Training Job Coaches to use Natural Support Strategies

Article Summary

McHugh, Storey, & Certo (2002) examined the effectiveness of training job coaches in implementing natural support strategies using a checklist as a tool for facilitation. Participants of the study included, three job coaches who provided individualized supports for adults with developmental disabilities at direct hire jobs as well as new supported employees that did not know any of their co-workers and had been in their position for one week prior to the first observation by the researcher. The role of the job coach was to assist the employee to reach job stabilization. The participants were previously informed of utilizing natural supports during job coaching. McHugh et al. (2002) assessed the employees social integration at work using the Vocational Integration Index, a four-item semantic differential social validation assessment, a social validation assessment that was completed by the employee's supervisor, and the researcher-devised checklist of natural supports indicators called the Job Coach/Natural Supports Record Form. Training sessions were held with the job coaches to review assessment information, give instruction on the purpose of the study, assign readings related to the study, and to review any other questions or issues related to the study.

McHugh et al. report, "That integration increased for all supported employees following the introduction of the Job Coach/Natural Supports Record Form." Natural support strategies increased and varied over a 6 to 8-week period of time when the job coaches utilized the natural support checklist. "All included co-workers more often in discussing issues with the supported employee, and they all encouraged the supported employee to start conversations with co-workers based on common interests." The results of the Vocational Integration Index illustrated an increase in employee benefits and for the most part in the other three areas. Results indicated "a higher degree of integration included increased participation in social activities during work hours and frequent interactions with co-workers." However, the social validation surveys that were completed by employers and job coaches indicated varied results regarding integration.

McHugh et al. concludes, "The challenge continues to redefine the role and approach of job coaches so that their behavior facilitates the involvement of work-site personnel (i.e., natural supports), while remaining active and supportive when needed; that is, to act as a facilitator or consultant to the business, identifying, engaging, and maintaining supports internal to the workplace." They also believe that further research is needed in the area of natural supports to better understand the unique needs of individuals in their very unique work environment. Reference