USING PRESENTATION PORTFOLIOS FOR EFFECTIVE
JOB REPRESENTATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

This paper describes the development and field-testing of a presentation portfolio, a job development tool for individuals with disabilities. The portfolio was developed with significant input from the vocational rehabilitation field and employers. Findings indicate that the portfolio could be an effective tool for job development.

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Introduction

It is widely recognized that individuals with disabilities represent the largest unemployed minority in the nation. Only 3 in 10 working age (18-64) people with disabilities are employed full or part-time compared with eight in 10 working age people without disabilities. Over the past 15 years, the disability population has become more severely disabled, and in turn, those who say they are unable to work due to their disability have grown from 29% to 43%. And yet overwhelmingly, these individuals say they want to work. (Harris Poll, NOD, 2000).

Supported employment and self-determination initiatives have clearly assisted people with disabilities to access employment. By developing innovative approaches to individualized planning, job development, job analysis/technology, and employer-directed job site supports, professionals in the field are putting together the tools needed to assist people with disabilities to reach their employment goals.

However, there remain those waiting for the opportunity to be included in work. One of the most compelling reasons for the lack of inclusion in the employment community lies with job development (Callahan & Garner, 1997, Sowers & Powers, 1994). A significant issue for people with severe disabilities seeking employment and for professionals assisting them continues to be how to approach employers and how to effectively represent the strengths and potential contributions of an applicant. (Sowers & Powers, 1995). This is further complicated when the person is unable to effectively and clearly represent themselves during an interview (Callahan & Garner, 1997). Because of the complexity of disability barriers, especially communication barriers, these individuals often have difficulty representing themselves to employers in

interview situations. Interviews are a critical (and often the deciding) factor in hiring. Unfortunately, individual job applicants and job developers are often unsure how to approach an employer if the applicant isn't able to effectively communicate (and thus effectively compete) during an interview situation.

Job development appears as the "bottleneck" in the effort to assist people with disabilities into work. The lack of tools that focus on representing strengths and potential contributions of an applicant through job negotiation, carving, and/or creating, and the lack of other forms of technical assistance in this area creates the "bottleneck" that prevents people from achieving employment. Some generic labor-market-focused job development materials are available, however these general methods do not solve the puzzle. Most focus on identifying and interviewing for existing and available job slots. Recent materials emphasize ways to structure an employment program to resemble an employment agency by focusing on job openings and matching an applicant to an existing job description, rather than putting the applicant first and attempting to find an individualized position that matches their unique contributions and preferences. In this day of hi-tech, on-line job searching, job developers can be seduced into connecting themselves and individuals with disabilities to the internet, thinking this will solve the problem of job development. However, these hi-tech approaches rarely meet the needs of people with disabilities. They lack the individual approach that focuses on an applicant's contributions and an employer's needs. Past experience has shown that the magic of the face-to-face meeting between the individual or his/her representative and the employer is what creates job opportunities for people with disabilities

The need remains for products and effective representation techniques to use with potential employers in ways that emphasize the applicant's strengths and their potential

contribution to a work environment. Available products and other materials often address the issue of preparing the applicant for the interview, but do not address strategies for significant representation on behalf on an applicant (Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke & Barcus, 1990; Brooke, Inge, Armstrong, Wehman, 1997; Callahan & Garner, 1997). Compounding the issues is the confusion and disagreement within the field as to how to balance the pure sales/marketing aspect of job development with the human/individualized perspective of representation (Hagner & DiLeo, 1993). The need exists for techniques and strategies that can bridge the gap between high cost, emotionally charged sales techniques and the employment needs of persons with disabilities.

Callahan and Garner in *Keys to the Workplace*, talk about the need for presentation materials that have the effectiveness of a slide presentation. Photographs are able to communicate a message in ways that words never will. In looking to other professions for effective presentation strategies, the use of portfolios by sales representatives and others who use this presentation technique in order to get their message across has proven very successful. The question was asked. "Why not use this same approach in job development and representation of people with disabilities?"

A literature search found little evidence that presentation portfolios were being used outside of school transition programs. In some special education districts, part of an individual's transition plan includes the development of a portfolio that has certificates, resumes, letters of reference, and in a few cases, photos. But the literature search found no evidence that portfolios were being used for people beyond school. There were a few job developers who were using portfolios to represent individuals when other approaches weren't working. This usually occurred when the individuals being represented were persons with significant and multiple

disabilities. Employers reacted very positively and in one case, a job was secured after the first meeting.

What Is a Presentation Portfolio?

A presentation portfolio is a "sales approach", a marketing tool that is value-supported and individually customized for each applicant. It provides a flow or outline for a presentation by a job developer. An effective portfolio is based on a perspective that is centered on individualization, discovery, and representation. It presents a positive visual description of people with disabilities at work.

The portfolio should incorporate language that describes the role of an agency in securing employment for a specific individual based on the natural way an employer does things.   Text pages describing the phases and steps used in supported employment are followed by photographs of people at work that illustrate the text message. Photographs can depict people being supported by job coaches, co-workers, and supervisors. They represent people in negotiated jobs, in carved jobs, and in created jobs, providing examples of successful job placements. The pictures give an employer a visual description of people in several jobs, assisting them in being able to picture a person in their own work place. Examples of photographs and text are presented in Figures 1 through 5.

Insert all figures about here

A portfolio can have two very distinct sections, one a generic section that illustrates many different people with disabilities in many different jobs and most importantly, a section on the individual to be represented during job development. Using two different sections allows an

employer to see people with disabilities in jobs in other workplaces in the community, some that he/she might know and then provides the story and information about the specific individual being represented. Pictures and text of the potential applicant represent a visual resume that communicates the best of the individual in ways that words cannot do. Pictures should communicate the individual's preferences and choices as well as describe the way the individual goes about accomplishing tasks, interacting with others, and "having a life". This provides the employer with a comprehensive and positive picture of the potential employee and allows them to see just how that individual will contribute to their worksite.

Creating Portfolios

Portfolios are easily compiled. Using an easel-type binder, photos are assembled and arranged with text pages to communicate the message and story. Both photos and text pages can be generated on a computer and printed with an inkjet printer. Photos can be scanned or can be processed onto a disc, then printed into an 8x10 inch format. This creates an inexpensive but professional looking tool.

Creating a generic set of photos that depict an array of individuals with disabilities in different jobs allows for employers to see the possibilities of people. It creates a visual endorsement from existing local employers to use when approaching new employers. This generic set of photos and accompanying text can be used over and over again.

Customizing the portfolio for representation on behalf of a specific applicant is just as easily accomplished. Photographs can be taken of the individual that communicate what they want, what they are good at, what they are already doing, and the way they do it. By using 5 or 6 strategic photos, an applicant and his/her abilities and contribution can be effectively represented

to an employer. Letters of reference, certificates or other materials can also be added for support.

The UCPA Portfolio Presentation Project

In 19__, the United Cerebral Palsy Associations entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to develop and field-test a presentation portfolio for use by supported employment programs. The remainder of this paper will describe the steps undertaken to validate the portfolio developed under this agreement.

Validating the Portfolio

A draft copy of the presentation portfolio was developed as described previously in this paper. This draft was presented at a meeting of rehabilitation professionals for their comments related to format, layout, sequencing, quality of photographs, clarity of message, etc. Following this meeting, the two primary authors made revisions to the portfolio to create a version for pilot-testing with employers, and also videotaped a presentation which was subsequently used as a training tool in pilot-testing and field-testing.

The pilot-testing was conducted in ten cities across the U.S. Community rehabilitation programs in those cities were solicited to conduct focus groups with employers with whom they have long-standing relationships, such as hiring a substantial number of consumers or serving on a business advisory board. After viewing each page of the portfolio, the participants were requested to rate the page using a 5-point Likert scale, and to provide additional comments. Following the completion of this exercise, the participants also engaged in directed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the demonstration. These sessions were videotaped. The two

primary authors used the scoring forms and the taped comments to further modify the presentation to a field-test version.

Field-testing occurred in __ cities, again using community rehabilitation programs. Each program was contracted to complete at least 10 presentations to employers in their area, then provide the employer with a feedback form. This form first requested general information about the type and size of the business, the demographics of the respondent, and previous experience with individuals with disabilities either personally or in the workplace. A summary of the sample is presented in Table 1. The second section of the form was a list of positive statements regarding the portfolio and the presentation, to which the respondent designated level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree." The list of statements is presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 1 about here

For the convenience of the respondent, the feedback form was designed in the form of a stamped, addressed, self-sealing mailer. This also allowed the form to be completed by the respondent anonymously and outside the presence of the presenter. Of the ___ presentations made, a total of 127 usable surveys were returned, for a response rate of __%.

Results from the Field-Test

Table 2 presents a summary of the responses to field-test survey items. As can be seen in this table, on most items respondents were overwhelmingly in agreement with the positive statements regarding the portfolio and the presentation. Over 80% indicated that they "agreed

somewhat" or "totally agreed" with five of the eight statements that focused on the quality of the presentation, the expertise of the presenter, and general impressions of workers with disabilities.

Insert Table 2 about here

The respondents were somewhat less positive about statements that asked them to make assumptions about their future actions as a result of viewing the portfolio. Between 71% and 76% either somewhat agreed or totally agreed that the presentation either (a) made them more comfortable about having employees with disabilities, (b) made them feel that there were jobs in their business that could be performed by people with disabilities, or (c) would motivate them to contact a rehabilitation agency to discuss hiring someone with disabilities.

Conclusion

Presentation portfolios represent a new tool in the "kit bag" of job developers. Its effectiveness depends on individual discovery and planning for employment and on individual representation. It will not replace other strategies, but will work to compliment their effectiveness when incorporated into a process based on individualized value and contribution.

The findings from the UCPA Portfolio Presentation Project showed that this could be an effective marketing tool for job developers. Employers were very positive after viewing the presentation regarding the informational value of the portfolio. They were somewhat less positive about the impact of the presentation on their future behaviors related to hiring persons with disabilities. It should be noted that these survey items requested the respondents to surmise possible future behavior related to hiring workers with disabilities, and did not attempt to monitor actual behavior.

The data derived from field-testing the portfolio did not allow for statistical analysis across respondent demographics, business types, or prior experiences with persons with disabilities. This was due to insufficient variability of the data. This is a positive statement regarding the potential value of the portfolio, in that responses were heavily positive on all the survey items. Future research on this tool should be directed toward gaining a better understanding the types of employers, positions, and consumers for whom the portfolio approach is beneficial in job development.

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Size of respondents' businesses

Mean = 817 employees

Small (15 and under)	23.2%
Medium (16 to 100)	27.4%
Large (over 100)	49.5%

Respondent sex

Male	40.5%
Female	59.5%

Respondent race

African-American	12.4%
Caucasian	87.6%

Respondent age

Mean = 39.7

Prior experiences with people with disabilities

Have hired or supervised a worker with a similar disability	51.2%
Have a family member who has a similar disability	25.2%
Know someone who has a similar disability	59.5%

Table 2

Summary of Responses to Field-Test Survey Items

Items	Totally disagree	Disagree somewhat	Neutral	Agree somewhat	Totally agree
The Portfolio accurately illustrated for me the work capabilities of people with disabilities.	1.6%	5.5%	3.9%	41.7%	47.2%
The Portfolio clearly described to me the work supports that people with disabilities might need.	3.1%	7.9%	8.7%	37.0%	43.3%
After listening to the presentation, I understand the process that may be used to support workers with disabilities in a business.	1.6%	3.9%	4.7%	31.5%	58.3%
The presenter was familiar with the Portfolio.	0.8%	0%	1.6%	15.7%	81.9%
The presenter appeared to have a positive attitude about people with disabilities.	0.8%	0%	0%	7.1%	92.1%
After listening to the presentation, I feel more comfortable about having employees with disabilities like those in the Portfolio.	0.8%	0.8%	27.6%	26.0%	44.9%
After listening to the presentation, I feel that there are jobs in my business that can be performed by people with disabilities like those in the Portfolio.	2.4%	3.1%	22.0%	37.8%	34.6%
After listening to the presentation, I will be more likely to consider hiring a person with a disability.	1.6%	3.1%	18.9%	33.9%	42.5%