ASSESSING EMPLOYABILITY FOR RESULTS

Prepared By:

Susan P. Curnan
Center for Human Resources
Brandeis University
and
Gerard F. Fiala
Management Consultant
with assistance from
Renee Lerche
The Network

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PREFACE

This paper on assessment is prepared for use by state and local officials responsible for the design, operation, or evaluation of education, employment and training programs. It offers ideas about what's possible in terms of aligning assessment more closely with other employment and training functions to strengthen management practices. It describes ways in which assessment can contribute to improved program performance and cost-efficient operations. It discusses opportunities for making assessment results more useful to a wide variety of users, including employers, individual job seekers, and program managers. It also suggests ways in which states can foster improved assessment practices at the operational level.

This paper is based upon recent expressions of interest in upgrading current assessment practices under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) by state decision-makers, Private Industry Council (PIC), representatives and job training practitioners. It is strategic in nature, and assumes a working knowledge of basic assessment terminology. Other papers cited in bibliography catalog or inventory assessment methods, approaches, tools or techniques; they also examine methods of measuring skill gains based on program participation. The intent of this paper is to spark some critical thinking about assessment. The challenge of, or trend toward, reorganization of assessment services may present a genuine opportunity to bridge the gap between what we know about assessment and what we're doing, resulting in a better balance of effectiveness and efficiency in employment and training programming.

This paper is organized into five sections as follows:

- Section I: Introduction, which defines assessment and provides a framework for the remaining assessment discussion.

- Section II: Job Requirements and Employer Expectations: The Context for Assessment, which summarizes employer-defined labor market requirements, and which provides the backdrop for assessment decision-making.

- Section III: Assessment Design Considerations, which identifies and describes the key design factors to be analyzed in expanding or enhancing assessment capability.

- Section IV: Program Management: Assessment Support and Requirements, which outlines the contributions that assessment can make to, and the support required from, program management.

- Section V: Assessment and State Agenda Building, which presents optional state agendas and discusses the implications for assessment performance.

The Appendix contains a case study and a comprehensive bibliography of assessment-related resources.

I. INTRODUCTION

Assessment practices have improved over the years based on trial and error, and this evolution will likely continue. However, mounting concerns in the employment and training community about cost-effective programming are challenging states to help decision-makers and practitioners build on what we already know about assessment in systematic and expedient ways. Many practitioners are already engaged in attempts to improve assessment. Some are not aware of recent developments in assessment. Others, unfortunately, are trying to secure better assessment tools, methods, or instruments without first determining what assessment should assess relative to labor market requirements and client needs and expectations. Still others have yet to realize the integral part that assessment plays in achieving acceptable program performance. Thus, state attention to client employability assessment is important.

Client assessment is fundamental to cost-effective job training programming, and therefore, merits the attention or policy-makers and practitioners alike. Achieving results depends upon our ability to carefully diagnose individual job training clients' needs in light of labor market requirements and prescribe remediation, training or placement services which address these needs.

Assessment is an integral part of workers' work lives and employer hiring, staff development and promotion decisions. Adult workers can be expected to change jobs at least five times during their working lives, and at least 10 million do so each year. Many of these individuals will require assessment and reassessment, education or retaining to make successful job changes. Employers, too, recognize benefits of assessment. They attempt to minimize costly equipment and staff investment mistakes by avoiding ill-prepared job applicants. To increase productivity, employers also focus training on what workers need to know to do their job in light of what they already know.

Increased public demand for job training accountability has reinforced for many the critical nature of assessment in the employability development arena. The planning, operation, and evaluation of assessment services under

job training programs is increasingly recognized as integral to achieving individual client gains in the labor market, employer satisfaction with job training products, and cost-wise management of diminishing federal resources. This attention to assessment is not new; it began with public attention to occupational training in the 1940s.

A great deal has been learned about assessment from trial and error since the forties. These lessons have helped us formulate the following principles upon which this paper is based:

- Assessment is ongoing; it begins at intake with the gathering of biographical data; continues through diagnosis of skills and deficits and prescription of services; and incorporates measurement of client progress on a regular basis using formal and explicit criteria.

- The more integrated assessment is in program design, the more relevant and useful are assessment results.

- Employability development plans are the principal documentation tools of assessment; they reflect assessment from intake through job placement.

- Assessment strategies must measure demonstrable skills, behaviors and attitudes, and knowledge in light of job requirements and employer expectations.

- Assessment processes should accommodate individual client needs, ranging from those of adults with prior work experience and transferable skill to those of youth with no experience and little, if any, labor market knowledge.

- Assessment processes should draw on a variety of tools and techniques, including oral and written questions, product (skill) review, and behavioral observation. Assessment procedures should provide opportunities for individuals to apply their skills in a context relevant to experience on the job.

- Assessment should gather only items of information which have a specific purpose and which can be addressed by the program.

A. WHAT IS ASSESSMENT

Assessment is the process of determining an individual client's strengths and skill deficits relative to job requirements and employer expectations; selecting an appropriate service strategy; and measuring the client's progress in skills acquisition using explicit and formal criteria. For individual clients, assessment is the process of specifically defining vocational goals which relate individual needs, interests, skills and behaviors to labor market requirements. For employers, it provides the means for evaluating and selecting individuals who will perform jobs successfully.

Assessment for employment and training helps define desired outcomes for individuals based on labor market requirements, client expectations and the policy environment in which the match between individuals and jobs is to be achieved. First and foremost, assessment systems, therefore, need to be grounded on in job requirements and employer expectations. An efficient assessment system combines a number of different assessment techniques to complete a picture of the client's job potential. On an individual level, assessment identifies where individual job seekers are relative to labor market requirements, and provides information for the efficient management of the employability development and matching process.

On a systems level, assessment is the vehicle through which policy decisions are implemented regarding who you take into the program; what you do for them at what cost; and what other community resources are used. Assessment information can, and should, in the long run, also influence such policy decisions, subsequently replanning the scope of the assessment process. Such decisions limit the segments of job seekers and jobs to be dealt with and, therefore, define the scope of the assessment process.

B. WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Assessment is a central resource for answering questions about how best to upgrade an individual's employability and productivity. For example, what skills, in measurable terms, does an individual job seeker need to be

employable? What skills does the individual have, and what skill deficiencies need to be remediated? When is an individual ready for employment? Without answers to these questions, it is impossible to accurately tailor education and training opportunities that build on what individuals know and can do, and redress what they need to know and do to function adequately in the labor market in ways that they can learn best. This information also becomes the basis for documenting individual progress and certifying individual accomplishments.

At the program level, assessment can help in three ways. It can be used to develop assignment criteria to ensure that individuals are selected for training on a rational basis, i.e., that they can successfully complete training, and that training is provided to those individuals for whom it is designed. It can assist in developing exit criteria to ensure that the question about whether individuals are ready for employment can be answered in terms of attaining the necessary basic and occupational skills to get and keep a job. It can serve as the basis for preparing employability development plans which describe the steps that need to be taken to ensure that individuals acquire the requisite skills, knowledge, and abilities to meet employer requirements.

At the systems level, assessment can provide information to help increase the effectiveness and efficiency of job training services. It can answer questions such as: Who is being served? Who is not served? What are the entry skill levels of individuals at program application in light of labor market requirements? What are the skill levels of individuals at program exit? What service strategies work best for whom? How much do service strategies cost? The answers to these and other questions can greatly enhance the cost effectiveness of program and training curricula design.

II. JOB REQUIREMENTS AND EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS: THE CONTEXT FOR ASSESSMENT

Key to improved assessment is a more precise statement of the mix of skills, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes that are necessary for individuals to perform competently in the labor market, and a better understanding of how to assess that mix. Without such clarity, it is difficult to determine the nature and extent of skill deficiencies in the current and future workforce. It is significantly more difficult to select appropriate solutions or strategies which can remedy skill deficiencies.

A. DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

Several recent studies have explored the problem of unemployment from the employer's perspective. Asked what they look for in new workers, employers--large and small and across industries--agree on four basic qualifications. Employers require:

- Basic verbal and mathematical skills;
- Work maturity, including the ability to follow instructions and to satisfy basic job behaviors such as punctuality and regular attendance;
- An awareness of the world of work, including some sense of one's own occupational interests and aptitudes; and
- Occasionally, a specific job skill such as the use of certain tools or machinery.

These qualifications define the core of employability, and thus, broadly define the scope of an effective JTPA assessment system. Of the four qualifications, employers consistently rate the first two, basic cognitive skills and work maturity, as the most essential. The evidence indicates that regardless of the occupational skills an applicant may possess, basic literacy, particularly signified by attainment of a high school diploma, and demonstrated work maturity, are considered central to an individual's ability to get and maintain a job.

The emphasis on basic skills and work maturity is expected to continue through the end of the century. Accordingly, many national groups, including most recently, the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development (CED) have drawn attention to the necessity of equipping future workers with a strong basic skills foundation as well as appropriate work attitudes and behaviors necessary to ensure economic productivity. The results of the most recent CED survey confirm what has been previously said by the business community: "Specific occupational skills are less crucial for entry-level employment than a generally high level of literacy, responsible attitudes toward work, the ability to communicate well, and the ability to continue to learn." The survey's findings convey three strong messages about employers' needs and set up an obvious challenge to assessment personnel:

- First, for entry level positions, employers are looking for young people who demonstrate a set of attitudes, abilities, and behaviors associated with a sense of responsibility, self-discipline, pride, teamwork, and enthusiasm.

- Second, employers put a strong value on learning ability and problem-solving skills.

- Third, employers do not think that the schools are doing a good job of developing these much needed abilities.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

Few endeavors have actually translated general employer expectations into specific assessments of the nature and level of those skills required to perform certain jobs or categories of work. Thus, JTPA decision-makers face two critical questions. How do you develop or select strategies for measuring or assessing these core skills and behaviors in ways that provide reliable and usable information on individual clients? How do you assess these core skills and behaviors in a way that maximizes client benefits and yields the greatest skill gain per dollar invested?

Recent surveys conducted by the National Governors' Association, the National Association of Private Industry Councils, and the National Alliance of Business, underscore the need for upgrading assessment systems based on

employer needs. For example, basic educational skill competencies were developed in only about one-third of the SDAs recently surveyed. One Brandeis University expert estimates that as many as 95 percent of the SDAs across the country may not be able to state the reading level of JTPA clients; yet research shows that cognitive skills are directly related to job performance. A recent Brandeis University study of 22 state welfare employment programs revealed, unfortunately, that only about one-third assess client education, work experience, skills and aspirations prior to beginning program participation. Some of the remaining programs indicate that they usually assess clients only after client failure to find a job or to complete a training assignment. Proper assessment could reduce costly mistakes, improve employability development strategies, and satisfy employer requirements.

Reports from technical assistance providers consistently reveal a tendency among decision-makers and practitioners to use standardized measures rather than performance reviews for assessing work maturity even though behavior and attitude assessment is key to meeting employer needs. Demonstrated performance is important because employers often use applications and interviews as means of assessing basic skill levels, especially for youth. For example, employers use both explicit and implicit signals in considering applicants for jobs. Examples of explicit signals are grade point average, spelling, legible writing, English language usage, and typing speed. Examples of implicit signals include nonverbal behavior, location of high school, and questions asked about job and company. Demonstration of cognitive skills and abilities as well as behavior and attitudes is part of employers' assessment of job candidates. Assessment strategies that include behavioral observation and other means of documenting applied skills should therefore be considered by decision makers and practitioners as sound assessment mechanisms for determining who is ready to interview with employers.

In accepting the research findings on employer needs as the starting point around which to build an assessment system, four information items should be gathered during assessment and used to the benefit of any client. These items are:

- A "snap shot" of the basic skill level;

- Some measure of work maturity and prior work related experience;
- An index of occupational interests and preferences; and
- Evidence of mastery of any job specific skills.

Determinations about a job seekers employability depends on the mix of skills and personal qualities the person brings to the employer. Employment and training decision-makers and practitioners need to be aware of which skills and qualities are important to employers and how information on these characteristics of job seekers can be communicated to employers either by the clients themselves or by practitioners.

III. ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND CONSIDERATIONS

Assessment in employment and training has evolved from a narrow scope defined by intake procedures and eligibility determination, to a broader scope of ongoing client-centered employability planning and accountability. Predictions of labor market success based upon test scores have continued to be one focus for assessment during this evolution. Today's definition of assessment as a process acknowledges that test scores do not tell all. Test scores can predict possible difficulties or low performance; however, they cannot, except in rare circumstances, predict success. Tests are best used in light of other available information about each individual client. This other information can be gathered from oral or written questions to assess knowledge, actual or simulated behavior observation to assess behaviors or attitudes, and product review to assess manual or cognitive skills.

In designing or enhancing assessment, decision-makers and practitioners can build upon lessons learned through experience. This section explores selected design factors which can help decision makers and practitioners decide how to make assessment an integral part of employment and training service delivery.

A. PLANNED ASSESSMENT USES

Assessment has many uses. It can identify the capabilities of individual job seekers. It can determine those clients who meet certain assignment criteria to participate in particular services and channel other clients to more appropriate program assignments. Assessment can diagnose individual client needs using any number of assessment techniques and tools and provide feedback on the results of such diagnosis. Based upon diagnostic results, it can help prescribe necessary remedial, training, support or placement services to attain individual client vocational goals. Depending upon client progress in skills acquisition, it can also help re-prescribe services as necessary. Because assessment is ongoing, it documents individuals' client progress during program participation. It provides the answer to whether the individual client is ready for employment and employer interviews. Assessment aids in referring clients to specific jobs as well as in following with

individual clients and employers. Follow-up information can then be used to improve given programs.

The selection of planned assessment uses will, of course, impact any assessment system's design. The design and operation of an assessment system with multiple purposes and users is not an easy task. The precision which will be required from assessment by labor market requirements and the heterogeneity of client population to be assessed will also affect the system's purpose. Making the complicated choice of assessment uses and eventually, the appropriate techniques for initial, interim, and final assessment requires a working knowledge of the assessment situation.

B. WHO IS ASSESSED?

JTPA clients vary widely in the degree to which they are prepared for productive employment. Thus, it is necessary to take a close look at clients and their employability characteristics in order to develop effective strategies for connecting them permanently with the workplace. The most effective assessment strategies operating under JTPA are those that acknowledge the need to select an assessment process based on the individual client's labor market experience relative to employer needs.

If we step back and look at unemployed JTPA clients, we can identify at least three groups:

- **Group One:** Individuals are employable; they have either lost their jobs through no fault of their own, e.g., dislocated workers, or have yet to secure jobs.
- **Group Two:** Individuals regarded by schools or other training institutions as employable, but lacking much, if any, relevant work experience.
- **Group Three:** Individuals who are currently unemployable by virtue of failure in school, child care responsibilities, dropping out of school, lack of knowledge of work, run-ins with the law, handicaps or other serious employment barriers.

Categorizing prospective JTPA clients is controversial. On the one hand, individuals argue that categorizing clients into groups is counter to

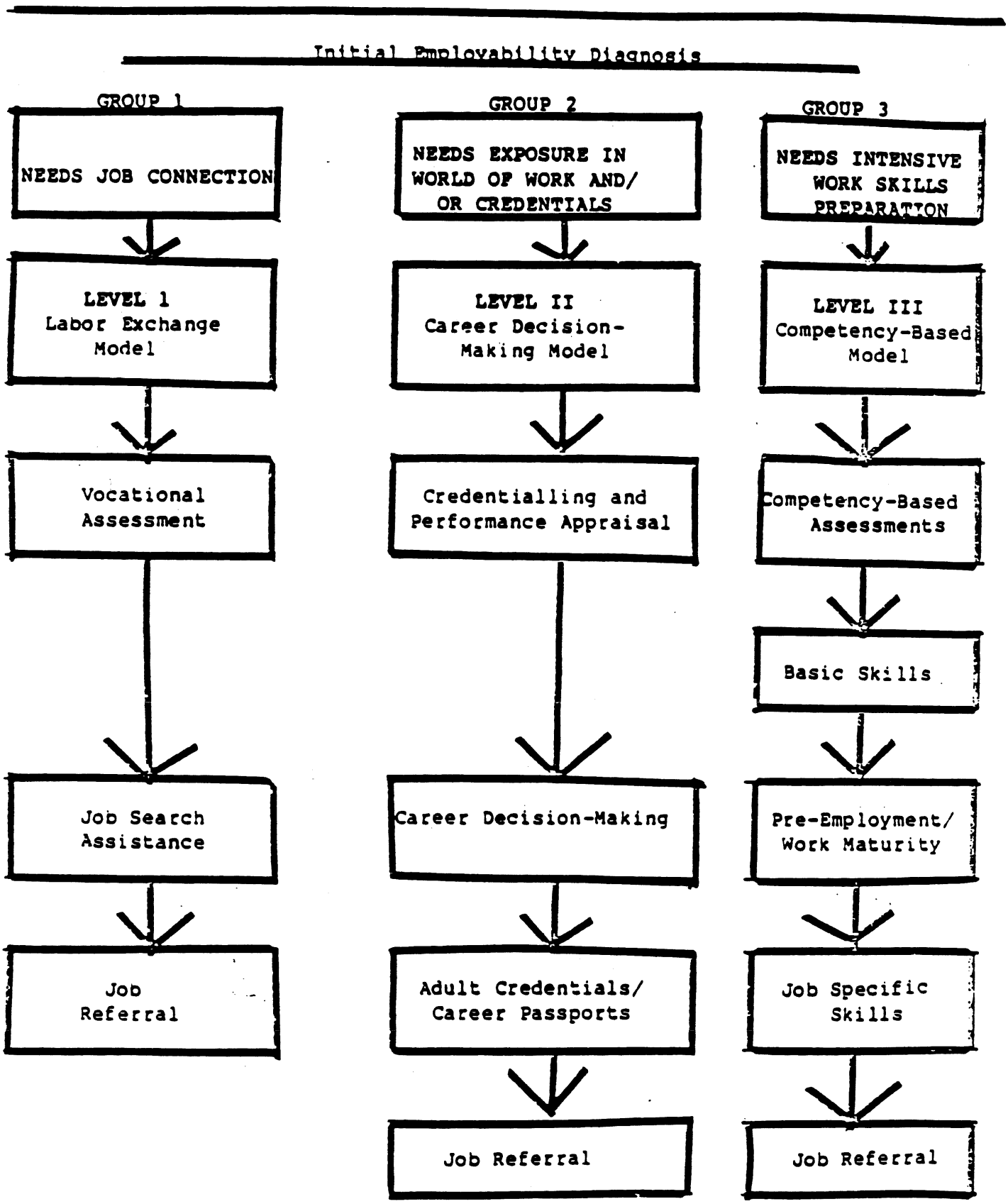
individualized programming trends and too dependent on subjective judgment. On the other hand, individuals argue that it is necessary to take broad characteristics into consideration when planning assessment as well as training activities. Decision-makers and practitioners need to ask: What are clients' education and work experiences? What evidence already exists that can help make assessment or placement decisions? Therefore, it makes sense to begin looking at broad groups of clients in designing assessment. Diagnosis should be the first step for all clients; it should take place prior to the assignment of services or instruction, and should be used to determine the skills that an individual brings to the program as well as the skill deficiencies that need to be addressed. Personal individualized planning can help determine which assessment model initially makes sense for each client. However, there is no short cut or substitute for a personal, thoughtful and thorough approach if you choose to provide a number of assessment models keyed to client needs. Keeping in mind the three groups identified above, you may choose to implement one or more of the models displayed in Exhibit 1.

As shown in Exhibit 1, Group 1 members, who are employable, can benefit from a classic labor exchange model despite the uneven exposure to world of work among older and younger clients. Group 1 members typically display clarity in interests, career awareness and eagerness to work. They are ready to use the self knowledge that results from matching preferences and skills to jobs. Graduating high school seniors and adult high school graduates comprise most of this group.

Group 2 members should be provided with opportunity to work; performance reviews are used to document work maturity as defined by employers. JTPA can provide an assessment of work performance through employer performance appraisals using employment enhancement experiences or on-the-job training.

Group 3 is the group that presents the greatest challenge to decision-makers and practitioners. There are no better alternatives than competency-based assessment and programming for this group. Group 3 includes low income minority adults and youth who are poor, who probably dropped out of school, who have little if any experience in the work place, and who are facing acute unemployment problems.

Exhibit 1: Selecting Effective Assessment Models Based Upon Client Characteristics



Thus, not every client can or should be offered the same assessment strategy. Depending upon the characteristics and needs of individuals, practitioners may develop and use certain criteria to trigger particular assessment techniques and tools. The characteristics and special needs of some potential clients may also mean that decision-makers and practitioners alike must make arrangements for assessment strategies to employ special resources, e.g., translators, in order to develop tailored employability plans.

In choosing assessment strategies, including those outlined in Exhibit 1, it is important to remember that potential JTPA clients' performance on assessment tasks may initially be poor because they are very anxious about assessment or not very "test smart." Assessment strategies may be tailored to include pretest orientations or trial runs, particularly for Group 3. Some key observations which may serve as cautions for assessment practitioners include:

- Most traditional paper and pencil tests are similar to classroom situations with which many at-risk individuals have a history of failure.
- Many tests have directions written at a rather high reading level which must be understood by the person taking the test if measurements are to be valid.
- Individual test items may be written at a relatively high reading level, and may reflect unfamiliar cultural content.
- Item content of tests designed for children, but given to adults, can be simple enough in reading level but uninteresting or insulting; this can seriously damage motivation to perform.

C. IMPACT OF TRAINING OR SERVICE DELIVERY STRUCTURE ON ASSESSMENT

Assessment can be useful only if it is closely connected with training and an integral part of the service delivery structure. For example, highly structured, programmed activities on a regularly scheduled basis require a different set of assessment responses than individually tailored, open entry/open exit activities. Generalized, relatively uniform outcomes, demand less assessment precision than specific, customized client outcomes. To

design an effective client-centered assessment process, decision-makers need to know the design of the overall program. Where does initial, interim and exit assessment occur? What time is required and available for assessment? What service options are available? Because assessment should collect only information on items which it can use, limited service options should be reflected in data collection. Collecting data which will not be used increases client and practitioner frustration and costs.

Decision-makers and practitioners are also faced with the need to balance enhanced or expanded assessment against available resources. Are there area resources that can be made available at little or no cost? Examples might include vocational rehabilitation or local education expertise. What costs are required? For example, if the initial stage of assessment is expanded, what are the costs to the service delivery structure in terms of personnel, money, facilities utilization, time, and importantly, client retention?

In selecting assessment techniques, decision-makers first need to decide how the technique will be used to determine the measurement precision necessary, and the degree of subjectivity that can be tolerated. Among other things, such judgments will relate to: the consistency with which similar assessment results are obtained when the particular instrument or technique is used; its ability to predict job success with some reliability; and the type and detail of information that can be obtained.

It is important to note that employers use performance appraisal even though it does not eliminate subjectivity in evaluation. The reliability of performance appraisal ratings can be affected by inconsistency among raters which is caused by too few or too many ratings categories; lenient judgment to avoid causing pain; avoidance of extremes in judgment; emphasizing general impressions, e.g., a well- or not well-liked individual, rather than specific performance. In order to minimize subjectivity in performance reviews, a three step process is suggested:

- Select scorers carefully;
- Provide indepth training for scorers about the meaning of terms used, the conduct of procedures, and the handling of results in an accurate and consistent fashion; and

- Pilot test the performance appraisal instrument by having two or more people score the same participant.

Major strides have been made in recent years in developing techniques which predict labor market success. In the past, employers were reluctant to use such techniques because of the legal problems which could arise from selecting workers based upon the techniques' results. However, the Employment Service has a new program entitled "Validity Generalization" which can predict potential job success with 53 percent accuracy, and employer and applicant demand is increasing at an unexpected rate. Discussed later in this section, Validity Generalization is an assessment technique which can be tailored to meet a variety of labor exchange assistance uses.

D. TOOLS, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

The assessment strategies outlined earlier can encompass a wide variety of tools, methods and instruments. Tests may be standardized, i.e., statistically reliable and valid (it measures what it claims to measure). They may be criterion referenced: in other words, they measure a client's ability to perform specifically stated skill objectives against absolute standards. Tests can be formal and informal. Formal tests tend to be purchased off the shelf; informal tests are often instructor developed, designed to monitor client progress or assess client needs through direct observation.

Before reviewing developments in assessment approaches, a checklist for reviewing assessment instruments and tools is summarized below. Decision-makers and practitioners responsible for designing or managing assessment processes should develop selection criteria to aid in choosing the most appropriate tools and instruments. The following principles for selecting appropriate assessment approaches may be adapted to meet local needs:

- Soundness and relevance to results. If the results can not be acted on, it is a waste of time to get the tool.

- Impact on actual delivery of services. If the assessment tool's results will not help to determine client

assignment to services in the time frame allotted, the tool shouldn't be used.

- Cost in dollars, time and staff. Consider the costs of securing and scoring the material, the equipment or facilities necessary, the training or certification of staff to administer the tool and the time commitments of both staff and clients.

- Acceptance by both practitioner personnel and clients.

- Staff development required, e.g., the training of multiple raters in test administration.

- Compliance with federal and state regulations, i.e., to the extent that specific, demonstrated job-related assessment tools are used to make client assignment to services, the tools must be in compliance with established laws.

The alternative assessment strategies displayed in Exhibit 1 reflect several approaches or techniques. Recent developments in credentialling, performance appraisal, literacy assessment and training, youth employment competencies, and computerized labor exchange are described below.

1. Credentialling

An estimated 55 million adults in this country do not have high school diplomas. These individuals present a challenge to decision-makers and practitioners alike, because nearly nine out of 10 jobs in America now "require" a high school diploma or equivalent. Many adults are not attracted to traditional adult secondary programs for a variety of reasons: family and work responsibilities, aversion to school, fear of inability to learn, and negative attitudes toward conventional classroom education. New adult credentialling programs can provide opportunities for adults to earn high school diplomas through assessment of their current learning, reducing barriers to participation for many adults.

Basic academic and occupational or special skills are evaluated by trained personnel who use a variety of techniques. The assessment approach to credentialling can reduce unnecessary instruction, eliminate time and attendance requirements, thereby reducing costs; it can also increase

effective instruction by individualization of services. Among the many resources in this area, Ruth Nixie's work for the State of Massachusetts indicates that the best adult credentialling model programs (New York State External High School Diploma Program and California's Diploma Plus, for example) work because they effectively design programs around the characteristics of adult learners.

Two different assessment for credentialling practices which reflect differing philosophies are Credit for Prior Experience and Credit for Prior Learning. Credit for Prior Experience assumes that an experience is valuable and contributes to an individuals education; therefore military experience, travel or prior course work can be credited. Documentation might include discharge papers, essays about, or photographs of travel, and transcripts from other institutions. The principal advantage of crediting prior experience is that most adults have participated in some activities which can be determined worthwhile and can be documented. Unfortunately, the disadvantage is that the specific learning outcome is not identified, and no current assessment verifies the skills. For example, taking a Spanish class five years ago is creditable, regardless of whether any ability to speak or write the language remains.

Credit for Prior Learning is a more accurate measure of achievement. Credit for Prior Learning assumes that experiences develop knowledge and skills which exist and can be assessed. Skills learned, e.g., typing in the military, Spanish through prior course work, are assessed for credit using applied performance tests although this approach is time consuming because current skills are measured by experts. A high school Spanish teacher may conduct an oral and written exam to assess current language skills; a vocational instructor may assess welding skills. Some of the assessment techniques used to document skills may be useful across several assessment strategies. The techniques include:

- Applied performance tests which are hands-on activities conducted in "real life" environments;
- Simulations of real life situations, e.g., mock interviews;

- Interviews which are structured or unstructured to evaluate communication skills;
- Product assessment of objects made by the client;
- Self-assessment of individual achievements; and
- Essays and reports which document writing ability as well as specific skills.

A similar, but less formal assessment process, is associated with the Career Passport Project for youth which is administered by the National Institute for Work and Learning. During the program, youth examine their experiences in school, sports, hobbies, volunteer activities, and home responsibilities. They identify those activities that have taught them skills and behaviors employers are seeking, e.g., punctuality, cooperation, budgeting or car maintenance. Each youth acquires a Career Passport which documents skills and behaviors, ensuring that the youth has the information at hand to complete a job application and the confidence of having skills and experience to offer employers.

2. Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal has captured the attention of the employment and training community because employers value good work habits and attitudes and many youth competency systems emphasize work maturity. At the present time, at least two schools of thought are emerging on the use of this approach. On one hand are practitioners seeking precision and the elimination of all subjectivity in evaluation. This point of view results in the use of highly quantified rating forms with numerical goals or standards attached to all characteristics. The result may be more of a record than evaluation and fall short of the insights to performance that employers believe are important to hiring decisions. On the other hand, traits such as initiative, integrity, leadership, and creativity are appearing on performance review forms. Although some evaluators believe that these traits are too subjective and therefore their measurement suspect, employment and training professionals argue that subjective or not, employers make decisions based upon such traits, and therefore that the employment and training community cannot afford to ignore employer needs and interests in this area.

As a result of thirty years of application and research, there is consensus that performance appraisal may be important, but that it is difficult. Searching for more objective, and possibly more reliable assessment methods, some managers have adopted Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scales (BARS). The BARS model involves detailed job analysis and complex scale construction. In a recent Psychology Today article, Berkeley Rice states that although it is expensive to construct because of its job and behavioral specificity, the BARS model results in greater reliability than traditional rating scales.

Performance appraisal should be an integral part of any assessment process. Although there is no easy way to get accurate and informative performance data, there is no substitute for personal judgment. Assessment methods that attempt to eliminate subjectivity entirely, or minimize the judgment and decision-making of evaluators will lose in accuracy, insight and value of information what they gain in ease of execution.

3. Literacy Assessment and Training

Many mature clients exhibit work maturity in entry level jobs and have worked for many years with minimal education skills. Many workers separated from their jobs by company closings or layoffs face multiple problems: they are older and have poor educational backgrounds. Often English is not their first language. Many are not equipped to take the education and training programs that are offered. How do you assess this group of clients? How do you evaluate the skills of the 60 percent functional illiterates in the prison population or youth who are disabled readers and comprise 85 percent of the population appearing in juvenile courts? Although a single approach doesn't emerge as the answer, the recent completed National Adult Literacy Project managed by the Networks, Andover, Massachusetts indicates that programs which build and subsequently evaluate an integrated system of adult literacy instruction appear to be the most successful. The basic elements of these programs are also characteristic of sound assessment processes. The elements include:

- A clear statement of overall goals and instructional philosophy;

- Measurable goals for each program component;
- Determination for potential students about whether program is suited to student's expectations and goals;
- Explicit statements about intended learning outcomes for students including precise standards for judging success in achieving outcomes;
- Development of individual learning plans for each student based on diagnosis of each student's educational needs and strengths;
- Instructional methods, materials and assessment strategies directly related to learning objectives;
- Frequent provision of feedback to students about their progress, and progress documentation;
- Frequent evaluation of program effectiveness in meeting individual program component goals resulting in literacy program improvements as appropriate.

Two educational programs which exhibit these characteristics are: the Comprehensive Competencies program (CCP), and the California Assessment System for Adult Students (CASAS). CCP was developed by the Remediation and Training Institute with support from the Ford Foundation. CASAS was developed by the San Diego Community College District and the CASAS Consortium with support from the California Department of Education.

4. Youth Employment Competency

Recognizing employment competency as a formal positive program outcome under JTPA is an important innovation. Many SDAs are extending the competency concept to include adult programming seeing youth competencies as a means to increase effective services and better program performance. The provision of competency-based programming integrates assessment procedures with program design. Genuine competency-based programs are always individualized, open-entry, open-exit, self-paced, and highly documented. To date, although many SDAs have youth employment competencies, a number of "competency" programs do not yet have the characteristics of competency-based programming. Such programs have youth competencies which resemble exit criteria;

assessment, including standardized pre- and post-testing, resembling documentation; and only tangential relationships between assessment and training. Although in compliance with JTPA, SDAs are well aware that time is required to develop and experiment with competency-based programming.

SDAs which do operate genuine competency-based programs are included as examples in the U.S. Department of Labor's guide to developing effective youth employment competency systems entitled: A System Approach to Youth Competencies. Another resource which provides a pragmatic approach for developing or upgrading youth competency systems is the National Association of Private Industry Councils' guide entitled: Implementing Competency Standards, A Guide for Private Industry Council Members.

5. Computerized Labor Exchange Approaches

Validity Generalization (VG) is the classical job matching approach. Job training centers in 22 states have been approved to conduct the Validity Generalization aptitude testing program. By correlating scores achieved on the General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB) with on-the-job performance or productivity, Validity Generalization offers a means to predict individuals' potential job success in large clusters of jobs, and provides a standardized service which is consistently applied to individuals seeking job service assistance. According to the Virginia Employment Commission which is testing VG in its Roanoke office, since VG's implementation the referral to placement rate has been lowered to 2:1; the placement rate for minorities has increased by 72 percent; 40 percent of the job applicants are already employed; and employer job listing are up by 32 percent. Employers are interested in using VG not only to find new workers, but to rank employees for transfer or promotion. This computerized matching tool can benefit assessment and vocational counseling as well as increase job referral effectiveness.

Designed for dislocated workers, the University of Missouri in Kansas City has developed a computer-assisted career guidance program that integrates aptitudes and interests information to help individuals focus on suitable occupational and career goals. The program is part of a larger Title III project to help individuals prepare for and find long-term jobs as quickly as

possible. The comprehensive test battery consists of the following inventories:

- The General Aptitude Test Battery which relates abilities to specific career fields;
- The Strong Campbell and the Career Assessment Interest Inventory which relates interest patterns to occupational groups; and
- The Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator which illustrates how personality style affects co-worker interactions and adaptation to the work environment.

In summary, there are many tools, methods and instruments which can be used to support assessment strategies. In selecting which tools, methods or instruments to employ, four factors are usually addressed. First, tools, methods or instruments should meet the needs of all those involved, i.e., individual clients, practitioners and employers. Second, each tool, method or instrument should meet a specific purpose. Third, they should be compatible with and related to clients' background, literacy levels, and willingness to be tested during assessment. Fourth, tools, methods and instruments should relate to job requirements and employer expectations, realistic career planning or prediction of training or job success.

E. IMPACT OF PARTICIPANT FLOW

Another way of looking at the assessment process is to examine who uses assessment information and how it is used at the different decision points in the flow of participants from program entry through program exit. Assessment activities at difference stages in the participant flow can answer the following questions:

Stage One: Intake and Eligibility Certification. In stage one, individual job seekers use assessment for self-evaluation, career decision-making, and job search purposes. Individuals can explore personal values, vocational interests, and abilities in light of current and future labor market requirements. Questions answered in this stage are:

-- Is the applicant interested in participating in the program?

-- Is the applicant a member of a service priority group?

-- Is the applicant eligible for participation?

-- Can the applicant benefit from program participation?

Stage Two: Assessment and Assignment to Services. As individual clients move from stage one to stage two, they can clarify what they need to do to acquire or modify behavior in light of labor market requirements; this clarification also serves as a statement of individual accountability for program participation. Counselors may collect, document and analyze initial assessment data to diagnose client needs and tailor individual service strategies in stage two. These tailored strategies are based upon specific skill deficits within functional areas. For instance, within the basic skill competency areas, identified problems with addition and subtraction might be addressed. Questions dealt with in stage two are:

-- What are the client's personal circumstances which may affect participation or employment?

-- What are the client's occupational interests and preferences?

-- What are the client's educational proficiencies, e.g., cognitive skills and levels?

-- What are the client's occupational proficiencies, e.g., work attitudes and behaviors, specific job skills, aptitudes, physical capabilities?

-- What is the client's vocational goal?

-- What are the services (including expected outcomes of each service) needed for the client to accomplish vocational goals? What is the necessary service sequence?

-- What supportive services or non-JTPA services are required?

-- What is the client's anticipated date of service completion?

Depending upon local arrangements, a case management approach may be used in which a counselor or instructor is assigned to each individual client at

program entry. The case manager is responsible for following the client and tracking his or her progress through stage three, providing performance feedback, and adjusting the service strategy as necessary through program exit. Performance accountability is reinforced by regular tracking of client performance.

Stage Three: Training, Job Development and Placement. Assuming that assessment information encompasses items that are important to job success, job placement personnel can distinguish among clients to make reliable and valid referrals based upon employer requirements. In turn, employers use assessment information for distinguishing who's best qualified among job applicants in making hiring decisions. Stage three assessment information which provides a description of individual accomplishments or attestation of demonstrated skills is a valuable aid in the screening and selection process. Questions addressed in this stage include:

-- What is the client's progress in skills/behavior acquisition?

-- Is progress being made at a satisfactory rate?

-- What outcomes have been accomplished?

-- Does the employability plan require revisions?

-- How can the client's performance be improved?

-- Is the client ready for employment?

-- Is the client employed?

-- How has the client performed on the job?

Data is gathered through assessment a variety of forms, e.g., registration, referral, eligibility certification, employability development plans, instructor records, counselor notes and so on.

Carefully crafted employability development plans function as the center-piece for effective client centered planning and management. They provide the vehicle for communication between the client and the instructor or counselor. Viewed as a "file" rather than a single form, the EDPs is the principal documentation tool in assessment. It collects and documents data

about client diagnosis, prescription and progress from a variety of forms. It lets practitioners know exactly where a participant is in the program, how well he or she is doing, and whether the prescribed services should be revised.

Effective and useful EDPs function as contracts between clients and trainers, containing mutually agreed upon goals, identification of client and trainer responsibilities in reaching goals and a timetable for regular review of progress and accomplishments. EDPs are precise "road maps" which identify: (1) where clients start relative to achievement of employment goals; (2) where the clients want to go; (3) road blocks to overcome; and (4) specific training plans which outline precise steps to take in order to accomplish goals. An analysis of selected information from EDPs can describe who the clients are in programs, their characteristics and needs, and the outcomes they have achieved.

IV. PROGRAM MANAGEMENT: ASSESSMENT SUPPORT AND REQUIREMENTS

Similar to other program components or functions, assessment both provides support for management decision-making and requires support from program management to accomplish its goals. This section explores the relationship between program management and assessment.

A. OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

Program managers should be aware of how operational decisions can influence the structure and substantive organization of assessment. For example, should assessment, particularly the initial stage, be open-entry, open-exit and self-paced; or is a more conventional structure needed to respond to traditional classroom schedules? Should assessment be centralized or decentralized? Is standardization necessary and feasible? Will assessment be contracted? Are there specific client needs that require referrals for more in-depth or specialized assessment? How will referrals be arranged? How are assessment responsibilities assigned? How many assessment and related staff are available for service and what is their expertise? Given the planned uses of assessment and assessment service strategies selected, what staff development needs to occur?

Decision makers considering centralized assessment and the establishment of an assessment center should be aware that the literature is mixed on the benefits of centralized assessment centers. Assessment centers can be effective if they concentrate on basic measures and specific assignment criteria for each service or activity. If assessment is decentralized, decision makers should determine whether standardized assessment is necessary and possible by asking the following kinds of questions. How can assessment strategies be used more systematically and consistently across organizations or geographical areas? Are clients hampered by imprecise information on available services or labor market requirement? Are clients receiving quality assessment on a consistent basis? Are employability plans less thoughtful because they focus only on what's known to be available for a particular part of the SDA? Is access to all available services and communication among assessment staff and service providers considered adequate?

Two important management concerns are how to ensure assessment quality and to establish management controls for assessment through contractual arrangements. One decision making process originally documented by the National Alliance of Business for performance-based contracts may be useful in reviewing assessment contractual and management arrangements.

- Consider the requirements of the client groups, e.g., the three groups proposed in Exhibit 1.
- Describe the anticipated performance levels related to both outcomes and process.
- Describe the service requirements, e.g., any particular strategies, tools, instruments and methods, or coordination arrangements to be employed.
- Determine reasonable costs, accounting for variations in intensity.
- Define measure of performance for the assessment system.
- Assign unit values for assessment.
- Structure rewards and sanctions based on performance.
- Design payment schedules for assessment service provider(s).

Existing staff capability affects assessment design, and designated improvements usually require increased staff capability. Usually attempts to build assessment staff capability are underestimated. For example, introducing the use of mock interviews as a form of performance review may require providing information or training to staff on how the mock interview is to be conducted, how ratings should be interpreted and how standards, focused interviewing techniques, and documentation procedures can be used. In cases of multiple raters for mock interviews, the handling of results both accurately and consistently also is a focus for staff development. In other words, staff capability represents both a resource for assessment and a cost of any assessment enhancement or expansion.

One of the important considerations in identifying and analyzing opportunities for improving assessment is the availability of resources. At

the local level, resource examples in addition to staff may include: counseling or testing expertise from local schools, colleges or vocational rehabilitation; availability of shared space with other agencies' assessmen personnel; access to employment service assessment tools and techniques; input from local associations of personnel officers, other groups working with the same client populations and, of course, employers. Determining what should be done and can be done to improve assessment practices at the practitioner or local level will be influenced by state policies and actions which influence the availability of resources. Operational state agendas for improving assessment are discussed in the next section.

B. SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT

Assessment helps decision-makers and practitioners design service interventions targeted for client groups receiving service priority. For those service delivery systems which maintain some degree of flexibility within the overall job training program design, assessment information can also be used to:

- Determine effective service sequencing for clients with selected characteristics;
- Figure out the average length of participation to achieve outcomes within each step of the service sequence;
- Estimate appropriate levels of resources to achieve outcomes given client skill levels relative to employer needs; and
- Identify appropriate coordination arrangements to ensure clients access to needed services.

Assessment information, then, can serve as the basis for building consensus about a comprehensive client-centered service strategy across various normally competing resources. It can provide a context for reviewing roles and responsibilities in light of demonstrated effectiveness which can result in more coherent service delivery system plans.

The employment and training community is challenged to combine client, financial and performance data in order to increase cost effective

programming. For example, in Los Angeles assessment findings provided the impetus for planning a city-wide literacy initiative. Aggregate assessment ca signaled the need for developing a sequence of service. A more detailed discussion of Los Angeles' use of assessment information is found in the Appendix. Decision-makers may want to consider building selective assessment data into existing information systems so that clients' progress can be tracked against plan. Some form of credentialling information might also be maintained which would benefit both job seekers and employers.

C. EVALUATION

Program managers need to know whether clients and programs are performing according to plan. Program managers and other decision makers should know whether program designs make a difference in the employment preparation and placement of clients, and whether sound assessment pays off. The first question focuses on monitoring ongoing operations to determine whether any corrective actions are necessary. By reviewing who is being served on a regular basis, program managers can also adjust performance. The second and third questions focus more closely on evaluation and subsequent replanning.

Typical job training program evaluations focus on whether or not performance standards are met and the difference between planned and actual performance. By taking into account assessment data, programs and services within programs can be reviewed for cost effectiveness. In addition to client flow and compliance monitoring, evaluation questions can include:

- Is the program or assessment unit diagnosing efficiently and effectively?
- Who is screened in and out of the program?
- Do employability plans adequately reflect training or services and progress?
- What "value" or skills is the program adding to individual clients?
- Is the program meeting employer expectations?
- Is there an adequate array of services accessible to

clients who need them?

- What service strategies work best for whom?
- Does meeting employer expectations result in greater labor market gains in the long run?
- What is the average length of time it takes to make individual clients employable? Does it vary by service strategy or client characteristics?
- How much does it cost to make individual clients employable? Do costs vary by service strategy or client characteristics?

Ensuring that assessment data are useful in monitoring and evaluating program performance requires careful and complete documentation, staff with appropriate substantive skills, and sufficient time and resources for data collection and analysis. Because few management information systems incorporate assessment data at this time, samples of client folders can be drawn to provide a detailed data base in specific areas of concern to program managers and decision makers.

V. ASSESSMENT AND STATE AGENDA BUILDING

Because assessment directly influences the cost effectiveness of programming and the system's responsiveness to employers, it is important that state officials develop an agenda for enhancing or expanding assessment services. This agenda will necessarily address virtually every component of job training service delivery and should make it possible to move the system toward more individualized client-centered employability planning and service delivery.

Four optional agendas for improving assessment are described below; they focus on information management, policy, coordination and operations. The agendas are interrelated, and most states are likely to pick and choose agenda elements that address unique state circumstances. All four agendas reflect the provision of technical assistance with varying degrees of intensity; all imply some redirection of state resources to focus on assessment.

- **The Policy Agenda** may include:

  -- Sponsoring an evaluation of assessment and performance data to determine the efficiency of resource allocations.

  -- Reviewing the current status of assessment practices and recommending areas for improvement.

  -- Adjusting performance standards by using enriched client data from the assessment process.

  -- Establishing criteria for encouraging the use of state programs including the eight, three, and ten percent set-asides, and Title III resources to improve assessment services to special groups; to promote joint agency use of assessment information or resources; and to develop alternative assessment models, e.g., for rural areas.

  -- Facilitating the development and acceptance of credentialling services and competency-based programming.

- **The Coordination Agenda** may include:

  -- Recommending ways to award financial incentives for interagency assessment endeavors.

-- Negotiating interagency agreements which focus assessment and program resources on client groups mutually targeted for service priority, and which specify roles and responsibilities based upon congruent expertise.

-- Collecting, analyzing and distributing outcome information by client characteristics across job training and other related programs.

-- Indicating in planning guidance to SDAs assessment that client data can, or should, be used as part of the rationale for planning decisions.

-- Promoting the use of assessment and certification services as part of a state's economic development marketing strategy.

o **The Operations Agenda** may include:

-- Developing local assessment staff capacity through the provision of "expert" assistance at state sponsored workshops or statewide SDA association meetings, and SDA on-site visits.

-- Examining Title III pre-layoff and "labor exchange assessment approaches" to determine best practices for different groups of dislocated workers, and transmitting the results to practitioners.

-- Developing marketing strategies for providing tailored screening and referral services to employers on a fee basis.

-- Supporting the implementation of tested or exemplary assessment practices for target populations.

o **The Information Management Agenda** may include:

-- Collecting, reviewing and circulating descriptions of alternative assessment strategies, including competency-based assessment approaches.

-- Sponsoring an SDA-to-SDA information exchange which encourages assessment personnel to solve problems based upon local experience and expertise.

-- Reviewing current management information system specifications and capacity in light of decision-maker and practitioner needs to include selected assessment information.

-- Assuring development of adequate information on labor market requirements and employer expectations for career decision making.

-- Assuring access to available information by a variety of users, including clients, assessment personnel and others.

-- Reviewing assessment data elements across job training and related information systems with a long-range intent of information sharing.

State assessment priorities will, of course, be reflected in individual state agendas and are likely to encompass a mix of technical assistance, coordination, and policy actions. Because assessment requires input from employers about what skills and behaviors are required of satisfactory employees and what information about prospective employees is important in the hiring process, states should be aware that improved assessment performance also parallels increased responsiveness to employer needs.

In summary, assessment is a critical function in employment and training service delivery. It reflects labor market requirements and contributes necessary information for the efficient management of client employability development and effective job matching.

Many resources to improve assessment can be found at the state and local levels. References to documents and organizations involved in assessment-related activities throughout this paper as well as the paper's bibliography provides a useful starting point for identifying such resources. In addition, the National Governors' Association and other national providers of technical assistance in employment and training can help you access relevant materials and technical expertise.

APPENDIX

THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT ON PLANNING: A CASE STUDY

The City of Los Angeles Private Industry Council (LAPIC), together with the Training and Job Development Division in the Mayor's Community Development Department, is developing a youth employment and training service delivery system which reflects LAPIC approved competencies and requires uniform prescribed assessment procedures city-wide. The Brandeis University Center for Human Resources is assisting these groups in this endeavor. A summary of the five step decision making process which the city partners have employed follows.

Step One: Analyze Current Assessment Data. Demographic and assessment data were analyzed to determine: who was served, and what their entry and exit skill levels were relative to LAPIC competencies. Assessment data were based on information from three primary sources: (1) the City's JTPA Registration Form; (2) the Adult Performance Level (APL) occupational knowledge content area pre- and post-tests; and (3) the Stanford test, Task/Level 2, Form E pretest and Form F post-test. Assessment data were organized into two groups for analysis purposes: Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) participants, and community-based organization youth participants, i.e., all other youth. Program services data supplemented the assessment data; they were collected through special purpose interviews and contract documents. Readers interested in a full description of the assessment system, data analysis and youth service plan should contact Brandeis University Center for Human Resources.

Some of the major program planning implications that emerged from this analysis include the following:

- The youth population is heterogeneous, and therefore, employment and training programs should treat youths individually according to each youth's needs.

- Basic skills remediation is critical; linkages with schools, community colleges, and community learning centers should be strengthened and literacy "feeder" programs should be increased.

For example, four out of five youth participants read below the national average. Nearly one-third of all youth participants read below the fifth grade level; another one-third read somewhere between the fifth and sixth grade levels. Although 86 percent of all LAUSD participants are enrolled in the eleventh or twelfth grade, only about 14 percent of LAUSD participants read at the high school level. In job training programs, LAUSD participants generally have received similar services regardless of their computational skills. Two-fifths (41 percent) of LAUSD participants who compute at the seventh or eighth grade level, and nearly two-fifths (38 percent) who compute below the seventh grade level have service interventions similar to those LAUSD youth participants who compute at or above their levels.

In the area of occupational knowledge, i.e., pre-employment and work maturity skills, over two-fifths of all youth participants,

43 percent of the LAUSD participants, and 44 percent of all other youth participants appear to be competent. On the other hand, one-fourth of the LAUSD participants and eight percent of all other youth participants are rated as having inadequate occupational knowledge. The remaining participants have marginal occupational knowledge.

- <u>It is important to maintain a balance of community agencies, including schools and youth serving groups to address the needs of youth participants</u>.

It appears that the LAUSD does a better job of reinforcing the basic skills of its participants over time; and the community-based organizations do a measurably better job in raising the occupational knowledge of their participants. For example, over two-fifths (43 percent) of the community-based program participants gained at least one skill level from program entry to exit, e.g., from inadequate to marginal or from marginal to adequate function in occupational knowledge. About one-fourth of these youth gained two occupational knowledge skill levels. Over one-fourth (28 percent) of the LAUSD participants gained one occupational knowledge skill level during this same time. However, over one-half (55 percent) of the LAUSD participants improved their basic skills.

- <u>Decision-makers should establish realistic performance standards for youth; performance expectations should make explicit the need to improve youth participants' employability skills, i.e., occupational knowledge and basic skills</u>.

Los Angeles youth participants are, on average, extremely disadvantaged compared to the national norms. The management challenge has been to set realistic benchmarks for programs and youth participant achievement. The LAPIC and the Community Development Department believe that competency-based assessment and programming is the appropriate strategy for use in establishing and meeting realistic performance standards. These partners are also aware that short term, placement-driven programs which place youth in jobs are, in many cases, unable to substantially increase youth participant skill levels as measured by the APL and the Stanford Test of Academic Skills.

<u>Step Two: Determine Strategies to Improve JTPA Program Design</u>. Based upon assessment results, decision-makers were faced with balancing two potentially competing factors: (1) statutory youth targeting goals and placement standards; and (2) a youth employment and training service delivery system design built upon effective programming for at-risk youth. Staff carried out two tasks to balance both concerns. First, they articulated a city-wide youth program planning design to reach the identified diverse youth groups. Second, they developed a performance-based contracting model with different reimbursement strategies that encourage and reward operators to effectively serve at-risk youth using a competency-based approach.

Using assessment data as described in step one, the City of Los Angeles' youth population was divided into the following three groups:

- Youth who have succeeded in school, who have some work experience, and who simply need connection to jobs.

- Youth who have, or will attain, high school diplomas or the equivalent, but who have little or no work experience and weak high school records.

- High-risk youth who are mainly minority youth, who are poor and may be public assistance recipients, who have dropped out of school, and who have little or no work experience.

Group one generally requires short term job search and placement services. Group two may require short term opportunities to acquire and demonstrate proper work behaviors and attitudes, build a work history, and gain knowledge about the labor market. Group three requires more intensive remediation in the areas of basic skills and work deportment; this group faces acute unemployment problems without such intervention. Many of these individuals also require help with emergencies ranging from medical and legal assistance to housing and child care support.

A three-tiered youth work preparatory model was designed based upon these assessment findings and JTPA programming options. As presented in Exhibit A below, it sets forth a sequence of services designed to make sense programmatically and financially; it requires major collaborative efforts in order to implement service delivery changes. Decision-makers are currently making some hard choices about who can best provide each service, and under what conditions.

Step Three: Articulate Operations Plan. The LAPIC and the Community Development Department correctly reasoned that a collaborative approach is critical to developing an individualized youth employment and training system. These partners directed that collaboration should begin early, and that it should involve program operators, private employers, educators, government officials, and community organization representatives. The partners asked the Brandeis University Center to act as an objective third party, building consensus for the operations plan across affected and interested groups.

Step Four: Develop Compatible Performance Standards and Flexible Contract Model. Decision-makers and practitioners stated the importance of developing compatible performance standards and a contracting approach flexible enough to accommodate variations in scope and training duration. In this way, pre-employable or at-risk youth may be served in significant numbers, and program outcomes in addition to placement will be recognized. To date, the City of Los Angeles contracting procedures are similar to those of other big cities; contracting relies mostly on easy to measure placement goals. According to Brandeis' survey of six big cities, current JTPA contracts generally do little to encourage service providers to enroll at-risk youth.

The Youth Work Preparatory Model displayed in Exhibit A offers a hierarchical service sequence and mix for effectively targeting youth who need

EXHIBIT A: CITY OF LOS ANGELES WORK PREPARATORY MODEL PROGRAM

Tier	Services	Cost*	
		Cost per positive term	Program/ source
Tier 1: Employable (Advanced)	o Job Search Assistance o Placement	$1,500 (x33 = $49,500)	Conventional Title II-A
Tier 2: Nearly Employable (Intermediate)	o Pre-Employment Skills Training o Tryout Employment or On-the-Job-Training o Basic Education	$3,600 (x 33 = $118,800)	JTPA "Menu" Title II-A and B; Eight Percent Set-Aside
Tier 3: Pre-Employable (Basic)	o Work site Training (level Behavior/Attitudes o Basic Education	$5,400 (x 33 = $178,200	Entry Employment Experience Title II-A and B; Eight Percent Set-Aside

* The Cost Model is based upon serving 100 youth participants per year with 36 participants on board at any one time. Model total budget is $346,500; average cost per positive termination is $3,500.

straightforward job connections, who need conventional programs, or who require basic, indepth services. The mix itself is expected to collectively result in a balanced cost-effective system which takes into account city-wide performance standards and youth needs. The needs of eligible youth determine the length and intensity of services, and hence, the cost. In turn, client assessment which diagnoses needs, tailors service strategies, and reviews progress, determines whether the three tiered model is effective and reliable.

Building on the three tiered program, a performance-based contract model, including three discrete reimbursement strategies was developed. The model recognizes city-wide performance standards and provides incentives to service providers working with at-risk youth. The model incorporates attainment of LAPIC approved youth competencies as payment benchmarks, ensuring the system's flexibility for more than one outcome. The performance-based contract model is presented in Exhibit B below. It displays three reimbursement strategies:

- Placement driven reimbursement (60 percent of payment) for service providers assisting employable youth through Tier 1 short-term advanced job search and placement services;

- Placement weighted reimbursement (55 percent of payment) for service providers working with nearly employable youth using Tier 2 or intermediate services, e.g., exemplary youth services, occupational skill training, on the job training and basic education.

- Youth competency attainment reimbursement (67 percent of payment) for service providers which help at-risk youth by providing Tier 3 services; these service providers also receive a bonus for job placement.

<u>Step Five: Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Plans</u>. The Youth Work Preparatory Model is scheduled for phase-in beginning July 1, 1986. Steps are now being taken to ensure that monitoring and evaluation plans are in place at that time. Procedures for assessing client assessment data will be important parts of both monitoring and evaluation plans; client assessment data will provide decision-makers and service providers with information about whether program services are making a difference in the employment preparation and placement of youth participants, and whether services are cost-effective.

Although this case study focuses on the City of Los Angeles, the impact that assessment can have on employment and training program planning and design is clear. Assessment can help local decision-makers better plan service strategies targeted for youth or adult clients. It also serves as a foundation for building coalitions of private sector and public sector organizations to cost-effectively deliver services. It provides information about on-going performance which local decision-makers can use to ensure that expected performance is achieved.

EXHIBIT B: SUMMARY OF CITY OF LOS ANGELES YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE-BASED CONTRACTING MODEL

NOVEMBER 1985

	Program Design and Target Group Options					
	Basic Level (Tier 3)		Intermediate Level (Tier 2)		Advanced Level Tier 1)	
Performance Benchmark	% of total payment	$ amount of total payment	% of total payment	$ amount of total payment	% of total payment	$ amount of total payment
1. Enrollment & Initial Assessment						
1.1 Enrollment & Eligibility	10%	$540	10%	$360	10%	$150
1.2 Initial Assessment	10	$540	10	$360	10	$150
Subtotal for 1	20	$1080	20	$720	20	$300
2. Post-assessment & Competency Attainment						
2.1 Post-assessment & Competency Attainment	25	$1350	15	$540	10	$150
2.2 Program Design (Hours)	22	$1188	10	$360	10	$150
Subtotal for 2	47	$2538	25	$900	20	$300
Cumulative Subtotal	67	$3618	45	$1620	40	$600
3. Placement						
3.1 Placement in unsubsidized employment	12	$648	30	$1080	40	$600
3.2 30-Day Retention	10.5	$567	15	$540	10	$150
3.3 60-Day Retention	10.5	$567	10	$360	10	$150
Subtotal for 3	33	$1782	55	$1980	60	$900
Cumulative Total	100%	$5400	100%	$3600	100%	$1500

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