

Measuring Short-Term Barriers to Employment Readiness

An Employment Intervention Framework for Improving Employment Outcomes

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Employment Readiness Scale™

Executive Summary

The primary role of career development professionals is to help clients obtain and sustain employment. Achieving that objective requires more than identifying barriers to employment—it requires identifying barriers that career practitioners can realistically address through targeted interventions and then measuring client progress over the course of service delivery. Employment readiness assessments therefore have their greatest value when they function not only as measurement instruments, but also as practical decision-support tools that guide interventions and document measurable progress toward employment.

Across Canada and many comparable jurisdictions, governments have, over the past few years, placed increasing emphasis on accountability and measurable employment outcomes for publicly funded employment services. As a result, employment readiness assessments are increasingly expected to do more than classify clients; they must also support intervention planning and provide credible evidence of participant progress.

This paper introduces the Employment Intervention Framework (EIF), an analytical approach developed to examine employment readiness assessments from a service support perspective. Using the Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) as a case study, each of its 75 questions was independently reviewed according to the primary employment intervention it was intended to inform. The review found that approximately 83% of ERS questions measure factors that employment professionals can reasonably influence through employment services, while the remainder primarily identify client-reported challenges requiring coordinated external supports.

Introduction

Governments increasingly expect publicly funded employment programs to demonstrate measurable client outcomes. Consequently, employment readiness assessments must support not only client classification but also intervention planning and the measurement of client progress.

Traditionally, these assessments have been evaluated according to their psychometric properties, including reliability, validity, and the constructs they measure. While these characteristics remain fundamental, an additional practical question deserves consideration:

To what extent do assessment results help front-line practitioners identify interventions that can produce measurable employment outcomes during the course of employment services?

This paper introduces the Employment Intervention Framework (EIF), an analytical approach that complements traditional psychometric evaluation by classifying assessment questions according to the employment interventions they are intended to inform. The Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS), with more than 300,000 administrations across Canada, the United States, and Australia, serves as the case study for illustrating the framework.

Review Methodology

This review did not evaluate the psychometric properties of the ERS. Instead, it examined each assessment question from the perspective of intervention planning.

The ERS contains 75 questions organized into two complementary components. The first 45 questions contribute to nine employment readiness factors. The other 30 questions measure Personal, Environmental, and Systemic Challenges. Together these components provide a comprehensive picture of the factors employment professionals address in helping individuals prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment.

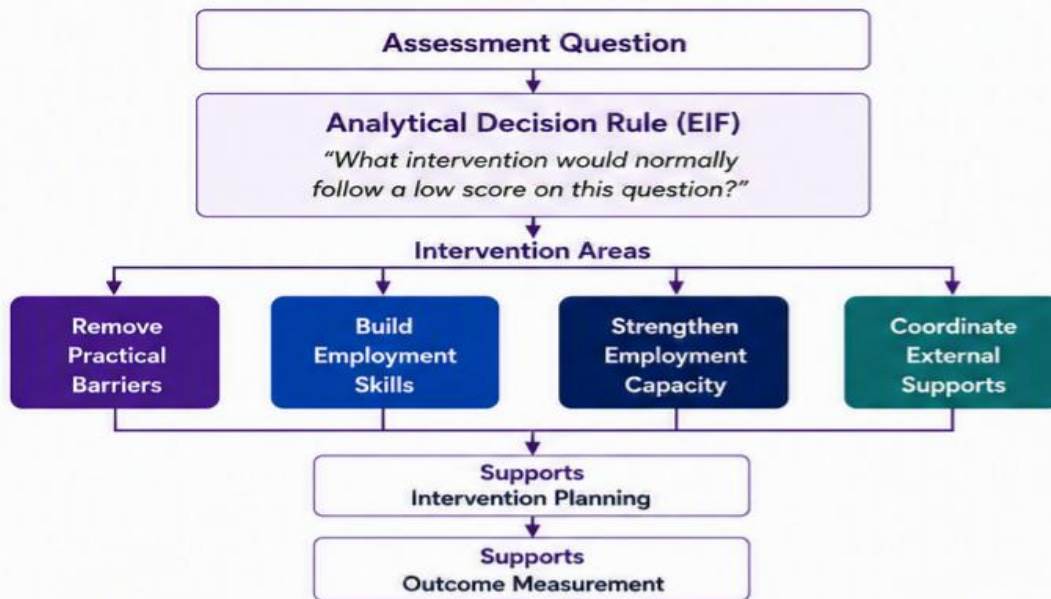
Analytical decision rule:

"What intervention would normally follow a low score on this question?"

Figure 1 illustrates the Employment Intervention Framework (EIF).

FIGURE 1. THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVENTION FRAMEWORK (EIF) MODEL

A conceptual model for linking assessment questions to interventions and outcomes.



The EIF classifies assessment questions according to the interventions they are intended to inform.

Source: Employment Intervention Framework (EIF).

Rather than classifying questions according to employment readiness factors or challenge domains, the Employment Intervention Framework classifies them according to the primary intervention they are intended to inform, providing an additional perspective for understanding how assessment information supports service planning and outcome measurement. The four intervention classifications are, Remove Practical Barriers; Build Employment Skills; Strengthen Employment Capacity; and, Coordinate External Supports. Appendix A gives examples of each of these interventions.

Although the ERS provides a substantial operational evidence base, the present review was conducted using a single employment readiness assessment. Future applications of the EIF to other assessments would help further evaluate its broader applicability

Findings

The analytical review examined each ERS question independently using the analytical decision rule described above. As shown in Figure 2, 62 of the 75 ERS questions (83%) were classified into three intervention areas that practitioners can reasonably influence through direct employment services, while the remaining 13 questions (17%) primarily identified client-reported challenges requiring coordinated external supports. This distribution suggests that the ERS is primarily oriented toward factors that employment practitioners can address through targeted interventions, while also identifying circumstances that may require coordinated support from other service providers.

FIGURE 2. EIF CLASSIFICATION REVIEW OF THE 75 ERS QUESTIONS

Each of the 75 ERS questions was independently classified using the Employment Intervention Framework (EIF).

INTERVENTION AREA	QUESTIONS	% OF TOTAL
Remove Practical Barriers	21	(28%)
Build Employment Skills	21	(28%)
Strengthen Employment Capacity	20	(27%)
Coordinate External Supports	13	(17%)
TOTAL	75 QUESTIONS	(100%)

The distribution shows how the 75 ERS questions map across the four EIF intervention areas.

Source: Employment Intervention Framework (EIF) classification review of the 75 ERS questions.

Together, the first three categories account for most of the ERS questions, indicating that the assessment tool is primarily oriented toward areas practitioners can reasonably influence through employment services.

Interpreting the Findings

The findings extend beyond the numerical distribution of questions across the four intervention categories. They illustrate how readiness assessments can function not only as measurement instruments but also as practical tools for developing individualized employment plans and documenting progress over time.

The significance of the analytical review lies not in the distribution of percentages themselves, but in what they reveal about the relationship between assessment tools and employment practice. The analytical review shows that most ERS questions inform interventions that practitioners can reasonably deliver or coordinate. As a result, the role of assessment extends beyond client classification to support intervention planning and the measurement of client progress.

Figure 3: Integrating Assessment into Employment Service Delivery

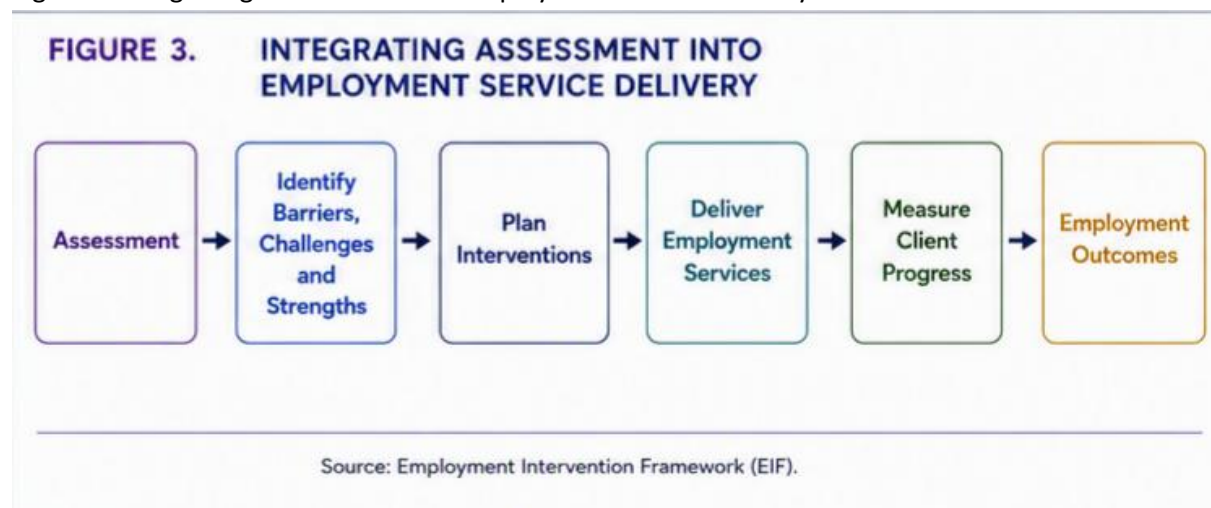
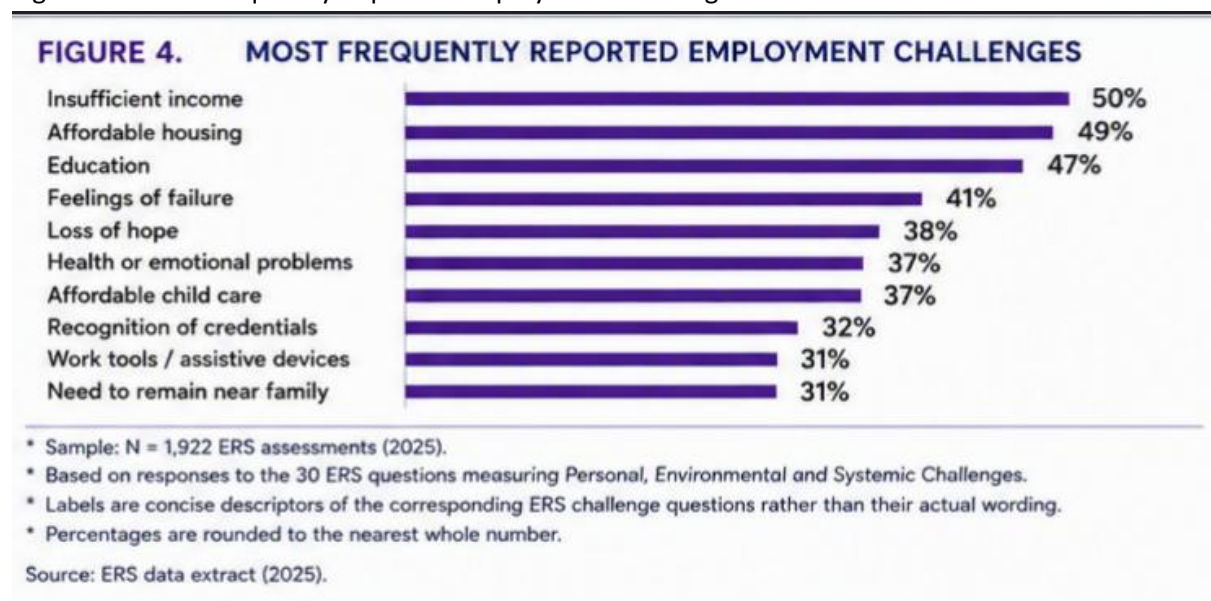


Figure 3 illustrates how assessment information supports the employment service process. While the ERS provides structured information about employment readiness factors, strengths, and client-reported challenges, the Employment Intervention Framework (EIF) adds an analytical perspective by linking individual assessment questions to the employment interventions they are intended to inform. Together, they demonstrate how assessment results can support intervention planning, service delivery, and the measurement of client progress.

Figure 4 illustrates the employment challenges most frequently reported by clients entering employment services. These findings highlight the practical issues front-line practitioners routinely encounter and reinforce the importance of combining direct employment interventions with coordinated external supports when developing individualized employment plans.

Figure 4 – Most Frequently Reported Employment Challenge



Implications

The Framework has implications for governments, funders, employment service providers, and assessment developers. While psychometric quality remains an essential criterion for selecting readiness assessments, the findings suggest that an additional consideration should be whether assessment information supports intervention planning and the measurement of meaningful client progress.

Implications for Practitioners

For practitioners, the EIF provides a practical way of interpreting assessment results. It encourages service providers to consider not only what an assessment measures, but also which employment interventions are likely to follow from identified client needs. This perspective can support individualized employment plans, improve service consistency, and strengthen documentation of measurable improvement.

Implications for Program Evaluation

For program managers and funders, the framework offers an additional lens for evaluating assessment tools used within outcome-based employment programs. Assessments that primarily measure factors responsive to employment interventions may provide stronger evidence for monitoring short-term client progress than assessments focused predominantly on characteristics that are less responsive to employment services.

Implications for Assessment Development

Assessment developers should evaluate not only psychometric quality but also whether assessment questions guide practical interventions, support measurable client progress, and contribute to improved employment outcomes. The Employment Intervention Framework provides a complementary perspective for designing future assessments by considering how assessment information can support effective service delivery, intervention planning, and measurable employment outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper introduced the Employment Intervention Framework as a practical approach for examining employment readiness assessments from the perspective of employment service delivery. Using the ERS as a case study, the analytical review demonstrated that 83% of the 75 assessment questions relate to areas that career practitioners can reasonably influence through employment services, while the remaining questions primarily identify client-reported challenges requiring coordinated external supports.

The practical relevance of this perspective is supported by operational experience from more than 300,000 ERS administrations across Canada, the United States, and Australia.

The principal contribution of the framework is not that it replaces traditional psychometric evaluation, but that it complements it. Alongside reliability, validity, and construct measurement, the

framework encourages consideration of whether assessment questions inform interventions that can reasonably be expected to improve client outcomes.

Across Canada and many comparable jurisdictions, governments continue to emphasize accountability and measurable employment outcomes. In this environment, assessments tools will increasingly be judged not only by what they measure, but also by how effectively they help practitioners identify strengths and challenges, develop appropriate interventions, monitor progress over time, and improve employment outcomes within the relatively short period that clients typically receive employment services.

Ultimately, the value of an employment readiness assessment lies not simply in its ability to measure employment readiness, but in its ability to support better employment outcomes. By linking assessment results directly to intervention planning and measurable client progress, the Framework demonstrates how employment readiness assessments such as the Employment Readiness Scale™ can become practical tools that help practitioners improve employment outcomes by linking assessment results directly to individualized intervention planning and measurable client progress.

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Appendix A.

Employment Intervention Framework (EIF) Classification Methodology

Purpose

The Employment Intervention Framework (EIF) provides the analytical methodology used to classify the 75 Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) questions for this review. This appendix describes the decision rule, intervention categories, and classification process applied during the analysis.

Analytical Decision Rule

Each assessment question was reviewed independently using a single analytical decision rule:

"What employment intervention would normally follow a low score on this question?"

This decision rule shifts the focus from what an assessment question measures to how its results would typically be used by employment practitioners when developing individualized employment plans.

Questions were classified according to the primary intervention they were intended to inform.

Employment Intervention Categories

Each assessment question was assigned to one of four intervention categories.

1. Remove Practical Barriers

Questions classified in this category identify practical obstacles that may prevent an individual from obtaining or maintaining employment.

Typical interventions include:

- transportation assistance
- housing supports
- child care
- work clothing
- assistive devices
- financial assistance
- referrals to community resources

2. Build Employment Skills

Questions in this category identify areas where employment-related knowledge or skills can be improved.

Typical interventions include:

- job search workshops

- résumé development
- interview preparation
- labour market information
- career exploration
- vocational training
- digital literacy

3. Strengthen Employment Capacity

Questions classified in this category identify factors that influence an individual's ability to participate successfully in employment.

Typical interventions include:

- confidence building
- career coaching
- goal setting
- motivation
- self-management
- workplace behaviours
- ongoing employment support

4. Coordinate External Supports

Questions in this category identify circumstances that generally require services beyond the direct mandate of employment practitioners.

Typical coordinated supports include:

- health services
- mental health supports
- addiction services
- housing agencies
- income assistance
- disability supports
- immigration services
- legal services

Although service providers may coordinate these services, they generally do not provide the interventions directly.

Classification Process

Each of the 75 Employment Readiness Scale™ (ERS) questions was independently reviewed.

Classification was based on the primary intervention that would normally be initiated following a low score on that question.

Where a question could reasonably support multiple interventions, it was assigned to the intervention category representing the most immediate or predominant employment response.

No attempt was made to evaluate psychometric characteristics during this review.

The classification results are summarized in the Table below:

Employment Intervention Framework Classification Summary

Intervention Category	Questions	%
Remove Practical Barriers	21	28%
Build Employment Skills	21	28%
Strengthen Employment Capacity	20	27%
Coordinate External Supports	13	17%
Total	75	100%

Application to Other Assessments

Although this study applied the Employment Intervention Framework to the Employment Readiness Scale™, the methodology is intended to be assessment-independent.

Future research could apply the same analytical decision rule to other employment readiness assessments to compare the proportion of questions that support direct intervention planning, coordinated supports, and measurable employment outcomes.

Proprietary Information

To protect the intellectual property of the Employment Readiness Scale™, the individual assessment questions are not reproduced in this appendix.

Instead, the appendix documents the analytical methodology used to classify the questions and the intervention categories applied during the review.