



**Working together to strengthen a
pioneering business model**

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Rotterdam, July 2008**

Overview

- Research question
- Methods
- Research site
- Discourse analysis
- Preliminary findings

Research question

- Research area: Collective action to survive the liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965, Aldrich and Fiol, 1994). The collaboration literature says that collective action is hard to achieve.
- Research question:
 - How do you get to collective action in the context of pioneering organizations?
- Dominant answer in the institutional literature:
 - It is a political process. Through framing institutional entrepreneurs as political operatives (Rao, 1998) gain support from others for their views on how organizations offering pioneering models will survive.

Research methods

- Discourse approach (Phillips et al., Zilber, 2007). Exploring in texts how people use institutional rules and resources
- The texts: collected talks, powerpoint presentations, and handouts.
- Data collection: Observe and take detailed field notes during presentations and informal gatherings with observations of the space and place (location of the conference, spatial arrangement of the event), actors (number, gender, age, dress code), and social practices (use of technology, exchange of business cards).
- Analysis: Moving from manifest content analysis, towards latent and finally the identification of collective narratives.

Research site: Alternative Staffing Organizations (two examples)

Harborquest (1970) Chicago

- In 2005, Harborquest placed about 1,000 people in temporary jobs with approximately 60 different employers.
- Harborquest does not have any eligibility requirements but most of their clients are low-income. Many are on TANF and have criminal backgrounds, low literacy levels, and/or other barriers to employment.

FirstSource (1999) New York

- In FY 2005, FirstSource placed 202 workers in temporary jobs at 93 different companies.
- Functions much like a privately-owned staffing company. More than 90 percent of FirstSource's revenue comes from employer fees.
- FirstSource works with a diverse array of job seekers, including a number of current and former *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families* (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals who face barriers to employment.

Research site: Alternative vs. Conventional Staffing

Activity by Occupational Sector

	Conventional (Sales)	Alternative (Placements)
Office-Clerical	42.5%	33%
Industrial*	25.0%	50%
Financial	0.5%	0%
Health Care	13.5%	4%
Technical**	7.2%	1%
Professional- Managerial	6.7%	3%
Other	4.6%	9%

* Conventional: Industrial = Alternative: Warehouse/Manufacturing, Cleaning & Property Maintenance, Transportation & Moving, Food Service

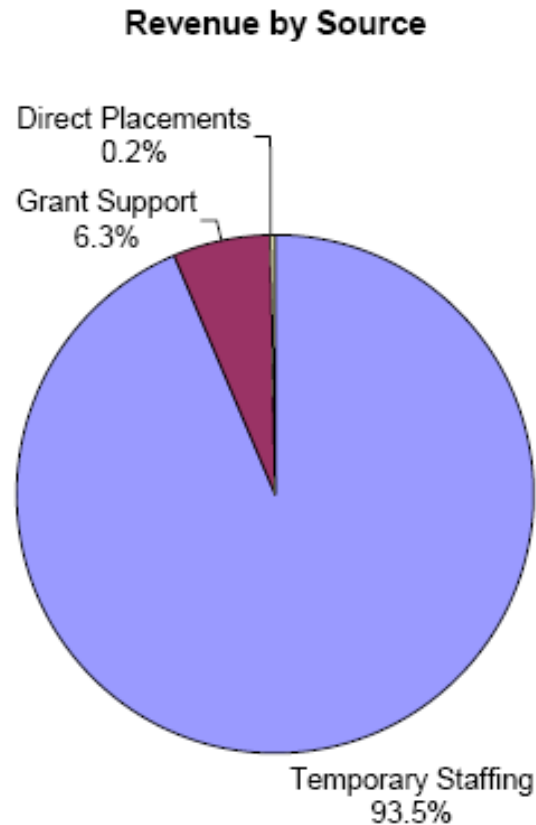
** Conventional: Technical = Alternative: Information Technology

*** Conventional: Other = Alternative: Construction, Other

Source: Alternative Staffing Alliance using numbers from "Staffing Operations Survey 2006, Temporary & Contract Staffing, American Staffing Association; 2006." and their own survey of Alternative Staffing Organization (10 responses)

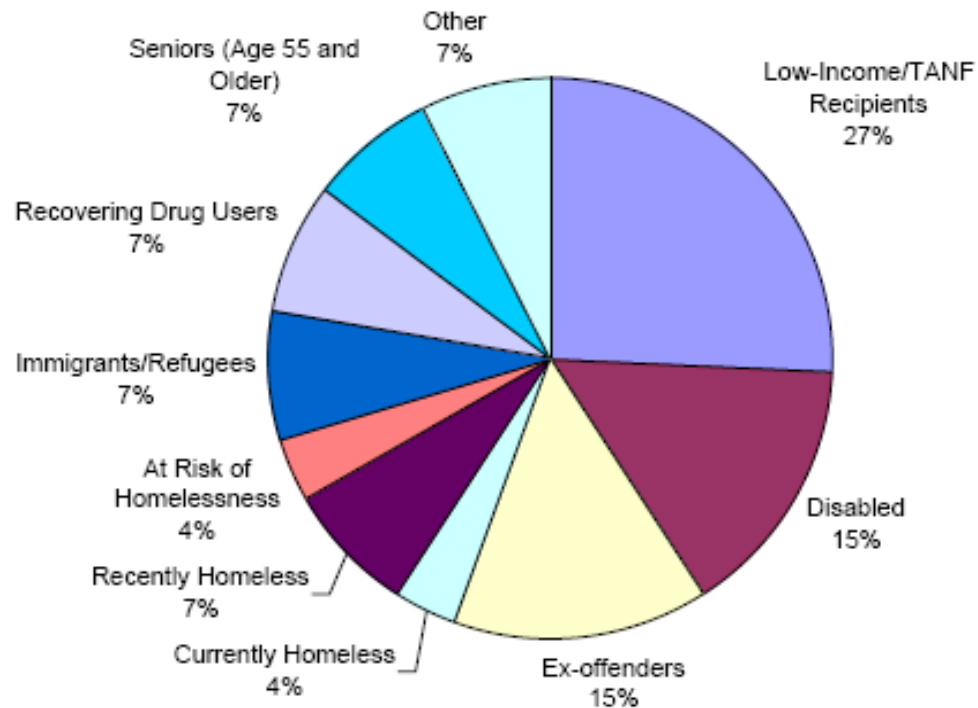
Research site: Alternative staffing in numbers (survey 10 organizations)

Graph 2.2: Revenue by Source



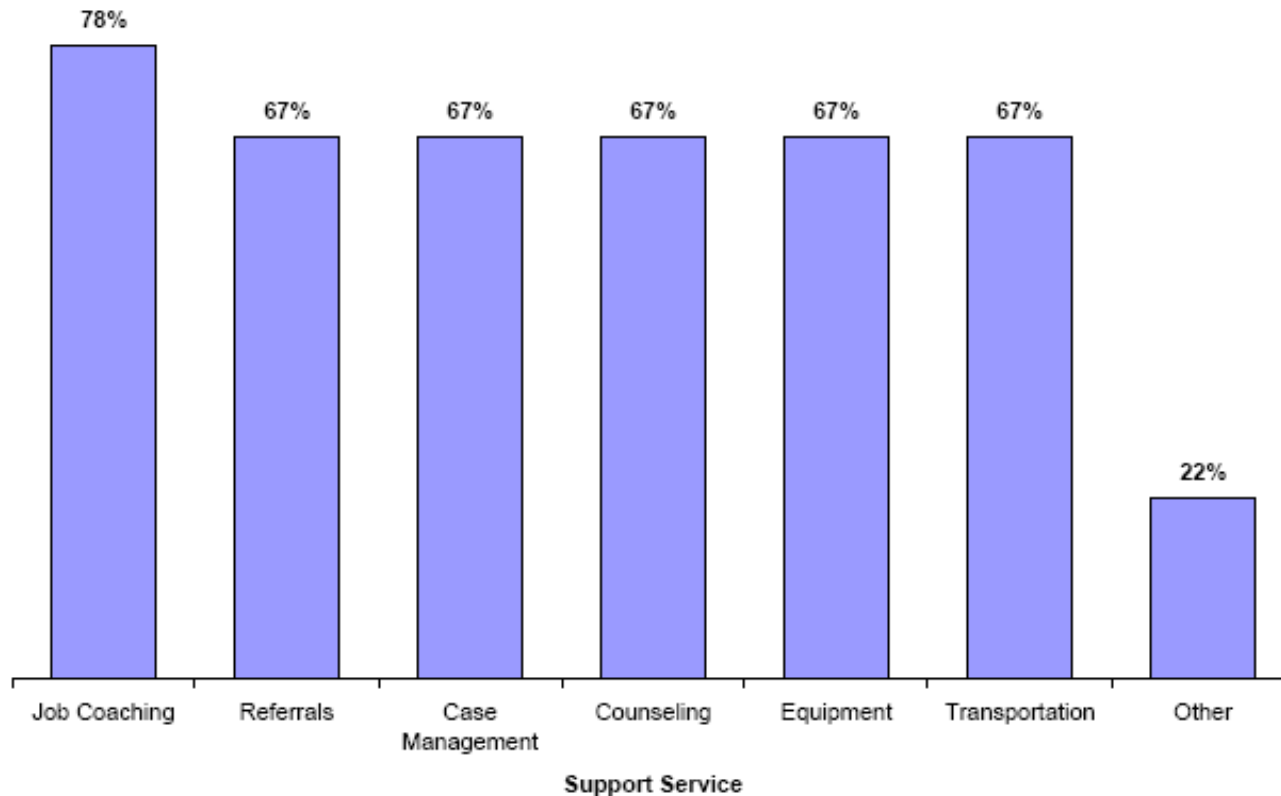
Research site: Alternative staffing in numbers (survey 10 organizations)

Graph 3.1: Main Characteristics of Target Population



Research site: Alternative staffing in numbers (survey 10 organizations)

Graph 3.3: Support Services Offered to Employees During and Between Temporary Assignments



Research site: Alternative Staffing Organizations (at a glance)

- Identify labor market opportunities and help low-skilled, unemployed and disadvantaged individuals access them by making temporary and temp-to-perm job placements on a competitive, fee-for-service basis.
- Provide Intensive pre- and post-placement supports for workers including Job coaching, case management, social service referrals (for child care, housing, health insurance, etc.), transportation, and supplying tools and work clothing are the most prevalent types of support.
- Some ASOs also offer additional services including direct placements, on-site coaching and managed work crews.
- People with disabilities, ex-offenders and homeless individuals are major target populations.

Research site: Alternative Staffing Organizations (at a glance)

- Jobseekers are primarily placed in entry-level office/clerical and warehouse/industrial positions.
- Individual ASOs place from 35 to over 2,000 persons per year. An average size ASO places 300 to 500 persons annually.
- Established ASOs cover at least 75% of their program expenses with fee revenues, and some generate an operating surplus.
- There are 60 organizations in the US and Canada. The oldest began operating in the 1970s and 80s and now post annual billings in the millions of dollars. Many ASOs were launched in the late 90's following welfare reform and during a period of low unemployment that favored market entry. New practitioners continue to enter the field.

Research site: Origin of Alternative Staffing Agencies?

- Why alternative staffing: The path to a job because:
 - “Entry level workers receive fewer benefits from personal and community networks because of their own limited experience and lack of access to job opportunities of those in their these networks.
 - Entry level workers more than rarely face institutional discrimination, be it racial/ethnic, gender, age-based, disability-based discrimination or other kinds of discrimination.” (Carre and Herranz, 2004: 2; Carré and Joshi 2000).

Research site: The name “Alternative”

- The term became common currency after a workshop in Boston in 2003 presenting the results from a research project funded by the Ford Foundation (see Carré et al., 2003). This research project identified, for the first time, these organizations as conducting similar activities, although with substantial differences in the scope of the services provided.

Research site: The Alternative Staffing Alliance

- Carre et al.'s study also included the idea of creating an association. This idea was taken by the Mott foundation which provided funds to the ICA group to explore, develop a vision and a preliminary operating plan.
- ICA's study confirmed the strong enthusiasm among ASOs in forming a national network. With founding from the foundation it launched the Alternative Staffing Alliance (ASA) with 13 charter members organizations in March, 2007.

Research site: Alternative Staffing Alliance

- *"a national association dedicated to supporting the efforts of groups nationwide who use a fee-based staffing services model to help individuals with barriers to employment find and retain work."*
- Its aim is to become a source of practical tools and resources, along with peer learning opportunities, to strengthen the field of practice and promote the alternative staffing model.
- It will also serve as the voice of the sector, communicating practitioners' distinctive worker-focused approach and the market-based advantages of this transitional jobs strategy"
- *(ICA web site visited September, 08, 2007).*

Research site: First annual conference (October, 2007)

- The conference was a two-day event attended by representatives from 20 ASOs, most of whom did not know each other. A representative of the Mott foundation was also present all throughout the conference and so were a few experts on labor and community development.
- The program was evenly divided between skill development sessions, in the areas of management, marketing, and data management for customer responsiveness, agenda setting workshops for participants to define the role of the Alliance, and social events for informal interaction among participants.

Imagine you are the organizer of this event?

Your goal: collective action to serve ASOs

- Where would you hold it?
- How would the program look like (free/formal time)?
- Who would be the speakers?
- What would be the topics?

Where?

- Chicago

- Home of the oldest which was also willing to co-host.
- Easily reachable site from across the United States

Program

- Similar proportion of formal presentations and events for informal engagement

Topics of conversation

Formal program (12 hours)	Skill Development (5 hours)	Policy role of ASA (3.5 hours)	Policy challenges for Alternative Staffing (3.5 hours)
Informal program (10.5 hours)	Funding	Getting know now one another	

Skill development: OB, Sales, data base management

Policy challenges: Competing with the "cowboys"

Findings

- Work in progress



Thanks

Bye!

