



Invited Rejoinder

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In this invited rejoinder, we address the Reaction Statements submitted by invitation to our article, *A Delphi Study to Improve Agreement Regarding Vocational Assessment Terminology*. We value the unique opportunity to engage in direct scholarly dialogue with the professionals whose thoughtful responses are published alongside our article in this issue. We extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Steven Sligar for serving as the Guest Editor for this issue, facilitating the blind peer review process, coordinating the invited Reaction Statements, and inviting us to contribute this rejoinder. Opportunities for such engagement with readers are rare, and we are grateful for this forum. We also deeply appreciate the constructive feedback offered in each Reaction Statement and thank the reactors for their careful and considered reflections. We believe this exchange advances the profession by promoting meaningful discussion among stakeholders in vocational evaluation and assessment while also contributing to the refinement of our original work. Below, we present our key responses to the Reaction Statements.

Contributions of the Project

Reactors largely affirmed this project's strengths and contributions, underscoring its relevance and significance within vocational evaluation and assessment. As a respondent noted, all stakeholders (including service providers, recipients of the services, purchasers, and referral sources) must have a shared understanding of service terminology to ensure effective utilization and outcomes of these services.

1. **Addressing a Critical Research Gap:** The study responds to a longstanding and significant gap in research on vocational evaluation and career assessment, an area that has received limited attention in the research. This gap is largely due to the absence of dedicated master's degree programs and other similar academic programs focused on vocational evaluation and assessment. Without such

specialized graduate training, the profession is threatened by the use of myriad service definitions from the field that try to fit services to their specialized service demands. Also, there are few university-based researchers to focus on these services, although they are mandated by federal law. Often, as practices respond to changing service populations, technological advances, new policies, and developing definitions, the nature of services looks much different than those structured around national definitions (such as those discussed in the article). Respondents point out that the study contributes new insights and empirical findings, which enhance the body of knowledge in this underexplored area. Hopefully, the study will form a starting point for continuing research regarding the definitions of these essential services.

2. **Clarifying Definitions and Promoting Standardization:** In addition to addressing the research gap, this study also sheds light on persistent challenges related to the definition and standardization of vocational evaluation and assessment services. The field has long struggled with a lack of consensus on what constitutes effective vocational evaluation and assessment, creating inconsistencies in service provision, policy development, and funding allocations. The findings present in this study highlight these ambiguities and provide a foundation for future discussion on the establishment of clearer, more standardized service parameters. As discussed in the manuscript, these definition challenges have broad implications affecting not only how services are delivered but also how their effectiveness is measured and understood within the broader landscape. As stated earlier, conducting meaningful research is challenging when services are inconsistently defined and delivered across settings.
3. **Informing Future Research, Policy, and Practice:** Overall, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the field by identifying critical gaps, addressing definitional inconsistencies, and providing empirical support for ongoing debates surrounding vocational evaluation and assessment services and methods. These findings have the potential to inform future research, policy development, and professional training programs to strengthen the foundation of vocational assessment as a field of practice and study. Recommendations in the article to disseminate, clarify, and provide input about the study's definitions to local, state, and federal policymakers are viewed as first steps to foster a national or possibly a co-national (i.e., Canada) set of service definitions.

Limitations of the Study and Areas of Future Research

The reactors provided valuable insights regarding the study's limitations and highlighted important areas for future research.

1. **Ongoing Development and Refinement:** There was broad agreement that additional research is needed to build upon the foundation established by this project. As outlined in the study, the researchers aimed to advance the field of vocational evaluation and assessment and provide a step forward in an ongoing process rather than provide a definitive conclusion. The reactors'

recommendations emphasize the importance of further research, particularly in refining some aspects of the definitions (discussed next), but also in extending future research projects to explore vocational evaluation and assessment as a promising or evidence-based practice. Continued investigation is essential for strengthening the field and ensuring its long-term relevance.

2. **Defining Quality of Life:** Several reactors noted the need for greater clarification in specific aspects of the definitions presented. One key area identified for further refinement is the concept of Quality of Life. In this study, we followed the data provided by expert participants, which led to the inclusion of the Quality-of-Life term. However, as the reactors correctly pointed out, further exploration and refinement of this construct could enhance its applicability and utility within vocational evaluation and assessment, especially since this has not traditionally been stated as an outcome of vocational assessment and might not be widely accepted in all settings.
3. **Alignment with Pre-Employment Transition Services:** Another significant area for future research highlighted by multiple reactors is the integration of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) requirements in the definitions. The suggestion to incorporate more explicit connections to Pre-ETS provides valuable direction for future studies. Clarifying how vocational evaluation and assessment align with and differ from Pre-ETS requirements, particularly in areas such as job exploration, work-based learning, and career decision-making, would help establish more structured and practical definitions. This may also support the expansion of career exploration-focused services within the current vocational evaluation and assessment definitions. However, care should be taken not to conflate the purposes, meaning, and intended outcomes of the two service systems, that of Pre-ETS and vocational assessment and evaluation services within the vocational rehabilitation process.
4. **Assistive Technology and Communication:** One noted limitation of the study is the lack of discussion on assistive technology, language, and communication factors in vocational evaluation and transition assessment. The respondent correctly points out that these concepts were not explicitly addressed in the literature review, which is accurate and is a fair criticism. These critical elements were not explicitly addressed in the literature review or survey, an omission that future research should rectify.
5. **Broader Perspectives:** Several reactors mentioned the potential selection bias of the current study. This is a critical point to consider for future research. This study sought experts and used experience and credentials to establish expertise. This resulted in a pool of experts with a wealth of experience in the field. However, the perspectives of newer evaluators and those entering the field without traditional master's degrees in vocational evaluation may not be adequately captured. Future research should consider including perspectives from newer evaluators and those entering the field through alternative educational pathways. Further, future researchers could also consider the merits

- of international research that includes views from multiple nations, such as the United States and Canada. Since the inception of this study, the collaboration between the United States and Canada professional organizations has further strengthened, which might open the door for future authors and participants from multiple nations.
6. **Real or Simulated Work:** One responder emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between vocational evaluation (which involves real or simulated work) and vocational assessment (which might not). The authors recognize those terms in the context of the history of vocational evaluation while addressing current perceptions of terminology. The current work illustrates how terminology has evolved (e.g., less frequent use of work samples in many settings) and underscores the need to clearly define the expected outcomes and critical processes associated with the different types of vocational assessment to ensure everyone understands the expectations. The inconsistency in terminology usage has led to significant confusion. The authors advocate for ongoing research to further clarify the distinctions between levels of vocational assessment and agree that education is necessary to promote consistent use in the ever-changing landscape of services.
 7. **Linking Assessment to Outcomes:** One respondent mentioned the importance of providing evidence to support vocational assessment as an effective intervention for leading to employment or choice of career pathways and services. While outcome effectiveness was not the purpose of this study, future research must focus on the link between vocational assessment and desired outcomes for people with disabilities. The updated definitions might be able to provide researchers and program evaluators with more unification in their understanding of the services so that contextualized data can be collected and interpreted to show the significance of the field.

In conclusion, vocational evaluation and assessment professionals operate within a dynamic environment that has changed dramatically in the last decade. To maintain relevance, it is

essential to review and update terminology regularly. This study underscores the necessity for consistency within the field and, through systematic analysis, makes a significant advancement towards more unified language. As with any profession, continuous research is essential to ensure the ongoing utility of vocational evaluation and assessment. This discourse, presented in the reactors' statements, and this rejoinder represent a progressive step forward.