



On & Off Job Support

Introduction

The provision of good support on and off the job is crucial for many people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups to obtain and maintain paid employment in the open labour market. On and off job support is stage 5 in the five-stage-process of Supported Employment¹. Effective support on and/or off the job is the core element of Supported Employment which makes it different from traditional placement services.

This paper provides the position of the European Union of Supported Employment on the important role of job support.

Background

Supported Employment began with the recognition that the 'train then place' methods contributed little to the integration of people with a learning disability into ordinary working life. The development of the 'place-train-maintain' strategy brought a new focus to support training in the real context of a company with an Employment Support Worker (job coach) instead of in a rehabilitation facility. The early practise was to place and train the individual through systematic training procedures with sometimes little attention to the company culture and the natural supports available on the work site from co-workers.

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

The Supported Employment process today should provide a variety of support on and off the job that can be tailored to the individual employees with disabilities, the co-workers and the company. The employee is supported to participate in all regular employee introduction, probation, performance and development procedures. Job support nowadays is more than direct training in the workplace. Job support supports the co-workers to train and support the new employee as much as possible, the company to make company procedures accessible for persons with disabilities and the employee to take over a new professional role and to develop his or her potential.

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

The Issues

Despite the fact that individualised job support is the key for many persons with disabilities to learn and maintain a job in the open labour market, funding of job support is often very limited. In many countries it is not possible to get more intensive job support and usually the job support is time limited. The amount of job support needed is often higher at the beginning of a new job and can be systematically faded over time, but ongoing support should be available whenever the employee or the employer needs it, as it is proven that this is one success factor in the whole process without which the person is at risk of losing the job again². Often it is very difficult to get funding for the necessary long-term job support in the open labour market whilst, on the other hand, lifelong support in a sheltered workshop is financed without problems. The ongoing support on the job site is often limited to crisis intervention and is not designed to support the employee to participate in training and career development opportunities³.

The kind of job support employees with disabilities, co-workers and companies need to work successfully varies in regard to the individuals, the target group and the company culture. As Supported Employment has expanded to encompass a wide range of job seekers with disabilities, then the provision of on and off the job support also needs to develop to continue to meet the employment needs of both the individual and the employer. It is important to note that effective job support is more than simple visits to the job site and includes instrumental, informative, emotional and feedback support. Some employees require more support to learn a new task in the company and prefer the attendance of an Employment Support Worker regularly on the job site, whilst others have a high qualification but need support to take over a new professional role and to deal with problems with co-workers and who prefer to have employment support outside the work place.

Moreover, the amount of support available on the work site varies from company to company. Job support addresses the employer's needs as well as the needs of the employee with a disability, which sometimes results in goal conflicts⁴. It is a balance to recognise the company requirements and to give guidance for adaptations and changes that facilitate the successful employment of people with different abilities.

² Doose, S. (2007): *Unterstützte Beschäftigung – Berufliche Integration auf lange Sicht*. Lebenshilfe Verlag, Marburg und Corden, A./Thornton, P. (2002): *Employment Programmes for Disabled People – Lessons from research evaluations*. Department for Work and Pensions In-house Report, Social Research Branch, Department for Work and Pensions, London.

³ See also EUSE Position Paper "Career Development and Progression"

⁴ See also EUSE Position Paper "Working with Employers"

The appearance of an Employment Support Worker on the job site can be confusing for co-workers and stigmatising for the employee with disability. Some employees, e.g. with mental health problems or former drug abuse do not want to disclose their problems to the employer and co-workers. The available opportunities for natural support by co-workers, family members and peers are on the one hand often not systematically used, whilst on the other hand it is difficult to rely solely on natural supports and sometimes too much may be expected of co-workers.

The support available is often strictly limited to work related issues. However, an employee's stability in the workplace is determined by a wide range of factors that also may need to be addressed by the Employment Support Worker in cooperation with other partners.

Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

The core element of Supported Employment is to provide and facilitate all the different supports on and off the job to help the employee to become and remain a valued worker. Job coaching and employment support is a professional strategy targeted to the employee, the co-workers and the employer. It is important to make the role of an Employment Support Worker very clear and transparent for all parties involved. Job support is an interactive process supporting the employee to successfully take over new roles and to foster his or her professional and personal development. Job support should help the company to accommodate diversity in the work place and to successfully include people with different abilities and support needs. Job supports and assistive technologies used should be discreet and fit into the company culture and natural supports by co-workers need to be encouraged and facilitated.

A person centred plan should orchestrate the different on and off the job community supports. An accessible action plan, based on the vocational profile of the person and the analysis of the work site and the company culture prepared in the previous stages of the Supported Employment process, should guide training and support needs. The employee's training and support must be appropriate and encourage workplace independence and progression.

The Supported Employment provider should work with the employee and the employer to determine preferred training and learning approaches, adaptations and support strategies which meet the individual needs and fit into the company culture. Co-workers and employers should be actively involved in this process and receive the necessary guidance to successfully include the new employee. A co-worker can act as mentor for the new employee to support him or her in the company and to act as a contact person for the Employment Support Worker.

The employee should receive personal and systematic support to learn and perform job tasks and to integrate successfully into the work team. The employee should be supported to participate in all 'typical' employee introduction, probation, performance and career development procedures. Job modifications, aids and adaptations can be effective tools to accommodate the work site making it as accessible as is possible for the employee. Employment Support Workers should therefore maintain a general awareness of such assistive technology and potential sources of funding for such modifications or specialist equipment.

Support and training should be flexible and available to develop relationships both in and outside the workplace including participation in workplace social events and activities with co-workers in and outside work.

It is important to both seek and provide regular feedback amongst all involved partners. The Employment Support Worker should be able to provide mediation between the employee, co-workers and the employer. The Employment Support Worker must react quickly in case of difficulties and should support all involved parties to solve problems as early as possible. Regular contact and a trustworthy personal relationship with the employee, co-workers and the employer is the basis for the successful support of an Employment Support Worker.

Employees should be supported to negotiate terms and conditions of employment according to individual needs, a regular work contract and opportunities for further training and career advancement. The employee should be offered support to participate in internal and external training and career development opportunities. Support and assistance should also be available to the employee should they want to move to a better position in the company or to change the job.

Support for the employee and the company should be provided both as intensively and for as long as is necessary. The support needs of employees with disabilities do not always disappear through their inclusion in a company. After intensive on or off the job support is no longer required, the Employment Support Worker should establish a follow-up system with the employer and the employee. The Employment Support Worker should stay in contact with the employee and the employer as this is an effective crisis prevention method and also provides the opportunity to develop new jobs based on good communications and a healthy working partnership. The employee and the employer should be able to contact the Supported Employment agency whenever needed.

Conclusion

Good support on and off the job is the core element of Supported Employment, which makes it a successful method to ensure people with disabilities obtain and maintain paid employment in the open labour market. Research has proven that supported work sites are more stable than unsupported work sites for people with disabilities. Despite this fact, the necessary funding for longer term and community based support is very limited or not available in many countries in Europe and must be enhanced in order to make full use of the positive effects of on/off the job support.

Further Reading

- EUSE Position Paper "Working with Employers"
- EUSE Position Paper "Values, Standards and Principles of Supported Employment"
- 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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