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Attitudes and Beliefs of Job Development Professionals toward Employers

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report

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Introduction

Job development and placement professionals assist people with disabilities to secure, maintain, and advance in employment and thus have an important role in achieving quality employment outcomes for the jobseekers they represent. Because of the important role they play, there is fairly extensive literature on effective job development and placement strategies, and a smaller amount on the types of practices they use and their effectiveness (e.g., Whitley, Kostick & Bush, 2009; Leff et al., 2005). However, there is little empirical literature exploring the attitudes these professionals have regarding the job development and placement process, including their attitudes toward employers and the employment process. This type of study is useful theoretically, in so far as attitudes and beliefs motivate behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), and pragmatically in terms of understanding how to modify specific attitudes and beliefs that might be inconsistent with best practices in this area. In this *Technical Report,* we will describe the attitudes and beliefs of job development professionals toward employers and the employment process, and examine how these beliefs may shape their job development and placement practices.

Methods

Four questions guided our examination of job developer attitudes and beliefs toward employers and the job development process:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of job development professionals toward employers and the employment process?
2. Are there differences in attitudes and beliefs of job development professionals based on experience?
3. Can we identify "types" of job developers based on their attitudes and beliefs?
4. What employer characteristics do job development professionals prefer?

We used two approaches to answer these questions. First, we conducted six 2-hour focus groups with 36 experienced job development and placement professionals in New Jersey and Maryland. The focus group members were specifically recruited based on their knowledge and experience of job development and placement processes. Next, we used the findings from these focus groups to develop an "Employment Providers' Attitudes & Beliefs toward Employment" Survey (EPAB) we distributed through a web-based process primarily in New Jersey and Maryland, with additional respondents from 7 other states. The EPAB Survey consisted of 25 items derived from the focus groups asking respondents to rate each item's importance based on their own experiences in job development and placement. In addition, we asked respondents to identify their work setting, their educational background, and their years of experience in job development and placement. Over a 3-month period, we received 260 surveys.

Findings

The majority of the respondents (80%) to the web-based survey were employed in community rehabilitation programs, providing services to a diverse population of people with physical, mental and emotional disabilities. Most of the respondents were female (74%), and the majority had at least a BA degree (61%). The respondents were experienced in job development and

placement: 86% had at least one year of experience in the job and almost 34% had 10 or more years experience. The following sections discuss our findings based on our research questions.

What are the Attitudes and Beliefs of Job Development Professionals Toward Employers and the Employment Process?

First, we examined the frequency of agree/disagree for the 25 items that comprised the Employment Provider Attitudes and Beliefs Scale in the survey. The survey features a 5 point Likert Scale (5 = Agree Strongly, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Disagree Strongly). Table 1 shows these results grouped according to percentages for "Agree" (5 & 4), "Neutral" (3) and "Disagree" (2 & 1). The items are listed based on the highest percentages of "agree", indicating the top 5 items on the Table had very strong endorsement by the sample. Indeed, only one of the items, *Employers are more likely to hire people with visible disabilities*, had a mean or average score of less than 3 on the 5 point Likert Scale.

Table 1: Attitudes & Beliefs Scale Item Responses

Item	Percent		
Employers …	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Are more willing to hire an applicant referred by a job developer s/he trusts	89.1	7.2	3.6
With a history of hiring people with disabilities, are more likely to hire	86.2	10.3	3.6
More likely to hire applicants from our agency because they trust us to make a job match	76.3	20.5	3.2
Respond positively to inquiries about their business and its operations	76.2	13.9	9.9
Base hiring decisions on bottom line	74.4	16.2	9.5
Who use online applications and pre-hire questionnaires create barriers for hiring people with disabilities	74.4	13.4	12.2
Are more likely to hire people with disabilities if they have entry level positions	69.2	18.2	12.6
Need to be sold on hiring people with disabilities	68.1	20.6	9.3
Prefer to know in advance if applicant has a disability	67.2	23.7	9.1
Are more likely to hire an applicant if they meet the job developer first	66.4	25.5	8.1

Are less likely to hire people with disabilities in current economy	62.2	21.1	16.7
Are reluctant to hire people with disabilities due to perceived costs	57.1	19.4	23.4
More likely to hire for volunteer jobs	55.8	27.2	16.6
Respond positively to full time job coach	55.6	26.2	18.1
Respond positively to lots of information on our agency and its services	54.1	24.5	21.3
With off-site HR mangers are less likely to hire people with disabilities	52.2	31.4	16.3
Understand and respect the job developers.	47.2	13.9	9.9
In small business are more likely to hire	39.8	30.9	29.3
Are too busy to interact with job developers	38.1	27.1	34.8
More likely to hire youth with disabilities	37.8	42.7	19.5
Want more info on disability and the ADA	37.3	30.9	31.3
Are influenced to hire by available tax incentives	34.9	40.2	24.9
Are motivated to hire for charitable reasons	32.8	39.7	27.5
With high staff turnover are motivated to hire	32.0	43.5	24.5
Are more likely to hire people with visible disabilities	22.1	47.2	30.6

Are there Differences in Attitudes and Beliefs of Job Development Professionals Based on Experience?

In addition to examining the frequencies of each of the 25 items, we also explored whether more experienced job development and placement professionals responded differently than those newer to the field. We used chi-square tests to examine differences among survey respondents grouped into four categories: a) less than one year experience; b) 1-5 years; c) 6 - 10 years; and d) more than 10 years, and looked at the frequency of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree - 1" to "strong agree - 5". For this analysis, we were interested in statistically significant differences by Agree or Strongly Agree. The eight items that significantly differentiated respondents by duration of experience are listed in *Table 2*.

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Table 2: Significant Differences based on Experience

Item	Percent Agree < 5 years (n~ 110)	Percent Agree > 5 years (n~143)
Employers base hiring decisions on the bottom line	65	81
Hire our applicants because they trust us to make a job match	63	86
Employers respond positively to inquiries about their business and its operations	72	80
Employers less likely to hire in current economy	58	80
Employers are more likely to hire people with disabilities for entry level positions	68	76
Employers are more likely to hire people with disabilities for volunteer positions	65	50
Employers need to be "sold" on hiring people with disabilities	75	67
Employers more likely to hire people with disabilities for entry level positions	68	76

As can be seen in Table 2, the percentage points range differentiating the two groups was relatively high - from 8 to 23 percentage points. Interestingly, there is a mix of endorsement of what might be construed as "positive" and "negative" items. For example, more experienced job developers significantly endorsed two items related to establishing relationships with employers ("trust" and "business inquiries"), but also felt that employers were less likely to hire in the current economy, and more apt to hire for entry level jobs. Less experienced job developers felt that employers need to be "sold" on hiring people with disabilities, and that employers are more likely to consider people with disabilities for volunteer positions. There is a fairly large spread (16 points) on the item *Employers base hiring decisions on the bottom line*. These differences between experienced and less experienced job developers began to suggest that there might be other patterns in the results and we explored different types of job developers based on their responses to the Scale items presented in *Table 1*.

Can We Identify "Types" of Job Developers Based on Their Attitudes and Beliefs?

In order to see whether items on the Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (reliability coefficient [internal consistency] = .67) could be grouped into response patterns, we used a method called "factor analysis" on the scale. Factor analysis is a statistical approach for reducing a large number of variables to a smaller number of "latent" or hidden dimensions, thus allowing us to organize the data in a more meaningful way. The statistical method yielded a set of "factors" within which the individual scale items (those listed in Table 1) are organized according to how strongly they

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"load" or "correlate" with the resulting factor. In the analysis, each item receives a coefficient ranging from -1 to +1, and the strength of its positive or negative association with the factor is indicated by the size of the coefficient. We interpreted the meaning of the resulting factors, naming them based on the strength and pattern of the items associated with it. Our factor analysis of the items in Table 1 resulted in three clearly identified attitudes/belief factors, which we describe as different types of job developers. Quotations from the highly experienced job developers who participated in the Focus Groups are used to provide more depth and illustration of these types.

Type 1: The Relationship Builders

We labeled this group " Relationship Builders" because the items which correlated or "loaded" highest on this factor suggested that these job developers understand the "bottom line" mentality of the business community, but, more importantly, feel that successful hiring is rooted in developing (and maintaining) good working relationships with employers, based strongly on "trust" (*Employers are more likely to hire a person with a disability when referred by a job developer they trust*, and *They trust us to make a good job match)*. There is also reference here to employers' experience (*Employers are more likely* to *hire an applicant we refer if they have a history of hiring people with disabilities*).

One item rated strongly by these job developers, *Employers are more likely to hire people with disabilities when they have entry-level positions* suggests that even though they endorse the importance of relationship building and trust, they feel that employers who base hiring decisions on the "bottom line" might just not believe in the work capacity of people with disabilities.

Table 3. Items Associated with Relationship Builders

Item	Strength (coefficient)
Employers are more willing to hire people with disabilities when referred by job developers they trust	.706
Employers with a history of hiring our applicants are more likely to hire	.620
Employers are more likely to hire people with disabilities for entry level positions	.611
Employers are more likely to hire people with disabilities if they meet the job developers first	.551
Employers hire our applicants because they trust us to make a good job match	.506
Employers base their hiring decisions on the bottom line	.371

There were a number of quotations from the focus groups, which illustrate this type. These include those below:

"I think if you develop a rapport with an employer, and you develop a good reputation from your agency that then facilitates a sense of trust. They don't want to be caught up in details and if we can guarantee that the client can do the job, generally they trust us."

"It really takes pressure off from employers, because I am not going there and saying, "Susie needs a job. Are you hiring?" It's not about that, it's about setting up a partnership where I can say, I have candidates and you can send me your job openings, I will send you referral and good candidates that I already be screened and will be good for the job. So setting up that partnership is really important and that might not get that actual individual you work with at that time a job, that might not, but we may get someone else a job and we can also share contacts with everyone, it's important."

"I spend a lot of time on the partnership – in partners meetings. We'll get around and meet the decision makers. If they have relationship with myself or my manager, they are likely to call. They might have any repetitive jobs that needs to get done and they may want to hire one of our people to do it."

Type 2: The Supply Siders

The items that characterized these job developers indicated an overall pattern of apprehensive attitudes toward employers and the employment process. For example, this group strongly felt that employers need to be "sold" on hiring people with disabilities who might only be considered appropriate for "volunteer jobs". The Supply Siders emphasize the barriers to employment reflected in endorsement of items such as, *Employers are not likely to hire people with disabilities in the current economy,* and that employers' perceptions of hiring costs is a major barrier for the applicants they represent. They seem to have low expectations of employers and their motives as illustrated by the strength of their response to such items as: *They are too busy to interact with job developers* and *They prefer to know about the applicant's disability in advance of the interview.*

Table 4: Items Associated with Supply Siders

Item	Strength (Coefficient)
Employers are more likely to consider people with disabilities for volunteer work	.750
Employers need to be "sold" on hiring people with disabilities	.718
Employers prefer to know about an applicant's disability in advance of an interview	.680
Employers are less likely to hire people with disabilities in the current economy	.574
Employers with off-site HR staff are less likely to hire people with disabilities are less likely to hire in the current economy	.532

Employers are less likely to hire applicants with disabilities due to perceived costs	.474
Employers are too busy to interact with job developers	.412
Employers are reluctant to hire people with disabilities due to perceived costs	.337

Although there were few responses from our seasoned focus group members describing Type 2, the following provides a sample of some of them:

> "I have told the employer that he/she can pay my client less so it doesn't interfere with SSI/SSDI. They see that as a plus, they're saving money plus getting the tax credit."

> "I think a major barrier is the economy right now. Years ago, our clients wanted an entry level jobs nobody wanted. Now, we are fighting to get these jobs."

Type 3: The Job Brokers

We called this third type of job developers "brokers" because they tend to focus on the importance of themselves and their agency in the job development process. This group sees their role quite positively. The statement *Employers understand and respect us* has a high positive association with this type, while *Employers are too busy to interact with job developers* had a high INVERSE relationship with this type (-.41). This positive impression of themselves extends to their role as a job coach (*Employers respond positively to a full-time job coach*). We call them "brokers" because they see themselves as important sources of giving information (*Employers respond positively to lots of information about* our *agency* and *Employers want more information about disability and the ADA*) as well as receiving it (*Employers respond positively to business inquiries*). In addition to their positive perception of their role, this type reflects positive expectations of employment of people with disabilities indicated by the INVERSE relationships to *Employers are not likely to hire people with disabilities in the current economy* (-.395), and *Employers are not likely to hire people with disabilities due to costs* (-.370). Of interest, is that both of these items were strongly associated with *Supply Siders* (.57 and .47 respectively).

Table 5. Items associated with Job Brokers

Item	Strength
Employers respond positively to lots of information about our agency	.760
Employers respond positively to inquires about their business	.685
Employers understand and respect the role of job developers	.655
Employers want more information about disability and the ADA	.525
Employers respond positively to a full-time job coach	.361

Employers are too busy to interact with job developers	-.409
Employers are not likely to hire people with disabilities in the current economy	-.395

Focus group members had some interesting quotes that are illustrative of this type:

> "Sometimes we think the employer is doing us a favor but they are not – we are filling a need and I emphasize the job matches a good candidate."

> "I try to get to know the employers prior, like set up a time to meet with them, to get to know their business; I kind of create jobs by looking around and learning about the business."

> "One of the things that I look for when I do my research is to find out if a company does diversity training. If they have diversity training then one of my hopes is that they have someone in there who I can deal with."

What Employer Characteristics do Job Development Professionals Prefer?

We finally asked job development professionals to rank the characteristics they most frequently looked for in approaching potential employers. These characteristics are somewhat similar to some of the EPAB items, in Table 1, but more directly elicit respondents' perceptions of which employers they believe are more likely to hire people with disabilities. The item most frequently ranked #1 was "employers who are open-minded" (40%), with the second most frequently ranked item as #1 being "employers who advertise openings" (39%). The third item was "employers who have a history of hiring applicants with disabilities" (26%), with items related to employers who seem to have a commitment to inclusion or diversity being 4th and 5th (employers with a "Diverse Workforce" and employers who have an "Inclusive Work Environment"). It is interesting to note that of the 11 employer characteristics, only 15% ranked "Attention to Bottom line" as the highest. These finding have implications for comparing job developer's attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities and those of employers, a topic that the authors address in separate Report.

Implications

Most of the research examining factors associated with successful employment outcomes for people with significant disabilities has focused on various characteristics of the job seekers (e.g. Anthony, 1994; Wewiorski & Fabian, 2004) or those of the employers who hire them (e.g. Gilbride et al., 2003; Hermandez, 2000; Luecking, 2008). However, the research that examines the attitudes and beliefs of successful job developers had been limited (Blitz & Mechanic, 2006). This study has taken a first step to examine job developers' attitude and beliefs regarding employers and the job development process.

One important finding of this study is job developers' attitudes vary tend to differ according to years of experience. While those with five or more years tended to see employers basing hiring decisions on the bottom line, those with less than five years experience indicated that employers need to be sold on hiring people with disabilities. This finding offers clear implications for

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training and preparation of new job developers so that can develop job development behaviors and approaches that more closely match expectations of employers as seen by experienced job developers. Ironically, "attention to the bottom line" was only ranked by 15% of the survey respondents as the highest ranked employer characteristic, while "employers who are open-minded" was ranked highest by 40% of the respondents. This seems to be incongruent with how experienced, and presumably more effective, job developers regard employers' hiring decisions. This implies a clear inconsistency among job developers in how they regard and approach employers.

We were able to draw distinct differences between "types" of job developers and the types of behaviors used in the job development process. This study identified three types: Relationship Builders, Supply Siders, and Job Brokers. We did not set out to describe a "successful" job developer, and characteristics of some of these types might be more or less effective depending on other circumstances, such as agency support, the type of surrounding community, and what works best for each individual based on his or her own background and experiences.

Practically, the results suggest that these data and the EPAB Survey can be useful tools for agencies to assess and modify skills, and provide best practices training for their staff. First, the survey can provide information on how new and seasoned job developers view employers. Second, the survey can be used to identify the strengths of a job developer, as well as areas that he or she may need more support and training. Finally, if the results indicate that most or many of the job developers within the same agency tend to share the same characteristics or fall in the same "type/group", then it may be appropriate or necessary to teach new skills, and/ or hire job developers with different skills.

Finally, our findings suggest several additional areas of inquiry. It would be instructive to determine which of the job developer types are more effective in helping job seekers secure employment and why. It would also be important to compare the respective job developer types with employer perspectives of people with disabilities and the job development professionals who represent them. These further inquiries would help translate the findings presented here into relevant pre-service and in-service training activities as well as provide direction to supervisory support of staff performing job development tasks.

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