Employment Advice

what works for disadvantaged people

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SKILLS TRAINING FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

About the STEP project

Disadvantage in the labour market is persistent and common across all EU member states. Disadvantaged groups do worse than others during recessions, and remain unemployed more at any time. Current approaches are often ineffective for individuals in need of help. The project "Skills Training for Effective Practice" (STEP), funded by the EU Erasmus+ Programme, has reviewed scientific evidence from around the world about the most effective methods of guidance for helping people choose and succeed in suitable careers.

This publication summarises our view of the evidence in a way that readers will find accessible and applicable to work with disadvantaged groups and individuals.

The STEP project goes on to create a curriculum to train counsellors, employment advisors and others working with disadvantaged groups, enabling them to apply the methods that research has shown to be effective. The curriculum is undergoing controlled comparative testing in four countries, and will lead to publication of a Handbook of Career Advice Skills based on the project findings.

This research study has been conducted in partnership with the research team of STEP project partners and this work is freely available from the authors and partners of the STEP Project, who are:

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1. Our approach

What is Career and Employment counselling?

The more or less 'official' position is summarised in a report for the OECD (Plant 2001). It states: '*In recent policy documents, both the EU Commission and the OECD have focused on careers guidance and information as key policy areas in terms of lifelong learning, and economic and social development.’* Key EU documents include the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU Commission, 2000), which explicitly points to guidance as one of six central policy areas, ‘*opening an avenue for not merely life-long learning, but also life-wide learning. Life-long and life-wide guidance are closely related to these learning concepts: modern, highly individualised career paths call for and build upon personal (long, wide, and, indeed, deep) guidance, tutoring, mentoring, coaching, counselling. The OECD .... pointed to the fact that the national and, indeed, the global economy are decisive factors in creating smooth transitions from education to work, but the OECD also included information and careers guidance as key factors.*’

With this backdrop, quality issues in employment guidance come to the policy-making forefront: career development and careers guidance are pivotal to sustaining economic, societal and personal development.

Many definitions have been offered for career counselling and for employment advice. Many refer to the use of resources, or to access to information, the making of informed choices as for example:

'Career guidance policies and services are designed to assist individuals at any point in their lives to manage their careers, including making informed occupational and education and training choices. They can help to ensure that individuals’ decisions are based on self-assessments and labour market information, thus reducing market failures. For developing and transition economies, most of which have limited resources, career guidance services can increase the efficiency of the use of scarce education and training resources. The services also promote social equity and inclusion by helping to ensure equal access to information on labour market and education opportunities’.

‘Career Management Skills refer to a range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise and organize self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions’. (Euroguidance 2013)

Many of these definitions regard 'better labour-market decisions' by individuals as a sufficient and good outcome, and also recognise that such a result is hard to define (what would the client have done otherwise? might they have been in some way 'better'?) and hard to measure.

With this kind of definition, deciding how to identify 'good advice' is difficult. When entry to jobs is the goal, the career choice element seems minimised. When individual choice is aimed for, the immediate job outcome seems less important. Just how social equity is enhanced is not clear. How scarce resources are to be more efficiently used is far from agreed. The mechanisms by which possibly bad advice leads to later-regretted choices are not studied. All these issues are problems that are not easy to resolve.

Our choice in this work is to focus on the ability of the client to identify a desired and good-enough job opportunity in the real and accessible labour market, and to make competitive efforts to achieve it. This too is hard to measure, since judgement about 'making a competitive effort' is subjective, and the necessary action varies from job to job, time to time and place to place. But the more concrete result of 'having a job' seems to us to miss an important point: careers are not made by a single job; choices about work happen many times in a lifetime, and the ability to manage one's own career, preferably without expensive help from the state, seems a greater long-term benefit. We have to accept that measurement poses problems. Our later criticism of the research is that little of it addresses these problems adequately, and we would be more than happy for the approach we advocate to be subjected to the most stringent independent randomised controlled trials possible.

Career guidance theory and disadvantage

This work is not about the many learned theories which help practitioners to think about their work advising clients. But advisors may want to think about their approach, and how the skills that we have listed later can be integrated in any theoretical framework.

As far as possible, we have tried to keep to what is shown by evidence to result in more clients getting work, staying in work, and getting more pay. Such evidence is always comparative: one way of working is shown to do better or worse than another on some concrete measure. We have not tried to compare the various theories about career counselling, because

- theories do not readily lend themselves to comparative study through performance measures[1]. For the most part they attempt to explain what happens and what causes there are in career choice. The link between that and advisor behaviour is not clear: theories may propose various kinds of activity and understanding, but do not on the whole describe what an effective advisor should do and how it should be measured;

- the prescriptions of different theories overlap. Most writers are aware that each theoretical approach extends and adjusts what already exists. The differences, clear enough on paper, may not be so obvious in daily practice. Services often use methods drawn from various theories, and few if any are wholly dedicated to one theoretical approach;

- we have not encountered comparative studies of job outcomes based on well defined service designs that adhere to and distinguish between specific theories.

Our approach has been pragmatic. We want to identify the behaviours of advisors, and the skills that advisors apply in successful support for clients' efforts in the labour market. We have not been concerned to interpret this evidence in favour of any career-theory.

We have however, referred to evidence and practice from psychology. We have tried to restrict ourselves to aspects of practice that have been developed from study of behaviour and the impact of advisor / counsellor / trainer behaviours on clients. The conceptual framework attached to the behaviours can be found in studies of

- self-efficacy
- client-centred counselling
- group work
- skill teaching.

and advisors may want to read more in these areas. We think that these are the largest elements in the skillset of the advisor, and we feel that knowing how and why they relate to individual behaviour change and belief modification should help advisors to adopt the right approaches and to be critical and thoughtful in so doing.

We have also been concerned with the relationship between disadvantage and the labour market. This is far from an exact science, and again our concern has been pragmatic: we want to identify what works for employers, for clients, and how to put it into practice. We have not tried to compare the various economic theories and related debates that grow on the back of welfare provision and labour-market activity, except at the very basic level that having a suitable job is generally a good thing for the individual, for their employer and for society. Nor have we sought to analyse the causes of disadvantage. It seems straightforward to us that disadvantage in the labour market can have personal, social and economic causes. Remedies for those causes are, on the face of it, desirable. Our work has been to look for the remedies that

[1] A clear exception is found in trait-matching systems developed from theories about person-environment fit. They have been the source of defined and concrete procedures that compare individuals with jobs. However, they have limitations and weaknesses of their own, and cannot be said to have provided a solution to the problem of economic disadvantage.

lie within the scope of everyday practice of employment advisors, trainers and employment-supporting organisations.

Several texts concerning the professional standards of advisors refer to knowledge that is also desirable, and generally they cover

- career development models and theories
- the change process, transition stages, and career cycles
- components of the career planning process
- the major organisations and resources for career development and community services.

These are all useful, but may or may not contribute to the 'active ingredients' in employment and career counselling. It feels intuitively sensible that some modest background knowledge and understanding of theory is a valuable asset. Such knowledge can surely only help the intelligent advisor to think critically about what they are doing and to do it better. But there is no evidence either way. It is conceivable that a wrong theory could lead to bad practice, or that limited understanding of a good theory would restrict capacity. But on balance we feel, as we do when we think of the ethical matters, that a critical awareness is helpful to good or at least thoughtful practice. And conversely, pure knowledge has limited value, and may actually restrict practice. Our approach is to include the skills of acquiring and evaluating knowledge and ideas within the working toolkit of an effective advisor.

Study Method

We have carried out a review of literature and research to inform this review, and to help us stay as close as possible to the evidence that exists.

The search procedure was to review via google scholar, google, and personal holdings, all documents whose key words included, or which were uncovered by searches on, evidence related to counselling, employment, careers and guidance. In addition, selected texts that were referenced within those revealed in this search were consulted as were contributions from partners in the STEP Project. In all over 200 documents were reviewed.

The initial intention was to apply a strict ranking based on the confidence in the validity of evidence in each study, and the quality of the evidence (accuracy and relevance of the findings). We aimed to determine:

- Validity, giving greatest weight to firm conclusions based on randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and consistent findings of systematic reviews of high quality studies, with less weight to generally consistent findings provided by methodologically weaker studies or review(s) of fewer or weaker studies, with low priority for limited evidence provided by conflicting data and inconsistent findings in single, or in reviews of multiple, studies

- Quality, with the greatest weight given to studies that explicitly define and measure both disadvantage and labour-market competence, and assess the impact of treatments independently of the treatment provider, via those that apply proxies for, or fail to define sufficiently, disadvantage or labour-market competence, and show limited evaluation of the impact of treatments, down to those that provide information that may be of value, but circumstantial to disadvantage or labour-market competence, requiring inference to be used in its application.

This led us to consider scientific evidence, direct and indirect evidence, and critical and well structured review by subject experts, but to exclude reports of projects, case studies and policy statements as being limited by their non-comparative methods and lacking controls or external review.

It quickly became clear that only a small number of the papers reviewed reached the highest standard of validity or quality. Those that did provided broadly consistent findings, though there was always the difficulty that different client groups, locations, welfare and economic backgrounds, and service design factors were involved in the various studies.

There are few full RCT studies that use comparable labour-market training group designs (examples are the JOBS I, JOBS II, and Changing Wonky Beliefs models) to support similar client groups from among the general population of unemployed people. Their good results are striking and we believe they provide the best available foundation. There are other good quality studies of models for placing people with learning difficulties and mental health problems in work, which apply a different service design (the 'IPS' model'). The service delivery models of these two types differ[2], but the methods used to support people into work are compatible and not inconsistent. We feel it is reasonable to include their findings alongside one another as evidence for generic skills and approaches.

A very small number of good quality RCT studies have shown conflicting results for, and in one case actual harm done by, services. Identifying the cause of failure is not easy, and their own researchers have been cautious about drawing conclusions, citing for example, differences in implementation and context in one case, and unknown standards of service in another. We judge – and it is our judgement and not a matter of evidence – that these results should not prevent us from reaching our conclusions. But they also lead us to caution that good results can only be obtained by well-designed and resourced services with clear goals, strong measurement and skilled staff.

A substantial proportion of the papers we reviewed

- did not use randomised controlled trials
- compared dissimilar services
- were professional reviews of services
- focussed on the professional standards of careers advice services but made no distinctions about what works and what does not work in helping people into work
- put forward plausible but largely unsubstantiated ideas
- repeated previous work
- presented or promoted policies with no apparent evidential justification.

We felt these had some weight as representing professional opinion: to have ignored or contradicted them completely would have been unwise. And in almost all cases it turns out that there is no obvious conflict between evidence for what works, and the matters presented. Outstanding exceptions are in the evidence for

- the decline in job-seeking effort over increasing durations of unemployment. This is widely expected and assumed, but evidential support is weak and ambiguous

- the relative benefits of private, public or NGO service providers. Although featuring largely in policy guidance from respected institutions, we found no evidence that comparable services did better or worse according to their status and ownership.

A small number of services, among them some well known and widely applied commercial products, purporting to be efficacious, were not supported by good quality evidence, and had counter evidence of considerable weight. We have not included them in our findings.

The literature is also well endowed with descriptions and claims of effectiveness that amount to little more than promotional material. Vocational training establishments lay claim to effectiveness of their classes; programme providers offer 'evidence' to government enquiries that is based solely on their own provision; practitioners clamour for early intervention without considering the deadweight effects that will follow: the examples are numerous, and unedifying.

Deciding which advisor skills are effective is not straightforward:

[2] The first uses mainly groupwork and tuition in job-search skills, the latter mainly one-to-one counselling alongside intensive support for employers and individuals, though both techniques may be applied in either setting and to different degrees.

- Few studies evaluate or test the skills of advisors. What an advisor should do, how they should work, in what kind of programme, is often described only in vague terms, and not subjected to any rigorous testing. A small number of good quality studies do provide this missing detail; but a larger number of reports describe activities and theories that are not supported by evidence.
- Identifying specific skills is hampered by the practice of evaluating whole programmes, or large groups of activities. For example, there are frequent references to 'engaging with clients', to 'empowering clients' to 'whole person approaches' but these are rarely analysed in sufficient detail to tell us what to do. At such a level of level of generality, a slave driver could claim to be doing good counselling: they would surely be 'engaging' and ‘motivating’ 'empowering' even if by means of the whip. This is a weakness in the evidence that makes it hard to discern what is being effective.

This shortage of strong evidence on the detail of advisor activities led us to turn to other sources for what works. We have taken as read the substantial evidence from RCT studies in closely-allied fields of counselling, guidance and psychological therapy. The application of the same behavioural and psychological concepts and methods in counselling behaviour-change, in therapy and in the service design of good quality employment programmes supported by positive RCT results has enabled us to add what we believe to be valuable detail to the list of effective skills for careers and employment advisors. But the logic of these links is ours, and should be tested more thoroughly in high quality trials.

One other issue deserves mention. The literature is dominated by certain client groups:

- employment support for disabled people has been more widely studied and reported on than, for example, ethnic minorities or carers. That is not to say that there is no attention to the latter groups and others. But the literature has perhaps identified disabled people as 'needing personal help', so the quality of help is discussed more, whereas other groups may be regarded as 'socially disadvantaged' so more attention is paid to ameliorating their social conditions than to ensuring they are competent in the labour market. This may explain the difference in research and policy emphasis we think we have seen

- young people get much attention. This is no doubt because they are the object of interventions at the moment they enter the labour market, and it does seem wise that their newness and inexperience should be compensated in this way. But is far from clear that they are 'disadvantaged', at least in the sense that we have defined disadvantage. Nor is it clear what the intentions and measurable results of career counselling for school and college leavers are: different authors adopt different approaches.

Faced with this situation and disparities in the evidence, we have made an assumption that successful interventions and programme designs for one social group will also succeed for another, provided there is respect for individual and community needs, and for employers. We have based this assumption on the strong evidence for it in the psychology literature.

New approaches and technologies

We have deliberately avoided exploration of some interesting and promising approaches – the application of computer technology is the most prominent example, bibliotherapy is another. The volume of work and the very rapid development of these fields led us to decide to limit the current review to activities with a substantial input from a trainer or advisor, working directly with groups or individuals. We recognise of course that the new approaches may be effectively integrated into personal counselling approaches, but felt it beyond our current scope to study them as much as would have been required.

What is 'Disadvantage?'

Our concern is career & employment guidance for disadvantaged people.

There may well be good reasons to provide career counselling to people who are not at a disadvantage in the labour market, but these are not our focus. Instead we want to consider how the very large numbers of people who are out of work, and who more often than not also belong to an identifiable social group that has higher than average rates of unemployment, are best to be helped. For if they have needs unique to their situation that are not met by 'standard' services, then the pursuit of equity and economic efficiency suggest that, at a reasonable price, something should be done to help.

That they should be helped is a matter of policy agreement across Europe. The high incidence of long-term unemployment causes concern in all countries. The low participation in work of migrants, ethnic minorities, disabled people, ex-prisoners, those in regions of economic re-structuring, religious and cultural minorities, are regarded as weakening the economy through reduced supply of labour, harmful to political unity, and perhaps least controversially unfairly contributing to personal poverty. Such matters are not to be ignored, and have been important parts of public policy, without much change in recorded statistics, for many years.

The common factor of interest for us, across all the social groups, is economic exclusion. That they belong to one group or another may be relevant, but is not definitive. There are many people who are, to take an example, disabled, but who are fully employed, and manage their careers well. Being disabled may make economic participation more difficult, but it is not identical with economic disadvantage. The Roma people of Europe are excluded from many aspects of their countries' social life, and suffer poverty and unemployment. Yet even there, there are those who are in the economy and do well. Being of Roma origin may make things hard, but it does not define disadvantage.

In a careful study, Pleace (2009) showed how offenders on probation experience multiple problems, including mental health problems and substance misuse issues, deficits in skills, poor socialisation into working environments, and lack of confidence and self-esteem. These issues are significantly part of offenders' lack of competitiveness, and possibly of motivation. But it would be wrong to assume that all offenders suffer equally, or are disadvantaged in the same way. So much so that in Building Bridges to Employment we read that '*The current evidence base is simply too poor to yield firm conclusions about the value of different employment interventions with offenders.*' In our view, that uncertainty may partly be the result of treating 'offenders' as a single group.

While this suggests that some tailored provision for identifiable groups may be desirable – and we must recognise the importance of differences in how groups are treated, under what regulations and laws, with what discriminatory practices, and so on – it equally suggests that economic disadvantage may be more frequently found in some groups, but at the individual level membership of any group is not in itself a necessary or sufficient cause.

The average duration of unemployment in Europe has been around 15 months since the early 1980s apart from the period 1990-2000 when the boom, and possibly also accession of new countries caused a low of 3.8 (1989) and 5.7 (1991), followed by a rapid rise to pre-1989 rates, with an exceptional peak of 19.2 months in 2006 (OECD). For the average person to be unemployed this long must be a sign of some structural deficit.

In many countries long-term unemployment is used to signal eligibility for employment programmes. Long-term unemployment, usually meaning more than a year out of work, is undoubtedly a contributor to poverty, and may signal some lack of competitive ability. However, it is not identical with disadvantage. This may be shown by comparing the figures for duration of unemployment with what they would be if all people had an equal chance of finding work[3]. The results show that real long term unemployment is greater than would be expected under ‘equal chances’ but only by about 10%. We think that this indicates the importance of chance in the distribution of unemployment: a large proportion of long-term unemployment is due to the inevitable effect of people being more or less unlucky in their search for work, and not to any inherent disadvantage.

[3]The calculation can be done by comparing actual exit rates from unemployment at each measured duration, with the exits that would occur of the exit rate was equal at all durations. The figures quoted are from the authors’ calculations based on the UK duration of unemployment statistics (NOMIS).

But we do know definitely that some groups do much worse than others, and we know that people unemployed for longer have a lower chance of leaving unemployment than those more recently unemployed, as can be shown from the same figures. So we find ourselves in a difficult position in defining economic disadvantage: unemployment duration and group membership are both inaccurate, and can only be seen as weak proxy measures for the cause we are seeking. From our perspective, being interested in the act of seeking employment, a better definition would address the issue directly, and only then enquire how to measure the resulting definition.

So we choose as our definition of disadvantage:

'inability for whatever reason, to compete fairly for jobs with the majority of others in a realistically chosen sector of the labour market'

- *inability* because the person lacks some relevant factor that might lead to success, be it confidence, knowledge, skills, or beliefs;
- *for whatever reason* includes all and any of those factors, and may be compounded by discrimination, legislation, poor support programmes, lack of educational facilities and so on;
- *competition* refers to the need to make certain specific efforts to identify and win a job, or become self employed, within the prevailing conditions;
- *realistically* refers to the domination of the labour market over individual desires. No person can create an opportunity that is not there. Nor can they expect (luck and poor recruitment aside) to compete for things of which they are not capable. Each person needs to assess the reasonableness of their aspirations and adjust them up or down according to their situation;
- *the labour market* means global and local availability of work.

This definition will not please everybody, but we think it captures the needs of the individual, and the goal of the advisor. If it means that some individuals who are from privileged backgrounds can be classed as 'disadvantaged', then so be it.

We acknowledge that

- we make the assumption that what works will transfer between risk groups. Acknowledging that tailored services may be needed effectively to deliver the active ingredients, we have seen nothing in the research literature to contradict this. Some groups (for example language minorities) may need support designed just for them – we will not catalogue or critique the many kinds of help that people can get;
- our definition is based upon an appreciation of the labour market position of individuals;
- choosing that basis does not mean that important non-labour market factors such as housing, quotas, subsidies, social supports, education and so forth should be ignored in giving employment advice;
- by this definition we have restricted our use of 'career counselling' and ‘employment advice’ in comparison with the usage of other writers.

Our definition leads directly to an approach to the problem of selecting who to help and how to help them.

Identifying the active ingredients

From our reading of the literature, there are many descriptions of employment advice and support, and even more of careers advice.

We want to go as far as we are able to identify what is effective in employment and career advice. To think about it, we began by considering

- *the active ingredient*, without which the service would be no better than no intervention, and which appear to increase the Labour Market competence of clients
- *excipients*: the necessary carriers of the active ingredient, such as registration forms, confidentiality policies, administration and so on. These contribute to the active ingredients but are inactive in their absence

- *inactive ingredients* and *placebos*: interventions that do not have the active ingredients which we have found in the evidence, but which may or may not have an influence on clients. Some worthwhile and respected methods may be in this category. But although evidence as to which these are is not strong, it would be wise to be cautious that no harm to clients is done by reliance on such interventions.

In reviewing the evidence, however, it has been difficult to distinguish inactive from active ingredients and from excipients. And we have identified the active ingredients by inference and triangulation: the good quality trials of successful programmes all point in the same direction. While we cannot rule out that this is because they share some common factor (similarity of design for example), by comparing them with closely related practices (effective counselling techniques, behaviour modification , skill development) and finding no points of difference, we can infer with a degree of confidence that they are good and active ingredients in programmes.

Application of the evidence for effective working has to be done with care: there is strong evidence that the most effective models of service delivery may not always succeed; and dissecting the corpse to find the cause of failure may not be easy. For example The Individual Placement and Support model for people with severe mental health problems has been supported in numerous studies; but when implemented in the UK in one case, '*There was no evidence that IPS was of significant benefit in achieving competitive employment for individuals in South London at 1-year follow-up, which may reflect suboptimal implementation. Implementation of IPS can be challenging in the UK context where IPS is not structurally integrated with mental health services, and economic disincentives may lead to lower levels of motivation in individuals with severe mental illness and psychiatric professionals.*' and comparing different models: '*This article discusses the net benefits of two approaches to supported employment that were compared in a randomized trial: Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and Group Skills Training (GST). Although a previous analysis showed that IPS participants were significantly more likely to find work, worked more hours, and had higher earnings, net benefits of the two programs were not significantly different.*' (Clark et al 1998)

Advisors' and clients' preferences differ. In one study, clients and their advisors were asked to rank the element of service that the deemed the most important. The difference is striking. Clients gave the complicated and time consuming social skills of employment advice and person-centred planning the highest rating; advisors gave importance to more technical methods.

Table 1: Customer and Counsellor Ranking of Importance		
Rank of Importance	Customers	Counsellors
1st	Employment Advising	Job Carving
2nd	Person-Centred Planning	Job Support
3rd	Job Support	Profiling
4th	Job Carving	Employment Advising
5th	Profiling	Person-Centred Planning

(adapted from Wolf-Branigin 2000)

Our conclusions are that the balance of evidence favours the customers' (clients') opinions.

There are a few things that seem to be commonly believed to be effective, but for which we cannot find scientific support. We have found no strong evidence, and conclusions drawn only from weak studies, from single case reports, or by repetition of previous beliefs and texts, for the following:

- that State services perform no better when contracted out to private for-profit companies, nor to NGOs. However, state services do sometimes get awarded far lower levels of resources than those in the other sectors as a result of a contracting-out policy, with the effect of creating an impression that they are doing better. (Davies 2008) The OECD promotes out-sourcing of employment programmes from government to private contractors, without clear evidence-based justification on grounds of better performance, and several countries have adopted this policy.

- that subsidies and grants help or hinder employment for economically excluded people. These are much-used policy tools, and a detailed critique is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to note that radically differing legislative frameworks in various countries of the EU have not succeeded in demonstrating the superiority of any one approach over others. Our strong suspicion is that legislation, subsidies, grants and regulation are not among the key things that work in getting people jobs
- that 'professionalisation' of services to unemployed people, which is being pursued in several countries, is actively making a difference. It is of course important and the professionalisation of services through high ethics and sound education is a desirable goal. However, we have seen only secondary and weak links between descriptions of the activities of a 'professional' and descriptions of what works. It is, we feel, possible for an ineffective service can be delivered professionally, that is to say ethically (up to a point), consistently, humanely, at a low price, on time and so on.

That said, the evidence we have gathered has for the most part led us to be confident in our conclusions about what works in the field of advisor skills and behaviour.

Career programmes and career tools

Programme design

In this work we focus mainly on the interaction between the client and their advisor. There is evidence from high quality studies around the world that this relationship is a - possibly the- significant contributor to client's progress. It seems likely that even where programmes offer good resources for clients, a poor-quality relationship can undermine their effectiveness.

We have seen some designs (the Initial Placement and Support Model, from the JOBS Programme and the Changing Wonky Beliefs training programme are good examples) that have provided employment advice effectively and have been carefully evaluated.

Within the successful designs are

- psychological measures and approaches to supporting clients that have a strong evidence base
- behaviours for advisors and trainers that are similar to well researched approaches from other fields
- direct links from the programme to the jobs market. Three examples of these links are providing training in job search and networking techniques, providing personal support during job entry, and maintaining high quality contacts with local employers.

Our view is that these are essential. Programme design may be flexible, providing these qualities are sustained.

Knowledge and Tools

Our study is about how counsellors work directly with individuals or groups to enable them to be effective in the labour market.

We recognise that there are many useful and practical tools, methods, teaching aids that can be pressed into service during this work. They include well validated procedures such as Holland's trait-task matching, interesting devices to encourage personal insights such as card-sorting games, and theories about career development and related counselling techniques.

We have seen little direct evidence of effectiveness for many of these: even the many (probably hundreds) of guides and training courses on writing a good CV have yielded almost no evidence, and none that we have found of any weight, yet to be able to write a CV when one is needed can only be a good thing, as is being practiced at interviews, good at networking and being skillful in a chosen job.

There are risks in using diagnostic tools, even when used carefully and as intended. Pleace (2009) in 'Delivering better housing and employment outcomes for offenders on probation' identified that '*Diagnostic tools designed to identify basic problems with numeracy and literacy could thus be perceived as challenges and threats to the offender's* [or client's] *self-image as (broadly) competent and capable adults'.*

So our approach has been to look for the advisory setting and factors that create a situation for the best use of such tools and methods. We have not attempted to catalogue or even describe them in any detail.

Wherever we have come across pure knowledge requirements for job seeking, such as knowing the local labour market, knowing welfare regulations, knowing about wage rates and so forth, our approach has been to encourage the skill of knowledge acquisition rather than the knowledge itself. We prefer to think of people – advisors and clients – as being empowered to find out rather than being told what to remember; and when information is needed, we prefer to look not at its content, but how the advisor may make it most useful to the client.

2. Helpful ideas: making a difference

It is important for advisors and their organisations to understand what is actually happening in the advisory relationship, and to recognise that not everything works equally well, and some things that appear effective may actually be making little difference, or even doing harm.

In this section we present some definitions and ideas to help clarify the 'active ingredients' and factors that make a difference, and separate out those that are the effective from the ineffective, the essential from the unwanted, and the helpful from the harmful. The evidence is not always conclusive as to which is which, and advisors need to be aware that they are doing complicated things which may have unintended consequences.

Active Labour Market Programmes

Most if not all European countries provide 'Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs)' which require benefit recipients, sometimes involving employers, to fulfil obligations to seek and take work as a condition of their benefits. In many countries these are very large scale, with spending representing a noticeable proportion of Gross Domestic Product and high political importance.

International experience confirms that the impact of ALMPs is often difficult to prove and less than hoped for. Not all have a positive impact. They often include wasted or deadweight costs that arise when the results are no different from what would have happened in the absence of the program. Employment subsidies have ambiguous effects: their net employment effect may be much less than the number of subsidised jobs, amounting to an unearned subsidy to the employer. The findings of various reviews of ALMPs imply that the programs as currently practised are not a solution to the problems of large-scale unemployment. (Kuddo 2009)

From one view, there is a real possibility that, at least in the short run, the result of employment counselling is that a job gained by one person is not gained by another. The successful jobseeker has substituted themselves for someone else. In this case, we take the view that, since we are promoting equality of opportunity in the competition for work, there is no real loss overall. Whether there is a longer term increase in economic activity, as is argued by many economists, is, if true, another gain. The question of whether the gain in equality is worth the social and tax cost of the service is another matter.

A second view is that existing workers may be dismissed and replaced by new job-seekers, especially if the employer thereby gains a subsidy. Evidence on this is controversial and inconclusive and beyond the scope of this work. But it is worth noting a study which suggests that '*there is no evidence that employed and unemployed job seekers are similar or apply for the same jobs. [...] We conclude that the unemployed do not directly compete with employed job seekers*.' (Longhi 2011)

A concept of great importance to the evaluation of employment programmes is 'deadweight'. It refers to the expenditure of effort and money in helping people who would have been successful in getting a job (or other positive result) without the help offered. To illustrate: suppose that employment advice is offered to everyone who is out of work on their first day of unemployment. We know that a large proportion would have found work within a few days and weeks without help. So the cost of the service they receive would be wasted, and it is possible that the intervention would delay their return to work. The service is excessively expensive, and possibly harmful to some.

Examination of the statistics on duration of unemployment and exit from unemployment shows that people able to find suitable work do not all do so right away; the chances of finding work have been shown to change only gradually over time: there is no clear cut-off date after which programme provision is always positive. (Long 2009)[4]

[4] Long (2009) helpfully adds that ‘If the characteristic [which lowers the probability of re-employment] is unobservable it will erroneously appear to the researcher that the probability of exit for a given individual is declining in the length of their unemployment spell.’

But as we look at longer and longer periods of unemployment, we find a higher proportion of people who have a disadvantage in seeking work. The probability is that services offered to the long term unemployed will have less wastage or deadweight, than those offered to people unemployed for a shorter time.

Services to the long term unemployed do however still have some deadweight. But the higher concentration of disadvantaged people among the long term unemployed also means that the chances of success following programme interventions are smaller than when the same programme is offered to an average group of shorter-term unemployed people: service to the long-term unemployed may appear to be more expensive per success.

Deadweight wastes money and effort. It may have harmful effects on some programme participants. Hidden or unreported deadweight also allows programme providers and employment advisors to claim successes that are not the result of their work. It may even encourage them to think they are having an effect when they are not.

An instance may illustrate. School leavers need to enter the labour market. It is common enough for them all to get some kind of careers advice, and we would not argue against that policy. But the rate at which they find work is affected by the state of the labour market, and the seasonal unemployment of school leavers across the EU attracts a great deal of attention in the press and political circles. But there is no evidence from the age statistics of the unemployed that the delay to getting a first job results in long-term disadvantage: if it did, we would expect to see those who joined the labour market at the time of high unemployment being more unemployed throughout their working lives, and this effect is not discernible. Consequently, whatever other good reasons may exist for youth programmes, we can surmise that deadweight is an important factor in successes that they claim.

Certain groups are much more likely to be unemployed than others: ethnic minorities, migrants and disabled people among them. But among those groups there are individuals who are successful in the labour market. The membership of a group does not necessarily confer economic disadvantage on every individual in it, though unemployment may be much more likely for a representative sample of individuals. Deadweight can exist and be an important factor even in programmes targeted on groups who are chosen because they share a characteristic (such as disability).

Deadweight is important for the weighing of evidence and reports reviewed in this study. It means that we cannot give much attention to specific case studies and individual reports and instances, since we have no way to know whether the results are influenced by deadweight or chance.

We also need to consider whether long-term unemployment confers economic disadvantage. The evidence is clear that it does increase poverty, and increase the likelihood of illness, mental and physical, and the risk of suicide, though the direction of causality is not clear in all studies. It is much less clear that long-term unemployment leads to a measurable reduction in job-search activity, or in a reduction in skills. While there is much opinion on the matter, mostly presuming that these effects do occur, the evidence is far from conclusive. One could say it differently:- no one becomes long-term unemployed solely by being long term unemployed. Other factors, some but not all of which may worsen with increasing spells of unemployment, and complicated by chance, are to be sought as the cause of persistent unemployment.

This then leads us to our choice of the factors to find and seek to redress labour-market disadvantage. Instead of proxy measures, such as duration of unemployment, ethnicity, disability and the rest, we would choose competence to operate effectively in the labour market.

The impact of interventions

It is important not to think of employment advice interventions as in any way 'medical'. Disadvantaged clients are neither ill nor deficient: the encounter with them is not to restore or repair, but to enable and empower.

In offering help, we should be sure that what we do is actively helpful. Our clients do not come to us knowing what kind of support will get them a job, or help them choose a job. When, occasionally, they do, their request is often very simple - 'find me a job' or 'tell me what I can do'. In either case, our task is to provide them with the means to resolve the issue that they present. Does what we do help or hinder?

It seems possible that at least some of our interventions have no content that can be measured as making a positive difference over a large sample of clients, or at least have no discernible relation to the job-seeking activity that we are supporting. But when a client attends our employment counselling group, there is a chance that they do better for no reason other than having turned up and taken part. And among them, some will believe they are doing better (or worse) while not changing at all. If this were the case, we could expect to do just as well or badly with some alternative programme design, and we might conjecture that the effective thing is attendance, not what we do during the event.

But in practice a few well-conducted studies have shown that certain programme designs and their content are effective in helping people into work and in increasing their earnings, with fewer remaining unemployed and the employed earning more compared to control groups. But the control groups often also show positive results, albeit smaller. What then is it about the programmes that is effective? What is the active ingredient?

In the most effective programmes the format, content, group leadership and advisor techniques and duration have all been carefully controlled. The attention to detail is evident from publications on 'compliance' or 'fidelity' to the studied programme, intending that it may be reproduced with the same good effects. However, it is the impact and results of the whole programme that is measured, and not the various factors that are subsumed in the overall design. To use an analogy, it is as if we have studied the effectiveness of a garage in mending your car; when in fact is the replacement of the broken part by the mechanic that is the real repair.

So we have limited confidence in the 'active ingredient' from programme studies alone, and have to turn instead to closely related research from the fields of counselling, psychological talking therapies, skill training and coaching. We choose these because what we do with employment clients is very similar to those other things: we talk to them, encourage them to do things, train them and help them through decisions and choices.

These studies strongly suggest that it is the relationship between advisor and clients, plus in the case of group work the intra-group relationships, and the activities that clients undertake, that are 'active'. This view is almost universally agreed to be right by scholars and authorities writing on career counselling. What then of all the other aspects of programmes?

An advisor-client relationship does not happen in a vacuum. They have to meet - by phone or in person or in some other way, at a specific time and place. The advisor has to work in a context, keeping records, sustaining ethical standards and so on. The setting is an essential carrier or vehicle for the active ingredient. But it may or may not have an impact on the outcome. We can, we think regard these kinds of things as the equivalent of the medical excipient, or the garage reception. Not part of the solution , but nevertheless essential to it.

And finally, there are things that may actually harm a client. Some ALMP experiments have been shown, in randomised controlled trials, to reduce the chance of employment. Whatever was done was harmful. And within programmes that seem to have only very modest results such as exemplified by the Work Programme in the UK, there will in all probability be individuals who have been harmed. For example, a person who can find work unaided is not just deadweight in the system; the time they spend in a programme is wasted - they actually lose from participation. In some studies, it has also been shown that people of high self-efficacy for employment seeking had their confidence reduced by participation in a programme that was effective in increasing self-efficacy among those with initially low confidence. What is good for one person may be toxic for another. A bad programme design may be toxic, if it presents or creates insuperable problems such as (for example only) welfare withdrawal for the client, or extreme procedural hurdles for the advisor.

Personal beliefs and experiences

It may seem self-evident that clients' desire to work, to have a job or be employed or self-employed, is an important factor in their eventual success. However, there is no clear unambiguous route to 'wanting a job'. The act of wanting may include both desire and ability. It may include beliefs about possibilities for work, coloured both by belief in personal efficacy and by beliefs about the labour market.

Such desire may also be influenced by factors other than the labour market and the person's direct relationship to it. The value of welfare payments is one obvious example, as is a competing role as parent or carer.

Nonetheless, there is some evidence that the desire for a job is a significant factor for successful placement in paid employment. Additionally, there is widespread evidence that beliefs have a very strong influence on desires and action generally. Beliefs about personal ability ('I can find a job...') and about the labour market ('there is a job for me to find...') are correlated with expressed desire, action and effort.

In their turn, beliefs arise from a wide range of influences. Some of these influences such as family and peers are not readily affected by advisor's interventions, though we are not saying that they cannot change. In general but beliefs can be influenced by experiences and activity. People who look for work are more likely to believe that they can find it than those who do not. But belief is not simple plasticity: failure and success have different effects on belief; the influences of different people may be unequal, and belief may fluctuate.

So questions of 'motivation' and 'personal choice' are important in the advisory relationship. To work with clients' beliefs should be an integral part of advisors' skills.

A client who does not want to work, and expresses this to the advisor, has, in our perspective, a valid point of view. However, as with all aspects of employment-plans, as explored below, the wish should be subjected to some testing:

- is it based on valid & sufficient knowledge of the labour market?
- is the client capable of an informed decision?
- is the client under any duress, such that their decision is not genuinely held?

Failure to consider these possibilities could confirm the disadvantage of an otherwise capable client.

Exploration of the client's beliefs and the relevant facts needs to be done skilfully so as to enable the client to make sound choices. Within that process, exploration of conflicting pressures for or against work, can provide insights that the client can use to establish their own desires or 'motivation'. (Burchardt 2005)

Psychological impact of employment counselling

Theories of career counselling use a diverse group of ideas about the interaction of personality and work. Studies of unemployed people participating in effective employment counselling groups have shown that they often achieve improvements to their psychological condition as measured by established methods.

Studies have found that personal development training:

- significantly improved job seekers' ability to find employment;
- improved the self-esteem, self-efficacy, coping skills, life-satisfaction and mental health of participants;
- resulted in higher quality re-employment in terms of earnings and job satisfaction;
- increased motivation among those who continued to be unemployed, including expectations of reemployment.

Some studies conclude that labour market programs should include training to improve psychological health, encourage positive aspects of coping (such as to promote an internal locus of control), build self-esteem and self-efficacy, promote greater participation in meaningful leisure activities, and challenge perceptions of deprivation. Interventions have sought to:

- teach problem solving and coping skills that inoculate participants against setbacks in job seeking and the prolonged effects of unemployment;
- improve mental health by reducing depression, psychological distress, guilt, anger, and helplessness, and life-satisfaction;
- improve attitudes toward work;
- increase self-efficacy and self-esteem to speed re-employment

(Eden & Aviram, 1993; Caplan et al., 1997; Proudfoot et al., 1997; Creed et al., 1998 & 2001).

Psychological constructs may be of value in properly conducted research settings, and they have indeed been used to show the good effects (maybe rather side effects) that employment and high quality advice can provide. Some studies suggest persuasively that improved psychological 'condition' is one of the active ingredients in the success of the programme for individuals within it. But employment advice is not therapy, and employment advisors are not usually qualified to offer therapies. An unqualified person, seeking to ameliorate a client's psychological state, however good their intentions, may make no change, may be ineffective, may hold out promises they cannot fulfil, or have harmful effects, such as creating ill-feeling or low mood when expectations are raised and not fulfilled. But we do not recommend any reliance on or use of psychological approaches other than those that are absolutely specific to the employment relationship, which we describe in the section on self-efficacy, and we would advise strongly against the danger of constructing employment programmes with psychological health goals unless they are led by licensed psychologist practitioners. Granted that improved psychological health may be a side-effect of good employment training or support, worse psychological health could equally well be a result of badly designed or delivered health interventions.

Terms in common use

Advisors reading about career counselling , employment and motivation are likely to find references to several concepts about individual worth and effectiveness. Many texts use careful definitions of these terms, and are able to evaluate them using carefully tested methods. However, the terms are also to be found in less carefully controlled usage, and care should be taken lest vagueness leads to loss of meaning. Some of the widely used terms (in both senses) are:

<u>Self esteem</u> Self-esteem reflects a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for example, "I am competent," "I am worthy") and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride and shame. (Hewitt 2009)

<u>Locus of Control</u> Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can control events affecting them. A person is said to have an 'internal locus of control' if they believe that they are able to control or contribute to their own future. The idea is widely referred to in counselling, advice and career-guidance literature, and is probably also closely associated to the more specific concept of 'self-efficacy', discussed elsewhere. It has been widely studied and a person's degree of internal locus of control shown to be correlated with their readiness to undertake tasks that may bring about their goals. It has also been reported that events and circumstances can have an impact on a person's locus of control, with implications for their future choices and efforts.

<u>Generalised self-efficacy</u> is a measure of confidence in ones coping ability across a wide range of tasks or situations. It is not the same as self-efficacy, which is covered later.

But the state of knowledge is incomplete: the distinction between Self-esteem, Locus of control and Generalised self-efficacy may be illusory. A 2002 study concluded that *'measures purporting to assess self-esteem, locus of control, neuroticism, and generalized self-efficacy may be markers of the same higher order concept*'.

That they are relevant, to some degree at least, was shown by a study (Burchardt 2005) reviewing employment of young people with disabilities. She found that '*By age 26...... young people disabled at both [young and older] ages were more than three times as likely as those who were disabled at neither age to agree that 'Whatever I do has no real effect on what happens to me' and concludes that 'This is a stark illustration of the effect that frustrated aspirations can have. Teenagers who set out with a belief that, for example, 'planning ahead can make things turn out well' have come to believe by their mid-twenties that their control over their own fate is limited.'*

<u>Motivation</u> There are almost as many theories of motivation as there are authors, but the idea remains slippery, with many possible interpretations. Whatever motivation is, it is certainly not simple:

- External influences can have ambiguous effects on people. Financial strain has been recorded as a motivator for job-search activity, and as a de-motivator because of the low mood it induces.

- People are generally more averse to possible losses than to possible gains, so the motivational effects of complex or risky situations may be hard to predict. (Kahneman et al)

The word is commonly used to refer to several different things:

- The desire for a result or outcome
- The pressing need for a result or outcome
- A belief in the value of the 'motivational' activity
- A belief in ones capacity to act successfully
- The difference between what one has or is, and what one would like
- The impact of external forces, which may be uni-directional, or ambiguous.
- The desire to conform to social norms

Certain studies have shown that motivation is a factor in employment: in one case '*job-search motivation increased reemployment at all follow-ups but did not affect reemployment quality*'. Accepting that as a good result, we would caution that what was measured and labelled 'motivation' was the result of a specific test administered under controlled conditions, and not the intuition of an individual advisor or client.

The use of the word often carries connotations of approval or disapproval, as when one describes someone as 'well-motivated' or even 'motivated to work'. Our view is that 'motivation' is so vague a term that it is best replaced by more specific wording, according to the situation at hand. Clients may be encouraged, to explore its possible meanings as a way to understand their situation more fully. But we would resist attempts to work directly on something called 'motivation for work' because we would often not know what we mean by that.

The advisor may see their role as being to motivate their client towards employment. Or this role may be pressed upon them and the client by the programme in which they are working. In either case, the ethical approach is to enable informed decisions. Such decisions may come through personal exploration, fact finding or practical experiences, and may take some time to reach.

Self-efficacy Among the theories, that of 'self efficacy' stands out as being concerned with clients' beliefs and responses to real-world tasks and situations, personal to each client, changeable and measurable. The body of research supporting the concept is large and covers numerous fields of application, including employment advice.

Self efficacy refers to a person's own belief in their ability to complete a specific task or reach a specific goal. The strength of belief is predictive of effort, achievement and persistence in the face of failure. Self-efficacy may be modified through well understood mechanisms which we present later. It is of value to the employment counsellor because

- the client can describe their own confidence for tasks and plan accordingly: it empowers them
- the confidence relates not to general mood or vague hopes, but to specific acts and goals. Levels of confidence can help clients to distinguish between alternative actions
- self efficacy can be enhanced by successful execution of goal-directed action
- self-efficacy can be enhanced by appropriate counsellor behaviour.

Self efficacy theory does not describe a personal therapy. It helps discern what will lead to greater personal effort and success at desired goals, and is specific to the task at hand. It has a very large body of research, and underpins several of the most prominent RCT studies of employment counselling success. Support in designing programmes from people qualified and experienced in the application of Self Efficacy theory is to be encouraged.

The impact of welfare benefits

Provision of financial support from the state can be an important factor in job-search. Knowledge (or lack of it) of the support can help or hinder. The advisor needs to be aware of the important components of welfare support and aid for employers, just as they should be aware of the main aspects of legislation concerning equality and employment. Examples of the wide range of supports that may exist (these are only samples) include:

- subsidies, fines and quotas due to & from employers
- financial support for aids and adaptations to workplaces
- local and national programmes of preparation for work, such as are funded by the European Social Fund
- free or grant-aided educational facilities
- in-work tax benefits or welfare payments
- social (non-work) support such as housing costs, childcare.

Whether the advisor needs detailed knowledge and the ability to provide facts is another matter: it will depend on the working environment and professional resources available. Where there are specialists who have the detailed working capacity to advise, employment advisors may need to know only the key facts and where to find more functional resources. Where the advisor is working in isolation from such specialists, they may need specific national, regional or local information in great detail.

We value highly the ability to find necessary information, and to apply resources and specialist professional help for clients, rather than the knowledge itself.

An example of the importance of information is given by some research which has shown that a lack of understanding of Housing Benefit (in the UK) as an in-work benefit undermines the journey back to work and that many advisers find it difficult to advise on potential entitlement to this benefit.

3. What works

A simple approach to 'what works' is provided by looking at well researched successful programmes and projects, and copying them. Some have gone as far as publishing standards or fidelity scales to help organisations apply the methods that seem to work. A good example is the 'Individual Placement and Support' (IPS) design that has been shown in several studies to be successful at helping people with severe mental health problems into work. However, the evidence of successful implementation is not universal, and we have to acknowledge that the programme design may not be the only effective ingredient. How a programme is delivered at the point of interaction between client and advisor is important too. Examples of detailed attention to advisor ability are to be found in effective and well researched programmes. Whether changed by overall programme design, by advisor interventions or both, enhancement of the client's capacity takes place at all stages and affects:

- basic beliefs about work
- decision-making and choice of job goals
- local labour market knowledge
- job search skills and behaviour
- increased job search self-efficacy
- resilience against setbacks and against prejudice
- ability to compete for work
- managing the transition to work
- keeping the job
- personal ability and potential.

Special groups – are they special?

Our definition of disadvantage refers to each person's 'inability for whatever reason, to compete in a reasonably chosen sector of the labour market'. This choice of definition emphasises the lack of relevant factors that might lead to success, be it confidence, knowledge, skills, or beliefs. The problem of disadvantage is 'located' in the labour-market ability of the person, and not in some other quality that they might possess.

The definition also refers to a situation in which personal inability may be compounded with discrimination, legislation, poor support programmes, lack of educational facilities and so on. However, since we do often find that disadvantage, as we have defined it, is more common among some groups (for example language minorities) than others, we should also acknowledge that members of that group may also need support designed just for them.

We are inclined to think that what works will transfer between risk groups and we have seen nothing in the literature to contradict this. In our view, there is a core of skills and activities that 'work'; and they can be enhanced considerably by being used in settings that are adapted to clients' needs, provided the core skills are not diluted.

Examples of provision for identifiable social groups are plentiful:

One report, the Career Development Program for Refugee and Migrant Youth, identified that *'(young people who are) clients of Migrant Resource Centres .... may not have engaged in any vocational or educational activity*'. Important competencies for this group include:

- *Job seeking skills;* (which is in our selection of core skills)
- *Workplace culture and laws;* (also in our selection of core skills)
- *Work based language and literacy;* (which is targeted provision for this group)
- *Accent modification;* (another targeted provision for this group)
- Development of personal attributes required in the workplace. (in our selection of core skills)'

and goes on to say that '*Appropriate communication is vital. This may include use of interpreters or bilingual facilitators; use of a variety of visual and non language intense methods of communication; use of terminology and concepts the client is familiar with*.'

Looking at ex-offenders, one study reports that '*the literature suggests that two types of employment related work are unhelpful. Raising job expectations through training without any serious prospect of a job on release may be actively damaging rather than just ineffective. This makes tailoring interventions to the local job market and/or employer involvement in programmes key success factors. Also, employment in prison workshops does not appear to increase the chances of employment on release.*'

The same report noted that '*even when a programme is successful, it is usually not possible to say which element, ... has made the difference. This.....reflects the fact that employment programmes rarely follow 'what works' principles. In particular, they do not adhere to a particular design and there is too much variation in what different offenders receive. Also, help is rarely targeted at those at higher risk of offending, although there is some evidence to suggest that, as with other interventions, these are the ones who benefit most. Lack of targeting is also wasteful.*'

Different issues arise with parenting responsibilities: one of many examples showed that '*On a variety of measures, including role overload, interference of work on family, interference of family on work, and psychological distress, late career mothers fared worse than the early career mothers. The authors highlighted the need to find ways to assist women, particularly those in an advanced stage of career development, to better combine work and family roles.*'

Another important group that suffers from relative under-employment, people with disabilities, is not one, but many groups. The needs of people with sensory impairment are radically different from those with learning disabilities. Both would, along with many other 'types' of disablement be much helped by suitable support. A person whose first language is Sign Language will need an interpreter or very competent sign-language advisor. A person with a learning difficulty may (depending on their personal characteristics) need an advisor who is practiced and skilled at advocacy and at empowerment.

But crucially there is good evidence that there is no clear dividing line between able and disabled, nor between employable and unemployable. The what-works principles apply to everyone; but they may need to be supplemented by extra provision to meet specific needs..

Within each group we can find people who at first glance might be assumed to be more disadvantaged than others, but who are successful in finding and keeping suitable work, and of high achievement. Special provision may be desirable, even essential. But needing such help is not a sign of labour-market inability.

Young people deserve a special mention. Career guidance supports the transition from school to the labour market which for many (but not all) is a new and strange place. Almost all young people can benefit from good advice. But are they 'unable for whatever reason, to compete in a realistically chosen sector of the labour market' ? If this test is applied and confirmed after they have had the usual careers advice that is part of their education, and being careful to pay attention to reasonable and realistic choices, we can say that they are disadvantaged. Does that mean that the large numbers of young people now unemployed in Europe are all disadvantaged? Not at all. It means only that the labour market is slow to absorb them. It has happened before, and we may hope that as before some kind of better equilibrium will return. The provision of employment programmes to alleviate youth unemployment is not our subject. We expect unemployment rates to fluctuate (they were much higher among young people in the late 1980s than today) and we expect them to be higher for any age group every member of which is entering the market simultaneously and for the first time. That does not constitute 'disadvantage', though it may call for action for other reasons.

Our goal is not to 'remove' or somehow eliminate the situation or circumstances, and often that is not possible. Our goal is to provide suitable support and adapt the delivery of a programme according to the actual need felt by the client. If there are a sufficient number of clients in the same situation (perhaps sharing a language issue, for example) then a programme can be designed for them as a group. If there are not sufficient numbers, extra or different provision must be made for each person. One study reported that *'Models based on using generalist advisers risk allowing young people with complex or less obvious needs to slip through the net, while relying on specialist disability advisers can lead to marginalisation and overuse of a limited range of segregated provision.'*

The requirements for tailored provision are that it should be (possible examples are given in brackets after)

- consistent with the other 'what works' provisions
- physically accessible (wheelchairs, rural transport)
- cognitively accessible (learning difficulties, language competence)
- culturally and socially accessible (religious practices, cultural norms, dietary habits)
- usable: understandable, practical, achievable (native language, with mentoring support, expectations set by client confidence)
- able to meet actual need as expressed by and observed in the clients (discussed with clients during design, prepared with community involvement)
- relevant to labour market conditions and requirements (knowledge of occupations that are open or available)
- delivered by people with both the requisite knowledge or skills (sign language users, mental health awareness) and the key generic skills that apply across all groups
- and for the advisor or programme designer to
- be able to carry out a Needs Analysis possibly involving community and employers
- recognise when specialist input is needed and resource accordingly
- adapt their own programme and practice to the needs of the client(s)
- involve clients in review and improvement.

Organisation

Using a model programme

When applying a specific model (such as IPS, JOBSII) the fidelity descriptors that they contain should be applied unless other well-evidenced criteria for effectiveness dictate otherwise. When first devising a model, the quality criteria and methods described in this work are a guide to effectiveness, and can usefully be supplemented by critical study of the literature; case studies and examples of programmes that do not provide independent evidence of effectiveness should be treated with caution.

For support to the individual, we have seen no better-evidenced model than Individual Placement and Support. However, that model was devised specifically for people with severe mental illness, and may not be fully transferable, or may need adaptation, or would simply be too costly for other applications. With that proviso, a key lesson of the model is that of early placement in work with adequate ongoing support is more likely to result in long-term employment and in higher earnings, than placement delayed by lengthy preparatory efforts.

For support to groups through structured training events, the best evidence supports the models of the JOBS II and the Changing Wonky Beliefs training programmes. These both provided week-long intensive job search training and were more effective than alternatives; we can see no reason why good results may not be obtained with different delivery formats, provided the advisor / trainer skills and methods are kept intact. But an important element of both these programmes was the way the group of clients or learners functioned, and the nature of the advisor/tutor’s support to the group as well as the individual, and we feel that these are likely to be active ingredients that should be retained in alternative formats such as distance-learning and support, or in isolated sessions or in groups with changing membership.

Designing a programme

There is strong evidence that interactions between skilled staff and clients are central to all the processes and must be included in any design. The detailed evaluation of client needs through a Needs Analysis carried out with clients, representatives with close knowledge of clients, with community and with local employers should be done, in order to add to the accessibility and effectiveness any provision. There is no strong evidence that enables direct comparison of the relative effectiveness of the many diverse elements presented here.

Needs Analysis may be carried out at the time of programme design and review, for groups of clients, and also with each client on entry to the programme.

Advisor contact time

The principle is that clients need time to change their ideas and behaviours: this can happen slowly and at different speeds for different people. The path to change may be erratic, and the time needed difficult to predict.

Allocating a fixed amount of time to clients is likely to leave some still needing help. There are few guidelines on the 'right' amount of time for an advisor to spend with a client; and the amount needed is recognised as very variable. Generally, an initial discussion is expected to take 30 minutes to 1 hour, but longer periods are reported. One programme for Refugee and Migrant Youth reports that *'Integrating skills and knowledge will take time. Ideally, programs should endeavour to provide continuity so that clients can develop career competencies over time. Career guidance programs with a small amount of regular contact over a longer period of time are likely to be more effective than shorter more intensive programs.*'

While an expert advisor applying effective conversational methods can make the best use of even a short time, very short (under half hour) initial interviews may have reduced effectiveness for a proportion of clients. The working relationship does not blossom in a short time, and not to a fixed schedule. Within reason, the more time that is available for advisors to spend with clients the better.

Programme design that gives some control over the duration of interventions to the client and to the advisor, is likely to be more effective than that which imposes fixed schedules. If limits are essential, a 'bandwidth' or average duration should be applied) with discretion within the limits set.

Frequent contact is desirable to encourage the working relationship to become effective.

Advisor Caseloads

Caseloads for advisors providing intensive support to disadvantaged clients should be under 30, and may be as low as 10 or 15 clients per advisor. In a randomised controlled trial of a successful supported employment programme, caseloads of 12 clients per advisor were noted. At the other end of the scale, we have instances of over 100 per advisor in Public Employment Services and some private employment services. In the latter case, anecdotal reports suggest that advisors find they are unable to give a fully personalised services nor develop the constructive working relationships with clients: the caseload is so high that the advisor is unable to make use of these most active ingredients. A sensible standard for advisor caseloads is hard to establish separately from considerations of clients' needs. A very wide range is recorded in current practice.

We note that

- where there is potential for a large proportion of deadweight, higher caseloads to process large numbers through public employment services may be justified on grounds of cost-effectiveness.
- where the needs of disadvantaged people are to be met, caseloads should be very much lower. Excessively high caseloads will hinder the development processes by which clients learn skills, adopt decisions, and develop their self efficacy. There is research to be done to establish the extent to which otherwise well-constructed programmes fail when case loads exceed certain as-yet-undecided levels.

Telephone counselling

There is very little comparative research on the benefits of telephone counselling. One published work on the use of telephone counselling for clients with common health problems noted that telephone techniques are effective for

- assessment and triage, for clinical and health management
- co-ordination of services within a case management framework
- provision of information and advice

- and return to work, but the latter was based mainly on practice exemplars.

Telephone counselling and support offers considerable practical advantages and some disadvantages, which we present for thoughtful review. Overall our experience and wider impression is that when used by a skilled advisor, the telephone is a very useful addition to their toolkit.

Advantages

- access is easy
- may usefully be used in conjunction with other face to face interviews and group sessions
- frequent contact may be made for little effort
- contact may be made at critical moments such as immediately before and after interviews
- the less-personal style may suit some clients
- cost savings may be made, but it is possible for costs to fall on the client
- short client interviews are encouraged

Issues to consider

- lack of body-language communication has to be compensated with an adapted verbal style
- some clients dislike the phone and may be less communicative
- hearing or language difficulties are exaggerated
- clients may become dependent on the advisor for more than job counselling. This is a hypothetical issue that we have not encountered but is a theoretical possibility.

We have no reports of the use of skype and social media.

A good rule for the application of distance techniques, is to use them because they work well in the particular circumstances, and not just to save money.

Access and use

A needs analysis of the client group should be carried out and results implemented in order that services are accessible and usable for clients.

Client and community advice in the setting-up stages can help to

- overcome resistance and suspicion of new services
- approach community and individuals in ways that help their active involvement
- identify any unique needs and build a service accordingly.

Suitable language, access and cultural sensitivity (for example to religious practices) is essential.

For some clients, special attention needs to be paid to encouraging their attendance and participation. There are examples of

- assistance with transport
- regular contact and encouragement to attend
- active participation in peripheral activities such as meal preparation for the participating group
- practical assistance to address the immediate needs of the client
- provision of services at certain times of day : in the evening, or during school hours for example
- provision in accessible locations.

Specialists

Provided the core advisor skills are not reduced, diluted or opposed, specialists can help organisations respond to specific needs. Specialist staff or support workers or other professionals may be able to underpin an otherwise generic service. However, great care must be taken that the apparent authority of professionals (medical or otherwise) does not over-ride the primacy of advisor skills, the focus on the labour market, and putting the client's own wishes and circumstances first.

What need is to be met should be discovered by analysing with clients or client representatives or community the specific issues and circumstances they face.

Some projects have reported good results from including employer specialists among their staff teams. The benefits have not been confirmed by rigorous testing, but it seems possible that may be an effective way to concentrate resources on employers. However, it should add to and not diminish the awareness of client advisors about their local labour market and its employers.

Staff skills & training

Several, and among them the most well-researched, studies emphasise the importance of staff (advisors and trainers) being fully trained in the skills and procedures that apply in the programme.

We would add that the skills of advisors and trainers should have priority over the procedural knowledge that is required. The skills applied by trainers and advisors in the professional relationship with clients are significant directing and facilitating influences on each client's decisions, learning and action. The procedural matters have relatively little influence on client development.

For example, Field (1998) notes : '*Staff development to promote self-determination includes:*

- *introducing staff to the concept of self-determination and an understanding of the component skills;*
- *providing staff with the opportunity to further develop component skills of self-determination (e.g, self-awareness, assertive communication, decision-making, goal setting) for themselves;*
- *providing an awareness of instructional materials and strategies to promote self-determination with students;*
- *and providing staff with support for addressing how self-determination can be infused into existing curricular efforts*.'

Failure to provide staff who are well-trained in the key advisor skills (described below) will result in a programme that may do harm to some individuals, damaging their confidence, using time they could have spent looking for work, wasting money in addition to not achieving the goals for which it aims.

Examples of the level of detail required for training staff may be found in the '*Changing wonky beliefs training program*' and in the *Trained trainers JOBS manual*. Our personal experience is that, with honourable exceptions, this goes far beyond what is usually provided in employment programmes.

Selection, profiling

Five main approaches may be taken to selecting clients for services:

<u>Duration of unemployment</u>: This is administratively simple, and results in a 'density' of people with disadvantage in the labour market (more or less as we have defined it) that increases with increasing duration of employment. However deadweight remains a problem at all durations but the most extreme. Programmes may in consequence be tempted to regard the easy-to-employ clients as successes when in fact they are succeeding in spite of rather than because of the programme. Duration of unemployment is the preferred approach of many public employment services.

<u>Profiling</u>: Profiling attempts to determine the likelihood of a person being at risk of long term unemployment by comparing a selection of their personal characteristics to a sample. Typical characteristics used are age, education, housing tenure, language, ethnicity, previous work experience. There are issues of equity and probity in allocating services on measures such as these, but, leaving them aside, profiling has proved difficult to do accurately or at reasonable cost. The goal would be for a profiling system to be more discriminatory than the duration of unemployment, with lower risks of false positives and false negative allocation to programmes. But profiling is imprecise and tends to break down at the individual level and carries a great risk of mismatching clients to programmes unless thoroughly tested and evaluated against alternatives before implementation.

<u>Self-selection</u>: Volunteering (self selection) for programmes offers a good start; the lack of compulsion means that only those willing to engage come forward. It is strongly recommended for programmes of the Individual Placement and Support model for people with severe mental illness. Volunteering almost (but not quite) guarantees some respect for the right of the individual to determine their own life, and is inherently attractive. From the programme and advisors' points of view, willingness is a good asset. Volunteer programmes are much more comfortable than those in which clients are obliged to attend under threat of benefit payment sanctions. But self-selection may add to deadweight, if only those ready and able to get work come forward for help. Self-selection may also exclude the most disadvantaged since they are less

likely to come forward, but we have seen no research that establishes the facts. Where evaluation suggests that a client may not need the programme (they have the requisite skills and confidence to proceed unaided), it may be ethical nonetheless to allow them a choice about joining. To exercise that choice, they will need good quality information about the programme, about how their existing skills and confidence have been judged to be good enough, so that they can make a well-informed decision.

<u>Advisor-selection</u>: Advisors sometimes also refer clients to services, as is instanced by the Croatian PES and others in Europe. This approach offers flexibility and sensitivity that are welcomed by advisors, and we guess also to clients; but for public services, they carry risks. Inconsistent referrals - by single advisors, or comparing between them - may be made. Advisors' judgements may not be fair to all, and may show prejudice even while being good-willed. Advisors may attempt to apply criteria that are not explicit, but which include elements of the other selection methods inappropriately used and mixed.

<u>Labour market confidence</u>: A final approach to selection can be imagined, which addresses directly the need of the client, relating it directly to the service being offered. Measurement of labour-market ability and confidence has little or no presence in the research literature; but there is strong evidence from social learning theory that confidence for tasks in prospect is a good predictor of effort and success. We suggest that it should be possible to identify people in need of support to become effective in the labour market, at an early stage in their unemployment if necessary, by a short questionnaire that measures their self-efficacy for labour market activity. There is evidence that people with high levels of confidence in their efforts in the labour market can have their confidence reduced by participation in programmes, even in programmes that are effective for more disadvantaged clients. The prospect of selection on a labour market confidence measure might offer some reduction in this risk. We suggest that our proposal should be subject to high quality evaluation, as have other approaches, but have some confidence that by making a direct link between the selection tool and the programme to be offered and the outcome desired, greater accuracy may be attained.

Information sharing and co-ordination

There is evidence from some programmes that information sharing between all the various service providers and authorities (such as welfare, social services, housing, training and employment services) can be helpful in co-ordinating services to the benefit of clients. Conversely, there are frequent anecdotal reports of practical difficulties faced by clients because the various public services do not co-ordinate well. Information sharing and co-ordination of services is widely seen as an important function for advisors, and central to the ‘Case Management’ approach to service design. However, we have no direct evidence of its impact, but must rely instead on the common sense view that it is better to overcome and remove organisational obstacles than to let them remain. Of course, confidentiality has to be respected when sharing client information.

Record keeping

Record keeping is, in our view, mainly an 'inactive but 'essential' part of employment advice.

However, often enough, and rightly, records may be open for clients to see, and they may make useful contributions to them. Where this happens, records become part of the 'active ingredients': what is held there can influence clients’ decisions and action. Records, including assessment results and reports, therefore need to conform to the guidelines for all communication. In addition to being factually correct, they should be accessible and personal, and should provide positive feedback and support growing confidence.

Advisor Skill and activity

Advisor skill

The advisor skills that are effective in helping people gain work are mainly concerned with the personally-directed interaction between advisor and client(s).

We pay less attention to organisational and administrative or procedural matters, since

- they feature in successful programmes mainly in the design and preparatory stages, with implementation being fairly straightforward
- there is little evidence that administrative elements contribute to success, though we can surmise that failure to administer well can contribute to failure
- we expect advisors to be competent at the simple administration that is needed, or to find it quite easy to learn.

The successful programmes, as judged by randomised controlled trials comparisons, concentrate on interpersonal skills and interactions, on clients' learning activities and advisor / tutors' teaching methods, in the labour-market and employment context. Most studies have examined whole programmes, and from them we have to make the inference that it is their application of interpersonal skills and development processes that is effective.

This is reinforced by a few studies which have shown that techniques 'borrowed' from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) are effective, and that adding sessions on personal development that employ similar methods to existing programmes can enhance their effectiveness. For these reasons we feel that our conclusion is robust, but we would not go so far as to say that employment advice and CBT are the same. Two essential differences are that there is no element of therapy in employment advice; and employment advice focuses on competence in the labour market, not on generalised or other learning and development goals.

Our view is encouraged by articles such as the International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners (AIOSP 2003), and widened by suggestions (but not research studies) from professionals in the field, that methods drawn from Motivational Interviewing and from Solution Focussed Brief Therapy are helpful. Both describe techniques for interpersonal support of clients in co-operation, goal setting and action planning, and our view is that few practitioners would find significant objections to any of the suggestions.

We have concluded that skilled professional interpersonal support and communication is the most important active ingredient in employment and career counselling. Without it, good advice, sound knowledge and even focussed practice may fail. It is, we believe, the common facilitator of all the processes that lead to clients’ emancipation in the labour market.

Fidelity to a model of skills and methods

We have not concluded that advisors should adhere rigidly to any particular school of thought. They can, we believe, learn a great deal from guides and detailed fidelity manuals for most of the schools of counselling but these have not to our knowledge been detailed in employment advice settings, and additional study and research would be needed for a worthwhile fidelity scale to be established. That said, some of the better randomised controlled trials of successful employment programmes have published manuals that are worth study.

As an aside, we are tempted also to suggest that the differences between different kinds of counselling such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Solution Focussed Brief Therapy and Motivational Interviewing are less real than individual adherents and practitioners might say; and we would call in evidence research done many years ago which suggested that an eclectic approach to the use of skills in personal counselling was effective; that is to say, counsellors who learned from all the schools of thought did well in their work.

As a second aside, we can note that there are fashions and ideas in counselling practice, some of which promise valuable results from novel, or even long-standing, methods or ideas. Several of these have failed to stand up to rigorous scrutiny, though they may continue to exist. We concur with the view that any apparent effectiveness that is found will almost certainly be due either to placebo effects or to the application of the core skills within the method, and not to the other apparatus that surrounds the core skills.

What is ‘Guidance’?

The literature of Careers refers often to ‘Guidance’. The overlap of skills and activities between ‘Guidance’ and the task of enabling labour-market competence is large. Guidance has been described as '*much more than a face-to-face interview*'. The Standing Conference of Associations for Guidance in Educational Settings, UK, (1992) identified activities of guidance:

- Informing
- Advising
- Assessing
- Teaching
- Enabling
- Advocating
- Networking
- Feeding back
- Managing
- Innovation
- Systems change

And Ford in 2001 added

- Signposting
- Mentoring
- Sampling work experience or learning tasters
- Following up.
- From the evidence we have seen, each of these activities, possibly excluding systems change, requires expert inter-personal skills if they are to be done well.

Interpersonal communication skills

There is a little evidence for, and much general approval, of the value of expert interpersonal communication skills for advisors. The approval is strong in the programmes for which there is good evidence of success, and we see no reason to think this is an accident of chance. But for evidence of what works, we have to turn to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Solution Focussed Brief Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, and the extensive evidence that identifies Self-efficacy as a predictor of effort and success in working towards life goals. The aim of any of these methods includes changes in behaviour and belief, just as in employment counselling. It is an important to our analysis that

- programmes that show success in randomised controlled trials refer to, include, or make use of parts of the counsellor skills that have been studied in connection with these therapies
- we believe that the skills are directly transferable to employment advice, or indeed to any form of self-development and life-goal achievement. This belief is supported, though not proven, by many exemplars from coaching and mentoring in both employment and non-employment fields.

Listening and exploring

There are many and good texts to follow on advisor communication skills. Here we only summarise briefly.

Client-focus

Many texts refer approvingly to 'client-centred' or 'client-focussed' advice. What do these terms mean?

The term is meant in a general sense, to show that advisors should avoid imposing rigidly pre-determined solutions and recommendations. In contrast with this approach, we can note that in previous years, it was common in the UK for occupations to be recommended to people based on a standard evaluation of their condition: blind people were to become piano-tuners. Today the same approach can be seen in the ease with which manual workers are referred for computer training as part of their employment preparation, with relatively little attention to their actual desires or labour-market aims. Such practices ignore the wishes and skills of the clients. At policy level, some European welfare systems allocate people to employability-categories according to their disability, despite there being little and weak evidence of any correlation between disability and occupation. Deterministic and mechanical application of job-person matching systems also work against personal choice, though used sensitively and with attention to the client's own decisions, they can be a useful part of the advice toolkit. Preconceptions about possible jobs can also close down options for clients, as when advisors assume that people can only do the lowest paid lowest skilled jobs because they have a disadvantage. For example, migrants become taxi-drivers, injured but skilled labourers become car-park attendants, with no thought for their real talents or ambitions.

'Client-focus' is also used to mean that the client is active rather than passive in the working relationship with the advisor. The advisor's task is to help the client to explore, discover, evaluate, choose and decide on action, and not to do these things for the client. By making the client active, and encouraging their confidence to do things that may be new for them, the client's labour-market disadvantage is diminished. If the advisor acts for the client, or does so too much, their disadvantage is not diminished, and may even be made worse.

An ethical and effective service avoids these risks. Instead it pays attention to clients' preferences. As shown in Bond (2004), even clients with quite severe disadvantages can have their own preferences, respect for which is going to lead to job-search strategies that are easier and more confidence-building for the client. Burchardt (2005) reminds us that '*Support for entry to employment should start from the aspirations of the young person and not automatically downgrade to what is seen to be 'realistic' given their impairment*'. We agree, and think the same standard should be applied to all disadvantaged people.

Understand clients' situations and needs

Numerous researchers and theorists regard a full understanding of each client as essential. It enables the advisor to

- help the client choose their own direction
- see what resources and support might help
- appreciate their clients' decisions and their own way of reconciling life's inevitable difficulties and compromises
- see their talents and encourage their development
- understand and help them through setbacks and difficult times
- build a professionally trusting relationship that allows corrective feedback, information giving and teaching.

What is 'full' understanding? It is an appreciation, from the client's perspective of

those social and personal matters of any kind that impinge on work, and that the client chooses to share with the advisor

- all the influences that bear on the client
- their beliefs about work
- their institutional setting (welfare, tax, law, permits etc)
- their work-related skills, experience, knowledge, qualifications, including those that arise from non-work activity such as caring, hobbies and so on.

This may sound like a lot. In practice, a sufficient understanding is all that is needed. Understanding is not usually gathered all at once nor even at the beginning of an interaction: it develops with the client and advisors activities and professional relationship. The understanding of the advisor helps the client

- review their participation
- trust the advisor to be on their side, albeit conforming to the rules
- further explore their own world, experiences and preferences. The experience of exploration of problems, making choices and using resources may be new for the client. The advisor's expert for this activity can enable them to see their world and their choices more clearly, helping them to make difficult decisions and to resolve sensitive or difficult issues.

Active Listening

Active listening is the means for understanding the client and showing them respect and concern for their good. It is a skillful activity in which the advisor adapts to the client, and not a rote or rule-based procedure.

Active listening also supports the client's thinking by making their ideas, views and choices apparent: when the advisor reflects out loud on what has been said, the concretisation of the thinking process support further clarification, correction, and decisions.

Active listening is the skill of

- giving full and close attention, and showing the attention through both non-verbal and verbal communication
- setting aside or being silent about the advisor's thoughts, concentrating on the client
- understanding and sympathising with (not necessarily agreeing) the client's view
- showing that understanding by checking and reflecting back what the client has said.

Reflecting

Reflecting means the re-stating the client's own sayings, story or speech, so that they can

- hear that they have been listened to and understood
- think further about their ideas
- add more to their statements
- hear out loud decisions they are reaching

Refinements of reflection have been identified that help clients understanding and encourage thoughtful change:

- Simple reflection: acknowledging the client's statement and its meaning, feeling or perception.

  Repeating with re-phrasing what the client has said, perhaps including any clear emotional clues.
- Amplified reflection : exaggerating the client's position or point in an more extreme form, always with sympathy and without sarcasm or irony. The client may hear their position differently, and confirm or modify it.
- Double- sided reflection: Reflecting both sides of client's ambiguous or conflicting statements, always without sarcasm or irony, so they hear the conflict and can explain more or move to resolve it.
- Re-framing: expressing a reflection in a way that sets the problem or issue in a more helpful light, always acknowledging the clients point of view but offering a new interpretation or meaning.
- Summarising: reflecting a bundle of client's concerns, thoughts, ambitions, circumstances, so that they can hear the bigger story that they have been telling. Summarising helps to close a portion of conversation and move on.

Supporting change

For clients to move from being at a disadvantage in the labour market, to being able to compete equally with others demands that they make changes:

- changes in behaviours, for example from inactivity to active job seeking.
- changes in confidence about their ability
- changes in their knowledge about how to look for work
- changes in their priorities for life and desires for their own future
- changes to their domestic arrangements
- changes in their social environment and how they use it
- changes in their relation with the state and welfare and taxes.

Evidence from reviews of client experiences suggests that

- as an advisor focuses on feelings, insight, challenges, and change, the client experiences an increase in self-understanding, hopefulness, assumption of responsibility, and attainment of new perspectives
- thinking about career aspirations is a common element in effective career interventions
- feedback, encouragement, and positive reinforcement by the advisor help the client
- clients who feel they have been helped in both personal and career matters tend to be more satisfied with their experience than were those who had been helped in only one domain. However, we would caution against excessive efforts to help clients resolve non-work personal matters: ethics, privacy and professionalism must be maintained.

Selective Feedback

During conversations with clients, and during feedback within training or group events, advisors should focus on work, or the work-related effects. To do so helps clients evaluate their ideas and situations more and more in terms of work, rather less in terms of other personal priorities. The focus provided by feedback strengthens the habit of putting work first.

For example: a client might have several home commitments that seem to be obstacles to work. Feedback on their ruminations about them could take the form of 'It's good that we are looking at these issues in plenty of time to include them in plans for work.' This both acknowledges the commitments, and emphasises the importance of work, and provides positive approval.

Effective feedback is that which enhances confidence and enables clients to change their behaviours or thoughts. To be effective, feedback should be

- prompt: a delay reduces the effectiveness
- directly relevant to the practical matters at hand
- based on observable events, actions or facts, not on supposition
- given so as to encourage self-evaluation, for example, by asking the client for their own evaluation of what has happened
- be uncritical, in that it encourages thoughtful self-judgement, not the imposition of the advisor’s opinion (even if this is valid).

To achieve these qualities, advisors will do well to

- encourage clients to discuss their own actions and responses, and make their own judgements
- help the client to evaluate by observing and referring to observable facts that merit consideration
- help clients decide what action they will take following their feedback
- limit the number of items dealt with at one time – trying to deal with too many at once brings the risk of forgetting and confusion.

Cognitive Rehearsal

The rather elaborate title 'Cognitive Rehearsal' describes discussions in which a client is helped by the advisor to find ways to handle problems or situations. The client is encouraged to imagine a situation in advance, thinking about the details and consequences, and then to prepare responses. The preparation helps the client to be mentally resilient to unwanted events. The advisor helps the client by

- encouraging them to identify a difficult situation (for example a job interview)
- recognise possible difficulties (not being able to answer a question, being excessively nervous, sweating)
- encouraging them to think of ways to cope with the difficulty (practicing answers to questions out loud and silently, having practice interviews of progressive difficulty, choosing suitable clothes)

- encouraging them to think through a detailed plan of how to implement the coping mechanism (time and place of practice, whether alone or in company, attendance at interview training sessions, reviewing the wardrobe and buying new items)

Setting Aside

Clients often have many issues that occupy their thoughts almost simultaneously. For example, money, family, health, work and travel can each have an impact on life, and together present a confusing and difficult challenge that may be overwhelming. A useful technique for dealing with multiple problems is for the advisor to suggest that some are set aside for the moment. Usually it would be those less directly affecting employment. The advisor does not deny the problem, just suggests coming back to it later. This can have the effect of helping the client to deal with one thing at a time; sometimes the set-aside problem diminishes in importance, or a solution appears because a new perspective has been taken. The method has the effect of breaking down complex interactions into simpler issues that can be solved one at a time. The process of dividing problems up into their elements makes them more tractable, but no less real.

Magnify Discrepancies

Clients very often face quite difficult choices that point in different life directions. For example, a young parent may find it hard to choose between staying at home with little money and reliance on family, or going to work and having more money but also more stress and missing the children. There is a 'discrepancy' between the choices.

When exploring such apparent conflicts, clients may get into repetitive thinking, mixing up aims and obstacles and finding no firm ground on which to base a decision. Advisors, able to see the choices more clearly, can, after confirming through reflection and feedback that they have understood, emphasise, perhaps even exaggerate the different choices with their connected outcomes and values. This may help the client see the choice more clearly, and encourage them to make a decision or, equally useful, to explore the possibilities in a more concrete way.

Evaluate Alternatives

Clients often do not have a single unambiguous aim. They may be choosing between welfare and work; between different career choices; in some cases they may be not only choosing, but also balancing the requirements, as for example between family and work.

These competing aims should be evaluated by the client, the advisor helping them to explore and find out more. The goal for the advisor is that the client should

- do some exploration: active exploration (reading, visiting, finding out, trying things, networking, discussing....) helps clients in two ways: activity provides information they can use in their decision, and it encourages motivation towards the goals it serves, or at worst clarifies wrong choices. Well planned activity can also enhance self efficacy.
- make informed decisions: the advisor may provide information, or may help the client discover it for themselves
- make personal decisions: the client makes their own choice, and is allowed time to reach it
- manage uncertainty: decisions do not come quickly nor easily. A supportive advisor will help the client live with the inevitable uncertainties.

Challenging

Clients, and employers too, often have beliefs that are inappropriately hostile to employment. For example, they may believe that there are no jobs available; that they cannot compete for a suitable job. Employers may hold unverifiable beliefs, such as assuming that people who have been out of work for a longer time are all unskilled or unsuitable. The literature in the field of economics concerning employers' beliefs about long-term unemployed people, and the impact on 'employability' is not clear on the extent of this factor: employer's beliefs are widely held to be a factor in prolonging unemployment, but the case is not fully decided.

These beliefs often go along with matching behaviours. Clients don't look for work because they believe it is not available; employers reject long-term unemployed people and try only to employ recently unemployed or still-employed people. The beliefs and behaviours get in the way of finding suitable work. They can be barriers to competing for work and to success. Advisors will have to challenge them and change them.

Challenge is most successful when:

- it is done in a trusting relationship. Winning trust from clients and employers gives the advisor permission to make challenges without causing distress or anger
- it is not an argument, nor a statement of objection, nor that the client is wrong
- it is done gently. Overt, aggressive or dominating challenges tend towards resistance and loss of trust
- the challenge can be invoked from the client – they challenge themselves
- it is based on action as well as conversation, so that experience contributes to changing ideas.

Exploration and appreciation of the client's situation beliefs and behaviours is essential before challenges are made. For example, a client in an area of structural unemployment such as follows closure of a major local employer, will probably know many unemployed people, including among their family and friends. Their social circle will influence their thoughts, perhaps suggesting that there are no jobs available – which may be true in comparison with earlier times. Challenging the client to move home to where there are more jobs is unlikely to work on its own. In this case, making a gentle challenge might take the form of exploring with the client

- what kinds of jobs are still around in the locality, and whether they are suitable, why not, what skills are needed and so on
- and accepting the proposition for the time being, but not letting it overwhelm the discussion.

Getting the client to challenge themselves is helpful. Clients' beliefs are sometimes based on exaggerations or incomplete appreciation of the situation. An advisor can explore in more detail, allowing the client to uncover more accurate truths for themselves. These developments in their thinking can help isolate problems and move towards realistic solutions.

Problem solving and barriers to work

In the literature attention is paid to 'work barriers'. The words are used to refer to diverse personal and institutional problems that may stand between a person and the possibility of work, while not being directly about work-skills, job search competence and so on. Examples include such things as childcare, mental and physical health, transport, financial strain, welfare and taxation regulations. Lee & Vinokur (2007) report that '*work barriers had a net adverse effect on employment outcomes, controlling for job search self-efficacy and employment intention*' and call for suitable resources and services to help overcome them.

Such problems or barriers have different effects on different people. For example it has been recorded that financial strain may be debilitating for one person, but motivating for another. And people may be found in work who have the same barriers to overcome as similar people who are not in work.

The advisor may need to explore the issues and their effects on the individual client, helping them to work around or resolve them. Building up a client's resources and confidence to work round their problems is a useful part of an employment plan. As with all other aspects of the plan, it should be based on client's needs and their own informed evaluations, not on a routine reaction to circumstances.

Working on solutions to barriers or problems is certainly desirable, but it is not an end in itself. They should be resolved so as to encourage activity directed to getting suitable work. If the resolution of barriers becomes the only purpose, there is a risk of delaying the client's getting into work. This is a common issue with programmes that routinely provide vocational skill training before job-search. Evidence shows that job search need not be delayed, and job outcomes are often best served by prompt job-search, with training following after. That is not to say that vocational training is without value – far from it – but it should be provided in the context of a work-plan that has early employment as a key goal.

Helping the client look for solutions is more effective than classifying problems as difficult or insurmountable. The effective advisor helps the client find their own solutions:

- prompting clients for their own ideas on how to tackle problems

- avoiding direct advice if the client is able, maybe with help or guidance, to create their own solution
- using a co-operative approach. The client who feels that the advisor understands and accepts the problem as they themselves see it is more accepting of efforts to resolve it
- by offering advice mainly when they have information, contacts or sources of help that would not normally be within the client's reach, and which the client may not need often in future.

Problem solving is helped by

- Innovation 'Standard' approaches – such as workplace adaptations, training courses, specialist services and so on, are sometimes absent, too slow, or too costly in effort, time and money. Provided the advisor works ethically and understands the fine detail of the problem (and any potential solution such as a proposed workplace or job) they can work with the client to find ready-to-hand simpler solutions
- Prompt solutions Placing non-work activities between the client and their work-goal introduces delay and risk of failure. Delay in going back to work should always be justified by definite gains that exceed the additional costs and risks
- A flexible approach within the bounds of ethics, is desirable. Rules controlling the advisor's work are not to be broken lightly, and only with permission and managerial support. But rigid adherence to rules can close off successful and valid interventions
- Divide problems into smaller elements. Problems often seem too big and daunting for the client to overcome. To tackle them all at once risks failure and loss of confidence. Advisors should help clients to slice problems into smaller elements that they can tackle easily
- Suspend big issues while smaller ones are tackled Advisors can help clients by recognising and describing big problems, and suspending decisions while easier issues are tackled
- Unforeseen outcomes or events interrupt well-laid plans. Advisors do well to prepare clients for the unforeseen, and to be present, practical and encouraging when things change.
- Researching new problems and solutions is part of an advisor's work. They will usually encourage the client to do this work for themselves as part of their development and confidence building, but also may use their own specialist contacts, networks and information as a resource to find new options.
- Offering examples and guidance can help clients who may not have the experience or imagination to devise their own solutions
- Reviewing progress as soon as possible and providing positive feedback, as much for effort as for results, keeps the client on track and active.

Action Planning

Advisors work with clients to create plans of action leading to a career, a job, or steps towards one.

While plans are often thought of as complete and decisive, often enough circumstances are not so clear as to allow final decisions. But action should not be delayed in the hope that clarity will be achieved.

Action by clients has an effect on their morale, wishes and ambitions, and on their beliefs about the future; so it has to be carefully planned, even in circumstances when the whole picture is not yet clear.

Careful application of the later section on self-efficacy is important to ensure that plans are achievable and help to build confidence. Thoughtful planning includes even quite small activities that are intended to clarify, explore, and build confidence, as well as or before 'larger' events and goals.

For employment and career advisors, plans have a clear focus on career goals. Even when these goals are still vague, jobs and careers are a guiding force.

Clients should be and feel that they are the leaders of their own plans. However, many clients have no experience of career planning. So the advisor should

- base the discussion on thorough exploration of clients' wishes

- help clients bring their own ideas and proposals into the plan by asking open and leading questions such as 'so how would you set about...?', 'tell me how you think you could...?'; 'what do you need to find out about....?'
- provide information after checking that clients do not yet have it or know about it. This is done so as to avoid taking the initiative away from clients
- capture clients' suggestions during conversation, when clients might not have appreciated their impact: for instance, a reference to a family member who is at home might prompt a question about childcare, which leads a client to a solution and action
- prompt clients to make the plans concrete and detailed and in a sequence
- summarise clients' plans explicitly and provide chances to change them or agree.

SMART Plans

It is popular to use the SMART acronym to describe effective plans. The acronym has several variants, but the main idea is that good plans are:

- Specific - they go in the right direction and are concerned with detailed goals and concrete action
- Measurable - you can tell when each piece is done, and whether it is successful, and how much has been achieved
- Achievable - each part can be achieved. This is important for clients with low self-efficacy, since success will build their confidence and failure may damage it. Dividing a plan into suitably small segments can help
- Relevant - the action is directed towards the relevant overall goal and circumstance
- Timebound - it has a timescale - which may be today, tomorrow , or in the more distant future. The further away, the greater risk of the plan being overtaken by life events.

FOGGY plans

In our view, SMART plans are a good, even essential ingredient of an employment project. But what when things are really uncertain? Forcing a client to make a SMART plan may led them to inevitable disappointment. In these situations, action is still called for. From our own experience, we would suggest that SMART plans can be helped by the inclusion of what we choose to call 'FOGGY' goals[5]:

- Flexible. They change as the client and advisor have experiences, discover their preferences and progress to knowing and stating their wishes with greater clarity.
- Organising. Plans and goals may change, and they develop with experience. But they always they have an organising function: activities are purposeful, and directed towards the main end, even if the details are still unclear. Reviews are carried out to clarify more and more detail.
- Going forward. Not knowing all the details does not mean being aimless! The aim is to be employed, to earn an income, to be involved in the economy. Activities should contribute to furthering that aim, rather than just filling in time.
- Gathering experience and information. People often need information to help them make decisions. Their experiences help them decide what matters to them, what can be achieved, and how to evaluate their information. Before achieving concrete results, planned activity enables clients to get the experiences they need to become self-directing. For example, work-experience in employers' businesses can lead either to confirmation of job choice, or to rejection of it: both are useful.
- Your client's, not yours. The client must feel the plan is helpful and desirable for them. It must suit their frame of mind. It needs to be achievable for them, whatever the actual demands of the situation. Skillful advisors help clients discover and create their own plans. Plans that present the desires and expectations of the advisor without the client's commitment and preferably their active creativity are less likely to command effort from the client.

[5] We should point out that the inclusion of Foggy Goals in our text is based on personal experience not evidence from studies.

Review

Plans, however small, should be reviewed at every meeting. That means the advisor should

- ask the client about their activity
- respond with understanding, sympathy and support
- provide positive feedback
- answer questions
- help make changes and adjustments.

Providing information

Clients' ability Clients who can find out information for themselves are better able to develop their careers than those who cannot. Wherever possible, advisors should show and help clients to gather their own information, helping them to learn the thought processes and activities involved.

Urgent and one-off Some information is however quite specialised and unlikely to be easily available to a client at any time (for example, the name of a contact in a public office). Other information may be needed only once, or is needed urgently, and so delay would be wrong (for example about regularising residence permits). In these cases the advisor should provide information as part of their service.

But advisors should also always check that the client

- needs the information
- would like to have it now
- can use it.

These checks, taking the form 'it sounds as if you could use ... now, can I help with that or would you like to think about it later?' avoid the risk of the advisor taking responsibility away from the client and the risk of diminishing their confidence.

When offering information, it must be in a form that is accessible and usable by the client. This will include various aspects including

- location: where is the information, how can the client have access to it?
- media used: can the client make use of the media – can they read, for example, or use the internet?
- language: can the client understand. This may be a matter of complexity, of jargon, or of mother-tongue comprehension.
- complexity: can the client use the information at an intellectual and practical level that is within their grasp?
- pressure of time or understanding: has the client sufficient time and opportunity to access, understand and reflect on the information?

Focus on sustainable work

Work is the focus of attention

That advisors should focus on work may seem obvious. But in the flow of conversation, while building a trusting relationship, understanding the complexities of clients' lives and considering the powerful influences of welfare and social circumstance, it is easy to lose the purpose:- to help the client be labour-market capable, and to make choices about work. Advisors should use work as the focus around which necessary exploration of other issues takes place.

Advisors' and clients' beliefs

Clients' belief that they can work at something that suits their abilities and circumstances affects their activity in job-search. Clients who do not believe that they can find suitable work, or indeed any work, are less likely to plan constructively and to commit effort and time to job search. Positive and realistic beliefs are associated with more determined and specific efforts.

Advisor's beliefs may also act as an influence on their clients perhaps by colouring their use of words, their tone of voice and the conviction with which they pursue work options. Advisors should be aware that many people living in and with conditions that they associate with disadvantage, are able to work. Advisors who also know examples of people in work who have something in common with their current clients are equipped with facts that can be persuasive.

Beliefs that support positive work outcomes include:

- Suitable work is good for health, income and social life[6]
- There are suitable jobs
- There is competition for jobs
- Employers are the solution
- Work has more than monetary value.

Conveying beliefs is often implicit and unspoken but represented in the direction and assumptions of the conversation. Conveying beliefs, motives and methods of working can also be explicit, and explained, so that the client has an opportunity to challenge, to share evidence. Sharing of advisor beliefs with the client has several advantages:

- the professional relationship is clear to the client. This helps them retain their own decision making power, and to decide to agree or disagree with the advisor's beliefs
- the approach is ethical because the advisor is neither hiding a belief nor the evidence: no covert persuasion is being applied
- The advisor's genuineness and appropriate self-disclosure encourages trust and self-disclosure by client.

Advisors should use appropriate, understandable examples that illustrate the strength of their beliefs, However, only those that are relevant to the client should be used, and only when the client is receptive.

<u>Sustainable work</u>

For many clients, the goal will be to gain an approximately suitable job as soon as possible. That is perfectly reasonable. Clients under pressure to earn and be occupied, or under the restricted choices in a local labour market, can decide to take a job that is not their ideal. What matters is that they are making their own informed choice.

Advisors may also be under some pressure to place a client in whatever work is immediately available. This happens most in employment advice where there is an 'outcome payment' to the advice-provider that is withheld until the client is employed.

However valuable these immediate outcomes, they are much enhanced if the client is enabled, through labour-market capability, to manage their own future work, and to find not just immediately-available work, but also a long term job that is suitable and permanent, and to do so with confidence to undertake future change, new jobs & new career directions.

Evidence from good quality randomised controlled trials strongly supports that in the long-term, that is to say at one year and two year follow up, the well designed projects that include skilled advisors and group leaders can result in longer duration of employment and higher salaries than others. However, most trials also show a falling-off in the number and quality of results with the passage of time after conclusion of labour-market training or advice. That said, many reports do not provide evidence of long-term effects, and comparisons or conclusions are difficult to draw.

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[6] This proposition is strongly supported by high quality evidence from around the world, both in the positive sense of benefit from suitable work as compared with unemployment, and the negative sense of the disadvantage and damage associated with unemployment. The direction of cause between ill-health and unemployment is not always clear, but evidence points to a decline in mental health and perceived well-being soon after becoming unemployed.

Long term gains, short-term employment

Looking to the long-term can introduce options for major skill-development and vocational training for clients. There is some evidence that vocational skill development is encouraging and helps overcome believed weaknesses. In the case of ex-offenders, for example '*offenders who were interviewed for this research tended to feel most encouraged and enthusiastic about job seeking following the successful acquisition of recognised 'high status' vocational qualification, that directly qualified an individual for a specific trade, a good example was an HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicle) licence. ...providers generally shared this view, if an offender could earn a qualification that directly qualified them for something, that was a good route into paid work*.'

However, a large body of research on the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model indicates that time spent on preparatory activities delays job entry, and may not enhance the results, for people with severe mental health problems. The place-then-train approach was more successful for this group, as we may imagine it will be for many clients. Bond (2004) reported that:

- *'Strong evidence, including direct experimental and quasi-experimental studies (showed that)*
- *Specific targeted efforts toward competitive employment are more effective than indirect strategies;*
- *Day treatment, sheltered employment, and other approaches lacking an competitive employment focus, do not contribute to, and may interfere with, the goal of competitive employment;*
- *Competitive employment outcomes are more desired and more recovery oriented than other forms of paid employment.*'

The research does not distinguish whether these results apply uniformly between different social groups.

Advisors should therefore be cautious about delaying job-entry, and about commissioning or suggesting lengthy training and skill-development. A client's confidence to undertake such training, the clarity of the job goal and relevance of the training will need to be weighed up while the client makes their decision. As far as mental health is concerned, the evidence shows strongly that early entry to work is more desired and more effective than prolonged preparation.

Job-capability match

Clients' abilities need to match the demands of the job. Clients may need to

- work out how well the job suits them by comparing their desires and strengths to its demands
- find any areas of development or training they should undertake
- recognise job requirements that are essential, and those that are optional.

Advisors need to help clients recognise their talents and strengths.

What are these strengths? Almost any experience or action by a client reveals something valuable about them, so nothing can be ruled out. All of the client's experience is useful, whatever its success or whatever its purpose or history. People differ, in their qualities , in the degree of ability and confidence, and in their desire to face new challenges. Knowing about these things is useful to the advisor because it helps the search for suitable job matches with the client. It is even more helpful for the client, who may use it to illuminate their journey through the labour market.

Skills No-one is without skill. Even the simplest operation requires some understanding and ability to manipulate self and the world to achieve something. It may help to think of skills in four groups:

- basic skills are required very widely indeed. Communication in a suitable way, interpersonal and social interaction are examples. Others are basic arithmetic, measuring, reading, and writing in your native tongue. Some commentators include simple computer skills, the ability to use common technologies, or to drive ordinary vehicles. Not all jobs need all the basic skills, but not having them narrows the opportunities
- vocational skills are those that are required for a specific job. They often have the same name as the job – woodworking, call-centre operating or engineering for example. However these names

often conceal a large number of sub-skills, many of which can be applied in different jobs. For example, using hand power tools is normal for woodworkers, and also for plumbers. But plumbers need some different skills from woodworkers too. Vocational skills can be both specific to a job, or transferable between jobs

- Specific skills are unique to the job: for example sewing shirt collars and cuffs; surveying and levelling building sites; surgical operations; software design
- Transferable skills are those that can be used in several occupations. All the basic skills are transferable. Examples of some transferable skills are bookkeeping, report writing, customer liaison, driving. On close examination, many vocational skills contain transferable skills, so it is useful to help clients discover their skills in detail, as what was learned for one occupation may be suitable for another. For example, sewing machinists are good at rapid highly quality machine operation needing hand, foot and eye co-ordination; surveyors are good at methodical procedures associated with numerical records and calculations; surgeons have good hand-eye co-ordination and work in a team using mixed professions' judgements to ensure safety to life; software designers are good at applying complex rules in novel ways while respecting protocols.

Character and personal traits. The client's personal approach to life is an asset that they can use in future work. The way a person behaves may make them suited to some occupations more than others. There are numerous examples of systems that are supposed to measure and match personality traits to occupations. Those that are well researched and based on good statistical evidence are worth considering as additional tools for the client and advisor. But there are many, including some that have long histories, for which the evidence of effectiveness is weak, missing, or not supportive.

Knowledge. Knowledge does not in itself tell you how to do something (excluding the 'knowledge about how to do it….'). But it can be valuable. Knowing an industry, knowing people, knowing about things, about rules and even knowing how much more there is to know can all be valuable. Active acquisition by the client of knowledge and experience is a valuable component in employment advice and support, for example through work experience placements, employer visits and similar first-hand experience.

Qualifications. Most people have qualifications. The higher they are – on average but not always – the more likely they are to influence the choice of job. Ordinary age 15-16 school qualifications on their own can help clients explore their wishes ('so you liked sport and drama; are they things you still like?') and higher qualifications can point in definite directions ('so, a degree in Architecture. Is working with buildings an attractive option?') but are not guaranteed. The point is that the qualification is an asset. So too is the effort and skill required to gain it.

Social and work networks. Since many, perhaps most, jobs are gained through word of mouth, social and professional contacts are valuable resources. So too is the basic ability to acquire and maintain those contacts. Activities that enhance social networks are valuable to clients and job seekers, the more so as there are frequent reports that social networks and contacts tend to decline during a period of unemployment.

Professional standing. Formal membership of a profession is clearly an asset. But so is 'standing' – the status given by being a professional person, that fits you for the social milieu and gives you recognition of your competence.

Experience. Clients' experiences in and out of work make them unique and valuable. Someone who has been out of work for a long time, but managed to maintain a family home has proved their ability to live and cope through hardship. They may well have skills and wisdom that would not be shown by a CV that concentrates only on their work.

Experience in work also provides a firm foundation for clients to assess their own abilities and skills (see above). Many clients, specially those from occupations of low social standing , have never attempted to recognise, categorise or value their skills. An advisor can help clients to examine their abilities in detail, and to recognise their talents. This may be in unexpected ways, and should include social and personal talents as well as direct operational abilities.

Some clients lack confidence in their own abilities and experiences. They may be unaware, or find it hard to identify them. Some of the reasons for clients' own skill-blindness are:

- generalising: being unskilled in one area makes the client feel they are totally unskilled, as though the weakness spills into other areas. Advisors may overcome this by separating the areas and discussing the skillful ones positively
- failure to see: clients simply may not recognise skills. They may see a qualification without seeing the skills, for example being a butcher but not valuing the inherent safety and hygiene ability
- difficulty describing skills: few clients have had to describe their own skills, so weakness may be more apparent than real, reflecting their own lack of descriptive ability. This is often the case with manual jobs that do not include high level communication skills. But this isn't a universal trait
- the influence of others: other people may tell the client that they are unskilled. It might be family, friends, society at large , anything that leads the client to feel that way. For example, low status occupations are popularly believed to be low in skill, but this is not always true. And though they may be skills that are low status or easy to acquire, they are still skills and abilities and strengths. Identifying these influences can help clients value their abilities.

To support clients' discovery of their skills and strengths:

- praise: state the skill or ability. Say that it is good, high-level and valuable. You do not need to exaggerate, or not much! Building drains is as important for human life as running hospitals
- feedback: for clients to hear what they have told you confirms that it is their own resources and abilities that are being praised, not some abstract thing about them
- emphasise achievement. Emphasising achievement reinforces its value to the client
- emphasise effort. The effort people make is essential to their future success, and being able to make an effort is an asset in itself
- analyse previous achievements and pick out transferable, basic vocational and specific skills and other personal resources.

Advisors must remember that they should not apply psychometric or aptitude tests, nor proprietary careers selection guidance procedures and databases unless they have approval from the manufacturer, distributor or accrediting body.

Missing Skills

Clients may not need to begin their job search by spending time learning new skills; and skills that seem important in theory may in practice be less essential. For example, it is common enough for new migrants to have driving jobs (taxis, buses) that on the face of it need language skills in which they are weak. It might be better if they had improved language, but it is not an absolute barrier to be weak in it.

However, some skills are definitely required. To get them, clients may need preparatory training, short or long. In that case the advisor should check the client's confidence and ability to complete the training, treating the training period with as much attention as they would starting a new job.

The unique job

Each job is unique. Its social and physical environment, its demands of skill and knowledge should be explored in as much detail as possible.

Often a job descriptions will reveal little about how to do a job and what is entailed in day to day work. Most are too general, and some even obscure important aspects of work in jargon. They should be used with care. Employers sometimes produce 'person specifications'. Like job descriptions, these may not reflect the job reality, or only aspects of it.

Job databases such as O*net can be useful helping people explore job options provided they are confident and competent computer users. Again it must be emphasised that catalogues and databases do not describe actual local jobs, but stylised and average occupations. Advisors should spend time exploring real jobs with clients, getting to know the detail that makes them unique. An inquisitive interest in workplaces and occupations is to be encouraged.

<u>Reality checking</u>

Clients often lack a wide knowledge of jobs. They have ideas that seem sensible enough, but which are not based on accurate information. Checking their wishes by reviewing jobs and their talents will help check that their goals can be achieved. Advisors can help clients do this exploration, and advisors' knowledge of the labour market can also help clients to find out if the desired job is actually available.

Advisors taking clients through this process can help clients learn to do their own 'reality checking'. This can be done in conversation, by exploring facts and information sources, and also through clients activities during their action plan.

<u>Over-confidence</u>

A few clients may appear to over rate their skills or their capability to do things. This can be a challenge for advisors:

The advisor may be wrong. Perhaps the client really is more competent than the advisor thinks.

The advisor might have inadvertently led them to believe in more capacity than they have. This could happen when positive feedback creates an exaggerated reaction.

The client may not know about the conditions and requirements of the job. The advisor can help the client explore the realities of the job, help gain a clearer perspective. In the end, it is the client's right to choose; the advisor should provide them with information and tools to make the choice.

An ambitious job goal may not be impossible, but may be helped by choosing steps towards it - entry level jobs leading to higher jobs - and planning accordingly.

Lack of personal insight or mental capacity to judge can be involved. To some extent we all have this, but it can be severe in some individuals.. It may be such that the client cannot appreciate complex realities. In this situation the advisor may want to check with a qualified colleague about the extent of the client's understanding. They can use the ambitious goal as a spur to action that leads towards it, with a satisfying job to be found along the way.

Employers

The research literature on career and employment counselling has very little scientific study of employers' needs and how to engage them. This lack will not deter us from considering how they might be involved, but it does limit the evidential value of what we say, leaving it on the same level as other commentators' remarks.

That said, it seems beyond dispute that a connection to and participation with employers should be a positive contributor to reducing discrimination and disadvantage, if for no other reason than that every time a client successfully wins and does a job, an employer is involved; the employer's satisfaction with the outcome is required; their dissatisfaction is to be avoided.

What follows is our understanding of current effective practice.

Why employers matter

Employers matter to employment programmes because:

- their behaviour defines how the labour market operates
- their businesses are the source of vacancies
- their vacancies and the jobs they lead to are the careers about which advisors offer advice
- employers are not perfect recruiters. Employment programmes can help them do better
- employers' opinions about what they want from their employees can be inaccurate and erratic, but it is useful in helping employment advisers respond to their needs

There is strong evidence from disability employment programmes that getting people into jobs quickly is in the longer term better than delaying job entry by providing lengthy preparatory training.

There is anecdotal evidence that programmes that have close links to local employers are good at filling employers' vacancies and they succeed by

- designing local programmes to suit the real and probable jobs that will arise
- putting clients in touch with employers
- helping clients tailor their decisions and their job-seeking behaviour to the employers' recruitment practices and to the jobs that are available.

Labour market knowledge

To overcome labour market disadvantage, clients need to know about their chosen or local labour market. To start with, they should be encouraged to choose job targets that are consistent with their personal aims, situation and priorities. This personal relevance will help them feel comfortable and be active. The choices they make can change as they discover more, and the advisor has a role to help them in that exploration and decision process.

Statistics

There are many examples of programmes using statistical information about the labour market, mainly during bidding and programme design stages. Such information is helpful in comparing the market between different areas and can contribute to an overall understanding of the market.

However, statistical information by its nature conceals important concrete events in any locality. Valuable information that is often missing from official statistics includes:

- which employer is recruiting,
- how they recruit
- what jobs are actually available now or likely to become available in the near future
- to what degree turnover in employment creates regular job offers
- what changes will take place in local small or large employers
- how jobs are structured and what sort of employment contracts or agreements are offered.

Advisors and specialist employer-liaison people who build working relationships with local employers are better able to benefit their clients than those who rely on statistics alone.

Programme design can encourage employer links, and with positive co-operation very high levels of work-placement can be achieved. We have seen occasional examples of 100% placement rates.

Skills to acquire knowledge

Labour market knowledge changes rapidly: firms change, managers change, employer habits change. Firms open and close, technical changes affect work, the overall economy affects recruitment and dismissals. Advisors can usefully have, and keep up-to-date, their own knowledge and contacts, which provide a valuable resource for immediate application with clients seeking work.

Clients will, in the longer term, have to be able to find things out for themselves, if they are to overcome disadvantage. Advisors should therefore encourage work plans that include clients discovering for themselves.

Knowledge about work that is available should include information on how employers recruit, and how any competition for work takes place. Very often the competition is by interview, but personal choice, 'head-hunting', and whoever turns up are all common too. Methods vary from sector to sector, from profession to profession , between firms in one profession or sector. Very precise and detailed information is needed. Armed with this, clients can acquire and practise the skills needed to get a job. This may – for example – include, networking, reading specialist trade journals, visiting employers, talking to specialists in the field. To get the detail they need to compete, clients should be looking at specific locations, professions, occupations, and employers. This discovery process may be new to them, so advisors should be ready to coach and help them, encouraging them to become more confident and capable as they gain experience.

Time spent finding out about, but then rejecting, jobs is not wasted: it develops skills and awareness.

Labour Market knowledge rest upon the understanding that the advisor has of their immediate economic environment. We should not mistake the resulting information for the active skill that the advisor needs, and can be readily acquired by 'walking their patch' and getting to know local people. Time spent in the field with employers, devoted to marketing and to understanding how the service serves them should not be skimped; without it advisors and their clients will be relying too much on guesses, too little on knowledge.

<u>The difference between a job description and a job analysis</u>

Knowing employers well enough to be able to assess actual job-content in addition to official job descriptions enables advisors to help both clients and employers to reach concrete recruitment decisions that are sensitive to nuances in work patterns and demands. Knowing the locality and the employer can help advisors to be sensitive to the important cultural and social content of jobs and of recruitment decisions, and act accordingly.

Job descriptions and person-specifications are usually poor descriptions of the actual environment, activity and performance requirements. Advisors should study the job as it is actually carried out, and not just as described in official papers. They may want to

- visit and observe
- take evidence from experts or specialists
- discuss with first-line supervisors
- observe similar activities and jobs elsewhere.

It is important that the client is able to do the job as it actually is, with whatever adjustments and aids have been agreed with the employer. This information will also be invaluable in deciding what adaptations, adjustments or aids can be called into play.

In discussion with the employer information of this kind provides a concrete basis for showing that your client can do the job. Detailed understanding supports innovative thinking and encourages practical problem solving with the individual employer and clients.

Understanding the employer's business

Some understanding of the employer's business is important: the employer is not there just to employ people: they have an ulterior purpose, and work under specific conditions and requirements. Knowing, at least in outline, how these matters apply to the employer helps the advisor to

- ensure the client is able to perform the job
- recognise elements of the work that are fixed and unchanging
- recognise things that can be flexible, can be adjusted, or are less critical
- evaluate non-performance matters, like the social setting, the environment, traditions, and take them into consideration.

Skills, attitudes and sometimes even personality have to be matched to what employers want. New recruits need to be able to do what is required of them, and to be dedicated employees. So the client and advisor need to get evidence of practical success, ideally from work in the same field, to support their application for the job, and to help them compete for it. Where the client has no evidence of work in the same field or type of job, the advisor can help them to recognise relevant experience and skills from other occupations. Where, as may often be the case, the employer believes that specific skills and job experience are required, where in fact they are desirable but not essential, the advisor can help the employer see the clients relevant talents, and may help the employer towards more open and effective recruitment criteria.

Employers may say they want certain things from employees, but advisors, not rejecting this advice at all, should nonetheless carry out their own assessment of what the job entails. Employers are not all trained to judge what is needed, and feeling that some answer is better than none may mention unhelpful generalities, when specific job skills are needed. Such phrases as 'soft skills', ‘basic skills’, ‘teamwork’ and 'motivation' are not uncommon. Faced with these vague statements, the advisor can discuss what examples the employer has, and so move to concrete behaviours and skills.

<u>Making a business case</u>

Often employers do not know – it is not their main business to know – the advantages of employing people. Such advantages can include for example

- cultural diversity that expands markets
- language skills
- new ways of doing things that can help productivity
- contacts with new potential customers
- improving community relations
- legislative requirements such as anti-discrimination law.

The commitment of disadvantaged people to work is often cited as a business advantage. We have seen little evidence either way on this, and feel it is best to work on individual's advantages rather than a supposed collective characteristic.

<u>Advance notice of vacancies and interview guarantees</u>

Many employers have frequently-occurring vacancies and know well in advance that new recruits will be needed. Advisors can work with the employer to map out the job requirements in detail, and prepare clients for the jobs. Asking the employer for a guarantee that they will interview these clients, maybe going as far as to guarantee jobs for those who are successful, can be helpful for both employer and clients, and are widely reported in the literature, though we know of no comparative studies.

Joint recruitment projects can be created where an employer is taking on a larger number of new employees. This happens when the open a new branch (perhaps a supermarket or office), when they occupy a new building, and so on. The work is the same as in advance recruitment, but with a larger number of future jobs all at one time, the advisor's organisation can and should make special efforts to help the employer, to prepare clients, to carry out community and organisational liaison. Instances of 100% success in job-filling have been recorded.

Disclosure

Legislation varies between countries concerning the rights and disclosure of personal matters in employment applications - such things as previous convictions, disability, previous employment, and gaps in employment. Advisors should be aware of the legislation, should know their own limits in giving advice (they may not be qualified to give advice on the law) and should discuss any disclosure with the client, who will make their own decision. If, and when, to disclose any disadvantage a client may have to an employer is much discussed. There is no generally accepted guidance, but on matters of voluntary disclosure advisors should bear in mind that

- early disclosure shows open-ness and may be taken as sign of trustworthiness. Late disclosure may have the opposite effect
- early disclosure shows that the client is self-aware honest and co-operative
- early disclosure helps the employer understand and make adjustments. Wherever there are real, practical difficulties about the recruitment process, they should be 'worked around' before the event or test takes place. Preparation and overcoming practical difficulties is essential.
- it is believed that early disclosure can lead to discrimination before the client has an opportunity to prove themselves. Concern that disclosure in CVs or advance letters may lead to rejection is neither supported nor contradicted by good evidence.
- when working for a group with distinct needs (such as ex-offenders for example) the advisor and their organisation can make contact with employers in advance of recruitment, and discuss any problems and issues, providing reassurance, information that encourages, and taking back to clients any concerns and advice.

For advisors working with groups of similar clients, the employer can be encouraged to take a positive attitude to the whole group. This is achieved by the advisor knowing the job details and understanding the business, and being felt to be an ally of the employer. Then the problem of disclosure is diminished in each individual case.

For advisors working with clients with differing personal situations, the question of disclosure should be discussed with each client in good time. The advisor can bring their knowledge of the employer into the discussion, and a personal decision can be reached.

Coordination

Employers do not usually know how to coordinate the work of various public agencies and NGOs, and have little desire to spend time on doing so. Advisors should take on this role as far as possible, and should make it easier for employers to navigate the waters. This role has been extended to encompass what some regard as a whole profession of 'case management'. We have seen no evidence for or against this professionalisation, but feel that the act of co-ordination is most likely to be a useful, even necessary, adjunct to the effective work (the active ingredient) by which the advisor helps the client to become self-confident and competent in the labour market.

Providing transitional and ongoing support

Many clients will need support from their advisor during the transition into work; some will need it for a longer time and some permanently. The nature of support can vary a great deal. The need should be assessed with the client, employer, line manager and work colleagues.

Changes to the social and home environment of clients during and after transition to work may also be important, and can call for support, or at least for solutions to domestic problems that might otherwise put difficulties in the way of sustained employment. Childcare and travel are frequently-met examples, but we would not want advisors to limit their exploration and problem solving to any simple list.

Provision of support should be 'as much as necessary, as little as possible'. Advisors should aim for clients to become secure and independent, and where or until this is not completely possible they and their organisation should offer suitable support to employer and to client. To place a client unsupported in work risks:

- the client leaving and being disheartened
- the employer being dissatisfied and less co-operative in future
- client's work colleagues feeling let down.

Subsidy & fines

Some countries have legal requirements for employment of disabled people, with subsidies and fines imposed on employers under certain conditions. Advisors should be aware of how the system operates, and should help employers meet their obligations, always of course respecting propriety and ethical judgments. For example, if an employer opens only the lowest grade of job to disadvantaged people, and receives a subsidy for them, an advisor may feel that the state is subsidising continuing disadvantage. But if the employer opens up all grades, it would appear that they are making a genuine attempt at equality, even if they are unable to recruit. These are not simple questions: the right thing to do will need to be judged in each case. We note that comparative statistics on the employment of disabled people in various European countries do not readily demonstrate the superiority of any of the various policies on legislation, obligations, subsidies and fines.

Prejudice

Employers also sometimes show prejudice against some classes of clients. Advisors have also been known (anecdotally) to infer prejudice where employers are actually acting out of what they see as legitimate business interests. A close working relationship can ease discussions on these sensitive points, and helps the advisor become something of a champion for disadvantaged clients. Members of minority social groups and people with unusual personal characteristics may face discrimination, even hostility, in the labour market. They may also face exploitation by employers who see them as unable to object to illegal or unfair practices.

It has been much discussed that employers may consider long-term unemployment to be an indicator of a client's being unfit, unproductive or an unsuitable recruit. Actual evidence is on this is hard to find, but the idea is plausible and much discussed in economic literature on unemployment. If true, it is one of the mechanisms by which people become disadvantaged, and should be addressed:

- with employers, exploring and explaining and seeking solutions, for example the use of structured work experience to prove competence

- with clients, developing ways to overcome prejudice (such as early disclosure, open discussion, building evidence of performance capability)
- with clients, developing resilience against setbacks and alternative employment approaches such as self employment. Activities that develop resilience against setback and keeping going in the face of difficulties feature in several of the best researched and most effective employment programmes.

Preparation can include:

- support for the class or group by the advisor building constructive relations with local employers
- support for the individual by the advisor contacting the employer and setting doubts at rest before recruitment, explicitly addressing each employer's worries and providing reassurance
- information provided to future work colleagues on social, religious and dietary customs
- informing the client(s) about rights and legal protection they should have and how to enforce it
- analysing the job with client and employer to reassure both of suitability
- helping clients to think through the possible problems and to choose suitable courses of action
- reviewing any failures at job interviews (etc) with clients to identify both social and job-related reasons and how to act in future.
- recording hostile events and reporting them or acting to prevent repetition

Whenever possible advisors should work with employers to present arguments against discrimination, to seek out job vacancies and to build rapport. Such employer contacts can lead to preparation for jobs and for recruitment situations that is very closely aligned to employers methods and needs.

Job search skills training

The disadvantage experienced by clients may be because they lack enough ability, knowledge or practice at job search. Unless a person has the means to identify jobs, they do not reach the point of applying or competing for them.

<u>Structured practice and training</u>
Provision of practice and training in job-searching is a valuable part of an anti-disadvantage programme. Knowing how to look for a job is helpful as is being confident and fluent in job search methods. Clients often need support and encouragement while they practice looking for work. Their support and the methods they use need to be structured: in a randomised controlled trial (Hatala 2007) a 'job search management system' was added to the program that social assistance recipients normally received. The findings were:

'A positive correlation between strength of an individual's network and re-employment was found. Understanding the value of social networks is important not only for re-entering the labour market but also for obtaining employment that is above the minimum wage…. The results indicate network strength and access to contacts with job-related information to be positively related to the probability of re-employment.' The added 'treatment' was

- a job search management system designed to help participants to work systematically through the necessary steps to become employed.
- a 'job search board' that enables both participant and facilitator to monitor job search activity and the number of contacts made. The system stressed the importance of the number of contacts made and the significance of each
- regular social network audits to ensure that participants were attempting to make contacts that could assist them in their job search
- role-playing techniques to practice the necessary rapport-building skills
- scripts were developed to assist participants in introducing themselves in networking situations.

The training offered should be relevant to the chosen sector, job and locality. Job search methods vary widely, and include professional networking, community networking (both exemplified in the previous example), internet search, publications, specialist journals, personal visits and letters, speculative and more targeted introductions.

Personal contacts and networking are to be included in all job-search methods, since the majority of jobs may be discovered, and many actually gained through these means. But other methods are not to be excluded.

Advisors should be skilled in learning about recruitment practices and job search techniques relevant to each occupation.

Frequent support is needed during job search, to maintain activity and review results. Some evidence suggests a minimum review frequency every two weeks, other every week.

Job search should be restricted to finding the target job, to avoid wasted effort and discouragement from confused and unproductive work. But if the job target is not clear, job search may be seen as part of the exploration that leads to a more refined decision.

Competing for work

Once a suitable job has been found, the actual competition calls on its own range of skills.

The form taken by the competition for work varies greatly. Interviews, structured and formal, or very informal, may be the most common, and being able to hold a persuasive conversation in an interview is good preparation. The social skill involved in interviewing, though often not related to job performance, can be usefully learned by clients. Equally important is that the social skills should be pertinent to the job: they should be those the client is likely to encounter when working with the intended workforce and managers.

Clients should review their competition skills and practice any that need improvement. Skills and approaches will vary with the chosen job. Advisors should be adaptable in the support and practice that they offer. Working with local employers will help them adjust to real conditions.

Practice can cover:

- composing a CV and adapting it to different employers and jobs
- interviews and group interviews
- informal meetings and social recruitment events
- networking and informal information and contact gathering
- taking tests that are known to be used by employers, for example, computer tests, vocational skills tests, psychological profiles
- personal presentation skills
- hygiene
- dress code.

Similarity of applicants

Employers use any one of various methods (tests, CVs, social networking and more) to reduce the number of applicants to people whom they believe are suitable for the job and to whom a final test interview or other selection procedure is applied. The effect of this is to create competition between broadly similar people. It may not be the obvious quality such as ability or experience that defines their final choice, since these things may already be adequate in every candidate. Other factors such as personality or presentation skills, that seem unrelated to the job, may also be important. Not all employers apply tested recruitment methods skilfully. Consequently, there also appears to be a degree of luck about the selection process in many jobs. So it is reasonable to expect well-prepared and suitable candidates to be rejected fairly often. We can surmise for example that if the average interview list has six people for each job, each of whom has been through and effective screening procedure, then since only one will be chosen, five will be disappointed. Any one candidate may expect to be rejected – on average – five times out of six good applications that they make.

Preparation for setbacks

With both luck and hidden recruitment criteria in operation, failure and setbacks are to be expected. There is good evidence that preparation for setbacks can maintain effort and confidence. The main mechanism for this 'inoculation' against setbacks is prior anticipation and working out how to deal with setbacks through advance problem-solving and skills practice . This work will not only increase skills for dealing with the social, emotional, and task demands of job search, but will enable the client to cope with the feelings and discouragement of rejection by having a plan of activity ready in advance.

The practice can be done in groups or between advisor and individual client.

Employment options

<u>Self employment</u>

Self-employment is a useful option for clients; it

- offers flexibility of hours of work and work demands, fluctuating according to personal need
- can be finely adjusted to existing skills and experiences
- may include family and friends in the work

but also

- is often associated with low pay, specially in early stages
- often demands long hours
- calls for resilience and stamina requiring special confidence and determination
- has little or no protection against redundancy or loss of work
- may include personal financial risks.

Working conditions for the different occupations of self-employed people vary as much as between any employed-status jobs. Equal attention to detail is required in the exploration of possibilities with clients. Self-employment can call for a wider range of skill and higher confidence than employment. Courses to help prepare for self-employment can be helpful in ensuring the needs are covered, and it is unusual though not unknown for advisors to offer such courses: they are usually provided by specialists.

<u>Semi-self employment</u>

Quite a large number of industries now require their employees to be 'self-employed'. This usually reduces the costs to the employer, shifts responsibility for tax and sickness and holidays to the employee, and offers few of the advantages of genuine self-employment. Pay is often low or minimum wage, though professionals also find themselves in this kind of employment.

Under this heading we can recognise obligatory self-employment, zero-hours contracts, and individual or personal sub-contracting. In each case the specific details will need to be explored. However weighted against the interests of the worker these kinds of contracts may seem, they can be helpful if they include elements of flexibility, for example in choosing hours of work or working part-time.

The informal and cash economy

Work opportunities exist outside 'official' employment. Some sectors use these much more than others: market traders; taxi firms; self-employed cleaners; small builders are common examples. Of course within these examples there are many who work entirely within the official system. For those that do not, the risk of penalties on discovery is weighed up against the benefits, usually low or no tax payment, and disadvantages such as loss of healthcare rights.

Advisors should recognise that these opportunities exist, and must take an ethical stance on how they help, what they disclose to authority, supported by their own organisation’s policy. There are examples of projects that have been allowed some relaxation of regulations to help clients make a transition from informal semi-legal work to properly registered and compliant self-employment; such instances need to be recognised by the authorities or the advisor may risk being seen as complicit in avoiding civic and legal duties.

Transition to work

Moving from unemployment to work involves

- changes to personal routines (getting up in time for an early shift)
- changes to family duties (childcare for example)
- changes to a partner's routines
- changes to personal finance, including early costs before income comes in, and reductions in welfare eligibility
- changes to personal habits (alcohol intake, regularity of mealtimes, personal appearance)
- increase in concentration and sustaining of effort (working to targets, for prolonged periods)
- new and different social contacts and expectations.

These and other factors must be planned for, so that the move into work is easy and can be sustained. Advisors should be diligent in helping clients recognise any possible difficulties and prepare for them.

Keeping the job

The transition to work is not complete on the first day of work. In many cases, advisors should work with those employers who are willing, and with clients, to address problems that come up during the first months:

- adjustment of behaviour to work demands
- performance and ability
- socialisation
- managing change in personal life.

Some clients, particularly those with severe and ongoing mental health concerns, learning disabilities or exceptional physical concerns, will need ongoing support from both staff in the employing firm and also an advisor or mentor. Detailing how to provide such care and support is not in the scope of this paper.

Entry-level jobs

Overcoming labour-market disadvantage may mean that clients take a first job that is below their potential. Advisors should be alert to the usefulness of a job that leads to promotion or to general advancement, but also careful that clients who take a basic job are aware of possibilities for advancement. If possible, a progression route should have been worked out before the job begins.

But that is not always so easy, and clients may want to progress to higher jobs at any time. They may need to refresh their skills and seek help from their advisor for a second time.

Developing ability and confidence

The successful learning and application of the skills needed to compete in the labour market depends on effective learning experiences and skill development and confidence to carry out action.

The methods for developing skills and the confidence to apply them have been well researched, though perhaps less in employment counselling than in other areas. The evidence we do have from studies of skill and performance in employment counselling is nonetheless consistent with evidence from other learning settings. For example, studying the impact of different levels of interview preparation on interview performance, Tross & Maurer (2008) found that '*individuals who participated in more comprehensive coaching ultimately received higher interview ratings*.' and that '*individuals who participated in introduction/awareness coaching received higher scores than individuals who participated in awareness-only coaching. And, individuals who participated in introduction/awareness/skill coaching received higher scores than individuals who participated in introduction/awareness coaching*.' confirming that introduction and information needs to be supplemented by conscious awareness and by skill development.

Effective skill training should enhance self-efficacy and mastery of the skills: work by Vinokur and Schul (1997) showed that '*... an enhanced sense of mastery had mediating effects on reemployment, financial strain, and reduction in depressive symptoms.*' and Van Ryn (1992) '*demonstrated the mediational role of job-search self-efficacy.*' and showed that '*job-search self-efficacy was shown to mediate the effects of the intervention through its direct effects on job-search intention and on short term job-search behavior, as well as through its indirect effects on subjective norms and attitude.*'

And skill training is deemed effective even when job entry is delayed. Heibert found that 'when people learn the skills involved in overcoming employment barriers like finances, family conflict, and lack of support, counselling should be considered successful, even if the immediate result is not job placement. Similarly, when people learn self-management skills that have been shown to have a positive impact on motivation (e.g., setting realistic, achievable, and observable goals, self-monitoring progress towards those goals, and rewarding oneself for goal-directed thoughts and actions….), counselling should be judged successful, because motivation (a precursor) can be shown to have a positive impact on job placement rates, job productivity, or other similar socio-economic variables.' (our emphasis).

From these and other studies it appears that the application of approaches that are able to develop knowledge, skill and attitude, plus the application of efficacy-enhancing methods, are important to the success of a wide variety of interventions to support job seekers.

Skill development

The texts on employment and career counselling identify a range of personal skills that are believed to be important for job applicants and for people thinking about their careers. Some of these are

- decision making
- planning
- goal setting
- job search
- self knowledge and awareness of personal values and interests
- problem solving
- networking
- self-presentation
- interviewing
- the list is long and can go into great detail as in
- CV writing
- using the internet for job search
- keeping records of job applications
- keeping records of contacts and networks

and so on.

These are, we feel, the daily bread of career support, and can be thought of as belonging to a group of skills that are suited to and essential for job search. They are skills that disadvantaged people may lack. They are also skills that a person may not acquire automatically through their education or experience. Often, they have to be learned in order to equip the job-seeker for their task.

Some texts also identify 'soft', 'core' or 'key' skills that they believe employers want, or say they want. Typical lists seem plausible and contain such items as 'interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and teamwork skills' as given in many texts on employability. To be able to work in a team, to be a leader or team player seem good assets for many but not for all jobs. But the evidence that these skills are in some way essential is weak: much of it comes from unsupported employer reports, from assumptions by advisors, and none from direct comparison of jobs with the skills noted. Should we reject this approach? On the whole, we think not since the good sense of having some common skills is hard to refute. But we would most strongly suggest that

- skill development should be carried out in the context of known tasks. That is to say, teaching skills that are definitely known to be needed for the job and absent in the client. This can be achieved by careful attention to concrete details in each situation, and also

- by applying confirmed methods of skill development. These methods apply in both person and group learning environments, whether counselling, workshops, group discussions or directed training.

The elements of effective skill development were identified from research and authoritative sources and summarised by Booth, Birkin and O'Malley (2009) and are given below.

Learning Modes:

The learning method should be appropriate for the required learning. For example: understanding an abstract concept is not helped by rote learning but learning by rote is, for example, an appropriate way of learning telephone numbers.

The chosen method should, therefore, contain a number of different ways of teaching for example group activity, individual reflection, concrete activity, theoretical content, and so on. The method chosen for any specific learning point should be appropriate for the stage and type of learning being undertaken.

Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)

It is important in developing training that assumptions are not made about what it is that the learner or client needs to learn. The Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) asks what they need to know, basing it on the actual task to be done. LNAs need to be thorough and appropriate to the learning that is planned.

LNAs should take account of the clients prior learning (skills acquired, conceptual development and problem solving skills, for example).

There is some good evidence that providing job-search training to people who are already confident in their own job search skills can damage their confidence, possibly leading to worse outcomes for them. The LNA can help avoid this risk.

Skills First

Helping clients to be more able to find and get jobs will very often include helping them to change their behaviour. The provision of information will not, of itself, change behaviour effectively. What will is training people how to do things. Information is important but when utilised in effective behaviour-change programmes it complements and supports skills acquisition rather than being the core content.

Skills learning programmes should not be dedicated to knowledge. Where it is important to include information it should be strongly anchored to achieving a learning outcome, and geared to the knowledge needs of the client / learner in helping progress toward task performance. Job search is a skills based activity
– few people will progress if they are just helped to understand what they have to do to get a job

Skills Acquisition

The principles of skill acquisition are essentially:

- Better developed skills lead to better performance
- Learners need a learning programme that enables them to ‘master’ the skills
- Learning is best when it proceeds according to the principles of ‘errorless learning’
- Advisors or trainers need to use progressive approximation to set learners’ behavioural learning targets.
- Learners need to be able to imagine themselves doing the skill to be acquired

Advisors or trainers need to acquire appropriate teaching skills to enable delegates to learn, particularly skilled feedback and active feed-forward techniques

Mastery is the ability to execute a complex behavioural performance with confidence and precision. It often includes skill applied in unpredictable or changing situations, as exemplified by job interviews.

Errorless learning refers to the application of skill practice without inducing mistakes or errors in the performance by the learner. When skill learning is done without error, it proceeds more surely and faster towards confident mastery. Repetition of errors during learning may re-inforce the erroneous behaviour, and be difficult to eradicate. Avoiding errors while making progress is achieved by making achievable demands, applying progressive approximation.

Progressive approximation is the gradual change in behaviour, moving closer and closer to the goal or target behaviour. This technique is effective is because mastery and complex behaviour that is some way from the current repertoire can be achieved over time without error by rewarding behaviours that match, closer and closer, the target behaviour.

There are three stages to successful skills acquisition:

1. Developing a picture of the skills to be performed.

This may be through a demonstration, either by the trainers or a video recording. Learners are helped if key aspects of the skills are highlighted and if they have a chance to reflect on what they have seen and observe sections again. This requires the trainers to be active in checking delegates have spotted the key sections and are responsive to replay requests.

2. The opportunity to practice the skill or chunks of a skills sequence: micro-skill rehearsal.

Skill are most easily practiced and learnt when presented in small – often very small – elements. By learning small behaviours that are easy to do without making mistakes, learners become ready to attempt more complex or longer groups of skills. Learners are helped if they are comfortable about making mistakes but promptly helped to adopt good practice. Sometimes they can be helped to spot pitfalls ahead. This requires the facilitator to be active when observing mini-skills to provide supportive feedback and feed-forward.

3. Final skills practice.

This is an opportunity to put the skill sequence together and experience the impact. Learners are helped when the overall impact is reviewed and the positive aspects of their performance are highlighted. This requires the trainer to observe a full skills practice and feedback on positive performance and development needs.

Feedback

Feedback refers to the discussion of the learner’s performance after observation by the advisor / trainer.

Effective feedback enhances confidence and enables clients to change their behaviours or thoughts. To be effective, feedback should be

- prompt: a delay reduces the effectiveness
- directly relevant to the practical matters at hand
- based on observable events, actions or facts, not on supposition
- given so as to encourage self-evaluation, for example, by asking the client for their own evaluation of what has happened
- uncritical, in that it encourages thoughtful self-judgement, not the imposition of the advisor’s opinion (even if this is valid).

To achieve these qualities, advisors will do well to

- ensure that the feedback session begins and ends with praise, approval or recognition by the trainer for the learner
- encourage clients to discuss their own actions and responses, and make their own judgements
- help the client to evaluate by observing and referring to observable facts that merit consideration
- help clients decide what action they will take following their feedback
- limit the number of items dealt with at one time – trying to deal with too many risks forgetting and confusion.

Feedback to individuals about their performance should be given to them privately and not in front of a group of learners because it risks both undermining the person’s confidence and distracting the group from its tasks. However, there are exceptions: praise is almost always as welcome in a group setting as between individuals though even then the trainer must be careful that praise to one does not undermine the confidence of another. Where all members of the group are very confident about self-disclosure, feedback in the group may provide learning points for all individuals.

Feedforward refers to the advance warning a trainer can give to a learner during or immediately before a skill practice, so that the learner is alert to the particular needs of the practice, the effort and concentration they might need, the danger points ahead. Typically the trainer may tell the learner(s) what to look out for in an exercise, what the exercise is helping them learn, and how they can act during the exercise.

Feedforward should

- be given so that it distracts as little as possible
- focus on the most essential learning point
- not contain too much advice, or it may cause confusion
- focus on the anticipated behaviour

Feedforward may also be used during the preparation of a client or learner for a real-life event such as a job interview. Here it is likely to be given some way in advance, and there may be several points to be covered in such a complex skill situations. The advisor should

- deal with each point separately to avoid confusion
- help the client or learner to provide answers and planned behaviours as much as possible
- encourage preparation, but
- avoid stressing the client with anticipatory worry.

Blended Learning

In order to maximise the efficiencies that both different learning styles and different technologies offer the training designer and to accommodate different economic, organisational and geographical constraints, a mixture of learning technologies may be required. The quality of how these are constructed and work together will determine whether both individual learner needs and the key learning points are met.

Pre-requisite learning

In developing learning events, learning design should take into account any pre-learning activity or pre-requisite learning that may be necessary. Experience has shown that delegates who do not have or are not confident in using pre-requisite skills are at a great disadvantage and do not benefit from programmes. The impact of taking learners onto courses for which they are not appropriately prepared are that the learner is distressed and learning and confidence are impaired greatly, the reputation of the course, training designer and trainer are damaged and also the learning of others in the group is jeopardised.

This means applying the results of a careful Learning Needs Analysis, and using design that takes account the skills in the group, and in many settings also a progressive programme of learning or activity that does not try to build on absent skills.

Number of delegates/clients

A learning programme should be have no more than a pre-assessed a maximum number of learners. The number should reflect the programme material, the intensity of the material and the need for advisors or trainers to be able to monitor learners' progression through the programme and manage the advanced skills development and concepts in the programme as well as be able to give feed-forward and feedback support.

Consolidation

Consolidation of skill through practical real-world application has been identified as essential to effective skills acquisition programmes. It provides clients and learners with the opportunity to use their skills in practice and receive feedback from trainers or advisors.

This will apply both to clients of employment services, who should practice new skills in near-real and real life settings with as much support from their advisors as is practical, and to people learning advice skills. For those learning to be advisors, close supervision in the early stages of their skill development is important to ensure that they provide proper support to their clients.

Using a group as a resource

Both clients and advisors in training may feel isolated or they may happen to join a learning group that is spread across a wide geographical area. Especially at times of stress or experiencing difficulties, their learning may suffer from their isolation. A good way of dealing with this is to encourage the learners to form action learning sets or social learning networks. In these, the learning design sets tasks that require smaller groups to co-operate in the achievement of the task. These groups can be set up as permanent or semi-permanent groups so that relationships can develop between the group members. At first, these relationships will be formal and for the purposes of the immediate learning objective but over time some will become less formal and will be used by the individual members of the group for a variety of reasons.

When a group is present and together in one place, the individuals and the group should be active in learning events: individuals should be invited to contribute ideas and direction. Trainer / advisor feedback is effective when given both to individuals and to the group as a whole. Engagement of individuals in the group enhances confidence and encourages the pooling of experience. But care must be taken not to isolate or undermine the confidence of any group member.

Evaluation

Evaluation should begin before training takes place, should continue throughout the delivery of the training and then measure actual behavioural changes in the learner. Finally, this information should be used to refine the product before going through the cycle again.

The usual end-of-course 'reactionnaires' which ask how much the delegates enjoyed the sessions and which are popular in many courses tell us very little about the effectiveness of training. The evaluation should measure change towards the intended skill that is the subject of the training. For instance, we may say that our training is to develop certain interview skills in the client, and one of these skills is that of responding to an unexpected question without undue hesitation. This will require the trainer to set up micro skills rehearsals of elements of an interview; brief the participants; observe the rehearsal; intervene constructively when necessary and give effective feedback. After the event, the evaluation can now establish what change in behaviour and confidence has resulted. The self-efficacy of participants in training for the tasks and skills they are learning may also be measured, before and after training, to give an indication of their progress.

Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the extent to which products, systems or services can be accessed by people, irrespective of any circumstance or disadvantage they may have. It is necessary to remove as many barriers to learning as possible, both for the clients or learners and those providing the learning. This applies at all levels from access to the physical learning space to the ability to interact with specific technology. Much of the recent work on accessibility has focussed on the ICT domain. In particular, a range of assistive technology solutions have been developed to enable people with sensory impairments (vision and hearing) and specific learning difficulties (eg., dyslexia) to exploit learning opportunities to the full.

Usability

Usability refers to the ease with which the training product or system supports people in achieving its goals. Usability is context-specific. Products and systems are not inherently usable; it is the quality of the interaction between the product/system and its human users that determines the degree of usability.

Contextual information is needed in four main areas to design usable products and systems:

- user characteristics (who will be trained?)
- user task requirements (what will they have to do?)
- the wider physical and social environment (where, with whom and how will this take place?)
- relevant technology platforms (what systems and tools will be used?).

The more the design takes account of these factors, the more likely it is that it will enable users to achieve their goals effectively, efficiently and with safety, comfort and satisfaction. It is important for users to be involved at all stages in the design, when they can help provide valuable contextual information. User feedback will help refine the product it as it moves from low- to high-level prototypes, and also where more formal evaluation measures are collected pre- and post-implementation. A user engagement strategy/plan should be produced early in the design lifecycle.

Usability can be measured objectively using performance metrics or more subjectively via user perceptions of quality in use. Expert inspection is another useful source of usability feedback, although it is generally advisable to use it to complement information provided by the actual users.

E-learning

E-learning is likely to feature more and more in advisor training and in client skill development. Our view of e-learning is illustrated by two definitions:

- the use of technological tools that are either web-based, web distributed or web-capable for the purposes of education
- content and instructional methods delivered on a computer (CD-ROM, internet, intranet) and designed to build knowledge and skills related to an individual or organisational goals An extensive e-Learning knowledge base exists, with no shortage of pedagogic and design principles that describe how to achieve effective e-learning outcomes.

Considerations of access, usability and skill development are important in the choice and design of e-learning methods. The practical learning experiences that are essential to skill development cannot be entirely replaced by written materials, images and computer interactions. But illustrative videos can provide ready access to good training exemplars, and the technology can support distributed and group learning in helpful ways.

Self-efficacy

The principles for development of self efficacy have been used in the design of employment programmes that have been shown in randomised controlled trials to be effective, and more effective than the controls. This is an exceptional finding. No other method has, as far as we can tell, been so explicitly tested. Other approaches, the IPS programme for example, are effective, but what has been tested in IPS is the programme, and to a lesser extent the detailed interaction with clients inherent in the programme design.

Self-efficacy therefore has a uniquely well researched position. Whether future research adds to its standing, or brings other aspects of the work of the advisor up to its standard, or qualifies its status, has yet to be seen.

What is Self-efficacy?

'Self-efficacy is the extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-efficacy), or one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations.

It differs from general confidence, self esteem, locus of control and other psychological concepts: it is specific to the goal in question, so is not a generalised self-view. People ordinarily have different levels of self-efficacy for different tasks.

Self-efficacy has been shown in many trials, and by some in the field of employment advice, to predict behaviour well. It is predictive of effort, ability to continue in the face of difficulties, and of performance.

If it seems circular to say that high confidence to do something predicts high effort, so be it. The stating of confidence is not the same as execution of the deed.

Self -efficacy is important in employment advice because:

- by expressing their level of confidence in specific employment-focussed tasks, clients can predict which are easiest, which they will persist at, and which are relatively more difficult for them. Using this judgement, they can choose pathways to employment at which they are more likely to succeed
- advisors can use clients' judgements to help create Action Plans that are more likely to succeed, because the client can evaluate their confidence or self efficacy for each element within the plan, and work accordingly: low self-efficacy elements should be avoided or provided with sufficient support and preparation
- by applying methods that improve self-efficacy, advisors can help clients to become confident and capable of tasks that previously eluded them.

Interventions applying self-efficacy

Motivation theories such as 'goal-setting theory', 'expectancy theory' and 'learned helplessness theory' suggest that individuals with higher self-efficacy, self-esteem, and a more internal locus of control will be more motivated and committed to achieving goals such as employment. Studies have found that personal development training:

- improves job seekers' ability to find employment; and results in higher quality reemployment in terms of earnings and job satisfaction
- improves self-esteem, self-efficacy, coping skills, life-satisfaction and mental health of participants; however, we question the causality suggested in this finding because we think it equally likely that improved self-efficacy resulting from well designed training has influenced the other factors. Whatever the case, the outcome is clearly desirable.
- increased motivation among those who continued to be unemployed, including expectations of re-employment.

Some studies conclude that labour market programs should include training to improve psychological health, to encourage positive aspects of coping, such as promoting an internal locus of control, to build self-esteem and self-efficacy, to promote greater participation in leisure activities, and to challenge perceptions of deprivation. However, we have reservations:

- we question the direction of causality assumed, and think that the improved psychological health that has been measured may be a result of well-conducted job-search training
- we strongly believe that employment advisors should not attempt psychological health interventions unless professionally qualified to do so.

With those cautions, we note that the interventions actually offered in these programmes include important topics we can endorse for advisors and trainers: for example

- teaching problem solving and coping skills that inoculate participants against setbacks in job seeking and the prolonged effects of unemployment;
- improving attitudes toward work
- increasing self-efficacy and self-esteem towards re-employment
- teaching job search skills, improving self-presentation, encouraging activity and promoting goal setting, and
- enlisting social support in job search activity.

Raising self-efficacy

Self-efficacy can be raised by using these well-tested approaches. Equally, it can be lowered by unhelpful experiences, resulting in worse performance and lower persistence.

Applying the right methods or approaches will make a valuable positive difference to the effectiveness of activities and discussions intended to improve clients' ability in the labour market. The methods can and should be applied to all kinds of client activity.

There are four main sources for self efficacy. They are, in order of greatest influence:

1. Mastery Experiences

"The most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences," (Bandura 2012). Achieving a goal, however small, strengthens self-efficacy for that goal, and probably for other proximate goals. Failing to achieve a goal can undermine self-efficacy.

In every stage of employment counselling and career guidance, clients should be supported to do work-focussed activities that they can achieve with confidence. Where they face essential tasks for which they have low self-efficacy, they should be prepared and supported as much as needed to ensure reasonable chance of success. Where there is inevitably a chance of failure as for example in job interviews, they should be helped to prepare for the possible failure and react in positive ways if it happens. Through these mechanisms their self-efficacy will grow, and they will be enabled to undertake progressively more challenging or complex tasks.

2. Social Modelling

Seeing another person or other people successfully completing a task raises self-efficacy, but they have to be 'valued examples'. So people similar to oneself, or esteemed advisors or mentors, can increase confidence. Seeing people very different from oneself does not have the same effect. This benefit may lie behind some of the good results achieved in carefully designed group job-search activities.

An important instance of social modelling is referent power: when trainers and advisors are seen by clients as reliable, well informed, human, understanding, trustworthy and socially close, they acquire the status of accepted social models, and also of people the client(s) wish to do well for. Trainers and advisors who do this are those who provide respect, accurate positive feedback, and also include some moderate self-disclosure and encouragement for participants' self-disclosure in appropriately relevant ways. (Janis & Mann, I977)

3. Social Persuasion

People can also be persuaded to believe they are able to succeed. Getting positive feedback from advisors contributes to their belief, provided the feedback is genuine and prompt and focussed on behaviour. Talking through problems, planning action together, and checking self-efficacy beliefs at all stages, is a form of persuasion, though perhaps not in the sense of changing someone's thinking, so much as in revealing pathways through their thinking and abilities towards desired goals.

What advisors do with clients is largely social persuasion, and so is, in itself, of lesser impact than mastery experiences and social modelling. It is therefore important to success that advisors enable their clients to have mastery experiences and to observe and reflect on social modelling. Merely being persuasive, or telling clients what to do, is less likely to succeed.

4. Psychological Responses

Moods, emotions and personal feelings aroused by situations are important in self-efficacy. But it is less the power of the emotion, than the perception of it and its importance to the client that is influential. Some people are driven to succeed by their feelings of (say) stress, while others are led to fear of failure. But learning to control emotional responses, as happens for example in preparing for the stress of interviews, improves self-efficacy and performance.

While feelings of self-doubt, fear of failure and uncertainty certainly are relevant to clients' employment prospects, they are by no means decisive: many people manage to get work while coping with such unwelcome feelings. Equally, general confidence and relaxation may not be a good predictor of success, unless it is specific to the individual tasks that are at hand.

Using self-efficacy to select between options

Advisors can help clients to gauge their own self-efficacy. The method is to ask the client (or employer) 'How confident are you of achieving………?' This can be asked of things the client suggests, or used to evaluate the achievability of suggestions from the advisor. Usually the question includes a reference scale: 'On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is completely confident, how confident are you of achieving…..'. This provides the advisor and client with a simple way to decide whether an idea should be included, subdivided into easier tasks or rejected as too difficult. It can be used to compare two suggestions, leading to selection of the easier, with or without inclusion of the more difficult one.

Clients often respond without giving a numerical answer; they show their degree of confidence in other more familiar ways – perhaps by saying something like 'No way – that's really hard' or 'No problem with that unless…' and so on. These are also valuable responses.

Self-efficacy scale questions also help describe the client's beliefs in detail, so that the advisor has a more accurate picture and fewer misconceptions. They can be used to create plans of action that progress from easy to more difficult tasks. Doing the easy tasks is the same as offering the client behavioural change that builds confidence and motivation through mastery experiences. These can be formulated as a plan of action which can help the client see their progress, and help the advisor monitor and change direction if necessary.

Personal capacity

Both theoretical and practical studies emphasise the value of clients' ability to manage themselves, to make decisions and be independent. In addition to specific labour market competences, it is worth noting that positive feedback and opportunities for developing skills through any kind of practice are desirable. The following skills are valuable in deciding on a career or going for a job, but also helpful in being in charge of one's own life. They can be practiced by clients and encouraged by the advisor:

- gathering information and knowledge, ascribing causes and reasons
- being active, having and evaluating experiences
- observing opportunities, weighing up alternatives
- thinking about personal priorities
- making decisions
- reviewing progress, adjusting plans and changing direction
- allowing and allowing for time
- considering the influence of others
- using social networks including family and friends.

Choosing a career

Advisors and clients are there not just to address the labour market, but also to make choices about their occupation and career. Enabling the client to make choices involves helping them explore and act in certain ways, applying well-understood techniques. But clients also need to reach decisions about their preferences when they have little or imperfect knowledge of themselves (at least as far as career information is concerned) or the possibilities that exist for them.

The advisor will want to avoid giving suggestions that might lead the client to later-regretted choices. Clients with little experience might easily be over-influenced by an apparently expert advisor. So advisors face a balance between providing information and encouraging choice on one hand, and imposing, maybe inadvertently, their own wishes on the other. The words 'advice' and 'advisor' suggest a role in offering stronger guidance, falling too much on the side of telling clients what to think and what to do[7], and more neutral terms such as 'counsellor' might be appropriate.

Choosing a career is about finding both an occupation and an employer to suit the client's wishes and personality. The choice can be wide, covering a possible lifespan and profession such as Accountant, Shop worker or Farmer, or the choice can be narrow and immediate, such as taking the job that comes up next in the local area, or with a certain employer.

Advisors should encourage clients with short-term horizons to think about how their next move could be a stepping stone to something further on. This may help them frame the decision in a way that fits with what is realistic and possible. Advisors should be aware that career choices are strongly influenced by customs, preferences and ideas about non-work life events such as childbearing, care for relatives, choice of where to live, as well as personal wishes and beliefs about employment.

Clients with long term goals but no short-term plans can be encouraged to imagine their goal, and work back from it step by step thinking about what they would need to do to achieve it.

Many clients will regard the exercise with some suspicion, since actually they don't really know what to do. They are quite free, of course, to see their career as an adventure (and risk) in moving from job to job as chance and experience permit, and satisfactory careers can be made in this way: desirable as it may be for the advisor to have the satisfaction that their client has a life-plan, life and its chances are longer and more varied than can be encompassed in a simple plan.

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[7] At least in English, where the word 'advice' has a historical meaning that includes an 'opinion given about action'.

There is often a gap between what job is available and what goals can be achieved now, and what is desirable in the longer term. How will that gap be filled? With a vacation job for a student? With an entry-level job for a migrant who wants to learn the language before attempting a professional job? For a local job for a young mother, until her children grow up? The balance between expedient immediate choices now and longer term goals and opportunities is always to be considered.

Here we do not offer a review of the very extensive literature on the processes of career-counselling and career choice. Our view is that, provided the measures to increase self efficacy, to be competent in competing for work, and to have adequate concrete plans and activity are in place, the help provided to clients to make career choices can be as extensive and expert as the literature suggests. Since our concern here is about reducing disadvantage, we feel that

- career advice that does not include development of labour-market competence falls short of our goal, and may even risk damaging clients' ability by the influence of disappointed hopes that reduce their self-efficacy
- career advice that does include development of labour-market competence can reach a very high standard of support, and advisors who have a skill in career-choice counselling will be well equipped to help.

Here we propose some topics that the employment advisor, whose initial goal is work rather than longer-term career choices, can use in conversation with clients, to help them explore their options. Clients may not be able to express clear answers to many questions, and advisors who have developed a good rapport will be able to use the questions to lead to further questions, or to help the client find concrete activities that will give them more and better information. They can also be prompted by use of well-researched tools and databases, as described below.

Choice of 'career'

Choosing a career includes several kinds of decisions:

- what profession or occupation to follow
- which employer to work for
- what sector to work in
- what kind of contract to work at
- what compromises to make for your career: home, location, money, learning...
- what job to go for

and some formal qualities can help a choice

- examinations that have to be passed
- professional status and qualifications
- previous experience of work
- other relevant experience
- skills and talents

When the answer to all or many of these questions is 'don't know', the advisor may help a client explore possibilities by asking

- what do you enjoy
- how do you fill your spare time
- what have you achieved
- what would you like to achieve
- what would you like to be known for and known as
- how important is work, money, profession
- where would you like to be
- how good are you at planning and working for the long term
- what do you dislike
- when have you failed or avoided things

- what do other people say about you and do you agree...or not
- do you like doing technical things
- do you like doing creative things
- do you like being around lots of people
- do you like studying and finding things out

and

- what do people you know do
- what jobs do you think you could do
- what jobs do you think there are round here
- have you got any plans for next week...next month..next year
- what does your family expect
- what do you expect
- would you do any job or do you prefer to be selective

and many more.

Discussion of the labour market can include:

- what jobs are there...
- round here
- in your ideal profession
- that you could get
- that you would like to train for
- that would put you on the right path

what employers do you know ....

- round here
- who use people with your profession
- that are recruiting
- that you can talk to
- that you could visit

who do you know...

- that you would wish to be like
- in your preferred job or profession
- who can tell you about jobs
- who can put you in touch with people

And what about self-employment? It can be chosen

- because it suits your temperament (I don't want a boss)
- because it suits your skills and the business environment (I'm a freelancer - everyone is)
- out of necessity (no-one wants me and no-one makes what I make)
- to fill a gap (I can do this till I get sorted out ..)
- to end a career peacefully (enough of the corporate ladder, at last!)
- to keep one's freedom (I'm not going to be tied down to schedules)
- to pursue personal dreams and ambitions (I have this idea..it's brilliant...)
- to make some money while caring for family (I can do this while Granny sleeps)

When can an advisor give suggestions, and how? While helping the client to make their own choices is certainly the goal, withholding information or being mean with ideas is unhelpful. An advisor whose idea for a client if misplaced, but who puts it forward at a suitable moment and encourages the client to reject or change it, is helping more than one who remains silent, leaving the client no better off. However, there is a strong risk that the client, wishing to be co-operative, will agree with and maybe follow whatever is suggested. To minimise that risk and encourage the client to their own choices the advisor should:

- check that a suggestion would be welcomed
- be clear that the suggestion is no more than an idea for discussion
- be clear that the client can reject the idea with no loss
- express their own uncertainty and hope that the client can add detail, amend, improve
- allow time for reflection
- encourage practical discovery by the client – perhaps through work trials, through reading or research, through networking
- offer to help with any technical information that the advisor can readily find, and that is not easily available to the client.

Psychometric tests and job matching

The existence of tests to tell a person what job would suit them is intuitively attractive. But the difficulties of creating and using such tests are considerable, and their value in helping people who are disadvantaged, rather than simply needing help making a choice, is neither proven nor disproven. It is clear that merely applying a test or measuring system to describe jobs that may suit a person does not in itself remove the disadvantage of being uncompetitive in the labour market. But as part of a wider support and development process, such advice can be useful.

There are many tests of ability and personality available to advisors. In quality they range from the highly tested and statistically validated systems which include detailed instructions, restrictions on use, qualification of users and regular review, down to some well or not-so-well established tests that seem to have little in the way of reported reliability and validity. It is not our role here to evaluate all these tests, but to consider how they may be used.

Their application is mainly in

- helping people make career choices - basically to identify a job or range of jobs or occupations that suits them
- recruitment , when employers use the tests to measure what they believe to be factors relevant to the job.

A large number of personality tests is available. Among them, only a small number show well proven statistically relevant correlations between their scales and occupational domain. If used, it is strongly suggested that only those that have adequately supportive statistical characteristics predictive of success within the relevant occupational domain are used. Even so, they must at all times be used with caution, expertise and as part of a wider career counselling or recruitment package and not as a standalone method.

Important matters that advisors should consider concerning job-person matching databases and tests are:

- they may not account for important differences in the actual job compared to 'average' jobs, nor for unique or local conditions
- the test manual instructions for administration and scoring must be followed. Without abiding by these even good quality tests are likely to give misleading results
- even when well used, no test is 100% reliable and no test provides a complete answer to career questions. They offer insights and ideas to help productive reflection and discussion, and should be used in that context
- some tests require prior abilities such as language, comprehension, understanding question formats, good eyesight, or concentration. Clients who for some reason do not have these abilities or have them in lesser degree than is implicit in the test, are likely to be disadvantaged or wrongly assessed by the test. This will make the results and any subsequent advice and guidance invalid but also make the test user vulnerable to litigation on the grounds of unlawful discrimination
- when using norm groups, that they are as close as possible to the characteristics of the individual who took the test

- practice tests to acclimatise the test taker to the situation can be useful but only if such tests are recommended by the test publisher.

If psychometric tests and occupational matching procedures have weaknesses, so too do advisors and the institutional settings in which they work. Advisors may have hidden prejudices and preconceptions, perhaps based on benign but limited and limiting observation of disadvantaged people in work. They may work in an environment that makes unjustified assumptions about the suitability of occupations and that limits the occupations that are offered to disadvantaged people, in the mistaken belief that this is helpful. The continuing existence of limited occupational choice within sheltered workshops for disabled people could be cited as an example which continues, simultaneously limiting choice and providing support that would otherwise be lacking.

Advisors inevitably find it hard to acquire and maintain all-round knowledge of the extensive opportunities, careers and professions within the labour market. Good quality job inventories can extend their knowledge even if they cannot fully replace actual observation of live jobs.

These matters are, at least if not consciously acknowledged and managed in the counselling relationship, just as serious as the deficiencies of formal tests. Having an independent non-personal way to add content to a conversation about a career can be a valuable balancing resource:

- doing a good-quality careers inventory and personality test can bring a sense of objectivity, perhaps false, but at least independent, to the counselling discussion.
- it can help clients who want to explore choices, widen their job search and extend their knowledge
- it can open up thinking about new or different occupations, or provide confirmation of an existing choice
- it can help clients who like to have concrete measurements and definite statements to go on.

Our view on employment tests, career decision tests and personality tests is that

- only those with an excellent research basis that have survived independent professional and research critiques should be used. This may exclude some famous tests
- only properly trained advisors should administer the tests
- tests should only be used if they have been validated for use with the clients group – for example, blind people, people with language impairment
- tests should be used in the context of personal career or employment counselling with an expert advisor

Groupwork

There is good evidence that advisors (also called 'trainers' in the literature) can work effectively with groups of clients, and that there are some advantages and some dangers in doing so.

How many in a group

The number in a group is decided by the number of trainers available. It should be possible for each member of the group to have direct attention from a trainer during exercises and discussions. It should also be possible for all members of the group to participate and make contributions in group discussions, and in sub-groups.

Without being too definite, we feel that the maximum is somewhere between 10 and 20 people, though evidence is lacking.

The minimum number is that which allows the group skill-practice to function well, and allows individuals to relate to each other in feedback and discussion – probably four people.

Benefits and risks of mixed groups

There is diverse evidence on the virtues of groups that include individuals of mixed ability.

Diversity in education has been positively linked to increases in job-search efficacy, but results have not been shown to be affected by age, gender, and race diversity in the group.

An important and unexpected finding from at least one good quality study is that job-search self-efficacy is raised most for those group members who start from a low point. Those with high self-efficacy at the start do not do well. In some cases they may actually have reduced self-efficacy or worsened symptoms, possibly because of lowered self-esteem when they join a group of low-functioning individuals or maybe because of their delayed entry to the labour market.

Highly motivated job seekers who fail in job searches appear to be at risk of poor mental health compared with those who less motivated. Job-search training aimed at increasing motivation to search for a job could further increase the risk among those who are already highly motivated.

One programme has addressed this risk by '*providing the workshop participants with a problem-solving process to help them to be prepared and to cope with the stress related to the experience of unemployment, the job-search process, and the inevitable setbacks that they will encounter*.'

Care should be taken that

- individuals do not experience reduced confidence caused by participating in the group
- participation does not delay job search
- motivational and efficacy-building efforts are linked to practical techniques for job-search and for coping with stress, setbacks and failure
- group membership is not compulsory.

Application of group resources

A positive perception of the group by its members is positively related to their own rate of change in job-search efficacy. Groups should be organised and led so that individuals are encouraged to input ideas & experiences, and to provide encouragement, feedback and praise to each other.

This can be achieved by:

- brainstorming, discussing experiences and problem solving by the whole group or sub-groups
- role-play, practice exercises with other participants, in sub-groups or pairs
- participants spending much of their time practicing skills and providing each other with support
- eliciting knowledge and ideas through both small and large group discussions

As a guideline, participants might spend as much as or more than half the time interacting among themselves, with trainers supporting and facilitating. Group exercises should be designed to encourage participants to support each other and give positive feedback to each other, so that they contribute to social support and reducing feelings of isolation.

Trainers' (advisors') activities

Supportive group leadership contributes to job-search efficacy at the individual level. Trainers should use the active learning methods described above in 3.7 'Skill Development' to enable participants develop to job-search skills. Use of these methods within a group setting also will help participants take advantage of the knowledge and skills of others.

In order to build trust and to facilitate the group and individuals while they learn job-search skills, trainers will

- encourage the group to answer its own questions
- give positive feedback on personal and group performance, ideas and thinking
- explain why something said was well-founded or suited the situation
- make use of the participants' earlier contributions later in the group work
- encourage the more passive or silent group members to participate
- thank the speakers in the group
- show that they value participation.

When effective group training is provided, typical responses from participants are that they

- feel happy or satisfied, encouraged in their efforts or inspired
- believe that the trainers understood their situation and expressed empathy and understanding
- are encouraged to participate
- were shown how to be supportive towards other participants and were helped by others
- sat that the material and discussion matches their situation
- enjoyed the friendly atmosphere.

Job-search skill training and preparation for setbacks

Job search skill training should most definitely be the focus of discussion and skill acquisition. It should be directly relevant to the group and individuals' situation, and may include activities and exercises that focus on

- finding job openings
- using contacts and employers
- making a job application
- job interviews
- identifying transferable skills

Preparation for and resilience in the face of setbacks is fundamental to effective coping with the stressful job-search process. The group training, preparation and problem-solving should include identification or anticipation of possible barriers to success and advance preparation of solutions to overcome these barriers. Some of these issues may lie outside the job, for example, child care responsibilities, health issues, dealing with welfare and bureaucracy. They are important for the success of job search, and should be included in the group discussions.

Effective group preparation will include

- sharing problems and talking about then in the group
- having the group generate possible solutions in a friendly supportive and not accusing manner
- discussing what do and how to cope if things do not go to plan
- making best use of skills and strengths
- offering simple commiseration and mutual appreciation
- reviewing the successes achieved by other group members to identify effective ways of coping.

In each case the group can help search for possible solutions to the problems, and the effect is to find actual solutions, to increase social support, and to build efficacy.

4. Ethics in a good quality service

When we work with unemployed and disadvantaged people we may be faced with the risk that what we do has the wrong, unintended or damaging consequences. Advisors need to be able to identify such situations. They have to know

- the limits of their personal judgement and authority
- to whom they can turn for advice
- how and with whom properly to raise ethical, moral or legal matters without creating conflict.

Ethical thinking is important to advisors, and to their managers and organisations, because it helps clarify concepts that sound good but are actually difficult to interpret. For example, we read widely of such things as

- holistic service
- empowerment
- individual ownership
- confidentiality
- equal opportunities
- impartiality
- transparency

but these words have different meanings in different situations and to different people. Advisors should be at least aware of the possible confusion and able to think analytically about their own actions.

Do no harm

The first rule of ethical intervention for others is to do no harm. Harm may often be done under the best of intentions. In employment advice it may happen inadvertently through:

<u>Wrong inclusion</u>: people who do not need the service are included in it. They may actually lose, as was shown in one study where those joining with high self efficacy left with lowered self efficacy. They may also suffer less obvious losses, such as missed opportunities and delays to their progress.

<u>Wrong exclusion:</u> people who need the service may be excluded from it. When a service decides to work mainly or only with the 'easier' clients that it receives (a process called 'cherry-picking' or 'creaming') those in most need are left out. They may not only not get the service, but also be excluded from other services. They may suffer loss of ability or confidence because of their exclusion.

Both of these harmful situations can be brought about by organisational and financial pressure associated with business performance and contract design: payment by results creates temptation to work with 'easy' clients, and defer or refuse support to harder to help clients. Wrong inclusion and exclusion may follow. There is evidence that this does happen.

<u>Wrong service</u>: where an unnecessary service or support is proposed, clients will suffer as a consequence: their entry to the labour market will be delayed, and the service may be wrong for them. Referral to another service or to an extended service should always be both justifiable and agreed by the client.

<u>Ineffective programmes:</u> The preceding are examples of ineffective programmes; another kind of ineffectiveness happens when a programme is delivered to the right clients, but it does not use effective methods. It may appear to achieve results, but actually they are due to luck and random effects. Such ineffectiveness may be due to inadequate quantity of 'treatment' (maybe excessive caseloads and no discretion over interview times) or providing inadequate quality of treatment (un-needed VET training for a skillful experienced person).

Advisors and managers must guard against this by careful study of the evidence for effective interventions, and thoughtful application of the findings. Results from programme participation should be measured against results from no-intervention groups, preferably by independent examiners.

Lapses of quality do additional harm to society: the programmes that support them are at best a transfer of public tax money to advisors and their organisations, and at worst may make the social problems they seek to reduce worse than no action.

Do good

Why do employment counselling? What is the good that it promotes?

In the sense that we have defined it, disadvantage excludes some people from the right to contribute to the goods of society, by making them less able to work productively. This must include the loss of self esteem from not making a reasonable contribution to one's world. It also excludes them from the right to enjoy the social and personal benefits from participation in work, be they inter-personal, financial or concrete gains, it excludes them, through social exclusion and through lack of money and resources, from enjoying some of the usual fruits of culture and society.

Society, as represented by those who are not disadvantaged, also loses: it loses productivity; it is widely held that it loses social cohesion and risks the growth of a hostile political environment; and it carries the cost of welfare and lost taxation.

Enhancing opportunities for disadvantaged people so that they equal those of others is a fair way to respond to these losses: it does no harm to others except perhaps by increasing good competition for jobs, a matter about which there are many arguments that we cannot follow here. If done well, it aims to uphold some of the rights of people to participate in a fair and just society. Doing it well, and doing no harm are our first goals.

Limits of competence and limits of judgement

The limits of each advisors' own professional competence and experience are to be kept strictly. Advisors never give advice or discuss issues outside their sphere of competence, and should explicitly defer to other professionals when circumstances demand. However, other professions may not be aware of the skills, methods and value of employment advice. When this is problematic, advisors should help them to an improved understanding.

Conflict

Conflicts, real or apparent, may emerge when negotiating return to work with employers: employers may have goals, working practices, or environments which may seem hostile to the safety, progress or success of the client. Such situations call for careful analysis, and discussion, and often the taking of expert advice.

Advisors should also be aware that their own assumptions and preconceptions may influence their view of ethical matters in ways that others do not approve. Taking advice, discussion and analysis and supervision are valuable in avoiding or mitigating conflicts.

Respect and trust

Showing respect for clients and employers, and their views and social settings, while maintaining professional independence is essential to the ethical advisor's attitude and actions.

What is respect? It is

- treating the client or employer as able to make, and making, their own choices
- recognising openly or tacitly the client's right to make their own choices
- restricting questions about choices to exploration of facts and the clients' perspectives, without hostile judgement of any kind, and with positive regard for the client.

Respect includes maintaining confidentiality, and exploring only relevant matters with clients. Domestic or business matters outside the scope of the employment-advisor relationship are sometimes relevant, but in each case the advisor will check with the client, and give appropriate promises of confidentiality or seek permission to disclose.

Respect may require the advisor to withhold their own different opinion, or to provide counter facts and counter arguments. At no time does respect include scorn, hostility towards, or dismissal of clients' views. It may be reasonable for an advisor to explain that that they hold different beliefs, if this will help develop clarity in the professional relationship.

Respect shown for clients is not only their moral right; it is also the basis on which the advisor constructs a professional helping relationship. It is the foundation of trust between client or employer and advisor.

The trust created by respectful behaviour gives the advisor permission to launch appropriate challenges and propose activities to the client, thus enabling the client to experience new things that contribute to their future choices and actions. There are limits to respect. These usually involve any risks or dangers to others, or legal boundaries and the necessary stance is mentioned below in 'Confidentiality'.

Advisors should avoid bias or prejudgement about employers' or clients' standpoints. Any advisor may hold or adopt different moral standards or codes of behaviour from their clients. But their role as an advisor is to support the client's employability, and is not to change or judge their morals or behavioural codes:

- this includes religious beliefs. It is an advisor's duty either to refuse to work with religions to which they are deeply hostile, or if working with people holding such religious beliefs, to suspend judgement and act in accordance with ethical and moral principles
- clients are entitled to their own opinions. Often those opinions provide valuable insights into the client's difficulties in securing employment, whether or not they accord with accepted moral or legal standards
- clients can be provided with new information and experiences to integrate with their opinions and codes. This may lead to change
- clients who have had sufficient access to a supportive and understanding advisor, to the relevant useful information, and who have experienced work-focussed activities have been provided with the means to make a reasoned and informed judgement about their own future. They have the right to decide for themselves. The advisor will have to exercise judgement as to when and whether to continue to support reluctant clients

Advisors may find for personal reasons that they are unable to work effectively with a client. They have the right to ask for the client to be referred to another advisor. Reasonable reasons might include: lack of progress, lack of empathy, irreconcilable moral differences, and extreme religious differences.

Advisors can acquire a position of influence over clients. The communication skills and methods used in effective advising are such that clients may place trust in their advisor's judgement beyond what is normal or they have experienced before. Advisors must therefore use their position with the highest standards of ethics, and must make every effort to help clients to make their own well-informed choices.

Self determination

In employment advice, self determination refers to:

- the right of clients to make their own judgements and decisions
- the right to make judgements and decisions that differ from others' and from the advisor's
- the right to have, from the advisor, information and experiences that support informed decision-making. As a consequence of this right, the advisor has a duty to provide the information and experiences in an accessible and comprehensible way
- the right to have a life unaffected by inappropriate interventions: advisors must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with client. They do not enter into any kind of personal, financial, physical or emotional relationship, even when they believe that it would be in the client's best interests. Should a client seek to initiate such a relationship, the advisor will make it clear that they cannot do so, will inform their manager, and will refer the client to another advisor should the inappropriate approach continue. An advisor who feels strongly tempted to suggest a non-professional relationship with a client should inform their manager in strict confidence, and be given the opportunity to refer the client to another advisor without any penalty.

This strong injunction against personal relations has a moral ground in the right of clients to make their lives supported by professional advice but without the inappropriate pressure that comes from personal involvement. It has equally strong roots in the inevitable damage that is done to advisors' independence and judgment should they enter a personal, family, financial, social, sexual or other relationship outside the professional one.

Clients have a right to leave the professional relationship or request a change of advisor without giving reasons. Managers should support advisors who through no fault of their own find a client leaving their care. Where participation in counselling or guidance is mandatory for the client, managers should make clear what procedures there are for referral to another advisor.

Self-determination is limited in scope for some clients:

- clients who have limited mental capacity, whether it is permanent or temporary, may not be able to make informed decisions in the normal sense of the phrase. Advisors should take great care and get qualified specialist advice to help them with such clients
- advice that does come to advisors from professional specialists may sometimes be ambiguous or even contradictory. Advisors should take the line of greatest personal safety and minimum physical and social risks
- where it is safe and proper to do so, clients may be supported by having experiences or practical exercises that enable them to decide what they can and cannot do and to form their own preferences – suitable work placements may be an example
- clients have a right to be accompanied by a friend, relation or chaperone.

What is appropriate for advisors, from clients and others? Recognising and avoiding inappropriate language and behaviour by clients or by advisors is required.

- advisors have the right to be respected as well as clients. They acquire that right as people: they should not be abused verbally or physically, nor should they feel under threat or in danger. Clients should be informed of this restriction on their actions before the advisory relationship begins. Advisors should be supported by suitable safety and personal protection
- advisors' privacy should also be respected, and the times and places where they are accessible to clients should be limited to what is reasonable to protect their privacy
- clients should respect the limits of the professional relationship. Some clients may need help to show this respect, for example by being supported by carers, representatives (lawyers, union officials and so forth) who have been informed about the advisory role
- advisors should not be expected to work outside their professional scope of practice
- advisors should be given working conditions that enable them to give clients their alert energetic attention, and to spend enough time with each client as supports their progress
- advisors should be accorded the right to give the best impartial advice to clients, acting in the clients' interests before the interests of others. At times this may involve advisors in careful balancing of competing demands on their loyalty. Advisors should not be put under pressure to give less than good support and advice to clients, and should have the right to question circumstances in which this happens.

Confidentiality

Advisors must respect the limits of professional curiosity as to clients' private lives. Advisors often have to explore their clients private lives on order to help clients to question themselves, to choose goals, resolve problems. This must be done with great caution and respect for privacy. Advisor should clearly tell clients (and employers) that while they are free to inform the advisor, the advisor has a strong bond of confidentiality and will not encourage inappropriate disclosure.

For the most part, such confidential information should not be shared. But it is inevitable at times that best interests will be served if some – and rarely all - of the information is shared

- between employer and employee

- between advisor and other professions
- among family members and other social contacts.

Getting adequate permission to share confidential information is the minimum. Above that, it is necessary that:

- permission is given in writing wherever possible, naming the professions and people to whom information can be given
- only the necessary information is shared
- clients and employers and others are kept informed about permissions and sharing
- clients and employers have the right to withdraw permission at any time
- documents are kept in a secure environment.

Occasionally an advisor may come into contact with information about things that pose a risk to others. While the preservation of life and safety is paramount, judgement has to be exercised as to whether, how, and when such risks over-ride the duty of confidentiality. This is normally a matter of company policy, and it is sensible to seek advice from a senior responsible person before proceeding.

Where there is believed to be a risk to personal safety of the client or others, the advisor may decide to act in support of their safety rather than with respect to the client's or employer's potentially dangerous wishes

- provision should be made for advisors to pass on information about risks of injury, risks to minors or vulnerable people, to relevant authorities. This should be covered by company policy and it should be made clear to client or employer when such disclosure might be made. This is uncommon but not unheard-of in employment advice
- clients may be acting against the law or about to do so. Advisors should be provided with company policy on how to respond, and clients should be made aware of this at the beginning

Whether or not to cease advising, or to disclose to authorities is a matter for policy and judgement.

5. Summary

Our approach has been to look for evidence of what is effective in helping people who are disadvantaged to be better able to compete in the labour market.

We start by noting that disadvantage as normally described by reference to some social or personal quality that is not directly associated with employment, such as disability, migration, ethnicity, that these are weakly connected statistically and causally with labour-market disadvantage. Our definition is directly related to employment, and is

'Inability for whatever reason, to compete fairly for jobs with the majority of others in a realistically chosen sector of the labour market'.

We looked for evidence based on high quality randomised controlled trials and found surprisingly few. Consequently, to add to those we found, we turned to areas of interpersonal therapy and guidance where evidence is more plentiful, and found considerable research and solid findings for certain activities and behaviours that are relevant for advisors of disadvantaged people. We have included this knowledge to add detail to the labour-market studies that we found. This joining of study results from different fields is not, we think, contentious, but it should be the focus of further trials to confirm the active ingredients in the relationship between advisor and client. By contrast, the bulk of career theory, interesting and worthwhile as it is, contributed little to the evidence base about disadvantage and employment, and we have not found it necessary to engage with theoretical considerations of career-choice.

In trying to identify ‘active ingredients’ for employment advice, we have found it useful to note that positive results need to be distinguished from those that arise by chance, and from those that would have occurred without interventions. Making this distinction is probably easier in review and study than in daily practice. But it is nonetheless important to separate effective from ineffective practice. Among the less effective practices are those embodied in many of the active labour market programmes of European Governments, which have a weak record of diminishing disadvantage, despite decades of effort.

The impact of welfare arrangements, and the effect of personal beliefs on employability, are strong. The desire to work and the belief in the possibility of work both have a causal relationship with effort to find work and success in doing so. And the direction of causality may work both ways, manifesting itself in complex personal relationships with the labour market. Advisor behaviours that incorporate learning from the psychology of belief and behaviour are shown in good quality studies to add to the effectiveness of employment programmes to which they are added.

Under our definition of disadvantage there are many different groups of people, with many causes for their apparent lack of labour-market capability. They have mainly been studied in isolation from one another: ex-prisoners apart from migrants, migrants apart from disabled people, disabled people apart from the homeless and so on. We have seen no evidence for or against the assumption that what works for one group will work for another, and the descriptions of what works have a great deal in common across the groups. So we have assumed that what works for one will work for all. That said, we are able to recommend that groups should also have any specific support that enables them to take advantage of a labour market programme. It would be foolish, for example, to offer support in the wrong language to a migrant group, or to expect people with learning disabilities to undertake complex programmes of activity unaided. Equally, we note that such support, vital though it is, is not the ‘active ingredient’, but is an essential carrier of the active ingredient in developing labour market competence.

Turning to what works, we see that the organisation and management of services can have an impact on outcomes. There are model programmes (IPS is a well known example) that can be followed, and where, as in IPS, these have been shown to have good results, any divergence should be carefully justified. Organisation and management need to pay attention to contact time between client and advisors, and to advisor caseloads. The use of specialists to meet particular needs is important, as is ensuring that specialists do not undermine the ‘what works’ activity of advisors. Access, technology and the usability of the service are important. Finally the use of profiling techniques to identify clients in need of support to establish their equality in the labour market is found to be problematic, and we suggest an alternative approach that might be used.

The greatest body of evidence concerns the design of employment programmes, and particularly the skills of advisors within them. Direct and live contact with employers is the most effective way to identify vacancies and to gain the information that helps prepare applicants for jobs. It can usefully be supplemented by employment and job databases, but there is no substitute for first hand contact.

Within successful programmes we see systematic and carefully planned activity that helps clients choose a career or occupation, find work to apply for, and compete against others in the labour market. These successful programmes treat this as an active learning process, and give great weight to discovery of self, of the labour market, and self-management by clients.

The successful programmes, and the skills of the most helpful advisors, are those that have the resources to support this learning activity, and do so in specific ways that encourage self-efficacy and confidence in clients. Programmes that follow these methods are more likely to meet with success than those that do not.

The skills of advisors are at least as important, and probably much more important, than the detail of programme design. Borrowing research from associated fields, and taking also the advice of acknowledged experts and designers of well-tested programmes, we see that interpersonal communication skills are a very significant factor. These skills include well defined behavioural skills covering listening, exploration, job choice and decision making, training and preparation for work and for competing for work. But they are not routine or procedural in nature: the quality of the human, and hence flexible and variable, relationship is a critical success factor.

Such skills are also vital to the use of group work with clients. Groupwork has several advantages, the main one being the extra personal resources and influences that are available in the group, but not excluding the cost saving compared with personal guidance. Groupwork and group training is a location for active learning, and methods by which clients acquire skills have been described and should be followed in the design of group experiences. Group work also has some risks, and care has to be taken to avoid the possibility of doing more harm than good for some if not all individuals in the group.

The application of technical, statistical or psychometric tests to match individuals to jobs is neither indicated nor contraindicated by our work. While we see difficulties and criticisms in technical approaches to job-capability match, we can see that provided they are well researched and based on solid statistical evidence and used as intended they can be a useful adjunct to – and not a replacement for – the skills of advisors and sound organisation. But their use needs care: there are common examples in daily use for which the evidence is weak or missing.

Finally, we mention some of the main considerations for an ethical service. We have not pretended to carry out a detailed survey of writings in this field, nor to present an exhaustive account. Instead we feel the need to point to the main issues which arise, all of which are undisputed in the literature, but which we feel are of great importance to a service that aims to enable individual clients better to lead their own lives in their chosen labour market.

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