

# Pathways to Employment

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## Systemic Review Leadership Overview April 1, 2011

Pathways to Employment (PTE), Minnesota's federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, brought together people with disabilities, employers, businesses, government, and providers to increase competitive employment of people with disabilities and to meet Minnesota's workforce needs.

The purpose of this Leadership Overview of the Systemic Review is to provide DHS leadership an overview of Pathways to Employment (PTE) and its infrastructure development activities so they will be prepared to:

- Represent PTE and its accomplishments to their constituencies, including DHS management, leaders in other state agencies, governor's office, CMS and other federal agencies, policy makers, the press, and the public.
- Support transition activities during 2011, the final year of the grant.
- Ensure sustainability of the progress made by PTE-inspired initiatives.
- Encourage on-going investment in infrastructure to support competitive employment of people with disabilities in Minnesota.

Other documents that report on the Systemic Review are available from [PTE.Public@state.mn.us](mailto:PTE.Public@state.mn.us). They include:

- Systemic Review Design
- Management presentation—PowerPoint presentation with key points from the Leadership Overview
- Communications summary—One-page brief for policy makers and other stakeholders
- Data summaries
  - Interview protocols and summaries
  - Document reviews
  - Focus group design and summaries

## Executive Summary

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Pathways to Employment (PTE), Minnesota's federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, brought together people with disabilities, employers, businesses, government, and providers to increase competitive employment of people with disabilities and to meet Minnesota's workforce needs. Competitive employment is a centerpiece of a quality life style. It provides positive identity, a meaningful place in community, and an adequate standard of living that allows for more than subsistence level survival. It incorporates personal choice, self-direction, and inclusiveness—all important policy goals for Minnesota.

Between 2006 and 2011, the diverse initiatives and activities of PTE invested in infrastructure and sparked systemic changes for people with disabilities. They are now encouraged to see competitive employment as an expectation of them, rather than a service provided to them. Professionals and organizations in both the public and private sectors, state agency partners, and the employment community have been affected in systemic ways by the work of PTE.

The PTE grant addressed systemic change in two very different and quite complex systems—employment and disabilities services. The project team used a variety of innovative tactics to initiate systemic infrastructure change, including:

- Develop and implement a simple Strategic Plan (<http://tinyurl.com/PTEStrategicPlan>) to align many diverse activities.
- Adapt to unexpected opportunities when they emerge.
- Invest in networks to provide information and to support collaborative action.
- Develop and/or implement electronic tools to support communication.
- Encourage innovation by imposing only essential constraints on projects and activities.
- Draw on multiple funding sources to support a single, focused vision.
- Use existing infrastructure as a starting point for innovation.
- Adjust to different organizational structures and cultures.
- Focus attention on the systemic change, rather than the project.

These tactics, though somewhat unconventional, allowed PTE to work at the intersections of sectors, agencies, and levels of government to create new pathways to competitive employment of people with disabilities. PTE supported many distinct activities and initiatives, all focused on the six strategies in the Strategic Plan. The accomplishments and impacts of those components are documented in other places and summarized in Appendix 2. Four overarching systemic impacts, illustrated by four case studies, resulted from the work of PTE that will embed and sustain the paradigm shift initiated by the program. As a result of its systems change efforts, PTE:

- Created a new platform for information and assistance. This platform ensures that people with disabilities have the access to information they need to obtain competitive employment when and where they need it.
- Increased focus on career development for people with disabilities in many institutions including K-12 schools, transition services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and WorkForce Centers across the state.
- Engaged business and government in hiring and retaining people with disabilities in positions of competitive employment.

- Developed public policies for systems change, infrastructure development and maintenance, and sustainability of the systems that support people with disabilities as they seek, find, and maintain competitive employment.

This document provides an overview of the challenges, strategies, accomplishments, lessons learned, and opportunities for sustainability for PTE. For more information about PTE and other aspects of this Systemic Review, contact [PTE.Public@state.mn.us](mailto:PTE.Public@state.mn.us).

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# Pathways to Employment

## Systemic Review Leadership Overview

This Systemic Review document provides an overview of the activities and accomplishments of Pathways to Employment (PTE), the comprehensive employment Medicaid infrastructure grant funded through the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170). The purpose of PTE was to increase the employment rate and earnings of people with disabilities and meet the needs of Minnesota employers through full use of the state's workforce. The principles of human systems dynamics informed the review and its exploration of the ways that the PTE team responded to complex, emergent phenomena. This report includes the following sections:

- Background
- PTE overview
- Systemic Review Approach
- Challenges and responses
- Innovative tactics
- Accomplishments
- Lessons learned
- Opportunities for sustainability

*The biggest thing I've noticed with PTE is that we're doing something that is truly about people not programs.*

## Background

The Minnesota Department of Human Services' (DHS) core values are the touchstones for decisions:<sup>1</sup>

- We focus on people, not programs.
- We provide ladders up and safety nets for the people we serve.
- We work in partnership with others; we cannot do it alone.
- We are accountable for results, first to the people we serve, and ultimately to all Minnesotans.

*People at DSD are talking about work in a whole different way now. That is HUGE!*

Expanding upon these core values, the Disabilities Services Division (DSD) within DHS has established a supporting set of values that function as guiding principles for all of its work. DSD's supporting values or guiding principles are best represented via the acronym CHOICE.<sup>2</sup>

**C**ommunity Membership—that is grounded in both participation & group membership

**H**ealth, Wellness, Safety—with emphasis on communication, relationships & trust

**O**wn place to live—people choose where and with whom they live, who

<sup>1</sup> At [www.dhs.state.mn.us](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us); Minnesota Department of Human Services' Core Values

<sup>2</sup> At [www.dhs.state.mn.us](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us); Disability Services Division Priorities

provides support

Important long-term relationships— that are reciprocal and provide for safety

Control over supports—and where possible the funding for personal supports, housing & transportation

Employment earnings & stable income— the generation of private income through typical jobs or self-employment or stable income from public and private sources

Both DHS and DSD develop and sustain strong partnerships with families, communities, businesses, counties, and other government organizations to help Minnesotans reach their goals. DHS and DSD, in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Minnesota State Council on Disability (MSCOD), developed and implemented Pathways to Employment (PTE), a comprehensive employment Medicaid infrastructure grant funded through the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170).

## PTE Overview

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The purpose of Minnesota’s Pathways to Employment (PTE) is to increase the employment rate and earnings of people with disabilities and meet the needs of Minnesota employers through full use of the state’s workforce.<sup>3</sup> Competitive employment is centerpiece of a quality life style. It provides positive identity, a meaningful place in community, and an adequate standard of living that allows for more than subsistence level survival. It incorporates personal choice, self-direction, and inclusiveness – all important policy goals for Minnesota.

*PTE has stimulated debate, constructs and initial demonstrations about new and innovative ways to advance employment of people with disabilities.*

With a focused effort on employment through PTE, the State of Minnesota expects to experience:

- An increased rate of employment for people with disabilities,
- An increase in the number of employers that hire individuals with disabilities,
- An improvement in the quality of life for people with disabilities,
- An improvement in the coordinated delivery of services and supports that prepare people with disabilities to enter and succeed in the competitive workforce.<sup>4</sup>

Pathways to Employment (PTE) brought together people with disabilities, employers, businesses, government, and providers to strengthen the infrastructure that will increase competitive employment of people with disabilities and, as a consequence, meet Minnesota’s workforce needs. A diverse group of stakeholders (see Appendix 1: Stakeholders Engaged in PTE) worked together toward this shared goal using six strategies:

1. Partnerships with business to meet workforce needs and expand job opportunities
2. Public policy and competitive employment of people with disabilities
3. Coordinated employment services and supports

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<sup>3</sup>At [www.positivelyminnesota.com](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com); PTE Grant Overview

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

4. A coordinated information and communication system
5. Strengthened transition services and work experiences for youth and young adults
6. Strengthened data collection and outcome measurement

To implement these strategies and to fulfill its mission, PTE supported learning for individuals; innovation in information and service delivery infrastructures; realignment in organizations; and change in the complex public and private systems that serve employment and the disability community. Not only did the activities and initiatives of PTE reach from municipalities to the federal government, they also reached across program and institutional boundaries that had formed the barriers to employment of people with disabilities. The infrastructure changes supported by PTE resulted in individual and systemic changes for people and organizations.

For individuals with disabilities, PTE represents a move toward choice. PTE addresses a major concern expressed in the recent report *Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work*, “The limited array of employment choices directly impacts an individual’s capacity to live a full, rich life as an active, tax-paying member of the community.”<sup>5</sup> (A new system of expectations, tools, and relationships supported by PTE allow people with disabilities to choose productive, competitive employment. Work is becoming an expectation for people with disabilities. Individuals may choose not to pursue it, but competitive employment is considered the norm. As a result of competitive employment, people with disabilities are more likely to develop independence and achieve full inclusion in their communities.

PTE has also instigated change for professionals who work in government, nonprofits, and businesses. They have learned to think about employment differently. They have also learned new ways to innovate, collaborate, and support systemic change.

*Systems change occurs top down and bottoms up simultaneously – so involve local but also top.*

In addition to individual learning, PTE has supported a variety of innovations in infrastructure. PTE activities and initiatives introduced or reinforced well-coordinated information, outreach, training and supports that allow each person with a disability to find the employment path that works for them. Policy changes, braided funding, integrated information technology, flexible personnel policies were all supported by PTE as parts of the infrastructure required to support the new paradigm for competitive employment of people with disabilities.

*People at DSD are talking about work in a whole different way now. That is HUGE!*

Organizations were changed as a result of PTE activities, as well. A critical part of this transition is that the role of government evolves away from a model of low expectations for work and a focus on serving and deciding for the client. The paradigm introduced by PTE involves new expectations for everyone engaged with competitive employment—people with disabilities and their families, publicly-funded programs (both government and non-profits), advocacy groups, and employers. Organizations that had seen themselves as independent and disconnected began to see through the eyes of their consumers and realized that integration at the point of employment was the most effective

<sup>5</sup> At <http://tinyurl.com/seg-exp>; National Disability Rights Network: *Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work* (January 2011): 24.

and efficient choice. As a result new temporary and permanent organizations were created, new policies were implemented, new relationships were forged, and many new opportunities emerged.

PTE supported change at all these levels—individual, infrastructure, and organization. It also engaged many different communities, including formal government, informal personal networks, and everything in between (see Appendix 1: Stakeholders Engaged in PTE). This wide range of tactics was necessary for PTE to reach its goal because systems that support employment and systems that support people with disabilities are both extremely diverse and complex.

## Systemic Review Approach

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This Systemic Review approach uses theory and practice from human systems dynamics (HSD) to describe the PTE tactics, results, and options for sustainability. The HSD approach is grounded in the theory of complex adaptive systems, but it uses simple tools to support observation, analysis, and action. The rest of this document outlines the challenges, innovations, lessons learned, and options for sustainability for the project, but the whole of the PTE effort was greater than the sum of these parts. The PTE team worked with their partners (including people with disabilities) to co-evolve infrastructure changes in the wide range of systems related to employment of people with disabilities. This section of the report describes the complex nature of PTE and explains why HSD methods were essential to getting a clear picture of PTE's methods and results. This section also sets the stage for the findings that follow by introducing five of the HSD tools that were used to collect, analyze and report on the Systemic Review.

### PTE as Complex Adaptive System

A complex adaptive system consists of:

- Many parts
- Permeable boundaries
- Relationships among the parts
- Emergent system-wide patterns

*Programs stepping  
out of program  
boxes.*

Human systems dynamics acknowledges that teams, organizations, communities, and partnerships can function as complex adaptive systems when they have many parts, permeable boundaries, and emergent system-wide patterns.

This Systemic Review assessed PTE as a complex adaptive system for the following reasons. PTE had *many parts*. Pathways to Employment invested in infrastructure improvements for multiple systems. Any formal or informal institution that influences competitive employment for people with disabilities was touched by PTE, including employment, education, disabilities services, as well as the many informal support systems. PTE had *permeable boundaries*. This investment influenced systems at local, county, and state levels and changed patterns for personnel, policies, and procedures. It sought to inform policy and practice in the private sector and at the federal level, as well. PTE supported *relationships among the parts*. Many initiatives intentionally built relationships across traditional system boundaries. Partnership and collaboration were a hallmark of PTE from the beginning. *System-wide patterns* emerged. PTE projects and initiatives supported diverse infrastructure improvements, including software systems; professional development; K-12 education; partnerships and coalition building, and a wide array of other public and private support

systems. At the same time, PTE focused on the individual needs of individual job seekers and his or her relationship to the working public. In its initial design and in its on-going implementation, PTE functioned as a complex adaptive system to set the conditions for infrastructure change.

## HSD Models and Methods

Complex adaptive systems behave in unpredictable and surprising ways, and effective action in any complex system is innovative and adaptive. As the complex system transforms over time, the project strategies co-evolve to meet the emerging needs and opportunities. For this reason, standard project analysis assumptions (e.g., predictable outcomes, incremental change, long-term plans, constant roles and responsibilities, and so on) are not valid in a complex adaptive system. Different assumptions and different tactics are required. The PTE team responded to this need for different assumptions and different working methods. The adaptations, innovations, and lessons learned that are described later in this document, demonstrate how PTE co-evolved over time with the emerging landscape of employment and disabilities. At first, these adaptive actions were intuitive and informed by long experience. Later in the project, formal tools (from HSD and other sources) informed the team in its decision making and action.

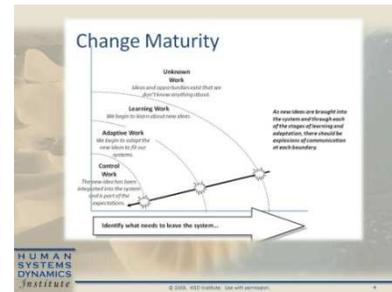
The Systemic Review process drew from a variety of HSD models and methods to understand and explain the systemic nature and results of the PTE team's approach. The results appear in the rest of this document, but these models and methods are described below.

**Patterns.** Over time, structures in a complex adaptive system change in unpredictable ways, but change can be observed in terms of pattern transformation. HSD defines a pattern as, "Similarities, differences, and connections that have meaning." A pattern transforms when those similarities, differences, and connections shift. Systemic, or infrastructure change, appears as a shift in a pattern. One significant pattern shift that resulted from PTE was a change in expectations for professionals, job seekers, and the community. Prior to PTE, employment was seen as a service provided to some people with disabilities, but the assumption was that a disabled person would not seek competitive employment. As a result of PTE activities, this assumption has changed, and competitive employment of people with disabilities is the expectation in Minnesota. The pattern (similarities, differences, and connections) of dependence and resulting poverty have been exchanged for the pattern of independence, wellbeing, and contribution to community through competitive employment of people with disabilities.

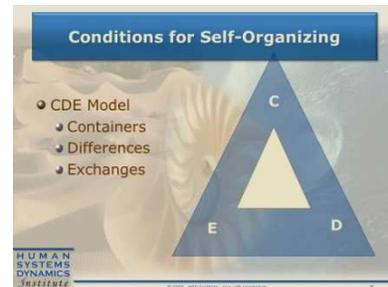
**Adaptive Action.** The unexpected is a way of life in a complex adaptive system. While planning and preparation are important, so is the ability to see and respond to opportunities when they arise. The PTE team demonstrated the ability to see, understand, and take action to make the most of surprising events and unplanned opportunities. This document is full of examples of adaptive action and its results.



**Change Maturity Model.** The Change Maturity Model defines four emergent stages of development in a complex adaptive project. Stage 1 involves “unknown work,” when a problem is apparent, but a solution is unknown. Stage 2 is “learning work,” when the problem is defined and multiple solutions are being explored. Stage 3 is “adaptive work,” when a solution has been identified, but implementation requires mutual adaptation between the context and the proposed solution. Stage 4 is “control work,” when the solution has been implemented is being sustained. One aspect of this model is that there is always something that has to leave the system as the project progresses from unknown to control work. The PTE team used this model explicitly during the project, and it was also used to solicit information during the Systemic Review focus groups.



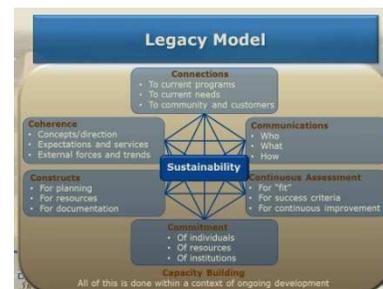
**Conditions for Self-Organizing.** Complex adaptive systems are said to be self-organizing because patterns emerge from internal interactions rather than being imposed from outside the system. HSD is based on an understanding that people can influence the conditions for self-organizing to make the process faster or slower and the product more or less ambiguous. These conditions (container, differences, and exchanges) do not predict or control self-organizing patterns, but they do influence them over time. All of the PTE activities influenced these conditions. The tactics described in this Systemic Review were analyzed and should be understood as influences on these conditions. Changes to systemic patterns should be seen as the results of these influences.



**Simple Rules.** When all the parts of the complex adaptive system have to act together in coherent ways, they need a short list of simple rules. If everyone is following the same rules, then, over time, regardless of where they are or what their jobs are, they will all participate in the same coherent patterns. The example is drawn from a group of birds that becomes a flock when all of them fly toward the middle, match the speed of neighbors, and don't bump into anyone.



**Legacy Model for Sustainability.** This model identifies the interdependent characteristics that determine sustainability in a complex adaptive human system. This model has been used to plan the sustainability recommendations that appear in the final section of this report. The list, as customized for PTE, include communication; collaboration; measurement and continuous improvement; policies, procedures, processes; resources; and skills and knowledge.



## **HSD Institute and PTE**

The Human Systems Dynamics (HSD) Institute was selected for the PTE Systemic Review for practical as well as theoretical reasons. For practical purposes, HSD Institute and its staff have been engaged in human services at county, state, and federal levels for twenty years. Over that time, they have helped to improve processes, data systems, strategic planning, systems thinking, management capacity, community engagement and a wide variety of other adaptive capacities. They have supported change in various divisions and administrations, including Aging and Disabilities Services, Child and Family Services, Chemical and Mental Health, and Information and Technology Strategies. These experiences inform the HSD team's systems view and understanding of infrastructure change in the public arena in general, and in Minnesota in particular.

PTE invested in infrastructure change as a complex adaptive response to a collection of complex adaptive systems. Such a complex and diverse effort required innovative and responsive management and decision-making approaches. HSD helped inform those decisions and is used in this document to explore and inquire about the PTE approach. For more information about HSD and the HSD Institute, visit [www.hsdinstitute.org](http://www.hsdinstitute.org).

## **Systemic Review Methodology**

A variety of methods were used to collect data for the PTE Systemic Review. These included: document reviews, key informant interviews, focus groups and case studies.

For the document review, documents were obtained from the website [www.positivelyminnesota.com](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com) and the SharePoint intranet site. SharePoint is a tool that allows individuals to create, share, and manage information within an organization. Staff from the Human Systems Dynamics Institute met with PTE staff to determine key types of information to focus on within the SharePoint site. A matrix was developed to review, analyze and present information obtained from the document review.

For the interviews, a structured interview protocol was developed and informed by the document review and discussions with PTE staff. Interviewees were selected by PTE staff with input from consultants. Fifteen interviews were conducted over a period of two months (August 23-October 25, 2010). The majority took place in the interviewees' offices. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. One person conducted the interview and took written notes. The same individual conducted all the interviews. Written interviews were reviewed and key points and thematic patterns noted. Interview responses were then organized according to interview questions and these were further organized by themes. Additional analysis of themes and supporting data focused on systemic change at all levels and impacts of PTE.

Three focus groups were conducted (September 7, October 26, and November 30, 2010). Participants included PTE staff, providers, and DEED staff respectively. Focus group participants were asked to construct a timeline of key events as well as identifying PTE activities and initiatives in relation to the Change Maturity Model. Transcriptions were made of all focus groups and the results distributed to the participants. Three staff members who were unable to

participate in the last focus group were interviewed separately, and their responses were incorporated into the transcription of that focus group.

From the data collected, as well as PTE staff recommendations, four case studies were developed. Each case study focused on a topical area and included related initiatives and programs, implementation strategies, lessons learned, and opportunities for sustainability. Topical areas included: Access to Information, Career Development, Business Engagement, and Policy Development. Additional interviews and reports provided data for the case studies as well as data previously collected from the document review, initial interviews, and focus groups.

## PTE Challenges and Responses

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Disruption and unpredictability are hallmarks of complex human systems in times of change. PTE activities and initiatives spanned a time of great change for business and for innovative government programs. The adaptive nature of the PTE project and its team allowed them to take advantage of challenges as they arose. In interviews and focus groups, PTE stakeholders recognized that early challenges were either resolved or made irrelevant as the project progressed because the PTE team responded creatively to a variety of difficult issues. This adaptive response is characteristic of successful behavior of a complex adaptive system. When environments and conditions change, successful groups adjust their tactics to continue moving toward a constant vision. The PTE team encountered traditional conditions for self-organizing (containers, differences, and exchanges) that had resulted in previous patterns of expectations and resources for people with disabilities. They shifted those conditions to encourage self-organizing of a different pattern—one that gives CHOICES to Minnesota’s people with disabilities. The conditions they encountered and their actions to shift those conditions are described below.

### Changing the Container

The PTE team took many steps to move people with disabilities out of the traditional boundary that had emerged to separate them from competitive employment. Organizational boundaries, functional boundaries, and participation in the grant activities all formed containers that challenged the PTE efforts.

**Organizational boundaries.** PTE depended on partnerships across many organizational boundaries. Examples include individuals and groups that support people with disabilities at federal, state, county, and local levels. Integration across institutional boundaries is always cumbersome, and even when change is accomplished, it isn’t always sustainable. In addition to boundaries between organizations, PTE often crossed borders within organizations. Groups that had been unaligned (across structures or management levels) were forced to work together more closely as a result of PTE.

While such program or institutional changes may not be permanent, personal insights and learnings often are. PTE team members built personal networks and established a wide range of formal agreements to bring these diverse groups together to implement the PTE strategies. They brought diverse stakeholders together in short-term projects, long-term relationships, and targeted efforts to build and sustain effective and

*Don't get stuck in collaborative structure—reviewing, reviewing, reviewing. Collaborate around work, tangible activities.*

efficient infrastructure to support competitive employment of people with disabilities.

There are many examples of ways that PTE facilitated innovative boundary crossing. DEED and MDE entered into a two-year interagency agreement to collaborate at twelve sites. The Bureau of Criminal Apprehension created an interagency agreement for two service worker positions. PTE also took advantage of pre-existing agreements that crossed organizational and functional boundaries, for example, the eighteen-year old interagency agreement with Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD) of DHS and DEED provided one foundation for PTE efforts.

**Functional boundaries of the past.** Traditions, professional networks, and service delivery structures for employment and education lay outside the purview of the Department of Human Services (DHS), the grant recipient. In addition, administrative, policy, funding, and regulatory structures (particularly at the federal level) often disrupted PTE work. The PTE team established strategic partnerships and collaborative projects to leverage existing resources and to introduce new opportunities. Over the course of the project, new leadership at DHS embraced the concepts of PTE and invested in activities and policies to support employment of people with disabilities. PTE collaborative activities contributed to various innovations, including integration of DLL, DB101 and MnWIC—Minnesota’s Work Incentives Planning Agency (WIPA)—into a continuum of Information & Assistance services; inclusion of employment into the comprehensive assessment tool (MnCHOICES); and development of a Rate Setting Methodology for Day Services.

*There is now recognition that there is a continuum of employment support, needs, requiring different approaches depending on where individual is on the continuum.*

**Participation in the grant.** Though many different systems and players were naturally engaged in the PTE mission, not all were included in the grant. Some, such as the Minnesota State Council on Developmental Disabilities, were not included. MSCOD was a full partner in PTE with the intention of serving as a spokesperson and integrating the multiple voices from across the diverse communities of people with disabilities. While this was an admirable idea, it proved quite difficult to accomplish. To broaden participation and include important partners, PTE teams and projects established opportunities for individuals and groups from various parts of the community to be involved in the activities and initiatives. Examples include the Minnesota State Council on Disability Annual Awards Luncheon; Career Exploration Day; and the Minnesota First Coalition.

## Focus on Significant Differences

Patterns in a complex system depend on the differences that make a difference in decision making and action. PTE dealt with a number of important differences, including between public and private sector activities, between people with disabilities and the rest of the community, and among the diverse needs of job seekers.

**Economic environment.** An economic downturn during the PTE grant challenged employment for all communities and segments of society. This affected PTE in multiple ways. First, the employment outlook for everyone deteriorated. Second, the state-wide budget deficit impeded some planning and program implementation. Third, transition and adjustment activities distracted staff and management from a focus on PTE and its core concerns. PTE invested in training, tools, and information infrastructure that will support the search for competitive employment, fiscal

adaptation, and strategic priority as the economy recovers. PTE-supported infrastructure innovations include Disability Employment Resource (DER) that appears on the *positivelyminnesota* website; published toolkits that support Camps to Careers and WorkForce Center Internships; the Assistive Technology Loan Program; and the MA-EPD Consumer Guidebook.

*PTE Accomplished:  
Building of  
sustainable cross-  
agency and cross-  
system connections at  
the local level.*

**Full inclusion in communities.** A focus on competitive employment draws people with disabilities into the community and out of traditional service delivery streams. PTE used a broad definition of *people with disabilities*—anyone who self-identified as having a disability. This decision expanded the reach of PTE beyond the traditional domain of human services (Medicaid waivers, disabilities, mental health, SSI, and so on). Though this approach complicated the project, it proved important for sustainable systemic impact. Ultimately, this approach shifted the paradigm from employment as a program or service for people with disabilities to competitive employment as an outcome. This shift is, perhaps, the most important of the systemic changes brought by PTE in Minnesota. Community inclusion was evidenced by the concept of Universal Design in WorkForce Centers and the ability of Disability Program Navigators to integrate traditional WorkForce Center resources with those from VRS (Vocational Rehabilitation Services).

**Housing and transportation.** Competitive employment opportunities are always influenced by the availability of adequate housing and transportation, but these factors were not formally included in the focus of the grant. In addition, counties, which deliver social services across Minnesota, were not a major focus of the PTE activities. In spite of these boundaries, through various initiatives and projects, PTE worked at local and regional levels to influence the conditions that enable people with disabilities to engage in competitive employment. One example of this approach is the Minnesota Council on Disabilities' Transportation Dialogues.

### **Building New Exchanges**

Boundaries and patterns are of little use if they are not connected together for communication and action. The final condition for self-organizing, exchanges, connects the parts of the system together so that system-wide patterns can form. PTE established new exchanges for collaboration, service delivery, and data sharing.

**Capacity to collaborate.** Few public or private institutions in Minnesota are prepared to collaborate with their partners. The PTE mission depended on effective partnerships, so individuals and institutions developed basic collaboration skills through their PTE activities. Sometimes, the lack of collaboration within agencies complicated collaborative efforts between agencies. Sometimes, the mission of PTE threatened traditional ways of doing work, so people and processes were uncooperative. Sometimes, a lack of upper-level commitment or lower-level understanding disrupted effective collaboration. Sometimes spoken agreements did not match up with the habits of practical action. The PTE team used a variety of strategies to build collaborative capacity at all levels in all stakeholder groups, including persistence, personal networks, starting small and scaling up, working on defined projects, and cultivating allies in partner organizations.

*System  
change/ systemic  
change is not for the  
weak-hearted 4  
steps forward, 5  
steps back.*

The Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) project was one example of ways that PTE brought diverse partners together to collaborate. Not only was DB101 created in partnership, it supports partnerships when it is used by Vocational Rehabilitation Services and in educating mental health providers about competitive employment for people with disabilities. An interagency agreement between MDE and Vocational Rehabilitation Services inspired by PTE will be a blueprint for future cooperation between the educational system and the vocational rehabilitation system. Minnesota Board on Aging's support for the integration of DB101 and DLL with the rest of the Minnesota Help Network is another example of effective collaboration on PTE projects. In another case, representatives from PTE, DEED, and AMHD collaborated in successfully obtaining and implementing the Johnson & Johnson Grant. This grant provided a model for integrated case management, which will support the next generation of collaborative action.

**Data sharing policies and practice.** Employment is an information-rich activity, and measurement of the PTE success also demands access to data on the individual and collective level. Traditional data privacy policies and practices restricted data flow and as a result restricted the effectiveness of some PTE activities and initiatives. As a result of PTE-related work, policies were changed or clarified to allow for essential data to be shared in support of people with disabilities who sought competitive employment. Data sharing agreements were established between DHS and the Department of Revenue and between DHS and DEED. Partnerships also developed among MDE, DOC, DEED, and MDH around how adult mental health data could be shared.

All of these challenges were deeply embedded as patterns in the traditional systems of disabilities and employment. Rather than avoiding these difficulties or trying to force through them, PTE chose an innovative and adaptive approach. In human systems dynamics, this approach is called *adaptive action*. In a difficult situation, where many factors mitigate against change, the best approach is an adaptive one in which you observe the behaviors of others, consider expectations and options, and take innovative action in the moment to shift the system away from old patterns and toward new opportunities. PTE demonstrated adaptive action in response to its many and complex challenges.

*Local schools have a new way to connect with business.*

## Innovative Tactics

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In addition to responding to existing patterns and challenges, PTE found new ways to observe existing patterns, consider available options, and implement action to influence systemic change.

*I think PTE has been an investment into me! I have learned so much and have many years of work left so PTE gave me the forum to try things and get to know people and systems all over the state.*

Human systems dynamics would recognize this as the practice of adaptive action in response to unpredictable systems change. The PTE team demonstrated innovative tactics in all phases of Adaptive Action, including their creative responses to all three of the adaptive questions: What? So what? and Now what?

### Adaptive Action Step 1: What?

The first step of an Adaptive Action process is based on carefully and sensitively observing the current situation. The PTE team captured their understanding of the current state in their Strategic Plan, which formed a foundation for all their subsequent actions. Long experience in

government programs and innovation helped them see what were the essential, but least constraining conditions to set for collective action. Finally, the team recognized that current assets could form a foundation for future innovation. Those responses to the first Adaptive Action question are described below.

**Develop and implement a simple strategic plan to align many diverse activities.** The PTE Strategic Plan fulfilled a requirement of the project submission, but its influence reached far beyond the formalities. The project team used the Strategic Plan effectively to guide decisions and align actions throughout the project. It became a framework for integration of diverse PTE activities and initiatives; provided a foundation for organization and operation of PTE work; and supported communications across the large and diverse team. Strategic Plan update meetings provided an additional opportunity to diffuse information across organizational boundaries and across divisions within the same department (e.g., Disability Services and Adult Mental Health Divisions of the Department of Human Services). For a full copy of the PTE Strategic Plan, visit <http://tinyurl.com/PTEStrategicPlan>.

**Encourage innovation by imposing only essential constraints on projects and activities.** Public projects are often stymied by the need to over-plan. When a situation is stable, and a purpose is narrow, then detailed planning is helpful. On the other hand, in a complex situation (like the intersection of employment and disabilities) overly detailed plans consume valuable project resources and often become obsolete before they can be implemented. PTE chose an adaptive path. Depending on the Strategic Plan for basic structure and supporting on-going communications, the team explored opportunities first and established the necessary project structures afterward. Though this approach was uncomfortable for some PTE team members and partners, it enabled significant systemic change to emerge from unexpected sources.

*Major systems  
change occurs in  
small increments.*

**Use existing infrastructure as a starting point for innovation.** Another resource-efficient tactic supported effective systemic change. Rather than starting from scratch or expecting to build a system from the bottom up, the PTE team leveraged existing resources to fulfill their own mission. They built on the successes of the past and strengths of the present to build capacity for the future. This tactic influenced many PTE activities, but perhaps the most obvious deals with online communications and resources. Existing information networks (MinnesotaHelp.info and the DEED website) were used as the base for designing, developing, and implementing support for employment of people with disabilities. Not only did this save design and development cost, it also simplified access for people who were already using the existing resources.

## **Adaptive Action Step 2: So what?**

The second step of Adaptive Action involves analysis of data and exploration of options. Groups ask many questions: “So what do our findings mean? So, what’s important to us and our clients? So, what resources and expectations do we have?” The PTE team used their networks and individual experiences with government programs and with people with disabilities to find creative answers to the question: So what?

**Adapt to unexpected opportunities when they emerge.** Framed around the Strategic Plan, PTE planning and activities optimized opportunities that arose over time. Given the fact that the employment system, demographics, public policy, and the economic environment were undergoing

significant changes, the PTE team members kept their eyes open to leverage unexpected events. In one specific example, PTE supported a partnership between mental health centers and employment service providers. Initially PTE helped AMHD with technical assistance. Later, for a small amount of money from PTE, AMHD introduced an integrated case consultation model that emphasizes employment. DEED and the Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD) were awarded funding through Johnson & Johnson for evidence-based supported employment and provided a toolkit to transform mental health services.

**Draw on multiple funding sources to support a single, focused vision.** The organizational, systemic, and infrastructure changes envisioned by PTE required significant resources. The broad-based goal of PTE depended on major change in multiple systems. The team developed an overall vision of the system of employment of people with disabilities. Then they used a variety of grants and sources of operational funds to support various components of the plan. Over the course of the project, PTE integrated resources from DMIE—Demonstration to Maintain Independence and Employment; Johnson & Johnson; Department of Labor; and the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) Grants. These various sources contributed toward the overall goal and coherent strategies of PTE.

**Adjust to different organizational structures and cultures.** The cultures and structures of the many PTE partners and stakeholder organizations are quite different, and PTE sustainability depends on all of them. The PTE Strategic Plan initiatives and activities were adapted to fit the needs of different organizational partners. Differences among DHS, DEED, MSCOD, and MDE were particularly relevant to the success of PTE.

*We have already demonstrated the sustainability of some of the programs, this means we did a good job of building; the things were grounded.*

For the most part, DHS is in the business of regulating the delivery of social services to clients. To optimize this function, it works in a regulation-based, service-delivery mode. The state defines programs and tools, informs counties of their responsibilities, and in some cases even executes quality control measures. As a result, DHS processes are built to be consistent, predictable, and stable. In such a system, sustainable change will be required and embedded in policy and process. While this approach can be efficient and reliable, it is also often resistant to change.

PTE responded to this organizational pattern by encouraging changes in policy, procedure, and information systems. The intent was to shift the long-term patterns of decision making for the organization as a whole. PTE supported many tactics to optimize the process-oriented culture of DHS, including integrating DB101 and DLL. Another example is the process of building a more integrated treatment plan involving mental health, creating a pilot program to test the model, and using the findings to inform a revision of Rule 29 covering mental health centers.

DEED, on the other hand, exists to provide a range of resources that can be used at the discretion of the client. To optimize this function, it works in a highly diverse, localized and customized service-delivery mode. Each region and each WorkForce Center structures the combination of services and resources that it believes are most useful to its local clients. As a result, DEED processes are built to be diverse, adaptable, and customized. Sustainable change in this culture must be flexible and provide options for clients and their advocates. While this approach can be

innovative and client-centered, it leads to inconsistent and unreliable implementation of innovative solutions.

The PTE sustainability approach at DEED involves developing and distributing programs and materials that can be integrated at the discretion of various WorkForce Centers. It also involves continuing to seek grant funds to sustain activities that were initiated under the PTE Grant and maintaining the networks and relationships that emerged in the course of the grant period.

Minnesota State Council on Disability (MSCOD) embodies yet a different structure to meet its mission. As primarily an advocacy organization, MSCOD balances its role between its other natural constituencies and the state. Over time, they have established a rich variety of methods and processes to engage their advocacy audiences, while still meeting all of their other formal obligations. This sensitive and delicate political situation requires on-going conversation and two-way dialogue to ensure sustainability of the gains made during the PTE Grant.

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) presents still a different sustainability challenge. It became engaged as a partner later in the PTE Grant cycle. The primary contact was with the Department as a whole, rather than specifically the area of special education (as might have been expected). This high-level connection reinforced the need for full inclusion of people with disabilities into the world of competitive work. Because of the unique structure and governance of educational institutions and programs across the state, sustainability of PTE will require embedding content in curricula; enhancing professional preparation; and redefinition of institutional roles, responsibilities, and funding streams.

The PTE project adjusted its objectives and processes to fit with the prevailing cultural patterns of its partners. This tactic made it more difficult to see the PTE program as a whole, but it increased the potential for sustainability because aspects of PTE are now embedded in these diverse organizations.

*Among the DHS employees with whom I interact, employment has been transformed from a siloed issue that people thought was laudable, but not central, to a major consideration when designing systems infrastructure, such as how people are assessed and support plans are developed.*

### **Adaptive Action Step 3: Now what?**

The final step of an Adaptive Action cycle brings a group to action. PTE and its many projects and initiatives engaged in action that affected individuals, organizations, and systems at many different levels. Representative examples are described below.

**Invest in networks to provide information and to support collaborative action.** The formal infrastructures for disabilities and employment were plagued by institutional silos. The PTE team established (or exploited) personal and professional networks to cross formal boundaries. As a result they were able to identify opportunities to implement systemic change in innovative ways. This strategy was particularly important in initiatives that engaged with the business community. Within a governmental bureaucracy, decision-making processes and power are formalized, however decision-making and power can be exercised informally as well. The business community, on the other hand, functions in a loosely coupled way through informal networks. Though the PTE team was embedded in an organizational hierarchy, they found creative ways to engage with networks to leverage opportunities.

**Develop and/or implement electronic tools to support communication.** PTE used a centralized and consistent tool (SharePoint) to facilitate communication among the large number of people and organizations involved in PTE activities. The SharePoint site was organized by the Strategic Goal areas represented in the PTE Strategic Plan, thus reinforcing the overall PTE approach. It ensured a level of transparency among diverse initiatives, projects, and functions. This data repository also provided an effective archive of decisions and actions in the course of the emergent and adaptive PTE process.

**Focus attention on the systemic change, rather than the project.**

“PTE is not a program.” This became the rallying cry of the PTE team and management. In the experience of the team, isolated programs tend to engender competition and conflict. To avoid this outcome, PTE intentionally refused to “institutionalize” itself. Instead, it focused on embedding the values, processes, and innovations into existing organizational and systemic infrastructures.

*Employment of people with disabilities is more “on the agenda” than it was five years ago. People are more aware and talking about it (I’m referring to policy makers, advocates, leaders.)*

Many of these successful PTE tactics are counterintuitive in the world of government programs, but they shaped the success of the innovative PTE approach. The reason is simple. The mission of PTE is different from traditional government program missions. It is systemic in nature and broader in scope—applying to all people with disabilities not just those who are eligible for publicly funded services. It crosses traditional lines of authority and engages the business sector and the market as equal partners. It also engenders change at all levels of activity, from individual to federal and community. In short, PTE engages as a complex adaptive system with other complex adaptive systems. It implements strategies that are sensitive to the complexity of human systems dynamics. Even though the radical nature of the approach generated some conflict and confusion in the course of the project, it proved to be an effective and efficient strategy.

## Accomplishments

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PTE embraced a wide range of formal and informal activities and initiatives (see Appendix 2: PTE Initiatives and Activities by Strategy). The accomplishments of each one have been evaluated either formally or informally by the project team and the participants. The details about these activities are documented in other places, so they will not be repeated here. Some accomplishments, however, stand out as keys to systemic change and sustainability of the PTE mission. They extended across multiple PTE strategies, organizations, initiatives, and activities to implement sustainable systemic change. The stories of four of those accomplishments are told below. They include:

- Access to information
- Career development
- Employer engagement
- Policy development

### Access to Information

It doesn’t matter what policies, procedures, and programs support competitive employment if people with disabilities don’t have access to the information they need. PTE supported the design

and implement of an integrated information and assistance system that gives people the information they need, when and where they need it.

The system includes three layers of support. The Disability Linkage Line (DLL) provides a single access point for all disability-related questions, and employment information is embedded in it. Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) is a web-based tool that offers safe, easy way for people with disabilities to explore the possibility of work. Finally, Minnesota Work Incentives Connection (The Connection) is an independent nonprofit that helps people with disabilities understand the effect work will have on their benefits.

Such an integrated information and assistance system is a significant innovation in support of competitive employment for people with disabilities because it includes information and problem-solving; on-line, telephone, and face-to-face connections; focuses on supporting people with disabilities as they support themselves in their job searches and employment decision making.

The Disability Linkage Line (DLL) is a free, information and referral resource providing Minnesotans with disabilities a single access point for all disability related questions. Users call a single, toll-free number. Depending on the area code of the dialer, the call is routed to one of four regional call centers (Northern, Central, Southern or Metro). DLL Options Counselors provide a free, neutral service that helps people identify resource and benefits options, make informed decision, manage their benefits, overcome barriers to services, and find solutions. DLL serves community providers, counties, individuals with disabilities and their support networks.

Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) is a web-based tool that offers a safe, easy way for people with disabilities to explore the possibility of work. DB101 is an interactive web site that includes:

- Information on state, federal, and other disability benefit programs
- Tools to show connections between work and benefits
- Tailored plans for moving forward
- Links to Minnesota's information network ([minnesotahelp.info](http://minnesotahelp.info))

The Minnesota Work Incentives Connection (The Connection) is an independent nonprofit that helps people with disabilities understand the effect work will have on their benefits. The Connection is Minnesota's designated Work Incentives Planning Agency (WIPA). Together, these three components establish an integrated information support system for people with disabilities as they engage in competitive employment.

The PTE team used several innovative strategies to develop and integrate the elements of this information and assistance network. Each one taught lessons in how to implement and sustain access to information for people with disabilities.

**Know what they need.** In early environmental scans, the PTE team realized that people did not understand the benefits system and were fearful of losing benefits if they became employed. DB101 responds to this need by expanding benefits planning and education so people can get information where they want it and when they want it. The lesson here is that effective interventions respond to the real, felt needs of people with disabilities.

*I think I've learned a lot about systems change. It's extraordinarily difficult work. You have to be flexible and adaptive and intuitive. It's not linear which is a challenge for me because I'm a very linear thinker.*

**Build on what exists.** PTE staff made use of existing products and processes to reduce costs, speed development, and enhance sustainability. They began by examining current Information & Assistance services. Based on this analysis, services were reconfigured, re-aligned to create the current integrated system. In addition, the current version of DB101 represents a customization of a tool that was originally designed as a benefits calculator.

**Consider sustainability from the start.** One of the most important lessons learned is the need to build sustainability into program planning and development from the beginning. PTE leadership emphasized sustainability as a working assumption. This created a context in which the focus shifted from a superficial discussion about what people wanted to a practical and difficult discussion in which the whole I&A function was examined and analyzed.

**Support long-term vision with short-term action.** A long-term comprehensive strategy of infrastructure change, like that of PTE, requires considerable resources. Since large appropriations and grants are difficult to obtain, short-term goals and smaller grants were aligned to contribute to the long-term goals and strategies. This allowed systems change to be supported using multiple resources. This approach also allowed PTE to take advantage of unexpected opportunities for change as they occurred.

*Students have an educated idea about what career they want to pursue, and what college they want to attend. They are provided opportunities to learn about how to pursue a career and have supports in place to increase opportunities for success.*

## Career Development

Pathways to Employment, functioning as a complex adaptive system, established a new, system-wide pattern in which youth with disabilities would expect to seek, find, and retain competitive employment. Such a pattern has the potential for significant systemic impact because it encourages and enables youth with disabilities to develop all of the CHOICE components (**C**ommunity Membership; **H**ealth, Wellness, Safety; **O**wn place to live; **I**mportant long-term relationships; **C**ontrol over supports; **E**mployment earnings & stable income).

To establish this new pattern, and to reinforce it where it already existed, PTE worked in partnership with public and private agencies that traditionally supported either people with disabilities or job seekers. By introducing clear employment goals into the world of disabilities support, PTE set new policies and procedures to inform professionals' expectations and interactions with youth. By introducing accommodations for people with disabilities into the career development world, PTE helped make resources available and accessible for youth with disabilities. By engaging with both disabilities and employment supports at the same time, PTE shifted the pattern of expectation and experience for youth of Minnesota.

As the first component of this strategy, PTE developed a comprehensive career pathway vision "Prepare for a Career!" The vision includes five major steps, as well as services and supports for each step. The steps help youth with disabilities through a process of exploration and career development. The steps include: 1) Understand Yourself, 2) Explore Your Options, 3) Develop a Career Plan, 4) Expand Your Skills, and 5) Obtain and Advance in Employment.

A second important set of strategies gave youth opportunities to experience the world of work. Camps to Careers structured activities to help youth explore a variety of career options. Internships provided opportunities for youth to gain more in-depth experience with a particular workplace and career choice. Mentoring programs, such as E-Connect/E-Mentoring, provided opportunities for youth with disabilities to establish networking relationships that are crucial for jobseekers of every age and ability.

Not only did PTE build the expectation and feed the imaginations of competitive employment, it also improved access to resources for job search and career development. Through the WorkForce Center Zones, PTE invested in infrastructure and systems change to make career development and job-seeking resources accessible to youth with disabilities. As a result of PTE infrastructure investments, facilities are more welcoming, information is more accessible, and personalized support is available from the Disability Program Navigators (now known as Resource Coordinators) who are responsible for making WorkForce Centers (WFCs) more accessible to people with disabilities.

The PTE team leveraged diverse resources to implement a pattern that encouraged and enabled youth with disabilities to seek, find, and retain competitive employment. In the course of their work, they learned the following lessons about complex, systemic infrastructure change.

**Build and maintain partnerships.** Career development opportunities for youth require the collaboration across many different stakeholder groups. Camps to Careers and other initiatives depended on school districts, colleges, Work Force Centers, county social services, businesses and non-profit groups, as well as parents and students.

Close collaboration among DEED, DHS, and MDE was also essential. Each agency has its unique structure and ways of functioning. They also have quite distinct organizational and political cultures. Each agency answers to different federal agencies and supports different kinds of functions that complicate the relationships and collaborations that supported PTE's efforts toward effective career development for youth with disabilities. Building and sustaining partnerships across these differences will be an important element to sustaining the work of PTE.

**Focus on the student.** One major success criterion for the PTE career development services was their focus on the student's interests, needs, and abilities. Each initiative offered options and opportunities from which the student might choose. Resources informed choice without pre-determining outcomes and expectations.

**Create synergies among initiatives.** PTE project and initiatives did not stand alone. Each one connected to and leveraged the others. Camps to Careers established opportunities for mentoring relationships. The Zones opened opportunities like Camps to Careers and mentoring. All of the initiatives worked together to begin the process of establishing a coherent bridge for youth with disabilities to develop their own career goals.

**Build on what exists.** Many of the career development options supported by PTE were based on previously developed models that were subsequently adapted, modified, and enhanced to contribute to the PTE mission of preparing youth for competitive employment. The Zones and Camps to Careers are perfect examples of this successful strategy.

## Employer Engagement

Patterns in complex adaptive systems are shaped by difference, but difference can also be a barrier to the formation of system-wide patterns. One very fundamental difference—between public sector infrastructure and private sector jobs—challenged the work for PTE. Engagement with employers was one key strategy in the original Strategic Plan, and it proved to be an important and difficult process throughout the project. Three primary strategies addressed the differences between employers and infrastructure systems that support people with disabilities: Building relationships, sharing information, and changing government practice.

PTE established and maintained relationships with potential employers by engaging the Business Leadership Network and the Governor's Workforce Development Council. Supported by PTE investments, the WorkForce Center Disability Program Navigators (now known as Resource Coordinators), conducted outreach efforts to share information and strengthen connections with employers across the state.

Sharing information was a second way that PTE sought to bridge the differences between people with disabilities and their potential employers. Traditionally, employers' lack of knowledge about

people with disabilities has been a major barrier to employment. Misconceptions about medical insurance, legal issues and absenteeism can prevent employers from hiring people with disabilities. To address this problem, PTE/DEED developed a comprehensive body of information about the value of hiring people with disabilities, including a sound business case for the practice. The Disability Employment Resource (DER) located on the DEED website provides this information to businesses. If funding is available, the DER can be supplemented with the personal support of a VR-BSS (Vocational Rehabilitation—Business Service Specialist), who can give “just in time” information and assistance to potential employers.

In addition to building connections with the business sector outside of government, PTE encouraged government to change its own employment practices to be more accessible to people with disabilities. The Minnesota State as Model Employer (SME) initiative, in collaboration with DEED's Vocational Rehabilitation Services and PTE, is a partnership with state agencies to increase employment of people with disabilities in state government. It helps state agencies and Minnesota businesses meet their workforce needs into the future, while providing competitive employment to people with disabilities. This initiative established internships in state agencies (including Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension) and provided support for standard hiring procedures in various state agencies.

The challenges and successes of the employer-related activities of PTE generated insights about the effect of the economic landscape on such projects and the challenges of collaborative relationships between business and government. Those insights are described below.

**The economic landscape.** The economic environment has tremendous influence over the outcomes of any employment-related effort. At least for the present, the economic downturn challenged one basic assumption of PTE: That Minnesota would have a difficult time meeting its future workforce needs. As unemployment rises, it appears that the workforce is sufficient to meet current needs in business and government, so people with disabilities are not seen as such a critical resource for the future.

**Personal and electronic connections.** The public/private relationships that influence employment programs are complex and challenging. Government and business have different goals, cultures, and processes. Efforts to bridge these differences through institutional partnerships proved challenging for PTE projects. On the other hand, initiatives that drew on professional, social, and electronic networks and relationships proved more effective.

**Model the goal.** The State as Model Employer (SME) served as a laboratory for developing internships, changing traditional hiring methods, identifying what supports people with disabilities need to be successful in the workplace, and identifying the benefits they bring as employees.

**Diversify solutions.** No single approach will build bridges across the government/employer divide. The business sector, and the employment sector within government, are diverse—each job and each institution has its own history, expectations, and hiring procedures. Connections with employers, therefore, must be adapted to fit specific situations.

## Policy Development

The systemic changes initiated and supported by PTE cannot be scaled up or sustained without supporting changes in public policy. The vision of PTE— competitive employment for people with disabilities that facilitates positive identity, community inclusion, and a way out of poverty—depends on a range of interdependent factors. Most of those factors are influenced by public policy. Examples include employment practices, transportation, housing, health care, and education. Pathways to Employment worked closely with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and the Minnesota State Council on Disability (MSCOD) to review issues, programs, and policies related to the competitive employment of people with disabilities. Specifically, PTE facilitated dialogue and supported on-going policy work within the Department of Human Services' Disability Services Division. PTE also supported MSCOD policy consultation with state lawmakers and agencies.

Through PTE efforts, infrastructure in Disability Service Division shifted to meet the employment needs of people with disabilities. As one interviewee noted in relation to systems change, “PTE set the groundwork on employment being an expectation, not just a set aside.” Infrastructure changes to support this new policy and paradigm included changes to information & assistance resources (e.g., Disability Benefits 101); assessment (e.g., Disability Linkage Line and MnCHOICES); service planning (e.g., Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MA-EPD) and Stay Well, Stay Working); as well as contract standards, performance standards, and measurement (e.g., provider report card).

All of these initiatives have engaged PTE vision and staff in shifting policy and practices to make competitive employment a reality for people with disabilities in Minnesota. Policy change efforts are on-going to support employment of people with disabilities. Lessons learned from PTE will continue to inform those efforts. Three key lessons are described below.

**Information & assistance (I&A) and assessment.** Information delivery systems, such as DB101 and DLL are significant, and they must be supported with procedures and practices to encourage all professionals to consider options for competitive employment for people with disabilities.

**Service and financing restructure.** The restructuring of non-residential (“day”) services has been an important infrastructure change supporting a policy shift to competitive employment for people with disabilities. With PTE support, DSD formed an advisory committee to develop a new payment structure. Recommendations will be presented at the state level and have the potential to influence public policy. Transportation and housing policies also influence the ability of people with disabilities to seek and maintain competitive employment. These will be key areas for policy development in the future.

**Spreading the vision.** One of the big challenges for the future is how to engage people who have not directly been involved in PTE work. Money is a great incentive for engagement, and PTE funding has leveraged existing development and stimulated new development. It is not the only motivator, however. “There is a tipping point in a change process,” one interviewee noted, “and we

have to be prepared to move faster. There is a tension in the change process, it is easy to see what should happen and hard to make the changes. We need to tell the story about how it can be better.”

## Lessons Learned

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PTE is a complex and diverse program, and it has attempted a wide range of innovative individual, organizational, infrastructure and systemic changes to improve competitive employment of people with disabilities and to meet Minnesota's workforce needs. The team has learned useful lessons that support sustainable, systemic change. When the many parts of a complex adaptive system have to coordinate action across many contexts, human systems dynamics recommends a "short list of simple rules." When all parts of the system follow the same rules, then coherent, system-wide patterns emerge. Through their work, the PTE team recognized and practiced the following simple rules.

Focus long term	The duration (5 to 6 years) of many PTE projects allowed systems to evolve and adapt from early stages of exploration, through design, planning, implementation, and on-going support. This stable and extended support enabled permanent change across the system as projects moved innovations across the Change Maturity Model from <i>Unknown</i> to <i>Control Work</i> .
Take the broadest view of disabilities	The PTE view included any person with a disability of any kind, whether or not they were eligible for publicly funded services. This broad perspective embedded PTE values, principles, processes, and policies across a wide segment of the employment system to ensure more sustainability.
Create new expectations	PTE has established the competitive employment of people with disabilities as the norm. In future, people with disabilities will have to make a conscious choice to avoid competitive employment, rather than having to struggle against the system to gain and maintain employment. This change in expectations at the individual and institutional levels will persist, long after PTE activities have ceased.
Take a realistic, incremental view	PTE and its many projects recognized that a lot of pieces have to be in place for a person to obtain and retain work. A number of these support systems have yet to be assembled. This realistic perspective led to decision making and actions that create the foundation for future development when funding becomes available. The continued development of DLL and DB101 are good examples of this strategy.
Build momentum for change	PTE built momentum for change through creative communications, policy changes, and easy-to-use products. All of these methods will continue to inspire systemic change and opportunity into the future.
Plan diverse measurement strategies	A complex program like PTE will show outcomes and impacts at many levels and in many ways. Some impacts will be quantitative, but many will be qualitative. Any effective evaluation plan should account for both quantitative and interpretive results. In addition, many of the most significant effects of PTE could not have been predicted at the beginning of the project, so a developmental or a reflective design for evaluation could be most informative and useful. This Systemic Review is an example of the kind of unconventional evaluation processes that support systemic change.

## Opportunities for Sustainability

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The PTE mission—competitive employment of people with disabilities—is not an end in itself, but a means to a much larger end. The ultimate goal is to reduce poverty and improve quality of life for people with disabilities. Competitive employment makes a significant contribution to that larger purpose. *Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work* notes:

It is clear that segregated and sheltered work no longer provides workers with disabilities and opportunity for ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ They may no longer be warehoused in institutions without meaningful daily interactions, but the change may merely be logistical. Segregation—whether it be in an institution or at work—is still segregation. Separate is still not equal.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of PTE was not directly to put people to work or to provide services in support, rather it was to establish and support the infrastructure that will enable others to provide services effectively and efficiently into the future. PTE stimulated and implemented change across the employment and disabilities systems. Together, these changes form a pattern of interlocking infrastructure components that engage people with disabilities in obtaining and retaining competitive employment. Along with other policies and practices, this pattern supports the vision of a society where people with disabilities have CHOICE<sup>7</sup>s to support high quality of life.

The question for the future is simple: How will these patterns be sustained across time, organizational and community bounds, and changing economic and political landscapes?

Human systems dynamics as a field of practice, considers the challenge of sustainability in complex and unpredictable human systems. Productive patterns can be sustained in systems when they cross institutional boundaries and when prediction and control are not possible. HSD research and experience have determined six characteristics of a complex system that allow it to sustain a purpose while adapting to unpredictable environmental changes. The team uses these seven characteristics to consider sustainability strategies for the PTE purpose.

### **Communication—Keep the “competitive employment” message alive.**

Every PTE stakeholder sends and receives hundreds of communications every day. Regardless of the audience, primary purpose, or medium, communications should embed messages about competitive employment and improving CHOICE for people with disabilities. Messages might include expectations, encouragement, advice, access to resources, news, and opportunities for partnership.

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<sup>6</sup> At [www.napas.org](http://www.napas.org); *Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work* (January 2011):9.

<sup>7</sup> CHOICE: **C**ommunity Membership; **H**ealth, Wellness, Safety; **O**wn place to live; **I**mportant long-term relationships; **C**ontrol over supports; **E**mployment earnings & stable income.

## **Collaboration**

### **Maintain productive relationships.**

PTE established an infrastructure of new collaborations and strengthened existing ones in support of competitive employment of people with disabilities and other facets of the CHOICE strategy. These relationships (personal and professional; formal and informal; local, state, and federal) can continue to sustain and adapt PTE-inspired infrastructure across the state.

## **Measurement and Continuous Improvement**

### **Engage in adaptive action (observe, decide, and act)**

Every PTE stakeholder has access to data regarding the status of competitive employment for people with disabilities and the resulting levels of prosperity and wellbeing. As time passes, those indicators will provide insights about how well the PTE patterns persist and how they need to adjust to meet changing needs. Sustainability requires adaptive action, when individuals and groups analyze data, incorporate data into decisions, and take action to maintain or adapt desired patterns.

## **Policies, Procedures, Processes**

### **Support competitive employment everywhere.**

Competitive employment and subsequent financial stability depend on a wide array of factors—many of which are influenced by formal policies, procedures, and processes. PTE implemented some changes that support competitive employment, but more change will be needed in future. PTE partners can continue to find ways to embed expectations and supports for competitive employment into structures at the individual, organizational, agency, and community levels. In the report by the National Disability Rights Network, *Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work* (<http://tinyurl.com/seg-exp>) there are pointed and explicit recommendations for policies, procedures, and processes to support competitive employment for people with disabilities. They recommend:

- End segregated employment and sub-minimum wage for people with disabilities
- Promote and facilitate integrated and comparable wage employment alternatives
- Increase labor protections and enforcement

## **Resources**

### **Think beyond traditional boundaries.**

PTE generated lessons about how to obtain and apply financial and human resources to reach shared goal. Braided funding, multiple coordinated grants, and private investment are all ways that resources can continue support competitive employment for people with disabilities.

## Skills and Knowledge

### Build capacity for self and others.

One of the key features of PTE and competitive employment for people with disabilities is capacity building. Do the individuals have the skills and knowledge they need? Do institutions have the policies, processes, and practices that support competitive employment for people with disabilities? PTE made infrastructure changes and provided documentation and training materials that are specific to its mission. These are available for all current and potential PTE partners. The maintenance and use of these materials will be key to continuing capacity development.

Over time, the efforts to sustain the pattern of PTE work will be just as diverse as the efforts that established it. These seven principles will support sustainability, but each PTE partner will implement these principles differently to meet their needs, capacities, and resources. As all of the PTE partners implement these principles they will contribute to sustaining the patterns of competitive employment of people with disabilities that were established through the PTE efforts.

## Conclusion

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Pathways to Employment brought people and organizations together across traditional boundaries to invest in infrastructure for competitive employment of people with disabilities. In the past, patterns at individual, institutional, and systems levels worked against competitive employment for people with disabilities. Complex human systems dynamics over time had established barriers that frustrated people who were willing and able to work. Pathways to Employment established the conditions for new patterns to emerge.

*PTE staff, especially at DHS, have developed an understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of collaboration.*

The PTE Strategic Plan set a framework for action. Decisions were made with a sensitivity to relationships, diverse needs, and multi-level organizational structures. Systemic change emerged from changes in attitudes, infrastructures, organizational and personal relationships, and the experiences of people with disabilities as they search for competitive employment. The results of PTE are sustaining now, they can be sustained over time, and the lessons from PTE can shape systemic infrastructure change in future projects.

For more detailed information from the PTE Systemic Review contact [PTE.Public@state.mn.us](mailto:PTE.Public@state.mn.us).

## Appendix 1: Stakeholders Engaged in PTE

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Advocates  
APSE (Association of People in Supported Employment)  
Business  
CAN DO Network  
Center for Workers with Disabilities (CWD)  
Cities  
Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MnCCD)  
Counties  
Educators  
Minnesota Employment First Coalition  
Families  
Federal government  
Governor  
Governor's Workforce Development Council (GWDC)  
High schools  
Legislators  
Legislature  
Medicaid Infrastructure Grants  
Minnesota Work Incentives Connection (The Connection)  
National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD)  
People with disabilities  
Policy makers  
Service providers  
State agencies, including Mn DOT, Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, MDE, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, State Rehabilitation Council, Minnesota Board on Aging, Department of Revenue, Minnesota Management and Budget  
Statewide Mental Health Leadership Team  
Universities, including Minnesota, California (San Francisco), and Rutgers, Virginia Commonwealth

## Appendix 2: PTE Activities and Initiatives by Strategic Goal

Strategic Goal	Activities	Initiatives
<p>1. Partnerships with business to meet workforce needs and expand job opportunities</p>	<p>National Disability Mentoring Day            Disability Mentoring Day made 1<sup>st</sup> day of the US Business Leadership Network Conference in Minneapolis (2006): “Minnesota Career Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”            Career Exploration Day            Employment First Summit            National Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Conference            Teachers’ manual: High School/High Tech C2C Website            C2C promotional video            C2C how-to manual drafted            C2C Tool Kits            Zone website            Zone brochures, magnet            Youth Zone draft            WorkForce Center Internships draft            Transition added to VRS Guide for Service Delivery            ERY (Employment Ready Youth) manual            Posters            Youth Resource Mapping Project C3            Disability Mentoring Day becomes Career Development Day</p>	<p>C2C (Camps to Careers): manufacturing, health care, art, digital media            E-Connect (formerly High School/High Tech) – national model integrated with C2C &amp; Disability Mentoring Day            ETO (Extended Training Opportunity) – camp follow-up model            The Zone            GLIDE (Generating Leaders in Disability Employment) Mentoring Program            E-Mentoring Internships            Project SEARCH            DB101 (Disability Benefits 101) Minnesota youth exploration tool, “Youth in transition” estimator function            Building Capacity to Create Work Experiences (PTE –MDE)            Competitive Employment Opportunities for High School Students with Disabilities grant opportunities (PTE-MDE)            DEED/MDE mini-grants – 12 schools            SME Internships            Mentorships            ERY (Employment Ready Youth) program            C3 (Connecting youth to Communities and Careers)</p>
<p>2. Public policy and competitive employment of people with disabilities</p>	<p>MSCOD Town Hall Meeting: Transportation Barriers            MSCOD Transportation Dialogues            First Annual Employment &amp; Disability Conference (coordinated with MNTAT)            Video Conference Series: Supporting Employment Innovations            Video Conference: Meaning and Value of Employment            Video Conference: MA-EPD &amp; SSA Work Incentives            MSCOD Training on Emergency Preparedness            Minnesota Employment First Consensus Report – available on its website (three summits)            MSCOD publication: “The Inclusive Workplace: Employers Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Using Assistive Technology for Employees with Disabilities”            MEPI website            Policy Brief: Stay Well, Stay Working (July 2009)            Policy Brief: Employment and Mental Illness in Minnesota</p>	<p>MEPI (Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative)            MNTAT (Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center)            Joint Legislative Policy Development            MA-EPD (Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities)            MnCHOICES (formerly COMPASS – a comprehensive assessment tool) adding an employment module            RSMI (Rate Setting Methodology Initiative) Intensive Workgroup            DMIE (Demonstration to Maintain Independence and Employment – “Stay Well, Stay Working”)            IPS (Individual Placement and Support model – part of the Johnson and Johnson Project): EBP-SE (Evidence Based Practices – Supported Employment)            CAN DO Network merged into Communities for a Lifetime</p>

	<p>Policy Brief: Employment of Minnesotans with Brain Injury</p> <p>White Paper: PWD The Answer to Impending Worker Shortage</p> <p>How-to manual for transportation</p> <p>Tribal Government Leader Training re: using Adult Rehabilitation Mental Health Services (ARMHS) as an employment support</p>	
3. Coordinated employment services and supports	<p>Applying Universal Design Principles to WorkForce Centers</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> Annual Disabilities &amp; Employment Conference (2009) (MNTAT)</p> <p>Updated Work Incentives Connection website</p> <p>Publication: “Achieving Self-Sufficiency” booklet on people with disabilities who have worked their way off of Social Security benefits</p> <p>Document: MA-EPD Protocols</p> <p>“How-to” manual for ENs in WFCs (Employment Networks in WorkForce Centers)</p> <p>“Works for Me” toolkits modified</p>	<p>DPN (Disability Program Navigators) at WorkForce Centers</p> <p>DB101 (Disability Benefits 101)</p> <p>WFCs (WorkForce Centers) as Employment Networks (ENs)</p> <p>MNTAT (Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center) – website, webinars, etc.</p> <p>Individual Placement and Support (IPS): The Evidence-Based Practices of Supported Employment Project in Minnesota (previously called Supported Employment Evidence-Based Practices (SE-EBP) “Fidelity” Project) (Johnson &amp; Johnson Grant)</p> <p>MnCHOICES (formerly COMPASS, Comprehensive Assessment)</p> <p>Legacy Grants to Counties</p> <p>MA-EPD (Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities) Program Administration</p>
4. A coordinated information and communication system	<p>Video: “Able &amp; Willing” Business Leadership Network</p> <p>Disability &amp; Employment Conference</p> <p>National campaign: “Think Beyond the Label” Business Leadership Network</p> <p>PTE on positivelyminnesota.com website</p> <p>Employment Report Card (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2010)</p> <p>VR-BSS “teachers manual” for the business communication tool [DER]</p> <p>WIC website updated to include changes in SSA &amp; new WIC materials</p> <p>Converting “Know Your Rights” publication to a webinar</p> <p>MA-EPD Outreach</p> <p>MA-EPD Consumer Guidebook</p> <p>MA-EPD Fact Sheet in Spanish</p> <p>CAT (Community Action Teams)</p> <p>MNTAT website</p> <p>Disability Special Edition of Minnesotahelp.info</p> <p>PTE Strategic Plan Brochure</p> <p>Publicizing Employment: success stories</p> <p>Marketing LISTSERV</p> <p>MSCOD Booth &amp; poster at the State Fair</p> <p>MSCOD “The Inclusive Workplace: Employer Guide to Reasonable Accommodations Using Assistive</p>	<p>DLL (Disability Linkage Line – part of the MinnesotaHelp Network which includes MinnesotaHelp.info an online database, Senior Linkage line, and the Veterans Linkage Line)</p> <p>DB101 (Disability Benefits 101)</p> <p>MnWIC (Minnesota Work Incentives Connection)</p> <p>VR-BSS (Business Services Specialists with expertise in Vocational Rehabilitation)</p> <p>PTE component of DEED website <i>Positively Minnesota</i></p> <p>PTE integrated into the MinnesotaHelp Network and website</p> <p>DER (Disability Employment Resource) on DEED’s website <i>Positively Minnesota</i></p> <p>PTE integrated into DLL</p> <p>PTE integrated into MnWIC</p>

	<p>Technologies for Employees with Disabilities”</p> <p>Radio ads Business ads Stakeholders’ communication Progress Reports Manuals, toolkits, materials, packets Trainings Conferences: virtual and in-person Posters Feature stories in print media, e.g., Access Press Cable TV Video</p>	
5. Strengthened transition services and work experiences for youth and young adults	<p>National Disability Mentoring Day Disability Mentoring Day made 1<sup>st</sup> day of the US Business Leadership Network Conference in Minneapolis (2006): “Minnesota Career Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” Career Exploration Day Employment First Summit National Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Conference Teachers’ manual: High School/High Tech C2C Website C2C promotional video C2C how-to manual drafted C2C Tool Kits Zone website Zone brochures, magnet Youth Zone draft WorkForce Center Internships draft Transition added to VRS Guide for Service Delivery ERY (Employment Ready Youth) manual Posters Youth Resource Mapping Project C3 Disability Mentoring Day becomes Career Development Day</p>	<p>C2C (Camps to Careers): manufacturing, health care, art, digital media E-Connect (formerly High School/High Tech) – national model integrated with C2C &amp; Disability Mentoring Day ETO (Extended Training Opportunity) – camp follow-up model The Zone GLIDE (Generating Leaders in Disability Employment) Mentoring Program E-Mentoring Internships Project SEARCH DB101 (Disability Benefits 101) Minnesota youth exploration tool, “Youth in transition” estimator function Building Capacity to Create Work Experiences (PTE –MDE) Competitive Employment Opportunities for High School Students with Disabilities grant opportunities (PTE-MDE) DEED/MDE mini-grants – 12 schools SME Internships Mentorships ERY (Employment Ready Youth) program C3 (Connecting youth to Communities and Careers)</p>
6. Strengthened data collection and outcome measurement	<p>Employment and Health Status Report 2008 Tax information MA-EPD at a Glance Employment Report Card (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2010) Research Brief on Taxes comparing taxes paid by MA-EPD enrollees to 1619 (a)(b) enrollees 2003-2008 Supporting Disability Counts II Data Conference (Feb. 2008)</p>	<p>PTE Systemic Review DEED Evaluations Data Sharing Protocols and accompanying data sharing processes</p>