



Job Sharing as a Collaborative Strategy of the Job Developers Network (JDN)

Community collaboration in job development enhances levels of peer support, increases resources and knowledge, and streamlines service delivery. Sharing job postings with job developer colleagues is one collaborative strategy which increases the likelihood of finding the best match between employer needs and job seekers. Job sharing yields positive quantifiable outcomes and more intangible benefits for job developers, job seekers, employers, and community employment and workforce development partners.

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Abstract

Employment service providers are increasingly collaborating with each other to enhance service delivery and improve employment outcomes. Job development professionals, whose role it is to connect employers and job seekers, benefit from collaborative strategies such as sharing job postings with colleagues in order to increase the likelihood of a good employer – job seeker match. For the Job Developers Network in Southwestern Ontario, an online portal provides one mechanism to measure shared job postings. Evaluation of the motivations for sharing jobs and the outcomes of sharing those jobs contribute both quantifiable metrics and less tangible but equally important measures of such collaborations. Job sharing provides value to job developers and their networks, and has positive implications for employers, job seekers, and other community stakeholders. Funding for collaborative strategies such as these will further strengthen community-based workforce development.

Key words: job development, collaboration, employment service, networks, community stakeholder, employers, job seekers, job sharing, job posting

Introduction

Collaborative approaches to job development offer many advantages. A robust comparative survey of collaborative employment service initiatives in Ontario, by Employment Sector Council, demonstrates that the benefits include increased organizational capacity, smoother service delivery and inter-agency referrals, and a more cohesive and effective community employment services system (Wood, 2015a). Job developers, the career development practitioners who directly match employers and job seekers, particularly benefit from working together, as wider sharing of both employment opportunities and candidates increases the likelihood of a good match.

Challenges to collaborative job development efforts include: funders' lack of recognition of collaborative initiatives, a competitive institutional landscape, and a lack of effective metrics to measure shared employment outcomes of collaborating. While Ontario employment service networks widely agree that the impacts of collaborative approaches to job development are positive, providing clear and measurable evidence of such value would add credence to pursuing collaborations (Wood, 2015a). If the outcomes of collaboration strategies, such as sharing job postings and job seeker candidates, can be better defined and articulated, then the positive implications for such collaborative mechanisms can be more widely advanced.

This research explores this latter challenge: how to measure and evaluate outcomes of community collaborative approaches for job development, which is the process of matching employer hiring needs and job seeker candidates. Using the case of the Job Developers Network (JDN) which operates in the Southwestern Ontario region, this investigation focusses on the specific practice of sharing job postings by its members. This study identifies the ways in which job sharing as a collaborative strategy employed by the JDN leads to successful outcomes, the ways in which those success can be measured, and the value that job sharing provides for those involved, including job developers, employers, job seekers, and community employment service stakeholders.

The Job Developers Network

The Job Developers Network (JDN) under study is comprised of specialized career development practitioners, usually known as job developers or employment specialists, from more than 20 Southwestern Ontario employment service providers (ESPs). Job developers assist employers with recruiting and hiring needs and connect them with appropriate job seeker candidates. The JDN is a forum for job developers to share information and resources, which often takes the form of sharing job opportunities and potential candidates across organizations. By working together to better match job seeker talent to employers' needs, the JDN aims to increase successful employment outcomes, leading to longer job tenure and enhanced employer satisfaction.

The JDN is managed by Employment Sector Council (ESC), the larger network of community service providers and partners located primarily in the London Economic Region, including its surrounding counties and urban centres.

Sharing Job Postings

Although only one of several mechanisms by which job developers collaborate, the JDN has identified that sharing job postings is of particular importance for directly connecting job seeker talent to employer needs, regardless of with which ESP the employer and/or job seeker works. The JDN develops and adheres to common protocols and standards for sharing job postings across member agencies, and uses an online members-only portal to share job opportunities and other communications (www.JDNnetwork.ca). JDN members use the portal to post details and descriptions of jobs that their employer partners are seeking to fill. All JDN members are then encouraged to submit suitable [pre-screened] candidate applications from their own job seeker client pool. The portal also serves as a database for job posting information, as well as a means for tracking outcomes of the shared postings.

Research Study Purpose

This working paper presents a case study of the JDN and its strategy of sharing job postings across its members. The JDN job sharing portal provides one means to measure and evaluate outcomes achieved through this particular collaborative approaches to matching employers with job seekers. The portal offers the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from a common measurement and assessment of job developer collaboration, which is typically inaccessible due to differing reporting requirements and service referral options across service providers. Additionally, this research seeks to understand the perspectives of key stakeholders, employers, and job developers, about the JDN and its job sharing practices, as effective means for improving the benefits of collaboration.

Research Problem: measuring and evaluating the strategy of sharing job postings, as part of a community collaboration approach to job development.

Research Project Objectives

This study builds on a major Employment Sector Council (ESC) survey of the major typologies of community-based collaborative approaches to job development across Ontario (Wood, 2015a). While this work provides a strong argument in favour of such collaborations, it remains difficult to measure these efforts empirically, due to the lack of metrics for and little attention paid to measuring collaboration. Through this research partnership with Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation, ESC addresses the next logical and necessary research question: how to better measure and evaluate outcomes of community collaborative approaches to job development? Our study looks at job sharing in particular, as one collaborative job development strategy. An online job sharing portal provides quantitative outcome measurements, while

qualitative outcomes of job sharing as a collaborative strategy are also explored in detail with JDN members, employers, and community stakeholders.

This research project evaluates the utility and value of job sharing as a strategy of the JDN, by addressing the following research objectives:

- 1. Assessing the information generated about shared job postings, collected by the portal database;*
 - 2. Exploring the motivation and circumstances by which job developers choose to share a job with their JDN colleagues via the portal;*
 - 3. Identifying and measuring the array of employment outcomes for employers and job seekers which result from these shared job postings; and,*
 - 4. Evaluating the utility of the portal as a community-generated labour market information dataset which spans employment service providers, funders, employers, and job seeker demographics.*
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The capacity to confidently measure and demonstrate the benefits of job sharing as one important means for job developers to work together, can contribute to a better understanding of how collaboration can and should drive regional and provincial workforce development strategies.

Research Foundations

Employment Sector Council's research into collaborative job development initiatives in Ontario (Wood, 2015a) provides much of the basis for this study. The results of this earlier exploration are presented in the ECS's *Community Collaborative Approaches to Job Development* white paper, and are summarized below.

Collaboration in Ontario Employment Service Provision

In Ontario, shifts in occupational demand have meant gaps between job seekers' skills and employers' needs (Graham and Graham, 2013). Employers identify a skills shortage as one of the greatest challenges they face, yet few businesses surveyed use a community employment service provider to source employees (CERIC, 2014; Siman, 2016). That ESPs are under-utilized in accessing skilled candidates suggests that employers lack awareness of available services, a conclusion supported by wide-ranging interviews with Ontario's Workforce Development Boards (Wood, 2015a).

Government-funded community employment service systems are highly diverse, typically comprised of ESP organizations which can vary widely in their approach to service delivery, types of clients served, services offered, roles of their staff, funding sources, and the institutional settings in which they operate. In the absence of consistently coordinated approaches to service

delivery, and in an effort to enhance their service profile, Ontario's ESPs are increasingly developing collaborative strategies, both within the workplace (see Samuels, 2010) and across organizations.

Wood (2015a) summarizes the benefits of thirty such cases of collaboration in Ontario as follows:

- Working towards seamless service delivery;
- Increasing organizational efficiency and capacity;
- Development of trust between service providers;
- Increasing in-house knowledge;
- Enhancing the legitimacy of community employment service providers; and,
- Presenting a unified vision for employment services.

Ontario ESP networks similarly identify the main structural barriers to effective and sustainable collaboration, primarily those factors beyond the control of these networks (Wood, 2015a).

Challenges to collaboration include:

- The inherently competitive environment of Ontario employment service provision;
- Segmentation of service provision, including differing mandates, funders, and target client groups;
- A lack of employer awareness of community employment services which can contribute to a stigma against ESPs; and,
- The lack of shared metrics for capturing collaborative efforts among ESPs.

Measuring collaboration between nonprofit (Gray, 2000; Chen and Graddy, 2010) and public organizations (Provan and Milward, 2001; D'armour, 2008) is the focus of substantial research and literature. More recently, Wood (2015a) advances our understanding of collaboration in the employment services sector, presenting a systemic look at how collaboration has developed, drivers of success, and barriers to collaboration between Ontario ESPs. Yet it remains difficult to measure success between collaborative initiatives due to: (i) the subjective nature of the subjects and their close involvement in the measurement; (ii) the often intangible nature of the outcomes of collaboration; and, (iii) the siloed nature of nonprofits can complicate comparisons (Whaley, 2010)

Even in the outcome-driven structure of Ontario ESPs, there remains a lack of metrics for evaluating collaboration. For example, while service coordination is a recognized Employment Ontario service delivery category, its measurement is marked by inconsistencies. Inter-agency referrals are one example of this (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2011). Referrals are the principal indicator of service coordination, however, successful employment of a client is the measure that is "counted" for ESPs by funders. Rather than integrating service delivery networks, or measuring collaboration, this approach to service coordination acts as a disincentive to collaborate because referrals are undervalued compared to employed outcomes (Wood, 2015a). Still, an Ontario Government commissioned report (MNP LLP, 2015, 16) notes that ESPs "still clearly see value in collaboration, as they dedicate a lot of time and energy to these relationships."

Job Development Collaboration

Job development is a central element of career development, and of particular value for addressing employers' workforce requirements. Job development as defined by the Ontario Government (2014) includes outreach and the provision of support to employers, identifying job-ready clients and matching their skills to employment opportunities, supporting workplace training and opportunities, and providing monitoring and supports for the placement. Savia (2014) provides a comprehensive description of the highly complex and demanding role of job developers (or employment specialists), who typically operate within dynamic labour market environments, under high pressure to meet employer hiring needs and to find employment for job seekers.

Collaboration provides additional specific benefits for job developers. As Savia (2014) notes, these professionals require competency in a wide variety of skills and knowledge. They juggle informal, nonformal, and formal learning behaviours in order to balance the needs of their organizations, employers, and job seekers. Additionally, job developers often work in isolation; it is not uncommon for smaller ESPs to employ only one person in this position. Collaborating with colleagues and counterparts from other ESPs can provide job developers with valuable professional supports for their day-to-day work, which include:

- Increasing the likelihood of making effective placements by sharing job postings;
- Increasing referrals through networking and information sharing;
- Increasing employer awareness of job development services through coordinated activities such as job fairs; and,
- Accessing colleagues' support and solutions when facing challenges (Wood, 2015a).

Barriers to collaboration such as those described above for ESPs, are often experienced more intensely by job developers (Wood, 2015b). In particular, the highly competitive nature of their work, combined with low employer awareness of job developers' role in hiring, integrating, training, and retaining workers can lead to additional job developer isolation and increase competition for what appears to be a small market share. A perceived lack of reciprocity in referrals between job developers can lead to a reluctance to collaborate further, meaning competition between job developers to recruit employers can be viewed as a zero sum game.

The inability of job developers to clearly articulate and measure the benefits of collaborative strategies such as job sharing and cross-referrals can limit further partnerships. Metrics which capture the shared investment by separate job developers (and ESPs) into a job seeker's ultimate employment, or an employer's satisfaction with services delivered, could demonstrate the benefits of collaborative approaches to job development. This demonstration could in turn help to raise the profile of the job development field and increase employer and community awareness about ESP services. However, as the evaluation of collaborative efforts still tends towards narrative, there remains a particular need for a more comprehensive evaluation of collaboration success to augment our current understanding of how job developers work better together (Wood, 2015a).

This working paper details efforts to address this gap in evaluation of collaboration by developing metrics for measuring collaborative initiatives in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Investigating the motivations behind job developer collaborative strategies and the outcomes of their application provides a complementary means to determine if these efforts are successful. Additional exploration of how other stakeholders, such as employers and community partners, recognize and support community collaborative approaches to job development, round out this examination.

Methodology

This study uses a mixed methods approach, integrating the complementary strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Given the general challenges of measuring and evaluating collaboration, using a combination of methods elicits more well-informed conclusions (Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2015). Quantitative portal data and survey data reveal the broader trends and patterns of collaboration among the JDN, while participants' narratives provide a necessary context that frames these measures and allows for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the quantitative measures, including additional insights and new directions not initially considered.

This project investigates three different subject groups: job developers, employers, and key stakeholders.

Job developers are specialized employment service provider staff who directly work with employers to match them with the best employees for their needs (i.e., from among their organization's job seeker clients). The job developers participating in this survey were staff from Job Developers Network (JDN) member organizations, who were registered users of the JDN's online portal for sharing job postings during the study period.

Key stakeholders are publicly identifiable leaders in employment, community, economic, and workforce development organizations. These individuals have expertise in and experience with community collaborative approaches to employment service delivery in general, as well as job development more particularly.

Employers have had an open job position at their company posted by a JDN member on the JDN online portal during the study period.

The study is conducted in four phases:

1. Data collection through the portal;
2. A focus group with job developers;
3. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders; and
4. Semi-structured interviews with employers.

Each of these phases is discussed below in detail.

All research procedures were conducted with approval of Western University's Research Ethics Board. Participants were provided with a letter of information and informed consent was obtained before engaging in any research activities. All participants were informed that their involvement and contributions to the study were entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participant names as well as any organizations that are mentioned are assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Phase 1: The JDN Portal

The first phase of this study evaluates data generated by an online job sharing portal. The JDN Portal is owned and operated by Employment Sector Council (ESC) and is used internally by job developers belonging to ESC's member organizations. It provides a platform for sharing job postings, a database for job posting fields, and an evaluation and assessment tool. Its launch on February 1, 2017 provided an opportune time to examine its reception and use. All users of the portal receive training from ESC on its purpose and use, and must be pre-approved by ESC before accessing.

Currently, the job sharing database on the portal is used by more than 70 individual job developers, from 20-plus member employment service providers, who regularly utilize this mechanism to increase their capacity to fill job openings. Since job developers use the portal on an ongoing basis, targeted recruitment efforts for research subjects were not made. Rather, job developers were made aware of the study through several means, including during meetings, emails, and a notice on the portal which explains that any data posted onto the portal during the period between February 1, 2017 and November 1, 2017 is to be collected as a part of this study.

When sharing a job posting on the portal, job developers are required to fill out particular data fields, including information about the position title, sector/industry, number of positions available, location across the London Economic Region, hourly wage and type (full-time, part-time, temporary, contract), transportation requirements and/or access to public transit, as well as criminal record check requirements, among others. Required fields were determined in consultation with JDN members and project researchers.

Given the level of detail that is being collected through these postings, the portal provides a suitable mechanism to gain a broader understanding of the types of jobs that are being shared through the network, as well as providing more specific information about individual job postings. Frequency and cross-tabulation analyses performed from the sample of 141 individual job postings provide a basic summary of descriptive statistics about the types of jobs shared on the portal.

In order to learn about the motivations job developers have for sharing postings and the outcomes of these collaborative efforts, a two-pronged survey for job developers accompanied each posting on the portal. First, job developers received an email from a research assistant in which they were asked to identify the reason(s) for sharing a job posting across the JDN. The responses to this open-ended question provide information about the motivations/incentives to job share, and contribute to a more complete picture of the labour market in the London area.

Second, after each shared job posting closed (i.e. the deadline for accepting applications has passed), the JDN member responsible for the posting received another email from a research assistant in the form of an exit survey. This email asked JDN members to identify how many applications they received from other network members, if interviews and/or hires resulted from that shared posting, and if sharing the posting had any other cost(s) or benefit(s). The responses to these emails were compiled into one document and thematically coded using NVivo software to highlight key themes around the motivations and outcomes of job sharing.

Phase 2: JDN Focus Group

In order to contextualize the findings of the portal data, job developer users of the portal during the study period were invited to take part in an audio-recorded focus group to explore the motivations and circumstances by which they chose to share a job posting with their JDN colleagues via the portal. Given the dearth of available literature on collaborative approaches to job sharing, the exploratory nature of focus groups is particularly advantageous in that it allows researchers to uncover both individual and group narratives about a particular phenomenon (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). As participants discuss and explain their perspectives, they may find themselves agreeing, disagreeing, or even challenging or posing questions to one another. This allows the researcher to capture unique insights about the topic at hand, as well as challenge existing “common sense” assumptions (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011).

An email invitation requesting the participation of job developers was sent out to all JDN member employment service provider organizations. A sample of 13 job developers representing 10 separate organizations took part in the focus group. The session was conducted in a neutral location, not associated with any particular employer or employment agency.

Upon their arrival, participants were provided with a letter of information and guidelines about how the focus group would be facilitated. Informed consent was obtained and the moderator discussed the importance of confidentiality with the group. Participants were also asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire to provide relevant background information, including questions about their experience in the employment sector and their familiarity with and use of the portal. The focus group was moderated by one research assistant, while a second research assistant took observation notes to capture interactions. JDN members were asked to provide their perspectives on the efficacy and value of the portal as a mechanism for collaboration, particularly regarding its ability to improve employment service outcomes for both job seekers and employers. Based on their responses, participants were encouraged to elaborate and appropriate follow-up questions were posed when necessary. At the end of the focus group, all participants were debriefed and reminded of the importance of maintaining confidentiality. Notes from the focus group were reviewed to identify the overarching themes, and were then analyzed through NVivo software for more detailed thematic coding. The audio-recording was selectively transcribed to identify quotes from participants that best captured the overarching themes. The findings from the focus group are presented using these themes.

Phase 3: Stakeholder Interviews

Key stakeholders, identified as influential leaders and decision-makers in the Southwestern Ontario employment sector, were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews to provide community impressions of the JDN and its impact on interested organizations. These stakeholders were identified by the research project manager, and included leaders of community service provider organizations, networks, and economic and workforce development organizations. A research assistant identified their publicly available contact information and sent them recruitment emails that explained the nature of the study as well as a copy of the letter of information.

Interviews were conducted with five stakeholders, all of whom have between 18 to 30 years of experience in the employment sector. Interviews took place at a time and location (their place of work, over the telephone, and a coffee shop) that was convenient for the participant. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one and a half hours. At the outset of the interview, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire, to contextualize their responses. The questions posed to stakeholders asked them to contribute their expert knowledge of the Southwestern Ontario labour market and workforce, to this study's evaluation of the JDN as a community-designed strategy to address both employer and job seeker needs. Although the conversation was guided by a set of pre-determined questions, stakeholders also had the freedom to raise issues or discuss topics that they felt were important. This proved to be a valuable component of the interviews, as stakeholders raised some significant points of interest that the researchers had not considered in advance.

Four of five interviews were audio-recorded. One participant chose not to consent to the audio-recording; in this case, the interviewer took hand-written notes. Following the interviews, a research assistant listened to the audio recordings and drafted summary notes for each, while also recording any reoccurring or important themes. The summary notes also included select verbatim quotations that illustrated participants' salient points. These notes were imported into NVivo software and thematically coded.

Phase 4: Employer Interviews

In addition to the perspectives of JDN members and key stakeholders, it was important to hear the opinions of employers as they can be considered target beneficiaries of collaborative job development strategies. To recruit employers whose job openings were posted and shared on the JDN portal, we requested the help of JDN members. JDN members invited their partner employers to participate in a semi-structured interview with a research assistant to provide their perspectives on the process and outcome of utilizing the JDN and its job sharing portal, as a means for sourcing their candidates.

Three employers expressed interest in participating. At the beginning of the interview, employers filled out a demographic questionnaire that included questions about their current position (all three participants worked in human resources) as well as their familiarity with the JDN (ranging from "not at all" to "very" on a Likert scale). Interview questions asked employers

to provide information on why they choose to work with JDN member organizations to address their hiring needs, and their perspectives on the effectiveness of sharing job postings across the network via the JDN portal, and other collaborative means for increasing their access to suitable candidates. Because the interviews were semi-structured, this allowed for a dynamic exchange between the employer and the interviewer (Arthur and Nazroo 2003). Despite the small sample size, the interviews with employers help to uncover a range of experiences and the complexities of the motivations and circumstances by which employers from both nonprofit and corporate recruiting backgrounds work, with community employment organizations. Interviews were audio-recorded and summary notes (including select verbatim quotes) were drafted. These notes were analyzed for key themes, and imported into NVivo software for more detailed coding.

Results and Discussion

The job sharing portal, the focus group with job developers, and interviews with stakeholders and employers uncover a wealth of information and perspectives on job sharing and collaboration in the employment sector more broadly. These findings are discussed here under the following categories: (1) Portal Data, (2) Job Sharing: Motivations and Circumstances, (3) Measuring Employment Outcomes, and (4) Value of Job Sharing and Collaboration in the Employment Sector. First, a quantitative analysis of portal data reveals how tracking job postings can help provide a useful context about the jobs being shared. Following this, the motivations behind job sharing and the circumstances required for continued collaboration are discussed from the perspectives of job developers, employers, and key stakeholders. Then job developers and employers share their experiences regarding job sharing and its resulting outcomes. The final section discusses the benefits of job sharing and collaboration more broadly, across job developers, employers, and key employment sector stakeholders. Analysis of the results also emphasizes the strengths of combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of job sharing.

Part 1: Portal Data

Our first research objective is to use the data collected by the JDN job sharing portal to learn more about the types of jobs being shared. Job developers share jobs across their networks for a number of reasons, and while not all of these shared are 'hard-to-fill' jobs, many are considered to be so, from the perspective of the job developers who posted them. But our statistical analysis also provides an additional labour market information (LMI) 'snapshot' based on the 141 shared job postings, even though they represent but a sample of the wider job opportunities in the London Economic Region (LER). Further, these job postings can tell us additional information about the pressures faced by job developers.

Data collected through the JDN portal illustrate the types of jobs shared by JDN members. These details allow us to situate our findings in the broader context of the London Economic Region workforce and economy, as well as relevant LMI in this area. Between February and November, 2017, 141 jobs postings populated the portal. These 141 postings represent 567 available jobs (as many of the postings advertised multiple vacancies) and more than 80 different employers. Job postings are shared by 25 individual JDN members, representing 13

community organizations. For the purposes of this analysis, we count each job posting as a discrete individual unit, regardless of how many jobs it represents. These postings could be weighted for different, more representative results if a more robust inquiry is required.

Positions posted were coded using the National Occupation Classification (NOC) and North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. NOC codes are the national standard classification system used to categorize occupations. Likewise, NAICS codes are a cross-national standard shared between the US, Canada, and Mexico. These codes are based on extensive research and are commonly used by various scholars, organizations, and the government when analyzing and discussing information about the labour market (Statistics Canada 2012). These codes are often used when studying and communicating information about the labour market. Given the complex nature of today’s economy, these standardized measures provide a comprehensive and manageable framework through which we can understand labour market activity (Statistics Canada 2012). Throughout these analyses, NAICS codes are primarily used to categorize jobs, in order to focus on industry- or sector-related jobs.

We also provide additional labour market information from the London Economic Region (LER) available on www.Worktrends.com, a regional LMI portal, to situate our data and analysis.

Almost one third of job postings shared on the portal are categorized as sales and service occupations, while jobs in trades, transport and equipment operators follow at 20 percent, and business, finance and administrative occupations at 18 percent (Figure 1). While sales and service occupations do represent a significant percentage of total jobs in the LER, at more than 10 percent (worktrends.ca: Trends in Sales and Service), job developers find that employers turn to them

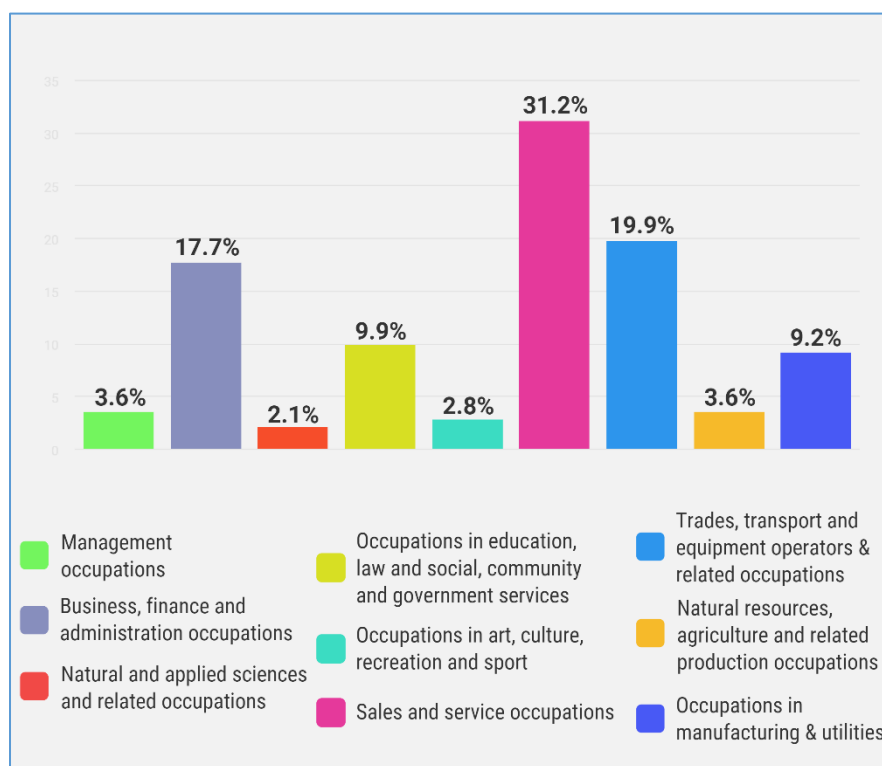


Figure 1: NOC Categories of Shared Job Postings

to fill more than this share of these positions. Job developers report that they tend to receive more retail position orders than other occupations, due to the perceived and actual skills associated with ESP client pools, which can be lower skill and entry level. The LER is also currently experiencing an expansion in the auto-manufacturing sector following several years of

recessionary decline in those positions (PRISM Economics and Analysis, 2016), explaining in part why jobs related to trades and manufacturing are the second most common to be posted.

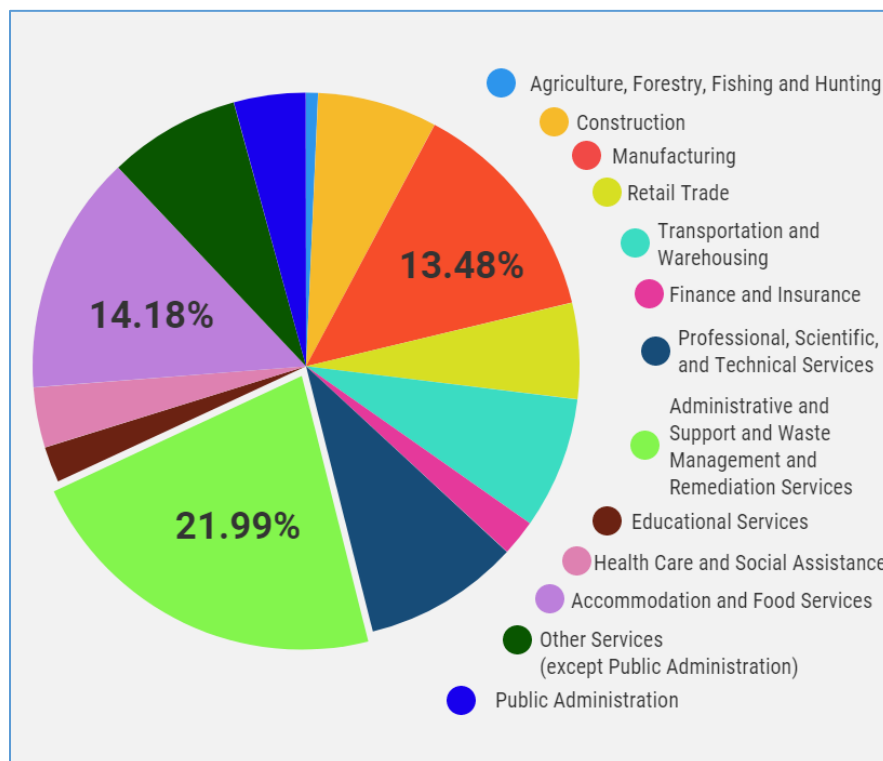


Figure 2: NAICS Categories of Shared Job Postings

Job postings represent a diversity of industries, by NAICS industry titles (Figure 2). The administrative and support category makes up one fifth of these of postings, in comparison to the larger LER which counts fewer than 20,000 of these sector jobs in total (worktrends.ca: Administrative and Support Services), out of approximately 323,000 people currently at work in London Economic Region (Statistics Canada, 2017). That the average annual salary of these jobs regionally is \$36,556 may offer part of

the explanation of the relative greater prevalence of these on the portal. Job developers report that low wage positions are often harder to fill due to being less attractive. When we examine these portal positions more closely, they are typified by part-time hours, and include job titles such as desk clerk, residential cleaner, general labour, and packing.

Accommodation and food services jobs are also common on the portal, and indeed job developers report that they often work with hotel and restaurant employers who experience frequent hiring needs and staff turnover. The accommodation and food services sector in the LER is also growing, adding approximately 4,700 jobs a year (worktrends.ca: Labour Market Briefing – May 2016).

Again, we see that manufacturing jobs represent another significant proportion of shared job postings. A recent Labour Market Analysis of the manufacturing sector supports this increase in manufacturing sector growth (LEPC, 2016):

“In 2015, the manufacturing sector employed over 46,000 people within the London Economic Region. The sector is forecasted to grow its workforce by 0.9% in the region between 2015 and 2019, requiring over 8,000 workers within the next 10 years.”

Just over half of all job postings advertise full-time positions, while the remainder are part-time (36 percent), temporary, and contract positions. These results suggest that employment opportunities considered to be precarious make up a significant proportion of these new job opportunities.

Precarious employment is defined by The Changing Workplaces Review – Final Report (2017, 41) as “work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements.

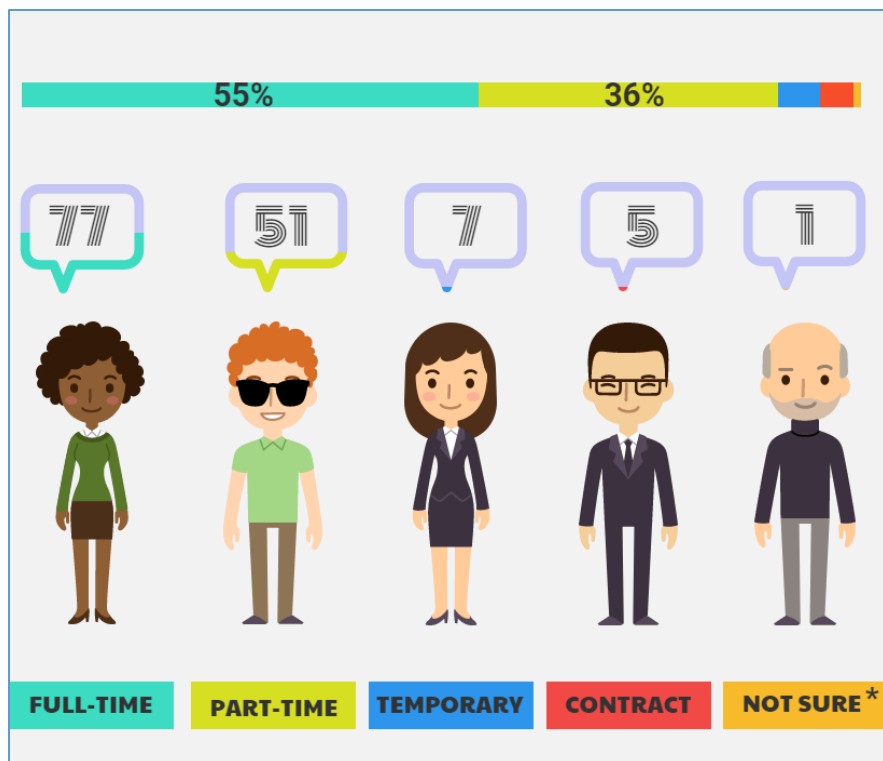


Figure 3: Position Types of Shared Job Postings

... For some, precarious employment is limited to work that has an element of contingency, and for others it is used synonymously with non-standard employment such as part-time and temporary work.”

Cross tabulation of job type with sector (NAICS) illustrates that manufacturing and construction jobs on the portal are more likely to be full-time and the expansion in these sectors could mean more ‘good’, new jobs. On the other hand, the more frequently posted sales and service positions tend to be part-time. As Ontario communities grapple with implications of precarious employment, the prevalence of these types of jobs on the portal suggest that job developers may have to balance filling the job openings assigned by employers with advocating for quality jobs on behalf of job seekers.

*NB: In some portal fields, the option of “Not Sure” is provided as selection option, with the expressed understanding that if requested, the job developer responsible for the posting is prepared to find more specific information.

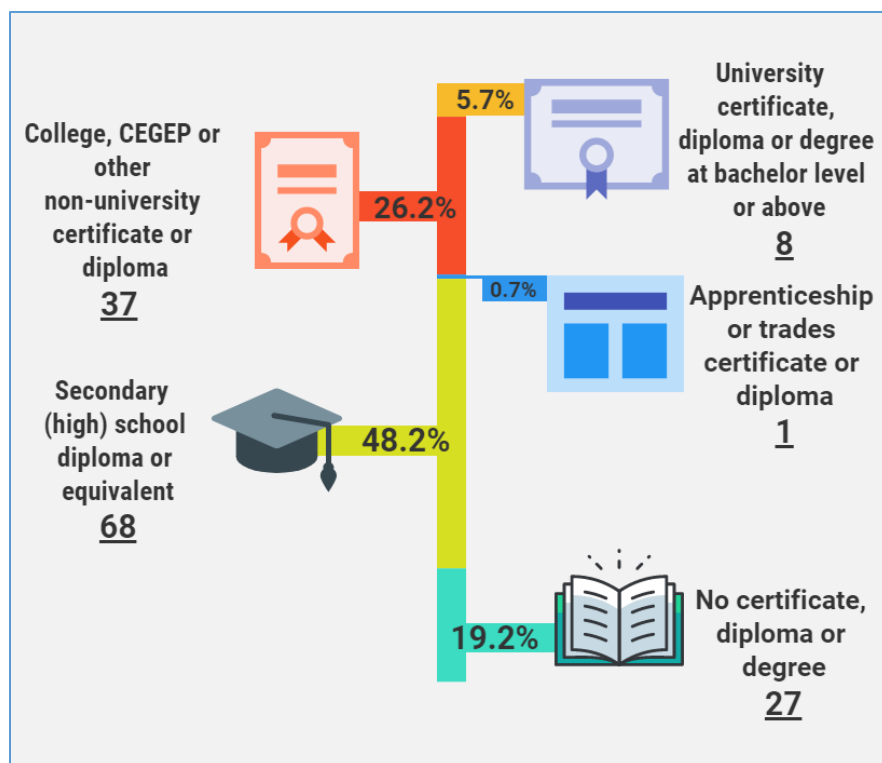


Figure 4: Educational Requirements of Shared Job Postings

Much has been noted about the workforce skills gap nationally and in Ontario. In the London Economic Region, the annual EmployerOne Survey supports the research that growing numbers of employers say they are encountering difficulties in hiring the workers they need due to labour and talent shortages (Siman, 2016). The JDN portal data shows that well over half of the job postings shared require lower levels of education: a high school equivalency or lower level of education (Figure 4).

This may seem to rebut

the notion that highly skilled workers are in highest demand but according to JDN members, these lower skill jobs are “harder-to-fill.” Due to commensurately lower wages and less security they are less attractive to job seekers. Still, we interpret the portal data to suggest that there exist employment opportunities in the LER for those at both ends of the skills and education spectrum, which is useful information for career development practitioners working with job seekers from all education and skill levels.

The portal provides geographic perspective as to where job postings are located, as well as the important role that access to transportation plays in securing employment. While job postings are concentrated in the City of London, others are based in Perth, Huron, Oxford, Elgin, Middlesex, and Lambton Counties and their respective urban centres (Figure 5). Slightly more than one third of job postings (36 percent) of job postings require workers to provide their own means of transportation, as a result of the location of the job or the need to travel as a job requirement. Outside of the City of London, there are very few public transit options. And while The City of London does boast a public transit system, several job postings are based in the city periphery not served by bus routes (Figure 6). These locations are in some cases sizeable industrial, manufacturing-based business parks, representing significant hiring potential.

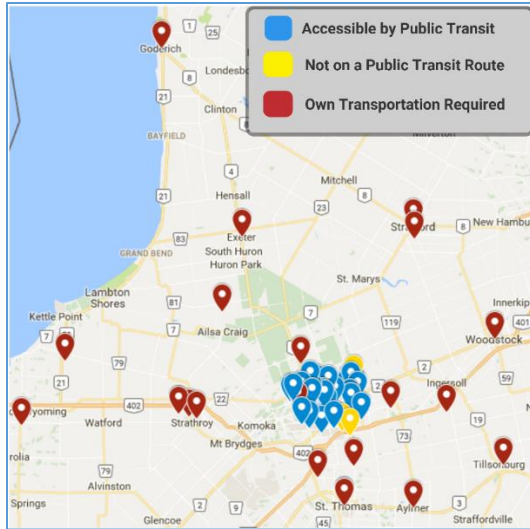


Figure 5: Location of All Shared Job Postings

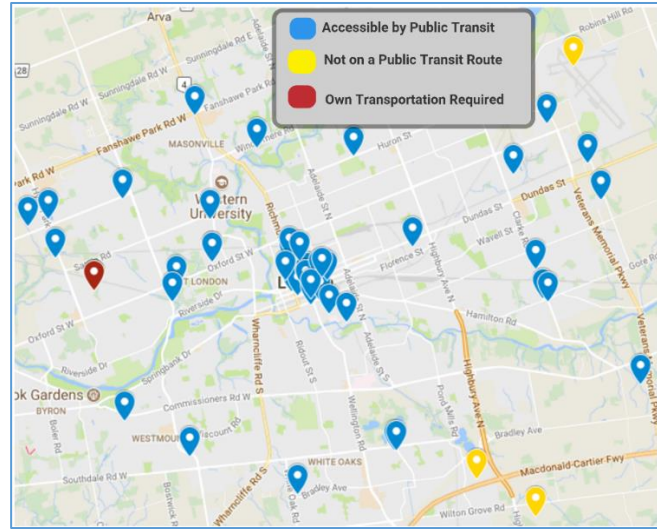


Figure 6: Shared Job Postings, City of London only

In response to the constant and major challenges posed by lack of access to transit or transportation for job seekers in our region, Employment Sector Council and its Job Developers Network surveyed job seekers who are also transit users, across our employment service providers. Our survey of 262 participants found that the majority of employment services clients missed job opportunities because the worksite was not on a bus route. Perhaps more disturbingly, in many cases they simply did not believe it was worthwhile to apply for such positions. For those respondents who were currently employed, the majority also experienced scheduling issues that prevented them from arriving to work on time or getting home safely, due to bus schedule frequency and timing (Wood, 2015c).

More recently, London area employers have been articulating their own concerns with the lack of transit access to their locations. A survey by the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) indicates that nearly half of the manufacturers in city industrial parks have limited or no bus service for their workers (Norman De Bono, 2017).

“We know that in many areas, employers struggle to get employees to the workplace,” says Kapil Lakhotia, CEO of LEDC. “There is a lack of connectivity. [Employers] surveyed indicated they are growing, they will be hiring over the next few years and the workforce needs transit.”

Struggles with getting to and from work plague many job seekers, and their potential employers in the London Economic Region, particularly outside the London City core. The portal provides us with an important snapshot of the challenges face by job developers to assist employers with clearly harder-to-fill positions: those not easily accessible by transit and those requiring workers’ own means of transportation. The JDN portal allows us to identify and capture these postings with relative geographic specificity, with wider implications for how our sector pursues transit access advocacy efforts.

Part 2: Job Sharing Motivations and Circumstances

Surveys conducted with portal users and the Job Developers Network member focus group discussion reveal the types of jobs job developers are most motivated to share on the portal. Survey responses mirror those discussed in the focus group and they are generally described as “hard-to-fill” postings. These jobs include:

1. Those with multiple vacancies;
2. Urgent need by the employer to fill;
3. Those where no suitable or interested internal candidate can be found; and,
4. Those requiring personal transportation to perform the job, including those in a remote location.

Occasionally, employers also directly request their posting be shared on the JDN portal.

When discussing their motivations for sharing jobs, job developers explain how the portal helps to ease the competing demands of their day-to-day work. Job developers explain their roles as involving a range of tasks and responsibilities that tend to vary, based on the organization which employs them. However, all job developers are in consensus that their day-to-day work could be described as inconsistent or unpredictable, as one job developer, Hannah, explains, “You can have a plan for your day, but there are a lot of fires to put out and a lot of relationships to manage.” Evelyn echoes this sentiment, “You are fighting fires every day. What is the most urgent rises to the top of the list.” Job developers explain that “fighting fires” was just the nature of the job, because meeting the needs of employers and job seekers often means dealing with unexpected or urgent situations as they arise. While job developers are constantly being pulled in multiple directions, this motivates them to share jobs on the portal, as it helps ease some of the pressure of finding candidates for such hard to fill jobs. Darren’s response provides a fairly comprehensive description of the types of jobs that he and his peers were motivated to share:

“I saw several benefits to sharing jobs on the portal. There was a quick turnaround needed, we had several positions available, we didn’t have enough internal candidates/or enough qualified candidates, plus I felt like it was a good opportunity to connect with other service providers and team up.”

Jobs that require personal transportation or those located in remote locations pose a particularly significant challenge for job developers, as many of their job seekers rely on public transit and do not have access to their own personal means of transportation. As Mark explains, “The job is located in St. Thomas and requires individuals who have a car for transportation. Many of our job seekers do not have vehicles.” Nearly 40 percent of jobs shared on the portal require transportation or are not located on a bus route, making it evident that this is one of the main motivations behind sharing jobs on the portal.

Likewise (and consistent with the findings from the portal data), job developers explain that a significant proportion of jobs they are asked to find candidates for, are part-time, temporary, or casual. Irene explains, “The employer is having a difficult time filling the jobs. They are casual hours and I think that is a large factor.” Although these jobs are reflective of the wider nature of

today's precarious job market, these sorts of jobs do not always receive much traction because they often require considerable flexibility on the part of the job seeker.

Despite the apparent over-representation of precarious positions, the portal does feature a diversity of jobs that range from low-skill, minimum-wage jobs to highly-specialized opportunities. While job developers are often approached by employers seeking candidates for highly-specialized and high-skilled positions, job developers also use the portal to work with job seekers with highly-specialized skills to find opportunities for these people.

Interestingly, one of the most salient motivations for job sharing discussed in the focus group is rarely mentioned in the survey responses: the desire to find a good fit between the employer and the job seeker. Focus group participants explained that the role of a job developer is both employer- and job seeker-oriented, and it is assumed that this particular motivation for job sharing was almost common knowledge because it is the fundamental concern of the job developer's role.

Job developers are tasked with balancing the needs of both parties. On the one hand, job developers need to ensure that the job seekers they recommend to employers meet the requirements of the job in order to maintain a positive working relationship with the employer. In this way, the portal provides them access to an increased labour pool, or as focus group participants referred to it as, the "hidden job seeker market." As such, the jobs shared on the portal are also motivated by job developers' inclination to help employers, because posting a job on the portal requires an additional effort on their part. On the other hand, job developers also need to ensure that job seekers find work that is not only appropriate to their skill-set but also something that they are interested in pursuing. Evelyn explains the complexity of this process:

"Fitting job seekers with jobs and employers is like fitting puzzle pieces together. You can't rush it. It has to be the right fit."

Similarly, Sarah speaks about the thought and consideration that job developers need to put into identifying these matches. The jobs she shares on the job portal are those jobs for which she cannot find a suitable candidate within her own pool. She has to make sure she is pairing two compatible pieces but this can be a lot of work:

"Sometimes it can be like finding a Unicorn." she explains.

Job developers maintain that individual efforts to fill jobs are not always able to yield the same results as collaborative efforts; however, collaboration can only flourish under certain circumstances. As Darren explains, "I initially shared the job posting because of urgency and also because there were multiple vacancies. Something occurred to me, though [...] I can sense that most agencies that work with the JDN do not want to "give up" or "hand over" "their" job seekers to other agencies in the JDN. In [employer's] case, she did not necessarily want the training incentives so I asked for resumes to be sent directly to her. If I were to have indicated on the posting to send the applicants my way, I could have stated also "no need to refer job

seekers to the referring agency,” and included my email as the contact, so that other agencies are more inclined to share candidates.”

In this explanation, Darren highlights an important barrier to collaboration that is rooted in the systemic issues around existing outcome measures. Job developers are required to meet certain employer and job seeker-related targets; however, focus group participants point to two key challenges that these measures impose. First, it becomes apparent that outcome measures are not consistent across community organizations. For example, for some, outcomes are tied to the number of job seekers placed in jobs. For others, outcomes are measured by the amount of government funding dispersed through particular programs. The second issue is the lack of measures in place to capture the outcomes of collaboration. For instance, if a job developer at one organization connects a job seeker with a job advertised through a second community organization, she would likely have to forfeit the success of that job seeker in her own outcome measures. This poses a significant challenge for organizations whose funders require them to report the number of job seekers they have successfully placed over a given period. As Scott states,

“Sharing is not as widespread as it could be, but this is tied to funding structure. A lot of organizations depend on numbers.”

In fact, these rigid measures (which also tend not to consider job quality) disincentivize job developers from collaborating with their peers, ultimately inhibiting their ability to best meet the needs of both job seekers and employers. Likewise, job developers explained that managers who feel the pressure from higher-ups also discourage job sharing and have their own internal sharing processes (including organization-specific physical and virtual job boards) that job developers must adhere to before sharing the postings externally with the JDN. Mark explains, “We have to get past the idea of a stat, it should be about connecting employers and employees.”

A handful of participants also feel as though there was not enough engagement from their peers, which would ultimately lead to a drop-off in job sharing. Because the job portal is intended to be a collaborative effort, focus group participants believe that all JDN members needed to buy in, otherwise collaboration feels like wasted effort. Hannah explained, “More jobs need to be posted if the portal is to survive. This only works if everyone contributes.” These views were echoed by others, for example, Mark, “If everyone posts one job a month, that would be a huge improvement.”

While job developers were motivated to share jobs, these types of collaborative efforts can only succeed under circumstances that promote these efforts. The existing system undermines job sharing across organizations. Rather, it encourages competition and an individualistic and competitive approach to connecting job seekers and employers, which works against all parties’ best interests.

Interviews with employers reveal that they are not entirely familiar with the process by which jobs are shared across the JDN. However, they do not seem to be concerned with their lack of understanding of this process because their priority is simply to find the best possible candidate

for the position. Employers are enthusiastic about job sharing and consider it to be highly beneficial because it helps to expand the reach of their job posting and improve the quality of candidates they receive. As Kim states:

“I like the idea of job sharing across organizations. We are pretty open because we have a lot of labour jobs. Newcomers, old, young, as long as their personality fits and they meet our requirements we want them. We need a broad outreach.”

However, one employer, Tess, who had recently begun working with the JDN, expresses concern with job sharing practices because she felt that job developers were not always aware of the jobs posted by a community organization on her request. In describing her meetings with job developers from different organizations she explains, “I think there is something going wrong in the flow of communication to them because they were unaware of our needs and had not seen the job postings.” As discussed earlier, Tess’s experience may be tied to the lack of buy in from all job developers and the use of the portal by some JDN members more than others.

“I believe that job sharing would be good for all of the agencies. But I think that when this is done, the employment counsellor or job developer who currently doesn't get the credit for the job placement should get some credit for it. I think the government should be made aware of the sharing. I think the referral organizations should also get the credit so the government knows that they are working together and that collaboration is happening and this is why it works. I don't think there should be a star, I think it should be about acknowledgement. It really helps the job seeker at the end of the day.”

Inconsistent or infrequent use of the portal is counterproductive and works against the needs of the employer. In fact, while discussing her perspectives on job sharing, Zeinab, an employer who frequently accesses the JDN expresses concern about how the success of collaboration would be measured by funders, and felt that the advantages of sharing should be made clear to the government:

Ultimately, employer participants are very much in favour of job sharing among job developers, as this means that employers’ postings have a wider reach, which improves both the quantity and quality of candidates they receive.

Stakeholders also identify collaboration among community organizations as an asset. They recognize that there has been a long tradition of collaboration in this sector within London, and that this co-operative orientation to job sharing ultimately benefits all of those involved, most directly, job seekers and employers. One stakeholder with over 25 years of experience in the employment sector, Sam, suggests that collaboration and sharing among job developers was its main draw:

“Job sharing is the main attraction of the JDN to employers. It's the selling point.”

Kylie, another stakeholder with over 25 years of experience in the employment sector, agrees with Sam’s statement. She discusses the advantages of collaboration, “It improves the overall

experience for job seekers and employers, and results in a higher quality of service.” With regard to job sharing in particular, she states:

“It is a practical expression of trust among job developers, because it allows them to put their money where their mouth is, in terms of acting on the collaborative spirit. As they build trust through job sharing, they become increasingly willing to share other information and help one another and provide support in a more general sense.”

Like employers, stakeholders are not particularly interested in the details of how jobs are shared. Instead, they echo the opinions of employers, explaining that simply knowing that jobs are being shared is what is important. Stakeholders also point to other positive outcomes related to the collaborative efforts of job developers, such as the creation of common service standards across a community, larger more effective job fairs, and how these various collective efforts coupled with job developers sharing best practices across organizations have functioned to raise the JDN’s collective profile.

Despite their favourable attitude toward collaboration, stakeholders also highlight the difficulties that the JDN may encounter in its attempt to bring job developers together. They advise that all organizations must be willing to commit to a collaborative model and the reinforcement of these values must come from within. As Charles, a stakeholder with over 30 years of experience in the employment sector, puts it, “You can bring people together, but you can’t make them get along. They have to develop that on their own.” Stakeholders also recognize government mandates and outcome measures pose a potential threat to the collaborative nature of the JDN. For instance, Sam and Charles both explain that in the past, community employment organizations had different target populations. There were agencies that catered to the needs of immigrants, young people, persons with disabilities, etc. However, after a shift in government priorities, specialized employment organizations no longer exist, and the result is services that are less robust than they once were—or as Charles describes it, “A recipe for forced competition.” This shift away from specialized organizations has resulted in less inter-organizational referrals because job developers need to ensure that they are meeting the broader targets set for their own organizations.

While most stakeholders discuss the advantages to collaboration, one interviewee, Elliot, also acknowledges the value of competition. He states that, “Collaboration and competition are both appropriate and useful and can benefit our customers if done ethically.” In discussing the importance of healthy competition, he points out that the JDN’s competition is not the community organizations which make up its membership. Rather, it is the for-profit recruitment organizations with which they compete. For this reason, he is also strongly in favour of the collaborative efforts of the JDN, particularly job sharing.

Part 3: Measuring Employment Outcomes

At the outset of the project, it was hoped that employment outcomes which result from shared postings could be captured through the two-pronged follow-up survey that accompanied each job posting on the portal. This follow-up survey posed questions to job developers asking them to provide any details about the outcome of their job posting, including information about

candidate referrals, any interviews that were granted, and/or successful hires. While we did receive several responses to the survey, it yielded fewer responses to the more specific questions than we expected. Still, in a few cases, job developers were able to provide quantifiable information about:

1. The number of candidate applications submitted by partner JDN members for this job posting in total;
2. Which partner JDN organizations forwarded candidates for the job postings;
3. How many JDN candidates received an interview; and
4. How many JDN candidates were hired.

Most job developers were unable to provide accurate responses to these specific employment outcomes measurements (referrals, interviews, hires), due to reasons which are explained below. Still, the exit survey provides one means to evaluate job sharing outcomes effectively and quantitatively, assuming user participation can be assured. Measuring tangible employment outcomes such as interviews and hires directly related to sharing job postings as a collaborative strategy would align well with some funders' use of similar metrics to measure organizational performance.

When asked about their low response rate to the follow-up survey, job developers in the focus group explain that it was often difficult to track results or provide follow up information when the job seeker is referred to a job posted by another organization. Community employment organizations use different indicators and targets for measurement that are not consistent with other organizations, and job seekers and employers do not always report back to job developers. Additionally, job developers explain that it can often take employers quite a while to reach out to job seeker candidates, often weeks after postings have closed. Thus, following up on the outcomes often requires additional time and effort on the part of the job developer which would take them away from their already hectic schedules. All of these factors combined made it challenging for job developers to respond to a systematic follow-up survey.

Despite the lack of response to the follow-up survey and specific questions about successful outcomes for candidates and employers, focus group job developer participants provide an overview of their experience with the portal including various employment outcomes. These outcomes ranged from receiving no response to a job posting to success stories where they were able to trace a candidate's journey to employment. Interestingly, job developers assigned positive value to range of different outcomes. For some job developers, the act of posting a job and spreading the word about an employment opportunity is valuable because even if they are unable to find a suitable candidate for an employer, they can report to the employer that they made every effort to share the job as widely as possible:

“Unfortunately, we were still unable to fill this position. I did not receive any resumes through the portal/JDN. However, the employer appreciated the efforts in attempting to find the right fit and helping to advertise/market the available positions.” – Indira

Others find value in receiving referrals for candidates with the appropriate skills and qualifications that they can bring to an employer (even if they do not ultimately get the job):

“I was able to find candidates that were an appropriate fit. I didn’t follow up but the employer was happy with my referrals”. – Evelyn

Of course, the ideal outcome is to post an ad, receive referrals for qualified applicants that a job developer can pass along to an employer, and have one of those applicants get the job.

“I did an internal post to the staff at [Community Employment Organization] to see if they had any candidates with the skills and abilities, My response wasn’t positive as per any job seekers having the required skills and abilities – and truly that is what it is about when building partnerships with employers; trying to give them the best most experienced candidates to help them build their business and more. In saying that, I then posted to the JDN portal to broaden my network in hopes to find qualified candidates to put forward for each position. My response was very positive from the JDN, specifically for the [position]. I received many resumes in return from the job developers of the JDN that allowed the owner of [company] to interview 5 job seekers and ultimately one of them got the job.” – Mark

Employers identify the JDN as one of several key points of contact when they have a vacancy, and employers generally describe positive outcomes in their experiences with the JDN.

“My outcomes have been very good when working with these organizations. I worked with [community employment organization] and I’ve hired a few candidates from them. No negatives to report. The current system is working well for us. I love working with the community and I’m all for non-profits and the JDN!” – Kim (Food Manufacturing)

“I use all of the agencies that are a part of the JDN. They are my first contact when a position becomes available. If we have an opening, I open the door to these agencies and I rely on them. [...] All of my experiences have been positive: the people I have hired are still here. When we hire people they stick around for a long time and move up in the company.” – Zeinab (Printing Company)

While two employers largely expressed positive experiences, one employer appeared to have a number of negative experiences with the JDN. She described receiving candidates that lacked the required qualifications for the jobs she had advertised, and felt that this might have to do with the fact that perhaps the job developers were not familiar with her organization. She also felt that she was not receiving as many responses to her postings as she had initially anticipated.

I was very excited about this when I heard about it because I thought it would just flood me with candidates, but that hasn’t quite happened unfortunately. I think I had unrealistic hopes. – Tess (Residential Services)

At the same time, Tess explained that she did often hire candidates through the JDN and not all of her experiences were negative, “I’ve found everyone in the JDN that I’ve dealt with to be very responsive to things that I need and very responsive to questions and such.”

Part 4: Value of Job Sharing and Collaboration in the Employment Sector

Job developers see immense value in job sharing and a collaborative approach to the employment sector more broadly. They agree that sharing job postings across the JDN is of high value, because it helps to improve outcomes for both job seekers and employers. Job developers also highlight the portal’s particular value as a marketing tool to engage employers. Several job developers indicate that they specifically mention the JDN and the portal to employers because it makes employers feel more optimistic about the visibility of their job advertisement:

“I always tell employers about the JDN. I use it as a branding or marketing strategy so that they know they are getting the most visibility I can provide.” – Marco

Likewise, focus group participants also discuss how the portal provides a useful point of reference for job developers to share with job seekers, to inform them of what types of jobs are currently available:

“I use the portal with job-ready candidates. I can show it to them and tell them that I will keep an eye out for jobs that match their employment goals.” – Indira

Ultimately, the portal helps to fill employer needs and matches job seekers with positions that they may not otherwise come across.

While job developers identify benefits to job sharing, they also discuss the value of collaboration more broadly. The collaborative environment fostered through the JDN has improved interaction and communication between different community organizations, shifting the orientation from one that was coloured by competition and isolation to one that prioritizes teamwork, cooperation, and trust. In the past, competition between job developers was much more pronounced both within and across community organizations; however, since the inception of the JDN, competition has decreased. Job developers feel comfortable seeking advice and exchanging best practices with their peers.

The network also provides a safe place to discuss how to navigate difficult situations using creative solutions with which managers or co-workers at their own organizations may not be able to support job developers. As Darren states, “Unofficially, you can work with other agencies. You just don’t tell your bosses. The ultimate goal is to help people get work”

Members who have a longer history in the employment sector can help alleviate concerns and provide useful advice. These types of candid conversations help to break down barriers:

“Even if it’s just symbolic, it helps lift the pressure off of one person. The JDN makes you feel more confident.” – Marco

“When you feel isolated and are in a position where you feel so challenged, you can have a lot of support from peers, especially those who have been there longer.” – Mark

Job developers credited the collaborative nature of the JDN as a driver for progress and success. Over time, the quality of resumes sent and received between colleagues has improved and this has resulted in a growing confidence among job seekers and employers.

The regular practice of co-hosting job fairs is another example of a JDN initiative that helps improve outcomes for employers, job seekers, and job developers. The JDN also serves as a mechanism for collective advocacy that empowers job developers and fosters a sense of solidarity. A number of participants recall situations where employers attempted to take advantage of the financial incentives community organizations sometimes offer to help place and support job seekers. Because of the collective orientation of the JDN, members began discussing the ways employers abused these incentives and formed a consistent response to such challenges.

Despite the systemic barriers that may limit the desire for collaboration, the JDN brings job developers together to work toward their ultimate goal of helping job seekers find work and helping employers find the talent they need. The collaborative efforts of the JDN has cast awareness of the many benefits of teamwork in the employment sector. As Mark explains:

“The support, resources, and connections have been invaluable. You can’t isolate yourself, it brings about a resentful attitude.”

Employers commonly discussed the intrinsic value of working with the JDN. These employers have a desire to help people who want to work, but need the opportunity:

“I want the unemployment rate to go down and we are offering good job opportunities because you don’t need a lot of education or any sort of skills to join our company. It is more of a personality fit.” – Kim

“I support the idea of helping provide newcomers with experience because it is so, so difficult when they haven’t had that Canadian experience, and a lot of employers have a block in their mind about it. [...] I don’t care where you came from, all that matters is can you do the job.” – Tess

“People just need and want a job, and this is a very good and meaningful way of doing that.” – Zeinab

These employers feel that by hiring someone through the JDN they are helping to reduce the unemployment rate and providing a much-needed chance to someone who may have barriers to employment and perhaps facing hardship.

Employers also find value in the fact that the job seekers they received had been pre-screened by a member organization:

“I believe that they have candidates that they already interviewed and they already have a job bank. It saves me a lot of time in searching and having to review applicant resumes that I receive online that are not relevant to the position.” – Zeinab

Working through JDN and its job developers helps to ensure that the employers are not wasting their time with a candidate who does not meet the minimum requirements for the advertised position. Similarly, employers explain that most of the people they hired from JDN member organizations worked out long-term. As Tess explains, “I have four people that we got from [Community Employment Organization] that have been with us for over a year.” Knowing that job developers are sharing job postings across organizations is also considered to be of high value, because this is thought to lead to increased exposure, and higher quality candidates.

Employers also take advantage of different programs and services offered at community organizations, such as co-op placements and training dollars:

‘I use agencies often because of the training subsidies and supports as well, because everyone we hire we have to train, so this is the basis for me convincing the company that this is a worthwhile effort. There is a cost involved in training, not just the person who is being trained, but the person who is doing the training is also not doing their job, so it’s more than just the person standing there learning how to do the work. The subsidies are a huge advantage of using the agencies, particularly for small to medium size companies.’ – Zeinab

On the whole, stakeholders explained that they do not have a lot of direct contact with the JDN. Participants indicated that they or a representative from their organization typically meets with the JDN roughly two to three times per year to discuss the general trends and patterns of London’s economy. Some stakeholders described situations where they partnered with the JDN to host various employment-related events or consulted with the JDN for advice about on various employment-oriented initiatives. Participants also made it clear that they were vocal advocates for the JDN. They provided everyday examples of how they supported the JDN, including promoting the JDN as a brand, highlighting the benefits of getting involved with the JDN, sharing jobs with the network, and connecting employers to various member agencies:

“When we meet with employers in the community, or those who are coming to the community, we mention the existence of the Job Developer Network, and when someone is working with a member agency, we mention that that agency has access to the JDN.” – Sam

“We support them vocally when talking to employers. We tell employers about the JDN so that they know that when they go to any agency, that agency can share the job more broadly.” – Kylie

While stakeholders are supportive of the JDN and its mandate, they also express a desire for greater collaboration or engagement between stakeholders and the network but understand the limits to collaboration under the current system. Kylie explains, “As the JDN changes there might be more opportunities, but right now [our relationship] is quite informal.”

The primary value of the JDN, as identified by stakeholders, is its ability to develop a collaborative model that helps to create shared standards and a coordinated system of approaches to the employment sector. For stakeholders, the JDN represents a model that helps to streamline programs and promote ongoing communication. The cooperative atmosphere fostered by the JDN allows members to exchange best practices and strive for continuous improvement that ultimately benefits the entire community. Sonia explains the value of having this sort of coordinated system and how it functions in the best interests of job seekers, job developers, and employers:

“There are some vacancies that no single agency can fill on their own, and that's not good customer service for the employer, so there is a vested interest in working together so that employers are not inundated by several different job developers. [...] It also helps fill positions with the best candidates and in this way job developers do not undercut each other in their effort to get employers on board, and they also wouldn't allow employers to undercut each other because some employers got word of hiring incentives that are offered at particular agencies.”

The JDN is also deemed to be as a useful mechanism to help orient new job developers to the landscape of their position by developing protocols and through their own-boarding process. Stakeholders also feel that the collaborative nature of the JDN serves as an asset to employers, because it increases community organizations' capacity to meet the needs of larger employers, thus providing them with a competitive edge. At the most fundamental level, the value in the JDN is rooted in its ability to connect employers with job seekers. As Mark concludes:

“There are employers who are struggling to find appropriate talent and there are people in the community who are struggling to find work; the JDN helps to reduce this gap.”

Not only does the JDN seek to help individual employers and job seekers, but it is also seen to reduce the burden on the social safety net.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research project was originally conceived as a means for addressing what is considered a gap in measuring community collaborative approaches to job development: the lack of quantifiable means to accurately measure the outcomes of employment service providers working together. We proposed that by narrowing down our focus on one particular aspect of job development collaboration, the practice of sharing job postings across networks, we could identify and measure specific, identifiable employment outcomes, such as: number and frequency of inter-agency referrals or how many candidates were advanced from partner job developers for each shared job posting. We postulated that if we could measure how many candidates were then called to interviews, and ultimately hired, as a direct result of job sharing as collaboration, we could use these metrics as a consistent, accurate means to evaluate whether sharing job postings is a useful strategy for improving employment outcomes. Further, we argued that demonstrating such values would allow the members of such collaborations, such as job developers and their employment service providers, to better articulate and promote their efforts to job seekers, employers, community partners and stakeholders, and to their funders. The greater the awareness of collaboration success, the more recognition there would be of shared efforts and an expansion in our understanding of what successful employment outcomes can look like.

What we find instead is that the environment in which job developers operate is highly complex and the ways in which employment outcomes are defined and measured vary so much, that it becomes a herculean task to measure every referral, to track every candidate who makes it to an interview, or sometimes to even know the employer has hired for the open position(s). Nonetheless, we believe this exploration and evaluation of the Job Developer Network (JDN) and the means and motivations by which its members share job postings, provide substantial new evidence that demonstrates these efforts work to the benefit to many: job developers, their job seekers and employers; and serve to support their community employment service systems and workforce development interests.

Very importantly, community collaborative efforts and employment service providers networks, such as the JDN, must be supported and funded by governments. The ESC White Paper (Wood, 2015a) details the effective and innovative work being accomplished by collaborative community networks across Ontario, but too often these successes are the result of disparate and inconsistent resources being cobbled together. It is worth noting that ESC's earlier recommendations to strengthen and sustain collaborative approaches remain unchanged:

- Provide sustainable funding for service provider networks;
- Use common, shared metrics to measure success; and
- Support collaborative environments for service provision (Wood, 2015a).

In the London Economic Region of Southwestern Ontario, Employment Sector Council provides the connective and administrative framework for projects such as the JDN. Membership in the ESC encourages building organizational capacity in order to contribute to a workforce development system that serves entire communities, including employers, job seekers, and

community partners. Most of ESC's member organizations are funded, directly and indirectly, by our provincial government in some manner to improve opportunities for Ontarians, our communities, our businesses, and our economy. Our network comprises employment and workforce development corporations which represent our businesses. Other members include municipalities, community service providers, post-secondary educational institutions, and school boards. In short, when the Premier of Ontario's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel (2015) tells us that, "growing a highly skilled workforce is a shared responsibility" we nod in agreement, because this is exactly what drives our collaborations. What is missing is provincial financial support to build, strengthen, and sustain the networks and partnerships that share responsibility for delivering on the Province of Ontario's goal to grow a highly skilled workforce and a resilient, inclusive, diverse, and strong economy.

Many other networks of Ontario's ESPs work together to bring out the best in each other. Like ESC and its JD, they recognize that working together to share talent, expertise, and opportunities means better connections between Ontarians, their skills and talents, and the employers who need them. Together, our networks are developing innovative and effective ways to improve our communities and economies, often in spite of a competitive provincial funding model that can pit service providers against each other. These networks increase the profile of all member organizations, and promote their benefits to employers and current and future regional workforces.

However, these collaborations and their successes often take place in relative obscurity, unrecognized and under-consulted by the Province, and often without direct funding to support their important function of leveraging the resources and expertise from their members. What more could be accomplished if our governments were to contribute resources and funds for their third party organizations to participate and thrive in such membership networks? The alternatives are the separation of ESPs, working in competition and isolation and without the significant benefits of collaboration such as those identified by this research project.

As such, we present our broader research findings and conclusions, together with recommendations for better recognition and support for job development collaborations, such as the JDN and its job sharing strategy.

A. The job sharing portal generates useful regional Labour Market Information.

The JDN portal is an online platform for job developers to share job postings. All information collected in the portal database about what are often "harder-to-fill" jobs provides useful details about employer hiring needs and patterns, skills requirements and gaps, as well as the workforce and labour market pressures faced by job developers. While the portal database is a small subset of job opportunities in the London Economic Region, our statistical analyses provide corroborating evidence in line with the major workforce development issues in this region: transit and transportation access, manufacturing sector expansion, precarious employment opportunities, and skills mismatches.

Recommendation:

We highly recommend that job developers who are sharing job postings, utilize an online portal or similar mechanism for tracking shared job postings. In addition to its efficacy in filling jobs, the

database and its subsequent capacity for comparative and longitudinal research into community collaborative strategies are worth the costs.

In the same vein, designating resources for Ontario communities to build and maintain portals, and other platforms for collaboration, is one crucial way for funders to support such collaborative processes. By supporting such mechanisms for collecting and sharing information, funders also benefit from the generation of additional, current local and regional LMI which directly reflects the workforce circumstances of the employers and job seekers being served.

B. Differences in how organizations define job development targets make it hard to measure ‘some’ employment outcomes, quantitatively and collectively.

By ‘some’ we mean the frequently referenced “client is successfully employed” as the ultimate arbiter of an employment outcome success. Other typical measures are meeting funder-determined program spending targets. While this evaluation of job sharing does capture specific and measurable instances of candidates being hired by employers via the portal, we find as well that job developers are quick to identify differing definitions of outcome success. Beyond the term of this project, the JDN will continue to monitor whether sharing job postings leads to positive outcomes, based on job developers’ own interpretation of what that means, in each individual case.

Recommendation:

Funders and ESPs which employ job developers would be well-served to recognize and support the ‘bigger picture’ results based on job developers assessment of successful job sharing success. Shared positive employment outcomes which result from staff at more than one ESP working together are important to all involved and should be celebrated and rewarded, rather than discouraged by narrow and differing funder definitions of service success. Funders should support community efforts to measure and demonstrate real indicators of collaboration.

C. Job Sharing means much more to Job Developers than just referrals and employment outcomes.

Sometimes sharing a posting on the JDN portal means finding a successful candidate for an employer. Sometimes advancing a job seeker application to a shared posting means a successful hire. However, job developers experience a multitude of other outcomes from sharing postings with colleagues: demonstrating to an employer the value-add the portal brings, reducing the stress that comes with filling large job orders or attending to urgent hiring needs, and knowing that when colleagues’ candidates are referred, they will be pre-screened, and job-ready to the professional standards of the JDN.

Further, the portal is but one means for sharing job posting and other information. Membership in the JDN connects job developers across organizations, encouraging them to contact colleagues with questions, to leverage resources, to strategize about complex job seeker candidates, to help find that perfect client or that perfect employer – and of course to share in that sometimes elusive, intangible celebration of making a solid employment match.

Recommendation:

Governments should prioritize funding for community networks and projects which bring together job developers and other career development practitioners. Funding support for CDPs to participate in collaborative projects promotes their professional development and encourages leveraging of expertise and resources via networks, for greater collective service impact. Business and program planning proposals should be encouraged to feature membership and leadership in networks and collaborative partnerships, and to demonstrate staff development and involvement via forums such as the JDN.

D. Employers may or may not [yet] know much about the JDN or the portal but they like the collaboration.

Employers connect with the JDN when they have hiring needs. Unsurprisingly, employers who participated in this research study were clear that they appreciate any efforts made on their behalf to increase the chances of finding appropriate employees. That they don't know much about the process of job sharing, isn't of large concern in our opinion. However, job developers do appreciate the value of describing in clear language to employers, that working together with colleagues from other ESPs is more advantageous than working in competition. Efficacy of ESP service delivery, combined with consistent shared messaging about the important role job developers play, increases employer awareness of and outreach to our JDN Members for services and supports.

Recommendation:

Funder recognition of and investment into collaborative ESP efforts means reaping system-wide rewards in the form of positive employer buy-in as service network partners. For example, the JDN has a much larger employer engagement reach than any of its single members or their funding partners. It's a proven no-wrong-door model for employer services.

E. Community Stakeholders recognize the JDN's value and function for a consistent, streamlined service system, especially for employers.

The London Economic Region has a long history as an integrated community service system with a strong commitment to collaboration and coordination. So it is not surprising that our stakeholder research participants are familiar with the JDN and its principles. What is quite interesting is their particular appreciation for how the JDN seeks to streamline service delivery from the point of view of the employer community. Very succinctly, anything that makes recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining workers easier and more effective for employers is to be recommended.

Recommendation:

We strongly recommend that governments add their support and resources to all manner of partners in local and regional workforce planning. The JDN relies heavily on the expertise, experience, resources, and influence of these and other community stakeholders, many from economic and workforce development fields. Their support for our region's approach to job

sharing as one means for better serving employers reflects these important partnerships and interests.

F. Community collaborative approaches to job development advance an inclusive and diverse workforce, and remove barriers that limit employment opportunities for many.

Working together removes some of the stigma that can be associated with individual community organizations, which results from misconceptions about their job seeker clients, the types of employers they serve, and the limits to what services they provide. When job developers collaborate to increase successful job seeker – employer matches, the shared success attracts more awareness, helping in turn to remove client and ESP labels. Sharing job postings doesn't just improve employer hiring, it encourages job developers to more recommend job seekers. It increases the talent pool to which employers are exposed, and supports hiring more non-traditional workers.

Recommendation:

Robust and sustainable funding and support of local and regional efforts to collaborate for better outcomes should top government spending priorities. The benefits of collaboration through practices such as job sharing include the development and adherence to system - wide commitments to diversity, inclusion, and depth of a region's talent pool. These clear and measurable outcomes of community collaboration are exactly the aims of government funded employment and workforce development programs and projects. After all, what better way to grow and leverage the significant strengths of community collaborations than to invest in those members who know what it means to share successes?

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