

# Self-perceived knowledge and skills of job coaches in Japan

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## Abstract.

**OBJECTIVE:** The purpose of the study was to assess the self-perceived knowledge and skills of Japanese job coaches and to examine whether their knowledge and skills differed across employment settings.

**PARTICIPANTS:** The 479 job coaches at Work Support Centers or Work Support Agencies comprised the study population.

**METHODS:** A Japanese version of the 80-item Self-Assessment for Students or Counselors (SASC-J) was mailed to all the Work Support Centers and Agencies.

**RESULTS:** There was no significant difference on any of the SASC-J 8 subsystems mean scores between Work Support Agencies and Work Support Centers. The highest mean score of these 2 employment settings was the “Placement Personal” (2.30 and 2.31), and the lowest was the “Education” (1.40 and 1.46). The overall mean score of the SASC-J was 1.82 ( $SD = 0.63$ ). A significant relationship was found between the years of experience and the SASC-J ( $r = 0.30, p < 0.01$ ).

**CONCLUSIONS:** Since the average below 3.0 on the SASC would mean that “you need to read a textbook on placement and/or a course in Placement”, the result of the current study suggested that Japanese job coaches, regardless of the employment settings, need to learn more about the systematic placement technique. Further studies are encouraged to assess the training outcome of the job coach.

Keywords: Supported employment, training, education, systems approach to placement

## 1. Introduction

Japan imported the supported employment concept and the job coach practice from the U.S. in the early 1990s. Currently, there are about 1,000 trained job coaches available in Japan, and a few thousands more

are expected to be available in the next few years. They are trained mainly by the National Institute of Vocational Rehabilitation and non-profit organizations. Many job coaches are registered with local vocational rehabilitation centers.

There are four general types of job coaches in Japan: (1) job coaches working with vocational rehabilitation centers, (2) job coaches working at welfare facilities or social work agencies for the transition from welfare to work (Type I Job Coach); (3) job coaches at private companies for the job retention of workers with disabilities (Type II Job Coach), and (4) job coaches at special needs schools for the transition from school to

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work. The role of a job coach can be summarized into a series of job development, on-the-job training, and job retention.

Many of the current Japanese job coaches are social workers. Naturally, they are comfortable with providing social services, but less so with vocational services. Since one of the key elements for the successful transition from welfare to work is the professional competency in both social and vocational skills [4], social workers are skillful enough to play the role of job coach. Thus, the “social worker-job coach” model works well. One study examined the factors contributing to the period of job retention for workers with intellectual disabilities [3]. The study found that, instead of specific vocational skills, factors such as daily living skills, conceptual skills, and self-direction skills contributed more to successful job retention. In this sense, the social worker-job coach model fits well in Japan.

Insufficient professional preparation in job placement is one of the greatest concerns for Japanese job coaches [2]. From the national sample of 398 job coaches working at Work Support Centers in Japan, Yaeda and Ishihara [5] identified that one of the major work stressors for job coaches was the lack of training in vocational rehabilitation in general. Although Japan has been successful in increasing the employment rate of individuals with disabilities in the last 10 years, many job coaches feel work stress in providing job placement services without having enough knowledge and skills. There is an urgent need for identifying which knowledge and skills area might be weak or strong for both the job coaches and the job coach trainers or educators. To date, no study in Japan is available assessing job coaches’ perceived knowledge and skills in job placement. We also do not know whether such knowledge and skills are consistent across different employment settings and whether the degree of knowledge and skills is related to the years of experience of the respondents.

The research questions of the present study included the following:

- (1) Is there a significant difference on the SASC-J between the Work Support Centers and the Work Support Agencies in Japan?
- (2) What are the weak and the strong areas of specific knowledge and skills perceived by Japanese job coaches?
- (3) Is there a significant relationship between the years of experience as a job coach and the SASC-J score?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The sampling pool consisted of job coaches currently employed at 247 Work Support Centers and 96 Work Support Agencies as of April, 2009. Since the exact number of job coaches at each employment setting was unclear, but a minimum of 3 work support coordinating staff is required at the Work Support Centers, 3 copies of SASC-J were distributed to each center and agency. A cover letter asking the administrative staff to distribute the questionnaires to their job coach staff and a self-addressed stamped envelope for the individual job coaches was mailed to a total of 345 work support centers and agencies.

### 2.2. Instrument

The 80-item SASC-J, the Japanese version of the Self-Assessment for Students or Counselors (SASC-J), was used to assess the self-perceived knowledge and skills of the job coaches. SASC-J is one of the assessment tools in the Systems Approach to Placement (SAP) for rehabilitation counseling students and practitioners (Kundu, et al, 2005) [1]. There are 8 subsystems in the instrument, namely, Client subsystem (15 items), Health subsystem (8 items), Education subsystem (6 items), Family subsystem (5 items), Social subsystem (10 items), Employer subsystem (14 items), Placement Personal subsystem (10 items), and Funding subsystem (12 items). The ordinal scale for each item of the instrument ranged from 0 to 4, as measured by “I have no knowledge or skill”, “I have a minimum knowledge or skill”, “I have an average knowledge or skill”, “I have more than average knowledge or skill”, or “I have enough knowledge or skill to train someone”, respectively. The content of each item was matched appropriately with the Japanese social and vocational service delivery system. After obtaining the translation approval from the original author, SASC was translated into Japanese, back translated into English, and the contents were checked and validated by the original author. A field test was conducted with 39 job coaches in Tokyo to probe the responses for appropriateness.

### 2.3. Data analyses

Descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to answer the research questions. For the t-tests ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), the dependent variables included each subsystem mean

and the total mean score of the SASC-J, and the independent variable was the employment setting with 2 levels, namely, Work Support Centers (WSC) and Work Support Agencies (WSA). To identify the weak and the strong areas of specific knowledge and skills perceived by the Japanese job coaches, the bottom 10 and the top 10 mean scores were rank-ordered. Spearman's *r* was tested to evaluate if a significant relationship exists between the years of experiences and the SASC-J score ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

2.4. Internal consistency of SASC-J

The Chronbach's alpha coefficient of the SASC-J was 0.985 for WSC ( $n = 331$ ), and 0.984 for WSA ( $n = 148$ ), and the overall alpha was 0.985 ( $N = 479$ ). The alpha value was high enough to be internally consistent as a measurement, however it is possible that the high coefficient may be due to the scoring redundancy within the survey instrument.

3. Results

3.1. Return rates

The return rate was 53.0% for the WSC ( $n = 331$ ) and 65.6% for the WSA ( $n = 148$ ), for a total of 479 work supporters and job coaches in the sample. Out of the 47 states in Japan, more than 90% (43 states) responded to the survey for the WSC. However, only 21% (10 states) responded for the WSA. This was not surprising since not all the states have organized WSAs by the municipal government. The 10 states that responded were; Miyagi, Fukushima, Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Osaka, Hyogo, and Ehime. The 148 WSA agencies consisted of respondents from the Kanto Plain, including Tokyo (77 agencies), Kanagawa (26 agencies), Saitama (21 agencies), and Chiba (2 agencies).

3.2. Demographic variables across WSC and WSA

- (1) 52% of the WSC were male while 59% of the WSA were female ( $\chi^2 = 4.6, p < 0.05$ )
- (2) No significant difference of the mean age (overall mean age was 40 years old)
- (3) No significant difference on the mean years of experience (overall mean was 4.4 years)
- (4) More paper work ( $t = -4.7, p < 0.05$ ) for WSA (2.6 hours a day), but more total working hours ( $t = 2.8, p < 0.05$ ) for WSC (8.5 hours a day)

Table 1  
Demographic variables between 2 settings

	WSC	WSA	<i>p</i>
	( <i>n</i> = 331)	( <i>n</i> = 148)	
Male(%)	51.8	48.2	
Female(%)	41.1	58.9	*
Age	39.7	39.8	
Years of experience	4.6	3.9	
Daily work hours	8.5	8.2	**
Hours with client	3.5	3.0	*
Paper work hours	2.0	2.5	**
Work satisfaction	60.7	65.3	**

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Table 2  
Differences on SASC-J across employment settings

Subsystem	Setting	MEAN	(SD)	<i>t</i>
Client	WSC	2.10	(0.62)	-0.46
	WSA	2.13	(0.60)	
Education	WSC	1.40	(0.81)	-0.69
	WSA	1.46	(0.81)	
Health	WSC	1.66	(0.69)	0.62
	WSA	1.61	(0.72)	
Family	WSC	1.96	(0.71)	-0.27
	WSA	1.98	(0.82)	
Social	WSC	1.42	(0.78)	-0.50
	WSA	1.46	(0.80)	
Employer	WSC	1.87	(0.81)	-1.85
	WSA	2.02	(0.81)	
Placement	WSC	2.20	(0.86)	-1.28
	WSA	2.31	(0.89)	
Funding	WSC	1.79	(0.68)	-1.18
	WSA	1.87	(0.66)	
Total	WSC	1.80	(0.62)	-0.89
	WSA	1.86	(0.64)	

( $N = 479$ ).

- (5) The major identified job title was the "Work Supporters" instead of the "Job Coaches" at both WSC (62.3% and 3.2%) and WSA (60.1% and 17.4%)
- (6) The two largest client populations were intellectual disabilities followed by psychiatric disabilities at both WSC and WSA

Table 1 summarizes these demographic variable differences between WSC and WSA.

3.3. Perceived knowledge and skills of the Japanese job coach

- (1) Is there a significant difference on the SASC-J between the Work Support Centers and the Work Support Agencies in Japan?  
No significant difference was found on the SASC-J between the Work Support Centers and the Work Support Agencies. Although statistical significance was not obtained at 0.05 level, the mean

Table 3  
The top 10 and the worst 10 knowledge and skills of Japanese job coach ( $N = 479$ )

Top 10 list		Mean	SD
1	Teaching job-seeking skills	2.66	0.79
2	Referral resources regarding placement	2.59	0.95
3	Agency resources regarding placement	2.45	1.04
4	State Grants in Aid	2.43	0.87
5	Teaching the use and management of local transportation	2.42	0.75
6	Agency policy regarding placement	2.42	1.04
7	Assessing attitudes towards work	2.36	0.96
8	Teaching basic communication skills	2.35	0.72
9	Social Security Disability Insurance (S.S.D.I.)/Medicare	2.32	0.87
10	Teaching interpersonal relation skills	2.27	0.72
Bottom 10 list		Mean	SD
1	Evaluating the orthotic/prosthetic/ adaptive technology aid report	0.84	0.94
2	Referring clients for orthotic/prosthetic/adaptive technology aid evaluation	0.90	0.95
3	Referring a client with religious barriers for assistance	1.05	0.94
4	Referring a client for on-the-job training Program	1.06	0.99
5	Referring a client with cultural/ethnic barriers for assistance	1.08	0.97
6	Determining religious barriers	1.16	0.95
7	Determining cultural/ethnic barriers	1.16	0.99
8	Guaranteed Student Loan (G.S.L.)	1.19	0.96
9	Referring a client for entry into a Formal Education Program (A.A., B.A., Graduate studies, etc.)	1.34	0.96
10	Referring a client affected by union barriers for assistance	1.37	1.05

score on the “Employer” subsystem of the WSA was a little higher than that of the WSC ( $t = -1.85, p < 0.10$ ). There were only 2 subsystem means that were both above 2.0 (“I have an average knowledge or skill”). Those were the “Placement Personnel” and the “Client” as shown in the Table 2. But those means were not close to 3.0 (“I have more than average knowledge or skill”). The overall total mean of the SASC-J was 1.80 ( $SD = 0.62$ ) for WSC and 1.86 ( $SD = 0.64$ ) for WSA ( $t = -0.89, p > 0.05$ ). Table 1 provides the summary of the t-tests for the 8 subsystems in the SASC-J between the 2 employment settings.

- (2) What are the weak and the strong areas of specific knowledge and skills perceived by Japanese job coaches?

Table 3 shows the top 10 and the bottom 10 of the specific knowledge and skills among the 80 items. The two highest mean scores obtained for the total sample ( $N = 479$ ) were “Teaching job-seeking skills” ( $M = 2.66, SD = 0.79$ ) from the “Client” subsystem and “Referral resources regarding placement” ( $M = 2.59, SD = 0.95$ ), from the “Placement Personnel” subsystem. The two weakest mean scores were “Evaluating the orthotic/prosthetic/adaptive technology aid report” ( $M = 0.84, SD = 0.94$ ) and “Referring clients for orthotic/prosthetic/adaptive technology aid evaluation” ( $M = 0.90, SD = 0.95$ ) which were from the “Health” subsystem. While

the top 10 list included 4 items from the “Client” and 4 items from the “Placement Personnel” subsystem, the bottom 10 included 4 items from the “Social” subsystem which included the “cultural” and “religious” issues.

- (3) Is there a significant relationship between the years of experience as a job coach and the SASC-J score?

A significant positive relationship was found between the years of experience and the SASC-J score ( $r = 0.30, p < 0.01$ ). Although it was not a high degree of correlation, the result indicated that experience might be a moderating factor that could influence the knowledge and skills score.

#### 4. Discussion

It was suggested by the original SASC developer that the average 3.0–4.0 in any sub-system would mean “you have enough knowledge to teach someone that subsystem”, and average 0.0–3.0 in any sub-system would mean “you need to read a textbook on placement and/or a course in Placement” (Kundu, et al, 2005) [1]. The results showed that the mean score of the 8 subsystems varied from 1.40 (“Education” subsystem by WSC) to 2.31 (“Placement Personnel” subsystem by WSA), which suggested that “work supporters” or “job coaches” in Japan would need additional instruction re-

Table 4  
Job coach seminar curriculum by JC-Tokyo

Lecture	1	Coordination by work support agencies and job coach
	2	Competitive employment for individuals with disabilities
	3	Physical disability and cognitive disability
	4	Vocational rehabilitation service delivery system
	5	Working life and family support
	6	Transition from welfare to work
	7	Case management and assessment
	8	Task analysis
	9	Disability awareness
	10	Introduction to vocational rehabilitation
	11	Case advocacy
	12	Transition from school to work
	13	Disability management
Seminar	14	Developing individual support plan from welfare to work
field work	15	Working at private companies
role playing	16	Task analysis and systematic instruction
	17	Job coaching
	18	Recording and reporting

regardless of the employment settings. Although many of the job coaches employed at either WSC or WSA have academic backgrounds in social work, education, or counseling, they perceive their knowledge and skills in job placement as insufficient.

When focusing on the weak knowledge and skills areas, items regarding “orthotic/prosthetic/adaptive technology aid” and “religious barriers” and “cultural/ethnic barriers” were evident. Academic areas such as assistive technology, rehabilitation engineering and multicultural rehabilitation counseling may be the key contents to be included in future job coach seminars. Although there have been a number of job coach seminars held in Japan in the last 10 years, it has not been clear as to what specific knowledge and skills are expected of a job coach. The previous seminars tended to focus only on employment and placement aspects, but not so much on education, health, family, social, and funding issues, especially assistive technology and cultural or religious areas.

Currently in Japan there are very few textbooks on job placement or supported employment. Of textbooks that are available, they fail to include assistive technology or multicultural aspects of the client. One possible explanation may be that Japan is not as multicultural as the U.S., thus less need for such education exists. However, multicultural issues should not be ignored for this reason. Since Japan has been recently accepting more and more foreign workers, worker adjustment and job retention have become an employer’s concern. Understanding their communication barrier and cultural differences in a work place has been neglected. Placement personnel should be culturally sensitive enough to provide an equal quality of services and should learn more

about multicultural issues in rehabilitation and allied health.

In terms of pre-service training, all the schools of social work in Japan have just started the 15-hour “Work Support Service” as an elective course. One remaining problem is that there is an insufficient number of qualified university professors in Japan with the proper training to teach job placement techniques including vocational rehabilitation. Very few universities in Japan have academic courses in rehabilitation counseling and/or vocational rehabilitation.

In terms of in-service training, National Institute of Vocational Rehabilitation and some Non Profit Organizations such as Job Coach Network of Tokyo and Employment Support Network of Osaka have been the leaders to train job coaches in Japan. However, there are still not enough job coaches available to meet the current demands. Therefore, municipal governments have taken an initiative for training job coaches and providing employment support by themselves.

For example, the Metropolitan Government of Tokyo started its original project in 2008, namely, the Job Coach Support Center of Tokyo (JC-Tokyo), in order to meet the increasing needs for supported employment practice. JC-Tokyo provides training seminars while providing direct supported employment services. So far, 62 qualified job coaches have been trained in the last 3 years, receiving a 9-day, 50-hour seminar by means of lectures, role-playing, group work seminar, and field work practicum. Table 4 shows the current job coach curriculum offered by JC-Tokyo. Seminar instructors of JC-Tokyo include business personnel employing workers with severe disabilities, university professors, vocational rehabilitation counselors, work

support center staff, social workers, special needs education teachers, medical doctors, human service officers, and private business consultants. Many of the job coaches registered by JC-Tokyo have professional certification or license already. These include Certified Social Workers, Certified Psychiatric Social Workers, Licensed Occupational Therapists, Licensed School Teachers, or Licensed Sign Language Translators.

The result showed that the years of experience as a job coach and the degree of knowledge and skills in job placement had a positive relationship. Many of the current job coaches in Japan get on-the-job training for just a short period of time and are expected to be effective job coaches. Job coaches may sufficient experience as social workers, but not necessarily as a job coach. Further investigation is necessary to see how the experience variable as a social worker may be related to becoming a knowledgeable and skillful job coach.

As indicated earlier, the “social worker-job coach” model works well in Japan because most of the current job coaches are social workers who have adequate knowledge and skills in social support and health care. Other cross professional models such as “occupational therapist-job coach” or “teacher-job coach” might work well, too. If this is the case, transition from hospital to work and transition from school to work would be enhanced through a systematic placement approach.

## 5. Conclusion

The research questions in the current study were: (1) Is there a significant difference on the SASC-J between Work Support Centers and Work Support Agencies in Japan? (2) What are the weak and the strong areas of specific knowledge and skills perceived by Japanese job coaches? (3) Is there a significant relationship between the years of experience as a job coach and the SASC-J score?

The knowledge and skills of the job coaches assessed by SASC-J did not differ significantly depending on their employment settings. The results showed that SASC-J scores were insufficient to demonstrate that current coaches feel qualified to teach someone else, especially in the subsystems of Education, Health, Family Social, Employer, and Funding. The results also showed that there was a significant relationship between the years of experience and SASC-J. Qualified social workers who have enough experience in social work could provide work support services as they

get more experience, but that would not guarantee any service accountability. The “social worker-job coach” model may function better if they learn more about vocational rehabilitation systematically. It is suspected that Japanese job coaches would benefit from additional knowledge and skills to assist with providing systematic placement. The current study did not examine how the knowledge and skills of job coaches would vary across individuals with different professional certification and/or license. Future studies are encouraged to assess the knowledge and skills of job coaches across professional backgrounds and academic degrees they have obtained. Such finding will be the foundations for the rehabilitation professional education program at the universities and in-service training programs.

The present study used the SASC originally developed in the U.S. and found it was a reliable instrument assessing the knowledge and skills of job coaches in Japan. A comparative study of the findings in terms of the social and cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan is encouraged. SASC-J needs to be validated with a national sample of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors, too. While VR counselors have 1 year of in-service training before they become certified, job coaches have less than a month of training period in supported employment. Currently, no graduate school to become a certified VR counselors is available in Japan, and most job coaches learn supported employment theory and techniques directly from those VR counselors in a short period of time. Advanced degrees for both VR counselor and job coach need to be established. Quality vocational rehabilitation and systematic placement must be assessed periodically and assured constantly.

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