

Labor Market Analysis Series: Using LMI in the Rehabilitation Counseling Relationship - Module 2

NICHOLE TICHY: Hello, and thank you for checking out module 2 of this four module series, talking about LMI and the VR process. This specific module, module 2, is focused on using LMI in the rehabilitation counseling relationship. My name is Nichole Tichy, and I will take you through how to use LMI throughout this process.

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So again, this is a four part series that will address the importance of LMI and how it can be used in the VR process. The four modules are, LMI-- what is it, and why is it important? In looking at module 2, we'll focus on the rehabilitation counseling relationship. Module 3 is LMI in the counseling process, considering cultural considerations, and looking at informed choice, and then finally, a guided tour of all of the resources that are mentioned throughout the various modules.

So specific learning objectives for module 2-- we're hoping that you're going to be able to describe the necessary soft skills and various counseling techniques, in order to facilitate the use of labor market information, to then be able to translate the information into personal practices, in order to enhance service delivery methods, and then finally apply information to a case study example, in order to practice using labor market information.

So before we get started, let's take a recap and remember some of the information that was presented in module 1. So module 1 provided an introduction to the topic of labor market information and the various types. So here we have, what is LMI?

And so specifically, labor market information, or LMI, is both quantitative and qualitative. It is gathered from a variety of sources and used to inform VR services about employment opportunities for their clients, as well as to provide occupational information.

So, just as a brief recap, again, quantitative data is the numerical information that can be used, such as understanding wages, the anticipated growth or decline of a particular job industry, and then understanding unemployment rates. The qualitative information is then the information that is collected from employers or local workforce representatives to understand the what, why's, and how's of unemployment.

So what does the hiring process look like? What does your growth look like within the business? Or how can the processes improve, through either hiring of individuals or through more efficient methods within the organization or the business?

And so, as another kind of reminder, using labor market information in the process is important because it aligns with the priorities according to the WIOA, and it also provides VR counselors with accurate information on employment trends to enhance outcomes and support individuals with disabilities finding employment in an efficient manner.

OK, so now that what LMI means, how do I use it with clients? So first, we're going to go through a little activity, counseling skills 101. Is this a fact, or is this a myth?

I need to be an extrovert to engage in communication with businesses. I need to be an expert in business management. In order to engage in the proper use of labor market information, I need to be proficient with selling services to employers. Incorporating labor market information into the counseling process, I am limiting an individual's informed choice.

So take a second, pause the recording if you need to, and think about whether these statements are facts, or whether they are myths.

These are all, in fact, myths. So the key takeaway from this is that you don't need to be an expert in business management. That's the job of the employer. As the counselor, it is your job to be able to obtain the information that the employer might have.

So how do you do this? Well, we go back to counseling skills 101. So micro-skills are the foundation of intentional counseling practices. They include basic communication skills to provide guidance, to reach certain job seekers, or even communicating with other professionals, such as employers. Attending behaviors are crucial for the development of relationships. But how are you listening? Are you paying attention to only the content that's being communicated, or are you listening to the tone and other observable behaviors?

For example in working with a job seeker who might show resistance to a specific job opportunity but doesn't outwardly express that they don't want the job, this is a really great opportunity to reflect the incongruence and explore the needs of the individual. So asking specific questions, reflecting potential feelings-- I'm noticing a little bit of resistance. What are

your thoughts? Or how are you feeling about this particular opportunity? And the same applies when engaging with employers or other workforce development professionals.

So, in talking about the various types of counseling skills that are used, we then shift a little bit to start talking about soft skills that are used for gathering LMI. One of the biggest things to consider is asking the right questions. Well, in order to be able to ask the right questions, you need to know what those questions are.

So if you're working with an individual who is ready to obtain employment, it might be beneficial to then ask an employer, where do they notice gaps in their business development? Or if they have processes that need to be enhanced, what are the most successful aspects of your business or organization? The expected number of job openings-- over the next six months, what does your growth rate look like, and how can an individual potentially fill in one of the spots?

How much the job pays, getting more information about the working conditions to ensure that, in fact, that location is appropriate for the individual who is seeking employment, and other related jobs and training.

So as counselors, the topic of hard skills and soft skills comes up frequently. So let's kind of refresh to what those mean exactly. Hard skills, also referred to as technical skills, are the job specific and relevant to each position and seniority level. In other words, each position in every company will require a unique hard skills list.

So for example, a programmer might need to a very specific coding language in order to perform the requirements of a job, whereas a soft skills are the general characteristics that are relevant to personality traits. So some soft skills you'd like to really see in all employees, regardless of their position or expertise, while other soft skills make sense in certain jobs and are less important in others.

For example strong communication skills are both a hard and soft skill for a counselor. But it's not necessary for a counselor to have skills in sales or marketing. So being able to think about the various skills that can enhance your ability as a vocational counselor or professional, to start working with employers or other workforce professionals to support individuals obtaining employment.

So we put it all together, and what do we get? So in thinking about combining labor market information into an already established VR process, VR counselors then start to gain knowledge about disability and developing employment goals. And so being able to understand the various types of workforce conditions, and being then able to understand an individual's potential limitations, and how to work with both of those in order to achieve one goal.

You also get someone who can gather information, whether it's about an individual skill set or the needs of an employer. So being able to find and ask those right types of questions, in order to gain information, in order to achieve one goal-- and that is, obtaining employment.

And finally, you get a professional who is capable of increasing awareness for persons with disabilities. You're decreasing stigma and confronting embolism by presenting this information, and engaging with employers.

So this wouldn't be a conversation of how to use LMI within the counseling relationship without putting an emphasis on the therapeutic alliance. So the therapeutic alliance refers to that close and consistent existence between two individuals, typically a working professional, such as a counselor, and a person who is seeking services, whether that is a client, job seeker, consumer. We can even consider employers in this case.

But the purpose of this relationship is to assist the individual in therapy to change his or her life for the better. So while vocational rehabilitation counseling isn't necessarily therapy, we are providing a service to individuals through counseling and guidance to be able to determine what steps are needed in order to achieve a goal.

So most scholars who write about the therapeutic alliance describe it as a relational factor in counseling that includes three specific dimensions-- goal consensus between counselor and client-- so something like an individualized plan for employment, collaboration on counseling related tasks-- so trying to figure out what steps are needed in order to reach that goal, and emotional bonding.

And so even though vocational rehabilitation doesn't go deep in exploring the emotional content of an individual, you're still developing a relationship. You're still presenting as someone who cares that this individual meets their employment goals.

And then it is the individual's perception of the quality of the relationship that is the strongest predictor of treatment success. I know for me, as I'm thinking about some of the relationships that I've previously had in terms of counseling, I can remember some of the clients that maybe I wanted to pull my hair out. But then there are others that had a really strong bond with, and then I found myself to be more motivated to work with. And so having this type of reflection is important as a counselor.

So perceptions and biases are not only about what employers see. It's about you as a counselor as well. And so this is a great time to be able to reflect and understand how your own perceptions and biases can impact the work that's being provided to the individual.

So here are some really key terms that enhance the therapeutic relationship. Carl Rogers is known for his person centered approach and the consideration of unconditional positive regard. Specifically, Rogers believed that people have a need for both self-worth and having positive regard for other people, so thinking positively about other people. And how people think about themselves and how they value themselves plays a major role in well-being.

Unfortunately, individuals with disabilities continue to experience barriers to employment. And as vocational rehabilitation professionals, it is important to remember that we don't need to be

one of those barriers. So as a counselor, how can you be that source of support as job seekers face barriers in their community?

So as we've talked about the relationship and the therapeutic alliance, and recapping what LMI is, this slide links to a video series presenting three segments to a case study demonstrating the use of labor market information in the VR process, from Explore VR.

This case study specifically has three segments. First, it shows an initial meeting with a consumer who has been out of the labor market and is considering if her skills are still current. The second, how the VR business liaison and the counselor illustrate the value of labor market information to the consumer. And finally, demonstrating that the use of LMI during plan development can bring a strong understanding of the consumer's options and a more efficient career planning process.

So the takeaway from this is that using LMI during plan development attempts to avoid misunderstandings in the counseling relationship. And so this three part segment demonstrates the use of that within the counseling relationship, to serve as a model. It also presents options to the individual as a method to the decision making process and engages the client as an active partner, which then increases empowerment and self-efficacy, to serve as a reinforcement that the individual's voice is important.

Additionally, the article, Teaching Labor Market Survey Methodology In Rehabilitation Counseling by Mary Barros-Bailey provides an overview of a 12-step method. This article will be attached to the resource documents that accompany this webinar.

So in talking about plan development and looking at different career options for people seeking employment, it would be remiss of us if we did not talk about career development theories. And so since a lot of this module is talking about the counseling relationship, it's also to go back to some of our roots as vocational counselors, and looking at some of the theory that informs the way in which we engage with individuals.

So to start off, the Trait and Factor Theory operates under the premise that it is possible to measure both individual talents and the attributes required in particular jobs. It also assumes that people may be matched to an occupation that's a good fit.

Parsons suggests that when individuals are in their jobs that are best suited to their abilities, they perform best, and their productivity is highest. So in thinking about the Trait and Factor Theory, what are some considerations to have in helping individuals find the perfect employment situation?

Another is Donald Super's Life Span Life Space Theory, which is also kind of that rainbow. And it suggests that career development has been an emphasis on the importance of the development of self-concept. According to Donald Super, self-concept changes over time and develops as a result of. Experience As such, career development is then considered life long.

So within that rainbow that Super presents, it talks about different phases of an individual's life. So the high school student who has not yet graduated is going to be in a different place, compared to the individual who might be in their 40s or 50s and I've already had several types of jobs, but are looking for something different. And so both of those individuals are going to need different things, because they are at different places within their lifespan.

And then finally, Sharf notes a four-step sequential process, so taking time to do the assessment of interests, abilities, values, and personality in order to gain an understanding of the person.

Once you have an understanding of the person, linking back to that Trait and Factor Theory, together, you can then learn about different types of occupations and what are the requirements of various industries. This then provides essential information, in order to make career decisions and initiate the job search process.

So what can I gain from gathering all of this information, whether it's information about the individual, such as their interests and abilities, or information about your local employment opportunities for an individual? So by gaining this information, you then discover a deep understanding of business imperatives. It opens the lines of communication with businesses and starts to develop those relationships.

And then it can enhance placement strategies, working smarter and not harder. So by researching local industry trends-- career clusters, and workforce projections, this then provides information to be able to make smart choices. So in knowing that a particular industry is saturated, and that it's not growing or it's on the decline, that's important information to know, rather than attempting to go into this industry and reaching that concrete wall.

It also provides the opportunity to uncover potential shortages in the workforce. So what industries need more people? Where would be a good place to place an individual that has a desperate need for people?

But also asking the question why-- Why. Is this a potential shortage? What does that environment look like? And is it appropriate? So simply just because there is a shortage in a workforce doesn't necessarily mean it's always going to be a good placement opportunity.

And this also provides the opportunity to reveal training partnerships or opportunities for collaboration. So being able to work with local community colleges or local universities that might be in the area, working with different businesses that might have in-house training opportunities that might be of benefit. And so without asking the questions or doing some of the research, it's hard to know what is available.

So again, the role of labor market information in the counseling relationship, considering management and supervision. So the use of labor market information will vary based on office or agency needs, and even location. So a rural office might have different needs or different opportunities, compared to a more urban office.

And whether the counselor is either carrying or covering a caseload-- so if you're carrying a caseload, your relationships with the individuals might be very different than someone who's covering a caseload. So being able to take the time to develop those relationships might not be the same in either of the situation.

And so for middle managers and supervisors, it can be important to understand the basics of LMI and the different tools that are used, in order to provide appropriate supervision and management for whether the staff member is either carrying or covering that caseload. And again, LMI does not need to be an area of expertise. It's simply another tool in that rehab counselor toolkit to be able to support individuals in finding employment.

And so more on the role of the supervisor-- while it's certainly understood that counselors and supervisors certainly have a lot on their plates. But it's important to know that as a supervisor, you support the counselors in your office to have the opportunity to engage in community relationships. So as the supervisor, how can you support a counselor engaging with the workforce development groups? Considering, is there a chamber of commerce? And what can you do as a supervisor to help counselors be involved in those kind of close-knit circles?

Also, in terms of knowledge, being able to share resources, and then engaging with the counselor in terms of the supervision process, considering the counselor, consultant, and teacher roles-- how, as the supervisor, can you provide knowledge or share resources to ensure that counselors within the office are engaging in this type of practice?

So what does labor market information have to do with the counseling relationship? So for example, we received a story about an individual who's seeking employment in the community. They walked into a dollar store and noticed that boxes and carts were kind of scattered throughout the aisles, and that only one person was managing the cash register. A vocational counselor made this observation.

And to keep a long story short, they spoke to the manager about innovative methods, in order to support the needs of the business through hiring one of the individuals that was seeking to use their organizational skills in an employment related capacity. So engaging in this shift from selling to understanding the needs of employers.

So looking at that example, asking the right questions, in order to meet the needs of a business, which can then turn into an employment Opportunity. So while some opportunities might not be as visible as the dollar store scenario, asking managers questions-- if you could improve an aspect of your business, what would it be? Or are there tasks that a lot of the employees are responsible for doing, and that they don't really want to do them? Being able to see if it's possible to create a separate position to support an individual who might want to do those tasks.

So engaging in some of those basic 101 counseling skills, active listening, in order to learn the needs of a business, and then developing a working alliance with the business community-- so

asking those questions, and listening to the concerns of the employers, in order to solve various issues in the workplace.

Employer engagement can seem very intimidating for some folks. Engage with colleagues or others in the community to use a role-play as an opportunity to expand this skill set and receive feedback. So reaching out to businesses to learn more about their context, their business values, what's reality in terms of the working environment, or what are some of these needs.

And so while it might be very intimidating to ask these kinds of questions, it might be beneficial to receive support from a business development specialist in your office, or seeking support from one of the employment specialist vendors to provide the opportunity to practice an elevator pitch.

But in doing this, you also gain perspective as to what it might be like to ask employers these various types of questions, and then gaining feedback as to how to improve your approach or the questions that you were asking, in order to obtain the needed information.

So career pathways has recently become kind of a buzzword. And career pathways are an integrated collection of programs and services intended to develop an individual's core academic, technical, and employability skills, providing them with continuous education, training. And it places them in a high demand and high opportunity jobs. So if the job seeker is a high school student or someone looking to change their career path later in life, this presents as a guide to support both the counselor and the individual to know that obtaining employment is a continuous process which can involve obtaining certificates and gaining various types of experience in order to achieve a long term employment related goal.

And so considering that it can be very difficult in this changing, kind of fluctuating workforce, for an individual to stay in one location for 10, 20, 30, 40 years, when there are opportunities for advancement and growth. It's important that we provide those same opportunities to individuals who are going through the VR process-- so finding out if there is a certificate to be able to support an individual in getting a promotion or moving closer to their ultimate career goal.

So different LMI resources and how to use them-- so in module 1, John provided a great deal of information on the career index plus, and then kind of got us started on how to use this as part of the process. We also introduced the O-NET. And in module 4, we will provide a walk-through an additional examples as to how this can be used within the plan development process.

The labor market is a big and diverse place. So these are just some points to consider when supporting job seekers. Engaging in a reflective process helps to increase awareness of the counselor and can help shift what might seem like a mundane task into something that is more engaging and meaningful.

So how can participants make choices about their careers when they don't necessarily understand the options that are in the current labor market? If the VR counselor can't give

them various options, who will? So remembering back a few slides ago, when we talked about reducing the number of barriers that individuals with disabilities might face as they're seeking employment, it's important that, as a VR counselor, we empower them to be able to have options and to make those choices.

So that way, their voices are heard. And then they can translate that level of empowerment and self-efficacy into their employment searches.

So as we're coming to an end, we're going to take all of this information and put it into practice. So with a brief case study, we are going to look at this individual together and walk through what it might look like to provide labor market information during this process.

So a vocational rehabilitation counselor in a rural office is working with a client who desires employment as a video game designer. Currently, this client does not want to move, but demonstrates promising ability to pursue this career.

The individual has completed courses in computer programming at their local community college. He also explained that he attended a design camp one summer, where he was able to successfully design his own video game, including plot and animations.

Even though this individual shows promise in this area, there are currently no businesses to support this type of employment. Rather than telling the client he needs to pick something different, how might this rehabilitation counselor use labor market information to assist this client?

So first, let's check the O-NET. There's a link here specific to the O-NET related to video game designers? And so what we find is that video game designers have what's called a bright outlook, meaning that the growth area, the growth in this area of employment, is much faster than average.

An additional support from the O-NET-- we are able to determine that there is a great deal of information about the skills required and what the working environment is. So earlier, we talked about the various types of hard skills and soft skills. The O-NET is a great way to determine what hard skills are needed for a given field. And so within video game designers, we learned that there are very specific programming languages that are needed, like C++, or learning how to code in Python. And so being able to relay that information to the individual, to kind of evaluate whether or not they're interested in learning these types of skills is a great place to start.

So we've done our O-NET research. What's next? Consider a career pathway approach. So what are on-ramps and off-ramps that can eventually get this individual to their ultimate employment goal? This individual does have some experience in the field. They're a high school student, already taking classes at a community college. They've attended summer camp. But they don't want to move, which can be a very limiting component of specific jobs.

So what credentials are needed to help them get started, and what options does this individual have? So let's start at the very beginning. Is there a gaming store in this area or a store with electronics? Is there a company that might let them write video game reviews? Does this individual have a streaming account?

So in thinking about some of these things, if an individual is working in a gaming store or a store with electronics, they're becoming familiar with the different consoles, different methods of playing, and developing the relationship and gaining understanding of the people who are playing these types of games. So this gives the individual more insight as to what is going to be needed in the future, in terms of game development.

Thinking outside the box, are there places where he'd be able to write video game reviews, putting himself out there to be able to be recognized by other either gaming companies or relevant /

And then a streaming account-- so does this individual use something like Twitch to show them playing video games and engaging with other people through online platforms, and kind of noticing what this individual notices as they're playing their games? So is he able to give commentary as to-- oh, well, I'm playing this game, and this is where this could be improved? And so, kind of putting himself out there and making it recognized, so that way when he does go to apply for a job as a game designer, the professionals within that company might be familiar with some of his work-- kind of developing a portfolio.

So providing empowerment-- a key component of this entire process is to empower the job seeker. Increasing autonomy and decision making skills increases the likelihood of an individual being an active participant in completing the steps to obtain employment.

So explore their career interest and goal. What steps are needed to accomplish that goal? And what does the individual see as a reasonable step? It's important to gain their input. So that way, something doesn't seem too daunting. And as the counselor, you're then faced with resistance.

And also encourage the job seeker to ask questions. Explore their vocational interests. Explore the workforce in their area, and ask the question, are jobs available in their area? If not, what else can be done?

So I've investigated the labor market information. But how do I exactly engage the individual in this process? Well, I don't exactly have that answer for you. I'm going to turn it over to Christine, who is now going to give you more information about informed choice in module 3.

Thank you. And if you need anything further, if you have any questions, again, my name is Nichole Tichy. I'm with the George Washington University. And my email is nbean2@gwu.edu. Thank you for watching.