

# Look Before You Leap: The Role of Self-Employment Coaching Self-Efficacy in Facilitating Client's Success

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## Abstract

In follow-up to the *Look Before You Leap: Self Employment Survival Strategies* project, the authors engaged Canadian Career Development Practitioners (CDPs) in an exploratory study looking at their overall opinions regarding self-employment, including whether or not it is a viable option for clients and the factors that contribute to CDPs engaging in self-employment conversations. This article begins by reviewing the "Look Before You Leap" project and the various resources developed through project activities, then outlines the findings from the follow-up study where the authors coined the term *self-employment coaching self-efficacy* and link this concept to the frequency with which CDPs engage in self-employment conversations. Results revealed that CDPs are less likely to engage in conversations with clients if they don't feel fully equipped to have those conversations. Other aspects related to perceptions of self-employment as a viable option for clients are also explored.

By the end of 2010, almost 2.7 million Canadians were self-employed (Industry Canada, 2011), accounting for approximately 16% of the total employment in the country. Economic downturns, such as the global recession that started in 2008, have been historically linked to increases in self-employment; it's not surprising, therefore, to find that in the year beginning October 2008 self-employment in Canada rose by 3.9% while paid employment fell in both the public sector (-1.6%) and private sector (-4.1%; LaRochelle-Côté, 2010).

Career Development Practitioners (CDPs) play a significant role in helping unemployed Canadians re-attach to the workforce (Bezanson, O'Reilly, & Mag-

nusson, 2009). Given the number of Canadians who are self-employed overall, and especially the rise in self-employment during tough economic times, it seems important that CDPs are equipped to support individuals contemplating self-employment or becoming self-employed (Kendall, Buys, Charker, & MacMillan, 2006).

In some jurisdictions, self-employment is embraced as a return-to-work strategy (Congregado, Golpe, & Carmona, 2010); in other cases, it is only explored as a possibility once all other viable options have been exhausted (Ministry of Social Development, 2011). However, neither extreme considers the individual and economic characteristics that contribute to self-employment success. Previous research, specific to the vocational rehabilitation sector in Australia, found that "while agency policies sometimes facilitate the choice of self-employment as a vocational goal, the office environment per se is perceived as quite negative towards such a goal" (Kendall et al., 2006, p. 204). It seems apparent, therefore, that CDPs are receiving mixed messages about supporting their clients to consider self-employment and many feel ill-equipped to engage their clients in self-employment exploration. During 2010 and 2011, with support from the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC), Life Strategies Ltd. developed a suite of "Look Before You Leap" resources to fill this perceived gap; the project is described in the following section.

## The "Look Before You Leap" Project

Co-authors Neault and Pickerell have a long history of helping CDPs better understand self-employment; our team has presented workshops, published articles and journals, and been in-

terviewed about self-employment topics. The "Look Before You Leap" project originally focused on supporting CDPs to move beyond government contracts to explore self-employment opportunities (e.g., providing career development within organizations, establishing a private practice of their own, providing career services within educational or vocational rehabilitation settings). In 2010, we presented *Look Before You Leap: Survival Strategies for Self Employed Career Consultants* at BC's Career Development Conference; recognizing a need for additional research and financial support to further develop the self-employment resources, we approached the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) with a partnership proposal for funding.

Within that application we noted that CDPs, and individuals interested in pursuing work as self-employed contractors or consultants, had an urgent need for accessible training and resources on the topic. This broadened our original scope beyond simply facilitating the self-employment of CDPs to equipping CDPs to better support their clients to explore self-employment possibilities. As training for CDPs and counsellors typically doesn't offer self-employment information, many individuals working in the field are poorly equipped to engage in self-employment discussions with their unemployed and underemployed clients. CERIC agreed to partner on the project.

## Research and Survey Development

The project began with a brief literature review focussing on the realities of self-employment, self-employment as a viable option for the unemployed, and factors contributing to self-employment success. To further explore self-em-



ployment, a brief (8-item) survey was sent to our network. The survey comprised quantitative and qualitative questions including: What is your self-employment status?, What's one thing you know now about self-employment that you wish you knew before?, and What percentage of clients do you have self-employment conversations with? We also asked participants to select the three most important entrepreneurial characteristics (e.g., empathy, independence, self-discipline, risk-taking) from a list of 10 derived from our research and personal experiences; an "other" option allowed participants to identify any additional characteristics they considered important for entrepreneurial success.

### Results

Ninety individuals responded to the survey; some (n = 59) were currently self-employed and the rest had all been self-employed at some point in their careers. Respondents identified 42 characteristics of self-employed individuals; the top three were self-discipline (25%), people skills (13.73%), and persistence (12.75%). Similar results were clustered, resulting in a final list of 35 characteristics of the successfully self-employed; each was then coded as a knowledge, skill, or ability (KSA). From responses we were also able to identify 10 strategies for self-employment success.

### Checklist

From our list of 35 characteristics, we then developed a checklist which allows individuals to self-rate against 105 entrepreneurial items using a 5-point likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). When scored, results were clustered into the 35 characteristics, with a total score classified as *low* (i.e., few of the identified characteristics), *average* (i.e., some of the characteristics), or *high* (i.e., many of the characteristics). Neault and Pickerell (2011) presented a condensed version in the *Look Before You Leap* book.

### Components

The "Look Before You Leap" project resulted in a suite of resources for CDPs and their clients including: (a) a 2

week (20 hour) facilitated e-learning course and (b) book focussed on self-employment, (c) a dedicated website ([www.lookbeforeyouleap.ca](http://www.lookbeforeyouleap.ca)), with annotated links to relevant resources for the self-employed, (d) a facilitator's guide to support CDPs and counsellors interested in teaching the course, and (e) a PowerPoint presentation to support in-person delivery of the course. We also developed (f) an interactive blog (<http://lookbeforeyouleap-selfemployment.blogspot.com/>) and (g) Twitter feed (@lookb4leaping) to share resources and highlight project activities.

### Evaluation

To ensure the resources being developed would work for the intended audience(s), we conducted several small focus groups with CDPs and individuals who were self-employed in a wide variety of fields. We also conducted two pilots of the course; the first as a mixed-mode post-conference session (i.e., combining an in-person workshop with e-learning extension) and the second fully online. There were 5 participants in the mixed-mode session, all CDPs; however, the second pilot, also with 5 participants, included self-employed individuals and those considering self-employment, from a variety of sectors. The diverse group of participants in the second pilot allowed us to test the assumption that two distinct groups (i.e., CDPs interested in learning about self-employment to better support their clients and individuals considering self-employment or already self-employed) could be mixed. Results of both pilots were positive with 100% of participants reporting they enjoyed the course overall. They also reported that course length and pace was about right (56%), the Leap book was very useful/useful (89%), and that the combined pilot worked well (44%), with the remaining 56% saying it worked for some discussions and not others; no one indicated that it didn't work.

Overall, the "Look Before You Leap" project met all of its objectives. The course materials and book have been very well received and there has been growing interest in the topic. While our focus was initially to help CDPs consider their own self-employment opportunities, that focus expanded

to equip CDPs to better support their clients contemplating self-employment. The second pilot expanded the target group even further, demonstrating that the Leap suite of resources is suitable for any individual interested in better understanding the realities of self-employment.

### Follow-Up

Building on our findings from the "Look Before You Leap" project, and to further assist CDPs, this article is intended to deepen understanding of clients' needs related to self-employment, explore attitudes about self-employment as an option for the unemployed, and encourage development of knowledge and skills through continuing education. To build a solid foundation for this next step, we revisited the literature.

### Literature Review

The context of self-employment is impacted by labour market trends and economic conditions; therefore, CDPs can't assume that self-employment knowledge from their past would be adequate today or in the future. Because self-efficacy is subject-specific, it's important to understand what would contribute to CDPs being able to competently and comfortably support their clients to consider self-employment possibilities. The following sections summarize literature related to today's self-employment context; self-employment knowledge, skills, and attitudes; and self-efficacy, especially as it relates to the ability to facilitate clients' exploration of self-employment as an option.

### Self-Employment Context

Self-employment growth in recent years is not only a Canadian phenomenon; it has been noted in Australia and the United States (Kendall et al., 2006) and throughout many parts of Europe (Congregado et al., 2010), just as a few examples. In investigating the movement into and out of self-employment, Congregado et al. (2010) described a "recession-push hypothesis" (p. 831), finding that in times of higher unemployment, especially during a crisis, there was an increase in people starting-



up new businesses (i.e., becoming self-employed). LaRochelle-Côté (2010) reported a similar trend in Canada, most recently during the recession that began in Fall 2008. This type of recession-related self-employment boom is typically followed by a bust where self-employment growth slows and some of the self-employed re-enter the traditional workforce as employees (Congregado et al., 2010; LaRochelle-Côté, 2010).

Of particular interest to CDPs may be government policies related to self-employment. In some jurisdictions, policies encourage self-employment to reduce unemployment rates and, perhaps, create additional jobs (Congregado et al., 2010) or to facilitate a return-to-work for injured clients or people with disabilities (Kendall et al., 2006). In other cases, self-employment seems to be discouraged, with few supports in place to help individuals make a successful transition from unemployment to working on their own (Ministry of Social Development, 2011).

Congregado et al. (2010) cautioned, however, that policies aimed at increasing self-employment may attract poor entrepreneurs. Individuals who move into self-employment to create a job for themselves aren't likely to engage in job creation (i.e., hiring others). Further, recent Canadian research didn't indicate that the increased self-employment in recessionary times was a result of the unemployed moving into self-employment; rather it seemed that as people left their jobs to become self-employed, the unemployed filled some of the resulting vacancies (Industry Canada, 2011).

In some instances self-employment merely served as temporary measure (Congregado et al., 2010) or a stepping stone into employment (Kellard et al., 2002). However, Jarvis (2003) described the new work paradigm as more about contracts/fees and personal freedoms than salaries/benefits and job security. Similarly, Vande Kuyt (2011) noted "we live in transformational times where job security is shaky at best" (p. 18). Self-employment is well suited for such a paradigm, so it's possible that self-employment won't "level off" as we come out of the current recession, but rather will continue to grow. Neault (1997a; 1997b) also highlighted the importance of an "entrepreneurial spirit"

for *all* workers to succeed in their workplace and the new economy – so understanding self-employment success characteristics may facilitate re-employment as well as self-employment. At some point those with an entrepreneurial spirit will move into action (Neault & Pickerell, 2011) and it's important for CDPs to be prepared to assist them.

### **CDP Self-Employment Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes**

In order to appropriately support clients, CDPs need a sound knowledge base so they can carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of self-employment versus traditional employment (Peel & Inkson, 2004). There is an abundance of research available on the topic of self-employment, exploring concepts such as why do people become self-employed (Lee & Cochran, 1997; Neault & Pickerell, 2011), what contributes to self-employment success (Kellard, Legge, & Ashworth, 2002) and self-employment satisfaction (Schjoedt, 2009), and self-employment realities (Delage, 2002).

Lee and Cochran (1997) identified eight themes from interviews with self-employed individuals about their decision to become self-employed: individuals were (a) motivated, either negatively or positively; (b) had a definite goal and appropriate connections; (c) learned about the workplace reality; (d) developed competence; (e) experienced a change in circumstance associated with favourable conditions; (f) accessed a supportive network; (g) built confidence; and (h) felt responsibility/ownership. Although this research is older and limited by participant numbers, it provided an understanding that "the purpose of career counselling for potential entrepreneurs is to actualize conditions of action that enhance a sense of agency, enabling a person to make a decision on self-employment" (p. 107).

Once the decision is made to explore/pursue self-employment, consideration should be paid to success and satisfaction factors. Schjoedt (2009) identified a link between self-employed persons' job satisfaction and (a) autonomy in scheduling and determining work procedures, (b) variety of activi-

ties involving different skills and talents, and (c) direct or clear performance feedback. In addition to financial and non-financial support (e.g., business planning), Kellard et al. (2002) noted that those who are successful in self-employment had a good employment history and previous exposure to self-employment. However, the research literature and anecdotal conversations reveal mixed beliefs about self-employment as an option for unemployed clients (Kendall et al., 2006).

When Kendall and her colleagues (2006) began to study self-employment as a vocational rehabilitation strategy, they believed that vocational rehabilitation practitioners in Australia viewed the option quite negatively; however, that's not what their research revealed. Rather, they found that the counsellors themselves had quite positive views about self-employment for many of their clients (as long as financial resources were in place and their clients had the necessary social skills); the roadblock appeared to be at the organizational level (i.e., respondents reported a lack of agency support for self-employment as an option). This seems similar to the current situation in British Columbia as a new model of employment services is about to be launched by the provincial government. Among other requirements, before discussing self-employment as an option CDPs will need to demonstrate "that no suitable Insurable Employment opportunity is available for the Client" (Ministry of Social Development, 2011, p. 100).

Although traditionally there has been a preference for, and focus on, moving individuals to employment rather than self-employment (Lee & Cochran, 1997), taking a last resort stance on participation in self-employment can be problematic, leading to failure of such programs (Rissman, as cited in Congregado et al., 2010). According to Congregado and his colleagues (2010), individuals who have been unemployed long-term and qualified, motivated entrepreneurs represent two distinct group and, thus, should not be treated the same. Clients who've been repeatedly unable to succeed within other employment programs/interventions likely have limited potential to succeed as entrepreneurs. Conse-



quently, self-employment policies that reflect the client's self-employment success potential may be more viable than policies that permit self-employment support only to those who are otherwise unemployable.

Two of the authors of this article (Neault and Pickerell) have been self-employed for most of their careers; both have presented, taught, and written extensively on self-employment and entrepreneurial approaches to effective career management (Neault, 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2003; Neault & Pickerell, 2011). However, through their work on the "Look Before You Leap" project and the additional research for this article, both had several assumptions shattered and biases revealed. In the four stages of learning model (Businessballs, n.d.), unconscious incompetence is a stage where people simply don't know what they don't know; they are, therefore, unaware of skill gaps. Shattering of assumptions/biases is an example of moving through the stages of learning into conscious incompetence; it's at this stage one is aware of the need to learn and may be motivated to develop additional skills or knowledge. As self-employment realities change with shifts in the economy, this highlights the importance of ongoing professional development on this topic. However, with limited participation in the "Look Before You Leap" course beyond our initial pilot, it appears that CDPs may not see the importance of professional development on this topic, are unwilling or unable to invest in it, or are simply unaware of their own skill gaps.

### Self-Employment Coaching Self-Efficacy

The significance of optimism (Neault, 2002) and hope (Niles, Amundson, & Neault, 2011) to both career success and job satisfaction has been well established; the literature confirms that these elements are similarly significant to the self-employed (Cassar, 2010). However, in neither case is this to be naïve optimism; rather, it is optimism grounded in knowledge about oneself and relevant contextual factors, supported by the capacity (e.g., skills and resources) to handle challenges that will inevitably be encountered (Neault &

Pickerell, 2011). The importance of reality checking is fundamental to the "Look Before You Leap" suite of resources. Our goal was to support CDPs (i.e., those personally considering self-employment and also those supporting clients to make informed decisions) to facilitate a realistic, informed optimism based on a solid understanding of what successful self-employment entails. This fits with Bandura's (1986) recognition that self-efficacy is subject-specific – it seemed important, therefore to facilitate the self-employment coaching self-efficacy of CDPs as well as the self-employment decision-making self-efficacy of individuals exploring entrepreneurial options.

Specific to counsellors, Marshall (2000) identified a developmental process that counselling students experience when forming their "counsellor identity or their belief that they can be a counsellor" (p. 4); this process includes specific education, supervision, practice, and reflection. Similarly, Williams, Cox, and Koob (1999) described a service-learning approach to increase self-efficacy whereby individuals learn through reflection and experience. It makes sense, therefore, that a similar process of training, supervision, practice, and reflection could also build self-employment coaching self-efficacy.

Our original research, conducted to support the "Look Before You Leap" project, informed the development of the suite of Leap tools and resources. In this present study, our research specifically examined (a) whether or not CDPs see self-employment as a viable option for clients, (b) the factors contributing to CDPs engaging in self-employment conversations with clients, (c) how self-employment discussions are initiated, (d) how CDPs learn about self-employment, and (e) whether or not self-employment knowledge contributed to a willingness to engage in self-employment conversations with clients.

### Method

Because the literature on this topic was limited, ambiguous, and in some cases contradictory, this exploratory study investigated relationships between a wide-range of variables including: location (i.e., province/territory), client

population, age, employment sector/type, self-employment experience, opinions and beliefs about self-employment, self-employment knowledge level (self-rated and assessed), self-employment program/service mandatory qualifying conditions and factors contributing to program success, and frequency of self-employment conversations.

### Participants and Procedure

Intended survey respondents were Career Development Practitioners (CDPs) who, as defined by Bezanson, O'Reilly, and Magnusson (2009), are individuals providing services in the areas of career education, career counselling, employment counselling, human resource development, career coaching, training in employment skills, training in work-related areas, and vocational rehabilitation (i.e., people who play a key role in keeping individuals employed and getting the unemployed back to work). To reach these individuals, survey invitations were sent through the authors' database, relevant provincial association listservs (e.g., BC Career Development Association [BCCDA]), and strategic key contacts throughout Canada. In addition, information about the survey was posted on several social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook). To maximize participation and promote timely responses, the survey period was deliberately short (i.e., 2 weeks). There was immediate pan-Canadian interest, as well as some international responses, with over 100 completed surveys within the first 24 hours and 195 total responses at the end of the survey period; of the 192 who reported being in a position to make career suggestions, almost all ( $n = 190$ ) reported that they would present self-employment as an option.

Most respondents were Canadian (96%) with 4% from other countries (e.g., US, UK, Australia). The highest representation in Canada was from BC (54%) – not surprising, given that the researchers are BC-based. However, there was a coast-to-coast representation with the second largest cluster of respondents in Ontario (21%), followed by significant groups from Manitoba (7%) and Alberta (7%), and 1% each



from Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, we didn't have representation from Newfoundland, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, or Yukon Territories. Many respondents (46%) came from metropolitan areas (i.e., population of 100,000+), were between 40 and 54 years old (42%), and were either employed directly by the government or by government-funded community-based agencies (65%). To a certain extent, self-employment experience of the self-selected respondents (i.e., those who chose to respond to the survey) was skewed. Compared to 16% of all Canadians who are self-employed (Industry Canada, 2011), 27% of our survey respondents reported being currently self-employed, with an additional 39% reporting that they had been self-employed in the past; only 34% had never been self-employed.

### Survey Development

The 25-question survey, which was uploaded to Survey Monkey, primarily comprised multiple choice questions with an opportunity for qualitative responses through an "other" or "comment" box. The questions were informed by the literature and the lead researchers' extensive experience within career development sector and with self-employment. The survey began with demographic questions (e.g., I work primarily in [region], I am [age], Have you ever been self-employed?) followed by content-specific questions (e.g., As a career practitioner, when would you present self-employment as an option? What percentage of clients do you have self-employment conversations with?). The final eight questions were an objective measure of self-employment knowledge derived from information in recent Statistics Canada reports about self-employment (e.g., In Canada, self-employment represents approximately \_\_\_% of total employment?; In Canada, which gender is represented to a greater extent in self-employment?). For each of these questions, multiple choice answer options were provided.

### Data Analysis

Survey responses were downloaded to a Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS) program and all raw scores were coded appropriately (i.e., assigning a value to each possible response). Some variables were arrived at through the *transform, compute variable* command which assigned a single overall score. Some survey questions provided respondents an opportunity to select "other" and specify a response beyond available response options. Where appropriate (i.e., when a respondent's written comment matched an available survey option), "other" responses were recoded into the available response options. Given the diversity of question formats and response options, results were analyzed through various statistical procedures including frequency distributions, correlations, and regression.

Qualitative responses were analyzed by manually coding answers with keywords and concepts similar to the approach used by Lee and Cochran (1997). In many instances, respondents' written comments included multiple keywords/concepts; following the template analysis model described by King (2005), some components of single items were assigned to more than one theme. Similar themes were clustered and frequencies were calculated. To ensure appropriate coding, quick Internet searches were completed to clarify unfamiliar terms or acronyms. Theming using coloured highlighters, symbols, and post-it notes was an emergent process (i.e., we didn't select pre-select themes and categories but, rather, extracted themes from the responses).

### Results

The following sections present survey results organized by CDPs' knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding self-employment and the frequency with which they engage in self-employment conversations.

#### Self-Employment Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes

Most respondents reported a mid-level of self-employment knowledge and skills. On a 5-point scale, with 1 being very limited and 5 being excellent, the mean scores for respondents' level of knowledge/skill in supporting clients to (a) *explore* self-employment

as an option and (b) *implement* their self-employment plans were 3.7 (SD = 1.05) and 3.4 (SD = 1.36) respectively. The two scores were significantly correlated ( $r = 0.76$ ,  $n = 193$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but weakly correlated with whether or not the respondent had been previously self-employed (i.e., with exploration  $r = .25$ ,  $n = 192$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; with implementation  $r = .21$ ,  $n = 192$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). All respondents were able to self-rate their knowledge and skills (i.e., no one chose "I'm not sure"). Due to the intercorrelation, we combined the knowledge and skill variables, creating a new variable which we named "self-employment coaching self-efficacy." These scores ranged from 1-5, with an average (mean) of 3.7. Responses clustered in the 3-5 range displaying a normal, but positively skewed distribution.

Most respondents (84%) indicated participation in professional development activities related to self-employment; the most common types of learning included self-study (48%), 10+ hour course or program (30%), short course (3-10 hours; 20%), and brief webinar, conference presentation, or workshop (less than 3 hours; 18%). An overall professional development variable was calculated by weighting each response (0 = none; 1 = self-study; 2 = brief webinar, conference presentation, or workshop; 3 = short course; 4 = course/program). Scores ranged from 0-10, with the average score being 2.65; however, there was a bimodal distribution of scores with the largest groups reporting self-study ( $n = 56$ , 29%) and full courses or programs ( $n = 48$ , 25%). Although we hypothesized that knowledge scores (from a brief quiz on self-employment facts and trends) would correlate with participation in self-employment professional development, no significant correlation was found.

In the future, 96% of participants anticipate engaging in further professional development on the topic of self-employment; most would prefer a face-to-face workshop, seminar, and/or course (70%), but close to half of respondents would consider an online course (50%), webinar (47%), consultation or coaching (44%), or use of printed materials (44%). Fewer (33%) indicated that they intended to increase



their knowledge by informational interviewing someone who is self-employed.

To explore respondents' self-employment attitudes in relation to potentially challenging client groups, we used an open-ended question. Although 35% of respondents ( $n = 59$ ) indicated that there were no groups they would exclude from exploring self-employment, other responses clustered into three themes: client characteristics, financial barriers, and lack of business knowledge and skills. Almost half of respondents identified specific client characteristics that could preclude self-employment (49%;  $n = 81$ ); these included limited social support systems, low skills, disability and mental illness, newcomer status, personal characteristics, no interest in self-employment, a history of unemployment/discrimination, youth and inexperience, criminal background, homelessness, living in a remote location, and multi-barriers. Significantly fewer respondents (11%,  $n = 19$ ) indicated concerns about exploring self-employment with clients who had financial barriers (e.g., poverty, limited savings). Only 5% ( $n = 8$ ) expressed concerns about their clients' lack of business knowledge/skills, previous business failures, unrealistic expectations of time/effort, and lack of "big picture" thinking.

Nearly all respondents (91%) indicated that self-employment works for some clients but not for others and should, therefore, be considered on a case-by-case basis. A few (7%) indicated that, in today's economy, self-employment is essential and that everyone should explore it as an option. At the other extreme, 2% of respondents believed that full-time employment was always preferred to self-employment.

We asked respondents two questions concerning self-employment programs. The first focussed on the mandatory client qualifications for entry into self-employment programs while the second asked respondents to consider what client characteristics/conditions contributed to successful completion of these programs, regardless of restrictions or mandates.

Respondents identified a wide variety of mandatory conditions including viable business ideas (73%), entrepreneurial personal attributes (72%), being

legally entitled to work in Canada (71%), and skills/knowledge relevant to the specific business product and/or service (70%); they also noted the importance of an active EI claim (39%) and being unemployed (45%). The client characteristic that was least endorsed was low skilled (4%), indicating a recognition of the skills required to become successfully self-employed. Approximately 25% of respondents identified other mandatory conditions for self-employment; these included specific entrepreneurial characteristics (i.e., passion, drive/dedication, understanding of costs), resources, interest in self-employment, and Reachback status (i.e., a person who has had an EI claim in the 3 years prior to applying for provincial assistance; Government of British Columbia, n.d.).

When survey participants were asked to reflect upon a client's chance of successfully completing a self-employment program if there were no mandatory qualifying conditions to consider, their responses clustered into a slightly different pattern. Personal attributes (93%) and viable business idea (90%) were still the highest rated. Similarly, skills/knowledge of specific business product and/or service (89%) remained important considerations. However, having an active EI claim (19%) and being currently unemployed (22%) were, not surprisingly, not seen as contributing in a major way to successful completion of a self-employment program (i.e., although, as mandatory qualifying conditions, they may facilitate entry into a self-employment program, they are not seen by many as contributing to successful completion of that program).

At the end of the survey, respondents had the opportunity to share additional comments or recommend self-employment resources; at this point, many returned their focus to groups that they perceived as unsuitable self-employment candidates (e.g., people lacking business knowledge or entrepreneurial characteristics; insufficient financial resources). However, others provided case examples where self-employment appeared to be the only option for their clients.

As noted in this section, there were significant differences amongst survey

respondents' knowledge, skills, and attitudes regarding self-employment; this, in turn, seemed to impact their likelihood of engaging in self-employment conversations with their clients. We explore the impact of this in the next section.

### Self-Employment Conversations

Most respondents (76%) reported having self-employment conversations with fewer than 25% of their clients; a few (4%) indicated not having self-employment conversations with any clients at all. Frequency of conversations was slightly, but significantly, correlated with self-ratings of knowledge and skill in supporting clients (a) to explore self-employment as an option ( $r = .28$ ,  $n = 192$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and (b) to implement their self-employment plans ( $r = .29$ ,  $n = 192$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). We were somewhat surprised to find that the self-employment experience of CDPs themselves was not significantly correlated with the likelihood of having conversations about self-employment with their clients (i.e., this apparently wasn't an influencing factor).

Respondents indicated that they presented self-employment as an option if the client indicated s/he would like to be self-employed (77%); if an assessment indicated self-employment as an option (66%); if the client demonstrated self-employment knowledge, skills, and abilities (64%); or if the client indicated s/he had been self-employed in the past (41%). Some respondents, however, indicated that they would only introduce self-employment after they'd explored all other options (16%). A few (11%) were at the other extreme, indicating that they would explore self-employment options when they first met with a client.

A step-wise regression analysis was conducted to determine which variables best predicted CDPs engagement in self-employment conversations with clients. We considered variables related to CDP demographics (i.e., city size, age of practitioner, and personal experience in self-employment) and engagement in professional development related to the topic of self-employment. Although each of these variables was hypothesized to potentially impact the



likelihood of self-employment conversations, the regression revealed that the best predictor variable was what we have labelled self-employment coaching self-efficacy (i.e., the career practitioner's self-ratings of knowledge and skill in supporting clients to explore self-employment as an option). This single variable was only responsible, however, for 20% of the variance; further research is necessary to determine what else may influence CDPs to explore self-employment as an option for their clients.

### Discussion

Overall, our findings indicate that CDPs have diverse attitudes and beliefs about self-employment and, also, about which circumstances would lead them to engage in self-employment conversations with their clients. The pivotal point seems to be self-employment coaching self-efficacy, a term we've used to refer to the CDPs' belief in their ability to explore self-employment as an option for their clients and, where relevant, to support their clients to implement their self-employment plans. It's this specific type of self-efficacy that appears to be impacting the frequency with which CDPs are conversing with clients about self-employment, more so than the CDPs' own self-employment experience and/or specific self-employment training.

From our findings, it seems that an effective way to encourage more CDPs to engage in discussions about self-employment with their clients is to facilitate the CDPs' self-employment self-efficacy. As both learning and reflection strengthen self-efficacy (Marshall, 2000; Williams et al., 1999), it makes sense that CDPs may benefit from learning more about self-employment and, as a result, be better equipped to explore self-employment as an option for their clients. The Leap project resources were designed for exactly that purpose; together they comprise the breadth of approaches to professional development that study participants indicated an interest in (i.e., face-to-face and online training, webinars, and self-study using printed materials). However, as with other types of professional development in the career and employ-

ment services sector, many CDPs recognize the *importance* of continuous learning but struggle to find the *time or money* to fit more professional development into their lives.

In addition, this research surfaced some apparently biased and unfounded assumptions amongst CDPs about factors that may preclude self-employment success. Although some CDPs reported that they would be unlikely to explore self-employment with people who have disabilities or mental health concerns, in some cases, self-employment may be the only viable option for members of these groups to return to productive work. Similarly, although some respondents expressed concern about exploring self-employment as an option with someone whose previous business had failed, there are countless success stories of people who have turned their lessons learned from business failures into successful entrepreneurial endeavours. Ellsberg (2011) reported interviewing many college dropouts who became millionaires and billionaires – they consistently credited their business failures as contributing to their exceptional longer term successes. Some CDPs also reported reluctance to explore self-employment with youth; however, biographies of such successful entrepreneurs as Bill Gates (Microsoft), Steve Jobs (Apple), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), and Richard Branson (Virgin Records) clearly indicate that self-employed youth can thrive. To overcome these assumptions that may be unconsciously limiting their clients' options, it seems important to engage CDPs in learning more about self-employment realities and success factors; courses, brief articles, blogs, and discussions with peers may help to fill the gaps.

Another interesting finding was that, although almost all CDPs (93%) ranked entrepreneurial attributes as the most important contributing factor to the successful completion of self-employment programs, considerably fewer (72%) reported that such attributes were among the mandatory client qualifying conditions for entry into such programs. Similarly, although 90% of CDPs reported that having a viable business idea was an important factor in determining successful completion of a self-employment program, only 73% indicated that

clients needed a business idea to qualify to enter such a program. Combined, this seems to suggest a disconnect between program entry requirements and factors contributing to a client's success, perhaps something of interest to program designers and policy makers. The CDPs who responded to our survey seemed to recognize that their clients' successful completion of self-employment programs may require more than the baseline requirements for program entry.

### Limitations

Although attempts were made to ensure research was comprehensive, this study does have some limitations important to address. Our participants comprised only a small fraction of CDPs working in the field; to further extend this research, broader representation is required. In addition, there was a clear self-selection bias; those who responded to our survey on the topic of self-employment had, on average, more personal experience in self-employment than the average CDP would have.

Although we tried to objectively measure CDP knowledge of self-employment, our approach didn't produce statistically significant results when compared to a variety of respondent factors. Not only was this component of the survey small (i.e., 8-questions), and many respondents opted not to respond to this section, our selection of knowledge to test was arbitrary and specific (resembling a trivia quiz). This clearly didn't effectively capture self-employment knowledge that many of our CDP respondents may have had. Although CDPs may not know specifics about self-employment statistics in Canada, with their broad knowledge base (e.g., LMI, research, coaching) they can still support individuals interested in pursuing self-employment.

### Recommendations

Whether or not funders (e.g., government policy makers) perceive self-employment as a viable option for various clients, many CDPs reported that self-employment should never be restricted to a certain "type" of client; instead, all should have the opportunity to consider it as an option. This contradicts some program mandates (e.g., BC's new service delivery



model) where self-employment is a “last resort”; instead, we’d recommend that a self-employment plan be considered a valid outcome of most career exploration interventions.

Canadian CDPs have a clear set of core competencies, and areas of specialization, as presented in the Canadian Standards & Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (S&Gs). Based on the results of our research, and the importance of developing self-employment coaching self-efficacy, we’d also recommend self-employment coaching be included in the S&Gs within the core competencies or as an area of specialization. Perhaps by embedding self-employment skills and knowledge into the S&Gs, CDPs and their managers may begin to understand the importance of developing specialized skills and knowledge in this area. This may be especially important given the belief, by many CDPs, that certain “types” of clients (e.g., disabled, youth) shouldn’t be considered for self-employment; seeing self-employment as a viable option for diverse clients may enhance their chances of a successful attachment to the workforce.

**Conclusion**

In summary, although CDPs seem willing and able to assist individuals exploring self-employment when it’s appropriate, more research is needed to better understand the development of self-employment coaching self-efficacy within CDPs as well as what barriers may impede client self-employment success. Clients, CDPs, program designers, and policy makers need to develop a shared understanding of self-employment and work together to ensure services that best support their clients.

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