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The Job Search Knowledge Scale: Assessing Consumers of a CARF Exemplary-rated Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Program

Daniel L. Joutras

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, djoutr1@siu.edu

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THE JOB SEARCH KNOWLEDGE SCALE: ASSESSING CONSUMERS OF A CARF
EXEMPLARY-RATED COMPREHENSIVE VOCATIONAL EVALUATION
PROGRAM

by

Daniel L. Joutras

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2008

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science

Rehabilitation Institute
In the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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in the field of Rehabilitation Administration and Services

Approved by:

Dr. William Crimando, Chair

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

November 4, 2011

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to the best parents a young man could ever have, Steve and Kathy Joutras. For your unvarying love, support, and encouragement, I am eternally grateful. I aspire to live in the examples you have demonstrated, and hope that one day I am able to truly show my appreciation.

I would also like to dedicate this project to my grandmother, whose constant intercession I am sure was a driving force behind my accomplishments.

Finally, and most importantly, I dedicate this achievement to my Aunt Karen, the woman responsible for my life's passion; for teaching me humility, patience, and unconditional love. I look forward to seeing you again someday.

“...Ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide.”

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In order for the vocational rehabilitation process to be considered successful, an individual needs to be placed in competitive employment; this is achieved only after the consumer becomes prepared for their occupation of choice, participates in an active job search, and retains the position after placement (Strauser&Berven, 2006). According to recent data, only 35% of people with disabilities engage in gainful full-time or part-time employment, compared to 78% of the rest of the population (Hergenrather, Rhodes, Turner, & Barlow, 2008). This statistic demonstrates that consumers of vocational rehabilitation services may need extra guidance and training in order to realize the goal of obtaining and maintaining successful employment.

Despite the focus of obtaining employment as the sole outcome of the vocational rehabilitation process, most employment services involve active participation on behalf of the client in a number of pre-employment activities, such as filling out applications, developing resumes and cover letters, and preparing for interviews (Coviello, Zanis, & Lynch, 2004). It is oftentimes difficult to help place an individual in employment when their skills relating to job seeking are lacking; therefore, rehabilitation professionals need to know how to assess these skills and how to improve upon them. An essential part in this process is helping individuals increase their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses so to better prepare themselves for employment (Rothman, Maldonado, & Rothman, 2008).

Mannock, Levesque, and Prochaska (2002) argued that there has been an increase in trying to understand and improve the outcomes in employment for people with

disabilities, but that employment rates are still very low for this group when compared to the rest of the general population. In order to produce a successful outcome, more focus is needed on the individual steps leading up to employment. The many skills required in job seeking are essential in obtaining and maintaining employment.

Statement of the Problem

This project is an investigation of individual job search knowledge of participants in a vocational evaluation program. It is a trial test using a new assessment tool (the Job Search Knowledge Scale, or JSKS) available to the Evaluation and Developmental Center in Carbondale, IL. For persons receiving vocational rehabilitation services, it is important to know where they stand in their knowledge, skill, and ability in job search methods prior to receiving services; more importantly, this is necessary to assess prior to referral for job placement services. The intent is to use preliminary data of clients who complete the assessment and apply descriptive statistics in order to determine their status in job search knowledge; these statistics will help represent where the client currently is and what they might need to work on. It will also be determined whether the presentation of information regarding job seeking strategies will increase an individual's job search knowledge. Finally, analysis will determine whether certain demographic information influences an individual's job search knowledge.

Persons with disabilities are often discriminated against in employment, and therefore may lack the skills and abilities to successfully gain and maintain employment. In order for rehabilitation professionals to assist clients in the vocational rehabilitation process, it is necessary that clients are aware of their needs and strengths. Hagner (2010) stated that clients are expected to actively participate in their own rehabilitation process,

and that naturalistic assessment must focus on the holistic process of career planning. Since the JSKS is a self-assessment tool, it is imperative that clients answer completely and honestly in order to identify their respective areas needing improvement. Because employment is an important first step in achieving independence (Migliore & Butterworth, 2008), individuals must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses to ensure their success in employment. Beveridge and Fabian (2007) also stressed the importance of job development on individual goals and abilities. The Job Search Knowledge Scale allows individual clients to assess their own status in relation to job seeking skills, and therefore assist professionals in developing unique plans and facilitating further education in the employment process.

Background of the Problem

According to Migliore and Butterworth (2008), only 35% of persons with disabilities are employed, with or without the services of a vocational rehabilitation agency. This percentage is extremely low compared to that of 78% of the general population. It is clear that there exists some gap between the two, whether it is provision of services or the knowledge and skills needed to obtain employment. Additionally, it is estimated that as many as 3.3 million Americans would benefit from such vocational rehabilitation services (Beveridge & Fabian, 2007). In order for clients to be successful in the process, an assessment of their job search knowledge should be conducted to help create a plan appropriate for each individual.

Strauser and Berven (2006) discussed that a major barrier for people with disabilities in obtaining employment is not having the appropriate skills to perform a job search successfully. Therefore, rehabilitation counselors must be aware of their

consumers' skill deficits by assessing what areas they lack skills in and what services can be put into effect to improve these skills. A counselor cannot effectively serve consumers without the knowledge of where the individuals stand in regards to job seeking abilities. Additionally, rehabilitation professionals must be knowledgeable on the resources, interventions, and programs that can help improve job seeking skills (Strauser&Berven, 2006).

Furthermore, goal-setting and recruitment skills have been noted as two major competencies that professionals can assist clients in attaining (Balcazar, Keys, Davis, Lardon, & Jones, 2005). These authors also stated that while no agreement exists on how to facilitate active participation, this aspect is also important in the VR process. The JSKS is an assessment that can help in identifying skills and goals, while also allowing the client to take on an active role in their own services.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to assess the job search knowledge of persons with disabilities who are consumers of a CARF exemplary-rated Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Program, and to determine if the inclusion of such educational materials will improve that knowledge. This will be accomplished by using statistical analysis of data gathered from human subjects. The specific research questions that are addressed include:

1. How does certain demographic information (i.e. age, gender, education, and work history) relate to individual job search knowledge?
2. What areas of job search knowledge are people with disabilities most lacking?
3. Does the presentation of related educational information increase an individual's job search knowledge?

Alternately, this project contains three hypotheses. First, it is hypothesized that demographic information will indeed affect the amount of job search knowledge an individual will have. Specifically, less education, less work history, and type and severity of the disability will lead to a lower baseline of job search knowledge. Secondly, people with disabilities are predicted to have the least knowledge in areas of resume/cover letter facilitation and interviewing skills. Finally, it is hypothesized that an informational session on job search knowledge tips will increase an individual's knowledge when compared to baseline.

Operational Definition of Terms

The definition of Job Search Knowledge is how much an individual knows about looking for employment, including the areas of identifying job leads, direct application to employers, resumes and cover letters, employment interviews, and following up.

Delimitations of the Study

The following delimitations were outlined in this research study:

1. Respondents to the Job Search Knowledge Scale included 50 vocational evaluation clients of the Evaluation and Developmental Center in Carbondale, IL during the course of the Spring 2010 semester.
2. Respondents to the scale were at least 18 years of age and had one of various disabilities.
3. Five areas of job search knowledge were measured, including identifying job leads, direct application to employers, resumes and cover letters, employment interviews, and following up.
4. Demographic information was retrieved from interviews and referral forms.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this project is to analyze individual's knowledge about job seeking methods, and to see if the presentation of educational information will improve that knowledge. This project, however, does have certain limitations that include the following:

1. This study does not provide suggestions as to how to improve one's job search knowledge, nor does it assess how one's knowledge came to be.
2. Based on the individual's disability, the assessment may have been difficult to understand despite having the administrator read items aloud.
3. External distractions, such as construction on the testing facility, may have affected respondents' concentration during the assessment.
4. This study only focused on consumers of vocational services within the southern Illinois region, possibly making it difficult to generalize to the greater population.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research project focused on the job search knowledge of people with disabilities, and whether an educational intervention can help improve that knowledge. While most research in this area has focused on the employment characteristics of people with disabilities, psychological factors involved, and barriers to employment, little research is presented in identifying the specific needs of this population in job seeking skills. Therefore, this review of related literature focuses on the following major areas:

1. Problems and barriers for people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment;
2. Job seeking skills and abilities of people with disabilities; and
3. Methods and approaches in assisting people with disabilities develop the skills for successful employment.

Problems and Barriers

Individuals with disabilities encounter certain barriers, both real and perceived, in the employment process. According to Timmons, Schuster, Hamner, and Bose (2002), people with disabilities have higher unemployment rates, lower average earnings, limited access to certain benefits, disproportionately high representation in low-skilled positions, and higher poverty rates. A number of elements factor into these results, including psychological and environmental obstacles, lack of education and services, and inadequate employment history.

Employment opportunities for people with disabilities are an essential part of developing necessary personal empowerment and social inclusion (Hartnett, Thurman,

&Cordingly, 2010). These authors also stated that understanding the barriers to social inclusion in the workplace, in addition to the perspectives of employees, employers, and service providers, remains important in achieving successful employment. As employment reflects social and economic status, maintaining a job is associated with other intrinsic characteristics of earning wages, having a social outlet, and using one's skills and talents to achieve independence and take a functional role in society.

Furthermore, the Canadian Council on Learning (2009) argued that a civil society must do everything in its power to promote full participation from each member in that society. Therefore, legislators and policymakers must be aware of the underrepresentation of certain populations and ensure appropriate methods of enforcing equal opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was the driving force for this legislature which provides civil rights protections to people with disabilities in employment (Hartnett et al., 2010).

Adequate education and employment histories are another important element in determining an individual's employment status. One of the largest barriers to employment for an individual with a disability is an insufficient level of education (Hernandez et al., 2007). Shandra and Hogan (2008) stated that an individual's work-related skill set is limited to the general credentials obtained while in school. For example, a person with a high school diploma would be more limited in their potential employment prospects than that of a college graduate. With higher education comes the acquisition of more skills that increase an individual's employability. The Canadian Council on Learning (2009) mentioned that a factor in lower levels of education among people with disabilities might also be due to the barriers in education that this population

faces; however, the inclusion of better skills and greater education might facilitate more labor force participation.

Martz and Xu (2008) argued that in addition to an individual's age and education level, sufficient work history is a predicting factor for successful employment. Because of the barriers people with disabilities have facing employment already, a lack of employment history might further prevent them in obtaining a job. Additionally, the presence of applicable work experience is just as important as any work history at all. Hall and Parker (2010) addressed that employment history barriers for people with disabilities include the large gaps between positions, which may be due to medical or psychological leaves. In order for an individual with a disability to achieve successful employment, a credible, consistent, and applicable work history must be present.

Final barriers that need to be addressed concerning barriers to employment for people with disabilities include the lack of accessible accommodations or assistive technology and the lack of appropriate professional services. According to Williams, Sabata, and Zolna (2006), a national survey found that 67% of respondents with disabilities stated that assistive technology helped them in obtaining employment, and that 90% of respondents admitted that assistive technology allowed them to work faster and more easily. Although acquisition of such technology and accommodations might be at times difficult, it is the given right of the individual with a disability to obtain accommodations that will further assist them in obtaining and maintaining successful employment.

Reasonable accommodations are required by employers in order to allow people with disabilities to compete for, work, and advance in their careers (Styers& Schultz,

2009). The purpose of accommodations is to level the playing field, making more of an equal opportunity in employment for people with disabilities as their non-disabled cohorts. Many individuals who are entitled to certain accommodations experience obstacles in acquiring them because of lack of knowledge of their availability, lack of advocacy to obtain them, and either personal or external biases against having accommodations.

Finally, individuals with disabilities are eligible for a number of services, both private and public, that can help them to achieve independence through employment; however, service provision must be competent in advocating for consumers or individuals might fall through the cracks. Martz and Xu (2008) stated that individuals with disabilities who receive both job placement services and certain training will increase their opportunities for employment. By taking advantage of the services available to them, people with disabilities will have greater success in the world of employment.

Furthermore, according to Timmons, Schuster, Hamner, and Bose (2002), quality of services is based upon the reliability of services, professionals' responsiveness to the needs of the client, good communication between the client and service provider, competent and knowledgeable staff, and active consumer involvement. Effective service provision is highly reliant on the professional's knowledge and expertise of the available resources in the community, as well as the need for active participation on behalf of the client. Additionally, community education provided by existing services encourages greater client participation; this enhances the client/provider relationship that will result in more positive outcomes.

Job Seeking Skills and Abilities

Rowland, Gilliland, and Moxley (1993) stated that job seeking skills training should focus on increasing the client's awareness of their own strengths and preferences, preparing him or her for a self-directed job search, and planning for responsibility in the job search so that the outcome of employment will enhance their skills. Job seeking skills would include all tasks necessary to obtain a position, not limited to where and how to look for positions, resume, cover letter, and application completion, interviewing, and disclosure of disability. In order for any individual, with or without disability, to be successful in obtaining employment, he or she must be aware of the imperative steps in the job search process; in addition to this awareness, the necessary skills must be practiced and developed in order to ensure proper attainment and retention of the position.

Kluesner, Bordieri, and Taylor (2005) stated that an assessment of an individual's job seeking skills should be covered in the planning and preparation phases of service provision, and is an appropriate service that can increase positive employment outcomes for that individual. Professionals must evaluate the job seeker's skills in the initial phases in order to provide concrete results of which areas the client needs assistance. In determining these skills, the service provider is better able to map out strategies that will assist the individual learn new skills and hone ones already in place.

A review by one professional summarizes that the job search process should be individualized, especially in assessment (Murphy, 2009). Individualized assessments need to offer an analysis of the work setting, job matching and creating, communication, negotiation, and management. Effective service provision in the job placement sector

relies on this person-centered planning approach, also known as the discovery phase (Inge&Targett, 2008). Through proper assessment and consideration of the client's interests and skills, service providers can better adapt a customizable plan that will work specifically for each individual.

Successful Approaches

While much research has focused on the characteristics and outcomes of people with disabilities in employment, little has sought to find particular approaches to job seeking skills enhancement for this population. However, studies support certain general rules of thumb when it comes to working with people with disabilities in job placement. Because the job placement process should be an individualized and person-centered process, it is on part of the service provider to adequately adapt these methods to each client.

Lemaire, Mallik, and Stoll (2002) found that employment skills training should be offered to people with disabilities at a younger age and include work and career exploration. This idea fits into the early intervention approach, wherein if these supports are supplied for the younger disability population, positive results in employment would be more substantial. Presenting career exploration and job seeking skills training to youth with disabilities further promotes realistic goals and aspirations. Another major area in career development is job readiness training (Keim&Strauser, 2000). Job readiness training focuses on identifying career interests of the client, developing job seeking skills, and assisting in accurate application completion, resume writing, interviewing skills, and employment maintenance.

Shandra and Hogan (2008) found in their study that in order to identify

appropriate employment opportunities for the job seeker, service programs need to facilitate the development of the network between the client and employer. For this network to become effective, the following are also suggested as necessary to provide positive outcomes: adequate service administration, appropriate curriculum and instruction for the job seeker, formalized communication between service provider and consumer, competent support services, and systematic follow-along services.

Morgan (2008) suggested an ecological assessment method that should precede the actual job development and placement phase of vocational rehabilitation. This assessment seeks to measure individual preferences in employment, current skill levels, and the requirements for the individual's preferred job selections. This assessment flows then into job matching, wherein the service provider identifies strengths of the consumer that would make that employment choice a success, weaknesses that might jeopardize the choice, and methods for overcoming those determined weaknesses. The ecological assessment and job matching approach is applicable and relevant because it increases the probability of employment for that individual and establishes the intrinsic motivation to develop the necessary skills for successful employment. Furthermore, it is consistent with the rehabilitation field's value of self-determination and shows respect for individual choices.

Kluesner, Bordieri, and Taylor (2005) determined that job placement services that include a wide array of activities can increase positive employment outcomes. These activities include job seeking skills training, job clubs, networking and contacts, individualized placement plans, and counselor knowledge of the working world. Additionally, there must be an agreement between both the client and counselor to

commit to active placement. By incorporating a multitude of aspects in the job search, development, and placement process, service providers better present a holistic approach to their clients.

Finally, two studies referenced earlier provided further information on the services that can increase results of successful employment. One such study found that services directed at the training for and attaining employment will prove better than simply direct placement services (Martz & Xu, 2008). In other words, the inclusion of job seeking skills and strategies in the pre-employment phase can increase an individual's probability of obtaining employment. Moreover, addressing concrete, short-term needs and goals of the job seeker will also better prepare them for employment (Hernandez et al., 2007).

Summary

Although the research measuring the job seeking skills of individuals with disabilities is limited, there exists substantial examination on the barriers to employment this population faces. It is important for service providers to understand each client's potential barriers, among others, in order to assist in employment goals. In addition, a client's current level of job seeking skills should be assessed in order to determine areas of improvement. Finally, many varying approaches to assisting consumers in the job search phase are beneficial, wherein the constant is client-centered planning. Based on the literature review, this research project seeks to provide information on the following:

1. barriers to employment of job seekers with disabilities (such as lack of education);
2. specific areas of job seeking skills that are strengths and weaknesses;

3. the usefulness of a vocational assessment on job search knowledge; and
4. how it effects that individual's job search knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of this research project was to determine which areas of job search knowledge people with disabilities struggle with, and whether that knowledge can be improved when presented with information on the topic. This chapter on methodology focuses on the following areas:

1. Sample selection
2. Description of the research instrument
3. Data gathering procedures
4. Data analysis procedures

Sample Selection

Participants in this particular research study were consumers of comprehensive vocational evaluation services at the Evaluation and Developmental Center (EDC) in Carbondale, IL during the spring 2010 semester. The EDC is a disability services agency and is part of the Rehabilitation Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Participants were at least 18 years of age and were referred from the state's Division of Rehabilitation Services, and had any number of diagnoses including but not limited to learning disabilities, sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, and mood or personality disabilities. These consumers had to voluntarily consent to participation, and the cutoff was 50 respondents. Respondents took the Job Search Knowledge Scale, consisting of 60 statements to which they determined were true or false.

Instrumentation

The Job Search Knowledge Scale (Liptak, 2009) was developed as a brief

assessment tool to measure an individual's knowledge about seeking employment. The scale represents five areas of job seeking, which include identifying job leads, direct application to employers, resumes and cover letters, employment interviews, and following up. It provides direction on the job search methods that work best so individuals can find employment more quickly. The scale consists of 60 statements, 12 in each area it represents, to which the respondent must determine are true or false. After completion, the scale provides a step to improve one's job search knowledge by reviewing additional information regarding the items on the scale.

The following represent sample questions from each of the five sections on the Job Search Knowledge Scale. Refer to Appendix A for complete assessment questions, separated by each subscale on the assessment.

1. You should focus your search on jobs that have been advertised. (identifying job leads)
5. If a question on a job application does not apply to you, you should leave it blank. (direct application to employers)
9. It is best to mass-mail resumes to any employers who might have a job available. (resumes and cover letters)
13. You should let the interviewer ask all the questions in a job interview. (employment interviews)
17. You should never send a thank-you note over e-mail. (following up)

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were gathered at the beginning of consumers' vocational evaluations, which usually began on Mondays. Upon arrival to the orientation room for vocational

evaluations, it was announced that this researcher would be conducting research on job search knowledge. Participants were ensured that all identifying information would be kept confidential, that results would be used for research purposes only, and that their refusal to participate would in no way affect the services to which they are otherwise entitled. If the consumer was willing to participate, he or she would complete a consent form. Refer to Appendix C for an example of the consent form used. Once consent forms were collected, participants were read aloud instructions for completing the scale, which included a brief background of the scale itself, and directions on determining whether each statement was true or false. Each consumer was given an EDC identification number which was used in protecting confidentiality.

This researcher continued by reading each item aloud, 1-60, to ensure all participants understood each statement. The research followed that of a pre-test/post-test design. Once the pre-test assessment was completed, the administrator instructed respondents to open their scale to step four on the inside and follow along with the information presented about each statement. This information indirectly provides the correct information for each item's answer. The administrator then read through each section, one through five, going over the educational material on ways to improve job search knowledge. This informational session lasted around thirty minutes.

After the session was finished, the participants were given a second Job Search Knowledge Scale as a post-test to determine whether the information presented to them increased their knowledge in any or all areas. Administration instructions were the same as that of the pre-test. Upon completion of the second assessment, tests were collected and respondents were thanked for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Demographic information was recorded on a separate data sheet, and included participants' age, gender, highest level of school completed, whether they received special education, whether they had a work history, and whether that work history was competitive. This information was derived from the Evaluation and Developmental Center's referral forms from state vocational rehabilitation counselors. Any information that was not provided in this form was derived from the vocational evaluation interview that each participant completed. Refer to Appendix B for a sample data sheet.

After pre- and post-tests were administered, they were scored according to guidelines provided by the Job Search Knowledge Scale. Answers marked 'B' or 'C' were correct and tallied for each section, with a maximum score of twelve for each section. Demographic information, responses to each of the 60 items, and totals for each section of the scale were then entered in the SPSS statistical package. Age and highest level of school completed were recorded in years, and males were denoted with a score of 0 and females with a score of 1. Whether the participant received special education, had a work history, or had a competitive history were denoted with 0 being a response of no and 1 being a response of yes. Each item on the assessment was scored with 1 being correct and 0 being incorrect.

Reliability statistics were computed for each of the five sections on both the pre- and post-tests using Cronbach's Alpha. Correlations were tested for significance at the .01 level. Correlations were also computed between each of the five sections on the pre-test and each demographic category. A paired samples t-test was used to determine the significance of each section of the assessment on both pre- and post-tests.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presents data collected from the research study on participants' job search knowledge. The methods described in chapter three were used to analyze this data through use of the statistical package SPSS. The chapter includes the following sections:

1. Description of the subjects and correlations between demographics and job search knowledge;
2. Areas wherein participants lacked knowledge and paired samples statistics; and
3. Analysis of whether educational information increases job search knowledge and paired samples t-test.

Demographics

Descriptive statistics methods were used to analyze demographic data of participants. Although there were 50 participants, one's age was left blank. Participants needed to be 18 years of age to participate in the study, as this was the minimum age noted. The oldest participant was 62, with an average age of about 27.5 years. Of the fifty participants, a fairly even distribution were male (58%) and female (42%). Furthermore, the lowest level of education recorded was sixth grade, with the highest level of education being 14 years, or an associate's degree. The majority in this study held a high school diploma or GED, making up 54% of the sample population. Those who had received special education services while in school made up 58% of the sample in the study. Finally, 74% of the sample held a work history, wherein 68% held a competitive work history. Having checked assumptions, all scales were determined to

have normal distribution.

The following tables represent characteristics studied, response rates, and percentages.

Table 1

Age Representation (in years) of Sample

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Age	49	18	62	13.147

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Males vs. Females

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	29	58.0
Female	21	42.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of Education (in years)

Years	Frequency	Percent
6	1	2.0
11	4	8.0
12	27	54.0
13	11	22.0
14	6	12.0
Missing	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Participants Receiving Special Education Services

Special Education	Frequency	Percent
No	21	42.0
Yes	29	58.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 5

Frequency and Percentage of Participants with Work History

Work History	Frequency	Percent
No	13	26.0
Yes	37	74.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 6

Frequency and Percentage of Participants with Competitive Work History

Competitive Work History	Frequency	Percent
No	16	32.0
Yes	34	68.0
Total	50	100.0

In order to determine whether demographic information affects a person's job search knowledge, correlations were analyzed between each demographic item and the five scales on the pre-test using Pearson's correlation. No statistically significant correlations were found to present. The table on the next page represents this correlation analysis.

Table 7

Correlations Between Demographics and Sub-scales of the Job Search Knowledge Scale

Sub-scale	Age	Gender	Work Hx	Competitive
Hx				
Identifying job leads	.056	.155	.075	-.020
Direct application	.066	.199	.145	.049
Resumes and cover letters	.306	.217	.201	.130
Employment interviews	.212	.204	.192	.108
Following up	.193	-.052	.027	-.010

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8

Reliability Statistics Using Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.855	.862	60

Areas needing improvement and sample statistics

The Job Search Knowledge Scale measures five areas, including identifying job leads, direct application to employers, resumes and cover letters, employment interviews, and following up. The following table represents paired samples statistics of each of the

five sections.

Table 9

Average Combined Pre- and Post-test Scores of Each Section of the Job Search

Knowledge Scale

Area	Mean	SD
Identifying job leads pre-	8.0800	2.27533
Identifying job leads post-	8.8400	1.85560
Direct application pre-	8.5000	1.75255
Direct application post-	9.5800	1.70342
Resumes and cover letters pre-	6.8000	1.92725
Resumes and cover letters post-	7.5400	2.11129
Employment interviews pre-	9.3400	1.77982
Employment interviews post-	9.8800	1.83659
Following up pre-	8.3400	2.46287
Following up post-	9.5600	1.93949

The average score on the resumes and cover letter section of the Job Search Knowledge Scale pre-test was 6.8 out of a total of twelve questions. This represents the area in which participants held the least amount of job search knowledge at baseline. Conversely, the average score on the employment interviews section was 9.34, representing the area on the assessment wherein participants scored highest. The previous table represents an increase of scores on each of the five sections of the

assessment from pre- to post-test. The area of following up had the most dramatic increase of average scores from pre- to post-test. Having included the educational information intervention in between testing sessions, the increase on average scores supports that this intervention helped to increase an individual's job search knowledge.

Educational presentation and paired samples t-test

A paired samples t-test was used to determine significance between each of the five sections on the assessment and its comparison between pre- and post-test scores. Significance was looked to be found at the .01 level. The following table displays results for this analysis.

Table 10

Paired Samples T-test Statistics of Individual Sections of the JSKS and Pre-test/Post-test Comparisons

Pair	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
1-identifying job leads	-.76000	2.06585	-2.601	.012
2-direct application	-1.0800	1.71238	-4.460	.000*
3-resumes and cover letters	-.74000	2.17415	-2.407	.020
4-employment interviews	-.54000	1.50116	-2.544	.014
5-following up	-1.2200	1.90905	-4.519	.000*

*p < .01.

Referring to the previous table, the sections of direct application and following up on the JSKS assessment were shown to be statistically significant at the .01 level. In summary, these sections on the assessment were shown to have significance from pre-test

to post-test scores, supporting the hypothesis of using an educational intervention to help increase job search knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary

The central purpose of this investigation was to determine the job search knowledge of individuals with disabilities participating in vocational rehabilitation. In performing the research study, it was hoped that by determining whether demographic information relates to job search knowledge, what areas people with disabilities lacked knowledge, and whether an educational presentation can increase that knowledge, vocational rehabilitation professionals could better provide effective services for consumers.

The Job Search Knowledge Scale was administered in a pre-test setting to 50 participants of the Evaluation and Developmental Center Vocational Evaluation program, after consent, confidentiality, and demographics were collected. Once the pre-test was completed, participants were given a brief educational instruction session that presented information that would lead them to understanding the correct answers. After completing their vocational evaluation from the facility, participants were then administered the Job Search Knowledge Scale as a post-test to see if their scores improved from the previous.

Data analysis procedures included descriptive statistics for demographic information, reliability using Cronbach's alpha, paired samples statistics, and paired samples t-test. Demographics were shown to have no correlation with an individual's job search knowledge. However, the study displayed a relatively high internal consistency from the value of Cronbach's alpha. Using paired samples statistics, the section of resumes and cover letters presented the area in which people with disabilities lack the

most knowledge. Finally, the paired samples t-test showed that the sections of direct application and following up were statistically significant at the .01 level. This translates into supporting that the educational session helped to increase scores from pre-test to post-test on these sections of the Job Search Knowledge Scale.

Several limitations were noted prior to completing this research project. It is possible that outside influences may have affected a participant's performance on the assessment, both for pre- and post-tests. Factors such as construction on the building where the assessments took place, learning information pertaining to job search knowledge in other aspects of the vocational evaluation, or some other change in the person's life may have influenced their scores. Furthermore, this project did not seek to assess how an individual's job search knowledge came to be, nor did it seek to provide any additional interventions on improving this knowledge other than supporting the inclusion of the assessment's educational intervention.

Conclusions

Based upon the results of this study, no significant correlations were found between an individual's demographics and job search knowledge. People with disabilities lack the most knowledge in the areas of resumes and cover letters, supporting part of the second hypothesis; however, they possess the most knowledge in employment interviews. Additionally, based on the comparison of the average scores between pre- and post-tests, it was determined that the inclusion of the educational session helped to increase scores, also supporting the third hypothesis. In presenting these results, it is noted that while a majority of the research hypotheses were supported, more research should be conducted in order to further evaluate the acquisition of job search knowledge.

Discussion

While no statistics supported the assumption that demographic information correlates with job search knowledge, it should be known that through investigation of individual test results, those with no work history and lower levels of education had lower scores on both pre- and post-tests than participants with competitive work history and higher education. Because participants with work history would likely have direct experience in the areas covered under the Job Search Knowledge Scale, their scores would be expected to be higher than those without employment backgrounds. In comparison, factors related to obtaining employment are more heavily introduced as a person's education progresses.

Resumes and cover letters was the area determined that participants had the least knowledge. One factor that may contribute to this would be the high volume of participants who were exactly 18 years of age, or the mean age being 27. The younger an individual is, the less likely they will have had the need to submit a resume for employment. Furthermore, learning the purpose and development of resumes and cover letters is usually an area that is much more heavily addressed as education progresses, especially at the post-secondary education level. Because employment interviews was the area that participants scored the highest average in, it should be noted that this could relate to the frequency of individuals who have competitive work history. Those with competitive histories accounted for 68% of the sample; it is likely that most in that percentage had to undergo an interview, and would therefore have applicable experience in the area.

It should be noted that if two items were omitted in the Job Search Knowledge

Scale, the value of Cronbach's alpha would likely increase, therefore increasing internal consistency. These items include questions 22 and 31 on the assessment:

22. Posting your resume with online job banks, such as Monster, is one of the best ways to find a job.

31. A "functional" resume, which is organized by your skills, is best if you have gaps in employment.

In comparing the average scores of each of the five sections for the pre- and post-tests, it is evident that participants scored better on the post-test after the presentation of educational information on job search knowledge. While this research study sought to find the correlation between the inclusion of the education segment and the increase of a person's job search knowledge, other factors may have contributed to this conclusion. First, participants were recipients of vocational rehabilitation services, wherein it is possible that they learned the answers to the assessment questions through other counseling or other evaluation. Furthermore, this research project did not measure the retention of this knowledge over a period of time; post-tests were given at the end of participant's vocational evaluation, which was normally two to three days after the educational presentation on job search knowledge.

Finally, while only the sections of identifying job leads and employment interviews were found to be statistically significant, all sections covered on the Job Search Knowledge Scale had an increase in their average scores from pre-test to post-test. Although it is assumed that the inclusion of the educational intervention helped facilitate this knowledge, other unidentified factors may have contributed to this increase. Furthermore, while as a group these averages increased between test sessions, upon

investigation of individual assessments, there was a small number of participants whose scores actually decreased from pre-test to post-test. This alludes to the conclusion that the intervention was perhaps difficult to understand, misleading, or confusing.

Recommendations

While this research project reached certain conclusions regarding people with disabilities' job search knowledge, it is clear that further research should be conducted in order to better understand this population's difficulties and barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. Based on the results of this investigation, there are certain recommendations for future research that might help facilitate the process.

Primarily, in this study I was unable to gather information regarding participants' specific disabilities. Although the majority of this sample was classified as having a learning disability, this information was unable to be collected for the many participants. If a researcher can understand the link between a specific disability and the person's job search knowledge, service providers might better be able to individualize each vocational rehabilitation case.

Additionally, further research might want to focus around different types of interventions in lieu of the educational presentation used in this study. This research project supported the inclusion of the educational session in fostering a person's job search knowledge; however, there is no proof that it is the only or the best intervention in assisting a person with a disability attain job seeking skills. Further research might include studying interventions such as job seeking skills classes, individual counseling, group interaction, and role playing; incorporating multi-level interventions might also be beneficial.

In performing the literature review for this project, it was difficult to find much pertinent research regarding the mechanics of job search knowledge. Little was presented surrounding the characteristics of what constitutes job search knowledge or how a person goes about acquiring such knowledge. Future research might look to describe and define the factors contributing to job seeking skills. Furthermore, as noted in the limitations, further research might focus on determining how an individual's job search knowledge came to be. By studying the precursors to this knowledge, employment specialists can better assess a consumer at baseline and develop an appropriate vocational rehabilitation plan.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

This appendix displays the items tested on the Job Search Knowledge Scale. For comprehension purposes, the scale was broken down into the sections it measures.

Identifying Job Leads

1. You should focus your search on jobs that have been advertised.
2. Newspaper “want ads” are the best source of job leads.
3. The Internet is the only resource you need to find a job.
4. Mass-mailing your resume is not an efficient way to contact employers.
21. You should always ask what a job pays before applying.
22. Posting your resume with online job banks, such as Monster, is one of the best ways to find a job.
23. All jobs must be advertised before they are filled.
24. You can often find unadvertised jobs by calling employers directly.
41. You should use the Internet to find out something about a business before you apply for a job there.
42. You should never call an employer without a definite job lead.
43. Networking is an effective method for finding employment.
44. Friends and family are often valuable sources of job leads.

Direct Application to Employers.

5. If a question on a job application does not apply to you, you should leave it blank.
6. You should list the kind of job you want on an application.
7. You should write “see resume” on an application if there is not enough space for your answer.

- 8. Completing an application will almost always get you an interview.
- 25. You can complete an application in either pen or pencil.
- 26. You should thoroughly look over an application before writing on it.
- 27. When asked about salary requirements, it is best to write “open” or “negotiable” on an application.
- 28. A lie on an application can be a cause for dismissal if you get the job.
- 45. It is better to e-mail employers than to phone them when making first contact.
- 46. You should prepare what you want to say in advance when contacting employers about job openings.
- 47. When calling about a job, you should always ask to speak to human resources.
- 48. You should always ask to meet with an employer, even if there are no positions currently available.

Resumes and Cover Letters

- 9. It is best to mass-mail resumes to any employers who might have a job available.
- 10. You don’t need to change your resume to submit it electronically.
- 11. Personal information (age, weight, gender) does not belong on a resume.
- 12. Your resume should be general and apply to many different jobs
- 29. Don’t include part-time jobs on a resume, even if they apply directly to your objective.
- 30. If you have not worked for a long time, it’s best to just leave an employment gap on your resume.
- 31. A “functional” resume, which is organized by your skills, is best if you have gaps in employment.

32. You should always list three references at the bottom of your resume.

Employment Interviews

13. You should let the interviewer ask all the questions in a job interview.

14. You should find out as much as you can about an organization before interviewing with them.

15. Neatness and grooming are not important in an interview as long as you are well-qualified.

16. You should not discuss volunteer or other non-paid work experience in an interview.

33. An interview is an excellent opportunity for you to evaluate the employer and the job.

34. All interviews are just one-on-one conversations.

35. It is illegal for an interviewer to ask if you have ever been arrested.

36. When answering interview questions, you should always give specific answers.

53. A portfolio is a valuable way to showcase your skills and experience.

54. In an interview, you should not be afraid to speak negatively about former employers.

55. It is acceptable to pause for a few seconds and gather your thoughts before answering interview questions.

56. First impressions are not as important as your work experience in an interview.

Following Up

17. You should never send a thank-you note over e-mail.

18. You should ask for a written description of any job you've been offered.

- 19. If an interview goes well, you don't need to send a follow-up letter.
- 20. You should wait several days after an interview before sending a thank-you note.
- 37. You should always send a thank-you letter to all the people who interview you.
- 38. After an interview, you should always wait for the employer to contact you first.
- 39. Follow-up letters give you another chance to convince employers that you are right for the job.
- 40. Only people who are applying for high-level jobs can negotiate salary and benefits.
- 57. The only negotiable part of a job offer is your salary.
- 58. If you want a job and are offered it in an interview, you should accept it on the spot.
- 59. You can use the Internet to determine the salary range for a job you are interested in.
- 60. Always ask for less money than you want so employers do not think you are taking a job just for the money.

APPENDIX B

This appendix represents the means of collecting data on the assessment.

EDC ID#: _____

Age: _____

Race: _____

Gender: _____

Education (yrs.): _____ Special Ed. (circle if yes)

Work Hx (Y/N): _____ Competitive (circle if yes)

Primary disability: _____

JSKS Pre-test (# correct)

Section 1: _____

Section 2: _____

Section 3: _____

Section 4: _____

Section 5: _____

Total: _____

JSKS Post-test (# correct)

Section 1: _____

Section 2: _____

Section 3: _____

Section 4: _____

Section 5: _____

Total: _____

APPENDIX C

This appendix includes a copy of the consent form used for the research study.

I, Daniel Joutras, am a graduate student at Southern Illinois University. We are conducting a research project on Job Search Knowledge to evaluate the effectiveness of a Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Program. This research project will be conducted in a pre-test/post-test (test/re-test) format. Both sessions will take approximately twenty minutes each.

Participants will be those persons referred by the state Department of Human Services for vocational evaluation and who are at least 18 years of age or older. Participation in this study is voluntary. Completion and return of the scales indicates voluntary consent to participate in this study. If at any time a participant decides not to continue, participants may withdraw from the study without prejudice. A subject's decision to participate or not participate in the research will not affect the EDC services to which they are otherwise entitled.

All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the identity of all participants. The following measures will be taken to maintain confidentiality: in lieu of confidential identifying information, the assigned facility number will be used to identify each participant; the list will be kept in a file cabinet in a separate office; only the researcher will have access to the list and the gathered data; upon completion of the study, the list will be destroyed via shredder.

Questions or concerns regarding the study can be directed to the following persons:

Daniel Joutras	Dr. William Crimando	Jack R. Musgrave
Graduate Student Researcher	Professor	Facility Supervisor
Rehabilitation Institute	Rehabilitation Institute	EDC
Southern Illinois University	Southern Illinois University	500C Lewis Ln.
Carbondale, IL 62901	Carbondale, IL 62901	Carbondale, IL 62901
618-453-6397	618-536-7704	618-453-6328

By my signature below, I attest that I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Participant

Date

**This project has been reviewed by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your right as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone 618-453-4533. Email siuhsc@siu.edu

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Daniel L. Joutras

djoutras@siccm.com

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Bachelor of Science, Rehabilitation Services, May 2008

Research Paper:

The Job Search Knowledge Scale: Assessing Consumers of a CARF Exemplary-rated Vocational Evaluation Program

Major Professor: Dr. William Crimando