

Measuring Employment Readiness

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Those involved in assisting youth and adults to make effective work transitions are under increasing pressure to make efficient use of resources and to demonstrate the impact of the programs and services they provide. At the same time, governments and other organizations that purchase programs and services to assist with such transitions are increasingly expected to show evidence that their dollars have been wisely spent in helping people to become employed and reducing reliance on income support.

Effective delivery of employment programs and services begins with an accurate determination of an individual's employment readiness and developing and implementing action plans to address areas where they are not "employment ready." Once the action plan has been carried out, it's important to have a way of knowing "are they employment ready now?" Frequently, the answer is inferred from the answers to two other questions: "Did they get a job?" or "Did they go on a training program?" Unfortunately, as outcome measures, these results really don't tell us "what works" to help ensure an effective transition and secondly, these outcomes are at best, a very imprecise measure of intervention effectiveness. If the individual does not find employment, is that due to limited vacancies, insufficient effort or the fact that they are still not "employment ready"? If they do not succeed in training, does that reflect a poor choice for that individual, limited effort, or a poor quality training program? These are tough questions to answer and reflect measurement challenges that have long been a concern in the employment service field.

To help address these challenges, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and the province of BC collaborated in initiating research and development that led to the creation of an Internet-based tool called *The Employment Readiness Scale*[™] (ERS) and its French counterpart, *l'Échelle d'employabilité*[™] now available at www.EmploymentReadiness.org. The research and development took place over a three period from October 1998 to August 2001.

The authors developed a model of employment readiness using the following definition: "being able, with little or no outside help, to find, acquire, and keep an appropriate job as well as being able to manage transitions to new jobs as needed." The ERS model is based on the assumption that, to be "employment ready," clients need to have achieved three goals:

Goal #1 – Become self-sufficient in five employability skill areas:

- Career decision-making
Knowing what kind of work one wants to do, verifying that there is some demand for that kind of work, and having a goal for making it happen.
- Skills enhancement
Having the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to perform the kind of work one wants to do.
- Job search
Having the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources needed to be successful in finding the kind of work one wants.
- Job maintenance
Being able to succeed at work and maintain a job once one finds it.
- Ongoing career management
Continuing to learn and planning ahead to handle career changes effectively.

Goal #2 – Understand the particular stresses or challenges they face:

- Personal, which clients can address individually
- Environmental, which clients can manage with help

- Systemic, which clients need strategies to overcome

Goal #3 – Cope effectively with the stresses or challenges they face, drawing on four sources of strength:

- Self-efficacy, or a sense of being able to perform well
- Outcome expectancy, or whether or not a client expects to succeed
- Social supports, or the client’s network and ability to get help
- Work history, or the client’s previous work success

Research has shown that just being self-sufficient in the five employability skills is not enough. Most clients face a number of barriers or challenges that act as stressors and can be incapacitating if not managed well. Clients who face significant challenges without assistance in handling them are likely to have difficulty in maintaining work even if they are successful in getting a job. So all three parts of the employment readiness model are equally important.

Using the Employment Readiness Scale™: Sample Applications

Because the ERS measures a range of factors related to employment readiness and can be administered more than once for pre-post measures, it can be used in a number of ways. In working with individual clients, the ERS can be used:

- At initial intake in order to gain information to use for intervention planning with a client.
- To educate clients about employment readiness through their Feedback Report.
- To provide clients with a detailed “map” of what they need to work on in order to become employment ready, and help them outline the specific steps they will take using the Action Plan function.
- After an intervention to see if the client benefited from the intervention.
- When a staff member believes a client to be “job ready” in order to verify that assessment.

In addition to the benefits for individuals, the ERS offers professional staff (e.g., career educators, case managers and other employment service providers) a tool that:

- Complements initial assessment interviews with detailed information on the individual’s readiness.
- Documents the extent of assistance required for purposes of planning with individuals.
- Identifies appropriate program and service options for individuals.
- Documents progress towards employment readiness from programs offered
- Supports program planning by detailing the needs of the client population.
- Assesses the relative effectiveness of different employability-related programs.
- Provides aggregated reports that can be submitted to funders for accountability reporting.

The ERS, through a Sponsor license, can provide funders with roll-up reports that:

- Document aggregate client needs by labour market area.
- Document the outcomes being achieved by funded programs.
- Measure the effectiveness of program funding and intervention types.
- Compare the effectiveness of programs in different labour market areas.

To obtain more information on the Employment Readiness Scale™, or for information on how your organization can obtain a license to use the ERS, please send your query to: ERSinfo@EmploymentReadiness.org or call 604-696-6377.