# Using Natural Supports in the Work Place

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This is an area that has been very stimulating to me over the last two year. Actually one of the first things that really got me thinking about natural support from work places, was a particular article by Nisbett and Hagnar, which is a Cash Journal 1988. I'm going to give you some views today which will probably challenge your thinking a little bit, and it might be interesting for you to go back to the Hagnar and Nisbett article.

To start with though, I would like to take us back first of all to thinking about what are outcomes of competitive employment and supportive employment when we talk about people going into integrated jobs, whether it be individual jobs of CETAP model.

The major thing that I get out of it, is I think in some ways the legislation very clearly says there is competitive employment and there is support employment, which are two distinct programs. Yet, I think all people who have worked in these fields, realise that it's not that black and white.

I know that with PE Personnel we had places a number of people who came out of ATC. Initially they altered on award wages (competitive employment), and then over time the levels of support that they required really had to be seen as supported employment. I mean the amount of support hours and on-going support was truly supported employment. So it's not a black and white kind of thing. I think that as long as people are working, and the main thrust being that people are working in regular jobs, or ordinary jobs, in integrated settings, receiving award wages where ever possible, or paid fairly, in situations such as supported individual jobs.

To recap on that, I really see the objective as being very similar, that supportive and competitive employment, when you are talking about individual jobs, is about wages, integration and on-going support.

I know when I look back on PE's life, that initially one of our first mission statements was about award wages, which was one of major outcomes we talked about. But over time the initial mission statement was about people securing and maintaining integrated employment, award wage being the main focus. And we had value statements about people having right to access open employment, no matter how sever their disability, yet we wouldn't look at anything like skill based, or productivity based wage.

So over the sic years that I've worked with PE, we really started looking at people that I didn't know how I could get to work any faster, I couldn't find a better job match, and yet they wanted to be part of integrated work, and I was denying them

access because I couldn't get an integrated job at an award rate. So that's something personally I found, I have swung to looking at developing the integration side. That's what we are after is integrated paid employment.

The other things that has happened when we talk about competitive and supported employment in Australia, the USA, and in other western countries that have been looking at this movement, predominantly CETAP agencies and individual jobs, the main approach is based on an agency staff member going into the employer, to provide training and support to the person with the disability firstly, and also to the employer. Would you agree with that as being the common sort of approach to CETAP and individual job agencies? In the USA this model is commonly called the Job Coach Model.

In Perth at PE Personnel we have job co-ordinators, Workplus has job advocates, and Emtech has Employment Co-ordinators. I'm sure you've all got different names for our support workers, but it is that kind of model - somebody that is a specialist staff that does into the job. I think that there's similar aspects within most agencies that help people to get into open employment.

So to summarise, the support service is provided by agency staff. The staff typically analyse jobs, train the person with the disability and evaluate what's going on. The staff remains on-site initially and gradually fade support. The amount of follow uo support caries from program to program. You can go to most competitive employment programs and find, like PE Personnel most employment programs which are core supported employment who provide the same levels of on-going support, so that's where I think the fuzzy lines come in. Also, the staff tends to advocate for the employee, whether that's in the work place looking for promotions, career changes, if some things are not working out, then the staff member from the agency tends to take on that kind of role. The other things is the agency thing is the agency tends to do things like – transport, train, we might get involved with the accommodation services, we may even help with social security, and budgets. I know staff who have helped people move house. They may do anything that nobody else is out there to do. Those are the common trends in the model. I have seen a number of them in Australia as they tend to fall into that kind of pattern.

This model has been very successful. It has been great for the employment and career opportunities for ourselves, and it has really seen a lot of people with disabilities going into employment, but we've got a long way to go. There is a lot more people with disabilities who aren't getting into employment, and lots of people working in sheltered workshops who aren't getting into open employment. We have been successful, but we've got a long way to go.

Job co-ordinator approach is one approach to helping people get into individual jobs. I think we've tended to think the job co-ordinator approach equals how you

get people into jobs, where there may be other ways. I think that we have to be lateral in thinking about how the other ways might develop in the future.

Two of the disadvantages with job co-ordinator approach have been, I know that there's a variation in retention rate, but in the United States with all the job coach type approaches, average retention rate only averaged out about 50-60%. So that's great, 50-60% of the people going into jobs are staying in jobs, but what about the other 40% So we have to look seriously at those people that are losing jobs and not getting back into employment. There are some programs that are doing some things very well, and there are some areas where the follow up has been very intense which is really great, but let's be serious about looking at the problems. This kind of approach that we're using has not solved all our problems yet.

One of the other things is that with the job co-ordinator approach it tends to create problems with fading and dependency. One of the things that can happen is that as soon as you bring somebody new into a work environment, and start the training and support of that person, you can create dependency problem in relation to the employee with the disability doesn't want you to go, so they keep on going things to maybe keep you in the work environment, and sometimes job co-ordinators become dependent on work sites, as they get too much reinforcement from staying there. I know that a lot of us have been aware or that, and try to build mechanisms to try and deal with it, but it is one of its disadvantages.

When people involved with normalisation initially told me of the problems I was really defensive, but we have to recognise that by providing a job co-ordinator to go in with the person with the disability, it is quite an obtrusive or unnatural way of providing support to people who go into the work force. It changed the work place, and it changed the dynamics of the work place.

It can also be costly to place and support some individuals. At PE we have project to help people leave ATC's in WA's west. We were finding that the job co-ordinators approach was very expensive with some individuals with more moderate to severe disabilities, because you end up providing on-going on the job support, to those individuals, in individual jobs. That really challenged us, 'how can we do it more effectively and still have the same outcomes?'

We need to be real when looking at what the problems are with job co-ordinators. The way we have approached open employment in the past tends to have been an extension of disability services which are externally imposed in natural work environments.

Mark Boldsworth, and Ballamy developed their technology in Universities and segregated work settings, they weren't an integrated environment. That's where it was all set up, clinical university type situations, not in natural work environments.

What Nisbett and Hagnar challenged me in that 1988 article was that we should be looking at more is to examine the social interaction and supports within a work place and then build upon and augment the natural process and interaction. So rather than looking more at what the employment situation is in the particular work place, have a look at the natural support, the training supplement it to make sure that it will work. Along with this it means that we have to really look and become familiar with what the business has to offer, the way they train and development, the way they look at careers, at skill, at job re-structuring. What we have to do every time we go to see an employer is become part of the work environment, the employment sector, and know their work and rules, and look at their system.

One of the things that we do, if you look at the literature on work places – natural work places, is that first of all there's informal interaction flourish at work, which provides a very supportive function to all of us. If you look at the research on what sort of informal interactions happen at work, these are the things that happen – joking, teasing, helping with work, catting casually, discussing works, coffee breaks, discussing personal life, asking or giving advice, and teaching and demonstrating work tasks. Now these are natural work environments, not show workshops, or where an agency has been involved, this is what happens typically in a work environment. These things add support to people, and we should really think about these things when trying to build the person with the disability into the work place.

Patterns of variation across work places. One of the things that we've seen in the past is we try and come down to a set of skills that people need to become a part of the work places. We really need to look at the environment, the culture, the ways that people interact in work places, and work from there, rather than the research stating that people need to be quiet, and keep on task. The research overall shows that patterns and interactions vary so greatly between work places, we also need to take individual approaches with employers and work places.

Finally there is support available naturally within work environments. The companies do value training, they do train their staff, they do have supervisors, they do have pre-development programs (most of them do anyway), and that we can tap into them and supplement them. Those three things are things we really need to keep in mind when approaching work environments.

In PE, Perth we are building upon the notion of co-workers supporting people with disabilities. I know a lot of job co-ordinator, job coach type people often informally develop co-workers to take on a role, especially to help with fading and support. But that's we're doing is to negotiate that before the person starts a job. Identify a so-worker, train the co-worker in how to show, tell, coach and watch the worker, and train them so from a very beginning, on the first day the person starts a job, they have responsibility for supporting the person with a disability. The other things we are looking at is actually providing remuneration to the employer, and/or the co-

worker so the costs are off-set. We are not placing a person with a disability into a job and not give them any support, we are training their staff, and we're also providing direct financial assistance to off-set the costs of training. Any time that an employer has a co-worker, especially if it fits part of a training guarantee program, it can be attributed to the training guarantee, being 1% remuneration. So there are other benefits, that we're starting to build in for employers to use this kind of approach. We continue to have a relationship with the employer, but it shifts from a job co-ordinator approach to more of a support person and consultant to the employer.

With this co-worker model we've been looking at it in more of a research approach. Some of the programs in the United States that are using co-worker strategies are finding that some typical things are coming out. First of all it taps into the parent involvement that I talked about earlier. A lot of the jobs are building them a natural support right from the job securing stage. Also really looking at designing and negotiating the job to build interaction and support into the job design, so people aren't just working solitary.

One of the jobs I fine most difficult to keep people in, because there's not a lot of natural support from interaction, is cleaning. Especially one cleaner in a factory, because nobody takes any sort of natural responsibility. So we need to look at things like adopting a consultant role, not a co-ordinator but a consultant, a support person to the employer. We also need to use different procedures for job training for whatever the business does, and supplement that, and read the work place culture and include informal routines.

One of the myths that I think we have is that people's disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, can't cope with informal routines. These people are beginning to dins that if you build it in right from the very beginning, people with intellectual disabilities are coping with change, interruptions, and so on, and that really helps with retaining their jobs.

The last final point, is matching a person into a job, they're looking at commonalities, and helping to promote commonalities to all people. So really with relationships, what they are doing, is really identifying that the co-worker has similar kind of interests where ever possible, or trying to build up the commonalities between people and work places.