

Creating Standards to Define the Role of Employment Specialists: A Case Study

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Abstract : In the United States, displaced workers, the unemployed and those seeking to build additional work skills are provided employment training and job placement services through a system of One-Stop Career Centers that are sponsored by the country's 593 local Workforce Boards. During the period 2010-2015, these centers served roughly 8 million individuals each year. The quality of services provided at these centers rests upon professional employment specialists who work closely with clients to identify their job interests, to connect them to appropriate training opportunities, to match them with needed supportive social services and to guide them to eventual employment. Despite the crucial role these Employment Specialists play, currently there are no broadly accepted standards that establish what these individuals are expected to do in the workplace, nor are there indicators to assess how well an individual performs these responsibilities. Education Development Center (EDC) and the United Labor Agency (ULA) have partnered to create a foundation upon which curriculum can be developed that addresses the skills, knowledge and behaviors that Employment Specialists must master in order to serve their clients effectively. EDC is a non-profit, education research and development organization that designs, implements, and evaluates programs to improve education, health and economic opportunity worldwide. ULA is the social action arm of organized labor in Greater Cleveland, Ohio. ULA currently operates One-Stop Career Centers in both Cleveland and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This case study outlines efforts taken to create standards that define the work of Employment Specialists and to establish indicators that can guide assessment of work performance. The methodology involved in the study has engaged a panel of expert Employment Specialists in rigorous, structured dialogues that analyze and identify the characteristics that enable them to be effective in their jobs. It has also drawn upon and integrated reviews of the panel's work by more than 100 other Employment Specialists across the country. The results of this process are two documents that provide resources for developing training curriculum for future Employment Specialists, namely: an occupational profile of an Employment Specialist that offers a detailed articulation of the skills, knowledge and behaviors that enable individuals to be successful at this job, and; a collection of performance based indicators, aligned to the profile, which illustrate what the work responsibilities of an Employment Specialist 'look like' a four levels of effectiveness ranging from novice to expert. The method of occupational analysis used by the study has application across a broad number of fields.

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