

The Impact of the 'Worker - Client' Relationship in Achieving Employment Outcomes in Contracted Employment Programmes

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Abstract

Empirical research in social work and other disciplines such as psychology and education confirms the centrality of relationship-building in achieving results in the helping professions.

This thesis reports on mixed methods research that explores the employment outcomes of employment consultants in Australian contracted employment services and their job seeker engagement and relationship style.

The literature review contrasts the dominant paradigm of a work first ideology that stresses activation and individual responsibility, with relationship based interventions that encourage building social capital and pathways to employment. The literature review considers ‘what works for whom’ in employment services, case management within a social work construct and identifies the gap in research in the effectiveness of relational models on engagement and employment.

The research methodology used focus groups of job seekers and employment consultants to inform the design of an online survey of employment consultants. The survey responses were used to construct a Relationship Focus Score which was correlated with employment outcome scores and the length of unemployment of job seekers on consultants’ caseloads.

The qualitative component explored the engagement styles of frontline workers and the individual and structural inhibitors to relationship based models of practice.

By comparing this research with earlier data the research identified a decline in the education levels of frontline workers, leaving workers dependent on government contract guidelines and the policy settings of their respective agencies to guide their actions at the frontline. This, in turn, results in few frameworks and little opportunity for discretion in implementing empowering models of practice.

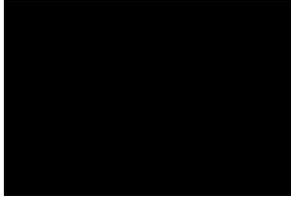
The findings suggest that a greater focus on relationship building and improving the skill level of front line workers could improve the capacity for effective case management, and better enable workers to practise in ways consistent with the values and processes expected in helping professions.

Further research is required to develop a deeper understanding of the degree of effectiveness of relationship based interventions in employment services.

Doctor of Social Work Declaration

I, George Giuliani, declare that the Doctor of Social Work thesis entitled 'The Impact of the 'Worker - Client' Relationship in Achieving Employment Outcomes in Contracted Employment Programmes' is no more than 60,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signed:



Date: 16 April 2015

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Thanks to Professor Carolyn Noble and Professor Marty Grace, their wisdom and experience as supervisors kept me on the right path and ensured a critical perspective of the topic.

To my loving and patient partner Julie, I dedicate this thesis to her for giving up many days and nights so I could complete this work, thank you, and yes, now we can go to Italy!

For Julie,
Luke and Lucy, Hannah, Heath and Tilly
In the end it's the relationship that matters.

¹ Peak body for not for profit providers of employment assistance and related services

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
APM	Active Participation Model
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CWC	Community Work Coordinators
DEA	Disability Employment Australia (peak organisation)
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DES	Disability Employment Service(s)
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (later DEEWR)
DEWRSB	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and Small Business (later DEEWR)
DSP	Disability Support Pension
EPF	Employment Pathway Fund
EPP	Employment Pathway Plan
ESA	Employment Service Areas
ESS	Reporting and management software which replaced EA 3000
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
ISCA	Intensive Support Customised Assistance
JA	Jobs Australia (peak organisation)
JCA	Job Capacity Assessment or Job Capacity Assessor
JN	Job Network (predecessor to current employment services model)
JPET	Job Placement, Employment and Training
JSA	Job Services Australia
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NESA	National Employment Services Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PR	Participation Reports (compliance report or activation process)
PSP	Personal Support Programme
WFD	Work for the Dole

Glossary of employment services terminology

Case manager: originally a social work term - adopted in the early years of the Job Network – a carry-over from community-based programmes and the welfare sector in general - sometimes used by long-term unemployed job seekers in focus groups about various helping professionals, including employment services frontline workers.

Client or participant: often used interchangeably with ‘jobseeker’ but in many cases indicating broader purpose or experience. Some organisations that provide employment services also provide welfare services, and the term ‘client’ can encompass a number of services being delivered, as distinct from ‘jobseeker’, which more generally refers to employment assistance.

Frontline worker: generic term for worker providing direct assistance in a broad range of possible contexts.

Employment consultant (EC): common term used for frontline worker engaged to assist people into employment.

Participant: often used in social assistance programmes and in Disability Employment Services (DES). Note: ‘client’ was used extensively by consultants in the focus groups and survey responses, even though the language of the Department and providers in general is ‘job seeker’ or, in the case of Centrelink, ‘customer’. The manner of usage was relevant and contains a relational inference – ‘when I am meeting with *my client*’, as compared with providing assistance to *the job seeker to find employment*.

Intensive Support Customised Assistance (ISCA): higher level of service under Job Network offered to job seekers assessed as being at high risk of long-term unemployment, or gauged as being particularly disadvantaged, or who have been unemployed for an extended period of time.

Breach: sanctions as a result of [Non] Participation Report (PR) (personal activation process). The partial or complete withdrawal of income payments following a failure to meet social security requirements, for example, non-attendance at a Centrelink appointment, service provider or job interview. In some cases, a short-term withdrawal of benefit until the income recipient contacts Centrelink – in other circumstances (for example, repeated failure) eight weeks total removal of benefit.

Note: other specific terminology is addressed in the relevant page footer.

Chapter 1 Purpose and context

1.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter begins with an explanation of the initial motivation for the research and then defines the research question and aims. The next section positions the research as practitioner research and outlines the theoretical framework, purpose and context for the research thesis. The chapter then introduces work first and relationship building in the context of case management as key modalities in employment assistance that underpin much of the discussion in this thesis. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the relevance of the research, possible implications for the sector, an outline of the thesis structure and major issues to be considered in the following chapters.

1.2.1 Motivation

The motivation for this practitioner research arises from my immersion in over 35 years of work in employment services; as a frontline worker, service manager, policy officer and more recently, CEO of a medium-sized, community-based agency.

The original impetus to undertake a research project was based on observations and concerns that the employment services sector had become so rigid and performance driven that it had lost the capacity to care for the very people it was trying to help; or, as suggested by Murray and Quinlan (2006, p. 21) ‘the programme should serve job seekers not the other way round’.

Amid the ever increasing compliance regime in employment services, I met people who still had great passion for the work. I knew from working in the field and from Jobs Australia research (Jobs Australia 2005) that the majority of frontline workers came to the sector with a genuine concern for the people they sought to assist. However, commitment was not enough and retention was (and is) an ongoing issue (Considine, Lewis & O’Sullivan 2011).

There were other practitioners and researchers at the time questioning the contradictions of competition policy and the perverse effect on service delivery from an economic perspective (Mitchell & Cowling 2003) and from an efficacy perspective (Marston & McDonald 2008). In short, the promised outcomes of a market driven contracted model were not apparent and claims of ‘parking’ and ‘creaming’² of job seekers by service providers was further evidence that, for some of the most disadvantaged job seekers, access to reasonable levels of assistance was not yet realised (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; Fowkes 2011).

² ‘Parking’ refers to putting aside jobs seekers not likely to achieve an employment outcome and ‘creaming’ refers to selecting those most likely to achieve an outcome.

Likewise, social policy commentators such as Quinlan (2008) had begun to question the moral and social implications of a commoditised employment services model, while others were suggesting that the Job Network was ‘a “one size fits all” activation model as it affects individual job seekers’ (Marston & McDonald 2008, p. 261). Meanwhile, workers at the frontline reported significant levels of stress and burnout (Patton & Goddard 2003).

The increasing complexity of the system and the administrative burden were testing the resolve of even the most dedicated workers, particularly when other community sector jobs were offering better financial opportunities and more compassionate work. A colleague introduced me to some of the psychological theories and research about the ‘working / therapeutic alliance’ and I began to make some initial comparisons with the employment services context. Consistent with my social work background and case management experience, a basic concept was developed and, after some reflection, the research question:

Do workers who develop strong supportive relationships with job seekers achieve more or better employment outcomes?

An invitation from Victoria University to enrol in a Research Doctorate provided the opportunity to explore the issue, while the rigour and discipline of a doctorate would help keep the project on track and provide the academic framework. It would also provide an opportunity to immerse myself in the literature and scholarly works – an opportunity not always possible when responding to the busy demands of day to day practice.

This study explores the issue of worker – job seeker relationships, initially through the experience of service users and frontline workers via focus groups and then by an analysis of survey responses from 830 frontline workers. The concluding chapter brings together the evidence, findings and discussion to address the core question: does relationship building as a primary intervention better assist those who experience long-term unemployment to find work?

1.3.1 Research aims

The aims of this research are:

- to identify relationship-based interventions at the frontline of employment services and to explore the extent to which they may facilitate better outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers;
- to contribute to the body of knowledge about the efficacy of employment assistance programs; and

- to influence social policy and the development of future iterations of employment services.

1.4.1 Practitioner research

The development of evidence based practice as a social work perspective requires an investigation of the 'link between professional practice and research' (Fox, Green & Martin 2007, p. 3). This thesis considers the interactions of practitioners at the frontline of employment services from the perspective of a researcher/ practitioner who has worked in employment services for 35 years. One of the implications of this practice research position is the possibility that the researcher may lack sufficient objectivity in the design, implementation and analysis/interpretation stages of the research. Practitioner research in that sense can be a two-edged sword. In this research project, the researcher's knowledge and experience of the sector has helped contextualise the complexity and the multiplicity of stakeholders and provided access to data not likely to be available to someone from outside the sector. However, practitioner research includes a risk of allocating weight to certain questions and responses because they align with the researcher's values and world view. There is a further risk of interpreting qualitative material in a manner consistent with the researcher's bias. Creswell (2007) suggests, that maximising the benefits and minimising the risks of practitioner research can best be achieved by a robust design and methodology. This research has further addressed the risk of bias and encouraged researcher reflexivity, by initial testing of interpretation and findings with peers, supervisors and the field via conferences and workshops. This matter is addressed further in the chapter on research design.

While many positivist researchers question the construction of practitioner research and the capacity of the researcher to deliver an objective position, if such objectivity is indeed possible (Fox, Green & Martin 2007), from a post-positivist perspective, practitioner research cannot be neutral or value free; even the most sincere attempt to be objective will still render the position of neutrality impossible.

Thus this research utilises the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Liamputtong 2012), as a criterion of quality. In accordance with this approach the qualitative research findings must be consistent with the existing body of knowledge about the experience of employment service users in 21st century Australia. To that extent, the focus group material reflects the experience of services users and is consistent with much of the current literature, for example the detailed accounts of job seekers' experiences found in Marston and McDonald (2008) and Murphy et al. (2011). The issue of research rigour is further addressed in 'Chapter 4 - Research design'.

1.5.1 Theoretical framework

This research engages a critical social work perspective that provides a critique and alternative construction of traditional mainstream social theory. The individual psychotherapeutic elements of the research draws on foundational work by Bordin (1979) and his theories regarding the therapeutic relationship and working alliance as key to achieving change outcomes in helping professions (Bordin 1979; Horvath & Greenberg 1989).

While traditional or conservative social theory positions individuals and their deficits in society as its key construct, critical social work contends that it is the power structures and processes that create and maintain forces of injustice and oppression. Critical social work articulates an alternative vision or set of possibilities and then develops an action plan that embraces anti-oppressive practice.

A critical social work based perspective is motivated by an interest in the emancipation of people who experience oppression (Mullaly 2010). Positioning this research within critical social work is consistent with the researcher's ontology and the foundational premise of social work as a quest for social justice in the context of an unjust society (Gray, Midgley & Webb 2012). In this context, the research seeks to identify elements of oppressive practice and the underpinning structural influences; as well as to suggest alternatives that empower people who are unemployed to make choices about the nature of services they require. Although much of the discussion focuses on the individual relationship between frontline worker and job seeker, it is not the intent or view of the researcher that the problems reside with the individual; but rather how to better enable the frontline worker and the individual job seeker to design ways that work for them both. In this manner, workers and job seekers are better equipped to respond the policy setting that influence their interactions.

While this thesis is positioned within a critical social work approach 'a governmental analysis utilising Foucault's construction of governmentality (Foucault 2003) invites researchers to think about individual subjects as being produced in specific social policy practices' (Marston & McDonald 2006a, p. 4). Foucault's construction of governmentality help explains the mechanisms by which governments and their agents implement policy; within such a framework, we can consider the impact of policy decisions by governments and their agents in directing the actions of frontline workers and job seekers; or as Rose (1999) conceptualises, 'how governments penetrate into the lives of their citizen subjects' (Rose 1999, p.18).

Foucault's (2003) construction of governmentality positions the use of power by governments in the political and administrative functions they implement to manage citizens (as is the case at the frontline of employment services), in a manner that controls their actions and maximises production. In this construct, citizens are made docile subjects of government and activated by 'technologies of agency' (enhancing and improving our capacities for participation and action) (McDonald & Marston 2005, p. 376). In an employment services context, this form of governmentality is best illustrated by the coercive compliance system found in neo-liberal workfare based programs that according to Marston and McDonald may be 'doing more harm than good in adopting a workfare response to address long-term unemployment (Marston & McDonald 2008, p. 266). Neo liberalism in this construct is not *laissez-faire* liberalism, but liberalism that constructs the market as 'the formative "truth" and "power" of society' (Gane 2008, p. 358).

These elements of 'truth' and 'power' are also discussed by Rose (1999) as he suggests that philosophical views of 'truth' (in the absence of empirical research) influence the views and practices of government, 'forming the very presuppositions upon which governments rest' (Rose 1999, p. 31). This explanation helps us understand how the current neo-liberal agenda continues to vilify youth and others in the absence of empirical research to support such a position, and the lack of structural, demand-side responses to unemployment.

McKee (2009) suggests that governmentality is discursive in nature 'wherein the exercising of power is rationalised (for example, by claims of addressing welfare dependency) as well as the interventionist practice as manifest in specific programs' (McKee 2009, p. 466). In recent time this rationalisation is expressed in the rhetoric of Work for the Dole and taking a hard line on dole bludgers, for example Abbott (2001). Foucault (2003) provides a framework that transcends the political spectrum and a mechanism for understanding how governments of all persuasions construct neo-liberal policies and exercise 'governmentality' or, as Dean (1999) explains, how Labor governments can, and do, deliver neo-liberal policies.

This research acknowledges, but questions the benefit of agency theory and self-efficacy as detailed in Marston (2008), where he critiques Mead's (1986) discussion regarding the individualisation of responsibility for unemployment. Quoting Mead: 'the core of the culture of poverty seems to be [the] inability to control one's life – what psychologists call inefficacy' (Mead, 1986, p. 144). Mead's preferred solution is to subject unemployed people to policies and programs that combine 'help and hassle' to transform the unemployed subject into active citizens, to exercise agency in their own

interest and if required to be activated to do so by compliance and performance benchmarks (Marston 2008).

A juxtaposed position is the exercising of choice and use of individual power by the client, a function assisted by case management and social work practice; however, the current focus on compliance and performance leaves frontline workers with little discretion to enact social work case management. Instead, what is delivered is a paternalistic aberration, or what Dean refers to as ‘technologies of government’ (Dean 1999, p. 4). Similarly, Dean (2007), unpacks how the ‘jobseeker can initially be constructed as a customer making choices in a market of employment programs’ (p118), or alternatively they must be coerced to fulfil ‘certain obligations’ by agents of the state using the ‘authority of expertise to help individuals help themselves’ (Dean 2007, p. 37).

Without diminishing the individual capacity of those seeking employment and the skills necessary to survive the day to day challenges of living on unemployment benefits, ‘efficacy research and practice assumes a level of volition and access to resources that may not be viable for many unemployed individuals’ (Blustein, Medvide & Wan 2011, p. 346). While this theory of the ‘active citizen’ exercising power to maximise their own self-interest (Foucaultian in origin) (McKee 2009), may apply to some newly unemployed skilled citizens, for those who experience a range of disadvantages in the labour market or a significant disability, this exercising of power and choice remains limited.

McDonald and Marston (2008) add that the key assumption of employment programmes and the policy framework in which they exist is that job seekers exhibit certain barriers or deficits, (predominately in motivation, but also in skills, attitude, ethnicity and location) and that an ‘activation’ response is required to address resistance. The rhetoric is consistent with early neo-liberal commentators like Lawrence Mead (1986) and Charles Murray (1994). The impact of this shift to an individual focus has seen ‘[t]he rising burden on the individual job seeker’ (Sidoti et al. 2009) and the dramatic shift from citizen to customer; from universal entitlement to reciprocal obligation, (Carney 2007; Carney & Ramia 2002a)

1.6.1 Purpose and context of the research

This research began during the 2008-2009 review of the Job Network³ and the commencement of its replacement, Job Services Australia (JSA). At that time, various groups were concerned about the capacity of JSA to assist those job seekers most

³ Government contracted employment services in Australia

distant from the labour market (Australian Council of Social Service 2012b (ACOSS); Horn 2011b). In December 2012 (three years later), the department responsible for employment services, DEEWR, called for submissions in reference to the next iteration of employment services set to commence in 2015 (DEEWR 2012a) (see also later section 'History of Employment Services'). This research, therefore, in addition to considering the worker - client relationship also seeks to influence the design of future models of employment services via submissions and conference presentations utilising some of the related research findings. A list of publications and conference presentations is attached at Appendix 7.

The contracting out and evolving design of employment services since the mid-1990s has resulted in 'extensive and complicated' (Rogers 2007, p. 398) requirements for providers and job seekers, has reduced innovation and has disproportionately and negatively impacted on disadvantaged job seekers (Fowkes 2011; Marston 2008; Nevile & Lohmann 2011). The nature of service delivery has shifted from the intensive case management models articulated in the initial design of the Job Network to one that emphasises a 'work first' approach, is generally routine and is often directed by scripts and information technology (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011).

This emphasis on 'work first' approaches rather than models that acknowledge the ontological underpinnings and personal aspirations of job seekers has not improved outcome rates for disadvantaged job seekers (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; Hasluck & Green 2007). DEEWR data at March 2013 indicate that long-term unemployment had increased by 80 per cent over the previous five years and that nearly 161,841 (28 per cent) of the total had been unemployed for 36 months or more (DEEWR Administrative Data, 2013).

1.6.2 Work first and relationship building

While 'work first' models have made few inroads into reducing long-term unemployment, recent international research in related disciplines draws attention to the client - worker relationship as a critical factor in achieving outcomes for high needs groups (Catty et al. 2008; Perdrix et al. 2011).

In employment services these worker - client relationships operate within the context of case management; however, evaluations of case management in employment services have reported mixed results (Brown 2001; Cull 2011; Eardley & Thompson 1997). In the initial development of employment assistance programs, case management models were adapted from social work constructs of case management; however, over time this welfare based construct has been eroded by programme compliance requirements (McDonald & Coventry 2009).

The inherent compliance role in contracted employment services creates significant role confusion for consultants (and job seekers), as they are expected on one hand to operate as agents of the state (compliance and reporting) and simultaneously be client focused and empathic – acting in the interest of the client. As Nevile (2011) argues, staff are ‘now expected to build a relationship with the client and get them a job and at the same time, monitor compliance and report breaches which may well destroy whatever relationship has been developed’ (Nevile 2011, p. 27).

The ‘compliance / empathy’ contradiction has been evident in previous iterations of the Job Network and, more recently, in the delivery of JSA, resulting in various agencies questioning the nature of assistance provided to disadvantaged job seekers and calling for ‘more intensive employment counselling, subsidised employment ...vocational training to improve skills and intensive engagement by the provider’ (ACOSS 2012a, p. 2; Horn 2011a). Agencies that assist specific disadvantaged groups have argued for service provision that is more consistent with social work models of case management, that include empathic relational aspects of mentoring and rapport building (as compared with process management) and ‘that allows multiple barriers to be addressed simultaneously’ (Cull 2011, p. 10; Gronda 2009).

These social work models of interaction, in the context of relationship-making, are the focus of this study. In particular, this study seeks to investigate relationship-focused interactions at the frontline of employment services in order to better understand and evaluate what drives such interventions and their impact on outcomes. Ultimately, a better articulation of effective actions and interventions at the frontline can be translated into specific training and job design for workers and, ultimately, improved outcome rates for disadvantaged job seekers.

Hence, the question posed in this thesis is, ‘to what degree does the quality of the relationship between frontline workers and job seekers influence the employment outcome in Australian contracted employment services?’

1.7.1 Relevance of the research

This research makes a contribution to knowledge regarding the effectiveness of contracted employment services and to the body of literature regarding employment assistance interventions; in particular, their efficacy for disadvantaged job seekers.

At the centre of employment services provision is the relationship between the job seeker and frontline worker; while local labour market conditions and individual circumstances are important factors, employment outcomes are highly dependent on the capacity of the worker to effect change in the employment readiness of the job seeker (Considine 2001; Nevile & Lohmann 2011).

The early employment assistance programs in Australia (CYSS, SkillShare and ESRA) borrowed from the case management and social work models of the day and operated in a relational model with an emphasis on engagement, holistic support and advice (DEET, 1990; Ball 1996; Ball & Lam 2008; Eardley & Thompson 1997). This was particularly important for very disadvantaged job seekers where poor relationships were often an underlying cause or effect of their unemployment (Giuliani 2011; Perkins 2008).

The development of Australian employment services over time, particularly in the community not for profit sector, commenced as a relational model. Australia became perhaps the first country outside the United States to implement an explicit, large-scale case management model within its employment services (Eardley & Thompson 1997, p. 9). Early work in the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) was based around youth work models of mentoring and supportive interactions. CYSS was rolled into SkillShare in the early 1990s and opened to all working age recipients of employment benefits while still utilising a supportive interactive model (Ball 1996). The introduction of Mutual Obligation and compulsory attendance at return to work (activation) programs began the shift to more legal – contract-based relationship between job seeker and those providing assistance (Carney 2007) and each iteration of the Job Network and other assistance since then has ‘reflected the activation policies of each subsequent government’ (Wright, Marston & McDonald 2011, p. 10).

The later stages of the Job Network and the current JSA model have reduced the capacity to develop relational case management interventions, an issue brought about at least partially by the focus on ‘work first’ approaches and the increased emphasis on activation. Thomas (2007), states, ‘increased Government monitoring and regulation of Job Network providers has impacted on the ability of these providers to furnish the flexible and tailored support necessary to improve the employment outcomes of long-term unemployed and difficult-to-place job seekers’ (Thomas 2007, p. 1).

This research explores the working relationship’s role in achieving outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers, and to what extent greater flexibility at the frontline might enable workers to initiate relational based interventions that may improve employment outcomes.

In contrast, the outcome of recent restructures has been a general tinkering of the fee structure or minor changes to the program’s architecture. Such tinkering drives providers to find new ways of ‘getting around prescriptive contracts in order to help their clients’ (Neville & Lohmann 2011, p. 47). Each time employment services are restructured, the same rhetoric appears; claims that the design and architecture of the new model will be more efficient, achieve better outcomes and provide access for the

most disadvantaged job seekers (Fowkes 2011; Mitchell & Cowling 2003). And yet, as discussed below and in the literature review, very little improvement is evident across the last three iterations of Australian employment assistance models.

An alternative noted in one of the submission papers on the design of the next employment services model is to place greater emphasis on 'job seekers being involved in the planning of their case management' (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2012b, p. 13), and to pay additional attention to research findings that note the critical success role of the frontline worker (Hasluck & Green 2007; Miller et al. 2005; Smith 2002).

1.7.2 Implications for the sector

The continuing quest for employment outcomes along with efficiency and value for the public purse drives a great deal of the current research and policy development in employment services. The critical approach of this research into what drives outcomes in employment services will add to the existing research material on this topic.

There are implications in the findings for policy makers and frontline workers in regard to training requirements, qualification levels and the time allocated to service delivery. For example, current employment services contracts do not set minimum qualification requirements for frontline workers, yet workers in other sectors, working with the same client groups, for example aged care and health services have set minimum qualification levels - an issue currently under review in the development of the next iteration of employment services due to commence in 2015 (DEEWR 2012b).

As this research seeks to influence worker interactions and the current treatment of service users at the frontline of employment services, it seeks to do so by questioning the current construct of the relationship and identifying the underlying paradox where both workers and job seekers acknowledge the importance of the working relationship but are constrained by policy settings and compliance requirements. This research considers the possible benefit of a more humane interaction where workers and job seekers become co-producers of shared objectives rather than binary positions of citizens or customers or 'Friend or Foe' (Behncke, Frölich & Lechner 2007).

1.8.1 Thesis Structure

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis and key issues for discussion. Having outlined the research aims, theoretical positioning, relevance and implications of the research, the remainder of the thesis is set out as follows.

Chapter 2 discusses the nature of employment and unemployment beginning with the historical international development of employment assistance and the corresponding social policy context. This section includes a brief discussion of the nature of unemployment, particularly over the past two decades with the introduction of contracted models of service delivery and the shift from citizen entitlement to customer theory.

The chapter introduces key issues such as privatisation, mutual obligation, Job Network, JSA and concludes with a discussion regarding the role of frontline workers and job seekers.

Chapter 3 considers the literature in relation to the quest for better outcomes in employment services and research into 'what works for whom' (Hasluck & Green 2007). The chapter reviews the literature in relation to the role of supportive relationships in the caring professions within the context of relationship building in case management captured in the theoretical framework of the 'Therapeutic Alliance' (Bordin 1979). The literature review also considers the limited material on working alliance in employment service research and the case for a greater emphasis on this approach in service delivery. The later part of the chapter considers the impact of compliance and reduced discretion in work first models of service delivery as well as the role of personal advisors in the UK. The chapter concludes with an outline of the literature on the effectiveness of Job Network and JSA.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology, rationale and design of the mixed methods model used in this research, as well as ethics and limitations of the study. The chapter covers issues such as the research sample, selection of focus group participants, survey construction and question design for the qualitative component of the study. The chapter covers the construction of the variables, the selection of the various groups for analysis and the process followed. The chapter concludes with a discussion about ethics and bias in practitioner research as well as other possible limitations of the study

Chapter 5 provides the results of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis, beginning with the major themes from the focus groups, followed by a discussion of the research findings and then the exploration and correlation of the Relationship Focus Score with other key variables. The chapter reports on the accuracy and integrity of the results before exploring the qualitative data derived from text responses in the survey. Key themes covered in the qualitative material include worker's models for assisting job seekers, what workers would change about their work, the degree that workers include job seekers in the planning process and their philosophical rationale for working in the sector.

The final chapter (6) draws together the findings from the results chapter and provides recommendations for change to the frontline delivery of employment services in Australia. The concluding chapter draws on the findings of the research to articulate the implications for frontline workers and employment services in general. These recommendations make reference to skill and qualification requirements and the use of relationship based engagement strategies as compared with compliance based models. The discussion regarding sector requirements considers staff recruitment, retention and the supervision systems necessary to maintain a robust professional workforce.

The final chapter locates the research findings within the existing literature regarding the role of relationship development in employment assistance and identifies some of the gaps in research in relation to this issue in employment assistance. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research, including better access to data available within government departments that could help build a robust body of knowledge on the research topic.

Chapter 2 The nature of employment and unemployment

2.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter provides the policy context prior to a discussion of the role of employment and unemployment in Australian society. The chapter then provides an overview of the historical evolution of employment assistance and related policy development as they pertain to employment and citizenship rights. The section on the history of unemployment in Australia makes reference to the international foundations of policy development, including the development of international employment programs. The chapter then discusses current international benefit provision, the introduction of mutual obligation, the privatisation of employment assistance in Australia and the resulting neo-liberal programme mix. Following an overview of the Job Network and associated pre-employment programmes the discussion considers the current Job Services Australia delivery model. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding the role and level of discretion available to employment consultants and the interconnection of these issues with employment assistance.

2.2.1 Social Policy context

Australian social policy since the time of federation (1901) has been fashioned around the notion of paid employment and the provision of a safety net for those who for whatever reason are unable to access paid employment. The setting of wages in the Harvester Judgement (1907) has been noted as significant in setting minimum [male] wages so as to maintain wage – cost of living parity for at least until the 1960s (Castles 1994). A feminist critique highlights the gender inequality and construction of women, not as equal citizens but as dependents arguing that the ‘wage earners welfare state’ and the dominant discourse relates to ‘white male wage earners’ (Bryson & Verity 2009).

The underpinning safety net of the welfare state – the notion that governments provide a relief from the harsh effects of the market, has been an ongoing feature of nations like Australia, the UK and New Zealand (Carney & Ramia 2002c). Since federation, and the first social assistance in the form of invalid and aged pensions, Australia has progressively made provision for various cohorts. In post war Australia, this has included unemployment and sickness benefits, and the later provision for sole parents and people with disabilities (Jamrozik 2001). Following a period of relative quiet, the election of the Whitlam Labor Government introduced significant social benefits including free tertiary education and universal health care.

By the 1970s changing world economic condition influenced the Hawke and later Keating governments to reduce worker wage protection and introduce neo-liberal responses to changing demand in the manufacturing sector and commensurate high levels of unemployment.

The recent and continuing dominant neo-liberal ideology in recent Liberal and Labor governments, has continued to reduce the protections inherent in the welfare state, in preference for New Public Management (NPM) smaller government and privatised quasi-market responses to welfare provision (Considine 1999). The mechanism for managing the NPM agenda is the increased use of contractualism as a key tool in managing government – non-government relationships (Carney & Ramia 2002b; Davis, Sullivan & Yeatman 1997)

The neo-liberal arguments for market driven responses are based on the rhetoric that, 'bloated welfare states were taking away individual initiative and the high taxes extracted to fund welfare states were reducing the incentives for wealth generation' (Parkin, Summers & Woodward 2006, p. 429).

The recent debate about welfare dependency in Australia and the suggestion that people do not really want to work (Saunders 2003) underpins community attitudes to people who are unemployed (Eardley, Saunders & Evans 2000) and is part of the reason for this thesis. The discourse of 'welfare cheat' also drives harsh punitive response from the community and policy makers. In response, this study explores the potential benefits for more compassionate and non-judgemental approaches.

2.2.2 The role of employment

Wilson, Thomson and McMahon (1996) suggest that the starting point for considering the role of labour, and hence unemployment, is to understand the function of a nation's economic surplus as a means to generate wealth. In order to maintain a stable economy, a reasonable economic surplus is required; this is generally achieved via a balanced interaction between the cost and supply of labour as the means of production. In a pure system if the cost of labour is too high then the nation's surplus is eroded; however, it is important to note that high wages also stimulate the demand for goods and services. An oversupply of labour results in reduced wages and increases unemployment or underemployment for some of the population. Put simply, the structural oversupply of labour occurs when production exceeds consumption (including exports) (Hirsch 1997).

Clearly, we do not operate in a perfect system and according to Ziguras, Considine and Dufty (2003, p. 3) 'there may be a structural imbalance in the economy whereby the skills of the unemployed do not match those required by industry. In this case a high number of job vacancies can co-exist with a high level of unemployment'. This issue currently exists in Australia and is exacerbated by geography in the context of labour shortages in mining regions. Ziguras, et al. (2003) also point out that there are time lags between people leaving and regaining employment and that employers are likely to incur a cost in labour replacement that can be more than the savings of minor wage reductions.

Keynesian theorists argue that some level of unemployment is necessary to manage inflation (Phelps & Taylor 1977), which is generally expressed in the notion of the non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment (NAIRU), with the rate of inflation being generally considered by conservative economists to be more critical than unemployment.

Others have argued for policies that advocate full employment, as even five per cent unemployment disproportionately affects more disadvantaged cohorts in society (Mitchell & Cowling 2003; Warner, Forstater & Rosen 2000). A further ramification of the acceptance of the NAIRU is the accompanying effect of increasing underemployment, that is, the measure of those who would take more work if it was available (Campbell 2008).

The issues of employment / unemployment are much more complex than can be covered in this thesis, as many tensions and ideological positions interact with the functioning of the system (Wilson, Thomson & McMahon 1996). Further, parts of the system may be regulated by the state, for example in the setting of minimum [male] wages by Justice Higgins in the Harvester Judgment of 1907. For Australian wage earners, this setting of minimum wages fixed part of the supply – cost – demand equation, at least until the 1960s (Jamrozik 2001), and was the main reason Castles (1985, p. 103) described Australia as 'the wage earners welfare state'.

This wage earners welfare state, according to Ramia and Carney (2001), included a level of protectionism via the industrial relations system by the provision of minimum labour standards and wages, selective immigration policies (protection of jobs from low cost labour) and a 'residual social security system providing protection for those who could not work' (Ramia & Carney 2001, p. 65).

Prior to the rise of neo-liberal approaches to employment policy, this 'employment-based approach to welfare was reflected in the pursuit of full employment' (Wilson,

Thomson & McMahon 1996, p. 12), supplemented by a safety net for those falling outside the system (unemployment) (Castles 1985). Ramia (2013) argues that, by the 1980s, both Australia and New Zealand began to fall behind Europe as welfare states as the emerging ideologies of privatisation and the deregulation of labour saw a decline in universal welfare and a tighter targeting of safety net entitlements (Ramia 2013).

2.2.3 Employment as a citizenship right and joblessness

The right to paid work⁴ is enshrined within the foundations of a democratic and civil society as a mechanism not only to sustain life, but to build social inclusion and contribute to the 18th century notion of ‘civil society’ (Dean,1999). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted unanimously in 1948, proclaimed, ‘Everyone has the right to work’ (Article 23) (Evans 2002). Early sociologists like Weber and Marx considered paid work as part of our social construct, an expression of solidarity and ‘interdependence amongst various sections of society’ (Jamrozik 2001, p. 128).

Hartman (2005) and others note that this historical discussion refers to male employment and that the notions of full employment and the setting of wages in the Harvester Judgement was on the basis of wages ‘sufficient for a man to support a wife (sic) and up to three children in frugal comfort’ (Castles 1994, p. 130).

Paid work as a citizenship right is further elaborated on by Pixley (1993) who, in the context of citizenship rights and obligations, argues that even though work makes it possible for us to participate in society, our position or status [in society] should not be determined by the level of our economic contribution and that a broader understanding of contribution should prevail.

The challenge, then, in a social policy context is to focus on employment opportunity and inclusion without reducing the status of those without employment to ‘half a citizen’ (Murphy et al. 2011). The recent neo-liberal discourse, epitomised by commentators such as Mead and Saunders, takes a paternalistic position toward those without employment and to the provision of welfare assistance. To that end, Mead (1997) argues that passive responses have failed to address the problem and that what is required is a ‘paternalism [that] asserts the authority to judge individual interest ... claims the right to tell its dependents how to live ... enforcing society’s interest in good behaviour [and] is deemed to serve the individual’s interest as well’ (Mead 1997, p. 4).

⁴ The author notes the inherent sexism in the historic and current dominant discourse that constructs paid work as a predominately male domain with little reference or acknowledgement of unpaid work and the inequality of differing rates of pay for women.

The major shortfall in this conservative 'new paternalism' is that it fails to address the issue of reduced employment opportunities brought about by structural change, globalisation and profit maximisation strategies in competitive market economies. For example, the structural changes that occurred in Australia between 1966 and 1999 resulted in only 4.4 per cent growth in the industrial sector, while employment in management, community services and administration increased by over 200 per cent (Jamrozik 2001). For low skilled factory and manufacturing workers unable to re-skill in time to take advantage of growth sectors, the new paternalism cuts deep.

Along with the structural changes that have occurred over the past three decades, societal attitudes to those experiencing unemployment have also hardened, including a re-emergence of the 'deserving / undeserving poor' dichotomy found in the poor laws of 1601 and 1815 (Quinlan 2007). The public media portrayal of individuals and families as 'job snobs' has coincided with harsher policy regulation of income benefit recipients (Eardley & Matheson 1999)⁵. The reduction in real terms of payments to sole parents (by transfer to lower paying benefit) and the introduction of eight week no payment penalties are further evidence of this harsher regime. It is not surprising that,

[o]ver the 11 years of the [conservative Liberal-National] Coalition (1996-2007) government, the focus on the behaviour of income support recipients intensified. Application of penalties for non-compliance with Activity Test requirements (looking for work, attending appointments, attending work for the dole) steadily increased' (Fowkes 2011, p. 6).

Perkins (2003) argues that another significant shift occurred during this period; 'a move from political logic to economic logic in policy decision making, with most decisions now starting from the question of 'what will be the impact on the economy?' (Perkins & Angley 2003, p. III), rather than, what are the social and political implications? In essence, this shift relegates citizenship rights as secondary to the national economy.

Within this tougher context, the nature of the relationship between frontline workers and the job seekers they assist has also changed (Thornton & Marston 2009). In particular, the focus has shifted from client focused service delivery to process focused. Following a series of interviews with frontline workers, Marston and McDonald (2006) note that, in addition to concerns regarding the administrative burden, '[r]espondents were generally quite concerned about the negative impact of the program's outcome focus on their relationship with their clients' (Marston & McDonald 2006b, p. 8).

⁵ In 1997, a current affairs program ran a series of stories on the Paxton family as examples of teenage youth taking a free ride on social benefits; the stories coincided with the introduction of harsher penalties and activity requirements for people on benefits.

2.3.1 History of unemployment in Australia

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides historical and current data on unemployment rates in Australia and more recently data on 'underutilisation' rates (under-employment) that is, the number and percentage of people who would accept more hours of work if it were available. In the following discussion on unemployment rates it is important to note that the ABS counts as employed those who have worked a minimum of one hour in the previous period and includes those who have worked up to 14 unpaid hours in a family business (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013).

To be considered to be looking for work the person must have made some active attempt to find employment - so persons who have given up or become disillusioned may not be counted.

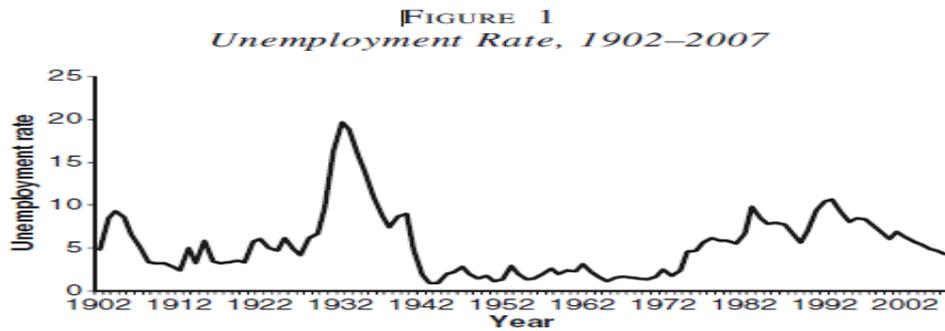
Campbell (2008) argues that,

the headline unemployment rate, which measures the unemployed as a percentage of the labour force, is a poor indicator of the efficiency of labour markets in utilising labour resources... it does not capture the many persons who want to take up hours of paid work (and may respond to opportunities if these become available) but who do not meet the criteria to be included in the count of the unemployed. Instead, these persons are counted either as 'not in the labour force' or even as 'employed' (Campbell 2008, p. 3).

More recently the OECD have noted the relatively high underemployment rate and casual employment rate in Australia (OECD 2012)

While keeping the above caveats in mind it is fair to say that unemployment levels in post-federation Australia have been relatively low compared with other western countries, with the exception of the 1930s depression when unemployment rose above 20 per cent (Bhattacharyya & Hatton 2011). As a post-war developing nation with a fixed wages system, 'fiscal and monetary policy [were used] to maintain levels of overall spending sufficient to generate employment growth in line with labour force growth' (Mitchell & Cowling 2003, p. 5). Migration was the other primary tool applied in post-war Australia to address the demand for generally low skilled labour.

Figure 1. Unemployment Rate 1902 - 2007.



Source: (Bhattacharyya & Hatton 2011, p. 203)

Post federation employment policy was underpinned by aspirations and theories of full employment (Keynes 1936) and a passive participation model in relation to the role of those unable to secure paid work. These aspirations of full employment were strengthened in the post-war period by the Commonwealth of Australia Full Employment in Australia Parliamentary Paper 1945 which, according to Black (1984, p. 34), 'would dominate Australian economic policy for the next three decades'.

The election of the Whitlam Labor government (1972) resulted in a dramatic shift to a social democratic approach in social policy, including fundamental changes to health and education (funded universal healthcare and the abolishment of university fees).

The labour government introduced the national employment and training scheme, the predecessor to many existing labour market programs. However, such changes were to be short lived, with the controversial dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government in 1975, the election of the Fraser Liberal Government and a corresponding reduction in universal entitlements.

By 1983, at the time of the election of the Hawke - Keating Labor government, (1983–1996) Australia was in the grip of unemployment levels approaching ten per cent and a global economic downturn driven at least partially by the decline in Australian manufacturing, the world oil crisis and a shift in US currency policy⁶ (Mitchell 2014; Mitchell & Cowling 2003; Mullaly 2007).

⁶ The shift from the 'Bretton Woods Agreement' which tied currency to the gold standard was abolished by President Nixon in 1971

Castles (1994) argues that during this period the Hawke - Keating government developed 'a new-found emphasis on economic rationalism [which] led to a perceived need to make the economy internationally competitive, with all sorts of possible side-effects on the established system of social protection' (Castles 1994, p. 132).

Following the 1988 Cass Review of the Social Security System, and amid skyrocketing unemployment rates, more active labour market policies were introduced by successive Labor and Liberal governments. The Cass review drew attention to the 'broader changes in the role of women, [arguing that] the social security system should treat people more as individuals [in contrast to women being considered dependents] and that the scope for dependency-based additional payments should be narrowed (Herscovitch & Stanton 2008).

Consistent with these broad changes was the growing influence of 'Market-like techniques for allocating resources (Considine, 2000, p. 275) or New Public Management (NPM) thinking; as well as the influence of economic rationalists who called for less involvement of government in direct service delivery arguing that 'steering not rowing' (Osborne & Gaebler 1992) should be the function of the State (Jamrozik 2001).

The basic tenets of this NPM paradigm included the 'spread of privatisation, decentralisation and individual centred responses to public need' (Considine 2001, p. 5). For job seekers NPM has resulted in a greater emphasis on their activity and compliance (Bredgaard & Larsen 2007; Sol, Hoogtanders & Westerveld 2005; Sol & Westerveld 2007). The influence of NPM mechanisms on service delivery is such that 'providers learn quickly that they must make active use of disciplinary tools if they are to maintain programme goals and achieve profitability' (Gray, Midgley & Webb 2012, p. 73)

2.3.2 Early developments in social policy and employment assistance

The provision of assistance to those out of work can be traced back to the poor houses of Great Britain and Scotland circa 1600 (prior to 1701 union). Early regulation of assistance was based on the Poor Law Act (1601), introduced to address high levels of poverty and vagrancy. Most assistance was church-based (Hothersall 2010) and conditions were harsh as part of an attempt to discourage dependence.

In 1834 modifications to the 'New Poor Law 1815' were introduced, including eligibility tests for recipients. A few years later the 'Outdoor Labour Test Order of 1842' was

enacted which included the provision of allowances for outdoor work, the earliest accounts of 'work for benefit' schemes (Hothersall 2010).

Even though the principle of work for benefit was enshrined in the 1601 Act and in the establishment of workhouses across the UK, the outdoor work for benefit became a major response in times of depression and poor economic conditions and was the model copied by Australia to create work for returned soldiers following the Second World War, for example, building roads and fences. It was later re-modelled as Work for the Dole.

While the UK and parts of Europe continued with their predominantly church-based assistance, the USA established a workhouse model which included the auctioning of people without employment as cheap labour (Wagner 2005).

By the turn of the 20th century more coordinated responses were emerging in the UK with the Unemployed Workman's Act 1905 and the establishment of the labour exchanges (1909), along with the National Insurance Act of 1911 which introduced the provision of health and employment insurance (Herscovitch & Stanton 2008).

The pre- and post-World War periods saw further advancements in 'collective approach [es] in responding to common problems' (Hothersall 2010, p. 46). The concept that all citizens should contribute and then all would benefit underpinned the Beveridge report of 1942 and strengthened the foundations of the welfare state in most western economies. For Beveridge the ideal of full employment worked in tandem with the provisions of the welfare state (Evans 2002, p. 8) This post-war/ pre-oil crisis period witnessed the significant expansion of social welfare provision in the UK and Australia, with a corresponding establishment of government ownership and delivery of infrastructure and services (Hothersall 2010).

2.3.3 Current international benefit provision

The current provision of benefits for those without paid work varies greatly across Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries. While the UK and Australia enjoy more universal systems, in that support is not time limited, other countries in Europe (Germany and the Netherlands) receive more generous allocations in the first 12 months then reduced amounts as a minimalist safety net. The initial higher payments are available to those who have made insurance contributions during times of employment and can be as high as 70 per cent of pre-unemployment wages.

A general user pays system exists in Japan, the USA and Canada, based on insurance contributions with some (but not all) American states providing a safety net by way of food stamps and other charity provisions. Assistance in the USA is legislated by the Federal Social Security Act 1936, which legislates for basic requirements in each state.

In Australia, the current universal provision of employment assistance and benefit payments has been the source of much recent debate. The 'welfare dependency' camp claim a tougher regime will weed out those not willing to work. Likewise they argue against any increase of benefit payments by 'implying that other government programs and payments are currently offsetting the inadequacy of the base payment (Australian Senate 2012, p. 93). A core group of those who argue that the current provision is inadequate to maintain a reasonable standard of living have recently done so via an open letter signed by 40 support agencies calling for a \$50 per fortnight increase in the Newstart allowance (ACOSS 2013).

2.4.1 The introduction of Mutual Obligation

During the 1980s, social policy continued to be heavily influenced by the emergence of a conservative right that tended to individualise unemployment with little reference to the structural changes afoot. Social policy commentators such as Lawrence Mead argued that 'the federal programs that support the disadvantaged and unemployed have been permissive in character, not authoritative [and that] there is good reason to believe that recipients subject to "requirements" would function better' (Mead 1986, p. 1) and; '[w]hat's missing is the idea of obligation' (Mead 1986, p. 81).

The notion of mutual obligation was not new but began during the reform of the 1834 poor laws. 'In rejecting the laissez faire, [notion that employers have no responsibility and that individuals should be responsible for looking after themselves] the Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb invoked the doctrine of a mutual obligation between the individual and the community' (Quinlan 2007, p. 15). The underpinning notion was that while society had a responsibility to prevent poverty and provide assistance, the individual had a greater responsibility to contribute and not be voluntarily unemployed; to breach the agreement would result in disciplinary training or being sent to work programs. These plans did not reach their full intent and were diverted by the Minister of Trade, Winston Churchill with the development of welfare based insurance provisions.⁷

⁷ For a detailed historical account of the development of mutual obligation see Quinlan (2007).

Australia, in the early 20th century, followed the UK model of unemployment benefits. The 1945 White Paper on Full Employment noted the responsibility of government to policies of full employment and the provision of assistance to the few per cent that would need social security benefits.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Hawke / Keating Labor government introduced the 'Working Nation' initiative, which included a dramatic shift from the notion of entitlement to 'Reciprocal Obligation' (the predecessor to 'Mutual Obligation'). This initial policy position was strong on the 'reciprocity' with an undertaking from government to provide work or training for those unemployed longer than six months in response to requirements of job seekers to be more actively looking for work. To achieve this policy shift, the Government developed a number of training and work programs badged as 'Working Nation', including the costly 'New Work Opportunities' program which enlisted people who were unemployed in local community projects (often including significant accredited training) at a basic wage.⁸

While the general argument for mutual or reciprocal obligation is often accepted by job seekers, and there is 'support among the general community for requirements of unemployed people to seek work and to undertake activities to improve their chances of finding work' (Ziguras, Considine & Dufty 2003); the question raised by most researchers, for example (Borland & Tseng 2004; Marston & McDonald 2008; Nevile & Nevile 2003; Yeend 2004) is - whether the processes and punishment regime is, in fact, mutual and in the context of structural unemployment or lack of capacity or skills, is mutual obligation fair?

The other common concern noted by Ziguras (2004, p. 11), is that 'while positive reinforcement increases motivation and hence performance, negative reinforcement and punishment have consequences other than the desired behaviour, including avoidance, unpredictability, negative emotions and adverse attitudes towards the punisher'. So while the theoretical underpinning of mutual obligation may have some general agreement, the question of true mutuality and fairness remains.

⁸ Unlike the later 'Work for the Dole', (WtD) program, which had no requirement to provide training and in which people who were unemployed worked for the unemployment benefit.

2.5.1 Privatisation and the commodification of employment services

By the end of 1993, Australian unemployment levels had reached 10.8 per cent; those searching for work for longer than 12 months had tripled over the preceding three years and, according to the OECD (1994), 34.5 per cent of the total unemployed were long-term, that is 12 months or longer (Considine, 2007).

The emergence of very long-term unemployment (VLTU) presented a new and more complex problem; unemployment rose quickly in response to economic downturn but recovery came slowly. Dissipation of the long-term unemployed into the ranks of the labour force was a slow and costly process. Working Nation delivered expensive labour market programs during the recession but failed to address supply side issues, according to Mitchell and Bill (2007). '[T]he evidence appears to support the view that employment growth has not been strong enough in areas that have persistent long-term unemployment' (Mitchell & Bill 2007, p. 25).⁹

Consistent with the privatisation agenda, and in response to criticisms of the Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) 'one size fits all' approach, the Labor Government introduced radical changes to the delivery of employment services. Between 1994 and 1996, the Keating Labor government commenced the outsourcing of employment services with a corresponding greater emphasis on job search reporting requirements.

A new regulatory body, the Employment Services Regulatory Authority (ESRA), was established to oversee the outsourced model. Two-thirds of employment assistance provision was contracted out to the not for profit sector and, for the first time, the for profit sector. A new government agency, staffed mainly by ex-CES staff, Employment Assistance Australia (EAA), held one third of the service contract. The focus was on 'Individual Case Management', a methodology carried over from previous models of service delivery to very disadvantaged job seekers and developed in the welfare and community services sector. For the first time, agencies were able to make a profit by retaining any surplus funds generated by efficient service delivery and payments they received for getting people into jobs, as well as bonus payments for 13 and 26 week outcomes.

⁹ More recent evidence suggests that, following the Global Financial Crisis, as unemployment declined it was those out of work for short durations who were first to be re-employed. Between April 2009 and April 2010, the percentage of very long term unemployed job seekers in JSA increased by 12.5%, whilst the percentage of short-term unemployed declined by 19.9%. In numerical terms, the number of NSA recipients reduced by 23,814, yet the reduction of VLTU was only 1,070 (DEEWR 2011b).

This bonus income was soon to be curtailed. In 1997, the newly elected Liberal – National Coalition government, who took a tougher approach to the needs of the unemployed (Considine 2001), cut billions of dollars from the budget allocation for employment assistance and completed the privatisation of employment services with the introduction of the Job Network. EAA became Employment National and secured a significant share in the first Job Network contract, only to fail dismally in the second contract round.

The privatisation of employment services coincided with a split of responsibility for policy and service delivery between the Department of Social Security (DSS) and a newly created agency called Centrelink (Herscovitch & Stanton 2008).

The fully privatised, competitive model included a decline in real terms in funding allocations from eight per cent of GDP to four per cent (Grubb, Lippoldt & Tergeist 2001; Horn 2011b). Appropriations for Labour Market and Training Assistance were cut from \$2.16 billion in 1995-96 to \$1.2 billion in 1997-98 and, 'between 1995-96 and 2001-02, funding for labour market programs fell by 58.9 per cent in real terms' (Mitchell & Cowling 2003, p. 10). Meanwhile, the quality of service provision, particularly to the most disadvantaged, continued to be of concern, with regular accusations of 'Creaming and Parking'¹⁰ (ACOSS 2000; Murray & Quinlan 2006; Thomas 2007).

The complete privatisation of employment services by the Liberal-National Coalition government has been described by commentators as 'notable for its radicalism' (Marston & McDonald 2006b, p. 2), and one that has attracted international attention for the resulting efficacy and unit cost reduction compared with previous models. The OECD labelled it 'a radical transformation...without parallel' (Martin & Grubb 2001, p. 16). However, while the Australian model has been touted as an efficient alternative to public sector service delivery (Grubb, Lippoldt & Tergeist 2001), it has also been occasionally satirised as a 'slick' red sports car emerging out of the flashy, neo-liberal privatisation workshop (Thompson, Jobs Australia Conference 2009, unpublished).

2.5.2 Privatisation, neo-liberalism and the mixed economy of welfare

Since the 1980s many members of the OECD including the UK and USA, have increased the 'use of contractual principles as regulatory tools' (Ramia 2002, p. 49),

¹⁰ *Creaming* – investing only in those likely to produce financial return; *Parking* – neglecting those less likely to obtain employment.

particularly in relation to models of public service delivery. Performance based contracts for the delivery of employment assistance were first implemented in the US then in the UK, closely followed by Australia and the Netherlands (Finn 2009a).

Continuing the contracting trend, most European Union (EU) member states are in the process of reform and are at various stages of contracting or sub-contracting service provision (Finn 2013). Common to all these contracts is the payment of fees according to performance or benchmark attainment, with various percentages of payments being dependent on employment outcomes (Bruttel 2007; Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011; Finn 2007).

This transfer of risk from the state to provider and citizen is common in advanced liberal welfare states and engages case management as the 'principal mode of engaging with long-term unemployed people...and set[s] economic participation as the key marker of citizenship' (McDonald & Marston 2005, p. 376).

Contracted, outcome-based employment services 'seek to realise efficiency gains through the transfer of risk to providers giving governments greater flexibility in delivery, but paying fees only in return for successful performance' (Finn 2013, p. 4). Some of the negative implications of this greater emphasis on payment for outcomes are the increasing claims of poor service provision for disadvantaged groups and the manipulation of the system by providers (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2008; Finn 2009a; Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; Jobs Australia 2011; Nevile 2013; Thomas 2007).

In the context of increased performance pressure on contracted providers and the corresponding ramifications for frontline workers, there has been a plethora of research into the effectiveness of contracted models of service provision, mostly with mixed results and particularly so for those furthest from the labour market (Borland & Tseng 2007; Finn 1997, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Green & Hasluck 2009).

This quest for increased performance translates in Australia to rule based programmes, an increased focus on the activation of job seekers and converts 'Welfare to Work' paradigms to 'Welfare AS Work' (Ziguras, Considine & Dufty 2003). The resulting impact on job seekers is a regime of daily activity (work) focused on compliance, attendance at employment services, job interviews, and informing Centrelink of any changes in personal circumstances.

2.6.1 The Job Network

The primary rationale for the reform of employment assistance and the introduction of the Job Network in 1997 by the then newly elected Liberal-National Coalition government was to provide '[b]etter quality of service for job seekers and more sustainable outcomes from labour market assistance and better value for money' (DEETYA 1996, p. 2). The objectives of the Job Network were to bring about greater competition in the employment services sector offering choice of providers for job seekers and individualised assistance for the longer-term unemployed (Vanstone, 1996).

The first Job Network contracts ran from May 1998 until February 2000; the second from February 2000 until June 2003 and the third contract between 2003 and 2006, including a 60 per cent market share 'roll-over' for better performing agencies.

The 2006 contract was extended to 2009 and also included some business re-allocation from poorly performing providers to high performing providers.

To reflect the new agenda of the Job Network, case management was rebadged as 'intensive assistance' and job seekers were assessed in regard to their job readiness and placed into the new Active Participation Model (APM) continuum model of service delivery. Job seekers were entitled to various sequences of assistance, including mandatory participation in fulltime Work for the Dole¹¹ (WfD) which, according to ACOSS, was designed as a penalty for job seekers that Job Network providers considered 'non-compliant' (ACOSS 2012a). (See Thomas, 2007 for further detail on the APM model.)

In addition to a greater emphasis on compliance, Considine (2001) notes several significant policy shifts coinciding with the introduction of the Job Network, including

de-coupling of policy and service delivery, the use of performance contracts, targets and quotas, the involvement of private agencies, the greater demand for job seekers to 'earn' or even 'co-produce' their service and a far greater emphasis on the personal or cultural capital of advisors and the job seekers than upon the supply of job training (Considine 2001, p. 181).

The performance of providers delivering the Job Network was measured by a star rating system based on a regression analysis of the likelihood of jobseekers with certain characteristics transitioning into employment, compared with the actual

¹¹ WfD was introduced in 1997, consistent with a 1978 proposal by, at that time opposition leader the Hon. John Howard for a 'Community Service Scheme'. Initially youth focused and part-time, it was expanded in 2002 to open age for 'eligible' (sic) participants. For full synopsis see Yeend (2004).

numbers of those assisted into work placements for 13 and 26 weeks. Other factors, such as the speed to placement, were also included. The star rating system's regression analysis was designed to take into account the local labour market conditions, however there has been much derision about the capacity of the system to truly adjust the metrics for local fluctuations in economic activity. There were also suggestions of manipulation of the system by providers who 'cherry-pick' those job seekers more likely to achieve outcomes and 'parking' those less likely to achieve an outcome (Fowkes 2011; Thomas 2007).

Other than cost reduction, the proposed benefits for job seekers of competition in employment services have not yet eventuated and there appears to be 'no particular benefit to service users of quasi-market reforms, particularly in policy contexts where service delivery systems are historically under-funded' (Spall, McDonald & Zetlin 2005, p. 56).

2.6.2 Pre-employment programmes

In the initial design of the Job Network, very disadvantaged job seekers who were deemed unable to benefit from assistance were to be excluded from the new service. The response from the welfare sector was swift in questioning why the most disadvantaged would not be entitled to service provision. In response, the Hon. Amanda Vanstone (in consultation with the welfare sector) introduced the Community Support Program (CSP) to assist those with significant barriers to employment but deemed 'not yet ready for the Job Network' (Department of Family and Community Services 2002). The focus and objective of the CSP was to prepare the disadvantaged unemployed people for the Job Network by addressing barriers to participation such as homelessness, substance abuse and mental illness (Department of Family and Community Services 2002; Perkins 2005).

In the latter days of the Job Network, the CSP (by this time re-badged as Personal Support Programme, (PSP) was shifted from the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) to the Department of Employment Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) with the revised objective of moving participants directly into employment. Correspondingly, the reporting requirements for job seekers were revised and severely disadvantaged job seekers were compelled to attend appointments and became subject to many of the same compliance requirements as Job Network participants. Likewise, the development of services for people with

disabilities has travelled a similar trajectory from the not for profit community sector to the regime of the compliance-driven, mixed economy of service provision (Neville 2011).

The other specialist programme that sat alongside the Job Network was the Job Placement, Employment and Training Programme (JPET), which was specifically designed to assist approximately 14,000 homeless or at-risk young people per annum. JPET services were generally located within specialist agencies (as was often the case for PSP) which provided for a range of auxiliary services to better support participants. JPET's role was to deliver a 'pre-employment programme and provide young people with transitional assistance to help them overcome barriers in their lives' and 'bridge the gap between short-term or crisis assistance and employment related assistance' (DEEWR 2007, p. 4).

2.6.3 Job Services Australia

Job Services Australia (JSA) replaced the Job Network and associated programmes from 1 July, 2009 with the objective of providing the right mix of training, work experience and other interventions to help job seekers, particularly the disadvantaged, obtain suitable employment. The shift from the Job Network to JSA involved the consolidation of several specialist programmes, including the PSP and the JPET youth specific programme.

According to the request for tender,

[T]he Provider (through the employment consultant) will negotiate an individualised EPP [Employment Pathway Plan] with each job seeker. The EPP will outline the best combination of skills development, work experience and personal support to help the job seeker overcome their barriers to finding employment. The activities and interventions identified in the EPP will be supported by a pool of funds called an Employment Pathway Fund (EPF) (DEEWR 2008a, p. 4).

The JSA model provides four levels, or streams, of service provision with a final work experience phase following 12 months (18 months for stream 4) of assistance in the allocated stream. Allocation to a particular stream is based on the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). Job seekers who 'achieve' a high score from the JSCI are referred to JSA via a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA). Assessments are conducted by Centrelink, generally in person but, in some circumstances, by telephone.¹² The allocation of a job seeker to a particular stream determines the funding level and

¹² For a short period the role of the JCA was outsourced to private providers but the discrepancy in assessments (and operating cost) soon saw the assessments returned to Centrelink.

outcome payments for the provider, as well as the notional allocation the provider receives for discretionary funds for job seekers, the Employment Pathway Fund (EPF).

The table below provides an overview of the fee structure; note the various payment types for each stream and that the service fee and outcome fees differ according to the stream. Until recently, outcome payments were also factored according to whether the outcome was sourced by the job seeker or the provider. The result was a complex system of assessment clarification and hundreds of different claim types.

Table 1. Employment services fee structure



JSA fee structure (DEEWR 2008a, p. 3)

2.6.4. Consolidation of specialist programmes

The inclusion of PSP and JPET clients in the JSA model added approximately 80,000 very disadvantaged job seekers into the generalist JSA mix without any recorded increase in the skill level of the generalist JSA workforce (Giuliani 2011). At the same time, requirements for sole parents and people on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) were tightened in the 2012 Federal budget with an allocation of an extra \$50 million for participation and compliance requirements focusing on the cohorts discussed above (DEEWR 2011a).

The key issue is that the JSA contracts took on a case load of job seekers with higher needs, more complex issues (mental health and disability) without a shift in the model

of service delivery, ratio of clients to workers or an increase in the overall skill level of the workforce (Giuliani 2011). The department maintains that, in terms of outcomes for stream 4 clients, JSA is an improvement on the previous Job Network and PSP. The then Minister for Employment Participation claimed a '90 per cent improvement in [their] outcomes than under the previous system' (The Hon Kate Ellis MP Minister for Employment Participation August 2012, p. 1). The comparisons with the previous PSP and JPET programmes are flawed, as they fail to acknowledge that stream 4 service provision is funded at almost three times the funding of the previous PSP and JPET and that these pre-employment programmes were designed to address vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment and prepare participants for the Job Network as a pathway to work (Department of Family and Community Services 2002; Giuliani 2013; Perkins 2007).

In July 2012, JSA contracts were rolled over for high performing providers (three stars and above) to June 30, 2015. At the time of writing, the Department had commenced consultations on the next model of employment services to commence July 1, 2015.

2.7.1 The role of the employment consultant

The dominant discourse regarding people experiencing unemployment has shifted from citizen to customer and from the structural to the individual. The implementation of Mutual Obligation policies and Work for the Dole (WfD) programmes has further aided this shift of attention from the structural and global causes of unemployment to the individual responsibility of job seekers and by implication frontline workers. Blustein et al., (2011), argue that the resultant counselling based interventions 'have been criticised for their emphasis on individual change without critical analyses of the socio-political context' (Blustein, Medvide & Wan 2011, p. 345). In the US context of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Hasenfeld (2010) claims that 'the entrenched bureaucratic model used to determine eligibility and to enforce compliance crowds out the professional model needed to provide employment services' (Hasenfeld 2010, p. 154). In this context, the task of getting people into jobs has become more complex, compliance focused and saturated with administrative requirements.

It is difficult to estimate the total number of employment consultants in Australia. At the time of writing there are fewer than 100 JSA providers in Australia with some providers employing several hundred consultants.¹³ Based on Considine et al. (2013) the

¹³ Australia's biggest provider has over 600 staff, but this could include other programs.

average number of consultants per provider is approximately 55 and extrapolating this figure to 100 providers the number could be around 5,000 - 6,000 consultants. The sector is 'predominantly made up of female frontline staff (77.0%) and most staff in the sector work on a full-time basis (88.2%)' (Considine et al. 2013). The gender imbalance is consistent with the community services sector (Meagher & Healy 2006), however the level of full-time work by female workers is not consistent with the sector, an issue currently under further investigation by O'Sullivan (2013).

The role of the consultant in the current JSA model is not substantially different from that in the Job Network; the function is to use quasi-case management techniques to shift job seekers into employment.

Generally, staff employed in the sector are motivated by their humanitarian values and beliefs (AC Nielson 2005). Such values and beliefs have been traditionally enacted in a relational model which has drawn many well intended, qualified and committed workers to the sector.

In the early days of the Job Network, the ambiguity in the consultant's role was articulated by Considine (2001) who suggested that it was not unlike the role of the job seeker in that both were being asked to construct and invent their own new way of interacting with each other and external operators. Considine (2001) describes the role of frontline workers as a shift to 'personality based' interventions and quotes the head of a large Australian organisation as saying that, 'the whole business now depends on just one critical variable – the personality of the staff member' (Considine, 2001 p.181).

Considine (2001) further suggests that consultants tend to be 'dependent on their own personal capabilities' (Considine 2001, p. 181), while others propose consultants are reliant on their 'life experience' as a model and justification for interventions in working with job seekers (McDonald & Marston 2005, p. 383).

This 'life experience' factor seems to coincide with a directive model, particularly as 'case managers agreed that they often reminded clients of their sanctioning power to get their attention' (Considine 2001, p. 55).

There has been no systematic analysis or evaluation of the workforce training requirements or qualification and skills necessary for consultants. Noteworthy is the effort by the National Employment Services Association (NESA) to establish the Employment Services Professional Recognition Framework (albeit linked to membership) but, without a mandate from the Department by way of minimum qualifications requirements for funded providers, skill levels and qualifications of frontline workers are unlikely to improve.

Caseloads in the Job Network have been considered high from the beginning, although this was not the original intention but an unintended consequence of competition policy. Hence, in 2001, 'most [consultants operated] with caseloads above 100 and more than a quarter [were] personally responsible for 150 long-term unemployed job seekers' (Considine 2001, p, 130). The average case load in 2012 was 115 clients, in a context of increased compliance and administration (Considine et al. 2013; Giuliani 2011). Most consultants spend only 42.62 per cent of their time directly with job seekers (Considine et al. 2013, p. 15) and 23 per cent of appointments were for durations of less than half an hour (generally one per month) (Giuliani 2013, p. 15).

According to Wright et al. (2011),

[T]he demand for service, expressed in terms of large case loads, works against the possibility of establishing ongoing rapport and tailored, individualised service delivery for clients. In short, the competencies of traditional human service case management are not conducive to the output imperative demands of the system (Wright, Marston & McDonald 2011, p. 313).

Consistent with high caseloads, there is evidence that workers experience high levels of stress (Patton & Goddard 2003); they are leaving the employment services sector at a higher rate than the general welfare sector (AC Nielson 2005; Giuliani 2011); and that service users report dissatisfaction with the service they receive from the Job Network (McDonald & Marston 2005; Murphy et al. 2011).¹⁴

The current JSA service delivery and recent policy changes requiring sole parents to transfer to Newstart payments (a significant reduction in payment) have not improved the general experience for service users and failed to assist parents into work (Cox 2013).

'Employment services have been experienced [by service users] not as environments in which they have been enabled to participate to negotiate or construct roles and identities that align with their capabilities or preferences, but as institutions which actively prevent that from occurring' (Casey 2013).

2.7.2 Consultants' discretion and outcomes

Early research into the role of frontline workers argued that, for better or worse, frontline workers enjoyed and required a level of discretion in how they implemented government policy. In 1980, Lipsky (2010), in his work on street-level bureaucracy,

¹⁴ Half of the unemployed people interviewed in the McDonald and Marston study discussed negative experiences with 'previous case managers employing coercive authority, (breaching) which created material hardship, particularly financial hardship, for the client.

illustrated that frontline workers had a good deal of discretionary power, and the positive and negative manner in which this discretion was exercised.

In the early days of the Job Network, discretion was considered critical to enable workers to adjust policies to fit the particular circumstances at the frontline. Riccucci (2005) has suggested that, in order to get the necessary results, ‘that street-level bureaucrats may not be following or carrying out the policy as intended’ (Riccucci 2005, p. 2). In an employment services context, workers in the earlier iterations of the Job Network, and particularly in the PSP and JPET, exercised this discretion where the personal circumstances of job seekers did not fit the strict policy directives, or where the longer term interest of the job seeker might be better served by a more flexible approach. The consequences of this discretion, if found out, could have resulted in a breach of contract action by the department. For example, Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2000, p. 156) argue that:

[C]ontrary to current views, street-level workers will risk careers, reduce the bureaucratic measure of their success, and make their jobs more difficult and more dangerous to provide extraordinary and often unauthorised help to citizens deemed worthy ... [however], if street-level workers judge citizen-clients as unworthy—as “bad guys”—then rules are used to protect the workers and to withhold or minimise services or at times to punish, even to be brutal.

In the UK, there is a growing body of evidence regarding the critical role of the worker in achieving employment outcomes (Smith & Lipsky 1995). Research for the Department of Work and Pensions in the UK notes the role of the worker (staff) in their evaluation of ‘What Works for Whom’, for example:

[T]here is little robust evidence that the nature of the provider of services, be it Jobcentre Plus, a private sector provider or some other organisation, has a systematic impact on effectiveness. What does appear to be important is the quality, enthusiasm, motivation and commitment of the staff providing the service... by providing support and encouragement of an appropriate type (Hasluck & Green 2007, p. 3).

In 2001, the Australian Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB), in their assessment of factors that contribute to high performance in intensive assistance,¹⁵ identified that,

[I]n addition to being outcome focused, better performing providers work to develop a “professional mentor” relationship with their clients. They use “one-on-one” relationships to establish trust and respect and to motivate job seekers and keep them focused on finding a job (DEWRSB, 2001b, p. 16).

¹⁵ Intensive assistance - a higher level of service, under Job Network offered to job seekers who are assessed as being at very high risk of long-term unemployment, gauged as being disadvantaged, or who have been unemployed for an extended period of time.

In the Australian context, there has been little, if any, specific qualitative research and no quantitative research into this element of service delivery.

Evaluations of the Job Network tend to note the short comings at the frontline. Anaf et al. (2012) and McDonald and Marston (2008) note that the general feedback from job seekers, with a few exceptions, is highly critical of frontline consultants' performance.

For example, 'most Newstart recipients in our study were frustrated in their experience of Job Network agencies, and of all the comments made, two-thirds were negative' (Murphy et al. 2011, p. 125).

For the job seeker, the employment services experience is generally negative (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010), in spite of the significant effort made by workers to provide what they can within the constraints of time and compliance requirements. This paradox is evident in much of the literature (Murphy et al. 2011; Murray 2006; Thomas 2007; Ziguas 2004). The outcome of this paradox is an overloaded and frustrated workforce struggling to do the best they can while job seekers continue to get more 'stick' than 'carrot' in a system so bogged down by compliance that administration consumes more worker time than services to the client (Ashkanasy 2011).

2.8.1 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the international influences and historical development of employment assistance in Australia. The chapter has outlined the critical function of paid work as a citizenship right as well as development of employment related social policy including the Job Network and Job Services Australia.

The chapter has introduced the complex and conflicted role of the employment consultant as central to this study. The next chapter will provide a review of the research and policy literature with an emphasis on the resultant service delivery settings.

Chapter 3 Employment programs - performance, policy and practice

3.1.1 Chapter overview

The previous chapter provided a historical overview of the nature of employment and unemployment, while providing a broad introduction to the development of Australian and international contracted employment services. It is not possible in this thesis to cover the vast array of research and associated literature on unemployment and the related programme models that focus on alleviating its effect. Hence, this chapter will consider some international material and predominantly focus on policy and practice positions that influence Australian contracted employment services.

The first part of this chapter considers material in relation to Australian contracted employment services as they relate to the research question, beginning with a definition and review of case management as a key relationship development tool and then a discussion of the quest for efficiency and effectiveness in employment services. The chapter then reviews literature on a sub-component of case management, the 'Therapeutic' or 'Working Alliance' (Bordin 1979; Deane, Crowe & Oades 2010; Horvath & Greenberg 1989)¹⁶. This 'Working Alliance' literature is discussed in some detail as the alliance relationship is consistent with the relationship development in the employment services context of this study.

The next section considers the emphasis on individual responsibility in employment assistance within the context of job seeker activation and agency theory and the underpinning compliance function of the job seeker diary so as to provide the context for the delivery of employment services. The chapter considers the issue and level of discretion of frontline workers within the context of international evaluations of employment assistance and the role of personal advisors in the UK. This element of discretion is critical as it directly impacts on the capacity of the frontline worker to foster relational ways of interacting with job seekers.

The latter section includes some analysis of 'work first' versus 'capacity building' approaches and then an overview of Job Network evaluations and a consideration of market manipulation prior to a brief comment on the initial performance of Job Services Australia. The conclusion to the chapter outlines how the literature has shaped the foundations of this research and research methodology.

¹⁶ The Therapeutic Alliance (the quality of the relationship between therapist and client) is documented in several empirical studies as a key ingredient in achieving client outcomes. A more detailed explanation will be provided later in the chapter.

3.2.1 Case management – an imprecise definition

The Case Management Society of Australia in Cooper and Yarmo Roberts (2006, p. 13), define case management as ‘a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual’s health needs through communication and available resources to promote quality cost-effective outcomes’.

The social work profession has a long history and involvement in case management in its traditional delivery of case work (O’Connor, Wilson & Setterlund 2003). Literature arising from the community welfare sector emphasises the case work and relational components of case management as well as the coordination of service delivery (McDonald & Coventry 2009), whereas the new public management discourse, as articulated by Considine (2001), tends to focus on the ‘management of the case’ and the equitable allocation of finite resources and accountability to stakeholders.

As Meagher (2004) argues, ‘new management techniques require social workers to take a more instrumental and impersonal approach to their work, and many perceive that their interaction with service users is little more than labour in the service of economy and efficiency’ (Meagher 2004, p. 10). Within employment services, this labour in the service of the state creates confusion for workers as they attempt to act in the interest of the client and state simultaneously.

McDonald, (2005) questions the view, common in a number of fields, that construct case management as the panacea of the helping professions, arguing instead that case management in various forms has been adopted by government departments and policy makers without a thorough assessment of its effectiveness. In considering the use of case management in the drug and alcohol sector, McDonald (2005) further notes that outreach and strengths based models of case management seem to have some overall benefits, most likely because of the relationship development component, but the overall general effectiveness of case management is still questionable. This relationship development element underpins social work theory in regard to supporting clients in identifying strengths and in making choices.

In a synthesis of 53 credible sources of empirical evidence in the homelessness sector, Gronda (2009) concludes that case management can be cost effective, has the capacity to increase the ability of clients to self-care and that,

a synthesis of the evidence finds that case management achieves this outcome through a relationship between the client and the case manager or case management team which has the qualities of persistence, reliability, respect and intimacy, and which delivers comprehensive, practical support (Gronda 2009, p. 8).

These relationship qualities are also noted by McDonald and Coventry (2009) who suggest that good case management encourages first order relationships.¹⁷ However, they also note that the dominant neo-liberal discourse of efficiency precludes the establishment and maintenance of these types of relationship based interventions in employment services.

3.2.2 Case management and employment services

The case management model currently delivered in employment assistance programmes tends to emphasise barriers and deficits - the initial assessment, the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI), that determines the level of assistance a job seeker receives is based on the identification of barriers (Disney, Buduls & Grant 2010; McDonald, Marston & Buckley 2003) and the role of the case manager has been reduced to a case management model that seeks to address those barriers. This identification of, and attention to, negative attributes fails to acknowledge the extensive research on case management, for example McDonald (2005) and Gronda (2009) in that it is the positive relationship building that encourages change.

Eardley & Thompson (1997, p. 8) note that, in employment services, 'the focus of case management is on the assessment of a client's circumstances and needs, planning of support or assistance, linking with services, monitoring progress and supply of a set of services'. However, they also suggest that even though the literature on case management in social work is silent on issues of coercion and sanctions, the use of case management in child protection, probation and parole implies that case management must, by default, have a social control function. This flawed 'ipso facto' logic criminalises and pathologises service users and contradicts the principles of case management, particularly in terms of respect for the client and their advocacy rights. This flawed logic does, however, support the view that case managers have become agents of the state and social control rather than agents of empowerment and choice.

Early attempts at case management by publicly provided employment services were generally constrained, Eardley & Thompson (1997) argue that,

the ability to carry out personalised assistance had been impeded by excessive caseloads, high turnover of CES¹⁸ staff, and insufficient resources for training. Further, the report questioned whether CES staff possessed the appropriate skills for case management' and that CES staff had 'a tendency to process rather than actively assist clients (Eardley & Thompson 1997, p. 58).

¹⁷ McDonald and Coventry (2009) describe first order relationships as those case work relationships where the worker operates 'alongside and with' the client as distinct from doing things 'for or to' the client.

¹⁸ Commonwealth Employment Service – later replaced by contracted services

The irony of this criticism is that the very same critique has been made in regard to the delivery of fully contracted employment services (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011; Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; Fowkes 2011; Giuliani & Casey 2013) which is consistent with initial concerns expressed by Carter (1994) that case management might easily become a 'coercive, rule-bound, disempowering activity rather than an individualised, needs-based experience aimed at realising human potential' (Carter 1994, p. 55).

Given the failure of the public provider to deliver case management, the concepts and principles of case management were then implemented in the initial contracting out of employment services, well before the formation of the Job Network. In the prelude to fully contracted models of employment services, the Australian Government experimented with a quasi-contracted model – contracted, but regulated by the Employment Services Regulatory Authority (ESRA).¹⁹ In the ESRA service model, job seekers were assisted by the public services provider until they were unemployed for six months, or in cases where other issues of disadvantage were identified, they were then referred to contracted service providers. Service delivery in ESRA rested heavily on case management practice and principles that emphasised working alongside the job seeker and building capacity. ESRA best practice evaluations found that:

[T]heir approach is not 'rule-bound'. They have an approach that is flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals ... Highly skilled case managers balance the roles of forming a personal yet professional relationship with their job seekers and continuously motivating them to look for work (Employment Services Regulatory Authority 1997, p. 11).

The early research conducted by ESRA into case management in employment services was glowing in praise of the modality of service delivery, particularly as it was consistent with much of the then social work literature. ESRA's evaluation found that,

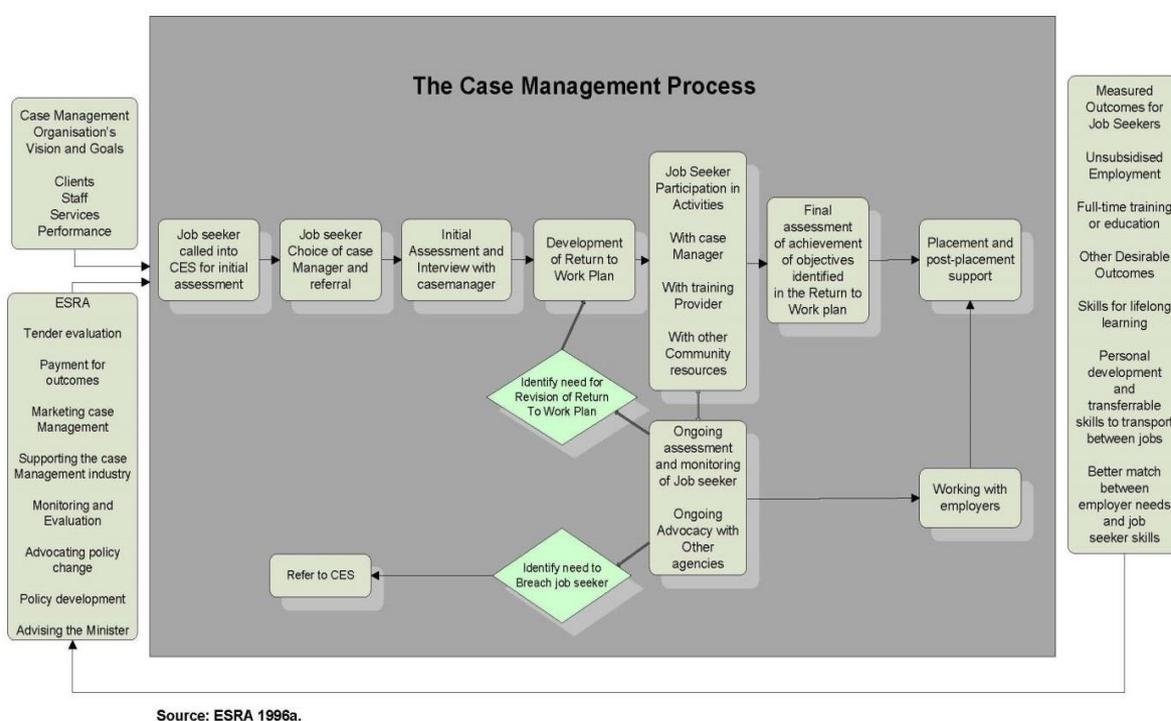
[r]esearchers undertaking this project found a strong correlation between the skill and experience level of case managers on site and high performance ... [j]ob seekers expressed a strong preference for case management over other forms of employment assistance they have experienced and a strong satisfaction with case management (Employment Services Regulatory Authority 1997, p. 11).

Significantly for this research, job seekers valued case management because of the 'personal relationship with their case manager' and that 'someone is [was] making an effort, in helping them find employment'. The ESRA best practice report argued that '[T]he results from the focus groups were a powerful endorsement for the retention of a programme of intensive, individual employment assistance' (ESRA 1997, p. 19).

¹⁹ The Employment Services Regulatory Authority (ESRA) was established as an independent authority in 1994 as part of wider reforms to the delivery of employment services

The ESRA model of case management as depicted in Figure 2 below identifies key elements in case management practice, including the initial choice of case manager, assessment process and planning stages as well as the flexibility of the system that allows for users to loop back through the system as required. In this construct, case management is considered broader than just a service delivery process and includes influence and interaction with policy development and advice to system administrators. The anticipated consequence of this broad approach is the development of transferable skills and a better match of workforce skills to employer requirements. In contrast, one of the early criticisms of the Job Network was that the model separated policy development from influences of service delivery (Considine 2001).

Figure 2. ESRA Case Management Process.



Since the demise of the ESRA case management model, and with the advent of fully contracted employment services, the delivery of employment assistance has developed a greater emphasis on work first models as compared with capacity building. This shift, according to McDonald and Marston (2005), asserts that, '[i]n advanced liberal welfare states, case management has become the principal mode of engaging with long-term unemployed people and in essence the tool of government via the Job Network'; 'an example of the self-activation and disciplinary dimensions of advanced liberal workfare states' (McDonald & Marston 2005, p. 378).

The Job Network's focus on a work first approach has fundamentally changed the nature of case management in the employment services context in a manner that McDonald and Marston (2005, p. 1) argue 'represents a radical localisation of governance wherein the rights and responsibilities between unemployed people and the state are articulated primarily in the relationship between the case manager and his or her client'.

According to Fowkes (2011), there has been an '[i]deological shift in the way that the relationship between income support recipients and the state [was] constituted' (Fowkes 2011, p. 6). This shift altered the way case management was constructed and delivered; the result was less help and more hassle in the form of punitive compliance.

The impact on the frontline of employment services is that case management has become more prescriptive as information technology now closely monitors everyday actions and the capacity for discretion is further eroded. McDonald and Marston (2005, p. 397) further note that,

the collaborative and empathetic qualities that are produced in relations between case managers and clients, for example, are lost when coercive authority is punitively exercised in the form of a sanction or 'breach'. It is at this level of interaction that citizenship and subjectivity are given meaning, a form of subjectivity that is sometimes very different than that intended by policy makers.

The primary tool now utilised by many employment service providers is a truncated version of case management, more likened to 'process management' constructed within a policy framework of fragmented services and a strict compliance regime.

Because of the fragmentation and distortion of case management practice this research cannot simply compare the outcomes of those who use a case management model²⁰ as some sort of proxy for relationship building, because the degree of practice variation and interpretation in the employment services sector is so varied. Therefore, this research has explored and adopted the concept of Therapeutic Alliance or the Working Alliance as a measure of the worker - client relationship.

3.3.1 The Working Alliance: The worker - client relationship

At the heart of the helping professions is the frontline worker.

The professional mentor or consultant role is discussed in much of the helping professions' research literature in various forms; in case management as part of the engagement process and in the psycho-therapeutic literature in terms of a 'Working' or 'Therapeutic Alliance'.

²⁰ The author recognises that this may have been possible at the time of writing by Eardley & Thompson (1997) and their assessment of the benefits of case management in employment services.

The concept of the 'Working Alliance' was developed by Bordin (1979) who contends that the 'working alliance between the person who seeks change and the one who offers to be a change agent is one of the keys, if not *the* key, to the change process' (Bordin 1979, p. 252).

There are three key factors according to Bordin (1979) in the development of a positive 'Working Alliance'; they are, agreement regarding the goal, clarity as to task that is, who will do what and bond or engagement. The correlation of these three factors with positive outcomes is consistent in much of the empirical research.

Bordin's ideas were later refined by others, including Johnson and Wright (2002), who noted the contribution of pioneer psychotherapists such as Freud (1958) and his early theories of transference (Greenson, 1967; Menninger, 1958; Zetzel, 1966). According to Johnson and Wright (2002), the alliance is characterised by a shared investment in the treatment process. 'One might say the patient [job seeker] "buys into" what the therapist is about' (Johnson & Wright 2002, p. 259). It is this 'buy in', or engagement, from the client/ job seeker that is so critical to the achievement of outcomes.

Bambling and King (2001) evaluated the body of literature on the 'Working Alliance' spanning the past 25 years, and conclude that 'the Working Alliance is a central component of successful therapy and the overall quality of the alliance influences the final outcome' King (2001, p. 38). The evidence of the 'Working Alliance' factor is so significant that consequently, 'many contemporary theories of psychotherapeutic change now emphasise the importance of the alliance, so much so that some theorists have referred to the alliance as the "quintessential integrative variable" (Wolfe & Goldfried, 1988, p. 449 in (Martin, Garske & Davis 2000, p. 438).²¹

A review of the social work literature did not result in a significant number of references to the 'Working Alliance' per se, in contrast to the psychoanalytical and therapeutic literature. However, social work has always had an emphasis on the role of the social worker in relationship to their client. In the clinical social work literature, Smith (2002) suggests that the findings on Working Alliance are 'relevant to general social work practice and that they confirm social work practice wisdom regarding the importance of workers showing clients a consistently positive attitude' (Smith 2002, p. 151). The potential to improve practice outcomes by a greater attention to the client – worker alliance is noted by Graybeal (2007). More recent research has explored the

²¹ See also (Horvath & Greenberg 1989; Howgego et al. 2003; Martin, Garske & Davis 2000; Tryon, Blackwell & Hammel 2007) for detailed empirical research on the role of the Working Alliance and outcomes in psychotherapy.

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relationship of the Working Alliance with attachment type and outcomes in clinical supervision (Bennett et al. 2013; Sterner 2009), and concludes that further research is required to understand the individual factors that influence attachment and alliance.

A working alliance approach is consistent with the personal interactions that occur in anti-oppressive social work practice, in a research context this means a balance of power and 'shared actions towards overcoming oppression' (Strier 2007, p. 861). In employment services this includes notions of citizenship that challenge discrimination and oppression. According to Roets et al. (2012), such a view 'enables professionals to make use of their discretionary space to (re)negotiate the finality of the employment trajectories in a flexible way' (Roets et al. 2012, p. 107).

Following a detailed review of the Working Alliance literature, Australian mental health researchers Howgego et al. (2003) concluded that,

the alliance was definable, measurable and relevant to the core business of case management – improving patient outcome...Bordin's concept of the alliance shows potential as a pan-theoretical, (common factors) variable across multidisciplinary settings, including that of case management, with the findings indicating its potential as a predictor of therapeutic outcome (Howgego et al. 2003, p. 182).

More recently, the issue of alliance has received considerable attention in research attempting to identify which modality of therapy works best with particular conditions. To that end, Miller et al, (2005) in a six million dollar empirical study of various modalities of therapy, found the quality of the relationship is a more potent predictor of outcome than any theoretical orientation, experience level or professional orientation. The implications of these findings for the employment services sector is core to this research thesis, predominately due to their potential to improve employment outcomes, but also as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of activation and compliance.

3.3.2 Measures of the Working Alliance

The Working Alliance Inventory (tool) (WAI) was developed by Horvath (1981) and Horvath and Greenberg (1989) as a tool to measure the Working Alliance as defined by Bordin (1979). The tool uses a questionnaire format of 36 questions rated on a Likert style seven point scale. The output of the tool is a separate score for each of the three key attributes of the Working Alliance (Goal Task and Bond) as well as an overall score.

Later developments of the WAI have correlated against earlier versions of the WAI (short version) by Tracey and Kokotovic (1989) and have refined the tool to 'identify a short version of the WAI that is consistent with its underlying theoretical base, has good measurement properties, and can be applied across diverse samples' (Hatcher &

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Gillaspy 2006, p. 12). Munder, Wilmers, Leonhart, Linster, and Barth (2009) have further adapted, translated and tested the tool for inpatient and outpatient use.

The adaptability of Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) into employment services and career counselling is documented by Masdonati, Massoudi and Rossier (2009) who used a modified WAI tool specifically for an assessment of the alliance in an employment counselling programme.

While this research did not use the Working Alliance inventory tool (WAI), the survey questions developed for the consultants' relationship score rating are consistent with the questions used in the WAI (see appendix 4 for a comparison of the two sets of questions). The questions used in this research were developed prior to realising those available in the WAI; so while other research has adapted the tool for the specific context, this research developed a relationship focus score and then found the questions and process was consistent with the WAI.

By drawing on the working alliance literature this research suggests that the impact of positive relationships on outcomes found in the WA literature are consistent with the case management and relational work that occurs in employment services (often with the very same cohorts as discussed in the WA literature).

3.3.3 Employment outcomes and the Working Alliance

The development of a positive 'Working Alliance' includes the establishment of a positive 'Bond' (or attachment) with the client, an agreement on 'Task' (who will do what) and agreement and mutual participation in the identification of the 'Goal' (the proposed end result). When considering these three components arising from the literature, the link and applicability to case management in employment services is evident, that is the Bond is consistent with the recognised importance to engage job seekers, as is the agreement about the tasks to be undertaken regarding the various training and other issues to be addressed in getting job ready, and finally, an agreement about the employment type and location (as well as other aspects) is aligned with the 'Goal' or desired result. The key point in these three factors is that the process is participatory and not a set of actions directed by the consultant according to requirements of the funding model or compliance regime.

In the early stages of the Job Network, the (Department Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) 2001b)²² noted in their assessment of better performing providers that:

they work to develop a 'professional mentor' relationship with their clients. They use 'one-on-one' relationships to establish trust and respect and to motivate job seekers and kept them focused on finding a job. They support the job seeker through the frustrations and disappointments of job search. A 'professional mentor' employment consultant helps the job seeker prepare for an interview, undertakes 'post-mortems' of interviews with the job seeker to find what can be learned for next time, shares the disappointment of a 'rejection' and the excitement of a job offer (DEWRSB, 2001, p.16).

There has been some limited research into the alliance and employment outcomes, mostly in the mental health and/or rehabilitation sectors. For example, Donnell, Lustig and Strauser (2004) found a significant positive effect of the Working Alliance on employment outcomes and later job satisfaction for people with severe mental illness, whereas Kukla and Bond (2009) found no correlation between the Working Alliance and employment outcomes for the same client group. In a randomised control trial (RCT) (n = 312) Catty et al. (2008), found significant correlation between vocational workers' ratings of the Working Alliance and employment outcomes for people with severe mental illness.

In their study on career counselling, (Solomon, Draine & Delaney 1995) found similar results to those reported in the psychotherapy literature, even though participants rated the alliance more highly than counsellors. Consistent with studies by Fitzpatrick et al. (2005) and Kramer et al. (2008), Solomon and colleagues found that,

establishing a positive alliance in the early stages of the counselling process is of particular importance to facilitate positive change, especially in short-term counselling processes. These findings indicate that professional training of career counsellors should consider emphasising working alliance formation and strengthening, especially in view of the lack of sufficient formal attention to interrelation factors in career counselling training' (Solomon, Draine & Delaney 1995, p. 150).

Other recent vocational rehabilitation research has used the WAI tool (Perdrix et al. 2011), but has removed the references to therapy and modified the language for employment services. Perdrix et al. (2011) found some mixed results in relation to counsellors' assessment of the alliance compared with clients', but strong agreement on the goal factor, suggesting modest reliability for the tool usage in the employment services context where the clarity of goal (employment) is explicit.

In an Australian study, Deane, Crowe and Oades (2010) reviewed several recent studies considering the WAI in employment services within a mental health context, and found that although correlations were evident, the design of the studies 'do not

²² The former name for DEEWR

allow for any conclusions regarding causality' (Deane, Crowe & Oades 2010, p. 104). The conclusions from a literature review of the Working Alliance is that the stronger the alliance (Goal, Task and Bond), the more likelihood of a positive therapeutic or employment outcome. While this can be said for research in the mental health sector, no specific studies have been conducted in Australian generic employment services.

In contrast, the primary underlying ideological position or dominant paradigm in contracted employment services continues to focus on the activation and the compliance requirements of job seekers; most likely because such approaches are easier to cost and contract in comparison to relationship building approaches.

3.4.1 Individualisation activation and agency theory

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, early models of assistance for people experiencing unemployment made good use of social work based case management practice and other relationship focused models of assistance. However, since the post-oil crisis period, Australia has experienced several waves of high unemployment (ACOSS 2005; Mullaly 2007) and models of assistance have shifted in search of greater efficiency and effectiveness. The globalisation of Australian industry and the ageing workforce have more recently resulted in pockets of high unemployment and paradoxical skill shortages. Over the same period, the notion of full employment has also changed; in the 1970s two per cent unemployment was considered the benchmark, whereas over the past decade, five per cent has become the new mark of full employment (Campbell 2008; Cook 2004). Unemployment levels for disadvantaged groups (youth, newly arrived migrants and people who are homeless) can often be as high as 15 per cent (Mitchell & Bill 2007; Rose, Morstyn & Tudehope 2011).

Since the contracting out of employment services, and in contrast to the costly 'Working Nation' intervention of the 1980s, more recent responses to high levels of unemployment have tended to favour a focus on the individual and how to better encourage or 'activate' people into work; for example, the recent OECD publication titled 'Activating Job Seekers: How Australia Does It (OECD 2012).

While much of the activation agenda is based on compliance with 'activity agreements', such agreements are underpinned with 'Agency Theory', or Principle – Agent Theory which is based on the notion of 'self-interest, opportunism, incomplete information, and goal divergence (O'Flynn 2007, p. 355) and that individuals and organisations will act in ways to maximise their own self-interest (Alford & O'Flynn 2012; Marston & McDonald 2011).

The view that self-interest dominates actions in the employment services context is questioned by Nevile (2013) who argues that 'while this assumption holds true in some cases, empirical studies also reveal that many agents are motivated by concerns other than financial self-interest' (Nevile, 2013, p. 65; Broadbent, Dietrich & Laughlin 2002). For many not-for-profit organisations, mission and altruism are the drivers of their actions. For individuals, life is more complex than simple self-interest. For example, child care, environmental values and other ideologies can and do underpin employment decisions.

The greater emphasis and focus on agency theory and the activation of those out of work provides a welcome distraction from government responsibility for high levels of unemployment and scapegoats the individual with paternalistic approaches. Cook (2004, p. 2) argues that governments have given up, or 'failed to produce sufficient employment opportunities [and that as an indication of this failure] income support has increased from five per cent of the working age population in 1970 to over 20 per cent in 2003'.²³

Eardley and Thompson (1997) note the considerable focus on and criticisms of job seekers' personal characteristics both by politicians and the media. The underlying rationale is that if people are not acting in their own best interest then they must be malingerers. Notable Australian examples include the then Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Tony Abbott, claiming that the unemployed were 'job snobs' and the Hon. Mal Brough, MP, attacking them as 'cruisers' (Abbott 2001; Brough 2002). The vilification of 'the unemployed' has indeed been the focus of much of the Government's commentary on the causes and hence recent policy interventions in regard to unemployment (Giuliani 2007). But this sort of narrow individual conceptualisation of unemployment is not new; for example, Mead (1986): '[this] "pathological" instability in holding jobs, rather than lack of jobs is the main reason for the work difficulties of the disadvantaged' (Mead 1986, p. 73). This approach constructs those without employment as welfare dependents who need to be activated (Breunig et al., 2003), rather than citizens who are entitled to, and in need of, assistance.

The irony of the focus on 'activation' is that it occurs despite acknowledgements of 'insufficient aggregate demand for labour' (Cass 1988, p. 111; Cook 2004; Mitchell &

²³ Income support reached 21.3% in 1996 but then declined to 15.2% in 2007 after changes to entitlements for sole parents and some groups with part-time earnings (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2012)

Bill 2007) and the negative psychological impact of unemployment on individuals as documented by several researchers (Blustein, Medvide & Wan 2011; Brewer 1978; Broman, Hamilton & Hoffman 2001; Perkins 2007). A further ramification of the focus on activation is the creation of a moral and social identity for those out of work with socially reinforced notions of self-blame (Bodsworth 2010; Dean 1995; McDonald & Marston 2005).

The language of ‘assistance’ has subsequently changed to reflect this emphasis on activation, with ‘Unemployment Benefit’ being changed to ‘Newstart Allowance’ and ‘Work Test’ re-labelled ‘Activity Test’, illustrating the shift from being able and prepared to accept work, to remaining *activated* in the search for work.

One of the clearest examples of the ‘activation agenda’ can be seen in the introduction of the Welfare to Work Policy framework introduced in 2006 with its primary objective to ‘increase workforce participation and reduce welfare dependency’ (DEEWR 2008b, p. IV). Welfare to Work introduced a new compliance framework and revised eligibility requirements with a particular focus on sole parents. The Department’s own evaluation assessed it, at best, as ‘only partly successful...in the context of continuing economic expansion and strong labour market conditions’ (DEEWR 2008b, p. 5).

The overall negative impact on sole parents is well captured in the public press of the day. For example,

it is unclear if sole parents are financially better off... for all their severity, [the changes] have done little to solve the chronic issues of high numbers of people moving to DSP²⁴, the poor employment prospects for the very long-term unemployed and mature-age people looking for work. If we didn’t know it already this is more evidence that sticks alone cause damage and pain – and often not much more. (Horin 2010, p. online)

While activation programmes in general have been found to be less than effective in assisting people into work, for some programmes like the ‘Work for the Dole’ (WfD) ‘there appear[s] to be significant adverse effects of participation’ (Borland & Tseng 2004, p. 18). While in July 2002 the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business continued to claim ‘that the WfD programme has a positive impact on gaining employment or entering education or training’ (Yeend 2004), the general consensus from advocacy groups such as the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) was that WfD failed to assist the most disadvantaged and had a fundamentally punitive effect.

²⁴ Disability Support Pension

Similarly, in an Australian randomised trial that focused on activation of very long-term recipients of employment assistance via the delivery of interviews and ‘counselling’ and the production of ‘Participation Plans’, the researchers (Breunig et al. 2003) found the intervention to be of limited benefit. This trial reported some improvement in social activity but no improvement in work hours. The research found that, although earlier studies show some benefit from similar types of assistance for the general population, enforcement or monitoring on their own were not effective in achieving employment outcomes for longer-term unemployed and/or disadvantaged individuals (Breunig et al. 2003).

In contrast to the negative reports and findings of ‘activation and ‘work first’ approaches, a literature review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials by Twamley, Jeste, & Lehman (2003) draws the conclusion that ‘supported employment (SE) programmes in general, and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) specifically, have produced consistently better outcomes than traditional vocational rehabilitation in terms of both competitive employment and employment of any type’ (Twamley, Jeste & Lehman 2003, p. 521). Such findings support the call for a greater emphasis on individual support and less attention to punitive approaches.

3.4.2 The compliance effect – the job seeker diary and participation

One of the core tools used by government and policy makers to ensure activation and compliance was the job seeker diary (JSD) which required those on benefits to document attempts at finding work and present the evidence at regular Centrelink interviews. The benefit of such requirements remains unclear in the context of low demand for labour in many Australian states. According to Borland (2003),

[T]he main finding from the disaggregate analysis therefore seems to be that the impact of the JSD is largest in conditions where labour demand for unemployed job seekers is likely to be relatively strong – where payment recipients do not have an extensive history of unemployment payments; and in regions where the rate of unemployment is relatively low’ (Borland & Wilkins 2003, p. 30).

Any positive impact of participation reporting is generally considered to be limited in regard to sole parents, youth, Indigenous and other vulnerable groups who appear to be generally negatively impacted by activation based interventions. This poor result continues to be the case despite attempts to reduce the impact by the introduction of no work, no pay arrangements rather than eight week benefit removal, as well as provisions for benefit reinstatement when job seekers comply with attendance requirements (Disney, Buduls & Grant 2010; Jobs Australia 2011).

Evaluations regarding compliance and ‘what works’ must include the element of ‘for whom’ and take into account the level of disadvantage experienced by the job seeker.

The critics of contracted delivery models point out the perverse incentives of a competitive model which includes a tendency to cream or cherry-pick those considered job ready and to park those hardest to help. Finn (2009) points out that 'performance incentives, especially the Star Ratings, continue[d] to shape provider behaviour in ways that disadvantaged the hardest to help and the providers who worked with them (Finn 2009a, p. 21), (ACOSS 2012a; Fowkes 2011; Jobs Australia 2011; Murray & Quinlan 2006).

3.5.1 Discretion at the frontline

Up until the 2006 reforms, employment service providers were generally able to exercise a reasonable degree of discretion. However, in 2006 reporting mechanisms were strengthened that required providers (even those working with the most disadvantaged job seekers) to submit participation reports with little redress. Providers were monitored by the department on the number of reports submitted and asked to explain less than average breaching activity. In this way the level of discretion available to providers and front line workers was reduced; some workers began to question their own professionalism while some organisations began assessing to what degree their actions in employment services were a direct contradiction of their mission. Some providers returned contracts and many church-based providers refused to take part in some aspects of the programme (Murray & Quinlan 2006). This conflict of values was reflected at the frontline, with a decline in qualification levels and increased turnover of staff, as well as 'evidence of high levels of negativity from staff delivering Job Network services' (Rogers 2007, p. 400).

The reduction in discretion in the Australian context had/has serious implications for the worker - client relationship, as it further enshrines workers, including those in non-profit agencies as agents of the state and instruments of social control (Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2000; Thornton & Marston 2009), whereas the use of discretion fosters relationship development and allows for the application of professional judgment prior to implementing policy directives, such as breaching for non-compliance. Historically, researchers like Lipsky (1980), Kelly (1994) and Smith & Lipsky (1995) argued that workers often made value judgments about the way in which they implemented government policy. At that time it was common for street-level workers to 'orchestrate outcomes that are compatible with their visions of justice' (Kelly 1994, p. 119) and to modify services to best suit the situation. While this may have been the case in early contracting of employment services, Lens (2008, p. 216) found that 'workers use bureaucratic short cuts that avoid a full assessment of clients' work efforts.

Process is exalted over substance, catching a diverse group of clients in the net of sanctions'. Likewise, McDonald and Marston (2006) note the greater use of discretion by Centrelink social workers as compared with employment services staff and Considine et al. (2013) report in a time series of research projects, the continued decline of discretion at the front line of Australian employment services.

It does not appear that caseloads have been a causal factor in the decline in discretion as caseloads in Australian employment services have not changed significantly over the past decade. Considine (2001) noted caseloads of over 100 per worker, and an average of 109.55 job seekers per worker in 2008 (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2008). By 2012 Giuliani (2013) reported caseloads of 114 per worker. Hence, the decline in discretion is more likely the result of increased micro-management of process by the department and the continuing emphasis on compliance in present day Australian employment services. This then leaves front line workers with little room to exercise professional judgements consistent with learned skills, personal values and ethics.

3.6.1 The impact of contractualism

Contractualism refers to the increased use of contracts as a key tool in the regulation of public relationships (Davis, Sullivan & Yeatman 1997). According to Ramia (2002), Yeatman argues that the 'current contractualist agenda is consistent with equality of opportunity, occasioning a redefinition of citizenship so as to improve on the discourse of social protection' (Ramia 2002, p. 49). Refuting Yeatman, Ramia contends that the social justice implications of such a position are perilous, and that the consequences for disadvantaged groups in a contractualist paradigm would increase the risk of further disadvantage (Ramia, 2002).

While the introduction of contract mechanisms continues to re-shape the nature of employment services and the relationships and accountabilities between governments and providers, as well as between providers and jobseekers, contractualism fails to provide direction on just what actions or modes of service provision produce the best results.

The language of contractualism stresses the individual responsibility not only of the job seeker but in the role of the employment services consultant, epitomised in the following comment by Sol and Westerveld (2007).

Contractualisation sets the spotlights not only on the individual job seeker, but also on the case manager and his/her (lack of) accomplishments towards this person on benefit, forcing the frontline workers to come out of the shadows, where many of them for so long have safely sheltered (Sol & Westerveld 2007, p. 309).

Apart from the suggestion that frontline workers have been hiding in the shadows, the language of contractualism constructs employment services as a series of requirements and obligations, which are easier to cost and reward, compared with the establishment of trusting mentor-like relationships. The contractual argument is that the actors in a constructed market model are free to determine the modality of service delivery as long as they get the required results. More recently, the heavily contracted regime of Australian employment services has moved well past the determination of required outcomes to dictating and monitoring the daily actions of workers at the frontline (Considine, et al., 2011; Fowkes 2011). In this manner, the emphasis on contractual agreements coupled with compliance and reduced discretion, limits the capacity of frontline workers to implement relationship based assistance.

3.6.1 International evaluations of contracted employment services

The overall performance and effectiveness of contracted employment services, both in Australia and internationally, have been subject to numerous evaluations with mixed results and much debate regarding the accountability of governments and providers for services to the most disadvantaged. This is particularly so where profit margins are the rationale for contract delivery and ‘the process of picking winners amongst participants is essential to [an] effective, financially viable delivery’ (Fowkes 2011, p. 11).

In his evaluation of welfare to work programmes in the USA, Finn (2007) concludes that:

[T]here are risks attached to the significant involvement of for-profit organisations. They are likely to follow profit maximisation strategies shaped by contract incentives and this may not necessarily deliver what is best for clients, especially for those with greater barriers. Moreover, if the entry of for-profit into local delivery systems displaces existing private and public infrastructure, then future capacity may be at risk when market conditions change and larger for-profit remove their capital to seek greater profits elsewhere (Finn 2007, p. 22).

In a review of international evidence, Finn concludes that ‘the relatively short-term employment-related performance standards rewarded in programmes are not good indicators of long-term impacts’ (Finn 2009a, p. 2); that minimising ‘parking and creaming’ is a challenge for performance based and outcome related funding; and that ‘caution should be exercised in using outcome data alone in what works in contracted employment services’ (Finn 2009a, p. 13).

In one of the most extensive UK studies, conducted by Hasluck and Green (2007), the researchers conducted a review of the evidence on ‘what works’, including reports from the UK Office of Work and Pensions. The study included extensive mapping by customer groups, a detailed review of the evidence by group and identification of the

key findings. Hasluck and Green concluded that: 'mandatory programmes produce mixed results' (p.4.); that '[w]hilst job search and links to employers are important, the motivation of the individual job seeker is the key' (p146) and;

[T]here is little robust evidence that the nature of the provider of services, be it Jobcentre Plus²⁵, a private sector provider or some other organisation, has a systematic impact on effectiveness. What does appear to be important is the quality, enthusiasm, motivation and commitment of the staff providing the service. While there is evidence that some pilot initiatives have performed well with private sector providers (for instance, Employment Zones (EZs)) much of this difference may be attributable to the greater awareness of staff that their performance is being monitored and evaluated (Hasluck & Green 2007, p. 145).

In their evaluation of the evidence Hasluck and Green (2007) conclude that personal advisors add value to well-motivated customers as well as those 'who are a long way from work' (p101). It appears that the one-to-one individual support from a personal advisor builds trust and that a 'goal orientated approach in working with each individual and the use of action plans along with active outreach was also considered important' (p136); and finally, that in consideration of the evidence related to the most disadvantaged job seekers that, 'the circumstances and context of engagement between advisor and customer is as (if not more) important than the specificities of the types of provision' (Hasluck & Green 2007, p. 138). The consistency of the findings by Hasluck and Green with the earlier discussion regarding the Working Alliance is strong and adds to the argument for this and other research into relationship focused models.

3.6.2 The role of personal advisors in UK Employment Zones (EZs)

One of the most recent explorations of the effectiveness of employment assistance is the 'Now It's Personal' series of action research projects coordinated by the UK Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). Throughout the research, the underlying arguments about the role of personal advisors are based on the work of Bennett and Cooke (2007) and other evaluations of the Employment Zones in socio-economically disadvantaged regions of the UK. The IPPR report (McNeil 2009) notes the critical importance of personal support, expressed in terms of reasonable assistance, time spent, and the inclusion of the job seeker in the planning process. The IPPR report is critical of the lack of minimum standards for 'employment advisors' and the inadequacy of 'on the job training', an issue also noted in many of the recent evaluations of the Australian JSA model (Giuliani & Casey 2013).

McNeil (2009) argues that the benefit of a personalised approach is more effective services, and that in spite of the greater cost in service delivery, these costs are offset

²⁵ The UK public provider

by better outcomes. In their final report of the 'Now it's Personal' series, the authors argue that a 'significant up-skilling of the advisor workforce is needed for more effective service', and that a 'fresh examination is needed of the role of the personal advisor' (Institute for Public Policy Research 2010, pp. 5, 9, respectively).

Commenting on a number of evaluations of the UK's Employment Zones (EZ) initiative, Bruttel (2005) concludes 'that for all jobs the EZs were around 10 percentage points more effective than Jobcentre Plus in the first wave of interviews, although this difference became insignificant in the second wave of interviews' (Bruttel 2005, p. 399).

These variations in effect and the limited empirical data on the impact of the personal advisor was the starting point for this research and an argument for further evaluations of the personal advisor's impact on outcomes.

Importantly for this research, the success of the EZs was in part attributed to the suggestion that 'private case managers enjoy a flexibility that allows them to find individually tailored solutions for job seekers with severe employment barriers' (Bruttel 2005, p. 400). While a more individually focused service model and the tailoring of interventions to participants makes sense, the absence of empirical evidence regarding the role of the advisor means that it is not clear whether the performance outcomes in the EZs are directly related to the introduction of the personal advisors, the greater flexibility they enjoy or the heavy emphasis on outcomes in the payment model (Finn 2008; Hirst et al. 2006; House 2003; Joyce & Pettigrew 2002; Thornton 2005).

In direct contrast to the discussion above, a Swiss-based study by Behncke, Frölich and Lechner (2007) argues that a tougher approach by the case worker can, in some circumstances, achieve up to two per cent better outcomes. The research by Behncke et al. investigates the effects of what they term the 'caseworkers' cooperativeness' on the employment probabilities of their clients. The research used a regression analysis of employment outcomes conducted over a three year period matched with workers ratings of their level of cooperation. The research found some short and long term positive effect. However, the context of the research requires some clarification. The authors note the mixed results of the research into the effect of monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms in the Swiss and international context. They also note the difficulty in convincing clients to accept less than optimal employment opportunities while they receive unemployment insurance at relatively generous rates.

Unemployment insurance in the Swiss context requires 'both employers and employees [where obliged] to contribute a share of 2.5% of salary. So in this study '[B]enefits amounted to 70-80 per cent of the job seeker's former salary depending on

age, dependents and income' (Behncke, Frölich & Lechner 2007, p. 7). During the period that the research took place the maximum benefit entitlement period was 18.5 months.

The method for gauging the cooperativeness of the case worker was by rating their response to the question; 'How important do you consider the cooperation with the jobseeker, regarding placements in jobs, and assignment of active labour market programmes? The response to this question was matched to the type of interventions utilised by the case workers and to the employment outcomes achieved over the three year research period.

In a similar study in Denmark the treatment group were required to attend rigorous employment assistance programmes early in their experience of unemployment while on generous benefit rates of between 70 per cent and 90 per cent of pre unemployment wages. The researchers argue that a threat of programme attendance improved the return to work rates by 30 per cent (Graversen & Van Ours 2008). While these studies may have some bearing in the context of 70 – 80 per cent pre unemployment benefit rates and supports a view that a tougher approach influences persons on relatively generous benefits to return to work more quickly, any application or extrapolation of the findings to the Australian context should be conducted with caution.

Given the mixed findings in much of the research about what works for whom, and the indication that the role of the front line worker is a significant factor, it is clear that more research is required into their role and just what skills and interventions they exercise in their interactions with job seekers to produce effective outcomes. The case for this research therefore, is to consider the relationship style of the frontline worker in a generic employment services context and also in a context of limited employment opportunities and low benefit levels. Hence this research explores to what degree (if any) an emphasis on relationship building might improve the likelihood of people finding employment or as posed by Graversen and Van Ours (2008), which is better, carrot or stick?

3.6.3 Work first versus capacity and relationship building

In a review of employment assistance in OECD countries Martin and Grubb (2001) conclude that there are significant technical difficulties in comparing employment programme outcomes and hence it is not possible to provide a definitive position. There are significant issues that confuse the analysis, for example the '[d]isplacement effect' of some programmes that may or may not be taken into account by various

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evaluations, as well 'little evidence of the long-run effects of active programmes (p.11). Further, although some of the 'evaluation literature tells us quite a lot about what works for which groups...the evidence is not instructive in importantly related questions such as why' (Drake, Bond & Rapp 2006; Martin & Grubb 2001, p. 12).

Heckman (1999) in Martin and Grubb (2001) cites the significant difficulties in programme evaluation and that 'the per-capita expenditures on participants are usually small relative to the deficits that these programmes are being asked to address.

In order for such interventions to generate large gains they would have to be associated with very large internal rates of return' (Heckman, LaLonde & Smith 1999).

Martin and Grubb (2001) found very limited impact of programmes directed at unemployed youth and that 'almost all evaluations show that special measures are not particularly effective for disadvantaged youths'. They later suggest that this may be a result of poor attitudes to work (blaming the individual) and that mentoring programmes may provide some opportunity for improvement in outcomes, again an issue related to the personal advisor role.

The finding regarding poor effect [for youth programmes] is supported by Swedish research showing 'minimal benefit to young people and those with disabilities' of specific programmes (Bennmarker, Grönqvist & Öckertb 2010, p. 27), though Hasluck and Green (2007) note that, in relation to disadvantaged youth, a mix of accredited training and work experience (subsidised and tailored to the needs of the individual) appeared to have some benefit, particularly for those with shorter periods of unemployment.

Employment assistance in the US in particular emphasise a 'work first' approach – one in which immediate job placement is stressed over development of human capital, that is education and training (Ricucci, 2005). The role of the 'case manager' in the work first approach is to activate the job seeker and place them into a job, any job, as soon as possible. Any idea of building skills and capacity is generally absent (Finn, 2000). The work first approach appears to benefit job seekers who are generally work ready and possess some skills, but is limited in its capacity to assist more disadvantaged job seekers.

In assessing the outcome of the US work first programme Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), researchers reported that 'few TANF applicants moving out of poverty over a four year period' and that women, in particular, were not better off following TANF participation. (Cancian et al. 2002).

Citing Dean (2003), McDonald and Marston argue that:

[Q]ualitative research into the impact of work first type programs on the long-term unemployed suggests that the unintended effects are significant. Dean's (2003) research into the New Deal and the experiences of people with multiple needs found that work first programmes fail to recognise and accommodate the practical and ontological needs of people with multiple needs (McDonald & Marston 2005, p. 380).

Borland (2003) draws attention to the mixed results for the UK 'Restart Programme' and the five to 10 per cent positive effect for young male participants but no significant effect for females or males who started the programme after longer durations of unemployment. Similar programme assessments show significant positive effect of early intervention programmes for those who had previously held a job but absent effect for others (Van den Berg & Van der Klaauw 2001).

Significantly, the positive performance of the Employment Zones in the UK, according to Finn (2009), may be related to the greater flexibility and 'discretion of the Zone managers and the performance funding model,' although he suggests there has been some informal and formal selectivity of clients who are more likely to achieve an outcome. (Hirst et al. 2006; Martin & Grubb 2001).

3.7.1 Evaluations of the Job Network

Most evaluations have been critical of the Job network, with the stage two progress report noting that the Job Network was only a ten per cent improvement on no intervention at all for general job seekers and had only a three per cent net effect for disadvantaged cohorts (Department Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) 2001a). On a positive note, the Job Network was cheaper to operate than the previous Labor government's Working Nation strategy given that overall spending on employment services dropped considerably and net profits for providers decreased from 18.2 per cent to 4.1 per cent from 1998 to 2002, but with employment outcomes similar to previous programme (Australian Productivity Commission 2002; Eardley & Thompson 1997).

The Productivity Commission, citing Considine (2001 p.75), noted the shift in attitude over a three year period (1996 -1999) 'from being focused on the needs of the job seeker, including attention to job seeker rights and advocacy, to an emphasis on off benefit outcomes as the primary motivation'. This is significant in relation to this research because, from the job seeker's perspective, they were no longer the focus of attention; the attention shifted to the 'off benefit outcome' and the resulting income for the provider, which in turn increased the risk of reducing services to those less likely to result in a paid outcome.

Considine (2001) describes how the changed relationship between the state and citizen in the contracting out of employment services has fundamentally shifted the relationship between providers and service users (now considered customers), particularly in the not for profit sector. This shift in state-citizen perspective is further paralleled in the provider - customer perspective, '[I]n the Australian case the quasi-market made both the public and private agencies totally dependent on the purchaser funds and thus on central government programme objectives' (Considine 2001, p. 175). In doing so, the relationship between provider advisor/consultant and the job seeker has been reshaped into one which is often described as the new paternalism (Mead 1997), and a sort of 'tough love' approach which is also expressed in the language and frameworks of contractualism (Carney & Ramia 2002a; Sol & Westerveld 2007).

The Job Network's effectiveness for disadvantaged job seekers has received constant criticism (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011; Finn 2009a; Fowkes 2011; Jamrozik 2001; Perkins 2007; Thomas 2007). Early evaluations in 2002 found that the likelihood of being in employment twelve months after referral to Intensive Support (then called Intensive Assistance) improved only marginally (Australia Productivity Commission 2002). Further, a report by the Australian National Audit Office (2005) found that assessment of barriers and customisation of job search plans was limited, and that the level of contact rarely met contracted specifications. An overall concern was expressed about whether assistance provided to job seekers was actually intensive and personalised (ANAO 2005). A 2012 OECD evaluation on activation of Australian job seekers concluded that,

[S]ince the mid-2000s there have been few if any external statistical evaluations of the impact of WfD [Work for the Dole] or other ALMPs [Australian Labour Market Programmes] and case-management systems, although there have been some evaluations of the benefit-system reforms (OECD 2012, p. 32).

3.7.2 Market manipulation or innovation

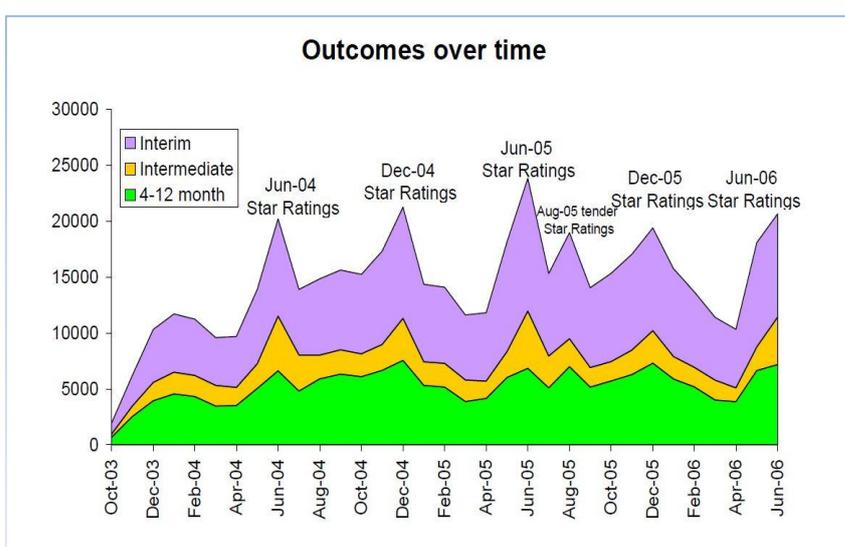
Integral to the issues of Job Network effectiveness have been constant claims that the system has failed to achieve targeted outcomes with 'widespread "parking" of harder-to-place job seekers' (Eardley 2003) and has 'resulted in providers "creaming" the system' (Thomas 2007, p. 18) (Fowkes 2011).

The underlying challenge of the Job Network was that the constructed quasi-market nature of the arrangements and the necessity of competition in some areas (tenders and job matching) conflicted with some of the elements of best practice in services to the most disadvantaged, that is, flexibility and joined up solutions for the most disadvantaged job seekers. As Burgess (2003, p. 239) puts it, '[I]n the end a contrived

market requires ongoing tinkering to address the inherent weaknesses associated with the attempt to completely commodify employment services in the context of a supply side approach to unemployment’.

Further evidence of providers manipulating the ‘contrived market’ can be seen in the behaviour of providers in relation to the timing of star ratings. In Figure 3 below it is clear that peak performance by providers is timed to coincide with the six monthly star ratings, which in turn influences contract rollover and tender outcomes. In this manner providers are gearing their performance measures to manipulate the market.

Figure 3. Outcomes and the timing of star ratings.



(Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) 2006, p. 24)

The response by the department to accusations of system manipulation or ‘sharp practices’ is further regulation of the system (Giuliani & Casey 2013). This, in turn, further detracts from providers’ capacity to achieve the necessary outcomes and financial viability which in turn drives providers to seek out ‘other ways’ to maximise outcomes as a proportion of operating cost. This continual cycle was raised by a number of the submissions on the next iteration of employment services (Davis & Giuliani 2013) with one submission suggesting that, providers have become ‘...a ‘herd’ of profit maximisers who are highly responsive to threats to their viability’ (Considine, O’Sullivan & Olney 2013, p. 3).

In attempting to reduce market manipulation by tighter contract requirements and regular audits, the department has, in effect, reduced the capacity for innovation; the fine line between manipulation and innovation is not always clear and so providers have reduced innovation in fear of adverse audit findings. Innovation requires the

frontline to implement actions consistent with their professional judgment and, if necessary, to modify the delivery of the original policy intention to meet the individual client's needs (Fording, Schram & Soss 2006; Kelly 1994; Lipsky 2010). This became increasingly difficult in the Job Network as innovation and discretion were squeezed out by IT systems and compliance requirements that stifled all but the most radical workers. A 2008 survey of frontline workers indicated that a 'combined percentage of 39.6 per cent of workers reported their work as 'routine' or 'very routine' (Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2008, p. 26).²⁶ In terms of IT systems, frontline staff generally believe that the 'system dictates how they do their job' (Considine et al. 2013, p. 19).

3.7.3 Job Services Australia (JSA) early performance indicators

In 2009, following sector consultation, the Australian government combined a number of specialist programmes and the Job Network into the Job Services Australia (JSA) contract. While many agencies, particularly in the welfare sector, raised concerns about the lack of specialist services for the most disadvantaged, the minor increase in resources for disadvantaged clients as well as the stronger emphasis on assistance to this group was a welcomed improvement (ACOSS 2012b; Horn 2011b).

Finn (2011) suggests that in the context of the global financial crisis (GFC) the consolidation and new structure was a significant administrative achievement (Finn 2011). In terms of this discussion and the question of 'what works', DEEWR has argued that the new model has doubled the outcome rate from 15.2 per cent under pre-JSA programmes to 30.7 per cent and claims a 90 per cent improvement in outcomes for stream 4 job seekers.

There are however, serious flaws with this assessment. Many of the pre- JSA programmes were not solely employment outcome, but social outcome focused; for example, the objective of the PSP and JPET youth assistance was to re-engage job seekers, assist them to address personal and work barriers and then connect them to the Job Network. The financial incentives also varied, with PSP support payments totalling \$2,805 and outcome payments equalling \$1,540 - a total of \$4,345 over two years or \$2,172.50 per annum (Perkins 2005). The same client type under JSA results in \$2,736 in service fees and \$6,600 for 13 week and 26 week outcomes, as well as access to the Job Seeker Account from which providers can purchase further assistance to the value of \$1,650 (DEEWR 2008a). Therefore, the total possible income under JSA for a stream 4 participant is \$11,586 per annum, whereas for two

²⁶ By 2012 this had increased to 57.3 per cent.

years of service in PSP the most a provider could earn was \$4,345. The claim that JSA stream 4 was a significant improvement on PSP fails to note the different objectives of the two programmes and that a JSA stream 4 outcome results in more than three times the possible PSP income.

A further problem of this type of performance assessment is that it fails to provide a comparison on the impact of the JSA model versus no JSA (or alternatives to JSA), an issue taken up by the OECD in its 2012 paper 'How Australia Activates Jobseekers (OECD 2012).

The OECD (2012) note the lower star rating of organisations working with disadvantaged groups and the 'need to investigate the technical reasons why the star rating regression over-predicts expected outcomes for certain disadvantaged client groups' (OECD 2012, p. 25). What is clear from the OECD evaluation is that Australia's employment services excel at activation; what is not clear is whether all this activation is resulting in better or longer-term outcomes, particularly when Australia's involuntary part-time work rate is '7.2 per cent' (OECD 2012, p. 14).

The department and the Minister at that time responsible for the delivery of the JSA programme claimed the performance of the JSA was an improvement on the Job Network and PSP. The casualisation of the workforce and high underemployment rates suggest a more complex picture. According to Fowkes (2013), '[T]he major difference between the two systems is in the rate of part-time employment after participation in the programme. The current system appears to be most effective in moving people from unemployment to underemployment' (Fowkes 2013, p. 3).

Other criticisms of the JSA include the failure to assist some of the more disadvantaged groups (Cull 2011; Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; Jobs Australia 2011; Rose, Morstyn & Tudehope 2011) and the continuing increase in compliance and 'red tape burden' (OECD 2012, p. 21), (Ashkanasy 2011; Jobs Australia 2011). A recent analysis suggested there are more than 144 different claim types and over 3000 pages of guidelines and procedures (Ashkanasy 2011).

The failure of the JSA to assist disadvantaged job seekers is partially linked to continuing criticism of the assessment process for stream allocation, particularly as jobseekers do not always disclose the underlying issues or personal circumstances relating to their unemployment (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; McDonald, Marston & Buckley 2003). Initially, providers referred job seekers who had not been adequately assessed back to Centrelink for reassessment, until a directive and policy change by the department in 2011 that, in effect, blocked reassessment unless initiated by the job

seeker. The issue was 'not necessarily being inappropriately referred but, for a number of reasons, not being appropriately assessed' (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010, p. 20). As the initial assessment and classification also determines the funding received by the provider, there are financial implications for providers if a job seeker is not classified into the appropriate stream.

In the later part of the JSA contract the capacity of the programme to respond to the needs of disadvantaged job seekers continued to be questioned by the welfare sector (ACOSS 2012; Davis & Giuliani 2013). There were further indications at the frontline that change was required as 57.3 per cent of frontline workers saw their job as routine and '22.7 per cent stated that the system dictates how they do their job to a large extent' (Considine et al. 2013, p. 19). This level of routine and lack of flexibility by frontline workers has also been documented by Nevile and Lohmann (2011) and is a major cause of the sector's lack of innovation. In many ways the criticisms that were made of the public employment system in 1996 have not been addressed by the privatisation of the system; the public bureaucracy has been replaced with a private bureaucracy with no real improvement in service quality. The need for reform to JSA was made evident with the Minister of the day requesting submissions regarding the next model of employment services (DEEWR 2012b; The Hon Kate Ellis MP Minister for Employment Participation August 2012, p. 17) noting 'the disconnect between employment services and other complementary services'.

3.8.1 Chapter conclusion

One of the minor narratives in the literature is the limited attention given to a structural analysis of unemployment and that much of the policy interventions occur 'in the absence of concomitant policies to alleviate the macroeconomic constraint and create real employment opportunities' (Mitchell & Bill 2007, p. 9). In the same manner successive governments have focussed on the inflation rate rather than the non-accelerating rate of unemployment) arguing that low inflation drives economic growth which will intern reduce unemployment. This absence of policies that focus on job creation is particularly the case in industries with low skill requirements or with capacities for 'work and learn' arrangements. The focus on individual responsibility inherent in a neo-liberal ideology continues to underplay these structural causal factors and stresses the activation of the individual as a reasonable response. There is a risk that the focus of this research on the worker – job seeker relationship may be misconstrued as assigning the individual responsibility for unemployment; this is not the case. The epistemology underpinning this research is that the macroeconomic and

structural causes of unemployment need to be addressed at the structural level and that job seekers can be empowered to make best choices about their own response to employment options in the context of supportive, equal powered relationships.

In reviewing the literature in relation to what works in assisting job seekers back to employment, it is clear that some programmes do make an impact for those who are job ready with shorter periods of unemployment and previous experience of work. It appears that, in some contexts, the provision of 'compliance activities including mandatory job search activities can have up to a six per cent benefit when there is a high demand for labour, and recipients do not have an extensive experience of unemployment and in regions where the rate of unemployment is relatively low' (Borland & Tseng 2003, p. IV). However, for those who are a long way from the labour market and with inhibiting factors such as limited skills and education, or from particular cohorts such as youth and sole parents, there appear to be few programmes that provide real benefit. In particular, 'work first' programmes that focus on activation and compliance have little impact on those furthest from the labour market and this in turn raises questions about the net impact of 'work first' compared with no intervention at all.

For those programmes that report positive effect, the 'why' question still remains; what elements of intervention underpin this effect? The dominant themes in the literature and current policy settings focus on compliance, activation and victimisation, concepts of agency theory and (one sided) Mutual Obligation predominately aimed at the individual. This research presents an alternative case, that is, for an anti-oppressive relational approach to employment assistance.

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature and the existing qualitative and limited quantitative material regarding the worker – client relationship and its influence on employment outcomes. The next chapter on research design will provide the underlying ontological positioning of the research and how that positioning and the literature has influenced the choice of methods and methodology. The chapter will explain the process used for the focus groups, the design of the survey tool and the data analysis process.

Chapter 4 - Research design

4.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter describes the research design, beginning with the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the research. The chapter outlines the methodology, rationale, challenges and design of the mixed methods model used in this research, as well as issues of quality and trustworthiness (Liamputtong 2012). This chapter discusses the research sample, selection of focus group participants, survey construction and the question design for the qualitative component of the study. The chapter describes the quantitative data analysis process, the selection of the various groups for analysis and the construction of the various variables. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethics and bias in practitioner research as well as other possible limitations of the study.

4.2.1 Epistemology

The research was undertaken as ‘practitioner research’ (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007), in that it was conducted in the context of the researcher’s profession and field of practice. ‘Practitioner researchers engage in an enterprise which is, in essence, about contributing to both transformation of practice and transformation of society. ‘Responsible and ethical practitioner research operates in such a way as to create actionable, actioned outcomes’ (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007, p. 206).

This research takes an interpretive approach that assumes that human behavior is ‘shaped by the meanings people have of the world’ (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2009, p. 9) and uses methods to research issues that lead to a better understanding, rather than a positivist approach that seeks to prove or disprove pre-devised hypotheses. An interpretive position, provides understanding about ‘power, outcomes and inequality in terms of who gains and who loses’ (Marston & Jacobs 2004, p. 79).

This research seeks to expand our understanding of the relationship between job seekers and consultants and the role of this relationship in achieving employment outcomes. This epistemological position is influenced by critical social work, in particular anti-oppressive perspectives (Mullaly 2007; Strier 2007), that draw attention to power dynamics and patriarchal constructs that seek to maintain a position of dominance via control, victimisation and oppressive methods. Anti-oppressive frameworks challenge the misuse of power and the structural inequalities in society that particularly affect individuals and groups who are disadvantaged due to race, gender, disability, age, sexual preference, or economic circumstances.

Critical social work theory acknowledges the political element and context of our personal and professional actions and the underpinning values of researchers who seek to improve the circumstances of individuals or groups that experience discrimination or oppression (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2009). Likewise, critical social work (Adams, Dominelli & Payne 2002; Fook 2012), is 'committed to understanding, critiquing and transforming the profession of social work and the unjust nature of society' (Campbell & Baikie 2012, p. 70). Critical social work is emancipatory in that it is 'person centered, empowering and critical of power structures' (Dominelli 2010, p. 2)

The critical perspective of this research means that it attends to injustices inherent in the current delivery of employment services as government policies are enacted in the daily interactions at the frontline. A critical approach seeks to understand how workers in employment services make decisions about what constitutes acceptable behaviour by service users, how they decide to inflict punitive measures and 'how actors in work settings make sense of their circumstances, and especially how they make their actions (and their outcomes) accountable as rational, common-sensical, and "in-accord-with-rule"' (Hassard & Pym 1990, p. p119). The research seeks to do this by analysing the experiences of service users and frontline workers, and by presenting a case for alternative ways of working that empowers job seekers and frontline workers to co-produce workable and enduring solutions to the complex societal and personal experiences of unemployment and the provision of employment services.

4.3.1 Methodology - qualitative and quantitative

Qualitative research begins with understanding the views and values of the participants in the research (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2009) and an endeavor to 'understand in depth the richness in the lives of human beings' (Jones, Torres & Arminio 2013, p. 11). This research adopts the definitions of qualitative and quantitative research articulated by Yoshikawa (2008):

By quantitative research, we mean methods of inquiry that analyze numeric representations of the world. Survey and questionnaire data as well as biological or physiological data are often analyzed in quantitative units. Inquiry that relies on qualitative methods collects and analyzes non-numeric representations of the world—words, texts, narratives, pictures, and/or observations. (Yoshikawa et al. 2008, p. 345).

The overall methodological approach to the research was an iterative, mixed methods approach. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue, 'a mixed method is well suited to practice research' and a multi-data approach is 'likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses' (Johnson, R. B. & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 18).

Greene (2006, p. 93) poses a broader definition than Johnson and Onwuegbuzie under the banner of 'Mixed Methods Social Inquiry', suggesting that mixed methods falls into four domains of issues and assumptions: 'philosophical assumptions and stances, inquiry logics, guidelines for practice, and socio-political commitments in science'. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2011) further develop these four elements by contributing additional material and contending that mixed method research, as a process, 'is better conceptualised as a continuous iterative, interactive and dynamic process' (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson & Collins 2011, p. 2).

Mixed methods was selected for this research because of its capacity to provide quantitative data analysis in relation to the employment outcomes of consultants while also providing a qualitative frame for understanding the perceptions and attitudes of frontline workers regarding job seeker engagement and outcomes. The selection of method, as suggested by Henn et al. (2009) is 'largely governed by the desire to achieve the best possible data to address the aims and objectives of the research' (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2009, p. 13).

In selecting the methods the researcher was aware of several qualitative studies in relation to the topic, (DEEWR 2009a; 2006) but that little, if any, quantitative data exists regarding worker - client relationship influences in Australian contracted employment services, hence the preference for a mixed method study.

The other key reason for a mixed method approach is that this research seeks to add a quantitative element to the existing qualitative material about the value of building good working relationships in achieving outcomes, for example the Department Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) (2001b) best practice evaluation. In the Australian context there is limited quantitative research on this issue, although there is significant data in the teaching and psychology fields (Hubble, Duncan & Miller 1999) and in the international Vocational Mental Health sector (Bjorkman & Hansson 2007; Deane, Crowe & Oades 2010; Goldberg, Rollins & McNary 2004)

4.3.2 The challenges of mixed methods

Even though there is strong support for mixed method research, confidence in the approach is still an issue in some sectors. The concerns noted by critics are generally in regard to transferability and integration of data across the two methods and how adequately the combination of methods addresses the research question. Other researchers question whether consumers and policy makers will value the findings from mixed method research to the same degree as single method research (Onwuegbuzie & Collins 2007).

Likewise, Hassard and Pym (1990) suggest that researchers are reluctant to diverge from traditional single models of research because of the risk of not having work published, and that 'each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defence' (Hassard & Pym, p.233). In conclusion Hassard and Pym (1990) argue the importance of researchers who are specialist in more than one paradigm in order to consider different perspectives on the same area of research.

Creswell (2011) notes the various criticisms of mixed methods, in particular that it results in a confusion of world views, epistemologies and paradigms. The key issue is that as methods are generally derived from ontologies or paradigms, for example positivist or interpretive, then mixed method research mixes these world views. However, Creswell suggests that in fact mixed methods research provides the opportunity for 'multiple ways of seeing things' (Creswell 2011, p. 272).

While acknowledging the various concerns, this research takes a pragmatic approach in mixed method research where the qualitative data (focus groups) is used to develop quantitative instruments (Yoshikawa et al. 2008), rather than the methodologically more complex option of using qualitative data to explain or support quantitative findings. This research uses comments derived from the survey to discuss the attitude of frontline workers as well as for the calculation of workers' scores for job seeker engagement focus.

Mixed method research must deal with the issues of language and make clear the application of quantitative terms such as 'variables', 'scores' and 'correlations' with qualitative terms such as 'subjective reality', 'narrative' and 'dominant theme', as well as the challenge of format and layout of reporting, as noted by Leech, Onwuegbuzie & Combs (2011):

Unfortunately, to date, there are not commonly agreed terms for mixed researchers. In fact, consensus has not even been reached as to the basic mixed research design terms, with multiple design typologies used by various authors (Leech, Onwuegbuzie & Combs 2011, p. 10).

Recently, some researchers have developed comparative tables of mixed method research terminology, for example, Jones et al. (2013), which this research makes use of to maintain the integrity and meaning of both paradigms.

Figure 4. Quantitative - Qualitative terminology.

<i>Quantitative</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>
Variable	Theme, code, category, multidimensionality
Correlate	Interpret, reflect, mutually shaping
Statistical significance	Profound, illuminating
Sample/subjects	Participants, co-researchers, co-travelers
Reliability	Triangulation
Rigor	Goodness, worthiness
Validity	Trustworthiness, catalytic validity
Proof, testing, and control groups	Judgments, perceptions, textual rendering
Results	Discovery, findings, constructing, meaning making
Generalizations	Contextual findings, appropriations
Outlier	Unique
Mechanical features	Morphogenesis (The evolving development of the structure of an entire organism)
Objective positionality	Tending to participants, indwell, human-as-subject, reflexivity
Bias	Perception, influence

Source: Jones et al. (2013, p. 4),

4.3.3 Quality and reliability

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011) present a case for a pragmatic response to the paradigm wars, choosing and combining methods so as to design research that selects the ‘best tools for answering our questions’ (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2011, p. 287) and then building design quality into the research process.

This issue of design quality in qualitative research is often expressed in terms of trustworthiness and is similar to the concepts of reliability and validity in quantitative research (Liamputtong 2012). However, trustworthiness in a qualitative context is achieved via theoretical, methodological, procedural and interpretive rigour. Methodological rigour is maximised by the selection of a methodological framework that fits the ‘aims of the research, the choice of methods and the approach to the data analysis’ (Liamputtong 2012, p. 24), which adds to the overall strength of the research design.

In selecting a mixed methods approach, the researcher sought to address some of the general criticisms of quantitative and qualitative research, for example, that quantitative research misses the contextual detail (Neil 2004), and that qualitative approaches can lack objectivity and ‘valid’ data. This research adopts the view that mixed methods research constitutes a coherent research paradigm and there is good fit of the method with the research question and that there are positive gains from mixed methods as an alternative to homogeneity (Feilzer 2010).

The inclusion of text responses in the survey instrument was designed to provide a significant body of qualitative material about the experience of frontline workers and, more specifically, their attitudes to and relationships with job seekers. The research seeks to do this independently of the accounts provided by job seekers, prevalent in much of the current literature.

Acknowledging the struggle and perspective of frontline workers and their attitude to job seekers is vital, as some research tends to stereotype frontline workers as generally lacking in empathy or genuine concern for job seekers (Murphy et al. 2011), while other research notes the higher than average burnout and turnover rates of employment consultants (AC Nielson 2005; Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2008; Goddard & Patton 1998; Patton & Goddard 2003).

4.4.1 Methods

A sequential mixed method was used (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie 2003; Teddlie & Yu 2007) The researcher first conducted focus groups with job seekers and consultants as an initial process to inform the issues and parameters of the research and then, based on the focus group findings, designed and conducted an online survey of consultants. Data in relation to employment outcomes achieved by consultants and the length of unemployment of the job seekers for which they achieved those outcomes, was obtained from existing DEEWR administrative data.

The research used focus groups of consultants and job seekers to determine the key themes and issues that influence their interactions and subsequent relationships. The focus group process was exploratory and informal, positioning the participants as 'experts' with an underpinning emphasis on service delivery improvement. The focus group process was also about eliciting the meanings and importance both groups attributed to relationship factors in employment services delivery.

The data that was transcribed from the focus group recordings was analysed with NVivo v10 software, and used in conjunction with the literature review findings to develop an online survey. The online survey allowed for both statistical and text responses and was distributed to consultants working in contracted employment services in Australia. Respondents were given the option to provide system identification details for later collection of outcome data on the basis that their responses to the survey remained confidential. The outcome data was sourced with permission from the consultants' workplace and is further discussed in section 4.5.3 of this chapter.

The results from the survey (830 responses) were separated into quantitative and qualitative data sets and analysed using SPSS v21 and NVivo v10 software respectively. These data sets were used to create several variables that were correlated with the outcome data provided for those respondents who gave consent.

The qualitative data was further analysed for key themes using NVivo v10 software. The findings are reported in later chapters and were used in a series of submissions to government regarding the next iteration of employment services. See Appendix.7 for a list of submissions and presentations.

4.4.2 Research sample

The focus group component of this research used a 'purposeful sampling' technique (Kumar 2010; Patton 1990; Sarantakos 1998; Teddlie & Yu 2007). 'The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry' (Patton 2002, p. 273). Access to these 'information-rich' groups was achieved by way of a specific request to employment service providers to recruit job seekers and employment consultants for the study.

In regard to the focus groups, the research used a Non Random - Non Probability selection (Coyne 1997; Kumar 2010). This is common for research using focus groups, '[i]f the goal is not to generalise to a population but to obtain insights into a phenomenon, individuals, or events (as will often be the case in the qualitative component of a mixed methods study)' (Onwuegbuzie & Collins 2007, p. 287) (parentheses in original).

The survey sample was drawn from a group of 67 employment services providers and the details can be found in section 4.5.11 later in this chapter; the focus group details are listed later in this chapter in Table 3

4.4.3 Recruitment - focus groups

The focus group participants (job seekers and consultants) were recruited via an email invitation to 64 organisations who deliver the Job Services Australia (JSA) employment services contract and who were members of the not for profit peak body Jobs Australia. The invitation was sent to the CEOs of the 64 organisations seeking their assistance in arranging the consultants and job seeker focus groups (see letter of request Appendix 1). A broad approach was undertaken to ensure geographic spread (as many Australian States and Territories as possible), as well as a mix of larger and smaller organisations.

A total of six organisations, some with multiple sites, in four Australian states agreed to participate in the focus groups. Sites included a spread of metropolitan and rural sites, including Bendigo, Mildura and Geelong in Victoria and one metropolitan site in Perth - Western Australia, Adelaide - South Australia and Sydney - New South Wales. Overall, 55 employment consultants and 36 job seekers participated in the focus groups, with four of the job seekers being interviewed individually. Individual interviews were conducted when the job seeker did not wish to be recorded or, as was the case at one location, where participants were accidentally booked for individual interviews.²⁷ In assessing the material after the completion of six focus groups, the researcher identified that the material had reached saturation point; that is, comments in the latter groups were repeating the information provided by earlier groups (Teddle & Yu 2007).

The recruitment of job seekers was arranged by the host organisation; posters and leaflets were distributed at the service sites and job seekers were invited to attend. Job seekers were provided with a \$25.00 gift voucher to offset travel costs and thank them for their time. Employment consultants were not provided with vouchers as they were on paid time by their agency. The provision of gift vouchers for job seekers reinforced an empowering message to the job seeker focus group participants about the value of their experience and knowledge as critical to the research process. This construct placed the job seekers, in particular, as well as the consultants as 'experts' in their experience of employment services, (Anderson 2010; Fox, Green & Martin 2007; Wadsworth 1998).

It is likely there was some skew in the job seeker focus groups toward longer-term unemployed job seekers as, generally, job ready participants were more likely to have moved through the agency and, therefore, may not have been available to participate in the study. Many of the focus group participants appeared from their comments, to have had lengthy histories in employment programmes and/or in the agencies where they were being assisted. The researcher did not collect or ask specifically for length of unemployment as such questioning was seen to perpetuate the negative connotations of long term unemployment.

²⁷ On reflection, the individual interviews provided richer and more complete information than the focus groups (in the job seeker context).

4.4.4 Focus groups process

The focus groups took place over a three month period from October to December 2009. At the beginning of each focus group, the researcher introduced himself as a long-term practitioner and now student of the system. The style of the researcher was informal and inquisitive; the participants were framed as 'experts' and their experience valued as critical to building a body of knowledge about participants' and workers' experience of how to improve the system.

The researcher explained to focus group participants that there was/is, as they well knew, much that could be improved in the way services are designed and delivered and that one way to bring about change is by research and advocacy – particularly research that considers the experience of practitioners and service users. The focus group participants responded well to this construct and were keen to comment on the services they delivered or received and how they made sense of interactions at the frontline of service delivery.²⁸ This is consistent with the view that individuals act on the basis of the meaning that things have for them (Charmaz 2003).

The researcher asked the focus group participants for permission to audio record the sessions and, in most cases, this was granted. In the two cases where job seekers did not wish to be recorded, hand written notes were taken (with permission).

4.4.5 Questions for focus groups

The questions posed in each of the focus groups are set out below. The researcher used open ended questions and did not interrupt the group conversations, seeking to allow the participants to respond to initial questions and comments made by others in the group. Occasionally, there were follow-up questions or requests for clarification; for example, '[c]an you explain that a little further?' The group discussion was essentially a response to '[q]ualitative questioning which keeps the interaction focused but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge' (Patton 1990, p. 297; 2003). The focus group questions are set out in Table 2 below.

²⁸ For example, some job seekers felt that reminders from employment consultants regarding pending appointments or job interviews were helpful and showed support and caring, whereas others experienced this as paternalistic.

Table 2. Question for focus group participants.

Questions for Case Managers	Questions for Job Seekers
<p>How have the recent changes from Job Network to JSA impacted on the day-to-day work you do?</p>	<p>How have the recent changes from Job Network to JSA impacted on the services you get?</p>
<p>What are the indicators of a good working relationship between a case manager and job seeker?</p>	<p>How important is the connection/relationship with your case manager in getting help to find employment?</p>
<p>How do you know when it's working – what does it look like and what are signs of positive engagement?</p>	<p>What's the difference between an 'OK' worker and a really good worker? (follow-up question) What does a really good worker do that makes them good?</p>
<p>If you were an observer of a positive working relationship what would you see, or not see?</p>	<p>Can you call your case manager in between appointments and is this important? (Why?)</p>
<p>If you had a chance to meet with the National Manager of employment services, what would you say, what would you suggest be changed/ kept the same?</p>	<p>If you had a chance to meet with the National Manager of employment services, what would you say, what would you suggest be changed/ kept the same?</p>
<p>Is there anything else that you think I should know - or you thought I would ask?</p>	<p>Is there anything else that you think I should know - or you thought I would ask?</p>

4.4.6 Informed consent

Focus group participants were provided with background information about the research and they signed consent forms (see copy of information and consent forms, Appendix 2). Focus group participants were informed of the confidential nature of research material and that the individual information they provided would not be shared with anyone including their service provider/employer or Centrelink. Employment consultants were assured their comments would not be provided to their employer, the funding department, or any other entity; and that the material would be used only for the specific research and only released/published in a non-identifiable format.

4.4.7 Focus group sample - reliability of the data

The research drew samples from four Australian states and a cross-section of rural and metropolitan regions. The consultants who participated in the focus groups were a subset of the same population that later participated in the survey. This process is common in sequential mixed method research (Leech, Onwuegbuzie & Combs 2011).

In conducting a review of the literature on focus groups, Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007, p. 289) consider the work of several studies and suggest the optimum number of groups is between three and six, with between six and ten participants in each group.

Based on the table below, this research generally met these recommendations and the total number of focus groups was sufficient to reach saturation point. Even though there were some smaller-than-optimal focus groups,²⁹ the average group size was 6.7 and there were eight groups of consultants and five groups of job seekers. Total consultants n = 55 and job seekers n = 36.

Gender ratios were generally consistent with the sector, (AC Nielson 2005; Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2011) with 62 per cent of the consultants being female and 38 per cent male; and 56 per cent of the job seekers being female and 44 per cent male.

Table 3. Focus group geographical coverage and participant numbers.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Group type</u>	<u>Number in group</u>
Benalla Vic.	Consultants	10
Bendigo Vic.	Consultants	9
Mildura Vic/NSW border	Consultants	6
Mildura Vic/NSW border	Job seekers	5
Swan Hill Vic	Consultants	4
Swan Hill Vic	Job seekers	4
Melbourne (Metro West)	Consultants	6
Melbourne (Metro West)	Job seekers	6
Melbourne (Metro East)	Consultants	7
Adelaide SA	Consultants	5
Adelaide SA	Job seekers	11
Perth WA	Consultants	8
Perth WA	Job seekers	6
Sydney (Western Region)	Job seekers	4 Individual interviews
Total Consultants = 55 Job seekers = 36		

²⁹ Two groups had only four participants.

4.4.8 Quantitative component - the survey tool

The development of the survey tool was based on the analysis of the job seeker and consultants focus groups’ data regarding the role and importance of the worker – client relationship in achieving employment outcomes. The use of focus group material to construct survey questions is discussed by Yoshikawa et al. (2008), who state that ‘conducting qualitative interviews first can establish a level of rapport that is crucial for collecting rich and personal accounts’ (Yoshikawa et al. 2008, p. 349). For example, focus group participants commented on the importance of consultants being ‘genuine and caring’ in their treatment of job seekers as well as flexible in their response to requests for assistance in between appointments. These elements of ‘connection’ were included in the construction of survey questions. The survey was tested with a group of consultants and their responses collated and compared with assessments made of their engagement style by their supervisor. The survey was then refined to address some minor matters of clarity.

The table below shows some of the key themes arising from the focus group data analysis and the corresponding questions in the survey. The left column lists the key points or issues identified in the focus groups and the right column lists the corresponding question developed for the survey. The full survey is included at Appendix 3.

Table 4. Focus group themes and construction of survey items.

Focus group themes	Survey item
<p><i>Job seekers key points- ‘good consultants’:</i></p> <p>Are easy to talk to – take time to listen and take an interest in the total lives of the job seekers they assist</p> <p>Are compassionate and acting in the best interest of the job seeker</p> <p>Are not judgemental but helpful with day to day tasks and life issues</p> <p>Build positive relationships that allow the consultant to be both supportive and appropriately directive</p> <p>Display obvious genuine concern for the wellbeing of the job seeker</p> <p>Take time to explain and go the extra distance to assist</p> <p><i>Consultants key themes</i></p>	<p><i>Resulting item</i></p> <p>Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes (1)</p> <p>I ask job seekers about their strengths. (2)</p> <p>Job seekers often discuss difficult personal issues with me. (3)</p> <p>I look for some common connection with job seekers (e.g. sport or other interest) (4)</p> <p>Explaining the requirements of the JSA programme to make sure the job seeker knows their responsibilities is a priority. (5)</p> <p>I work collaboratively with the job seekers to develop (shared) goals (6)</p> <p>The quality of the relationship I have with job seekers has little bearing on the outcome (7)</p> <p>The job seekers I assist would report being listened to and respected (8)</p> <p>I ask job seekers about what other personal issues might be affecting them (9)</p>

Take the time to enquire about their personal life – e.g. family	I generally spend as much time with job seekers as needed (10)
Consultants should provide their full attention	I focus on the job first and expect that the other issues will fall into place (11)
Are inclusive in processes and planning	I like to include the job seeker in decision making and in making choices about various options. (12)
Take the time to engage with job seekers even if it takes several appointments to connect	I develop the Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) with the job seeker's full participation. (13)
Are not judgment or patronising	The new employment services model (JSA) supports building rapport with job seekers. (14)
Provide a blend of practical assistance in non-judgemental and understanding manner	I know my overall performance and outcome rate is above average. (15)
Are inclusive, empowering and encouraging	Most job seekers are not really interested in work. (16)
Display honesty and genuine caring	In providing assistance to job seekers I start with building the working relationship : I focus on the job first. (6)
Are able to provide assistance in between appointments.	My style is best described as 'in their face and challenging": I have a more conciliatory encouraging style. (7)
Provide follow-up support by phone	I am genuinely concerned about what happens to my job seekers: In the end it's just a job (8)
Explore possible options with participants	
Display real empathy	

The survey was conducted over a seven week period, from 8 July to 30 August 2010, following 12 months of service delivery under the then new Job Services Australia (JSA) 2009 – 2012 contract. Invitation emails were sent to 67 organisations who delivered JSA; 64 members of the not-for-profit peak body Jobs Australia and three not-for-profit non-members³⁰. At the time of the survey there were approximately 110 organisations in total delivering JSA³¹. The 67 organisations represent approximately 60 per cent of the providers at the time but might not represent 60 per cent of the total number of consultants as staff numbers fluctuate across providers. Those organisations who agreed to participate were asked to distribute the survey hyper-link to frontline workers engaged in the delivery of JSA.

Of the 67 invited organisations, 38 confirmed they would participate, however survey responses were received from 43 organisations; a 63 per cent take-up rate. The discrepancy in take up is most likely because some organisations distributed the link to staff without responding to the original invitation email. Three large agencies, each with

³⁰ Not all not-for-profit JSA providers are Jobs Australia members and the researcher identified three non-members who were invited to participate in the survey.

³¹ Numbers vary due to sub-contracting arrangements and some organisations novating (selling) contracts to bigger national providers.

more than 200 consultants in the not-for-profit employment services sector declined to participate, citing staff workload implications and the impact on staff at a busy period of the year.

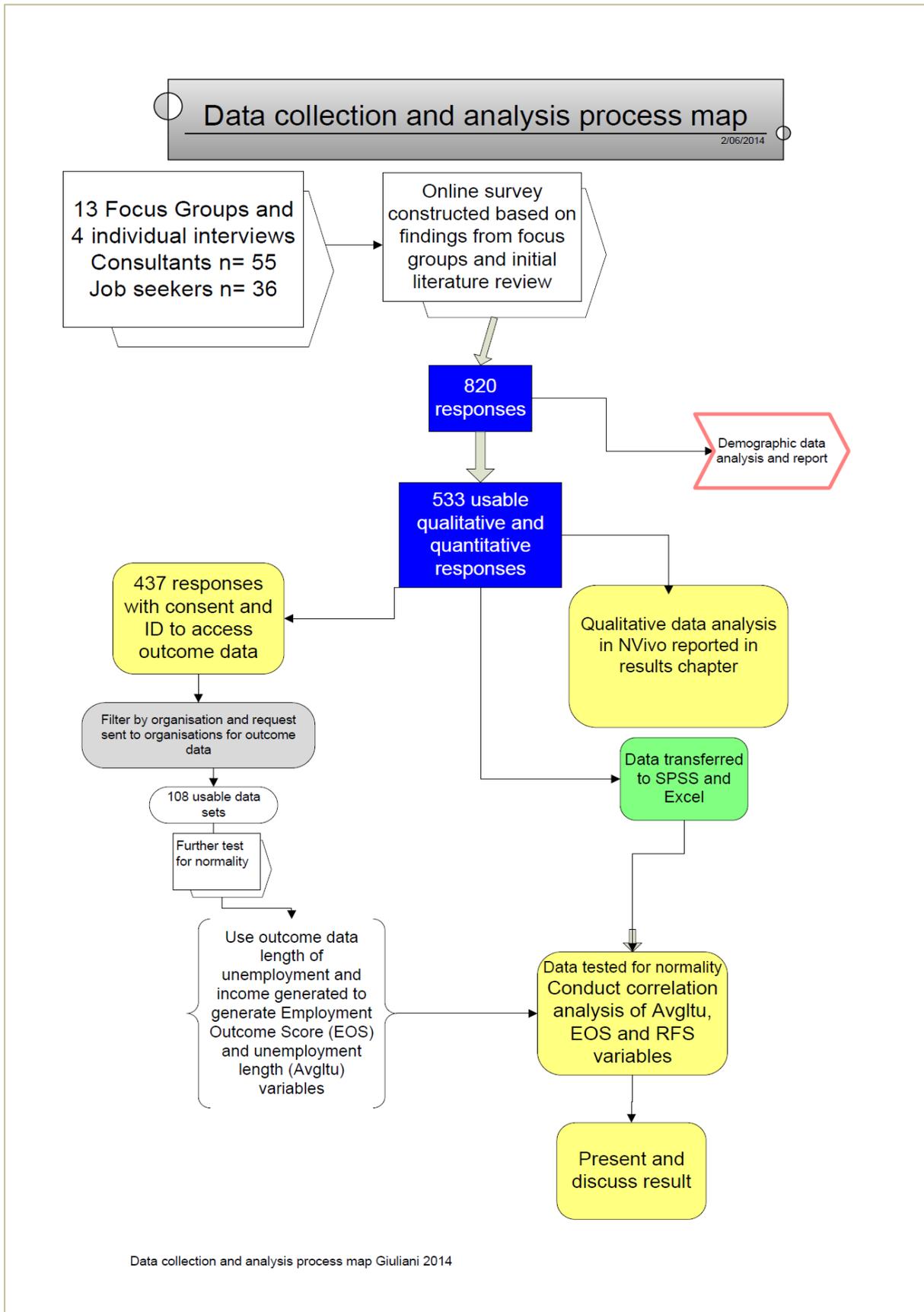
The survey response from 830 workers represents 28 per cent of the potential total sample based on 42 organisations with total staffing numbers of ≈3000. This number was determined by their registration details with Jobs Australia.

The demographic profile (see results section) of the respondents was generally consistent with previous studies in the employment services sector (AC Nielson 2005; Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2008; Considine et al. 2013). There were some minor variations between this study and the Considine study, as the Considine (2008, 2013) data included staff with other roles in their organisation (administration and management), as well as organisations from the for-profit sector, whereas this research included only frontline workers from the not-for-profit sector.

The survey was distributed as a hyperlink to all staff in participating agencies. Online research software <https://www.qualtrics.com/> was selected due to its ease of use and robust architecture. A specific licenced copy of the software was provided for the purpose of the research. Some analysis was conducted within the software, for example, cross tabulations, queries and basic graphs. The responses were downloaded to IBM SPSS statistics v21 for further analysis, including test for skewness, kurtosis, distribution and correlation. Qualitative responses were downloaded into Nvivo 9.1 software and analysed for thematic and repeating patterns.

The processes for the various stages of the research are outlined in Figure 5 below. Note that following the cleansing of the data, the qualitative and quantitative data were subject to separate analysis.

Figure 5. Research process map.



4.4.9 Question design – quantitative data

The survey questions were derived from the job seekers' and employment consultants' focus group responses and literature reviews on factors that lead to positive employment outcomes. Some questions were based on emerging themes from the focus groups as a basis for, or indicator of, a good working relationship; for example: 'I look for some common connection with the job seeker', or 'I include the job seeker in the decision making' (as an indicator of power (im) balance).

The questions used in the research were later compared with questions used in the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) – SR Version Subscales (Munder et al. 2009) which were based on earlier work by Tracey and Kokotovic (1989). Although there are some differences, the underpinning meaning of the questions are consistent, as they focus on the Goal, Task and Bond engagement triad as discussed in the various literature on the Working Alliance (Bordin 1979; Goldberg, Rollins & McNary 2004; Horvath & Greenberg 1989). The influence of the working alliance (quality of the relationship) and its effect on outcomes is well documented (see literature review) and has been applied in various mental health, community health and psychotherapeutic fields to improve outcomes. A comparison of the survey and WAI questions can be found in Appendix 4.

One significant difference between this research and other material that uses the WAI was that this research constructed the questions based on research with frontline workers rather than the client's experience of the interaction. Hence, respondents were asked to make judgements about how the job seeker experiences their intervention; for example: 'The job seekers I assist would report being listened to and respected' (question 16.8 in survey).

The research survey included questions on values and beliefs and what workers perceived as their purpose for working in the field. Again, this was based on comments from the focus groups about the genuine positive regard some employment consultants appeared to have for job seekers. The underpinning rationale for considering the motivation of the consultant is that the issue goes directly to the quality of the relationship. If the consultant's motivation is client focused, as compared with 'just a job', then the quality of the relationship is enhanced by the job seeker's perception of motive and genuineness (Miller, Duncan & Hubble 2004).

Some questions were framed in the negative to avoid the risk of error created by acquiescence, i.e., 'the propensity to respond positively to items irrespective of item contents' (Friborg, Martinussen & Rosenvinge 2006, p. 874). For example, question 17.7, 'The quality of the relationship has little bearing on the outcome'.

The questions were posed in a series of Likert scales as well as ‘Semantic Differential’-based scales (Lozano, García-Cueto & Muñiz 2008). Dawes (2012) suggests that the minimum number of options in Likert-type scales should be four and that any scale above seven is of limited psychometric benefit. The Likert scales used in this research varied between five and seven.

The Semantic Differential (SD) measures people's reactions to stimulus words and concepts in terms of ratings on bipolar scales defined with contrasting adjectives at each end (Dawes 2012; Lozano, García-Cueto & Muñiz 2008; Spillane et al. 2010). The value and credibility of the SD is in its contrasting of two opposite positions and the requirement of the respondent to position their view somewhere in between, as distinct to the Likert scale which requests a rating generally between one and five - seven.

Table 5 below, reproduced from Friborg et.al, (2006), highlights the differences between the two rating scales, particularly in relation to positive constructs. In the example below, a rating of ‘1’ still leaves some doubt about the negative perspective of the response in the Likert format. While the Likert scales are considered easier to use, particularly in lengthy surveys, the SD scales are considered more accurate overall. For this reason, the research survey used a mixture of Likert and SD scales.

Table 5. Comparison of Semantic Differential and Likert scales.

Examples of item transformations from a Likert to a semantic differential format		Not true at all							Very true
<u>Likert format</u>									
I feel that my future looks promising		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
It is easy for me to think of good conversational topics		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<u>Semantic differential format</u>									
I feel that my future looks ----- uncertain		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	promising
To think of good conversational topics is ----- easy		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	difficult for me

4.4.10 Sample size – survey

There were initially 850 respondents to the survey. Of this 850, 30 were discarded as the respondents indicated working across other programmes, for example Disability Employment Services (DES). Data extracted for the 820 respondents have been reported in the demographic tables in the results chapter. Qualitative data were extracted for 533 respondents based on respondents answering at least three of the four qualitative questions. A Relationship Focus Score (RFS) was calculated for each of these respondents (which is detailed below in the section on ‘Data Analysis’), with 108 of these respondents later matched with an Employment Outcome Score (EOS). The reason for only 108 matchings was that many of the respondents had not been

employed for sufficient time in JSA services to establish enough outcomes and others had duties in addition to frontline work, for example, marketing or employer liaison. A further reason was that despite several requests, not all the organisations approached provided outcome data.

Erdfelder, Faul and Buchner (1996) argue that many of the suggested sample sizes in research literature 'would lead to statistical tests with inadequate power' because they are not based on robust power analysis. In this context, 'inadequate power' refers to insufficient sample size that might result in various false or positive errors, hence they suggest 64 participants for one-tailed correlation analysis and 82 for two-tailed (Onwuegbuzie & Collins 2007). VanVoorhis and Morgan (2007) argue that '[A]ttending to power during the design phase protects both researchers and respondents' (VanVoorhis & Morgan 2007, p. 43) and suggest as 'a rule of thumb' that 'n' be greater than 50 for correlation analysis with an increase of 'n' with increasing independent variables.

Kleinbaum et al. (2013) justify sample size in a similar correlation study that considered the effect of the doctor – patient, relationship (n = 107) on a number of factors related to the outcome of pregnancy. Consistent with the above and (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007) the correlation analysis for this research was conducted with n=108.

4.5.11 Selection of final 108 consultants for data analysis

Of the 820 frontline workers who responded to the survey, only 437 provided contact details and logon IDs. This group of 437 were filtered by organisation and an email was sent to the CEO or contact person asking for the employment outcome report for each individual worker. The number of organisations approached for outcome reports was 28 and responses were received from 14.

The 14 organisations that responded provided data for 208 frontline workers; however, there were only 108 suitable data sets following cleaning of the data. Cleaning was on the basis that workers must have worked in the same organisation for at least 16 months to ensure they had adequate time to achieve at least 20 outcomes. A minimum of 20 was set because the Department uses 20 as the minimum number for regression analysis for star ratings purposes. Participating organisations identified a number of workers who had responsibility for other workers' job seekers and/or had taken over other clients during the past 18 months. These workers were excluded from the outcome analysis of the study.

4.5.1 Data analysis process

This research draws on two sets of data, the focus group discussions (qualitative) and the survey data which includes quantitative and qualitative data.

The focus group audio recordings and hand written notes were transcribed into NVivo 9 software for thematic analysis. The material was then coded, separately for job seekers and consultants. The key themes arising from the analysis were the basis for the survey tool development and are reported in the results chapter of this research

The survey tool was constructed from the key themes arising from the focus groups and the literature review and was tested by five consultants who were not participants of this research. Their responses were used to refine the questions for clarity and flow.

The online *Qualtrics* software was used for the collection of responses posed in the survey. Basic demographic data and question responses were downloaded to Microsoft Excel and SPSS for further analysis. The demographic data charts were produced using a combination of the *Qualtrics* software and Microsoft Excel.

The qualitative data from the survey was downloaded into Nvivo 10 software. The responses were coded into themes and sub-themes. This material is reported in the results chapter.

The quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS v 21; this included the testing for normality, skewness and kurtosis. The data from the survey responses were used to construct the EOS, RFS and Avgltu variables.

The variables: consultant Relationship Focus Score (RFS), and the average length of job seeker unemployment (AVGLTU) were constructed in order to investigate any relationship between the variables and the Employment Outcome Score (EOS).

4.5.2 Construction of the Relationship Focus Score (RFS)

The construction of the Relationship Focus Score (RFS) was calculated from responses to the survey items regarding job seeker – worker relationships. These survey items were initially based on the feedback from the focus groups regarding what constitutes or contributes to a 'good' working relationship.

The survey tool items 16, 17 and 18 are detailed below in Table 6. Each item poses a series of questions using Likert or Semantic Differential scales. The responses to the questions by the survey participants were allocated points according to the scale used. For example in the sample below from survey item 16, respondents were allocated 1 point for strong agreement and 7 points for strong disagreement, (with corresponding points allocated along the scale). After allowing for questions posed in the negative or

where the questions were reversed, respondents were scored accordingly, and their score subtracted from the highest possible score. Again, using the sample questions below a person strongly agreeing with the questions would lose three points from the possible highest score (21) and therefore score 18, a person strongly disagreeing would score zero.

The final score was adjusted to provide a final RFS score out of 100. That is $100 \times \text{raw RFS score} \div \text{total possible score} = \text{RFS score}$.

From the total 820 respondents only 533 usable outcome scores were generated as not all respondents completed every item.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I ask job seekers about their strengths. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job seekers often discuss difficult personal issues with me. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The online survey and relationship scoring was tested with 17 frontline workers (who were not later participants of this research). The test respondents were asked to complete an online beta version of the survey. The supervisor of these 17 frontline workers was asked to rank the workers in line with an estimate of their relationship style. The ranking allocated by the survey was then cross-referenced with the results of the supervisor. The score allocated by the survey for the relational emphasis of the worker and the ranking provided by the test agency were generally consistent.

In considering the development of the RFS, Table 28 on page 131 provides a thematic analysis of high scoring responses, which in retrospect, helps validate the scoring process. Further, a comparison of some of the questions used in this survey and those used for the Working Alliance Inventory which further supports the RFS score construction, can be found at Appendix 4.

Table 6. Items used as basis for Relationship Focus Score

<u>Items from group number 16</u>
Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes I ask job seekers about their strengths.
Job seekers often discuss difficult personal issues with me.
I look for some common connection with job seekers (eg sport or other interest)
Explaining the requirements of the JSA programme to make sure the job seeker knows their responsibilities is a priority.
I work collaboratively with the job seekers to develop (shared) goals
The quality of the relationship I have with job seekers has little bearing on the outcome
The job seekers I assist would report being listened to and respected
I ask job seekers about what other personal issues might be affecting them
I generally spend as much time with job seekers as needed
I focus on the job first and expect that the other issues will fall into place
I like to include the job seeker in decision making and in making choices about various options.
I develop the employment pathway Plan (EPP) with the job seekers full participation
The new employment services model (JSA) supports building rapport with job seekers
I know my overall performance and outcome rate is above average
Most job seekers are not really interested in work
<u>Semantic differential items - group number 17</u>
I work in this field because it is consistent with my social justice values: It's really just a job
I believe most jobs seekers are - doing it pretty tough: not really trying
The organisation I work for is most interested in - the wellbeing of the job seeker: getting a paid employment outcome
The values of the organisation where I work are consistent with mine: inconsistent
I work in a very supportive culture: I get very little support
In providing assistance to job seekers I start with building the working relationship: I focus on the job first
My style is best described as 'in their face and challenging': I have a more conciliatory encouraging style
I am genuinely concerned about what happens to my job seekers: in the end it's just a job
<u>Items in group number 18.</u>
I focus on a job outcome above all else
I spend more time/effort with those that are likely to achieve an outcome
I have little time for job seekers who don't appear to be trying
I focus on the job seeker's needs more than the employment outcome
I don't waste time with difficult to place job seekers
I am tough on job seekers who don't make enough effort
Sometimes you have to push job seekers to get them to do what's good for them
I work flexibly with job seekers to help them in whatever way I can
I use participation reports to ensure compliance

4.5.3 Construction of Employment Outcome Score (EOS)

The development of the EOS was based on the average income generated by each individual consultant.

Question 24 in the research survey asked the respondents for their logon ID (without password) to the DEEWR Employment Services System (ESS)³² for the purpose of correlating their responses to the survey with their individual performance data. The researcher did not have access to the department's ESS system. The logon IDs³³ from survey respondents who provided contact details were filtered by organisation. The researcher wrote to the CEO or contact person in each of the participating organisations and requested a copy of a downloadable ESS report labelled 'Managed By' for each of the participants from their organisation. A sample of the downloadable report is attached at Appendix 5.

The 'Managed By' outcome report provides results for job seekers who have been placed into employment filtered by the individual worker logon ID. The report also includes the stream type, duration of unemployment, income generated by each placement, start date and outcome type, as well as other outcome details.

The income derived for each employment outcome is a combination of placement fee, 13 weeks fee (continuing employment) and 26 weeks (continuing employment) fee. The fee is based on the stream level of the participant, which is determined by the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) assessment conducted at Centrelink when the person applies for the unemployment benefit, (Newstart Allowance).

The (JSCI) determines the stream level after taking into account the length of unemployment and the various barriers to employment disclosed by the job seeker, as well as any disabilities and social factors, for example, homelessness and education level. Job seekers who score above a determined level are referred to a specialist Job Seeker Capacity Assessment (JSCA) and are generally allocated a stream 4 classification, whereas job ready, newly unemployed job seekers with no barriers to employment are referred as stream 1 (A table of payment rates for various stream level outcomes can be found in Chapter 2).

³² Only the logon ID was requested – no passwords were requested (or provided), thus maintaining the security requirements of the system. The department was consulted in relation to this process and took a neutral position on the matter.

³³ CEOs had been contacted prior to the survey and asked to participate, so the request was consistent with previous correspondence. Copy of email in Appendix 1

The outcome payment amounts determined by DEEWR for each stream act as a proxy measure for the level of difficulty in achieving placement and ongoing employment for each individual job seeker. The stream level set by the Department is based on a regression analysis of the likelihood of job seekers within certain JSCI score ranges achieving employment (DEEWR 2009b; McDonald, Marston & Buckley 2003).

To generate the outcome score the researcher calculated the total income generated for each consultant and averaged the income according to the number of successful outcomes achieved, (by the consultant) so as to create the Employment Outcome Score (EOS) variable. A score was calculated for each consultant where the organisation provided the report and where the consultant had been employed at the same organisation for more than 16 months. This was to ensure comparable caseloads and sufficient time to achieve outcomes.

Only received income was included in the calculation of the EOS – that is, excluding ‘claimed amounts’ - as many in-process claims may not eventuate in a final payment as the department rejects claims that cannot be verified, or that do not meet the minimum work requirements for a particular job seeker. Thus the Employment Outcome Score as calculated for this research, is claimed to be a reasonable indicator of each workers performance in relation to their employment outcomes

4.5.4 Construction of the Average Length of Unemployment (Avgltu) variable

The reason for the development of the Avgltu variable was to ensure that any connection between the employment outcome and relationship score considered the degree of disadvantage of job seekers assisted by the consultants in this research. The ‘duration of unemployment’ data was accessed from the reports provided by agencies (with consent from consultants) as contained in the same downloadable reports used for the employment outcome score. The length of unemployment for each job seeker assisted by the individual consultant is recorded in the report and the Avgltu variable is the average length of unemployment of all job seekers who achieved outcomes on the individual consultants’ caseload.

The use of ‘length of unemployment’ as a measure of disadvantage is consistent with other research and was used in the original development of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) which is used by the department to determine providers’ star ratings (Murray & Quinlan 2006).

An alternative measure would have been the JSCI score for each job seeker, but this was not available in the data reports and, even if it were, there are some difficulties in using the JSCI because job seekers do not always disclose pertinent issues in the

JSCI assessment. The JSCI has been criticised for failing to adequately assess a person's likelihood of gaining employment and that, rather than an assessment tool, it acts as a rationing device by the department in allocating set percentages of job seekers into each of the stream levels (McDonald, Marston & Buckley 2003; Quinlan 2008).

A further justification for the use of average length of unemployment is that recent data released by the department on outcomes for each stream, indicates a 50 per cent outcome rate for stream 4 clients with shorter lengths of unemployment, (less than six months), whereas those with longer periods, 24 months or more, achieve only a 31.4 per cent outcome rate (Australian Government Department of Employment 2013). This data supports the view that a significant variation exists in the employment outcomes of job seekers in the same stream and that length of unemployment is a more robust measure for the purpose of this research, particularly as the JSCI process does not increase the JSCI score for persons unemployed for more than 24 months.

4.6.1 Ethics - statement of intent

This research was approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee; reference number HRE09-043 on 1/5/2009.

This research sought at all times to:

- respect the confidentiality of each person participating;
- pose no threat to participants and bring them no harm;
- give participants the right to refuse to participate at any stage of the research without fear or favour (entitlement to existing service is assured) and;
- encourage participants to be considered as partners in the research process.

There were two key risks identified in the ethics application process.

1. Emotional discomfort inherent in focus group participation. It was suggested that, in exploring relationships, participants might experience stress related to other relationships. Participants were advised that they could leave the group at any time. Participants were offered counselling if any part of the process produced any uncomfortable emotions that they felt they needed to talk about, (see information provided to participants, Appendix 2). No group participants reported any discomfort during or after the focus groups. One participant in the job seeker focus group later asked their consultant about the counselling offered with a view to accessing general counselling.

2. The other identified risk was that job seekers and employment consultants might be concerned that comments made in the group could be relayed to their worker or employer, that is: fear of disclosure. To address this issue, the researcher:
- assured participants of the anonymity of the research and that no identifying information would be disclosed to any other person;
 - explained that no identifying information would be included in reports or transcripts;
 - asked the participants taking part in the focus group to respect the privacy of the group members and not disclose information outside the group;
 - informed the group that, even with these processes in place, confidentiality could not be guaranteed and that they should, therefore, refrain from making any comments in the focus group that they might not be prepared to make in a public forum and;
 - informed the group that they could withdraw at any time.

Participants in the focus groups were provided with information about the research aims and purpose and were asked to sign consent forms. All participants gave signed consent to participate in the study (see attached consent form, Appendix 2).

During the focus group process, the researcher observed participants and looked for any non-verbal indicators of discomfort as well as checking with each person that they were comfortable with the process and that they had had ample opportunity to contribute if they so wished.

In addition to the general issues of confidentiality and consent, qualitative research ethics are about the fidelity and 'Democratic Validity' (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007) of the research, as well as the extent to which stakeholders are consulted in the design and processes of the research. To this point, the involvement of the focus groups early in the design stage was consistent with the values that underpin emancipatory research. The ultimate ethical validation will be to what degree the research sheds light on the oppressive elements of the employment services system for jobs seekers and workers alike. This was evident in the paradox often pointed out by both job seekers and workers that, even though they want to work in a respectful and supportive manner, in many situations the compliance and administrative overlays interfered with making this a reality.

Ethics in practitioner research is 'an orientation to research practice that is deeply embedded in those working in the field in a substantive and engaged way'

(Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007, p. 203). Ethics goes deeper than meeting the requirements of the ethics application, to ensuring the treatment and presentation of research participants' views are presented in an accurate and fair light.

In terms of fidelity, the researcher made presentations at Jobs Australia and Disability Employment Australia conferences to test some of the findings for congruence with the sector's employment consultants and management staff. Some early findings were also presented at University of Melbourne – Centre for Public Policy Conference 'Employment Services for the Future: Ideas from Australia and Around the World' in February 2013 (see appendix 7.).

All material collected and subsequent analysis has been stored electronically with secure passwords and hard copy stored in locked file cabinets. No confidential data has been disclosed in any format.

4.6.2 No conflict of interest or undue influence

Kumar (2010) notes the importance of research being free from undue influence in relation to funding sources or research sponsors. This research was supported by Jobs Australia, in that the researcher was initially employed at Jobs Australia during the data collection stages of the research and, although not directly paid to conduct the research, interstate travel for the focus groups occurred as part of the researcher's employment. The original concept, research design, processes and findings were independent of any directions from Jobs Australia.

The findings of the research are not designed to favour any person or organisation and, even though focus group participants were provided with gift vouchers (\$25.00) at the completion of the focus group, no influence was exercised over their views or comments.

Job seekers and employment consultants appeared free to comment as they might wish and the focus group discussions contained a strong element of collaboration and commitment to improve the system for all involved.

4.6.3 Bias

The nature of practitioner research, whereby the researcher is connected to the research subject, introduces the risk of 'motivational bias' (Henn, Weinstein & Foard 2009, p. 29). The researcher in this research was/is sympathetic to the issues and struggle of the participants, and is influenced by direct practice experience with the research participants. While this may have provided a sense of connection with the participants in the focus groups and added to the quality of the material, the later interpretation of the material is clearly subject to researcher bias.

To reduce the risk or degree of bias, the researcher in this project sought to be transparent in process and reflective with supervisors regarding the influence of the researcher's history in employment services delivery. The supervision process regularly questioned the research assumptions, particularly those arising out of the researcher's employment services practice experience.

4.6.4 Limitations

At the time of writing, this research is the first of its type in an Australian context that seeks to add a quantitative analysis to the previously qualitative proposition that high performing providers build strong professional relationships with their job seekers (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) 2006). Hence, there is limited opportunity to learn and compare with previous material. Future research on this issue will hopefully build on the findings and learn from any shortcomings of this initial work.

The research design cannot account for the local variations in labour market conditions. To do this would require further segmentation of the data into geographical regions, rendering the data sets under-powered for robust analysis. At a general level, some interrogation of the data was conducted to check the demographic details of the better performing consultants. One agency did appear to have higher than average relationship focus scores. This is possibly a reflection of the agency's emphasis on client engagement and the general welfare orientation of the organisation involved.

The overall size of the project and the resources required was a further limitation. Even though the research has benefited from the support of the not for profit peak body, Jobs Australia, and its members who deliver employment assistance, greater support from the department that administers the programme would have added significantly to the research. Performance data held by the department could have been cross-referenced with the findings of the survey and therefore provided a more robust data analysis component. For example, the variables developed in this research were based on the data provided by participating organisations. These data were based on the 'average length of unemployment' of job seekers and the 'average income' (outcome payments) generated by the consultant; both these factors directly relate to the degree of difficulty in achieving and sustaining employment outcomes.³⁴ The payment schedule is based on the stream allocation (1-4) of the individual job seeker, which is

³⁴ The payments made for placement and longer-term outcomes for each job seeker are based on the stream level of the job seeker, which in turn is based on the JSCI score and likelihood of the job seeker gaining employment.

based on the JCSI assessment of the barriers faced by the individual. The error margin created by the use of proxies in this research could have been significantly reduced with access to regression analysis data held by the department on each JSA provider. Such access would have added greater validity to this aspect of the research. However, accessing the data held by the department at the individual worker level was well beyond the scope and capacity of this research.

While the creation of the specific RFS measure is better aligned to the employment services context of this research, in retrospect this research could have made use of the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) tool. Doing so would have provided for a better comparison of the research findings with WA research in the mental health sector as it relates to employment assistance.

This chapter has provided the design settings and an explanation of the methodology and methods, the next chapter of this thesis presents the research findings in tables and graphs, as well as a narrative exploration of the qualitative data.

Chapter 5 – Findings

5.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter begins with an outline of the process for managing the data derived from the mixed method process and then discusses the major themes arising from the focus groups of job seekers and consultants. The material from focus groups provided an introduction to the issues from the perspective of consultants and job seekers and was used in the design of the survey questions.

The chapter then reports on the survey findings beginning with the demographic data and other details of the work context for employment consultants followed by an exploration and correlation of the Relationship Focus Score (RFS) with other key variables. The chapter discusses the accuracy and integrity of the results before exploring the qualitative data derived from text responses in the survey. Key themes covered in the qualitative material include workers' models for assisting job seekers, what workers would change about their work, the degree to which workers include job seekers in the planning process and their philosophical rationale for working in the sector.

5.1.2 Process for managing data from mixed method research

As the focus of the research has been to explore and describe the client - worker relationship, both inductive and deductive reasoning is utilised for data analysis. While the methodology has been discussed in the previous chapter, some details of the processes have been included here for clarity.

The qualitative and quantitative data are presented chronologically, commencing with the qualitative data from the focus groups, then the statistical - quantitative findings from the survey, followed by the qualitative data from the specific text section in the survey.

The format for data analysis was derived from the framework for reporting mixed methods data analysis, Leech, Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011)³⁵ and Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003). The adapted framework makes use of six of the seven stages, omitting the final consolidation stage as combining the data occurred throughout the earlier stages. The framework is outlined in Table 7 below.

³⁵ The writer notes the value of material by these authors in providing some of the primary frameworks in the field of mixed method research reporting.

Table 7. Outline of data analysis process

Stage	Action definition	Section
Data reduction	Reducing the data to usable subsets and grouping	Thematic analysis. Initial exploration of the data
Data display	Description of data sets	Sample quotes (qualitative) and table and graphs (quantitative)
Data transformation	Constructing narrative analysis of quantitative data and coding of qualitative material. Conversion of qualitative responses to establish quantitative data for scoring	Pattern analysis and narrative of qualitative data. Comparison and description of quantitative data.
Data correlation	Correlation of data sets.	Correlation of relationship focus scores with other variables
Data comparison	Comparing themes from focus groups with survey data	Analysis of congruent and conflicting themes and results
Data integration	Integrating quantitative and qualitative as a whole	Inferences from findings

Adapted from Leech, et al. (2011).

5.2.1 Job seeker focus groups - major themes

Overall, 36 job seekers participated in focus groups or individual interviews. Initially many of the participants wanted to discuss their general experience of unemployment; however, following some initial acknowledgement of the very real struggle of being unemployed, the researcher was able to respectfully move the discussion to their interaction with, and experience of consultants. While many of the accounts were generally positive, it should be noted that it was less likely that an invitation to a focus group would have engaged disenfranchised or breached job seekers.

5.2.2 The System

Job seekers were asked about any impact of the changeover from the Job Network to JSA and, while the respondents made very few comparisons, job seekers had strong views on the nature of the then new JSA programme model and service system. Job seekers viewed the system as 'convoluted' and 'very complicated', with a 'lack of interaction and communication' from consultants. Others suggested the JSA system was flawed in the manner in which newly unemployed job seekers, who might require significant interventions, were required to wait several months for assistance.

The emphasis of the JSA process on negative barriers rather than any analysis or assessment of strengths was pointed out by a number of participants. As one job seeker commented,

the whole thing starts with the negative, the questions are all about the negative – they start with barriers and length of unemployment and they pick the person to pieces' (JSK Sydney Metro 2)³⁶.

Job seekers were apt at identifying the impact of the system on consultants, as well as pointing out the lack of clarity regarding the consultant role. For example, one job seeker asked, 'is it about sales or HR or is it just the processes [they have to do]?' In this context, the job seeker was identifying the role confusion in the employment consultant function, the inherent confusion of having to sell the unemployed to employers as job ready workers while simultaneously managing the processes as directed by programme guidelines.

In considering the systemic issues, job seekers identified three major concerns of the JSA service model. These were, the over-complication of the system, the focus on the negative attributes of job seekers and the lack of clarity and contradictions in the role of consultants. Overall, job seekers communicated that the complex, insensitive system had lost its focus on the service user and was more intent on systems processes than the needs of the job seeker.

5.2.3 On the issue of job seeker - consultant relationships

While job seekers appeared well aware of the particular demands on consultants, there was some dissatisfaction expressed in relation to conflict management. For example,

If they [CMs] have an issue they should deal with it. They are there to offer a service and it all depends on their outlook on life' (JSK Vic Rural 3) and: one of the most important things is to be courteous to people – that would be number one because some of them are bloody hostile (JSK Vic/NSW Rural 4).

The following job seeker expressed the frustration of systemic pressures as well as the lack of experience or empathy from her consultant.

You shouldn't have to convince the person [consultant] you are worthy – some case managers don't always see it – that most job seekers are insecure and need hope and direction. Like, I haven't worked for 18 years and I have been a single mum and it's not what I have to do – so I went to Centrelink again and did another thingy [assessment] and then they came back and the case manager said that's what we have been waiting for and I said that's what I have been trying to tell you and really I had to do that myself [dissatisfaction with worker evident in voice tone] I was so stressed that week because they were sending me for all these jobs that I didn't have to do (JSK SA 2).

Getting the 'right' consultant appears to be more a matter of chance; for the following job seekers the experience was extremely positive.

³⁶ Unless otherwise noted, quotations and references to job seekers relate to the group number as it was not always possible in the transcripts to distinguish between individual job seekers.

I have had really good ones, like there was one at [provider name removed] who treated me almost like a son – used to buy me McDonalds – didn't care that I was part Aboriginal, treated me good like cause he could see that I was trying (JSK 1, Sydney Metro 2).

[Good consultants] well they don't judge ...like I have a very bad family background ...but they don't look down on you, [they] make you feel part of the place like - they bring you in, they make you feel welcome and things like that (JSK 2, Sydney Metro 2).

From the accounts of focus group participants, it is clear that access to quality service provision is something of a lottery. While many job seekers could identify and acknowledge the complexity of the system, the level of uncertainty made it difficult for job seekers to have confidence in the service system or the delivery agents.

5.2.4 Consultants' skills and experience

Some job seekers expressed concern over a perceived lack of consultants' skills or experience, for example:

I really believe it's in the person – a lot of people aren't suited to this type of job and I've come across them – they just stress right out because they are working with people that are in a difficult position and they don't know how to handle it properly, and I often wonder as to what a worker needs in terms of skills – I might be wrong but do they have to have social working skills – are they actually trained in any professional capacity? (JSK, VIC/NSW Rural 4).

This issue of skills and experience is discussed later in relation to qualification levels; however, the mirror of this concern was expressed in one of the consultants' focus groups:

I just think it's difficult to be a case manager not having any training – especially for people who are going to be seeing s2-4 [more difficult to assist job seekers] and not having any counselling background or anything like that – obviously with some clients you are going to be dealing with pretty serious issues and I just don't feel we are prepared to deal with that sort of thing – we are not doctors or psychologists – we're not counsellors, we're not social workers but in some situations we're put into a situation of having to deal with a client with severe psych problems or issues or barriers that they feel they want to talk to you about and you're not trained (EC - Vic/NSW Rural 3).

The comments above are supported by material in the quantitative data analysis (later in this chapter) regarding the generally low level of qualifications and skills of employment consultants. As both job seekers and consultants raised the issue in the focus groups, questions about education levels and training were added to the survey tool.

5.2.5 What does a 'good' worker do that makes them 'good'? ³⁷

Most job seekers referred to the manner in which they were treated in order to define the competence or quality of the consultant, while others noted the access to resources (material aid) as important. For example:

³⁷ The researcher purposely used the term 'good' to encapsulate in broad terms all that job seekers might value in consultants.

I have a good CM – she knows what my needs are, she knows me quite well, she's good (JSK, SA 2).

Others noted particular attributes in their assessment of consultants:

[T]hey just ask how I am going, they think about me as a person – her being like that makes me feel more positive about the whole job outlook, she knows what I want in [work] hours so she sends me for jobs that match (JSK SA - 2).

Comments by job seekers underpinned the general view that 'good' consultants are evident by their relational attributes. For example, a good consultant is a,

good listener and someone you feel comfortable to talk to about what you actually need, they know how to get jobs for people and what employers want to see, that's why they do what they do and why they are good at what they do (JSK WA Metro 2).

Job seekers were cognisant of the challenges for consultants in regard to 'difficult' job seekers, for example,

they see so many people and have to put up with not nice people all the time, must be hard for them as well, it - works both ways - but the nicer you are to them the better you are going to get along (JSK SA 2).

The point was put simply by the following job seekers:

[W]hat a good consultant does – is say don't worry mate – I will help you fill that out (JSK WA Metro 2). They are [S]omeone who can motivate me and have confidence in me – encourage me (JSK Vic/NSW Rural 4), and, I think the friendship and the relationship you have with the person you go to see is very significant [be]cause if you don't like the person then you don't want to go (JSK Sydney Metro 2).

There was some suggestion in the focus groups that the quality of relationship allowed consultants to be both directive and compassionate, with the proviso of acting in the best interest of the job seeker, for example:

CMs are welcoming – strong enough to direct me to look after myself but still be there to help, she [consultant] gave me the courage to deal with things and after I came back from hospital she was there! (JSK Melbourne Metro-West 2) and; [A] good case manager gives you a call through the week just to see how you are going and a few days before you are to start a course – a reminder and then 6am on the morning to make sure you are on your way – that's going the extra.... (JSK WA Metro 1).

Marston & McDonald (2008), and Murphy et al. (2011) make reference to the paternalistic abuse of power by consultants as agents of the state, however the suggestion from the job seekers in the focus groups was that the underlying motivation of the consultant was more important than their actions. Where job seekers believed that consultants were genuinely acting in the job seeker's best interest, then reminder calls and directive action was seen as supportive and encouraging, an expression of genuine concern rather than paternalism.

5.2.6 Taking time to 'really' listen - genuine caring

One of the most repeated themes arising from the focus groups was the concept of being 'listened to' as an indication of respect and caring - job seekers wanted their experiences and life stories to be heard and acknowledged. For example,

[Y]ou need to explain and they have to give you time and listen – not just give you a bunch of papers (JSK Vic/NSW Rural 4).

For the following job seeker the emphasis on being heard was similar,

[H]aving a case manager I sometimes feel I need to just talk – so we can sit down and work out what I can do... [T]o talk to me and ask “what do you think?” not like some, where you go in and they talk in big words and I think - I can't do it! I would love them to just listen to you (JSK Vic/NSW Rural 4).

For another job seeker, the quality of care was evident in the patience and encouraging nature of the consultant:

[T]hey interact with you like they actually care - genuine caring in each of them. You can look them in the eye – it's in their body language; they're honest and patient and if you're not sure of something then they go over it again... they help with follow-up calls (JSK Melbourne Metro-West 2).

The issue of positive regard was also noted by the consultants. While many other accounts of consultants' interactions have been identified as controlling and paternalistic, the daily actions at the frontline as reported in the focus groups contained ample examples of client focused support.

5.3.1 Consultants' focus groups - major themes

The focus groups with consultants included eight groups with a total of 55 participants. Consultants were keen to share their experience of service delivery and used narratives of their interactions with job seekers to express both positive and negative interactions. Overall, there appeared to be a clear intent among the consultants to form supportive relationships; however, the power differential and the nature of these relationships varied greatly.

5.3.2 Connecting with job seekers

Consultants identified several barriers to building relationships: foremost were 'time' and 'caseload' size. For one consultant the paradox of trying to be efficient and engaging was identified, yet clearly it was ultimately more important to be fully present for the job seeker, that is:

[G]ive them your full attention – even though you only have 15 or 20 minutes; by giving them your full attention they know straight away that you are interested, where if you sat there typing and only looked at them now again, which is the way to save time,³⁸ but it doesn't save time in the long run because it takes you so much longer to get them somewhere because they don't trust you (EC SA Metro 1).

These comments and the data presented later regarding the average time spent with job seekers, raises questions about the quality and quantity of services at the frontline.

³⁸ Note: it is common for consultants when interviewing job seekers to complete data entry and work from behind the computer in order to save time in the interview process.

The consultant in this example is questioning the false economy of multi-tasking; the end result is poor engagement and lack of trust and respect.

On the issue of building good working relationships, there were various views on engagement and rapport building, for example:

I think foremost is making them comfortable, like feeling comfortable in the interview and appointment, being friendly towards them, but always acting in a professional manner (EC Vic Rural 2).

Going back to establishing the connection, they come in and might tell you their dad is sick, so the next time because they have given you that snippet [of information] and want to see what you do with it so I try to remember next time, "how's your dad going? He was sick last time". And then they are like, "well I am not just a number, she remembered me talking about that last time" and that connects me, if they have given me something then I always try to give them something back, I have remembered what is going on in their lives (EC Vic Rural 1).

This issue of making 'human' connections with job seekers was commented on by several consultants, who suggested that it was about connecting at a level that acknowledges the humanness of the job seeker and shifts the relationship from customer to client focused service provision.

5.3.3 Indicators of positive relationship

When asked about the way in which positive engagement was expressed, consultants identified informal and non-verbal indicators, for example:

You can't always gauge it - client could be having a terrible day - but you notice they are having a bad day and engage in a little small talk - even if it's meaningless small talk before they go into the interview room, you can tell the relationship is heading in the right direction (EC Vic Rural 1), and:

[W]hen you see a relationship that has empathy on both sides and you can see it in the non-verbals and in the context of the conversations you can see that they have respect for what the person [consultant] is saying (EC Vic Rural 4).

Consultants were well aware of the power imbalance and while some sought to use their position, the following consultant was sensitive to their privileged position and sought to level the playing field as part of the engagement process:

I think another way that you can make them comfortable is not to make them feel like they are being patronised or [not being] condescending towards them. Obviously most of them have hit a rough patch in their life and they are dealing with some circumstances...they may feel intimidated by someone who has a steady job, so you don't want to make them feel like you are judging them or talking down to them or anything like that (EC Vic Rural 2).

5.3.4 Inhibitors to relationship building

Consultants cited issues such as time, age difference and skill/education level as potential blockages to building rapport with job seekers, for example,

I can also see that it's going to be very difficult because I will have 180 on the caseload and only seeing them monthly – there is not really going to be a chance to build up rapport with them (EC Vic Rural 2).

It was also clear that some consultants considered the engagement process important enough to allocate significant time and effort. The following consultant describes the time element and the persistence required:

[E]ngagement - I've got one client there - who I have been working with for four weeks now and it's taken three weeks for him to tell me anything - he is just terribly, terribly shy - he comes across as arrogant but he's not...and has taken three weeks to look eye to eye and smile so I'm like, 'he smiled today', he's engaged (EC Vic Rural 1).

5.3.5 What makes for engagement?

In response to the question 'what does engagement look like?' most consultants identified positive empowering models, for example:

just talk about common things as well, and what they have been doing recently and so just having – it's like empathy, understanding where the next step will be – “so what do you think the next step will be?” [saying this to the client] “do you think it's work experience or volunteering? What direction do you want to go in?” (EC Rural Vic,

and, as one consultant put it:

I always ask – how can I empower this client to do more for themselves, how can they do their job search – it's about empowering them – so I bring them down to the computers and show them how to do a search (EC SA Metro 1).

Comments about genuine caring for clients were sprinkled throughout the discussion survey responses. As one consultant framed the issue,

it might not be kosher or fashionable – but I care about what happens to the job seekers ... building good working relationships and really helping JSKs is a lot easier when you care about the outcome (EC WA Metro 1).

The following consultant's comments connect client focused attitudes in relation to engagement and relationship building with core elements, including *spending time* to *really listen* and *express concern*.

[O]ne thing I have always maintained is to treat them like they are the most important thing at that point in time and just listen to what they have to say. Just listen to them, it may not be what you want to hear, but just listen to them and at that point they are the most important thing in the room (EC Vic/NSW rural 3).

In the following comment the consultant identifies the critical element of 'attitude' and being respectful as an acknowledgement of the plight of people out of work.

Caring and [being] genuine in trying to understand the spot they are in and going the extra step “here to help” attitude. It can be depressing to have to depend on the government – being respectful makes a difference (EC Melbourne Metro West 1).

5.3.6 How do you know when it's working?

Both job seekers and consultants drew attention to the capacity for ad hoc drop-in or in between appointment phone calls. This ad hoc capacity seemed to indicate a level of relationship that was more than appointment based and a marker of higher levels of engagement. While the researcher suggests that this behaviour, taken to extremes, could be interpreted by job seekers as punitive, or by consultants as unwanted interruptions, there was no evidence of this reported from either group.

According to one consultant,

when the job seeker comes in at any other time, not just their appointment time and asks for some assistance - something you've offered to do for them beforehand, [and] they are coming in to take that offer up (EC Vic Rural 4),

then job seekers were engaging as co-producers of their own outcome. Or, when a case manager offers to assist beyond the normal parameters of the job, that is,

put aside what you would be doing (admin) and do the extra without it being like a job (EC Vic Rural 4),

then the consultant is indicating a higher level of commitment to the job seeker relationship and the outcome.

5.3.7 Focus group conclusions and survey question construction

The purpose of the focus groups was to develop a body of evidence in relation to indicators of engagement and positive working relationships and to inform the research methodology and the construction of the survey questions. Key findings included the overall positive attitude of the consultants to the plight of the job seekers, the importance of time spent exploring issues as a means to building rapport and the flexible use of time. Most notable was the genuineness of caring as expressed by numerous consultants. As one consultant commented,

we hope our clients would say - we listened – we cared – we helped (Vic Metro East 1).

Based on the focus group responses, the survey items were formulated to investigate indicators of engagement, relationship building and shared responsibility for planning and achieving outcomes. Some example items are listed below (Table 8) to draw the connection between the focus group responses and the survey design; a full copy of the survey items can be found in Appendix 3.

Table 8. Survey questions developed from the focus group analysis

<p>Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes I ask job seekers about their strengths.</p> <p>Job seekers often discuss difficult personal issues with me.</p> <p>I look for some common connection with job seekers (e.g. sport or other interest)</p> <p>I work collaboratively with the job seekers to develop (shared) goals</p> <p>The quality of the relationship I have with job seekers has little bearing on the outcome</p> <p>The job seekers I assist would report being listened to and respected</p> <p>I ask job seekers about what other personal issues might be affecting them</p> <p>I generally spend as much time with job seekers as needed</p> <p>I focus on the job first and expect that the other issues will fall into place</p> <p>I develop the Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) with the job seeker's full participation</p> <p>Job seekers trust me - they know that I try to act in their best interest.</p> <p><i>Respondents were also asked to indicate their preference between two opposing positions</i></p> <p>I work in this field because - it is consistent with my social justice values : it's really just a job</p> <p>I believe most jobs seekers are - doing it pretty tough : not really trying</p> <p>In providing assistance to job seekers - I start with building the working relationship : I focus on the job first</p> <p>My style is best described as - 'in their face and challenging': I have a more conciliatory encouraging style</p> <p>I am - genuinely concerned about what happens to my job seekers : in the end it's just a job</p>

5.4.1 Survey findings

The survey was conducted in the latter part of 2010 following 16 months of service delivery under the then new Job Services Australia (JSA) contract.

Sixty-seven³⁹ organisations were invited to participate with 63 per cent (n=42) agreeing to participate. Three of the largest agencies, with an estimated 15-20 per cent of the total staff in the not for profit employment services sector, declined to participate, citing workload implications and the impact on staff at a busy time of the year.

The response from 850 workers represents 22 per cent of the potential total population based on 42 organisations with total staffing numbers of approximately 3000. Staffing numbers were determined by their registration details with the peak body for not for profit employment services, Jobs Australia.

³⁹ In the intervening time between the focus groups and the survey three other organisations in the NFP sector were identified and added to the list.

The demographic profile of the respondents to this research is generally consistent with previous studies of the employment services sector (AC Nielson 2005; Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan 2008) There were some minor variations that are most likely influenced by the fact that other studies have included staff with administration and management responsibilities (whereas this research included only consultants).

The following Tables (9 – 23) provide data on the context and environment of service delivery, including critical issues such as the education level of consultants, time in the sector, organisation type and the average time consultants spend with job seekers. While this contextual material is not the main focus of the research, it provides important information about the conditions consultants have to work within and other factors that indirectly influence the key issue of this research – the consultants' capacity or ability to develop relationship based intervention with job seekers.

5.4.2 Explanation of various groups in qualitative section

There were 851 respondents to the survey; one was removed as there was no data recorded in the online form. Although the 850 group has been used for some of the demographic analysis, 30 of this group were later removed as they indicated they had additional responsibility for other programmes in their organisation; for example, they worked across JSA *and* Disability Employment Services.

Of the remaining 820 respondents, 437 provided consent and contact details for the employment outcome component of the data collection and, of this 437 group, 315 respondents were discarded as the JSA providers they worked for did not provide outcome data or they had not worked in the sector for the full 16 months and could not be included with those who had. Some responses were discarded as the respondent had roles that were not comparable with the general frontline worker role, that is, they had significant time allocated to job placement or marketing. These factors were disclosed by organisations when providing the outcome data. Employment outcomes and associated information were provided by 122 respondents. The data from one organisation was discarded as the material was not provided in the format requested and any attempt to reformat the data could have contaminated the main data set.

The final data set used for analysis comprised 108 respondents from nine organisations. This group is compared below with the main 850 group to substantiate the 108 group as a valid subset of the total survey sample.

5.4.3 Demographic profile

As can be seen in the following tables, staff in the sector are predominately employed as full time (90 per cent) and more likely to be female (74 per cent), with 62.2 per cent holding Certificate IV or lower qualifications. The general age profile is consistent with other recent research (Considine et al. 2013) and highlights two predominant groups; the 25 to 29 age group and the 45 plus group, particularly 45 plus women. The drop off after the 25-29 age range may well be the influence of the predominantly female cohort (over 70 per cent) and the impact of parenting responsibilities on work capacity. This result could be affected by the fact that 90 per cent of the jobs in the sector are full time, which could deter women seeking part-time employment from returning to the sector.

Table 9. Age profile of survey respondents.

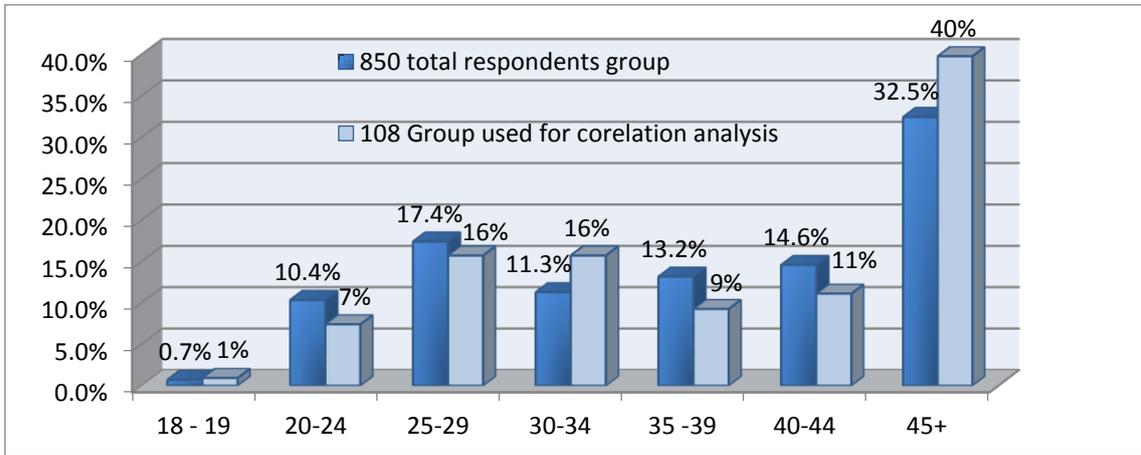


Table 10. Age bracket by gender of respondents.

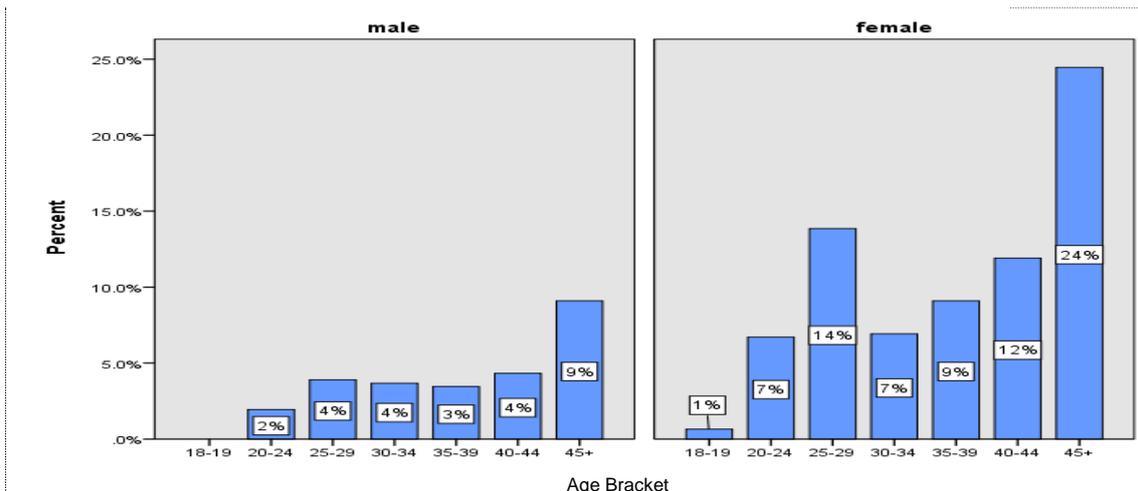
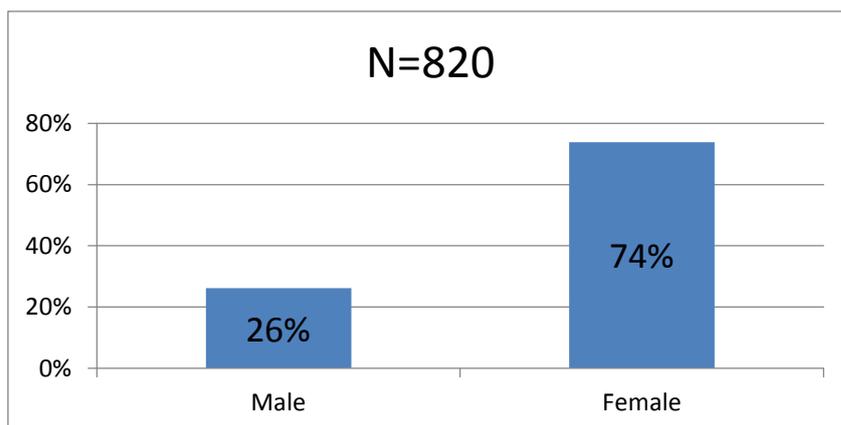


Table 11. Gender distribution of survey respondents.



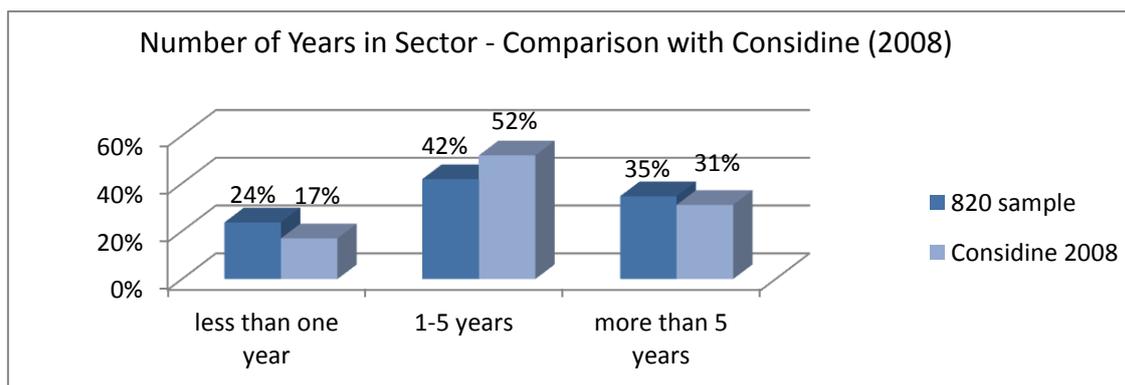
Consistent with Considine (2008), and in general with the community sector, 74 per cent of the respondents were female; an issue in the sector that is often linked to low pay rates (Kun 2011).

Table 12. Organisation type.

Answer	Response	%
Small organisation (less than 50 staff) with major focus on employment services	109	15%
Medium size organisation (50 - 100 staff) with major focus on employment services	65	9%
Large multi-site organisation (100+ staff) with major focus on employment services	223	32%
Small organisation (less than 50 staff) where employment is only one of several services	19	3%
Medium size organisation (50 - 100 staff) where employment is only one of several services	35	5%
Large multi-site organisation (100+ staff) where employment is only one of several services	254	36%
Other (please explain) Total staff = 2	1	0%
Total	706	100%

Most respondents (68 per cent) reported they were from large agencies: i.e. with more than 100 staff, and 44 per cent were from organisations that delivered services other than employment. This is consistent with the recent trend for fewer contracts but larger organisations. For example, in the early stages of the Job Network there were over 300 providers, whereas in the JSA at November 2013 there were fewer than 100 providers.

Table 13. Duration of employment in sector



Respondents were asked how long they had worked in the sector (not just in their current job). Compared with Considine (2008, 2012), this research sample had a greater percentage of frontline workers in the sector for less than one year and less representation for one to five years. This may be influenced by the timing of the collection that is 18 months into the new JSA programme and may also indicate increased turnover in the sector. Twenty four per cent of the respondents had been in the sector for less than one year, 42 per cent between one and five years and 35 per cent for more than five years.

The turnover rate in the sector is consistent with comments made by consultants as they expressed frustration at what they claimed were unfair demands that led to burnout and consultants leaving the sector. For example:

The system tells us to treat each job seeker as an individual, however, the system does not allow us to necessarily do this due to required number of appointments, limitations for clients with personal or mental health problems (EC 446).

Table 14. Full time and part-time working hours

Answer	Response	%
Full Time	735	90%
Part Time (please state hours per week).	82	10%
Total	817	100%

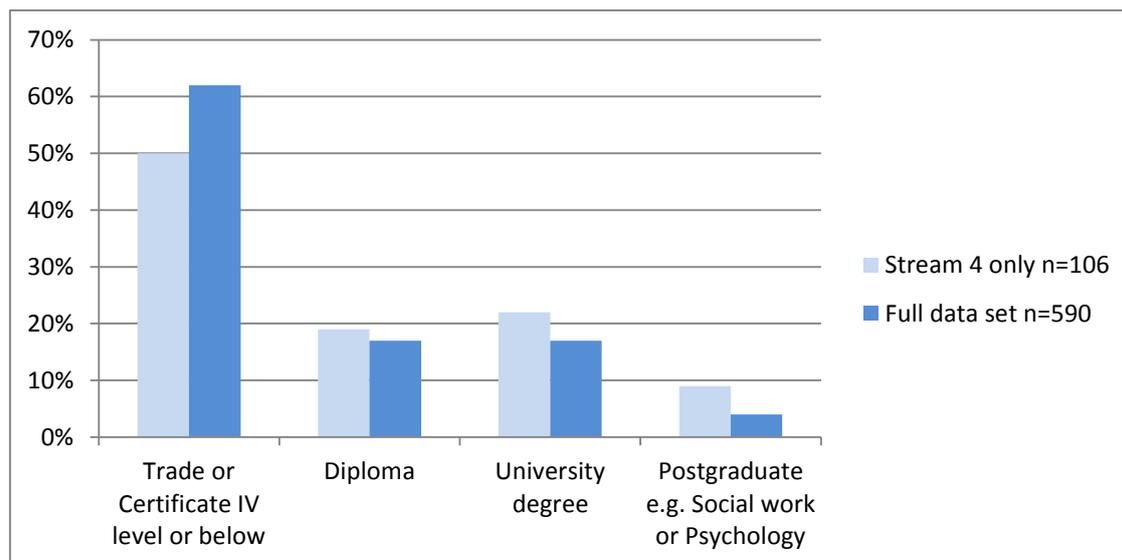
Most staff are employed as full-time employees, with only ten per cent in part-time employment. Many of the part time jobs were reported as 30 hours+ per week, with the median being 29 hours, so at the upper scale of part-time work.

5.4.4 Qualification levels

The research found relatively low qualification levels of frontline workers compared with the community sector in general. An analysis of the sector by Meagher and Healy (2006) indicates a continual *increase* of qualification levels in the community sector.

A recent survey of Disability Employment Services (DES) indicates that 34.9 per cent of DES workers have Certificate IV or lower qualifications compared with 62 per cent of workers in this study (Disability Employment Australia 2014). Of the 590 respondents to this question only 38 per cent held qualifications above Certificate IV. Only four per cent held specialist qualifications in Social Work or Psychology. There was only a minor difference in the qualification level of generalist workers assisting job ready job seekers and those assisting very disadvantaged stream 4 job seekers.

Table 15. Qualification levels of respondents



There were 106 workers who reported working solely with stream 4 job seekers. This group had a greater representation of workers with higher qualifications than the 590 response group, however 50 per cent of this group had Certificate IV or below qualifications.

Twenty per cent of workers, who reported providing assistance to stream 4 or specialist client groups, listed their qualifications as 'high school' or Certificate II/III in administration or other business type qualifications.

This data on qualification levels raises concerns about the number of frontline workers with Certificate IV or lower qualifications who are providing support and assistance to job seekers with significant disabilities and complex factors such as poor mental health, domestic violence and drug and alcohol addictions.

5.4.5 Specific training provided

Survey participants were asked to indicate what other training had been provided in their role as consultants and were given the option of making further comment on training provided, (multiple answers permitted).

Table 16. Further training provided

Answer	Response	%
No not really	279	34%
Working with mental health issues	397	49%
General relationship or counselling training	191	24%
Drug and alcohol	208	26%
Housing and homelessness	74	9%
Other (please state)	216	27%

Organisations appear to provide some supplementary training to address the prominent issues presented by job seekers; note that 34 per cent of respondents reported no further training received.

This finding is consistent with Kun (2011) who found that 35 per cent of respondents to an Australian Services Union (ASU) survey reported they received no training and that the issue was serious enough to 'encourage an employee to leave their current employer' (Kun 2011, p. 22).

From the table above, for those who were able to access training, the most common training provided was in mental health and drug and alcohol. A breakdown of the 'Other' category includes the following:

- Employment services, Case management (X 12)
- In-house training, including conflict and negotiation training
- Dealing with difficult and or aggressive clients,
- First Aid
- Dealing with domestic violence
- Indigenous and cultural awareness
- Disability awareness.

Comments on training included various references to the complexity of the issues faced by job seekers, especially those presenting with serious mental health issues. For example,

The knowledge staff now need to operate in this job effectively and the ongoing changes that they need to keep up-to-date with make this job very demanding as it is quite complex and this is more so in this current [new JSA] contract (EC 154).

5.4.6 Caseload

Survey participants indicated the number of job seekers they assisted in each stream. The average caseload was 114 job seekers (SD = 46.2) per frontline worker. This is consistent with other recent research in the sector and is well above the ideal, (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010). Most workers carried a mixed caseload of stream 1- 4 job

seekers, with 106 workers indicating that they assisted stream 4 clients exclusively. There was significant variation in the caseload size, with over 17 per cent of respondents reporting caseloads of over 150 clients.

As several workers commented,

[t]ime is restricted due to high caseload numbers. JSKR's [job seekers] may fall through gaps due to workers being over stretched (EC 56). Make the environment more relaxed, there is not enough time to service job seekers, appointments feel rushed. It would be nice to have less on the caseload to spend more time actually finding out more about the job seeker, rather than rushing them out the door (EC 41). Further, I also think that Stream 2-3 case workers have too many numbers on their caseloads and don't get acknowledged that quite often their clients can have pretty serious non-vocational barriers, however, their focus still has to be primarily employment related (EC 71).

The sub group of 108 respondents used for the correlations analysis later in this report had an average caseload of 112 job seekers.

5.4.7 Time spent face to face with each job seeker

Respondents were asked about the direct face to face time spent with job seekers, this was to provide some sense of the time available to consultants to build rapport and establish or maintain working relationships. The results are outlined in the table below.

Table 17. Time spent with each job seeker (per month).

Answer		Response	%
Less than half an hour		161	23%
Between half and one hour		502	72%
Between one and one and a half hours		24	3%
More than one and a half hours		11	2%
Total		698	100%

Given the average caseloads noted above it is not surprising that 95 per cent of workers report spending less than one hour with job seekers. The JSA guidelines require at least one contact per month and the fee structure is based on the number of contacts. To provide extra contacts, providers would have to self-fund the contacts or justify the extra contact from the Employment Pathway Fund (EPF)⁴⁰

Based on the average caseload and the data above, one contact per month would absorb approximately 95 of the 152 work hours available per month, a position supported by the claim that most workers spend around 50 per cent of their time on

⁴⁰ The EPF is a flexible but reportable fund to assist job seekers with extra requirements – e.g. counselling, work clothes as well as other resources. Expenditure must be acquitted and evidence supplied to justify the benefit to the job seeker.

administration and compliance (Ashkanasy 2011; Jobs Australia 2011). For a system that is supposed to assist disadvantaged job seekers, clearly there is not enough time to provide the service required. Caseload numbers dictate the time available for each job seeker and, as one worker put it,

I wish we had the time and capability to assist the clients on the job more than we do have. This would give us a better opportunity to assess a client's capabilities on the job, and give a chance to instigate training to help the client maintain the position we refer them to, rather than just refer them and trust to luck that they have all the interpersonal skills, as well as the on the job skills, to keep the job (EC 258).

5.4.8 Use of specialist job placement or reverse marketer

Questions regarding role type were posed to ascertain which of the following critical aspects of helping people into jobs the frontline workers performed and which functions were shared with other staff. Note that multiple responses were possible.

Table 18. Job placement and marketing role.

Answer		Response	%
There is a separate position for job placement and placement support		372	53%
I am responsible for job placement and support		336	48%
The organisation employs reverse marketing staff (note: more than one response permitted)		319	46%

While 53 per cent reported that other staff assisted with the job placement and support role, 48 per cent reported that this was part of their role. Likewise, 46 per cent of respondents reported that other staff conducted the marketing of job seekers to employers. The implication is that approximately half the frontline workers in employment services are tasked with the role of marketing their job seekers to employers and providing job placement support.

5.4.9 Performance incentives and impact on work style

Consultants were asked about the use of incentives or bonus payments. While some workers reported that their organisation used rewards and financial bonuses to drive performance, 62 per cent reported no such incentives.

Table 19. Receipt of incentives.

Answer	Response	%
Rewards, other than payment linked to performance targets	112	16%
Financial bonuses based on job placements or 13/26 week outcomes	139	20%
Performance-related pay based on caseload size	9	1%
None	433	62%
Total	693	100%

The impact of rewards or bonuses for performance outcomes was mixed with n=159 (71 per cent) of 223 respondents reporting that the bonuses system does not influence the time they allocate to job seekers. Although it was not clear if they were paid hours, 66 per cent n=127 reported working extra hours to achieve outcomes and 68 per cent n=152 said they gave priority to motivated job seekers.

Table 20. Impact of incentives on work priorities

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N =	Mean
The bonus makes me more selective about the job seekers I give extra time to	18	46	83	76	223	2.97
I work extra hours to maximise outcomes	37	90	70	25	222	2.37
I give priority to motivated job seekers	66	86	48	22	222	2.12

While the respondents stated that the bonus or incentive did not make them selective there is evidence of consultants giving priority to motivated job seekers. This is consistent with later comments by consultants that some job seekers were either not motivated or not ready to look for work.

Table 21. Consultants' views on value of relationship building with job seekers.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Some what Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Some what Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree	N =	Mean
Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes	465	146	24	2	0	1	2	640	1.34

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Some what Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Some what Disagree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree	N =	Mean
The quality of the relationship I have with job seekers has little bearing on the outcome	37	60	82	61	81	162	154	637	4.87
Job seekers trust me - they know that I try to act in their best interest.	214	284	109	25	3	1	1	637	1.94

In the table above, most workers expressed a generally positive attitude toward job seekers and, when asked about the importance of the relationship in achieving outcomes, 93 per cent somewhat agreed, agreed or strongly agreed that the relationship was/is critical to achieving an outcome. A similar percentage believed that they were trusted by job seekers and acted in their best interest.

Table 22. Consultant attitude to work context and job seekers.

Question								N =	Mean
I work in this field because it is consistent with my social justice values	199	232	132	37	22	9	It's really just a job	631	2.17
I believe most jobs seekers are doing it pretty tough	79	209	240	66	34	6	Not really trying	634	2.66
I work in a very supportive culture	216	193	120	62	29	13	I get very little support	633	2.26
In providing assistance to job seekers I start with building the working relationship	281	230	94	13	13	2	I focus on the job first	633	1.82

My style is best described as 'in their face and challenging'	28	35	93	125	193	158	I have a more conciliatory encouraging style	632	4.41
I am genuinely concerned about what happens to my job seekers	321	208	76	20	6	3	In the end it's just a job	634	1.72

It is reasonable to conclude that most consultants work in the employment services sector because they want to make a contribution to the negative circumstances of others, believe job seekers are, in the main, 'doing it pretty tough' and are genuinely concerned about the plight of job seekers. Most state that they place significant emphasis on relationship building with an encouraging style, but, as we will see later, much of this is framed within a compliance and paternalistic construct.

Table 23. Outcomes versus job seeker focus.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Responses	Mean
I have little time for job seekers who don't appear to be trying	17	98	214	258	52	639	3.36
I focus on the job seeker's needs more than the employment outcome	78	263	203	82	11	637	2.51
I am tough on job seekers who don't make enough effort	84	299	183	55	15	636	2.40
Sometimes you have to push job seekers to get them to do what's good for them	99	341	137	50	10	637	2.26

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Responses	Mean
I work flexibly with job seekers to help them in whatever way I can	250	319	57	7	3	636	1.73
I use participation reports to ensure compliance	164	270	141	49	12	636	2.17

There was some contradiction in the responses found in Table 23 (above) with 70 of the 636 consultants (11 per cent) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the proposition that they were tough on job seekers who don't make enough effort. However, 440 (69 per cent) of the respondents agreed that, 'you have to push job seekers to get them to do what is good for them'. Likewise, 569 (89 per cent) claimed to work flexibly to 'help them in whatever way I can' and yet, in the following question, 434 (68 per cent) indicating that they use participation reports to ensure compliance. There appears to be inconsistency between the intent and the capacity of consultants to work in empowering and compassionate ways. It appears that consultants' intent is not matched by their actions and that they resort to participation reports as a perceived form of engagement.

5.5.1 Relationship Focus Score (RFS) correlation with other variables

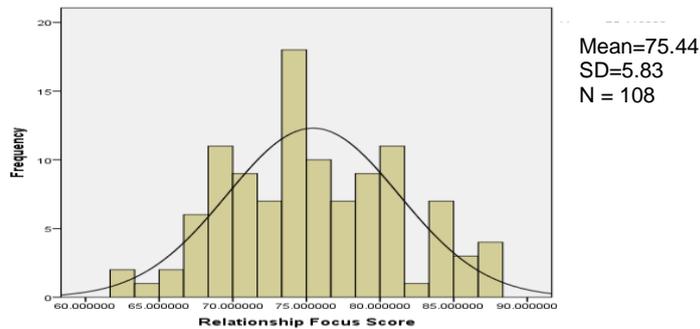
This next section considers the connection between the relationship focus score (RFS) of employment consultants and other variables. The scores were constructed from the responses to survey questions about the consultants' attitudes and emphasis on relationship building. The analysis was conducted with the use of SPSS statistical software and considers the data for a sub sample of survey respondents, n=108 for whom detailed DEEWR performance data were provided via their organisation. Prior to correlation analysis, the validity of the data is presented and discussed.

The analysis was conducted to test for any connection between the relationship focus score of consultants with the dollar value of their outcomes and/or the length of unemployment of the job seekers they assisted. Where possible, skewed data were transformed to enable parametric testing. Equivalent nonparametric tests were also conducted to triangulate results and check for any possible error effect of transforming the skewed data (Pallant 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell 2007).

5.5.2 The Relationship Focus Score (RFS)

The Relationship Focus Score was tested for normality with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test; the results were, sig = .145, n =108 and were considered normal. The following figure indicates the normal distribution of the relationships scores of employment consultants. These were used for the later parametric correlation tests.

Figure 6. Relationship Focus Score histogram.



In Figure 7. below, the Relationship Score by gender indicated a minor difference in the average RFS for male and female respondents. An independent-samples t-test was conducted (Table 24 below) to check that later findings were not influenced by gender. Testing determined that there was no significant difference between males (M = 74.6, SD = 6.6) and females (M = 75.8, SD = 5.4) Based on Levene's Test, equal variances was confirmed with $t(106) = -1.03$, $p = .30$, (two –tailed) and greater than .05. Hence, the remainder of tests conducted without further reference to gender.

Figure 7. Relationship score by gender.

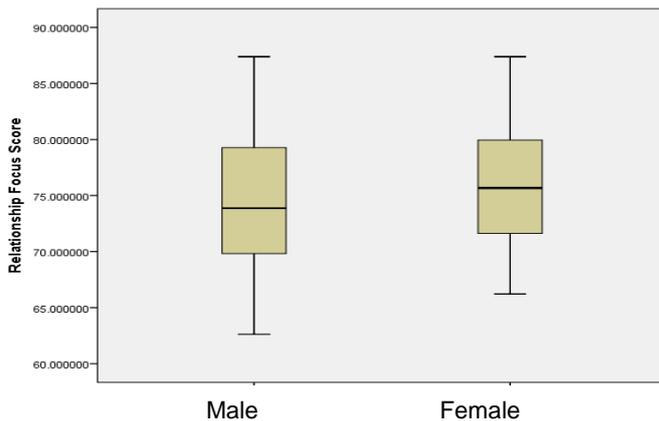


Table 24. RFS Independent samples test.

RFS	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.576	.449	-1.035	106	.303	-1.26181142	1.21870573	-3.67801407	1.15439123
Equal variances not assumed			-.958	51.689	.343	-1.26181142	1.31748985	-3.90592697	1.38230413

5.5.3 The Employment Outcome Score (EOS)

The data for the employment outcome scores contained one outlier that was more than 50 per cent greater than the next highest score and so, to ensure this did not unduly influence the results, was allocated an average score (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007). Initial normality tests on the EOS indicated some positive skewness (see Figure 8 below) and the data were transformed using the $\sqrt{}$ calculation in SPSS that is, SQRT(EOS\$). This resulted in a Kolmogorov-Smirnov value of $p = .20$ $n = 108$ and was considered normal. The later tests correlating the EOS with Relationship Scores and Length of Unemployment were therefore conducted using Parametric methods.

Figure 8. Employment outcome score histograms – original and transformed.

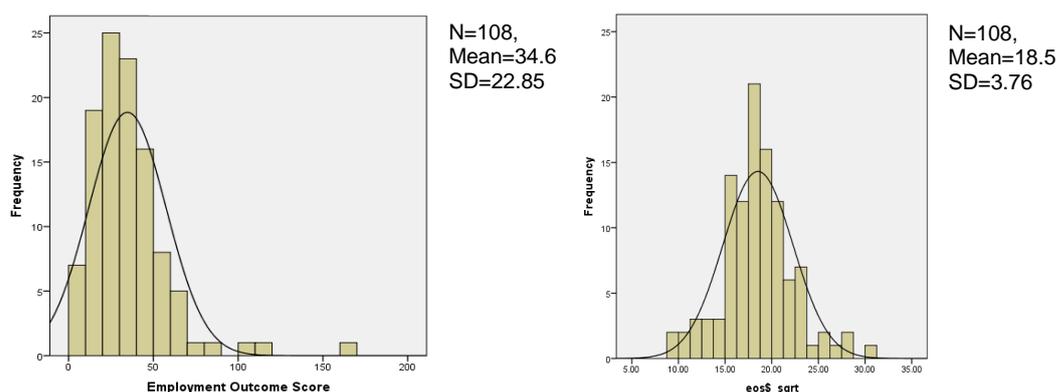


Table 25. Employment Outcome Score Tests of Normality.

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
eos\$_sqrt	.073	108	.200 [*]	.982	108	.143
Employment Outcome score	.108	108	.003	.940	108	.000

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance. a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

5.5.4 Length of unemployment variable – rationale for use

The 'length of unemployment' was used as an independent measure of the degree of disadvantage, rather than the JSA stream classification or the JSCI, both of which require disclosure by the job seeker of various characteristics in a Centrelink interview which, according to some commentators, is a flaw in the current JSCI assessment process, (Caswell, Marston & Larsen 2010; Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; McDonald, Marston & Buckley 2003).

To support this position, the research considered data on the employment status of stream 4 job seekers three months after placement, which shows only 31 per cent of those unemployed for 36 months or more achieved a positive outcome, compared with 50 per cent for those who were less than 12 months unemployed (Australian Government Department of Employment 2013, p. 13 Table 2.5). Further, the JSCI attributes up to 12 points for unemployment durations up to 24 months but attributes no extra points for those, say, 36 months unemployed (DEEWR 2012, p. 7). Job seekers who have been unemployed for 36 months or more have the lowest employment rate three months after placement compared with any other group except those with a disability, yet the JSCI makes no point allocation for these cases. The researcher took the position that stream level and JSCI score were not sufficient in determining the degree of difficulty or likelihood of outcome, that is, length of unemployment must be considered.

The length of unemployment of each of the job seekers assisted by individual consultants was used to generate an average length of unemployment variable.

The average length of unemployment was used as the control variable because of its exact measure and robust nature. Normality testing on the average length of unemployment indicated some positive skew, so the data were transformed by Log_{10} function in SPSS, which produced the results in Figure 9 below. The Kolmogorov-Smirnova and Shapiro-Wilk tests supported the assumption of normality for the transformed Avgltu_log (Table 26).

Figure 9. Length of Unemployment histogram - original and log₁₀.

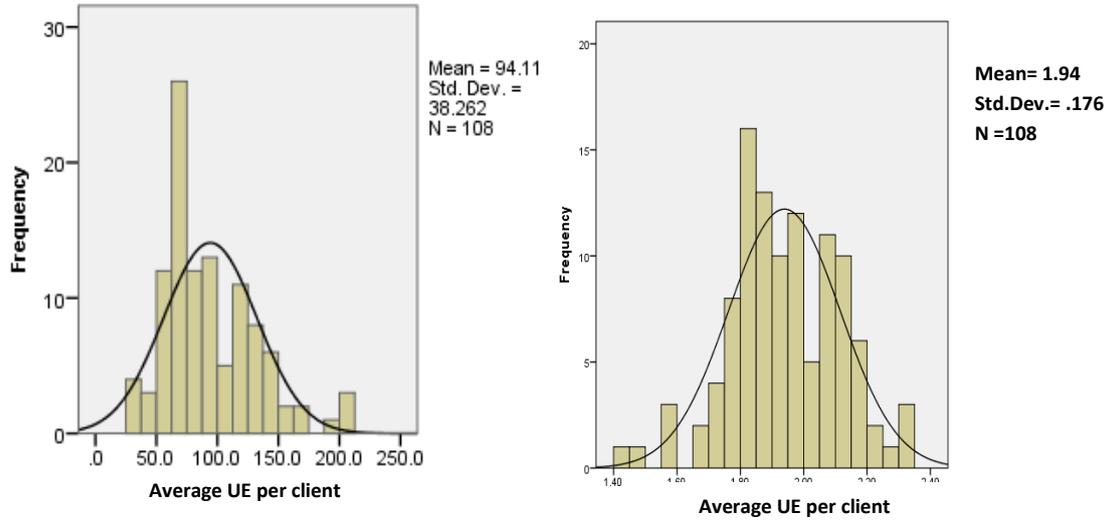


Table 26. Average Unemployment and Avgltu_log - Test for Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Avg UE per client	.118	108	.001	.938	108	.000
Avgltu_log	.065	108	.200 [*]	.987	108	.380

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance. a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

5.6.1 Correlation analysis

Using SPSS, the researcher conducted parametric correlations using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to investigate any relationship between the three independent variables (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel 2002).

5.6.2 Correlation of RFS with EOS

The relationship between RFS and EOS was investigated using the Pearson product movement correlation coefficient. The results indicate no significant positive or negative correlation between RFS and EOS ($r=0.086$, $n=108$, $p= < .375$). Based on this analysis, the relationship focus of consultants has no detectable influence on their outcome performance. This will be discussed further in the section on key findings.

5.6.3 Correlation of RFS and EOS with Avgltu-log

The relationship between the RFS and the Avgltu-log was assessed using the Pearson product movement correlation coefficient. The results indicate a weak, but significant, correlation between the two variables, ($r = .20$, $n = 108$, $p = < .037$). There was no significant correlation between the EOS and the Avgltu-log, ($r = .036$, $n = 108$, $p = < .711$).

Table 27. RFS, EOS-sqrt and Avgltu-log correlations.

		RFS	EOS_sqrt	avgltu_log
Relationship Focus Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.086	.201*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.375	.037
	N	108	108	108
eos_sqrt	Pearson Correlation	.086	1	.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.375		.711
	N	108	108	108
avgltu_log	Pearson Correlation	.201*	.036	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.711	
	N	108	108	108

*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-

The results of the various tests indicate that consultants with high relationship focus scores have longer term unemployed job seekers on their caseload while achieving the same value of outcomes.

Nonparametric correlation (Spearman’s rho) correlation analysis was conducted on the relationship between the EOS, RFS and Avgltu; the results for these tests were consistent with the findings presented above. Consistent with the parametric tests, the RFS and Avgltu correlation indicated a weak positive correlation between the two variables, ($r = .22$, $n = 108$, $p = < .02$).

5.6.4 Stream level and RFS

Following the presentation of some of the data above at conference, the researcher was asked to explore any relationship between consultants with greater representation of stream 3 and 4 job seekers and their relationship score. Normality test on caseload data showed skewed data created by outliers as some consultants had only stream 4 job seekers on their caseload as compared with others with a spread of stream 1 – 4 job seekers. After removal of outliers ($n=14$), Nonparametric correlation tests indicated no relationship between average stream levels and the RFS.

A series of Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to explore any relationship between the categorical variables Duration in Employment Services, Age and Education level with the continuous variables of Employment Outcome Score (EOS) and Relationship Focus Score (RFS). There were no significant differences in the median scores for the variables tested.

5.6.5 Correlation of RFS and caseload size

The caseload size data were tested for normality and found to be normally distributed; this was then correlated with RFS and avgltu_log and EOS_sq.

The RFS correlation with caseload size produced the following result $r = .07$, $n = 108$, $p = < .426$ indicating no observable correlation between the case load size and relationship score

Non-parametric tests were performed indicating a negative correlation between caseload size and average length of unemployment. This result indicates that as caseload size increases the average length of unemployment within the caseload reduces. The result of the Spearman's rho test was $r = -.23$, $n = 108$, $p < .017$, indicating a weak but significant negative correlation. This is consistent with larger caseloads having a greater percentage of stream1 job seekers and smaller caseloads for those working with stream 3 and 4 job seekers.

5.7.1 Key findings

Overall, there was no correlation evident between the relationship focus of consultants and their outcomes. There was a weak positive correlation between the relationship focus score of consultants and the average length of unemployment of the job seekers they assisted. That is, consultants with higher relationship focus scores achieved at least the same value of outcomes but had longer term unemployed job seekers on their caseload. This research does not suggest causality, but notes the relationship of RFS and outcomes with longer term unemployed job seekers. It may be, for example, that workers with exposure to longer term unemployed job seekers place greater emphasis on the relationship building aspect of their engagement.

5.7.2 Consideration of false positive or false negative results

The coefficient of determination between the RFS and the Avgltu was only four per cent; as such a false positive is possible and further research would be required to test this finding. An independent samples T-test was conducted of high RFS scoring consultants ($n=30$) and low scoring RFS consultants ($n=30$) and there were no significant differences in the mean scores of the two groups.

Possible bias in consultants' selection of job seekers was also considered as a possible cause of a false positive effect. However, as job seekers are referred from Centerlink, it is not possible for consultants with high relationship scores to select job seekers with longer terms of unemployment. There is the possibility that, once referred to the provider, that some reallocation of longer term unemployed job seekers to certain consultants takes place. This issue was not considered in the design phase and was not tested, however, even if there is some filtering or allocation at the provider level this does not alter the finding of consultants with higher RFS scores achieving the same level of outcomes for longer term unemployed job seekers.

5.7.3 Difference testing – RFS and qualification level

There was only a very minor variation in the RFS median score for those with Certificate IV or less qualifications (MD = 74.3) compared with those with Diploma or higher qualifications (MD = 75.2). A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no statistically significant difference in the RFS scores across qualification levels. While it might be expected that respondents with higher degree qualifications, in particular social work or psychology, might have a greater emphasis on relationship building this was not evident in the findings. This issue is discussed further in the final chapter.

5.8.1 Survey - qualitative responses

The next section of this chapter explores the responses to a series of questions posed in the survey for which respondents were asked to provide text responses. Survey respondents were asked four key questions including, what model (if any) drives their practice; what is one thing they would change about the way they work with jobseekers; to what degree do they include job seekers in the planning process (co-production) and what is their personal philosophy for working with job seekers and is this consistent with the organisation in which they work? The responses were thematically coded using N-Vivo software

Of the 830 survey responses, 461 respondents provided a text response to these four questions. The analysis was conducted on the responses who answered at least three of the four questions. Of the 461 respondents, 108 (23 per cent) provided further comments in the free text section (Q23), or used the opportunity to express their frustration at 'tedious compliance', high caseloads and lack of time with jobseekers. Many suggested improvements to the JSA model, the role of Centrelink and the need for better professional development for consultants. For example,

I feel good practice standards should be set in terms of caseload numbers, minimum qualifications, and the provision of interview rooms, especially in dealing with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of job seekers (EC 717).

While many consultants expressed empathy and concern for the plight of job seekers, there were strong elements of condescension and a punitive approach. Comments like the following were not uncommon:

I give a realistic picture of how things work within job services and in the workplace and labour market. I listen to what people are saying, and attempt to work with job seekers. In the instances where job seekers are not engaging I talk [to them] about what punitive measures I can use, and that I don't like being put in a position where I have to use them (EC 340).

5.9.1 Thematic phase analysis

As an initial process to identify the key themes in the responses and any general connection to the Relationship Focus Score, the researcher considered the word and phrase patterns of high and low scoring respondents. The table below sets out the differing emphasis of high and low scoring consultants.

Table 28. Word and phrase patterns from high and low relationship scores.

Score of 80 and above	Score of 70 and below
To promote personal identity , worth and find the value in the job seeker, to increase their confidence in achieving.	We are here to assist them in employment opportunities through training and work experience where necessary.
My personal philosophy is to uplift, encourage and inspire people from all walks of life to become and achieve the best for themselves	Follow the compliance rules and be fair, yes
I think we need to treat the " whole person " rather than telling them to come back when they are ready to work.	Every job seeker is capable of gaining employment – it's a matter of finding the employment for the job seeker
Dealing with jobseekers with dignity and respect .	Encourage and create a goal plan with job seekers and work closely together to achieve this goal.
My philosophy is to listen to the job seeker's needs and together build their pathway to employment ...	If they are suited to JSA then they have to comply with their requirements which is consistent with our policy
Provide support and show clients you have a genuine interest ...	To get suitable employment for job seekers
I aim to deliver all services in an equitable and caring manner, aimed at developing skills and self-esteem while helping clients to secure a successful future.	My personal philosophy is to push those that can be pushed (or need to be pushed) but go gently with those who have major psychiatric conditions. / The organisation I work for is only interested in outcomes at the end of the day and they don't understand that some people are just not job ready .
I view the clients as my equals and respect their personal goals and views, While acknowledging their obligations regarding Centrelink. I always keep in mind that, with the right life events and personal circumstances, I myself could end up in their shoes .	I am here as a tool for them to utilise to gain work and to help them locate suitable training ...however, I also have a job to do to assist my employer meet contractual obligations ...I am fair, but I am no fool. I remain employment focused as much as possible...
My personal philosophy is about empowerment , being true to Self, maintaining honour and integrity of the Self, the client and the Organisation. Reflective learning and communication is the key to my style.	

In considering the highlighted words in the above table, this research notes that the focus of the higher scoring consultants is on dignity, respect, empowerment, caring,

honour, integrity, learning and communication, whereas the focus in low scoring responses is on training, work, goal plan compliance, pushing those that need pushing, outcomes, locating training and meeting contractual obligations.

In essence, high relationship focus scoring consultants gave consideration to the whole person and their development, whereas the low scoring respondents were more focused on process adherence, outcomes and contractual obligations.

5.10.1 Model and frameworks for assisting job seekers

In response to the question regarding models or frameworks for assisting job seekers there were 182 coded references. The most prevalent (45) referred to the department guidelines or compliance framework as a model. This often included,

spelling out the requirements for participation and being fair but firm...and [ensuring job seekers are] made aware of their obligations (EC 21),

as well as the consequences of failure to comply.

For some consultants, the issues were overtly simple:

[B]asically I work within the compliance framework and set realistic goals' (EC 273) and '[J]ust abide by company policy and utilise community resources and government funding' (EC 277).

For others, it was all about compliance (note the capitalisation in the original, by the respondent in the following comment):

I also engage STRICT COMPLIANCE & PARTICIPATION REPORTS TO CENTRELINK. I advise jobseekers that we (job seeker and myself) are both within a system. They are being monitored by Centrelink, and I am being monitored by DEEWR. Hence, we both need to do the right thing. I tell them it is my obligation to forward reports to Centrelink if they are unable to furnish evidence for non-compliance (sic) (EC 309).

While respondents did not use the exact phrase, there was evidence of a 'carrot and stick' mentality in responses, for example:

I make them aware of the PR [participation reports] process and entice them with reverse marketers (EC 376).

5.10.2 Models of intervention

Respondents identified several models of intervention, however only 23 of 182 respondents named a particular model or frame work while others stated personal experience or no model (n=35). Forty-five referred to compliance as a model; it appears that most workers are dependent on the DEEWR guidelines and their life experience to guide their work with job seekers. Models referenced included:

- Client centred counselling
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (university training)
- Prochaska's Trans-Theoretical Model of Change (1994)

- De Bono's Six Thinking Hats
- Reflective learning models
- Strength based interventions
- Litchfield General Model
- Motivational interviewing,
- Reality therapy with client centred counselling
- Solution focused
- Biopsychosocial model
- Empowerment and choice theory (six references)

The following consultant outlines how a solution focused approach was developed in the absence of any agency defined model:

I adopt a solutions-focused style of counselling to help encourage clients to focus on what they can do and allow them to feel a sense of self-efficacy that can improve their motivation and confidence. I adopted these models over time as I realised most of the materials provided to job seekers was stale and was therefore not providing them with different approaches to 're-thinking' their situations (EC 416).

5.10.3 Consultant's life experience as the basis for interventions

Several responses were coded as 'condescending' and 'harsh'. Inherent in the response was that reporting non-compliance to Centrelink was considered a form of engagement with no other reference to, or models for, alternative action. Several examples are provided below:

I feel that my life experiences and various work history helps job seekers to understand that I understand how and what they find difficult at times...I have also gone through some pretty rough situations in my personal life where I am a proven fact that you can change your careers with doing training for upskilling and stop feeling sorry for yourself and do something about improving your life (EC 164).

I find that, however, compliance is sometimes the most effective tool for engagement - because it has a profound affect (sic) on a client's living situation. Bad behaviour cannot always be remedied by polite conversation and a cup of tea and iced vo vo with the consultant (EC 255).

Always ensure attendance and failure to comply results in participation reports. This ensures focus on work goals and brings other barriers to the surface that they disclose. E.g.: they declare cash in hand work or they admit drug use as there is no room to lie or manipulate the system any longer (EC 436).

5.10.4 Anti-compliance

There were nine strong non-compliance sentiments expressed as alternatives to the harsh attitudes of others, including flexibility about meeting times, including out of hours and out of office meetings. These positions were strongly motivated by 'not wanting them to suffer the consequences of non-attendance and therefore being prepared to meet out of scheduled office hours, will make special arrangements and meet in other informal locations' (EC 311) and by 'try[ing] every available avenue before submitting participation reports' (EC 247).

The following comment epitomises the frustration and cynicism expressed by the anti-compliance thinkers:

[I]n my opinion any true human interaction between ECs and job seekers is in no way valued or rewarded. From what I can gather, to be 'successful' one must tick all the boxes, push the right amount of paper and get sufficient numbers in each category. No weight or emphasis is put on the individual's job satisfaction or even a positive change in outlook and drive. I have been instructed to adopt a more bureaucratic way of functioning to ensure 'success' (EC 378).

5.10.5 Relationship development and a caring approach

Consultants who took a caring and relational perspective (49 of 182) tended to emphasise mutual respect, empathy, client focused interventions and genuineness in their concern for job seekers. These consultants highlighted the importance of collaboration, flexibility in their work and taking time to listen to the job seeker's experience. Also evident in this group were references to frequent phone contact in between appointments and identifying and addressing specific client needs as well as responding holistically to client issues, encouraging short term and longer term goals and steps to achieving these and emphasising a team approach between] job seeker and consultant. This group also commented on the challenge of assisting people who were not yet ready for employment in a realistic but caring manner, for example,

I show a personal interest in their lives and talk about other issues that they feel are important and affecting their capacity to work/search for employment. I don't believe in pushing job seekers into employment when they are not ready and therefore set them up for fail (EC 20).

5.10.6 Planned sequential interventions

There were 12 respondents to this question who articulated a 'stepping stone' or sequential approach. For example,

I use a long term case-management approach. I look at five levels of capacity. 1. Crisis 2. Survival Needs. 3. Health Needs. 4. Social Needs. 5. Vocational Needs. I seek to address identified and non-disclosed barriers over time, with a view to assisting JSKER to become enabled/empowered and capable of vocational pathway at a point in time determined in consultation between us (EC 70).

This was one of the few times case management was articulated as a model.

5.11.1 What would consultants change about the way they work?

The strong response to this question made it clear that consultants are under extreme pressure from administration and compliance requirements; their overwhelming call was for a reduction in administration and caseload numbers.

While general responses to issues such as 'consultants' training' resulted in 17 references, the issue of 'more time' resulted in 110 references, reduced administration 24 and lower caseloads 24. These three issues made up 53 per cent, or 158 of the 299, coded issues in responses to this question. There were 29 items coded under

‘JSA system changes’, including recommendations to reduce KPIs, improve privacy, improve access to Centrelink information, increase community development type interventions and to increase efforts to assist those not yet ready for work.

The following two quotes were typical of the comments made by consultants as they buckle under the strain of having too many job seekers and not enough time to assist high needs clients:

Currently holding nearly 140 clients and having to see each one of those clients once every 3 weeks is nearly impossible to keep track on client's progress etc. I believe by making the case loads smaller (70 - 80 per employment consultant) it would see employment consultants being able to have more productive time with their clients - rather than having to rush through an appointment in 30 mins and complete the following [tasks]: [list provided]...By having smaller caseloads the focus would shift from pressure for placements to being able to work with clients and ensure they are ready to maintain regular employment or stay engaged with education (EC 313).

The DEEWR contract disempowers everybody and it all comes down to money and less care for workers and job seekers, the administration takes over the ability to service clients as if you work hard with clients the more work there's is to do and double on paper work. It is a stress induced environment. This stops clients from getting the best from workers. Stops workers from being innovative because of high caseloads and financial pressure for outcomes. Without outcomes there are no workers because there is no money. Makes it very difficult and creates inappropriate pressure (EC373).

5.11.2 Compliance – more or less?

There were mixed responses to the issue of compliance and participation reporting, with 36 of the 299 responses calling for stronger compliance measures and only six taking a less compliance position. Consultants expressed frustration by what they perceived as a failure by Centrelink to withhold benefits from those who appeared to be ‘gaming’ the system. For example, the following consultants would like to

[b]e in a position to be able to have an effect on job seekers who repeatedly abuse the system... for example who are continually working for cash in hand and collecting Centrelink benefits (EC 438), and; I would give the consultant the power to apply participation failure and not have them answer failures to a Centrelink member of the PR team that is not working closely with the JS [job seeker] (EC 201).

Others took the opposite position, suggesting that,

[compliance] is very detrimental to those of them who have children as it's usually the children who do without (EC 263) and; [T]he compliance issue of reporting and sanctioning jobseekers only creates and re-enforces a negative perception of the nature of social services over economic outcomes regime (EC 183).

While the issue of compliance is discussed further in the concluding chapter, it was clear that the frustration expressed by consultants was at least partially fuelled by excessive attention on targets and increasing pressure to generate more outcomes/income, as noted by the following consultant:

[n]ot to have the pressures of bringing in X amount of income each month - hence seeing x people to keep us functional - is too many in a day which leads to stress on personnel as this is a highly demanding industry (EC 185).

This element of interference was also alluded to in relation to DEEWR's involvement in micro monitoring:

If DEEWR would back off and not be so directive about how we manage clients - we are supposed to be the ones who know what's best for our clients (e.g. mandatory contact regimes which may not be appropriate for all) (EC 247), (parentheses in original).

5.11.3 Client focused – a more inclusive process

Consistent with other research regarding the motivation of consultants and their focus on job seekers, there appeared to be little self-interest in the responses. In a word count analysis of the qualitative responses the word 'pay' was mentioned only 11 times. Only one comment referred to pay rates, for example:

this industry does a great deal for the government and job seekers - we do not get enough encouragement nor pay to fully take control and assist all clients to the best of our ability (EC 446)

A word search on 'salary', 'bonus payments' and 'conditions' also revealed no responses, whereas the search on 'time' revealed 575 usages of the word. The issue or word 'time' was the fifth highest ranked word after, job/s, work, clients and employment.

Consultants were scathing of the manner in which the caseload and compliance requirements reduced the amount of time they had to assist job seekers. Over and over again, consultants' primary wish was for more time to assist job seekers; the option of lower caseloads was suggested 71 times.

A small number of respondents (20) described inclusive processes for engaging job seekers in the planning process. This group seemed very keen to check for engagement and sought feedback to validate their assumptions for example,

I always check back with them asking something like, "Is that right?" I also turn the screen towards them so that they can read the EPP while it is being completed. Other codes for example "job search" are standard ones but I ask the job seeker what type of "other" things they would be doing in order to find work. Even if it is something as simple as "I will ask at the corner shop where I live if there is any work for me". I then write this in the free text area (EC 179).

Others in this group also drew a connection between engagement and relationship development. In the following example, the consultant is cognisant of not misusing their own authority and of not being directive but empowering,

I try and involve them as much as possible, but it is also a matter of building a relationship with them rather than [me] being another person to 'tell them what to do' or to point out what is best for them. I try and be understanding and find things we have in common in order to develop a relationship, and give them feedback on their choices, and encourage them to be honest, whether it's good or bad, and build on the pathway plan from there (EC 387).

The impact of relational work on workers was evident. For one worker the capacity to distance more from the job seeker, 'to care less', is poignantly described below:

I think I need to be less caring... I care that they have interview techniques and that they can job-search effectively and I care when something bad happens, like they get cancer - it affects me, or they die, so maybe I need to care less (EC 324).

5.12.1 To what degree consultants include job seekers in the planning process

Some consultants considered the involvement of the job seeker in the planning process as critical to success, stating that they,

totally involve the job seeker...at the end of the day the job seeker is only going to really respond in a positive manner if they feel you respect and value their opinion enough to include them in decisions that are about them! This sounds idealistic I realise but the majority of job seekers do respond to this way of servicing' (EC 49).

It appears that, for some consultants, involving the job seeker was a more subtle attempt to control or direct the job seeker's actions; 24 of the 130 coded responses to this question suggested that they include the job seeker, but further analysis highlights their intention is not about co-production but compliance. For example:

I always explain the compliance aspects of the EPP and only add other codes if I have discussed them with the client and they know and agree with their reason for inclusion. My aim is for them to offer suggestions as much as me guiding them towards what I see as wise and useful activities' (EC 235) and: it depends on the client coherency of what it is we are doing and unfortunately how much time I have to complete it. I do ask clients questions and if they understand what I have entered (EC 363).

So, while there appears to be an effort by consultants to include job seekers, this is constructed within the context of compliance and with what the consultant considers as 'wise and useful'. Suggesting that job seekers are engaged in a collaborative process in the context of compliance regime is not defensible as an inclusive process. Likewise, it is not inclusive for consultants to make suggestions about goals and activities and then discuss these in the context of '*what is expected*', for example:

I am very careful to ensure that they understand how the activities will assist them to achieve their employment goal in an effort to *maximise compliance*', (EC 443, emphasis added).

5.12.2 Not inclusive but directive

There were 17 examples of directive models of pathway planning, including some that the consultants acknowledged were lacking in engagement but, none the less, were a consequence of system constraints such as time and regulation. As one consultant articulated,

I always explained to job seekers about their options and choices but sometimes I have to make the decision on their behalf...There are some activities in the EPP that job seekers doesn't (sic) have a choice but to comply. This is good in a way as I found it help[ed the] client to stay focus[ed] on achieving their goals (EC 199).

Some responses appeared ambivalent to the rights of job seekers to be involved in the decision making process and displayed disregard of job seekers' views and opinions. There was a lack of insight into the very sentiments they espoused, for example:

[it] depends on the client (not that the client has a say). At times they need a sense of authority and dictatorship while many others require guidance and encouragement' (EC 217), (parenthesis in original).

It is clear from the following quote that some consultants believe the way to manage disagreement regarding content in the pathway plan is to override job seeker opinion:

I do involve them as I think it is important to gauge what they believe they can undertake and what activities they agree and disagree with. If I strongly feel that something particular should be in the EPP I will put in in even if the job seeker does not agree (EC 424).

For some, the inclusion of the job seeker was considered a waste of time. For example:

[I]ncluding the job seeker in the preparation of the plan seems to be counterproductive in most part mainly due to the case manager being the professional in work placement. However this may soften with job seekers with higher level barriers to employment (EC 444).

The inference here is that the consultant knows best and that, in regard to 'high needs' job seekers, it does not really matter because they are a long way from employment.

5.12.3 Compulsory elements

The following selection of examples gives evidence of the compulsory aspect of the planning process noted by 19 responses. Here the consultants are articulating the contradiction of working together to agree on a pathway plan when the reality is that job seekers have little power to dispute the directives of the consultant. Failure to engage with job seekers was often constructed as the job seeker's responsibility, which in turn justified a punitive response, for example:

I try and engage them but if they are difficult or don't want to speak I let them know I will be putting this in to their EPP (EC 384).

The compulsion to participate in the planning process was expressed in terms of Centrelink requirements, yet some consultants appeared to subvert the process, opting to place greater emphasis on verbal agreements, for example:

I also think that the EPP is more about having written requirements that allows Centrelink to punish job seekers when the time comes. For me, I get more commitment from the verbal agreements I make with my clients (EC 388), and, I involve them through open communication, though the EPP is largely used as a compliance document, therefore I don't consider there is a great deal of negotiation (EC 389).

5.12.4. Difficult to get agreement

This final group of 15 respondents expressed the particular difficulties in negotiating an agreement. They cited reasons such as the job seeker's capacity to engage in the process or outright refusal or avoidance:

If a job seeker has mental health or drug and alcohol issues then you start off involving them in the decision making and encouraging them but if they consistently refuse to gain any assistance to address these barriers then sometimes they need to be given a couple of choices to choose from to try to move them forward (EC 425).

While expressed in a demeaning manner, the point being made is that for some job seekers the process of engagement in a planning process that focuses on employment is a long way from their immediate needs and that other forms of assistance and planning are required. For example:

I think a pathway plan has a purpose but I don't think disadvantaged job seekers understand or care enough about one, despite how well you explain its purpose. Disadvantaged job seekers don't care for paperwork, particularly if it has a Centrelink logo on it' (EC 449), and: 'It depends on the individual job seeker. If it is my belief they are work avoiding, I focus on compliance and site attendance and push them hard to provide evidence of job search activities. If they have "issues" it is a more negotiated process that engages them (EC 455).

5.13.1 Personal philosophy for working with job seekers

This question was constructed to solicit consultants' underpinning motivation for working in the employment services sector and their attitude toward job seekers. There were 197 coded responses, however many of the responses can best be described as models or methodology rather than personal philosophical underpinnings of practice.

For some respondents, their underlying philosophical position for what they do was,

[t]o empower them to make their own decisions and take action to make them happen' (EC 109) and 'focus on their strengths and empower them to make choices that can positively change their lives (EC 159).

Others took a firm approach such as,

[W]e are here to get the job seeker to a place where they can be independent and that comes not through hand feeding them everything. This is somewhat consistent with my organisation. Sometimes you have to show *tough love*' (EC 181) (italics in original).

A theme of firmness, toughness, and even a punitive approach was prevalent in many of the responses to this question. Consultants who professed to understand the challenges faced by job seekers nevertheless continued to take a tough line, including an even tougher line for repeat offenders who, according to one respondent,

should be penalised harder and all CR's [contact requests] and PRs [participation reports] should be actioned quicker. This will improve attendance and outcomes as it will make the job seeker take all Job Service Australia Providers more serious[ly] and a better understanding that we are here to help them as well (EC 356).

The irony is that this tough approach is rationalised by the consultant because 'we are here to help'. This perception that repeat offenders were intentional in their actions seemed to justify this punitive position with no real evidence of exploration of alternative reasons and no thought of administrative or structural influences.

There appeared to be an expectation from consultants that job seekers would comply with all instructions, display good spirited obedience and that failure to do so justified punishment. The following quotes further highlight this nuanced paternalism:

I fully understand the challenges which currently face job seekers in regional [place named] and am empathetic to a degree however if they don't display some kind of willingness to cooperate with us then my patience, tolerance and willingness to assist them is limited. This is reasonably consistent with my employer's philosophy (EC 443)

5.13.2 Consistent or inconsistent with organisational position

Consultants who took a less punitive, more structural perspective seemed more often at odds with their organisation compared with those who took a 'tough love' approach who, in the main, seemed consistent with their organisation. The suggestion that many of the tough positions taken by consultants are consistent with their organisation is an issue for further discussion in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Of the 199 coded respondents, only 26 who held a generally positive view toward job seekers were consistent with their organisation; more often, client focused consultants were in tension with their organisation. The following examples of consultants who took empathic and empowering approaches highlight their conflict with their respective agencies:

I work from a philosophy of empathy and self-empowerment and I feel that a good rapport is integral in achieving outcomes for both the client and organisation. Unfortunately though I feel that the entire organisation down from DEEWR to the Job Providers are heavily focused on outcomes and ultimately this is a business where profits and the bottom line is the most important issue. There is also often a lack of understanding of mental health issues and best practices and framework to work within in providing assistance and support to clientele (EC 158); and,

My organisation is totally focussed on outcomes that sometimes do not suit the client we are working with. DEEWR and Centrelink need more flexibility for job seekers as it is often not just black or white. Case managers really need to have some sort of counselling qualifications to deal with complex issues that arise on a daily basis. My organisation does not often support us and often puts in guidelines extra to those of DEEWR which often 'tie our hands' and prevent us from getting outcomes (EC 310).

The consultants in these last two examples are not disregarding the importance of outcomes, only the manner in which they are achieved and the financial imperative. This issue of quality and longevity of outcome was referred to by the following consultant:

I encourage them to find their passion to follow a course of study if required, address any barriers so they can be more likely to maintain employment. No, it does not appear to be consistent [with organisation] all they want is placement (EC 453).

5.13.3 Walk a mile in their shoes

Some consultants expressed great empathy with the plight of job seekers, for example:

I try to remember that this person sitting opposite me is someone's child and I try to make a difference. Sometimes their homelessness, addiction or trauma needs to be addressed appropriately prior to thoughts of working. I believe that our organisation thinks accordingly (EC 100), and: I treat clients with the same respect that I would expect to get and remember most of my clients really want to work and are doing it very hard (EC 182).

In essence, this group of workers expressed the desire to help alleviate the physical and emotional discomfort of the job seekers, sometimes based on their own experience of unemployment. As one worker expressed,

I just want to help people and I know how some of them are feeling as I too have been in their position. I like reassuring them that there will be opportunities coming their way (EC 397).

5.13.4 Community development perspective

Six workers constructed their rationale for assisting job seekers within a community development framework and considered their role an,

attempt to build a better and stronger community by working with individuals in order to offer them opportunities for self-empowerment (EC 5).

Likewise, the following consultant understood their role as influencing far more than the individual job seeker they were assisting:

I believe that by assisting people into employment it will not only help them but their family members who depend on them. I believe that working encourages social inclusion, better standard of living & a better community & living environment (EC 269).

5.13.5 Dignity and respect

The degree that consultants identified with the daily struggle of jobs seekers is evident in the following quotes – this group of consultants appeared to grapple with the philosophical rationale for their work (14 of 199). For many, this included elements of personal dignity for the client and respect of cultural beliefs and the job seeker's humanity; as one consultant noted:

[b]eing able to have a sense of cultural reality in dealing with clients where English is a 3rd and 4th language. Dealing with clients who practice traditional ties with the land and being able to be flexible in assisting clients in work and training expectations they can undertake while maintaining their cultural inheritance (EC 128).

For another consultant this included,

treating them fairly [with] regards to age, sex, culture or religion... and provide the best quality of service and work co-operatively with other organisations to help improve lifestyles and attitudes for the job seekers. I believe that our service is consistent within the organisation (EC 141).

Note also that this response was one of the few references that commented on working with other agencies to achieve the best outcome for the job seeker.

5.13.6 Clients have deficits ?

For a number of consultants, the primary rationale was contained in a range of deficit based assumptions (17 of 199). While there appeared to be some attempt to understand the issues from a job seeker's perspective, the underlying theme was about deficits and compliance. For example:

[M]ost clients that I work with have been through many services and remain unemployed...Clients lack motivation and have little goals in place (EC 277).

In the following quotes job seekers are constructed as ‘other’ or as subjects to be fashioned or fixed:

I believe that JS are still people and deserve respect and courtesy. I believe in helping them in the best way that I can but if they don't want to be helped then it won't be as effective. This is somewhat consistent with my organisation (EC 203); and:

I believe we all have goals of some kind - for some it might be just another bottle of booze, or another wrap of speed - but we all “want” something. In understanding this, it does make this job much easier. I just help people to focus on a positive small goal - a “want” that isn't going to damage their bodies, and will make them more skilled...I know the organisation I work in would be sympathetic to my philosophy (EC 250).

5.13.7 Income and compliance focused

Some consultants identified the incongruity between the objective of assisting disadvantaged job seekers and the financial objectives of the JSA programme, for example,

I believe that a job is not always the best outcome for some people...I am shocked to hear "How much is this client worth?" or not being able to place [into work] clients in stream 1 because they are not worth money. I think JSA has lost the human side of providing services to people (EC 388).

I believe that paid employment is an excellent outcome for job seekers and is a positive change in their lives, however, we as stream 4 consultants can do little to achieve this goal if other non-vocational barriers have not been overcome and I believe it is unethical for us to be pushing people into work when they have not yet addressed other issues. Due to the way JSA are rated (job placements), we are being pressured into getting people into employment, even though it is not their primary focus at the time (EC 435).

5.13.8 Strength based – solution focused

As noted earlier, consultants responded to this question as if they were asked for methods used in assisting job seekers. Given this mis/understanding of the question, several (11) identified strength based and solutions focused ways of working. While the honesty and genuineness of the consultants is noted, there still appeared to be a lack of understanding of the complexity of issues faced by job seekers and that the type of assistance required may be more than a positive approach. Further, there were very few references to the use of external professionals, or any joint case management in addressing the job seeker's needs. Some examples of the responses coded in this category include:

I attempt to encourage them to focus on their strengths and find employment goals that suit these, also try to encourage them to have “realistic” goals, I don't feel that this always lines up with our organisation's philosophy as there is a lot of emphasis placed on achieving set targets irrespective of client types/numbers etc. (EC 370); and:

I believe in solution focus and strengths based practice along with providing problem solving tools (EC 373).

5.13.9 Two- way trust

A number of consultants (14) listed building trust and co-production as their philosophical underpinning in working with job seekers. This included,

I always believe to find what motivates the client and work with this to build a plan WITH them not FOR them (EC 176), (capitalisation in original).

The issue of trusting relationships was noted in response to other questions in the open answer section. Although it seemed important for consultants to build strong communicative relationships, very few consultants were able to expand on how these relationships added value to their work or how it might influence outcomes. It is possible that some consultants naturally operate in a relational manner toward job seekers with little thought about the method or benefits of such an approach.

5.14.1 Other comments

On completion of the survey questions, respondents were offered the option of making further comment and 108 consultants took the opportunity to raise issues such as the complexity of the JSA system, high burnout rates of staff, compliance and practice standards. Some examples of comments are provided below:

The knowledge staff now need to operate in this job effectively and the ongoing changes that they need to keep up-to-date with, make this job very demanding as it is quite complex and this is more so in this current contract (EC154);

People in this position need to have a will to help the individual. It's a high burn out type of role and has a high turnover and the money isn't the best but it can be very rewarding (EC 163);

It is difficult for JSA staff to be heavy handed with job seekers because we are the ones who need to have a positive relationship with job seekers and need them to respect and value us if they are going to be successful in changing their lives (EC 409); and,

I feel good practice standards should be set in terms of case load numbers, minimum qualifications, and the provision of interview rooms especially in dealing with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of job seekers (EC 158).

5.15.1 Results chapter conclusions

This chapter has reported on the research results, starting with the focus group results and how the issues raised therein were used to construct the survey questions. The results of the survey and the key themes from the qualitative and quantitative data have been presented for consideration as well as the results of the correlation analysis. The Relationship Focus Score, Employment Outcome Score and the Average Length of Unemployment were correlated to consider any value of relationship building in the delivery of employment services. This chapter has also considered the qualitative responses to key questions in the survey regarding models that guide worker practice, what changes workers would make to the system, to what degree they include the job

seeker in the process and their inclusion in decision making, and finally their underlying rationale for working in the sector.

The next and final chapter in this thesis discusses these finding and related issues as they relate to implications for service delivery and the research questions. Given the research cited in the literature review and this thesis on the benefits of a relational approach, the question is then, how this might be better integrated and encouraged in a rigid, compliance driven system? The next chapter discusses these issues, as well as a further contradiction; while most of the consultants in this research espouse and endeavour to operate in compassionate and empowering ways there is some incongruity between this ambition and their actions at the front line.

For workers who seek to work in a manner that is consistent with their values, but contradictory to the culture of their organisation, the risk is disillusionment and burnout. The sort of dehumanising effect noted by Mullaly (2010) that occurs for both worker and service user as a result of oppressive practices.

The final chapter concludes with a discussion about the interplay between the heavily regimented processes and guidelines, the low level of skills and qualifications of consultants and the perceived loss of discretion of workers at the frontline.

Chapter 6 - Discussion and thesis conclusions

6.1.1 Chapter overview

‘Front line services reflect what the purchaser pays for’ (Considine 2013)

This chapter sets out a synthesis of the research findings and discusses the key issues as they relate to the aims of the research as defined in the first chapter at section 1.3.1. The aims of the research were to identify relationship based interventions and explore their potential influence on outcomes, to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding employment assistance and to influence social policy and future iterations of employment assistance. The research aims will be addressed iteratively throughout this chapter, as will to what degree this thesis has responded to the research question - do consultants who focus on relationship development and job seeker engagement produce better outcomes?

Following an overview of the key findings, the chapter considers the implications for frontline workers and employment services and makes recommendations regarding the use of relationship-based engagement strategies as compared with compliance based models. This final chapter locates the research findings within the existing literature on the role of relationship based methodologies in employment assistance and within the policy settings that drive current service delivery.

The chapter discusses the possible service delivery and policy implications of the research findings, particularly the ongoing ramifications of low qualification levels and the overly regimented processes that constrain worker – job seeker relationships. The chapter argues that further research, including better access to data available within government departments could add to the body of knowledge on the research topic. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research process and future practice from the perspective of a practitioner - researcher.

6.2.1 Relationship focus and outcomes

The question posed in the introduction to this thesis, was to what degree the quality of the relationship between consultant and job seeker might influence the employment outcome. The exploration of the Relationship Focus Score (RFS) and the Employment Outcome Score (EOS) indicated no significant positive or negative correlation.

There are of course a number of possibilities for this result; it may be that no correlation exists or that the methods and analysis used in this research have not been able to identify any connection (if one does exist). And yet, the qualitative component of the

research indicated that the relationship factor was important to both job seekers and consultants alike.

Importantly, there was a weak correlation of the Relationship Focus Score (RFS) and the average length of unemployment (Avgltu) of job seekers. There are some relevant implications of these findings. The employment outcome rates for consultants with high relationship scores were consistent with those with lower relationship scores: however, high scoring consultants appeared to be achieving the same results for job seekers with longer lengths of unemployment. That is, high relationship scoring consultants achieve a comparable number of outcomes but with higher representations of disadvantaged job seekers.

There appeared to be no negative impact of a strong relationship focus which is consistent with most of the literature covered in Chapter 3 that noted the benefits of a relational approach for longer term unemployed job seekers. The argument by Behncke, Frölich and Lechner (2007) that a tougher approach can improve outcomes is not consistent with this research. As noted in section 5.6.2 there was no positive or negative correlation between relationship focus and employment outcomes. While a tough position may reap benefits for newly unemployed job seekers and in other contexts where the unemployment insurance payments are 75 per cent of pre unemployment wages, (as was the case in the Behncke et al. research) it does not appear to be the case in the Australian context.

The literature discussed earlier in this thesis, draws attention to the benefits of attending to the support needs of job seekers who face significant disadvantage (Bennett & Cooke 2007; Catty et al. 2011; Green & Hasluck 2009; Kukla & Bond 2009). The failure of work first or activation focused interventions to account for support needs is likewise documented and the findings of this research supports an argument for greater attention to supportive responses in employment assistance.

6.2.2 Relationships and service delivery models

Based on the focus group feedback, job seekers were well aware of the complexity of the system requirements and the contradictions inherent in the employment consultant's role. Job seekers considered that the consultant's role lacked clarity; an issue also noted by Considine (2001). Other researchers, (Ashkanasy 2011; Considine, O'Sullivan & Olney 2013; Nevile & Lohmann 2011) also note the lack of clarity in the employment consultant role, as well as the limited capacity for innovation and increasing reliance on information technology systems.

While job seekers had a good understanding of the difficult issues faced by consultants they still wanted to be treated with respect, empathy and understanding and for their story and experience of service provision to be heard. Job seekers valued the genuine caring of those consultants who displayed these traits and questioned why the system could not provide more assistance to those job seekers who needed it most. Some job seekers' experience of the relationship was of being genuinely cared for and connected to their consultant (engagement) in a manner that is consistent with the key elements of the Working Alliance literature, that is, Bond, Task and Goal. However, according to job seekers, 'quality' service provision was predominately a matter of chance.

The principal motivation and intent of consultants was/ is focused on helping people to get jobs; most consultants understood the importance of engaging and connecting with job seekers in order to provide assistance. However there was little clarity about how engagement was to be achieved, therefore leaving many consultants to default to the policy settings and directives of the contract. Some consultants in this study found ways to better connect with job seekers which appeared to be underpinned by attitudes of empathy and empowerment.

6.3.1 Workers and their qualifications

Consistent with other research, employment services is a mostly a female domain with 74 per cent female and 26 per cent male; 90 per cent of workers are engaged as full time. This differs considerably to the general community services sector which has similar gender distribution but a 50 per cent part-time employment rate (Meagher & Healy 2006). This variation with the general sector has been noted by (Considine et al. 2013) and, in the absence of any other explanation, may simply reflect the predominately full time nature of employment services work or that the lack of formal qualification requirements results in a different gender mix of applicants.

There appears to be high job turnover in the sector, with 24 per cent of the workers in this study employed in the sector for less than one year. This was significantly higher than the 12 per cent reported by Considine et al. (2013) and could indicate a higher turnover in the early stages of the JSA contract, or could be due to this research focus on consultants compared with the Considine et al. data which included other positions such as administrators and managers, where one might expect greater stability of employment.

As compared with Nielson (1995) and Considine (2008), this research identifies a clear decline in the qualification levels of employment services frontline staff. This has occurred during a period in which the concentration of disadvantaged job seekers has

increased and various programmes designed to assist them have been consolidated into generic service provision. By comparison, between 1996 and 2001, the all-industry proportion of formally qualified workers increased by 6.3 per cent (Meagher & Healy 2006, p. 30).

In the employment services sector, only 38 per cent of consultants hold qualifications above Certificate IV level and only four per cent have post graduate Social Work or Psychology qualifications. These low qualification levels are concerning given the significant and complex barriers to employment faced by stream 3 and 4 job seekers, including homelessness, substance abuse and mental health disorders (Perkins 2005).

The qualification levels of 106 consultants who reported to be working with only stream four job seekers did not differ greatly from the main group (n = 720), with nine per cent holding post graduate qualifications. Of concern is that 20 per cent of the consultants working with stream three or four job seekers had only high school or equivalent qualifications.

On the job or work related training offered to consultants tends to focus on managing the systems and 'problem' job seekers; more recently training for consultants has been offered on 'Reflective Practices for Self Care and Resilience', with the preface suggesting that '[L]ow staff morale, work related stress, job burnout and job disconnect can significantly contribute to difficulties in achieving outcomes and the underperformance of a site' (NESA 2013). Note the emphasis on performance of the site – not the wellbeing of the workforce. For consultants this reinforces the dominant individualised responsibility discourse, while denying the structural flaws in the current system.

The lack of minimum qualification requirements in employment services contradicts other community sector standards where minimum qualifications are often mandatory, for example in Aged Care services where 85 per cent have post-secondary qualifications (Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2011). The 2012 advisory panel on employment services administration and accountability also noted the lack of minimum qualification requirements and recommended that, in addition to minimum qualifications, 'DEEWR and the provider sector jointly pursue the professionalisation of the employment services workforce' (DEEWR 2012a)⁴¹. The issue of qualifications and skills were raised by job seekers and consultants alike, initially in the focus groups and later in the survey commentary. Job seekers wanted

⁴¹ An issue not addressed in the recently released Request for Tender Employment Services 2015

assurance that the consultants were qualified to provide the required services while consultants raised corresponding concerns about not being qualified to address the complex issues presented by job seekers.

Low level skills and lack of practice frameworks in current service delivery has resulted in workers relying on the department guidelines rather than practice skills. The lack of alternative frameworks means that workers operate within the dominant paradigm of compliance and activation. Higher level qualifications are more likely to include advanced skills for engaging job seekers as well as an understanding of how and why to use professional discretion in responding to the causes and effects of social disadvantage. Without higher level education and skills, workers are less likely to consider alternative ways of working and are left to the rationalities of the sector as epitomised by the following worker 'I love the participation report because I can make them do what I want them to' (Giuliani 2013, p. 8)

6.3.2 Consultants' motivation - intent versus delivery

Table 23 on page 122 provides some insight into the motivation of consultants and their attitude toward job seekers, with 83 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are genuinely concerned about what happens to job seekers.

While consultants endeavour to work in the best interests of their job seekers, the number of consultants who make use of participation reporting (68 per cent) and agree that 'sometimes you have to push jobs seekers' (69 per cent) indicates an inconsistency of intent with action.

Consistent with other research, for example Marston and McDonald (2008) and Murphy et al. (2011), which is rightly critical of the often paternalistic and harsh treatment of job seekers, there is a significant contradiction between the intent of consultants and what is actually delivered. Rather than demonising consultants as mean-spirited 'Jekyll and Hyde' types, it is clear from this research that consultants are simply not always able to deliver services consistent with their values and rationale for working in the sector. To what degree this inconsistency is the result of low qualification levels or lack of specific engagement skills is not clear and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Consultants perceived few other options but to comply with guideline directives, setting out the participation requirements for job seekers and the consequences of non-compliance. As a fall-back position, consultants drew on their own experience as authority to convince job seekers that participation was in their best interests. The misappropriation of the participation reporting process as an engagement tool by many consultants is evidence of the lack of skills and reliance on guidelines and punitive

measures. There was very little evidence of consultants seeking alternative ways of engaging job seekers to reduce the need for breaching.

There were marked contradictions in the responses provided by consultants, suggesting that while their efforts were well intended, the lack of skills and dominance of compliance driven mechanisms results in the delivery of scripted processes as compared with case management or relationship based interactions. While 93 per cent reported that trust and a positive relationship with the job seeker was important or very important, 434 of the 636 respondents (68 per cent) said they used participation reports to 'engage' job seekers. While the overall attitude of consultants was intent on assisting job seekers into employment, consultants appeared unable to convert these positive attitudes into actions consistent with their beliefs. The inhibitors to acting in ways consistent with values was articulated by consultants as mainly to do with time, caseloads and the defined processes required by the contract.

6.3.3. Consultants and organisational values

Based on the responses to survey question 19 regarding consultants' philosophy for working in employment services, it appears that it was more common for consultants who had a compliance focused attitude to be consistent with their organisation, as compared to consultants who took a relational approach. To what degree this is a response to reduced discretion or the inability of the consultants to fashion their own versions of justice is not clear.

It does appear from this research and from a recent analysis of the JSA model that discretion and innovation have been squeezed from the system as providers become a 'herd of profit maximisers who are highly responsive to threats to their viability and who embrace standardisation of services as a way to minimise risk' (Considine, O'Sullivan & Olney 2013, p. 3) While some consultants justify their actions in terms of duty to the organisation, others find themselves in an ethical dilemma of 'who to serve' when the interests of the organisation and the welfare of the client are mismatched' (Thornton & Marston 2009, p. 73). For the bulk of consultants who found themselves in contradiction with their agencies' culture, the conflict was located within the ongoing viability of the organisation verses the interest of the job seeker.

6.3.4. Attitudes to relationship building

While 93 per cent of the consultants identified the relationship with job seekers as key to achieving outcomes, the ability to put these ideals into practice was limited by the capacity and capability of the consultants as well as structural factors such as job seeker compliance and reporting requirements.

Some consultants sought to off-set the impact of limited time and high caseloads by including job seekers in the pathway planning process or co-production of their outcomes. However, this was limited and most likely impacted upon by the lack of established relationships with job seekers.

There was evidence and examples of a tough, punitive approach by some consultants in the focus group consultations, though; this was much more evident in the survey responses.

The lack of separation between engagement and compliance in policy and procedures creates confusion for consultants and job seekers. This was evidenced in the claims made by consultants that they sought to engage job seekers in supportive relationships but then used punitive measures to 'make them do what is good for them'. This tough love approach occurs in the absence of any investigation of alternative engagement techniques. Further, for the majority of consultants, engagement has become synonymous with compliance.

6.3.5 Misguided paternalism – contradictions in service delivery

From this and other research it is clear that most consultants are motivated by altruistic intentions (AC Nielson 2005). Rather than being frustrated or disappointed by pay levels, workers were frustrated by not being able to provide the services they believed could best help job seekers.

In stark contradiction, 440 of 637 responses (69 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that you have to 'push job seekers to get them to do what is good for them'. The quantitative data and qualitative responses indicate that rather than consultants working with job seekers to establish a trusting relationship and engaging them in the co-production of an agreed outcome, consultants are determining the best option for job seekers and under covert or overt threat of punishment instructing them to comply with consultants' directives. It may well be that this model of direct instruction works for consultants with job ready clients, high caseloads and little time, but it may also be why achieving employment outcomes for very disadvantaged clients is an ongoing challenge for the JSA and other contracted models.

It is important to note the small but significant group of consultants who continue to work in empathetic and empowering ways. This minority group displayed altruism and concern for the job seekers in their caseload. They found opportunities to go out of their way to connect with job seekers well beyond the nature and requirements of the contract, arranging extra options for drop-in assistance and reminding job seekers of appointments in a manner that was job seeker focused. While the majority of

consultants claimed to be genuinely concerned about their job seekers (Table 22) very few converted this concern into the way they treated or involved job seekers in the decisions that affect their lives.

6.3.6 The price of altruism

As noted, in most cases the clear intent of consultants was to provide the best possible services within the constraints of the service system. This placed consultants in a precarious position as they sought to meet the expectations for outcomes while compliance and administration requirements increased. Employment service providers have little, if any, individual or collective power in the price setting for contracted employment services. There have been some examples in the UK and Australia where governments have set the price too low, and then provide financial assistance to providers in order to avoid a collapse of the quasi-market (Finn 2009a, 2013; Yaxley 2003). The current Australian prices were set by the department in 2009, which was based on Job Network pricing set years earlier. There is no provision in Australian contracts for price increases. The primary mechanism that providers use to create efficiencies, to address wage movement and the increased cost of compliance is to increase caseloads.

Given the lack of fee increases and the general feminisation of employment services (and community services in general, where gender based pay inequities are well documented), the burden falls on the individual consultant to 'do more with less'. This includes competing on behalf of their job seekers for the limited job vacancies, all the while under pressure from their organisations to maintain / improve their star ratings and hold on to their contracts. This creates a dilemma for consultants: do they assist each job seeker as best they can, or select for those who are more likely to achieve an outcome? In the end, their very job depends on them making the 'right' choice.

The cost of altruism is evidenced by the 57 per cent of respondents (Table 20) who stated that they work extra hours to maximise outcomes. It is very unlikely that 57 per cent of the workforce is on paid overtime hence this more likely suggests that workers are contributing their own time to achieve outcomes. There was also strong disagreement with the proposition that workers have little time for job seekers who do not appear to be trying (Table 23); that is workers were still prepared to assist job seekers who appeared to be making less than the required effort.

In this context there is little, if any, protection for workers; union representation is low with 93.8 per cent reporting non membership (Considine et al. 2013, p. 6). There are no minimum education levels and no maximum caseload set in the contract, leaving

providers to recruit at will and without set standards. This lack of standards is reflected in the average caseload numbers ($n = 114$) and, more importantly the deviation ($SD = 46.2$) with 17 per cent of consultants with 150 or more job seekers on their caseload.

For frontline workers in contracted employment services, the cost of commitment and altruism cuts deep.

6.4.1 Qualifications and performance

The international evidence regarding the role of the Personal Advisor draws attention to the skill level and educational attainment of frontline workers (Institute for Public Policy Research 2010). In comparing respondents with Certificate IV or lower qualifications with those who held diploma or above qualifications, no significant differences in relationship styles could be identified. It was not possible from the data to draw any conclusions regarding the performance and the education level of consultants. With 62 per cent of consultants holding Certificate IV qualifications or less, and only four per cent with post graduate qualifications, the skew of the data was beyond any normalisation adjustment.

One possible explanation is that education attainment does not relate to relationship focus or performance. An alternative possibility, and one supported by the response data, is that consultants simply adopt the compliance and activation paradigm in the absence of case management models or other practice models within their organisation. This suggestion is consistent with Larsen (2013) who identifies 'triple activation' as a dominant theme, that is, activate the provider with contractualism, activate the frontline with technological processes and activate the job seeker with activity testing and participation reporting.

The suggestion that organisations utilise their more qualified staff to assist their more needy job seekers is only supported by the data to a very minor degree. There was some slight variation in the percentage of post graduate qualification levels in consultants with stream 4 only caseloads, compared with consultants in the general group. Seven per cent of consultants with only stream 4 clients on their caseload held post graduate qualifications compared with four per cent in the total group. However, the data indicate that 20 per cent of consultants assisting stream 4 only clients had no relevant qualification and that there are also consultants with no relevant qualifications with mixed caseloads (including stream 3 - 4). It is indeed an irony that a contract so compliance focused fails to set minimum standards for workforce qualifications. As has been suggested in UK based studies, more research is required into the impact of skills and education on employment outcomes (Institute for Public Policy Research 2010).

6.6.1 Positioning the findings within the literature and theoretical framework

As noted by McDonald and Marston (2008; 2005), the relationship between the state and its citizens is enacted in the relationship between consultant and job seeker with the primary emphasis on motivating and activating the unemployed. This activation of the unemployed aligns with Foucault's articulation of 'governmentality,' in that the actions of the state via the agents of state administration seek to make productive citizens out of 'docile subjects'. The findings of this study indicate that the actions of the frontline workers are also subject to governmentality and that, while in the past frontline workers made use of reasonable levels of professional discretion, the capacity and capability of workers to do so in the current construction of employment services is severely limited.

The critical social work perspective of this research has sought to identify and critique the locus of power and oppression inherent in the machinery of government and resulting policy settings, as well as suggesting alternative ways of considering the options at the front line of service delivery. The tools of compliance and governmentality are enacted in employment services to disempower both job seekers and workers and, while a broad body of research points to the effectiveness of collaborative arrangements and relationship building in assisting long term unemployed job seekers, the neo-liberal agenda serves to perpetuate the dominant paradigm of activation and work first ideologies.

This research finds that relational case management and individual support is more likely to assist disadvantaged cohorts back to work. In arguing for a case management approach, this research stresses the relational aspects of case management as described by McDonald and Coventry (2009) and the collaborative aspects of relationship making. This position was made clear in the responses from job seekers and consultants, as they expressed their strong preference for greater flexibility and discretion to develop the types of relationship interactions that encourage and motivate strengths based responses. See also Twamley, Jeste & Lehman (2003) and McNeil (2009).

The qualitative and quantitative data analysis in this research supports the findings that job seekers and consultants would rather that collaborative and relational models guide their interactions; greater consideration should be given to the social benefits of employment assistance and to the development of qualitative measures of employment services. Further, the current narrow focus of employment as the only measured outcome in the current employment services contract, neglects the value of social

outcomes and the benefits of a pathway or milestones approach. Previous programs that have assisted very long term unemployed job seekers, for example PSP and JPET, achieved outcomes commensurate to the current service model, while also achieving social and developmental outcomes for the target group (Perkins 2010). Models of assistance that include social outcome measurements and a distance travelled approach such as those discussed by Lloyd (2003) and Dewson (2000) should be piloted and evaluated against generic employment services.

6.7.1 A case for relational case management based on Working Alliance models

The three key elements of the Working Alliance are Task, Goal and Bond. These elements align with the survey questions asked of consultants about their work and their attitude to job seekers. Responses to questions about the Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) tell us about how consultants consider the shared task of planning the various interventions and programmes that make up the overall plan.

While some consultants may seek to work with job seekers in collaborative and empowering ways, it is clear that most consultants develop the Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) based on their judgement of what activities job seekers should undertake.

As was noted by some consultants, the tension in implementing an EPP is that the EPP forms part of the activity agreement and, once signed, job seekers are under threat of sanction if they do not comply. The capacity to develop a shared agreement about 'who will do what' or to trial various options under the threat of breaching is, in itself, a contradiction. This view was expressed by consultants in acknowledging the value of verbal agreements that were positioned outside the jurisdiction of the mandatory pathway plan. These consultants identified the pathway plan as a compliance tool and preferred to negotiate their assistance with the job seeker in a more collaborative style.

The potential to separate the contract requirements from the case plan could address some of this contradiction. This could then allow the consultant and job seeker to develop a shared agreement about the various tasks and processes. The separation of compliance from the planning process could provide for more innovative options in the search for employment and allow for the co-production of outcomes.

Likewise, a clearer agreement about the 'Goal' would enhance the capacity for Working Alliance based engagement. The underlying assumption by most consultants was that the 'Goal' equates to employment; while this may be the case there was little evidence in the responses of consultants that they checked this assumption in the context of higher level objectives such as economic independence, better living conditions or

provision for family. By not identifying the higher level goals and aspirations of job seekers, consultants risk failing to identify and support the motivations for job seekers to get a job in the first place.

A dominant theme in the literature regarding programme models that affect outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers is that the capacity of the worker to facilitate and maintain positive working relationships is influential on the outcome. The findings from this research indicate that the settings of the current JSA contract and the planned next contract, severely inhibit the capacity of workers to form positive supportive relationships to the benefit of job seekers.

See also Catty et al. (2011), Masdonati et al. (2013) and Elad-Strenger and Littman-Ovadia (2012), these research projects consider the Working Alliance in less harsh conditions than the Australian JSA context as well as the social benefits of relational approaches.

6.8.1 Relating the findings to the current policy settings

Over the past 20 years of market driven employment services, both Liberal and Labor governments have implemented neo liberal based policies: the variance has been the extent that each side of politics has individualised the issue and how harsh they have been in enacting punitive measures.

The recent election of the Abbott-led conservative Coalition Government in 2013 and the subsequent harsh 2014 Budget has precipitated a renewed assault on welfare recipients, including the return of Work for the Dole and Green Army programmes. Subject to legislation before the Parliament at the time of writing, job seekers under 30 may have to wait six months prior to receiving benefits and will be required to participate in Work for the Dole for six months per year at 25 hours per week.

While waiting for benefits, job seekers will still be required to participate in job search activities and meet with providers on a monthly basis; failure to do so will extend the wait period for benefits (Honourable J. B. Hockey MP 2014). While some exceptions will apply for very disadvantaged job seekers, this proposed new policy setting introduces a whole new meaning to 'Mutual Obligation' and ignores the overwhelming body of evidence about the efficacy of work for benefit schemes, the structural causes of unemployment and what type of assistance is required to get people back into work.

In October 2014, the Department of Employment (previously DEEWR) released the Request for Tender (RFT) for the next iteration of employment services due to commence in July 2015. The proposed new model continues the shift of risk and

responsibility to job seekers and providers with a funding model more heavily weighted to outcome payments. The rhetoric in the RFT makes it clear that the emphasis is on activation and compliance, with little recognition of the structural or other issues faced by job seekers, for example:

The work that Employment Providers do with Job Seekers in each stream will vary. However the common objective for all streams is to ensure continuous Job Seeker activation by removing the option of passive welfare, increasing job outcomes and introducing stronger Mutual Obligation Requirements in return for taxpayer funded Income Support (page 33 RFT)

The new model, in the name of reducing administration and increasing flexibility, is less prescriptive about what services job seekers can expect to receive yet very specific about the role of Work for the Dole (WfD) as a punitive response for recalcitrant job seekers. The RFT outlines how providers can mandate earlier than scheduled WfD to address 'job seekers who do not appear to be making enough effort to find employment' (Department Of Employment 2014). Given the findings of this research about the skill level of consultants and their lack of discretion, it seems likely that consultants will apply the rules in the strictest fashion. Previously, providers were critical of Centrelink for overturning their recommendations, generally because Centrelink were able to conduct a thorough impartial assessment and deemed that in more than 52 per cent of cases a cut to benefits (punitive action) was not necessary (Disney 2010). Now, rather than a participation report, consultants can punish job seekers with WfD without 'interference' from Centrelink.

The welfare sector has expressed concerns about the harsher treatment of job seekers in the context of high unemployment and limited jobs growth. The CEO of the peak body for not for profit providers, David Thompson, has suggested that the proposed changes represent a significant safety risk to contracted providers and will diminish the capacity to build the sort of helping relationships required to assist vulnerable job seekers (Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2014). There is a real likelihood (based on the findings of this and other research) that consultants will simply continue to adhere to the policy settings and 'breach first and ask questions later'.

Both the current Prime Minister, Tony Abbott and Employment Services Minister, Eric Abetz have maintained a hard line and argued that the 'Government is committed to a new approach that will deliver better outcomes for job seekers and employers, and value for taxpayers' money' (Senator the Hon Eric Abetz 2014); a line not too different from the rhetoric in previous new model announcements. In the context of this research, the proposed changes contradict all the national and international research on successful employment services.

6.8.2 Future practice at the frontline

The current activation agenda has been very successful in generating activity for the sake of activity, as noted by the OECD (2012). However, all this activity has not reduced the number or percentage of longer term unemployed. Job seekers and consultants have been active in complying with the various requirements of the JSA contract. The data collected in this research and the department's own data (DEEWR 2012c) indicate that consultants have, on average, less than one hour per month with job seekers as a consequence of caseload size and administration requirements. It is not possible to deliver the services required for disadvantaged job seekers under such conditions.

Contracted employment services that rely predominantly on outcome payments for viability have failed to assist those most distant from the labour market. The focus on individual deficits, rather than on the failure of the market, likewise has failed to assist long term unemployed job seekers (Flentje, Cull & Giuliani 2010; Horn 2011a). This leads to the question: how might the nature of services change in a relational case management model?

In such a model, the focus would be on the job seeker or service user; job seekers would have choice and voice about the services they receive. The initial mantra articulated by Vanstone (1996) at the contracting out of employment services would be enacted in a service where job seekers could choose providers and visa-versa. The service would provide quality interventions, including training and auxiliary support for job seekers who are truly involved in the establishment of the work plan and are in agreement with the consultant about the goals and objectives of their participation. In essence, job seekers become co-producers of the process and outcome, rather than passive or unwilling subjects in a compliance based, under-resourced system.

It is recommended that some controlled trials be undertaken to consider the cost benefit (over time) of intensive case management with a focus on the factors inherent in the Working Alliance literature. In such trials, the employment services requirements of 'work first' and 'activation' could be translated into co-production models (Alford & O'Flynn 2012), where participants are engaged in the design of various tasks and processes with a view to achieving realistic employment goals.

In the context of the current call for reduced administration, the department could trial a reduced caseload model and assess the outcome benefit of more intensive work with each individual job seeker as distinct to a 'one size fits all' approach. Such an approach could consider some of the less tangible social benefits from case management and a

better understanding of the progression of job seeker toward work capacity rather than the simplistic dichotomy of employed – unemployed. Some recent research has considered the progression of job seekers, for example (Barrett 2012; Horn 2011b) and the progression of soft outcomes as they relate to employment (Blades, Fauth & Gibb 2012; Lloyd & O’Sullivan 2003).

6.8.3 The recruitment of consultants

Over the past decade, the recruitment of consultants has focused on information technology and sales type skills (Jobs Australia 2011). This is further reflected in the basic training available for consultants that mirror the requirements of the contract and the administrative systems that in the past were the domain of the public bureaucracy and Centrelink.

Six of the seven core units in the current Certificate IV in Employment Services qualification relate to work processes, with only one core unit on communication skills. Most of the elective subjects focus on information attainment regarding how the employment services sector operates. If employment services workers are to be equipped to implement engagement and relationship building, then more targeted qualifications must be brought to the sector. One peak body, ‘Disability Employment Australia’ (DEA), has moved outside the employment services qualification, instead selecting skill sets from a number of qualifications to better match the skills required by consultants. Future training in employment services needs to consider skills sets that utilise the engagement attributes discussed in this research thereby engaging job seekers as co-producers of their outcome. The earlier comments from job seekers and consultants made specific references to the skill level of consultants and the data on skill levels of consultants indicates they are far below other workers in community services.

The construction of participation reports as an engagement tool must be further challenged. Job seekers and consultants made it clear that they would prefer more collaborative ways of engagement. The sector would benefit from models that engage difficult to contact job seekers via the other agencies they attend, or by better use of technology, as well as by learning from some of the recent national trials that include the co-location of employment assistance with other like services.

6.9.1 The case for reform

In late 2013, the outgoing Labor Government called for submissions on the next iteration of employment services due to commence in July 2015. The response from the sector has been summarised by Davies and Giuliani (2013), who note the sectors' call for a

separation [of] the role of the government agency responsible for policy formulation from the regulation of employment services contracts' and for high[er] levels of stakeholder input into the design of the employment services system' (Davis & Giuliani 2013, p. 2).

Others have called for a significant redesign of the system. The Australian Council of Social Services has re-iterated their call for an increase to the Newstart allowance based on the recommendations of three separate Senate enquiries (ACOSS 2013). There have also been suggestions that Australia may be in breach of a number of human rights treaties as the government continues to shift sole parents to the lower Newstart payment when their youngest child reaches eight years old (Cox 2013)

In the context of this research and the associated literature a possible way to reduce caseloads to workable levels could be at least partially achieved by a reduction in compliance requirements (Ashkanasy 2011):

The extent of red tape in the outsourced employment services system is now legendary. It has been noted as problematically high by every independent review that has been done, from the Productivity Commission in 2002 to the Advisory Panel on Employment Services Administration and Accountability (APESAA) review in 2010. Recommendations for these reviews have been almost completely ignored. (JA December 13 news release, 2013)

6.10.1 Time for a real change

In tracking the development of employment services over the past two decades it has become clear that '[T]he bureaucratic approach that the Government swept aside in abolishing the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) has now re-emerged in the Job Network with the same costly and crippling effects' (Murray & Quinlan 2006, p. 20). Other critics of the current system have argued that 'the next focus of public sector reform should be on the relationship between the citizen and frontline staff in public services (McNeil 2009, p. 9).

Most recently, in a review of the sectors' submissions in response to the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2013 Issue Paper Employment Services – building on success, the dominant themes were clear.

A system that is based on control, that requires activity for its own sake, that diminishes the scope of people's autonomy and increases their sense of powerlessness will not support the development of long-term employability ...if we are serious about improving

long-term outcomes for unemployed people, then we have to see these as complex challenges in the true sense of the word. It is in the nature of complex problems that they require localised, adaptive solutions (Fowkes 2013)

While this research has made a contribution to understanding the key challenges faced by job seekers and consultants, further research is required and, in particular, research that replicates Working Alliance models into generic employment services. This type of research could be conducted with several JSA providers or with one large provider with multiple sites.

Possible future research could also correlate Working Alliance scores with department outcome data – and could include JSCI and other indicators as well as frequency of visits. Such a suggestion is consistent with OECD (2012) recommendations for DEEWR to release data on system performance to the sector (OECD 2012).

The findings from this research could guide future pilot projects that involve several agencies with a focus on preferred practice models for disadvantaged job seekers with dissemination of results across the sector and not, as in some recent trials, that are located in a single provider with no results or learning disseminated to the sector.

In addition to the above, alternative studies that utilise in depth ethnographic approaches or ethnomethodology (Hassard & Pym 1990), could further highlight the experience of workers within the regimented employment services context and how some workers (as was the case in this study) simply accept the policy edicts of employment service providers as absolute and indisputable. Such an approach could also draw on the narratives of frontline workers as found in Marston and McDonald (2006b) and the organizational ethnographies discussed by Brodtkin (2008).

As the publication of this thesis will be later than the current government's implementation of the design of Employment Services 2015 and beyond, material from this research has been used in several publications, conference presentations and in submissions on the design of employment assistance.

6.11.1 Personal reflection

The initial motivation for this research was based on observations that employment services had become rigid in their approach and had lost sight of the job seeker at the centre of the process. Likewise, employment consultants were frustrated and discouraged by the increasing workload as a result of increasing compliance requirements for both job seekers and service providers. Central to the issue was that very disadvantaged job seekers did not appear to be receiving the assistance they most needed and that contracted, profit driven models of service delivery had not improved outcome rates.

The primary rationale was to explore the potential for relationship building as a mode of engagement and service assistance to enhance outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers and to do this within a critical social work framework.

This thesis has sought to draw attention to the core elements in assisting disadvantaged job seekers into employment. The immersion of this research within my field of work has on the whole been positive; the access to sensitive outcome data and the cooperation of consultants and job seekers was greatly enhanced by my working in the sector. Practitioner research that embeds the researcher within their profession is most likely to include significant bias in the perceptions and assumptions of the researcher. While this must be true of this research, the overall findings have been tested against the feedback from supervisors and others in the sector, and repeated reflection on assumed positions. I am confident that my thesis is well supported by other literature and hence robust and defensible.

Through the process of this research I have become conscious of the significant pressure and responsibility on front line workers and that much of the literature positions these workers as tough paternalistic agents of the state. I believe this research contributes to the body of literature about how little discretion workers in employment services actually have as they seek to do the best they can in an overly prescribed environment. Likewise I have sought to critique the language of politicians and policy makers as they denigrate disadvantaged citizens by suggesting that they do not really want to work and prefer a existence as 'welfare dependants'.

The increasing stronghold of neo-liberal ideology in the policy positions of the current Abbott Government as they tighten job search requirements for people with mental health issues and propose extended waiting periods for people under 30 years of age, gives little hope for those proposing a more humane and empathetic approach to disadvantaged job seekers. A recent presentation from Tony Nicholson, the Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, argued that we can no longer rely on government for the level of support and interventions that the welfare state will require over the next few decades, both as a result of ageing population and declining economic resolve. He argues that,

[O]ur sector has evolved to a critical stage underpinned by a particular paradigm. Central to this paradigm is the idea that our sector can continue to meet society's current and emerging needs by contracting to government, expanding and aggregating organisations, driving for greater efficiency, and further professionalising, regulating and circumscribing care (Nicholson 2014, p. 3).

With that in mind I have reflected on the early labour market programmes of the 1970s. The focus at that time was on local responses to local need (even though the causes were macro-economic and structural). The early Community Youth Support Schemes

(CYSS 1970) garnered strong local support with 30 per cent of the budget sourced from local communities or business; maybe it's time to rediscover the 'think global – act local' mantra, for in the end '[P]eople are the principal agents of change in their lives (Gregg & Cooke 2010, p. 19).

While I have drawn attention to the individual relationship factor, I have also sought to dispute the neo liberal perspective; that the individual is to blame for their 'poor' choices' or their 'lack of agency'. This is consistent with my first supplication to recognise young people as citizens with a desire to work and not as 'dole bludgers' as was popular in the press at the time; the focus of that report was to engage local young people in the design and implementation of local solutions (Giuliani 1979).

My hope is that this research will further the debate and encourage new research into the role of frontline workers in a manner that enables them to do good work alongside those who need it most. I am deeply indebted to the job seekers and consultants for their contribution to this endeavour.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Letter to CEOs requesting their participation

Dear CEO

I am writing to ask for your support with a research project that I am undertaking as part of a Doctorate in Social Work at Victoria University and with support from Jobs Australia.

The outcome of the research will be of significant value to the sector as the research considers the role of the case manager/employment consultant and their working relationship with jobseekers and the overall impact on outcomes.

As part of the development of the survey instrument and the indicators of a positive working relationship I need to conduct a number of focus groups of employment consultants and jobseekers (separately).

That's where I need your help – could you arrange for me to conduct a focus group with some of your staff on the understanding that their comments are confidential to the research project.

Following the focus group I would then provide material for your staff to provide participants – inviting them to a focus group to gain their perspective on the matter.

I have attached a copy of the consent forms and other information on the research for your information.

If after reading the information you decide that your organisation is able to assist, a reply to my email will start the ball rolling. A contact person with whom I can follow up the process would also be of assistance.

If you require any further information I am available by phone or email.

Thank-you

George Giuliani

Jobs Australia DCEO

Victoria University Doctorate Student 3079803

12/5/2009

Appendix 2. Information and Consent forms

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS (Job –Seekers and Case Managers) INVOLVED IN RESEARCH – FOCUS GROUPS

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: **The impact of the ‘Worker – Client’ Relationship in Achieving Employment Outcomes in Contracted Employment Programmes.**

This project is being conducted by a student researcher George Giuliani as part of a Doctorate of Social Work at Victoria University under the supervision of Professor Carolyn Noble Head, Social Work Unit, School of Social Sciences Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development at Victoria University.

Project explanation:

The proposed research considers to what extent the quality of the relationship between the front line worker (employment consultant) and the jobseeker influences the employment outcome of disadvantaged jobseekers in government contracted employment services. The research results will be of significant value to employment services providers wanting to improve outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to participate in a focus group (approximately 8 people) and discuss some of the factors that you think make for a good working relationship with employment consultants. Please note, we are not asking you to directly comment on your employment consultant or rate their performance. We think that you as a jobseeker is in the best position to comment on how employment consultants can best do their job.

What will I gain from participating?

Whilst we are not in a position to pay participants we will cover travel expenses and provide a small gift to thank you for Job Seeker’s participation, e.g. movie tickets or a CD voucher.

How will the information I give be used?

The information will be used to design the questions for a survey that will be distributed to employment consultants. None of the comments you make will be disclosed to any other person except for the research team, the information will not be provided to you employment consultant or the organisation they work for or any government department including Centerlink. In fact no one other than the researcher and the focus group will know of your participation.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

We do not perceive any risks but should any issue arise that makes you uncomfortable or upset in the focus group you can withdraw at any time (and still be reimbursed for travel etc). You are also encouraged to contact the researcher who can arrange for you to speak to someone about what might have upset you.

How will this project be conducted?

As mentioned above, the focus group will provide the information that will help the researcher design the survey. (It's really important to get the right questions) the survey will be distributed to employment consultants and the results will be used to inform providers and programme designers about what role a good working relationship has in assisting jobseekers to find work. So in the end this research is really about improving services for jobseekers.

Who is conducting the study?

The research is supported by the peak body for not for profit employment services – Jobs Australia.

Professor Carolyn Noble Head, Social Work Unit, School of Social Sciences Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development at Victoria University.

Email: carolyn.noble@vu.edu.au Social Work Unit : ph 03 9919 2917 F: 03 9919 2966

George Giuliani, Doctorate Student. Email george@ja.com.au mbl 0418326859 Jobs Australia ph: 03 93493699

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Principal Researcher listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4781.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH – FOCUS GROUP

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

You are invited to participate in a focus group (approximately 8 people) and discuss some of the factors that you think make for a good working relationship with employment consultants. Please note, we are not asking you to directly comment on your employment consultant or rate their performance. We think that you as a jobseeker is in the best position to comment on how employment consultants can best do their job.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, (insert participants name) of (insert participants suburb
.....

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:
The impact of the ‘Worker – Client’ Relationship in Achieving Employment Outcomes in Contracted Employment Programmes. being conducted at Victoria University by: Professor Carolyn Noble

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by: George Giuliani

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Focus group participation

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way. I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher Professor Carolyn Noble, Head, Social Work Unit, School of Social Sciences Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development at Victoria University.
Email: carolyn.noble@vu.edu.au Social Work Unit : ph 03 9919 2917 F: 03 9919 2966

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4781

[*please note: Where the participant/s are aged under 18, separate parental consent is required; where the participant/s are unable to answer for themselves due to mental illness or disability, parental or guardian consent may be required.]

Appendix 3. Full copy of survey

JSA worker - jobseeker engagement survey Final

Q1 INTRODUCTION Any queries about your participation in this research may be directed to George Giuliani on george@ja.com.au or the research supervisor Professor Carolyn Noble, Head, Social Work Unit, School of Social Sciences Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development at Victoria University carolyn.noble@vu.edu.au

Thank you for agreeing to assist with this survey - by doing so you are helping us to better understand what makes for good practice in employment services. Remember your answers are confidential - so you and the researcher are the only people that will see your response - please be honest with your answers (don't just select what you think the researcher wants to hear) if you are not sure about a question or what your response should be, select the best or closest choice - there are less than 25 questions and most are tick a box - some questions require a response before you can move to the next page - so let's begin!

Q2 Duration of employment in employment services sector? (not just with current employer)

- Less than 6 months (1)
- 6- 12 months (2)
- 1-2 years (3)
- 2-4 years (4)
- 4-6 years (5)
- 6 years+ (6)

Q3 My age bracket is?

- 18 - 19 (1)
- 20-24 (2)
- 25-29 (3)
- 30-34 (4)
- 35 -39 (5)
- 40-44 (6)
- 45+ (7)

Q4 Gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q5 Is your employment?

- Full Time (1)
- Part Time please state hours per week. (2) _____

Q6 Is English your second language

- No (1)
- Yes (2)
- If English is not your first language, what is? (3) _____

Q7 Level of qualifications

- Trade or Certificate IV level (1)
- Diploma (2)
- University degree (3)
- Postgraduate e.g. Social work or Psychology (4)
- Other (please specify). (5) _____

Q8 Have you received any specific training to assist you in your Case Manager role? (Multiple answers permitted)

- No not really (1)
- Working with Mental Health issues (2)
- General relationship or counselling training (3)
- Drug and Alcohol (4)
- Housing and Homelessness (5)
- Other (please state) (6) _____

Q9 My role is best described as:

- Employment consultant or case manager (1)
- Senior Case manager (has extra duties or higher/more complex case load) (2)
- Senior Case manager with staff reporting to me (please note number of staff reporting to your position) (3) _____

Q10 Please indicate the number of job seekers (caseload) and predominant type of job seekers you assist at any one time. If you assist more than one particular stream enter approximate numbers for each of the streams you work with.

- _____ Generalist stream 1 (1)
- _____ Generalist stream 2 (2)
- _____ Generalist stream 3 (3)
- _____ Generalist stream 4 (5)
- _____ Specialist stream 1 (please indicate specialist type) (4)
- _____ Specialist stream 2 (please indicate specialist type) (6)
- _____ Specialist stream 3 (please indicate specialist type) (7)
- _____ Specialist stream 4 (please indicate specialist type) (8)

Q11 On average how much time do you get to spend face to face with each job seeker

- Less than half an hour (1)
- Between half and one hour (2)
- Between one and one and a half hours (3)
- More than one and a half hours (4)

Q12 Please indicate the type that best describes your organisation.

- Small organisation (less than 50 staff) with major focus is employment services (1)
- Medium size organisation (50 - 100 staff) with major focus is employment services (2)

- large multi-site size organisation (100+ staff) with major focus is employment services (3)
- Small organisation (less that 50 staff) where employment is only one of several services (4)
- Medium size organisation (50 - 100 staff) where employment is only one of several services (5)
- Large multi-site size organisation (100+ staff) where employment is only one of several services (6)
- Other (please explain) (7) _____

Q13 At the organisation I work in:

- There is a separate position for job placement and placement support (1)
- I am responsible for job placement and support (2)
- The organisation employs reverse marketing staff (3)

Q14 Does your organisation offer any of the following incentives?

- Rewards, other than payment linked to performance targets (1)
- Financial bonuses based on job placements or 13/26 week outcomes (2)
- Performance-related pay based on caseload size (3)
- None (4)

Logic for Q 15. If 'Does your organisation offer any of the following incentive... Rewards, other than payment linked to performance targets', Is Selected, Or 'Does your organisation offer any of the following incentive... Financial bonuses based on job placements or 13/26 week outcomes', Is Selected, Or ' Does your organisation offer any of the following incentive... Performance-related pay based on caseload size Is Selected, Or Does your organisation offer any of the following incentive... Other (please specify',) Is Selected, then go to Q 15.

Q15 As you answered yes to the previous question please answer the questions below.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Disagree (3)	Strongly Disagree (4)
The bonus makes me more selective about the job seekers I give extra time to (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work extra hours to maximise outcomes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I give priority to motivated job seekers (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Thinking about your work with job seekers - please rate the following statements using the scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Somewhat Agree (3)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)	Somewhat Disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly Disagree (7)
Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I ask job seekers about their strengths. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job seekers often discuss difficult personal issues with me. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I look for some common connection with job seekers (e.g. sport or other interest) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explaining the requirements of the JSA program to make sure the job seeker knows their responsibilities is a priority. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I work collaboratively with the job seekers to develop (shared) goals (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The quality of the relationship I have with job seekers has little bearing on the outcome (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The job seekers I assist would report being listened to and respected (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I ask job seekers about what other personal issues might be affecting them (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I generally spend as much time with Job seekers as needed (10)	<input type="radio"/>						
I focus on the job first and expect that the other issues will fall into place (11)	<input type="radio"/>						
I like to include the job seeker in decision making and in making choices about various options. (12)	<input type="radio"/>						
I develop the employment pathway Plan (EPP) with the Job seekers full participation (13)	<input type="radio"/>						
The new employment services model (JSA) supports building rapport with job seekers (14)	<input type="radio"/>						
I know my overall performance and outcome rate is above average (15)	<input type="radio"/>						
Most job seekers are not really interested in work (16)	<input type="radio"/>						
Job Seekers trust me - they know that I try to act in their best interest. (17)	<input type="radio"/>						

Q17 Please use the scale below to indicate your level of agreement with the two alternative positions

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)
I work in this field because it is consistent with my social justice values : It's really just a job (1)	<input type="radio"/>					
I believe most	<input type="radio"/>					

<p>jobs seekers are - doing it pretty tough : not really trying (2)</p> <p>The organisation I work for is most interested in - the well being of the job seeker : Getting a paid employment outcome (3)</p> <p>The values of the organisation where I work are consistent with mine : inconsistent (4)</p> <p>I work in a very supportive culture : I get very little support (5)</p> <p>in providing assistance to Job seekers I start with building the working relationship : I focus on the job first (6)</p> <p>My style is best described as 'in their face and challenging": I have a more conciliatory encouraging style (7)</p> <p>I am genuinely concerned about what happens to my job seekers:In the end it's just a job (8)</p>	<input type="radio"/>					
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Q18 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements

	1 Strongly Agree (1)	2 Agree (2)	3 Neutral (3)	4 Disagree (4)	5 Strongly Disagree (5)
I focus on a job outcome above all else (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
I spend more time/effort with those that are likely to achieve an outcome (2)	<input type="radio"/>				
I have little time for job seekers who don't appear to be trying (3)	<input type="radio"/>				
I focus on the job seeker's needs more than the employment outcome (4)	<input type="radio"/>				
I don't waste time with difficult to place job seekers (5)	<input type="radio"/>				
I am tough on job seekers who don't make enough effort (6)	<input type="radio"/>				
Sometimes you have to push job seekers to get them to do what's good for them (7)	<input type="radio"/>				
I work flexibly with job seekers to help them in what ever way I can (8)	<input type="radio"/>				
I use participation reports to ensure compliance (9)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q19 What is your personal philosophy for working with job seekers and is this consistent with the organisation you work in?

(Free Text response)

Q20 Could you tell us about any model or framework you have for engaging job seekers and how you have come to adopt that particular way of working.

(Free Text response)

Q21 If you could change one thing about the way you work with job seekers what would it be?

(Free Text response)

Q22 Thinking about your work with more disadvantaged job seekers to what degree do you involve (them) in developing the pathway plan? - rather than just saying a little or a lot please explain your thinking.

(Free Text response)

Q23 Thank you for your assistance - your contribution will help further the sector's understanding about good practice in employment services - please make any comment you think might be helpful to this research. If you decide not to provide full contact details please provide state and organisation details and make sure you finish the survey by clicking the next button (>>>) at the bottom of this page.

Q24 Please enter your contact information below. Note that this information will not be released but will allow your organisation to provide performance data using your log-on ID for cross-referencing purposes. No individual data will be released to any other party including your employer under any circumstances - your individual response remains confidential at all times. In providing your details you agree to the researcher accessing outcome data from your employer.

Name: (1)

Organisation: (2)

Work Address: (3)

Suburb: (4)

State: (5)

Postcode: (6)

Email: (7)

ECSN Logon ID (checked with DEEWR - ok to provide). (8)

Appendix 4. Comparison of WAI-SR questions with survey questions

(Horvath & Greenberg 1989) Scale questions used by permission

Survey Questions - research relationship scoring	Working Alliance Inventory Question
<p><u>Goal Scale</u> I develop the Employment Pathway Plan (EPP) with the job seeker's full participation</p> <p>I work collaboratively with the job seekers to develop (shared) goals</p> <p>Explaining the requirements of the JSA program to make sure the job seeker knows their responsibilities</p> <p>I focus on the job seeker's needs more than the employment outcome</p> <p>I ask job seekers about their strengths</p> <p>Building a good working relationship with job seekers is critical to getting employment outcomes</p> <p><u>Task Scale</u> I like to include the job seeker in decision making and in making choices about various options</p> <p>I generally spend as much time with job seekers as needed</p> <p>I work flexibly with job seekers to help them in whatever way I can</p> <p><u>Bond Scale</u> I start with building the working relationship.</p> <p>The job seekers I assist would report being listened to and respected</p> <p>I ask job seekers about what other personal issues might be affecting them</p> <p>Job seekers trust me - they know that I try to act in their best interests</p> <p>Job seekers often discuss difficult personal issues with me.</p> <p>I am genuinely concerned about what happens to my job seekers</p> <p>I look for some common connection with job seekers (e.g. sport or other interest)</p>	<p>[Client] and I agree about the steps to be taken to improve his/her situation</p> <p>We are working towards mutually agreed upon goals</p> <p>We have established a good understanding between us of the kind of changes that would be good for [client]</p> <p>I have doubts about what we are trying to accomplish in therapy</p> <p>My client and I both feel confident about the usefulness of our current activity in therapy</p> <p>[Client] and I have different ideas on what his/her real problems are</p> <p>We agree on what is important for [client] to work on</p> <p>[Client] believes the way we are working with her/his problem is correct</p> <p>[Client and I have built mutual trust</p> <p>I am confident in my ability to help [client]</p> <p>I appreciate [client] as a person</p> <p>I believe [client] likes me</p>

Appendix 5. Sample of data report – outcomes by consultant

Note – the following information was provided for each job seeker on the selected worker caseload in aggregate excel format.

All		1 of 1
STREAM:	Stream 2	<input type="button" value="New"/>
CONTRACT REFERRAL PLACEMENT DATE:	14/05/2010	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>
CONTRACT REFERRAL PLACEMENT STATUS:	Commenced	<input type="button" value="Restore"/>
JOB SEEKER AGE:	20	<input type="button" value="Find Prev"/>
ALLOWANCE TYPE CODE:	NSA	<input type="button" value="Find Next"/>
COMPLETED YEAR 12 FLAG:	Y	<input type="button" value="Criteria"/>
ELIGIBILITY:	FEP	<input type="button" value="Close"/>
PARTIAL WORK CAPACITY:	No PWC	
PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT CATEGORY DESCRIPTION:	18-20 NSA/YA/STP	
REMOTE FLAG:	N	
ANCHOR DATE:	16/06/2010	
ANCHOR TYPE:	EDUCATION ACTIVIT	
BROKERED OR ASSISTED:	ASSISTED	
OUTCOME NOT PAYABLE REASON:	No valid semester da	
ANZSIC CODE:	N/A	
JOB ID:		
JOB TYPE DESCRIPTION:	N/A	
JOB TENURE:	N/A	
CLAIM ID:	0	
CLAIM CREATION DATE:		
CLAIM DATE OF EFFECT:		
CLAIM APPROVED DATE:		
CLAIM AMOUNT:	0	
CLAIM AMOUNT APPROVED:	0	
CLAIM GST AMOUNT:	0	
CLAIM RECOVERY REASON:	UNKNOWN	
JOB SEEKER INDIGENOUS INDICATOR:	N	
UE WEEKS:	123	
MANAGED BY:	Worker ID	
FULL OR PARTIAL PLACEMENT:		

Appendix 6. Investigation of other variables - Kruskal-Wallis Tests

Relationship Score and Duration in Employment Services

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Relationship Focus Score	108	75.44628254	5.836071851	62.612613	87.387387
Duration in Employment Services	108	4.00	1.708	1	6

Ranks

	Duration in Employment Services	N	Mean Rank
Relationship Focus Score	less than 6 months	13	61.73
	6 - 12 months	12	54.38
	1 -2 years	13	37.92
	2-4 years	23	48.39
	4-6 years	18	58.14
	6 years plus	29	61.33
	Total	108	

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	Relationship Focus Score
Chi-Square	6.836
df	5
Asymp. Sig.	.233

a. Kruskal Wallis Test b. Grouping Variable: Duration in Employment Services

Average Income and Duration in Employment Services

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
avg income per client	108	\$356.6721	\$144.84729	\$78.36	\$944.24
Duration in Employment Services	108	4.00	1.708	1	6

Ranks

	Duration in Employment Services	N	Mean Rank
avg income per client	less than 6 months	13	52.38
	6 - 12 months	12	51.92
	1 -2 years	13	51.92
	2-4 years	23	52.13
	4-6 years	18	62.72
	6 years plus	29	54.45
	Total	108	

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	avg income per client
Chi-Square	1.601
df	5
Asymp. Sig.	.901

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a. Kruskal Wallis Test b. Grouping Variable: Duration in Employment Services

Average Income and Qualification level

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
avg income per client	108	\$356.6721	\$144.84729	\$78.36	\$944.24
Qualification level	108	1.50	.837	1	4

Ranks

	Qualification level	N	Mean Rank
avg income per client	Trade, Cert IV or less	74	53.61
	Diploma level	18	56.17
	Degree level	12	52.17
	Post Grad BSW or Psy	4	70.50
	Total	108	

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	avg income per client
Chi-Square	1.221
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.748

a. Kruskal Wallis Test b. Grouping Variable: Qualification level

Relationship Score and Qualification Level

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Relationship Focus Score	108	75.44628254	5.836071851	62.612613	87.387387
Qualification level	108	1.50	.837	1	4

Ranks

	Qualification level	N	Mean Rank
Relationship Focus Score	Trade, Cert IV or less	74	53.71
	Diploma level	18	62.14
	Degree level	12	56.29
	Post Grad BSW or Psy	4	29.38
	Total	108	

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	Relationship Focus Score
Chi-Square	3.734
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.292

a. Kruskal Wallis Test b. Grouping Variable: Qualification level

Appendix 7. List of publications, conference presentations and submissions

Australian Senate 2011, *The administration and purchasing of Disability Employment Services in Australia*, Canberra, Written submission – appeared before the Committee and provision of answers to questions on notice 11 November 2011

http://web.archive.org/web/20120317141608/http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=eet_ctte/disability_employment/report/index.htm

Davis, S & Giuliani, G 2013, 'What did you say? Independent report to the employment services sector', <http://www.e-focus.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Giuliani-G-Davis-S-2013-What-did-you-say-independent-report-final-Dec-20131.pdf>.

Flentje, E, Cull, E & Giuliani, G 2010, 'Achieving sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged job seekers: challenges for specialist providers under the current Job Services Australia contract', viewed 23/12/2010, <http://www.e-focus.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Flentje-Cull-Giuliani-Dec-2010.pdf>

Giuliani, G 2011, 'Why People Skills Matter at the Front Line!', paper presented to Disability Employment Australia - National Conference, Sofitel Brisbane, May 2011, <http://www.e-focus.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Giuliani-Skills-at-the-front-line-ACE-Conference-2011-final.pdf>

— 2013, 'Frontline Workers in Australian Employment Services: Why Qualifications and People Skills Matter!', paper presented to Employment Services for the Future: Ideas from Australia and around the World, Melbourne, 7/2/2013, <http://www.e-focus.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Frontline-Workers-in-Employment-Services-conference-paper-and-slides-low-res-.pdf>

Giuliani, G & Casey, S 2013, 'E-focus Submission to 'Building on Success employment Services 2015', <https://submissions.employment.gov.au/empforms/archive/pages/2015-employment-services-building-on-success>