

THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL COUNSELING AND
PLACEMENT IN RELATION TO
TENURE, MOBILITY AND OTHER FACTORS *

Vocational counseling and the placement of workers in jobs have been given considerable attention by the armed services, civilian governmental agencies, educational institutions and community agencies. The question frequently arises as to the value of such services and to what extent they have contributed to various aspects of vocational adjustment. The kind and extent of vocational counseling varies considerably among those administering it. Likewise, the placement of workers by public and private agencies varies from routine referral to jobs to extensive vocational counseling and testing.

This outline is concerned with the effectiveness of vocational counseling and placement in the community and particularly with the role of the Employment Service in such activity. The outline is not a blueprint for research and it does not attempt to cover methodology. A number of research topics is listed which may serve to stimulate further exploration. No doubt many of the investigations suggested can be carried out in a local area. Others will require data on a state wide or national basis.

The history of governmentally operated placement services in this country has gone through a series of phases and reveals a changing approach both of method and philosophy as to the role and operation of such services.

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In a dynamic economic society it is imperative that institutions be under continuous surveillance to determine whether historical functions are suitable to the needs of the present and whether an institution in its current stage of development coupled with the entire complex of the economic structure of society is capable of contributing effectively to those social and economic ends generally deemed desirable.

Federal participation in the field of employment services began with a simple type of organization in 1907. The organization set up was the Division of Information in the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, then part of the Department of Commerce and Labor. The primary purpose of the Division was to prevent a congestion of alien immigrants at the ports of entry by providing information concerning employment opportunities that existed throughout the country.

During the first World War, a U. S. Employment Service was created as an independent unit within the Department of Labor. After the labor market distortion and confusion of the war period had passed, the Employment Service languished because of reduction in congressional appropriations. Thus the National Employment Service was regarded at the time as an emergency institution and not necessarily a service of a permanent nature needed to insure a smooth functioning of the labor market.

On June 6, 1933, the Wagner-Peyser Act created the U. S. Employment Service as a permanent bureau and provided for a system of federal-state participation.

The service was not merely an agency to facilitate the movement of unemployed persons into employment but was also to provide counseling and other services to those seeking a vocational field and to employers with hiring problems. Later developments saw the Employment Service transferred to the Social Security Board and combined with the Bureau of Unemployment Compensation. This latter move was made on the assumption that job finding and benefit payments are parts of the same problem and should be coordinated.

During World War II, the U. S. Employment Service was declared a war agency which attempted to channel the available skills of the labor force to those areas and establishments where they were most urgently needed. The state services were "loaned" to the Federal government for the duration. In November, 1946, the states resumed their role in the scheme while the federal bureau was transferred back to the Department of Labor.

While the history of the U. S. Employment Service as here presented is skeletal, it is an attempt to illustrate that the type of federal participation in a scheme of employment service has changed with the changing nature of the times. The existence of the present type of agency is not an economic accident but is part of the growth of new attitudes and new institutions that have been called into play as a result of political, economic, and social dynamics.

The problems of full employment, strained labor relations, high labor turnover, in fact every problem at all connected with the labor market, call for an extensive examination and evaluation of the present role of placement and counseling services.

The importance of vocational counseling generally as a means to a sensible and necessary channelling of available manpower into existing occupational opportunities has been emphasized by many factors in an economy characterized by an extensive division of labor and technological advance. The field of vocational guidance has developed significantly since the pioneering work of Frank Parsons in 1908, but it has far to go in terms of possible future developments. Many questions remain to be answered and a more workable connection between the established techniques and the placement services might be evolved. Like the techniques of placement, the role of counseling in a vocational sense must be continuously evolving to meet new needs and situations.

Enough time has passed to allow for an evaluation of the counseling techniques suggested as a result of the Occupational Research Program of the U. S. Employment Service and other developments by government, universities, and other research groups. There is also a need for local studies to attempt to ascertain the value of these services and what relationship, if any, exist between the counseling and placement activities and tenure of employment, labor mobility, job satisfaction and other factors.

An approach to an analysis of placement and counseling services might be made in a number of ways. The one suggested by this memorandum divides the subject into three categories. First, there is suggested a critical analysis of the present techniques of counseling and placement. Secondly, an empirical approach can be followed to determine characteristics of those who use

the employment services and to evaluate the results of the activities of these agencies. This approach might be largely, though not necessarily completely, statistical in nature. Finally, since there is a widely accepted belief that market gluts (including the labor market) are likely to appear from time to time and that the government must participate in some capacity to prevent and ameliorate such gluts, there is therein suggested a theoretical approach as to the possible role of placement agencies as a co-operative institution in a long run government compensatory program.

A. Techniques of counseling and placement.

1. The Employment Service, both locally and nationally, and other public and private organizations have produced considerable occupational information as aids for counseling and placement in the Employment Service, Veterans Administration, schools, colleges and other organizations. Such information has included descriptions, definitions and classification of occupations, occupational monographs, and occupational families.

What has been the value of various kinds of information? In what types of counseling situations has each been used? To what extent has such information played a part in the placement process? What formats and arrangements of information are best utilized in various situations? What has been the relationship of the backgrounds of interviewers and counselors to the uses made of occupational information?

How has occupational information been integrated into the counseling and placement processes? What concepts of occupations should counselors possess?

2. The U. S. Employment Service, the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U. S. Bureau of the Census, and other public and private agencies have supplied considerable information regarding labor markets and industrial and occupational long term and short term trends.

What information concerning labor markets is of value to counselors? How has it been used? How has trend information been applied and with what results? What training is necessary for counselors to have to understand and use labor market and trend information? How can the reliability and validity of such information be expressed to counselors whose backgrounds are in psychology? What formats are best suited for the presentation of labor market and trend data?

3. It has been noted that during the period of manpower shortage many placement and counseling techniques were abandoned. How are the uses of placement techniques affected by the level of employment? Are their uses increased, modified or decreased? How do the uses affect the confidence of employers and applicants upon the service?

4. The Occupational Research Program of the U. S. Employment Service inaugurated in 1934 developed three kinds of measures to aid in evaluating worker skills and potentialities. These were oral trade questions, performance trade tests, and aptitude test batteries.

What has been the practical value of these techniques in the local labor market? In what types of counseling and placement situations are they used? What has been the effect of technological developments over a period of time on the value of such aids in counseling and placement? Are there any particular occupational areas where they are more successful than in others? What is their usefulness with partially qualified applicants compared with the better qualified?

5. Dr. Arnold Steinbach in an article on the "Functions of Employment Offices During Periods of Prosperity and Depression" claims that the philosophy of public placement agencies during a depression changes from that of the best man for the job to a need criterion.

Are placement techniques of so pliable a nature that they vary with the cyclical economic trend? If so, what is the effect of this upon the efficacy of the placement process?

6. It is assumed that counseling and placement, no matter how scientific the methodology, cannot be of top notch value if the personnel are not well trained, paid and equipped.

Do the personnel of counseling and placement services generally have the necessary academic and practical background to insure a proper understanding of the nature of the applicants problem? To what extent are appointments on a merit or on a political basis? What relationship exists between the educational achievements and experiences of the interviewers and counselors and the quality characteristics of interviews, referrals, and placements made by them? What personnel problems are posed by the generally low level of salaries that are prevalent in some agencies? What is the turnover rate of personnel and what is the extent of the problem created by the existence of higher paid opportunities in other employment?

7. In one of its first conventions, the International Labor Office recommended the abolishment of private fee charging employment services.

Do such agencies approach placement in a "scientific" manner, or is it merely a matter of quantity placements being made primarily for fees?

How do the techniques of placement of private agencies as well as philanthropic and public and private school employment bureaus compare with that of the public employment service? In which areas of the labor market are the private agencies more effective and what are the reasons for this?

8. The fact that agencies have programs of vocational counseling implies that there is a philosophy and definition of vocational counseling.

What actually is meant by vocational counseling and how are the various types of counseling defined and classified? To what extent are placements related to the vocational goals of the applicants as well to existing opportunities for employment? To what extent does the applicants financial need for work affect placement practice?

9. The U. S. Employment Service is once again located in the Department of Labor after having been a part of the Social Security Board and during the war a part of the War Manpower Commission.

How has the counseling and placement program of the Employment Service been affected by the federal agency under which the Employment Service has operated? What was the effect on this program by the federal control during the war period? What has been the effect on the programs with the return of the offices to state control?

B. Inquiry into the efficacy of placement and counseling services.

1. It has been noted that the placement and counseling activities of the Employment Service vary considerably among communities. There are likewise wide variations in school counseling and placement programs.

How are the types and extent of counseling and placement related to the conditions in the community such as kinds of industry, size of establishment, extent of labor turnover, and type and extent of unemployment? What is the effect of the degree of unionization and of employer and union policies and practices that come about in collective bargaining? What degree of confidence in placement services do employers and labor have? What approaches are made by the personnel of counseling placement services to gain confidence, to adjust programs to meet local needs, and to evaluate their programs?

2. Aside from cyclical distortions, the labor market has been characterized by a number of special problems related to certain groups of job seekers. What efforts have been made to handle these problems and what success has resulted?

What approach has been used to handle such special problems as youth first entering the labor market, the more aged of the labor force who are unable to compete with the younger workers, the workers who become "unemployables" at different levels of the business cycle, the handicapped workers, the women

and negro groups? While these problems are always present, they are accentuated at the lower levels of the business cycle. A suggested fertile area for the application of counseling techniques would be that of unskilled youth first entering the labor market. How do those who have used these counseling services compare with those who have not in the matter of tenure, job satisfaction, remuneration and other indices of job adjustment? On the basis of results, how adequate are the present methods of counseling? How must they be developed further to be effective in handling these special problems of the labor market?

3. The Employment Service is often criticized because it does not adequately serve applicants for jobs in the professional and semi-professional classifications.

How far has the Employment Service progressed in service to applicants for jobs in the professional and semi-professional fields? How feasible is it for a public agency to undertake an extension of service to professional groups when placement costs are generally high? How effective has the Employment Service been in the placement of teachers? What has been the role of the National Roster of Scientific and Specialized Personnel as a part of the Employment Service program?

4. Since the passage of the Wagner-Peyser Act, the nation has been through a depression, a war, and a period of practically full employment. An historical study of the employment service created by the act might reveal its strengths and weaknesses and serve as a guide in future developments.

How has the Employment Service adapted itself to the changing situations as they occurred? In what type of situation has it been most effective? How uniform has been the effectiveness in different geographical areas over a period of time? How have the characteristics of the personnel changed over a time period? What has been the result in the matter of placements and amount of counseling sought and aid given since the combination of the functions of the bureau of Unemployment Compensation and the U. S. Employment Service in the first reorganization act in 1939?

5. There is an integration on the state level of the functions of the Employment Service, the Bureau of Unemployment Compensation, and some parts of the Veterans Administration; while there is a decentralization of these agencies on the federal level in Washington.

What is the effect of the separation of these bureaus in Washington on the local efficiency of the branch agencies? Does this separation on the "top" level create bureaucratic hostility? How effective administratively would a combination be and how might

this combination be effected?

6. There are several types of services rendered by the public employment offices. These may be placement, veteran service claims taking, labor market information, counseling, industrial services and community services.

How does the emphasis on the type of service vary in different communities or is there a prevailing tendency to emphasize placement despite the fact that in some areas the problems call for a different emphasis. For instance, in an area where the population is evidently larger than the possible needs of the industrial potential, does the emphasis continue to be primarily that of placement or is there a stress on labor market information? Similarly, in a community with a large veteran problem how has the employment agency adapted itself to meet this local condition?

7. Arguments for the integration of the job finding and unemployment compensation functions of a social security program have included the claim that both are different aspects of the same problem.

What problems are created by tying the compensation paying function of the Bureau of Employment Security to the placement activities of the Employment Service?

What relationship is there between the extent and kind of unification and the effectiveness of placement? A claimant for compensation must be willing and able to work at "suitable work," How has the definition of suitable work evolved and how satisfactory is it? Should the definition be tied to wage rates, previous employment experience, or should there be more emphasis upon the nature of available employment?

C. The Employment Service as part of a compensatory government plan.

The Full Employment Act of 1946, while hardly a comprehensive or complete approach to the possibility of government action in the matter of cyclical economic fluctuations, at least is a recognition of the dangers of threatening depressions and of the fact that something will have to be done should such a depression occur.

Should the economy be so unstable in the future that reasonably full employment is not maintained and should governmental powers to plan and act to thwart a downswing in the cycle be extended in general accordance with the economists who advocate a greater degree of planning, there could be a reliance upon the Employment Service for aid in such a compensatory program. It is difficult to suggest the role of counseling and placement services in such a situation apart from the context of an overall governmental plan. Any government program set up to combat depression might do well to utilize existing agencies whenever possible rather than create others that duplicate the functions of those already operating. Once a plan is evolved, then it will be more feasible to outline the role of the public employment service in such a scheme. Without this, suggestions of the various contributions that the Employment Service can make will probably have to be in the line of suggested extensions and elaborations of existing functions. However, possibilities might be enumerated and evaluated.

Experience with public employment services in the United States include two war periods and one serious depression. The nature of the difficulties that the service might face in a time of stress would be indicated by these past experiences, although, of course, the exigencies of a future situation will create new difficulties.

Possibly the chief role of the placement service in a time of depression would be to aid in the channelling of the unemployed to government work projects.

What criteria of employment might be set up in selecting workers for the government projects? Should aptitude requirements be relaxed in the selection of such workers? In selecting workers should emphasis be upon the greatest skill or the greatest need? What economic and social problems are involved in the possible use of the less than most efficient workers for public works projects? How might employment offices in different economic areas set up suggestive plans for relief work projects that would correlate the type of project inaugurated with the available skills of those who would most probably be unemployed?

Both the labor market information and counseling aspect of the unemployment service would be carrying a heavy load of work in periods of high unemployment.

What might the employment service do to prevent large undesirable shifts of the more mobile elements in the labor market in response to rumors of distant employment opportunities? How might a program of retraining of workers in light of possible

technological developments be subsidized and fitted into a government depression program?

The problems of a depression would call for a high degree of cooperation between the Employment Service and civic leaders and officials of a locality in an effort to alleviate those problems of the labor market that become especially pressing in periods of low economic activity.

Could such committees be set up in an attempt to stabilize local labor markets? What type of projects might be promoted to aid the economically vulnerable groups such as unskilled youth, women, and negroes? Could the Employment Service be expanded to include a morale division and what might such a division do to preserve morale among the unemployed?

The employment creating aspects of a compensatory government program would probably be in the hands of one government agency. Another might have the task of certifying those eligible for employment. Still another might make the actual work assignments.

How might these functions be coordinated to make the administration as simple as possible and yet be compatible with individual needs and justice?

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