

The Comparative Effectiveness of a Model of Job Development versus Treatment as Usual

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The Comparative Effectiveness of a Model of Job Development Versus Treatment As Usual

Abstract

Job development is critical to assisting people with serious disabilities to obtain jobs, but little is known about the actual methods that make job development effective. Using a post-only quasi-experimental design, the study examined the effects of the Conceptual Selling® method used within the context of job development on number of job development contacts and number of placements. When controlling for employment specialist's characteristics (age, length of time in current position, years of human service experience and years of business experience), the employment specialists trained in the Conceptual Selling® method had more job development contacts per employer leading to more effective job placements for employers contacted than the control groups.

Key Words: Job Development, Evidence-Based Practice, Supported Employment

Introduction

The Individual Placement and Support model (IPS) is one of the best documented evidence-based practices for assisting people with psychiatric disabilities to obtain competitive employment (Loveland, Driscoll & Boyle, 2007; Bond, Drake & Becker, 2008; (Drake, Bond, & Becker, 2012). The IPS model of Supported Employment has several core components including individualized job development in the community. Job development has been broadly defined as “an employment specialist facilitating an employer’s decision to hire a person with a disability by understanding employers’ needs as well as clients’ preferences, abilities, and skills” (Carlson, Smith & Rapp, 2008). Several studies have shown that job development is an indispensable ingredient to supported employment services. For example, a random-effects meta-analysis of a multi-site study known as the Employment Intervention Demonstration Program (Leff, Cook, Gold, et al., 2005) found that individuals receiving job development were five times more likely to obtain competitive employment than consumers not receiving job development. Gervy & Knowal (2005) found that when job developers accompanied clients to their job interviews, they were nearly four times more likely to receive a job offer. More recent studies also demonstrate that job development is the most critical component of the IPS model and is strongly linked with more favorable employment outcomes (e.g., Larson, Barr, Kuwabara, Boyle & Glenn, 2007).

Although job development is viewed as critical to assisting people with significant disabilities to obtain employment (Griffin, Hammis & Geary, 2007; Zadney, 1980; Leff et al., 2005), little is known about what methods and approaches are actually most effective when performing job development activities. However, a few general elements do have empirical support. The first tenet is the focus on engaging the employer in a relationship by identifying the

needs of the employer (Bissonnette, 1994; Marrone, Gandolfo, Gold & Hoff, 1998; Emmett, 2008; Stensrud, 2007; Griffin, Hammis & Geary, 2007; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1999; Swanson & Becker, 2013; Swanson, Bond & Becker, 2013; Royer, 2014). Studies have found the employment specialist's ability to form relationships with employers is associated with better employment outcomes (Corbière, Brouwers, Lanctôt, & van Weeghel, 2013), differentiates high and low performing supported employment programs (Gowdy, Carlson & Rapp, 2003), and discriminates between more successful and less successful employment specialists (Glover & Frounfelker, 2013).

The second tenet of job development is matching the strengths and skills of the job seeker to those employer needs and the job (Gilbride and Stensrud, 1992; Luecking, 2008; Luecking, Cuzzo & Buchanan, 2006; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1999). Indeed, strong job match in IPS is linked with longer job tenure over time (Kukla & Bond, 2012). Inherent in this process is the formation of relationships with consumers and the proper gauging of their needs, preferences, strengths, etc. as related to employment. Empirical evidence supports this notion and indicates that employment specialists with high competitive employment rates are relatively stronger in this domain compared to their counterparts with lower job placement rates (Glover & Frounfelker, 2011).

Given these general principles of job development, items were added to the IPS fidelity scale addressing quality and quantity of job development (Becker, Swanson, Bond, & Merrens, 2011). The strategies associated with these items are consistent with the facets of the Conceptual Selling® for job development (Carlson, Smith & Rapp, 2008). An exploratory study of Conceptual Selling® for job development found that placement outcomes prior to training in the Conceptual Selling® process averaged 25% compared to 61% post-training (Carlson et al.,

2008). Given these promising preliminary findings, this study sought to further examine the use of the Conceptual Selling® method by employment specialists in evidence-based supported employment programs using a post-only quasi-experimental design. It was hypothesized that the use of the Conceptual Selling® method would be associated with more job development contacts with employers leading to more job placements compared to a traditional job development approach.

Description of Conceptual Selling®

Conceptual Selling® is a sales call planning method developed by Miller Heiman Inc. (Heiman & Sanchez, 1987). Its premise is that traditional sales – pushing the buyer into the sale regardless of the buyers’ need/readiness or selling for the sake of the sale – is not effective. Conceptual Selling®’s premise is that in order to effectively sell, the salesperson must understand what is important to buyers, their needs and what they want to accomplish, fix or avoid. Once the buyer’s needs are understood, the salesperson can match the product or solution to those needs. Conceptual Selling® describes a framework for planning and executing interactions with the seller emphasizing the importance of identifying what stage of the process they are at in order to determine what strategies to employ. This is much like stage-wise interventions in motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) where practitioners’ behavior is dictated by the client’s stage of change (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992).

The basic tenets of the Conceptual Selling® method include (Heiman & Sanchez, 1987):

1. Create a “win-win” solution that is productive and successful for both the buyer and the seller.
2. Focus on the customer/buyer’s decision-making process.

3. Understand the employer's concept (what is important to them) before providing information about how your product or service might help.
4. Incorporate three phases in the process: getting information, giving information and getting commitment.
5. Present information to the buyer based on what the employer says he/she needs and helps them to make good buying decisions.
6. Get a commitment from the buyer toward the next step in the relationship at every contact.

When translated to job development within the context of supported employment evidence-based practice, the Conceptual Selling® method provides a framework for how to engage employers in a relationship with the goal to help the employer make good hiring decisions, which may or may not involve hiring a client. This entails understanding what is important to the employer in their business and in their hiring decisions, understanding how they make decisions, and being a part of the solution by proposing ways a job candidate can fill the needs. Ultimately, both the employer and the job candidate have their needs fulfilled. With this method, the employment specialists ask questions and obtain information in order to understand what the needs of the employers are (what they want to accomplish, fix or avoid) before they give information about their program or a potential job candidate.

When the employment specialist gives information, it is directed at information that directly speaks to the employers' "concept" or needs and helps them to make a good hiring decision. Each time the employment specialist meets with a particular employer to obtain information about the business and understand their needs or give them information about their program or a job candidate, the employment specialist should ask for a commitment from the employer that will move the process forward. Commitments could include such things as asking

if the employer would give a tour of their business, introduce the employment specialist to a hiring manager, interview a client, etc.

Methods

Using a post-only quasi-experimental design, this study examined the effect on job placement results of implementing the Conceptual Selling® method of job development activities by employment specialists involved in high fidelity evidence-based practice programs for people with psychiatric disabilities. The study was approved by the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board.

Study Participants

Four agencies with supported employment programs in Kansas participated in the study. The programs selected had good fidelity to evidence-based practice in supported employment (Becker, Swanson, Bond, et al., 2008) based on fidelity reviews conducted within the year preceding the study. Two randomly selected programs from the 14 Kansas evidence-based practice sites agreed to participate as experimental sites and made a commitment to being trained in the Conceptual Selling® method and implementing the method. Then, two comparison programs were selected and asked to participate based on matching similar characteristics of experimental programs including 1) baseline employment rates, 2) number of employment specialists, and 3) evidence-based practice fidelity score ratings. The experimental group consisted of 15 employment specialists from two agencies who received training in the Conceptual Selling® method (CS group) and used the process in their job development contacts for a six month period following training. The comparison group consisted of 12 employment specialists from two employment agencies. This group performed job development as usual or traditional job development (TJD group). In this case, traditional job development is a non-

systematic approach to talking with employers, asking employers about a job opening and giving limited information regarding their program or client. Traditional job development is typically a one-time contact unless there is a job opening and does not typically include getting detailed information about an employer's hiring needs.

Employment specialists were required to report clients for whom they were job developing on behalf of on the job development tracking form. The clients were identified by client ID numbers. The client numbers served by the group trained in Conceptual Selling® was 139 and the TJD group had 168 during the intervention.

Each employment specialist completed a survey that asked them about their educational background, age, and years of experience. There were no significant differences between the two groups in education, length of time in their current positions as employment specialists, length of time employed as an employment specialist prior to their current job, amount of human service experience, business experience, or the amount of experience working with people with psychiatric disabilities. The comparison group ($M=49$, $SD=13.4$) was significantly older than the experimental group ($M=37.9$, $SD=11.68$) [$t_{(24)}= 2.251$, $p<.05$].

Participants in the experimental group were trained prior to implementation and data collection. Participants attended 12 hours of training on Conceptual Selling® and the specific use of Green Sheets or job development contact planning forms that contain the core elements of the Conceptual Selling® method. The employment specialists trained in the Conceptual Selling® method used a planning process associated with this method that pre-plans the contact with an employer by identifying where the employment specialist is in the process and which of the elements they need to use and how. This planning process is intended to drive the interaction between the employment specialist and the employer. Green Sheets were monitored in several

ways. There was a periodic review of the planning forms by the employment supervisor and by researchers to monitor the quality of the Green Sheets. The two employment teams in the experimental group were asked to review Green Sheets at team meetings and individual supervision sessions. There was no monitoring of the comparison group in their preparation or pre-planning, or lack thereof, for employment contacts. Typically, there is no written pre-planning by employment specialist for job development contacts.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of two primary sources: job development tracking and job development observations over a six month of the study period.

Observation of Job Development Contacts

In order to measure the extent to which an employment specialist was or was not performing elements of Conceptual Selling®, each employment specialist was observed by one of the researchers trained in Conceptual Selling® doing a job development contact with an employer monthly for a total of six observations per employment specialist. Both the experimental and comparison groups were observed. Prior to the job development observations, researchers performed joint observations and ratings to determine reliability and consistency in the ratings of the instrument. A total of 142 observations were completed for both groups; the group using the Conceptual Selling® method [CS] ($N=75$) and the group using the Traditional Job Development method [TJD] ($N=67$). Only one observation (CS group) was excluded from the analysis due to missing information.

Researchers were trained in the CS method and worked with a lead trainer from Miller Heiman to develop a rating scale that included the core elements of the Conceptual Selling® process. The Conceptual Selling® Observation Scale consists of 22 items. The original

instrument has five subscales: Valid Business Reason; Getting Information; Establish, Check or Improve Credibility; Giving Information on Unique Strengths; and Asking for a Commitment. The items corresponding to the element “*Establish, Check or Improve Credibility*” and one item from the element “*Getting Information*” (Attitude Questions) was removed from the model after the job development observations because researchers rating found that these were elements of the model that could not be identified during a one-time observation but needed context over time or were difficult to determine only by observation. Thus, the following items were used for analysis in this study: “*Valid Business Reason*” (Items 1, 2, 3), “*Getting Information*” (Employer Concept Items 1, 2, 3 and “*New Information Questions*” Item 4 and “*Confirmation Questions*” Item 5), “*Giving Information on Unique Strengths*” (Items 1, 2, 3), and “*Asking for an Action Commitment*” (Items 1, 2, 3, 4). One item, “*Giving Information*”, is context dependent meaning the first employer contact should not include giving information, but rather getting information. Therefore, items related to “*Giving Information*” were reverse coded to account for this.

The expected five components were captured using a Principal Components Analysis (varimax rotation) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .74. Cronbach’s alpha for the total items was .7. We confirmed the content validity and reliability for the instrument to create sum scores indicating the use of the Conceptual Selling® Model. Because each item is rated dichotomously (1=Present, 0= Not Present), total scores on this scale ranges from 0 to 15. The independent sample *t-test* revealed that CS group received higher scores (M=8.06, SD=3.03) than TJD group (M=5.89, SD=2.68) [$t_{(139)} = -4.48, p < .001$], reflecting higher consonance to the Conceptual Selling® model for CS group.

Tracking Job Development Contacts and Placements

Both the comparison and experimental groups recorded their job development contacts for the six month period. A job development tracking form was used and included the name of the company contacted, the date or dates of contact with the company, client ID numbers for clients they were doing job development on behalf of, and whether the contact(s) resulted in a job for a client. The client ID numbers were used to identify the client pool. Job tracking forms were to be completed at the time of each contact and submitted to researchers on a monthly basis. A total of 739 contacts were completed for both groups -- CS group (259 contacts) and TJD group (479 contacts) -- resulting in 61 job placements (out of 139 clients) for the CS group and 70 (out of 168 clients) for TJD group.

Data Analysis

The current study hypothesized that the employment specialists trained in the CS are likely to have multiple contacts for each employer which are likely to increase the probability of a job offer by the employer when compared to the TJD group. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a mediation analysis by controlling for employment specialist characteristics (including age, length of time in current position, years in human service experience, and years of business experience). Since the number of job development contacts and the number of job placements were count variables, a poisson regression was used.

A random intercept model (a 2-1-1 mediation model; See Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009) is more appropriate given the nested data structure (i.e., the employers were nested within the employment specialists). However, we applied a fixed effect model in this study because the effective sample size for the between-level indirect effect is only 27 for our data (i.e., 259 employers were contacted by 15 CS group and 479 employers were contacted by 12 TJD group)

which leads to a lack of power to detect a nonzero indirect effect in level-two units. Mplus version 7.11 was used for the mediation analysis. The Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (MCMAM) was used to create a 95% confidence interval for testing the indirect effect (Selig & Preacher, 2008).

Results

Outcomes of CS on Job Placements and Employer Contacts:

Employment specialists in the CS group made an average of 2.48 (SD=1.88) contacts per employer while employment specialist in the TJD group made an average of 2.09 (SD=2.13) [p<.05]. The CS group had 43.9% (61/139) of job placements while 41.7% (70/168) had job placements for the TJD group (p>.05). The job placement rate given the number of employers contacted was 23.6% (61/259) for the CS group and 14.6% (70/479) for the TJD group (p<.05).

The mediation analysis revealed that the employment specialists in the CS group tend to have more job development contacts for each employer ($\beta=.18$), which led to more job placements ($\beta=.24$). We found a significant indirect effect ($\beta=.04$). The Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (2,000 repetitions) revealed that a 95% Confidence Interval (0.01, 0.07) does not include zero.

Discussion

This is the first study to explore the effectiveness of the Conceptual Selling® method as applied to job development for people with severe mental illness. The hypothesis was supported to some extent. Given that TJD group extensively contacted employers (479 vs. 259 contacts) keeping fewer contacts per employer (M=2.09 vs. M=2.48) than CS group, the number of actual job placements was similar between the two groups (41.7% for TJD vs. 43.9% for CS) in the end. However, mediation analysis revealed that CS method may be more effective -- the

employment specialists trained in the Conceptual Selling® method had more job development contacts per employer than the control group, which led to more successful job placement rate for employers contacted. Caution should be taken in interpreting this finding to mean that simply visiting employers multiple times will lead to greater placements. Since it was found that the group trained in Conceptual Selling® used more elements of the Conceptual Selling® method more often than the control group, it is possible that the elements of the interactions with the employers (e.g. stating the purpose of the visit, getting information from the employer before giving information about the program or client, and asking for an action commitment at the end of the visit) had an impact on the effective job placements. Also, the length of employer contacts was not collected. It is possible that length, not just frequency, could be influential in engaging employers.

Several limitations should be noted. There was no random assignment of clients which could introduce selection bias. In addition, we do not have information on the clients served, including education and job readiness, which cannot address any client characteristics that may have militated against actual job placements. Further, there were only two centers involved in each group with a small sample of employment specialists. Although statistical procedures were used to address this, it did limit the study and did not allow for a higher level analysis. Another limitation includes the sample was only drawn from one state which could limit its comparability. Finally, the most recent IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale, which added job development items, was not available at the time when the study was implemented.

Regardless of the aforementioned limitations, the current study contributes to the job development in IPS Supported Employment literature. Two factors of this study add confidence in the findings. First, although the comparison group (TJD) was not trained in the Conceptual

Selling® method, the training offered in evidence-based practice supported employment (EBP-SE) does contain some similar concepts (e.g. engaging the employer in a relationship and asking about employer needs). Second, all of the programs included in the study had high fidelity to the evidence-based practice in supported employment which could have muted differences between groups. Taken together, the comparison was made, in fact, with an active control condition more than treatment as usual.

Conclusion

While job development is universally acknowledged as a key element in employment programs, there has been no research on the effectiveness of various models and methods. This study suggests that the specific methods used may be influential in achieving employment outcomes. Furthermore, this research suggests that the Conceptual Selling® methods when applied to job development may be more effective than traditional job development. While additional research is needed, the incorporation of the core ideas and tools of Conceptual Selling® into training programs for employment specialists and their practice seems warranted.

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