

IMPLEMENTING PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING

Voices of Experience



EDITED BY

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Vocational Profiles

Anne O'Bryan

An important part of person-centered planning is assuming that most people will be interested in having a full adult life. In our society this includes the expectation of a job and career as a necessary option. Supported employment is a way of ensuring the probable success of that choice.

The Vocational Profile is the person-centered plan used in supported employment. Ideally, supported employment (and Vocational Profile planning) would follow on from broader person centred planning. Thus, an understanding of how someone wants their life to develop in general would naturally contribute to the creation of employment supports to achieve specific career goals. However, for some people with clear employment priorities or even just access to an employment service, supported employment may come before broader life planning. This should not keep someone from additional person-centered planning. People will grow and develop throughout their lives, and planners need to remain involved and flexible. Beginning the career of your dreams will likely lead to raised expectations in other parts of your life, and supports must be available to realize a growing quality of life in each person's home, social relationships, hobbies, leisure, education and lifestyle.

What is supported employment?

There are many definitions of supported employment; this is the one I prefer (O'Bryan et al. 2000):

A person is hired and paid by a real employer.

The job done meets the person's requirements and the employer's required standard.

The person and the employer receive just enough help from a support organization to ensure success.

The supported employment service invests time to learn about each person; their interests, routines, skills and potential skills as well as potential support needs. This makes up each person's Vocational Profile and results in a description of the individual's ideal job. The Vocational Profile aims the supported employment service at the job and career opportunities that reflect the person's prefer-

ences and strengths. It also describes which work places are most likely to naturally provide the required support, such as clear tasks, a supportive atmosphere and helpful co-workers. Once the person has been hired, the service provides a variety of supports to the person and their employer which complement what is naturally offered in the workplace. This support can include teaching someone to walk to work, or to take public transport, or to arrange for a taxi, or to assist the person to find a co-worker willing to provide a regular lift. It will also include ensuring that the employer's induction suits the person and, wherever necessary, supporting the person and the employer to adapt teaching strategies, methods of assistance or the workplace layout. For people with more complex needs, it may also include specific individualized training, such as systematic instruction. Once a person has successfully begun employment and is working independently of their coach, the service's role is to stay in touch with the person and their employer just enough to ensure ongoing success and career advancement.

What should supported employment be like?

The Association for Persons in Supported Employment has developed *Ethical Guidelines for Professionals in Supported Employment* as basic human principles to follow (DiLeo et al):

- People receive assistance as unique individuals with varying interests, preferences and aptitudes.
- There are sufficient options related to each individual's interests and desires in life in order for them to exercise control and autonomy over their life's direction.
- Services are always dignified, age appropriate and enhancing.
- People have the opportunity to actively participate in all their chosen pursuits of life.
- Individuals are provided opportunities to develop skills of interest and use in their lives by discovering their capacities.
- People have access to diverse individuals in social contexts in order to build friendships, working relationships and networks of individuals to share places, interests or experiences.
- Services are designed to support persons in natural settings in ways that minimize artificiality or restriction.
- At all times, the individual receiving supports is the central driving force in the development of options and decisions.

- Employment should be an option for any person interested in working, regardless of label, support need or perceived functioning level.
- Jobs developed reflect personal interests, preferences, abilities and life goals as well as employer needs. The decision to take the job is made by the individual based on reliable information.
- Existing supports natural to the work environment are maximized for training and ongoing support. Best training practices and technology appropriate to the setting and culture are used.
- Efforts to provide a holistic and integrated life service support are made. The individual's family members and friends are involved.
- Persons have the opportunity and support for career advancement that may provide additional responsibilities, compensation and challenge.

How can person-centered planning using the Vocational Profile make a difference?

Many people have described the Vocational Profile process (Callahan and Garner, 1997, McLoughlin et al 1987, DiLeo & McDonald 1993, Leach 2001). The Vocational Profile is a way of gathering information about each person's interests, skills and potential skills (as well as support needs) which aims job developers at the ideal job for each individual. It differs from many traditional employment assessments because it assumes anyone who wants to work is employable. It is at its most effective when seen as an investment to help someone learn about and achieve their career goals. It should not be imposed on people who know what they want and need minimal support to get a job.

This discovery strategy is useful for anyone with complex support needs or past difficulties in achieving successful employment. A relationship between the applicant and employment specialist is built up over time from conversations, observations and spending time together. This relationship results in a comprehensive picture of the job applicant which provides the basis for an individualized job development process. This profile captures what has been discovered and underpins all planning and job development.

Gathering the information

The profiler should use a variety of methods to learn about the person in a variety of environments. A good way to begin is to spend time with the person - talking with them, their family, friends

and staff. Accompanying the person to a variety of work places and community establishments also helps. Observing the person's reactions to people, places, and activities can add information about potential career directions and indicate those most preferred by the person.

Talking to people who know the person well may produce additional information. Discussions can provide important ideas about the person's interests, experiences, habits and skills, especially if these are hidden or no longer practised. Of course, each person should suggest people to contact and give their consent for doing so.

Another way to gather information is through short job tryouts in a variety of real work places. Tryouts should take no longer than two weeks and may take no more than two hours - whatever time it takes to find out the person's interest in the particular job and level of comfort with the particular workplace atmosphere. Job-related preferences, stamina and speed can be observed, helping to narrow down types of settings, jobs and co-workers. On-the-job learning can also be explored, resulting in ideas for aids, adaptations and training strategies where needed.

Developing the Profile

Listening to and learning with the job applicant is an important part of developing the knowledge to support job and career success. However, a clear, attainable written vision is necessary to realize future success. The information is recorded in everyday language in sections that relate to the person's preferences, experiences, skills and support needs. These factors then influence the development of a job that is well suited to the person. McLoughlin et al suggest the outline on the facing page.

These elements guide employment specialists to develop a job that reflects the interests, skills, potential skills, resources, hopes and supports available to a person. Recent focus on self-determination encourages vocational profilers to prioritise a person's preferences over the more static information gathered in other areas and to assist people to complete the profiles themselves (Wehmeyer 1992, Martin et al 1993, Kilsby and Beyer 2002). The profile does not follow a rigid formula but rather focuses attention on all areas which may help the person explore what is already there to assist them to become a successful employee. Where there are gaps in the profile, the employment specialist can work with the person to identify strategies to develop the

Vocational Profile Outline

Personal

family and friends in the person's life
support available through these relationships
neighbourhood description including available services, transport and employment
detailed description of how the person currently spends their time (e.g. 7:00 am - 10:00 pm)

Educational

school history and achievements
work training achievements
use of community resources
recreation and leisure training and achievements

Experience of Work

formal and informal work performed at home or for others
sheltered employment
paid work

Present skills

domestic (personal care, home care)
community (using shops and services, transportation)
recreation and leisure
academic (reading, maths, time, money)
mobility (walking, sitting, lifting, carrying)
sensory (hearing, sight)
communication
social interaction
physical health
vocational

Learning and performance characteristics and preferences

ways the person learns best
helpful adaptations
preferred length of instruction
preferences for working alone or as part of a team

Preferences

types of work the person wants to do
what the person enjoys doing at home
observations of the kinds of work the person likes best
observations of the types of social situations the person likes best

Connections

potential employers amongst family, friends or neighbours
family or friend contacts for employer leads

Flexibility or accommodations that may be required

habits and routines,
specific preferences for hours, location, work environment, compensation, transport, co-workers, adaptations and assistance
physical/health requirements
communication and behavioural support requirements

profile further. The completed profile helps aim the job developer at the ideal employment situation for the person.

Using the Vocational Profile

Carol is a woman labelled as having a severe disability who at age 30 lived in a long stay hospital in London. At that time she received an Industrial Therapy Assessment which summarized previous Health Care reports. The assessment reported that Carol had shown little or no interest in activities and that she became very agitated and generally disruptive in work situations. Because Carol uses a wheelchair, the assessors decided that most packaging tasks in the sheltered workshop were not suitable and assigned her to place completed bags of parts into big boxes. The way Carol responded to this assignment led the assessors to conclude that she was unsure about what to do, reluctant to complete the task, and required constant prompts. Eventually, she got so agitated that it was necessary to remove her from the situation. The assessors summarized Carol's work potential this way:

Carol is unsuitable for this type of work and probably any type of work which requires her to produce at a consistent level. She seemed to have little understanding of what was required and displayed little interest. She is unable to work in a busy environment where others need to concentrate. Her concentration level is very low as she was easily distracted away from the task and appeared at various times to be staring into space. The offer of a cup of tea on completion of the task proved not to be an incentive despite the fact that Carol is usually rewarded with a cup of tea for good behavior.

Carol has now worked for four years in an office that manages school meals. She is involved in organizing the menus, developing promotional campaigns for the children and sending out all correspondence. Reflecting her sense of her self, she is pleased to be a member of a lively team of well-dressed individuals. Her success, which began with the creation of a careful vocational profile which is summarized on following pages, demonstrates the falsity of pessimistic expectations.

A look at the Carol who shines through the vocational profile shows that the conditions of her previous assessment couldn't help but justify pessimistic predictions about her ability to hold a real job. To produce new results, we need new ways of understanding who people are.

Key Points from Carol's Vocational Profile

Domestic information

Carol has strong connections to her parents and her aunt. While they are elderly and would not be able to provide support on a daily basis, their support of the employment process will be important to Carol.

Carol lives with 3 other people with learning difficulties. She wakes to an alarm clock, bathes and dresses with support and attends a day centre 5 days a week. She leaves for the day centre at 8:30 and returns at 3:45. Carol watches TV for relaxation and receives communication support from a Speech Therapist at home. At 7:00 she shares her evening meal with her housemates, then watches soaps until she goes to bed at 10:15.

Carol is close to her key worker, but has not developed friendships with the people she lives with. She occasionally attends the local Gateway club [a social club for people with learning difficulties].

Currently Carol uses the swimming pool and leisure facilities every week. She particularly enjoys shoe shops and is well known by all the sales people. Carol also enjoys going out at night to the local theatre or cinema and for a meal at a restaurant or drink at a particular pub.

Carol lives in a quiet residential area of similar properties that border on a large community park. Most amenities are a short bus ride away. There is a popular shopping centre within easy reach and a wide range of public services, including libraries, swimming pools and colleges. Bus and rail services are available and travel is easy. Carol has her own car and all staff are registered as drivers.

All types of employment are available near Carol's home, including retail, public service, private sector manufacturing, transport and all the service industries.

Educational information

Staff have focused on basic living skills since Carol was a child. Carol undertook light industrial work in industrial therapy and at a day centre. When she was clear about the purpose, she was keen and enthusiastic about the work. When she did not understand what was required, she had difficulty in the work setting.

Work experience

The profiler developed his knowledge about Carol's work by spending time with her at home and by finding out about the specific tasks she had done at the day centre and at a local cafe once a week. Carol is extremely particular about her room and possessions. Her clothing is always clean and pressed. Carol does a lot of ironing for herself and others. The house vacuum cleaner has been adapted to clip on to her chair so that she can vacuum the downstairs. At the day centre Carol packaged drainpipe pieces for a local manufacturer. At the cafe she provided a washing and ironing service.

Present skills

Carol is able to use one hand, her head and chin to dress, clean and do some cooking.

She uses accessible facilities and prefers longer bus or car rides because it takes her quite a while to get in and out of the vehicle.

She has acute hearing and vision and takes a keen interest in everything happening

around her. She communicates very effectively with a Rhebus book and some Makaton [a form of sign language].

Carol's strength of personality makes her well liked. She usually has a relaxed manner and lets people know if something is bothering her. She is rarely ill and is enthusiastic about working.

Being around lots of people in a busy warm environment enhances Carol's learning and performance. She learns fast, usually with just a demonstration. She prefers to then try the task herself with support provided only when she requests it. She does need support to get to and from work.

Carol feels pain if the temperature in her environment drops below legal standards for warmth.

Work preferences

Carol wants to work near or with computers.

Her appearance is important to her and she enjoys being with glamorous people of her own age.

Her parents think a busy office environment would suit her.

Carol is very social and primarily likes doing things with others.

She is interested in TV soaps and music on the radio.

At home she organises bills, insurance forms and other correspondence into piles in her room.

She also enjoys ironing.

Connections

Carol's connections are most likely to come from the potential employers near her home. There are many public and private sector administrative opportunities.

Flexibility and accommodations

Carol's place of employment must be warm and wheelchair accessible. There must be enough space for her to get around and all tasks must be in easy reach.

Carol will need support for all personal care.

Occasionally she may lose concentration and require a gentle touch on her right hand and a point back to her work. Carol needs clear instructions and may need support to return to work from her tea break as she has a passion for cups of tea.

She will work slowly while she is learning tasks and should not be put under pressure to speed up while learning.

Carol receives Benefits and she will require excellent benefit advice in order for her to earn an income as well as continue to be healthy and safe.

Ideal job

Working in a large office with a very social team of fashionable people of her own age.

How do we greatly increase the number of people at work?

Sadly, Carol is an exception. She is one of a growing but still far too small number of people with learning difficulties who have the support they need to hold real jobs (DoH, 1999).

A person's postal address is the strongest predictor of whether she will have the same opportunity as Carol. In some places, employment specialists are committed to seeing past labels and difficult personal histories to discover the capabilities, interests, and supports that make for success at work. Global assessments of severity of disability become insignificant as specific details of the exact assistance a person needs come into focus. Once the ideal job and the necessary supports can be clearly specified, people can work together to overcome the many barriers that still stand between people with learning difficulties and real jobs.

England's government has set a clear objective in *Valuing People*, its policy statement on supports to people with learning disabilities [intellectual and developmental disabilities]:

Moving into Employment To enable more people with learning disabilities to participate in all forms of employment, whenever possible in paid work, and to make a valued contribution to the world of work.

Making progress toward this objective calls for big changes in the ways agencies relate to each other and in the way the benefits system works for people. But these changes will only make a difference if people and families and service organizations can find what they need to get people to work (see O'Bryan, Simons, Beyer, & Grove, 2000) .

People and their families need

Good information about what job and support options are currently available in their area.

The expectation of all professionals that most people will wish to have a career and that it is possible for people to have satisfying jobs and careers in ordinary community workplaces.

Job coaches and other champions who will find out each person's ideal job and develop job and career opportunities from which people can choose.

Job coaches and other champions who will work with government people, such as New Deal Job Brokers and Benefit Advisors [staff

in generic agencies responsible for helping people get work], to successfully support people into the work they want.

Good chances to influence local developments and decisions which will affect people's job and career opportunities.

Service organizations need

Adequate long term funding aimed at career success for people, including people with significant needs for assistance.

Clear policies that define the organization's purpose in terms of assisting people to work in real jobs and focus their energy on the kind of individualized job development and support that Carol's situation exemplifies.

Support from a network of other practitioners and researchers and people with disabilities at work to get around barriers such as the benefit trap.

Effective ways to continuously improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their practice. (The Quality Network, 1998).

Conclusion

Person-centered planning, in the form of a vocational profile, provides the necessary link between policy objectives and real life. Competently constructed vocational profiles provide the foundation for facing and dealing with the many problems that keep people from work, one person at a time. As service reforms take hold, fewer of these problems will be generated by government policy and agency practice. This will make the work of developing good jobs easier, but it will not diminish the importance of planning thoughtfully with each person.

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