

Emerging employer views of people with disabilities and the future of job development

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Abstract. Employer views of people with disabilities and vocational rehabilitation programs have evolved along with societal views of disability and legislative initiatives to prevent employment discrimination. This article discusses relevant literature on these employer perspectives, relates these perspectives to an evolving paradigm of dual customer and demand-side job development, and discusses the implications of these perspectives for job development practice, especially as they relate to facilitating job development with job seekers who have requirements for unusual or extensive accommodation and support.

1. Introduction

The relationship between employers and the field of vocational rehabilitation has undergone considerable evolution over the last fifty years. The “Hire the Handicapped” marketing slogans of the 1960’s and 1970’s were essentially designed to appeal to employer altruism. These appeals suggested that charity, rather than job seeker competence, would be a chief reason that employers might want to partner with rehabilitation and disability employment service programs. They also put rehabilitation and job development professionals in a supplicant position, petitioning employers to consider applicants with disabilities without offering much in return [7]. This approach has been widely discredited in recent decades to the point that in contemporary practice the notion of “selling” employers on hiring people with disabilities is gradually giving way to more customer oriented approaches that feature identifying and then meeting specific employer needs through the careful matching of individual job seekers to workplace tasks and employer demands [22].

However, attempts to convince employers to hire people with disabilities are still widely characterized by a combination of “sticks” and “carrots.” Employment discrimination, for example, is forbidden by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and therefore the threat of legal action is a figurative “stick” goad-

ing employers into legal compliance of the ADA’s non-discrimination mandates. On the other hand, tax credits and on-the-job training subsidies for hiring people with disabilities are examples of “carrots,” offering enticements to hire people with disabilities by offering reductions in tax liability and initial wage output. Although the intended result of these approaches has been to create employer demand for this potential supply of workers, the continued disappointing employment rates of job seekers with disabilities suggest that these approaches by themselves, or even in combination, are insufficient incentives to convince employers to consider partnering with rehabilitation programs [33]. In fact, according to many policy makers and researchers, the primary emphasis in vocational rehabilitation practice remains on the supply side of the workforce development equation with limited attention provided to employer requirements for human resources to meet business exigencies [12,38].

Indeed, since its inception, the two main functions of vocational rehabilitation, training and placement, operate on the supply side of the labor market. That is, the goal has primarily been to inform and prepare job seekers and facilitate their connection to jobs. This approach relies on offering employers a supply of workers who present, in various ways, skills that will meet the needs of the labor market. Thus, the practice of job development has long been characterized by variations on the theme of convincing employers to hire people

with disabilities as a means to access an “untapped resource” to meet hiring needs, offering to supply potential workers with little regard or understanding of the real operational demands of employers.

While the processes that prepare job seekers for the employment search, connect them to jobs, and even support them after the hire are important, what is often neglected is the value of influencing workplace operations in order to create a demand for disability employment services. It has only been in the last decade that serious attention has been given to adopting demand-side approaches by providing services directly to the employers to help them meet their labor needs and to help them change the nature of the work environment so as to be more accessible for job candidates with disabilities [12].

The importance of demand-side approaches has become increasingly recognized both by federal policy leadership [9,16] and in contemporary rehabilitation and job development practice. Moreover, there have been increasing calls for a dual customer approach to rehabilitation service delivery, that is, regarding both job seekers and employers as end users and customers of vocational rehabilitation and its job development initiatives. This notion has also been gaining momentum throughout the broader workforce development system [30,44]. Thus, according to many leaders in the workforce development field, relationships between employers and any initiative designed to connect individuals with perceived barriers to employment, including vocational rehabilitation, should be characterized by mutual benefit [14].

The vocational rehabilitation field has a long history of carefully assessing and understanding the needs of the job seeker customer [38]. However, there continues to be an incomplete attempt to understand and incorporate employer perspectives in job development approaches [43]. Thus, pursuing an effective dual customer job development strategy necessitates that employer perspectives be well understood and addressed. This article reviews relevant literature on employer perspective of disability and disability employment service providers and relates this perspective to an evolving paradigm of dual customer and demand-side job development. The article also addresses the implications of these perspectives, especially as they relate to job development for job seekers who, because they lack requisite skills or training or because of unique job accommodation needs, are unable to compete for “off the shelf,” or standardized jobs.

2. Employer perspectives on disability and disability employment services

Historically, employers have demonstrated conflicting views about disability and about potential employees with disabilities. These views have often reflected or were influenced by prevailing social issues and legislative policy related to disability. The mid-20th century views of disability as a medical condition to be fixed and mediated often translated into employer hiring initiatives that were motivated by reactions to charitable appeals, as evidenced by the “Hire the Handicapped” marketing of the time. It is not surprising, then, that the way in which disability employment was marketed to employers often resulted in prejudicial views of disability, as early studies often found (e.g. [10,35]). It is also not surprising that the need to better educate employers about disability has been a persistent theme in vocational rehabilitation.

Certain companies, however, took a keen interest in disability employment and one of the most widely cited series of studies of employer perspectives on hiring people with disabilities was conducted by the DuPont Corporation [5]. These studies consistently found that managers positively viewed people with disabilities, generally regarding them as easy to supervise and as producing as much or more as their co-workers without disabilities. The results of these studies often found their way into employer recruiting materials to illustrate to other employers that there was a good reason to hire people with disabilities. Unfortunately, this often created another problematic stereotype of people with disabilities. Job developers often used this information to present to employers the image of super-achieving workers who would go above and beyond what was required of employers to prove their worth [17]. As with any attempt to generalize about a specific demographic category of job seekers, such as gender or race, this approach can create skewed and inaccurate perceptions, not to mention unrealistic expectations. More problematic is the discrimination that often results, such as when employers are disappointed with the performance of an employee and vow to never again hire someone from that categorical group again.

A bigger issue perhaps is that over the years, employers consistently have reported that they are unaware of, or naïve about, the availability of people with disabilities as a supplemental labor pool [7]. This suggests that disability employment marketing efforts have fallen short of their intended mark. In addition, when employers have been aware of disability resources, there often

is confusion due to fragmentation of disability-related information, the “silo-ization” of programs serving distinct disability groups, and/or perceptions of not having the experience and resources to adequately support the employment of individuals with disabilities [2,39]. This suggests that the field of vocational rehabilitation has struggled with clarifying how it can help employers make the most of this segment of the job seeking population. Consequently, even when employers have expressed a willingness to hire people with disabilities, they are frequently at a loss as to how to recruit them, identify workplace supports and accommodations that might be necessary if they did recruit, and how to get help in managing disability in the workplace after the hire. Recent years have seen some encouraging changes in these perspectives although troublesome perceptions still persist.

2.1. Emerging employer perspectives

Many present-day employer views reflect a relatively sophisticated understanding of disability and often employers even make a credible case for how company profitability requires the effective inclusion, accommodation and management of previously marginalized workers, including those with disabilities [37]. The emergence of the Business Leadership Network (BLN), an employer-led peer to peer membership movement to promote employment of people with disabilities, is an example of this business viewpoint [20,41]. However, while the views of employers about disability have evolved along with society at large, more recent examinations of employer attitudes about disability still reflect many of the same conflicting views apparent in many early studies.

On the one hand, employers express generally positive and affirmative attitudes toward workers with disabilities [18,39]. Indeed, due to the ADA, it would be illegal to say otherwise. However, corporate responsibility to the larger community is still often invoked when companies articulate a policy about workers with disabilities, rather than a belief in their potential for productivity. In this respect, the field of vocational rehabilitation is not much further ahead than it was 40 years ago when charity was often a prime motivation for hiring workers with disabilities. This suggests that while employers generally are much more enlightened about disabilities than in the past, many more are still holding outdated and even discriminatory views.

Specifically, employers still tend to be more negative when specific attitudes toward workers with disabili-

ties are assessed. For example, workers with physical disabilities tend to be viewed more positively than workers with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities [4, 18]. This suggests an ongoing potential for not only misunderstanding, but also discrimination. The discrimination may be inadvertent, but it still indicates a huge hurdle when recruiting employers to hire individuals from these groups. In addition, other “invisible” disabilities, particularly learning disabilities, are still widely misunderstood by employers, since their needs for individual and specific accommodation may well be unknown at best, or dismissed as unnecessary at worst [11]. Overall, in their reviews of 37 studies of employer attitudes toward disability Hernandez et al. [18] concludes that employers’ expressed willingness to hire applicants with disabilities still exceeds actual hiring, although there is noted progress.

2.2. Experience helps

A very encouraging aspect of the Hernandez et al. [18] review, and several more recent studies (e.g. [26, 39]), is the finding that employer views about disability tend to positively change with exposure. Simply stated, employers with prior contact with people with disabilities tend to hold more favorable attitudes toward workers with disabilities than those who have not. With respect to people with typically stigmatized disabilities, such as intellectual and psychiatric disabilities, employers have consistently been more positive about these workers when appropriate supports are provided [3,6,32]. In fact, in many cases where employers are given specific consultation from rehabilitation professionals, they are willing to go well beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for reasonable accommodations by providing an array of supports to workers with significant disability [39].

Many employers with experience hiring people with disabilities indicate that the presence or absence of disability was not a primary concern when making hiring decisions. One study found, for example, that regardless of the nature or severity of disability more than 75% of youth who completed a standardized work-based internship program in high school were offered ongoing employment by their host companies, even though the companies were under no obligation to retain the interns beyond the internship period [26]. This strongly suggests that, once individuals with disabilities are on the job and performing, their contributions to the companies’ enterprise negates, or at least obscures, their disability in the eyes of their employers.

In fact, there is a history of research that supports the notion that company hiring decisions are less influenced by the presence or absence of disability than by potential contributions by a job candidate to the company, especially when it is clear that value is being added to the employer's enterprise. More pressing concerns to employers are often simply matching a person to a specific company need, irrespective of a disability or a need for accommodation. There is much evidence that under the right conditions and with available and competent assistance, employers are willing to develop new and augmentative approaches to meet human resource recruitment and retention needs, including hiring persons who require extensive initial training and follow-up support [42].

Many companies, including those that may typically require workers with highly technical skills, can be persuaded to consider applicants with disabilities without the requisite skills. This is the case primarily when applicants offer something of value to an employer that addresses a specific operational need. For example, alternative and specific task assignment to a worker with a disability, sometimes called customized employment, often makes it possible for other employees to accomplish more, thus contributing to increasing company outputs [26]. Assigning a person with a disability to deliver documents from one company department to another, thus allowing other workers to remain at their posts to more quickly complete more complicated tasks, is an example of this type of approach. Such customized arrangements, along with the evolution of supported employment methodology, have opened the door to employment for people considered to have significant disabilities.

Regardless of employer perspective on disability, employers often need the expertise and support of vocational rehabilitation professionals who are well versed in not only disability support methodology, but also in developing and managing employer relationships. It is also therefore important to understand how employers perceive these professionals and the organizations they represent.

2.3. Employers view of disability service providers

We have already seen that in the past employers have often been confused by disability employment marketing and where to find potential workers with disabilities. Similar confusion and frustration has also been expressed in relation to disability employment programs. Employer focus groups conducted by the author

(e.g. [26]) and by other researchers (e.g. [28]) consistently yield three types of comments by employers: 1. they resent having numerous organizations soliciting for job openings simultaneously, 2. they perceive job development personnel as being naïve about or unfamiliar with business practices, and 3. they do not see job development personnel active in the business arena, that is, participating in trade groups, chambers of commerce and other forums important to employers. As a whole, they are often confused about the mission of disability employment service providers and how they relate to their enterprises. This suggests a fundamental shortcoming in marketing these resources to employers in that their awareness is low and the messages they receive from disability employment programs are unclear or misdirected.

In the past, employers have expressed frustration with the reliability of disability employment programs [19]. Yet, employers who have positive experience with workers with disabilities often point to the importance of competent support of organizations that have disability expertise. A recently published series of essays written by employers consistently identified two factors in their success with workers with disabilities: the help of partner organizations experienced in disability issues, and the ability of these organizations to positively contribute to the companies' overall operation [22].

One study compared the responses and opinions of employers with those of job developers [8]. In separate groups job developers and employers who have hired people with disabilities were asked the same question: what factors contribute to successful employment of people with disabilities? Overwhelmingly, job developers identified such "soft" factors as employers' understanding attitudes and flexible approach to accommodations. By contrast, employers pointed to quality service from employment specialists and competence of particular workers as contributing factors to successful employment. In other words, employers were satisfied when the needs of their enterprise were the ultimate focus. Thus, disability is not necessarily a primary concern when employers make hiring decisions. However perceived support from job developers is a very critical factor in making the placement successful from the employer point of view.

Essentially, the extant literature on employer views of people with disabilities suggest that employers are generally willing to consider hiring people with disabilities, but still hold confused and stereotypical beliefs about various aspects of disability. Many who might

be interested still have trouble finding such applicants. Those who have had previous experience with employees with disabilities are typically satisfied with the experience, but as a general group employers may still be hesitant to hire people with disabilities, especially those with certain disability labels.

Considered as a whole, findings from both past and recent studies of employer perspectives of people with disabilities, as well as perspectives employers have of those organizations and professionals facilitating job seeker entry into employment, suggest the need for re-focused job development strategies and disability employment advocacy. This is especially the case if vocational rehabilitation is to make more headway in facilitating employment for individuals with significant support and accommodation needs. Instead of methodology and advocacy which has historically concentrated on aspects of disability and related accommodations, job development needs a stronger focus on the context of the employers' enterprises and organizational processes. In short, a refined approach is needed that more effectively considers the demand-side of the employment development equation and that demonstrates to employers that they are valued customers of job development initiatives.

3. A paradigm for customer oriented and demand-side job development

It should be intuitive that if the goal of job development is to link job seekers with jobs, then job developers should be experts at partnering with those who have the jobs, that is, employers. It should also be intuitive that partnerships are effectively established only when there is strong mutual benefit. Few would argue that all good job development involves meeting a specific business need. However, as we have seen, there can certainly be some improvement in this regard in the field of vocational rehabilitation. Accordingly, purposeful creation of employer demand for job development services is one tactic for elevating job developer effectiveness. The continued evolution of employer/rehabilitation partnerships, and indeed the success of future of job development activity, would be well-served by an improved focus on demand-side concerns. One early framework for a demand-side approach in vocational rehabilitation was discussed in a seminal article on the subject by Gilbride and Stensrud [13] who presented a job development paradigm for creating demand for job seekers with disabilities through targeted

service to employers. Selected aspects of this framework are featured in Table 1 and are described here in more detail.

3.1. Focus on employer need

As we have seen, many employer marketing initiatives by disability employment programs have either featured general appeals to employers to hire people with disabilities or appeals to hire people with specific disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, mental health disabilities, blindness, deafness, etc. A demand-side orientation minimizes the "selling" to employers of potential candidates from categories of job seekers. Rather, it maximizes the importance of interactions that feature getting to know the particular circumstances of individual employers or the circumstances of specific industry clusters. This demand-side approach also means that, as with any successful marketing effort, it is better to find out what the employer customers want and need and then match it to what job development programs have to offer, than it is to try to persuade them to buy what these programs are selling. That is, attempts to convince employers to "hire people with disabilities" are not as constructive as identifying and then meeting employer needs.

The notion behind this approach is that by focusing on the particular operational needs of the employer, that is, how work gets done in the company, the job developer can better present candidates who can meet those needs. Especially in the case of job seekers who do not have the requisite skills or training to apply for standard jobs in the company, getting to know employer needs often yields hidden job opportunities where specific tasks can be re-assigned for better operational results, as in the example of task re-assignment to deliver documents across company departments presented briefly in the previous section. Hiring decisions are thus primarily the result of meeting a specific operational need rather than on the relative merits of job seekers with a particular label or the mission of a particular disability employment program. One especially helpful job development strategy that helps determine employer needs is the informational interview [15,22] where the point of the contact is to learn more about the company as opposed to presenting specific job candidates or highlighting the value of the disability employment service. Information gleaned from such employer encounters serve to provide a better understanding of employer needs, identify how those needs might be met by current or future job seekers represented by the job

Table 1
Characteristics and features of demand-side job development

Characteristic	Feature
Focus on employer need	Minimizing the “selling” to employers of potential candidates from categories of job seekers, i.e., people with disabilities, and maximizing interactions that feature getting to know the employer’s circumstances and how work gets done.
Consultation approach	Identifying areas in which employer needs operational help, offering alternative ways to address this need, including matching a job seeker with the skills and characteristic to meet that need.
Increasing demand	Identifying functions and tasks associated with improving productivity and service delivery and presenting potential candidates to perform these functions.
On-going consultation	Recognizing that the relationship with the employer does not end with the placement, and providing help to insure production, performance, and appropriate work behavior of the employee.
Customer service orientation	Emphasizing responsiveness to employer need, soliciting feedback from employer about service, and making service adjustments based on employer need and feedback.
Improving employer financial position	Finding a way for employers to save money, make money, or otherwise improve their operation as a result of the relationship.

developer, and to ultimately identify if there are other value added services the job developer can provide the employer.

3.2. Consultation approach

In many respects, the role of the demand-side oriented job development professional is more similar to that of an organization development consultant than simply one of assisting job seekers find jobs [24]. Organization development is a field of business and human resource management that promotes continual examination and adjustment of companies’ internal processes to optimize organizational performance so that productivity and profits are increased [36]. In the context of organization development, internal processes refer to job design, employee selection and management, employee role clarification, and work flow dynamics.

For a company to achieve optimal performance it must address the quality of internal processes, that is, continually improving the organization of how the work gets done and who does it. In identifying potential work tasks for job seekers with disabilities, the demand-side oriented job developer seeks to identify how work flow design and job development can be mutually addressed. In effect, the job development professional provides consultation to the employer by identifying areas in which the employer needs operational help, offers alternative ways to address this need, and matches a job seeker with skills and characteristic to meet that need.

3.3. Increasing demand

From a demand-side perspective, it is not sufficient for the job development professional to merely help

the job seeker find a job that he or she likes and can do. From the employer’s perspective, the hiring of the individual must also do one or more of the following: save the employer money, help the employer make money, or help the employer’s operation run more efficiently by providing a means to accomplish more work and deliver better products or services. This necessitates an approach to job development that goes beyond simply presenting a potential candidate to employers. When job development professionals can identify specific job tasks that potentially improve company operations, they can then help employers recruit people to perform these tasks. This job-task identification process often leads to finding what has been called the “hidden job market” [1]. That is, this entails discovering employer workforce needs that are not immediately apparent, often not even to employers. But in doing so, a demand is created to meet a specific employer operational need.

This concept is particularly useful for an evolving and increasingly sophisticated approach to employment of people with significant disabilities called customized employment [15,31]. Customized employment builds on the tenets of supported employment as pioneered and promoted by Wehman [42] and others [29], and involves a process that includes: 1. facilitating a self-determined, person-centered discovery process that involves creating a profile of particular tasks that a job seeker might perform well, personal traits relevant to the job search, and necessary accommodations and supports that might be needed in a particular workplace; 2. developing an individualized job search plan that identifies a list of prospective employers to contact and visit where the job seekers traits might be used; 3. contacting employers and eventually negotiating for the

assignment of work tasks in a particular workplace that includes tasks identified in the individual's profile; and 4. identifying and implementing individualized post-placement support that may include job coaching, assistive technology and/or other interventions that might assist the individual perform the tasks to the satisfaction of the employer [31]. These interventions are designed to result in employment where job tasks are carved or restructured from an existing job, or created to match the job seekers characteristics with an employer's operational need. An example of this concept is when a job seeker was hired by a large department store to prepare new clothing items for display so that sales clerks can wait on more customers and thus make more sales.

It is especially in the third part of this process, contacting and negotiating with employers, where the job developer must show where such an arrangement can meet specific employer needs. In essence, this job-task identification process is the rationale behind job customization. A demand is thus created for the job seeker's characteristics. Ideally, in all effective job development approaches there is negotiation with employers so that mutual benefit results. Such a negotiation approach is a useful tactic for any job seeker, but it is especially effective when the job seeker requires considerable support and accommodation.

3.4. Ongoing consultation

Employers who hire individuals with disabilities will often need post-placement assistance to insure the arrangement ultimately works for the employer. Thus, the job development professional oriented to demand-side needs recognizes that the relationship with the employer does not end with the placement. The job development professional will provide ongoing consultation by assisting the employer and the employee address circumstances that will affect production and performance.

For example, a job that is customized does not typically have pre-existing performance expectation. The job developer will necessarily remain available to help identify reasonable productivity standards for that particular job, given the employer's need and the employee's circumstances. Once the standard is established, for example, the number of files handled in a specified time period, the job developer may be requested to provide assistance to both the employer and the employee to set up the workplace in such a way that the standard is met. From an employer's point of view, this assistance might be considered not only post-placement consulta-

tion that helps the company's operational demands, but also "service after the sale" in the traditional customer service sense.

3.5. Customer service orientation

Any quality and long-term relationship between a job development professional and an employer is characterized by an orientation to anticipating and addressing employer's expectations, and then meeting or exceeding them [24]. This can be a simple matter, such as providing the employer with information or a service before an agreed upon deadline. Or it can be more involved, such as helping an employer recruit employees from another source, for example another workforce development program, if the job development professional cannot provide applicants for a specific position or employer requirement.

A customer service orientation requires responsiveness to employer need, soliciting feedback from the employer about the service, and making service adjustments based on employer need and feedback. Customer service should be a hallmark of any good job development. However, in the end, providing responsive customer service to employers creates and cements the demand for job development services and the job seekers they represent. Good customer service is in itself an effective marketing tool. Employers tend to come back for more and tell other employers about the service.

3.6. Improving employer financial position

Ultimately, demand-side job development means finding a way for employers to save money, make money, or otherwise improve their operation as a result of the placement. Job development professionals can only successfully create demand for their service and for the job seekers they are assisting if they respect the employers' fundamental need to make a profit or operate efficiently. Negotiating successfully for job opportunities requires that the job developers show the employer how it creates a direct and distinct advantage to his or her enterprise. It would be nearly impossible to convince an employer to hire an individual with perceived barriers to employment without showing how it would work for the employer. Otherwise, vocational rehabilitation would be all about "make work" and employer benevolence – not only the antithesis of a demand-side orientation, but also counter to the notion of job seeker self-determination and competence. In order to gauge how this concept works in practice, the following section describes the reactions of employers who hired individuals considered to have significant disabilities for customized jobs.

4. Employer perspectives on customizing employment

The author previously reported the results of a detailed survey of employers who successfully hired individuals considered to have significant disabilities [25]. The individuals hired by these employers were participants in a customized employment demonstration project, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, in Montgomery County, Maryland in 2004 and 2005. This project employed customized employment strategies summarized previously in this article. Nine employers were asked to respond to questions designed to relate to the demand-side job development framework outlined above, including the following:

- What was your primary reason for working with the job development professional and for hiring the project participant?
- Has the hiring helped meet specific company need or contributed to improvements in production, sales, or service?
- How would you rate the level of customer service you received from the job development professional?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the service of the job development professional?
- Did this process affect in any way your perceptions and practices in recruiting, hiring and supervising people with disabilities?
- If you were to explain to another employer the benefits of this approach, what would you tell him/her?

All of the survey respondents indicated some aspect of operational improvement as a result of hiring an individual into a customized job, such as addressing a backlog of work or meeting sales and production goals. All of the respondents also cited the competence of the employment specialist in making the hire successful and expressed very high level of satisfaction with the responsiveness and attentiveness of the job development professional. All but one stated that they would be definitely more open to hiring people with disabilities as a result of the experience. The one who equivocated suggested a careful approach to identifying specific job duties for the employee would be necessary for future consideration. Finally, all stated they would recommend such an approach to other employers. While this purposeful sample does not constitute a rigorous or broad scale examination of employer attitudes, it does offer important feedback from demand-side cus-

tomers on job development strategies that feature the demand-side considerations described above.

In the context of the demand-side job development characteristics espoused by Gilbride and Stensrud [12, 13], the responses by the employers illustrate the value of this approach to the employer customer who receives service-oriented consultation, interacts with job development professionals who concentrate on meeting their needs, and experiences improvement in company operations. Taken as an aggregate, these responses indicate that employer demand for disability hiring can indeed be created, including when individual job seekers require considerable accommodation and job task customization. Alternatively stated, creating demand yields employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities, including for those individuals without the requisite skills or training for existing company positions but who add value in a distinct way. Consider the following case example.

4.1. *Insuring mutual benefit – A case example*

Robert is a high school drop out with only basic math and reading skills. His work history has been extremely sporadic due to persistent mental illness and related past hospitalizations. When he was referred to the job development program for job seeking assistance he had been out of work for several months. Previous employment history included only two very brief and unsuccessful jobs in food service. A thorough inventory of his skills and interests indicated that he preferred and could perform well in an environment that was not too fast paced or noisy, where he had clear and concrete tasks, and where he could have regular designated cigarette breaks. Specific skills also included labeling and alpha/numeric filing, attention to detail, and good fine and gross motor skills. His job search plan was based on his skills in filing and related tasks, finding employers for whom the performance of these tasks would be useful, and identifying ways to accommodate his need for a deliberate pace and regular breaks from his tasks.

In the meantime, the job developer assisting Robert had established a relationship with a marketing support service company that was experiencing a large influx of new business orders. During a visit to the company to conduct an informational interview, she found that in order to keep up, all staff members in the company, including the Vice President and General Manager, were taking on supplementary duties such as labeling files, matching personalized inserts to labels, and mail

Table 2
Mutual benefit of a demand-side consultation

Company's operational concerns	Robert's duties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rapidly expanding business made it hard to keep up with orders – Professional staff performing administrative duties – Diverted and delayed work flow across departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Labeling new client files – Matching personalized inserts to file labels – Delivering packages and documents to all departments – Packing, sealing, weighing and posting mail pieces
Results for the company	Benefits for Robert
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Senior staff no longer performing administrative duties – could concentrate on client service – Business orders filled faster – Increased profit margins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work in environment that welcomes his contributions – Tasks and working conditions matched to skills and preferences – First steady long term job

handling and packaging. Through a careful analysis of the business's operation the job developer was able to help the company identify a set of customized job tasks, including the supplementary duties that were performed by high-level staff, which could be re-assigned to improve work flow. Ultimately, it was negotiated that Robert perform these tasks. A quiet cubicle where Robert could concentrate on his tasks and a distinct break schedule so he could smoke outside were also negotiated. As of this writing Robert has been working in this position for more than two years, the longest he has ever held a job.

Just as importantly, the company reports that administrative work flows more smoothly and business orders are filled faster. Senior staff can now concentrate on activities critical to creating business and serving the company's customers. Profit margins have also improved. Table 2 presents the mutual benefits the arrangement has for both Robert and the company for which he works. The mutual benefit that was created through this arrangement is a clear example of providing consultation to an employer so as to create a demand for Robert's skills.

5. Implications for job development practice

The quest of disability employment initiatives to engage employers and improve the employment outcomes of people with disabilities does not mean that only the most so-called "job ready" should be the primary beneficiaries of these initiatives. Nor does it mean that employers will only want to hire applicants who are ostensibly qualified. However, it does necessitate methodology that effectively meets employer, or demand-side, needs, regardless of the extent to which accommodation and support might be required by individual job seekers. As we have seen, many disability employment programs struggle to connect to their community's employers. Adopting a demand-side approach to

job development will not only open doors for the so-called hard-to-place, but it will also expand the value employers see in disability employment programs generally. Indeed, if disability employment initiatives are seen by employers as helping them identify operational needs and ways to address them, the possibilities to create unique and lasting partnerships with employers are considerable.

Ultimately, a demand-side approach to job development offers two advantages: it augments methodology to assist individuals who have unique and often complex job assistance needs, and it offers a way to engage employers other than traditional attempts to "sell" disability employment. In a larger sense, the adoption of demand-side job development methodology such as attentive consultation, responsive service, and focus on company need will enable job developers to expand their employer partnerships, as the survey cited in this article suggests. It is a way to pull customers of vocational rehabilitation programs into the workplace by meeting demand-side concerns.

The following summarizes implications of demand-side job development for the larger effort to promote employment of people with disabilities:

- Providing service oriented consultation to employers can create demand for job seekers with disabilities and disability employment program expertise;
- Identifying ways to add value to employers' operations will often create hidden, customized job opportunities for individuals not able to easily apply for "off-the-shelf" jobs;
- Meeting mutual need, as opposed to simply trying to sell employers on the advantages of hiring from a categorical segment of job seekers, will likely be more successful in attracting employer interest in disability employment programs;
- Creating a demand for what individual job seekers have to offer, and then facilitating their connection to a work place where they are needed is not only possible, but desirable. Thus, demand-side

job development and supply-side job development activities are entirely complementary.

Facilitating employment searches with people with disabilities, particularly those who require extensive support and accommodation, requires a complete understanding of employer circumstances. Recent examinations of employer views on disability overwhelmingly suggest that, in spite of continuing misperceptions among many employers, there is ample evidence that disability in and of itself does not trigger inherently negative employer responses. In addition, exposure to disability usually yields improved employer views of disability. Key reasons, then, for persistently low rates of employment for individuals with disability are not due to inherent or pervasive unemployability, or to ingrained negative employer attitudes. Rather, explanations for this circumstance may be found in how well prepared workplaces are to support the employees with disabilities. Demand-side job development offers vocational rehabilitation another tool in its arsenal to enhance and expand employer partnerships and thus prepare the workplace for people with disabilities. Ultimately, the success of linking job seekers with work is as much about meeting employers' needs as it is about serving job seekers.

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