

Functions, Roles, and Job Satisfaction of Employment Personnel

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Rehabilitation itself is one of the evolving concepts and changing ideas of the twentieth century. Rehabilitation is a moving target. The professional identity of all those within it must continue to move with it, or move out from it (Hamilton, 1960, p. 6).

Functions

According to Wuenschel and Brady (1959), the basic functions of placement in 1950s' rehabilitation were to persuade the employer to be receptive to hiring people with disabilities, to thoroughly know the qualifications of clients, and to be able to bring the worker and the employer together when suitable employment openings occurred. These basic functions continue to be important today.

Placement activities require personnel to wear many hats in serving both clients with disabilities and potential and current employers. For example, according to Flett, Biggs, and Alpass (1994), placement specialists must be concerned with the art of 'person/environment fit' by matching the client's knowledge, skills, and abilities to the vocational environment and the opportunities it provides. A central focus of the job placement specialist's activities is on preparing clients with disabilities for entering an increasingly competitive labor market. Perhaps the most difficult part of the job placement process is this identification of available jobs.

Roles

Controversy existed in the 1950s and continues today concerning who should be delegated the tasks of job placement. Lee (1955) believed that responsibility for placing the client in employment resided primarily with the rehabilitation counselor and should not be appointed to anyone else. The debate over placement specialization, as summarized by Decker and Stanojevich (1978), continues today: "The dilemma to use or not to use placement specialists is still an unanswered question" (p. 44). For example, Stevens, Boland, and Ranson (1992), in their project to promote the acceptance of placement specialists in the Florida Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, found that: (a) counselors did not know how to use specialists effectively; (b) negative biases existed concerning hiring specialists with disabilities; and (c) that much groundwork needed to be done to assist with the acceptance of placement specialists.

Changing patterns in rehabilitation such as teamwork, the development of a professional self-concept, and the growing consciousness of the significance of work, led to the differentiation of specialist roles (Waldrop, 1959). Placement issues also grew more complex because of the changing population of individuals receiving rehabilitation services. Waldrop argued convincingly for a broader and more significant use of skills and competencies to meet the diverse needs of rehabilitation clients.

Caldwell (1959) recognized a difference in the essential functions of traditional rehabilitation counseling and job placement responsibilities; however, he did not see role definition as a serious problem facing work in rehabilitation settings. According to Caldwell, all rehabilitation work

represented goal-specific activities in which professional differences converged and profession-specific methods could be nourished and preserved. He suggested that most professional differences in rehabilitation efforts arose from legitimately different perceptions of the basic problem and from goal-oriented activities which were specific to the training of the individual, as well as to the objective of the rehabilitation program. Caldwell felt that a team approach in rehabilitation was appropriate to tackle these job placement role issues. Members of the rehabilitation team, regardless of their individual roles, all have a common goal—helping the person with a disability to achieve employment.

Because so many professional skills contribute to successful job placement, Obermann (1960) perceived rehabilitation as a complex process. Although he saw much value in specialization, he also saw some difficulties arising from it. Obermann was concerned that specialized training needed to become competent in various professions, as well as and the development of profession-specific vocabulary, literature, and associations, tended to alienate rehabilitation professionals from one another.

Specialty in rehabilitation involves much more than whether or not to designate placement specialist roles. Rehabilitation personnel may specialize according to the agency focus, philosophy of treatment, special competence required, and/or particular type of disability (Hamilton, 1960). According to Goodwin (1992), the majority of rehabilitation counselors practicing in the late 1980s specialized by working with individuals with a particular type of disability, by concentrating on some specific aspect of the rehabilitation process (i.e., job placement), or by working in a specialized setting. Goodwin was concerned that rapid growth of specialization would result in the fragmentation of the rehabilitation counseling profession.

Hamilton (1960) believed the growing community role of the counselor posed a significant problem within rehabilitation and concluded: (1) the professional identity of rehabilitation is its concern with people first, and with agency and professional prerogatives only secondarily; (2) rehabilitation can only be successful within an agency or program whose scope and philosophy accepts this approach; (3) and rehabilitation services should only be provided by personnel with sufficient professional training, insight, and skill.

Job Coaching Roles and Functions

The roles and functions of individuals providing rehabilitation employment services changed drastically with the advent of supported employment in the 1980s. As the supported employment movement continues to grow, a second generation of issues focusing on service roles are emerging (Grossi, Test, & Keul, 1991). Added to the roster of placement professionals during the last decade has been the job coach or employment specialist. Job coaching soon became the one placement function which could be clearly differentiated from the responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor. However, the role of the job coach also continues to evolve and now includes the role of employment consultant and co-worker trainer, as well (Hanley-Maxwell, & Whitney-Thomas, 1995). Like other job placement personnel and rehabilitation counselors, in some cases, job coaches may serve as a generalist or may specialize in the areas of work they do (Jackson, 1997).

Occupational Stress and Job Satisfaction

Occupational stress and job satisfaction have been the topics of both discussion and research in rehabilitation for some time (Bordieri & Riggat, 1989) in a variety of rehabilitation settings. For

example, Smits (1972), Crawford (1977), Feindel (1980), and Phillips (1983) documented levels of worker satisfaction among counselors, supervisors, and directors of vocational rehabilitation agencies, respectively. Several studies also examined job satisfaction of rehabilitation workers in relation to staff turnover (Crimando, Riggart, & Hansen, 1986; George & Baumeister, 1981; Zaharia & Baumeister, 1979), staff burnout (Riggart, Godley, & Hafer, 1984), self esteem (Garske, 1996), pre-determinant traits (Matkin & Bauer, 1993), achievement (Emener & Stephens, 1982; Bordieri, Reagle, & Coker, 1988), and service quality and cost (Zaharia & Baumeister, 1979). Wright and Terrian (1987) surveyed the job satisfaction of 757 rehabilitation practitioners using a Rehabilitation Job Satisfaction Inventory (RJSI) designed specifically for rehabilitation professionals and found a higher degree of intrinsic (i.e., satisfaction with the work itself) over extrinsic satisfaction (i.e., satisfaction with the work environment).

There is indeed a wealth of research in documenting relationships between aspects of the work environment and various physical and psychological outcomes (Flett, Biggs, & Alpass, 1994); however, one occupational group which has received very little research attention in this context, is the job placement specialist. Despite the extensive research literature, one practical research question that has been neglected concerns the experience of placement workers and the subjective feelings of stress and satisfaction created by their work (Flett & Biggs, 1992). Flett and Biggs (1992) and Flett, Biggs, and Alpass (1994) believe such study is warranted due to the complex nature of the work inherent in securing employment for people with disabilities. For example, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that a significant source of stress for job placement specialists might stem from problems associated with identifying jobs and placing clients in those jobs in difficult economic times. Another problem identified by Flett and Biggs as a potential source of stress for job placement specialists is a high level of role conflict due to lack of clear expectations and variable and inconsistent reinforcement. In 1994, Flett, Biggs, and Alpass conducted an exploratory analysis to determine whether a professional training program for these rehabilitation practitioners that focused on core skills and competencies, might have some beneficial effects on perceived levels of job related stress and tension. Results of the analysis indicated that training participants showed significant improvements in perceptions of job stress and tension, once they felt competent and more aware of role expectations.

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