



John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

Transcript Episode 7: James Moore

Podcast Introduction (*music playing*): Welcome to *Work Trends RU*, presented by the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. In this podcast, we speak with experts, policymakers, and thought leaders about issues affecting work, education, training, the economy, and well-being. Each episode of *Work Trends RU* provides insights into important topics like changes in the job market, economic challenges, and how artificial intelligence is shaping the future of work. Our guests share their thoughts and reflections on how public and private sectors can better address the needs of workers, job seekers, and employers. Join us as we discuss the evolving landscape of work and education on *Work Trends RU*. (*music ends*)

Carl Van Horn: Welcome to *Work Trends RU*. I'm Carl Van Horn and I'm the director of the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and a professor at Rutgers University. Today we're very pleased to have James Moore, who's principal at KPMG, as our guest.

Welcome, James. Good to see you again.

James Moore: Good morning, Carl. Thanks for having me.

Carl Van Horn: In addition to his very important experience and work now, he's also a member of the National Advisory Board of the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development. And we certainly appreciate his assistance there.

James, you've done a lot of work over your career. It's very important. You've led workforce programs and advised managers and leaders at all levels of government - state, local, federal. And so, I know it's hard to summarize a career like yours, but, from your perspective, what do you think has been the greatest impact of the work? The things that you're really most proud of or that you'd like to think about when you reflect on all the work you've done.

James Moore: Carl, thank you for that question.

When I reflect on the roles and responsibilities that I've had, and you mentioned I've had the privilege of working at every level of government - local, state, and federal. I served as the Deputy Director in DC for their workforce development program. I had the pleasure of working in New Jersey as the Deputy Commissioner for Labor, and I also had the pleasure working at the federal level during both the Obama administration as a senior policy advisor during the first term and as a deputy secretary for policy during the second term. And for me, I think about the frontline staff, right? We can build all the greatest technology, we can have all the greatest

strategies, we can have the most impactful labor market information. But building capacity at every level of the system is extremely important. Ensuring that the frontline staff have the necessary tools and resources to be able to translate those policies into action. Ensuring that those individuals have the right, not only mindset, but building a culture within the organization that allow the frontline staff to be more responsive to the needs of job seekers. I think that's critically important. We spend a lot of funding on developing and workforce programs, investing in workforce programs. I think a critical part of that is ensuring that we invest in the frontline staff, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to inform job seekers. We focus a lot on labor market information, we think about, y'know, designing a program that is human-centered design. Again, that's focused on putting the experience of the job seekers and their aspiration at the forefront. But with all that, I think having a well-trained, diverse, empathetic frontline staff is the most important thing we can do. Those are the ones that the job seekers see when they come into the center. Those are the ones they interact with when they call the call centers, ensure that those individuals have the tools and resources and training that they need to effectively impact job seekers.

Carl Van Horn: And that's an interesting, important point. One of the issues I've been concerned about for many years is that there's really not the same clear career path into those jobs as there were any other job. But in workforce, there's just not that training program at the college or graduate level in most places to create that pipeline for people that go into those jobs.

James Moore: You're absolutely correct, Carl. And as I reflect on that statement, when you think about the individuals that, and that role is critically important. I think it's one of the most important roles within the workforce system. And to really think about that there isn't a clearly defined career pathway from K12 through college, that there's a degree that you can go off and now be a case manager in a workforce system, is something that really needs to be addressed. I mean, there's credentials you can take once you find your way into those jobs, but there's not a clearly defined pathway of training that a prepared individual, once they graduate from college, or even community college, and walk into those jobs. So, that, to me, is a gap that needs to be filled. Because again, you know, to me, it's one of the most critical important roles within the workforce system because again, they're the ones that are interacting with the job seekers, those individuals who are unemployed. They're meeting with folks when they're probably at some of the most desperate times of their lives, they just lost a job and they have to take care of their families. So, that being able to be empathetic during those times, being able to navigate the maze of WIOA and all the other workforce systems, being able to think through the referrals that are required, that's a special person. And to not have a clearly defined occupation for that is something we definitely need to think about and address.

Carl Van Horn: There were attempts historically to do this. There were regional training labs years and years ago. Universities and other institutions coordinated them. It was modeled somewhat on the education labs around the country.

But again, thinking about that, you mentioned, obviously, one important thing that needs to be improved. What are some of the other issues in terms of assistance for job seekers you think should be fostered?

James Moore: I, I think we used the term modernized workforce systems and infrastructure quite a bit. It was a common theme during the pandemic, need to modernize the UI system because of the aging infrastructure. I, I think there hasn't been a deliberate effort to really not only modernize the unemployment system along with the workforce system, but also the referral system to all the other social services. It's still very fragmented. There's data that's isolated in one organization. For many reasons, those data can't be shared for either federal or state requirements around data sharing. I understand the privacy to protect individual data, but that fragmented data, I think, limit the ability for the system to be able to, with ease, refer you to a particular service that a job seeker may need.

The workforce system, many states are operating especially on unemployment and very dated systems. I think another component is the actual, even within WIOA, the employment services and the training side really are somewhat disconnected. When you go into a One Stop center, sometimes folks will say, "Well, I'm ES" and, y'know, "I'm Title II" and they should be seen as one synonymous unit and they don't. So, I think removing those barriers within the organization would be key. I think a stronger alignment with labor market data, not just the data that's required to be collected from the BLS, but also work with employers, pull that information in to understand what their needs are. Leveraging, there's just a ton of new techniques leveraging AI to be able to scrape data from the internet to get some real time information on what the actual jobs credentials are and how that information can then inform the design of workforce and training program. And, again, in this environment, I think it's even more greater that we have access to these programs and removing any barriers so that individuals who truly need these services don't have to go through many hoops and hurdles to gain access to the services. We kind of touched on it again, but definitely, y'know, professionalizing the actual workforce field so that those frontline staff have the right training to support and deliver high quality.

Carl Van Horn: Yeah, you, you mentioned AI and, you know, that's obviously the topic everywhere, that what can we do with AI? Have you worked with any states, localities that are trying to apply AI to the workforce program?

James Moore: I haven't directly. What I'm mostly aware of is they're buying services from vendors that have AI-enabled tools. Whether it's being able to assess the individual resume to align them to job opening to predict where they are better fit, referral services, individuals coming into the workforce system with many barriers and being able to predict the likelihood of that person being successful and then prescribing the appropriate training. So, but I haven't seen, I'm not aware of a state designing a, a tool to help facilitate that connection between being unemployed and employed or reskilling, upskilling job seekers. But I can tell you, at KPMG, we, we are working on an interesting tool for the RESEA Program, still in early development. And this was born out of a evaluation we were doing for a couple of states and we noticed that the time from orientation to interview to developing the individual employment plan to creating a really responsive customized labor market information was the challenge. It's the challenge for many reasons. One, just the scheduling. Y'know, you have seven to nine hours in a day to get a person in for the orientation, or you can just put it online, they watch a video. The seven to eight hours a day to get a person in for an interview, and then the per magnitude of number of individuals that need, need to have those one-on-one interviews just took a lot of time. And then when we just talked a lot about training and then there's different skill levels. So, for one individual to be able to assess that interview question and develop a

really robust individualized employment plan, it depends on their training and skill level. And, even more so when you need to develop a customized labor market information. So, what we are currently working on is AI tool, it's a conversational bot that you have a conversation with. So, when you log into your profile, it actually give you the complete schpiel of what you're required to do while you in the RESEA, from the work storage to all the activities that are required. And then it's transitioned to the actual interview. And then from that interview, it produces a very detailed individual employment plan based off not only your profile, but the profile of other individuals that had some success from the actual traditional stuff in the IEP to recommendations for training. And then it ties it back to that individual labor market information to tell you, are you facing a ton of competition in your labor market? If you are, maybe reconsider that occupation and maybe there's something that's somewhat related, a related field with greater opportunities and here's the training path for you to go down to be able to get that. We are really excited about it, still in this infant stage, we're, y'know, working through some of the kinks, but we've presented to a number of states and they really like the ability to be able to have that type of technology. And the neat thing about it, it becomes a very effective tool to allow staff to focus on those individuals who are hard to serve, as opposed to, you know, individuals who can navigate the system themselves. So, now staff can really be dedicated to a lot of handholding for individuals who have more barriers, more challenges, or more difficulties getting connected. And those that are internet savvy can go through the program, meet all the requirements, with the aim of having them quickly facilitate getting a job.

Carl Van Horn: The other, I think exciting, thing about that is to give people some realistic expectations about what can happen because people don't understand, as we were alluded to earlier, the career pathways, as we call it. So, let's say they want to be a chef because they've seen the cooking shows, but they don't realize that prior to that, there's a path before you ever get to that position. So, yeah, I think that would be very helpful for people. And also, it's probably easier in some ways to get that advice directly from something you're looking at on the internet than it is to have a person across the table from you say, "You're not going to be a chef for 10 years unless you do these things".

James Moore: Absolutely.

Carl Van Horn: So, how do you see the whole workforce world interacting with the businesses in the business community? Obviously, most people who hire are very busy; they're not all large corporations. They tend to be small, medium-sized businesses. And there's lots of talk about how do we involve business. But what's your experience about what actually works, that gets businesses engaged and creates both opportunities for them and for the people who are applying for work?

James Moore: I think there's two things really. One is for a smaller business, I think they should definitely leverage the workforce system as an extension of their HR system. Definitely have them screen potential candidates for work and also identify what are some of the changing landscape that they should be aware of. I think for a larger mid-size, large employers, small as well, engages co-creators. I think that's a missed opportunity where we don't have that insight from employers on their specific skill needs and helping them participate in the development of a training program also encouraging those employers to offer some work-based learning opportunities so that it's beneficial to both. Right? I mean, there's a lot of OJT opportunities that I think employers don't take advantage of that the system can offset

their costs, almost like try before you buy it. And I think the workforce system don't do a good job of pulling information from employers to understand where they're going, not where they're currently at in that cycle of hiring, where they're going. What are their needs a year, five years out because there's sometimes there's some latency in how you build the time it takes to build a particular training program. And then there's also the requirements of if it's not on the ETPL, you gotta wait. So, I think the sooner those interactions and conversations happen, the more responsive the workforce system can be for employers, but also getting the employers around the table to share that information.

I think both investment in upskilling and reskilling is important. And we just talked about automation and AI and having employers inform the workforce system, how they're leveraging AI. Just think about, you know, years ago, I was talking to a state DOT and their, their hiring needs are totally different than it was 10 years ago. Because now you have autonomous vehicles, so you're not, now you need a different skillset to understand how autonomous vehicles interact or impact the work that they're doing. So, the evolution of how technology is changing the way employers work is also should be changing how the workforce system think about training the next generation of workers.

Carl Van Horn: On the research side, what message do you have for researchers and what they should be focusing on to help improve these programs?

James Moore: I think translating research into practice. I remember many times in my days on the second floor in the Francis Perkins building, we would have these great policy debates. And I would say that's great in theory, not practice, right? You can solve any problem in whiteboard almost, but it's just something that can be actionable or action in the workforce system. And I think that's important to, for resources to not only think about just the ones and zeros when they're coding stuff, but also getting that insight from the folks on the ground who actually have to deliver these new or innovative policies that's been shaped in, in DC or at a university. And I think one of the greatest things that DOL pushed for a minute of training programs or program evaluation and producing that evidence and understanding how a particular component of a training program is impactful and it's really moving the needle. Then, I think longitudinal outcomes are important. Just that, you know, short-term snapshot shows the purpose, but understanding three, four, five years down the road, how those programs are impacting and having the data to go back to determine how the design of that program made a difference and could it be replicated or scaled in other places. And then studying the impact, you know, we mentioned AI, studying how AI and automation is going to just change the workforce dynamics and the training needs. So, those are the three things I would say, focus on things that can be actually put into action, leveraging longitudinal analysis, and making sure that pushing for data that can be looked at over a number of years. And then studied how this new technology is going to impact the way we do work, how we do work, and where we do work.

Carl Van Horn: Yeah, I'm sure that when you're dealing with some of the folks that you provide service to, you bring to that conversation your knowledge of the research that's being done. How do you persuade them that this is worth trying? You know, because they haven't done it. There's an old saying, it's not made here, right? If we didn't do it ourselves, we're skeptical. I mean, so if something was done in Nebraska, but today it's not going to work in New Jersey or

vice versa. Do you have those conversations and how do you persuade people to, they should try something new?

James Moore: I think the best way to encourage individuals to take a leap of hope or faith when it comes to investing in a new technology, you know, obviously you want to say that it's a proven practice. The workforce system, first thing they ask you when you walk in and do a pitch is, "Where, where have you done this before?" That's number one, right? So, you need that automatic, you know, I would say street credibility to get in the door. And, secondly, to your point, well, not even is New Jersey different from Pennsylvania, but they would tell me North Jersey is different from South Jersey, right? But the way you get around that is breaking it down to bite-sized pieces and adding that uniqueness of that entity or that region into the equation and having them understand with really specific details that whatever we're pitching to you, whether it's a new approach to serving a difficult population or leveraging a new technology to facilitate the customer journey, is telling a story with that individual customer in mind and not using general logic being extremely general that, just because it worked in North Jersey or worked in South Jersey is going to work here. It's being able to understand and speak to what are some of their specific challenges and how that technology will address that challenge, and again, going back to being able to evaluate and show that you are moving the needle, it's important.

And then there will be times where you're going encounter some challenges and difficulties that may not, the outcomes may not generate at the level that you expected, but that you make improvements to the system overall. What do we learn from that process? What have we learned from the work we've done in other states that we can then apply to your states so we don't make the same mistakes. I think those are conversations you want to have. I think being upfront and truthful is ultimately important as well.

Carl Van Horn: So, you have mentioned some of the projects that you're working on. Are there any others that you and your colleagues at KPMG are developing and you're hoping will be used by a state and local workforce organizations?

James Moore: There's a couple, where we did an assessment of the workforce ecosystem. We interviewed job seekers, the K-12 community college training providers, employers from different sizes, small, medium, and large in the state, the workforce system practitioners, our frontline staff, supervisors and managers, and also the state staff. And, they all have a different view of the world, right? So, we gave them four or five different policy initiatives in this particular state. When you looked at the responses, thematic analysis of it, everyone viewed it different. So, that tells us upfront that if you're very different, you gonna, when you put into practice, when you put into practice, you gonna deliver it different. So, there was a need to do some alignment and thought and then practice, but, also we looked at the geographical distribution of the AJCs in the state and the types of individuals that were coming in coupled with the population in those regions and we saw some real disturbing trends of, there was segments of population within that geographical commuting distance that was just not using the system for many reasons. So, that was an important data point. We looked at the transportation nodes in that particular state and realized that one, you didn't have a vehicle, you did not have a job because you just could not get to work. We looked the childcare facility locations in that particular state and realized if James need to be at work at seven in the morning, the child care center didn't open to seven, there's no way James get to that job and

drop the kid off and get to the work location. So, coupled with all that, we were able to show that what were some of the challenges and opportunities to help move the needle on better connecting folks. Now we can't build new roads overnight, but you could build satellite centers and other government buildings that folks can go in and get service. You can relocate staff to a closer proximity for folks to get to. You can't move jobs, but you can convince employers that some of those jobs can be done remotely so that James doesn't have to have the challenge of barrier of trying to get his child to a child care center and then get in to work. So those are some of the things, just that one project which I was really excited about because it's really cool to do, but you can then use data along with responses to those like this really cool mix of qualitative data and quantitative data really being infused, the response we got from job seekers on their challenges, from the frontline staff on their misunderstanding or not complete understanding of policies and programs in the state and how just some simple alignment in how you communicate that information, not only to jobs, you just put to employers. There's a ton of service in the state that the employers weren't really sure that the state offered and the state offered. So, just breaking down those silos of misinformation or lack of information, getting to the right people, and then being able to show where are some of the infrastructure bottlenecks that's, you know, just preventing folks from being successful. And what are some of the things you can do, like simply putting a kiosk in a library that a person can go in who don't have internet access in their home to apply for jobs, to check on benefits and things of that nature. So, just some was low tech solutions, some was high tech solution. But again, having that full understanding of what the system itself faced and what could be done in the short term to address it that didn't cost a lot, just some realignment of resources, then what could be done to really effect change in the more long term. So, it was that marriage of the research and forming the operation, which is always great.

Carl Van Horn: Well, you've talked about a lot good work that you and your colleagues at KPMG are doing and will be doing. Now, I'd a shift to something more personal about yourself and that is we ask all the people on Work Trends RU to talk about their first job. People usually have memories of that, whether it's good or bad. And what I'd like to know is what was your first job for pay or not for pay? And what are some of the lessons you got there and that you carry through with you today?

James Moore: My first job for pay, me and my cousin started a, a lawn service. So, we would go door-to-door knocking on the neighbor's house and ask to mow their lawn over the summer to, to make money for the school year. So, that was always very interesting because I grew up in Mississippi, so, I imagine the summers are very, very hot. And then pushing a lawn mower, you know, not only just to go seek out potential customers, but to actually do the work was even more. So, I learned that to be resilient and to work hard as a teenager.

My first job for pay in a structured work environment was with Walmart. And Walmart in the South was, it was a great job. When Sam Walton was still at the helm, where he really had a respect for the frontline staff, where even part-time workers at the time had a 401k. You had stock options at Walmart. When I was 17, 18 years old, I worked from Walmart through my senior year in high school through, throughout college. And it's, it's amazing how the shift in the mindset when Sam was sent to Hamden, when he passed, and his sons and daughter took over the operation, they went from focused more on the bottom line than focusing on the people. And, when I was in college, you know, I was in ROTC and I worked at Walmart. So, I had a choice to make. I'm gonna go just be in the military for 20 years or go be a manager at

Walmart. Cause the managers at Walmart, I knew very well, they made, they made pretty good money at that time. I could be a regional manager and I could make \$200,000 a year. And this was like in the early 90's. But that's since changed. But what I learned while working there was to focus on the customer. I started off as the stockman, so my, my job was to really just go and restock the shelves. And then I moved to a salesclerk in an electronic department and then just being able to anticipate the customer need and be attentive and really help them understand that they're making this large purchase for either television or, back then, was a VCR player. To me, discipline and focus on making sure that you help the customer navigate the different decisions they had to make, but also being attentive to their needs and responsive to their needs. And I always got joy in that.

Carl Van Horn: And you also grew up on a farm, right? I imagine you weren't paid for the work you did there, right?

James Moore: No, I was not paid [laughs]. No, that was, that was, um, I think when I say really learned hard work, I would invite all my friends down on a Sunday to help me with my short chores. I would call it like, you know, male bonding a competition. So, all my firewood I had to split for the week, you know, all the hay had to stack for the week, you know. I would call it a competition, see who can stack the highest bales of hay. So, literally, they would do all my chores for me. So, I did learn how to, I learned my leadership skills and somehow to delegate to, to others.

Carl Van Horn: Well, thank you so much, James, for sharing your experiences with us and the lessons and the really exciting work that you're doing KPMG. And as always, it's a pleasure talking with you and look forward to learning more about what you're doing in the near term. Thank you very much.

James Moore: Carl, thank you for this opportunity. I truly enjoyed the conversation.

Podcast Close (*music playing*): Thank you for joining us on today's episode of *Work Trends RU*, where we explore the issues affecting the future of work, education, and how the workforce can be better supported by both the public and private sectors. Tune in next time as we continue our conversations on the evolving landscape of work and education. (*music ends*)