

VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF PEOPLE WITH SEVERE PHYSICAL DISABILITY

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Abstract

This article reviews vocational assessment for people with severe physical disability with the intent of better informing all vocational professionals about such activities and enhancing their knowledge. The article presents a detailed overview of the history of vocational evaluation for people with severe physical disability. Inefficiencies of standard evaluation models are reviewed. Elements of a model vocational assessment are extensively detailed. Steps in the selection of appropriate vocational evaluation laboratory equipment are described. The concept of testing and training within an assessment model is presented. The future direction of vocational assessment for people with severe physical disability is discussed. Issues are identified for further study.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandated services for severely disabled persons in the state-federal system (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Federal Register, 1974). Researchers have reported that work evaluators consider severely physically impaired clients to be very difficult cases (Bates, 1981).

The purpose of this article is to examine the issue of work evaluation for the severely physically disabled population by reviewing the background of work evaluation, relating criticisms about standard work evaluation models, and outlining elements of a model work evaluation program. Particular emphasis is given to selecting appropriate testing instruments and implementing a testing/training concept within the assessment model. The article concludes with a discussion on future directions of work evaluation and the identification of issues for further study.

Background

Work Evaluation's development has been traced to the contribution of several disciplines over the past fifty years (Pruitt, 1977). Vocational assessment services for people with severe physical disability have lagged behind the application of vocational assessment services for people with other disabilities. Lawrence Bates (1981), in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Research and Training Center, conducted a survey of evaluation centers on the topic of evaluating severely physically impaired people. Bates reported: "In fact, approximately one third of the evaluation centers that responded indicated that they would like to be able to evaluate the vocational potential of severely physically impaired people but lack what they consider to be the necessary evaluation tools" (Bates, 1981, p.2).

In the review of literature, special techniques and studies presented new possibilities in this field. Micro-motor analysis systems have been developed to establish time standards for the completion of manual tasks. Two examples are Methods-Time-Measurement (M.T.M.) and Modular Arranged Pre-determined Time Standards (MODAPTS) (Bates, 1981). Shworles and Tamagna's study on development of modern vocational objectives for severely disabled homebound persons set forth techniques used to adapt modern vocational tools in assisting people to gain information industry skills (Shworles and Tamagna, 1973). The Controlled Environmental Laboratory Evaluation (CELE), developed by the Goodwill Rehabilitation Center of Milwaukee, presented an evaluation design which helps to control extraneous factors within the testing situation (Rosinsky, Luce, Nelson, and Currie, 1976).

Criticisms of Standard Work Evaluation Models

People have been critical of the vocational assessment services provided to the severely disabled population. Complaints have been made about the practice of using work evaluation techniques originally developed for the less handicapped and applying them with severely disabled people (Schalock & Koran, 1979). In addition, there has been dissatisfaction with the concept of screening out individuals because they fail to meet job readiness criteria of standard work evaluation models (Ditty & Reynolds, 1980). Recognizing their success in placing severely disabled people into community-based employment, researchers have been critical of work evaluation models that continue to describe these people as feasible for competitive employment (Revell, Wehman, & Arnold, 1984).

Elements of a Model Work Evaluation Program

Articles have been written on the criteria for an effective work evaluation service. The reader is referred to Sankovsky's work (1978) for a broader description. Turning attention back to this article, the author presents the following key elements of a work evaluation service for the severely physically disabled:

1. **The Use of Modification.** Regarding vocational assessment for the person with severe physical disability, the willingness to modify testing instruments and the knowledge to understand the implications of testing modifications represent key components in the process (Bates, 1981).
2. **Effective Report-Writing Skills.** Reports should provide a description of interventions for identified limitations, explain testing modifications, and analyze the validity and reliability of testing instruments utilized in the vocational assessment.
3. **Awareness of Total Rehabilitation Process.** Evaluators should be cognizant that a primary objective of vocational rehabilitation is job placement. Criteria for successful work evaluation programs should go beyond number of clients served and amount of income generated, and include number of clients placed into community-based employment. Work evaluators should extend the length of follow-up services to ascertain the impact of work evaluation on the total rehabilitation process.
4. **Involvement in Professional Organizations.** Work evaluation is a dynamic field. The number of available testing instruments has risen rapidly during the last ten years (Berven, 1984). Through involvement in professional organizations and attendance in continuing education programs, the evaluator keeps abreast of changes and provides an up-to-date service.
5. **Location in a Comprehensive Rehabilitation Hospital.** Work evaluation services are provided effectively in a variety of settings, however, there are distinct advantages in providing work evaluation services for the severely physically disabled in a setting where additional rehabilitation services can be obtained. The following services contributed to the comprehensive vocational evaluation package: Vocational counseling, Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, Psychology,

Neuropsychology, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Hearing.

Selection of Testing Instruments

A discussion on the merits and limitations of psychometric testing, work sample systems, and situational assessment techniques is outside the scope of this article. This section provides information about the use of psychometric tests and work samples for the severely physically disabled population.

Initially, testing instruments should be selected based on their ability to answer questions from the Individual Evaluation Plan (Botterbusch, 1978). Accepting the premise that a person should not be given a psychometric testing which requires greater reading ability than the person possesses, evaluators need to be knowledgeable of reading level requirements for each administered test (Botterbusch, 1978). Moreover, people with severe physical disability tend to perform poorly on tests designed to measure speed of response (Botterbusch, 1978). Tests should be administered in which a high percentage of people complete all items within the designated time limit. Turning to work samples, work evaluators should be prepared to make input modifications (Bates, 1981). Bates describes input as all the instructions which are given to the clients. Overall, the selection of testing instruments should be judged on performance in the areas of validity, reliability, and norms (Chandler, 1983).

Testing/Training Within an Assessment Model

Vocational assessment of people with severe physical disability represents a serious challenge to the evaluator. Creative solutions will continue to bridge the development of services. Testing and training within an assessment model typifies this approach. In this model, the evaluator assesses learning style and potential (Ditty & Reynolds, 1980). Moreover, the evaluator utilizes task analysis techniques to modify work samples and other testing instruments. The evaluator provides further modification to standard work sample procedure through repeated administration of the same work sample. This modification yields information about learning potential. In this model, the evaluator focuses on providing information about learning style and identifying information which might prove useful to a job trainer in a supported work role.

Future Directions of Work Evaluation

1. There will be earlier vocational rehabilitation intervention for people with severe physical disability (Coughran & Daniels, 1983). Programming within schools will be geared toward opening options for community-based work experiences.
2. Disabilities will continue to change (Spears, 1983). The evaluator will need to redefine disability and functional limitations based on advances in medicine and technology.
3. The physical boundaries of the assessment setting will extend out into the community. The use of video tape recorders to augment job analysis will become more prevalent.
4. There will be continued growth in the number of testing instruments available for work evaluation. The microcomputer will be a central part of the

evaluation process. With the expected increase in the number of available software packages, there will be more time demands placed upon the evaluator in selecting testing instruments.

5. Evaluators will strive to expand their referral base. Referral sources will include Private Industry, Insurance Companies, and Self-Insured Companies. As a result, work evaluators will be held more accountable for their work and will be called upon as expert witnesses in legal cases.

Issues For Further Study

1. There needs to be research conducted on the topic of work evaluation effectiveness. Predictive validity outcome studies should be done to show the degree of relationship between work evaluation predictions and job placement outcomes.
2. There should be a study of work evaluation cost-effectiveness in serving the severely physically disabled population.

Summary

Vocational assessment of people with severe physical disability represents a significant challenge to today's work evaluator. The opportunity exists to analyze current programming and make the necessary changes within this dynamic profession.

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