**RRTC State of the Science**

**Delivering effective employment supports: Organizational design and capacity building**

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**Abstract**

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are valuable contributors to the workforce, and the expectation for competitive integrated employment continues to grow. Many individuals with IDD use employment supports and services to assist them in finding, securing, and maintaining employment through a service provider. At the same time, service providers are experiencing great changes related to funding and expected outcomes, as well as emerging priorities around transforming their employment supports away from sheltered settings towards integrated employment. In the pursuit of improving employment outcomes for people with IDD in this new context, agencies must consider a holistic investment in their culture, staff, and individuals they support. Drawing from several different research activities, this paper focuses on important elements for organizational design and transformation and the delivery of effective employment supports.

**Introduction**

Since the introduction of supported employment in the Developmental Disabilities Act of 1984 and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986, there has been continued development and refinement of best practices in employment services and supports. Progress includes demonstrations of creative outcomes for individuals with significant support needs, including customized jobs and self-employment, community rehabilitation providers that have shifted emphasis to integrated employment, and states that have made a substantial investment in Employment First policy and strategy. Despite these achievements, the promise of integrated employment has not been realized for many individuals with IDD. The number of individuals supported in integrated employment by state IDD agencies has remained stagnant for the past fifteen years, participation in non-work services has grown rapidly, and individual employment supports are not implemented with fidelity to a consistent model or expectations (Butterworth et al, 2016).

Responding to this need, the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is a research project housed at the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. It is part of the ICI’s ThinkWork! initiative, a group of projects promoting community employment for people with IDD.

The RRTC’s work covers four main areas:

1.  Sharing knowledge with, and supporting individuals and families around employment.

2.  Increasing the effectiveness of employment consultants

3.  Building capacity and supporting organizational change for community rehabilitation providers

4.  Furthering policies and practices of high-performing state employment systems

This paper addresses organizational design and capacity building, using findings from research strand two (research on employment consultants) and three (organizational change for community providers.

**Background**

Community providers (CPs) are the primary source of employment support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in the United States. Historically, the vast majority of community providers offered predominantly sheltered or facility-based employment services while offering limited community-based or integrated employment options. Recent national and state-level policy changes, along with a growing dissatisfaction with segregated work and non-work services among individuals with IDD and their family members (Migliore, Mank, Grossi, & Rogan, 2007), have created an imperative for organizations to change their organizational structures and service delivery models from primarily sheltered work to community-based work, and to prioritize competitive integrated employment as the first option for individuals with IDD (Nord, Luecking, Mank, Kiernan, & Wray, 2013; Novak, 2015). While some organizations have successfully transformed their services (Brooks-Lane, Hutcheson, & Revell, 2005; Brown, Shiraga, & Kessler, 2006; Rogan & Rinne, 2011), many have either not begun or have struggled to do so, despite growing demand for integrated work opportunities (Martinez, 2013).

**What do we know about organizational transformation?**

For many community providers, organizational change “necessitates a complete rethinking of mission, vision, values, and practice” (Rogan & Rinne, 2011, p. 250). At the same time, organizations face a myriad of external and internal barriers, including a lack of strategic planning as well as challenges securing stable long-term funding for individuals (Butterworth, Fesko, & Ma, 2000; Rogan & Rinne, 2011). Murphy et al. (2014) argue that many organizations continue to allocate resources in program services focused on community outings and socialization rather than employment. Lack of planning, leadership, communication, and business acumen was another major barrier faced by providers, as agency leaders had limited experience with organizational transformation and now had to lead a staff, which was formerly center-based, that is scattered all over the community. Providers also reported instances of resistance from stakeholders, including family members, regarding the change process (Rogan, Held, & Rinne, 2001; Rogan & Rinne, 2011). In addition, many providers are challenged by building the internal capacity of their staff to provide individualized, person-centered supports, despite acknowledgement in the field that an ongoing investment in staff professional development is necessary to develop and maintain staff’s core competencies and to implement best practices (Timmons & Lyons, 2016). Lastly, inconsistent communication of priorities from states through funding mechanisms and “business as usual” practices can impede organizational change efforts (see Winsor & Hall, 2017)

**What do we know about employment supports?**

Service providers employ a large and diverse staff of professionals who need to remain trained and abreast of the most efficient job finding and job support practices in the field. Employment consultants, sometimes referred to as employment specialists, job developers, career navigators, or job coaches, assist job seekers in exploring, finding, securing, and maintaining employment. These tasks are complex and multifaceted, and may range from engaging families to support employment as a goal, helping a person arrange logistics like transportation to work, and negotiating customized opportunities with potential employers. Literature highlights four primary tasks of employment consultants: 1) getting to know job seekers, 2) finding jobs, 3) providing supports before hire, and 4) providing supports after hire (Bissonnette, 1994; Griffin, Hammis, & Geary, 2007; Migliore, Hall, Butterworth, & Winsor, 2010).

Employment consultants not only support job seekers with various tasks, but also are responsible for getting to know and facilitating relationships with businesses and employers, requiring a set of specific skill and approaches (Migliore, Nye-Lengerman, & Lyons, in development). These approaches include making multiple connections with employers through various types of communication (Gandolfo, 1999), breaking down jobs into customized, manageable tasks to ensure a match between a business and a job seeker (Condon, Gelb, & Gould, 2005), and building a strong professional network (Henry, Petkauskos, Stanislawzyk, & Vogt, 2014). Furthermore, once employment has been secured, the employment consultant supports long-term job retention (Griffin et al., 2007), often providing frequent or periodic check-ins (Butterworth, Migliore, Nord, & Gelb, 2012) with an emphasis on facilitation of natural supports and decreasing dependence on paid staff (Barrows et al., 2016; Butterworth, Whitney-Thomas, & Shaw, 1997; Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 1999).

**Research questions and areas of focus**

This manuscript synthesizes findings from the early stage of two research strands within the Rehabilitation and Research Center (RRTC) on Advancing Employment for Individuals for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities designed to strengthen delivery of employment supports, one focused on organizational transformation and one on improving implementation of employment supports. The following research questions were identified:

*(1) What are the most important features necessary for successful organizational transformation to support competitive integrated employment outcomes and full engagement in community life?* While the literature has described the experiences of community providers that implement a transformation, there has been limited research that addresses an efficient holistic approach to supporting change. This line of research is developing a strategy for supporting community providers to rebalance resources to emphasize individual integrated employment. Completed stages of research include a Delphi panel and case studies of organizations that have completed a transformation

*(2) How do effective employment specialists implement supports, and how do they make decisions about which support activities to emphasize and implement with each job seeker?* While extensive literature about employment support strategies is available, there is limited information about how employment consultants make decisions about strategy and time investments during the employment process, and limited research on the relative effectiveness of the strategies identified. Employment consultants have to make dynamic decisions about strategy including whether they have enough information about individual preferences and skills, whether to pursue existing jobs or a customized approach, and balancing time between direct employer outreach and engaging family and friends in networking with employers. Research also suggests that employment consultants do not consistently implement the practices identified in the literature, suggesting that there is a need to organize them into a clear, easily communicated model for implementation. The overall goal of this research is to support employment consultant’s use of best and promising practices by describing the use of practices by effective employment consultants, building a holistic model for employment support, and providing integrated training and data-based performance feedback. Completed stages of this research include qualitative interviews with family members, people with disabilities, employment consultants, and their supervisors.

**Methods**

This paper draws upon data collected through two separate research initiatives funded as part of the RRTC at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The use of multiple methods from which to draw information provides a more complete picture of organizational transformation, with an emphasis on the competencies of employment consultants.

**Delphi Panel on Organizational Transformation**. A Delphi process was used to gather and collect information about the most essential elements of organizational transformation. The Delphi process draws upon the collective knowledge of a group of experts (Rowe & Wright, 1999). Thirty-six experts were asked about six features of organizational transformation. Panelists included professionals, trainers, field leaders, family members of people with IDD, and self-advocates with IDD.

**Qualitative Interviews with Effective Employment Consultants**. Qualitative interviews were conducted with employment consultants, supervisors of employment consultants, job seekers with IDD, and family members of job seekers to explore effective employment support strategies. Researchers conducted 43 interviews in total, asking questions about techniques, engagement, planning, and organizational practices. Interviews were coded, and memos were created based on these codes using Atlas.ti to develop a set of effective employment practices used by employment consultants.

**Findings**

The studies focused on understanding the features of provider transformation and support practices adopted by effective employment consultant. Organizational transformation cannot occur without a strong workforce of employment consultants, and employment consultants perform their most effective work within an organizational culture that promotes a shared mission of employment for individuals with IDD, both in its vision and implementation. The following findings section 1) provides an overview of major findings from the Delphi panel which includes 10 essential elements in organizational transformation; 2) describes the findings from qualitative interviews about effective employment support activities.

**Findings on essential elements in organizational change**

The Delphi process had two rounds of inquiry. First, the 36 experts were asked to respond to six elements essential in organizational transformation, as identified by earlier research (Butterworth et al., 2007). They were asked to change or refine any of the six characteristics’ definitions, as well as to add any new characteristics they felt were missing. Panelists confirmed the original six elements of organizational change and identified four additional areas that are essential to transformation. In the second round, the Delphi panelists were asked to rank these ten elements in order of importance.

The ten ranked elements essential for organizational transformation from the Delphi panelists were as follows.

Table 1: Ranked Elements and Definitions

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| Name of Element | Definition of Element |
| Clear and consistent goals | An explicit commitment to increasing competitive integrated employment. Goals must be measurable, compelling, easy to grasp, directly reflective of the core mission, modifiable, specific to an established time frame, and reflect the needs of individuals. |
| An agency culture that values inclusion | Establishing a culture that values supporting individuals in the community rather than in facilities, positive thinking, learning, creativity, innovation, and continuous quality improvement. |
| An active, person-centered job placement process | Proactive job-finding one person at a time. This “just do it” approach creates momentum as successful employment outcomes are achieved and celebrated. |
| A strong internal and external communications plan | Communicating clear, authentic expectations for competitive integrated employment. Internally, this includes all levels of staff, individuals, families, and board members. Externally, it’s marketing services in the community. |
| Reallocated and restructured resources | Active and ongoing investment in realigning all fiscal, material, and staff resources in order to put into place the supports and services needed for increasing competitive integrated employment. |
| An ongoing investment in staff professional development | Frequent and ongoing training, continuing education, conference participation, and mentorship opportunities to develop and maintain staff’s core competencies and to implement best practices. |
| A focus on customer engagement | Engagement with customer groups including individuals, families, funders, and other community partners. It also means engaging with new and existing business partners to meet both individual and market needs. |
| Effective employment performance measurement, quality assurance, and program oversight | Establishing a clear framework for implementing and measuring administrative, management, and program strategies over defined periods of time in order to determine the impact and success of efforts. |
| A holistic approach | Consideration of the whole person with wrap-around life supports, and use of a career planning process that involves staff, parents, and friends, and include any accommodations, including assistive technology. |
| Multiple and diverse community partnerships | Partnerships can include school districts, state agency offices such as vocational rehabilitation, faith-based and/or civic organizations, and transportation resources. |

**Effective employment supports**

Although the analysis and interpretation of the findings is still in progress at the time of this writing, the preliminary findings from the interviews with the employment consultants point to at least four areas of supports for assisting job seekers: 1) Preparing the ground and communicating expectations; 2) getting to know the job seeker; 3) finding jobs, 4) providing other supports before hire, and 5) providing support after hire.

**Preparing the ground and communicating expectations.** Setting the stage for positive placement process requires that the employment consultant focus on communicating a commitment to the job seeker and his/her success. This stage provides clarity on roles and expectations, communicating the importance of high expectations for competitive integrated employment, often absent in employment services.

“…I’ve got to establish some ground rules from the beginning: number one ground rule is ‘I’m not here to find you a job. You and I together as a team are going to find a job’…”

**Getting to know the job seeker.** Employment consultants described getting to know the job seeker in the context of understanding his or her goals and aspirations, informing the job search, thus optimizing the job match and in turn finding jobs that lead to higher job satisfaction and job retention. A first step of establishing trust with the job seeker facilitated employment consultants’ understanding of who the person was and what s/he wanted. After trust was established, the best way to getting to know a job seeker was through asking a lot of “what” “why” and “how come” questions, being a good listener, and observing the job seeker in real life experiences.

**Finding jobs.** After having gathered enough information about a job seeker’s preferences, skills, motivations, and attributes, employment consultants proceeded to finding jobs that best met those criteria. Several participants recommended leveraging job seeker and family member personal connections. This approach helped to expand the consultants’ networks of employers beyond their own circle of professional connections. Moreover, it helped to connect with employers who knew the job seekers and, therefore, potentially were more likely to collaborate in developing natural support after hire. When existing job openings were not a good fit, or if there were no job openings, a strategy was to identify tasks that no one was doing or were being done inefficiently, and that, if addressed, would create a new job while adding value to a business. A general rule was to ensure that the employer felt that his or her businesses’ needs were a priority.

**Other supports before hire.** All supports that could not fit under either getting to know a job seeker or finding jobs—or that fit both these categories—are grouped under the category of “Other supports before hire.” Examples included assisting a job seeker with work and social skills, advance planning for transportation to and from work, advising about work incentives, and connecting with family members.

Touring businesses—i.e. visiting workplaces without the explicit goal of hiring a job seeker—was described as a strategy with many benefits. It exposed job seekers to a variety of work environments and tasks, giving them an opportunity to form an opinion about workplaces while observing appropriate workplace behaviors. Touring businesses was also an opportunity for the employment consultant to understand how the job seeker may interact with potential co-workers. Employers benefitted as well. They could learn about a job seeker in case future job opportunities emerged, without the pressure of going through a formal job interview. Informational interviews with employers was also described as beneficial. Informational interviews with employers allows employment consultants to learn about how the business works and make observations about its operations and how the particular skills of a job seeker can address gaps and inefficiencies.

Other supports included identifying transportation alternatives. Often this was part of the criteria for a good job match and helped to ensure a smooth transition to employment and job retention. Another aspect of providing other supports before hire was connecting with family members, if they were active in the job seekers’ lives. Involving families made sense because of their long-term support roles. Families provided a perspective that employment consultants could not otherwise get by spending only a limited amount of time with the job seeker. Employment consultants also reported providing advice to families and job seekers about work incentives planning to address concerns about losing or changing access to benefits.

**Providing support after hire.** After a job seeker was hired, employment consultants assisted with follow up supports that included breaking down complex tasks into smaller, easier steps; assisting with communication strategies or alleviating anxiety; and facilitating natural support from co-workers whenever possible. Relying on co-workers for support, rather than on specialized job coaches, enhanced job seekers’ sense of belonging in the workplace, job satisfaction, and job retention. Checking in with short visits or calls emerged as a common strategy to increase job retention.

**Decision making in the employment process**. While the core steps of the employment process are common, the intensity of support needed by job seekers varies widely depending on their experiences, clarity about their interests, and many other factors. In addition to describing the supports used by effective employment consultants, a core research question addressed how they make decisions about support strategies. Due to the uniqueness of employment consultants and the varying settings they practice within, further exploration on how decisions are made is warranted. XXXX

In addition, parallel research that will be incorporated in the next stage of the RRTC work plan is collecting real time information about how employment consultants use their time. These data suggest that nationally employment consultants do not distribute their time in ways that emphasize the practices used by these effective employment consultants or best and promising practices identified in the literature.

**Discussion**

**Synthesis of the two studies.** An organization’s focus, values, and infrastructure create conditions that are conducive to successful organizational transformation that result in effective front line supports. A comprehensive transformation effort must include an emphasis on the front-line, while the use of promising employment consultant practices foster the activities of a comprehensive organizational transformation process. The ten transformational elements (study one) can be conceptualized within three essential components 1) focus and values, 2) agency infrastructure, and 3) employment consultant practices (study two). The collective knowledge gained in these studies highlight the connection between these three components and employment consultants’ practices. Figure 1 highlights the multifaceted relationships between environment and practices, leading to a comprehensive employment support model that facilitates improved employment outcomes.

The synthesis of the two studies reveals a symbiotic relationship between the agency and employment consultant practices. Effective employment practices can thrive in organizations where a clear focus, values, and infrastructure are present; organizational focus and values are carried out and disseminated through practices of employment consultants. The following section will discuss each of the three conceptual elements (focus and values, agency infrastructure, and employment consultant practices), describing the connections between the findings from the studies.



Figure 1.

**Focus and values.** An organization’s focus and values provides the groundwork from which to build a road map for practices, directions, and priorities. Key themes are: 1) agency goals and 2) culture and values.

*Goals.* Delphi panelists highlighted the importance of clear and uncompromising goals in supporting organizational transformation, which they described as maintaining an explicit commitment to increasing competitive integrated employment. Effective goals were measurable, compelling, and easy to grasp, directly reflective of the core mission, modifiable, and specific to an established timeframe. They must also reflect the needs of individuals. The existence of a focused and clearly defined vision for the agency guides each decision including the development of a strategic plan for transformation, building an infrastructure to support those changes, and investing effectively in front-line supports of employment consultants. Strong and well-articulated goals are critical to employment consultants as they provide a framework for expectations of performance. Many employment consultants and supervisors recognized that their organizations provided foundational direction for their work, which supported the approaches they used with job seekers and families. Examples include investment in models of training for all new staff, participation of employment consultants in strategic planning, or consistent messaging from agency leadership focused on the mission.

*Culture and values around inclusion.*Having a clearly defined vision regarding integrated employment inevitably requires an agency culture that fully embraces meaningful inclusion. Delphi panelists explained thatagencies needed to establish cultures that explicitly and visibly value supporting individuals in the community rather than in facilities. An agency culture that values inclusion as core commitment seeks to engage individuals and their families, all levels of staff, and the community at large, in reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationships**.** The culture also must value positive thinking, learning, creativity, innovation, and continuous quality improvement in order to achieve authentic community engagement for the individuals they support. This culture guides the work of all staff including employment consultants, who execute the functions of their jobs within their own sets of values and philosophies around inclusion.

Employment consultants and supervisors from study two expressed values and preferences that guided their work and in order to see success, it is important that these values coincide with organizational values and culture. Employment consultants identified collaborative leadership, believing in all people, passionate drive, getting to know job seekers as whole individuals beyond their employment goals, empathy, diversity, and awareness of inequity as values which influenced the ways in which they delivered support. Supervisors from study two also identified the importance of these values over skills when hiring front-line professionals. While effective employment practices can be taught, ensuring alignment of core beliefs guarantees a good fit for the organization.

**Infrastructure.** The programs, policies, and practices within an organization can affect employment consultant practices, while also enabling or obstructing organizational transformation. While all of the Delphi elements related to agency infrastructure (reallocation of resources, communication, staff development, performance measurement, partnerships) are relevant to employment consultant activities and capacities, in particular resource allocation; professional development; and community partnerships directly converge with the front line.

*Resource allocation*. The Delphi panelists identified the allocation and alignment of resources according to the agency’s clear and uncompromising vision and mission as essential when moving from a “focus on goals and values” to the development of an infrastructure that supports a new set of practices. Transformation requires an active and ongoing investment in realigning all fiscal, material, and staff resources to put into place the supports and services needed for increasing competitive integrated employment. Movement towards community based, and inclusive supports often requires fiscal creativity and commitment. Resource commitment is necessary as new front-line people staff are hired or those previously supporting individuals in the workshop are learning a new set of skills to support community employment.

As noted in study two, some services provided by employment consultants are not always “billable” to an external funder. Preparing the ground and establishing trust can be time-consuming and nuanced, as there is not a formula for this support strategy. Additionally, most community providers cannot bill for this development time, yet it is critical to establishing long range success. To get to know job seekers, build trust, and establish quality relationships, out-of-the-ordinary activities (e.g., visiting families in their homes) may be required that may not be financially supported by a funder. An organization must be willing (through what its staff members value) and able (through investment) to support employment consultants’ activities that are truly focused on the job seeker and the achievement of meaningful outcomes. Furthermore, an organization must prioritize the allocation of resources toward building and maintaining the capacity of their employment consultants to effectively deliver the most effective strategies as highlighted in more detail in the section below.

*Staff development.*An ongoing investment in staff professional development highlights an organization’s commitment to their employees in order to continually improve practice.Delphi panelists noted that essential to transformation is frequent and ongoing training, continuing education, conference participation, and mentorship opportunities to develop and maintain staff’s core competencies and to implement best practices, for all levels of staff from administration to the front-line. These findings suggest the need for an integrated approach that incudes skills development, values and leadership development, and training and technical assistance to support implementation and create a strong infrastructure.

Investment in staff training and support upon hire was identified as critical to grounding employment consultants and providing technical knowledge on the “how-to’s.” Some organizations adhere to a formal prescriptive training, such as customized employment, while others develop their own tailored approaches to training and staff onboarding. Training provided a general framework of key aspects of the supported employment process, in addition to the provider commitment to skill development and knowledge acquisition of employment consultants. Beyond training and hiring, an investment in team building among employment consultants was also seen as useful. The ability for teams to talk, problem-solve, and brainstorm collectively improves employees’ ability to communicate strong and consistent messages and provide supports to those most challenging to employ. In addition to team-based work, mentoring was another training strategy that included matching junior employment consultants with experienced employment consultants.

*Community partnerships.* Delphi panelists noted that multiple and diverse community partnerships enhance the quality of an organization and its practices. Providers must engage organizations and state systems and create buy-in for the transformation process. These partnerships can happen with school districts, state agency offices such as vocational rehabilitation, faith-based organizations, and transportation resources.They provide a range of resources including new funding opportunities, expanded employment and community membership and exploration opportunities for job seekers, and resources that built job seeker human and social capital. Partnerships with other providers and those at the state level allowed organizations to share ideas and create a larger coalition invested in the transformation process.

Organizational partnerships also support networking efforts and the development of professional connections of employment consultants at the individual level. Robust networks of community and business relationships provide additional opportunities for finding, and developing employment opportunities for job seekers. Connections with employers may be targeted based on a specific job seeker, or more general “getting to know you” opportunities (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, etc.). Employment consultants routinely draw upon business and community partnerships to develop jobs, as well as to promote the work of the organization. In addition, employment consultants often interact with diverse support teams that include families, case managers, education professionals, staff from vocational rehabilitation, etc. While engagement and participation of these stakeholders may vary, their participation may be required as it relates to funding or program outcomes; therefore, employment consultants may also ask these partners to draw upon their personal and professional networks to support a job seeker.

**Employment Consultant Practices.** Effective employment consultant practices represent the third and final component of the conceptual model. Good direct support practice can thrive in an organization that clearly outlines their focus and values, and is establishes necessary agency infrastructures. Organizational transformation and support practices of employment consultants both require an emphasis on customer engagement; and, a holistic approach.

*Customer engagement.* A focus on customer engagement helps build strong relationships and investment. Providers must engage with their two main customer groups: individual and families, as well as new and existing business partners to meet both individual and market needs. Engaging with individuals and families on an ongoing and frequent basis not only reassures them and increases their comfort with the transformation and job finding processes, but it also increases their investment. Engaging individuals at the outset supports them to envision themselves in varied employment roles and prompts open conversation where fears can be shared and assurances can be developed. Gaining the confidence and trust of individuals and families is important as well. Engagement with employerscreates further employment opportunities for individuals and helps to build a coalition of expanded advocates for integrated employment and community integration in general. Approaching employers using business language and demonstrating the likelihood of increased revenue and efficiency has proven successful.

Employment consultants work with many of an organization’s customers: job seekers, families, support teams, and businesses. When “preparing the ground” for the placement process, all team members, including the job seeker, should be involved whenever possible. Levels of engagement will vary, but consistently circling back to continue to engage all stakeholders whenever possible provides new opportunities to discuss emerging issues and problem solve collectively.

Employment consultants are often the face of an organization to a business owner or employer. While the job seeker always remains the primary focus, establishing rapport with employers can directly benefit job seekers. Employment consultants must learn the language of business. Communicating, negotiating and overall engagement with businesses requires a different skill set than what has been traditionally expected of employment consultants. Many employment consultants and supervisors indicated that they frame their engagement and outreach based on what is best for the business. Organizations must convey that they have something to offer businesses and employers, and that employment consultants can provide workforce solutions, staff training, and policy knowledge.

*Holistic approach.* Delphi panelists indicated thatproviders must consider the whole person with wrap-around life supports as necessary, and use a career planning process that involves staff, parents, and friends. A job is successful only if it supports and respects the relationships, activities and life priorities that are important to a person. This process should take into account any necessary accommodations, including assistive technology. Maintaining a holistic service delivery approach creates opportunities for cross-departmental quality improvement and greater understanding of staff people’s roles. Breaking down silos puts employment on everyone’s mind and fosters efficiency and a shared responsibility for employment. A holistic approach allows organizations to leverage each other’s resources and specialties. An example of this is using day habilitation supports for skill building and career exploration (funded via the IDD system) while searching for integrated employment (funded through the VR system).

At the individual level, the career planning processes is enhanced with a broader set of resources and perspectives, as well as a deeper more well-rounded understanding of the individual. This enables the seamless blending of employment and the rest of one’s community life from the beginning. An employment consultant’s ability to see the whole person was valued by their supervisors, job seekers, and family members. In addition, this holistic approach also identified families, support team members, and personal networks as critical to the employment process. In preparing the ground with job seekers and teams, employment consultants established roles, defined professional boundaries, and set expectations around the job finding process. Examples of support practices include: having meetings in the environments the job seeker is comfortable in, asking questions and engaging other members of the team in planning and discussion, speaking to friends and supports outside the team about the job seeker, exploring different aspects of the job seekers interests and preferences through conversations and observation in different settings, developing team action plans and steps. The inclusion of multiple perspectives while still placing the job seeker at the center of the process was seen as a highly effective approach to placement.

**Limitations and Strengths**

The employment consultants’ study had a number of design had a number of limitations, including 1) convenience sampling, 2) time-limited interviews, and 3) inability to control or account for extraneous variables. However, the design’s strength was in focusing on specific support strategies with interviewees, and asking employment consultants to report on only one job seeker for the interview, allowing them to be more detailed and accurate in the strategies they reported.

Overall the primary strength of the research was in combining perspectives and methodologies to highlight organizational transformation through a workforce lens. Organizations not only need their workforce to provide support strategies, but the workforce itself is a delivery device for organizational culture and priorities. This work reveals the mutually beneficial relationship that exists between organizational transformation and employment consultant practices.

**Recommendations for future research**

The ten elements identified by the Delphi panel in study one have great impact on the strategies and approaches that affect the quality of services and outcomes for job seekers as described by employment consultants in study two. Future research should explore the impact of organizational culture on employment outcomes, through employment consultant practices. This could include but is not limited to: effective balance of employment consultant’s time (direct vs. indirect supports), most effective support strategies by situation, effective models to provide training and implementation feedback to employment consultants, effective staffing structures (specialist, dedicated job developer, use of job coaches for ongoing support), cost effectiveness and cost-benefit on specific support strategies, and effective organizational communication strategies In addition, a better understanding of effective employment practices is critical to developing a strong employment consultant workforce that is prepared to support the changing needs of job seekers in the face of policy and system changes.

**Conclusion**

The presence of key transformational elements support an organization’s growth and transition from sheltered or facility based settings into community based settings. This paradigm shift can also affect how employment consultants provide support. Additionally, effective employment consultant practices serve as fuel for a comprehensive model of employment supports, with the job seeker at the center of this model. Organizational practices and structure influence the employment consultant workforce, and employment consultants can be facilitators of organizational transformation. The synthesis of these studies reveal that the combination of organizational transformation (focus, values, and infrastructure) and employment consultant practices, support a comprehensive model of employment supports that can improve employment outcomes for job seekers.

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