

Employment specialists' views and practices of “Moving clients forward”

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Purpose

- To better understand the views and practices of employment specialists as they support clients with mental illness to get and keep a job
- To explore what helps or hinders their work with clients with mental illness

Background

- People with mental illness experience a higher rate of unemployment than any other disability group
- Disability Employment Services (DES) support people with mental illness to get and keep a job
 - Eg. Job seeking, providing ongoing support, negotiating reasonable accommodations
- DES has undergone continuous, significant changes in policy since it was established in the 1980's
 - Increased focus on competitive employment outcomes
 - Increased compliance and administration requirements

Background

- Employment specialists are the frontline staff who work with clients in DES
- Employment specialists come from a broad range of backgrounds
- There has been limited research exploring the views and experiences of employment specialists
 - Few studies relating to job satisfaction, competencies, and the working alliance
 - Lack of research into the employment specialists' perspectives of supporting people with mental illness, and what helps and hinders them in this role

Study Design and Methods - Overview

Design:

- Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014)

Methods:

- Recruited employment specialists from four DES providers to participate
- Participants completed a brief form about their work and demographic information, then participated in an in-depth, semi-structured interview of approximately 1 hour
- Recruitment and interviewing continued until saturation achieved
- Interview data was recorded, transcribed verbatim, then coded and analysed

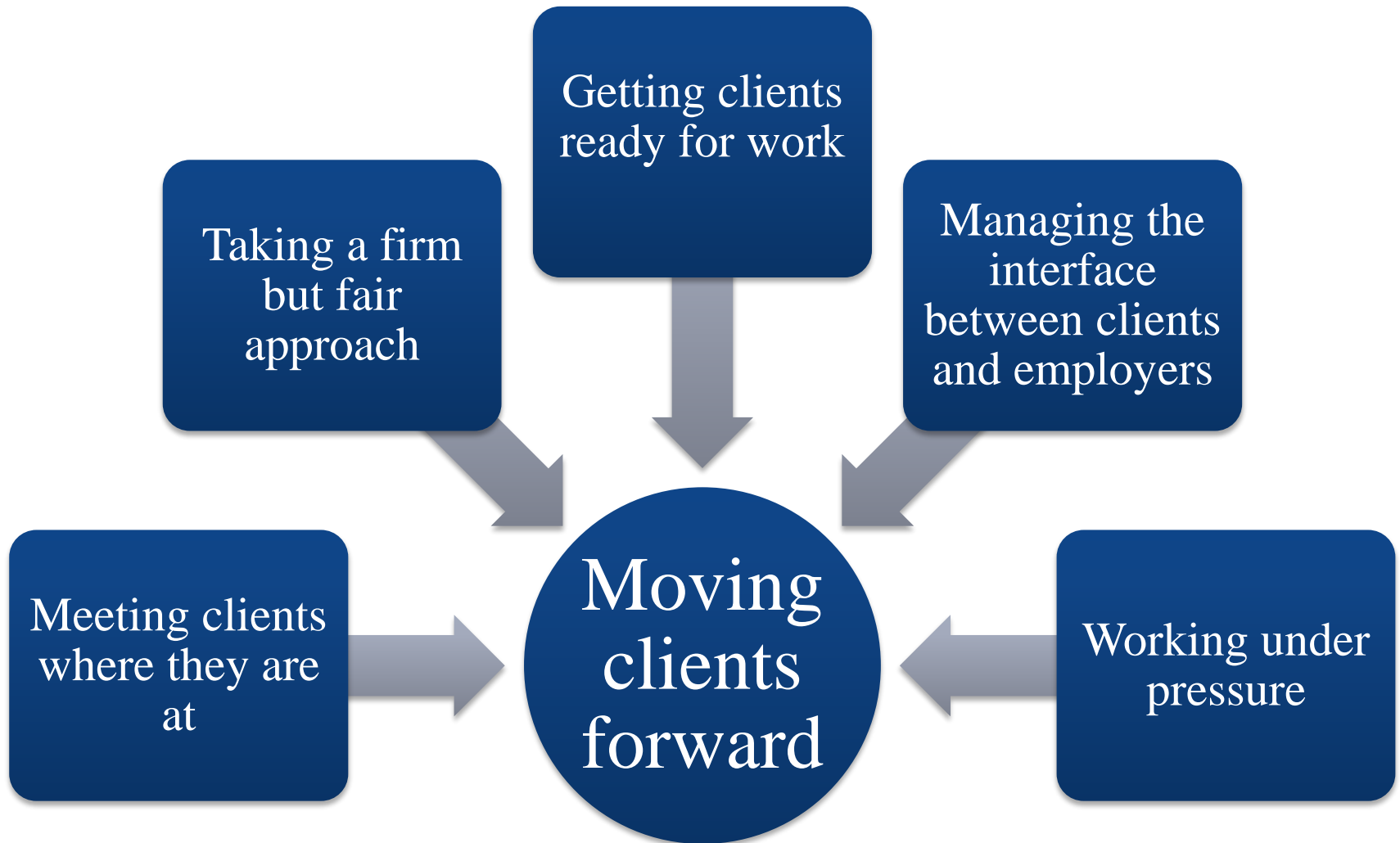
Moving clients forward

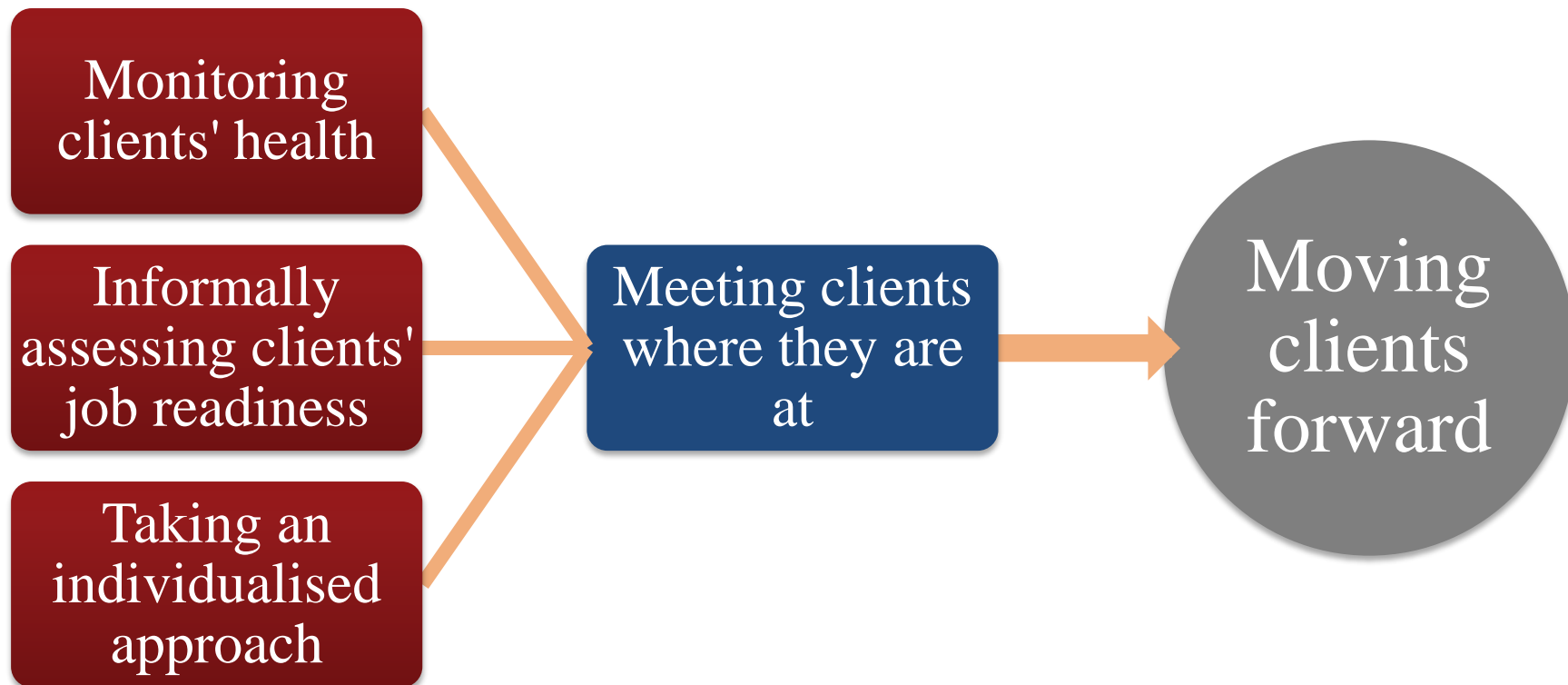
“I want long-term employment for my clients, alright? Something stable, long-term, so they don’t have to go through this again.” (Pauline)



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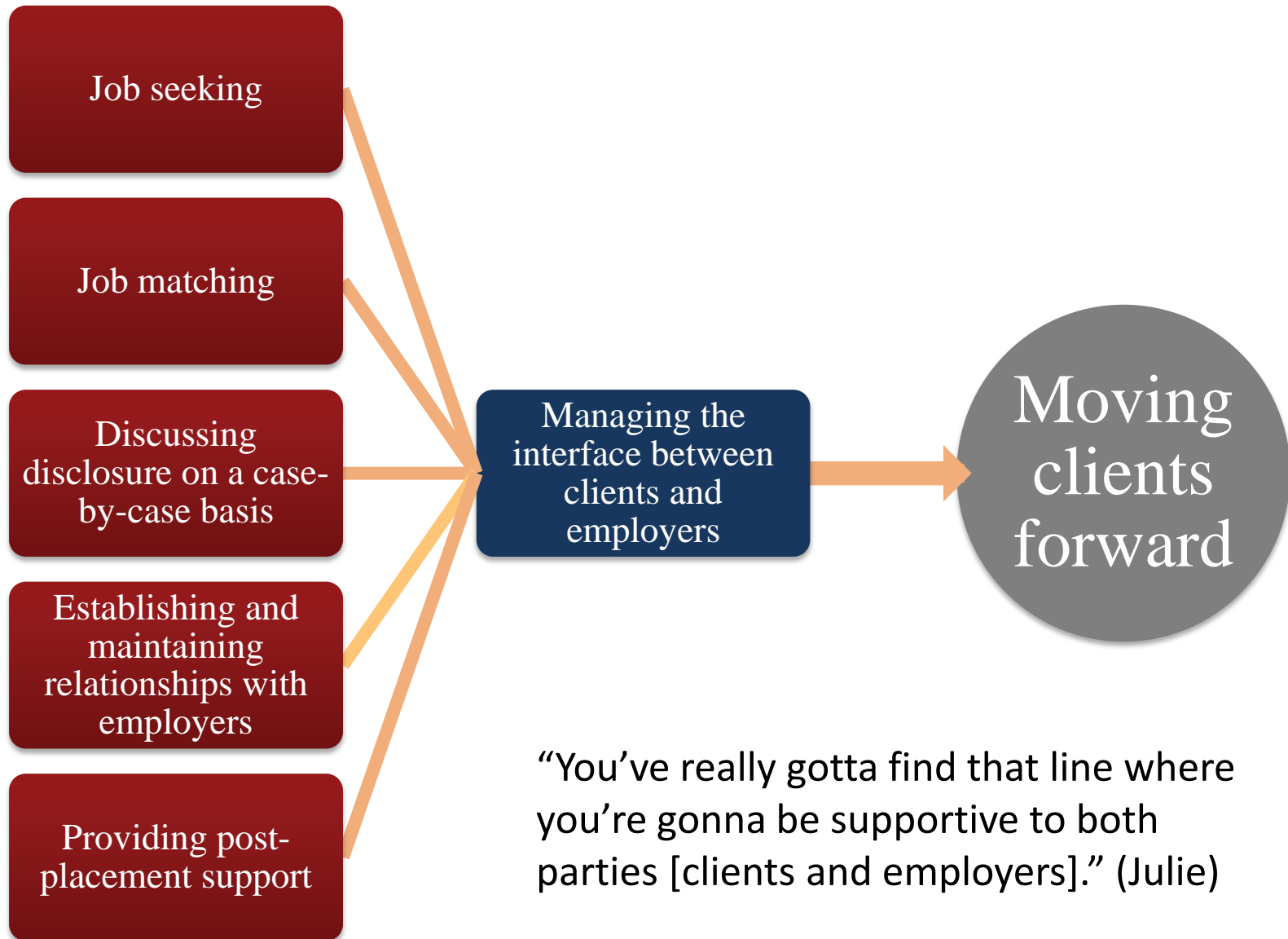
“So from the get-go I sort of try and find out... what is impacting them now, and what’s going to help them move from one place to another. And what’s going to get them back into the community. Because as we know, mental health is like a wave. It’s almost like the tide. It comes in and it comes out. So, you know, we have to meet – I always meet clients where they’re at.” (Alice)

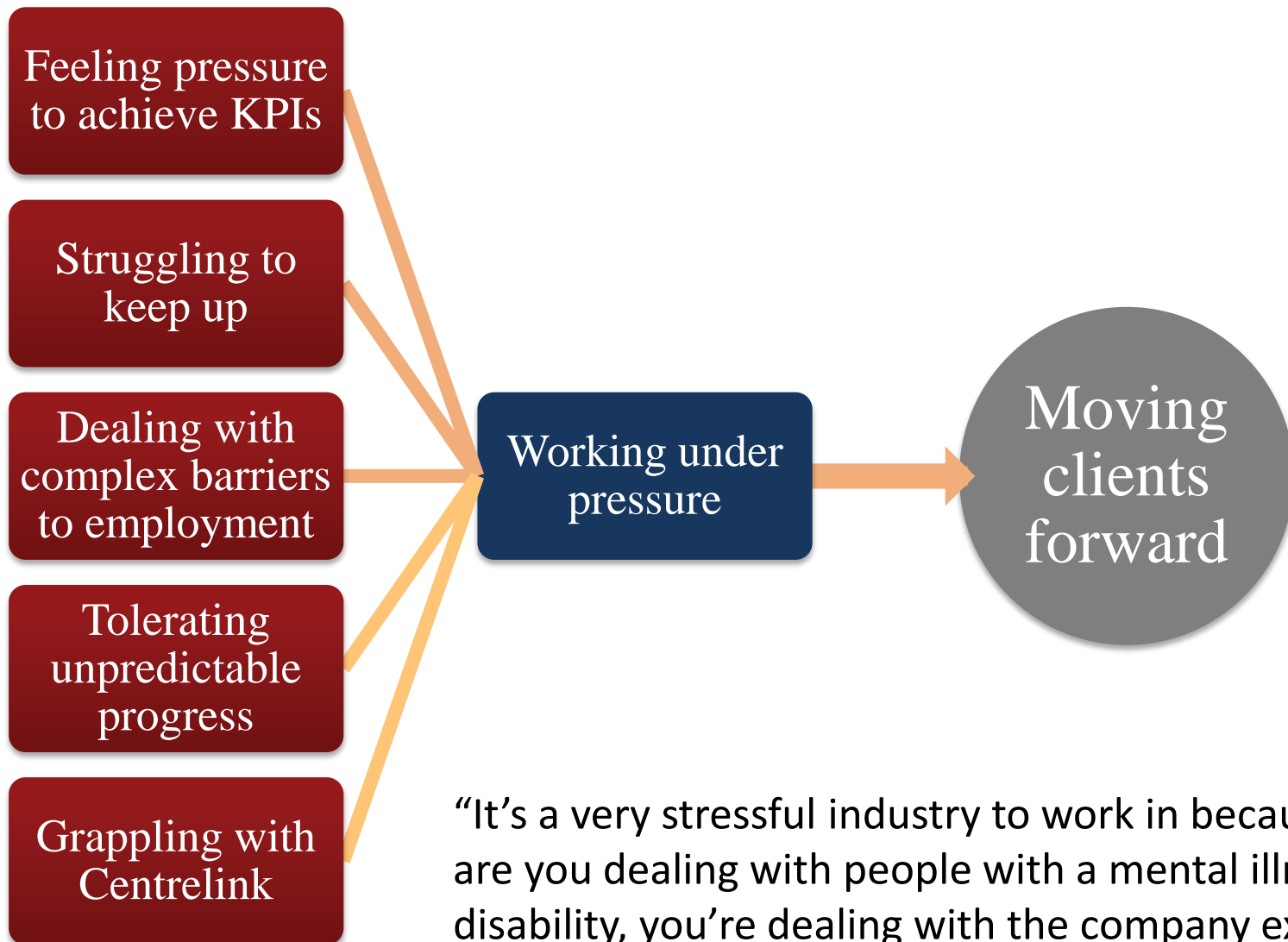


“Firm but fair, you’ve probably heard that expression? ... you sort of use a bit of that with your clients, you know? You’re their friend, but you’re also prepared to say, ‘hey look, you can do better. I think you can do better. I think you need to focus on this and work that way’. You build a very strong relationship with them.” (Victor)



“I’ll encourage people, if I think it’s going to be beneficial for them, to do things like short courses, volunteer work, training, work experience, whereas in the strict IPS model that’s not – they don’t go down that road. They try and get people into work straight away. And you know, we’ll try that as well. But more often than not that person doesn’t necessarily work out that way.” (Susan)





“It’s a very stressful industry to work in because not only are you dealing with people with a mental illness and a disability, you’re dealing with the company expecting a particular amount of placements in a month and a particular amount of outcomes in a month and revenue.”
(Belinda)

Discussion

- Drastic gap between the evidence-base and practice
 - Best practice principles related to service accessibility, job readiness, rapid placement, integration between mental health and employment services
 - Lack of adjunct interventions such as motivational interviewing, cognitive remediation, skills training
- Policies and performance-based funding strongly influence employment specialists' practices
 - Incongruency between mental health and employment policies
 - “Job ready” clients tend to receive more intensive support
- Frontline staff use discretion when implementing policies
 - Eg. Managing non-compliance, completing admin requirements



Thank you

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Acknowledgements

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