Workforce Intermediary Partnerships:

Key to Success in High-Performing Labor Markets

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Executive Summary

This review of some 170 books, policy reports, and journal articles reveals that the workforce intermediary model of workforce development evolved from the 1980s to the present to serve a broad range of participants and become a central actor in the structure of local labor markets. As a subset of a larger body of labor market organizations, workforce intermediaries broker the relationship between workers and employers, reducing uncertainty in the labor exchange process and managing transaction costs. Initial formation of workforce intermediaries stretches back to the federal Employment Services of the 1930s. The features of modern intermediaries were forged in successive versions of federal workforce legislation that emphasized "second-chance" services to disadvantaged persons and "low-skilled workers" in low-income communities. Scholars found that focus on these constituencies tended to stigmatize participants, lessening their attractiveness to employers. High-performing workforce intermediaries adapted by becoming more closely attuned to local community members and regarding industry, both employers and unions, as partners in developing training curriculum, designing supportive services, and serving the precise needs of employers in targeted industry sectors. Most importantly, workforce intermediaries strive to integrate workforce development and economic development perspectives and services. Modern workforce intermediaries are diverse in their sponsors and partnerships, spanning local chambers of commerce and labor federations to worker centers. Further advancement in this organizational field requires greater sustainability among these organizations and government resources to establish what the Jewish Vocational Services calls a "sophisticated learning community" (Rubin 2019, 17) to share knowledge, identify best practices, and nurture continued innovation.

Introduction

Over the past quarter century, the emergence of workforce intermediary organizations and a new paradigm (Giloth 2000) of workforce policy, strategies and practices has been a major topic of discussion in labor market studies, as reflected in the roughly 170 pieces of literature (mostly from the early 1990s through 2020) examined for this policy and practice review.

There is broad consensus about how the post WWII labor market was structured and the factors that undermined that status quo, undercutting the psychological contract between workers and employers and ushering in an employment relationship mediated by the external labor market (Cappelli 1999). The destruction of the traditional employment relationship produced a labor market environment of "high uncertainty" for employers and a dilemma: how to upgrade or renew their skill base among new hires and existing workers to meet the pressures of product markets that placed a premium on quality and diversity, the optimal productive use of microelectronic technology, and the advantages of high-performance work systems to drive flexible production strategies (Rogers & Streeck 1991). In response, organizations in the workforce, community and economic development fields launched a flurry of new career pathway, workplace learning and employer-engaged programs and experimented with varied organizational forms. Yet "the ultimate shape of the labor market is … far from being determined," wrote Osterman (1999, 180) near the beginning of this period.

As social entrepreneurs, community-based organizations, business associations and labor-management partnerships, among others, have established and refined their organizational models during this transitional period, the shape and leading actors of a new "institutional infrastructure" (Dresser and Rogers 1998, 7) of labor markets has become more clear. Many of these academic experts, policy developers and program practitioners see the workforce intermediary as the core of a new institutional structure for local/regional labor markets. Workforce intermediaries have the potential to be a "key building block" of new workforce systems at the local[1] level, complementary to the federal workforce system and able to link together its disparate elements (Uhalde et al. 2003).

This review presumes that the flourishing of workforce intermediaries is a positive step in the transformation of labor market relations that is improving the employment prospects for workers and contributing to the economic viability of urban America and its neighborhoods (Holzer 2017).

"Robust and agile workforce intermediary partnerships are the key to success in high-performing, sustainable regional labor markets that integrate services by the workforce and economic development organizations that value a diverse and equitable workforce."

1 *When I use the term "local" here, I am referring to both local (an urban jurisdiction), metropolitan and regional economic areas of service provision as defined by the practices of the workforce intermediary itself. The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, for example, is based in Milwaukee and serves individuals and organizations in the regional economy of southeastern Wisconsin.*

Viewing the workforce development field and labor market institutions from the perspective of workforce intermediaries represents a contrasting way (Giloth 2000) to explore labor market change, as compared to the traditional discourse about policy options that dominates much of the literature.

This review concludes that sufficient research has been done and on-the-ground practice accumulated to identify a new category of workforce intermediaries, what I call Workforce Intermediary Community & Industry Organizations. They are positioned at the intersection of the fields of workforce development, economic development and community development (Andreason 2016). As the US economy struggles to recover from the disaster of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that these organizations are mobilized to play a central coordinating role in workforce development programs that are embedded in communities, aligned with economic development strategies, and responsive to the documented needs of employers for skilled workers.

The AFL-CIO Working for America Institute: An Experienced National Workforce Intermediary

This report focuses on the evolution of policies and practices of local workforce intermediaries. Helping to lead the work of intermediaries at the national level is the AFL-CIO Working for America Institute (Institute) . Since its founding in the 1960s as the Human Resources Development Institute, the Institute has served as a strategic partner with organized labor, employers and the workforce system to expand high quality training and apprenticeship programs, leveraging labor management partnerships to produce strategies that ensure that workers have the skills necessary to meet industry demands and providing opportunities for workers to build careers and earn family-sustaining wages.

The value of the Institute rests in its access to the labor movement's vast network: 55 international unions, more than 650 state and local labor federations representing more than 12.5 million workers, and more than 1,600 labor and community members of Workforce Development Boards.

The Institute draws upon this nationwide network to introduce and implement training and career pathway innovations such as innovative Registered Apprenticeship , expanding diversity and equity in workforce development, peer support programs for workers in transition, and a worker-centered approach to basic skills training and economic development planning. It achieves program goals by offering policy guidance, sponsoring webinars and conference workshops, writing toolkits, delivering in-person and digital technical assistance, and doing research and writing on best practices in the field.

The Institute has focused on developing best practice high road workforce development models, including support to expand the participation of the organized labor, joint labor management partnerships and community representatives on state and local workforce boards. The Institute has provided training and technical assistance to state and local labor federations and labor-management partnerships and supports labor workforce intermediaries to advance worker centered training in high growth sectors. Its work is directed toward advancing equity, workforce diversity and equal opportunity to careers that pay family-sustaining earnings.[1]

1 *Johansson, Erin. Advancing Equity through Workforce Intermediary Partnerships: Best Practices in Manufacturing, Service and Transportation Industries. AFL-CIO Working for America Institute and Jobs with Justice Education Fund, October 2017.*

Most recently, in partnership with the US Department of Labor the Institute has expanded expand Registered Apprenticeship in Advanced Manufacturing and Hospitality sectors and has been successful in implementing innovative models in both sectors in collaboration with state and local labor workforce intermediaries as well as labor and joint labor management training partnerships.

In recent years the Institute has trained leaders in establishing state-based workforce intermediaries and collaborated with organizations such as the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO Keystone Development Partnership, the California AFL-CIO Workforce and Economic Development program, the Minnesota AFL-CIO Regional Training Partnership, Michigan AFL-CIO Workforce Development Institute, Indiana Labor Institute for Training and the Chicago Federation of Labor Workforce and Community Initiative in expanding labor engagement in apprenticeship and workforce development programs.

The Institute has provided support to labor and joint labor management training and apprenticeship programs working with the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Council including member unions such as the United Auto Workers (UAW), International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), the Machinists Institute and the United Steelworkers (USW) as well asto the Boston Education Training and Skills Corp (UNITE HERE Local 26) and the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas (UNITE HERE Local 226) to expand innovative registered apprenticeship in manufacturing, hospitality and other industries.

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with years of success in meeting its program objectives, the Institute administers grants and contracts in alignment with national goals set out by the U.S. Department of Labor, state government agencies, foundations and labor-management coalitions that support workers' access to lifelong learning.

The Institute understands the central role of government in providing robust career navigation and quality workforce development programs to unemployed and underemployed workers and under-represented population as well as the important role played by workforce intermediaries as partners with government agencies and employers as the economy recovers from the pandemic.

The Institute continues to actively seek partnerships with government, community and employer groups as well as workforce intermediaries.
The Institute has voiced its support for labor and management sector intermediaries to help expand partnerships that nurture sustainability and effectiveness in working with government and industry leaders to find quality jobs and expand career opportunities for all workers.

Labor Market Intermediation

Employers in the United States have largely dismantled their internal labor market norms and procedures in recent decades, undercutting the previous model of mutual obligations between workers and employers. This change in employer behavior produced a transitional period in labor market relations marked by plant closings and mass layoffs, the outsourcing and offshoring of work (Marschall and Clawson 2010), determined opposition to unions, and increased use of temporary and contingent workers (Osterman 1999) who labor under precarious conditions. The expectation of "lifetime employment" and the opportunity to steadily move upward in a corporate career ladder was eliminated, replaced by the vagaries of corporate restructuring and the individualistic outlook that blue collar and white workers alike were on their own to obtain the training and skills to maintain employment security (Cappelli 1999).

In this volatile environment the labor market intermediary approach and related strategies gained credence (American Assembly Steering Committee 2004), driven at first by a few long-time organizational practitioners, such as the activist founders of Project Quest in Texas (Osterman and Lautsch 1996). In turn, social entrepreneurs experimented with new models, potentially spreading the workforce intermediary innovation to thousands of organizations. These Labor Market (LM) intermediaries build upon opportunities presented by changing labor market conditions, bringing new players into those markets and producing incentives for innovative patterns of collaboration (Osterman 1999).

The phenomenon of labor market intermediation, where organizations outside a firm's internal labor markets influence the selection of human resources, is not new (Benner 2003). Established by New Deal legislation in the 1930s, the federal tax-supported Employment Service (ES), for example, was structured as an intermediary to administer local centers providing labor exchange services, counsel workers, promote their training and retraining to meet the demand of employers, and coordinate the manpower-related services of community agencies. The ES guided unemployed workers into the industries where their skills were most needed, especially during wartime and national emergencies (Adams 1969). The National Commission for Manpower Policy (1978), overseen by the U.S. Department of Labor, published a special report on *Labor Market Intermediaries* that included chapters on institutions such as the Public Employment Service and Hiring Halls.

In accord with a standard definition, LM intermediaries "interpose themselves between workers and firms to facilitate, inform, or regulate how workers are matched to firms, how work is accomplished, and how conflicts are resolved" (Autor 2009, 1). From a management perspective, LM intermediaries in their "staggering" number and range of organizational forms have disrupted the traditional employer-employee relationship by opening up other avenues of information about job openings (e.g. online job boards and social media sites functioning as recruiters), matching potential employees to employers that are hiring (e.g. temporary help services), and becoming the employer of record for firms who wish to segment their workforce (e.g. Professional Employer Organizations) to pass on legal obligations to an outside entity (Bonet, Cappelli and Hamori 2013). This is the crux of the different paradigm that management theorists argue has altered the boundaries of mainstream US firms and changed the attitudes, behaviors and practices of their profession.

For the purposes of this review, an *institutional structure* comprises the set of implicit or explicit rules, regulations, norms, standardized procedures, or contractual relationships that govern market transactions (modified definition based on Freeman 1998, 4). Institutions enable or constrain the practices of an array of entities that share a mutual awareness that they are involved in the organizational field of labor market intermediation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

It is important to distinguish between labor market intermediaries that are now key players in the institutional structure of local labor markets and workforce intermediaries that are *organizations or networks of organizations* that offer workforce development services to members of a community composed of individuals or firms (e.g., worker centers, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and some chambers of commerce.)[2] Workforce intermediaries are innovative organizational entities that have been established, or existing entities have taken on the features of workforce intermediaries, to take advantage of opportunities presented by perceived deficiencies or failures of the existing institutional structure. As they evolve, these workforce intermediaries have the potential, working incrementally, to alter the institutional structure (North 1990) and become major players – or perhaps central actors – in the institutional environment. The process of these intermediaries gaining influence will be discontinuous, varying from place to place, depending on the dominance of economic sectors, traditions, and other local circumstances (Kazis 1999).

The institutional structure of local labor markets provides a framework for cooperation and partnerships, especially in targeted sectors of the economy. I argue that workforce intermediary organizations are becoming key actors in the institutional infrastructure of local labor markets. The literature examined here displays indicators of such movement, explained below in terms of several themes that reveal how the field has progressed. First, I will summarize the particular ways in which intermediaries improve the functioning of local labor markets.

2 The literature reveals several instances in which individuals took on the role of an intermediary. See (Lowe et al. 2010).

The Value and Functions of Intermediaries

The literature affirms consensus about the advantages of labor market intermediaries, features that also apply to workforce intermediary organizations. Broadly conceived, labor market and workforce intermediaries are third parties that *broker relationships* between job seekers and employers (ITAA 2000; Bernhardt et al. 2001; Lynch 2004; Sutton 2004; Harrington 2006; Conway and Giloth 2014; AFL-CIO 2017), provide information about available jobs, counsel workers about the skill requirements of occupations, perhaps directly offering skill training to them or referring them to educational institutions. Intermediaries interact with employers to identify their current and future skills and hiring needs. They act to reduce transaction costs in the operation of the hiring process, for both job seekers and employers (Kazis 1999; Benner 2003). In addition to assisting workers in their job search and employment prospects, intermediaries benefit individual employers and improve the functioning of local labor markets. LM intermediaries help employers reduce uncertainty in the labor exchange process by managing risk (Benner 2003). James Harrington (2006) elaborated on the impact of intermediaries on three types of risk. (See Box 1)

The mitigation of these risks directs attention to the well-known problem of "free riders," referring to firms that "poach" persons with specialized occupational skills from other firms rather than upgrading the skills of existing employees. When Rogers and Streeck (1991) did empirical research among Wisconsin metalworking firms, they found that the threat of poaching was real and affected employer behavior, producing a disincentive to train incumbent workers:

> While all firms would be better off with a well-trained workforce from which to draw … it makes little sense for any individual firm to train workers in anything but narrow, firm-specific tasks if workers can move between employers and there is no assurance that other firms will also train…. Firms are reluctant to make additional investment in training, *on their own*, since they fear other firms will reap the benefit without incurring the cost. (13, emphasis in original.)

The negative effect of the free rider scenario on the willingness of firms to train is frequently cited in

Box 1. Intermediaries mitigate three types of risk:

1. the employment risk when an employer decides to hire someone when their future workforce needs will be affected by changing technology and new product markets unknown to the employer at the point of hiring;
2. the quality risk in which an employer cannot be certain a new hire has all the skills required for current and future production systems; and
3. the mobility risk that a trained employee may not stay with the employer for a long enough period to recoup the training investment. Labor market intermediaries "help producers identify, screen and hire personnel with specialized capabilities," (6) increasing the organizational competence of the firm to make optimal use of information and its division of labor.

Source: Harrington, James W. "Labor Market Intermediation: Commodity Chains, and Knowledge Transfer." Paper prepared for the meeting of the Commission on the Dynamics of Economic Space, 2006, Auckland, New Zealand.

"There is growing attention being paid to what are being called "workforce intermediaries," a subset of all labor market intermediaries that … have become a fundamental component of the structure and dynamics of labor markets." — Benner (2003), 133, 136

the abstract but seldom documented, as Rogers and Streeck did in this case. It is important to point out because it leads directly to a countervailing strategy: establishing a mechanism or consortium to assure that all firms, especially in a sector of a regional economy, conduct training at the same time and have access to a pool of capable workers who have skills that are responsive to the needs of employers as determined by the information collected and processed by that mechanism. Such a solution would move toward *institutionalizing* a response to the free rider danger, which is produced by the individualistic, combative structure of American "free market" industrial relations. If sustainable, the organizational mechanism would become a player in the *labor market intermediary institutional structure* of one or more industries in the regional economy of Southeastern Wisconsin.

Under the auspices of the Center on Wisconsin Strategies (COWS), Rogers went on to facilitate a year-long discussion leading to the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP), an iconic workforce intermediary formed by the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, employers, a local community and technical college, and other partners (Neuenfeldt and Parker 1996; Dresser and Rogers 1998, 2003). A fundamental aspect of their intermediary routines is an annual Industry Needs Assessment of manufacturers, using intelligence gathered from the insider, shop-floor perspective offered by the representatives of workers – key union officials (AFL-CIO 2017).

The constructive impact of workforce intermediaries on the operation of a local labor market is the other critical advantage. Local labor markets in the US are marked by a lack of clarity and a confusing jumble of often competing programs, resulting in a "fractured system with multiple entry points, bureaucratic rules, conflicting priorities, inconsistent and nonrepresentative employer participation, poor coordination, and missed opportunities for labor market upgrading" (Dresser and Rogers 1998). In an environment where social and political relations are "informal and decentralized" with a continued reliance on "temporary networks and convenient alliances as much as formal authority," young people have meager guidance about pathways to make the transition from school to the world of work (Zemsky et al. 1998). It is challenging for young people to obtain the combination of education and vocational training conducive to career satisfaction. The local workforce system sponsored by the federal agencies, and governed by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation and regulations, is characterized by various organizations performing multiple functions that are not necessarily coordinated efficiently (Eyster et al. 2016).

LM and workforce intermediaries help to counteract these deficiencies by providing the economies of scale that accompany collective employer participation in influencing the availability of workers with pertinent skills and sharing the cost of replenishing the pool of skilled labor. They contribute to identifying advanced production practices in an industrial sector, enabling their diffusion more widely to "capture the accumulated wisdom of learning across firms" (Dresser and Rogers 2003, 285). Intermediaries facilitate system-building, helping to move training programs away from income-targeted criteria – the norm in the WIOA structures governed by workforce development boards – toward a more employer-centered model activated through the formation of employer consortia (Osterman and Batt 1993). In the framework of traditional economics, third party intermediaries help to compensate for a market failure by bridging asymmetries of information, aggregating demand as signaled by employers, and raising the skill equilibrium in a geographic area (Lynch 2004).

In his continuing study of labor market innovations in Silicon Valley, Benner (2003) acknowledges all of these advantages and adds *labor market adjustment*. He argues that intermediaries facilitate the process of labor market adjustment to new economic conditions by building social networks among workers that increase their employability, allowing them to take advantages of opportunities presented by multiple employers. Because they directly augment the strength of regional economies, "intermediaries have become a fundamental component of the structure and dynamics of regional labour markets" (631).

As explained in the sections below, Benner's prediction about the centrality of workforce intermediaries is born out in the way the concept and its realization has enhanced collaboration with employers, mobilized some chambers of commerce and trade associations to act as intermediaries, and begun to improve coordination between economic development and workforce development practices.

Labor Market (LM) Intermediaries and the Workforce Intermediaries Subset

Long-time analysts of the workforce intermediary organizational field, Maureen Conway and Robert Giloth, acknowledge that one of its difficult aspects is the variety of terms used to describe intermediaries (Conway and Giloth 2014). In order to constrain the components of this organizational field under study and make it more manageable for further research and the distribution of resources, it is necessary here to distinguish between LM intermediaries and their subset, workforce intermediaries. The definition of LM intermediaries used above covers a broad swath of entities and organizations. These are entities that Americans typically think of as institutions and regularly are named as such when appearing in popular culture, media accounts, and everyday language usage. Based on the literature (e.g., Mills 1978; Harrington 2006) and such common-sense usage, LM intermediaries include the entities show in Box 2.

The operation and practices of these organizations, corporations, and online entities in Box 2 are governed by an institutional structure of rules, regulations and informal norms that have evolved over a substantial period of time. The area is further complicated because many are national-level systems established by federal legislation yet composed of local and regional offices that are themselves part of local labor market structures. If local offices and campuses and committees and websites are treated as separate entities, the number is overwhelming and unwieldy as a subject for research. Volumes and innumerable academic articles have been written about these institutions, so a close examination here is beyond the scope of this paper.

Workforce intermediaries, as this organizational field has evolved since roughly the 1980s, are a subset of the larger category of LM intermediaries. How many workforce intermediaries are operational? The answer depends on how they are defined, of course, and definitions have varied over the decades. In turn,

Box 2. Selective List of Labor Market Intermediaries

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in High School
- Post-secondary institutions, principally community colleges
- K-12 education system
- For profit technical schools
- Temporary help agencies, such as Manpower, Inc.
- The federal workforce development system, including the American Job Centers
- Public Employment Service (now co-located in the Job Centers)
- The Federal Registered Apprenticeship (RA) system
- Building and Construction Trades Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (JATC) system and its hiring halls
- Correctional institutions
- Some chambers of commerce (if they take on intermediary practices)
- Some industry trade associations (if they take on intermediary practices)
- Private employment agencies
- Online, electronic job boards and social media sites such as LinkedIn
- Community-based organizations.

there is no reliable count of the number of extant workforce intermediaries, though the literature provides some estimates.

- Research in 1999 by the National Network of Sector Partners (NNSP) developed criteria and surveyed 243 organizations (Marano and Tarr 2004).[3]

- It is common for workforce intermediaries to have a central role in forming the partnerships that anchor regional sectoral initiatives (Oldmixon 2006). A rare "snapshot" of sector initiatives in 2010 estimated that there were more than 1,000 such initiatives nationwide, many of which could be expected to include one or more workforce intermediary organizations (National Network of Sector Partners 2010).

- Funded by the Ford Foundation, a rigorous 2003 study of workforce intermediaries by the Partnership for Employer-Employee Responsive Systems (PEERS) concluded that more than 200 organizations in local communities nationwide identified themselves as a "new breed of workforce intermediaries" that was "destined to become a fixture of regional and national labor markets" (PEERS 2003, 7). This finding echoes Benner's conclusion. (The PEERS' examples of organizations that function as workforce intermediaries stretches beyond non-profit community groups to include industry, namely chambers of commerce, business associations, unions, and institutionalized joint labor-management training partnerships.)

- As part of their efforts to improve working conditions for low-wage workers, immigrants and local community members, worker centers (Fine 2006) view workforce intermediation, operating on both the supply side and the demand side of the labor market, as "central to their work" (Doussard 2018, 251). The four major alliances formed by worker centers number 122 members, another indicator of the minimum size of the workforce intermediary universe.

Given the critical role that workforce intermediaries play in sectoral and industry partnerships, and the insight that it is more feasible to understand the dynamics of industry through the experience of employers, unions and their peers at the state and regional level (Dedrick 2014), the proliferation of industry initiatives inside states, often facilitated by government investments, also points to the large number of such intermediaries. When a new governor prepared to take office in 2003 in Pennsylvania, for example, the Keystone Research Center was commissioned to prepare a strategy for establishing a "well-functioning learning and career infrastructure" (Benner, Herzenberg and Prince 2003, 1). Workforce intermediaries were envisioned as the key actors that would build upon past collaborations, guided by industry-driven principles, to assemble employer consortia. In the following six years, the Commonwealth invested about $100 million to develop a network of nearly 80 industry partnerships that engaged some 6,000 businesses. Partnerships came together as industry organizations discovered common issues and realized the value of collaboration. "None of this would have been possible without the convening process of an intermediary that brought them together to discover common interests and concerns," affirmed Dedrick (2014, 70).

The literature confirms that there are many hundreds of workforce intermediaries across the country, with concentrations where state governments have incentivized the formation of sectoral partnerships (Wilson 2017) and provided supportive resources to accelerate their maturation (Good and Woolsey 2010). An accurate tabulation of their numbers, and the identification of organizations that fit a definition, remains a topic for further research.

* * *

The labor market and workforce intermediary literature since the late 1980s reveals a great deal about how conceptions of the entire organizational

3 *This 1999 survey includes individual community colleges, so the number may be inflated. In this review, community colleges are regarded primarily as educational institutions who are very likely to be partners of workforce intermediaries and provide educational services to their clients or members.*

field have evolved, notably around the topics of:

- reaching targeted populations
- the enhanced role of community organizations
- the involvement of employers and business associations
- the presence of durable labor-management partnerships, and
- coordination between the fields of workforce development and economic development.

Given the changing nature of the US labor market and competitive pressures, it is rational for employers and business associations to increase collective action among themselves. Such action benefits their operations while also, conceivably, increasing workforce diversity by turning to the community for new hires. The outcome has been the emergence of a new category of workforce community and industry intermediary organizations whose practices have been coalescing around the themes of services to a broadly based constituency, more intense employer engagement, and linking economic and workforce development activities. This review now turns toward these topics.

“Dual Customers” and Evolution of Community and Industry Engagement

Two of the most frequent phrases found in the literature, especially in the early decades, are “low-wage workers” and “dual customers.” This is understandable because workforce intermediaries appeared in the context of ongoing political consideration of the character of the federal workforce development system and policy negotiations over the components of successive legislation.

A. Policy on Low-wage Workers and the Disadvantaged Population

Stretching back to the early 1960s, with the passage of the Area Redevelopment Act and the Manpower Development and Training Act, the federally funded workforce development system was envisioned as a second-chance system “to help unskilled and deficiently educated poor individuals to compete in the labor market” (Levitan 1988, 1). National employment and training programs were directed toward disadvantaged persons, noting that this population was concentrated among people of color, young persons, and women who are the single heads of households. Amid debate among economists about the reality of “class unemployment” that was concentrated by locality and race, among other factors, policy makers noted that, despite general economic growth in the early 1960s, unemployment remained high among minority groups in central cities and depressed rural areas. Once the impact of such unequal opportunity fueled the civil disorders that accelerated from 1965-67, federal funding flowed to programs such as community-based skill centers that helped disadvantaged persons learn job hunting skills, obtain basic education and counseling, and use supportive services to facilitate job search activities (Levitan, Mangum and Marshall 1972).

An unintended consequence of this focus on the disadvantaged was that the recipients of government aid were stigmatized. Programs became isolated from mainstream labor market operations and identified by the public with welfare programs that gained the reputation of being restricted to special interest groups. Speaking at a 1988 seminar on employment policy, former U.S. Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall and MIT Professor Paul Osterman (1989) agreed about the stigmatization problem and argued for a central role to be played by strong, local labor market institutions serving a *broad base of clients*, an approach that would increase its legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Osterman summarized the reality of stigmatization, validated by at least one research study:

> [T]he traditional constituency of employment programs – the economically disadvantaged – remain of serious concern [because] the graduates of income-targeted programs aimed at poor people are stigmatized by the very fact of participation in such programs. Programs which aim at a very narrow group will not be sufficiently attractive to employers as a source of labor. Accordingly the programs will be limited in effectiveness (32, 35).

The early years of extensive discourse about workforce intermediaries bore the stamp of this focus on the disadvantaged and low-wage workers. Reports analyzing the growing number of workforce programs in states referred to the importance of offering services to minority, economically disadvantaged, low-wage and avowedly low-skill clients (Stevens 1986; Ganzglass and Heidkamp 1987; Creticos and Sheets 1989). Enthusiasm was growing by the late 1990s for the potential of workforce intermediaries to help low-skill workers, the economically disadvantaged, and hard-to-employ job seekers access a “continuum of opportunity” to succeed in a complicated labor market (Kazis 1999). Workforce intermediaries, in contrast to LM intermediary institutions, were characterized by their focus on advancement for “low-income, low skilled job seekers and workers" (Giloth 2003, 216). When an influential definition of workforce intermediaries was put forward in 2004, it characterized them as "homegrown, local partnerships that bring together employers and workers, private and public funding streams, and relevant partners to fashion and implement pathways to career advancement and family-supporting employment for *low-skilled workers*" (Giloth 2004, 5). (Emphasis added.)

In order for the organizational field of workforce intermediaries to move forward, realizing their potential to become central players in local labor markets, divergent perspectives needed to align. How could they continue to serve the populations that desperately needed a second chance in the labor market, while counteracting the stigma problem? The solution was already percolating among the organizational forerunners of these intermediaries: long-standing and newly emerging organizations with strong roots in their communities that were taking on workforce development activities.

During the same period as the Clinton Administration was integrating its work-first, welfare-to-work philosophy in legislation that would become the Workforce Investment Act, Boston researchers Bennett Harrison and Marcus Weiss (1998) were drawing from three volumes of empirical research about organizations that had been successful in placing and retaining local community members in jobs with local industry. They made an important contribution to our thinking by defining workforce development as practices that go beyond job training to include "a constellation of activities from orientation to the work world, recruiting, placement, and mentoring to follow-up counseling and crisis intervention" (5), an insight that distinguished workforce intermediaries from specialized service LM institutions such as temporary help services (placement in jobs) and technical schools (skill training).

This assertion by Harrison and Weiss raised a critical question: what organization could best package together the "outreach, recruiting, training, placement, follow-up counseling, child care, and transportation" (150-51) services to job seekers? Their answer centered on the idea that community organizations – those that were long-embedded in their geographic area and were *trusted local agents* by residents – were adopting this holistic outlook and reaching into their communities to identify appropriate constituents based upon the organization's understanding of their culture, experiences and career aspirations. These community-based workforce intermediaries then had the credibility to reach out to area employers as partners and co-creators of job opportunities.

Going beyond employers as passive "customers" being sold a bundle of skills, this advanced role for community organizations moved them toward the center of the local institutional structure. In subsequent years that position was reinforced when the community organizations played a central role in organizing employers in an industry sector as a collective whole. The rise of sector strategies (Prince, King, and Oldmixon 2017) and coalitions helped employers to recognize their common interests. Identification of the centrality of community-based workforce intermediaries was groundbreaking and recognized as such by scholars (Giloth 2000; Cordero-Guzman 2004; Sutton 2004; Hawley and Taylor 2006).

This pivotal role for community-based workforce intermediaries helps to resolve the stigma dilemma because it meets the mutual goals of helping low-wage, disadvantaged community residents obtain (and keep) jobs and enabling employers to understand that their mutual interest lie in *collaborative practices* that benefits their firms, the pool of skilled workers, and the vitality of the regional economy. Working as a mediating agent, ensuring that trainees obtain the much-heralded soft skills that employers say are desirable, these intermediaries have a latent potential to build the social ties among community members that have long been recognized as critical in labor markets, especially in burgeoning industries such as information technology (Chapple 2006).

B. Community-Based Worker Centers as Workforce Intermediaries

This strategy of reliance on intermediaries – both organizations and networks of individual mentors –

to deliver culturally sensitive workforce connections is relevant to the experience of immigrants and the evolution of a new organizational expression of worker centers. A case in point is provided by North Carolina, where Latinos populate occupations in the construction industry (Lowe, Hagan and Iskander 2010). Many coming from Mexico, for example, arrive with substantial construction skills from their hometown communities. They rely upon a social network of established immigrants in the industry to obtain employment, both working for construction firms and boosting their understanding of US construction technology doing side projects. They generally do not have credentials to validate their skills and are not eligible to enter formal registered apprenticeship programs and attend community college because of the state's residency and English-language requirements. Employers have limited knowledge of their capabilities. In this context, where long-standing immigrants have established a level of trust with selected employers, the network acts as the intermediary to recruit new workers, vouch for them with employers, and obtain employment in which they can maintain and upgrade their skills through work-based learning. Through this sort of "coethnic skill development" (215) a supportive network of skilled immigrants helps to reproduce the social relations that were present in their home countries. They become better integrated into the local labor market and construction industry. Immigrant intermediaries thus contribute to "filling an institutional gap created by inaccessible training and credentialing programs," lending "additional support … for strengthening and institutionalizing skills intermediation through immigrant advocacy groups and worker centers" (291, 220).

Similar dynamics revealing the importance of social networks for minority employability was offered by pre-apprenticeship programs in Chicago. The worker center Arise Chicago obtained state funds in 2007 for a pre-apprenticeship program conducted in concert with a Carpenter's Union joint apprenticeship program. The program relied upon the self-selection of candidates, based upon the union's knowledge of the behaviors required to succeed as registered apprentices. Existing journey workers taught classes and connected the trainees to a social network of experienced workers. Compared to a contemporary classroom-based pre-apprenticeship program, the worker center effort was more effective. All of the participants in the apprenticeship readiness program were indentured because of "their training under UBC journeymen, the tutoring, and intensive case management to resolve academic, family, health, and transportation problems" (Worthen and Haynes 2009, 216). Networks were institutionalized in this case by the presence of an established joint apprenticeship program.

Many worker centers conduct workforce-related activities. For a 2013 analysis, the author used Fine's (2006) criteria to identify 105 worker centers in multiple localities, viewing their websites to examine self-reported programs. Nearly 90 percent of the centers offered workforce development services such as classroom education, computer literacy, informational forums, skill training (e.g., using the tools of a trade, under guidance by experienced workers), skill assessment, hiring halls for laborers (matching immigrant workers with suitable employers), English as a second language, job search techniques, and entrepreneurial skills (Marschall 2013). Worker centers not only qualify as community-based organizations but have adopted the broad framework of workforce development practice that Harrison & Weiss (1998) concluded was a mark of workforce intermediaries. Although the question of whether worker centers are *primarily* social movement organization or workforce intermediaries is contested (Fine 2006, 246-47), there is no reason why these centers could not embrace a dual identity that positions them in both of these fields.

Indeed, scholars have highlighted the flexibility and adaptability of the workforce development activities of worker centers, enabling them to become central actors in local labor markets. It is reasonable to conclude that worker centers are *hybrid* organizations that partner with other groups in industry sectors, organize to improve workplace conditions for low-wage workers, and offer a "core set of direct services [that] involve labor market support, support with contract negotiation and labor market navigation, some form of language classes or popular education, and a modest set of legal services focusing mostly on combatting wage theft and other labor, employment, and employer abuses" (Cordero-Guzman, Izvanariu, and Narro 2013, 109). Worker centers and their industry-based networks "share a number of goals, approaches and practices that give them a shared identity" (108) and move them toward the institutionalization of their work and the solidification of their capacity to advocate for the interests of low-wage workers.

Business and Industry Organizations as Customers and Partners

Though Labor Market (LM) intermediaries, arising out of the Great Depression and the War on Poverty, generally directed their practices to improve the labor market participation of individuals, the interests of enterprises and the effect of business associations on public policy was a matter of concern. After a 1970 executive order, it was mandatory for businesses to list job orders with the Employment Service (Cassell and Rodgers 1978). Feedback from a National Employer Committee in 1972 and 1975 criticized the ES for having so many priorities that its effectiveness was impeded (109). Concerned about his standing with business, President Lyndon Johnson established the National Alliance of Businessmen in 1969 and immediately gave the organization a business-subsidy program to promote (Levitan, Mangum and Marshall 1972). The national policy effort to institutionalize continuous input by business in the modern federal employment and training system was launched by the formation of Private Industry Councils (PICs) in an update of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). Each revision of the laws since then has strived to increase the influence of business to *administer* local workforce programs (under the Job Training Partnership Act) and then to *set local policy* (in the Workforce Investment Act) (Barnow and Spaulding 2015).

The ongoing process of activating and maintaining employer engagement with external workforce intermediaries is a dominant topic in the literature. The importance of employer willingness to at least cooperate with workforce intermediaries to provide jobs to community members is self-evident, the counterpart to serving individuals in the "dual customers" policy mantra. The intensity of the connections with employers, and how long-term trust may be sustained through business cycles (Prince, King and Oldmixon 2017), is the challenge. Publications approach it from several angles. The literature includes a thorough history and analysis of federal strategies to institutionalize employer

Box 3. Sample of long-standing workforce intermediaries that integrate employer engagement

- In San Antonio, Texas, the iconic Project Quest worked closely with the business community from its outset in 1990 to design curriculum (Osterman and Lautsch 1996) and was explicitly designed to be "employer-driven" (Prince, King and Oldmixon 2017).
- In San Jose, California, the Center for Employment Training (CET) employer engagement "model" features intensive engagement with the human resource personnel of area companies, the formation of employer advisory boards, involvement in curriculum development, and hiring instructors from local companies (Harrison and Weiss 1998, 56-57).
- In the retail industry of the 2000s, the success of developing career ladders for employees involved following design principles in which the needs of employers were the "central determinant" (Prince 2003, 19) of job specifications; the intermediary develops customized agreements with employers to supervise the conduct of those career ladders.

> *"[I]f we are to generate the high and broad skills that we require … a direct and substantial contribution of the enterprise to industrial training is indispensable. Enterprises … have to become places of learning in addition to being places of production as no other institution can do what they can to produce the urgently needed collective good of a large supply of work skills."* — Streeck (1989)

oversight of federal workforce boards (Barnow and Spaulding 2015) as well as a framework to help understand how employer engagement activities and forms of partnership mediate the goals of employers and the goals of workforce programs (Spaulding and Martin-Caughey 2015). A variety of case studies, in a number of localities and industries, indicate that progress is being made. (See Box 3)

The instrumental aspect of the employer engagement mandate – guidance about how to implement it successfully and descriptions of best practices – is plentiful in the literature. What is less evident is the theory behind how it stems from structural changes in labor market relations and why such involvement is important. Here we return to Streeck and a few other scholars.

As explained earlier, the erosion of internal labor markets (including the elimination of apprenticeship programs) and extreme competitive pressures has produced a radically restructured labor market. As the workers sought by employers gain their skills, those skills become their property, not subject to appropriation by any one employer. In the view of an employer, skills are a *collective good* that are available, potentially, to all employers in a sector of a local economy (Streeck 1989). As long as employers fail to provide training to their workers, the local economy will not produce the scale and quality of skills necessary for the entire labor market to prosper and adjust to new challenges and opportunities (Benner 2003). In this environment, it is rational for employers to collaborate with one another to ensure that an optimal number of workers in a sector have the skills to increase the productivity of the production process as a whole. In essence, employers may choose to take skill development out of competition at the same time that they continue to conflict over products, services and technology adoption. To effectively negotiate this new dynamic and prosper "a direct and substantial contribution of the enterprise to industrial training is indispensable. Enterprises … have to become *places of learning in addition to places of production* as no other institutions can do the work they can to produce the urgently needed collective good of a large supply of work skills" (Streeck 1989, 99). (Emphasis in original.)

The rise of associative behavior in the United States among employers, often expressed in the implementation of sector strategies (Conway and Giloth 2014) in concert with workforce intermediaries, is an understandable outcome of these new labor market dynamics. A local labor market restructured along these lines – with greater collaborative behavior among firms and active workforce intermediaries embedded in their communities – will have wide implications, as follows:

1. Individual workers will have greater opportunities to obtain the generalized "soft skills" that are applicable to many workplaces, and multiple industries, rather than being confined to receiving mainly the firm-specific training commonly provided in the past. The concept of "multiple career pathways" will gain greater public acceptance (Marschall 2019) and networks will develop to promote that perspective (Hoffman and Schwartz 2017).

The openness to gathering skills from multiple sources, and following prescribed career ladders, will tend to benefit the disadvantaged, low-wage workers who are the perennial target of government-sponsored training.

2. The supply of work-based learning opportunities (Cahill 2016) will tend to increase because the "skills that are most needed in such markets are of a kind that can only be generated with the active involvement of employers. This is because such skills are most likely to be generated through work-based learning in close proximity to the work process, and clearly not in schools" (Streeck 1993, 173). It appears that this trend is helping to revive systematic apprenticeship-style training and encourage more on-the-job training options through "the creation of institutional *opportunities* for managements to pursue successfully a high skill and high wage policy" (181). (Emphasis in original.)

3. A restructured labor market, with robust, agile and community-based workforce intermediaries as central actors, will tend to open up the labor market to new agents and organizations, including unions and cooperative labor-management partnerships, who have a worker-centered outlook that will, again, benefit groups previously excluded and build greater equity and diversity (Johansson 2017) in the workforce.

These changes, and their implications, are occurring incrementally as government, non-profit enterprises and private, for-profit firm experiment with new clusters of practices and develop greater trust among themselves. Another reason for optimism is the appearance of greater associative behavior (NGA 2002), building over recent years, among unionized firms in some sectors and chambers of commerce, the subject of the next section.

Business and Labor Union Associations as Institutions

Employer engagement and concerted associative activity to increase skill levels in an industrial sector tends to be strongest among firms whose employees are union members (Benner 2007) and have negotiated collective bargaining language that institutionalizes skill training for their members. Strategic union intervention in skill formation through the bargaining process delivers tangible benefits to union members (Kemble 2002). The AFL-CIO and its member unions have used this opportunity to advocate for high road partnerships in which employers invest in worker training, create good jobs, and boost regional economies (AFL-CIO Working for America Institute 2000).

Many US unions regard the establishment of workplace learning systems, and strategic involvement in and formation of workforce intermediaries, as consequential activities that bear the potential to help their members attain employment security and adjust to the demands of a precarious labor market (Marschall 2012). Labor-management partnerships, in particular industry sectors and across geographic areas, have become part of the institutional arrangements that frame union activities in the workplace. These activities provide opportunities for workers to gain (and upgrade) occupational skills in a manner that both enhances their employment security, contributes to firm productivity and overall performance (Ogden 2007), and contributes to increasing the high-skill content of a labor pool.

A federal government survey of private industry establishments indicated that 56 percent of unionized workers had access to work-related education assistance (U.S. Dept. of Labor 2006). Since the early 1980s, the most prominent, well-financed, and institutionalized innovations in the field have been the collectively bargained joint training programs in major industries, especially automobile manufacturing, telecommunications, steel production, rubber, aerospace, health care, and among hospitality (hotel, restaurant, and gaming) firms (Marschall 2012). The impact of multi-employer programs is particularly evident in labor markets where unions have significant influence. Notable here are programs in New York City, where union-affiliated programs provide training and skill-upgrading to more than 200,000 employees annually (Fischer 2003) and San Francisco, California, where one-quarter of the unions offer occupational skill training for their members, investing a total of more than $7.2 million yearly (Stange 2003).

A model for union engagement in both worker training and economic development is present in Las Vegas, Nevada, where the Culinary Workers Union established a jointly governed Culinary Academy of Las Vegas that has provided skill training, apprenticeship, customer-service education and related workforce development services to more than 42,000 union members and community residents since its founding in 1993. The union and the Academy have become major players in the institutional structure of the local labor market through their ability to set standards for training and job quality (Gray and DeFilippis 2015; Culinary Workers Union 2020).

Support for education stretches back to the earliest days of American trade unions, when workingmen's parties advocated local public school systems and unions were instrumental in passing federal vocational education legislation (Stacey and Charner 1982). In the modern era, as American labor formulated its position on new forms of work organization, the AFL-CIO (1994, 15) called upon its member unions "to embrace an expanded agenda and to assume an expanded role as the representative of workers in a full range of management decisions..." Direct sponsorship of workplace learning programs was framed as a way for unions to augment the employment security of members, help them advance on the job and adjust to changing workplace conditions, and reach out to new constituencies (AFL-CIO 1999). Categories of union-related programs include joint apprenticeship programs, union-controlled programs, jointly governed programs in multiple industries, regional social partnerships (such as the WRTP) that involve workforce intermediaries, and occupational associations that may be regarded as proto-union formations (Marschall 2012).

The involvement of unions and labor federations in joint training partnerships and workforce intermediaries is well-documented. What is under-researched is the practice of business and trade associations becoming involved *directly* in workforce development – taking on a workforce intermediary identity – in contrast to merely collaborating with intermediaries present in their service areas. A 2003 survey of 716 business and trade associations nationwide found that about one-third were involved in workforce development and preferred to work with a few trusted partners (such as community colleges) to carry out these activities (Melendez, Hawley and McCormick 2012). Locally, chambers were more likely to be involved than trade associations. Researchers concluded that these "associations, a unique type of nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to serve the interests of business are becoming labor force intermediaries that provide a structured way of engaging employers …. Hence, by serving the interest of member businesses and improving labor market efficiencies, business associations … are also carrying out a social mission that benefits the community" (96).

The writings of Rogers, Dresser and Streeck would lead one to predict that chambers would become involved in training-related activities if local chambers discerned a demonstrated need among its business members. Such engagement is now a reality. In this recounting I consider that local chambers are membership-based, community organizations with the capacity to form partnerships with other actors in local labor markets.

Local chambers of commerce are uniquely American, non-governmental institutions that represent the collective interests of business in a service area and "share a common ambition for sustained prosperity of their community/region, built on thriving employers" (ACCE 2009). They are strong proponents of a free market economic system and organized as 501(c)(6) entities, enabling them to lobby and adopt positions in public policy debates. Though their precise missions vary, the core of their associative activities historically has been economic development (Hawley and Taylor 2006) and promotional efforts that favor sustained economic growth. The American Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) estimates that there are 13,000 chambers in the United States. At the national level, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has a center on education and workforce issues, part of the Chamber of Commerce Foundation, with an active online presence, regular conferences and forums, and publications on workforce matters.

The active involvement of chambers grew incrementally. A report by the U.S. Chamber's Center for Workforce Preparation reported that the nonprofit had been assisting local and state chambers since 1990 on workforce issues by providing tools, program models and best practice examples (Cheney 2001). An early activity was the formation of local Workforce Academies, funded as a U.S. Department of Labor demonstration project, that enabled local chambers and community partners to convene employers, conduct research, and then sponsor forums that featured topics such as "hiring, training, retaining and advancing workers" and "community resources that assist employers" (15). A 2001 survey of more than 1,800 employers found, however, that many faced difficulties in finding skilled workers and were "relatively ill prepared to address costly turnover problems" (3).

The U.S. Chamber's workforce development initiatives accelerated after that survey, with the formation of the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), which sponsored annual forums on improving the K-12 education system and highlighted the intervention of chambers in local labor markets. The ICW partnered with The Manufacturing Institute and Jobs For the Future in a decade-long, foundation-funded Workforce Innovation Networks (WINs) project that was guided by the strategy of "using the natural infrastructure of employer organizations as workforce development intermediaries" (Workforce Innovations Networks 2008, 5). The WINs collaboration produced resources on multiple topics, including career ladders (2003), working with One Stop Centers (2004), helping chambers navigate the workforce development system (2004), scaling workforce intermediaries to advance family sustaining careers (2004) and best practices for chambers to improve the pool of skilled workers (2006).[4] By 2007-08, the WINs effort had documented that a critical mass of employer organizations – local chambers, regional manufacturing associations, state employer-based intermediaries and employer associations, and state labor federation sectoral partnerships (notably the WRTP) – had embraced workforce development practices and the workforce intermediary model as the optimal strategy to improve the functioning of local labor markets (Workforce Innovations Networks 2008; U.S. Department of Labor, and Training Administration 2007).

The U.S. Chamber defined the fundamental challenge as "signaling." There has been a misalignment between how employers signal their hiring needs and how job seekers convey their knowledge and skills in response, a problem not resolved by employers sitting on advisory councils. Rather, the solution involves creating an "employer led" mechanism for gathering labor market information and acting effectively on that information to serve employers as a collective whole in an industry sector (Tyszko 2018).

Three decades of activity in the workforce development arena culminated in a cohesive framework to structure the activities of local chambers. In a remarkable recognition by the U.S. Chamber, a 2014 report declared that the 1980s

4 *Summarizes of these and related WINs publications are available on page 19 of Workforce Innovations Network. Organizing and Supporting the Employer Role in Workforce Development: A Guide for Employer Organizations on How and Why to Become Workforce Development Intermediaries. Guide. Institute for a Competitive Workforce, Center for Workforce Success, and Jobs for the Future, January 2008.*

workforce strategy that centered on outsourcing was *outmoded* and needed to be replaced by a "new demand-driven strategy that can address … the need for talent on demand in a constantly changing business environment" (Center for Education and the Workforce 2014, 7). That framework centered on employers coming together as voluntary "collaboratives" to define their hiring needs, conduct research, and implement a Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) system akin to the supply chain systems firms used for production. Employers are envisioned as the "end user customer" (4), not just the advisor. Because employers share values and mutual understanding of business matters, they could execute such a system themselves and reach out to trusted partners for certain services. The system could accelerate the talent acquisition process, they argue, by using work-based learning practices and career pathway resources. The Center for Education and Workforce presented the new TPM system in 2014 as a "transformational change" (31).

In subsequent years the Center elaborated on the TPM approach, explaining that it "places a strong emphasis on employers working together in a *collaborative*—a voluntary assembly of business members that share the common goal of improving the talent flow process. This collaborative can be managed through a trusted intermediary, such as a business or economic development organization, chosen by employer members" (Center for Education and Workforce 2015, 4). To meet the challenge of youth employment, chambers were encouraged to become "talent orchestrators" themselves or "organize their members to work in partnership with a business-facing intermediary to achieve scalable results" (Center for Education and Workforce 2016, 15). In a presentation to the National Association of Workforce Boards forum, the Center reported that 350 partner organizations, located in 33 states, had adopted the TPM system (Center for Education and Workforce, 2020).

* * *

Economic development practices, and the Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) that comprise this organizational field, are mentioned frequently as key players in local labor markets. Articles on workforce intermediaries commonly appear in the peer-reviewed journal, *Economic Development Quarterly*. One policy tract offers an elaborate justification for why an "evolved economic development organization" (Parilla and Liu 2019, 8) would be a compelling candidate to be the central business-facing intermediary for "career-connected learning systems" (37). A constant refrain in the literature is that the efficiency of a labor market suffers if economic development strategy and workforce development practices are not linked to maximize their objectives (Leigh 2018). The growing structures of cooperation between these sectors is the subject of the next section.

Connecting Workforce Development and Economic Development

In simplified terms, there is a considerable gulf between the economic development and workforce development fields. Economic development sits on the "demand side" of the market, with practitioners who tend to view the world from a private-sector business, competitive perspective that places a paramount value on the ideology of "value-free development" (Logan and Molotch 2007) and unalloyed economic growth to foster a positive "business climate." Workforce development is positioned on the "supply side," centered on pursuing greater economic equity for residents, full employment, job retention, and ample jobs for diverse segments of the community. Traditionally, economic developers focus on attracting new businesses to a service area while workforce practitioners are concerned about the impact of those businesses on the availability of jobs, especially for urban neighborhood residents. These differences tend to produce "disconnected thinking" that inhibits collaboration (Harper-Anderson 2008, 120). Workforce development practitioners are often viewed as social workers by economic developers, who see the core of their work as expressed in public-private partnerships (Fitzgerald 2004).

The same economic and political forces that have advanced workforce intermediaries have tended to draw together the two fields, notably in local labor markets. Employers are more vocal about their need for skilled workers and willingness to work with community-based workforce intermediaries. Workforce development boards, pressed by requirements in federal legislation, are more conscious of the need for region-wide, joint planning that incorporates knowledge of economic development efforts. Connectivity between the sectors is increasing with greater cross-fertilization among stakeholders. States and localities have funded broad-based initiatives to identify clusters of growing industries, the results of which serve as foundations for sector-based approaches. In a 2005 nationwide survey of 170 workforce development administrators, 91 percent of respondents affirmed that workforce agencies rely upon sectors in their work (Harper-Anderson 2008).

Mayors in cities such as Chicago have integrated workforce development goals into economic development deals, helping to maintain manufacturing in the area by ensuring an ample supply of job-ready workers. Back to the election of Mayor Harold Washington in 1983, Chicago has engaged community organizations as lead partners in the economic development task of rebuilding the city's manufacturing base by establishing Manufacturing Connect (MC). It is a workforce intermediary that engages small and medium-sized manufacturers to prepare young people for entering the industry (Lowe et al. 2018). Focused on metal manufacturing, the MC has developed a network of more than 60 employers who have created explicit training protocols in their operations, embracing mentoring and joining in peer learning to share challenges and successes. The formation of Sectoral Workforce Centers in Chicago has attempted to better integrate the city's workforce development infrastructure with the needs of manufacturing and retail employers as primary customers (Schrock 2013).

From a human capital perspective, regional economies vary in the quality of their educational and training institutions, the incentives present for individuals to maintain their occupational skills, and the public policies that provide a framework for industry skill formation activities. Regions with a large proportion of skilled workers tend to be economically stronger and grow faster (Garmise 2009). The workforce system of a region is "comprised of both new and historic institutions and … economic development in the 21st

> *"[O]ur entire way of thinking about the workplace is being challenged by [Labor Market Intermediaries]…. We are at the point of a paradigm break, where the existing model no longer explains the reality we see."*
> — Bonet, Cappelli, Hamori (2013), 383

century depends on making sure that the system is strong, coherent and aligned with economic development" (213). The essential connection between the two fields is that working together they will better serve the productivity of firms and the career aspirations of employees.

Qualitative research of pioneering localities that effectively have managed the intricate, extended process of aligning economic development institutions and workforce agencies reveal that the collaboration will evolve differently from place to place, depending on the dominant industry or industries in the area and the flexibility and innovation of governing structures. Success may depend on the persistence of political leadership (especially mayors and county executives) and sheer determination to carry out a strategy through expected changes in elected political officials. Economic developers are well served if a partnership's relations with community organizations is sufficiently robust that their growth-coalition projects provide jobs and tangible benefits to neighborhoods (NCEE 2007). Ample resources can smooth the way. In Boston, for example, years of agency reorganizations culminated in the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the city's planning and economic development agency that has integrated its operations with the Office of Jobs and Community Services (OJCS), the workforce development office that oversees the Boston Private Industry Council, its career centers and convenings of industry sectors. When the BRA considers large-scale real estate developments, they call upon OJCS experts to gain feedback from community organizations and neighborhood residents about how the new development could provide employment opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents. Developers are required to pay a linkage fee to the Neighborhood Jobs Trust (NJT), administered by the OJCS. NJT funds are then used for job training, retraining, employment counseling and other community-sensitive workforce services. Consistent political leadership has been critical. Mayor Thomas Menino praised the linkage between the agencies and declared: "I believe that if we do not link job training with economic development, we will fail in our mission" (17).

The successes of connecting workforce and economic development in Boston and other cities show that the evolution of linking these institutions will depend on a number of factors that will vary from one location to another. As workforce intermediaries evolve to become high-performance organizations, it is critical that each of them has at least one partnership with an economic entity and be engaged in deliberations about the human, skill formation dimensions of economic growth projects in their local and regional economies.

A New Category of Workforce Intermediaries

This review of books, academic journal articles, and reports by policy makers and workforce practitioners reveals that the organizational field has matured to the point that high-functioning workforce intermediaries are those that incorporate three dimensions of policy and practices into their ongoing operations:

- Close collaboration with industry – including individual employers, unions and joint labor-management partnerships – to comprehend their skill requirements, growth strategies, occupational make-up and their workers' career aspirations, especially as concentrated in the one or more industry sectors that anchor the local economy

- Deep and abiding connections to local communities as reflected by community-based organizations, including faith-based and social justice organizations, that have a durable history of representing the interests of members of the community and its neighborhoods, and are engaged in providing broadly defined (Harrison and Weiss 1998) workforce development services

- The policy recognition that connecting economic development projects and workforce development services is important, as reflected in at least one active partnership with an economic development government agency and the projects of private sector developers.

An unknown number of new wave workforce intermediaries possess all three of these features. To move the organizational field forward, it would be useful to conduct research to identify these high-functioning entities that I call Workforce Intermediary Community & Industry Organizations, or WICIOs. Using the community term is self-evident. The industry term signifies that this sector includes employers, chambers of commerce, trade associations, unions and labor-management partnerships (often serving both their members and persons in the community). A WICIO is defined as:

> A homegrown, local partnership that brokers the relationship between employers and workers by delivering a broad range of workforce development services to participants, and (1) collaborates with a critical mass of local industry organizations in one or more sectors of the area economy, (2) is a community-based organization trusted by community residents in their neighborhoods, and (3) has at least one partnership with an economic development government agency in its state or local/regional service area.

This definition expands on Giloth (2004, 5). It references the broad range of services approach identified by Harrison & Weiss (1998). The number of employers with which a WICIO engages will vary over time, so the "critical mass" requirement will be subject to variations as revealed by research. Economic development agencies are generally institutions directly related to city, county and state governments, so this requirement is suggested as an indicator of the WICIO's knowledge about economic growth prospects in the area and ties to institutional resources.

A definition such as this, flowing from the extant literature since the 1980s, is useful because it constrains the organizational field to a size manageable for future research and, perhaps, future funding resources. It is unusual because it encompasses both chambers of commerce and worker centers. My approach here is that these organizations will retain their existing identities, as business associations and social justice organizations respectively, but may choose to adopt the WICIO identity by engaging in certain activities. Both are community based and membership-based, one with local employers as members and the other comprised of individual members. Their combination under a single organizational "brand" signifies that both are crucial organizations in a high performing labor market that strives for sustainable economic growth with broad prosperity for all, industry and workers alike. Any organization that meets these requirements has the potential to be a central actor in the institutional structure of the local labor market.

As stated earlier, the institutional structure of a local labor market includes a number of long-standing organizations, or local adjuncts of national organizations or corporations, that provide labor market intermediation services and have been institutionalized over time. It is expected that organizations in the WICIO field do not now have the hallmarks of institutions. They generally are aware of one another, especially if they operate in the same geographic area, but likely do not collaborate on a continuous basis. The WICIO designation is intended to encourage such collaboration. As these organization interact with one another on a systematic basis, develop patterns of coalitions and alliances, gain a sense of "mutual awareness … that they are involved in a common enterprise" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 148), and develop standardized procedures, indicators of sustainability, and shared knowledge of best practices, they may be expected to become more institutionalized and better able to exercise influence in a local labor market.

The maturation and institutionalization of the Workforce Intermediary Community and Industry Organization (WICIO) organizational field may produce a "back to the future" kind of situation. Writing in the 1970s, scholars who examined the historic possibilities and limitations of the public employment service foresaw a future labor market system that would coordinate national policy and local conditions, "linking employment policy and economic policy, and organizing intermediaries around community or regional efforts to achieve both enlargement of the supply of jobs through economic development and more efficient operation of local labor markets" (Cassell and Rodgers 1978, 150). As the American economy struggles to emerge from the pandemic-induced recession, perhaps this vision is within our grasp to realize.

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