What Do Employers Want? An Assessment Tool and Manual to Increase Success Rates of Employability for Youth with Barriers to Employment

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The procedures in this staff manual are to be used by agency staff, as part of the broader services they provide, or under supervision of agency staff.
DEDICATION

To my Mom and Dad.

I hope I have made you proud.
ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment resulting from barriers to employment is an issue that needs to be rectified. To combat this issue, the Government of Canada has created the Youth Employment Strategy to help decrease the number of unemployed youth in the country. At the time of the thesis, the Skills Link program at KEYS Job Centre did not use empirically supported interventions for addressing youth barriers to employment. The Skills Link staff requested that an assessment tool be created to assess the participants’ job readiness skill sets. The assessment tool would be used to identify how the program could provide as much support for the participants as possible, and to strengthen the program by creating workshops to specifically target the skills that employers want the most.

The final two products of this thesis is a manual of behavioural techniques for intervention and the accompanying assessment tool. The manual includes the following information: an explanation of the purpose of the assessment tool and manual; a copy of the assessment tool; instructions for administration of the assessment tool, and a description of behavioural methods. The assessment tool encompasses job-readiness skills such as hard skills, soft skills, pre-employment job searching skills, and appropriate workplace behaviour skills.

The thesis focused on the development of the assessment tool and manual, and not the implementation. The intention is that staff will use the materials created for assessing participants and create behaviourally based workshops. Recommendations for further research include implementation of the assessment tool and manual, and formal feedback to assess the effectiveness of the tools.
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Chapter I. Introduction

According to McQuigge (2012), Statistics Canada analyzed educational and employability streams of youth aged 15 to 29 and found that 13 percent of Canadians in this age group were not in educational training or employment. This number known as the NEET has been an effective way for Europeans to measure youth employment rates since the 1990’s (McQuigg, 2012). By measuring unemployment rates in Canada, professionals may find that there are other issues in the youth population than strictly unemployment such as mental health issues. Unemployment in youth can be caused by unlearned pre-employment skills. A lack of understanding in how to build a résumé and cover letter, approach employers, and acquire specific skills directed to the workplace are all skills that need to be addressed. Recognizing these skill deficits is not only benefit the youth population, but employers as well. Providing skills to youth gives them an opportunity to give the employers good quality employees to ensure growth within their business and limits wasting time constantly training employees. It also provides young people with the basics to remain employable. There are certain skills that employers look for when hiring new employees such as dressing appropriately, being on time, and knowing how to do the job. Not all people are equipped or able to learn the skills required for employment or even searching for a job.

Obtaining employment is a challenge that many people face and is especially an issue among youth aged 15 to 30 (North, Mallabar and Desrochers, 1988). Unemployment in the youth population has been an ongoing issue (North, Mallabar and Desrochers, 1988). Even today, youth have more difficulties finding employment than their older counterparts. Young persons who have difficulty obtaining employment are called “difficult-to-place” individuals, meaning they struggle with finding employment and being able to maintain the employment for long periods of time (Feintuch, 1955). People who have trouble obtaining and maintaining a job may have difficulty doing so because of lack of training or behavioural skills sets. Some issues that youth might experience are homelessness, behavioural skill deficits, mental health issues, medical health issues, and self-esteem. Feintuch (1955) advised that professionals who help aid others in employability should address skills that employers want and require in the workforce. In the mid 50’s, the best way to help young persons achieve success in finding a job was to create sheltered workshops, where basic skills sets were taught to the participants in order to help them overcome their barriers to employment (Feintuch, 1955). Today, pre-employment programs include sheltered workshops in order to convey and deliver important skill-building information. Many agencies still use sheltered workshops and are very successful in aiding participants in obtaining employment. In many of these workshops, participants learn pre-employment skills such as resume building, job search skills, workplace appropriate behaviour, and conflict resolution.

Reinforcement-based programs have been shown to be highly effective in other areas of functioning such as increasing and reinforcing participation in job-related activities (Petry, Andrade, Rash & Cherniack, 2013). The authors stated that reinforcement based approaches could improve quality of life since employment can decrease substance use in clients that are substance dependent (Petry et al., 2013). Employment is positively reinforcing for clients because they are rewarded for their services in paychecks and verbal positive reinforcement (Petry et al., 2013). Petry, Andrade, Rash and Cherniack (2013) stated that people who are chronically unemployed might benefit from programs or interventions that are based on positive reinforcement. Petry et al., (2013) stated that “job-seeking behaviours” such as searching for job
postings, developing a resume, as well as completing job applications, and that these behaviours should be reinforced.

It is hypothesized that creating an assessment tool, to be completed by participants before entering employment skills training, could provide information about which pre-employment skills each participant already has. Once the participants have completed the program, they will take the assessment tool again. This post-training assessment will provide information to the workshop facilitators regarding the skill level of each participant, and thereafter be able to address these concerns. Skills that were not previously taught in the program, but are shown to be applicable to enhancing participant success, can be added to the program at a later date.

Including positive reinforcement techniques, constructive feedback, modeling and redirection can provide structure for participants and reinforcement for correct behaviours. The goal of the thesis is to develop a manual and an assessment tool for participants and staff to use during employment skills workshops. The manual and assessment tool will be used to increase skill building behaviour, increase the number of youth employed from the program, and provide basic pre-employment skills for post program employability.

Basing the assessment tool on the skills employers need in new employees and most recent literature supporting these ideas, major skills sets will be addressed in the manual and assessment tool. The pre-employment skills included in the assessment tool and manual will be job readiness skills such as job-seeking strategies, applying for jobs, resume and cover letter building, interview skills, managing finances, conflict resolution skills, problem solving within the workplace, keeping motivated, goal setting, and behavioural contracting. This thesis provides an overview of building skills related to the workforce using behavioural techniques for youth. In addition, this thesis is intended to improve current workshops by providing a list of what skills employers want in young employees as well as bringing in skill sets that can be built into the program at a later date. Due to time constraints, the assessment tool and user manual were not implemented; however, they were left with the agency to be used at a later date.

The thesis provides a review of literature on what skills employers’ want, as well as behavioural methods used to increase positive behaviour and motivation to obtain employment and remain employed. Methods on how to use the assessment tool and manual are provided as well as a discussion on what population the manual will be directed towards. The thesis final product includes the facilitators manual to be used in conjunction with the assessment tool, and is to be used at the discretion of the facilitators whenever applicable. A summary of the thesis as well as limitations and recommendations is included in the discussion.
Chapter II. Literature Review

Unemployment and Crime

Researchers have recognized that there is a link between unemployment and crime (Baron, 2008). Baron (2008) stated that unemployment is regulated by external variables. Unemployment itself can be a motivating factor for one to commit crime in order to surmount financial problems (Baron, 2008). Frustration due to unemployment coupled with a lack of support systems, a decrease in control over one’s situation and living arrangements, peer pressure, a lack in punishment systems and deviant values may be a large factor in an individual’s decision to commit crime (Baron, 2008). People’s emotions and negative experiences related to unemployment can determine their behaviour towards crime (Baron, 2008). Crime is also more likely to be an issue in places where there is little value placed on employment, little effort is placed in finding work and when no commitment to finding employment is present (Baron, 2008).

Pre-employment Skills: Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills

Hard skills are learned behaviours relative to work experience and functioning, and are specific to individual jobs (Coates, 2004). Hard skills are also behaviours that are mechanically performed and can be observed, recorded, and measured; for example, woodworking and use of point of sales equipment are hard skills (Coates, 2004). Coates (2004) stated that these skills or behaviours are acquired through training. North, Mallabar and Desrochers (1988) reported that in order to enhance employability, the following skills are needed: basic educational skills, work maturity, pre-employment and marketable skills. Basic educational skills include reading, writing, speaking and basic math and computation ability (North, Mallabar & Desrochers, 1988). North et al., (1988) stated that work maturity is a valuable skill that is learned over time and is the ability for one to work in the given environment and interact with co-workers using appropriate behaviour. Pre-employment skills include job searching, applying to jobs, creating a resume and cover letter, as well as interview techniques (North et al., 1988). Marketable skills encompass other skills that are relevant to the specific job or trade. Skills specific to jobs may involve knowing how to use a particular cash system or specific safety protocols (North et al., 1988).

Not all skills are concrete abilities that one can teach or be taught easily, these other skills are known as “soft skills” or “people skills” (Coates, 2004). According to Bissonnette (2004), there are some skills that can enhance professional growth and development such as assertiveness, decision-making, listening, gathering research, working well in a team, learning another language, public speaking, organization and planning, negotiation, supervision, giving and receiving feedback, networking, time management, setting goals, stress and behaviour management, the ability to learn, customer service, and working independently.

Soft Skills, also called “people skills” are harder to observe and measure (Coates, 2004). Soft skills include communication skills, listening skills, cooperating with others, problem solving skills, and conflict resolution (Coates, 2004). These skills are not taught in school, but are learned behaviours from colleagues (Coates, 2004). Since everyone’s experiences are different, so are their skill sets (Coates, 2004). Although many behaviours or skill levels are effective in the workplace and in everyday life, others may cause problems and interfere with work (Coates, 2004). North et al., (1988) stated that youth gain these skills in everyday tasks that are given to them to complete and are then reinforced for the completion of such tasks. Pre-
employment skills are learned through everyday interactions with others however, when these important behaviours are not learned, interventions in the form of skill development programs are needed.

Pre-employment skills are linked to independent living and contribute to a young person's ability to be financially self-sufficient (North et al., 1988). If they are unable to support themselves financially, youth and young adults will need to depend upon others including government supports to take care of them (North et al., 1988). It is important that skills are learned through cognitive interventions and then put into practice in order to properly prepare the individual for employment (North et al., 1988). Although job readiness skills are important and need to be in place in order for employability, interventions that are designed to establish good work ethic, integrity and responsibility can be disregarded by participants because of the belief that employment is not as important as spending time elsewhere (Tonkin, Dickie, Alemagno & Grove, 2004). Tonkin, Dickie, Alemagno and Grove (2004) noted that interventions based on addressing “soft skills” are effective in changing behaviour and building skills.

The American Society for Training and Developments (ASTD) and the Department of Labor found a number of essential skills that are desired by employers, seven domains were found (Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer, 1990 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). These seven domains are basic skills in reading, writing, math, problem solving, creative thinking, self-esteem, motivation, goal setting, planning development in career advancement, and communication (Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer, 1990 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). The authors also stated that the Michigan Employability Skills Employer Survey identified three major skill domains: academics, personal management and teamwork (Employability Task Force, 1988, 1989; Mehrens, 1989 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). Academic skills include basic knowledge of reading, communication, math, problem solving, gathering information and logical thinking (Employability Task Force, 1988, 1989; Mehrens, 1989 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). Personal management skills consist of honesty, integrity, responsibility for oneself, pride in ones work, self-control, following directions, adaptability to learning new skills and being involved in the job (Employability Task Force, 1988, 1989; Mehrens, 1989 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). Teamwork skills include the ability for the employee to function in a changing environment and solve problems as a team. This also involves the ability for the new employee to work well with organizational norms and work well with others who might be challenging to get along with (Employability Task Force, 1988, 1989; Mehrens, 1989 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004).

The Basic and Expanded Basic Skills: NYSDE study conducted by business owners, scholars and educators, identified two skill domains as mathematics and language (The New York State Education Department, 1990 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). Other expanded skills include listening and speaking skills, reading to gain knowledge, analyzing information, evaluating situations, writing to express oneself, social interaction, basic mathematics operations and logic, statistics, algebra and geometry (The New York State Education Department, 1990 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). The NYSDE also included personal and interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, utilizing information systems, priority setting, appropriate work behaviour, responsibility, and general handiness (The New York State Education Department, 1990 as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004).

High Schools and the Changing Workplace: The Employer's View (NAS) identified necessary skills for employment as ten “core competencies” that all workers should have to be employable (O'Neil, Alfred, and Baker, 1997, as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004). These ten core
competencies include speaking English (or predominant language of where the individual lives), problem solving, reading, writing, mathematics, science and technology, oral communication, rights and responsibilities of workers and basic economic knowledge, good work habits (positive attitudes, a desire to learn, responsibility, ability to work independently and in groups, good personal hygiene, and sobriety from substance use) and interpersonal skills (O’Neil, Alfred, and Baker, 1997, as cited in Tonkin et al., 2004).

Bissonnette (2004) stated that there are 15 essential behaviours needed in order for new employees to be ready for work and to behave on the job. Having good personal hygiene including being prepared for work with clean clothes is a behaviour that needs to be addressed before someone is ready for work (Bissonnette, 2004). It is necessary for employees to remain abstinent from drugs and alcohol before and during work hours (Bissonnette, 2004). Employees must be able to follow company rules and regulations, show up to work on-time and ready to work, relate to co-workers and be friendly to customers, manage moods, be willing to speak up when problems arise, admit when mistakes are made, be able to receive constructive feedback and change behaviours accordingly to the feedback, continuously strive to maintain productivity on the job, meet performance standards, be honest and loyal to the company and refrain from stealing from the company and co-workers (Bissonnette, 2004).

Employment counsellors recognize there is a demand for communication skills in the workforce and that for people to be successful in the workplace they must be able to communicate effectively with their employers and other co-workers (Stevens, 2005). The use of language, both orally and written, is a highly sought-after skill that employers want (Stevens, 2005). Stevens (2005) stated that as technology intensifies the need for employees to communicate quickly and effectively by email, over the phone, letters, reports, meetings and handheld devices, increases. The Silicon Valley studied 104 employers on the satisfaction of the communication skills of the most recently hired employees, all of which were recent college graduates (Stevens, 2005). The employers in the study noted that they were overall dissatisfied with the communication skills of their new employees and recommended that the students should obtain more training in communication skills as well electronic media, self-expression and portraying a more positive self-image (Stevens, 2005). Given the importance of communication skills, new employees should be clear and concise in their writing (Stevens, 2005). The authors recommended spending time editing, using correct grammar, and proper speaking patterns to reduce the use of slang and derogatory terms (Stevens, 2005).

Maes, Weldy, and Icenogle (1997) stated that a skill is the ability for one to perform a particular behaviour or cognitive ability to complete a task that has become a routine. These behaviours are learned from consistent training or experience. A survey performed in the Gulf Coast reported that being self-motivated, having excellent communication skills, and having the ability to problem solve are highly sought after in the workplace (Maes, Weldy & Icenogle, 1997). The authors also stated that being able to follow instructions, listen and engage in conversation are also required (Maes et al., 1997). Employees at entry-level positions are not the only ones who need communication and soft skills training, managers who spend the majority of their time interacting with people should be provided with interpersonal sensitivity skills training as well as communication and soft skills training (Stewart, 1967).

Donovan and Williams (2003) stated that when people fail to reach goals they have set for themselves, they have a tendency to set easier goals for themselves in the future. Setting goals and receiving feedback on performance is important to an individual’s intent to complete a task (Chen, Thomas & Wallace, 2005). Goals are either process or outcome oriented and include
gaining information, motivation or an activity to be accomplished (Amundson, 1994). Process goals are usually internally influenced whereas outcome goals are externally pushed; clarifying this in career and job searches can help clients focus on what goal setting they should focus on (Amundson, 1994). Setting process goals, to accomplish before employment, can help youth achieve information and skills required for employment (Amundson, 1994). It is recommended that setting smaller objectives to accomplish within a greater goal of employment can provide people with a sense of success upon completion of each smaller objective.

Maes et al., (1997) stated that competency is the aptitude for one to engage in behaviours that are not routine; it is a cognitive ability or skill that allows one to cope or react to the change of environment. In residential treatment, youth workers are required to provide constructive problem solving skills and work with changing environments and behaviours (Pazaratz, 2000). Working alone and within a team is an important part of problem solving when issues arise (Pazaratz, 2000). Pazaratz (2000) stated that not every worker is able to effectively react to the changing environment and demands of residents. Receiving training to more effectively manage pathological behaviours, working in teams, utilizing information from others, behaving like role models and understanding principles of normalization can help with the core competency to problem solve in difficult situation (Pazaratz, 2000). This concept can be applied to other areas of functioning such as learning how to problem solve by learning how to utilize the surroundings and modeling others’ behaviours when being trained for specific jobs.

**Behavioural Skills Training**

Behavioural skills training related to employment can be used with groups of people who need to learn similar skills or behaviours. These behavioural skills can range from conflict resolution to resume building (Miltenberger, 2008). Miltenberger (2008) stated that is more effective when conducted in small groups and when all members participate equally. Modeling and role-play techniques are used to teach the new skill, then each member of the group rehearses the new skill or behaviour and doing so gives each participant the chance to see mistakes made by other members and learn from the redirection by the facilitators (Miltenberger, 2008). Although group behavioural skills training can be an effective way to create new behaviours and skills, trainers or facilitators do not always have the undivided attention of the participants (Miltenberger, 2008). When the participants do not pay attention and participate in the learning new skills, it may distract others from participating and learning (Miltenberger, 2008).

The strategies used to ensure that behavioural skills training is effective are identifying the skills that need to be taught and all behaviours that need to be learned and conducting a task analysis of complex skills, which are called behavioural chains (Miltenberger, 2008). Facilitators must identify all situations in which the skills are used, then assess the learner’s skill level, and then begin the new training at the easiest level that the participant(s) can perform (Miltenberger, 2008). Facilitators must model the new behaviour in the appropriate context and use role-play with other participants, and then have the participants practice the behaviour in the appropriate context (Miltenberger, 2008). Facilitators must also provide positive reinforcement and feedback for appropriate behaviour and if needed provide instructions and feedback for when behaviour needs to be improved (Miltenberger, 2008). Once the participants have mastered the behaviour, the facilitator should move on to the next behaviour until all are mastered and the skill has been successfully learned in one situation (Miltenberger, 2008). Once the behaviour has been learned in one situation, the behaviour or skill needs to be practiced in
new situations to ensure generalization, this will ensure that the skill can be used in various settings and for multiple purposes (Miltenberger, 2008).

Positive Reinforcement and Motivation

When a steady paycheck is not enough to motivate an employee to remain working, rewards programs can be used to engage employees in their work (Scott and McMullen, 2010). Reward programs differ from reinforcement because they are not based on monetary payment. A reward program can include non-financial incentives, employee input, and the use of opinion surveys to gain employee insight and change, as well as specific pay programs (Scott and McMullen, 2010). Self-efficacy is more likely to develop when an employment service provides encouragement and reinforcement based on positive emotional states, and when the participant has accomplished successful attempts at mastering new skills (McDonald and Marston, 2008). When self-efficacy is increased, motivation to become employed and remain employed increases as well (McDonald and Marston, 2008).

Reinforcement is used to strengthen behaviour by administering an immediate consequence that follows the occurrence of the behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). Positive reinforcement assures that behaviour will be strengthened over time and will be more likely to occur in the future (Miltenberger, 2008). When building skills and striving to achieve goals, it is important for positive reinforcement to be utilized in order to increase the skill mastery. It would be optimal for automatic positive reinforcement to be built into an intervention or workshop for completion of tasks related to finding employment.

Since all behaviour patterns are learned, over time it becomes increasingly more and more difficult to break those routines (Coates, 2004). It is understandable why some people revert back to old ways of behaving and using their ineffective skills (Coates, 2004). Replacing old behaviours with new ones by using reinforcement to support the new behaviours is an effective way to increase productivity (Coates, 2004). When a participant displays more productive behaviours such as arriving to workshops on time, reinforcing this more advantageous behaviour in a workshop setting will help the individual upon returning to the workforce because they will have learned that arriving on time is rewarded in the workplace (Coates, 2004).

Shaping and chaining can also be used to teach new skills by first breaking down a skill into smaller and more manageable behaviours, this is called a task analysis (Miltenberger, 2008). Shaping and chaining pertain to the implementation of the result of the task analysis (Miltenberger, 2008). Forward chaining can be used by teaching one component of the behaviour at a time, starting with the first component of the behaviour and then providing the participant or learner with reinforcement once the behaviour has been learned, subsequently modeling and reinforcing the next behaviour until all behaviours in the chain are learned (Miltenberger, 2008). Total task presentation can be used to show how the skill is performed, first, and then, break the skill down by task analysis (Miltenberger, 2008). Prompting is used to increase the probability that someone will engage in a wanted behaviour at the appropriate time (Miltenberger, 2008). A prompt is used to elicit an appropriate behaviour and a reinforcer can be administered after the appropriate behaviour has been displayed (Miltenberger, 2008).

Modeling and Giving Constructive Feedback

Modeling is demonstrating the correct behaviour the learner is to acquire (Miltenberger, 2008). The learner must be able to pay attention to the behaviour being demonstrated and then
be able to perform the behaviour or new skill (Miltenberger, 2008). When teaching new skills, the model should give a reinforcer similar to the reinforcer that the learner will be receiving in the workforce in order to be effective in creating the new behaviour pattern (Miltenberger, 2008). Miltenberger (2008) stated that constructive feedback for incorrect behaviour when learning a new skill should be given immediately; always involve praise or reinforcement for correct behaviour, and a statement about what could be improved upon. Providing the participant with feedback on incorrect behaviour by stating both what the participant did correctly and what needs to be improved upon and then modeling the appropriate behaviour again (Miltenberger, 2008).

Youth unemployment rates in Canada are significantly high. Simply being younger than 30 years of age can be a barrier to employment (McQuigge, 2012). Adding to this, there are many skills and behaviours that employers want to see in new employees that people may not have acquired yet because of youth and inexperience, which increase the number of unsuccessful attempts at becoming employed. Many skills are not taught in the natural environment and therefore need to be trained. In sheltered workshops, providing behavioural skills training can enhance skill mastery and provide participants with the skills necessary to be successful in the workforce. The authors in the literature reviewed here summarize general skills or behaviours that employers want in new employees. Many of these behaviours are prerequisites to future learning within the workplace and are therefore needed to maintain employment. The literature provides knowledge on how to train new skills to youth and encompasses what employer’s need in new employees.

The literature reviewed in this thesis provided insight on basic behavioural techniques that can be applied to the employment field. The literature from Baron (2008) discussed the importance of creating a positive view surrounding employment at an early age. Programs aimed at increasing youth employment do so by providing positive views on employment, as well as a safe and nurturing environment, to learn these necessary pre-employment skills. These influences can help aid in deterring youth from crime by providing strong support networks and financial assistance while they learn.

By providing information about basic behavioural principles and step-by-step guides to implementing these procedures, project coordinators can acquire skills used by many other professionals to help aid in the success the participants in their program. The behavioural techniques described within this literature review are based on clinically demonstrated effective interventions for behaviour change and can be applied to many different populations.
Chapter III: Method

Participants

The assessment tool and manual are to be used with the purpose of helping youth who have issues overcoming barriers to employment. Participants must be between ages 15 and 30 and have one or more barriers to employment to be accepted into the skill-building program. Barriers to employment include one or more of the following criterion: non-completion of a Secondary School Diploma, low levels of numeracy and literacy abilities, language barriers such as not speaking the language of majority, health concerns, drug issues, abuse issues, residence in a rural or isolated location, been fired from a job, quit a job without telling the employer, a record of long-term unemployment, involvement in the criminal justice system, collect welfare or other social assistance programs, at-risk of becoming homeless or homelessness, lack of social supports from friends, family or community, self-disclosed disability such as physical, mental health or learning disability, Aboriginal descendent, visible minority, poor self-management skills and single parent status ("Youth employment strategy," 2012). Participants should also demonstrate motivation to become employable by providing evidence of recent job search as well as come to the agency on their own free will. Evidence of recent job search can include a list of the employers’ names and times that they visited the establishments.

Project Coordinators and Facilitators

Project coordinators are required to have either a bachelor’s degree or college diploma in the human services field, such as psychology and social work. Project coordinators of this employment training are involved in and responsible for recruiting participants, selecting participants who will be successful in the skill-building program, organizing and teaching workshops based on skill-building criteria, recruiting other workshop facilitators, speaking to employers for the participants to enter job placements, and continually provide support for participants when they are in workshops and on their placements. Project coordinators can use the assessment tool and manual at their discretion to determine whether the group collectively has the same barriers to employment. Therefore, the project coordinators can create workshops to supplement the needs of the participant groups. They can also use this information to refer participants to specific programs, and provide further guidance and individualized counselling.

Facilitators are skilled professionals that are recruited by the project coordinators to assist in teaching life skills to the participants. Facilitators should be skilled in the trade they are teaching, and be able to direct their workshops towards employment training.

Design

The assessment tool and manual were created by the author as part of an applied thesis in the Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology degree program during a 14-week field placement. The assessment tool and manual were not implemented during the 14-week placement due to time constraints. At the beginning of the thesis placement, there were issues surrounding initiating the skill-building program. Due to this delay, the author was unable to work with any participants at the time; therefore, the decision to create an assessment tool and manual was made in order to fulfill the requirements of the placement. The assessment tool and manual were created to supplement the project coordinators in creating behaviourally based
workshops, and increase the number of skills acquired by the participants while they were in the program.

Assessment Tool
The assessment tool was created to assess the participants’ skill repertoires before entering the program in order to determine the skills they will need to learn for future success in finding and maintaining employment. The assessment tool was also created to be taken by the participants again after the program ended to see which skills were not developed; this will aid facilitators in creating workshops that will support developing skills that are needed before entering the workforce. The manual was created to supplement the assessment tool by providing behavioural techniques in order to help participants ascertain new skills that the assessment tool identified was missing.

The first part of the assessment tool (Appendix A of the manual) includes 19 fixed-choice scale questions focused on living arrangements, education background, volunteer experience, job search experiences, hobbies, personal interests and current means of income; participants will circle or check the answer that best fits their situation. The second half of the assessment tool includes 67 job readiness skills that have boxes beside them for the participants to check off which skills they believe they have already mastered. The final page of the assessment tool includes a section for additional notes to be added by the project coordinators or the participants. Instructions on how to complete the assessment tool are included in the manual (Appendix A) for the facilitators to use as a reference when explaining the tool to the participant.

Manual
The manual (Appendix A) includes behavioural techniques and information to increase positive behavioural change in the participants. The manual consists of five main parts. Part I is the introduction that includes the rationale for the use of the assessment tool and manual; also included is the background information of youth employment rates in Canada as well as a brief description of what is included within the manual. Part II includes instructions for administration of the assessment tool, two removable copies for photocopying and a compact disk that contains an electronic copy of the manual and assessment tool. Part III includes information on behavioural contracting, reinforcement, and positive feedback techniques. Part IV includes information on shaping, chaining, and behavioural skills training for the facilitators to use when teaching new behaviours and skills that are needed for employment. The combination of the manual and assessment tool are intended to increase the participant’s repertoire of necessary skills required for the workforce by providing the means to behaviour change to the facilitators. The manual also contains a copy of the assessment tool that can be removed to photocopy, as well as a compact disk that contains digital copies of the assessment tool and manual.

Supporting Information
Adding to an extensive literature review, other resources were consulted in preparation for the assessment tool and manual. Facilitators and other agency staff were consulted in conversations with staff members that chose to participate. The staff were instructed that all agency and names would be changed to maintain confidentiality and that their answers would be included in the appendices of the manual. The collective input from research in the literature review and personal communications with agency staff were used as a guide to construct the
assessment tool. The facilitators and agency staff provided a list of skills they viewed were important for job readiness and a list of appropriate questions that should be included in the assessment tool.

**Procedure**

Each participant is to be given ten minutes to complete the assessment tool after a debriefing of its purpose and instructions for answering the questions. The assessment tool should be administered in an office or equivalent setting and each participant will only need a pen to complete the questions. Participants are provided with the agency’s consent form; the consent form must be completed prior to using the assessment tool. Project coordinators who use the assessment tool and manual will comply with the consent and ethical standards as proposed by the agency. Project coordinators will also use the agency’s policies regarding storing participant information and completed assessment tools. It is recommended that the assessment tool be administered individually to each participant during initial selection of the group. When administering the assessment tool, the project coordinators will explain the purpose of the tool, provide information on confidentiality measures, hand the tool to the participant and will then emphasize the importance of honesty when answering all questions. If the participant has any questions about the assessment tool, the coordinators can provide help at any time. All information that is gathered is confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of the facilitators and the participant. The assessment tool will be administered before and after the program has been completed to determine which skills still need to be learned, in order to be ready for employment. This will provide the coordinators with information for improving the program, meeting the needs of the participants, and/or the need for referral to other services. The manual will be used to design and implement relevant and helpful employment workshops.

**Confidentiality**

There are no supporting confidentiality or informed consent procedures attached to the manual or assessment tool; however, a note is included in the manual about maintaining confidentiality. Project coordinators will be required to follow the agency’s privacy and informed consent procedures in regards to skill-building programs and code of ethics. The participant must complete the agency’s consent forms before the assessment tool is used.

**Evaluation**

The manual and assessment tool could not be evaluated during the field placement due to time constraints and therefore does not contain a formal evaluation. However, through personal communications within the agency informal feedback of the usefulness, overall structure, and legibility of the assessment tool and manual was obtained.
Chapter IV: Results

Final Products

The final products of the thesis project include the pre-employment skills assessment tool (Appendix A of the manual) as well as the facilitator’s manual (Appendix A), which was designed to accompany the assessment tool. The assessment tool was created to assess participant skill repertoire. This is necessary in determining the needs of the participants in order to create more efficient workshops, and foster participant success in obtaining and maintaining employment. The assessment tool focused on subjects such as hard skills, soft skills, pre-employment job searching skills, and appropriate workplace behaviour skills. These pre-employment skill topics were based on the research of the literature. The first part of the assessment tool includes 19 questions focusing on background information on employment, education, job search, support systems, and job goals. The second part of the assessment tool includes 67 job readiness skills that have boxes to the left of the statements. The boxes are for the participants to check off which skills they believe they already have mastered.

The manual was designed to be used in tandem with the assessment tool and therefore includes the following important information: an explanation of the purpose of the assessment tool and manual; a description of the contents; participant and facilitator characteristics; explanation of barriers to employment; background of youth unemployment rates in Canada; a copy of the assessment tool; instructions about how to administer the assessment tool; confidentiality measures; behavioural methods; behavioural skills training; ending notes; and personal communications with professionals in the field. The manual is to be used by the program coordinators as a reference tool for administering the assessment tool as well to provide a brief background into behavioural techniques for building employability skills.

Feedback Received

The assessment tool and manual were reviewed by one of the two project coordinators in order to obtain feedback on the design and versatility of the materials. In general, the feedback received was positive; however, some of the questions on the assessment tool needed to be removed due to repetitiveness. The manual and assessment tool were noted to be professional, legible, and valuable for use within the program. The agency staff decided to use the assessment after the completion of the thesis placement for assessing the next skill-building program session. The feedback from those who reviewed the participants’ completed assessment tools noted the following issues: the hard and soft skill columns were not fully understood by the participants and need to be changed or altered to display simpler and more explanatory language; and there is an number of skills listed were overwhelming for the project coordinators. The project coordinators wished to briefly review the participants’ assessments, therefore the assessment tool needed to be shorter in length. There were minor changes to a few questions such as eliminating the first seven questions, as well as a clause to question 12 to skip ahead to question 15 if they checked yes. The manual was not reviewed thoroughly by the project coordinators because of time pressures and will be reviewed at a later date.

Changes to the Manual and Assessment Tool

Based on the feedback from the agency described above, the assessment tool was corrected to suit the needs of the facilitators as well as the participants. The first seven questions were eliminated from the assessment tool; these questions were a repetition of the online...
assessment already completed by the applicants before the initial face-to-face evaluations with the facilitators. In doing so, the question numbers changed and will, hereafter, be referred to by the numbers use in the altered assessment tool. Question 12 was reworded from, *where do you live* and was changed to, *who do you live with?* The clause, *choose all that apply,* was added to questions numbered three, five, seven and eighteen. The option to check *never* was added to question 15 to provide a full range of options for the participants. At the end of the second page, a note for the reader including information about what hard and soft skills are was added so the reader understood what they were completing on the following page.

As well as agency feedback, the author’s own concerns regarding the assessment tool and manual included limiting the manual to containing one copy of the assessment tool because the manual was already contained on a compact disc. The changes that were made to the assessment tool were made to in increase comprehension of the participants to accurately complete all questions. The changes made did not affect the content of the questions, nor did it alter the complexity of the assessment tool.
Chapter V: Discussion

Thesis Summary
This thesis project sought to increase the success rates of the participants in the skill-building program by providing the program coordinators and facilitators with an assessment tool for measuring necessary skills for employment and a manual to provide information about behavioural methods for teaching skills to the participants. The skills selected for the assessment tool were chosen based on the information found in the literature review. The manual consists of best practices for behavioural methods; such as, positive and negative reinforcement, positive and negative punishment, behavioural contracting, positive feedback, behavioural skills training, modelling, shaping, and chaining.

At the time of the thesis, there were two areas of information missing from the skill-building program. First, the program coordinators wished to have a list of required skills to help assess the participant skill levels before and after the program. This could also be a tool to help the coordinators decide how to strengthen the program by building more efficient, behaviourally based, and skill-oriented lessons. Second, the program was based on changing the behaviour of the participants by making them more employment ready; however, there were no behavioural methods being used to change the behaviour of the participants. By incorporating a manual with methods of behavioural change, as well as a tool to assess skills, there was the potential of increasing the participants’ employability. The goal of the thesis was to address these issues and, therefore, strengthen the program and increase participant success rates in the program. This would result in the youth unemployment rate in the city decreasing and would help boost the economy.

The information used to create the assessment tool and manual was gathered from personal communications (Appendix D of the manual) with the agency staff, and a literature review conducted by the author. Personal communications with agency staff were kept confidential. The literature was compiled from articles and publications related to the subject of employment and behavioural psychology.

Strengths
A major strength of the thesis is that it incorporates empirically validated information into the final products. Incorporating empirically validated studies, as well as information from published studies, provides the reader with valid and useful information of best practices in the field of behavioural psychology. To supplement the literature review, the manual also includes personal communications with the agency staff. These communications consisted of the staffs’ knowledge of job readiness skills. All staff feedback was taken into consideration when completing the assessment tool. The manual consisted of step-by-step instructions on administration of the assessment tool, as well as detailed information about behaviour principles and practice. Examples are also used for behavioural contracting, which simplifies creating contracts for the participants easier. Another strength of the assessment tool is the simplistic language used for participants; this allows for ease of use and quick completion.

Limitations and Challenges
Although the manual has a great potential to be helpful to project coordinators and facilitators, there are some limitations that must be taken into consideration. For example, because of the time constraints, the author was unable to test the assessment tool. Therefore,
there was no formal way to collect data on usefulness of the assessment tool and manual. This limitation impacts the overall validity of the assessment tool and manual. However, the agency staff provided input for implementing changes to the assessment tool.

Another limitation to the thesis project is that no empirical method of evaluation was developed for the use of the assessment tool and manual. First, the assessment tool was not created with a method to evaluate its effectiveness. The assessment tool was created as a supplemental tool to aid project coordinators and facilitators with selecting participants, and assessing their skill levels before and after the program. The manual was created as a supplementary tool to enhance skill building within the participants and increase the skill levels of the participants. Due to time constraints, the manual could not be used nor reviewed by the project coordinators. For these reasons, there is no way to determine the effectiveness, reliability, or validity of either the assessment tool or manual. Therefore, the results of the assessment tool are to be considered at face value and used subjectively among the participants. Another concern about the assessment tool is the length; however, the amount of information needed to be included in the assessment tool could not be limited.

**Multilevel Challenges to Service Implementation**

**Client Level.** It can be challenging to work with clients who are not motivated to change. They may not understand that their behaviour affects those around them, especially co-workers. Young adults may have unrealistic expectations of employers. Some feel that employers owe them something in return for working for them, above and beyond a paycheck, and it can be frustrating to help them understand that that is not the case. It is also challenging to provide assistance to clients who do not show up for meetings or work. We, as professionals, cannot help these clients unless they are present and ready to participate; we cannot force them to go to work, nor can we be there in the mornings to get them out of bed and to their jobs. Also, clients who engage in drugs and alcohol on a daily basis are especially hard to create job-related behavioural interventions for because they may have difficulty just trying to become sober. Is also difficult to work with clients who reject all suggestions for behavioural change and do not accept responsibility for their own actions. These clients do not see the potential for change and do not see a reason for change; this makes it difficult to make a program or intervention that will be actually beneficial to their well-being. During the planning of the skill-building program, time constraints based on the program coordinator’s schedules may be a factor that prohibits incorporating behavioural methods of teaching new skills. This can be because of the extra time and effort it takes to learn these techniques, and figure out a way to use them in an already successful program.

**Program Level.** It can be hard to incorporate a set program into an already established and time-constrained program. Another issue that arose from the thesis placement was that there was no contract to begin the skill-building program for a month into the semester. This was especially difficult because there were no clients to work with. Without clients there was no way to implement a behaviourally based program; this left the thesis project with less time to create a program, as well as limited the range of project development. This left the author with the option to create the assessment tool and manual. Although this is what the agency wanted, this limited the availability of the author to utilize all the knowledge learned from the program.
**Organization Level.** On an organizational level, some agency employees may not see the benefits that behavioural analysis can provide. Some people are resistant to change their original ways of providing support for clients. Within an organization, there are interventions and ideas already in place, and some employees may not see the value of a placement student’s contribution. This makes it difficult for the student to establish a good working rapport and express new ideas. Conversely, if the organization believes that they should change certain things about the program, this does not mean that at the service level this will change.

**Societal Level.** At the societal level, employers look for the perfect employee. They want employees to have all the skills acquired and to be perfect for the job. This, however, is not realistic in the world we live in. Employers and others in the community need to be informed of barriers some potential employees may be facing and give these people an opportunity to prove themselves as worthy employees. Many people need help acquiring the skills needed to remain employed, but many employers tend to fire these people lack the skills to perform the job rather than investing the time to train them. Increased awareness of the benefits of implementing behavioural psychology may result in a better understanding of the need to provide more training for those who lack the skills necessary to maintain employment.

**Contribution to the Behavioural Psychology Field**

In the field of behavioural psychology, professionals strive to create positive behaviour change in individuals by using the science of behaviour. Empirically validated interventions are used to contribute to these acts and to promote building skills within individuals. All are done so to increase the client’s functioning and overall quality of life. This thesis combines empirically validated knowledge about skill building to increase participant’s knowledge and abilities to sustain employability in order to reach these goals.

This thesis was created to serve the needs of the individuals within the skill-building program as well as the project coordinators. The thesis was created to add to the behavioural psychology field by increasing the knowledge of behavioural principles to others in the field.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The hypothesis proposed in the thesis was not tested because of time and logistical constraints. It is recommended that the assessment tool and manual be implemented by the project coordinators as proposed within the manual and in Chapter III of the thesis. There also needs to be a source of formal feedback from staff and participants for evaluating the effectiveness of the assessment tool and manual during and after the skill-building program. This might include obtaining measures of the participants’ skill levels and their ability to maintain employment post-program. Information could be gathered in mandatory three, six, and twelve-month follow-up by the project coordinators. There should also be a section included in the research and incorporated into the manual for assessing the participants’ motivation. This is important because participants need to be motivated and ready for change in order for the program to be effective in aiding the participants in moving forward. This could include motivational interviewing techniques and group counselling techniques incorporated in the manual as well as providing formal methods of collecting data for motivation and skill acquisition. As well as motivational interviewing, the assessment tool and manual should also account for the background and level of functioning of each participant. Not all participants have had the opportunity to develop certain skills because of their history, thus this must be
taken into account when assessing and teaching participants certain skills. This includes the participant’s level of functioning and comprehension of information taught. Each participant must have the motor functioning and ability to practice the skills required to be learned and, therefore, the project coordinators must take this into consideration when accepting participants into the program. Further research and planning should be completed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the assessment tool and manual to validate the effectiveness of this contribution to the skill-building program.
References


Appendix A: Pre-Employment Skills Manual
What Do Employers Want?

An Assessment Tool and Manual for Increasing Success Rates of Employability for Youth with Barriers to Employment

Developed by Megan Gordon

Bachelor of Applied Arts in Behavioural Psychology
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2013

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1 This manual was designed for the Skill Building Program that participated in this thesis. Permission must be obtained from the author Megan Gordon, at meganegordon27@gmail.com, if others wish to use it.
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PART I

Introduction
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT TOOL AND MANUAL

The purpose of the manual and Pre-Employment Skills Assessment Tool (Appendix A) is to aid project coordinators in increasing the success rates of the participants who enter the skill-building program.

The assessment tool was developed to focus on determining which pre-employment skills are most desirable to employers when they are hiring new employees. The assessment tool was also developed to identify which skills each participant may or may not already possess and then create workshops according to the skills that still need to be learned. The assessment tool will allow project coordinators to identify the needs of the group, create workshops that teach or facilitate the learning of these skills and provide knowledge as to which services the participants need to be referred to.

The purpose of the manual is to provide instructions for assessment tool as well as offer information for incorporating behavioural techniques into sheltered workshops. This information is intended to increase positive behavioural interactions and initiate skill building in the participants.

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS

- **Part II: Assessment Tool:** Part two includes step-by-step instructions on how to administer the assessment tool.

- **Part III: Behavioural Methods:** This section includes information about behavioural contracting, positive reinforcement techniques and positive feedback. This section will provide the reader with a brief background into behavioural analysis and why it has been shown to be effective in changing behaviour.

- **Part IV: Behavioural Skills Training:** Part four is a continuation of behavioural techniques, however depicts a different theme within behavioural analysis. Facilitators can use Behavioural Skills Training when they are teaching new behaviours and skills that are needed for employment.

- **Part V: Ending Notes:** Part five includes ending notes by the author and discussion.

- **Part VI: Appendices:** Included is a list of further readings and a reference section.
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

In order for participants to be eligible to enter the skill-building program, they must meet the following criteria2:

- Between the ages of 15 and 29 at the time of assessment
- Currently not enrolled in full time school
- Legally able to work in Canada
- Participants must be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident in Canada
- Not in receipt of Employment Insurance (EI)
- Need assistance in overcoming barriers to employment
- Demonstrate a strong motivation to become employed

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Barriers to employment include one or more of the following criterion as stated by Service Canada:

- Non-completion of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma
- Low levels of numeracy and literacy abilities
- Language barriers
- Health concerns
- Drug issues
- Alcohol issues
- Residence in a rural or isolated location
- Been fired from a job
- Quit a job without telling the employer
- Record of long-term unemployment
- Street involvement
- Involvement in the criminal justice system
- Collect welfare or other social assistance programs
- Lack of social supports from family, friends or community
- Aboriginal descendent
- Visible minority
- Poor self-management skills
- Single parent status
- At risk of becoming homeless or homelessness
- Self-disclosed disability such as physical, mental health or learning disability

PROJECT COORDINATOR/FACILITATOR CHARACTERISTICS

Project coordinators are responsible for supervising, monitoring and providing support for the participants who participate in the program. Project coordinators run the program directly by taking part in all intake processes, are responsible for providing a smooth transition into employment for the participants, build and decide which workshops are needed for the specific group they are working with and provide continuous support to each individual. Project coordinators must be able to identify the needs of the participants as individuals and as a group, establish a working rapport with the participants and provide supports for the participants as they transition from sheltered workshops into the workforce. Project coordinators also work with employers to ascertain problems as they reveal themselves during the job-trial placements.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATES IN CANADA

Unemployment, for many youth ages 15 to 29, can possibly be a result of a deficiency in experience and skill sets. According to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2012), being between the ages of 15 and 29 can be a barrier to employment in itself and needs to be remedied. In 2009, Statistics Canada found that the unemployment rate for youth ages 15 to 29 was a staggering 13.3 percent (Marshall, 2012). This number might not seem high, however unemployment in any country can result in people living on the street, using government resources and possibly turning to crime in order to survive (Baron, 2008). In 2013, nearly five years after the study was conducted, youth unemployment is still an issue and is why skill-building programs need to exist. The assessment tool and manual were developed to help young people learn the skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment and to decrease the number of youth turning to other services for financial aid.
PART II

What Do Employers Want?

Pre-Employment Skills Assessment Tool
WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT?
PRE-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOL

HOW TO ADMINISTER THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The assessment tool is to be administered twice during the duration of the program; once during the initial evaluations and again at the end of the program. Below is a step-by-step guide to administering the assessment tool:

**Step 1:** During the initial assessment stage of recruiting youth for the skill-building program, explain to the applicants what the assessment tool will be used for. The purpose of the assessment tool is to help the project coordinators identify which skills are needed for each individual, and it is important for them to answer all questions with complete honesty in order to do so.

**Step 2:** Hand the assessment tool to the applicant you are speaking with and briefly explain each section of the assessment tool. The first two pages of the assessment tool are used to gather background information about the applicant and why they need assistance to overcome barriers to employment. The last two pages are used to identify which skills the applicant states they already possess. Next, explain all confidentiality measures that are in place by the agency and note that the assessment tool will be taken again at the end of the program.

**Step 3:** Give the applicant any materials needed to complete the assessment tool (a pencil or pen). Ask the applicant to read each question carefully, answer the questions truthfully and only pick their top 15 skills on the skill list. This will ensure applicants are not simply choosing all of the skills on the list. Allow ten minutes to complete the assessment tool. If any questions arise, answer them right away.

**Step 4:** Once the assessment tool is complete, retrieve the papers and store in a locked cabinet with all other confidential materials.

**Step 5:** At the end of the program, administer the assessment tool again. The second time the participants complete the assessment tool they should only complete the skills section of the papers. Ask each participant to come into the office to complete the assessment tool again. Each participant should be away from the group to maintain privacy and decrease the chance of one participant influencing another participant’s answers.

**Step 6:** Collect each assessment tool again and staple each of the assessment tools together. Store the papers with all other confidential files in a locked cabinet.

At the end of the program, the assessment tool answers will show the facilitators which skills the participants have acquired from the program. This will help the facilitators decide where they need to refer the participants for further assistance and will help strengthen the program by providing the data necessary to build successful workshops for building these necessary skills. This will increase the likelihood that future participants will acquire these skills in the upcoming
programs. Participants will be provided with a pen, desk and chair to write the assessment tool, ten minutes to complete all pages and will be asked to be as honest as they can when submitting their answers.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

• Cabinet with a lock for storing confidential material
• Photocopier or printer
• Pen or pencil
• Writing surface
• Quiet workspace

A WORD ON CONFIDENTIALITY

For the purpose of maintaining the confidentiality of the participants and applicants of the program, measures of confidentiality already in place by the agency should be followed at all times. Each participant’s completed assessment tool should be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked room. Assessments collected from applicants that are not accepted into the program should be discarded as soon as possible. Information about each individual should not be shared with anyone except the individual who filled out the assessment tool and the program coordinators, unless expressed and written consent by the individual has been granted.
Part III

Behavioural Methods
BEHAVIOURAL METHODS

BEHAVIOUR AT A GLANCE

Miltenberger (2008), states that behaviour is directly observable, measurable and quantifiable. Behaviour can be defined as anything we do, everyday tasks we perform, words or phrases we speak (verbal behaviour) and the absence of these acts (Miltenberger, 2008). When increasing or decreasing behaviour, behavioural therapists conduct functional assessments to determine why the behaviour is occurring and what the consequences for the behaviour are before determining their intervention strategy (Miltenberger, 2008). For the purpose of this manual, the basic concepts behind behaviour analysis are stated; all concepts noted in the manual are basic knowledge that can be applied in the classroom to help participants become motivated towards behaviour change.

There are many aspects of behaviour and applied behavioural analysis that could not be included in this manual, however basic terminology and techniques used in skill building are provided. For more information about behavioural analysis and psychology, please see the additional reading material (Appendix C).

REINFORCEMENT

Reinforcement is a powerful means to change behaviour. To be effective in changing behaviour, it is important to provide the occurrence of the behaviour with reinforcement (Miltenberger, 2008). A reinforcer is something that is desired by the individual receiving it and is most powerful when it is not available to the individual at all times (Miltenberger, 2008). Some examples of reinforcers are food, stickers, extra break time and money. Once the target behaviour has been exhibited, providing the learner with a reinforcer will strengthen the behaviour because it is an immediate and pleasant consequence (Miltenberger, 2008). If the individual displays an appropriate behaviour and reinforcement is provided directly after the behaviour, the behaviour is more likely to be shown by the individual again (Miltenberger, 2008). This occurs because the individual expects the pleasant consequence to be provided upon the display of the behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). For example, providing a participant with a candy for coming back from break on time will increase the likelihood that they will return from break on time more frequently. This will only work if the participant likes candy and the reinforcement will have to be administered after every occurrence of the behaviour for the number of times previously outlined in assessment of the behaviour.

Behavioural therapists will perform behavioural assessments to outline how many times an individual must exhibit the target behaviour before fading of the reinforcement can occur. They will also determine what form of reinforcement will be most powerful for that specific individual. Finding the right reinforcer for an individual can be achieved by simply asking the participant what they like or what will motivate them to change.

Behaviour: individual returns from break on time → Consequence: participant receives candy
As children we learn that when you turn a door handle and push or pull the door it will usually open for you; this is the process by which we learn. The same principles of behaviour analysis are exhibited in this situation.

**Behaviour:** turn door handle then push or pull door  ➔  **Consequence:** the reinforcement for the behaviour is the door doing what we want it to do

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**TYPES OF REINFORCEMENT AND PUNISHMENT**

**Positive Reinforcement:** defined as the *addition* of a stimulus or reinforcer that comes directly after the desired behaviour in order to increase the likelihood of the behaviour to occur again (Miltenberger, 2008). For example, when a parent is teaching their child to put their toys away, the child is taught how to pick up the toy, carry it over the toy box and then place it in the box. The parent praises the child for complying and putting their toys away. This creates an association between praise and putting the toys away, and strengthens the desired behaviour.

**Negative Reinforcement:** defined as the *removal* of a stimulus or reinforcer that comes directly after the desired behaviour in order to increase the likelihood of the child finishing their homework (Miltenberger, 2008). For example, when teaching a child to finish their homework before they get playtime, removing a toy may increase the likelihood of the child finishing their homework. Providing positive reinforcements of verbal praise while the child is working on the homework and then returning the toy for completing the task will eventually increase the likelihood of the child completing homework in the future.

**Positive Punishment:** is the *addition* of a stimulus in order to decrease behaviour and should come directly after the display of the behaviour that is to be decreased (Miltenberger, 2008). For example, when attempting to decrease the amount of television one watches, if another person administers a painful pinch each time the first person turns on the television, this will create a learned association between turning on the television and pain. Positive punishment can be effective in changing certain behaviours and should not be used as an intervention on its own (Miltenberger, 2008). When decreasing an undesired behaviour, one must always replace this behaviour with a novel and more rewarding behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Negative Punishment:** is the *removal* of a stimulus in order to decrease behaviour and should come directly after the display of the behaviour that is to be decreased (Miltenberger, 2008). For example, when decreasing the amount of smoking, decreasing the ability of the individual to access cigarettes, will eventually decrease the behaviour of smoking.
BEHAVIOURAL CONTRACTING

Behavioural contracting is a technique used to help individuals self-monitor and be held accountable for their behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). A behavioural contract can be a written agreement with the individual themselves or with a second party (Miltenberger, 2008). In order for a behavioural contract to be successful it should be associated with consequences such as receiving a reward for completing the tasks or a consequence for not completing the tasks outlined in the contract (Miltenberger, 2008). When negotiating a behavioural contract with a client, it is important to outline the purpose of the contract, the dates that are associated with completing the goal(s), names of all parties, steps involved in reaching the goal, the consequences (positive and negative), and sign the contract (Miltenberger, 2008). For a visual representation of an individual behavioural contract, see Figure 1 below. Having the contract visually available to the individual will allow for more accountability and in turn reach the set behavioural goals (Miltenberger, 2008). It is also very important to be held accountable for all the consequences of behaviour this means a second party should hold the first responsible for completing the tasks by each outlined date (Miltenberger, 2008).

Figure 1.
Individual Behavioural Contract

Date: __________ to __________

For the dates stated above, I ____________________, agree to the following tasks:

• I will research 30 places I would like to work
• I will research the job descriptions and skills I need to acquire for these jobs
• I will create a resume to fit the different jobs I would like to work at
• I will go to these establishments and ask to speak to a manager
• I will drop off my resume in person at these establishments

If I perform all these tasks listed above by the date I have stated above, I can reward myself by ______________________________________________________.

If I do not accomplish all these tasks by the date I have stated above, I will take away __________________________________________________________.

Signature: Participant ______________________________________
Signature: Project Coordinator ______________________________________

Figure 1. Individual Behavioural Contract for participants during job search days of the skill-building program. Contract outlines dates for participant to have tasks started and completed by, tasks to be completed, consequences and the participant and program coordinator’s signature. Behavioural contracts can be posted on the wall for the individual to see. In order for contract to be effective, participants must be held accountable for adhering to the contract or for non-completion of tasks.
POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Providing an individual with positive feedback is important because the participants may not know what they are doing correctly or incorrectly. Providing the participants with constructive positive feedback includes verbally telling the individual what they need to change in order to elicit the appropriate behaviour, giving instruction for the correct behaviour, modelling the correct behaviour and providing verbal reassurance for what has been displayed correctly by the individual. Positive feedback is very similar to providing positive reinforcement; verbal positive reinforcement or praise is used when giving positive feedback and should be used often to let the participants know that they are doing at least one thing right (Miltenberger, 2008). Positive feedback not only provides the learner with knowledge about what they are not doing appropriately, but gives them reassurance, direction and reinforcement for what they are doing correctly. Always providing reinforcement when appropriate will provide an overall positive feeling and a desire for change in the individual.
Part IV

Behavioural Skills Training
BEHAVIOURAL SKILLS TRAINING

Behaviour Skills Training can be used when teaching novel behaviours and changing the topography of already identified behaviours. Behavioural Skills Training (BST) can be applied when helping youth develop hard and soft skills in order to be effective in obtaining and maintaining employment. Many people already have acquired specific skills such as learning to talk to employers, how to remain professional on the job and how to approach customers, however sometimes these skills just need to be polished before entering the workforce. This is where BST becomes an important asset in developing these satisfactory skills into excellent skill sets.

HOW TO USE BEHAVIOURAL SKILLS TRAINING

**Step 1:** Identity and define all skills that need to be learned; when defining skills, describe all the behaviours needed to perform the skills in step-by-step terms (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Step 2:** Identify all situations in which the skills will need to be performed in and all reinforcements (verbal praise) that the learner will react to (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Step 3:** Assess the learner’s skill levels by asking the learner to perform how they would behave in the situation you are attempting to train in (Miltenberger, 2008). For instance, ask the learner how they would act if their boss told them they were doing something wrong (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Step 4:** Start training the learner with the first step or easiest behaviour in the list you defined in step 1 (Miltenberger, 2008). Begin training by modelling the appropriate behaviour in the correct context and why it is important to the situation you are training for (Miltenberger, 2008). Simulate the situation as clearly and real as possible, allow the learner to observe the modelling, and then answer any questions the participant may have (Miltenberger, 2008). Once clarification has been made, ask the learner to practice the behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Step 5:** Provide feedback for correct behaviour rehearsal and give constructive feedback for any changes that need to be made (Miltenberger, 2008). Once the behaviour has been rehearsed a few times without error, the learner should be considered to have mastered the skill (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Step 6:** Practice the behaviour in different situations and with different people to allow for generalization in other situations (Miltenberger, 2008). If the learner is having difficulty mastering the skill, model and provide feedback more frequently and in different situations until the learner can perform the skill (Miltenberger, 2008). Always provide positive feedback and reinforcement for correct behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008).

**Step 7:** Practice the behaviour in the context and situation that they will be used in, this can be directly taking the client to the workplace and practicing the behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008).
MODELLING

Modelling involves using a teacher to display the appropriate behaviour to a learner and by doing so the learner gets to observe the behaviour in the right context (Miltenberger, 2008). Modelling is used to aid the learner with understanding how to perform the correct behaviour. For modelling to be an effective tool in teaching new behaviours, the learner must have an ability to imitate the teacher, possess the ability to pay attention to the teacher and physically be able to perform the behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). Instructions that are used to describe the appropriate behaviour(s) to the learners should be specific and explained before modelling occurs (Miltenberger, 2008). The learner should rehearse the appropriate behaviour until they can repeat the behaviour without any assistance (Miltenberger, 2008). Positive feedback should be given after each rehearsal of the behaviour to make adjustments and then to reinforce the correct behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). The teacher should model and provide positive feedback to the learner in the environment that the behaviour will be used in (Miltenberger, 2008). If this is not possible, creating a similar environment will allow the learner to understand the context in which the behaviour should be used (Miltenberger, 2008).

SHAPING

Shaping is a behavioural method that is used to polish a behaviour that is already in a person’s repertoire and is defined as reinforcing successive approximations of the target behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). Shaping uses reinforcement of a particular behaviour and extinction of all other behaviours that are shown (Miltenberger, 2008). In order to use shaping techniques, the behavioural term called extinction will need to be used in order to be successful.

Extinction: is a behavioural term that describes the process by which a behaviour that was previously reinforced is no longer being reinforced, and the frequency of the occurrence of the behaviour eventually decreases until it is no longer exhibited in the future (Miltenberger, 2008).

When teaching hard skills, shaping can be an effective way to instruct these new behaviours. The first step to using shaping is to define the target behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). This provides everyone with a goal to work towards and operationally defines the behaviour. This step outlines what the behaviour looks like, how many steps are involved in reaching the goal, how many times the learner needs to perform the behaviour to be considered mastered and what reinforcer(s) will be used (Miltenberger, 2008). When shaping behaviour, the first approximation to the target behaviour is reinforced (Miltenberger, 2008). Ask the learner to rehearse the behaviour until they get it correct for the previously outlined number of correct responses and reinforce the occurrence of the behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). Once this approximation has been achieved, stop reinforcing the behaviour completely (Miltenberger, 2008). As a result, extinction will begin and new behaviours will build upon the previous (Miltenberger, 2008). The teacher should then only reinforce the new behaviours that are closest to representing the target behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008). Continue reinforcing and using extinction until the learner has mastered the target behaviour without assistance or needing a prompt (Miltenberger, 2008).
Prompts: a behavioural technique that is used right before behaviour is exhibited; they are used to increase the likelihood of the behaviour being displayed (Miltenberger, 2008). Prompts can be verbal or physical cues that remind the learner to perform a behaviour or task, this is much like using cue cards when performing speeches (Miltenberger, 2008).

CHAINING

Chaining is similar to shaping, however involves a much more complicated series of responses and consequences. Chaining is used to teach a series of behaviours in a task (Miltenberger, 2008). A behaviour chain involves completing a task analysis of all the behaviours involved in the chain (Miltenberger, 2008). A task analysis involves identifying all the behaviours that are required for the learner to perform the task and writing them down in the order that they are performed (Miltenberger, 2008). The next step is to revise the list and see if the behaviours can be broken down into smaller steps for easier learning (Miltenberger, 2008). Once the task analysis is complete, begin teaching the behaviour chain by using modelling of the first step in the chain, and then ask the learner to rehearse the behaviour and then reinforce the correct responses (Miltenberger, 2008). Use prompts to elicit the behaviour if the learner does know what to do, gradually fade this prompt until the learner can perform the behaviour on his or her own (Miltenberger, 2008). Do this with all the behaviours in the chain until the chain is complete (Miltenberger, 2008). Once the entire chain has been learned, each of the behaviours in the chain should act as a prompt for the behaviour after it (Miltenberger, 2008). There are six chaining procedures that can be used when teaching new behaviours:

- **Forward Chaining:** the method of chaining that is explained above. The trainer teaches the first behaviour in the chain first, then each of the successive behaviours after each other until the chain is complete (Miltenberger, 2008).

- **Backward Chaining:** the learner is taught the last behaviour in the chain first and is then taught each of the behaviours in the chain backwards (Miltenberger, 2008). The last behaviour in the chain is taught first, then the second last behaviour and so on until the first behaviour in the chain is taught last.

- **Total Task Presentation:** when the teacher performs all of the behaviours in the chain to show the learner the entire task (Miltenberger, 2008).

- **Written Task Analysis:** written instructions for the steps in a behavioural chain, they can be written on paper or on the computer for the learner to access (Miltenberger, 2008)

- **Picture Prompts:** used to show the learner pictures of how each of the behaviours are to be performed (Miltenberger, 2008)

- **Self-instructions:** verbal prompts by the learner to engage in each component of the chain (Miltenberger, 2008)
PART V

Ending Notes
At the time of the thesis, the author sought out to bridge two gaps within the skill-building program. The first was to identify a list of important skills that are needed for the participants to be successful in the workforce and the second was to incorporate simple behavioural techniques into the already successful program. The author identified the lists of hard and soft skills in an extensive review of the literature and by personal communications (Appendix D) with the agency’s staff.

The assessment tool includes a list of hard and soft skills that employers desire and has two purposes: to provide information about which skills each participant needs to develop in order to be successful and strengthen the program by identify the skills that need to be developed within the group and therefore create workshops to teach these skills. The manual includes simplistic directions for including behavioural methods in the classroom, changing participant behaviour and increasing skill building within the participants.

Due to time constraints, the assessment tool and manual could not be implemented, however the assessment tool and manual can be used at the agency for assessment and skill-building purposes. Further research into identifying the skill sets that make a participant successful in the program could be looked upon and considered when assessing future participants. Limitations of the study include time constraints and lack of standardization measures when constructing the assessment tool. Due to the time constraint, it was not possible to test the reliability of the assessment tool nor was there time for the facilitators to use the information provided in the manual. Strengths of the study included simplistic language for participants and facilitators to understand and general organization of the documents.

Further research into pre-employment skills could include identifying the skills that each individual employer desires and creating additional assessment tools based on this information. Employers could also be asked to identify which skills they view are most important at their places of work and identify any hard or soft skills that they view are most important for their business. The program coordinators can add this additional knowledge to the assessment tool in order to help future participants understand and develop the skills necessary for the particular jobs they would like to apply to. The author encourages project coordinators and facilitators to use the assessment tool and manual to their advantage. Any alterations to be applied to the documents can be done so, with permission by the author, to aid in easier accessibility and use.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT? PRE-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS ASSESSMENT TOOL
What Do Employers Want? Pre-Employment Skills Assessment

Please be as honest as possible when filling in your answers, this will allow the facilitators to help you be as successful as possible in the program.

1. **When was the last time you handed out resumes?**
   - More than a year ago ☐
   - More than 6 months ago ☐
   - Less than 6 months ago ☐
   - Less than a month ☐

2. **How often do you job search? (I.e. Any of the job search strategies shown in question 3)**
   - More than 20 times a month ☐
   - More than 10 times a month ☐
   - Less than 5 times a month ☐
   - I never job search ☐

3. **How do you job search? Choose all that apply.**
   - Internet ☐
   - Classifieds ☐
   - Over the phone ☐
   - E-mail ☐
   - In-person ☐

4. **How many interviews have you had in the last month?** ________

5. **Who do you live with? Choose all that apply.**
   - With immediate family ☐
   - Independent living ☐
   - No permanent residence ☐
   - With sibling(s) ☐
   - With a friend(s) ☐

6. **Do your family and/or friends have steady jobs and/or income?** Yes ☐ No ☐

7. **Who in your household works? Choose all that apply.**
   - Mom ☐
   - Dad ☐
   - Guardian ☐
   - Sibling(s) ☐
   - Other ☐

8. **Do you feel that you have supports in your life that can help you through difficult times and in finding employment?** Yes ☐ No ☐

9. **If yes, what/who are those supports?**
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

10. **On a scale of 1 to 10, how supported do you feel by others?**
    
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11. What is your current source of income? ____________________________________________.

12. Did you finish high school? If you have completed high school diploma skip ahead to question 15. If you have not completed your high school diploma, please continue to question 13.

   Yes ☐   No ☐

13. When was the last time you earned a high school credit?

   More than a year ago ☐   More than 6 months ago ☐

   Less than 6 months ago ☐   Less than a month ☐

14. Do you have plans to obtain your Ontario Secondary School Diploma? Yes ☐   No ☐

15. When was the last time you volunteered?

   More than a year ago ☐   More than 6 months ago ☐

   Less than 6 months ago ☐   Less than a month ☐   Never ☐

16. Do you have any hobbies? Yes ☐   No ☐

17. If yes, what are they?

   ____________________________________________

   ____________________________________________

   ____________________________________________

18. What is your current source of transportation? Check all that may apply.

   Bus ☐   Walk ☐   Taxi ☐   I have my own vehicle ☐

   Parent(s) and/or guardian drive ☐

19. What is your ideal long-term job goal?

   ____________________________________________

   ____________________________________________

*Please note: the following page contains two lists of skill categories known as “Hard Skills” and “Soft Skills”. Hard skills are skills you know you can physically do. “Soft Skills” are known as “People Skills” or “Communication Skills,” and are related to attitude in the workplace. Please ask for an explanation if you need one.
**Pre-Employment Skills:** Please be honest and check only your top 15 skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard Skills</th>
<th>Soft Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can read</td>
<td>☐ I can change my behaviour when I am told I am doing something wrong, or if I notice I am acting inappropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can write</td>
<td>☐ I can work well in teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I have good personal hygiene</td>
<td>☐ I learn new skills easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can follow company rules</td>
<td>☐ I am responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can show up on time and ready to work</td>
<td>☐ I have a positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I strive to maintain productivity</td>
<td>☐ I can interact well with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I know how to gather information to make a decision</td>
<td>☐ I can communicate via emails, text messages and over the phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I know how to create a resume</td>
<td>☐ I can communicate face to face with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I know how to create a cover letter</td>
<td>☐ I am assertive with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can use a computer</td>
<td>☐ I am good at making decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I know how to use computer software such as Microsoft Office programs</td>
<td>☐ I know how behave in an interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can type well</td>
<td>☐ I feel comfortable when speaking to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I have experience with supervising others</td>
<td>☐ I am a good listener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can examine situations and create solutions</td>
<td>☐ I am loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can use statistical math</td>
<td>☐ I can speak in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can use geometry</td>
<td>☐ I can organize and plan well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can use basic math skills (adding, subtracting)</td>
<td>☐ I know how to negotiate with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I am handy around the house and with tools</td>
<td>☐ I am good at time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can meet performance standards</td>
<td>☐ I know how to set goals and objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can refrain from using drugs and alcohol during work hours and prior to working</td>
<td>☐ I am honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I know how to budget money</td>
<td>☐ I can give constructive feedback to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can count money</td>
<td>☐ I can received constructive feedback and try to change my behaviour(s) accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can balance cashes</td>
<td>☐ I have good customer service skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ I can lift more than 50 lbs.</td>
<td>☐ I can speak English (or major language spoken in the workplace)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can receive constructive feedback well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I know how to network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ When I am in a difficult situation I know how to manage my behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can resolve conflict with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I have integrity in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can creatively think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I have good self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I am motivated and take pride in my work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I take responsibility for my actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can use self-control over my emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can follow instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can adapt to learning new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can engage in the work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I have a desire to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I understand basic economic knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can work in groups or teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I can work independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I understand that I need to act appropriately in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐ I am friendly towards customers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: FURTHER READING

For more education about all the behavioural techniques mentioned in this manual, please read these additional resources:


APPENDIX D: PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

   The author consulted Mrs. Dallas initially to inquire about her knowledge of job readiness skills. During the interview, Mrs. Dallas indicated that she felt incorporating a sensitivity of the backgrounds of the pupils who would be completing the assessment tool. She felt the assessment tool and manual would be very useful if the author wrote the tool and manual with many different lenses; in a sense the author should write with a sociological perspective and should be user friendly all who will use them.

   Ms. Kyle stated for one to be successful in finding and maintaining a job, they should know their employment goals. Employees must be dependable and have a strong motivation and readiness to work and these two skills must work in combination with each other. Ms. Kyle also stated that being knowledgeable of the labour market and where one would like to work is the best way to start looking for a job that they will be successful in maintaining.

   The author consulted Mrs. O’Brien about job readiness skills. Mrs. O’Brien stated that a good attitude was the most important skill that employers want. Having the right attitude includes being dependable and having a motivation to work. Communicating with the employer, knowing the employers expectations, knowing workplace ethics, taking initiative, managing technology such as cell phone use during work hours, dressing with appropriate attire before, during and after work hours and having a self-awareness of what one wants in a job can improve overall enjoyment of the job and increase productivity. Mrs. O’Brien also stated that stability is also very important because stability includes being able to transport oneself to and from work on a daily basis, having the financial capacity to have child-care provided when necessary and being self-aware of what hours one can work.

   Mrs. Morgan was also consulted to incorporate her knowledge of job readiness skills. She discussed the following job readiness skills or traits: one must be presentable towards employers including clean clothes and brushed hair, show respect towards the employer, have an eagerness to do the job, stable living environment and stable mental health, motivation and initiative and cognitive ability to do the job. Other job readiness skills that were discussed were the job seekers efforts to finding and maintaining employment. Mrs. Morgan strongly emphasized this skill. She stated that a lot of employers stress this skill strongly as they need employees who will take initiative. She advised that employees should to be aware of their fears and phobias when job searching so they find employment that is best suited to their character, skills and abilities.

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3 To ensure confidentiality, all names that appear in this appendix are fictional.