



Building Relationships with Employers

Tim Riesen
 Research Assistant Professor
 Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation
 Utah State University

Agenda

- Explore the importance of integrated employment for people with disabilities.
- Review procedures and results of a focus group study on customized employment.
- Provide recommendations for practice and future research.



Consistently Poor Employment Outcomes for People With Disabilities

American Community Survey
(Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2015).

33.7% of individuals with disabilities between ages 16-64 are employed.

State Data: National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes.
(Winsor, et al., 2017)

18.6% of adults with intellectual disabilities are employed.

National Core Indicators Project
(Hiersteiner, Butterworth, Bershadsky, & Bonardi, 2016).

14.8% of working aged adults who are supported by state intellectual and development disabilities (IDD) agencies are employed in paid community jobs.

Contributing Factors

Lack of applied, inclusive work experiences

Readiness Paradigm

Low Employment Expectations

Incomplete Agenda (Bachrach, 2015)

Focusing solely on providing education and support to people with disabilities will not address all employment barriers.

Legislation

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA)

- Specific amendments designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Defined competitive integrated employment.
- Modified the definition of supported employment to include customized employment.
- WIOA, (2014)
 - CE is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and carried out through flexible strategies.



Building Relationships

- WINTAC, (n.d). Essential Elements of CE
 - Negotiation of job duties.
 - Individualization, involving one job for one person.
 - Businesses in the community.
 - Develop strategies for assisting employers to identify areas in which the employer might benefit.
 - Avoid job openings and typical personnel process when approaching employers.
 - Job development representation.



Building Relationships

- U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (n.d.) indicators
 - “personalized job description and/or other employer expectations that did not exist prior to the negotiation process.”
- Competency model for customized employment (Harvey, Szoc, Rosa, Pohl, and Jenkins, 2013)
 - Possess the knowledge and skills to understand business and employment practices.
 - Employment specialist be proficient at business networking.

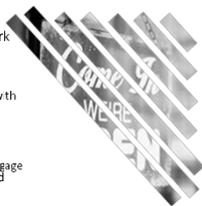


Building Relationships

- Numerous studies regarding employer perspectives on hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities using traditional approaches to employment (e.g., Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1995; Kay, Jans, & Jones, 2011; Luecking 2008)

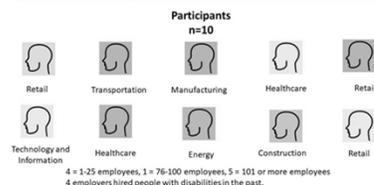
Limited research on how employment specialists can work with employers to customize jobs.

- Luecking, Cuozzo and Buchanan (2006)
 - Telephone interviews with 9 employers who hired individuals with disabilities into customized jobs
 - Authors found that the customized employment process met employer needs, helped meet production goals, and improved customer satisfaction.
 - The study did not provide information about how to initially engage employers to learn about business needs during the customized employment process.



Employer Views of Customized Employment: A Focus Group Analysis

Research Question
Given brief training on customized employment, what do employers with no experience with customized employment identify as facilitators and barriers to the process?



Method - Procedures

Pre-focus group
Video.

Employers watched 3 min 40 second video created by the Office of Disability Employment (ODEP).

- Three vignettes of people with disabilities working in customized jobs and provided interviews by national customized employment experts.
- Interviews with employers who had hired the three individuals highlighted in the vignettes who described the customized employment process

Qualtrics Survey®
Number of Employees, Type and Purpose of Business/Service



Method - Procedures

Synchronous Online Focus Group
(Boydell, Fergie, McDaid, & Hilton, 2014; Walker, 2013)

- Accommodate employer schedules
- Accommodate geographic diversity
- Provide a convenient data collection format
- 3 groups
- 75-minute sessions
- Adobe Connect®

Method - Design & Analysis

Qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2013)

- Open-ended focus group interview method (Patton, 1990)

Digitally Recorded
Independently transcribed
Reviewed and coded transcriptions to identify themes.

What factors would influence you and your business to customize jobs for people with disabilities?

Results - Themes

Business Need

Networking

Communication

Training

Financial

Results - Themes

Business Need

"I would probably want that individual to come and spend multiple days working in all different aspects of the business and meeting with me so that they had a real true understanding of all the different layers and departments. We could actually brainstorm and come up with perhaps some creative employment areas."

"pay attention, ask good questions, and think creatively about how to fashion a job."

"Should do a level of hands-on work themselves so that they understand the process..... then [the employment specialist] would have the level of accountability of something that they put in place."

Results - Themes

Business Need

Barriers

"We actually had a provider come and speak to us and that person didn't understand their business as well. They were here for a particular candidate but when the team asked questions they were not capable of answering."

Not asking:
"what can we [employment specialist] do for you and how can we [employment specialists] help your company?"

Being to **"pushy"** or can't take **no** for an answer.

Not understanding the **role** of the community rehabilitation professional and not being able to convey **role** to the employer.

Results - Themes

Employers indicated they would like to hear about past successes with customized employment and how those successes can generalize to their business.

Networking

"I think they [employment specialists] would need to have some examples of past successes with other companies and show how they have worked for other companies."

informational video



Results - Themes

Employment specialist serve as a liaison between the employer and customized employee and communicate with the employer about what components of the customized job are working and not working.

Ensuring that the specialist conducted regular check-ins with the employer.

Performance reviews

Communication

"what are some of the challenges and what are some of the solutions?"

"It is hard for us being so small that we would want to just create, you know, the position would have to be something that made sense and that was a need we needed to be filled."

Results - Themes

"We kind of do a **discovery mode** with all of the candidates that we are interviewing and we put together a **summary package** about why this person is a perfect fit for the position."

Communication

"Present what someone's **strengths** are, what their **weakness** are, and information about what they enjoy. That is something that we try to do anyways as we get new employees, as we get people going, we start to realize what employees are good at...Some people are good at some things that others are terrible...so you try to line people up with what their strengths are."

Results - Themes

"...actually **teach** a person at the company how to work with a person with a disability."

Contract-to-hire scenario
"try the employee out before they fully invest in bringing that employee on as a full-time or permanent employment."

Training

Employers also indicated that general training was needed on how to handle issues that they may not be comfortable handling.

Results - Themes

Employers seemed to struggle with the concept of customization and what that meant for the business from a financial perspective

"we do not have the funds to do it financially because we don't have the extra padding or luxury for the extra labor"

"we can't just create jobs because it sounds cool, it has a lot to do with our forecasting and productivity as a company"

Financial

Discussion

Employers may not fully understand the CE process

"If the person did not have the capacity to do a specific task, or to learn the task, or required a lot of prompting to complete an employment task, the employer would not customize that job for a person with a disability."

Meaningful Engagement is Critical

Employers are reluctant to work with employment specialists who seek only to place individuals into jobs and move on to the next case.

Essential Communication

Permeates all areas of the customized employment process from establishing contact with the employer, following up with the employer to ensure tasks are completed, and communicating about the capabilities of the customized employee.

Recommendations

Value Propositions

Take the time to adequately learn about business need.

Matches all or part of those needs to the information gathered about the customized employee.

Business Acumen

- Understand local business.
- Convey information about CE using business terms.
- Training on business principles.
- Networking.

Follow-up

- Ensure essential customized tasks are complete.
- Ensure employer and employee satisfaction with performance demands of the job.
- Examine business operations to incorporate new employment tasks as needed.



Limitations & Future Research

Only 10 employers participated, thus limiting the generalizability of results to larger samples of business and industry.

No comparison of employers with and without customized employment experience.




Future research should investigate the differences between employers with and without customized employment experience.

Future research may want to begin with more extensive training of employers on the tenants of customized employment and then ask targeted questions to identify how well it aligns with business operations.