

Applications of the Vocational Decision-Making Interview (DMI)  
to Vocational Rehabilitation and Special Education

Thomas Czerlinsky, Ph.D.

Abstract

This paper describes the usefulness of the vocational Decision-Making Interview (DMI) for various aspects of vocational rehabilitation and special education. The DMI is an instrument which determines various types of vocational decision-making strengths and deficits of individuals. Several specific areas of usefulness to practitioners in the field are discussed: its general uses; its utility to vocational evaluation services; its use within general counseling and guidance; how the instrument can be of benefit in the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP); and its use for program development and evaluation.

Most individuals, at some point, must identify their own vocational goals, and make vocational and/or educational decisions appropriate to them. Individuals can vary widely in their capacity to make satisfactory vocational decisions, ranging from those who have made a satisfactory vocational/educational decision with which they are satisfied and which they know how to implement, to those individuals evidencing the "indecisive personality" (Holland & Holland, 1977), which lack the necessary skills to carry out the vocational decision-making process. Individuals with disabilities, however, because of the limitations imposed upon them by their disabilities, are often under more pressure than their non-disabled counterparts to make vocational decisions/choices which are "realistic." Such differences between disabled and non-disabled individuals must be taken into account by professionals concerned with their vocational decision-making capacity.

Of the considerable research which has been conducted in this area, very little has addressed persons with disabilities or other "special populations." Most research dealing with vocational indecision has focussed exclusively upon "normal" high school and college populations (Thoresen and Ewart, 1976).

The Vocational Decision-Making Interview (DMI)

A major reason for the lack of research in this area is that there have been few, if any, reliable and valid instruments specifically suited for identifying and classifying the particular vocational decision-making problems of disabled populations. Thus, little can be known about this group's vocational indecisions and about possible remediation or treatment strategies directed toward their unique as well as common problems. Now, however, an instrument to assess and identify disabled individuals' vocational decision-making problems has been developed, and the instrument's reliability and validity have been established. This instrument is the vocational Decision-Making Interview (DMI). It has been shown to be suitable for vocational rehabilitation clients as well as for students in special education settings. The DMI is a 69 item structured interview addressing the actual day-to-day problems in vocational decision-making confronting individuals with disabilities. The DMI is comprised of three broad sub-scales: (1) Employment Readiness; (2) Self-Appraisal; and (3) Decision-Making Readiness. Each of these sub-scales is in turn comprised of more narrowly defined content sub-categories.

The DMI is intended to be individually administered. Each item is a statement which is read to the person. He/she then verbally responds whether for him/her the statement is true, false,

or whether he/she is not sure if the statement is true or false. Being an interview, rather than a test, interpretation and elaboration by the professional (within specified limits) is permitted and indeed encouraged. Therefore, low reading level is usually not a problem with the DMI, particularly since it is written at a grade level of 6.7. Each of the DMI items is scored on a three point scale (True, Not Sure, or False). Additionally, about half the items are followed by open-ended prompts, for which the individual indicates actual content choices for the items. Depending upon the particular characteristics of the individual, total DMI administration takes from twenty to fifty minutes, with an average administration time of about thirty minutes.

The research results with the DMI (described by Czerlinsky et. al., 1982; Strohmer et. al., 1984; Czerlinsky, 1985; and Czerlinsky, Jensen, and Pell, 1985) have been very positive. Although fully described in the above references, a summary of some of the main results with the instrument are the following:

1. Internal consistency analyses (internal reliability) showed that the three DMI sub-scales evidenced satisfactory internal consistency.
2. Test-retest reliability results, with one-week test-retest intervals, showed that the DMI sub-scale scores remained significantly stable over time, with a sample of vocational rehabilitation clients. The reliability coefficients (Pearson  $r_s$ ) ranged from .62 to .80 (all  $p < .01$ ).
3. In a further test-retest study with special education students, the DMI was administered with test-retest intervals ranging from two weeks to a full school year. Reliability coefficients ranged from .55 to .87 (all  $p < .01$ ), with no drop in reliability as the test-retest interval increased.
4. A major validity criterion was that the three DMI sub-scales and Total score discriminate between individuals chosen a priori to differ in level of vocational decision-making capacity. This discriminant validity criterion was met, in that vocationally undecided persons (individuals with disabilities just beginning vocational evaluation) scored significantly lower on two of the three DMI sub-scales than vocationally decided persons with disabilities (in vocational training programs). Means of the third scale were in the predicted direction, but did not reach the  $p < .05$  significance level.
5. Another validity study showed that the self-ratings on the DMI of individuals with disabilities correlated highly and significantly with independent ratings, on the same dimensions, carried

out by vocational evaluators working closely with these individuals. This supported the interpretation that DMI scores were valid indicators of vocational decision-making strengths and weaknesses of individuals with disabilities.

6. An additional study showed that the DMI is sensitive to treatment interventions directed toward the realm of vocational decision-making. Clients with disabilities were interviewed with the DMI at the beginning of vocational evaluation, and again at completion of this service. Data analyses revealed that each of the DMI sub-scales showed significant mean increases, when post-evaluation scores were compared to pre-evaluation scores. There were no corresponding increases in a control group which did not receive vocational evaluation.

These results attest to the statistical reliability and validity of the instrument. The studies conducted to date with the DMI have been principally concerned with developing and refining the instrument, and with establishing its psychometric properties. That research has shown very positive results for the DMI.

#### The Utility of the DMI

The DMI is expected to have impact in a variety of settings, and upon a range of services and processes. There are several reasons for this. First, the DMI is a structured interview rather than a test. Thus, it allows the administrator to clarify items which otherwise might have been misunderstood or not understood at all. Secondly, the DMI is verbally administered. This eliminates the problems posed by some other instruments for individuals with a low reading level. Also, this mode of administration makes the DMI well suited for use with visually impaired individuals.

An important aspect of the DMI is that it was designed to serve both as a measuring instrument and as a clinical tool. In its measurement capacity, the DMI is capable of determining vocational decision-making skills of groups of individuals, be they special needs students or adults with disabilities. Thus, it can lead to the development of individualized treatment or training programs which can then be applied to the group as a whole. When used primarily in its clinical application, the DMI can help persons initiate or further develop their critical thinking processes. In most cases, however, both the clinical and the measurement components will overlap, and both will be of interest to the examiner.

Vocational Evaluations. A major use of the DMI for vocational evaluations is in terms of providing information. The content areas of the DMI address the real day-to-day problems in vocational decision-making faced by individuals with disabilities. These content areas can give

the evaluator important information, which is often not included with referral information. Patterns of DMI scores may pinpoint the student's preparedness for vocational evaluation and vocational decision-making, and whether the problems are informational, maturational, or stem from lack of decision-making skills. Because of the DMI's format, individuals with limited ability to verbalize their thoughts about vocational decision-making can respond to the items using only the three point scales ("True", "Not Sure", or "False"). On the other hand, the open-ended items enable higher functioning respondents to be very specific with their answers. In this way, the instrument is appropriate to a wide range of persons with disabilities.

Secondly, the DMI can be very useful for planning the vocational evaluations. It provides information about which content areas are particularly needed, and, conversely, which seem to pose no particular problems (and therefore could be minimized during the vocational evaluation process). Such information can lead to more precise planning, and thus improve the cost-effectiveness of the overall vocational evaluation process.

Thirdly, when administered at the outset of the vocational evaluation, the DMI has been shown to help establish rapport with the interviewees. This helps ease the tension they may feel in a group or "testing" situation, and demonstrate to them that the evaluator is interested in their welfare and wants to assist in vocational planning by collecting information and soliciting their preferences.

**General Counseling and Guidance.** The DMI can be used to help individuals identify vocational decision-making problems which can be remediated through the counseling process, or which can lead to expanded counseling to assist with possible psychological, emotional, social, and environmental problems. In this regard, it is appropriate to a wide range of settings and individuals. Thus, the DMI can be used by school based counselors as well as others (vocational evaluators, etc.) involved in developing the client's or student's IEP and IWRP.

**IEP and IWRP Development.** The development of the IEP and IWRP, a critical aspect of vocational planning, requires focussing upon the establishment of realistic vocational goals. Lack of concrete and accurate knowledge about the individual's vocational decision-making capacities and vocational interests can lead to the development of unrealistic IEPs and IWRPs. The DMI can provide a useful mechanism for assessing individual vocational decision-making skills prior to focussing efforts on development of these plans. Since the DMI provides immediate feedback, in cases where significant vocational decision-making difficulties are identified, the plan may then focus on the remediation of these difficulties prior to beginning specific skill building training programs in occupational areas which would ultimately prove unrealistic or undesirable.

#### Program Development and Evaluation.

Individuals can vary widely in terms of how prepared they are to make vocational decisions, depending on factors such as their abilities, their disabilities, their experiences with diverse career education programs, their environment, and their needs. The DMI can be used to identify some of these unique factors and needs of individuals and groups of individuals. This information can serve as an objective basis for specialized program development directed at those factors and needs.

In addition, research has shown that the DMI is sensitive to the efficacy of vocational evaluation in improving vocational decision-making skills. The instrument, therefore, is sensitive to treatment effects of programs which impact upon vocational decision-making. It should be useful, therefore, in evaluating effectiveness of a number of other vocational rehabilitation programs and services.

#### Summary

The vocational Decision-Making Interview (DMI) can address various aspects of vocational decision-making capacities of individuals. It can be very useful for service providers concerned with the vocational decision-making processes of special populations.

The DMI can be utilized by professionals concerned with the vocational decision-making processes of special populations to benefit the individuals making the vocational decisions, the professionals themselves, and the programs/services being offered. The instrument can be a positive and important contributor to various facets of improved vocational decision-making.

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AUTHOR:

Thomas Czerlinsky  
Research and Training Center  
University of Wisconsin, Stout  
Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751

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