

The Revised Position Paper of The Interdisciplinary Council on Vocational Evaluation and Assessment

Samuel Castiglione, D.Ed
VECAP Representative and Facilitator for the Council
Baltimore, MD
Pamela F. Leconte, Ed.D.
George Washington University
Frances G. Smith, Ed.D.
Recognizing Differences, LLC
George Washington University

The Interdisciplinary Council on Vocational Evaluation and Assessment is a national coalition that represents the issues and concerns of personnel involved in vocational evaluation and assessment across a variety of settings and disciplines.

Background

Eleven organizations that came together to express concerns and build consensus from 1989 to 1993 (Smith & Schuster, 1993; Schuster & Smith, 1994) comprised this coalition. They published a consensus of their work as a National Position Paper (Smith, Lombard, Neubert, Leconte, Rothenbacher & Sitlington, 1994, 1996). Several of the initial organizations have since disbanded.

Starting in late 2016, representatives of several of the existing organizations agreed to renew and expand the Interdisciplinary Council. In early 2017 all the existing and new organizations were invited to make comments and suggest revisions to an online draft of the original document. On October 24, 2017 members offered comments/revision either in-person or via virtual presence during a Symposium at Atlantic Beach, N.C., the day prior to the National Forum on Issues in Vocational Evaluation. After incorporating all the proffered ideas, in an October 2017 draft, and after further opportunities to comment in December 2017 and January-March 2018, a final version of the Revised Position Paper is offered for dissemination.

This revised paper, in addition to re-affirming the basic principles of the original, strives to include attention to: the four paradigms (individualization, empowerment, cultural considerations and assistive technology) of the Thirtieth IRI (Thirtieth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues [IRI], 2003), the place of Universal Design for Learning in assessment, the rise of computer/internet assessment, and to ethics in practice.

The organizations invited in 2017 to participate in and renew this coalition include:
American Board of Vocational Experts (ABVE)
American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADRA)
American Evaluation Association (AEA)

American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)^{1*}
American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA)*
Commission of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)
Council for Educational Diagnostic Services (CEDS)*
Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT)*
International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP)
National Association of Disability Evaluation Professionals (NADEP)*
National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)*
National Community of Practice on Transition (NCoPT)
National Counseling and Development Association (NCDA)
Registry of Professional Vocational Evaluators (RPVE)
Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals Association (VECAP)*
Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association (VEWAA)*

The Interdisciplinary Council seeks to promote, through a unified voice, the responsible practice of vocational evaluation and assessment by encouraging advocacy, professional standards, communication, leadership and policy development, all of which enhance the overall provision of best practice (*see Appendices A for Definitions and B for Levels of Assessment*).

Goals of this Interdisciplinary Council

- Provide an avenue for linkages among disciplines
- Facilitate a unified voice regarding certification, policy development, and legislation
- Promote professional standards of practice
- Advance the development of common language and definitions while recognizing diversity among disciplines
- Promote significant individual participation in the development and implementation of vocational evaluation and assessment practices
- Provide a forum to discuss key concerns in the field and share information across disciplines
- Encourage the establishment of unified quality assurance in practice and outcome
- Promote public education and advocacy for vocational evaluation and assessment
- Advocate for support and funding of education and training in vocational evaluation and assessment.

¹ An asterisk * denotes one of the original organizations that developed the first Position Paper in 1994.

Scope of Services

Vocational evaluation and assessment are professional disciplines which utilize systematic appraisal processes to identify an individual's vocational potential. Individuals range from school-aged youth to senior adults who are making career decisions or vocational transitions. The vocational evaluation and assessment professional provides services to identify, observe, and document an individual's strengths, interests, values, temperaments, work-related behaviors, aptitudes and skills, physical capacities, learning preferences and education and training needs. When applied to high school students, assessment data provide educators and staff, students, parents and other service providers with valid information to guide educational plans and career development, inform transition assessments and promote a smooth exit from high school to employment and postsecondary opportunities.

Underlying Values

The foundation of vocational evaluation and assessment is that all human assessment should be holistic, humanistic and equitable. A holistic approach encompasses issues of diversity, all relevant attributes of the individual, his/her existing or potential environments (ecologies), and the interactions between the individual and the environments. A humanistic approach to vocational evaluation and assessment requires an individual's involvement, informed choice, and self-determination, and processes that are designed and implemented to benefit the individual served with an emphasis on individual capabilities and strengths. Equitable services ensure that each individual is treated fairly – whatever one needs to complete the assessment process in a non-discriminatory way is what he or she should receive. Further, the environment should fit the individual rather than the individual adjusting to fit the vocational environment.

Guiding Principles

The following eight principles serve as guides to best practice across settings.

- A variety of methods, tools and approaches should be used to provide accurate vocational evaluation and assessment. A broad range of questions must be posed to determine what type/level of assessment is required to uncover an individual's unique abilities and needs and to customize the process. Individual self-determination is enhanced by incorporating the individual's questions and goals into the initial planning to help drive the process. Attention to possible cultural influences should be explicit before and during the evaluation and assessment. Assessment professionals remain aware of advantages, disadvantages and research findings regarding current computerized/web-based and evolving distance, and virtual reality assessments.
- Vocational evaluation and assessment information should be verified by using different methods, tools, and approaches for each domain of investigation. Separating an individual's attributes into domains such as interest, aptitude, or learning preferences helps organize the assessment. Using alternative methods or approaches to validate findings can primarily be achieved by a *triangulated* process: a) observing an individual's demonstrated or manifested behaviors, such as performances on actual work; b) using an individual's self-report or expressed statements; and/or c) administering some type of survey, inventory or structured interview or test.

- Behavioral observation is essential in any vocational assessment process. Behavioral observation (e.g., observing physical performance, social characteristics, interactions with people and other aspects of the environment) occurs throughout the assessment process. The observation process can be a) informal or formal, b) occur in a variety of environments, c) made by a variety of people, with sensitivity to possible cultural influences, and d) should be documented and presented in an objective, non-biased manner.
- Vocational evaluation and assessment may involve on-going developmental processes in career development. However, all individuals, especially those with disabilities, challenges, or barriers, may need evaluations and/or assessments of varying degrees given at different junctures over their career life-span. Incorporating Universal Design for Learning in Vocational Evaluation (UDL in VE) [which entails multiple means of: representation, expression and engagement] into the planning and implementation of evaluation and assessment processes (Smith, Leconte & Vitelli, 2012), and thoughtfully considering and applying additional Assistive Technology (AT) when needed (Smith, Leconte, Garner & Umeasiegbu, 2015) can promote equity, fairness, and usability of results.
- Vocational evaluation and assessment should be an integral part of larger service delivery systems. Vocational evaluation and assessment should be the basis for planning needed services, resources and support; therefore, it can be an integral part of the total service delivery system. Evaluation and assessment professionals know and follow their own codes of ethics as well as recognize the ethical demands on collaborating professionals.
- Vocational evaluation and assessment requires the collection of input from a variety of individuals and requires an understanding of how to use the results of the assessment process. An interdisciplinary team approach allows for the effective use of information which can be translated into effective planning, implementation activities (e.g., placement, support services, counseling), and fulfilled vocational development for consumers. Vocational evaluation and assessment results should be interpreted and conveyed to the individual as well as others in language that is understandable to all. Benefits of this process are optimal when started as early as possible in the developmental process and extended throughout the adult service delivery process.
- Vocational evaluation and assessment should be current, cross-validated, and relevant to be useful.
- Vocational evaluation and assessment is grounded in career, vocational and work contexts.

Competencies

The Interdisciplinary Council on Vocational Evaluation and Assessment strongly recommends that all individuals providing vocational evaluation and assessment services demonstrate competency or successful completion of training in competencies related to each of the guiding principles identified in this document. They include the following:

- The ability to apply ethical principles in the selection, adaptation with accommodations and modifications, and/or development of methods and approaches which are useful in determining an individual's attributes, abilities, and needs. This

includes incorporating AT, UDL in VE, and cultural sensitivities to insure an individualized approach of empowerment.

- The ability to utilize alternative methods and approaches which can be used to triangulate information generated by or collected from other assessment sources.
- The ability to conduct formal and/or informal behavior observation and documentation strategies that can be integrated in a variety of settings.
- The ability to collect, interpret and report ongoing data from assessment, in conjunction with occupational and labor market information, that can be utilized to promote successful transition through critical junctures of the individual's career development.
- The ability to interpret vocational evaluation and assessment data in a manner that contributes to the total service delivery system. Vocational evaluation and assessment team members must be capable of summarizing, interpreting, synthesizing and reporting formal and informal data in a manner that promotes useful planning, goal setting, and coordination of needed support services.
- The ability to function as an effective participant on an interdisciplinary team.
- The ability to select, implement and integrate evaluation and assessment approaches which are current, psychometrically-sound, useful, trustworthy and grounded in career, vocational and work contexts.

The Interdisciplinary Council on Vocational Evaluation and Assessment will work with its member organizations to implement the principles outlined in this document. We believe an interdisciplinary approach to vocational evaluation and assessment encourages the involvement of a team of professionals, practitioners and individuals. Hence, professional roles and certification criteria should be met according to the specific service area. The vocational evaluation and assessment specialist who has in-depth training in vocational evaluation and assessment is an essential team member.

The Council affirms its commitment to the stated mission, goals and objectives, and its dedication to proactively supporting individuals and service providers in responding to the challenges of current economic conditions, new legislative mandates, changing demographics and changing service delivery systems. Increased individual input will guide provision of services.

References

- Ahlers, M., & Busic, D. (2003). *Fundamentals of vocational assessment*. Workshop presented at the 11th National Forum on Issues in Vocational Assessment, Charleston, SC.
- Ahlers, M. (2010). *Fundamentals of vocational assessment*. Workshop presented at the 14th National Forum on Issues in Vocational Evaluation and Assessment, Oklahoma City, OK.
- Crow, S. (July, 1975). Vocational evaluation project final report. *Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association Bulletin* (Special Edition), (8).

- Dowd, L. R. (1993). *Glossary of terminology for vocational evaluation, assessment and work adjustment*. Menomonie, WI: Materials Development Center, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- Schuster, D.L. & Smith, F.G. (1994). The interdisciplinary council on vocational evaluation and assessment: Building consensus through communication, advocacy and common goals. *Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Bulletin*, 27(4), 111-114.
- Smith, F. G., Leconte, P., Garner, W. E., & Umeasiegbu, V. I. (2015). Current technology in vocational evaluation: Trends and opportunities, [Special issue]. *Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association Journal and Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Journal*, 53-71
- Smith, F.G., Leconte, P., & Vitelli, E. (2012). VECAP position paper on universal design for learning for career assessment and vocational evaluation. *Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals Journal*, 8, 13-27.
- Smith, F., Lombard, R., Neubert, D., Leconte, P., Rothenbacher, C., & Sitlington, P. (1994). The position paper of the interdisciplinary council on vocational evaluation and assessment. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 17(1), 41-42. Online available at <https://vecap.org/position-papers-and-semantic-works/>
- Smith, F., Lombard, R., Neubert, D., Leconte, P., Rothenbacher, C., & Sitlington, P. (1996). The position statement of the interdisciplinary council on vocational evaluation and assessment, *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 19(1), 73-76.
- Smith, F.G. & Schuster, D.L. (1993). Building consensus: The interdisciplinary council on vocational evaluation and assessment. In R.R. Fry and W. E. Garner (Eds), *Proceedings from the Sixth National Forum on Issues in Vocational Assessment*, 51-56.
- Thirtieth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues. (2003). *A new paradigm for vocational evaluation: Empowering the VR consumer through vocational information* (30th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues). Washington, DC: Rehabilitation Services Administration, US Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.iriforum.org/download/IRI30.pdf>.
- Wood, C. & Hays, D. (2013) Uses of Career Assessment. In C. Wood. & D. Hays, D. (Eds.), *A counselor's guide to career assessment instruments (3-10; 6th ed.)*. Broken Arrow, OK: National Career Development Association.

Appendix A

Three Definitions

For clarity in working together, the Interdisciplinary Council adopts the following definitions and affirms the foundational three levels of assessment that form the backdrop to our work

Career Assessment

“Career assessment is a measure of a client’s or student’s career development process as well as the content domains of that process. In essence, it is the evaluation of the process and content of career decision making using a variety of assessment tools” (Wood & Hays, 2013, p.4).

Vocational Assessment

“A general term for the process of identifying and appraising an individual’s level of functioning in relation to vocational preparation and employment decision making” (Ahlers, 2003, pp.10-11).

Vocational Evaluation

“A comprehensive process that systematically uses work either real or simulated, as the focal point for assessment and vocational exploration, the purpose of which is to assist individuals in vocational development. Vocational evaluation incorporates medical, psychological, social, vocational, educational, cultural, and economic data into the process to attain the goals of evaluation” (Dowd, 1993, p.28).

It “is a comprehensive vocational process when more in-depth information is needed beyond Levels I and II that systematically uses work to assist individual’s vocational development and career decision making. The process can use work samples, standardized tests, situational assessments, behavioral observation, community-based assessment, transferable skill analysis, job matching and background analysis.” (Ahlers, 2010, pp.12-13).

Appendix B

Levels of Assessment

This process traditionally includes three levels of service intensity and comprehensivenessⁱ

Level I – Screening or Needs Assessment:

The initial process designed to arrive at a decision for vocational planning or for providing additional services. This approach may consist of interviews, functional assessment, limited standardized testing, collecting and analyzing background information. It is also used to assess one or two specific skills related to a specific vocational option. If more information is needed or questions emerge, Level II can be initiated.

Level II – Clinical or Exploratory:

A process to further investigate vocationally relevant information. It may include additional interviewing, additional vocational counseling, additional standardized testing, transferable skills analysis and/or job matching. Vocational options may not have been determined. If more information is needed or questions emerge, Level III can be initiated.

Level III – Vocational Evaluation:

A comprehensive vocational assessment process when more in-depth information is needed beyond Levels I and II that systematically uses work, real and simulated, to assist individual's vocational development and career decision making. The process can use work samples, standardized tests, situational assessments, behavioral observation, community-based assessment, transferable skill analysis, job matching and background analysis.

(Three levels from Ahlers, 2010, pp.12-13).

Application of the Three Levels:

All or a variety of assessment methods, as cited in the previous levels, are used to construct a vocational profile.

What is important to note is that these 3 levels are typically considered to build on each other and are not mutually exclusive. Some individuals may not need any level of formal assessment service beyond collecting relevant information portfolio style. Others, especially those facing the greatest transition, career, and vocational challenges or barriers may need one, two or all three services to further their self-awareness and enhance the career development process.

ⁱ The original basis for this three-level view to vocational evaluation flowed from: The Vocational Evaluation Project Final Report, with Dr. Stanley H. Crow acting as the

Project Chair. Originally published as three monographs, it was published in entirety in a special edition of *The Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Bulletin* (Crow, 1975). The specific material for the three-level view is found in Chapter Two: Vocational Evaluation Services in the Human Services Delivery System (pp. 29-32). Of interest is that the authors determined that Level 1 screening is used as an initial process in all human service delivery; that Level 2 assessment is most identified with what could be called clinical assessment; and that Level 3 – the most intensive, requiring vocational evaluation, is a process of last resort and incorporates work in various situations (e.g., work sampling, simulated work, situational assessment in situ) to corroborate or validate clinical findings, or to specify further avenues to vocational planning and action.