

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field Vol. 29

June 2, 2021

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This monthly update highlights relevant research for RETAIN states and summarizes key takeaways that may benefit program implementation. Each summary includes a link to an article, a resource, or a formal abstract. An accessible version of For Your Insight is attached to this email.

A Literature Review of the Role of Return-to-Work Coordinators in Trial Programs and Interventions Designed to Prevent Workplace Disabilities

Shaw and colleagues (2007) reviewed the literature to examine whether using return to work (RTW) coordinators is effective in preventing workplace absences. The authors reviewed 40 articles related to on-site services and supports provided by RTW coordinators to reduce work absences associated with physical health conditions. Workplace interventions that included RTW coordinators showed a moderate to large positive impact on disability outcomes, such as improved job satisfaction, increased accommodations, and reduced lost workdays. The authors found six skill areas that may contribute to the effectiveness of RTW coordinators:

- **Ergonomic and workplace assessment** is a common approach used by RTW coordinators that may help to “accurately identify problem tasks, generate more alternatives for transitional work, and maintain credibility with both workers and employers.”
- **Clinical interviewing** involves interviewing workers about work and medical histories and may help to establish rapport with workers.
- **Social problem solving** refers to the ability of RTW coordinators to facilitate communication between stakeholders, such as supervisors and Human Resources staff, to overcome perceived problems or barriers to implementing RTW strategies.
- **Workplace mediation** focuses on communication skills to help overcome disagreements between workers and employers about RTW accommodations.
- **Knowledge of business and legal rights** refers to the RTW coordinator’s knowledge about the legal rights of employers and workers.
- **Knowledge of medical conditions** refers to the need for RTW coordinators to be knowledgeable of common disabling medical conditions. However, studies that included this competency did not identify specific types of important medical knowledge (e.g., diagnosis of symptoms, setting goals for recovery, and understanding prognostic factors).

The authors concluded that (1) the success of RTW coordinators “depends on competencies in ergonomic job accommodation, worksite communication, and conflict resolution” and (2) future research should evaluate if different types of work settings influence the effectiveness of RTW coordinators.

Abstract available: [Shaw, W., Hong, Q., Pransky, G., & Loisel, P. \(2007\). A literature review describing the role of return-to-work coordinators in trial programs and interventions designed to prevent workplace disability. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 18\(1\), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-007-9115-y>](#)

Tags: RTW coordinators, workplace disability, competencies

Development and Validation of Competencies for Return to Work Coordinators

Pransky and colleagues (2010) conducted focus groups with 75 return-to-work (RTW) coordinators to find the competencies required for their success. The authors identified eight competencies: administration, individual personal attributes, information gathering, communication, professional credibility, evaluation, problem-solving, and conflict management. Then, the authors sent a survey to RTW coordinators asking them to rank these competencies. RTW coordinators rated the competencies focused on general personal attributes (e.g., perseverance, teamwork, insight, resilience, self-awareness, and open-mindedness) and skills related to communicating and coordinating with all stakeholders involved in the RTW process the highest. The authors concluded that their findings can be used to inform the hiring, training, and professional development of RTW coordinators.

Abstract available: [Pransky, G., Shaw, W. S., Loisel, P., Hong, Q. N., & Désorcy, B. \(2009\). Development and validation of competencies for return to work coordinators. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 20\(1\), 41–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-009-9208-x>](#)

Tags: RTW coordinators, competencies

Supervisor Autonomy and Considerate Leadership Style are Associated with Supervisors' Likelihood to Accommodate Back Injured Workers

McGuire and colleagues (2015) conducted a study to determine if supervisor autonomy and leadership style affects their support of job accommodations for workers with back injuries. The authors surveyed 796 supervisors. The survey included questions about supervisors' level of autonomy at work and two types of leadership style: considerate and initiating structure. Considerate leadership style emphasizes the development of personal relationships with supervisees. Initiating structure leadership style focuses on defining team roles and adhering to rules to complete work objectives. The survey also included one of eight randomly assigned scenarios about a worker with a back injury and questions about how a supervisor would accommodate the worker in the scenario. The authors found that supervisors with considerate leadership style and high levels of autonomy were more likely to accommodate workers with back injuries. The authors concluded that the results may be used to influence employers to give more flexibility and autonomy to their supervisors.

Full text available: [Mcguire, C., Kristman, V. L., Williams-Whitt, K., Reguly, P., Shaw, W., & Soklaridis, S. \(2015\). *Supervisor autonomy and considerate leadership style are associated with supervisors' likelihood to accommodate back injured workers. Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 25\(3\), 589–598. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-015-9567-4>](#)

Tags: Accommodations, back injury, leadership style

This communication was prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy and Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) state grantees, by the American Institutes for Research under DOL Contract Number 1605DC-18-F-00429. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.