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Shared Responsibility: Job Search Practices from the Consumer and State Vocational Rehabilitation Perspective

by David Temelini and Sheila Fesko

Introduction

This study was conducted as part of the Center on Promoting Employment: Rehabilitation Research & Training Center. Staff and consumers from state vocational rehabilitation agencies were surveyed to gain a better understanding of effective job search practices. The correlation between these practices and traditional (e.g., hours worked, wages) and non-traditional employment outcomes such as social relationships at work and satisfaction with work were analyzed. A component study of job search practices used by community rehabilitation providers was also completed.

Methodology

A multi-level approach was implemented to obtain the perspective of both vocational rehabilitation staff and individuals with disabilities (consumers) in twenty states. One hundred and ninety two staff completed a survey which asked for job search information for the last consumer assisted in obtaining employment. Consumers for whom staff provided information were also asked their perspective regarding the job search. One hundred and one consumers completed this separate survey. Both the staff and consumer surveys requested information on job search practices, job description, and consumer/family involvement. Consumers were also asked to report on job satisfaction, job search support and how the obtained job equated with job preferences.

Findings

Consumers

The majority of consumers reported being "very satisfied" with assistance received in finding a job. A majority rated their job performance as "very good," reported overall job satisfaction, and would like to stay in their current job for more than five years. Areas reported as less satisfactory included compensation, fringe benefits, opportunities for advancement and fairness in pay as compared to other employees. The most frequently cited type of support received from

friends and family were ideas about the type of work they could perform, suggestions about where to look for a job and in providing transportation. Most consumers reported feeling comfortable talking to supervisors and co-workers with problems or questions regarding the job. Consumers with sensory impairments and physical disabilities tended to work more hours and earn higher wages as compared to consumers with mental retardation and mental illness. For consumers with sensory impairments and physical disabilities, more hours were required in the job search.

Demographic information reported by staff and consumers is summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Staff Demographics ^(a)

Variable	%
Highest Level Of Education	
High School	5
Some College	7
Bachelor's Degree	42
Master's Degree	50
Length Of Time On Job	
Less than 1 yr.	3
1-3 yrs.	24
3-5 yrs.	9
More than 5 yrs.	64

Time Spent On Job Search ^(c)

No. of Hours	
Mean	33
Range	1-280

Table 2

Consumer Demographics

Variable	%
Disability ^(a)	
Mental retardation	15
Mental illness	19
Physical disability	38
Sensory impairment	14
Other	13
Length Of Time On Job ^(b)	
2-4 mos.	22
4-6 mos.	20
6 mos. - 1 yr.	29
More than 1 yr.	28

Job Descriptors ^(a)

Wage	
Median	7.15
Range	3.60-22.50
Hours worked	
Median	34
Range	2-40

^(a) as reported by staff (N=192). ^(b) as reported by consumer (N=101)

^(c) as reported for the last consumer assisted in finding community based employment who remained on the job for at least 60 days

Staff

When rating job search practices on use and effectiveness in assisting consumers obtain employment, staff reported positively on the use of counseling, resume development, informal discussion of vocational interests and goals, matching the consumer to the job,

and discussing job accommodation needs with the consumer and potential employers. Practices that were used infrequently or viewed by the staff as not effective included agency-sponsored public relations events, hosting a business advisory group, arranging for subminimum wage, or offering to have the consumer on an agency's payroll instead of the employer payroll. Staff reported that the majority of consumers were involved in all aspects the job search, but that 70% of consumers' families were not very involved in any aspect of the job search. Staff found it effective to provide job related supports, assess employer satisfaction with staff services and to meet with the consumer outside of the work place.

The remaining sections apply to national results obtained from both vocational rehabilitation and community rehabilitation providers.

The following five patterns of job search activities that typically occurred together were identified through factor analysis.

Generic/Not Individually Focused

- Review want-ads
- Develop employer list through phone book / business directory
- Cold contact employer
- Research business and labor trends
- Host a job fair

Individually Focused Placement

- Assess job match
- Restructure job for the individual
- Discuss job accommodations needs

Agency Marketing Approach

- Host an employer advisory board
- Participate in a business-oriented community group, such as the Chamber of Commerce
- Conduct agency sponsored public relations events
- Make general presentations to business regarding abilities of people with disabilities
- Create agency brochure
- Provide general assistance to employer on a broad range of issues

Traditional Job Placement Approach

- Guarantee employer production needs
- Offer subminimum wage
- Offer contract where consumer not on employer's payroll

Networking Strategy

- Canvas personal network to obtain job leads
- Use consumer's social and professional network

- Develop job seeker's resume
- Provide counseling support with job search issues
- Use Employer Account Strategy (frequent contact with companies to develop relationship)
- Involve job seekers in a Job Club
- Identify advocate within targeted company

Most Effective Strategy

This national study lends insight into how rehabilitation staff assist individuals with disabilities obtain employment. As compared to other strategies, the networking approach typically resulted in a higher hourly wage and greater number of hours worked, as well as a shorter length of time spent on the job search. The use of a networking approach was an effective tool in bringing about quality employment outcomes. By incorporating this strategy, staff can use their time more efficiently and consumers can take a more active role in the job search. Individuals with disabilities may need assistance in developing networks and using networking strategies since they traditionally have had smaller social and personal networks to draw upon for job leads.

Implications

Rehabilitation providers might develop and implement the following activities to improve services.

- Emphasize a networking approach that includes consumer and staff personal and professional networks
- Use person-centered planning to assist with vocational goal setting, visualize the future and develop the individual's social network
- Train consumers with the tools to put together, use and maintain networks.
- Build staff's own network by talking with people in the community about their work
- Develop ongoing relationships with employers (i.e., Employer Account Strategy) to highlight connections when job openings occur
- Maintain relationships with previous employers and continually monitor satisfaction with services. Positive relationships can be the building blocks for future job leads