

USING INDUSTRIAL BUYING BEHAVIOR PRINCIPLES TO IMPROVE THE VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION SERVICE EXCHANGE: AN EXPLORATORY DISCUSSION

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The delivery of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services is an expensive and critical service provided by governments. Various inefficiencies in providing such benefits, however, can be reduced through the application of marketing and buyer behavior research.

CURRENT VR SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Review of the handicapped person's work potential is the initial step in the rehabilitation process. Together, the VR counselor and client develop goals and a related training program. When the client is ready for competitive employment, a job search is begun.

The intangibility of the VR service offering confuses performance appraisals. A disabled employee's capabilities are difficult to assess until the person has been on the job for some period of time. Thus, the production process used by rehab counselors is not standardized, which makes it more difficult for employers to judge the applicant's qualifications.

Perhaps the most basic problem is that the traditional VR service delivery model focuses almost exclusively on the disabled person. VR experts have not recognized the employer as their real customer.

APPLYING ORGANIZATION BUYING RESEARCH

Findings from the industrial buyer research literature substantiate the idea that VR counselors and employing organizations should work together regularly. This perspective is suggested by researchers who advise marketers to locate key decision people in the organization buyer center (Jackson, Keith, and Burdick 1984; Ryan and Holbrook 1982; Ronchetto, Hutt, and Reingen 1989).

Other findings related to the nature of the buying task (McCabe 1987), organizational structure (Johnson Brown and Reingen 1987), information search (Roedder John, Scott, and Bettman 1986), purchase novelty (McQuiston 1989), and service familiarity (Sujan 1985) are also relevant.

More fully incorporating employers into the rehab process would yield several important benefits: realistic setting of employment goals, ongoing VR-employer relationships, and standardization of VR process.

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