

Job Finding

Introduction

Within the Supported Employment process, job finding is the stage that connects the job seeker with potential employers¹. Job seekers' skills and abilities are viewed in terms of their relevance and requirement in the open labour market and therefore there is a matching of the job seekers' employment needs with those of the employers' needs.

This paper provides the position of the European Union of Supported Employment on the critical and challenging phase of job finding.

Background

From its origins, Supported Employment has focussed mainly on the job requirements of the job seekers. However more recently, it has been recognised that an awareness of the employment and recruitment needs of employers is essential for securing employment outcomes.

As Supported Employment has developed and expanded to encompass a wide range of job seekers then the job finding phase also needs to develop to continue to meet the employment needs of the relevant job seeker groups.

It is recognised and acknowledged by Supported Employment service providers that they must continue to develop their skills and methodologies in engaging with employers so as to be able to identify suitable job vacancies and to support their job seekers in all aspects of job finding.

The Issues

Supported Employment has its initial engagement with employers at stage 3 (Job Finding) of the process, with the primary focus on the needs of the job seeker. However, there is growing opinion that Supported Employment providers must also address the needs of employers. In order for the Supported Employment process to work, it must be advantageous for both the job seeker and the employer.

¹ For further information on the 5 stages of the Supported Employment process see also EUSE (2005): European Union of Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards

One job finding method that has been developed by Supported Employment providers over the years is that of 'job carving'²; this is where a job is created by identifying parts of a job or tasks that the employer needs completing and can be completed by the job seeker. It can take imagination and creativity on the behalf of both the employer and the Employment Support Worker, but in many cases it can lead to a successful employment outcome.

Whilst there are obvious merits in this approach there can be a danger that such created jobs may be short term and have no progression prospects or career development opportunities for the employee. Moreover, this method may be extremely useful for some client groups such as people with learning disabilities but may not be wholly appropriate for other client groups who have no intellectual impairments. There are obvious merits in this job approach but it is important always to think about possibilities for career development and progression opportunities. Consideration should be given to the fact that many job seekers/employees have employment skills or professional training/education that makes them capable of more complicated jobs.

It is often said that one of the strengths of Supported Employment is the belief that one size does not fit all and therefore this view should also prevail within the job finding process. It is common in Supported Employment to secure jobs by mostly informal methods such as job carving, word of mouth, informal contacts and extending work experience placements. Of course, if these approaches work for the job seeker then all is well and good. However, as Supported Employment expands then there is a general concern amongst service providers that an increased knowledge of the formal methods of job finding must also be developed. The formal methods would include job application forms, job seekers having access to their own curriculum vitae and job interview techniques training. Awareness by Supported Employment providers of both the formal and the informal job finding approaches could lead to improved informed choices and self determination of job seekers and increased competencies of service providers in addressing the needs of employers.

There are issues regarding who should carry out the job finding process. Some projects employ a job finder, others believe the Employment Support Worker should perform job finding and some enable the individual job seeker to perform job finding activities. It is likely that all Supported Employment providers will claim to fully include the wishes of the job seeker but there is evidence that the job seekers' employment expectations only stretch to the limit of the skills of the Supported Employment personnel. The decision of who does the job finding may be influenced by financial or staffing constraints and whilst there are merits in all of the approaches, it appears that the success of whichever approach is adopted is dependent on the skills of the staff/job seeker concerned³.

² Also often referred to as Job Creation

³ Spjelkavik/Evans (2007): Impressions of Supported Employment – A study of some European Supported Employment Services and their activities; p. 34f. Work Research Institute, Oslo.

Moreover, when we apply the Supported Employment method of finding a job for an individual, we take a different approach than if we were trying to find an individual for a job. It is acknowledged that the key is finding the correct job match, and the skills and training required to ensure this match are critical.

It is recognised in many, if not all European countries, that the job finding phase is an area where Supported Employment needs to improve and make more progress.

In fairness to many Supported Employment providers it can be difficult to deliver effective job finding when there is so little available and reliable training in this area.

Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

The European Union of Supported Employment acknowledges the critical part that job finding plays in the Supported Employment process, and it is therefore essential that job finding is addressed in a professional and effective manner. In order for the successful 'job matching' to be achieved, the job finding activity must firstly be conducted. This can only be carried out if the Employment Support Worker has gathered extensive and detailed information about the labour market in their area, coupled with their knowledge of each of the employers doing business in the locality.

During Stage 2 (Vocational Profiling), Employment Support Workers are committed to finding out as much information as is possible about the job seeker⁴. It is equally important that the same commitment is given to researching potential employers. If, on completion of the research into one employer, it is indicated that they are not suitable for the current job seeker, the time and effort has not been wasted as the research may be of benefit to other job seekers.

The lack of systematic and effective training is of concern to the European Union of Supported Employment, and as this is both critical and challenging, this gap must be dealt with so as to improve the employment outcome success rate of Supported Employment. In recent years, the EUSE conferences that are held biennially endeavour to have workshops and speakers on job finding and marketing techniques.

The European Union of Supported Employment also acknowledges that the job seeker must play a role in the job finding process. Service providers can empower the job seekers to identify their own job preferences and this in turn should increase the chances of the job match being successful. Through playing an active role in the process, the job seeker should be encour-

⁴ See also EUSE Position Paper "Vocational Profiling"

aged to see themselves as someone who can be of benefit to a suitable employer. Their skills and abilities are needed and appreciated, and their role in society can be greatly enhanced through their participation in the open labour market.

When listings of potential employers are being compiled, both job seeker and the Employment Support Worker must be involved, and the job seeker should be encouraged to identify any contacts that they may have established. When decisions are made in relation to which employers are to be targeted, the details of the initial approach should be agreed and carried out in accordance with the agreement and permission of the job seeker.

The materials that are used to communicate the benefits of Supported Employment need to reflect the fact that we are dealing with two distinct customers – job seekers and employers. Marketing and promotional materials should be of a high standard that demonstrates the professionalism of the service being provided.

The use of informal and formal job finding techniques are strongly advised by the European Union of Supported Employment as this allows the service provider to select the most appropriate approaches to use in each situation.

Conclusion

In the past, the emphasis has been primarily focused on finding out the needs and skills of the job seeker. It should be recognised that Supported Employment service providers must carry out more research into the needs of employers and must develop links and better ways to approach them. Creativity and flexibility are needed when we are deciding how to carry out our job searches, and it is through good quality training that we can improve our techniques when it comes to job finding.

Further reading:

- EUSE Position Paper “Working with Employers”
- EUSE Position Paper “Supported Employment for Employers”
- EUSE Position Paper “Career Development and Progression”

This document is available in alternative formats such as Braille, Audiotape or Electronically on request.

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Produced by the European Union of Support Employment/Leonardo Partnership
as part of the European Supported Employment Toolkit.