



Research on Supports given by Employers regarding Career Development and Advancement of Persons with Visual Disabilities

(Research Reports No.127) Summary

[Keywords]

Visual Disability, Career Development, Supports given by Employers

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This research explores the current situation of career development, work experiences and vocational training for persons with visual disabilities, presents issues when trying to expand duties at work and seeks how to make full use of the workers' capabilities, based on the results of interviews with staff at support agencies, workers with visual disabilities and their employers.

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2 Research Period

FY 2013 to 2014

3 Composition of the research report

Introduction Purpose and Method of Research

Chapter 1: Problems regarding Career Development of Persons with Visual Disabilities

Chapter 2: Current Status and Issues regarding Career Development of Persons with Visual Disabilities Engaged in Office Work

Chapter 3: Current Status and Issues regarding Career Development of Persons with Visual Disabilities in the U.S.

- Focusing on State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and Work Experience Programs for Young People in the States of New York and Nebraska -

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4 Background and Purpose of Research

National Institute of Vocational Rehabilitation conducted "A Study on Increasing the Employability of Office Workers with Visual Disabilities" (see Research Reports No. 116) from FY 2011 to 2012, in an effort of promoting employment of persons with visual disabilities. Through this study, we found out that office workers with visual disabilities are dealing with changes of tasks and work environment by themselves. However, it has also been identified that in addition to the accommodation on work environment including assistive technologies, supports and trainings provided by employers and external experts are essential, such as establishing in-house support teams and reviewing and re-structuring tasks.

Taking these results into account, in this study, we explored the following questions; what are the challenges workers with visual disabilities face at each stage of their vocational lives; what are the supports needed; what are the accommodations the employers should take into account in terms of career development and advancement.

5 Method

(1) Collection and Analysis of Literature Information on Domestic and International Situations

A Collection of Information on Domestic Situation

We gathered information on assistive technologies and educational and training materials for persons with visual disabilities, through websites and by contacting organizations which sell self-learning materials as well as by attending seminars and workshops.

B Collection of Information on International Situation

We gathered information on transition "from school to work" in the U.S., focusing on the work experiences programs for young people with visual disabilities provided at State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and analyzed them.

In addition to the Internet research, The Institute for Community Inclusion of Boston University, NRTC on Blindness and Low Vision of Mississippi State

University and Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired shared lots of their insights on our research.

(2) Interviews with Experts

We conducted interviews with vocational counselors for persons with disabilities and vocational training instructors at National Vocational Rehabilitation Center and National Kibi-Kogen Vocational Rehabilitation Center, and asked them how they support persons with visual disabilities and provide vocational training. Also, lectures and question and answer sessions were held, having professionals as lectures, focusing on training, assistive technologies, and supports for career development/advancement after being employed. Moreover, we visited special schools for the blind and universities and conducted interviews, asked them how work experiences/internships are taking place.

(3) Case Study

We conducted interviews with employers and employees introduced by employment support agencies in Tokyo in order to understand the current situation of supports provided in terms of career development for workers with visual disabilities.

We sent a list of question in advance, so as to perform the interviews efficiently.

In general, the survey was conducted separately with the employees with visual disabilities and his/her superiors or Human Resources representatives.

6 Summarized Results of the Study

(1) Analysis of Domestic Situation

As a result of literature review and interviews with experts, we gained insights as follows.

a In terms of development of assistive technologies, the version of screen reader software has been upgraded in order to be compatible with the upgrading of Office Software.

b Touch screen systems (e.g. iPad) are useful for persons with low visions.

c There are educational materials for self-learning for Office 2010.

d Post-employment trainings for workers with visual disabilities are provided at public training centers. There were requests that these training programs should be more flexible, which should be put into consideration.

e In addition to public training centers, there are private organizations which provide trainings for workers with visual disabilities. Their time frames are more flexible and have evening and weekend classes so that workers can attend classes after work. There are cases where companies pay for the expenses, but in most cases, employees have to attend them with their own expenses.

f Training lessons are given in group and individually.

g Most of the public and private training centers, which have post-employment programs for workers with visual disabilities, are located in metropolitan areas. When people living far from the metropolitan want to participate in such programs, they have to travel long way to attend training lectures, even if they are for short period. Distance training and other methods should be considered for the convenience for the people living in non-metropolitan areas.

h Special schools for the blind have career development programs at school. Many post-secondary schools provide work experience programs as part of their curriculums.

i The department of informatics of the university for students with visual and hearing disabilities also provide internship at companies in the computer fields. However, due to the security problems, what students could do was quite limited and the period tended to be very short.

(2) Analysis of International Situation

a In the U.S., Vocational Rehabilitation services are provided by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) within the U.S. Department of Education, allocating subsidies to State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies, based on the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

b Some states have State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies for persons with visual disabilities, in addition to general Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies. In our research, we chose two of the VR Agencies for Blind and Visually Impaired people, one in New York and another in Nebraska, in order to study transition programs for young people.

c The aims of work experience in the Agencies are to have their clients know what he/she "can do" and "cannot do", to have an opportunity to learn the work ethics, and to have positive feedbacks which helps them to feel more sure of themselves. These aims were clear and the programs are planned realistically, and the programs in the U.S. will be good examples when we are trying to ameliorate our programs in Japan.

(3) Case Study

We interviewed 13 persons with visual disabilities engaged in office work (11 companies), the levels of disabilities and the work contents of each participant are presented in the table on the next page. Following is the general characteristics of the participants.

- With regard to the levels of disabilities, at the time this survey was conducted, all the participants were blind (totally blind or had severe visual disabilities), and were unable to read and write ordinary print. However, 3 of the people became blind after they started (re-started) working.
- Five people (2 males and 3 females) worked 5 years or less, and 8 people (6 males and 2 females) worked more than 5 years, after being employed by the present company they work for.
- Two people left the company they were working for after they became disabled. They both received training and were employed by other companies. Two other people received training with their employment contracts maintained. After receiving training, they resumed working for the same companies in different posts.
- There were also 2 cases where people changed jobs seeking better conditions. One of them changed jobs in the same business field. The other changed jobs because of the difficulties in work environment and employment management.

- Summary of case examples of the subjects

Case Example	Category of Business	Level of Disability	Use of Braille	Employment Status	Job Duties
A	Manufacture and Sales	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Managing and Operating the system of the entry and leaving time and human-resource-management.
B	Insurance	Totally Blind	○	Contract Employee	Office Work Related to Human Resources
C	Communications	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Managerial Position in Business Development
D	Communications	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Website Accessibility Diagnosis
E	Communications	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Website Accessibility Diagnosis
F	Manufacture and Sales	Totally Blind		Full-time Employee	Office Work Related to Human Resources
G	Manufacture and Sales	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Office Work Related to Human Resources (e.g. Calculation of Travel Expenses)
H	Manufacture and Sales	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Office Work Related to Human Resources (Training)
I	Food Service	Severe Visual Impairment	○	Full-time Employee	Personnel Training
J	Information Service	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Program Creation
K	Personnel Scheduling and Dispatch	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Sales Position in Personnel Scheduling and Dispatch
L	Welfare Service	Totally Blind	○	Full-time Employee	Welfare Consultation and Support
M	Comprehensive Human Resource Business	Severe Visual Impairment		Full-time Employee	Human Resources and General Affairs

As a result of this case study, we gained the following insights:

- Among a variety of issues that should be considered after employment, it is particularly important to identify the tasks the person can do in terms of functional abilities and general aptitude. It is also important to provide reasonable accommodations, such as to be able to have an access to the company computer network.
- Opinions of vocational training instructors can be useful to companies, when defining duties and tasks. Also, in terms of providing reasonable accommodations, the help of the company system engineer is important, in addition to the expertise of job coaches, vocational training instructors and sales personnel of assistive technology companies.
- Companies hire not only persons with visual disabilities but also those with other disabilities, and the companies' perspectives on career development are different according to the characteristics of disabilities. Persons with visual disabilities, in many of the cases, were good at writing and language skills, and their duty included tasks related the skill. In many of the cases, their careers were developed by allowing them to do what they can do.

d Three of the cases were employees with visual disabilities newly graduated from universities. At the beginning, their terms of contracts were different from other graduates with no disabilities. While their non-disabled peers were hired full-time with unlimited term contract, those who are disabled were hired as full-time with limited term contract. However, the difference in contracts was just for a limited period, and the aim was to judge their aptitudes. Two of the cases now have unlimited contract. As for another employee, the person can opt for managerial career if certain criteria were met.

e With regards to career development and advancement after being employed, it is generally the case that people can advance their careers by experiencing different duties. Therefore, it has been generally considered that not experiencing different duties would hinder their career advancement. However, excelling in one area will make the person a specialist, and frequent change in duties will not benefit workers with visual disabilities.

f In the manufacturing industry, the tasks for office work is limited. The quality of works done will be improved by having background knowledge of the specific field.

g Trainings to catch up with screen reader software upgrades, should be given with employers' expenses, not by making the employee responsible for the expenses.

h When a person with visual disabilities attend training courses to improve and expand duties, some employers actively support him or her, but in most cases such trainings are done by the person's financial expenses and personal efforts.

i When persons with visual disabilities attend in-house training or courses held by outside organization, employers should ensure the accessibility of the texts and training materials.

j If an employee gets disabled while working for a company, the person and the company should make full use of the existing systems such as sick leave system, so as to facilitate the worker continuing his/her work.

(4) Future Issues

This research investigated and analyzed career development at school and career development and advancement at work. In the case study, we gained an interesting insight through interviews with workers with visual disabilities and their superiors. Experts and support specialists pointed out problems, and gave us suggestions and insights. Our study on the U.S. support system and work experiences programs gave us hints regarding our policy making.

The issues of future study would be; 1) accommodating children/young people with visual disabilities in the integrated settings including examination for diploma and qualification; 2) decreasing the services gap between metropolitan areas and local areas; and 3) expanding the focus of study to more less severe visual impairments including low visions.