

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY-POPULATIONS BEING SERVED,
TYPES OF EVALUATIONS BEING CONDUCTED, AND THE IMPACT OF THE 1998
REHABILITATION ACT AMENDMENTS

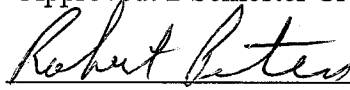
by

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Vocational Rehabilitation

Approved: 2 Semester Credits


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December, 2004

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ABSTRACT

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| (Writer) | (Last Name) | (First Name) | (Middle Initial) |
| Vocational Evaluation in the 21 st Century-Populations being served, types of evaluations being conducted, and the impact of the 1998 rehabilitation act amendments. | | | |
| (Title) | | | |
| Rehabilitation Counseling/, Vocational Evaluation | Dr. Robert Peters, | October, 2004 , | 37 |
| (Graduate Program) | (Research Advisor) | (Month/Year) | (# of Pages) |
| American Psychological Association, 5 th edition | | | |
| (Name of Style Manual Used in this Study) | | | |

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current state of the art of Vocational Evaluation. This study will examine the types of assessment tools/instruments being used by vocational evaluators, the client populations being served by vocational evaluations, and the types of vocational evaluations being conducted. In addition, it will also examine the impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had on vocational evaluation.

Client empowerment, informed choice, community based assessments, trial work experiences, serving people with the most severe disabilities, and the use of real work in vocational evaluations are all part of the goals in the vocational rehabilitation process and have been mandated by the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments. The importance of this study

is to determine what types of vocational evaluations are being conducted, the impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had on vocational evaluation, and client populations being served by vocational evaluations.

This study will play a role in assessing the current state of the art of vocational evaluation related to mandated community-based assessments and the use of real work in vocational evaluations. Results of this study will assist in identifying if the Rehabilitation Act Amendments have impacted the types of vocational evaluations being conducted in the 21st Century.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In Vocational Rehabilitation, a three-step process is used to assist people with disabilities in making vocational decisions. The first step is to identify an individual's skills, aptitudes, abilities, interests, and needs; second, identify the demands and rewards of various occupations; and third, integrate the information taken from steps 1 and 2 to match the person with an occupation. Vocational counseling recognizes the importance of these three steps and uses them to identify appropriate vocational goals. In Vocational Rehabilitation, the first step in this framework often takes the form of a vocational evaluation (Janowski & Bordieri, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

The historical development of vocational evaluation, and the way it is utilized, has been impacted by federal legislation and by the people being served in the rehabilitation process. The 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments mandate community-based assessments, trial work experiences, empowerment and career development. The Rehabilitation Act Amendments require that vocational evaluation use real work, such as community-based assessments, to assist individuals in their decision-making and career development goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for this descriptive study is to investigate the current state of the art of Vocational Evaluation. It will identify the current types of assessment tools being used by vocational evaluators, the populations being served in vocational evaluations, and the types of vocational evaluations that are being conducted. It will also investigate if the reauthorization of the 1998 Rehab Act Amendments, which mandate community-based assessments and trial work experiences, has had an impact on the types of vocational evaluations being conducted.

Theoretical Framework

The historical development of vocational evaluation, and the way it is utilized, has been impacted by federal legislation and by the people being served in the rehabilitation process. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 required that states place a priority on serving people with the most severe disabilities. The Rehab Act Amendments of 1978 added the independent living program which set the precedence for client self-direction and empowerment. Technological advances and medical advances have enabled people with the most severe disabilities to be more independent and employable. The Rehab Act Amendments of 1986 added the supported employment program which mandated a new philosophy that people with disabilities should work and be employed within the community (Corthell & Griswold as cited in Stewart 1997).

The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 emphasized the need to assist individuals with the most severe disabilities to achieve competitive employment in integrated settings. The 1992 amendments have caused community rehabilitation programs, including vocational evaluation, to respond to the mandate by developing new and innovative employment programs that provide direct preparation for competitive and integrated employment (Schroeder, 1998a).

The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 expanded options for consumer choice. The 1998 amendments mandate that people with disabilities are to be full and active members of the rehab process through the exercise of informed choices with respect to assessments for determining eligibility and VR needs and in the selection of their employment goals, services, and service providers (Shroeder, 1998a).

The 1998 amendments require that vocational evaluation uses real work, such as community based assessments, to assist individuals in their decision-making and career development goals (Shroeder, 1998a).

According to Thomas (1999), Vocational Evaluators will expand and market their roles as vocational/career experts, disability specialists, and educators. Two distinct service directions will result because of these roles: 1) career assessment and development services for the general public, including people with disabilities; and 2) community-based assessment for people with the most severe disabilities.

Definition of Terms

Vocational evaluation is a professional discipline with an accepted definition, standards for practice, common principles, a code of ethics, and a distinct body of knowledge. "It incorporates medical psychological, social, vocational, educational, cultural, and economic data in the attainment of the goals of the evaluation process" (VEWAA Glossary, 1993, p.14).

By definition, vocational evaluation is a comprehensive process that systematically utilizes work, real or simulated, as the focal point for assessment and vocational exploration to assist people in vocational development (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

Real or simulated work in an evaluation is used to assess an individual's vocational potential. Caston & Watson define vocational evaluation as the process of assessing an individual's physical and mental abilities, strengths, and weaknesses related to work (1990). Vocational evaluation is a process of helping people identify, gather and interpret information for the purpose of pursuing viable occupational options (Stewart, 1997).

Caston and Watson (1990) goes on to describe, the purpose of a vocational evaluation, is to make predictions concerning a persons ability to work, potential vocational objectives, and training needed for employment.

Outcomes of a vocational evaluation may include: a realistic and objective analysis of a person's vocational assets and needs, an accurate estimation of a person's potential to enter or

return and engage in specific gainful employment, an identification of occupations for clients who are entering the world of work or who want to change occupations, and an identification of barriers to employment (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

Vocational Evaluators

A vocational evaluator becomes qualified to provide evaluation and assessment services by the attainment of a master's degree and completing the necessary internship requirements. Certification through the Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES) assures that the evaluator has gained the necessary competencies to practice within the field (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

Vocational Evaluators conduct vocational evaluations. They analyze the skills and interests of their clients and match the skills and interests to appropriate employment, training, or educational opportunities (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

The evaluator may administer, score, and interpret psychometric tests and work samples; may interview and counsel with clients regarding their work potentials, may recommend appropriate jobs or careers; and may analyze jobs in order to understand their requirements (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

A work sample is a well-defined work activity that involves tasks similar or identical to those performed in an actual job. Psychometric tests, work samples, and other assessment instruments assist the evaluator to make vocational recommendations.

Vocational Evaluators use a variety of tools to empower people to make decisions regarding employment and career development. They use career, occupational, and labor market information. They also use assessment tools, such as work samples and psychometric tests, to determine vocational strengths and needs. They consider a persons skills, abilities, interests,

work values, environment, disability, culture, and current labor market information to help consumers make decisions about careers (Thomas, 1999).

Professional literature prior to 1998 discusses “matching clients to jobs”. Literature written after 1998 discusses “client empowerment and career decision making”. Therefore, it is important to investigate what is currently being done in the field of vocational evaluation.

Types of Evaluations

Some vocational evaluation services rely only on assessment instruments such as work samples and psychometric tests. According to Prediger (1974) as cited in Stewart (1997), career counseling approaches that use assessment instruments in a manner characterized by test’ em and tell’ em still appear to be in use. This approach is limiting, directive, static, and sterile. It represents an inappropriate use of quantitative assessment instruments and does not meet the career development needs of individuals in the 21st century.

The use of quantitative assessment instruments, which include work samples and psychometric tests, has recently come under criticism primarily from the way rehabilitation professionals use the instruments and from the characteristics of the instruments themselves (Healy, 1990, as cited in Stewart, 1997).

Rehabilitation professionals, which include vocational evaluators, have been criticized for using assessment instruments to connect clients with occupations at the expense of helping clients to develop self-assessment skills (Healy, 1990, as cited in Stewart, 1997). Self-assessment skills promote self-regulation and adaptability to new situations. Assessment instruments provide clients with self-knowledge, not necessarily self-assessment skills (Stewart, 1997).

Vocational identity is developed from an understanding of self and how it relates to the world of work. Vocational identity does not necessarily come from completing assessment instruments. Vocational identity helps clients develop certainty and self-directedness about occupational decision-making (Stewart, 1997).

When quantitative assessment instruments are the primary tools used in a vocational evaluation the environmental context in which clients are located may be ignored. Clients should be aware of how environmental context has influenced their occupational development and how the context has helped shape their vocational decision-making (Mitchell & Krumboltz 1990 as cited in Stewart, 1997).

Community-based assessments or trial work experiences have benefits to the consumers that participate in them. They expand an individuals' ability to explore opportunities and interests. The person learns work skills that he/she sees as real and are used in the real work world. Community-based assessments also enable an individual to learn about employer expectations, it helps to develop problem solving skills, it builds self-esteem & self-worth, and the functional training can be used as a reference for subsequent job searches and development of a work history (Mezack, 1995).

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed that vocational evaluators are employed within CRP agencies and are willing to participate in the study. The participants in the study will be chosen randomly. The survey items are assumed to be unbiased.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

A review of theory and research literature was conducted relative to vocational evaluation, consumer empowerment, and community based rehabilitation facilities (CRP's). The literature reviewed supports the need for further research in the area of vocational evaluation in the 21st century, how it is utilized, assessment instruments used and the impact of the 1998 Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act.

Rehabilitation services in the United States emphasize provision of services for people with disabilities who have vocational potential. Services often include vocational evaluation, functional assessment, work hardening, job-site analysis, reasonable accommodation, job-seeking skills, employer development, job placement and follow-up services (Shahnasarian, 2001).

Vocational Evaluation

There are three major theories of vocational counseling; identification of a consumers skills, abilities, needs, and interests; occupational knowledge and ability to identify demands and rewards associated with occupations; and integration of consumers skills, abilities, interests and needs with occupational information in order to identify appropriate vocational goals.

Vocational evaluation is often the first step in this rehabilitation framework (Janowski & Bordieri & 1992).

The profession of vocational evaluation emerged in the late 1950's and was created out of a need to identify the employment characteristics of people with disabilities. At present, it is utilized by people with and without disabilities.

By definition, vocational evaluation is a comprehensive process that systematically utilizes work, real or simulated, as the focal point for assessment and vocational exploration to assist people in vocational development (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

Cain 1992 as cited in Havranek (1999) stated "Vocational evaluation should include at least the following: interests; cognitive skills; perceptual, sensory and motor skills; career awareness and maturity; functional/life skills and behavior; and social adjustment" (p.34).

Vocational evaluation outcomes may include; an analysis of a consumers vocational strengths, weaknesses, and needs; placement recommendations, descriptions of job site accommodations; vocational alternatives for people looking for a career change; and a person's potential to enter or return to employment. An assessment of motivational factors relative to employment and career development may also be included (Fry & Herrand, 1992).

Literature suggests that vocational evaluation will diverge into two distinct service directions in the 21st century. The first direction is career assessment and development services for all people, those with disabilities and those without. Portfolios and profiles will be used in the evaluation process. The purpose of a profile is to allow consumers to record evaluation feedback using their own terminology and incorporate that information into their career decision making and planning endeavors. The portfolio includes the profile along with space to keep pertinent vocational information such as resumes, vocational information, references, transcripts and certificates. By empowering individuals through informed choice they will be able to use the information included in their profiles and portfolios in self assessment, decision-making, and career planning (Thomas, 1999). Vocational evaluation helps people better understand themselves, understand strengths and limitations, and discover how to meet relevant goals and determine where they fit into the world of work (Stoelting, 1991).

The second direction vocational evaluation will take is in the form of situational or community based assessments. These will be used to serve consumers who have significant or severe disabilities. The focus is to provide real work or hands on vocational opportunities to this client population. They may also identify essential functions to be assessed in the areas of independent living skills, transportation, educational environments and community integration (Thomas, 1999).

Research also suggests that vocational evaluation has lost its usefulness due to the advent of outcome-based rehabilitation and a need for shorter, cheaper services such as quick screening processes, self-report inventories and computer-based screening systems. Vocational evaluation has decreased in utilization in some rehabilitation settings but has expanded in new arenas (Thomas, 1999).

Vocational evaluation has become an important aspect in the provision of transition services from school to work for students with disabilities. Transition services, based on individual needs, preferences, and interests include; instruction, community experiences, development of employment and independent living objectives, and functional vocational evaluations (West & Taymans, 1998).

Functional vocational evaluations, when appropriate, were mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for students with disabilities. Vocational assessment programs based in schools are multi-level programs. Level 1 assessments begin during elementary years and focus on needs, values, interests, abilities, interpersonal skills, decision making skills, utilize vocational and career exploration activities and have the goal of building self awareness (Levinson & Ohler, 1998).

Level 2 assessments focus on assessing vocational interests, skills, aptitudes, achievements, work habits, career maturity and occur during middle or high school. Observations, standardized norm referenced assessment instruments and interviews are utilized. Career exploration and tentative vocational and educational goal development are key factors (Levinson & Ohler, 1998).

Level 3 assessments utilize work samples, community or situational based assessments and focus on specific training an individual needs to obtain further education or employment (Levinson & Ohler, 1998).

Studies Relative to Vocational Evaluation

Caston and Watson (1990) conducted a study that examined the relationship between provision of vocational evaluation services and rehabilitation outcomes. The study included 185 consumers of a state Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation whose cases had been closed. Of the cases studied, 25.4% had been consumers of vocational evaluation services. It found that specific job recommendations were absent in most of the evaluation reports even though they are mandated by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). Counseling, work-adjustment, and training were the primary recommendations. It was also suggested that it is unknown why when specific vocational recommendations were given, they were often not followed.

The study indicated that 13 of the 47 consumers who had received evaluation services and were employed at time of closure were given specific job recommendations. Of those 13 consumers, 31% were working in the type of job recommended. It was also found that vocational evaluation services were less likely to be received by consumers who were successfully rehabilitated. This might be expected due to evaluations being used as a way to

determine feasibility for rehabilitation services for consumers with the most severe disabilities (Caston & Watson, 1990).

Client self-knowledge and perceptions of how individual characteristics relate to the demands of the vocational environment is an important outcome of vocational evaluation. Janowski and Bordieri (1992) conducted a study to examine the impact vocational evaluation had on client self-perceptions related to self-estimated levels of vocational aptitudes and interests. Seventy-three consumers of comprehensive vocational evaluation services at a nonprofit rehabilitation facility were the subjects of the study. Results of the study suggested that vocational evaluation had no impact on client self-estimates of their aptitudes and did little to change client self-estimates. The study also suggests that there were no significant differences between pre and post evaluation mean estimates of interest levels. Clients tended to over estimate interest and aptitude levels when compared to test scores. Reasons for this include that consumers may define constructs differently than the tests and limited vocational experiences may be a restriction when estimating aptitudes and interests.

The authors hypothesized that test taking and receiving performance feedback such as the case when psychometric tests and work samples are the primary means of evaluation may not be the ideal way to contribute to client self understanding. If clients had participated in situational assessments or on the job evaluations they may have more readily incorporated the aptitude and interest feedback (Janowski & Bordieri, 1992).

Assessing a client's aptitudes and intelligence are often used in vocational evaluation to assist in the return to work process for consumers with work related injuries. Interpretations and recommendations related to intellectual and aptitude test scores of consumers are often used to make decisions regarding retraining and job placement. Literature suggests that making

vocational recommendations based solely on test scores has many limitations and other factors should be considered. Other factors include skill level of past work, disability incentives, ambition, motivation, family support and the local labor market (Crystal, 2000).

Empowerment

Empowerment through informed choice has been emphasized greatly in rehabilitation literature. This is mainly due to the 1992 Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act.

Empowerment and informed choice have allowed people with disabilities to become active partners in choosing services and selecting service providers. This trend was frequently referred to as “consumerism in rehabilitation” throughout the literature reviewed.

The theory of free will and freedom of choice has been discussed as far back as three centuries. Free will is a basic philosophy of human kind and has played a role in the field of rehabilitation. A basic component of free will is that a person has the capacity to act and that he or she feels free to choose among a variety of possibilities. A consistent theme of free will is responsibility or the ability to respond and to act on one’s own wishes. Rehabilitation promotes independence, autonomy, free will, and independent action (Phemister, 2001).

The concept of empowerment and freedom of choice is important in all vocational services, including vocational evaluation. When the empowerment model is used in vocational evaluation the individual goal of employment will be discussed before describing the evaluation process. By starting with outcome issues related to employment, consumers will better understand the importance of vocational evaluation, which, should in turn, increase their motivation to participate in achieving a personal career-life goal (Thomas, 1999)

Wolf-Branigin (2000) reported on a project in which a consumer choice model relative to employment services was integrated into the service delivery of a state rehabilitation agency.

Integration of the model was an effort to fully realize the empowering partnership promoted in the 1992 Reauthorization of the Rehab Act. Components of the model included:

- Person-Centered Planning assisted the customer to develop vocational goals and involved employment advisors along with friends and family members.
- The Vocational Profile involved an asset-based exploration of a customer's skills, abilities, interests along with his or her interests.
- Employment Advisors, selected by the customers, provided support, advocacy and vocational information.
- The Vocational Profile Meeting was the tool used to define the ideal vocational objective. It utilized information gathered from the vocational profile and was the tool that led to a job match.
- Job Development/Carving was a process that utilized the information from the profile to develop job positions. Positions were developed and modified based on employer needs and customer assets.
- Job Site Facilitation involved conducting a job assessment and facilitating the employer and employee relationship in order to establish natural supports, therefore minimizing job coaching.
- Customer Satisfaction allowed customers to determine acceptability of services. This was key in the project design. Payments for services were only rendered once the customer was completely satisfied with them.

The hypothesis for the study was that within outcome based rehabilitation consumers and counselors often have differing priorities. Results indicated that both reported a high level of agreement relating to positive statements regarding the components of the consumer choice

model but component rank of importance differed. Customers ranked from most important to least; employment advising, person centered planning, job support, job carving and profiling. Counselors ranked job carving most important followed by job support, profiling, employment advising, and person-centered planning.

Wolf-Branigin (2000) suggested that it is beneficial to assess the reasons for the discrepancies between the views of customers and counselors related to the most important components of the model. Customers valued the components that were most time consuming while counselors placed the most importance on tools used throughout the model that took the least amount of time. Due to increasing caseloads, the conflicts need resolution so the issues do not negatively affect the adoption of the model and negatively impact the partnership between customer and counselor. The feedback from the report reflects the challenge that rehabilitation counseling faces in balancing the values of partnerships and empowerment with the conditions of large caseloads and outcome-based performance expectations (Wolf-Branigin, 2000).

Community Based Rehabilitation Programs

CRP's contribute to the employment and training advantage of people with disabilities. There are approximately 4,500 CRP's nationwide. In the 21st century, programs and services of CRP's will be customer driven and funding will shift from dependence on government to serving business and industry (Goldstein, 1998).

Services provided by CRP's may include job seeking/keeping skills, vocational evaluation, work adjustment, skill training, supported and community based employment, and work and day activity programs (Thomas, Menz, Rosenthal, 2001).

CRP's work jointly with state vocational rehab agencies and the Rehabilitation Services administration to provide employment related services to people with disabilities. The emphasis

of the 1992 Rehab Act Amendments to assist individuals with the most severe disabilities achieve competitive employment has caused CRP's to develop new and innovative programs. Programs focus on activities designed to convert supported or extended employment programs into those that focus on competitive employment and to establish, improve, or develop assessment procedures and methods to determine the interests, priorities and needs of consumers (Schroeder, 1998b).

Some CRP's are also expanding services to serve specialized population groups, including people without disabilities, who have vocational evaluation and training needs (Schroeder, 1998b).

Chapter III: Methodology

The current state of the art of vocational evaluation needs to be investigated as the historical development of vocational evaluation, and the way it is utilized, has been impacted by federal legislation and by people being served in the rehabilitation process. The 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments mandated community-based assessments, trial work experiences, empowerment, and career development. The Rehabilitation Act Amendments require that vocational evaluation use real work, such as community-based assessments, to assist individuals in their decision-making and career development goals.

A random sample of vocational evaluators working in Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP's) across the country, are the subjects in this study. A list of vocational evaluators working in CRP's was obtained from Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

A self-report instrument, constructed by the author, was used to gather data relevant to the study. The questionnaire was mailed to vocational evaluators working within Community Rehabilitation Programs. A postage paid return envelope was provided.

Subject Selection and Description

A random sample of Vocational Evaluators working in Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP's) across the country, are the subjects in this study. A list of Vocational Evaluators working in CRP's was obtained from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). The subjects were "blindly" chosen by using a table of random numbers.

Instrumentation

The instrument that was used in this study is self-developed, by the author, based on professional literature in the field of vocational evaluation. The instrument is a confidential, self-report questionnaire. The purpose of the instrument was to gather data, from Vocational Evaluators, related to the purpose of the study. The response format consists of multiple choice type items.

The self-report questionnaire identified vocational evaluators demographics, types of assessment instruments/tools being used by vocational evaluators, client populations being served by vocational evaluations, and the impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had on vocational evaluation

The instrument is assumed to have content validity after a pilot study was conducted. Subjects involved in the pilot study were individuals currently involved in the field of vocational rehabilitation. These people were chosen because of their knowledge and expertise in the field. The instrument is assumed to have content validity based on the pilot test. Reliability will be unknown.

****questionnaire attached-please see appendix C**

Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires were mailed in November, 2004. Respondents were asked to return them in postage paid return envelopes by November 22nd, 2004. The responses were analyzed and an Excel spreadsheet was used to calculate the descriptive statistics of each variable. Descriptive statistics include the number of respondents and percentages.

Unknowns and Limitations

Rate of response, the percent of the solicited sample who respond with usable data is an issue that is unknown at this time. Assuming adequate rates of response, limitations may include mistakes or errors made by respondents on the questionnaire, which could impact the results of the study.

Results

RATE OF RESPONSE: Surveys were mailed to a sample of 180 vocational evaluators. Useable responses were obtained from 75 vocational evaluators for a rate of response of 41%.

DEMOGRAPHICS: Respondents were asked to indicate several demographics in the questionnaire. The Gender, Location, Ethnicity, # of years worked in the field, and approximate # of vocational evaluations conducted per year, were requested in multiple choice items and will yield data at the nominal scale of measurement.

IMPACT OF THE 1998 REHAB ACT AMENDMENTS: Five items in the questionnaire requested ratings of opinions about the impact of the amendments. The items were scored on five-point Likert scales of agreement (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree), which created data at the interval scale of measurement.

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS/TOOLS: Five items in the questionnaire requested responses to multiple-choice items in regards to the types of instruments/tools being used, which yielded data at the nominal scale of measurement.

CLIENT POPULATIONS BEING SERVED: Two items in the questionnaire requested responses to multiple-choice items in regards to the people being served by vocational evaluations, which yielded data at the nominal scale of measurement.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will report the results of the survey that was distributed to vocational evaluators working in CARF accredited community rehabilitation programs (CRP's) throughout the United States. Vocational evaluators responded to 17 questions regarding types of assessment tools being used by vocational evaluators, the populations being served by vocational evaluations, and the impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had on vocational evaluation. An introductory cover letter, consent to participate, survey instrument, and return self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to vocational evaluators. Vocational Evaluators were requested to return the survey in the self addressed stamped envelope within 2 ½ weeks of mailing date. The data was gathered and converted into an Excel spreadsheet for data analysis purposes. The responses to this survey will be used to discuss research objectives.

The following are research objectives that are the focus of this study.

1. To identify the current types of assessment tools/instruments being used by vocational evaluators and the types of vocational evaluations that are being conducted.
2. To determine populations being served by vocational evaluations.
3. To determine if the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, which mandate community-based assessments, have had an impact on the types of vocational evaluations that are being conducted.

Questions #1-5 asked questions related to demographics of the vocational evaluators. Of 75 respondents to this survey, gender diversity of the group included 23 males at 30.67% and 52

females 69.33%. The group of participants included 1 Native American at 1.33%, 10 African Americans at 13.33%, and 64 Caucasians at 85.33%. All 75 respondents identified gender and ethnicity.

Of the 75 respondents, 24 (32%) reported they provided vocational evaluation services in a rural area (less than 50,000 persons). Thirty-four (34) (45.33%) of the respondents indicated they provided services in an urban area (50,000 or more persons). Eleven (11) (14.67%) of the respondents indicated they provided services in a suburban area (adjacent to an urban area). Seven (7) respondents did not identify the type of area they provided vocational services in.

Of the 75 respondents, 30 (40%) have worked in the field of vocational evaluation five years or less. Fourteen (14) (18.67%) reported they have worked in the field for 6-10 years. Ten (10) (13.33%) have worked in vocational evaluation for 11-15 years. Twenty-two (22) (29.33%) of the respondents indicated they worked in the field of vocational evaluation for 15 years or more. One (1) respondent did not indicate the number of years they have worked in the field.

Respondents indicated the number of vocational evaluations they conduct per year as follows; 22 (29.33%) conduct 1-25 vocational evaluations per year, 11 (14.67%) conduct 26-50 evaluations per year, 11 (14.67%) conduct 51-70 per year, and 31 (43.33%) of the respondents conduct 71 or more vocational evaluations per year. One (1) respondent did not indicate the approximate number of vocational evaluations they conduct per year.

Questions #6-12 inquired about the types of assessment tools being used, types of vocational evaluations being conducted, and the types of assessment tools/instruments vocational evaluators feel are most beneficial to clients.

Of 75 respondents, 68 (77.33%) of the respondents reported that they use psychometric tests when conducting vocational evaluations. Sixty-six (66) (88%) utilize work samples, 71

(94.67%) utilize interest inventories, and 64 (85.3%) utilize community-based assessments when conducting vocational evaluations. Ten (10) (13.33%) of the respondents reported they never use psychometric tests when conducting vocational evaluations, 2 (2.67%) of respondents never use work samples, 2 (2.67%) never use interest inventories, and 10 (13.33%) reported they have never used community or situational based assessments when conducting vocational evaluations.

When asked the percentage of vocational evaluations conducted that are community-based assessments, of 75 respondents, 15 (20%) reported they have not conducted any community-based assessments. Thirty-five (35) (36.67%) of the respondents indicated 1-25% of the vocational evaluations they conduct are community-based assessments. Eleven (11) (14.67%) of the respondents reported 26-50% of their evaluations are community-based, 6 (8%) reported community based-assessments encompass 51-75% of the vocational evaluations they conduct, and 4 (5.33%) reported 76% or more of their evaluations are community-based assessments.

Of 75 respondents, 33 (44%) reported they have not conducted any vocational evaluations that are strictly psychometric testing in nature. Sixteen (16) (21.33%) reported that 1-25% of the vocational evaluations they conduct are strictly psychometric testing based. Eight (8) (10.67%) of the respondents indicated 26-50% of their evaluations are psychometric testing based only, and 4 (5.33%) of the respondents indicated that 76% or more of the vocational evaluations they conduct utilize only psychometric tests.

Of 75 respondents, 55 reported percentages related to client populations being served by vocational evaluations. People with developmental disabilities made up 31% of respondents caseloads. People with serious mental illness made up 24.9% of respondents caseloads. Physical disabilities made up 14.34%, learning disabilities made up 14.1%, general mental health made up

7.17%, orthopedic disabilities made up 6.88%, and sensory disabilities made up 2.86% of respondents caseloads. Respondents were also asked to identify percentage of caseload assessed utilizing psychometric assessments, situational assessments, or work samples. Most respondents did not reply to this question so results were not analyzed.

Of significant measure, when asked if people with severe disabilities participate in community-based assessments, 51 (68%) reported that people with severe disabilities (severe described as having 3 or more functional limitations) participate in community-based assessments. Fifteen (15) (20%) of respondents indicated people with severe disabilities do not participate in community-based assessments.

Questions # 13-17 asked vocational evaluators to rate their opinions, using a five point likert scale of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), related to statements about the impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had on the on the field of vocational evaluation and types of vocational evaluations conducted.

When asked if the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, which mandated community based assessments, have impacted the types of vocational evaluations conducted, 5 (6.67%) respondents indicated they strongly disagreed that the amendments have impacted the types of vocational evaluations they conduct. Twelve (12) (16%) of the respondents disagreed that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have impacted the type of evaluations they conduct, 22 (29.33%) were neutral, 24 (32%) agreed, and 9 (12%) strongly agreed. The mean level of agreement was reported at 3.28.

Of 75 respondents, 11 (14.67%) reported they strongly agreed that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had an impact on the profession of vocational evaluation. Of important measure, 40 (53.33%) of respondents agreed the amendments have had an impact

on the profession. Twenty (20) (26.67%) were neutral, 2 (2.67 %) disagreed as well as strongly disagreed. The mean level of agreement was reported at 3.75.

When asked if more people with severe disabilities have been served by vocational evaluation services because of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, 12 (16%) of respondents strongly agreed. Twenty-Four (24) (32%) of respondents agreed, 24 (32%) were neutral, 8 (10.67%) disagreed, and 5 (6.67%) strongly disagreed. The mean level of agreement was reported at 3.41.

Question # 16 stated; People with severe disabilities are participating in community-based assessments due to the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments. Of 75 respondents, 10 (13.33%) strongly agreed, 22 (29.33%) agreed, 27 (36%) were neutral, 12 (16%) disagreed, and 3 (4%) strongly disagreed that more people with severe disabilities have been served by vocational evaluations because of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments. The mean level of agreement was reported at 3.32.

Question # 17 stated; The 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had an impact on the client populations receiving vocational evaluation services. Of 75 respondents, 14 (18.67%) strongly agreed, 33 (44%) agreed, 21 (28%) were neutral, 1 (1.33%) disagreed, and 3 (4%) strongly disagreed that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had an impact on the client population receiving vocational evaluation services. The mean level of agreement was reported at 3.75.

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter will look closer at the results of the survey and describe how survey results relate to research and existing literature. This chapter will discuss the limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research. The responses to the survey will be evidence used to support or reject the initial research objectives.

The following research objectives are the focus of this study:

1. To identify the current types of assessment tools/instruments being used by vocational evaluators and the types of vocational evaluations being conducted.
2. To determine populations being served by vocational evaluations.
3. To determine if the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, which mandate community-based assessments, have had an impact on the types of vocational evaluations that are being conducted.

Conclusions and Implications

For the first research objective, identifying the types of assessment tools/instruments used by vocational evaluators and types of evaluations being conducted, my findings indicate that vocational evaluators are using a variety of assessment tools and instruments when conducting vocational evaluations. Seventy-One (71) respondents indicated they use interest inventories, this represents 94.67 % of respondents and the most frequently used type of assessment tool. Sixty-six (66) respondents reported they use work samples when conducting vocational evaluations, this represents 88% of respondents and the second most frequently used type of assessment tool. Sixty-four respondents indicate they use community-based or situational assessments, this represents 85.33% of respondents and the third most frequently used type of

assessment tool. Fifty-Eight (58) respondents indicated they use psychometric tests when conducting vocational evaluations, this represents 77.33% of respondents and the fourth most frequently used type of assessment tool. These findings support the literature that suggests vocational evaluators are using community-based assessments when conducting vocational evaluations and comprehensive vocational evaluations that encompass all of the above-mentioned types of assessment tools/instruments are most beneficial to clients.

Research findings and related literature suggest that vocational evaluators feel community-based assessments are most beneficial to clients although community-based assessments were ranked only as the third most frequently used type of assessment tool being used. Fifteen (15) respondents indicated they never use community-based assessments, this represents 20% of respondents. Thirty-five (35) respondents reported they use community-based assessments only 1-25% of the time, representing 46.67%. Eleven (11) respondents reported they use community-based assessments 26-50% of the time, representing 14.67%, 6 respondents use community-based assessments 51-75% of the time representing 8% and only 7 respondents utilize community-based assessment 76-100% of the time. These findings may suggest further research is needed as to why community-based assessments are not used more frequently as they are seen as the most beneficial by evaluators and mandated by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments.

The second research objective findings, determining client populations being served by vocational evaluations, suggest that people with severe disabilities are participating in vocational evaluations and community-based assessments. Fifty-one (51) respondents indicated that people with severe disabilities (severe defined as having 3 or more functional limitations) participate in community-based assessments, representing 68% of the respondents.

Most respondents indicated they serve multiple client populations. Populations served reported in the survey included people with developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, mental illness, orthopedic disabilities, physical disabilities, and general mental health.

Of 75 respondents, 55 reported percentages related to client populations served by vocational evaluations. People with developmental disabilities made up 31% of respondents caseloads. People with serious mental illness made up 24.9%, physical disabilities made up 14.34%, learning disabilities made up 14.1%, general mental health made up 7.17%, orthopedic disabilities made up 6.88%, and sensory disabilities made up 2.86% of respondents caseloads. The findings of the survey indicate that many client populations are being served by vocational evaluations with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and physical disabilities as the client populations being served most by vocational evaluations.

The third research objective findings, determining the impact of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments on the field of vocational evaluation and types of evaluations being conducted, suggest that the Rehabilitation Act Amendments have in fact impacted the types of vocational evaluations being conducted in the field of vocational evaluation. Research findings lend support that more people with severe disabilities are being served by vocational evaluations, more people are participating in community-based assessments, and the types of client populations participating in vocational evaluation services have also been impacted by the Amendments.

Thirty-three (33) respondents reported they agreed or strongly agreed that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have impacted the types of vocational evaluations they conduct, representing 44% with 22 respondents being neutral representing 29.33%.

Fifty-One (51) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had an impact on the profession of vocational evaluation, representing 65% of respondents.

Thirty-six (36) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that more people with severe disabilities are being served by vocational evaluation services due to the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, representing 48% of respondents, with 24 respondents at 32% neutral regarding this statement.

Thirty-two (32) respondents indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that people with severe disabilities are participating in community-based assessments because of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, representing 42.66% of respondents, with 27 respondents at 36% neutral in regards to this statement.

Forty-seven (47) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have impacted the types of client populations being served by vocational evaluations, representing 62% of respondents.

Recommendations for Future Research

Overall this study attempted to identify the types of assessment tool/instruments being used by vocational evaluators, client populations served by vocational evaluations, and the impact of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments on the field of vocational evaluation.

The results of the survey seem to support the notion that the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, which mandate community-based assessments, trial work experiences, empowerment, and the use of real work in evaluations to assist people in decision making and career development goals, have had an impact on vocational evaluation in the 21st Century. From the results, it would appear to be important that future research examine more specific

relationships between the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments and specific impacts they have had on the field of vocational evaluation. It may also be important to examine specific populations and types of vocational evaluations conducted along with perceived benefits of the assessment tools/instruments used.

The limitations of this survey include the limitations of the self-developed survey instrument and discrepancies in respondents interpretation of survey items, possibly posing limitation in the overall outcome of this study. Another limitation may be a low rate of response at 41%. Reasons for low rate of response may include errors such as instructions to respondents, time commitments, postal errors, or any combination of issues.

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Appendix A: Cover letter

November 5th, 2004

Dear Vocational Evaluator:

I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I am currently working on my thesis requirement in the Vocational Rehabilitation program at Stout. My goal is to discover what Vocational Evaluation looks like in the 21st century.

I will be investigating the current types of assessment tools being used by vocational evaluators, the populations being served by vocational evaluations, and the impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments, which mandate community-based assessments, trial work experiences, empowerment, and career development, have had on vocational evaluation. Due to your expertise in the field of vocational evaluation, I am asking for your opinions on issues regarding vocational evaluation

I am asking for about five minutes of your time to complete the attached survey on issues related to your field of work. This survey is being sent to a random sample of vocational evaluators across the country working in community rehabilitation programs. Your feedback is vital to my study and is very much appreciated. I assure that your responses are completely confidential. There is little or no risk to you in filling out this questionnaire. Your participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at anytime.

Dr. Robert Peters, thesis advisor, and I will be the only people that will have access to your responses.

Please return the completed survey by November 22nd, 2004 in the postage-paid return envelope. Again, your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely

Kelly Zahn
2227 E. Yale St.
Phoenix, AZ 85006
602-404-5145

Dr. Robert Peters
UW-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751
715-232-1983

Appendix B: Consent to Participate

Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: VOCATIONAL EVALUATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY-POPULATIONS BEING SERVED, TYPES OF EVALUATIONS BEING CONDUCTED, AND THE IMPACT OF THE 1998 REHABILITATION ACT AMENDMENTS

Investigator:

Kelly Zahn
2227 E. Yale St.
Phoenix, AZ 85006
602-404-5145

Research Sponsor:

Dr. Robert Peters
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751
715-232-1983

Description :

The purpose for this descriptive study is to investigate the current state of the art of Vocational Evaluation. It will identify the current types of assessment tools being used by vocational evaluators, the populations being served in vocational evaluations, and the types of vocational evaluations that are being conducted. It will also investigate if the reauthorization of the 1998 Rehab Act Amendments, which mandate community-based assessments and trial work experiences, has had an impact on the types of vocational evaluations being conducted.

Risks and Benefits:

Risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. All information obtained will be confidential. Your participation in this study will assist in the investigation and description of the current state of the art of vocational evaluation.

Time Commitment :

Research will be conducted during the month of November and final project estimated to be completed by December 22nd, 2004. Please return the questionnaire in the self addressed stamped envelope by November 22nd, 2004.

Confidentiality:

Responses to the questionnaire are completely confidential and will be viewed only by this investigator and research advisor. Your name will not be included on any documents. We do not believe you can be identified from any information you submit. This informed consent will not be kept with any of the other documents completed with this project.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into this investigator.

IRB Approval:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator:

Kelly Zahn
2227 E. Yale St.
Phoenix, AZ 85006
602-404-5145

IRB Administrator

Sue Foxwell
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Advisor:

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Statement of Consent:

By completing the following survey you agree to participate in the project entitled "Vocational Evaluation in the 21st Century-Populations being served, types of evaluations being conducted, and the impact of the 1998 rehabilitation act amendments.

Appendix C: Survey

The purpose of the following questionnaire is to determine what types of assessment tools you are currently using, client populations you are serving, what types of vocational evaluations you are conducting, and what impact the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have had on Vocational Evaluation.

DEMOGRAPHICS

1). YOUR GENDER

- ☐ MALE
- ☐ FEMALE

2). ETHNICITY

- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Black
- ☐ White
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Other

3). YOUR LOCATION

- ☐ RURAL-Less than 50,000 persons
- ☐ URBAN-50,000 or more persons
- ☐ SUBURBAN-Adjacent to an urban area

4). # YEARS WORKED IN VOCATIONAL EVALUATION

- ☐ <5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ >15

5). APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF VOCATIONAL EVALUATIONS YOU CONDUCT PER YEAR

- ☐ 1-25
- ☐ 26-50
- ☐ 51-70
- ☐ 71 or more

The following section of the questionnaire contains items that pertain to the types of assessment tools used in vocational evaluation. Please place a check on the left side of each of the items that most accurately reflects the types of assessment tools that you use and your personal feelings about them.

6). What type assessment tools/instruments do you currently use when conducting a vocational evaluation?

- ☐ PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS
☐ WORK SAMPLES
☐ INTEREST INVENTORIES
☐ COMMUNITY-BASED or SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

7). What type assessment tools/instruments have you NEVER used when conducting a vocational evaluation?

- ☐ PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS
☐ WORK SAMPLES
☐ INTEREST INVENTORIES
☐ COMMUNITY-BASED or SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

8). What type assessment tools/instruments do you feel are most beneficial to clients?

- ☐ PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS
☐ WORK SAMPLES
☐ INTEREST INVENTORIES
☐ COMMUNITY-BASED or SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

9). What percent of the vocational evaluations that you conduct are community-based assessments?

- ☐ I have not conducted any community based assessments
☐ 1-25%
☐ 26-50%
☐ 51-75%
☐ 76% or more

10). What percent of the vocational evaluations you conduct are strictly psychometric testing based?

- ☐ I have not conducted any evaluations that are strictly psychometric testing in nature
☐ 1-25%
☐ 26-50%
☐ 51-75%
☐ 76% or more

The following questions pertain to the types of client populations being served by vocational evaluations. Please check the responses that most accurately reflect your client population

- 11). Please estimate the percentage of clients served in vocational evaluation in each of the following categories. Also, estimate the percentage that are evaluated using work samples, situational assessment, or psychometric assessment only.

| % Served | % evaluated with Work sample | Situational | Psychometric |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| ___ DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ LEARNING DISABILITY | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ SENSORY DISABILITY | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ ORTHOPEDIC DISABILITY | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ PHYSICAL DISABILITY | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ MENTAL ILLNESS | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| ___ GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH | ___ | ___ | ___ |

- 12). Do your clients with severe disabilities (3 functional limitations=severe disability, 2 functional limitations=moderate disability, 1 functional limitation= mild disability) participate in community based assessments?

___ YES

___ NO

In response to the following items please circle which number, on a scale of 1-5 (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree), most accurately reflects your opinion about the impact of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments that mandate community based assessments.

- 13). The 1998 Rehab Act Amendments have impacted the type of vocational evaluations I conduct. 1 2 3 4 5

- 14). The 1998 Rehab Act Amendments have had an impact on the profession of vocational evaluation. 1 2 3 4 5

- 15). More people with severe disabilities have been served because of the 1998 Rehab Act Amendments. 1 2 3 4 5

- 16). People with severe disabilities are participating in community based assessments due to the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments.. 1 2 3 4 5
- 17). The 1998 Rehab Act Amendments have had an impact on the client population receiving vocational evaluation services. 1 2 3 4 5