

*AN OUTCOME MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR
EXTENDING ADVANCES IN CHOICE RESEARCH INTO
CHOICE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORTED WORKERS WITH
SEVERE MULTIPLE DISABILITIES*

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We evaluated an outcome management program for increasing choice opportunities provided by 2 job coaches for 5 supported workers with severe multiple disabilities in a community job. The program involved specifying and monitoring behavioral outcomes among workers and staff, training staff, and supportive and corrective feedback. Increased choice provision occurred for both job coaches across a 1-year period. Results indicate how outcome management can help translate advances in choice research into routine practice.

DESCRIPTORS: outcome management, choice, supported work

Despite numerous investigations demonstrating the benefits of providing choice-making opportunities to individuals with disabilities, many people with severe disabilities are often denied such opportunities in their day-to-day lives. To illustrate, although work-related choices can affect job performance and overall quality of work life, people with severe disabilities—and particularly severe multiple disabilities—often experience few on-the-job choices in supported work (Everson & Reid, 1997).

One variable that affects the frequency of choice making among people with severe disabilities is whether support personnel have the skills to provide meaningful choice opportunities. Consequently, one potential means of increasing choice making in supported work situations may be to train job coaches in methods of providing choices as part of their ongoing work activities. Because ample evidence indicates that simply training support staff in new work skills is not likely to result in consistent application

of the skills during the regular work routine (Reid & Parsons, 2002), consideration should also be given to developing procedures for maintaining choice provision following training. The purpose of this investigation was to evaluate an outcome management program for training and maintaining job coach provision of choice-making opportunities within a supported work situation with workers who have severe multiple disabilities.

METHOD

Participants and Setting

Participants were 2 job coaches, Liz and May, who worked with 5 supported workers with severe cognitive and physical disabilities (4 were nonambulatory) in a small publishing company. The supported workers were nonvocal except for brief utterances. The workers worked part time preparing advertising material and books for mailing. Each job coach was assigned 1 or 2 supported workers each day (2 or 3 workers were at work on a given day).

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Behavior Definitions, Observations, Experimental Conditions, and Design

The target behavior was a *choice* provided by a job coach to a worker, defined as an open-ended question regarding something a worker would like to do (e.g., “Where do you want to work?”), a two-option question (e.g., “Do you want to work with Liz or May?”), or a two-object presentation (e.g., showing address labels and tabs while asking if a worker wanted to label or tab). A worker’s *choice response* also was defined (vocalizing a choice option named by a job coach, gesturing toward an object in a two-object choice, or extended looking at an object in a two-object presentation). Choices and choice responses were observed continuously throughout two work periods. Interobserver agreement checks occurred during 26% of observations, and agreement averaged at least 91% for choices provided and choice responses.

Experimental conditions—baseline. During baseline, job coaches worked with supported workers in their typical manner. Following preparatory activities, the coaches provided support for their workers on job tasks assigned by a company supervisor. After an approximate 30-min work period, a brief break was conducted, followed by another 30-min work period.

Experimental conditions—outcome management program. The intervention represented a six-step outcome management approach to staff supervision (Reid & Parsons, 2002). The first three steps involved (1) determining desired worker outcomes (represented in the behavior definitions for choice responses), (2) identifying job coach actions to assist workers in attaining the outcomes (the definitions for job coach choice provision), and (3) monitoring staff performance and worker outcomes associated with Steps 1 and 2 (represented in the observation system). These steps were instituted at the beginning of the study for baseline analysis. Steps 4

through 6 represented the actual intervention with the job coaches. Step 4 involved training the coaches to provide choice opportunities, using a protocol that identified different types of choices (e.g., where, with whom, and how to do a task). During a 20-min meeting with the 2 coaches, the protocol was explained along with a rationale for presenting choices and honoring the choices by providing the chosen options, and the three formats for presenting choices were demonstrated. Next, the job coaches were asked to review the protocol, develop ideas regarding types of choices, provide as many of the identified choices as reasonable without interfering with work assignments, and were thanked for their efforts. Finally, the job coaches were asked to focus only on the one work period identified during the training.

Step 5 of the management program involved supportive vocal feedback. Following an observation, a supervisor informed the coach how many choices had been provided during the work period and how (or if) the number of choices represented an increase over baseline. Once a job coach’s frequency of providing choices stabilized above baseline, feedback was no longer provided unless the job coach asked about the choices observed. Step 6, implemented if choices decreased to baseline levels (once during follow-up), involved corrective feedback that specified that the number of choices observed was not above baseline levels.

Follow-up. Follow-up observations occurred after formal observations were discontinued (Figure 1). A job coach supervisor continued to visit the work site intermittently each week.

Experimental design. The experimental design was a multiple probe across work periods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Across job coaches and work periods, one choice was offered during baseline (Figure

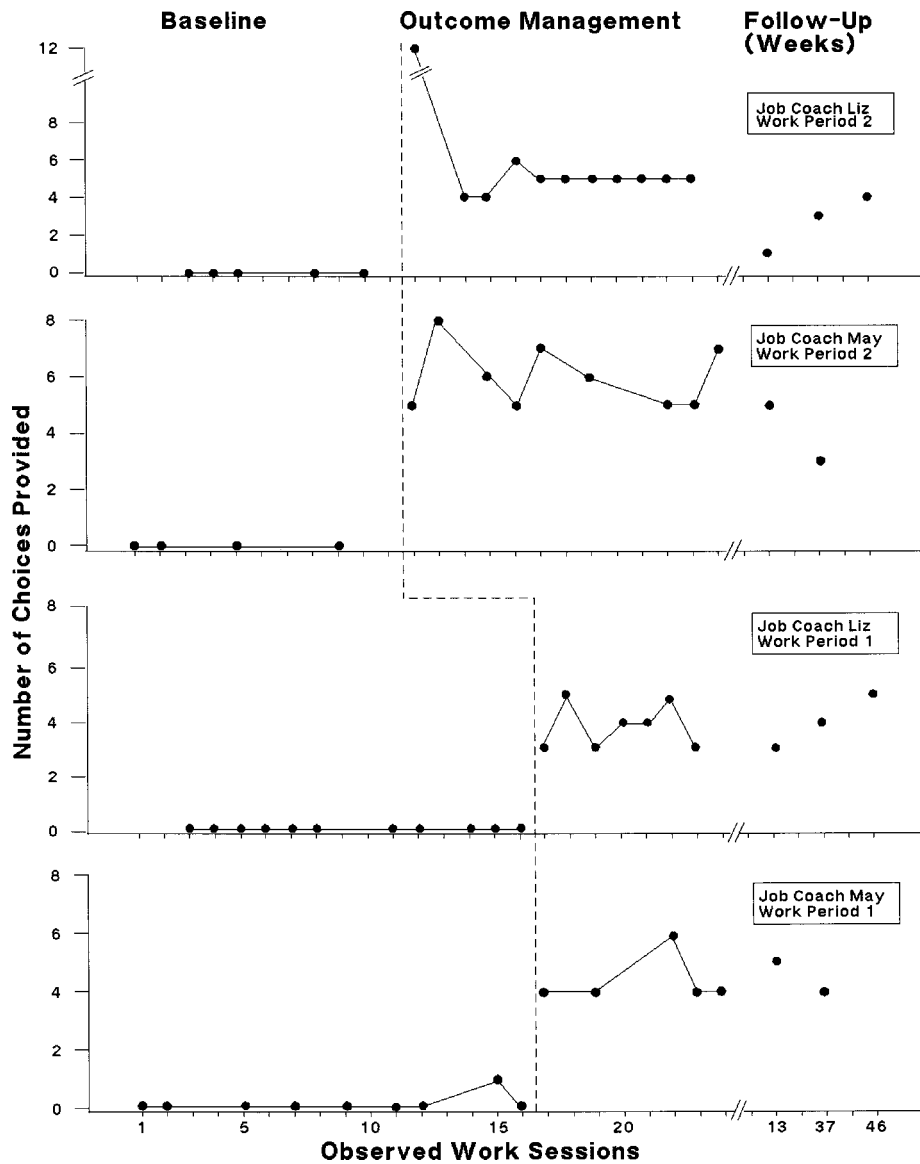


Figure 1. Number of choices provided by each job coach during each observed work session in both experimental conditions for two work periods.

1). In contrast, following implementation of the outcome management program, increases occurred for both job coaches and work periods, averaging at least 3.9 choices per work period for each coach. The increases generally were maintained above baseline levels during follow-up observations conducted for a 1-year period following the initiation of the program. The supported work-

ers responded to 94% of all choices provided with an observed choice response, and job coaches consistently honored the choice responses by providing the chosen option.

The follow-up results are noteworthy in that provision of choices appeared to become a regular part of the job coaches' routine, even though there was minimal supervisory action directed toward choice provi-

sion during follow-up (one occurrence of corrective feedback and responding to a job coach's questions). One potential explanation for why staff performance was maintained with minimal supervisory action is that providing choices requires seemingly minimal staff effort. It may also have been that the intermittent but frequent presence of the supervisors served as a stimulus for the coaches to provide choices.

One limitation to the investigation is that attempts were not made to evaluate effects of the choices offered to the supported workers beyond their frequency of choice responses. However, the purpose of this investigation was to extend what has been demonstrated through research in terms of benefits accompanying increased opportunities to make choices. This investigation attempted to translate what was learned from such research into changes in the work situation such that supported workers would have more opportunities to make the types of

choices that research has shown to be beneficial. In light of the changes in job coach behavior, research seems warranted on applying the outcome management approach to other areas of staff performance. Such investigations may help develop means of bridging the gap between typical service provision and various technological advances reflected in the research literature.

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