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Kathy Muhr, Aniko Laszlo and Alexis Henry on Using Concept Mapping to Evaluate Employment Collaboratives for People with Disabilities

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Using Concept Mapping to Evaluate Employment Collaboratives for People with Disabilities.

Hi. We are Kathy Muhr, Aniko Laszlo and Alexis Henry from UMass Medical School's Center for Health Policy and Research. Through Work Without Limits, a Massachusetts network of employers and providers that aims to increase employment for people with disabilities, we evaluate and promote programs, policies, and practices related to recruitment, retention, accommodation, and career advancement of people with disabilities. One of our efforts has been the development of Regional Employment Collaboratives (RECs), which bring together cross-disability employment service providers to more effectively engage employers and identify ways of producing better employment outcomes.

We conducted a process evaluation of the RECs, asking the question "*what does it take to build and sustain a collaborative of disability employment service providers*?" using a concept mapping approach. Concept mapping is a participatory, multi-stage, mixed-method approach that, among its many uses, involves stakeholders in describing how programs are developed and implemented. To conduct the evaluation, we invited REC members to participate in "brainstorming" sessions during which they generated statements in response to the above question. Next, members sorted and categorized the statements into similar groups. We then entered the sorted statements into a concept mapping software program, which uses multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis to generate a visual representation – a concept map – of how the statements were grouped by the participating members. As a final step, we reviewed our findings with the REC Project Directors, who helped us interpret the data, determine a final number of clusters, and generate meaningful labels that captured the concepts the clusters represented.

The concept map shows the relationship of clusters to each other – clusters closer together on the map represent concepts that are more closely related and those further apart represent concepts less closely related. This approach revealed concepts that were related to the necessary ingredients for building collaboratives in general, as well as concepts that were specific to building collaboratives focused on enhancing employment for people with disabilities. We feel that the concept mapping approach was very effective in getting the first-hand perspectives of the stakeholders involved in building the RECs, and provided us with some strategies for further development and replication of the REC model.

Lessons Learned

Learning Curve. Make sure you allow enough time to learn your concept mapping software, and to complete all stages in the concept mapping process.

Concept Mapping Software Overload. The Internet provides an extensive list of concept mapping software, some are free and others are not. It is important to select the software that best meets the needs of your project.

RAD Resources

Concept Mapping. Examples of concept maps and various concept mapping software products.