

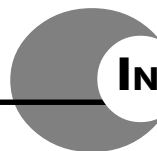


Workplace Supports in Practice

By: Pat Rogan, Becky Banks, & Michelle Howard

ABSTRACT

This article reports the findings of a study that investigated ways in which workplace supports are being conceptualized and implemented by four organizations that provide supported employment services. Data were collected during two-day site visits at each organization. Site visits included observations at 39 work sites; semistructured interviews with 126 primary stakeholders (individuals with disabilities, co-workers, employers/supervisors, and agency employment staff); document analysis (e.g., program descriptions, training and marketing materials); and a written survey about supported employment beliefs and practices. Findings indicate that each agency was driven by strong leadership, vision, and values. Each organization had a history of innovation and change. Staff were well-trained, committed, and professional, and worked collaboratively with each other and with businesses. The use of natural supports was promoted within each organization, but there was a wide variety of interpretations and practices among staff. The discussion highlights areas with which these organizations struggle, including: serving people with high support needs; developing a strong emphasis on person-centered approaches to planning and service delivery; assisting staff to facilitate workplace supports and social relationships; actively involving job seekers in the job search process; and increasing work hours and/or responsibilities of the employees with disabilities.



INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of supported employment, integration has been a defining feature of good practice. Both physical and social integration are considered critical aspects of supported employment. Job coaches or employment specialists are also a core feature of supported employment. In recent years, the concept of natural supports has emerged, focusing on the importance of adhering to the norms and practices of workplaces and tapping supports that exist or can be developed. This effort to define, implement, and evaluate natural or workplace supports has addressed the rationale and scope of natural supports (Nisbet, 1992), social relationships between employees with disabilities and their coworkers (Chadsey, Linneman, Rusch, & Cimera, 1997), the climate or culture of workplaces (Hagner, 1989), business practices used to support diverse workforces (Fabian, Luecking, & Tilson, 1994), and employment consultant roles and strategies (Hagner, Rogan, & Murphy, 1992; Murphy & Rogan, 1992; Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994; Shafer, 1990). An ongoing national study of supported employment practices by Mank, Cioffi, and Yovanoff (1997, 1998) indicated that the more typical (or natural) the process of job acquisition, training, and support, the better the outcomes for employees in terms of wages, integration, and benefits. Furthermore, the study indicated that the greater the integration, the higher the wages and benefits. Thus, implications for supported employment providers are great. How are supported employment providers conceptualizing and facilitating workplace supports? What strategies are being used to maximize workplace supports,

while assuring additional supports are provided as needed? How are people with high support needs being supported on the job?

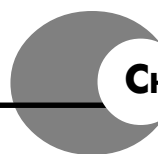
The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways workplace supports are conceptualized and implemented by a subset of organizations involved in the Mank, Cioffi, and Yovanoff (1997, 1998) study. Four of the organizations that ranked highest on measures of “typicalness” were selected for this qualitative study. These organizations were Life Skills Foundation in St. Louis, Missouri; Elwyn, Inc. Employment Support Services in suburban counties near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Eastside Employment Services in Seattle, Washington; and Enable in Syracuse, New York.

Two-day site visits were conducted at each organization. Site visits included: participant observations at a total of 39 work sites; semi-structured interviews with a total of 126 primary stakeholders (43 employees with disabilities, nine co-workers, 29 employers/supervisors/managers, 44 agency employment directors, coordinators, or consultants, and one parent); document analysis (e.g., mission statements, program descriptions, marketing materials, training manuals); and a brief written survey about beliefs and practices completed by supported employment personnel. The interview protocol for each constituency is provided in Appendix A. When possible, interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Detailed notes were taken when tape recording was not possible.

A constant comparative method of data analysis (Wolcott, 1994) was used to sift through the data as it was gathered from each source. That is, researchers (the authors) met at the end of each day of data collection to reflect on the information gathered and to identify emergent themes, perceptions, and interpretations across observations and interviews. In addition, interview transcripts were analyzed and independently coded by each researcher. Key themes were

identified within and across data sets. A draft of this report was sent to each organization for review and feedback prior to being finalized.

This article describes the characteristics of these organizations, staffing patterns, supported employment practices, and strategies related to workplace supports. The discussion section summarizes key findings and proposes further areas for research.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORGANIZATION

LIFE SKILLS FOUNDATION, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Life Skills Foundation was established in the 1960s by family members. It is a large organization serving approximately 1000 individuals and employs over 400 staff. Programs and services include supported employment, supported living, a summer work program, and a non-work day program. The supported employment program, covers urban and suburban areas, serves about 200 people per year with 15 staff.

Organizational Philosophy and Values. Life Skills has had a traditional organizational structure, but a history of pursuing progressive services in supported living, supported employment, and related areas. The mission of the organization states: “Life Skills Foundation assists people with disabilities to live and work with dignity in our community.” Supported employment personnel stated that:

- a) Individuals should have choice in the type of job they want.
- b) Individuals should achieve independence from paid supports.
- c) Individualization means tailoring supports to meet each person’s needs.

Leadership. The current Director of Employment Services, Jocelyn Jones-Waller, has a

long history with the organization, serving for 13 years in supported living and socialization services. This background significantly impacted her orientation toward holistic and comprehensive services, and individualized, person-centered planning processes. She brought this orientation to the employment arena. Jocelyn provides strong leadership with an open, collaborative style. Her strong values and vision have enabled staff to make many positive changes in a short period of time. According to Jocelyn, the employment program is seen as somewhat radical within the larger organization. In her words, "We are able organizationally to adjust and move quickly. We have that flexibility to just go for it. Identify the outcome and just go for it."

Staffing Patterns and Roles. A Program Coordinator hires, trains, and supervises 12 full-time job consultants. A Corporate Developer works with Life Skills and provider agencies in the area to work with businesses and develop jobs. The 12 job consultants are divided into two self-directed work teams that meet weekly three times per month, and together once a month for training. Each team has a team leader. In addition, part-time "on-site" consultants are hired to provide job coach services at work sites.

Staff Training. Life Skills prefers to hire people with real world experience, maturity, and good attitudes. New staff members are given a two to three day orientation/training emphasizing natural supports by a senior staff person and an employment services handbook outlining supported employment procedures. Experienced job consultants take new staff to visit sites where people are working. Staff are trained as generalists who are involved in all aspects of the employment process from assessment through job coaching. However, part-time staff are assigned to provide ongoing support or back-up support.

Staff Retention. Staff retention ranges from 1 1/2 to six years, with an average of two to three years. Retention has improved in recent

years as the organization has hired more full-time positions and developed a team structure.

Funding. Life Skills operates under an outcome based funding system. The organization receives \$1440 per assessment (half at referral and half at completion), and \$1440 per placement. Job coaching is reimbursed via purchase of service agreements with vocational rehabilitation. County monies cover follow-along services, and are reimbursed at \$28-\$32 per hour.

ELWYN, INC. EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES, PENNSYLVANIA

Like Life Skills Foundation, Elwyn is a very large organization that serves Philadelphia and surrounding suburban counties, and has divisions in New Jersey, California, Delaware, and Israel. Elwyn began in 1852 with residential cottages for boys. It now runs a school on their organization's campus, and provides early intervention, residential, short-term mental health, genetic counseling, and employment services. Adult day programs include a day habilitation program, three sheltered workshops, and a supported employment program (since 1985).

Organizational Mission and Values. While the larger organization has discussed closing their segregated programs, it has not been until recently that there has been real interest in doing so. The overall mission of Elwyn's employment services is "matching the labor needs of employers with the employment needs of people."

Leadership. Like Life Skills Foundation, Elwyn's employment support services has a strong female director who has been with the organization for over ten years. Cindy Sterling began as an employment specialist. She has clearly set the tone for the development of innovative services. Her program is viewed as radical within the larger organization.

Staffing Patterns and Roles. There are 35 staff serving a two county region. Staff are not formally organized in a team structure, but there is strong collaboration among staff.

Staff Training. Staff are trained as generalists who are involved in all aspects of the employment process. Training involves a three-day employment specialist workshop, inservices, and shadowing an experienced job consultant. Job consultants are to continually access information through training opportunities such as Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) conferences, and written materials. The budget includes \$500-\$700 per staff for training. Cindy Sterling, Director of Employment Services said, "We do a lot of reading and talking about things related to supporting people."

Staff Retention. Elwyn staff are adults from diverse backgrounds, including careers in business. Current staff had been with employment services from a few months to six years.

Funding. Supported employment has a \$1.5 million dollar budget, comprising a small portion of the total organization's budget of \$120 million. The largest funding source is the County mental health/mental retardation with vocational rehabilitation providing a smaller portion (\$90,000). County funding is set up as a fee-for-service, vocational rehabilitation uses a performance based funding system. Situational assessments are authorized for up to 20 days at a fee of about \$179 per person per day. Authorization for job development and support services up to 90 days is usually 100 hours per individual. There is flexibility in negotiating each "package."

EASTSIDE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Eastside Employment Services began in 1984 as a spin-off of a sheltered workshop. The organization is small, providing only community employment services to 71 individuals with 7.25 full-time staff, with five providing direct services.

Leadership. The Executive Director, David Schlesinger, has been with the organization for 12 years providing an involved, low-key leadership. His role is an "articulator of quality," as well as, "reading the curve and being ahead of the curve" while positioning the organization for the future.

Staffing Patterns and Roles. As with the two agencies described above, all staff positions are designed as generalists, although this has not always been the case. Staff roles are based on people's strengths. Staff work closely together as an informal team and meet every two weeks. The Program Manager is responsible for quality assurance and staff training.

Staff Training. New employees receive an employee handbook and learn about the organizational values, procedures, and policies and shadow experienced staff mentors. Eastside supports ongoing staff development via conferences and training opportunities according to needs and interest. Staff exhibit a high level of professionalism in their dress and behavior.

Staff Retention. Staff turnover is low with staff being with the agency from three to seven years. The executive director treats the hiring process as a getting to know the job seekers. He gathers information about the person and provides quality training once they are hired. Turnover is reduced by hiring wisely, providing competitive salaries and benefits, giving bonuses, and investing heavily in personnel.

Funding. Eastside Employment Services receives block funding from the county for serving a given number of people. County monies are used for general job development and follow-along. They also receive fee-for-service dollars from vocational rehabilitation for job training.

ENABLE, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

Enable, an affiliate of United Cerebral Palsy, has been operating since 1948. It is a large, multi-service organization that provides

early intervention and inclusive preschool services, medical and clinical services, assistive technology, family support, self-directed personal services, community living, day habilitation, and community employment services.

Organizational Mission and Values.

The principles espoused by the organization include choice, inclusion, individualization, and empowerment. The philosophy of Enable's Community Employment Services is to:

...support employers and people with disabilities by setting up jobs that satisfy both person and the employer. We believe all persons with disabilities have the right to the same opportunities and experiences as non-disabled citizens. A person's choice is our priority when seeking employment opportunities.

Leadership. In the past, Community Employment Services had a director, they now operate as a self-directed team, with a coordinator for the four teams. Each coordinator had previously been an employment consultant in the agency. As coordinators, they do not carry a caseload. This approach is unique nationally, and epitomizes a flat organizational structure and team approach to supported employment.

Staffing Patterns and Roles. Community Employment Services has 25 staff. In addition to four coordinators, there are typically five employment consultants per team who support 6-10 individuals each. Six job coaches provide only support on the job. Employment Consultants have traditionally operated as generalists; however, a job developer and vocational counselor position were recently added to supplement the efforts of staff.

Staff Training. Enable invests heavily in staff training, which involves a period of up to six weeks during which the new staff person learns primarily through hands-on experiences with senior employment consultants. All staff are

involved in monthly inservices and are encouraged to attend other training events.

Staff Retention. Staff turnover among coordinators is low, ranging from 5 to 12 years at Enable. Turnover among employment consultants is fairly low compared with other providers in the area due to the reputation Enable has earned for providing quality services.

Funding. Enable is funded at a higher rate than other organizations (\$9600/person), because they have traditionally served people with high support needs. Their follow-along rate is \$3200 per person per year.

AN OVERVIEW OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

The primary purpose of visiting these organizations was to learn about their workplace support strategies. It was important to understand their entire approach to supported employment in order to learn when they attend to support issues and how supports are facilitated. The following sections address assessment, job development, training, and ongoing support procedures used by these programs. All names of people are pseudonyms. The reader is reminded of the Mank, Cioffi, and Yovanoff findings (1997, 1998) the more typical the job process, the better the outcomes.



GETTING TO KNOW AND PLANNING WITH JOB SEEKERS

All four agencies referred to the process of getting to know, and planning with, job seekers as "intake" and "assessment," traditional terms in supported employment. Various forms of person-centered planning were used by the organizations. Approaches included: meeting with job seekers at their home or agency offices to gather information; spending

time in community settings; observing job seekers during job try-outs; and obtaining information from files, parents/guardians, and other sources. Planning involved staff, the job seeker, parents/guardians, and funders.

As stated by a job coach supervisor, "Getting to know the person well is the key to successful workplace support." However, due to pressures from funders and systemic issues, each organization differed in the amount of time they spent with job seekers and the activities in which they engaged. One organization used a fairly standard approach with job seekers that involved situational assessments at three job settings in the community. Afterwards, individuals could be deemed "not ready" to work, an out-come not considered appropriate by supported employment advocates. It did not appear that any of the agencies commonly used Personal Futures Planning, PATH, or other planning tools.



JOB DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYER CONTACT

Staff were asked to describe their approach to job development and employer contact, while job seekers were asked how they got their job, and employers were asked how they were contacted. Each of the organizations shared common approaches to job development, but also used unique strategies that met their needs. While all four organizations considered staff to be generalists, three of the organizations added a job or corporate developer position in recent years to supplement the efforts of employment consultants. At one agency staff do not do job development until they have sufficient experience providing supports on the job.

Supported employment has largely followed a "person-first" approach to job development. That is, jobs are sought based on the

interests and skills of each job seeker. Three of the four organizations used this approach. Eastside Employment Services uses a "jobs first" approach in which they find people to fill jobs. As an Eastside job consultant said, "In the job development phase we try to sell a pool of people willing to work." The agency feels this approach is appropriate due to two factors:

- 1) the nature of their clientele (most do not have intensive support needs), and
- 2) the local practice that no organization "owns" job seekers; they are free to seek services from any provider.

The use of personal connections to secure employment has long been a common practice in our society. Each organization has shared examples of using connections to find jobs, or starting "with the contacts that individuals have." For example, "neighbors of John's have connections with the manager of the grocery store and helped him secure his job," and "Larry found his job through connections with a board member who works with the dental laboratory." Staff also used their personal connections to open doors to employment for individuals: "One of the managers at Keith's job was friends with someone from Life Skills."

Cold calls and drop-in visits were also commonly used, especially for people considered "more capable." For individuals who could fill existing job openings, employment consultants or job seekers called to ask, "Are you hiring?"

Job seekers had varying levels of involvement in their job search. If job seekers were involved, staff assisted in completing job applications and interview for jobs.

Employment consultants were asked how they approached employers. The following quotes represent efforts to learn about the needs of employers, and to provide the support they may need:

"We can meet your needs to fill high turnover jobs or jobs you can't fill."

"I find out from employers what their needs are. I sell that I am on call and there for the long haul."

"I come in and help you with training; help you understand their needs and get to know the person."

One agency executive pointed out that "Typical is not always good. For example, Brent (an employment consultant) sniffs out job openings within the company and goes to Alison (an employer). They don't even let the process open up to others or our person wouldn't get it." In other words, the employer hires an individual with a disability without advertising the position.

Each of the organizations secured a wide variety of jobs, most of which were part-time and offered at least minimum wage. Eastside Employment Services was the only organization that steered away from fast food and high turnover jobs: "We don't do Burger Kings and other high turnover jobs. These are not seen as valued jobs. We target full-time or close to full-time work." Table 1 on the following page provides a listing of the jobs that were observed for each agency.

JOB TRAINING AND SUPPORT

The primary discussion area regarding workplace supports is job training procedures. Job coaches train employees, then "fade" from the job site once the individuals learned their jobs. Attention to natural supports has caused employment consultants to rethink their role in relation to workplace personnel. An employment consultant summed up the issue well when he said, "It's our industry's fault that employers think we should do the training. We have some people,

if it had been done differently at the beginning, fading would be easier. Once we build a rapport with an employer, we stress that 'you're the employer, you do training and supervision, but the job coach can help'."

Since these organizations were selected due to higher ratings on natural support measures, it is not surprising that they were so attuned to workplace support issues. This section summarizes perspectives on natural or workplace supports discussed by employment consultants and workplace personnel.

Perspectives on natural supports.

Employment consultants offered various definitions/descriptions of natural supports. The following quotes are representative of comments addressing the work environment, work-related supports, integration, and social relationships.

"Natural supports are other than paid agency staff (e.g., co-worker, friends, calendars, clocks, objects used for support). Supported employment staff start facilitating natural supports when a barrier is identified, and look for "unpaid" ways to eliminate barriers."

"Getting the person integrated in the workplace as close to the way we are integrated. We try to integrate them in the workplace so they are not an island."

"Connect with existing resources first, even during job development and other support activities. Being available for the individual when necessary, but not taking front and center stage. Rather, allow the individual and employer to conduct the show."

"My role is helping co-workers feel comfortable enough to treat them like anyone else."

"The work environment, employees proximity of job--consider all of these natural supports."



TABLE 1 -- WORK SITES OBSERVED

LIFE SKILLS FOUNDATION, ST. LOUIS	ENABLE, SYRACUSE
<u>Grocery Store</u> -- bag groceries, collect carts, price checks	<u>Label Company</u> -- shred paper, clean
<u>Fast Food Restaurant</u> -- clean dining area	<u>Bottle Redemption Center</u> -- sort bottles
<u>Dental Lab</u> -- clean casting molds	<u>Bagelry</u> -- cleaning
<u>Videotape & Recording Distributor</u> -- sort mail, unpack shipments	<u>Print Shop</u> -- duplicating
<u>Phone Refurbishing Company</u> -- clean and test telephones	<u>State Senator's Office</u> -- clerical
<u>License Photo Lab</u> -- license photo operator	<u>Copy Products Sales & Service</u> -- telemarketing
	<u>Restaurant</u> -- cleaning
	<u>Data Processing Service</u> -- data entry
	<u>Teleservices</u> -- photocopy, shred, deliver mail
	<u>Hotel</u> -- dishwashing, custodial
EASTSIDE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, SEATTLE	ELWYN, INC., PHILADELPHIA
<u>Sign Making Business</u> -- custodial	<u>Fast Food Restaurant</u> -- custodial
<u>Recycling Plant</u> -- recycle	<u>Court House</u> -- custodial
<u>City Court</u> -- filing	<u>Condominium</u> -- grounds work
<u>Bank</u> -- clerical	<u>College Food Services</u> -- food preparation
<u>School District Admin. Bldg.</u> -- clerical	<u>Convenience Store</u> -- custodial, stock
<u>Circuit Board Company</u> -- assembly	<u>Car Dealer</u> -- wash cars, custodial
<u>Software Manufacturer</u> -- clean/supply kitchen, mail room	<u>Restaurant</u> -- food preparation
<u>State Division of DD</u> -- clerical	

Employment consultant strategies.

Employment consultants offered various accounts of the way they approach training and support for employees with disabilities. Despite an organizational orientation toward natural supports, some employment consultants described a prescribed process that was driven by the agency and job coach:

"First I start out at 100%. I'm there everyday, every hour they work. It's required that we're there 100% to see and observe. You start at 100% and eventually fade to 25%. When they are at 25% we put them in retention."

Another employment consultant reiterated his role as the primary trainer:

"I try to learn the job myself, then model it. I get the person to do the job, then I get the employer involved."

In contrast, most other employment consultants offered a completely different orientation that was based on typical procedures used in businesses:

"I prefer not to do the training because that's not really our job. If another employee came in, they would do the training."

The executive director of one agency described their philosophy of workplace supports in this way:

"As little as possible, as much as necessary."

As a standard practice, one organization's staff does a formal "Welcome on Board" presentation for personnel that addresses such questions as, what is supported employment, what can you expect from us, what do we expect from you, and what are developmental disabilities? The goal of this training is to develop natural supports and build bridges. The other three agencies used an informal approach of sharing information and involving co-workers.

The following tips were offered for facilitating natural workplace supports:

"From day one ask co-workers for input and ideas. They know the job; you have to get to know them and look to them for help. You have to help them see they are so important."

"The more time the job coach puts in (*at the worksite*), the less bonding the employer and co-worker have. If the job coach only works with the consumer, it is an "us" and "them" kind of thing."

"I help develop **supports** myself by introducing people and suggesting that

they all have lunch together, or if the consumer has a question or problem, saying, "Why don't you go to this co-worker here" and helping the consumer pick out people and know they can go to other people."

"Just get a lot of feedback from the other employees and the employer, being very open and communicative with them, and seeing how the consumer is doing and asking them how they feel."

"It's trial and error. Pick people who are interacting, who show interest at the same place and time. Often people will volunteer, sometimes I have to cultivate it more."

"I pay attention to who is paying attention to the individual."

"I figure out from an employer's perspective 'What's in it for me?' I identify barriers and provide suggestions."

All of the organizations had worksites where more than one person with a disability worked. Half to two-thirds of the worksites of one organization had multiple people working in different areas of each business. One of the agency directors felt that "through multiple placements in one company, the environment trains itself."

Several of the larger businesses that employed up to eight individuals with disabilities had a supervisor or manager who acted as a "champion" for supported employment. While these company personnel spoke eloquently of the benefits of supported employment, they also viewed it as a program, and spoke of the supported employees as a group.

When asked how their role as a job coach had changed over the years, an employment consultant since 1985 addressed the shift from a social service to a business

mentality, and from taking care of people to building their skills in workplaces. She said, "It is the difference between social services, caring, and hands-on experience with disability, to staff with business experience, social skills, ability to interact, and good appearance. We figured it would be easier to teach people about disability." Another person who had been an employment consultant for ten years said, "We've changed! I used to wear a uniform at Wendy's. We were perceived as an employee and expected to perform. I remember one co-worker saying, "Get up...and go start those fries! Now we're here as a consultant or facilitator to assist with training."



WORKPLACE CULTURES OR CLIMATES

Attention to workplace supports must also involve attention to the culture or climate of the work setting. Each work setting is unique, with characteristics that can enhance or impede the success of individuals with disabilities. This section provides a discussion of several of the workplaces that were positive for employees.

The employers or managers of some workplaces had reputations for being supportive of a diverse workforce. Diversity and disability awareness was part of their orientation and training programs. One such company was Deirberg's grocery stores in St. Louis, which hired numerous people with disabilities. A manager at one of the stores grew up with an individual with a disability and was described as "caring and treated people fairly in comparison to their competition." Within such an environment, co-workers are more apt to be supportive. For one employee, whose grooming could be a problem at work, the head checker had a razor, shaving cream, comb, and an extra white shirt and tie at work in case he needed these.

Deluxe Teleservice in Syracuse is another supportive company. An employee described it as a "very diversity-oriented, people-oriented organization." The company hires many people with different abilities. It offers "uplifting, encouraging programs" for professional development. Awards are given to recognize people for their good work performance. Chefs are brought in occasionally to fix food. Deluxe sponsors a 50's day, ice cream socials, and other fun events for their employees. The employee with a disability knows everyone and is well known throughout the workplace. He even mentioned that co-workers had attended a party at his home.

Tube Art, a sign-making company in Seattle, was described by one of the managers as being "very family-oriented." Managers work side by side with employees. The company offers diversity training through their human resources department. This training occurs during staff orientation as well as through their management training. The training has been expanded to include disability training. However, one of the managers felt that the most effective method of addressing employee support issues was during department head meetings. Personnel issues were discussed at these meetings, including discussions about supports for Mitch, who has a disability.

One individual described the difference in workplaces between his two part-time jobs. "At one worksite, people are nicer. They get along, talk together, and help. They celebrate special days." At the other site (*fast food*) he feels there are no interactions.



SOCIALIZATION AT WORK

Social interactions are difficult for many individuals, but are a critical aspect of workplace supports. Why are some people well integrated

on the job while others remain peripheral to the social routines of the workplace? Several factors need to be examined. Most of the employees in this study worked part-time. Thus, they arrived at work late, left early, and/or worked fewer days. As a result, they missed out on the daily routines and social rituals that often serve to bond co-workers together. Observations and interviews revealed that many employees with disabilities took their breaks and ate their lunches alone. When people appeared to be socially involved at work, there was always at least one “ally” who truly enjoyed the individual and watched out for him or her. These allies were often both proud and protective. For example, a co-worker at the dental lab “feels responsible for supporting Mark and talking things through with him when he has problems.” If he gets particularly upset, she contacts a supervisor in another department who has taken Mark under his wing.

Another co-worker said, “When Bob has a seizure, I will go to him, hold him, tell him it is OK, and I let him get back in sync. I tell his parents and I track the occurrence of the seizures.”



EMPLOYER/SUPERVISOR/ MANAGER PERSPECTIVES

Most employers, supervisors, and managers had wonderful things to say about their employees as workers and as people, even with some rough moments. One supervisor had invested in the success of the employee, said:

“I’m not going to say it was easy. For the first six months she was just about all anybody could handle. She would get mad for no reason at all other than if what she did wasn’t up to quality standards. She would blow a gasket, cussing and screaming. The second half of the year she began to calm

down and realized I wasn’t going to fire her. I took her under my wing. That seemed to be the turning point for her. I think it is good for us. Yeah, she is not easy to deal with at times, but if that happened to me tomorrow, I would hope someone would help me feel productive in society. That’s what drives me to keep her here.”

Management spoke of their employees’ work ethic: “He is a hard worker, willing to work on his day off, or will work later than scheduled. He needs to be told to take a break or he’ll skip it.” The manager at a car dealer said, “With John, we feel part of the community. You need to give back. Besides, he’s a hell of a worker.”

Other employers spoke about the positive impact their employees have on the work environment:

“They help to bring us down to earth. Sometimes they cut through hidden agendas because they see things more in black and white. They have pride in their work. They are concerned about all of us. We have learned sensitivity because they won’t play the corporate game. Their presence has affected the atmosphere in the workplace.”

Some employers, supervisors, and managers went out of their way to accommodate individuals with disabilities. The supervisor at a Seattle software manufacturer says the support she gives is “just the common things any manager would do: finding out what motivates them, and how to champion them.” Some atypical things she has done include explaining bus schedules, talking them through bad days, working with their families to describe benefits packages, and developing checklists to keep the employee focused.

Not all employers had glowing comments about supported employees, of course. It was apparent that some held negative stereotypes and low expectations. For example, a bank manager said, “supported employment is a good idea because they do jobs that other people get bored with.”



ONGOING SUPPORT

Each of the four organizations demonstrated a commitment to long-term relationships with employers and the people they supported. People were assisted to find multiple jobs over time and, in some cases, were being supported without additional funding. Ongoing support was defined by these organizations as a site visit two times per month. In some cases, this schedule was appropriate. In others, it is system-driven, not employer or supported employee driven.



DISCUSSION

This study looked at workplace supports from the perspectives of provider agency personnel, employees with disabilities, employers, and co-workers. The organizations that were studied demonstrated many positive features currently considered best practices in our field, as discussed below.

- The leaders of each employment program articulated a clear vision and held strong values that served to guide the direction of services they offered.
- Each organization had a track record of innovation and change, and was willing to take risks.

- Staff were generally well trained, professional, and committed. Agencies invested in their development.
- Staff demonstrated strong collaboration and teamwork.
- Staff invested in long-term relationships with businesses and focused on customer service.
- Staff worked hard to find good job matches and supportive work place cultures/climates.
- Most people were paid at least minimum wage, and efforts were made to secure good paying jobs with benefits.
- Each organization promoted the use of natural supports.
- Organizations demonstrated a commitment to reserve individuals after they had fallen out of previous jobs.

Because these are learning organizations, they struggle with how to move from conceptualization to practice, and from a system-centered to a person-centered mode of service delivery. Some of the areas needing additional attention are discussed below.

Serving people with high support needs.

Although each of the agencies involved in this study served at least one person considered to have high support needs, only one organization had a strong history of doing so. While trying to maintain this standard; however, this organization has recently opted to reduce the number of individuals with high support needs being served in order to meet their contract goals. This situation parallels national data which indicates 10.3% of people with mental retardation in supported employment are considered to have severe/profound disabilities (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1998). Although supported employment was initially targeted for individuals who needed intensive, ongoing

support to get and keep employment, this population continues to be underserved. Two primary reasons for this situation are insufficient funding and inadequate knowledge about employment options and assistive technology.

Developing a strong emphasis on person-centered approaches to assessment and planning.

If the assessment and planning processes used by agencies still resemble traditional habilitation plan procedures controlled by professionals, agencies must invest in using approaches that are truly person-centered and driven. It is important to invest in getting to know each job seeker in order to make good job matches. Shortcuts taken during this phase may lead to job loss or dissatisfaction. Again, funding dictates the amount of time allowed for assessment and planning. Despite these constraints, agencies must continue to invest in in-depth, individualized approaches that build the involvement and self-determination of job seekers.

Building the expertise of staff to facilitate workplace supports and social relationships.

Although the organizations in this study were clearly aware of, and oriented toward, natural supports, there were a wide variety of interpretations of natural supports among staff. In practice, many employment consultants used a more traditional training, then fade approach. That is, employment consultants provided the initial training, then faded from the work site as the individual demonstrated more independence. In a few cases, employment consultants sat with or near the employee throughout their work shift. While some employees need intensive, ongoing supports, efforts should be made from the start to build internal workplace supports.

Actively involving job seekers in their job search.

Traditionally, job coaches have sought and secured jobs *for* people with disabilities. With the national movement toward self-determination and choice, professionals are attempting to involve the individuals in all aspects of the job process. Data from the Mank, Cioffi, and Yovanoff study (1997, 1998, in press) indicate that the more typical the job search, job training, and general support procedures, the better the outcomes for the individuals. Thus, it behooves providers to involve job seekers as much as possible in all aspects of the job process.

Increasing the work hours of those who desire more work.

Most of the individuals in this study worked part-time. Many expressed a desire to work more hours. If most other employees in a business work full-time, how does part-time status impact the status, supports, and social relationships? This question requires further study, but one might hypothesize that part-time status puts individuals at a distinct disadvantage.



FUTURE RESEARCH

Many questions were raised by this study that lend themselves to future research. They include:

- Are there differences in workplace supports between those who work full-time and those who work part-time?
- How do employers and co-workers describe typical workplace supports available to any worker?

- Does the use of personal networks for job development correlate with better outcomes?
- Does formal or informal training for worksite personnel reap better outcomes?



CONCLUSION

Workplaces are fascinating environments, they are complex entities that strive to support

their workers while making quality products and profits. Employers benefit from hiring employees who meet their labor needs, and from the support they receive from employment agencies. Employment consultants strive to walk the fine line that there is between too much and too little support, and between responsiveness to individuals with disabilities employed, employers, and funders. This study attempted to better understand the dynamics of workplace supports from the perspectives of all of those individuals who were involved.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The following questions guided interviews.

Supported Employment Customers

1. Describe your job. What do you like/dislike about your job? What do you like best about your job? Is there anything you would like to change about your job?
2. How did you get this job? (What role did you play in finding this job?)
3. How were you trained to do your job? Who taught you your job? Describe how training was provided.
4. Do you need help to get ready for work? If so, who helps you? How do you get to work?
5. Do you need help to do your work? What kind of help do you need? Who helps you?
6. Who do you talk with most at work? Who do you take a break with? Who do you eat lunch with? Do you have friends at work?
7. Do you have social get-togethers or parties at work? Outside of work? Do you get together with any of your co-workers outside of work?

Employment Consultants

1. How long have you been in your current position? Describe the training you Received for this job.
2. Describe your organization's philosophy and values regarding the provision of employment services.
3. Describe how you assist people to become employed (planning, job development, employer contact, job training, ongoing support).
4. How do you define natural supports? Where in the process do you start to focus on natural supports? How do you balance, or mix, natural supports and employment consultant support?
5. What are your most successful approaches for facilitating supports? What are your biggest barriers?
6. What is your role in facilitating connections and supports outside of work?
7. Discuss the focus person's work situation.

Employers/Supervisors/Managers

1. Does your business provide diversity and/or disability awareness training?
2. How were you contacted about (supported employment)? How was the person hired and trained?
3. In what ways are (person's) work conditions (e.g., hours, wages, benefits, responsibilities, work location) the same or different from co-workers?
4. Describe the type of support provided (person). What accommodations, if any, have been needed? What role has agency staff played?

5. Describe the nature of (person's) social interactions at work. Is person involved in employer-sponsored social activities outside of work?
6. How would you describe the work climate/culture here?
7. Describe the most positive aspects of having (person) as an employee. Do you have any concerns or needs that have not been met?

Co-workers

1. How long have you been working here? How long have you known (person)? Describe your involvement with (person).
2. Who trained (person) to do the job? How was training provided?
3. Describe (person's) social interactions at work and outside of work. With whom does she/he interact?
4. How would you describe the work climate here?

Director of Employment Services/Coordinators

1. How long have you been in this job? Describe your background and training.
2. Describe your organization and its services (brief history, current organizational structure, characteristics of people served, philosophy and values related to employment services, general supported employment approach).
3. How are staff recruited, trained, and supported?
4. To what do you attribute your outcomes (e.g., staff skills? Employer relations? Family support? Self-advocacy? Community connections?
5. What issues or barriers do you face in the provision of quality supported employment services?

Protocol for Observations at Job Sites

1. Type of work being performed by focus person and coworkers.
2. Physical description of setting.
3. Nature of interactions and supports across all employees.
4. Adaptations/accommodations used by focus person.
5. Climate/culture of setting.

Document Analysis

1. Mission/vision statement
2. Training materials
3. Marketing materials
4. Media articles
5. Other

