

A COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYABILITY ASSESSMENT STRATEGY FOR DISABLED PERSONS

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ABSTRACT: Employability refers to the personal attributes or functional vocational capabilities (FVC's) that the individual possesses. Related to performance in the work place, these FVC's can be enhanced through the proper types of rehabilitation services. However, it is difficult to select these services unless a comprehensive employability assessment of the individual has been conducted. This paper discusses the elements and emphases of such an assessment in terms of a Diagnostic Employability Profile (DEP) currently being developed at the Arkansas Research and Training Center on Vocational Rehabilitation.

A recent VEWAA monograph (Roessler & Bolton, 1983) addressed the distinction between employment and employability. Employment represents the outcome or end goal or rehabilitation services. The probability of achieving a successful outcome with an individual is largely the function of four classes of variables: (a) work-related aptitudes, skills, values, and attitudes of the person, (b) quality of rehabilitation services, (c) level of support from significant others, and (d) labor market conditions.

The Diagnostic Employability Profile addresses two categories of variables:

1. Stable characteristics such as abilities, interests, and personality traits that are important considerations in job/person matching.
2. Modifiable skills germane to employability, i.e., the critical behaviors needed to seek and maintain work.

Assessment of the individual's status on these two classes of variables results in an employability profile which has implications for program planning, vocational counseling, and work adjustment training.

Our model for employability assessment is derived from three existing theories that evolved from research and services in vocational rehabilitation: (a) the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (MTWA) provides an excellent psychometric framework; (b) the Chicago JVS theory of work adjustment is based on clinical insights into individual functioning, and (c) Hershenson's model provides a necessary developmental perspective.

Assessment and intervention strategies discussed in this paper are especially appropriate for severely disabled individuals who are receiving services from rehabilitation facilities and workshops. These individuals should have completed most medical evaluation and restoration services

so that they have reached a reasonably stable level of physical functioning. They would then be ready for comprehensive employability assessment and intervention in order to prepare them for successful employment. Use of these assessment techniques is not, however, limited to facilities; they are equally appropriate for efficient diagnostic work in field settings. Such developmental research is planned as part of our Center's five year research plan.

Propositions

Comprehensive employability assessment deals with those functional vocational capabilities (FVC's) related to success in selecting, obtaining, and maintaining jobs. It presumes adequate collection and accurate interpretation of social history and medical data. Other propositions equally essential to our employability assessment program are:

1. Disabled persons are underrepresented in the work force.
2. Persons seeking services from the public VR program need multiple employability services if they are to secure more than temporary, secondary labor market jobs.
3. Vocational success is a function of the match of person (abilities and values) to job (demands and reinforcers).
4. Employment must be viewed as developmental, i.e., as leading to a career, rather than as static, i.e., as completed once an entry level job is secured.
5. Career encompasses four stages-- exploration, establishment, maintenance, and retirement; the first three stages are particularly important in vocational rehabilitation.
6. To fulfill the task demands of exploration, establishment, and maintenance, rehabilitation clients must (a) understand how their abilities, aptitudes, interests, and personality

predispositions affect their vocational functioning and (b) develop the specific skills essential for job selection, acquisition, and maintenance.

7. Employability assessment, therefore, must encompass stable characteristics such as intelligence, aptitudes, and interests, and modifiable characteristics such as job seeking and maintaining skills.
8. Enhancing vocational success involves multiple services, e.g., (a) diagnosis of functional vocational capabilities, (b) interventions to enhance selfunderstanding and skill levels, and (c) environmental modifications through job analysis, modification, and restructuring.
9. An employability counseling model should be developed for individuals with disabilities that meets the following criteria: (a) the role of the client as co-manager should be respected and (b) the basic counseling orientation should be facilitative and nondeterministic.
10. Implementation of the model requires both a Diagnostic Employability Profile and Employability-enhancing Interventions.

Diagnostic Employability Profile (DEP)

To identify dimensions to include in a Diagnostic Employability Profile, we reviewed 15 measures frequently used in vocational evaluation settings. In a figure entitled "Functional vocational capabilities comprising general employability" (Roessler & Bolton, 1983, p. 7), we presented the results of this review. Section II in that figure (Roessler & Bolton, 1983, p. 7) can further be elaborated to specify variables comprising the

work personality as defined by Walter Neff. Variables in Section II are directly related to the manner in which individuals cope with the demands of work. Lacking these fundamental skills, some individual receiving vocational rehabilitation services are unable to find and maintain a job so that the other elements of the match principle can operate, i.e., the balance between higher order worker needs and work reinforcers, and between worker competencies and work demands.

The purpose of employability assessment, therefore, is to identify not only the skill deficits related to selecting, finding, and maintaining a job but also the abilities and preferences relevant to matching person and job optimally. This task includes the following considerations: (a) constructs to measure, (b) assessment instruments to select, (c) types of interventions to develop, and (d) outcomes desired from the interventions. Figure 1 presents one perspective on these concerns as they relate to the Diagnostic Employability Profile. Each column addresses two broad categories, stable characteristics and modifiable skills.

Stable Characteristics

In addition to intelligence and achievement measures, instruments assessing selected stable characteristics include the GATB/NATB, USES Interest Inventory, and the 16 PF-E. The GATB and NATB, are reading and nonreading versions of a well-known aptitude battery developed by the U.S. Employment Services. Nine specific aptitudes are measured ranging from estimates of general intelligence to manual dexterity. GATB/NATB results relate to a series of Occupational Aptitude Patterns (OAP's) that suggest a wide variety of vocational alternatives for which the person possesses the requisite aptitudes.

GATB results can be combined with data from another measure, the USES Interest Inventory, to determine

which of the OAP's are consistent with the person's vocational interests. Cross referencing aptitudes and vocational interests enables the evaluator to develop an even more precise list of job possibilities. Although a significant step, interrelating aptitudes and interests does not provide all of the vocational counseling information needed regarding stable employability characteristics. A measure of personality-related predispositions and preference is, therefore, included in the DEP.

The 16PF-E is a standard measure of normal personality function assessing primary and secondary personality factors. Results are useful in vocational counseling because they indicate (a) problems that might inhibit the person's performance such as high social anxiety or low self-esteem and (b) personal preferences or styles that would interact significantly with different types of job demands. Greater self-awareness of these performance inhibitors and personal style preferences would enable the individual to make more realistic job choices.

Modifiable Skills

In the area of modifiable skills, the first construct of interest is employability maturity. The work of Donald Super and John Crites provides many insights regarding the nature of employability maturity. As we use it, this concept includes three components: (a) knowledge of self, the world of work, and preferred occupational roles and careers, (b) realism in occupational preferences, decisions, and choices, and (c) problem-solving and decision-making skills. To minimize the effects of literacy, employability maturity is assessed via a structured interview. Specific questions deal with the knowledge, realism, and problem-solving attributes of the person as they relate to the tasks involved in selection and acquisition of work. Results of the interview are intervention oriented, i.e., findings from the interview indicate

counseling or training that the person needs to improve his/her job readiness.

To assess another important area of modifiable skills, the simulated job interview samples an individual's behaviors in terms of starting the interview; explaining experiences, skills, and work history; discussing disability, salary, fringe benefits, and advancement; and closing the interview. A detailed behavioral checklist has been developed to score the individual's performance and, more importantly, to identify deficits for interview training.

A composite job application has also been developed for the individual to complete. Performance on the job application is evaluated in terms of neatness, correct grammar and spelling, completeness, and total time required to complete the form. Application and job interviewing skills are important for obtaining a job; maintaining employments, however, another important area to evaluate.

Two approaches to the evaluation of job maintenance behavior are included in the DEP; a series of simulated work situations (Work Performance Assessment/WPA) and a behavioral rating scale requiring observation of actual work performance (Work Personality Profile/WPP). By administering the WPA, the vocational evaluator can determine how individuals typically respond to the interpersonal and task-related demands of work. Gathered through simulated situations dealing with task performance, teamwork, socializing on the job, and dealing with supervisors, results provide a profile of the individual's employment potential in terms of specific behavioral strengths and weaknesses. This profile can be used in identifying significant job/person match considerations and/or in developing behavioral work adjustment interventions.

Based on the early work of William Gellman, the work Personality Profile (WPP) is a comprehensive observer-rating instrument designed for use in vocational adjustment settings. The WPP enables

rehabilitation professionals to identify deficits in 58 specific work behaviors that are organized into the following eleven categories of work performance: acceptance of work role, ability to profit from instruction or correction, work persistence, work tolerance, amount of supervision required, extent trainee seeks assistance from supervisor, degree of comfort or anxiety with supervisor, appropriateness of personal relations with supervisors, teamwork, ability to socialize with co-workers, and social communication skills. WPP data can serve as a basis for (a) the development and assignment of clients to remedial programming, and (b) the measurement of improvement in targeted work behaviors by completing the WPP at regular intervals.

Reporting DEP Results

Results from the instruments listed in Figure 1 and from a thorough analysis of social history and medical data (Roessler & Rubin, 1980) combine to form a profile of the individual's employability strengths and deficits. Reporting these findings in a meaningful way is, however, no simple undertaking. In this section, we discuss tentative guidelines for reporting the Diagnostic Employability Profile (DEP).

The professional responsibility for interpreting the DEP lies with vocational evaluators; they have the expertise to identify a wide range of potentially feasible vocational objectives for the client. To the degree possible, these vocational recommendations should be made in terms of a career rather than a single entry level position, i.e., potential vocational goals should be presented in a hierarchical fashion representing a typical career pattern in a given industry. The client's, counselor's, and family members' reactions to these possible vocational roles are, however, critical to understanding the suitability of each recommendation.

In relation to stable client characteristics, important job/person

match issues should be discussed, i.e., work demands or psychological climate aspects of different jobs that would or would not be consistent with client preferences. Data for these conclusions can be drawn from occupational information resources regarding specific jobs and from results generated by such DEP elements as the USES Interest Inventory, the GATB/NATB, and the 16 PF-E.

Employability strengths and weaknesses should be behaviorally described based on results from the Work Personality Profile, the Work Performance assessment, and the simulated job application and interview. These assets or limitations should be related to a specific job seeking or maintaining demand such as those identified in a recent literature review (Roessler, 1983). Employability interventions should then be specified for critical employability skill deficits.

Employability Interventions

Interventions suitable for modifying functional vocational capabilities can be developed from resources describing career adjustment (Bolton & Roessler, 1982), social skills training, and

work adjustment. For example, in the area of job maintenance, we have previously outlined four modules for development: Interpersonal/social demands of work-dealing with co-workers, Interpersonal/social demands of work - responding to supervisors and employers, Organizational adaptability/conformity to work setting rules, and Position performance (Roessler & Bolton, 1983, p. 17).

Each employability module will help trainees improve their capabilities to (a) assess situations (when should one use these skills?), (b) process or make response decisions (What are the various response options, and (c) respond appropriately (how can one translate response options into behavior?). The format for the modules will follow social skills training principles, e.g., (a) describe the behaviors involved and their importance to success on the job, (b) model correct application of the skills in an appropriate context or contexts, (c) rehearse the skill components through role-play situations or social interactions, (d) reinforce correct application of skill components, (e) identify specific aspects of the performances that need to be

Figure 1

Major Components of a Diagnostic Employability Profile

CONSTRUCTS	MEASURES	INTERVENTIONS	DESIRED OUTCOMES
Stable Characteristics			
1. Aptitudes	1. GATB/NATB	1-6. Occupational information, vocational counseling, adult education.	1-6. Self-awareness, job/person match.
2. Interests	2. USES Interest Inventory		
3. Personality, i.e., performance inhibitors	3. 16 PF-E		
4. Intelligence	4. WAIS, OTIS, BETA		
5. Basic Academic Skills	5. WRAT		
Modifiable Characteristics			
7. Employability Maturity	7. Employability Maturity Interview (EMI)	7. Problem-solving, decision-making training	7. Realistic choice making
8. Job seeking	8. Simulated job interview and application	8. Job seeking skills training	8. Job acquisition
9. Job maintaining	9. Work Personality Profile, Work Performance Assessment	9. Behavior modification, social skills training	9. Job maintenance

changed, and (f) encourage generalization of skill improvement of the natural environment through homework assignments.

Conclusion

Increased emphasis on employment as an outcome in vocational rehabilitation has resulted in more attention to the concept of employability. Defined in terms of stable and modifiable characteristics, employability can be diagnosed through a combination of traditional psychometric and behavioral assessment techniques. Results of these strategies combine to form a Diagnostic Employability Profile indicating important job/person match and skill training considerations. Proper use of this DEP contributes to the enhancement of client employability, and thus to the employment success of individuals receiving rehabilitation services.

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