12-1-2011

Research to Practice: Improving Job Development Through Training and Mentorship

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ICI

Research to Practice

December 2011
Issue No. 51

Improving Job Development Through Training and Mentorship

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What was the purpose of this study?

Prior research suggests that employment consultants who provide job development support do not consistently use the most promising practices in their field[1]. These practices include involving family and friends in the job search, using job restructuring or job creation to expand employment opportunities, negotiating with employers, and using planning strategies that emphasize choice, empowerment, and an effective job match.

The purpose of this study was to validate a curriculum based on these promising practices for a training and mentoring program that targeted employment consultants. The curriculum was designed to improve employment consultants' effectiveness in assisting job seekers with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) in finding individual paid employment.

We addressed the following research question: Did employment consultants who attended training on individualized job-development strategies and follow-up mentoring assist more job seekers in gaining individual paid employment, compared to employment consultants who did not attend this training and mentoring program?

What training and mentoring did employment consultants receive?

The curriculum drew from emerging and best practices in supported and customized employment. Major areas addressed included strategies to identify job seekers' skills, abilities, interests, and support needs; strategies to implement individualized career planning; strategies to market to employers, address their business needs, and match the interests and abilities of job seekers with needs of individual businesses; and strategies to negotiate with employers and build relationships with the business community.

Training employed a number of teaching methods, including lecture, discussion, interactive group exercises, and community-based exercises. Training participants also engaged in individual mentoring sessions one and three months after the training seminar. These sessions were held at a place of the employment consultant's choosing, such as at their office or at a community employer.

The purpose of the individual mentoring was to provide one-on-one instruction and guidance to the training participants. Several employment consultants wanted to talk about the successes of the clients they were working with, the relationships they had with employers in the community, and the challenges they were facing in finding individuals work. The mentoring session gave the individual an opportunity to talk about their experience in their job and how the training may or may not have helped them perform in their job.

Finally, long-distance assistance was encouraged and made available; participants could reach the trainer by way of telephone or email to address professional issues. All participants in the intervention group received a training manual that included presentation materials, resources, handouts, useful websites, and forms that could be employed in their professional practice.

[1] Migliore, A., Butterworth, J., Nord, D., Cox, M., & Gelb, A. (In press). Implementation of job-development practices. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

How was the study carried out?

The study used an experimental research design with random assignment of employment consultants to either an intervention or control group. In the spring of 2009, we asked the directors of 25 programs in Connecticut and Minnesota to identify up to four employment consultants from each program. The directors identified 84 employment consultants, all of whom were mailed a baseline survey. Among other questions, the survey asked for the number of job seekers with IDD assisted in finding employment during the 12 months prior to the survey.

In June 2009, a total of 39 employment consultants in the intervention group attended a three-day training followed by two onsite individual mentoring sessions and six months of access to phone or email support. One year after the three-day training, in July 2010, all employment consultants were asked to report the number of job seekers with IDD who found employment during the preceding 12 months. Then we provided the same training and mentoring modules to the consultants in the control group.

Of the 84 employment consultants enrolled, only 54 resulted to be eligible for participation and only 33 provided valid data yielding a response rate of 61%. Reasons for not being eligible included reporting zero placements at baseline or reporting that job development was no longer a job duty.

How were the data analyzed?

The valid data from the 33 employment consultants were analyzed to assess whether there was a difference in the outcomes of the intervention and control groups after the employment consultants in the intervention group received training. This was done by computing the change in the number of job seekers reported as employed by each employment consultant 12 months after intervention, compared to baseline. Then we computed the average change within each group and run a T-Test to assess whether the average change in the intervention group was different from the average change in the control group.

Employment was defined as working in an individual job that paid at least minimum wage and that entailed working in environments where the majority of co-workers were without disabilities.

What were the findings? Did training lead to better outcomes?

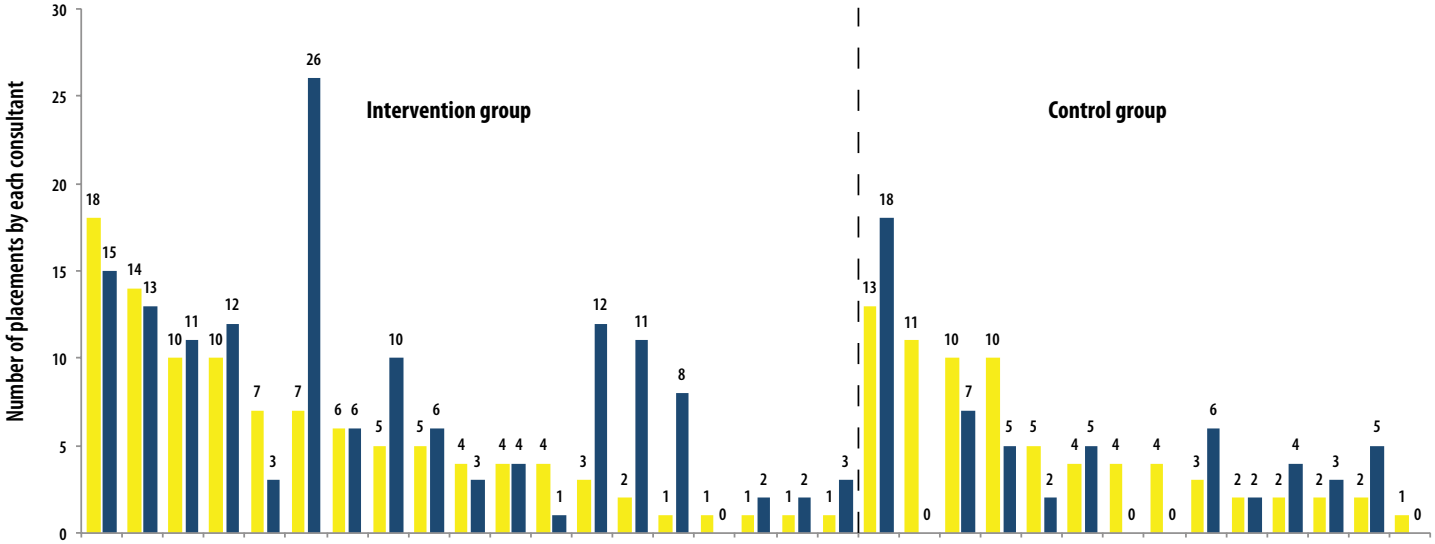
Yes, on average the intervention group outperformed the control group by 3.4 placements per employment consultant. As Table 1 shows, during the one-year period after intervention the employment consultants in the intervention group placed 2.3 more job seekers in employment, on average, compared to their baseline data. During the same period of time, the employment consultants in the control group placed 1.1 fewer job

Table 1. Changes in the number of placements after training, compared to baseline

	Average Change	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Significance (1-tailed)	ES r *	N
Change as a number						
Intervention	2.3	5.5	3.4	.03	.33	19
Control	-1.1	4.2				14
Change as a percentage						
Intervention	105%	203%	110%	.03	.32	19
Control	-5%	85%				14

*Effect Size (ES) 'r' small = .10; medium = .30; large = .50

Figure 1. Number of job seekers placed in employment by each employment consultant



seekers, on average, compared to their baseline data.

The second section of Table 1 shows the average changes as percentages: The employment consultants in the intervention group placed more than twice the number of job seekers (105%) compared to their baseline, whereas employment consultants in the control group placed 5% fewer job seekers compared to their baseline. The effects size (ES) of the differences was medium and all differences were statistically significant at a $p<0.05$ level (1-tailed). Even after removing the outlier who reported 26 placements seen in Figure 1, the consultants in the intervention group outperformed the control group by 2.5 placements, on average, which was still a statistically significant ($p< .05$; 1-tail) medium effect size ($r = .31$).

As seen in Figure 1, however, not all employment consultants in the intervention group reported an increase in their number of placements, and some employment consultants in the control group reported an increase in their number of placements, even though they did not attend training.

As for the quality of the outcomes, we found that the employment consultants in the intervention group reported placements in jobs that paid $0.99 an hour more—on average—compared to the jobs reported by their colleagues in the control group. The effect size of this difference was small, borderline to medium, but it was statistically significant at $p<.10$. Moreover, employment consultants in the intervention group reported placements in jobs that entailed 6.7 more weekly work hours—on average—compared to the jobs reported by their colleagues in the control group. The effect size of this difference was medium and statistically significant at a $p<.05$ level. Table 2 and Table 3 show the characteristics of the eligible employment consultants.

What are the implications of these findings?

The results of this study indicate that as employment support programs look to improve their effectiveness in assisting job seekers with IDD, they should consider training on individualized job-development strategies and follow-up mentoring for their employment consultants. Like the curriculum used in this study, training and mentoring should focus on helping employment consultants improve their competencies in the following areas:

- Understanding job seekers' preferences and skills within a person-centered career planning approach: spending time with job seekers, talking with people who know job seekers well,

observing job seekers in work and non-work environments, using job shadowing or situational assessment, and developing a personal career profile.

- Knowing how to find jobs: researching the local labor market, involving job seekers' personal networks in identifying job leads, using job trials and informational interviews, and developing a job-seeker portfolio.
- Knowing how to connect with employers: exploring employers' needs, developing meaningful proposals, and negotiating customized job descriptions.
- Understanding implications after the hire: identifying and facilitating natural workplace supports, addressing work incentives, and fostering relationships with employers.

The results also indicate that innovative training approaches may be effective only for some employment consultants. We speculate that other factors that may influence employment outcomes include employment providers' priorities, organizational supports available to employment consultants, consultants' personal experiences, funding mechanisms, and job seekers' support needs. To facilitate the implementation of promising job development practices, therefore, it is critical that funding agencies, employment programs, and supervisors organize their activities around the same principles of individualized job-development strategies as those taught to the employment consultants in this study.

What were the limitations and strengths of this study?

We acknowledge that this study had some limitations. For example, the employment programs and the consultants were not randomly selected. Random selection allows more confidence in generalizing the findings beyond

Table 2. Characteristics of the employment consultants—categorical variables (N=54)

	#	%
Gender		
Male	22	48%
Female	24	52%
Total	46	100%
Age group		
Less than 25	3	6%
26-35	14	29%
36-45	9	18%
46-55	17	35%
56 and over	6	12%
Total	49	100%
Race		
White	40	83%
Black or African American	8	17%
Total	48	100%
Ethnicity		
Not Hispanic or Latino	47	100%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%
Total	47	100%
Highest education level		
Some college	11	22%
2-year college	7	14%
4-year college	28	57%
Master's degree	3	6%
Total	49	100%
Annual salary before taxes		
$35,000 or less	22	45%
$35,001 to $45,000	21	43%
$45,001 or more	6	12%
Total	49	100%
Time spent in job development in a typical month		
Less than 25%	10	20%
25% to less than 50%	15	31%
50% to less than 75%	9	18%
75% to less than 100%	6	12%
Full time	9	18%
Total	49	100%

Table 3. Characteristics of the employment consultants and outcomes—scale variables (N=54)

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Years worked as an employment consultant	5.6	5.0	0.3	20.0	46
Years with current employment provider	7.2	7.0	0.5	27.3	45
Typical number of job seekers with IDD on caseload	16.6	13.4	1.0	60.0	47
Job seekers with IDD employed	6.2	8.8	1.0	59.0	48
Of the job seekers employed, percentage with IDD	92%	17%	33%	100%	47
Weekly work hours of job seekers	18.4	9.0	4.0	40.0	47
Hourly earnings of job seekers	$8.53	$2.14	$6.50	$20.00	46

the sample. Another limitation was that the employment data were self-reported. Self-reported data are not always accurate because people may not accurately remember the past. Also, although sample size was sufficient to capture a statistically significant effect, larger samples are always recommended to increase data stability.

Despite these limitations, this study has some important strengths. One is the research design adopted for this study: experimental with random assignment. This is the strongest research design for assessing effectiveness of program implementation. Additionally, the study experienced a high response rate among participating employment consultants, and the implementation of the study was smooth, with no disruption that could have threatened the validity of the findings.

Conclusion

One way to increase the employment rate of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities is to assist them with state-of-the-art individualized job-development strategies. This study shows that training on individualized job-development strategies and follow-up mentoring of employment consultants can help job seekers with disabilities in reaching their employment goals.

Resources

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This publication will be made available in alternate formats upon request.

ICI UMASS BOSTON

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE, Issue No. 51
December 2011

A special thank you goes to all the employment consultants, contact people, and CEOs of the employment programs who graciously addressed all of our data requests. In addition, we would like to thank the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services for helping to connect with the employment programs in Connecticut, Melanie Jordan and Cecilia Gandolfo for developing the curriculum, Monica Cox for data management, and Anya Weber for copyediting.

This study was a joint project that involved the University of Massachusetts Boston, the University of Minnesota, and the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services. John Butterworth was the principal investigator.

This study was supported by a cooperative agreement from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (Grant #H133B080005). The opinions contained in this document are those of the grantees and do not necessarily reflect those of the funding agency. The study was approved by the institutional review boards of the University of Minnesota, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Connecticut Department of Developmental Services.

Suggested Citation

Migliore, A., Butterworth, J., Nord, D., & Gelb, A. (2011). *Improving job development through training and mentorship.* Research to Practice Brief, Issue No. 51. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

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