Responsive Career Pathways

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Applying Behavioural Insights to Career Guidance

Sasha Tregebov, Andreea Seusan & Michelle Krieger

Future Skills Centre
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Blueprint

Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Sasha Tregebov is the Director of BIT Canada, the Canadian office of the [Behavioural Insights Team](). Prior to establishing BIT Canada in 2019, Sasha worked in BIT's New York City office, overseeing a large program of work with US cities. Sasha holds a Master of Public Policy and Administration from Ryerson University.

Andreea Seusan is a Senior Advisor with BIT Canada. Prior to joining BIT, she worked at UNICEF where she applied behavioural science to advocate with governments and businesses around the world for policies that support children's development. Andreea holds a Master of Public Health from Columbia University, where she specialized in health behaviour change.

Michelle A. Krieger is an Associate Advisor with the Behavioural Insights Team. She holds a PhD in Applied Social Psychology. Prior to joining BIT, she conducted research in the areas of online gender-based and sexual violence, job search behaviours, and health equity.

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About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded based on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change. Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization. As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

About The Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre is a forward-looking organization that prototypes, tests and measures new and innovative approaches to skills development and training. It is passionate about building a resilient learning nation, backed by an agile and responsive skills ecosystem that equips everyone with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and share in Canada's prosperity.

As a Pan-Canadian organization, FSC works with partners across the country to understand how global trends affect the economy, and to identify what skills working-age adults need to thrive within an ever-evolving environment. FSC is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program and was founded as a partnership between Ryerson University, Blueprint and the Conference Board of Canada.

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Executive Summary

High-quality, responsive career guidance can be a critical enabler of skills development and better employment outcomes for Canadians. However, career guidance in Canada is not consistent; practices and challenges vary greatly across provinces, service providers, and service recipient populations.

Overall, Canadians face a number of barriers to accessing career guidance services,[1] including behavioural and motivational barriers. Overcoming these barriers is a crucial part of achieving the Future Skills Centre's (FSC) vision for responsive career pathways. This paper identifies some of those behavioural and motivational barriers and, based on a literature review of approximately 75 academic and grey literature papers, proposes some promising strategies for addressing them.

There is real opportunity for the FSC and other system actors to chart new ground by supporting the advancement of these strategic ideas. The most promising opportunities will integrate them into the development of new, innovative approaches to responsive career pathways and support their delivery through policy and system-level change. Such change should seek to address the deep-seated, structural and systemic root causes of the barriers addressed here.

1 Hyperlinked terms throughout the paper connect to the Glossary.

Key Themes

Increased awareness of career guidance is important but insufficient.	Job seekers and their supporters need to be engaged where they are, and the benefits of career guidance made more personally relevant.
There is a need to reduce administrative burdens on practitioners and their clients.	Entry into career guidance services needs to be made as easy as possible, and administrative processes simplified.
The relationship between practitioners and their clients must be prioritized.	Practitioners need to build trust and rapport with their clients, and support them to accomplish their goals.
Practitioners need to implement more structured and personalized assessments and goal-setting activities.	Thorough, strengths-based assessments should be conducted to tailor guidance to clients, and to help mitigate demotivation.
Clients must be empowered to develop their own job search goals and be supported through implementation.	Clients should lead the development of their employment goals and plans while benefiting from timely and personal prompts and reminders.
Job readiness activities must be complemented with interventions that support self-efficacy and resilience.	Beyond traditional job readiness activities such as CV development and interview preparation, practitioners can help clients identify their personal motivations for building a career and enlist social supports to help foster sustainable employment outcomes.

High-quality, responsive career guidance is a crucial contributor to skills development and better employment outcomes for Canadians. Today, a wide range of barriers limit Canadians' ability to access these services and affect the impact the services have on labour market outcomes.

1 Introduction

Introduction

Career Guidance in Canada: A Highly Varied Landscape

The field of career guidance in Canada is heterogeneous, to put it mildly. Current practices and challenges vary significantly across provinces, service providers and service recipient populations. But high-quality, responsive career guidance is a crucial contributor to skills development and better employment outcomes for Canadians. Today, a wide range of barriers limit Canadians' ability to access these services and affect the impact the services have on labour market outcomes.

This paper seeks to identify significant behavioural and motivational barriers to accessing and benefiting from career guidance, as well as promising, evidence-informed strategies to address those barriers. Alongside the work of other research teams, these ideas will inform a conceptual framework for responsive career pathways in Canada as well as opportunities and options for Future Skills Centre (FSC) investments in realizing this framework.

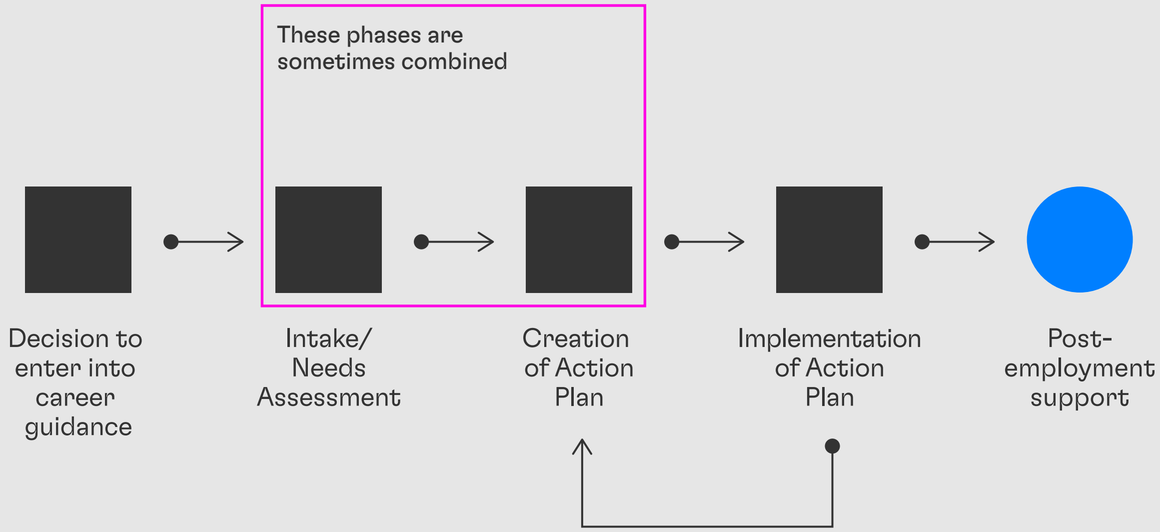
The ideas put forward in this paper are based on a review of about 75 relevant peer-reviewed articles and grey literature publications, as well as our applied behavioural science experience and expertise. We found very little behavioural science literature examining career guidance interventions, so the review relied on relevant behavioural theories and interventions from adjacent domains. It also benefited from the advice and guidance of several Canadian practitioners and leaders that informed our understanding of common career guidance models. This is a complex policy domain and the literature review and ideas arising from it are far from comprehensive. However, we believe that the ideas put forward can meaningfully inform the proposed conceptual framework, options for support, and directions for future research.

While many of our ideas are likely to be broadly applicable, we developed them to address career guidance delivered through publicly funded employment services. We focused on recommendations that were relevant to the predominant job readiness model of career guidance. However, we believe the large majority of them are equally relevant to lifelong-learning, career development models. Taking a behavioural science perspective, we prioritize the cognitive, emotional and social context of career guidance. As a result, our ideas build on and reinforce important features of client-centred service delivery that are a significant focus of innovation efforts in the field.

Importantly, our ideas focus on the needs of service recipients that face significant barriers to sustainable, high-quality employment. These are the people who can benefit most from more effective, accessible career guidance. We recognize that unequal access to resources, structural racism and other systemic issues represent the most significant barriers to accessing and benefiting from career guidance (and to better labour market outcomes more broadly). We want to be clear that our ideas to address the behavioural and motivational challenges experienced by clients and career practitioners do not obviate the need for addressing these issues.

Structure of this Paper

Our ideas are organized around a generic version of the "user journey" through career guidance, developed and validated through consultations with experts and practitioners. Though many clients will experience some version of this journey, these phases are neither standardized nor prescriptive across Canada. The activities undertaken in each phase of the journey may differ significantly from service provider to service provider or from province to province.



As a result of this heterogeneity, our recommendations will need to be reassessed for relevance in each implementation context. Detailed design of the interventions should be undertaken in partnership with practitioners and clients in the specific implementation context, then rigorously evaluated prior to scaling.

2

Key Barriers and Considerations

PHASE 1

Deciding to Enter Career Guidance

Description

Clients may enter career guidance services through multiple routes, such as formal or informal referrals or through their own self-directed pathway. In many cases, people will find their way into career guidance due to unemployment. Others may do so when they are looking to make a career change. This phase usually involves a potential client becoming aware of career guidance, making the decision to access it, enrolling, and making an initial appointment or "dropping in."

Key Barriers

There are a wide range of reasons that people who could benefit from career guidance do not enter the service. Many are structural: people who cannot find affordable childcare or transportation to the job centre are unlikely to take up the service. Potential clients without proof of identity (for example, a SIN card), a permanent address, or internet service may be unable to enrol in some cases. Further, the experience of living in poverty or experiencing job loss can lead to scarcity-induced cognitive load (Goldsmith, et al., 2020), which increases focus on immediate challenges and creates difficulty evaluating and choosing between options or services that would offer benefits in the longer term (Mani et al., 2020). These are the barriers that are most limiting uptake and should be a priority for investment, but there are also cognitive / motivational barriers that can limit entry.

Career practitioners and employers have identified that for a person to be considered "employable," at minimum, they must be motivated to work. A lack of motivation may prevent them from being reliable and dependable: characteristics that are essential for maintaining work (Evolution Group Inc, n.d). Having and maintaining motivation to work throughout the career guidance process is therefore foundational to entering and benefiting from the service.

Potential clients may be uncertain about what career services exist, or which they would be eligible for. A recent project conducted by the BC Behavioural Insights Group and WorkBC, a British Columbia employment services program, found that lack of knowledge about employment services was a significant barrier to uptake (BC Behavioural Insights Group, 2021). Potential beneficiaries of these services may also underestimate their need for the service and undervalue its potential benefits due to optimism bias / planning fallacy and present bias. The former leads people to think that finding work will be easier and take less time than it does, while the latter will encourage potential clients to focus more on the short-term costs of participating (for example, the time it will take) than the longer-term outcome of a higher potential chance for, or quality of, employment.[2] While these cognitive biases are not universal, on average, people underestimate how long it will take to find employment (Spinnewijn, 2015).

The attractiveness of career guidance may also be reduced by the perceived stigma of receiving the service. Stigma is a recognized barrier to entry for psychological counselling more generally, though research specific to career counselling is less common. Research with post-secondary students found that stigma played a role in determining attitudes toward career guidance (Ludwikowski et al., 2009), and our expert interviews suggested that a similar dynamic may be present for adults.[3]

Status quo bias may be a barrier for some people for whom seeking guidance would represent a departure from entrenched habits. This is particularly relevant for those individuals facing long-term unemployment as well as for precariously employed individuals whose industries are at risk of disruption but remain employed.

Finally, the intake or enrolment process can also generate barriers. Friction costs, seemingly minor additional steps required to enter or access services, can have a large deterrent effect on uptake (Service et al., 2015). If intake processes require a lot of information, use complex forms / language, or require multiple interactions, potential clients will be less likely to complete them. These frictions can further exacerbate the natural tendency to procrastinate or forget (which is especially powerful for people experiencing scarcity-induced cognitive load).

2 Present or status quo bias may be particularly relevant for individuals who are employed, but considering a career change or additional training. For most career guidance clients, the short-term costs of unemployment are likely quite clear and salient.

3 There is more stigma toward participating in career counselling in some groups than others. For more research on this see, for example, Rochlen & O'Brien, 2002; Wu et al., 2017.

Key Considerations

Use proactive communication to increase awareness of career guidance and its perceived value

Our first set of ideas for consideration focuses on helping people better understand the availability and potential benefits of career guidance services.

- **Engage job seekers and their supporters where they are.** We cannot rely on people identifying their own need for career guidance and proactively reaching out to take up support. Our discussions with practitioners indicated that awareness and understanding of the services is generally low, including among groups of Canadians that would benefit most from guidance services. To address this gap, service providers should identify the locations, channels and services that these individuals are already using and integrate information about career guidance and its benefits into these spaces. Where feasible, they should go beyond simply providing information to raise awareness and should seek to facilitate action (for example, pre-booking an initial appointment with a career practitioner to position career services as the default option). Provincial career services can tap into the federal Targeting, Referral and Feedback (TRF) tool to identify and target Employment Insurance (EI) applicants for employment programming, as is currently the case in Québec and British Columbia.

  Organizations promoting entry into career guidance should also consider audiences beyond the job seeker, reaching out to others who care about their wellbeing. Having a trusted messenger suggest the service or even book an appointment could help hesitant job seekers. One study found that sending parents of high-school students weekly, one-sentence personalized messages about their children's school performance decreased students' likelihood of dropping out (Kraft & Rogers, 2015).

- **Make the benefits of career guidance more personally relevant by tailoring outreach to different groups.** The experts we spoke with consistently noted that many people who could benefit from career guidance may not think that it is for "people like them" due to perceived stigma of receiving support, suggesting the need for tailored proactive communications. The use of narratives and testimonials from relatable messengers are promising strategies for tailored outreach (De Wit et al., 2008). In one study, older unemployed workers who were mailed information that outlined the benefits returning to work can have on future retirement benefits increased the number of people who accessed employment resources and returned to the workforce (Liebman & Luttmer, 2015). The approach resonated because retirement gains were a salient, important subject for the audience.

- **Make outreach more attractive by timing it to coincide with "fresh starts."** Making major changes in life, like pursuing a new vocation, is never easy given the human preference for the status quo and our tendency to focus on the short-term (Dai et al., 2014). However, there are moments in our lives when we are much more open to change, usually around big events or set milestones, and when people tend to make career decisions (such as after leaving school, a few years into working life and a few years prior to retirement) (Institute for Employment Studies, 2013). Offering career guidance services to people during these windows may increase interest and uptake of the services.

Make entry into services as easy as possible

Once people are interested in career guidance, either through a referral or their own initiative, it should be as simple, quick and painless as possible to take up the service. We propose several ways to reduce administrative frictions and increase accessibility. We recognize that these recommendations will not be relevant in some service models or may be more relevant to the next phase in the process, Intake / Needs Assessment. As noted above, there is significant variation in how entry, intake and needs assessment processes are structured.

- **Streamline referral and entry processes to reduce the effort required by potential clients.** This could include reducing the number of fields in forms and documentation requirements or pre-filling documentation where possible. Even if more information is ultimately required for effective service, the information that is collected before clients receive tangible support and / or get to know their advisor should be minimized. We recognize that this is a challenging recommendation for many service providers due to strict protocols; organizations setting out these requirements have a large role to play in implementing this recommendation.
- **Help clients navigate referral and entry processes through "signposting."** Where processes involve multiple steps, navigational aids should be provided to keep everything straight. For example, checklists can decrease cognitive load by simplifying actions and letting clients easily track their progress. A recent trial with WorkBC looked at the impact of different emails on uptake and found that an email containing a checklist and an indication that people were on the final step to accessing services increased the number of people who clicked on and submitted the application form (BC Behavioural Insights Group, 2021). In addition to helping people keep track of the process, the indication that they were close to completing it likely enhanced motivation given the goal-gradient effect, which is discussed later in the paper. Once a client has expressed interest in the service, we recommend a personal follow up from a named practitioner as soon as possible. This is a window of opportunity when the client is likely to be feeling motivated; human outreach at this early stage can help get the client in the door.
- **Prompt and remind potential clients about incomplete processes and initial appointments.** All people can get distracted, procrastinate, and forget. If processes are not complete, reminders that let people know they have already made progress and are close to completing their goal of getting support should be sent. Where the intake process is in-person or requires a virtual meeting, reminders should be sent the day before and the day of.

PHASE 2

Intake/Needs Assessment

Description

Intake refers to the completion of processes required to formally begin receiving career guidance services. It often takes place during an initial meeting in which a practitioner explains the services offered. Needs assessment, which is often combined with intake, seeks to identify the supports the client will need and their most compelling opportunities for good employment outcomes. Although this varies widely between practitioners and services, some degree of assessment is necessary to determine the services required and how best to offer them. Some service models triage clients into streams according to how "job-ready" they are deemed to be at intake and the level of support that will be needed.

The needs assessment is conducted over one or more interviews and this phase also includes formal or informal assessments completed by the client and practitioner. It may also include exercises and forms completed by each independently. At the end of this phase, the client, with the support of the practitioner, will decide on a career path or objective, which is usually to find or become qualified to work in a specific field.

This phase is an important moment in the client journey because it determines the initial and broad job goal. It also sets the tone for future interactions, providing practitioners with the opportunity to build rapport and cultivate client engagement and motivation.

Key Barriers

There are a number of complex barriers that may limit engagement at this stage. Rapport is an important determinant of client engagement and employment outcomes (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2018), and many researchers have called for a greater emphasis on relationship-building in the early stages of career guidance. A recent longitudinal study of career services in Israel found that the quality of working relationship between the client and practitioner predicted the depth of career exploration, and that client perceptions of rapport in the first session were the strongest predictor of outcomes (Elad-Strenger & Littman-Ovadia, 2012). In this study, rapport was understood as the "strength of the working alliance" and was measured through a variety of self-reported factors including "bond" and "alignment on goals and tasks." Complex or redundant intake processes create administrative burden ("sludge") for both the client and practitioner, undermining the development of a strong working relationship. This remains a barrier throughout the user journey as career practitioners spend a large proportion of session time filling out administrative paperwork due to the comprehensive documentation required by employment services. Interpersonal factors, such as a lack of shared culture or language, may also present barriers to building rapport. Funding constraints may generate large caseloads that limit time with clients: a structural factor limiting relationship-building. Expert interviews also suggested that Human Resources practices within career services do not consistently focus on this element of practitioner skill.

Conducting an effective needs assessment requires sustained engagement throughout interviews and activities. Sludge is also a barrier here, as is the low career-related self-efficacy of some job seekers. In particular, low self-efficacy reduces engagement with career exploration and guidance tasks as people feel that they will not be able to succeed (Falco & Summers, 2019).

Some equity groups have been found to consistently underestimate their suitability for particular roles. For instance, research with girls and women has shown that they tend to pursue careers in STEM at lower rates, not due to lower aptitude, but at least in part because of beliefs that they will be unlikely to succeed in such careers (Marra et al., 2009). Low self-efficacy can lead to avoidance behaviours, which not only limit career exploration, but also goal persistence in the face of challenges (Betz, 2001).

A diverse array of cognitive barriers can limit the quality of decisions related to setting career goals during the needs assessment phase. Job seekers often lack knowledge or have inaccurate perceptions about different occupations and the skills they require, especially given the rapid changes in the labour market. Occupational and labour market information (LMI) can improve the quality of decision-making by closing these gaps, but it also introduces biases in data interpretation. For example, base rate neglect may lead some practitioners and clients to focus on rates of change in a career rather than more important data regarding the absolute level of employment in that field. Confirmation bias may lead them to seek out and focus too much on LMI that reflects their preconceived ideas. As knowledge gaps are reduced, there is a risk of choice overload, a behavioural science concept demonstrating that — in some situations — providing individuals with more and more options can be detrimental to choice-making (Chernev et al., 2015). This barrier is likely deepened for clients experiencing scarcity, given the strain scarcity puts on cognitive bandwidth.

Stereotyping and availability bias may lead practitioners to fail to recommend jobs that do not match their preconceived notions regarding gender, ethnicity, ability or other factors. Individuals facing high barriers also tend to be screened out because of employer perceptions and they therefore struggle to gain access to the job market.

Clients' limited exposure to occupations is a significant barrier to both career exploration and job searching, limiting the availability of alternatives (Lent & Brown, 2020). Status quo bias may also lead clients to focus on jobs that are overtly related to their most recent or current position (beyond the extent to which that is rational).

Finally, there may be structural or programmatic limitations on the resources available for assessment and career exploration activities. Assessment tools may not be appropriate for all clients and there may be limited resources and ability to access alternative options. For instance, the ability to refer out to other assessment services, such as psychosocial assessments or translation services.

Key Considerations

Simplify administrative processes

Reducing sludge through streamlining and simplification where possible can increase completion of intake and needs assessment processes while also creating more time for building rapport and thoughtful consideration of job goals.

- **Simplified and streamlined processes should prioritize collecting the information that is necessary to deliver high-quality, tailored services.** In addition to consolidating forms and streamlining processes, common techniques to simplify communications include lowering the average reading level, making documents shorter, and using formatting to group related items and divide text into sections (Lasky-Fink et al., 2020). In one experiment, simplifying the application process for a subsidy offered to low-wage earners in the US by using a shorter worksheet increased uptake by over 39% (Bhargava & Manoli, 2015). In work with UK job centres, the Behavioural Insight Team (BIT) found that streamlining intake processes (in particular, consolidating the number of required forms) allowed more time for conversation (Sanders et al., 2021). Combined with other interventions, it also contributed to quicker returns to employment at a national scale.
- **Use "downtime" in the assessment process to prompt self-reflection.** Where administrative tasks cannot be taken out of client interactions, as is often the case in Canada right now, given the requirements placed on service providers, clients should be encouraged to use the time to reflect. In the UK job centres intervention described above, people completed a survey about their experiences and aspirations to prompt thinking on the questions prior to first meeting with a practitioner. The rationale was to boost feelings of self-efficacy in the first conversation (Sanders et al., 2021).
- **Ensure that human assistance is readily available throughout the process.** Some service models are moving toward fully online intake and needs assessment processes. In these cases, and in digital guidance processes more broadly, human assistance should be accessible, especially as digital processes are inherently a barrier for some.

Build trust and rapport

Developing a high-quality working relationship between the practitioner and client is a key task in this phase and lays the foundation for future work.

- **Design the physical environment to be welcoming.** The physical environment has been shown to influence clients' mood, behaviour and the quality of interactions in other counselling environments (Dijkstra et al., 2008), with client preferences driven by a desire for comfortable and welcoming spaces (Sanders & Lehmann, 2019). Such changes could also include efforts to create culturally welcoming spaces, for instance, having materials available in multiple languages. Changes to the physical environment to build a less formal, more comfortable atmosphere may help facilitate relationship-building. In BIT's career services work in the UK, desks were rearranged to move computers to the side, enabling practitioners and clients to face each other. While this change was not evaluated in isolation, as part of a broader set of interventions it resulted in higher rates of employment compared to intake as usual (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2018).
- **Prioritize and support rapport-building.** The duration of in-person interaction during the Needs Assessment phase should be increased to allow practitioners the time to establish rapport with clients, and to frame this as a central part of their role expectations and performance evaluation. We recognize that there may be significant costs associated with this (for example, reduced caseloads and more practitioners hired), but we believe it is worth testing nonetheless. Beyond increasing duration, there are exercises that may help strengthen rapport at this early juncture. An exercise between teachers and grade nine students in the US, for instance, showed that identifying similarities strengthened relationships and improved academic performance (Gehlbach et al., 2016). More research would be required to identify or develop similar exercises for the career guidance context with adults.
- **Avoid or delay asking for potentially stigmatizing or demotivating information.** Service providers need to know about their clients, and with an increasing trend toward pay-for-performance models with differing incentives based on barriers to employment, that need is stronger. **However, asking clients to describe their barriers to employment (for example, disabilities, or characteristics that may engender labour market discrimination) may stigmatize and demotivate participants.**

  This information should be requested in ways that normalize challenges. Also, it should be asked for once clients are starting to feel supported. If clients are placed into tiers based on service need or likely difficulty in "placing," this information probably should not be made visible.

Conduct thorough, strengths-based assessments

A good assessment process can enable more effective, personalized guidance (Myers et al., 2011), addressing availability bias and barriers to motivation. Such assessments are critical to supporting clients' self-reflection and guiding their career exploration. Canadian career practitioners have identified "self-awareness of occupational interests, relevant attitudes, personal values, job-related skills" as clients' number one need, while "acquiring employability and essential skills" was listed as seventh (Bezanson et al., 2009).

- **Enable broader, more thorough assessments.** In many cases, practitioners may be unable to spend enough time (or more than a single session) on assessment given time pressures and high caseloads. However, without the time to use a variety of assessment methods and tools, client and practitioner biases can play a significant and detrimental role in determining strengths, challenges and opportunities. Workflows and funding models should enable such activities. Thorough assessments can even help determine the nature and extent of client biases that may negatively impact downstream decisions; practitioners should assess for biases in clients' self-appraisal, level of career-related indecision and decision-making skill (Brown & Lent, 1996). On the basis of this information, practitioners can prioritize exercises and conversations that address decision challenges.
- **Use a strengths-based model during assessment.** Strengths-based approaches, which emphasize recognizing clients' strengths versus focusing on their deficits, may be particularly useful for clients with low self-efficacy and clients who are demotivated. Practitioners can draw on client strengths by asking clients to reflect on their strengths or shifting how questions are asked or options are presented. Though strengths-based models have been proposed for adults (Owens et al., 2019) and at-risk youth (Smith, 2006), in the context of career guidance, there are few studies that have recently evaluated this approach. We understand that many career practitioners are implementing strengths-based approaches and we recommend leveraging this ongoing work to refine and more rigorously evaluate approaches.

Address common biases in job goal identification

Even in an iterative career guidance process, the initial job goal serves as a critical anchor for future discussion. In a linear process, it may be the most important decision the career practitioner and client make.

- **Use a proven, structured model for setting the job goal.** Structured decision models reduce the impact of cognitive biases like confirmation bias, choice overload and availability bias. In a career guidance context, these models tend to simplify choices by breaking them down into smaller "mini-decisions." For instance, in the three-stage PIC (Prescreening, In-depth exploration and Choice) model, practitioners and clients identify aspects or characteristics of work that are important to the client and proceed sequentially through options based on the client's interests, comparing differentiating features and trade-offs.[4] The PIC model may also help practitioners use LMI in a systematic, less biased, way. However, we do not believe the PIC model has been rigorously evaluated, and we recommend conducting a randomized evaluation.

- **Integrate high-quality, accessible, timely LMI to improve job goal decisions.**

  Career practitioners and clients would benefit from high-quality LMI that recognizes and addresses the range of cognitive biases that limit access, comprehension and informed action. This would require LMI that is simple to understand, selective, personalized, focused on near-term outcomes (or makes longer-term outcomes feel more tangible) and avoids traps.[5] Some work has been done with youth to explore how they use LMI (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2020), which demonstrates that clients benefit more from LMI when assisted by a practitioner (Milot-Lapointe et al., 2018), but more work is needed testing how and when to provide LMI so that it generates positive labour market outcomes.

- **Integrate engagement with employers as part of career exploration.** Career guidance services can benefit from increased relationships with employers as early as the Needs Assessment phase (although much of the supporting research focuses on youth) (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). This might entail facilitating short-term job trials for clients to facilitate career exploration and address availability and status quo bias. Individuals facing high barriers (but who are motivated, reliable and dependable) stand to benefit the most from increased touchpoints with the workforce. Career services should be a bridge between the client and employer.

4 For an in-depth description, see Gati & Asher, 2001.
5 This list combines elements identified by BIT with recommendations from a 2020 OECD report: see Hofer et al., 2020.

PHASE 3

Creation of Action Plan

Description

Following, or sometimes in parallel with, the Intake / Needs Assessment phase, the client and practitioner will create a plan for achieving the identified overall career goal, which we refer to as the Action Plan. At this stage, the practitioner and client will typically fill out a form outlining the client's employment goals and identifying the activities that should be undertaken to achieve this goal. The Action Plan may or may not be a formal document or tool, and the term is used herein to refer to a variety of heterogeneous practices. These can include things like resume writing, interview practice, job search, assistance with resume writing, attendance at career fairs / recruitment events, pursuing training and development opportunities and ongoing meetings. The most common activities relate to resume writing and interview practice.

This stage is an important opportunity to motivate the client and to create a practical and achievable Action Plan that will guide progress toward their career goal. Ideally, this phase should help the client answer questions like: What actions do you need to take, and when, to turn this goal into reality? What kinds of barriers might stand in the way? How might you tackle them? What kinds of resources and supports can you draw on to overcome these barriers?

Key Barriers

Several cognitive biases and barriers may stand in the way of the client benefiting fully from this stage. People may over- or under-estimate the amount of work required to realize their goal, they may not undertake effective planning activities, and may become demotivated by the process and structure of the Action Plan itself. Clients may be overwhelmed by the size of the overall job goal and not know where to start.

Inaccurate self-perceptions may limit the effectiveness of Action Plans. For example, optimism bias and planning fallacy may lead clients to think that finding employment will be easier and quicker than it is in reality. They may therefore create an Action Plan that is unrealistic, both in timelines and the number or frequency of activities set out, and one that does not anticipate obstacles. On the other hand, people with low self-efficacy may underrate their skills and abilities. Assessing clients' cognitive and decision-making biases can help better tailor interventions in the Action Plan.

The structure and format of the Action Plan may also create a barrier to its effectiveness. Typically, forms look like forms: administrative, transactional documents that need to be completed but do not serve a compelling purpose. Action Plans that are long, technical or otherwise difficult to understand will tax clients' cognitive load and make it less likely that they will refer back to it. **We also believe that if clients do not feel invested in the Action Plan or empowered in its development, the plans will be both lower quality and less likely to be implemented.**

The Action Plan template we reviewed,[6] which may not be representative, listed activities but did not include any prompts that would help the client plan when, where and how they would carry those out. Failing to prompt for detailed planning can undermine implementation and as a result, the client may end up with an Action Plan that does not serve its purpose as a roadmap for achieving their goals.

6 This Action Plan template is not public and cannot be cited in this report.

Key Considerations

Improving the process of creating an Action Plan

We propose several recommendations that reimagine in-person interactions between practitioners and clients to switch from a transactional, practitioner-led model to a motivational client-led model. We recognize that these recommendations are likely to increase resource requirements and may contradict incentives related to higher caseloads.

- **Have clients lead the development of their personalized Action Plan.** Tactically, this could mean that the client fills out Action Plan worksheets, or the practitioner does so as the client explains the activities that they think will be important. The worksheets and the practitioner will need to provide prompts throughout the process to ensure that key activities are not missed. **The rationale for this approach is that increasing agency will lead clients to be more active in these discussions, increasing the quality and personal relevance of the Action Plan, and leading to more faithful implementation of the plan. Indeed, people tend to value things more when they've had a hand in building them, a phenomenon called the IKEA effect (Mochon et al., 2012; Sarstedt et al., 2016).**

  In developing the Action Plan, the client may persuade themselves of the need to adopt new behaviours and / or attitudes, making those changes more likely than if the practitioner was trying to persuade them to do so (Aronson, 1999). To facilitate this, the practitioner should prompt the client with questions that require them to justify why the actions they are setting will make a difference. A 2012 trial that we ran in job centres in the UK showed that job seekers who set their own goals and plans through a "commitment pack" became independent of income support faster than those who did not. And in Moldova, we encouraged job seekers to play a more proactive role in their job search by leading the development of their Action Plan. Each job seeker set concrete goals, planned how they were going to achieve them, and regularly received feedback and assessed their progress. This approach led to an increase in the likelihood of a person's case being closed within five months, compared to the control group (Vasilescu & Midoni, 2019).

- **Minimize administrative processes during the Action Plan development session(s).** Administrative work such as entering the Action Plan information into case management systems should be completed before or after the in-person sessions, if possible. Basic Action Plan information should be pre-filled so that it does not need to be discussed during the session. We know that in British Columbia, for example, information from the needs assessment / case file is used to pre-fill many sections of the Action Plan. Given the amount of change management practitioners need to deal with, they should be given clear and effective tools to support further changes, like checklists to clearly identify what administrative tasks are done when. Reducing administrative tasks during the in-person sessions should create space for the client-led approach described above (which is likely to be more discursive) and the more detailed planning activities recommended below, while also increasing the perceived value of the Action Plan.

Improving the content and structure of the Action Plan

The recommendations above focused on the *process* of creating the Action Plan. These recommendations focus on the *content* as well as the *structure* of the document itself. A meta-analysis of the "active ingredients" of career guidance found that written exercises, including goal setting, are associated with better employment outcomes across job services and programs (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000). We recommend reframing Action Plan activities as goals; specifying how and when they will be achieved; planning for obstacles; using prompts to guide the process; and ensuring that the Action Plan is easy to understand and use. The overarching rationale for our recommendations is that the Action Plan will be most effective if it is as specific and realistic as possible.

- **Reframe Action Plan activities as goals.** Breaking down large challenging goals, such as seeking employment, into smaller, achievable, sub-goals has long been shown to increase motivation and persistence, and to make it easier to attain those goals (Brunstein, 1993). In addition, setting task-based goals has been shown to be effective. For example, in a study with college students, setting task-based goals had a positive effect on both task completion and course performance. Setting performance-based goals however, was not beneficial to course performance (Clark at al., 2020). For complex goals, such as finding employment, task-based goals framed around learning are effective because the focus is on mastering the task rather than worrying about the performance outcome (Latham & Locke, 2007). As such, having a learning goal orientation has been found to be linked to job search intensity among unemployed adults (Creed et al., 2009). In light of this research, we recommend that each activity in the Action Plan be considered a goal in and of itself (for example, writing a CV), which can be further broken down into concrete tasks (for example, find most recent CV, review good examples, write career vision statement, incorporate feedback from career practitioner etc.).
- **Form implementation intentions.** Simply setting goals (or listing activities) is often not enough. Once goals have been set, clients should be prompted to state where, when and how they are going to complete each goal or activity: a technique known as forming implementation intentions. Implementation intentions often take the form of "if-then" statements. Across 94 studies, people who set implementation intentions were more likely to achieve their goals than those who did not (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). A field experiment in South Africa found that unemployed young people who created a detailed job search plan submitted 15% more job applications without increasing the time they spent searching for jobs. This suggests that planning prompts may increase efficiency of job search (Abel et al., 2017). Forming implementation intentions is especially helpful for initiating action when cognitive load is high (Brandstätter et al., 2001), which is likely to be the case for clients dealing with the stress of unemployment (Brown et al., 2003). This technique was a key component of the successful intervention in Moldova discussed above. Every two weeks the job seekers reviewed their progress against each of their goals, identifying any obstacles to achieving them. (Vasilescu & Midoni, 2019).

- **Plan for obstacles and how to overcome them.** An effective way of bringing implementation intentions to life is through a technique called mental contrasting (Oettingen, 2012). This strategy of identifying obstacles to achieving goals and planning how they can be overcome has been recommended in the context of career guidance (Lent & Brown, 2020). A commonly used form of mental contrasting is identifying a Wish, Outcome, Obstacle and Plan, or WOOP. This method has been found to be more effective than goal setting alone (Saddawi-Konefka et al., 2017). One risk in employing these methods is that they may be demotivating for individuals who may already be attuned to things that can go wrong in pursuing a goal. For practitioners who work with clients facing significant and multiple barriers, alternative approaches might be preferred. For example, building in "emergency reserves" — or a type of slack — into goals has been shown to decrease the impact of sub-goal failure on overall goal attainment. This technique increased individuals' motivation to persist after failing at a subgoal, leading to better performance on long-term goals (Sharif & Shu, 2021).

- **Provide prompts in the Action Plan to address common cognitive errors.**

  - ***Use reference class forecasting to set realistic deadlines.*** To set realistic deadlines for goals, a method called reference class forecasting can be employed to counter planning fallacy. This is a method of predicting the future by looking at similar past situations and their outcomes. For example, the practitioner may suggest a timeframe for writing a CV based on how long it typically takes other clients.

  - ***Provide personalized and relevant examples of Action Plans.*** Personalized examples of Action Plans from clients in similar situations may increase motivation while providing a realistic sense of the work ahead.

  - ***"Anchor" clients on a larger number of activities.*** Some jurisdictions require job seekers to undertake a minimum number of activities (for example, job applications) to maintain benefits eligibility. These minimum requirements can act as anchors that job seekers may focus on when developing an Action Plan. However, this can be problematic when the minimum requirements are lower than the number of activities that are likely to result in a successful job search. In these cases, larger, more realistic anchors should be established.

  - ***Make it easier to understand and engage with the Action Plan.*** Reducing the cognitive load required to understand and refer back to the Plan can be achieved by simplifying and summarizing the information in it and ensuring the use of plain language standards. The Action Plan should include a clear and accessible summary to make this information salient, and should only contain the information necessary for the client to achieve the desired goal. Forms should aim for grade eight reading levels, which can be checked using a variety of tools such as Hemingway Editor.

PHASE 4

Implementation of Action Plan

Description

After the Action Plan has been created, the client and practitioner will begin to implement it. This will look different based on the goals and level of support that is needed for each client, as well as the capacity of the practitioner. Activities in this phase may include writing and revising resumes and cover letters; doing mock interviews; job search support and monitoring; networking and participation in recruitment events; skills development activities such as identifying and enrolling in training programs; and other activities detailed in the plan. **Job search interventions are a core component of career guidance and have been shown to increase individuals' likelihood of finding employment almost threefold** (Liu et al., 2014). This is a critical phase where the "rubber hits the road," with clients either engaging or not engaging in the activities that will help them achieve their goals. Ideally, practitioners and clients will consult the Action Plan throughout this phase to guide their work, monitor progress and revise the plan as needed. This phase ends once the client has found employment and typically marks the end of the service, although some services are starting to extend career guidance into post-employment support, as described further in the following section of this report.

Key Barriers

This stage will be variable in length and may last longer than clients expect, so sustaining client motivation and persistence is important. Clients with low job search self-efficacy are less confident in their ability to successfully search for jobs and obtain employment. This belief poses a significant barrier as job search self-efficacy is positively associated with job search behaviour, likelihood of obtaining employment and number of job offers (Kanfer et al., 2001). Clients might also lack knowledge about how to effectively search for jobs. As Canadians increasingly turn to the internet for job searching (Ipsos, 2004; Tavakoli et al., 2010) individuals with low literacy or digital skills face compounded challenges. Another barrier to effective job searching is a perceived lack of control. One study showed that individuals with an internal locus of control — that is, who believe that their actions determine outcomes — set higher thresholds for the minimum salary they would be willing to accept and searched more intensively for jobs (Caliendo et al., 2015). In contrast, individuals who believe their actions are unlikely to change their circumstances, or to impact their chances of finding work, may be less motivated or empowered in their job search.

Job seeking intensity is also affected by other behavioural factors like self-regulation. In particular, self-regulation strategies such as emotion control, motivation control, and an individual's commitment to having a job have all been found to be associated with job seeking intensity (Creed et al., 2009). Self-regulation has also been shown to predict resilience (Artuch-Garde et al., 2017), which is particularly important for clients dealing with repeated rejections or other "failures" within their job search. Overall, the perceived and actual ability of the job seeker to persevere through job search activities is a critical factor in implementation success.

During the job search, status quo bias may limit the range of options clients consider. Clients tend to monitor and pursue a narrow range of job types informed by their existing and past roles (Institute for Employment Studies, 2013). They also tend to focus on their most recent or current salary and exclude suitable jobs from their searches (Babcock et al., 2012). Evidence from Germany and Hungary suggests that this reference dependence also affects job search intensity throughout the journey (DellaVigna et al., 2016).

Critically, clients may become demotivated when the process takes longer than expected and they are not able to see progress toward their goal. This may reduce their likelihood of persisting in completing tasks and continuing to attend meetings.

Clients with scarcity-induced cognitive load may have many competing priorities and limited resources, making it difficult to complete job search tasks or engage in other career activities such as attending job fairs. Similarly, people in precarious employment may struggle to allocate time for seeking better employment in the face of pressures to keep earning. Still others may quite simply forget or procrastinate to act on the goals and tasks in their Action Plan. These specific barriers would be best addressed by broader social supports (for example, income and supportive services), but complementary interventions related to career guidance services may also be able to help.

Key Considerations

The strategies we propose address both behavioural barriers to engaging with skill development work as well as risks to motivation. A meta-analysis of 47 job search interventions found that interventions were only effective when they included both skill development and elements to boost motivation such as self-efficacy interventions (Liu et al., 2014). Many of the recommendations for earlier phases (for example, reducing sludge, building rapport) continue to be relevant here, but this section focuses on ideas that are unique or specific to this phase of the client journey.

Support clients to accomplish the tasks in their Action Plan

Simple, clear, personalized guidance and reminders can help the client effectively implement the activities in their Action Plan.

- **Provide simple, personalized job search guidance.** Many clients do not know how to effectively search for employment; practitioners can play an important role in closing this gap. This can be done during in-person sessions and complemented by online tools (Briscese et al., 2020). A BIT trial in Australia found that a website with job search tips and templates for creating a CV and cover letter was most effective for the least disadvantaged job seekers (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2018). More disadvantaged clients likely need more intensive in-person support, including personalized guidance (such as specific job search terms and criteria to ensure that clients are considering an appropriate range of options). In a study with disadvantaged youth in British Columbia, clients highlighted that the most helpful employment support they had received was youth-focused, personalized to their specific needs and tailored to locally available jobs (McCreary Centre Society, 2014). Beyond personalization, guidance should be limited to that which is most essential, easy to access and that employs simple language.
- **Use behaviourally-informed (SMS) reminders and prompts to boost attendance at appointments.** Two BIT experiments leveraged SMS reminders to increase attendance at job fairs and career appointments. In the first, we found that personalized text messages that evoked a sense of reciprocity[7] were most effective in compelling job seekers to attend a recruitment event, compared to the control status quo SMS that was not informed by behavioural insights (Sanders & Kirkman, 2019). In the second, we found that a reminder SMS that aimed to boost-self efficacy[8] reduced the number of missed National Careers Service appointments by 24% relative to the status quo of receiving no message (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019). Other research has shown the value of email reminders in increasing attendance at guidance appointments (Darling et al., 2017).

  However, email and SMS reminders are not a panacea. The same study that showed them increasing attendance at guidance appointments demonstrated no effect on overall program completion. Similarly, in an intervention that used planning prompts to help young people search for employment, weekly reminders did not offer any additional benefit (Abel et al., 2017). We recommend further testing of reminders and prompts to promote self-directed participation. Promising strategies include leveraging the fresh start effect by timing messages to coincide with personal milestones and the beginning of a new week or month (Dai et al., 2014), and having clients write their own reminders and prompts (automatically delivered to them later).

7 The *SMS read: Hi [Client First Name], 8 new jobs are now available at [Employer]. Come to Bedford Jobcentre on Monday 10 June between 10am and 4pm and ask for Sarah to find out more. I've booked you a place. Good luck, [Advisor First Name].*

8 The SMS read: *No one is born with a perfect career. Time & effort can boost your skills & CV...*

Build motivation and confidence by supporting self-efficacy and resilience

Our second set of key considerations relates to building non-cognitive skills that can help people persevere through job search / skills development and minimize triggers that demotivate them.

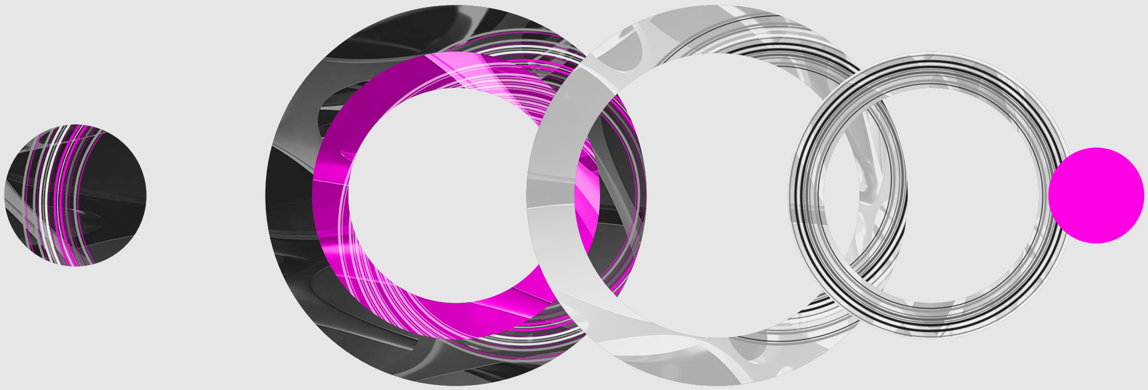
- **Use strengths-based models to mitigate demotivation.** Strengths-based models for career guidance and job search activities, which emphasize recognizing clients' strengths versus focusing on their deficits, are linked to positive outcomes. For example, JOBS is an evidence-based and behaviourally informed group program designed to help job seekers in their search for employment while also caring for their mental health. This program seeks to help clients recognize and build strengths through active learning and also applies principles of inoculation against setbacks to help maintain motivation and self-efficacy. JOBS has been shown to increase job search self-efficacy and motivation; boost preparedness and resilience against setbacks; and importantly, has resulted in higher rates of employment and positive mental health outcomes (Price & Vinokur, 2014). More broadly, evidence on the impact of interventions that aim to build resilience in the context of career guidance is still emerging. Our current view is that where there are trade-offs, interventions that address the root causes of low resilience should be prioritized, but that there is value in further research and development in this domain.
- **Emphasize learning over performance throughout the implementation of the Action Plan.** Career practitioners should help clients develop a learning goal orientation in which the focus is on developing competence and mastering something new. This is in contrast to a performance goal orientation, in which the focus is on demonstrating competence and gaining praise. Individuals who adopt a learning goal orientation tend to take on more challenging tasks and work harder on them. Unemployed job seekers who participated in a workshop designed to develop learning goal orientation set more job search intentions, engaged in more search behaviours and had greater chances of reemployment (van Hooft & Noordzij, 2009). To this end, advisors should celebrate small accomplishments and reframe "failures" as learning opportunities.
- **Help clients identify their personal motivations for finding a job and building a career.** Intrinsic motivation tends to lead to greater persistence compared to extrinsic motivation, which is linked to rewards and punishments. For example, having a personally meaningful reason for learning helped adult learners sustain motivation during tedious academic tasks (Yeager et al., 2014). Practitioners can talk to their clients about their motivations or ask clients to do expressive writing on the topic. These motivations can then be embedded in Action Plans, reminders and other prompts.
- **Visually show the progress toward goals.** Once the client has reframed Action Plan activities as goals and broken them down into smaller, achievable task-based goals, it is important to visually capture their progress. According to the goal-gradient hypothesis, people increase the level of effort they exert toward achieving a goal depending on how close they perceive themselves to be to that goal (Kivetz et al., 2006). This can be leveraged as part of the implementation of the Action Plan by creating a checklist that includes administrative tasks that can easily be checked off. Pre-checked items, such as booking the appointment, may increase motivation by making the client feel as though they have a head start. This endowed progress effect may increase the client's motivation to progress toward their goal.

Enlist social support

Practitioners and clients are not the only actors that can support job seekers in implementing their Action Plan. Where appropriate, family, friends, partners and even other clients can be involved to bolster commitment and keep clients on track.

- **Encourage clients to send their Action Plan to someone in their life who supports them.** People are most likely to fulfil goals if they share those goals with others (Epton et al., 2017). This can be leveraged in group career guidance settings or by asking the client to share their Action Plan with a close contact. This form of social commitment may hold clients accountable for completing key tasks. Clients could choose to have prompts and reminders shared with their supporter(s) in addition to the Action Plan.

- **Consider peer mentoring and advising.** Career practitioners could connect clients with relatable role models and peers to keep them engaged and motivated. While our literature scan did not identify any tested models for peer support in the context of job search, a government of Canada employment training program for older workers recommends group-based, peer support models as a best practice (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014), and the broader literature on peer mentoring[9] suggests this to be a worthwhile avenue. Conversely, exercises that ask the client to *give* advice to a peer may increase their own motivation. This idea is based on recent research showing that struggling individuals are more motivated by giving advice than receiving it. Specifically, people who were struggling to find employment were more motivated by giving advice to someone else who was also struggling with the same issue than by receiving expert advice (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2018).



9 E.g., in health, Petosa & Smith, 2014; and among parolees, Marlow et al., 2015.

PHASE 5

Post Employment Support

Description

While it is not standard across jurisdictions, some service providers continue to provide support after the client has found work (for example, WorkBC). Post-employment support is typically less intensive and may be tied to certain milestones like completing an apprenticeship, obtaining further credentials or a salary increase or maintaining employment for a defined period of time. Common areas of focus in post-employment career guidance include addressing workplace challenges and identifying further skills development opportunities. While the overall value of post-employment support is outside the scope of this review, our literature scan suggests that career guidance models including post-employment support may be more effective and address a need for ongoing support identified by practitioners. We anticipate it becoming more common, and wanted to address several behavioural and motivational barriers and strategies unique to this phase of career guidance.

10 See, for example, Glebbeek & Sol, 2018; Myers et al., 2011. Examining the relative effectiveness of including post-employment support was outside the scope of this research.

Key Barriers

Even where funding structures and service delivery models encourage post-employment support, behavioural change can be slow and challenging. While anecdotal, our expert interviews provided strong support for this assertion. Practitioners and clients may have entrenched mental models where finding a job is the end goal, reducing motivation to continue engaging in career guidance. Transformation efforts tend to focus on processes, rules and funding models, but the psychological impact of status quo bias is a powerful and consistent barrier as well. The benefits of post-employment support may also not be as motivating for clients, as the immediate, short-term need for employment has been satisfied (an example of short-term bias).

Key Considerations

Helping practitioners and clients reorient to post-employment support, and stay engaged and motivated throughout this phase, may require significant "scaffolding" throughout the career guidance journey.

- **Longer-term skills development and employment goals should be centred so they do not appear as an afterthought later in the process.** This should start in the Intake / Needs Assessment phase, and similarly, the Action Plan should integrate post-employment (and perhaps even post-guidance) goal-setting and activities (Lent & Brown, 2020). As this will be a departure from current practice for many providers, practitioners need to have access to simple, accessible and timely prompts and tools as well as dedicated training. This could include structured assessment tools that assess potential barriers to sustained employment and ongoing skills development / upskilling, common or recommended medium to long-term career goals to spark discussions and similar prompts for relevant Action Plan activities. Post-employment guidance sessions may need to be somewhat more scripted or prescribed than is ideal to help facilitate the transition.
- **The use of short-term goals to maintain motivation should be explored.** Milestones like obtaining a raise, passing a probationary period or completing a new micro-credential could be used to help sustain engagement. Many clients, especially those facing significant barriers to labour market attachment, may take many placements before finding sustainable employment. One of the experts we spoke with mentioned how important it is to celebrate every employment period, even if short, as a success and a learning experience that opens up opportunities for a better fit in future work. While this advice was shared in the context of the value of "work first" and job development-centric employment service models, we believe it may be equally relevant in the context of post-employment support in more traditional job readiness focused models.

3 Conclusion

Areas for Future Research

Our literature scan identified very little applied behavioural science research on career guidance; most of our ideas are informed by a mix of theory and empirical evidence from adjacent contexts. This suggests that there are many potential avenues for future research to draw on the insights of applied behavioural science to inform career guidance services. It also suggests a particular need for rigorous evaluation of the ideas presented in this report. In considering evaluation options, we note the need for longer-term, longitudinal studies; active labour market programs often only yield results two to three years or more after they are completed.

In this background paper we focused on clients of career guidance services, and, to a much lesser extent, practitioners. This excluded interesting lines of inquiry about the potential role of applied behavioural science. Similar exploratory behavioural science reviews could dive deeper into the cognitive and motivational barriers influencing practitioners, as well as explore those influencing other important actors, such as employers.

Our ideas were also developed using a model of in-person career guidance services. Online and hybrid services may elicit a different set of barriers to accessing and benefiting from career guidance, requiring different solutions. Future research could also look at how different delivery models, such as online-only services, present different challenges but also potential advantages, for effective career guidance.

Ways Forward

Career guidance can play a critical role in achieving the FSC's vision for responsive career pathways by offering forward-looking, customized, high-quality and accessible guidance to a wide range of Canadians.

To realize this vision, behavioural and motivational barriers need to be addressed from entry into career guidance to exit. Being out of work or precariously employed is uniquely challenging. It taxes our ability to process information and make good, long-term decisions for ourselves and undermines our self-confidence. Common career guidance activities fail to address these barriers to the extent they could, reducing the accessibility and effectiveness of career guidance. Based on our literature scan and consultations with experts in the field, as well as our applied behavioural science experience, we developed a range of promising considerations, many of which build on existing best practices, for re-orienting career guidance toaddress these barriers more fully. Key through-lines to our ideas include:

Reducing administrative burdens on practitioners and their clients;

Prioritizing and investing in the relationship between practitioners and their clients;

Implementing more structured and personalized assessments and goal-setting / planning activities, as well as timely prompts and reminders; and

Complementing job readiness activities with new interventions that build motivation and confidence by supporting self-efficacy and resilience.

The ideas we have proposed will require detailed, context and culturally-specific design prior to implementation. Given the diversity of career guidance models and client populations, we are unable to offer more prescriptive recommendations. While our ideas were developed to be relevant to "typical," current publicly funded career guidance models, which generally aim to support job readiness among clients facing barriers to employment, they are largely still relevant to more transformational approaches being considered and adopted across Canada (for example, lifelong learning- and career development-centric models).

The FSC and other system actors have an opportunity to chart new ground by supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of these promising ideas within the career guidance models of service providers across the country. However, we recognize that existing funding models, delivery roles, technology solutions and practitioner capabilities may limit the extent to which some of these ideas can be readily implemented. The scope of our research did not extend into implementation considerations, and we recognize that some of our ideas may not be feasible within current funding and delivery models, especially where they require large caseloads and extensive reporting requirements for frontline practitioners.

Perhaps the most promising opportunities will focus on integrating the solutions we put forward into the development of new, innovative approaches to responsive career pathways and supporting their delivery through policy and system-level change. This change should seek to address the deep-seated, structural and systemic root causes of the behavioural and motivational barriers we identified, such as income insecurity and structural racism.

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