Career Development, Disability and Vocational Rehabilitation

Nicholas Buys
Laurie Buys
Elizabeth Kendall
Deborah Davis

Running head: Career development and rehabilitation
Numerous theories of career development have been proposed to explain the process of occupational choice over the lifespan. These theories emphasise the centrality of work in people’s lives. The attainment of meaningful employment with career advancement opportunities is important to most people, including people with disabilities. However, although they constitute nearly 20% of the population, (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998) people with disabilities have been largely overlooked in the career development literature. This situation is unfortunate. Given their high rate of unemployment and marginalisation in the labour market, people with disabilities require vocational rehabilitation services that are guided by appropriate theories of career development. A service delivery system that emphasises meaningful careers is more likely to achieve sustainable employment outcomes for people with disabilities than the current focus on job placement. This argument forms the basis of the current chapter, which aims to: (a) explain the need for career development approach in vocational rehabilitation; (b) summarise the issues concerning the application of career development theory to disability; and (c) review recent career development theoretical frameworks and practices that may inform rehabilitation counsellors in their work. For the purposes of this chapter, the term career development refers to the developmental process of an individual’s sequence of occupationally relevant choices and behaviours (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998). In contrast, job placement refers to the process of assisting the individual to obtain a specific job at one point in time.

Need for a Career Development Approach in Vocational Rehabilitation

People with disabilities continue to face significant disadvantage in the labour market with unemployment rates of over 50% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). These rates have not decreased over the past two decades, resulting in ongoing marginalisation of this population in our society. Furthermore, when compared to their ‘non-disabled’ peers, people with disabilities are more likely to:

• be long-term unemployed (Athanasou, 1994);
• lack marketable employment skills (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1996; Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999);
• face accessibility problems to workplaces because of physical barriers, poor job design, and a lack of accessible public transport (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1996; Barnes et al., 1999; Baume & Kay, 1995);
• face negative attitudes by employers about their employment potential (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1996; Barnes et al., 1999; Patton, 1997);
• earn substantially less money on average (Chirikos, 1991);
• disproportionately be laid off from jobs (Yelin, 1991), particularly at times of economic restructuring and rapid labour market change.

The economic costs of disability in Australian society are considerable. The last ten years have seen large increases in both Commonwealth expenditure on disability income maintenance programs and State government expenditure on compensation payments for
injured workers. For example, the number of people on disability support pension has doubled over the last ten years (Newman, 1999) and workers compensation programs in several states have experienced spiralling costs and unfunded liabilities (Grellman, 1997; Kennedy, 1996). One of the primary arguments for the introduction of vocational rehabilitation programs in Australia and overseas is the cost savings that can be achieved by assisting people with disabilities to obtain a job or return to work. However increases in expenditure on rehabilitation have not been matched by reductions in the costs of disability and injury. For example, expenditure in the United States (U.S.) on vocational rehabilitation in 1991 was over two billion dollars, yet only a third of clients accepted for services were closed in employment (Weaver, 1995). As a result, questions about the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation programs have been raised (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1996; Ford, 1998; Ford & Swett, 1999; Gilbride et al., 1994; Weaver, 1995) with one researcher commenting that “traditional services for employment preparation have not served individuals with disabilities well, especially those with more severe disabilities” (Ford, 1998; p. 71).

Reasons for poor employment rates among people with disabilities are complex and blame cannot be totally laid at the feet of vocational rehabilitation programs. However it is our contention that the traditional focus on job placement has significantly decreased the effectiveness of such programs. Further, we suggest that a job placement approach to rehabilitation is insufficient in the current labour market to ensure durable and satisfying employment options for people with disabilities. Instead, we recommend that rehabilitation services adopt a career development approach to service delivery to promote long-term employment outcomes for their client groups and, by doing so, contribute to a reduction in the economic and social costs of disability.

The inadequacy of the job placement approach is evident in research findings. Issues of job retention and durability of employment outcomes among people with disabilities is one area of concern (Rubin & Roessler, 1995). For example, in a study of rehabilitation case closures in one U.S. State, Gibbs (1990) found that 25% of people were no longer employed three months after closure, and only 50% employed one year after closure. Similarly, Beck (1989) reported that 40% of injured workers in one state workers compensation scheme were unemployed three years post-injury. Poor retention rates have also been reported in Australia among agencies providing employment services to people with disabilities (e.g., Personnel Employment, 1999). Gilbride, Stensrud and Johnson (1994) summarised the situation well when they stated, “people may be placed, but they may not be assisted to sustainable or promotable employment” (p. 217).

Traditional job placement approaches also ignore important career maintenance issues that maximise opportunities for job retention and career development. For example, the period between job placement and case closure was found to be one of the least active phases of the rehabilitation process (Rumrill & Koch, 1999) resulting in poor employment outcomes. Other research revealed that career maintenance concerns were not being adequately addressed as part of individuals’ rehabilitation programs. Such concerns included implementation of worksite accommodations, financing of accommodation devices, and planning for promotion and advancement beyond the initial
The types of jobs in which people with disabilities have been placed have also contributed to poor job retention rates. Placements arranged by specialised employment services in particular are often entry level ‘disposable’ jobs in the secondary labour market, making the occupants vulnerable to redundancy (Hagner & Dileo, 1993; Hagner & Salomone, 1989; Parmenter, 1990; Whitehead, 1990). Furthermore, these jobs are usually poorly paid with little opportunity for promotion or career development (Barnes et al., 1999; Ford, 1998; Hagner & Salomone, 1989). The perception that people with developmental disabilities will remain in one job for their career and that they are immune to the boredom of repetitive jobs has been challenged (e.g. Hagner & Dileo (1993). Such jobs result in high turnover, despite on the job support, as occupants lose interest in the work to seek more satisfying employment opportunities.

In the workers compensation context, increasing costs have been partly attributed to the number of long duration claims, often known as ‘long tail claims’. Statutory or common law lump sum payouts for workers have often been used to ‘solve’ the problem of increasing numbers of long tail claims. However, the net result of these ‘solutions’ is a huge transfer of costs to Commonwealth social security programs (Brenan & Wightman, 1995; Industry Commission, 1994) and the consignment of workers to long-term unemployment (Beck, 1989; Brenan & Wightman, 1995) with all the attendant psychosocial issues that accompany this state (Winefield, 1995). Other solutions focus on early return to work and improved injury management processes. Although these maybe effective at preventing some long tail claims, they are not able to adequately assist injured workers who possess few transferable skills and cannot return to their previous jobs. In these situations a job placement approach will not work because they do not address employability issues such as skill deficits, functional restrictions in relation to the original job and poor job maintenance skills.

Given the above issues, it is timely for vocational rehabilitation to now adopt a career development approach to service delivery. Career development is designed to enhance ongoing employability by providing people with disabilities with long-term career goals and the planning skills required to achieve these goals. It focusses on assisting people to build portfolios of skills and knowledge to enhance their career resilience (Szymanski, 1999) in the face of a labour market characterised by uncertainty, casualisation, downsizing, delayering, restructuring, and outsourcing. It recognises that people with disabilities, like their non-disabled peers will have multiple jobs within a career and that rehabilitation services should assist them to plan for a succession of jobs within their working lifetimes. There is considerable support for the argument that a rehabilitation service delivery system focussed on preparing individuals for a lifelong process of choosing occupations is more likely to result in sustainable employment outcomes. It will also better meet the aspirations of its clients by enhancing both their long-term economic independence and self-esteem through supporting satisfying career choices (Hagner, Fesko, Cadigan, Kiernan & Butterworth, 1996).
Career Development Theory and Disability

If the field of vocational rehabilitation is going to adopt a career development approach to service delivery it is important that it have a sound theoretical basis for practice. As Kurt Lewin stated: “There is nothing as practical as a good theory”. However, the area of disability has received scant attention in theories of career development (Patton, 1997). Furthermore, there has been an assumption that these theories have equal relevance to females, people with disabilities and other cultural groups despite the fact that they have been developed by white [non-disabled] males of European descent (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Several reviews have now questioned the applicability of the predominant theories of career development to people with disabilities (Conte, 1983; Curnow, 1989; Goldberg, 1992; Hagner & Salomone, 1989; Navin & Myers, 1983; Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright & Ettinger, 1996; Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998). The issues raised by these reviews are outlined below.

Trait-factor approaches

Trait-factor theory has strongly influenced career guidance practices (McMahon & Patton, 2000) and models of vocational rehabilitation (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998). Trait-factor theory is concerned with the matching of measurable individual traits (e.g. skills, aptitudes, interests) to job requirements. The matching of people to jobs has formed the basis of many rehabilitation practices in areas such as job analysis, transferable skills analysis and vocational assessment.

The problem with strict adherence to trait-factor approaches is that they exclude people with disabilities from jobs. By focussing solely on worker trait factors in relation to job requirements, these approaches ignore the fact that many jobs can be performed by people with disabilities with the provision of worksite modifications, job modifications and other supports (Hagner & Dileo, 1997; Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998; Wehman & Kregel, 1985). The simplistic nature of trait-factor theory also ignores the many contextual factors that impact on career development for people with disabilities including discrimination, socio-economic status, opportunity structures, socialization and the complexity of the labour market (McMahon & Patton, 2000; Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998; Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 1986).

Models of work adjustment

Theories of work adjustment have been put forward to explain the process of “achieving and maintaining correspondence with a work environment...” (Zunker, 1994) and have been viewed as having particular applicability to the area of disability. Although not strictly theories of career choice, models of work adjustment have often been incorporated within the career development literature (e.g. Brown & Brooks, 1996; Sharf, 1992, 1997; Zunker, 1994). There are two major theories of work adjustment, namely the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1984) and Hershenson’s Model of Work Adjustment (Hershenson, 1981; Hershenson & Szymanski, 1992). Both
Theories were developed originally for people with disabilities and have heavily influenced vocational rehabilitation practice.

The Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment is a person-environment fit model in the tradition of trait-factor theory (Dawis, 1996). The theory proposes that the worker has needs (e.g. pay, good working conditions) and values (e.g. achievement, altruism) that may be met by reinforcers in the work environment, and that the work environment has needs (e.g. task requirements) that may be met by a worker’s skills. When the person and the work environment are in correspondence both parties experience satisfaction and the worker remains or is retained in a job (i.e. tenure). Dawis (1996) viewed this process as “foundational for career planning” (p. 82). In this context, rehabilitation counsellors need to work with people to find occupations for which the satisfaction of both parties is predicted, resulting in careers where the “prospects of tenure are good” (p. 82).

The second major theory of work adjustment, Hershenson’s model, (Hershenson, 1981; Hershenson & Szymanski, 1992) is more developmental in nature, and describes work adjustment in terms of the interaction of three domains. The first domain, work personality, develops during the preschool years and includes the individual’s system of work motivation, work related needs and self-concept as a worker. The second domain, work competencies, develops during school years and includes work skills, interpersonal skills and work habits. The third domain, work goals, develops during the transition from school to work. Work adjustment is the product of the interaction of these domains with each other and the environment over time. Work adjustment consists of three elements – task performance (e.g. completion of work), work-role behaviour (e.g. appropriate dress, responsiveness to supervision) and work satisfaction. Understanding these elements and the interactions between them facilitates the career counselling process. For example, rehabilitation counsellors can work with individuals to identify where work adjustment problems occur and design appropriate interventions.

While theories of work adjustment have been useful in explaining aspects of vocational behaviour of people with disabilities, they have been criticised on two grounds. Firstly, their focus is viewed as too narrow because they lack recognition of important environmental and contextual variables that influence work adjustment (Dobren, 1994; Salomone, 1996). These include social support networks, accessible transportation and labour market characteristics, all of which have been shown to be influential on career choice and job retention for people with disabilities. Secondly, work adjustment theories do not examine the long-term developmental relationship between a series of jobs and the way these jobs are chosen by an individual. Conte (1983) argues that any theory of career development must take this relationship into account to have utility in predicting occupational choice.

**Personality and developmental theories**

Career development theories that focus on inherent personality factors or traits as the major determinants of vocational choice (e.g. Holland, Roe) have been useful to explain and predict the matching of individuals with appropriate work. However, they are
problematic when used to describe the vocational development of people with disabilities. For example, Holland’s focus on the match between vocational personalities and work environments ignored the impact of other factors on career choice for people with disabilities such as family systems, availability of job modifications, employer attitudes and social attitudes. Conte (1983) contends that these environmental factors are more significant influences on vocational choice for people with disabilities than inherent personality traits. This argument is consistent with social models of disability that view externally imposed barriers as the reason for the limitations on opportunities for people with disabilities, including employment (Barnes et al., 1999). By focussing on intrapsychic variables, personality theories are in danger of perpetuating negative stereotypes of people with disabilities through ascribing problems with career development to individual deficit as opposed to disabling environments.

Many career development theories assume that developmental experiences over the life span are similar across different populations. As a consequence, these theories have largely ignored the ‘lived’ experiences of people with disabilities, and in particular, children with disabilities (Conte, 1983; Osipow, 1976). Limitations imposed on people with disabilities in areas such as education, development of self-efficacy, vocationally related decision-making and access to developmental experiences can severely impact career maturity, career decision making and career choice. Understanding these life experiences is therefore crucial to understanding the development of vocational behaviour for people with disabilities (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998).

Theory and diversity

No single theory can adequately account for the vocational behaviour of people with disabilities, because of the heterogeneous nature of this population (Hanley-Maxwell, Szymanski, & Owens-Johnston, 1998; Patton, 1997; Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright & Ettinger, 1996). People with acquired disabilities often have quite different experiences than people with congenital disabilities in terms of vocational development (Conte, 1983). Even Super distinguished between ‘precareer’ and ‘midcareer’ disability in relation to self-concept, a key factor in vocational development. Furthermore, there is considerable diversity among people with disabilities in terms of abilities, values, interests, cultural background, ethnicity, socioeconomic status etc. (Patton & McMahon, 1997, 1999; Savickas & Lent, 1994; Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998). Finding a single theory of career development to account for the vocational behaviour of all people with disabilities is therefore an impossible task (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998).

Career Development and Rehabilitation: Theoretical Applications

The problem of applying career development theories to people with disabilities raises the question: What do we use to inform a career development approach in vocational rehabilitation? One answer rests with recent attempts to develop frameworks to examine theoretical convergence and application in relation to career development. These frameworks, which may be described as systems or ecological approaches to career
development, have focussed on the general population (Patton & McMahon, 1997, 1999; Savickas & Lent, 1994) and people with disabilities (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998).

**Systems approach**

The use of systems theory has been proposed to “develop a framework to represent the complex interrelationships of the many influences on career development” (McMahon & Patton, 1995, p. 17). These influences include individual, social and environmental factors, as well as chance events. (e.g., Patton & McMahon, 1997, 1999). The systems approach has explicitly acknowledged disability as an individual factor that can influence career development (Patton, 1997). It is particularly useful within a rehabilitation context because it enables the rehabilitation counsellor to clearly identify the sub-systems that impact on an individual’s career development and the interaction between those sub-systems. By identifying the important sub-systems and how they inter-relate, rehabilitation counsellors can assist individuals to understand issues and barriers to their vocational development and conjointly decide on appropriate interventions.

The systems approach is also consistent with recent ecological and systemic models of vocational rehabilitation (Browder, 1991; Cottone, 1986; Dobren, 1994; Hagner & Dileo, 1993; Hanley-Maxwell, Szymanski & Owens-Johnson, 1996; Parker & Schaller, 1996). Analysis of the interaction between the individual and elements in the social and environmental/societal context over the life span allows the counselor to ‘map’ the influences which impact on the person’s career as well as selecting theoretical constructs to inform practice (Patton & McMahon, 1997). In this context, the systems approach overcomes Conte’s (1983) criticism that many career development theories are overly focussed on psychological variables to the exclusion of environmental factors that influence the lives of people with disabilities.

However the representation of disability within the systems framework remains overly individualistic. By representing impairment primarily as an “intrapersonal” variable (Patton, 1997, p.17) it continues to evoke notions of individualistic explanations of disability as ‘personal tragedy’ (Finkelstein, 1980) or ‘personal trouble’ (Borsay, 1997) rather than focussing on disability as a ‘social construction’ (Barnes, 1997). Structural interpretations of the causes of disability are important for practice because they direct the rehabilitation counsellor to examine and address environmental and social barriers to career development rather than perceived deficiencies arising from impairment. The systems theory framework *does* provide an opportunity to consider disability in this wider context by acknowledging that change can occur through “an intervention in the wider system” (Patton, 1997, p. 87) in areas such as social attitudes, laws and social policy. However it will need to consider its definition of disability if it is to fully achieve this goal.

**Ecological approach**

Szymanski and Hershenson (1998) also provide a framework to relate career development theories and their application to people with disabilities. Their model
describes career development as being determined by the interaction of constructs and processes identified from the career development literature. Constructs include:

- Individual attributes relating to the person e.g. gender, race, ability;
- Contextual factors surrounding the person’s life e.g. socioeconomic status, socialization pattern;
- Mediating variables that impact on the person’s interaction with their environment e.g. negative social attitudes towards disability, cultural and societal beliefs;
- Environmental constructs that influence the person’s behaviour e.g. globalisation of the labour market, work culture, physical access in work environments; and
- Outcome constructs (usually behaviours or states) that result from the interaction of other constructs e.g. job satisfaction, occupational attainment (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998).

Processes include:

- Congruence: the match or mismatch of people with their environments;
- Decision making: strategies used by people in making occupational choices;
- Developmental: those processes that occur over time and influence the acquisition of career related skills and attributes;
- Socialization: process by which work and other roles in life are acquired;
- Allocation: process by which ‘gatekeepers’ in society (e.g. teachers, employment consultants) restrict or allow opportunities for people, often according to external criteria;
- Chance: occurrence of uncontrollable events that influence career development (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998).

This type of ecological approach to career development is particularly useful to rehabilitation counsellors as it allows them to examine the interaction of the above constructs and processes to inform career development interventions for people with disabilities. These interventions can range from the barrier removal and advocacy through to career counselling and planning. The ecological framework also acknowledges that contextual, mediating and environmental constructs are often of greater importance than individual factors in the career development of people with disabilities (Conte, 1983). Although early theories did not take these constructs into account, recent sociological (e.g. Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996) and socio-cognitive approaches (e.g. Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1996) have done so with their focus on structural constraints to career choice. This emphasis on social constructs as determinants of vocational behaviour is consistent with ecological and social models of disability (Barnes et al., 1999; Hagner & Dileo, 1993; Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1996) that have received considerable support from the disability rights movement. Ecological frameworks of career development are therefore more likely to represent the experiences and aspirations of people with disabilities in terms of vocational rehabilitation service delivery.

Career Development and Rehabilitation: Practical Applications

The vocational rehabilitation field has used career counselling techniques to assist people with disabilities to identify and obtain work. Traditionally, these intervention strategies
have been applied primarily within a job placement, not a career development, framework. However, it is our contention that any future use of such strategies should be guided by: (a) appropriate career development theoretical frameworks such as the systems or ecological approach, and (b) a service delivery mandate that is focussed on assisting people to pursue careers, not just obtain a job. In this context, the section below describes some examples of policy changes and program level interventions that can be used to facilitate a career development approach.

Policy level interventions

The impact of career development on the rehabilitation field has tended to be in specific areas of intervention rather than on a systemic level. This has meant that examples of system-wide approaches to career development for people with disabilities are scarce. The supported employment movement, which has gained impetus since the mid-1980’s, has focussed on long-term job support to enable consumers to learn and retain employment. However many participants in these services have been placed in entry-level positions with little opportunity for career advancement (Hagner & Dileo, 1993).

Recently there have been calls for the U.S. State/Federal vocational rehabilitation system to adopt a career development approach to service delivery (Rumrill & Koch, 1999; Rumrill & Roessler, 1999). Rumrill and Roessler (1999) suggested two changes to policies relating to case closure to achieve this goal. First, they recommended that qualitative criteria (e.g., potential of a placement for training and advancement) be included in performance evaluation of rehabilitation counsellors in addition to the current quantitative criterion (i.e., numbers of clients successfully placed). Second, they suggested that the time between job placement and case closure be extended to 12 months during which more assistance be provided to overcome barriers to productivity and develop the person’s career enhancement skills. These recommendations, which are also relevant to the Australian rehabilitation system, would help to overcome the job retention problems that have plagued vocational rehabilitation services. Furthermore, they would provide people with disabilities with the career planning skills to cope with changes in the labour market.

Program level interventions

Vocational assessment

Rehabilitation has drawn heavily on the area of career assessment to develop it’s own approaches in terms of vocational evaluation. Career decision-making instruments have been used extensively by rehabilitation counsellors to assist people with disabilities with their vocational planning. There are several publications that provide an overview of vocational assessment practices in rehabilitation (Bolton, 1987; 1998; Power, 1991; Zunker, 1994). However, it should be noted that these practices have been criticised over the past two decades because of their potential to ‘screen out’ people with severe disabilities from vocational rehabilitation services and employment (Gold, 1980; Hagner & Dileo, 1993; Hagner & Salomone, 1989; Rogan & Hagner, 1990). In response, more
situational and community based assessments have been recommended for use with this population (e.g., Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke & Barcus, 1990; Pancsofar & Steere, 1997).

It is recommended that the field of vocational rehabilitation now focus their assessment practices on career choices for people with disabilities rather than on job placement. In considering the use of vocational assessment tools in this process, it is important that: (a) the results of these assessments be discussed with clients in the context of making occupational decisions that are relevant to a long-term career choice, not just a job, (b) more emphasis be given to assessment processes that identify strengths and limitations in areas such as career maturity and career planning, and (c) the systems and ecological theoretical frameworks be used to identify the range of issues that may impact on the rehabilitation program.

**Transition from school to work**

Transition planning, particularly from school to work, is crucial to the career development of people with disabilities (Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1996). Interventions used in transition planning are usually designed to prepare students with disabilities to function independently in post-school social and vocational roles. These interventions include relevant high school employment, functional curricula, ecological assessment, education in regular classrooms, teaching methods that facilitate generalization of skills into community settings, employability skills training, parent involvement and supported placement (Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1996; Schmitt, Growick, & Klein (1988). It is also important that transition planning be viewed as one step in the career development process. As Szymanski (1994) pointed out, transition planning “should expand rather than restrict the range of occupational choices available to a student” (p. 404). As part of a career planning approach students should be guided to explore their interests, increase their occupational knowledge and self-awareness, and acquire skills.

**Specific Career Interventions**

There are a range of career intervention strategies that have been adapted or developed for use with people with disabilities in vocational rehabilitation settings including individual career counseling, career planning systems, career classes and workshops and career decision making approaches (see Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright & Ettinger, 1996; Wolffe, 1997). The use of these interventions by rehabilitation counsellors has usually been within the context of job placement. However, recent examples of interventions have emerged that focus on a career development approach (Rumrill & Koch, 1999; Szymanski, 1999). For example, Szymanski (1999) recommends the use of career planning to manage the stress resulting from labour market changes such as the growth of short-term contract work, decreased job security, and technological change. She argues that career planning tasks such as goal setting, acquisition of occupational information and continuous learning to avoid skill obsolescence is a means of managing such stress. To support the career planning approach, Szymanski (1999) suggests that rehabilitation counsellors assist people to develop and maintain “career resilience
portfolios” (p. 283). These portfolios include the individual’s (a) current knowledge and skills, (b) future goals, (c) a plan for acquiring the skills and experience need to achieve these goals, and (d) stress analysis and strain prevention.

Another career development intervention recommended by Rumrill and Koch (1999) is the employment by vocational rehabilitation agencies of ‘career maintenance specialists’ to provide post-employment services. These services would include (a) technical advice to employers on job accommodations, (b) self-advocacy training for consumers, (c) information dissemination about relevant employment laws (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act), (d) implementation of career maintenance clubs (similar to job clubs), and (e) career advancement counselling. The details of such services would be outlined in an individualised career maintenance plan that outlines short-term and long-term career objectives and the steps, resources and timeframes needed to achieve these objectives.

Unfortunately, the complexity of career development constructs carry with them the danger that people with severe disabilities may be excluded from career planning initiatives based on spurious notions that they are incapable of making career choices. Hagner and Salomone (1989) outline a number of strategies that can be used to assist people with developmental disabilities to make career decisions. These strategies include innovative techniques to locate job leads, the provision of on-the-job supports, guided job experiences, decision-making training, career guidance, and long-term career services. A life span approach to career development is viewed as particularly important to ensure individuals with severe disabilities receive appropriate developmental experiences in childhood and obtain assistance to move beyond the first job to make a series of occupational choices (Conte, 1983; Hagner & Salomone, 1989).

Conclusion

The development of theoretical frameworks of career development affords rehabilitation counsellors an opportunity to integrate and apply useful concepts of career theories to their work with people with disabilities. However, changing rehabilitation systems to focus on comprehensive career development programs will not be easy. Assisting people with disabilities to realise career choices over the life span by addressing both individual need and economic and social barriers will be viewed as costly by governments. Mutual obligation in terms of government responsibility has tended to imply assistance to find a job, not pursue a career. Longitudinal research that evaluates the economic and social consequences of a career development approach is required to determine whether such a model is of sufficient value to justify an increase in rehabilitation expenditure in return for long-term cost savings associated with increased job retention. Research will also be required to ‘operationalise’ a career development approach for use in vocational rehabilitation service delivery. At present, there is a scarcity of literature that provides practitioners with guidance in this area. Fortunately, the ecological and systems frameworks summarised in this chapter offer an opportunity to develop a rational and coherent set of career development interventions that both meet the needs of people of disabilities and can be empirically examined.
References


