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San Jose State University, 1992

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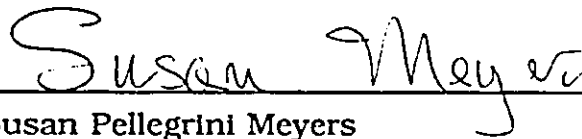
STRESS MANAGEMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION:
A SURVEY OF
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the College of Education,
Division of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
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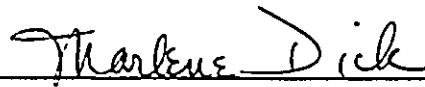
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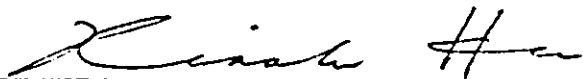
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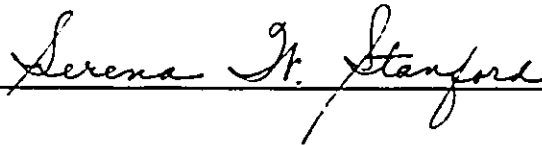


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ABSTRACT

STRESS MANAGEMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION: A SURVEY OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

by Kerry Beth Hosley

A study was conducted to determine perceived levels of work-related stress and job satisfaction in vocational rehabilitation counselors, to explore the association between job stress and job satisfaction, and to describe commonly used methods for managing stress. Survey methodology was used to gather data regarding level of job satisfaction, sources of job satisfaction, level of job stress, sources of job stress, and methods of stress management. The results indicated high levels of both job stress and job satisfaction, without correlation between the two. The greatest source of job satisfaction came from a sense of helping others. The greatest source of work-related stress was the uncertain future of the vocational rehabilitation benefit in California. Exercise was reported as the most commonly and most frequently used stress management activity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Statement of Purpose.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Hypothesis.....	3
Definitions.....	3
Assumptions.....	4
Limitations.....	5
Delimitations.....	5
Statement of Significance.....	5
2. LITERATURE SEARCH.....	7
Burnout Defined.....	7
Common Causes of Job Burnout.....	7
Burnout Prevention.....	11
Job Satisfaction.....	13
3. METHOD.....	16
Introduction.....	15
Development of Questionnaire.....	15
Questions.....	17
Cover Letter.....	17
Selection of Population.....	18
Administration of Questionnaire.....	19
Procedures.....	19

4. RESULTS.....	23
Demographic Information.....	22
Measures of Job Satisfaction and Job Stress...	24
5. DISCUSSION.....	34
Conclusions.....	34
Limitations.....	37
Suggestions for Further Study.....	39
Recommendations.....	40
REFERENCES.....	42
APPENDICES.....	44
A. Cover Letter.....	45
B. Questionnaire.....	47

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Educational Profile of Respondents.....	23
2. Frequency Distribution: Number One Sources of Satisfaction.....	25
3. Frequency Distribution: Overall Levels of Job Satisfaction.....	27
4. Frequency Distribution: Number One Sources of Job Stress.....	28
5. Frequency Distribution: Overall Levels of Job Stress.....	29
6. Frequency Distribution: Stress Management Activities.....	31
7. Correlations.....	32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has the desire for meaningful and satisfying work. For vocational rehabilitation counselors, job satisfaction may come from a sense of having a positive effect on the life of a client, a person who once sustained a work-related injury, but now has returned to suitable employment and is rebuilding his or her life. Work in the human service fields, such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, has many rewards. It can, however, be as draining as it is gratifying. Even in the midst of success, vocational rehabilitation counselors are subject to constant stress stemming from high expectations of self and others (Maslach & Florian, 1988). Professional demands can very quickly outweigh and eventually eclipse one's personal needs, which may lead to fatigue and job burnout. In no time, the counselor may want to stop helping others and may, in fact, need serious help for herself or himself.

It is the role of the vocational rehabilitation counselor in private industry to assist injured workers in their return to suitable and gainful employment. The clients are adults who, because of work-related injuries, cannot return to their usual and customary occupations. The multifaceted role of vocational rehabilitation counselors includes the tasks of counseling, vocational assessment, job development, job placement, and case management. Rehabilitation counselors are at the hub of a complex process, coordinating the activities of a number of skilled professionals (including attorneys, nurses, physicians, physical therapists, vocational evaluators, vocational trainers, job developers and others) who are working to meet the needs of the disabled client. In California, the work of vocational rehabilitation counselors within the worker's compensation

system is overseen by a state regulatory agency called the Rehabilitation Unit. For every case, a set of tasks must be completed within the brief time-frame set by the Rehabilitation Unit. This complexity of players and tasks, the time pressures inherent in the process, and the presence of highly personal human factors (such as loss of work identity, pain from physical injury, grief from real or perceived loss of abilities, disruption of familiar patterns, and financial hardship) interact to make rehabilitation work a physically and emotionally demanding field.

Statement of the Problem

As human service providers, vocational rehabilitation counselors are highly susceptible to job stress and burnout. It is commonly remarked within the profession that a typical vocational rehabilitation counselor does active casework for only five years before changing fields (Deneen & Hesselund, 1986). While the causes of job dissatisfaction are not difficult to identify, skills for preventing early job burnout are harder to pinpoint, and harder yet to practice. Even though vocational rehabilitation counselors are skilled professionals, trained to take care of the needs of others, they tend to ignore their personal needs for stress management and as a result, counselor burnout is a common cause of job dissatisfaction within the field.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe common sources of job stress and job satisfaction in the field of vocational rehabilitation counseling, to identify methods used by veteran counselors to manage stress, and to determine whether there is an association between expressed levels of job satisfaction and job stress.

Research Questions

The review of literature and survey of counselors was conducted with the following questions in mind:

1. How do vocational rehabilitation counselors rate their overall levels of job satisfaction and job stress?
2. What common sources of job stress and job satisfaction are identified by vocational rehabilitation counselors?
3. What, if any, effective stress management tools are routinely used by vocational rehabilitation counselors who have remained in the field longer than 5 years?
4. Do counselors who routinely engage in stress management activities experience a greater level of job satisfaction than those who do not?

Hypothesis

The researcher hypothesized that there would be a significant negative correlation between job stress and job satisfaction in vocational rehabilitation counselors as measured by the respondents' ratings of these two variables.

Definitions

For the purposes of this research, the following definitions were used:

- 1) Vocational rehabilitation counselor: a qualified professional working within the private worker's compensation insurance

system whose regular duties involve the evaluation, counseling, and placement of industrially injured workers.

- 2) Job burnout: an extreme form of occupational stress which occurs when work-related problems interfere with optimal professional functioning and enjoyment of one's work. Symptoms may include chronic fatigue, low motivation, low morale, disillusionment, irritability, exhaustion, indifference and depression. Typically, symptoms also interfere with life outside of the workplace.
- 3) Job satisfaction: a sense of reward and purpose gained from one's work, including fulfillment of one's professional self-image.
- 4) Stress management: any activity, performed at least once per week, which reduces tension and anxiety, and enhances a sense of physical or emotional well-being.

Assumptions

Conclusions from this study will be based on the following assumptions:

1. The survey instruments administered for this study were valid for the vocational rehabilitation counselors surveyed.
2. The responses obtained for use in the study were representative of other vocational rehabilitation counselors from whom no responses were obtained or sought.

Limitations

The results of the survey were limited by the participants' subjective definitions of the variables (job satisfaction and job stress). The researcher also had no control over intervening work and life conditions which may have influenced the respondents, such as size of caseload, office politics, and family dynamics. Finally, the study was limited by the counselors' willingness to participate in the survey and to disclose information.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to active vocational rehabilitation counselors working within the private worker's compensation system in the San Francisco Bay Area. In order to insure that the respondents had enough work experience to be susceptible to the long-term effects of job burnout, and in order to gather data on stress management from "survivors" in the field, the study was delimited to counselors who had been active in the field of vocational rehabilitation for at least five years continuously.

Statement of Significance

The field of vocational rehabilitation is growing to keep in step with the numbers of people in the workforce who sustain industrial injuries. The outcome of the rehabilitation process is significantly influenced by the skills and attitudes of the rehabilitation counselor (McGowan & Porter, 1965). As the field expands, it becomes more important for counselors to foster their own job satisfaction, not only to maintain skilled and experienced counselors in the field, but also to draw competent, caring newcomers.

As a graduate student training in the field of vocational rehabilitation counseling, identifying methods for long-term survival in the profession is of great personal interest to the writer. Training for two years to enter a profession with built-in obsolescence would be folly. It is the researcher's goal, therefore, to identify preventive measures against professional burnout in vocational rehabilitation counselors. By practicing specific stress management skills, the researcher believes it will be possible to develop a plan for establishing healthy, sustaining work habits early in professional life. This information would be of interest to all graduate students training in the field, to counselors currently in practice who wish to remain in the profession, as well as to psychologists and business people who study the effects of job burnout and successful coping mechanisms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE SEARCH

The review of literature focused on research in four closely-related areas: 1) definitions of professional burnout, 2) common causes of professional burnout, 3) strategies for prevention of and remedies for burnout, and 4) sources of job satisfaction.

Burnout Defined

Job burnout is defined as a debilitating psychological condition brought about by unrelieved work stress, which results in: 1) depleted energy reserves, 2) lowered resistance to illness, 3) increased dissatisfaction and pessimism, and 4) increased absenteeism and inefficiency at work (Veninga & Spradley, 1981). Burnout has also been described as a response to chronic, everyday stress, not reaction to an occasional crisis (Maslach, 1982). The chronic nature of the stress leads to diminished tolerance for familiar conditions, often without evident changes in the work environment. Maslach identifies the hallmark of the burnout syndrome as a shift in perception of other people from positive and caring to negative and uncaring.

Common Causes of Job Burnout

Veninga and Spradley pay special attention to three work conditions which tend to ensure an unusually high level of stress. Listed alongside dead-end jobs and burnout bosses, they identify a stressful condition most relevant to this investigation: the fact of being in a helping profession. Vocational rehabilitation counseling belongs to a group of jobs known as "burnout occupations." Driven by high ideals of service, the desire to make the world a better place, and

high, often unrealistic expectations of our influence, our visions of serving humankind are doomed for a head-on collision with the daily realities of hard work, setbacks, and sacrifice.

Christina Maslach (1982) refers to a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy in which the reduced sense of self-esteem and reduced sense of accomplishment that accompany burnout lead to poorer performance and apparent confirmation of the negative view. Particularly in jobs which require a high level of emotional involvement, this cycle contributes to the dehumanizing of clients and routinized service delivery, and can best be handled by prevention rather than cure. Maslach recommends setting realistic goals, doing the same thing differently, taking a detached view of work, and accentuating the positive as precautionary measures. After the fact, social supports are needed to break the burnout cycle. Improvements in the workplace will be necessary to prevent its return.

The first symptoms of burnout in members of the helping professions may appear when helpers realize they cannot meet their own standards, let alone the standards of their clients. Because counselors do not punch a clock, "difficulty in getting away from clients" is cited as the single greatest cause of burnout in the helping professions (Veninga & Spradley, 1981). In their research, additional causes of burnout include lack of recognition for achievement, daunting bureaucratic red tape and administrative deadlines.

Three common states of job dissatisfaction, if misunderstood, can lead to burnout (Veninga & Spradley, 1981). One state is found in workers who believe they must be 100% satisfied with their jobs and not settle for less. It was recommended that people in this group

keep a "job satisfaction balance sheet," redefine more realistic goals, and consider themselves lucky if they are satisfied 50% of the time.

A second type of job dissatisfaction develops among pessimists who believe that "everyone hates their jobs." This attitude tends to foster a dramatized and false perception of stress, and can lead to a slippery slope of job burnout, since the pessimist is unlikely to believe that any effort will remedy their discontent.

A third common state of job dissatisfaction is felt by people who want to believe that they won't burn out if they enjoy their work. Unfortunately, research data disproves this hopeful theory, by showing that unrelenting stress can build to job burnout even in workers who still claim to love their jobs. The people in this category tend to blame their malaise on personal inadequacies, rather than looking at organizational solutions.

Flowers and Parker (1984) explore the current tenuous status of the field of rehabilitation counseling as an overwhelming source of stress felt by counselors. Flowers and Parker have outlined legislative attempts to reduce the workers' compensation benefit which would eliminate the need for vocational rehabilitation counselors within private industry. Also cited is the lack of a nationally recognized educational standard, which, they suggest, reduces the professional status of rehabilitation counselors. They advocate knowing one's self as the pathway to greater objectivity, clarity of motivations, and higher job satisfaction.

A high level of accountability has also been identified as a significant source of stress (Deneen & Hessellund, 1986). Vocational

rehabilitation counselors within the worker's compensation system are accountable to a stifling number of individuals including the injured worker, the applicant's attorney, the insurance carrier, the defense attorney, treating physicians, training facilities, evaluation facilities, and the regulating body, the state rehabilitation unit. It is not unusual for vocational rehabilitation counselors to find themselves in adversarial roles. They may ask: Who is my client? The injured worker, or the insurance company who orders and pays for the rehabilitation services? Rehabilitation counselors also find themselves pressured to maintain literacy in current technology affecting disabilities and to keep abreast of the changing local labor markets.

Another consideration in evaluating stress is the inadequate preparation given to rehabilitation counselors for handling ethical issues which confront them on the job (Rubin, Rubin, Garcia, Millard & Wong, 1988). The workers' compensation system is fraught with conflicts between the legislative mandate for full integration of disabled individuals and coexisting policies which act as barriers to this goal. Counselors are trained theoretically to "act in the best interest of the client" but they are hired, paid by and accountable to private insurance companies whose goals are candidly limited to cost containment. The Rubins suggest that rehabilitation counselors will be better prepared to handle such ethical dilemmas when graduate schools integrate training on ethics into the curriculum.

As mentioned earlier, vocational rehabilitation counselors within the workers' compensation system interact with a variety of other professionals. Counselors are constantly analyzing and making recommendations for services. Research suggests that the credibility

of recommendations made by vocational rehabilitation counselors is influenced by the credentials they possess (Matkin, 1986). It is suggested that the more training counselors can claim, the more likely they are to receive case referrals. Vocational rehabilitation counselors are pressured by market demands to maintain their professional credentials through continuing education.

Burnout Prevention

As preventive measures against the psychological states which presage burnout, Veninga and Spradley (1981) recommend a combination of personal and organizational strategies. Personal strategies include listening to and believing messages from the body that signal stress; reevaluating situations perceived as stressful, in order to become less reactive to the trivial and transitory irritations, yet still allow appropriate reactions to genuine crises; and lowering expectations for achievement.

Organizational strategies focus on the structure and content of the job. No one knows our job and its potential for stress production as we do, therefore no one can monitor the hazards as we can. Skillful planning can forestall many stressful incidents, and allow us to manage pressure, keeping it to a tolerable level.

Organizational strategies may include developing a detached view of the job. This can be achieved through various means, including humor; fantasy (imagine your job as a one-act play, and you as a spectator); becoming an observer and recorder of action, rather than a central player; or regularly describing your job to a disinterested outsider. The detached view doesn't mean lack of concern, it simply

allows workers to temporarily disconnect their personal investment and to bypass standard reactions.

Those workers seeking to reduce stress are urged to analyze the hidden structure of their jobs, setting aside the standard, formal description of job duties. They are advised to analyze the tacit demands of the underlying political culture, in addition to essential business functions. This evaluation of hidden job structures may include taking a stress inventory, listing major frustrations at work with divisions for activities, people and work conditions. The inventory can then be used to redesign those aspects of the work within the worker's sphere of influence.

In "Preventing Rehabilitation Counselor Burnout by Balancing the Caseload," Payne (1989) analyzes many causes of and remedies for professional burnout in vocational rehabilitation counselors, stressing effective management of roles as the key to burnout prevention. Payne cites a variety of recent literature on stress in outlining the essential tools of mentally healthy rehabilitation counselors. According to Payne, these include effective time management, establishing realistic expectations, balancing interactive and administrative responsibilities, adopting a team-approach to case management, developing "critical empathy," nurturing one's personal life, and incorporating routine self-evaluation. Payne concludes that counselors must learn to be as concerned for themselves as they are for their client's welfare.

Characteristics of stress-resistant people have been identified as an openness to change, a feeling of involvement in whatever they are doing, a sense of control over events, and trusting that they are doing the right thing (Bruyere & Anderson, 1984). The importance of self-awareness in preventing job burnout, not denying a sense of frustration, being sensitive to individual symptoms of stress and making constructive efforts to take control of the situation are

emphasized. Recommended ways of adapting to a stressful work situation included reducing self-expectations, looking for ways to lighten the workload, and using more effective goal setting with clients.

Counselors are urged not to submerge their personal needs under the pressure of professional demands (Maslach & Florian, 1988). The cost of doing so may be a loss of desire to help others, and may, in fact, result in the need for professional counseling for the helper.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction among vocational rehabilitation counselors is important to individuals entering the field, and for the retention of counselors already working in the field. The counselor's satisfaction with work and services may contribute to the success or failure of a rehabilitation plan (McGowan & Porter, 1967). Therefore, improving job satisfaction may strengthen the services provided to clients.

Perhaps more than any other activity, work creates a high level of physical, emotional, and intellectual demands. Our response to the variety of stimuli which work provides has been labeled "job satisfaction" (Miller & Muthard, 1965). A rehabilitation counselor's level of job satisfaction may be molded by a number of factors, including: basic rehabilitation philosophy, educational background, training, type of agency or organization, interaction with colleagues and superiors, and aptitude for administrative details.

The amount of work handled by vocational rehabilitation counselors is not as critical to their mental health as is the control the worker has over work rate and related work processes (Murphy & Schoenborn, 1989). A study suggested that counselors who have the

autonomy to make decisions on casework report a higher level of job satisfaction than counselors without the authority to make decisions. In this case, granting counselors the authority for decision-making also reduced costs of rehabilitation by reducing the time between planning and implementation.

Studies comparing the job satisfaction of private sector to public sector vocational rehabilitation counselors describe higher satisfaction in the private sector. Desired features of private sector work are listed as salary incentives, smaller caseloads, referral control, and more satisfactory relationships with colleagues and supervisors. On the other hand, large public sector agencies appear to stifle counselor effectiveness with larger caseloads, fewer training opportunities, and less interpersonal contact (Howell, 1983). Other studies found counselor job satisfaction to be significantly higher in private agencies based on job security, opportunities for advancement, financial incentives, emotional involvement in the job, and relations with associates (Crawford, 1977).

Summary of the Review of Literature

The literature supports the view that vocational rehabilitation counselors are subject to burnout due to a high level of professional demands. The review of literature provides findings which appear to be supportive of the hypothesis linking higher job satisfaction with control of job stress. Options for challenging job stress ranged from the abstract (developing a personal philosophy which allows a positive adaptation to stress) to the practical (employing specific time management strategies); however, a general pattern emerged for the significance of self-knowledge as a favored stress management tool.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Introduction

There is a popular axiom which states, in essence, that some stress is necessary to insure our optimal performance as human beings. When stress reaches a level where it interferes with the enjoyment of our chosen occupations, however, it is no longer beneficial, and needs to be managed. In "Rehabilitation Counselor State of Being," Bruyere and Anderson (1984) claim that the most common reaction to unmanageable job stress among vocational rehabilitation counselors is to leave the field. The information found in the literature search conducted for this research implied that there are other, more satisfying approaches to handling job stress. It was the purpose of this study to research the most common sources of job stress for vocational rehabilitation counselors, and to identify successful methods for managing them. The researcher predicted that counselors who report a higher level of job satisfaction will also report a lower level of work-related stress.

Development of the Questionnaire

A three-page questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed to gather necessary data on job stress, tools employed for managing stress, and their effects on job satisfaction. To develop the questionnaire, the investigator relied on information about sources of stress and stress management discussed in the literature. The investigator also drew upon past experience as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in the private sector, and on information gained through consultation with colleagues.

A pilot study was completed with a group of ten vocational rehabilitation counselors who participate in an informal monthly meeting of counselors in the South Bay. Group members have been employed in the rehabilitation field for greater than five years, and consist of both men and women, both self-employed and employees of large and small firms. The purpose of the pilot study was to assure that all instructions provided with the questionnaire were clear, to assess if the questionnaire was organized in a logical format, and to insure that questions which asked respondents to select from a list, did in fact include the most common answers in order to minimize the use of "other". Minor changes in wording and format were made as a result of information gained from the pilot study. Significant editing occurred on the forced-choice lists in Question 6 (sources of job satisfaction), Question 8 (sources of job stress), and Question 10 (resources for stress relief). Selections proposed by the literature which were not chosen by any of the pilot group were discarded, and selections commonly entered in the "other" category by participants in the pilot group were added.

The questionnaire included one open-ended and nine forced-choice questions, all of which offered the option of selecting "other" and writing in additional information. Information was gathered regarding the following general topics:

1. Demographic information, including age, sex, level of education, size of firm, and number of years employed in private vocational rehabilitation.
2. Identification of the major sources of job satisfaction and job stress.

3. Overall rating of levels of job satisfaction and job stress.
4. Identification of strategies regularly used in management of stress.

Questions

The survey of vocational rehabilitation counselors was conducted with the following research questions in mind:

1. What common sources of job stress are identified by vocational rehabilitation counselors?
2. How do vocational rehabilitation counselors rate their own levels of job stress and job satisfaction?
3. What, if any, effective stress management tools are regularly utilized by vocational rehabilitation counselors?
4. Do counselors who express a lower level of stress also experience a greater level of job satisfaction?

Cover Letter

The cover letter (Appendix A) was used to introduce the researcher and contained a brief description of the purpose of the study. Participants were given an assurance of confidentiality, and offered a summary of results upon request.

Selection of Population

To describe perceptions of job stress and job satisfaction, and what, if any, stress management strategies are commonly used by vocational rehabilitation counselors, the researcher surveyed a random sample of active counselors within the San Francisco Bay Area. A questionnaire was mailed to 200 vocational rehabilitation counselors, selected by a random process from mailing labels provided by the California Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (CARP). This group represents members of CARP for 1992 within six counties comprising the San Francisco Bay Area. The study setting, therefore, included Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Monterey, and Santa Clara counties. CARP is the preeminent professional organization for rehabilitation counselors in private practice. There are approximately 1000 CARP members statewide, representing an estimated one-half of the existing vocational rehabilitation counselors in California.

Participants were selected by assigning numbers to CARP members in the six selected counties. Corresponding numbers were placed in a container, and 200 were drawn at random. In order to take advantage of the natural rhythms of the work schedule, questionnaires were mailed to arrive at the beginning of the calendar month, when the workload is typically lightest.

The population was intended to include counselors who are self-employed as well as those employed within private rehabilitation firms. The investigator sought information from vocational rehabilitation counselors who have worked in the field for more than five years continuously. However, since there was no way to pre-screen for this characteristic, respondents were asked about length of service early in the questionnaire, and responses from counselors with less than five years of experience were not included in the analysis.

Administration of the Questionnaire

The cover letters and questionnaires, stamped and self-addressed for convenience of return, were mailed to each of 200 potential participants on March 31, 1992. A total of 127 questionnaires were returned by April 30, 1992. No follow up procedure was performed to encourage greater return. This resulted in a total response rate of 127 questionnaires, or 63.5% return. One questionnaire was insufficiently complete to be analyzed. A total of 16 questionnaires were not used in the data analysis because the respondents had worked in the field for less than five years. Therefore, 110 of the questionnaires returned were usable, comprising 55% of the sample population. Although a small number of respondents did not answer all of the questions as directed, the information provided was adequate for analysis of the data.

Procedures

Questions 1 through 5 requested demographic information from each respondent, regarding age, sex, level of education, employment setting, and number of years in practice. This information was gathered to obtain descriptive characteristics of the sample population. Basic statistical methods such as measures of central tendency, frequency tallies, and percentages were used to describe these variables.

Question number 6 was designed to solicit data regarding the greatest sources of job satisfaction. Respondents were asked to assign rank ordering to a list of forced-choices, including: 1) helping others, 2) applying professional skills and education, 3) good pay, 4) independence, 5) flexible hours, 6) successful plan closure, 7) negotiating successful conflict resolution, 8) recognition of a job well

done, 9) establishing a good professional reputation, and 10) other, please describe. Frequency distribution was used to analyze the data.

Question number 7 was designed to gather information regarding the respondent's overall level of job satisfaction. A Likert-type scale was provided, offering a range of one through five with 1=highly unsatisfied, 2=unsatisfied, 3=neutral, 4=satisfied, and 5=highly satisfied. Frequency tallies were employed to determine mean and mode responses. Pairs of raw scores from Question 7 (job satisfaction) and Question 9 (job stress) were analyzed using the Pearson r correlational procedure for correlation between overall level of job satisfaction and overall level of job stress.

Question number 8 was designed to identify significant sources of job stress. The question offered a forced-choice list of job stresses, including "other," and requested respondents to rank them, with number 1 as the greatest job stress. The list of choices included: 1) caseload too heavy, 2) meeting a billing quota, 3) bureaucratic delays, 4) dislike marketing, 5) too much time spent on the telephone, 6) challenge of current tight labor market, 7) unmotivated or uncooperative clients, 8) working with insurance representatives, 9) attending conferences, 10) providing testimony, 11) working with attorneys, 12) the uncertain future of the rehab benefit, and 13) other, please describe. Frequency distribution was used to analyze this data.

Question 9 was intended to collect data regarding the respondent's overall level of work-related stress. It was structured like question 7 in order to facilitate the analysis of correlation between job stress and job satisfaction. A Likert-type scale was provided offering a scale of 1=very high stress, 2=high stress, 3=moderate stress, 4=low stress, and 5=no stress. The data was analyzed using frequency distribution,

measures of central tendency, and with data from question 7, for a correlation.

Question 10 was designed to yield data describing regularly used methods of stress relief. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of times per week they engage in any stress management activities from a forced-choice list. The options offered included: 1) physical exercise, 2) goal setting, 3) delegating work, 4) socializing with family or friends, 5) consulting with colleagues, 6) meditation or prayer, 7) hobbies, 8) taking breaks, 9) alternating tasks, and 10) other, please describe.

Frequency distribution was used to analyze data from Question 10, treating each choice as a separate variable. Question 10 was also analyzed by summing the frequencies of all stress management activities performed in one week, and by counting the variety of stress management activities, with each separate activity assigned a value of 1 regardless of the frequency of use. Those two measures were analyzed for correlation with Question 7 and Question 9, to determine if use of stress management activities correlated to perceived job satisfaction or job stress.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Demographic Information

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and 127 were returned (63.5%). From those, 126 were sufficiently complete to be considered for further analysis. Sixteen of the 126 respondents had worked in the field of vocational rehabilitation for less than five years, and, as defined in research limitations, their data was not included in the statistical analysis, leaving 110 questionnaires in the final analysis, or 55% of the original sample population.

Demographically, the final sample of 110 respondents was 55.4% male and 44.5% female. The lowest age reported was 27, and the highest, 70. The mean age of respondents was calculated at 43.8 years.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents (68 counselors) have a masters degree. Forty percent (44 counselors) hold a masters degree and have passed the CRC examination, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, the nationally recognized certification for vocational rehabilitation counselors. Of the remaining respondents, 33% (37 counselors) hold a bachelors degree, and 5% (5 counselors) had earned a doctorate. Of 37 respondents with a bachelors degree, one holds a CRC. Two of five Ph.D.s have the CRC. The total number of respondents holding the CRC is 48, or 44%. Table 1 illustrates the educational profile of individuals who completed the survey.

Participants were asked to identify their current employment as a small firm (five or fewer counselors), a large firm (more than five

Table 1

EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Degree/Credential	Number	Percentage
Bachelors degree	37*	33*
Bachelors degree and CRC	1	1
Masters degree	68*	62*
Masters degree and CRC	44	40
Ph.D.	5*	5*
Ph.D. and CRC	2	2
Total with CRC	48	44
	n*=110	n*=100%

counselors), or self-employed. Sixty-eight individuals, 61% of the total, classified themselves as self-employed. Of the remaining respondents, 24% (26 individuals) identified themselves as working for a large firm, and 15% (16 individuals) work for a small firm.

The final demographic question requested counselors to indicate the number of years they have been employed as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in the worker's compensation system. As noted previously, 16 questionnaires were disallowed owing to less than five years of experience in the field. Among the remaining 110 respondents, the minimum number of years in the field was five, and the maximum reported was 18. The mean number of years in vocational rehabilitation counseling was 10.3 years, with 10 years as the mode response.

Measures of Job Satisfaction and Job Stress

The remainder of the survey was designed to gather data regarding levels of job satisfaction, sources of job satisfaction, levels of job stress, sources of job stress, and measures for combatting work-related stress.

Question number 6 asked respondents to rank a list of sources of job satisfaction, with 1 as the greatest source. Table 2 displays the frequency distribution of the number one sources of job satisfaction by raw scores and percentages. Overall, "helping others" was the highest-rated source of job satisfaction with 51 respondents (46%) selecting it as their number one choice. "Applying my professional education and skills" was second in first-choice rankings, with 19 respondents (17%). "Negotiating successful conflict resolution" was the third first-choice ranking, with 12 responses (11%). The fourth choice was "independence," with 11 responses (10%).

Table 2

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION
NUMBER ONE SOURCES OF JOB SATISFACTION

Source of Job Satisfaction	Number	Percentage
Helping Others	51	46
Applying Professional Skills and Education	19	17
Negotiating Successful Conflict Resolution	12	11
Independence	11	10
Establishing a Good Professional Reputation	6	5
Successful Plan Closure	5	5
Good Pay	3	3
Flexible Hours	2	2
Recognition for a Job Well Done	1	1
Other	0	0
	n=110	100%

Question 7 asked counselors to rate their overall level of job satisfaction on a Likert-type scale, from highly unsatisfied to highly satisfied. Table 3 displays the frequency distribution for each of the five levels of job satisfaction, as follows: 6 respondents (5.4%) described job satisfaction as "highly unsatisfied," 9 respondents (8.2%) reported "unsatisfied," 11 (10%) "neutral," 51 (46.4%) reported "satisfied," and 33 (30%) reported "highly satisfied." The mode, or most common report was of satisfaction with the job.

Question 8 asks about significant sources of stress on the job. By raw scores, the "uncertain future of rehab" was ranked most often as the number one source of job stress, chosen by 25 respondents, or 23% of the total. Twenty-three individuals (23%) designated "uncooperative clients" as their number one stress. "Heavy caseload" ranked third as number one stressor, selected by 17 respondents (15% of the total). The fourth greatest source of stress was "working with insurance representatives," gathering 14 first choice designations, or 13% of the total. The frequency distributions, by raw scores and percentages, of number one sources of job stress are displayed on Table 4.

Overall level of job stress is examined in Question 9. Respondents rated their own levels of work-related stress on a Likert-type scale, with 1=very high stress, 2=high stress, 3=moderate stress, 4=low stress, and 5=no stress. The frequency distribution of overall levels of job stress is illustrated in Table 5. Eight counselors (8%) rated their job stress as very high, 42 rated theirs (38%) high, 45 (40%) moderate, 14 (13%) low, and 1 (1%) claimed no job stress. The mean response was calculated at 2.78, with a mode of 3 (moderate stress.)

Table 3
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION
OVERALL LEVELS OF JOB SATISFACTION

Level of Job Satisfaction	Number	Percentage
Satisfied	51	46.4%
Highly Satisfied	33	30.0%
Neutral	11	10.0%
Unsatisfied	9	8.2%
Highly Unsatisfied	6	5.4%
	n=110	100%

Table 4

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION
NUMBER ONE SOURCES OF JOB STRESS

Source of Stress	Number	Percentage
Uncertain future of rehab benefit	25	23%
Unmotivated or uncooperative clients	23	23%
Caseload too heavy	17	15%
Working with insurance representatives	14	13%
Bureaucratic delays	7	7%
Challenge of current tight labor market	6	6%
Meeting bureaucratic deadlines	4	4%
Meeting a billing quota	3	3%
Providing testimony	3	3%
Dislike marketing	2	2%
Too much time spent on the phone	2	2%
Attending conferences	2	2%
Working with attorneys	2	2%
	n=110	100%

Table 5

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION
OVERALL LEVELS OF JOB STRESS

Level of Stress	Number	Percentage
Moderate stress	45	40%
High stress	42	38%
Low stress	14	13%
Very high stress	8	8%
No stress	1	1%
	n=110	100%

Question number 10 was designed to gather data about stress management activities used by vocational rehabilitation counselors, limited to those which are used at least once per week. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency, specifically the number of times per week, they use any of a list of stress relief tools. Table 6 shows the frequency distributions by raw scores and percentages of response of number one sources of stress management used at least once per week. Among the respondents, exercise was the most widely and frequently identified stress relief tool, with 84% claiming to exercise at least once per week. The mean frequency of exercise is 4 times per week for this set of respondents.

The second most widely used resource for relaxation is socializing. Seventy eight percent of the respondents socialize with family and friends at least once per week, with a mean frequency of 3.8 times per week. Consulting with colleagues is the third most popular activity, used by 70% of the respondents with an average frequency of 3.0 times per week. Delegation is the fourth most widely used resource, selected by 65% of the respondents, with a mean frequency of 3.9 times per week.

The least used methods of stress management from those listed on the questionnaire include hobbies, utilized by 34% of the respondents with a mean frequency of 1.1 uses per week, and meditation or prayer, utilized by 22% of the respondents with a mean frequency of 2.2 per week.

A correlation between overall job satisfaction and overall job stress was sought by comparing the responses from Questions 7 and 9. The correlation coefficient was calculated at .139 with a .195 level of significance (see Table 7), indicating a low level of correlation between

Table 6

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR
STRESS MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Stress Management Activity	Number*	Percentage
Physical exercise	92	84%
Socializing with friends or family	86	78%
Consulting with colleagues	77	70%
Delegating work	72	65%
Alternating tasks for change of pace	62	47%
Taking breaks when needed	56	51%
Goal setting	56	51%
Hobbies	37	34%
Meditation or prayer	24	22%

n=100

*Number of respondents who engage in the activity at least once per week.

Table 7

CORRELATIONS

Correlation between:	n=	r=
Overall job satisfaction and overall job stress	110	.139 ^a
Overall job satisfaction and frequency of stress management activities	110	.305 ^b
Overall job satisfaction and variety of stress management activities	110	.037
Overall job stress and frequency of stress management activities	110	.025
Overall job stress and variety of stress management activities	110	-.151

^a p < .195^b p < .05

overall job stress and job satisfaction in this survey. This same conclusion can be observed in that 85.2% of the respondents reported moderate, high, or very high stress, while at the same time 76.3% of the respondents reported satisfaction or high satisfaction with their jobs.

The data from Question 10 was also analyzed for correlation between: a) expressed overall levels of job satisfaction and frequency of stress management activities, b) job satisfaction and variety of stress management activities, c) job stress and frequency of stress management activities, and d) job stress and variety of stress management activities.

A positive correlation was demonstrated between level of job satisfaction and frequency of stress management activities, so that higher expressed job satisfaction correlated with more frequent use of stress management resources. The correlation coefficient was calculated at .305, with a .05 level of significance. No correlation was found between job satisfaction and variety of stress management activities (correlation coefficient=.037), between job stress and frequency of stress management activities (correlation coefficient=.025), or between job stress and variety of stress management activities used (correlation coefficient=-.151). Data on correlations in Questions 7, 9, and 10 are illustrated in Table 7.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The study of vocational rehabilitation counselors was primarily designed to: 1) describe sources of job stress and job satisfaction among vocational rehabilitation counselors, 2) determine the degree of correlation between job satisfaction, work-related stress, and use of stress management activities, and 3) describe the methods of stress management most often used by counselors. For the researcher, the study may have raised more questions than it answered. The investigator hopes that the information will be useful to some, and that it may stimulate further inquiry. The following discussion is organized in terms of conclusions and implications, problems and limitations, and suggestions for further study.

Conclusions

The return rate of 49% women and 51% men represents an accurate female-to-male distribution of the sample population, 200 San Francisco Bay Area members of CARP. The average respondent is 44 years old, has a masters degree, a CRC, is self-employed and has worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for 10 years. A high rate of return of the questionnaires (63.5%) indicated that the participants showed interest in the material and the questions contained in the survey instrument.

The results of the investigation appear to reject the hypothesis that there is a correlation between level of job stress and level of job satisfaction. To the contrary, data appear to suggest that there is a positive correlation between job satisfaction and frequency of stress

management activities, that as one increases so does the other. The researcher has no data to support a supposition that would explain this outcome; however, she would tend to believe that the field of vocational rehabilitation is one in which high levels of stress and high levels of job satisfaction co-exist without causal relationship. Although potential for stress is significant, rewards which lead to satisfaction are also common.

Research question number one was designed to describe the overall levels of job stress and job satisfaction among vocational rehabilitation counselors. Results of the survey suggest that, among the sample population, vocational rehabilitation counselors are satisfied to highly satisfied with their choice of careers. Greater than 75% of the respondents indicated overall levels of satisfaction to high satisfaction with their jobs. Respondents to this survey perceive a moderate or high level of job stress, with 38% of the respondents describing their overall levels of job stress as high, and 40% describing stress as moderate.

In order to answer the second research question, the researcher sought to identify common sources of job satisfaction and job stress. Described in the literature as an early motivation for choosing vocational rehabilitation counseling as a career, "helping others" remained the number one source of job satisfaction in the sample group of veteran counselors. The literature implied that "helping others" quickly becomes a thwarted goal in most helping professions. However, by subjective standards, the outcome of this survey implies a degree of success in accomplishing the goal of "helping others", since that remained the strongest source of job satisfaction among a sample of counselors with a mean of 10.3 years in the field.

"Applying professional education and skills" and "negotiating successful conflict resolution" ranked second and third as the most significant sources of job satisfaction. It is interesting to note that all of the highest ranking responses describe the utilization of personal skills, rather than secondary features of the work such as "good pay," "independence" or "flexible hours." These results suggest that the greatest satisfactions are gained from what counselors are bringing to the work, rather than what the work gives to them.

With regard to significant sources of job stress, the survey identified "the uncertain future of the rehabilitation benefit" and "uncooperative clients" as the worst factors, followed by "heavy caseload" and "working with insurance representatives." By this analysis, three of the four greatest sources of stress are factors which are outside of the counselor's control. Of the four worst sources of stress expressed, only "heavy caseload" is within the counselor's realm of control. Based on the profile of the average respondent I would suppose that most counselors in this survey, being self-employed, have the choice of controlling caseload size, which means that this one stress factor (heavy caseload) probably could be reduced. The remaining top three stressors could be managed but are not likely to be eliminated.

Research question number three was designed to describe effective stress management activities regularly used by the respondents. Exercise, socializing, and delegation ranked as the top three choices used most often by the subjects of this survey. Eighty-four percent of the group exercise at least once each week, with a mean frequency of 4 times per week. Seventy-eight percent socialize with family and friends at least once per week, averaging nearly 4 times. The third highest-ranked activity, consulting with colleagues, was chosen by 70% of the respondents with a mean frequency of nearly 4 times per

week. Of the top three most frequently used strategies, only consulting with colleagues applies as an organizational strategy, while exercise and socializing are activities which are applied outside of the workplace.

The researcher supposes that vocational rehabilitation counselors might have a high awareness of health and physical fitness as a result of working with injured workers, and that frequent exposure to the fragility of physical wellness might encourage counselors to treat physical exercise as an important activity.

The final research question asks if counselors who use stress management techniques experience greater job satisfaction than those who do not. The results appear to suggest that higher job satisfaction is associated with more frequent efforts at relaxation, regardless of the technique employed.

Limitations

There is no way to compare the profile of the average respondent in this survey to the true population of vocational rehabilitation counselors, therefore this information cannot be generalized into a wider circle. As in all surveys, there was a percentage of non-responding subjects. The sample may have been skewed, since those counselors who are very highly stressed may not have replied to the questionnaire. Or, perhaps, counselors who are less stressed did not reply, since they weed out expendable activities (such as replying to surveys) as part of their successful stress management strategy.

By design, the sample was intended to include only counselors who had worked as vocational rehabilitation counselors for five years or

more. While it was necessary to include this delimitation to insure that the sample had an opportunity to reach a level of experience when job burnout would be more likely to occur, it may have skewed the sample toward a group of counselors with higher levels of job satisfaction. One would expect dissatisfied counselors to have left the field sooner, and longevity to be associated with satisfaction.

Since survey Questions 6, 8, and 10 were eventually analyzed for only the number one choice, more efficient questionnaire instructions should have requested the ranking of only the top 3 or 4 items. This would have reduced the time required for respondents to fill out the questionnaire, and insured greater equality of weight assigned to each item by the respondents. Instead, some subjects ranked all 9 or 10 items listed, while others ranked only four or five.

Another limitation of the questionnaire was the arbitrary selection of sources of job stress, job satisfaction, and stress management activities based on responses from the pilot study group. The researcher chose to discard factors listed in the literature which did not appear in responses from the pilot group; however, the factors listed in the literature may have been significant for the larger sample.

Frequent use of a stress management activity does not equal a claim about its effectiveness, only about popularity of its use. It may be that the best methods of stress management were not listed in Question 10 or were not used by this sample. Therefore, the researcher cannot advocate the use of exercise, for example, as an effective stress relief method, but can simply report that it is the most popular method among the group surveyed, and that more frequent exercise may be associated with higher job satisfaction.

The finding that higher job satisfaction correlates with more frequent use of stress management activities raises the proverbial "which came first?" dilemma. Does higher job satisfaction result from greater participation in stress management activities? Or, are counselors who engage in more frequent stress management activities more satisfied because they pay greater attention to their personal needs? Perhaps counselors who engage in more frequent stress management activities actually generate more job stress, which this study has suggested does not necessarily correlate with less job satisfaction.

The researcher supposes that vocational rehabilitation counselors might have a high awareness of health and physical fitness as a result of working with injured workers, and that exposure to the fragility of physical wellness might encourage counselors to treat physical exercise as an important activity.

Suggestions for Further Study

This survey is but a starting place for further studies. Questions can be raised regarding the lack of proven correlation between job stress and job satisfaction. Why was there no correlation between these two variables in this group? Given the diverse ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds of vocational rehabilitation counselors, what influence do these factors have on their perceptions of job stress and job satisfaction? Does a sense of job satisfaction stem from untested factors, such as a specialized caseload (psychological stress cases, monolingual clients, spinal cord injuries, for example)? Is the Rehabilitation Unit jurisdiction in which a counselor works an important variable in evaluating stress? Are particular insurance carriers more demanding, and therefore more stressful to work with than others?

This study intended to survey only vocational rehabilitation counselors who had stayed in the field for longer than five years. It would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study, starting with counselors with less than five years experience and following up after several years had passed, to help determine the reasons for attrition from the field.

Recommendations

With the uncertain future of the rehabilitation benefit ranked as the number one source of job stress among respondents, a recommendation for rehabilitation counselors to diversify their skills seems appropriate. No less than the clients which they serve, vocational rehabilitation counselors need to be aware of career planning in case of forced change. Education and training allowing diversification into any of the myriad sidelines available in the counseling and social service fields might offer counselors a sense of security during the restructuring of the workers' compensation benefit in California.

Additionally, counselors may need to develop strategies for "getting away from it all," in light of the survey responses. It appears that the respondents feel strongest job satisfaction from helping others, yet those who they help are identified as uncooperative and unmotivated, in other words, as primary sources of job stress. The researcher surmises that frequent regular breaks from work, particularly avoidance of working on weekends, would ease the counselors sense of entrapment in work, and allow the rejuvenation required to prevent burnout.

Based on the literature search, and comments written on the returned surveys, this researcher will suggest that vocational

rehabilitation counselors are in need of better ethics training in graduate school. The workers' compensation system has strong potential for ethical dilemmas, which counselors may feel unprepared to handle. An introduction to this subject could be accomplished by the addition of role-playing scenarios, or discussion of actual cases offered by working members of the class. Individual counselors and the industry as a whole would be served by this preparation.

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APPENDIX A
COVER LETTER

ROBERTS & HOSLEY

VOCATIONAL COUNSELING SERVICES

KELLY ROBERTS, M.S.
KERRY HOSLEY, B.S.

March 30, 1992

Dear Counselor:

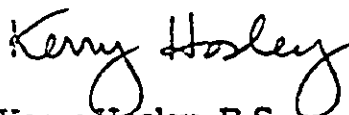
I am a vocational rehabilitation counselor and a student completing my Masters in Special Education and Rehabilitative Services at San Jose State University. In order to fulfill the requirements for the masters degree, I have designed a project to study the relationship between stress management and job satisfaction among vocational rehabilitation counselors. I would like you to participate in this study.

Would you please take a few minutes to complete this confidential 10-question survey? For your convenience, the questionnaire is pre-addressed and stamped. Just fold and staple before you mail it. In order to keep all replies confidential, please do not write your name or any identifying information on the questionnaire. As a working vocational rehabilitation counselor, I appreciate the value of your time, and thank you for assisting me in the completion of this project.

If you would like to receive a report of the results, please contact me by phone or under separate cover and I will mail you a summary at the project's end.

Thank you again.

Sincerely yours,



Kerry Hosley, B.S.
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors: Stress Management and Job Satisfaction

All responses will be kept strictly confidential. Please do not write your name or any identifying information on this questionnaire.

1. Your age _____
2. Your sex: (Circle One) Female Male
3. Please circle those degrees and/or certificates which apply to you:
Ph.D. M.A./M.S./M.Ed B.A./B.S C.R.C.
4. Check those which describe your current employment:
____ Large firm (5 or more counselors)
____ Small firm (Fewer than 5 counselors)
____ Self-employed
5. How many years have you been employed as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in the worker's compensation system? _____ years
6. Which of the following describe the most satisfying aspects of working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Please rank those that apply to you, with #1 being the greatest source of job satisfaction.
____ Helping others.
____ Applying my professional education and skills.
____ Good pay.
____ Independence.
____ Flexible hours.
____ Successful plan closure.
____ Negotiating successful conflict resolution.
____ Recognition for a job well done.
____ Establishing a good professional reputation.
____ Others (Please describe.)

7. Please rate your overall level of job satisfaction, using a scale of 1= highly unsatisfied, to 5 = highly satisfied.

1	2	3	4	5
highly unsatisfied	unsatisfied	neutral	satisfied	highly satisfied

8. Which of the following would you identify as significant sources of stress on the job? Please rank them, with #1 being the source of greatest job stress.

- _____ Caseload too heavy.
- _____ Meeting a billing quota.
- _____ Bureaucratic delays.
- _____ Meeting bureaucratic deadlines.
- _____ Dislike marketing.
- _____ Too much time spent on the telephone.
- _____ Challenge of current tight labor market.
- _____ Unmotivated or uncooperative clients.
- _____ Working with insurance representatives.
- _____ Attending conferences.
- _____ Providing testimony.
- _____ Working with attorneys.
- _____ The uncertain future of the rehab benefit.
- _____ Others (Please describe.)

9. Please rate your overall level of work-related stress, on a scale of 1= very high stress, to 5 = no stress. (Circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
very high stress	high stress	moderate stress	low stress	no stress

10. What resources do you regularly utilize (at least once per week) to relieve work-related stress? Please mark all that apply and indicate frequency of use (number of times per week).

Physical exercise
 Goal setting
 Delegating work
 Socializing with friends/family
 Consulting with colleagues
 Meditation or prayer
 Hobbies
 Taking breaks when needed
 Alternating tasks to provide a change of pace
 Others (Please describe)

If there is any other information you would like to include, please feel free to do so here. Thank you very much for participating in this survey.