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# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

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Technology Adoption and Transformation  
of the Vocational Rehabilitation Process:  
A Case Study of Counselors within State  
VR Agencies

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## ABSTRACT

The public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is facing the challenge of having to increase service capacity with constant or even decreasing resources. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and the Internet in particular, offers a wide range of opportunities to improve service delivery and to more actively engage individuals with disabilities in the VR program. Existing research on Internet applications in VR suggests that the Internet can be a useful tool but that it will not replace the counselor. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence that shows how ICT is currently being used and how it can effectively be integrated into the continuum of modes used for delivering public VR services. This raises three important questions that will be the focus of this dissertation research: 1) *How do state VR counselors use ICT to deliver services and engage customers in the rehabilitation process?* 2) *What affects and possibly predicts technology adoption and use by state VR counselors?* 3) *How do state VR counselors (ICT adopters and non-adopters) regard the benefits and disadvantages of technology-based services?* Particular emphasis will be placed on Internet service delivery (e-government). Overall, the goals of this research are: a) to provide a descriptive summary of ICT adoption and utilization by VR counselors to facilitate the rehabilitation process and customer engagement, b) to develop a theoretical model to explain counselor technology acceptance; c) to discuss the implications of these findings for policy and practice, and d) to generate recommendations for VR service delivery, resource management, and staff development.

The study will integrate components of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model into a conceptual framework that will be used to investigate technology acceptance. The study proposes four sets of factors that are likely to impact individual technology adoption and utilization: counselors' perceptions of the attributes of ICT, communication channels, characteristics of counselors and state VR agencies. The research will be implemented in two phases using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Phase one consists of a comprehensive sampling and selection process of potential state VR agencies (sites) to be used in the case studies carried out in Phase two. The goal is to select four state VR agencies that differ in important aspects relevant to counselor technology adoption. Phase two is a comparative case study of the four state VR agencies. Case study data will be obtained through a document review, a survey of state VR counselors, in-depth qualitative interviews with and participant observation of counselors in their practice.

The proposed research contributes to e-government policy in the field of VR by increasing our understanding of the factors that affect ICT adoption and utilization by VR counselors in the delivery of employment services. It will provide illustrations of these factors and their effects that are grounded in the unique situations and experiences of VR counselors of the participating sites. Comparative data on how these factors vary within and across the case study sites will contribute to the development of a conceptual model of technology adoption and utilization in VR service delivery. In addition, the study will also investigate reasons for non-adoption (rejection, discontinuance), an area that has received little attention in the field of innovation diffusion. More broadly, the study will contribute to existing research on technology adoption and its implications for public service delivery by building a knowledge-base about staff acceptance and utilization of ICT, barriers to and facilitators of ICT utilization, as well as advantages and disadvantages of technology-based services in the field of vocational rehabilitation. This information will also be transferable to other public human service systems including the One-Stop system, the welfare system, and other disability service systems (e.g., Mental Health, Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities).