace. Brexit and the rapid rise of developing economies will influence Britain’s industrial mix and areas of strength.

SOCIAL CHANGE – The nature of work will continue to change, with portfolio careers, flexible working, and lifelong learning likely to remain, if not accelerate. Demographic change will also shape demand for employability services, with older workers an increasingly critical and engaged part of the labour force. Concerns about privacy may also strengthen in response to increasingly pervasive technology.

TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION – Technology and digitisation will reshape the expectations of employability service users, as well as the broader world of work. Developments such as the growth of ubiquitous connectivity mean service users will demand increasingly personalised, responsive support. Meanwhile, innovation and investment could give rise to whole new industries and jobs.

Automation will rapidly change labour markets, displacing demand for routine manual and cognitive jobs, but also creating new demand for others, including in fields not traditionally considered vocational, like creative arts and design.

These factors can read like a verse from Billy Joel’s ‘We didn’t start the fire’. Unless the sector deeply explores these drivers and use them to create plausible future scenarios, it risks another Groundhog Day.

New ideas emerge in response

Good business model ideas can emerge from a single scenario. In the case of Shell, one scenario stepped through the events that would lead to the collapse of the USSR, enabling it to be more responsive as world

events unfolded. More typically, ideas emerge from the collision of several scenarios to create more robust business model ideas. Innovative ideas that could emerge from good scenario planning include:

1. The wrap-around business – Employability providers excel in many capabilities that are valuable in other public services, including bidding and business development; mobilisation; case management; supply chain and partnership management; learning and development; service system knowledge and networks; and holistic assessments.

For some providers, extending into relevant but separate service lines will be an effective way not only to smooth the boom and bust, but also to deliver further value that aligns with their purpose, mission and values. This strategy is often discussed but rarely executed effectively. This might be because providers leave it too late in the cycle. By this stage, the risk appetite and investment requirement associated with diversification may be limited. Clearly, planning must have a sufficient horizon and contemplate low unemployment scenarios right from the start, as discussed above.

2. Multi-sector career paths – We know employability practitioners have a plethora of skills that apply in other sectors, from caseload management to behavioural change techniques to coaching and mentoring. Alongside the effort to professionalise employability practice, there is an opportunity for providers to help employees see themselves and their skills in a broader context.

It is essential that we do not construct a silo of our own. We must ensure that sectoral competencies are transferable. In an ideal world, brilliant employability professionals would spend time in other sectors during bust phases then return during boom phases, bringing fresh perspectives, skills and motivation.

3. Life-cycle stewards – Commissioners frequently invoke ‘market stewardship’ to frame their role managing public service markets. Under this framework, commissioners consider not just the needs of the user and the outcomes being sought, but also the broader dynamics shaping the operations and outcomes of the market. Using scenario planning, commissioners could think beyond a single economic cycle and lay out a longer vision and approach.

“We know employability practitioners have a plethora of skills that apply in other sectors, from caseload management to behavioural change techniques to coaching and mentoring.”

“By taking scenario planning seriously and infusing it with innovative thinking, providers can make better strategic and operational decisions, explore diversification, and work with staff to reframe employability career pathways.”

For example, we envisage central and/or local governments maintaining a playbook for scaling up employability services, as part of economic emergency response planning. This would support improved sector responsiveness and push commissioners to maintain pilot light capability by investing in professional development, research and evaluation. Recent commentary, including in these pages, highlights the risks of forgetting past lessons in the rush to scale up.

Managing the boom and bust cycle will require ongoing innovation

As the new system takes shape, managing the next bust phase and beyond should be part of the conversation for providers and commissioners. The sector must not repeat the mistakes of assuming the growth phase will last forever or delaying planning until it is too late.

By taking scenario planning seriously and infusing it with innovative thinking, providers can make better strategic and operational decisions, explore diversification, and work with staff to reframe employability career pathways. Concurrently, commissioners can support these efforts by adopting a whole-of-cycle stewardship approach.

We hope these ideas spark discussion and that creative strategies for managing the employability sector's boom and bust cycle emerge.

Over the next few months, Nous is working with the IEP. We will engage the sector leaders through a set of scenario planning workshops and will present a synthesis of this work at the 2021 IEP Summit. The workshops will be delivered online with provisional dates set for mid-to-late November.

Please email scott.parkin@iemployability.org, Zac.ashkanasy@nousgroup.com or Jamie.tang@nousgroup.com to register your interest.

“Unless the sector deeply explores these drivers and use them to create plausible future scenarios, it risks another Groundhog Day.”



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