A Descriptive Study of Current Practices in Vocational Evaluation

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Abstract

This descriptive study surveyed practicing vocational evaluators who attended the Eighth National Forum on Vocational Issues. The intent of the survey was to collect data from vocational evaluation practitioners to identify the populations served, the average time spent in evaluation by a consumer, and the current practices in vocational evaluation and assessment. A total of 102 surveys were collected using the convenient method of sampling. The conference was held on March 14, 1997.

In regard to current practices, results indicate that psychometric testing continues to be the most common method of testing. However, situational assessment and commercial work sample testing was identified in the top five for people with mental retardation. Commercial work sample testing was also identified in the top five for use with consumers with cognitive and psychiatric disabilities.

The review of literature indicated a trend in serving the more severely disabled. Therefore, vocational evaluation and assessment should use work, real or simulated. However, this study continues to suggest the strong use of psychometric tests rather than work sampling or situational assessment, which reinforces the critics of the current practices used serving those people with the most severe disabilities.

Introduction

In the 1980's, important changes began to occur which affected the way vocational evaluation was provided and perceived by those who purchased services and by those served. Regardless of the assertions of early theorists that vocational evaluation had to be sufficiently long in order to provide a comprehensive appraisal of the individual's assets, shorter term evaluations (one week or less) became the accepted practice (Wesolek & McFarlane, 1992). Due to this change, which occurred because of financial considerations and accusations of inefficiency with longer term evaluations, many evaluators relinquished the use of real work, either facility based or community based, in favor of work samples or short length and standardized psychometric tests.

As this change took place, there was a federal mandate to serve individuals with more severe disabilities, along with more emphasis on providing individualized "client-centered" assessments. Individuals with disabilities jointly developed their rehabilitation plans and consequently were more involved with their rehabilitation and assessment process. These changes were incongruent with the use of shorter term assessments and the use of more trait-factor instruments (Wesolek & McFarlane, 1992).

As indicated by Kaiser and Modahl (1991), there appears to be two different approaches to vocational evaluation: (1) mechanical and (2) clinical. The mechanical model was derived from military and applied psychology. It requires the careful and consistent use of standardized devises to measure traits. These traits are then validated against job requirements. Most of the tests, assessment systems, and work samples are based on this approach. "Due to the reduction in funds and time, the psychometric model is the more commonly used model" (Botterbusch, 1989, p. 118).

In comparison, the clinical model emphasizes the observation of work performance and work behavior factors. This type of evaluation is best performed in the community through

situational assessment or job site evaluation. However, evaluators may use the work performance/work behavior observation model to approach work sample assessment in a clinical way (Kaiser & Modahl, 1991).

Although the above mentioned models are separate approaches, both may be utilized. As indicated by Modahl and Kaiser (1991),

> Application of mechanical types of data is far easier and requires less highly developed skills of the evaluator than does taking a more clinical perspective. However, due to limitations of solely normative information which gave rise to the field of vocational (work) evaluation, greater consideration of clinical methods are called for which signal a return to the roots of this profession. (p. 71)

During the 1980's and into the 1990's, there have been issues raised in regard to vocational services. The major criticisms of vocational evaluation include the following: (1) Each consumer receives the same standard evaluation regardless of their disability. (2) Vocational evaluation relies too heavily on psychometric tests rather than work, real or simulated, as a means of predicting job success. (3) A lack of research exist in regards to the effective application of vocational evaluation (Fourteenth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 1987).

Research in the field of vocational evaluation has been limited. As a result, the argued lack of evidence supporting it's effectiveness has opened it to criticism. Although validity data on commercial work samples and evaluation systems have been collected, research efforts need to continue. As indicated by Hayward, Thomas, and Fiore (1991),

> ...researchers have found that vocational evaluation is much more than instrumentation, and that the more subjective (and significant) issues such as behavior, communication, available supports, motivation, vocational readiness, and maturity cannot be overlooked.

Therefore, it is the total process rather than the isolated instruments that must be validated. (p. 259)

Because outcome studies are few, sample sizes small, and study sites geographically restricted, the research available has been perceived as having questionable value. In an attempt to overcome some of the above barriers, this study was conducted.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this descriptive study was to survey practicing vocational evaluators who attended the Eighth National Forum on Vocational Issues to determine what services are being offered as vocational assessments and vocational evaluations. The conference was held on March 14, 1997, in Colorado Springs.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

I. What populations are being served?

II. What is the average time spent by specific consumer groups in evaluation?

III. What are the current practices for specific consumer groups in vocational evaluation?

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data was gathered through the self-report method. A survey was designed and pre-tested with employed evaluators to provide suggestions for improvement. The survey was redesigned (Appendix A) and distributed on March 14, 1997 to practicing vocational evaluators who attended the Eighth National Forum On Issues In Vocational Assessment in Colorado Springs. The intent of the survey was to collect data from vocational evaluation practitioners to identify

populations served, the average time spent in evaluation by a consumer and responses. However, survey questions 3 and 6 are based on less due to a few surveys not being completely filled out.

Results

The eight item survey was designed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question I

What populations are being served?

The following survey question was designed to answer research question I:

Survey Question #5:

What is the major population you serve? (102 responses)

Physical Disability:	33	Mental Retardation:	8
Cognitive Disability:	21	Other: (Included a combination of the four)	27
Psychiatric Disability:	13		

It appears from this data that physical disabilities were the major population served at 32.4%. The other category, consisting of checking more than one population, was the second highest with 26.5%. The third highest population served was cognitive disabilities with 20.6%. Mental retardation (12.7%) and psychiatric disabilities (7.8%) were identified the least.

Research Question II

What is the average time spent by specific consumer groups in evaluation?

The following survey question was designed to answer research question II:

Survey Question #6:

Related to the major population indicated above, the number of hours spent by a consumer in evaluation? (102 responses)

	Physical	*Cognitive*	*Psychiatric*	*MR*	*Other*
Mean	17.5227	20.9286	31.8077	51.0625	24.3700
Range	56.5000	58.0000	117.0000	156.0000	139.0000
Std. Dev.	11.9397	17.2643	32.3770	53.1214	32.4168

The data indicated the average number of hours to be the highest for mental retardation (51) and psychiatric disabilities (32). This finding is positive in that it would be reasonable to assume that the more severe the disability the more time is required. The range in the number of hours reported varied greatly for mental retardation (156) as compared to physical disabilities (56.5).

Research Question III

What are the current practices for specific consumer groups in vocational evaluation?

The following survey questions were designed to answer research question III:

Survey Question #3:

Number of individuals you evaluate per month? (102 responses)

	Physical	*Cognitive*	*Psychiatric*	*MR*	*Other*
Mean	11.8906	12.8500	18.7308	11.875	16.2917
Range	41.5000	23.0000	66.0000	27.5	50.5000
Std. Dev.	9.3677	7.5378	21.1085	11.5349	14.2195

Survey Question #2:

What type of setting do you work in: (101 responses)

	Physical	*Cognitive*	*Psychiatric*	*MR*	*Other*	*Total*
School	0	9	0	1	4	14
Private	12	3	2	0	2	19
Nonprofit	6	4	5	5	13	33
Public	15	5	6	2	8	36

Survey Question #4:

Primary referral source? (102 responses)

	Physical	*Cognitive*	*Psychiatric*	*MR*	*Other*
Work. Comp.	8	2	0	0	6
DVR	20	12	11	7	20
School	0	11	1	1	8
Other	3	1	1	0	5

Survey Question #7:

Tools and techniques used to perform evaluations. A Likert Scale was used with five being the most used and one being never used. (102 responses)

	Physical	*Cognitive*	*Psychiatric*
Interests Inventories	4.72727	4.71429	4.23077
Aptitude/Multi-aptitude Tests	4.15152	4.09524	3.92308
Achievement Tests	4.30303	3.38095	3.23077
Intelligence Tests	2.84848	2.38095	2.15385
Behavior/Personality Inventory	2.72727	2.52381	3.00000
Dexterity Tests	3.90909	3.71429	3.15385
Commercial Work Samples	3.18182	3.66667	3.38462
Self-Constructed Work Samples	2.15152	3.04762	3.07692
Situational Assess. (community)	1.90909	2.38095	2.46154
Situational Assess. (facility)	2.06061	3.28571	3.00000
Job Site Evaluations	2.24242	2.28571	2.84615
Physical Work Capacity	2.48485	2.28571	2.30769
Computerized Career Info. System	3.36364	2.52381	3.23077
Computerized Evaluation	2.82828	2.76190	2.69231
Career Information Systems	3.33333	2.90476	3.38462
Job Shadowing	1.69697	1.85714	2.23077
Computer Tutorials	1.48485	2.00000	2.30769

	MR	*Other*
Interests Inventories	4.37500	4.11111
Aptitude/Multi-Aptitude Tests	2.87500	3.77778
Achievement Tests	3.00000	3.74074
Intelligence Tests	2.37500	2.51852
Behavior/Personality Inventory	2.62500	2.88889
Dexterity Tests	4.12500	3.77778
Commercial Work Samples	3.12500	3.03704
Self-Constructed Work Samples	1.62500	2.55556
Situational Assess. (community)	2.87500	2.29630
Situational Assess. (facility)	3.37500	3.07407
Job Site Evaluations	2.75000	2.07407
Physical Work Capacity	1.87500	2.40741
Computerized Career Info. System	1.87500	3.03704
Computerized Evaluation Systems	1.75000	2.70370
Career Information Systems	2.25000	3.03704
Job Shadowing	2.12500	1.81481
Computer Tutorials	1.12500	2.14815

Survey Question #8:

What type of work samples are used to perform evaluations? (102 responses)

	Physical	*Cognitive*	*Psychiatric*
Single-Trait Work Samples	2.51515	2.85714	2.46154
Cluster-Trait Work Samples	2.96970	3.66667	3.846154
Simulated Job Samples	2.84848	3.23810	3.46154
Job Samples	1.93939	2.14286	2.07692

	MR	*Other*
Single-Trait Work Samples	3.25000	2.37037
Cluster-Trait Work Samples	2.37500	2.85185
Simulated Job Samples	2.50000	2.51852
Job Samples	2.87500	2.40741

Current practices show that most evaluations (68%) are taking place in public and nonprofit settings with referral sources being mostly from DVR (60%). Work samples continue to have an influence in evaluations. However, respondents indicated using work samples occasionally. In addition, the most common identified type of work samples were cluster trait.

The following were the top five most used tools/techniques by population served.

Physical Disabilities:

1. Interest Inventories
2. Achievement Tests
3. Aptitude Tests
4. Dexterity Tests
5. Computerized Career Information Systems

Cognitive Disabilities:

1. Interests Inventories
2. Aptitude Tests
3. Dexterity Tests
4. Commercial Work Samples
5. Achievement Tests

Psychiatric Disabilities:

1. Interest Inventories
2. Aptitude Tests
3. Commercial Work Samples and Career Information Systems
4. Achievement Tests and Computerized Career Information Systems
5. Dexterity Tests

Mental Retardation:

1. Interests Inventories
2. Dexterity Tests
3. Situational Assessment (facility-based)
4. Commercial Work Samples
5. Achievement Tests

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Conclusions & Recommendations

The review of the Literature revealed specific criticisms by professional who advocate for the most severely disabled.

The primary criticisms are:

I. Consumers of Vocational Evaluation receive the same standard evaluation regardless of disability.

The finding of this study indicates that this is not true. The amount of time people are involved varies significantly. The range of the means was 18 hours for physically disabled to 51 hours for people with Mental Retardation.

II. Vocational evaluation relies too heavily on psychometric testing, rather than work, real or simulated.

It is discouraging that the results of this study cannot refute this criticism. The ranking of the tools used indicates that psych tests are the most frequently used for all groups.

However, it should be noted that work samples and situational assessments were ranked in the top five by evaluators working with people with Mental Retardation.

<u>Physical Disabilities:</u>

1. Interest Inventories
2. Achievement Tests
3. Aptitude Tests
4. Dexterity Tests
5. Computerized Career Information Systems

Cognitive Disabilities:

1. Interests Inventories
2. Aptitude Tests
3. Dexterity Tests
4. Commercial Work Samples
5. Achievement Tests

Psychiatric Disabilities:

1. Interest Inventories
2. Aptitude Tests
3. Commercial Work Samples and Career Information Systems
4. Achievement Tests and Computerized Career Information Systems
5. Dexterity Tests

Mental Retardation:

1. Interests Inventories
2. Dexterity Tests
3. Situational Assessment (facility-based)
4. Commercial Work Samples
5. Achievement Tests

It can be concluded that the results of this study have mixed implications for our profession.

It appears that the majority of the people being served are not cognitive disabled, thus justifying the reliance on tests and computers to help people identify vocational goals.

However, the accepted definition of Vocational Evaluation places primary emphasis on the use of "work", real or simulated, as the tools that make us a distinct profession.

The questions that may be asked are:

1. How are we different from other testing professions?
2. Should we claim that we are the appropriate assessment service for people with the most severe disabilities?

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