

# What Do Employment Specialists Really Do? A Study on Job Development Practices

Alberto Migliore, Allison Cohen Hall, John Butterworth, and Jean Winsor  
University of Massachusetts Boston  
Institute for Community Inclusion

*This study examined the extent to which employment specialists implemented the job development practices recommended in the research literature when assisting job seekers with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Self-reported data were collected through a Web-based survey from 163 employment specialists from 74 employment programs in 28 states. Questions focused on the following four clusters of activities: getting to know job seekers, finding job openings, engaging employers to hire, and facilitating transition to a job. Findings showed that some employment specialists self-reported practices conflicted with the practices advocated in the literature. On the basis of our findings, we recommended a greater emphasis on implementing job development activities recommended in the literature as well as furthering research on effective, evidence-based practices.*

**DESCRIPTORS:** employment, job development, employment specialists, intellectual disability, evidence-based practices, vocational rehabilitation, families

Whereas most working-age adults in the United States are employed or expect to find paid jobs, most adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) spend their days in sheltered workshops, day centers, or nonpaid community activities (Butterworth, Smith, Hall, Migliore, & Winsor, 2009; Winsor & Butterworth, 2008). The lack of employment of people with I/DD is a concern because it results in an increased likelihood that they will live in poverty, more resources will be diverted to welfare pro-

grams, and government entities will be unable to collect tax revenues (Cimera, 2010; Fremstad, 2009; Stapleton, O'Day, Livermore, & Imparato, 2005).

Compared with the general population, people with I/DD are less likely to transition into the workforce because they face greater challenges. These may include their support needs (Kennedy & Olney, 2006; Smith, 2007), the family members' concerns (Burke-Miller et al., 2006; Devlieger & Trach, 1999), an availability and accessibility of services (Moore, Feist-Price, & Alston, 2002), a traditional tendency of public programs to fund sheltered workshops and day centers (Butterworth et al., 2009; Winsor & Butterworth, 2008), the culture and values of rehabilitation programs (Butterworth, Fesko, & Ma, 2000; Cohen Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, & Metzler, 2007; Inge et al., 2009), or the difficult socioeconomic circumstances (Novak, Rogan, Mank, & DiLeo, 2003; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005).

To assist job seekers with I/DD in overcoming these challenges, a network of employment programs and related professionals—often referred to as *employment specialists*—are available across the nation. These professionals can draw from a wide body of literature to learn about job development strategies for assisting job seekers with disabilities. These strategies involve four main steps: getting to know job seekers, finding job openings, engaging employers to hire, and facilitating the transition to a job.

Getting to know job seekers is critical for optimizing the job match and increasing job retention (Griffin, Hammis, & Geary, 2007; Hoff, Gandolfo, Gold, & Jordan, 2000; Phillips et al., 2009). To be effective, the process of getting to know job seekers must go beyond the public image job seekers show when they interact with professionals (Callahan, Shumpert, & Condon, 2009; Griffin et al., 2007). To this end, the literature recommends that employment specialists gather information from a variety of sources by speaking with family members and acquaintances and observing job seekers in both work and nonwork environments (Callahan et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2000).

The next step is finding job openings. The literature suggests that employers typically look for candidates who are connected to the employer's network of acquaintances as opposed to relying on advertising (Fesko & Temelini, 1997; Granovetter, 1995; Levinson & Perry, 2009; Luecking, Fabian, & Tilson, 2004). Bissonnette (1994) estimates that

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Address all correspondence and reprint requests to Dr. Alberto Migliore, Institute for Community Inclusion/UCEDD, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125. E-mail: alberto.migliore@umb.edu

only 10%–20% of openings ever reach the job market, and only 10%–15% of employers advertise job openings. Gervey and Kowal (1995) found that more than 70% of job offers came from employers with whom employment specialists established relationships compared with only 22% of job offers originating from advertisements in newspapers. Involvement of job seekers' family members and acquaintances is one strategy for expanding the network of connections with employers (Fabian & Waugh, 2001; Fesko & Temelini, 1997; Hagner, Fesko, Cadigan, Kiernan, & Butterworth, 1996; Hagner, Rogan, & Murphy, 1992). Other strategies include attending job fairs and business events as well as networking with key members of the local community (Griffin et al., 2007; Levinson & Perry, 2009; Luecking et al., 2004). Once these contacts have been established, employment specialists need to track interactions to support the job development process efficiently (Test, Sollow, & Flowers, 1998; Wehman, Revell, & Brooke, 2003).

If finding jobs that match job seekers' skills and preferences is challenging, an alternative strategy is to create or negotiate new job descriptions. This strategy is especially effective when existing employees have to divert some of their time to completing ancillary tasks. In these situations, an employment specialist can propose reorganizing tasks or addressing unmet employer needs in a new job description that meets the needs of both the job seeker and the business. This strategy has been described as a win-win approach because the new organization of tasks can lead to an increase in businesses' efficiency while generating new employment opportunities for job seekers (Bissonnette, 1994; Callahan, 2003; Griffin et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2000; Phillips et al., 2009).

Once a job opening is found, the job seeker and the employment specialist need to negotiate a commitment to hire. The literature suggests that one way to engage employers is to understand the needs of their business. This approach is effective because it shows that the employment specialist is committed to proposing a candidate who will meet the employer's needs (Bissonnette, 1994; Emmet, 2008; Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1995; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1999; Hagner, Noll, & Enein-Donovan, 2002; Levinson & Perry, 2009). Another way for job developers to engage employers is to suggest that job seekers complete job trials before employers make the final hiring decision. Job trials have been found to be effective because they reduce employers' perceived risks associated with hiring. In addition to job trials, reassuring employers that assistance is available from the employment organization in the event of a problem once a job seeker has been hired is another way of capturing employers' attention (Culver, Spencer, & Gliner, 1990; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1999; Hagner et al., 2002; Hoff et al., 2000).

After a hire has taken place, emphasis shifts to facilitating transition to the job to support better employment outcomes and retention. The availability of natural supports in the workplace has been associated with higher

levels of workplace inclusion, leading to better employment outcomes (Butterworth, Whitney-Thomas, & Shaw, 1997; Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 1999, 2000). The literature notes that workers are more empowered if they have been instructed on how to make requests of supervisors and/or coworkers, market their skills and abilities, and develop friendships with colleagues (Hagner et al., 2002; Test et al., 1998). Maintaining a connection with job seekers after hire is another strategy used by employment specialists to smooth the transition and increase job retention while building a relationship with the employer (Griffin et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2000; Wehman et al., 2003). Finally, providing assistance with transportation and helping with work incentives planning positively influences success on the job (Drake & Becker, 2003; Szymanski & Danek, 1992; Test et al., 1998). In particular, work incentive planning addresses concerns that family members may have about employment and ensures that an individual is prepared for changes in benefit levels (Revell, Kregel, Wehman, & Bond, 2000; Rogan, Held, & Rinne, 2001; Wehman et al., 2003).

Because of all these complex factors, successful transition of job seekers with I/DD into employment involves significant knowledge and skills on the part of employment specialists (Griffin et al., 2007; Hewitt & Larson, 2007; Luecking et al., 2004; Owens & Young, 2008). Luecking et al. (2004) stated:

A great deal of the success of the employment process rides on the competence and commitment of the people who represent job seekers [...] Regardless of the job seeker's level of motivation, skill, experience, attitude, and support system, his or her ability to get a job will often depend on the effectiveness of employment specialists. Simply stated, if they are good, job seekers get jobs. If they are not, the barriers to employment for job seekers can become insurmountable (p. 29).

Unfortunately, despite their critical roles in supporting job seekers with disabilities, little is known about the extent to which employment specialists implement the good practices described in the literature (Drake & Bond, 2008; Gervey & Kowal, 1995; Kluesner, Taylor, & Bordieri, 2005; Luecking et al., 2004). Assessing and ensuring the implementation of good practices are vital for any program that aims at better outcomes. This is because adopting these practices is believed to affect outcomes, and knowledge alone is not a guarantee that good practices are executed (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004; Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Assessing and ensuring the implementation of good practices are even more important in the case of programs for job seekers with disabilities because of the many challenges that this group faces in finding jobs including, in recent years, an adverse economic environment and a high unemployment rate.

The purpose of this manuscript was to increase our understanding about what job development practices were implemented by employment specialists when they assisted job seekers with I/DD and whether these practices matched the recommendations in the research literature. We addressed the following research question: To what extent did employment specialists implement the job development practices recommended in the literature when assisting job seekers with I/DD?

## Methods

The research methodology of this study involved survey research. This section describes the participants, the instrument, the data collection procedure, and the data analysis procedure.

### *Participants*

A total of 163 employment specialists from 74 employment programs in 28 states<sup>1</sup> participated in this study. Participant selection involved a number of steps. First, a list of more than 12,000 programs that provided day services to adults with disabilities was created by requesting information from the state I/DD agencies, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), the state Vocational Rehabilitation programs, the Internet, and personal contacts. The list was developed in 2008 as part of a larger research project. Second, the authors randomly selected 954 day programs from this list and screened them to retain only organizations that provided employment services to adults with I/DD. A total of 170 employment programs met this criterion. The remaining organizations were excluded because they either did not have a Web site from which their employment services could be verified (36%), the information available on their Web site showed that they did not meet the selection criteria (34%), or the information on the Web site was insufficient for determining if the criterion was met (9%). Third, the executive directors of the 170 employment programs were asked to nominate four employment specialists who had substantial job development responsibilities for at least 1 year before data collection. Of these employment specialists, executive directors were asked to select two employment specialists who had been with the organization the longest and two employment specialists who had been with the organization the shortest amount of time. The purpose of this selection method was to increase the likelihood that both experienced and less experienced employment specialists were included in

the sample while ensuring that they had some minimum professional experience in the field by having worked at least 1 year with job development responsibilities.

### *Instrument*

The instrument was a password-protected Web-based survey with questions focused on employment specialists' demographics, employment outcomes, and job development activities. The demographics section included questions on employment specialists' characteristics such as time dedicated to job development, tenure, and past attendance at training for employment specialists. The employment outcomes section focused on the number of placements of people with I/DD in individual employment during the year before data collection, their work hours, and their earnings. Work hours and earnings were asked with reference to the last job seeker who gained individual employment with assistance from each employment specialist. Individual employment was defined as work that paid at least minimum wage and entailed working in an environment where most coworkers were people without disabilities. Individual support could have been provided. Finally, the job development activities section focused on how employment specialists assisted job seekers with I/DD who gained individual employment during the year before the survey. Items focused on the following four types of activities: getting to know job seekers (7 items), finding job openings (14 items), engaging employers to hire (4 items), and facilitating transition to a job (8 items). Respondents were asked to rate each item using a five-point Likert-type scale drop-down menu. Below is the directive that opened this section of the survey:

Please think about the job seekers with intellectual or developmental disabilities that you assisted to gain individual employment between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2008. With these individuals in mind, indicate for how many of them you performed the activities listed below. Choose the most appropriate answer from the following selections: For none of them, For a few of them, For about half of them, For most of them, For all of them, or Not Applicable (N/A).

Of the items focused on searching for jobs, six referred to general activities rather than actions performed for specific job seekers. These items were tested by asking if the relative activities were performed in the past 2 weeks, past month, past 3 months, past 6 months, or the past year.

Question items for this survey were developed on the basis of the job development literature and feedback from experts. The literature was reviewed to identify the most frequently recurring job development activities that were included as items in a draft survey. The draft survey was then discussed within our research team. In addition, feedback was solicited from six experts, including

<sup>1</sup> The number of employment providers per state is shown in parentheses: California (3), Colorado (3), Connecticut (1), Florida (5), Illinois (3), Indiana (6), Kansas (3), Kentucky (1), Louisiana (1), Massachusetts (4), Maryland (3), Michigan (2), Minnesota (7), North Carolina (4), New Hampshire (1), New Jersey (6), New Mexico (3), New York (2), Ohio (1), Oklahoma (2), Oregon (1), Pennsylvania (2), Tennessee (1), Texas (4), Virginia (1), Washington (2), Wisconsin (1), and Wyoming (1).

three professionals who provided training to employment specialists, a coordinator of an employment program, an employment specialist, and the coordinator of a disability advocacy organization. Finally, the survey was piloted by three employment programs in three states—I Idaho, Massachusetts, and Virginia. A letter was mailed to the executive directors of the three organizations asking them to identify up to four employment specialists and forward them a letter requesting their participation in the pilot. The pilot survey contained questions that asked participants to comment on the clarity and appropriateness of the survey and the need for additional items as well as the time it took to complete the survey. Seven employment specialists completed the online survey and provided minor comments. Follow-up telephone calls with the executive directors of the programs were conducted for additional feedback. Overall, minimal changes were made on the basis of the pilot feedback.

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection began in January 2009 and ended in June 2009. After obtaining approval from the institutional review board, we contacted the executive directors of the 170 employment programs via regular mail and asked them to nominate up to four employment specialists with the criteria described earlier in the *Participants* section. The executive directors were asked to forward envelopes with instructions to the selected employment specialists and to return a one-page form with the names of the employment specialists and some general information about the employment programs that they managed. The instructions for the employment specialists included a link to a password-protected Web-based survey. One week after the mailing, thank you/reminder postcards were sent to all executive directors. In addition, two reminder letters were mailed to the nonrespondents at 3-week intervals. As recommended in the tailored design method, the second reminder letter showed greater emphasis on the importance of completing the survey, and it was mailed using certified mail (Dillman, 2007). Executive directors who still did not respond to the mailings were contacted by telephone to make sure that they had received the letters of invitation and to address any questions or concerns. Packages with cover letters and instructions were resent upon request. These data collection procedure yielded the following participation totals: 74 employment programs returned the one-page form with participants' nominations, 68 employment programs did not respond, and 28 employment programs did not meet the eligibility criteria because they either did not provide employment services or their employment services did not target job seekers with I/DD. On the basis of these figures, the response rate for the eligible employment programs was 52%.

The executive directors of the responding employment programs nominated 226 employment specialists. To ensure a high response rate among these employment specialists, a thank you/reminder postcard and two reminder

letters were sent to them following the same scheme used for their organizations. In addition, telephone calls were made to nonrespondents to verify that they had received the instructions on how to respond to the survey and to address possible questions or concerns. Paper copies of the surveys were mailed to a few participants upon request. A total of 163 employment specialists completed the survey, 39 never responded, and 24 were considered not eligible because they did not report any placements ( $n = 20$ ) or they reported no job development responsibilities ( $n = 4$ ) during the year before the survey. On the basis of these data, the response rate of eligible employment specialists was 81%.

#### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involved descriptive methods. Scale measurement variables such as the number of placements, weekly earnings, and hourly wages were analyzed using means, standard deviations, minimums, and maximums. The Likert-type scale answers were recoded into dummy variables giving a value of 1 if a specific activity was performed for most or all job seekers and 0 in all other cases. The six items that measured whether an activity was performed in the past year were recoded, assigning a value of 1 if respondents reported doing the activity within 3 months of the survey and a value of 0 for activities performed more than 3 months from the survey. Results were then reported as frequencies of these dummy variables.

## **Results**

This section describes the characteristics of the employment programs, employment specialists' demographics, employment outcomes, and the implementation of the job development activities.

#### **Characteristics of the Employment Programs**

The large majority of the 74 employment programs that participated in this study were private not-for-profit organizations (92%), with the remaining programs split evenly between public and private for-profit organizations. Most programs (74%) employed up to six employment specialists who met the eligibility criteria for this study ( $M = 6$ ,  $SD = 7$ ,  $\min = 1$ ,  $\max = 41$ ). About half of the employment programs assisted more than 200 people with disabilities annually. On average, 82% of the people assisted by these employment programs were people with I/DD ( $SD = 22$ ,  $\min = 18\%$ ,  $\max = 100\%$ ).

#### **Employment Specialists' Demographics**

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the employment specialists. Most participants were female, most were in the age group between 36 and 55 years, and most identified themselves as White. Their level of education varied, with most the employment specialists having completed at least a bachelor's degree. Most employment

Table 1  
Employment Specialists' Demographics

	Percentage	No. respondents
Gender		
Male	25	40
Female	75	122
Total	100	162
Age (years)		
18–25	8	13
26–35	19	31
36–45	25	41
46–55	28	45
56–65	19	30
66 or older	1	2
Total	100	162
Race		
White	84	134
Black or African American	12	20
Asian	1	2
Native American or Alaska Native	2	4
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	1
Total	100	161
Ethnicity		
Hispanic or Latino	5	8
Not Hispanic or Latino	95	143
Total	100	151
Education		
Some high school	1	1
High school, certificate, or general equivalency diploma	10	17
Some college	24	39
Associate's degree	15	24
Bachelor's degree	36	58
Graduate degree	12	20
Others	2	3
Total	100	162
Salary		
\$15,000 or less	2	3
\$15,001–\$25,000	23	37
\$25,001–\$35,000	49	80
\$35,001–\$45,000	18	29
\$45,001–\$55,000	7	11
More than \$55,000	1	2
Total	100	162
Weekly work hours of employment specialists		
Up to 10 hours	2	3
Over 10–20 hours	1	1
Over 20–30 hours	2	3
Over 30–40 hours	85	139
Over 40 hours	10	17
Total	100	163
Overall number of years doing job development		
Up to 1 year	19	30
Over 1–2 years	14	23
Over 2–5 years	21	34
Over 5–10 years	20	32
Over 10 years	26	40
Total	100	159
Time spent doing job development (monthly)		
Less than 25% of the time	7	11
25% to less than 50% of the time	12	19
50% to less than 75% of the time	18	30
75% to less than 100% of the time	35	57
Full time	28	46
Total	100	163

specialists earned up to \$35,000 per year and almost all of them worked full time. Most employment specialists reported up to 5 years of experience in job development work, and most spent 75% of their time or more on job development activities. Although the employment specialists also assisted job seekers with disabilities other than I/DD, on average 85% of all job seekers who gained employment were people with I/DD (*SD* = 25%, min = 7%, max = 100%).

**Employment Outcomes**

Table 2 shows the employment outcomes of the employment specialists in the study. During the year before data collection, most employment specialists generated five or fewer placements in individual employment for job seekers with I/DD. Most employed job seekers earned \$8 per hour or less, and most worked 20 hours per week or less.

**Implementation of Job Development Activities**

Table 3 shows the percentage of employment specialists who implemented specific job development practices for “most or all” job seekers who gained individual employment during the year before the survey. The practices are grouped into four clusters: getting to know job seekers, finding job openings, engaging employers to hire, and facilitating transition to a job. For instance, the figure of 61% in the first row, corresponding to “Facilitated/attended person-centered planning,” means that 61% of employment specialists implemented this activity for most or all their assisted job seekers with I/DD who gained individual employment in the year before the survey. Other activities implemented by most respondents to get to know job seekers included talking to referral and funding agencies and talking to family members. When searching for a job, most respondents relied on classified ads in newspapers and on the Internet, made cold calls to employers, and

Table 2  
Employment Outcomes

	Percentage
Placements (I/DD) by each employment specialist	
Up to 5	60
Over 5–10	24
Over 10–15	8
Over 15–20	5
Over 20	3
Total ( <i>N</i> = 156)	100
Hourly wage of job seekers with I/DD	
Below \$5.85	2
\$5.85–\$8	71
Over \$8–\$10	18
Over \$10	9
Total ( <i>N</i> = 118)	100
Weekly work hours of job seekers with I/DD	
Up to 10 hours	19
Over 10–20 hours	43
Over 20–30 hours	27
Over 30–40 hours	11
Total ( <i>N</i> = 122)	100

Table 3  
Job Development Activities

	Percentage	No. respondents
Getting to know job seekers		
Facilitated/attended person-centered planning	61	156
Talked to referral and funding agencies	59	158
Talked to family members	54	162
Observed job seekers in nonwork environment	43	159
Situational assessment (observed in work environment)	38	160
Talked to job seekers' former employers	19	153
Talked to job seekers' acquaintances	17	156
Finding job openings		
Browsed classified ads in newspaper/Internet	53	156
Made cold calls to employers	53	156
Approached employers with success in past	53	157
Attended business events to expand network <sup>a</sup>	51	142
Read books/articles about effective job development <sup>a</sup>	43	149
Asked employers re: job openings in related businesses	39	152
Interacted with disability advocates <sup>a</sup>	36	140
Involved family members or acquaintances	34	151
Knocked on doors of businesses <sup>a</sup>	33	150
Negotiated to create new/modified positions	27	154
Facilitated reorganizing tasks so new job is customized	27	160
Filled in a log to keep track of contacts <sup>a</sup>	22	139
Searched job openings without referrals in mind <sup>a</sup>	18	154
Sought assistance from One-Stop Career Centers	16	141
Engaging employers to hire		
Stayed in contact with employers after hiring	87	159
Conducted a formal analysis of employers' needs	46	158
Offered employers the opportunity to do a job trial	30	161
Assisted employers filing a tax credit application	26	157
Facilitating transition to a job		
Stayed in contact with job seekers after hire	88	162
Taught job seekers about expectations in the workplace	86	161
Taught job seekers about how to seek assistance	80	161
Taught job seekers how to relate to coworkers/supervisors	77	161
Assisted job seekers with scheduling/transportation	67	162
Trained coworkers/supervisors to support job seekers	39	157
Facilitated work incentive planning (e.g., PASS, IRWE)	27	162
Job-coached after hire	23	158

<sup>a</sup>This activity was performed in the past 3 months preceding the survey.

approached employers with whom they had been successful in the past. In the 3 months before the survey, most employment specialists attended business events to expand their networks. About engaging employers, the only activity reported by most employment specialists was ensuring that they stayed in contact with employers after hiring. Finally, to facilitate transition into the workplace, employment specialists stayed in contact with job seekers after hire, assisted them with scheduling/transportation, and taught them social skills such as understanding workplace expectations, seeking assistance, and relating to coworkers/supervisors.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which employment specialists implemented the job development practices recommended in the literature. Our findings showed that, although some practices were implemented consistently, other equally important practices were not. For instance, less than half of the employment specialists observed job seekers in work or nonwork set-

tings, and even fewer talked to job seekers' acquaintances. These activities are recommended in the literature as a way to get to know job seekers beyond the public face that they typically show when interacting with professionals and as a way of expanding potential job leads and informal supports for employment (Callahan et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 2007; Hoff et al., 2000).

Assisting job seekers to find jobs is a core responsibility of job developers. The findings suggested that employment specialists relied on job-search practices such as reviewing classified ads and making cold calls to businesses. In contrast, a smaller percentage of employment specialists reported networking with family members or employers. This raises concerns about the efficiency of the job development process. The literature emphasizes that employers tend to hire candidates who are connected directly or indirectly to their networks of acquaintances. In fact, only a small percentage of job openings are likely to be advertised (Granovetter, 1995; Levinson & Perry, 2009; Luecking et al., 2004). In addition, we found that relatively few employment specialists reported creating or negotiating new

job descriptions. This practice is recommended, especially when fewer job openings are available or job seekers have significant support needs (Bissonnette, 1994; Callahan, 2003; Griffin et al., 2007; Levinson & Perry, 2009; Luecking et al., 2004). In addition, less than half of the employment specialists reported having read job development literature during the 3 months before the survey, and very few kept a log of their contacts with employers.

While attempting to engage employers to hire, less than half of the employment specialists conducted formal analyses of employers' needs or offered employers the opportunity for job seekers to complete job trials before making a final hiring decision. This is of concern because assessing employers' needs is a way of showing employers that employment specialists are committed to meeting their businesses' needs and ensuring a strong fit between the new hire and the job. Moreover, offering to have job seekers complete job trials is a way of assessing fit and reassuring employers who may be concerned about the risks of hiring (Bissonnette, 1994; Fabian et al., 1995; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1999; Hagner et al., 2002; Levinson & Perry, 2009).

During the transition to a job, less than a third of employment specialists provided or facilitated work incentives planning to the job seekers they assisted. When properly implemented, disability benefit counseling may improve job seekers' and families' engagement in pursuing and sustaining employment (Drake & Becker, 2003; Rogan et al., 2001; Strategy Unit Report to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005).

#### ***Possible Reasons for Not Implementing Practices Recommended in the Literature***

The reasons for employment specialists not implementing recommended practices are unclear. However, some hypotheses seem likely. First, some employment specialists may judge that certain practices are unnecessary for some of the job seekers on their caseload. To account for this possibility, we focused on whether an activity was implemented for "most or all" job seekers as opposed to "all" job seekers. Second, some employment specialists may not be familiar with the practices described in the job development literature. This hypothesis is substantiated by the fact that more than one third of employment specialists had less than 2 years of experience in this field and less than half of them had recently read books or articles about effective job development strategies. Third, employment specialists may not engage in some practices because of time constraints. This hypothesis is substantiated by the fact that only about one third of employment specialists reported full-time involvement in job development responsibilities. Finally, billing standards set by funding agencies may conflict with some job development strategies. This is especially the case if the system in place for funding employment programs is based on billing for activities that are not consistent with the practices described in the literature. The reasons why employment

specialists do not implement certain good practices need to be further investigated.

#### ***Limitations and Strengths***

A major limitation of this study is the use of self-reported data because this format does not guarantee objectivity. For instance, employment specialists may have provided socially desirable responses, or they may have responded on the basis of the activities performed most recently. In addition, this study did not take into consideration job seekers' support needs. Although the study focused on job seekers with I/DD, people within this group have a wide range of support needs, which may require different job development strategies. Also, this study focused on the most frequently occurring practices described in the job development literature. However, additional practices might exist that have not been tracked in this study. Finally, this study may have underrepresented employment specialists who worked for employment programs that did not have an Internet presence.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature in several ways. Although self-reported data are not the best way to measure job development activities, these data can still be revealing when responses are not consistent with the expected answers. For instance, contrary to what one would have expected, few employment specialists reported involving job seekers' acquaintances to get to know job seekers or reported negotiating new job descriptions. Moreover, most respondents reported browsing classified ads to find job openings. These answers showed that employment specialists had an unclear perception of what the good practices were.

In addition, although self-reported data are not a precise measure of the absolute level of activities' implementation or participants' beliefs, they can provide a useful input source. For instance, the percentage of employment specialists who instructed most or all job seekers about expectations in the workplaces (86%) was substantially higher than the percentage of employment specialists who facilitated work incentives planning (27%). Although these percentages per se may be an inaccurate measure of the extent to which these two practices were in fact implemented or believed to be important, the difference between these percentages shows that instructing job seekers about workplace expectations was likely to be performed more often than facilitating work incentive planning.

Another strength of this study is that the employment programs were randomly selected from a large national list of programs that involved 28 states. This enhanced the potential for representing a varied spectrum of national practices. Finally, given the lack of literature in the area of implementation of effective job development practices, this study may serve as a stimulus for further investigation and other research methodologies.

#### ***Recommendations***

The findings of this study have implications for employment specialists, representatives of employment programs,

training programs, funding agencies, and accreditation programs, as well as researchers. On the basis of the findings of this study, we recommend that employment specialists place greater emphasis on involving families and an expanded circle of people who intimately know the job seeker and put a greater emphasis on observing the job seeker in everyday life. These practices are critical for improving the quality of information gathered about job seekers' interests, skills, and preferences and for building strong relationships with people close to the job seeker, who will be instrumental in finding and supporting jobs. In addition, we recommend that employment specialists invest more in negotiating customized job descriptions while deemphasizing classified ads as a job-search tool. This approach requires that employment specialists engage employers by developing long-term relationships, focusing on their needs, and developing proposals that outline the work the job seeker will perform and the benefits to the company. Finally, we recommend that employment specialists address benefits planning in a more systematic way to increase the likelihood that job seekers and their families will choose employment knowing that their overall income will increase.

Although employment specialists seem to be the main target of these recommendations, other stakeholders play a key role as well. Training programs are integral to ensuring that knowledge about best practices in job development is transferred to employment specialists, state and federal funding agencies establish contractual guidelines that support the use of best practices, employment providers establish organizational standards for job development, and accreditation organizations define best practices for job development in their guidelines.

Because there has been limited research on the specific strategies emphasized by employment specialists and because experimental support of the practices recommended in the literature is thin, we recommend a two-tiered approach to expanding research in this area. First, additional descriptive and predictive research is needed to further document the specific strategies in use by employment specialists. Building a strong evidence base in this area will allow further exploration of the relationship between practices and outcomes and, as an extension of the work in this study, will support understanding the roles of strategies in relation to the support needs of job seekers. Second, once relationships between job-search practices and outcomes are better articulated, experimental research that assesses the role of specific recommended job practices, such as a more robust approach to career planning and network engagement or negotiation of job creation or customization, can be used to establish a stronger evidence base regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of practices.

Increasing knowledge about evidence-based practices and coordinating all stakeholders in a system-wide effort to promote the implementation of these practices are essential steps for helping job seekers with I/DD to negotiate

the various challenges to employment and to maximize their employment outcomes.

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