

An Examination of Guidelines to Promote the Implementation of Vocational Assessment in Employment-related Disability Welfare Service Agencies

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Abstract

Vocational assessment guidelines for work support service agencies were developed and examined by 20 experts, consisting of practitioners and researchers in the field of work support and vocational rehabilitation, using the Delphi method. First, draft guidelines for vocational assessment practice were developed based on two preliminary surveys. In the first round of the Delphi study, the 20 experts were asked to rate the levels of agreement and importance using 9- and 5-point Likert-type scales, respectively. In the second round, the results from the first were fed back to the respondents so that they could compare their own responses with those obtained from other experts. The items with a matching rate among experts above 90% (37 items under seven areas) were included as the final guideline items. Verifying these guidelines and their practical use at work support service agencies could lead to improved vocational assessments.

Key words: delphi method, vocational assessment, employment-related welfare services for persons with disabilities

Introduction

The past few years in Japan have seen a significant increase in job placement and employment among persons with disabilities (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020). In this context, initiatives to support the transition from employment-related disability welfare services to active employment at typical firms are gaining momentum. According to Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2019), users of these employment-related disability welfare services increased by a factor of 4.56 between 2008 and 2017. Further, over the same period among these users, the number who transitioned to employment at typical firms increased by a factor of 4.95. While the rate of securing employment at typical firms has been 54.8% for Type A Support for Continuous Employment Offices and 80% for Type B Support for Continuous Employment Offices, a large bias remains between business establishments, and the fact is that many such establishments do not have a track record of securing employment at typical firms. The future expansion of vocational autonomy among persons with disabilities will therefore require mechanisms that can stimulate transitions to regular employment among employment-related disability welfare services as a whole, including Support for Continuous Employment Offices.

A system involving support by workplace adaptation supporters (job coaches) to facilitate work placement in regular employment has been gaining increased attention. Rubin et al. (2016) describe the process of employment support as consisting of four

stages: evaluation, planning, treatment, and placement. Of these, they point out that the “evaluation” (or assessment) stage requires the provision of support so that persons with disabilities can understand the extent of their own current and potential occupational abilities and interests and be aware of jobs that may be commensurate with these abilities and interests, as well as of any services and types of support that will be necessary for those jobs. Roessler & Rubin (1992) also state that the end goals of assessment are the integration of clients (persons with disabilities) with information concerning support services and the clarification of the most feasible vocational objectives. Strauser et al. (2014) regard vocational assessment as a key service for encouraging career development and employment for persons with disabilities, and point out the need for such assessment to be carried out accurately to set goals and evaluate outcomes.

In this way, work support is important for not only work placement, but also the entire support process leading up to the stage of providing work placement support. Moreover, it is important that assessment, which constitutes a basis for work support (including work placement), be carried out properly. Assessment that is implemented from a vocational point of view in the context of work support needs to be carried out so that the persons with disabilities in receipt of that support will be able to transition smoothly to the workplace most suited for their respective needs, to continue working in a stable manner, and to foster their working skills.

From implementation reports focusing on vocational assessment, we can confirm descriptions indicating that the results of assessments implemented from a vocational perspective have enabled work support measures to function effectively (Nakamura, 1990; Murakami, 1997; Koyama et al., 2013; Kato et al., 2018; Tuchiya, 2018). Specifically, vocational assessment has been reported to have assistive outcomes in terms of clarifying challenges facing those receiving support (Shinogaki, 2006; Noda & Noda, 2008), increasing the efficiency with which information is collected in limited support environments (Shimoda et al., 2010), contributing to shared understanding among work support providers (Higuchi & Noutomi, 2010), enabling the efficient collection of information with a view to adaptation by firms (Goto & Shiba, 2015), and contributing to the promotion of self-understanding among support recipients (Matsuda, 2013; Matsuse, 2017; Shimizu, 2018). On the other hand, however, very little research has been done with regard to assessment implemented from a vocational perspective, and it has been pointed out that vocational assessment is not now being implemented to a sufficient degree in practice (Maebara, 2020; Maebara et al., 2020). In considering the transition to regular employment and improvements to the quality of work support at employment-related disability welfare service agencies, we believe that it will be effective to formulate guidelines for promoting the implementation of vocational assessment, which is indispensable in the context of practicing support. Such guidelines are important and will conceivably lead to possibilities for systematic environmental improvements and staff training for putting vocational assessment into practice. Therefore, in this study, we aim to examine guidelines for promoting the implementation of vocational assessment in employment-related disability welfare service agencies.

Methods

Methodology

In this study, we examine guidelines for promoting the implementation of vocational assessment in employment-related disability welfare service agencies. To that end, we undertake a method for group decision-making by a group of experts comprising the study participants. The fact is that this type of group decision-making method is implemented using an informal

committee-style approach without any fixed rules. The advantages and disadvantages of such methods are summarized as in Table 1 (Pope & Mays, 2008). In this study, we use the Delphi method, which incorporates ways of maximizing these types of advantages and minimizing the disadvantages, and which can also be used as a rule-based formal method.

The Delphi method

The Delphi method, named after the Oracle of Delphi, is a questionnaire-based method for collecting opinions developed by the RAND Corporation in the USA that involves the element of repeatedly feeding back the evaluation of questionnaire results to respondents (Soma et al., 2009).

In the Delphi method, expert opinions are collected and summarized by surveying experts by means of a questionnaire and then repeating the feedback of the survey results. As a formal approach to group decision-making, this method can eliminate the disadvantages associated with group-based decision-making methods and confer a method with scientific credibility based on its advantages using a clear, easy-to-follow, and structured approach.

Study flow

In the Delphi method, study participants do not meet to interact with each other in person. Rather, data are collected by sending a questionnaire and then listening to the ideas of each participating expert (Murph et al., 1998). In this study, data were collected from e-mail exchanges with the study participants. In the Delphi method, at least two rounds of surveys incorporating survey feedback are conducted to reach consensus. The number of rounds should be tailored to take time, cost, and participant fatigue into account. Moreover, there are no firm or fixed rules for consensus building, which can take various forms (Powell, 2003). In this study, the Delphi method was implemented according to the flow shown in Figure 1. Specifically, a preliminary survey was conducted in two rounds to prepare draft guidelines to implement in the main survey. In the first round of the main survey, respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with the guidelines (on a 9-point Likert scale), to rate their respective level of importance (on a 5-point Likert scale), and then to provide their opinions on the

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Group-based Decision-making Methods

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of a broader range of knowledge and experience • Interactions among members of the group stimulate people to think more broadly about their choices • Counterarguments to proposed ideas also come up for discussion • Individual proclivities and preferences can be eliminated • The perspective of a group is more persuasive than the perspective of an individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominance on the part of specific individuals • Pressure that calls on people to agree with the opinions of the majority or of those with authority • More extreme decisions are argued for than would be in the case of decisions by individuals • Intransigent problems are not addressed

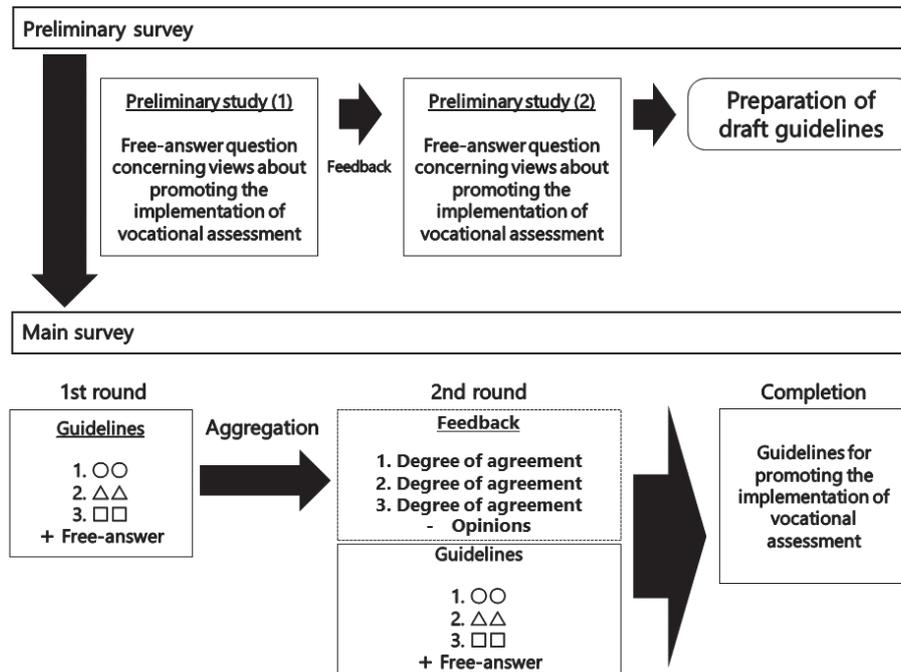


Figure 1: Survey flow for this study (Delphi method)

guidelines in a free-answer format. These results were aggregated, and the guidelines were then revised on the basis of the aggregated results and opinions for the second round, at which point, the respondents were once again asked to rate their agreement with the guidelines (out of 9) and their relative importance (out of 5) and to provide their opinions on the guidelines in a free-answer format.

Study participants

The Delphi method involves the selection of experts as study participants. When selecting experts, it is necessary to choose reliable individuals who work in the field at issue and are suited to the objectives of the study. It is also said that the selection of participants should be determined on the basis of quality rather than by so-called statistical sampling (Powell, 2003). Usually, the number of study participants will vary

depending on the study in question (Powell, 2003). Studies involving six people or fewer will be less reliable, while those involving more than 12 people will have diminishing returns (Murph et al., 1998). While some have argued for having as many participants as possible, there is no basis for this (Powell, 2003), and it has been pointed out that there is almost no advantage in having 50 people or more (Pope & Mays, 2008). Beyond this, the number of participants needs to be judged according to the scope of the problem as well as with reference to available resources such as time and funding (Powell, 2003).

We selected 20 experts with backgrounds corresponding to the basic information listed in Table 2 to participate in this study.

Method of analysis

Preliminary survey

Table 2: Information on the Study Participants

Attributes and number of study participants	
Study participants: Total 20	
• Vocational rehabilitation area (7), Social welfare area (10), Medical area (1), Educational area (1), Corporate area (1), Total: 20	
• Researchers (6), Practitioners (14), Total: 20	
Years of experience	Mean ± SD
Years of experience with work support (n=18)	9.1±5.63 (max 23, min 0)
Years of research experience (n=11)	4.4±7.83 (max 35, min 0)
Years of education	17.8±3.40 (max 28, min 12)
Qualifications (Multiple answers allowed):	
2 licensed social welfare workers, 1 certified care worker, 5 psychiatric social workers, 1 certified psychologist, 2 childcare workers, 4 licensed teachers, 3 social welfare officers, 2 vocational counselors for persons with disabilities, and 6 job coaches	

From the opinions obtained through the two rounds of the preliminary survey, we conduct a qualitative analysis to categorize these with respect to similarities in their meaning, and then prepare draft guidelines for promoting the implementation of vocational assessment.

Main survey

The nine levels of the degree of agreement were classified into three categories (degree of agreement: high group, middle group, low group), and then opinion response rates by the respondents were tallied for each of the three groups. Also, mean values and standard deviations were calculated for the five levels of importance. Through the two surveys, opinions were gathered and guideline components adopted based on the response rates for the final degree of agreement. Also, guideline components were adopted in cases where 95% or more of the responses were categorized in the high group or in which 85% or more of the responses were categorized in the high group, and this

increased to 95% or more with the addition of the responses categorized in the middle group. In terms of importance, the guidelines were ordered based on their mean values.

Research ethics

This study was approved by the Akita University Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving People Living in the Tegata Area (May 18, 2020, No. 2-2).

Results

When providing the details of the first round as feedback, with reference to the opinions provided in the free-answer segment, we deleted duplicate items and revised other items for clarity before presenting these as a second draft of the proposed guidelines. Tables 3–9 list the guideline items and the selection rate for the degree of agreement in the first and second rounds. Items that were ultimately chosen for adoption are

Table 3: Policies for Implementing Assessment Inside Organizations

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	Assessment is carried out as appropriate in day-to-day work settings.	0	5	95	5	5	90
2	Assessment is explained in pamphlets and other printed material.	0	35	65	5	20	75
3	The implementation of assessment is systematically demonstrated. → (1st round revision) Assessment is systematically implemented in the course of support.	0	15	85	0	10	90
4	Assessment is implemented in each phase of work support. → (1st round revision) Assessment is implemented in each phase of work support (job preparation, practical training, job hunting, placement support, etc.).	0	20	80	5	10	85
5	An assessment support system has been put in place.→ (1st round revision) A support system for staff who carry out assessment has been put in place.	0	25	75	10	10	80
6	Steps are being taken toward a shared understanding among staff members regarding how to implement assessment.	0	10	90	5	0	95
7	Procedures, etc. have been organized for implementing assessment.	0	25	75	10	20	70

Table 4: Systems for Implementing Assessment Inside Organizations

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	Staff members are present who have knowledge and skills concerning assessment.	0	0	100	5	10	85
2	Staff members are present who can supervise assessment.	0	10	90	5	5	90
3	I can contact experts for advice, etc., concerning assessment.	0	25	75	5	20	75
4	Time has been secured for the individual support required to implement assessment.	0	1	90	5	10	85
5	Efforts are being taken to develop and allocate personnel to be able to implement assessment.	0	10	90	5	15	80
6	Training is being carried out with respect to assessment.	0	20	80	10	20	70
7	Support for professional development is being provided, such as participating in training with respect to assessment.	0	15	85	10	10	80
8	Efforts are being taken to ensure a common understanding of the need for assessment.	0	0	100	10	5	85
9	Staff members share a common understanding regarding the use of assessment.	0	5	95	0	15	85
10	Case conferences are held to improve knowledge and skills about assessment.	0	10	90	10	20	70

Table 5: Mechanisms for Implementing Assessment Inside Organizations

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	I know of various examples of support for implementing assessment.	0	20	80	0	20	80
2	I have opportunities to have work experiences (e.g., on-the-job training) and implement assessment outside of the workplace.	0	0	100	0	0	100
3	We have arranged opportunities to share assessments with other support agencies, including local vocational centers for persons with disabilities and employment and livelihood support centers for persons with disabilities. → (1st round revision) We have arranged opportunities to share assessments with other support agencies, including local vocational centers for persons with disabilities, employment and livelihood support centers for persons with disabilities, and municipal work support centers.	0	10	90	0	5	95
4	There is a consultation desk for users and their parents that contributes to the implementation and use of assessment.	0	30	70	0	15	85
5	Regional cooperation can be smoothly achieved to implement assessment.	0	15	85	0	5	95
6	I understand the role of other area support agencies and can collaborate with them.	0	5	95	0	5	95
7	Vocational assessment tools (e.g., the Makuhari Work Sample) are available. → (1st round revision) item deleted	10	25	65	—	—	—

Table 6: Environments for Implementing Assessment Inside Organizations

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	We collaborate and share the results of assessments with other organizations (e.g., labor organizations, medical institutions)	5	5	90	5	10	85
2	We regularly check and review the contents of the assessments that are being implemented.	0	5	95	0	0	100
3	A venue has been secured for on-the-job (corporate) training to implement assessment.	5	10	85	0	10	90
4	We have developed a sheet for assessment.	0	10	90	0	10	90
5	Vocational assessment tools (e.g., the Makuhari Work Sample) are available.	5	25	70	5	20	75
6	A room is reserved for conducting assessments.	10	30	60	5	35	60
7	I attend case conferences at other organizations (e.g., medical institutions, labor organizations) to obtain information about assessment.	15	0	85	10	10	80
8	We provide information to other organizations about our assessment sheets and details about implementation.	0	10	90	5	10	85
9	It is considered necessary to record information about assessments and the progress of support.	0	5	95	0	15	85

Table 7: Requisite Knowledge for Implementing Individual Assessment

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	The results of completed assessments can be communicated back to the person being assessed.	0	0	100	0	0	100
2	I can interpret the results of assessment.	0	0	100	0	0	100
3	I understand the method of assessment (with the exception of how to use various tools).	0	5	95	0	5	95
4	I know how to use vocational assessment tools (e.g., the Makuhari Work Sample).	0	15	85	5	5	90
5	I understand the purpose of using assessment tools.	0	5	95	0	0	100
6	I have some knowledge about assessment methods (e.g., the theory behind them).	0	10	90	0	20	80
7	I understand the nature of disabilities facing various people. → (1st round revision) I fully understand the nature of the disabilities facing the individuals receiving support.	5	10	85	0	0	100
8	I have an understanding of how to support workplace adaptation (e.g., work support at typical companies).	0	0	100	0	0	100

Table 8: Practical Skills for Implementing Individual Assessment

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	Assessment can be flexibly implemented in work support according to the situation.	0	5	95	0	10	90
2	The results of assessment can be reflected in individual support plans. → (1st round revision) item deleted	0	10	90	—	—	—
3	I can interpret the results of assessment.	0	5	95	0	5	95
4	I can select an assessment method according to the nature of a disability.	0	15	85	0	10	90
5	I can implement assessment based on observational evaluation.	0	0	100	0	10	90
6	I understand the need for assessment.	0	0	100	0	5	95
7	I have counselling (interview) skills.	0	5	95	0	5	95
8	I can grasp the needs of our users.	0	0	100	0	5	95
9	I am acquiring knowledge and skills that relate to work support.	0	10	90	0	5	95

Table 9: Infrastructure for Promoting the Implementation of Assessment in the Community

	Survey round Degree of agreement (%)	First round			Second round		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1	I have access to use cases for assessment.	5	15	80	0	25	75
2	We have resources for receiving assessment consultations.	0	15	85	0	25	75
3	There are occasions for delivering practical reports concerning assessment.	0	30	70	5	25	70
4	Guidelines for assessment procedures are put in place. → (1st round revision) Guidelines for assessment procedures have been put in place.	5	5	90	0	15	85
5	Guidelines for assessment procedures are shared.	5	10	85	0	15	85
6	There are opportunities to receive training about assessment.	0	15	85	0	5	95
7	There is support (financial and otherwise) for conducting assessments → (1st round revision) item deleted	5	15	80	—	—	—

shown in bold.

In the second round of responses, items for which a lack of agreement was apparent were excluded. The items that were ultimately adopted were arranged in order of importance and selected as guidelines (Table 10).

As summarized above, the guidelines for promoting the implementation of vocational assessment that we obtained as a result consisted of 37 items across seven areas.

Discussion

Although the need for vocational assessment has been acknowledged by researchers, supporters, and other professionals involved in work support, methods for promoting its implementation in practice have never been fully examined. In the sense that relevant guidelines have been clarified in this study using the Delphi method, this is extremely important.

Unlike the usual approach of interviewing professionals using a committee method, the Delphi method is a way of receiving feedback on answers to structured questions and then refining one's own answers while seeing them objectively. Unlike the

committee method, it is thought that the researcher's personal judgment can thus be kept to a minimum, enabling guidelines to be subjected to more objective scrutiny. In addition, all of the participants in this study were experts involved in work support as practitioners and researchers. That such a wide range of people familiar with the reality of the field have participated in this study as collaborators may be considered to guarantee the validity and usefulness of its results in practice settings.

While the guidelines resulting from this study may be considered to be useful as a basic resource for promoting the implementation of vocational assessment, we also feel that it is necessary that they be passed on and developed with a view to further refinement. For example, further consideration may be needed with regard to the question of whether they are appropriate for businesses that have already adequately implemented vocational assessment in practice, or to the possibility of further corrections and additions to the items, including their feasibility in practical settings. We would like to leave these as issues for future consideration.

Table 10: Guidelines for Promoting the Implementation of Vocational Assessment

No.	Area	Mean	SD
Area 1	Is there a preestablished policy for implementing assessments in the organization? This “policy for implementing assessments” is a matter that relates to the following four items.		
1	Assessment is carried out as appropriate in day-to-day work settings.	4.8	0.41
2	Assessment is systematically implemented in the course of support.	4.7	0.47
3	Assessment is implemented in each phase of work support (e.g., job preparation, practical training, job hunting, placement support).	4.7	0.47
4	Steps are being taken toward a shared understanding among staff members regarding how to implement assessment.	4.7	0.49
Area 2	Has a system been put in place for implementing assessments in the organization? This “assessment implementation system” is a matter that relates to the following five items.		
1	Staff members are present who have knowledge and skills concerning assessment.	4.8	0.55
2	Staff members share a common understanding regarding the use of assessment.	4.8	0.52
3	Time has been secured for the individual support required to implement assessment.	4.6	0.50
4	Staff members are present who can supervise assessment.	4.5	0.69
5	Efforts are being taken to develop and allocate personnel to be able to implement assessment.	4.5	0.94
Area 3	Have mechanisms been put in place for implementing assessments in the organization? These “assessment implementation mechanisms” are a matter that relates to the following six items.		
1	I understand the role of other area support agencies and can collaborate with them.	4.9	0.37
2	I have opportunities to have work experiences (e.g., on-the-job training) and implement assessment outside of the workplace.	4.9	0.37
3	We have arranged opportunities to share assessments with other support agencies, including local vocational centers for persons with disabilities, employment and livelihood support centers for persons with disabilities, and municipal work support centers.	4.7	0.57
4	Regional cooperation can be smoothly achieved to implement assessment.	4.6	0.6
5	I know of various examples of support for implementing assessment.	4.5	0.6
6	There is a consultation desk for users and their parents that contributes to the implementation and use of assessment.	4.3	0.73
Area 4	Has the organization been equipped with an environment for implementing assessments? This “environment for implementing assessments” is a matter that relates to the following six items.		
1	We regularly check and review the contents of the assessments being implemented.	4.9	0.37
2	It is considered necessary to record information about assessments and the progress of support.	4.8	0.41
3	A venue has been secured for on-the-job (corporate) training to implement assessment.	4.7	0.47
4	We have developed a sheet for assessment.	4.7	0.67
5	We collaborate and share the results of assessments with other organizations (e.g., labor organizations, medical institutions)	4.4	0.94
6	We provide information to other organizations about our assessment sheets and details about implementation.	4.3	1.03
Area 5	Do individuals have the requisite knowledge for implementing assessments? This “requisite knowledge” is a matter that relates to the following seven items.		
1	The results of completed assessments can be communicated back to the person being assessed.	4.9	0.37
2	I can interpret the results of assessment.	4.9	0.37
3	I have an understanding of how to support workplace adaptation (e.g., work support at typical companies).	4.9	0.37
4	I fully understand the nature of the disabilities facing the individuals receiving support.	4.8	0.41
5	I understand the method of assessment (with the exception of how to use various tools).	4.8	0.44
6	I understand the purpose of using assessment tools.	4.8	0.55
7	I know how to use vocational assessment tools (e.g., the Makuhari Work Sample).	4.2	0.95
Area 6	Do individuals have the practical skills for implementing assessments? These “practical skills” are a matter that relates to the following eight items.		
1	I understand the need for assessment.	5.0	0.22
2	I can grasp the needs of our users.	5.0	0.22
3	Assessment can be flexibly implemented in work support according to the situation.	4.9	0.31
4	I can interpret the results of assessment.	4.9	0.37
5	I have counselling (interview) skills.	4.8	0.44
6	I can implement assessment based on observational evaluation.	4.8	0.44
7	I can select an assessment method according to the nature of a disability.	4.6	0.50
8	I am acquiring knowledge and skills that relate to work support.	4.6	0.50
Area 7	Is infrastructure being developed to promote the implementation of assessment in the community? The “community infrastructure for assessment” is a matter that relates to the following item.		
1	There are opportunities to receive training about assessment.	4.6	0.59

Postscript

We would like to thank all of the participants for their generous cooperation in the execution of this study.

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