

European Project Working

Value of Learning Needs Analysis

Vocational Rehabilitation Consultants Ltd and Rehabilitation Network Ltd have been working with the UK Department of Work and Pensions and a number of European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey) since 2007. Sitting alongside the obvious joys of European travel and cultural exchange experiences are some fairly serious motives which we would like to bring to the attention of key players in the VR field particularly policy makers and government officials. Our work includes:

1. Trialling DWP Course Design Principles (Birkin, Booth & O'Malley 2008) (TRAVORS & DESEPA projects)

Key design features include three themes – psychological concepts (self-efficacy, learning modes); training techniques (learning needs analysis, skills first, skills acquisition, blended learning, pre-requisite learning, number of delegates, consolidation, using the cohort as a resource, evaluation) and; technology (accessibility, usability, e-learning)

2. Trialling VR content transferred by rehabilitation service providers (TRAVORS & DESEPA projects)

Key content has been grouped under 5 essential skills and behaviours – working with employers, work-focussed interviewing, case management, job seeking skills, recruiting and maintaining a job, generic skills and trainers' skills

3. Understanding the competencies of key players in the VR field (DC Key Train project)

To enable better integration of disadvantaged groups into the European Labour Market

4. Developing a European VR journal (GEPP project)

To collect best practice case studies of disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities, vulnerable adults etc and provide a discussion forum for other practitioners working in the field

One of the main goals of our European project partners is to develop and accredit skills based training courses using self-efficacy training methods. Underpinning much of this European project work, as the first step, is the familiar learning needs analysis tool.

What is a Learning Needs Analysis?

A Learning Needs Analysis is an assessment of the organisational goals and skill requirements that are relevant to your training brief. In our field we are, of course, talking about VR related goals and skills i.e. the skills required to help people with disabilities and vulnerable adults get and keep work. In a Learning Needs Analysis you are trying to answer the following key questions:

- A. Organisational Information – what are the business goals? What is the problem, how much time / resource / money / staff commitment is available to solve the problem, what skills does the employer think staff need to demonstrate to do the skill well?
- B. Skill matching: working from the organisation's business goals to the actual skill training needs – what skills are required?

There are a number of research tools available to help you with gathering your Learning Needs Analysis information. Direct observation and stakeholder interviews are to be preferred to documentary evidence, though all are valuable. The tools can include shadowing – direct observation of work, job interviews – to gather information about job tasks, work activities and work situations and circumstances. 'Desk' research – examination of job descriptions, checklists, questionnaires, qualitative evidence and management information data

Why do you undertake a Learning Needs Analysis?

Goldstein in his book Training in Organisations – Needs Assessment, Development and Evaluation (1986) outlines the following process and reasons for undertaking a learning needs analysis:

- A. Find out the organisational goals so that you can ensure:
 - The goals / values / approach of training programme match those of the organisation
 - Training programme goals fit within / supported by organisational environment
 - Get top management and line management on board / develop two way communication system
 - Find out organisational expectations and include in the training programme
- B. Find out any organisational constraints so you can build them into the training programme:

- Resources available – staff time, budget, staff support time, training resources
- Legislation, political factors that you need to work within
- No's of staff, difficulty in recruiting them etc

C. Skills analysis so you know the full skill set for the job:

- Determining relevant skills
- Importance, time-frequency, difficulty of learning task etc

D. Find out what skills are missing so you know what skills you are teaching:

- Analysis of staff performance through interview and/or observation

Case example – how a Learning Needs Analysis will fit into the structure of our DESEPA trials (May – Sept 2010) and DC Key train competencies research (Mid May – Mid August 2010)

The DESEPA trials have been designed to test training course design concepts and VR content for Human Resource and Line Manager staff and for non-specialist VR practitioners. DC Key Train is looking into the competencies required by key players working in the VR field with people with disabilities and vulnerable adults.

The structure of the DESEPA trials and DC Key Train competencies research will both be based on DWP Course Design Principles (Birkin, Booth & O'Malley 2008). This document sets out DWP recommendations for course design and includes a comprehensive list of references.

Firstly we will conduct a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) as the basis for individual and organisational learning. It will be undertaken by phone or visit and may include an interview, observation, desk research of job descriptions, company goals etc. We anticipate the learning needs analysis taking approximately 1 day of organisational time to:

- Collect relevant documentation e.g. job descriptions
- Undertake 1 – 1.5 hour interview to obtain answers to LNA questions
- Arrange access to potential participants for observation / informal questioning on their perception of key skill gaps
- Administration of short skills based questionnaire

The Learning Needs Analysis will inform the course design and content with sample materials and learning design being produced for the organisation to consider and comment on before the course is implemented. It is expected that skills acquisition requirements will fall within our list of skills and behaviours. For example

Skill Module	Key Skills
Generic interviewing	Enables open trusting and accurate communication Provides coaching or training to enable the client to act on their own behalf

Skills	Aids clients' and employers' thinking and communication Undertakes the work from the perspective of the client and employer Acts professionally and builds a sound reputation Applies the principles of employment
Work-focussed interviewing	Sets and keeps a focus on work Develops trust and motivates clients towards work Gathers relevant information Uses client's (SE) evaluations to choose goals and formulate plans Helps clients to select from alternatives and to adopt realistic goals and plans

Learning will be based on a variety of methods including demonstration, practical exercises, discussion and web based assessment. The final stage will be the evaluation of behavioural outcomes (skills) including administration of self-efficacy and manager / supervisor, skill acquisition and 'happy sheet' questionnaires.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that undertaking a Learning Needs analysis can be time consuming but it actually starts to pinpoint real needs whether they are related to skills acquisition or competencies. It presents a values led way to tackle course design which takes time to listen to the community who will benefit from the end results.

Follow up

To date our courses are offered in UK and Europe and will form part of the Estonian Social Worker qualification framework and be adopted by one of Austria's biggest training providers.

The content of our trials and courses can sit within the learning outcomes framework for University of Derby Corporate, ACM-VR 30 credit course. It will be possible to be assessed for learning obtained during the trial and then enrol on the ACM-VR course, at a reduced cost, to complete the full learning outcomes.

For more information please visit

www.rehabwindow.net for back issues of rehab review carrying recently published articles by David Booth, DWP and David Imber, VRC

www.vocationalrehabilitationassociation.org.uk or www.rehabwindow.net for further information on our full training courses

www.travors.eu or www.vocationalrehabilitationconsultants.com or www.rnltraining.com for further information on UK and European partners

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