

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT: EXPANDING THE USE OF SELF-EVALUATION AND WORK CLIMATES

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ABSTRACT: Two criticisms of current approaches to vocational assessment are that they (a) limit workers' involvement in the evaluation process and (b) measure work behaviors without regard to work climates in which they occur. Research has shown that work--related behaviors are directly affected by changes in the work climate. Moreover, self-monitoring facilitates behavior change. This paper outlines procedures for using videotape and discussion sessions to assist handicapped adolescents to evaluate the appropriateness of their work behaviors within specific work climates. Benefits include worker insight into some reasons behind their behaviors and easier transition from vocational training programs to actual employment.

Professionals in the fields of vocational evaluation and work adjustment have long contended that the failure of handicapped workers to maintain gainful employment is often a consequence of inappropriate work habits rather than an inability to carry out the technical requirements of a job (Kolstoe, 1961; Michael-Smith, 1950). The literature is replete with strategies for measuring critical work habits (Sawyer & Morgan, 1981; Wright, 1980), but two weaknesses are inherent in many of these approaches.

One criticism stems from the fact that a worker's work habits are usually evaluated by someone other than the worker. This practice subsequently minimizes the extent to which a worker assumes personal responsibility for modifying those behaviors deemed inappropriate for a particular work setting. To get around this problem, workers have sometimes been taught to chart their own behaviors, the effects of which have been praised by a number of investigators (Kelly et al., 1983; Litrownik & Freitas, 1980). Another approach to monitoring behavior has gained popularity, namely videotaping, and results of using it also have been encouraging (Booth & Fairbank, 1983; DeRoo & Haralson, 1971).

A second criticism of many types of vocational assessment is that work behaviors are often little opportunity for the worker to observe and evaluate his/her behavior across a wide gamut of working conditions. Research has indicated that a worker's behaviors are influenced by the task and the physical aspects of the work setting (Lustig, 1970). Yet, work habits are also affected by employer styles and other aspects of the work climate. These include the spatial arrangement of workers in the work area, communication patterns commonly used between the workers and supervisors, and the degree of responsibility allocated to the workers (Friedlander & Greenberg, 1971; Hall & Schneider, 1973; Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Schein,

1978). Organizational development specialists have emphasized these aspects of work climate when helping individuals to understand the importance of work values, norms, and behaviors that may be required for membership and advancement within an organization (Kaye, 1982; Margerison, 1979; Van Maanen, 1975; Wallach, 1983). While elements of work climate have been addressed in a few rehabilitation programs (Gelfand, 1966; Gellman & Friedman, 1965), routine use of work climate variables has yet to be systematized and established as a fundamental component of vocational assessment.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, it describes a model of vocational assessment that stresses self-monitoring of behavior through videotaping and individual/group discussion to encourage workers to evaluate personal work habits within the context of different work climates. Second, it presents some impressions of handicapped adolescents and professionals who have used the model. Third, it addresses some of the reasons for the model's success and the significance of using it within various disciplines related to vocational evaluation.

Description

The assessment model herein described employs a standard five-step procedure. The evaluator initially selects a specific work activity that can be completed by two to four workers (Step 1). This activity might be as simple as an assembly task or as elaborate as a simulated office situation in which workers are required to file, take dictation, and type reports.

Once an activity has been chosen, the evaluator assumes the role of a work supervisor and creates a specific work climate in which the activity is to be conducted (Step 2). The evaluator does this by altering the spatial arrangement of the workers, the degree of responsibility afforded to them, and the communication patterns

between he/she and the workers (see Table 1).

Table 1

Dimensions of Work Climates

Type	Worker arrangement	Degree of responsibility	Communication patterns
Bureaucratic	Hierarchical	Interdependent	Channeled
Tyrannical	Isolated	Independent	Negative
Supportive	Grouped	Shared	Positive
Innovative	Individual	Open	Progressive
Laissez Faire	Grouped	Undifferentiated	Sporadic

If the evaluator chooses to create a bureaucratic climate, for example, he/she positions the workers in a hierarchy. Each worker then is assigned a task which can only be completed after one worker has received input from another worker. Feedback to the workers is initiated only by the evaluator/work supervisor, and it is channeled in only one direction, i.e. down through the ranks.

While the workers and the evaluator are involved in the work activity, their behaviors are videotaped using standard video equipment (Step 3). It is ideal to have a cameraman film the work sessions, but satisfactory results have been obtained by using a stationary camera positioned so that all participants can be seen at the same time.

Work sessions usually last fifteen to twenty minutes. At their completion the workers view the videotape and note specific instances in which they demonstrated appropriate and/or inappropriate work habits (Step 4). Data sheets listing various work behaviors provide the worker with a profile of his/her work performance. They also facilitate his/her understanding

of the appropriate work habits for the specified work climate within which he/she was working.

After viewing the videotape and noting his/her work behaviors, each worker participates in an individual or group discussion session moderated by the evaluator (Step 5). The objective of this session is to assist each worker in examining details of his/her behavior and the underlying feelings which accompany them. Questions such as the following are asked. "How well did you follow the instructions of your supervisor?" "What exactly did you say when your supervisor told you to speed up your work?" How did you feel when your supervisor criticized you?"

These procedures help each worker to understand his/her reactions to the work climate and in turn to identify specific behaviors that might be changed if conflict is to be avoided. As the worker is presented with additional opportunities to experience different work climates, he/she begins to acquire a repertoire of behaviors that can be used as alternatives to inappropriate ones that he/she might be initially inclined to use in a given situation. In short, this self-evaluation of a worker's vocational behaviors and subsequent adaptation to various work environments gradually evolved into an on-going, interactional process of work adjustment.

Impressions

This model was used as part of a vocational assessment battery with developmentally handicapped adolescents prior to their entry into vocational special needs programs in public high schools and vocational schools in Northern and Southeastern Ohio. Feedback from these students and their evaluators revealed by-products of using this model besides obtaining profiles of the Students' work behaviors.

The students commented on the value of using video to see the effect of their behaviors on co-workers.

Moreover, both the workers and their evaluators reported that the discussion sessions enabled them to set aside time to examine the students' underlying needs associated with their overt behaviors. The importance of this sharing of experience has been emphasized by mental health specialist such as Bass (1967) and Raymond (1975).

Workers stated that the model also enabled them to focus on behaviors that needed to be changed and to pace themselves when dealing with increasingly complex problems. This approach is consistent with that stressed by Gellman and Friedman (1965) who warned against placing workers in stressful situations before they could handle them.

Discussion

To date the efficacy of this model has been measured through (a) interviews with handicapped students and vocational special needs personnel, and (b) direct observations of the students' increasing ability to demonstrate alternative and appropriate behaviors in contrived and actual work settings. The apparent success of this model thus far may be due in part to its uniqueness, and yet it would seem that this feature in and of itself does not explain the improvement that has been noticed in some students' overall ability to cope with work-related stress.

Haas (1949) maintained that instead of teaching individuals to avoid conflict, we should teach them to make conflict work. Most strategies for teaching individuals to cope with stress either have relied upon collaboration between the organization and the workers (Crowfoot & Chesler, 1982) or required the worker to engage in activities that removed him/her either mentally or physically from the stressful environment (Newman & Beehr, 1979). If the results of research which has evaluated the effectiveness of using self-monitoring techniques can be applied to stress

reduction in work-related settings, then it would seem that this model has attained a relative measure of success due to its emphasis on an active and personal involvement of the worker in every step of the vocational evaluation and adjustment process. Ultimately this in turn may lead to improvement in a worker's decision-making (Payne, 1983); performance (Clark, 1982); and psychological, physical, and interpersonal qualities of life in general (Osipow, 1979).

Future research using the procedures and materials outline in this paper will undoubtedly shed additional light on the utility of this model for various types of professional involved with vocational evaluation. It is safe to say at this time, however, that information gathered through this approach can be of use in writing vocational goals for individualized education and rehabilitation programs, in examining a worker's disruptive behaviors within the context of a planned activity, and in monitoring changes in both the frequency and quality of a worker's work habits. At the very least, this model can facilitate a worker's transition from the protected atmosphere of a vocational training program to the complex demands of actual employment (Neff, 1971).

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