Reconceptualising the vocational rehabilitation process using a career development approach

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Abstract

The traditional job placement approach to vocational rehabilitation service delivery is no longer sustainable in terms of delivering meaningful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. For vocational rehabilitation to be relevant in the current labour market to the needs and aspirations of this population, a conceptual shift is required in the focus of service delivery. This paper suggests that an approach focussed on career development is warranted, and to this end, a model of career development for vocational rehabilitation underpinned by systems theory is presented. The application of the model is illustrated through the use of a case study and the implications of the model for rehabilitation practice are explored.
Re-conceptualising vocational rehabilitation using a career development approach

Over the past 60 years vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, with their strong focus on job placement, have been viewed as having served Australia well (Tipping, 1991). Assisting people with disabilities to obtain work is seen as a good investment by society because of savings in social security expenditure and clawbacks through income tax payments. However, despite considerable increases in VR expenditure over the last two decades, employment rates for people with severe disabilities have not significantly improved with unemployment rates for this group remaining at over 50% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). During this same period labour markets in Australia have undergone a radical shift. The classical wage-earner model that focuses on full-time permanent work in a regulated labour market is no longer relevant in Australia (Buchanan & Watson, 2000). Labour markets are now characterised by high levels of unemployment, a high degree of casualisation of the workforce, growth of precarious work, and a massive increase in low paid jobs in the service sector. Vulnerable workers in this labour market include many people with disabilities. These workers are "likely to suffer labour market churning: to move between a succession of short-term low-paying jobs, to move in and out of employment…" (Buchanan & Watson, 2000, p. 28). In this environment the traditional job placement model of rehabilitation service delivery is not sustainable in terms of ensuring durable and satisfying employment options for many people with disabilities (Buys, Buys, Kendall & Davis, 2001). Indeed, available data indicates that job retention rates among people receiving disability employment services are poor (Anderson, Psychogios & Golley, 2000). Gilbride, Stensrud and Johnson (1994) summarise the situation regarding VR services well: “people may be placed, but they may not be assisted to sustainable or promotable employment” (p. 217).

In response to these issues it is the contention of this paper that the job placement approach to VR needs to be replaced by a model that focuses on career development. It is argued that it is only through assisting people with disabilities to pursue long-term sustainable careers that the ‘labour market churning’ of this population will be reduced. In this context the purpose of this paper is to present a model of the VR process that has a career development focus.
Traditional Models of VR

The VR process is usually characterised as a short-term intervention strategy comprising several stages that ultimately lead to a vocational outcome. This process appears to be consistent across many industrialised nations and stages in the process are commonly described, with minor variation, as referral, initial assessment, vocational evaluation, planning, service delivery, job placement and follow-up (Brabham, Mandeville & Koch, 1998; Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service, 1994; Rubin & Roessler, 2001). However, the ultimate focus of these approaches, job placement, (Rubin & Roessler, 2001; Vandergoot, 1981) is inadequate for two reasons that relate to the nature of the intervention. First, due to funding constraints, people with disabilities are often placed in easily accessible jobs where minimal training is required. These jobs are often low paid and in the secondary labour market, and are usually the most precarious in terms of longevity. Such jobs form what is termed the secondary labour market (Hagner & Dileo, 1993). It is not surprising therefore that people with disabilities are disproportionately laid off from jobs (Yelin, 1991), particularly at times of economic restructuring and rapid labour market change. Second, even where training is provided to people with disabilities and jobs attracting reasonable salaries are found, little attention is paid to career planning. Consequently people with disabilities may move 'laterally' in the job market rather than obtaining promotions or advancing their careers. Furthermore, they may be laid off from their jobs with little idea about to re-enter the labour market and capitalise on career opportunities. A more sustainable approach to VR focussing on career development is clearly required.

Adoption of a career development approach radically alters the way in which we conceptualise the VR process from assessment through to job placement for people with disabilities. If we take the view that career development is a lifelong process consisting of multiple jobs, the notion of a 'one-off' job placement as the criteria for success in service delivery is challenged. Instead, placement is viewed "as an event within a person’s overall career development" (Vandergoot, 1981, p. 263), and the criteria for success becomes the client's capacity to pursue a sustainable career.

Although a career development approach to VR has been advocated in the literature over the past two decades (see Navin & Myers, 1983; Rumrill & Roessler, 1999; Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright & Ettinger, 1996; Vandergoot, 1981; Vandergoot, Jacobsen & Worrall, 1979), little seems to have changed
in the service delivery domain. Part of the problem for vocational rehabilitation practitioners has been that ‘traditional’ career development theories have largely ignored the impact of disability on people’s lives (Buys et al., 2001; Patton, 1997). The consequence of this has been that vocational rehabilitation practitioners have lacked a cohesive theoretical foundation for practice. However, recent ecological and system approaches to career development (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 1997; Savickas & Lent, 1994; Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998) offer hope in this area by offering frameworks to relate career development theories to rehabilitation practice (Buys et al, 2001).

**Theoretical framework for a career development approach to VR**

The systems theory framework when applied to career development attempts to identify and represent a range of individual, social and environmental influences on vocational decision-making and behaviour as a system of complex interrelationships (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 1997). It acknowledges that these influences change in importance over time and that chance factors, including the onset of disability, can have significant impact on career development.

Such systems theory frameworks are useful because they can guide rehabilitation counsellors in identifying the sub-systems (e.g. attitudes, family, labour market) that affect clients and the relationships between these sub-systems. Counsellors can then assist individuals to “understand issues and barriers to their vocational development and conjointly decide on appropriate interventions” (Buys et al, 2001, p. 41). By focussing on the range of socially constructed barriers and other environmental variables that influence the lives of people with disabilities, the systems framework moves away from explanations of career development that overly focus on the impairment associated with disability (Conte, 1983). Consequently, greater emphasis is placed on interventions addressing the barriers that people with disabilities face in wider society (e.g. employment discrimination, access problems to workplaces) rather than remedying personal deficiency.

The systems theory framework also aids rehabilitation counsellors in selecting constructs and interventions from other career development theories to inform practice by identifying salient variables that impact on an individual’s career development over the lifespan. In effect, the framework provides "a map for practitioners that alerts them to the broad range of influences and hence the theories to which
they can refer” (McMahon & Patton, 1995, p. 20). The systems theory framework is used in this paper to underpin aspects of the conceptual model outlined below.

**Career development model for VR**

The conceptual model for the career development approach to VR is described in Figure 1. It involves four phases: (a) career exploration and decision-making, (b) career enhancement, (c) job realisation, and (d) career management. The foundations for this model have been derived, in part, from the work of Vandergoot (1981). He proposed a career development model for VR that focussed on "identifying and enriching a person's productivity" (p. 277) in the labour market. The model consisted of three phases that included: (a) *productivity enrichment* aimed at preparing clients for careers, (b) *productivity realisation* directed at achieving placement that is consistent with clients’ long-term vocational goals, and (c) *career enhancement* aimed at preparing clients for long-term career development. The primary difficulty with Vandergoot’s model is its linear representation of events. In contrast, this paper presents a process that is repetitive and cyclical for two reasons. First, events that occur at different phases are not necessarily exclusive to those phases. Activities primarily associated with the career enhancement phase, for example, may occur at other phases in the process. During career exploration clients will acquire self-knowledge in relation to work that will be critical to the development of future career options. Similarly, the acquisition of skills necessary to find employment in the career enhancement phase will also be important to ongoing career management. The notion of repetition is represented in Figure 1 by overlap of the phases. Second, the career management phase is somewhat recursive as depicted in the mini-cycle in Figure 1. Within this phase it may be necessary to revisit activities characteristic of earlier phases. For example, if a career option is no longer deemed satisfactory due to a significant life transition, ill-health or injury, economic downturn, or labour market change, further work in career exploration, career enhancement and job realisation may be required.

Figure 1 also represents the notion that counsellors will initially work intensively with clients, and then over time, clients will become increasingly independent in terms of their own career management. This is important for two reasons. First, the goal of case management within VR should be to promote the independence of clients in job seeking and career planning activities. Second, VR systems usually
sanction only short-term intensive interventions by caseworkers, thus clients need to become self-reliant in their career management as soon as possible.

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**Career exploration and decision-making phase**

The career exploration and decision making phase consists of assisting people to: (a) clarify career and life aspirations and values, (b) develop a self-knowledge of their skills, abilities, aptitudes and interests, (c) understand the barriers to their participation in work and a career, (d) obtain knowledge of occupations and the labour market, and (e) make career choices based on this information.

Due to the emphasis within many rehabilitation systems on short-term interventions for immediate placement in employment, career and life aspiration issues have traditionally not been considered in VR. This model proposes that clarification of these issues is a foundation for effective career development. Exploring with clients their own meaning of work and career, and how these fit with their broader life plans assists them to work collaboratively with the rehabilitation counsellor on the clients' goals rather than on assumptions of the centrality (or otherwise) of work and career in people's lives. Reaching an understanding of what is important to the client, such as family, lifestyle, community and other activities, as well as those factors related to work and career (eg levels of income, job security required, desires for skill and personal development) is a key part of this exploration.

Formal assessment of skills, aptitudes and interests is traditionally termed vocational assessment in rehabilitation service delivery. Through the use of tools such as transferable skills analysis, aptitude and achievement tests, and interest inventories, counsellors aim to increase clients’ self-understanding so they are better prepared to make career decisions. These assessment approaches have been well documented in the rehabilitation literature (see Bolton, 1998, 2001; Power, 2000). While the utility of these assessment techniques is accepted, there is a growing movement in the area of career counselling for more consideration to be given to qualitative assessment approaches (McMahon & Patton, 2002), and this is consistent with enabling clients to clarify their career and life aspirations. The intention of qualitative approaches is to “encourage individuals to tell their own career stories, and uncover their subjective
careers and life themes” (p. 59). Individuals can then use this information, with the assistance of the counsellor, to move towards a more preferred future. Constructivist assessment approaches of this nature have considerable applicability to the area of disability and career development because they are more likely than quantitative methods to elicit information relevant to career planning. For example, it is well recognised that acquired disability can “alter the relationship of past experiences to current occupational choices” (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998, p. 340). The use of ‘lifelines’ to explore life histories in terms of career aspirations, career influences and transitions (McMahon & Patton, 2002) can reveal the impact of acquired disability on clients' careers, and also emergent life themes/patterns that reflect barriers to their career development (e.g., perceived discrimination). Similarly, the use of genograms with individuals who acquired disability early in life can reveal “patterns of family influence” (McMahon & Patton, 2002, p. 63) that have a profound impact on the development of vocational behaviour (Roe & Lunneborg, 1990).

The use of qualitative assessments for self-understanding provides not only richer career information for both the client and the counsellor, but can be an intervention in terms of enabling clients to build confidence and to recognise where discrimination and attitudes of others may have been internalised. For example, under-estimation of ability by significant others, such as health professionals and potential employers, may lead to self-doubt and lowered confidence. Taking a qualitative approach to identifying transferable skills asks the client to engage in a process to recognise and confidently value their skills. In contrast, the use of quantitative assessment of previous achievements may result in the same list of skills, but these skills may not be confidently recognised by the client as a true reflection of their capabilities because of their lack of involvement in the assessment process. These processes of building meaning, purpose and confidence are essential to assist the client to establish a solid platform for immediate and future career exploration (McMahon, Adams & Lim, 2002).

The second part of the career exploration and decision-making phase is to engage the client in a career decision-making process using information from assessments and with reference to the labour market. In VR systems this process is traditionally called vocational counselling. Because VR systems usually mandate that interventions will be time limited, the end point of vocational counselling normally is a decision about which occupation a client will pursue. Funding patterns and constraints in these systems
have meant that clients are placed in occupations that are available either in terms of their current transferable skills or following a brief period of training. Adopting a career development approach to VR changes the focus of vocational counselling to one of career exploration, the outcome of which will be decisions about jobs within the context of a career. Given that career development involves a "lifelong sequence of occupationally relevant choices and behaviour" (Szymanski & Hershenson, 1998, p. 327) it is important that clients make occupational choices that fit within their overall career goal (Rumrill & Roessler, 1999).

Assisting clients to obtain relevant labour market information about occupations, requirements of occupations, areas of job growth, and current job vacancies is a key part of the vocational counselling process. However, a career development approach involves more than just accessing information for two reasons. First, clients need to understand how selected jobs relate to career objectives (Wolffe, 1997) in terms of skills and knowledge acquisition. There is little point identifying jobs that will not contribute to the achievement of a career goal. Second, clients need to become lifelong learners in terms of accessing up-to-date occupational information and labour market trends (Patterson, 1996). For clients to realise career goals and develop resilience in a changing labour market it is important they understand that sourcing and evaluating occupational information is a continuous process and not a ‘one-off’ event that ceases following a job or career decision. Clients should be aware that the skills required for occupations can rapidly change. Technology, for example, has led to the demise of many occupations and the introduction of new occupations (Irwin, 1994). Clients need to be familiar with the new sets of skills these occupations require as well as possessing the job-seeking skills needed to change jobs.

Planning is an important part of the career exploration and decision-making phase. Rehabilitation counsellors use rehabilitation plans to document the steps and resources necessary to achieve a vocational goal. Within a career development approach rehabilitation plans are replaced by career plans. Career plans contain short-term and long-term career objectives, steps and timeframes and resources required (Rumrill & Koch, 1999). They can also include the skills needed to achieve career goals and the means by which these skills will be acquired. In a career plan, the acquisition of a job is likely to be a short-term objective in realising a career pathway. Career plans can be useful as tools for ‘gap analysis’ (Phillips,
1998) in that the objectives and timeframes specified in plans allow clients to determine what they have achieved at a particular time and what further action is needed to achieve their career goals.

**Career enhancement phase**

The career enhancement phase focuses on assisting clients to: (a) understand and develop their skill levels in relation to job hunting and pursuing their chosen career, and (b) enhancing their knowledge of the world of work in relation to their specific job and chosen career. Assessment and enhancement of clients' abilities in areas such as job seeking, resume preparation, interview skills and application writing is well-established practice in vocational rehabilitation service delivery, and there are many useful rehabilitation resources in this area (eg see Boerner, 1994; Wolffe, 1997). However, developing a client's knowledge of those skills necessary to pursue a career or careers over a lifetime is not traditionally part of VR practice. Pressures to secure immediate employment outcomes can lead to short-cutting the process of training clients in effective job search skills necessary for future job transitions and career planning. A career development approach to VR focuses on building up skills in areas such as self-efficacy (Strauser, 1995) and self marketing through the job search process, career planning (Szymanski, 1999), development of career portfolios (Koch & Merz, 2001), and career maintenance (Rumrill & Roessler, 1999). It also involves overcoming career barriers such as negative employer attitudes, lack of workplace accommodations and family issues. In short one of the primary aims of the career enhancement phase is to "strengthen the person’s ability to choose, obtain and maintain good jobs in accordance with his or her long-term career goals" (Rumrill & Roessler, 1999, p. 28).

Career enhancement also builds on the career exploration and decision-making phase in terms of knowledge of employers, the labour market and the world of work. Currently rehabilitation counsellors provide, or assist clients to obtain, occupational information necessary to find job leads. Such information may include job advertisements in newspapers and on websites, sourcing job leads through family and friends and employer contacts. However, career enhancement also focuses on locating specific sources of information needed to pursue their chosen career such as occupational outlook websites and trade publications, as well as through building networks. Accessing the experience and support of people established in particular fields is an effective means for clients to obtain relevant information for identifying transferable skills, making informed career decisions, revealing 'hidden' opportunities and
gaining pertinent, up-to-date career information. This can be done through activities such as informational interviewing (Bolles, 1996), job shadowing (Wolffe, 1997) and mentoring. Given the rate of occupational change, it is essential that clients are able to access up-to-date information about trends in their chosen career, including keeping up with the skills necessary to do these jobs. Clients will need to know how to access training necessary to update these skills so they remain competitive in pursuing their career.

**Job realisation phase**

Job realisation is the phase where clients obtain and accept a job offer. Where necessary, rehabilitation counsellors may provide other services at this stage such as worksite modification, assistive technology, job coaching, implementation of support services and other workplace interventions. In this context the job realisation phase represents a convergence between traditional service delivery models and a career development approach. Where the two differ is that a career development approach suggests that the placement must be consistent with the person’s overall career development rather than being viewed as an isolated event. The job is therefore a ‘stepping stone’ on the way to a career or careers pursued over a lifetime (Vandergoot, 1981). This requires that considerable emphasis be placed on exploring suitable careers in the career exploration and decision-making phase to ensure that clients have a clear path to follow if they decide to leave the job or are made redundant in today’s unstable labour market. In traditional vocational service delivery systems the job realisation phase also includes a post-placement follow-up period of three to six months that is concerned with maintaining clients in their current position. It involves monitoring and supporting clients, and can include services such as ongoing worksite modification, resolving workplace issues (e.g. supervision, interpersonal conflict), on-site training, encouraging appropriate workplace behaviours, education of workplace peers, development of natural supports and resolving issues with transport to and from the workplace. The job realisation phase is viewed as the logical conclusion to the rehabilitation process. However, within a career development framework the next phase is career management.

**Career management phase**

The career management phase is concerned with management of the career in the longer term and focuses on assisting clients to maintain and advance their careers, including the processes of changing jobs in the future and reviewing career over time. This assistance is particularly important so as to avoid "the
revolving door of placements” (Rumrill & Roessler, 1999, p.30) whereby clients move from one position to another, usually in low skilled, unstable jobs.

Career management skills include those developed with clients in earlier phases of the model such as career exploration and planning, decision-making, dealing with environmental barriers and sourcing information about labour markets. With the reduction in job security in today's labour market, the reality for most workers is that they will need to change jobs and career direction regularly throughout their working lives. Thorough, instructive and future-focussed assistance in the earlier stages of the VR process, should mean that clients should be well equipped to manage future job transitions independently or with need for only minimal further assistance at this point.

Career management entails more than securing and maintaining jobs. It also embraces notions of continuous learning and management of career in the context of life in general. Clients need to learn how to learn (Szymanski, 1999), negotiate roles, resources and access requirements in relation to any promotions or changes in the workplace, problem solve in a complex labour market, avoid skill obsolescence, maintain a work-life balance and review career aspirations and opportunities. Career aspirations should not be treated as static but an evolving process over time. Fluctuation in the labour market and people's realities of changing life experiences, needs and desires, health status and other circumstances, requires regular review of career direction and life balance. It is not expected that rehabilitation counsellors will be actively involved with clients for the duration of their careers. This approach is intended to assist clients to become independent in the career planning process. For example, skills and techniques developed in the earlier stages, such as negotiation and self-advocacy and accessing and developing networks with others, can be applied to the career management phase. However, rehabilitation counsellors may serve as 'consultants' to clients on an as needed basis over a long period of time (Szymanski, 1999). In this role they may also be useful in assisting the client to identify and access other sources of career support, such as identifying a mentor, joining a professional association and accessing useful community or professional groups.

Case Study: Tony

Tony, 41 years of age, left school when he completed Grade 10 at the age of 16 years. He has had several jobs including clerk and stores manager in a local engineering supplies firm, self-employed fisherman,
apprentice carpenter, and carpenter. At the age of 36 he injured his back while employed as a formwork carpenter and was unable to return to this type of work. Tony has two children and his spouse works as a shop assistant. He has taken on the role of 'househusband', including after school care of the children. The family receives a small amount in social security payments from Centrelink, and has eligibility for a health care card, which assists with medical costs. After five years out of the workforce Centrelink referred Tony for vocational rehabilitation assistance.

**Career exploration and decision making phase**

At the time of referral Tony was pessimistic about the outcome of rehabilitation because of his pain levels and uncertainty about his work future. Functional restrictions specified by his doctor included a sitting tolerance of 30 minutes, a standing tolerance of an hour, and no heavy lifting. In the initial sessions the rehabilitation counsellor explored with Tony what he had achieved in the past and also encouraged him to develop a vision of a preferred future. Initially, Tony was reluctant to engage in this activity as he felt he had little control over his future or choice of options. The counsellor drew on a solution-focussed therapy approach called the 'miracle question' (de Shazer, 1988) to overcome this reluctance. Solution-focussed therapy is a goal directed systems based model of therapy that focusses on building solutions through working collaboratively with the client (de Shazer, 1985). By asking questions such as: "Imagine that a miracle happened overnight and tomorrow morning you woke up to discover that you were no longer limited by your back injury, what would you do?" and "How would life be different?", the counsellor was able to focus Tony on positives and strengths, and work to generate possibilities and hope. The process revealed that Tony, whilst doubtful, was highly motivated to return to employment and that work played a number of important roles in his life, including being able to support his family financially and to offer opportunities for challenge, stimulation and autonomy. In addition, through the use of assessment instruments and transferable skills analysis, Tony was able to see that he possessed a wide variety of skills and interests that were relevant to careers that were within his functional restrictions.

Tony was also asked to complete a life span time line to identify the events, and possible influences around his major life decisions. This revealed a number of profound influences and consistent themes related to his career. An early role model was Tony's grandfather whom he greatly admired as a man of principle. As a boy he accompanied his grandfather on trips to value rural properties and he dreamed of
being in the same job. However restlessness in his teenage years and a loss of interest in education meant Tony had not pursued this dream. As he reflected on his working life, Tony relayed the growing importance of achieving a comfortable living standard and having a challenging career, while at the same time having sufficient time to spend with his family on weekends and evenings.

The timeline also revealed the profound losses that Tony experienced at the time of his injury that have continued to impact on his life. He reflected that his aspirations, continuity of achievement and his valued role in his family had ceased at this time. His inability to pursue work in the building industry after his injury further compounded his feelings of loss. However, it also revealed that he had enjoyed many aspects of his new family role and had felt recognised achievement in his community work. He was very proud of the quality of life he had attained, and the valuable role he contributed in his family. Revelations from the timeline process surprised Tony and he began exploring how his strengths and influences from the past could be applied to his current circumstances to assist in accommodating the limitations placed on him by his work accident. Tony recognised he could draw on these attributes during his rehabilitation program, and could also apply them in the future.

Tony identified his major barriers to returning to work as his pain levels and his need to be able to control his activity, as well as his responsibilities within the family. To help improve his physical tolerances, Tony undertook a gym program with the approval of his doctor, provided with back-education, and given a back support to use when seated and driving his car. The combination of these activities resulted in increased stamina and reduced pain levels. During this time Tony participated in a self-paced computer skills course to increase his sense of self-efficacy and improve his basic skills in keyboard and common software packages.

With his increased confidence and insights, Tony was now ready to consider his career plans. He reviewed the information about his career dreams and needs, interests and transferable skills with his counsellor, and then identified several occupations of interest, including valuer, real estate salesperson, property manager, and computer technician. With his counsellor Tony developed an initial career plan to break down the steps he would take to research the long-term viability of selected career options and identify a suitable career. As part of the plan, Tony was coached on using informational interviews learn to about the experience and skills required for each occupation. As part of his explorations into the
occupation of valuer, he spoke with a valuer, the Australian Property Institute and two employers and learned that a degree in property economics was required. Tony also analysed the employment trends and options for valuers by reviewing pertinent labour market websites and recontacting the professional association. Simultaneously, Tony was encouraged to explore the other interest areas so that he was well placed to contrast the options in terms of meeting his career needs.

On completion of the tasks in the initial plan, Tony and the counsellor again reviewed his position. Tony had developed a revised view of himself and was beginning to realise that it was possible for him to return to employment. He stated that he now wanted to obtain a job in which he could have some control over his environment so that he could reasonably manage his back pain. He acknowledged that if he was able to work, the family would benefit from his additional income. Long-term career options were discussed and Tony confirmed his passion for valuation as his career choice. His career plan was revised to identify valuer as his career goal. Objectives of the plan included further investigations into careers in valuation, and steps to pursue a job in the short-term that would develop additional skills for his preferred career choice.

**Career enhancement phase**

During his visits to valuation firms Tony was able to identify related occupations, available in the short-term, that could contribute to his longer-term career goal. It appeared that clerical work in the finance sector would offer valuable experience related to his career goal as well as offer him an income whilst he pursued part-time tertiary studies. Transferable skills in the area of administration gained from his previous occupations combined with his newly acquired computer skills meant that he was well placed to obtain such work.

In accordance with his career plan Tony developed his self-marketing skills in preparation for job search. His research into occupations and their requisite skills provided a platform for his marketing efforts. Additionally, his new found recognition of his achievements and transferable skills gave him considerable confidence in what he had to offer a potential employer and formed the basis for a career portfolio. To help Tony refine his job search and presentation skills, he participated in a job club group that included sessions on how to self-market, prepare an effective resume, source 'hidden' vacancies and
effectively present in interviews. He identified several employers he considered would be suitable and sent off his resume to each.

Another objective of his career plan was to continue developing his knowledge of his chosen occupation of valuer. He began networking with professionals in the field to enlist support and guidance. As a result Tony met a valuer in the bank, who seemed to want to assist him with his efforts to return to the work force. He found his contact with him informative in terms of opportunities in valuation and he learned about the skills and attributes that he possessed and also needed to work as a valuer. Tony also learned about 'trade' publications that provided insights into developments in the field of valuation and listed conferences he could attend to build on his knowledge and contacts. All indications pointed to a healthy outlook in the demand for valuers over the next five years.

**Job realisation phase**

Two barriers to obtaining employment became evident during Tony's job search efforts. These were his lack of recent work experience and employers' concerns about the impact of his back injury on his productivity. A three-month work experience placement as a clerk was therefore negotiated for Tony at a local building society to consolidate his work skills and provide him with experience. Following a work site assessment a graduate work program was organised with regular breaks, and ergonomic furniture provided. After school care was also arranged for his children.

While on the work experience placement, Tony continued to apply for suitable positions. One of these was a vacancy for a teller in another branch of the building society. Through colleagues he found out that the branch manager supported staff development, which would provide Tony with the support he needed to complete his degree. Tony successfully applied for the position, and was told he was selected because of his preparation, work experience and enthusiasm.

**Career management phase**

Prior to his commencing the position, Tony reviewed his activities to this point with his rehabilitation counsellor. He was able to clearly describe the processes he went through to identify his choice of valuer, and the activities that had lead him to successfully obtain his current job. He also recognised the support his new 'valuer mentor' had given him, and they continued to meet regularly. Tony planned to stay in the teller position until he completed half of his degree, and then seek a move to a position more closely
linked with valuations, either within the building society or elsewhere. His career plan was revised to incorporate these new career management objectives and to build in a process of follow-up with the counsellor. They agree to meet six-monthly, but Tony was encouraged to utilise the counsellor as a consultant more frequently if required.

At six months, Tony's plan was proceeding well, he was enjoying his position and his studies, managing his back pain effectively and balancing his home, work and study commitments. However, at the second review Tony expressed concerns with managing stress. The load of part-time studies and full-time work, together with his family needs were becoming exhausting and he was falling behind in his studies. In addition, rumours were rife in the building society that the branch would soon lay-off staff. The stress and heavy workload appeared also to be compounding Tony's back pain. With all the difficulties, he had lost touch with his mentor and ceased attending professional association meetings. The counsellor assisted Tony to problem solve the issues.

The ideal solution for Tony was to drop his position back to part-time to enable more time for other commitments. The counsellor coached him in putting together a proposal to put to his manager that was successful. Tony was asked to review his back care strategies taught earlier in the program and this resulted in his returning to daily back exercises and taking up swimming as a way to increase his fitness and manage stress. As Tony had been feeling frustrated with the slow progress towards his career goal, he was encouraged to resume his networking with his mentor and professional association and to be observant about any possible openings in the industry. He was also linked with student services at his university who were able to assist with support for managing his back pain during studies and exams, as well as providing targeted career support towards his career goals such as informing him of paid cadetships in his industry.

At the third review meeting much had changed. The building society had closed the branch where Tony worked. Whilst he was offered another position in a different branch, he elected to leave. His networking had paid off, his mentor told him about an ideal position as a clerk with a small practice of valuers. Tony researched the company and used this to effectively market himself into securing position. He continued to undertake his exercise to manage his back and stress, and developed an extensive
network of contacts in the industry and university who encouraged his progress towards his long-term goal. Tony eventually secured a position as a valuer.

**Implications of the model for vocational rehabilitation services**

The career development model is proposed to address deficiencies of the current VR system. Whilst pressure to demonstrate accountability and outcomes with tax payer or insurance company dollars can lead to a focus on immediately available jobs, this model shifts the focus to enhancing the longer term employability of people with disabilities. It is argued that a career development approach will ultimately result in better returns for rehabilitation investments, as clients will be more independent, less likely to require substantial further assistance on a revolving door basis and more likely to sustain employment throughout their working lives. Three key implications arise out of the proposed model concerning the (1) evaluation of VR services; (2) role of the rehabilitation counsellor; and, (3) need for research regarding career management issues for people with disabilities.

Although a career development approach can be delivered through current service delivery structures, it will entail re-conceptualising criteria for deciding on case closure and evaluating effectiveness of services. Traditional notions of case closure based on quantitative criteria such as retaining a job for three months are somewhat problematic within this model. It is likely that rehabilitation counsellors will need to use different types of criteria as a basis for case closure (Rumrill & Roessler, 1999). For example, an assessment by the client and counsellor of the client's level of independence in the career planning process may be an appropriate indicator of when a program should be closed. Evaluation measures assessing effectiveness of interventions will need to change. Maintaining criteria focussed on measures such as number of clients placed in jobs will continue to drive service delivery toward short-term but potentially unstable outcomes. More effective, and indeed more accountable, measures include longitudinal tracking of clients' employment and assessments of how well services have assisted clients to develop career resilience. A new set of future oriented criteria could also lead to further gains through calling attention to systemic and individual career management issues previously not considered, such as issues of discrimination experienced by people with disabilities in relation to career promotions and potential gaps in service delivery.
There are implications of this model for the role of the counsellor within the VR process. Its emphasis on a process of collaboration, involvement and encouraging skill development reframes the role of counsellors as partners and coaches as they facilitate the client to develop career goals and the skills necessary to pursue a career. Given the long-term nature of establishing careers, clients may encounter difficulties in maintaining their careers. In these situations clients may seek the services of counsellors as 'consultants' to help them keep their careers on track. In these instances, clients will determine when and what services they require from counsellors rather than vice versa. In response to changes in the labour market, there is also an emerging political role for counsellors (McMahon & Patton, 2000; Miller, 1999; Peavy, 2000). Rehabilitation counsellors are often in a privileged situation through having access to information about career development issues. As clients tell their stories of aspirations and frustration experienced, counsellors have access to valuable information to inform better service delivery mechanisms, and advocate and educate policy makers regarding the barriers people with disabilities face in managing a career. Through being cognisant of the social and political context in which careers are fashioned, rehabilitation counsellors are in a good position to impact the systems and institutional structures that prevent clients from realising career aspirations. Broadening the role of rehabilitation counsellors in this way has long been advocated by some in the disability rights field (see Hahn, 1991).

Finally, the model of service delivery proposed in this paper raises the need for research to better understand career management issues of people with disabilities. The career management needs of this population have been unexplored, yet such research is necessary to better inform and enhance service delivery models and strategies. Furthermore, longitudinal research that 'tracks' clients through career exploration, planning and management is needed to understand their changes in terms of career development. This research will not only inform interventions in career guidance for people with disabilities but could also build a foundation for a theory of career development that adequately reflects the lives of this population.

**Conclusion**

Labour markets in Australia will continue to change and vocational rehabilitation services cannot afford to ignore the impact of this on clients of their services. With the increased focus on assisting social security recipients with disabilities to participate in employment programs there is an opportunity to
introduce models of service delivery that will adequately prepare them for the competitive labour market. Models focussed only on job placement will not achieve this aim. Instead an approach that embraces the notion of building those skills required for long-term career development is needed. This paper provides the foundations for such a model.

References


Figure 1: A Career Development Model for Vocational Rehabilitation