

From Numbers to Narratives

Understanding the Impact of
Employment Services on
Australian Jobseekers



Acknowledgement of Country



Helping Unemployed
People Find
Sustainable Work

A close-up photograph of a man's face, partially obscured by a yellow sticky note. The man has grey hair and is wearing a white t-shirt under a grey jacket. His right hand is resting on his chin, and his expression is one of concern or frustration. The sticky note is affixed to his forehead and contains the handwritten text 'LOOKING FOR A JOB' in black marker. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

LOOKING
FOR A
JOB



Does the employment services system help or hinder those it is designed to assist?

And what is the impact of jobseekers' mental health?

Foundational Assumptions of the System



Labour Market Economics

Threats and
financial
sanctions

Mandatory
participation

Mutual
obligation
requirements

Engagement with the System

Provide employment guidance and assistance

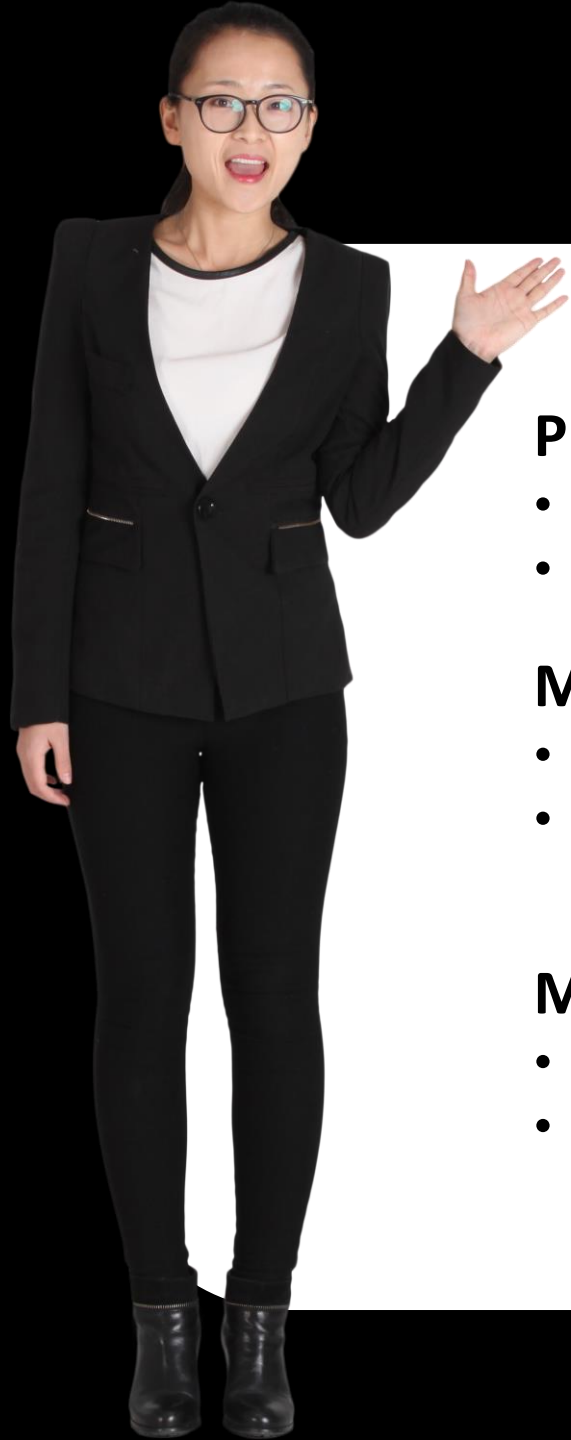
- Face-to-face engagement
- Practical assistance

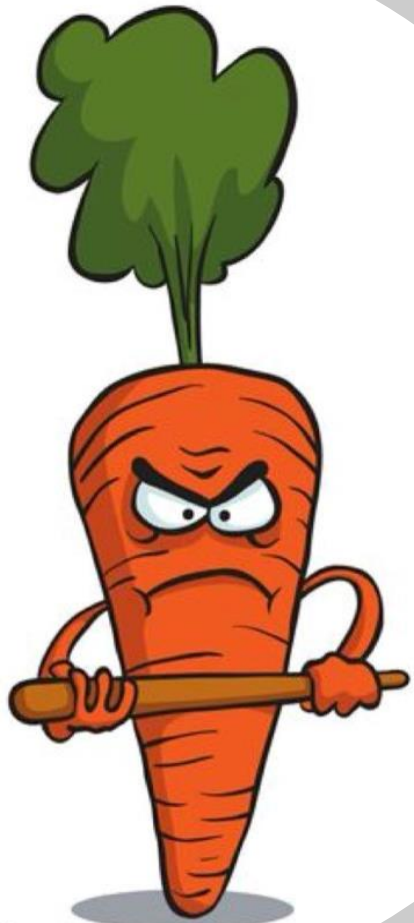
Monitor mutual obligation requirements

- Prescribed job search activities
- Apply sanctions for non-compliance

Meet 'job outcome' targets

- Pay-for-performance remuneration
- A job, any job, as quickly as possible





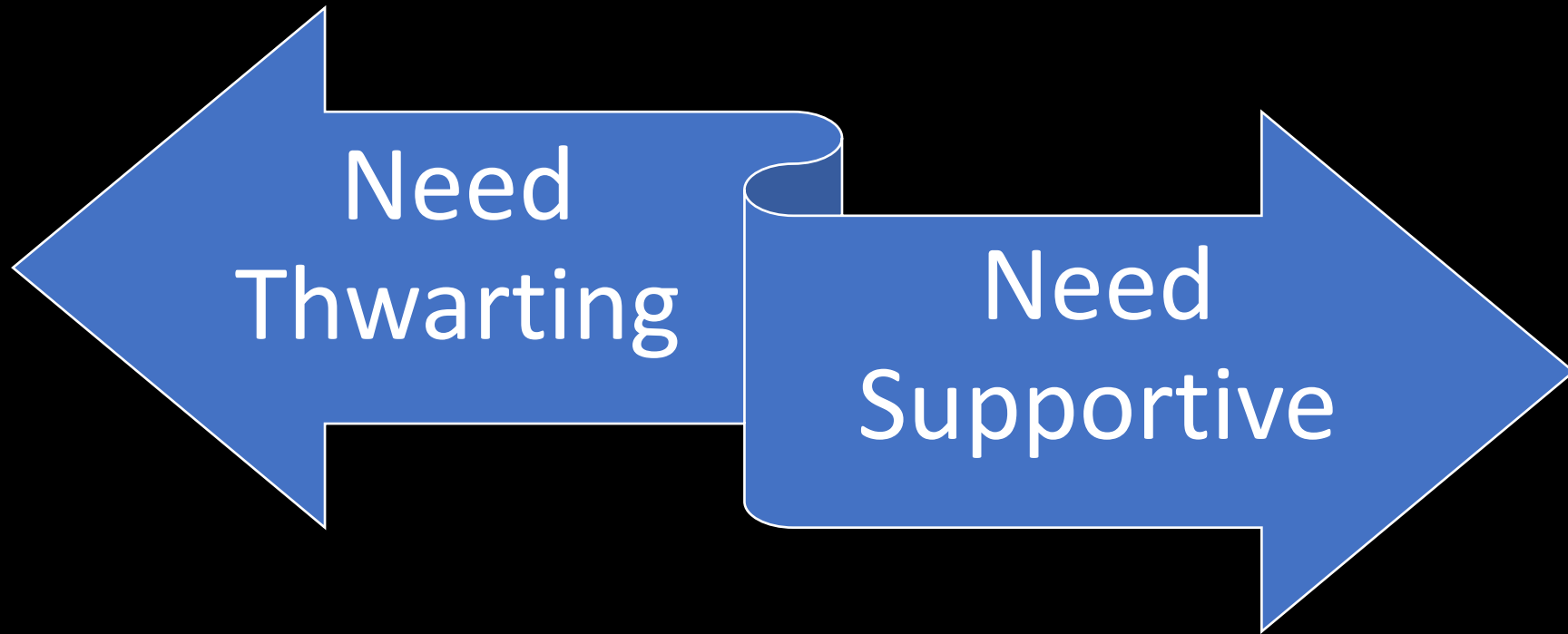
A 'carrots and sticks' model

Could we think beyond
'sticks' in Australian
employment services?



THREE BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

Engagement with ECs



Quality of motivation

Mental health



Negative Impacts on Mental Health

Thwarting **relatedness** = poorer mental health



Well-being scores



Ill-being scores



Negative Impacts on Mental Health



Thwarting **competence** = poorer mental health



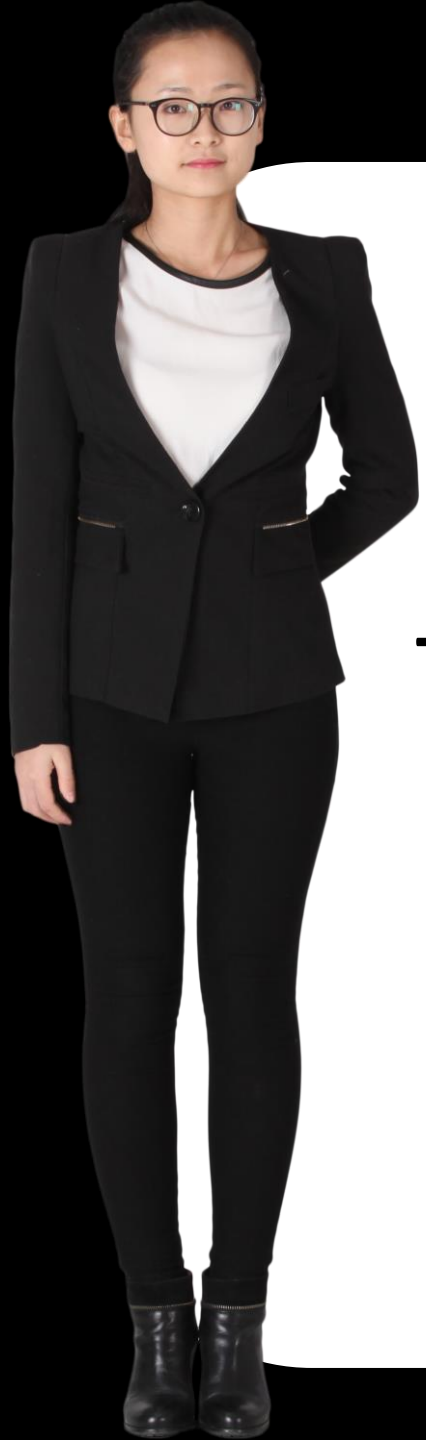
Well-being scores




Ill-being scores



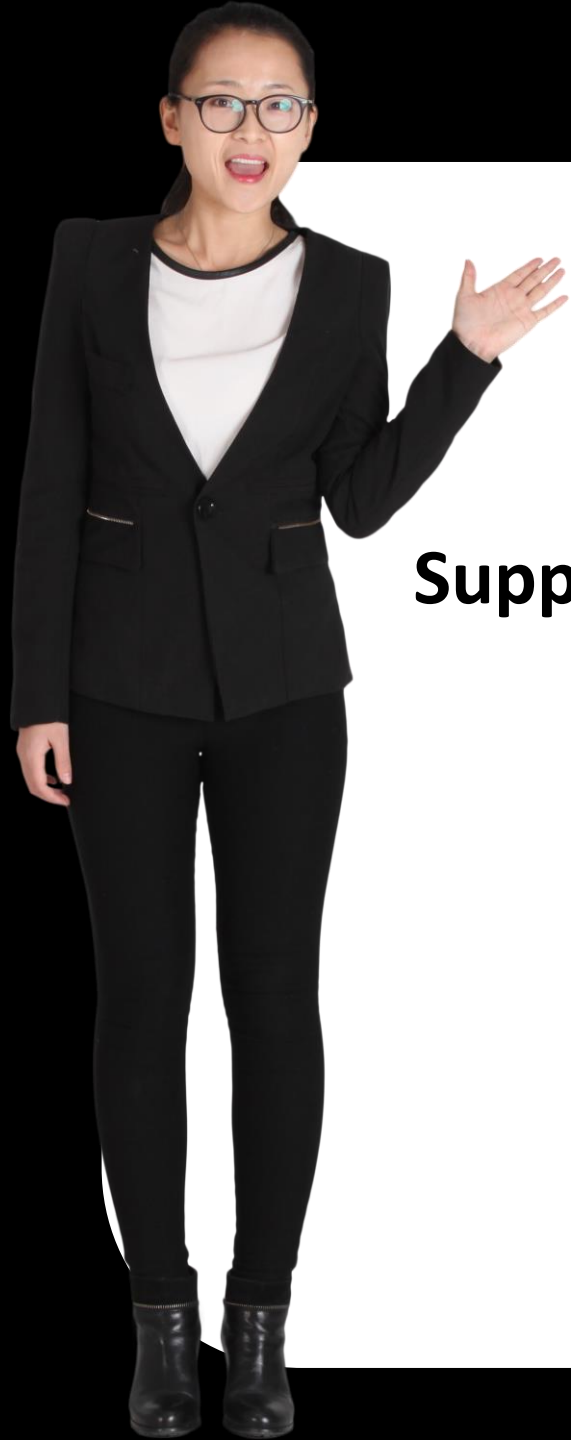
Negative Impacts on Job Search



Thwarting **competence** =  Job search intentions



Positive Impacts on Mental Health



Support for **relatedness** = better mental health



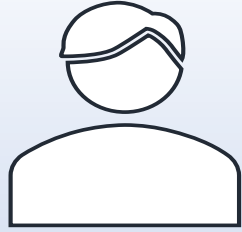
Well-being scores



Ill-being scores



What about autonomy?



Autonomy

The need to act with
a sense of volition
and self-
endorsement over
one's behaviour







“It's hard to look and feel good when you are living in poverty.”

Participant 108, age 51



“Chasing down the work”

Participant #40, age 59

Young and Unemployed

I feel so much shame as a 24-year-old man that is unemployed for such a long period of time.

I used to apply with tailored cover letters for companies only to be ignored or rejected, so I stopped sending cover letters after one year of job-seeking, and only send the resume, simply because I just don't see the point of tailoring a cover letter to companies that don't even look at my resume.

I have a Diploma of Hospitality Management, with 2 years Hospitality experience, I have a car and full availability, Australian Citizen. I don't understand why I can't find a job."



Mature Age Jobseekers



“As usual being 62, employers have no interest in even giving me a chance, use excuses such as ‘We don't think you fit into our culture’, they of course will never say because of your age difference. Or those jobs mostly advertise to say ‘we are a tight knit young team’ or such. Many job ads use the ‘young team’ slogan”.

Lack of Response



“Nothing destroys your confidence more than the thought that you are not worth the time to be contacted”



Over the past 1 1/2 years I have sent numerous applications for roles I am very capable of performing. In preparing these applications I spent many hours writing application letters and feel that in most cases they are probably not even read. Generally there is no response, it is exhausting and currently I feel I have no words left to write.

Barriers to Employment



“I know that I am not able to work a normal job the way I have in the past but disclosing my illness and challenges in an interview will no doubt take me out of the running. To be honest, I wouldn't hire me”.

“I feel we are just ticking boxes in applications. No-one is actually going to hire me when my body is worn out and I have no desk skills”



Perspectives on Employment Services



“My consultant has never called me proactively. I have received no help at all from them and I don’t think they have any interest in actually helping me!”

“...it’s also a rushed call which is to check how my search is going, no information or support is given. It definitely feels like I am just on a list than needs to be ticked off”



Perspectives on Employment Services



I've had 3 consultants over 6 months - the first one was essentially useless and moved on after 2 appointments (phone only).

Second consultant was much more engaging (still only by phone) and made multiple promises, but nothing eventuated.

Perspectives on Employment Services



Dealing with my job active provider has been frustrating and humiliating. I have 20 years' experience in my field and have to put up with being patronised by some 20-year-old who can't even manage to reliably file my paperwork and needs me to send her everything multiple times.

Being 'accountable' to someone I'd fire if they were one of the 30 people I managed in the job I lost due to COVID is infuriating.

Perspectives on Employment Services



“I am a tertiary qualified female who is repeatedly required to participate in pointless IN HOUSE ‘upskilling’ courses to make me ‘workforce ready’ (stock replenishment, check out operation, etc) have resulted in ZERO interviews and their refusal to allow the ‘training’ money to be used to keep professional qualifications or even a driver’s license - which can be used in the real world - make it transparent as to the money spent it is.

Perspectives on Employment Services



“They
don’t help”

Competence
Need

“They
don’t care”

Relatedness
Need



Positive Comments



I have never been without work. It has been traumatic. They have shown great empathy and understanding, great warmth and I am very grateful for this

My service provider is very understanding of my mental health problems and caters my job plan around it



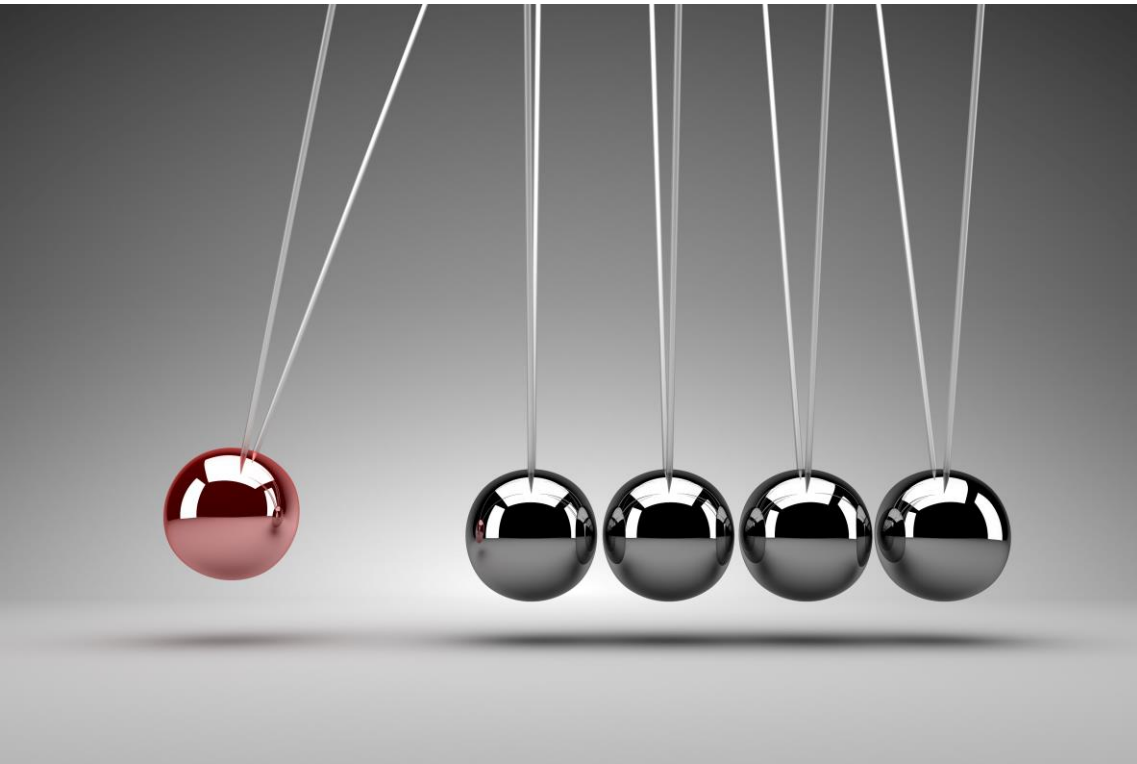
Practical Implications

Workforce Australia

**Employment
Services**



System Enhancements?



- Points-based activities and autonomy
- Compliance framework still applies
- Digital engagement and competence
- 'Enhanced Services' – relatedness and competence
- A benchmark - mental health

Your Local Workforce Australia Provider

We've been helping people like you find work for more than 40 years. Our team creates a tailored plan with the support you need to overcome your personal barriers to employment, helping to secure the right job for you!



[Find a job that works for me >](#)

We connect people to meaningful and sustainable employment

When you connect with MAX, you will have a team of health, training and employment professionals alongside you as you journey into meaningful and sustainable employment. You will also have access to a wide network of employers across the country. Want to find out more about the employment services we deliver?

[Learn more](#)



Selected References

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Thank you!