
**WORKFORCE 2010 PROJECT #3:
"EMPLOYER OF CHOICE" SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL DESIGN REPORT**

**Prepared by
The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute, Calgary AB
June 3, 2005**

BACKGROUND

Alberta's current labour market shortage, coupled with low wages, high turnover and shortage of skilled workers in services to persons with developmental disabilities, has made it critical that a coordinated effort be undertaken to assist rehabilitation organizations in their human resource planning and practices. In response to this need, one of the activities identified by the comprehensive Workforce 2010 initiative is the development of a series of benchmark standards that make rehabilitation organizations desirable places to work for now and in the foreseeable future.

A practical application of such standards is a self-assessment tool that employers can use to measure how close they are to being "employers of choice" in the rehabilitation sector. The intent is to equip service providers with a "springboard" from which they can, if necessary, launch into a more detailed analysis and response to specific areas needing improvement. The tool will also help validate areas of strengths in which an organization, if desired, may act as a resource to others, and thereby enhance the human resource capacity of the field as a whole.

This document lists some of the key factors that would need to be included in a tool intended to provide a general assessment of an organization's human resource practices, and describes the methodology by which these factors were identified. The document also presents a draft version of the tool for further discussion and refinement.

METHODOLOGY

Rehabilitation literature and our own primary research in Alberta (see reference list appended) were reviewed to identify the characteristics that attract people to work in services to persons with developmental disabilities, and are associated with positive job satisfaction or related to low turnover. Human resource practices that foster or leverage these characteristics were articulated, and then short-listed to those that were most salient. A five point scale was attached to each characteristic, and a scoring system developed to measure an organization's overall rating. A first draft of the tool is attached to this document, and will be presented to the Workforce 2010 Advisory Committee for review and pilot-testing. The tool will be refined and finalized based on the feedback received.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following table summarizes the most prevalent human resource practices, identified in the literature, that contribute to making rehabilitation organizations desirable to work for now and in the foreseeable future.

HR Practices of “Employers of Choice”	Sources
<u>Recruitment</u>	
<p><u>Fair Compensation</u> The organization provides fair and equitable compensation, including competitive and progressive benefits, e.g., entry-level and part-time positions are eligible for same benefits as other positions.</p>	<p>Larson & Lakin, 1999 Larson, Hewitt & Anderson, 1999 Mitchell & Braddock, 1994/1993 VRRRI, 2005/2000</p>
<p><u>Flexibility</u> The organization has policies and practices that offer flexibility in work arrangements and structures. Alternative work practices are explored and creative solutions to functional requirements are accepted.</p>	<p>AHRE, 2003 Larson, Hewitt & Anderson, 1999 Lowe, 2001 VRRRI, 2005/2000</p>
<p><u>Workforce Diversity</u> The organization values and encourages diversity in employees; it has strategies to attract non-traditional labour pools, e.g., engages in targeted marketing, offers part-time, flexible work arrangements for people 55 or older. The organization has policies that demonstrate cultural awareness and accommodative practices.</p>	<p>Howard & Gould, 2000 Lowe, 2001 VRRRI, 2005</p>
<p><u>Value Congruence</u> The organization espouses prevalent or progressive social values, e.g., equity, justice, democracy, empowerment. The organization has a clearly articulated philosophy/value statements. There are processes to ensure organizational values reflect and are consistent with employee values and consumer/family values, e.g., through stakeholder engagement and participatory mission/vision setting exercises.</p>	<p>Hatton & Emerson, 1998 Howard & Gould, 2000 Lock, 2003 VRRRI, 2001</p>
<p><u>Initiation and Orientation</u> The organization offers pre-service training, apprenticeships or volunteer programs that provide potential new entrants into the field opportunities to learn core competencies and explore the job/career. Orientation processes are well-defined and comprehensive, e.g., new recruit receives clear instructions on roles/responsibilities, organizational information, reporting structures, etc., is paired with more experienced employee during first 3 months on the job, team supports are identified.</p>	<p>Larson, Hewitt & Anderson, 1999 VRRRI, 2005</p>
<p><u>Job Match</u> The organization has processes to determine if there is a fit between the job requirements and employee’s skills/interests, e.g., using realistic job previews, including potential team members/ consumers in the interview process.</p>	<p>Howard & Gould, 2000 Lock, 2003 VRRRI, 2001</p>
<p><u>Customer Service and Product Excellence</u> The organization is committed to understanding customer needs, providing effective customer services and having quality products and services. The organization is seen as a benchmark of excellence in its products and services (positive brand recognition).</p>	<p>AHRE, 2003</p>

Retention	
<p><u>Fair Compensation</u> The organization provides fair and equitable compensation, including flexible benefits/family-friendly policies responsive to the life stages and needs of employees, e.g., child/elder-care resources, flexible work schedules, fitness centres, home loan assistance, educational loans/grants, social events, personal sick time for family illnesses, etc.</p>	<p>Howard & Gould, 2000 Larson & Lakin, 1999 Mitchell & Braddock, 1994/1993 VRRI, 2005/2000</p>
<p><u>Employee Health and Work/Family Balance</u> The organization demonstrates a firm commitment to valuing employees and fostering employee satisfaction/health, e.g., via policies, practices, strategic plans and management communications. The organization exhibits knowledge of and interest in employee's personal life, e.g., family composition, life style, values and career/personal goals.</p>	<p>Howard & Gould, 2000 Lock, 2003 Lowe, 2005 VRRI, 2005/2001</p>
<p><u>Resources and Environment</u> The organization provides the basic requirements for employees to succeed in their positions, e.g., training, proper technology and equipment, information, relevant authority, opportunities for teamwork and cooperation, safe and healthy work conditions.</p>	<p>Hatton & Emerson, 1998 Howard & Gould, 2000</p>
<p><u>Effective Communication and Participation</u> The organization has effective and multiple mechanisms for timely, two-way transfer of information. There are opportunities for employees to contribute their opinions and knowledge to decision-making processes, e.g., within teams, cross-unit task forces/committees/work groups. Employee feedback is sought and responded to.</p>	<p>Lowe, 2001 VRRI, 2004</p>
<p><u>Self Actualization and Career Growth</u> The organization provides employees with the challenges to use their skills and gifts, and to do meaningful and fulfilling work. There are multiple training opportunities and there is a strong relationship between training/advancement opportunities and the career/growth aspirations of the employee. Training recognizes and rewards valued skills. The organization has well-defined career paths and accurate skills inventories that are referred to for identifying employees for new opportunities.</p>	<p>Ford & Honnor, 2000 Hatton & Emerson, 1998 Howard & Gould, 2000 Larson, Hewitt & Anderson, 1999 Lock, 2003 Lowe, 2001 VRRI, 2005/2001</p>
<p><u>Leadership Skills and Support</u> Supervisors and mid-managers have strong leadership and people management skills, e.g., are supportive of employees, make staff feel valued, advocate for employee needs and are effective at influencing upper management decisions impacting on their staff. Leadership development and succession planning are part of the organization's strategic goals and objectives.</p>	<p>Ford & Honnor, 2000 Howard & Gould, 2000 Larson, Hewitt & Anderson, 1999 Lock, 2003 Razza, 1993 VRRI, 2005/2001</p>
<p><u>Role Clarity and Performance Recognition</u> Employees understand their roles and responsibilities, and receive feedback on performance through formal and informal mechanisms in a timely, supportive and constructive fashion. Reward systems are fair and appropriately recognize employee contribution.</p>	<p>Howard & Gould, 2000 Lock, 2003 VRRI, 2005/2001</p>
<p><u>Creativity and innovation</u> The organization values and provides flexible and multiple mechanisms and resources for employees to engage in activities that promote learning, knowledge and innovation, e.g., partnerships with educational institutions, peer mentoring, coaching, teamwork, job shadowing, job enrichment/job enlargement opportunities, secondments. Creative problem solving and innovative approaches are encouraged; risk-taking is supported.</p>	<p>AHRE, 2003 Howard & Gould, 2000 Lock, 2003 Lowe, 2001 VRRI, 2005/2004/2001</p>

REFERENCES

- Ford, J., & Honnor, J. (2000). Job satisfaction and community residential staff serving individuals with severe intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 25*(4), 343-362.
- Government of Alberta, Human Resources and Employment (AHRE). (2003). *Alberta Careers Update*. Edmonton, AB: The Author.
- Hatton, C., & Emerson, E. (1998). Organizational predictors of staff stress, satisfaction, and intended turnover in a service for people with multiple disabilities. *Mental Retardation, 31*(6), 388-395.
- Howard, B., & Gould, K. (2000). Strategic planning for employee happiness: A business goal for human service organizations. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 105*(5), 377-386.
- Larson, S.A., Hewitt, A. & Anderson, L. (1999). Staff recruitment challenges and interventions in agencies supporting people with developmental disabilities. *Mental Retardation, 37* (1), 36-46.
- Larson, S., & Lakin, K. (1999). Longitudinal study of recruitment and retention in small community homes supporting persons with developmental disabilities. *Mental Retardation, 37*(4), 267-280.
- Lock, G. (2003). "Living, valuing and sharing" – a case study of retaining IT professionals in the British Columbia Public Service. *Career Development International, 8*(3), 152-158.
- Lowe, G. (2005). Raising the bar for people practices: Helping all health organizations become "preferred employers." *Healthcare Quarterly, 8*(1), 60-63.
- Lowe, G. (2001). Employer of choice? Workplace innovations in government. Retrieved from http://www.cprn.org/documents/18345_en.pdf, on May 30, 2005.
- Mitchell, D., & Braddock, D. (1994). Compensation and turnover of direct-care staff in developmental disabilities residential facilities in the United States. II: Turnover. *Mental Retardation, 32*(1), 34-42.
- Mitchell, D., & Braddock, D. (1993). Compensation and turnover of direct-care staff in developmental disabilities residential facilities in the United States. I: Wages and benefits. *Mental Retardation, 31*(6), 429-437.
- Razza, N. (1993). Determinants of direct-care staff turnover in group homes for individuals with mental retardation. *Mental Retardation, 31*(5), 284-291.
- The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute. (2005). *Workforce Profile and employer Perspectives. Report from Survey of Service Providers in Alberta*. Prepared for AARC, Workforce 2010 initiative. Calgary, AB: Author.
- The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute. (2004). *Facts for a Solid Foundation: Essential Intelligence for Planning the Future Workforce*. Prepared for AARC, Workforce 2010 initiative. Calgary, AB: Author.
- The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute. (2001). *Perspectives of staff, consumers and parents on services to people with developmental disabilities. Focus group findings*. Calgary, AB: Author.
- The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute. (2000). *Staff turnover in services to persons with developmental disabilities in Alberta. Survey findings*. Calgary, AB: Author.

APPENDIX

**“EMPLOYER OF CHOICE” SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL
PRELIMINARY DRAFT FOR INTERNAL REVIEW**

“EMPLOYER OF CHOICE” SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

What is an “employer of choice”?

“Employers of choice” are organizations that exemplify such innovative and effective human resource management principles and practices that the most highly qualified and desirable employees choose to work for them rather than anyone else. They are industry leaders and their organizational structures, cultures and systems set the benchmark standards of excellence for others in their industry to follow.

What is this Self-Assessment Tool about?

This Self-Assessment Tool identifies the leading human resource practices and strategies that services to persons with disabilities are encouraged to implement if they are to be perceived as “employers of choice” in the rehabilitation field in Alberta now and in the foreseeable future. The standards are derived from extensive human resource and rehabilitation management literature and research.

What does it measure? What does it mean if I score high or low?

The objective of the tool is to provide organizations with a simple gauge to measure how close they are to being “employers of choice” in the rehabilitation sector. The intent of the tool is not to say whether you “pass” or “fail”, but to impress upon the user the complex and diverse bundle of strategies required for effective recruitment and retention.

Most organizations are already doing very well in some of these aspects. We hope that the tool will help them to systematically validate areas of strengths within their organization, and encourage them to act as a resource to others, thereby enhancing the human resource capacity of the field as a whole. Many organizations will find that they do not get top scores on some aspects. We hope that the score will encourage them to embark on a more detailed analysis of areas needing improvement, and to implement some of the strategies that can get them closer to being “employers of choice”.

How does it work? What do I need to do?

The Self-Assessment Tool is designed to be very simple to use. There are two sections, recruitment and retention, each with a set of applicable standards. Each standard has a list of examples under it as indicators of how well the standard is being met. For each of the standards, rate your organization on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), using the indicators as a guide. The more indicators you can think of as things your organization is doing under each standard, the higher the score you can give yourself for that standard. Our list of examples is not comprehensive, and your organization may be doing more than the list, or other similar things to those on the list. Add up your total score for each section.

Is the Self-Assessment Tool scientifically valid?

The benchmark standards in the Self-Assessment Tool are derived from strategies identified in rehabilitation and human resource research literature. Recruitment and retention have been shown to improve if these strategies are in place. However, the Tool itself has not been scientifically tested for its validity and reliability, since these activities are beyond the scope of this project. The Self-Assessment Tool is a simple guide to help organizations have a general understanding of how their human resource practices “stack-up” against those of industry leaders. As such, it is easy to use and an effective start for more in-depth organizational analyses.

"EMPLOYER OF CHOICE" SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

RECRUITMENT						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/ Not applicable
	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)	(0)
<p><u>1. Fair Compensation</u> The organization provides fair and equitable compensation, including competitive/progressive benefits, e.g., entry-level and part-time positions are eligible for same benefits as others.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>2. Flexibility</u> The organization has policies and practices that offer flexibility in work arrangements and structures. Alternative work practices are explored and creative solutions to functional requirements are accepted.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>3. Workforce Diversity</u> The organization values and encourages diversity; it has strategies to attract non-traditional labour pools, e.g., engages in targeted marketing, offers part-time, flexible work arrangements for people 55 or older. The organization has policies that demonstrate cultural awareness and accommodative practices.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>5. Value Congruence</u> The organization espouses prevalent or progressive social values, e.g., equity, justice, democracy, empowerment. The organization has a clearly articulated philosophy/value statements. There are processes to ensure organizational values reflect and are consistent with employee values and consumer/family values, e.g., through stakeholder engagement and participatory mission/vision setting exercises.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>6. Initiation and Orientation</u> The organization offers pre-service training, apprenticeships or volunteer programs that provide potential new entrants into the field opportunities to learn core competencies and explore the job/career. Orientation processes are well-defined and comprehensive, e.g., new recruit is paired with a more experienced "buddy", and receives clear instructions on roles/responsibilities, organizational information, reporting structures, etc.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>7. Job Match</u> The organization has processes to determine if there is a fit between the job requirements and employee's skills/interests, e.g., using realistic job previews, including potential team members/ consumers in the interview process.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>8. Customer Service and Product Excellence</u> The organization is committed to understanding customer needs, providing effective services and having quality products and services. The organization is seen as a benchmark of excellence in its products and services (positive brand recognition).</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Add up the number of check marks for each column and calculate the total score for this section (A + B + C + D + E + F)</p>	<p>___ x 5</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p>(A)</p>	<p>___ x 4</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p>(B)</p>	<p>___ x 3</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p>(C)</p>	<p>___ x 2</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p>(D)</p>	<p>___ x 1</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p>(E)</p>	<p><u> </u></p> <p>(F)</p>
(A + B + C + D + E + F) Total Recruitment Score						

RETENTION						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/ Not applicable
	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)	(0)
<p><u>1. Fair Compensation</u> The organization provides fair and equitable compensation, including flexible benefits/family-friendly policies responsive to the life stages and needs of employees, e.g., child/elder-care resources, flexible work schedules, fitness centres, home loan assistance, educational loans/grants, time off for family illnesses.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>2. Employee Health and Work/Family Balance</u> The organization demonstrates a firm commitment to valuing employees and fostering employee satisfaction/health, e.g., via policies, practices, strategic plans and communications. The organization exhibits interest in employee's personal life, e.g., family composition, life style, values and career/personal goals.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>3. Resources and Environment</u> The organization provides the basic requirements for employees to succeed in their positions, e.g., training, proper technology and equipment, information, relevant authority, opportunities for teamwork and cooperation, safe and healthy work conditions.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>4. Effective Communication and Participation</u> The organization has effective and multiple mechanisms for timely, two-way information transfer. Employees can contribute their opinions and knowledge to decision-making processes. Employee feedback is sought and responded to.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>5. Self Actualization and Career Growth</u> Employees have meaningful and fulfilling work. There are multiple training opportunities and a strong relationship between training/advancement and the employee's career/growth aspirations. Training recognizes and rewards valued skills. There are well-defined career paths and accurate skills inventories.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>6. Leadership Skills and Support</u> Supervisors and mid-managers have strong leadership and people management skills, e.g., are supportive of employees, make staff feel valued, advocate for employee needs and are effective at influencing upper management decisions impacting on their staff. Leadership development and succession planning are part of the organization's strategic goals and objectives.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>7. Role Clarity and Performance Recognition</u> Employees understand their roles/responsibilities, and receive performance feedback through formal and informal mechanisms in a timely, supportive and constructive fashion. Reward systems are fair and appropriately recognize employee contribution.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>8. Creativity and innovation</u> The organization values and provides flexible and multiple mechanisms and resources for employees to engage in activities that promote learning, knowledge and innovation, e.g., partnerships with educational institutions, peer mentoring, teamwork, job shadowing, job enrichment/job enlargement. Creative problem solving and innovative approaches are encouraged; risk-taking is supported.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Add up the number of check marks for each column and calculate the total score for this section (A + B + C + D + E + F)</p>	<p>___ x 5</p> <hr/> <p>(A)</p>	<p>___ x 4</p> <hr/> <p>(B)</p>	<p>___ x 3</p> <hr/> <p>(C)</p>	<p>___ x 2</p> <hr/> <p>(D)</p>	<p>___ x 1</p> <hr/> <p>(E)</p>	<p><u> </u></p> <p>(F)</p>
(A + B + C + D + E + F) Total Retention Score						

SCORE CALCULATION

Recruitment Score _____

Particular areas of strengths (high scores): _____

Particular areas needing improvement (low scores): _____

Retention Score _____

Particular areas of strengths (high scores): _____

Particular areas needing improvement (low scores): _____

Overall Score _____

INTERPRETING THE SCORE

Maximum possible score: 80

Gold Standard Achievement Score: 70–80

Congratulations! Your organization has a comprehensive set of progressive and exemplary practices that should make you a highly desirable employer to new and current employees now and in the foreseeable future. You should focus your resources on maintaining your leading edge, raising the bar even higher through more progressive and innovative practices, and sharing your expertise and knowledge with others in the field.

Silver Standard Achievement Score: 60–69

Well done! Your organization has made impressive progress towards achieving excellence. While there are some areas that you could improve on, there are some in which you may well be an industry leader. You should focus your resources on enhancing your organizational capacity in the identified areas of weakness, and sharing your expertise in areas where you excel.

Bronze Standard Achievement Score: 50–59

Good job! Your organization has made a good start towards being an above average employer, possibly even with a few areas in which you excel. There is clearly room for progress in a number of your human resource practices, and with the right effort and commitment, you should be able to make improvements. You should focus your resources on areas where you are particularly weak, and bringing these up to a higher level, while maintaining your achievements in areas where you are already doing well.

Scores below 50

You are not alone! This tool has, hopefully, identified your areas of weakness, and given you some solid ideas for strategies that you can implement to improve recruitment and retention in your organization. Resource and knowledge sharing opportunities with other organizations should help you to maximize your efforts most effectively.