

EMPLOYMENT MODELS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR THE INCLUSION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

Gülce Güner - Wise Academy, Sweden
Emre Hüseyin Yiğit - Wise Academy, Sweden

Abstract

This chapter explores the critical role employment plays for People with Intellectual Disability (PwID), highlighting it as a means for achieving dignity, independence, and societal contribution, and how sectorial barriers still persist, despite progress in disability rights. Moreover, it examines employment models and practices to enhance workforce inclusion, promoting a more equitable society, addressing the impact of misconceptions on employment opportunities and exploring models like Supported Employment, Sheltered Workshops, Integrated Employment, and Customised Employment, each providing pathways to inclusion. Best practices including accessibility, accommodations, and inclusive hiring are discussed, with real-life examples demonstrating their effectiveness. Ultimately, this chapter aims to offer insights into creating more inclusive employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities, advocating for systemic changes in the job market.

Keywords: Intellectual Disability; Employment Inclusion; Supported Employment; Workplace Accommodations; Inclusive Hiring Practices.

Relevance of the Chapter for People with Intellectual Disability (PwID)

This chapter has a significant impact on People with Intellectual disability (PwID) as it addresses the obstacles they encounter when seeking meaningful employment. This text examines employment models such as Supported Employment and Integrated Employment, emphasising the ways in which they promote independence and social inclusion for PwID. The chapter promotes the significance of inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations, and advocates for the elimination of stereotypes that restrict the workforce participation of PwID. By providing valuable insights and exemplary methods, this guide plays a vital role in establishing a job market that is more inclusive. It is a resource for employers, policymakers, and advocates who are committed to empowering these individuals.

Objectives of this Training Subsection

- Equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement inclusive hiring practices and workplace accommodations for PwID.
- Challenge and change prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions about PwID, fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion within organisations.
- Provide practical strategies for integrating Supported Employment, Sheltered Workshops, Integrated Employment, and Customised Employment models, enhancing employment opportunities and workplace participation for PwID.

Cite as: Güner, G., & Hüseyin Yiğit, E. (2024). Employment Models and Best Practices for the Inclusion of Individuals with Intellectual Disability. In C. Sousa, J. Pereira, & C. Casimiro (Eds.), *No Barriers: Strategies and Best Practices for the Employment of Individuals with Intellectual Disability* (pp. 87-100). Edições Universitárias Lusófonas. <https://doi.org/10.24140/nobarriers.v1.p02.03>

Introduction

Employment represents far more than just a means to earn a livelihood; it embodies the principles of dignity, independence, and the ability to make meaningful contributions to society. Nevertheless, individuals with intellectual disabilities have long faced formidable hurdles in accessing employment opportunities. Despite advancements in recognizing and upholding the rights of individuals with disabilities, substantial barriers persist within the job market. In the forthcoming chapter, we delve into various employment models and exemplary practices designed to cultivate the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the workforce. Through this exploration, our project chapter aims to shed light on strategies that can facilitate greater participation and integration of individuals with intellectual disabilities into the workforce, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Understanding the Importance of Inclusion

Employing individuals with intellectual disabilities is not solely a matter of social justice; it's also a strategic business decision. By embracing workplace diversity and fostering inclusivity, organisations cultivate a dynamic environment enriched by a variety of perspectives and talents. Individuals with disabilities bring unique communication skills, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness & self-regulation to teams, enhancing collaboration and innovation. Moreover, their presence promotes a culture of empathy and understanding, which in turn strengthens team dynamics and morale. Through effective time management & work ethic, problem-solving, and adaptability, individuals with disabilities demonstrate their capabilities and commitment, contributing meaningfully to overall productivity and creativity. By providing opportunities for these individuals, organisations not only enrich their workforce but also uphold fundamental values of equality and respect, creating a more vibrant and successful workplace for all.

Addressing Common Misconceptions

Integrating individuals with intellectual disabilities into the workforce faces significant hurdles rooted in pervasive misconceptions and stereotypes. These biases often lead to discrimination and barriers during the hiring process, overshadowing the diverse abilities and potential contributions of these individuals.

Employers' reluctance to provide equitable opportunities, coupled with the lack of support systems and accommodations, further compounds the challenges faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities. To address these issues, it's crucial to challenge stereotypes, promote awareness, and implement inclusive hiring practices and support mechanisms.

By fostering inclusive environments and recognizing the value of diversity, organizations can harness the unique perspectives and talents of individuals with intellectual disabilities, driving innovation and fostering social inclusion within the workforce. Embracing inclusivity not only benefits individuals but also enriches workplaces and society as a whole.

Models of Employment

Supported Employment

Supported Employment emerged as an approach to enhance the participation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. The roots of this model date back to the 1960s and 1970s and are a product of the disability rights movement of that era. As part of the efforts to increase the integration and independence of people with disabilities in society, the necessity for them to be able to enter the workforce and be employed in competitive jobs was emphasised.

This model not only focuses on helping individuals with disabilities find jobs but also on succeeding in their jobs. Unlike traditional rehabilitation approaches, Supported Employment aims to provide personalised support tailored to individual needs and skills. This support encompasses various aspects, starting from the hiring process to ongoing coaching and adjustment in the workplace to enhance job success.

Today, Supported Employment practices are observed across a broad spectrum. Through collaborations between public agencies, non-profit organisations, and the private sector, various programs and services are offered to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities. These programs focus on increasing awareness among employers about individuals with disabilities, ensuring appropriate workplace accommodations, and supporting the hiring process.

The fundamental principle of Supported Employment is to facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce and maximize their potential. This model represents a significant step towards increasing diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, while also ensuring equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in society.

Sheltered Workshops

Sheltered workshops have historically served as environments where individuals with disabilities can participate in productive work activities within a supportive framework. Sheltered workshops began in the mid-nineteenth century typically as extensions of educational or medical institutions (National Disability Rights Network [NDRN], 2012; Nelson, 1972). Originating from a desire to offer meaningful engagement and skill development, these workshops initially aimed to create a safe and accommodating space for individuals who faced barriers to employment in traditional settings due to their disabilities. The advent of sheltered workshops coincided with evolving societal attitudes toward disability and labour rights. They were often established by charitable organisations, government agencies, or private entities with the intention of providing vocational training, employment, and socialisation opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These workshops offered a range of activities, including assembly work, packaging, crafts, and other tasks, tailored to accommodate various abilities and support the personal growth of participants.

In recent years, there has been a shift in focus from sheltered workshops toward integrated employment settings. While sheltered workshops have provided valuable opportunities for skill development

and socialisation, there is a growing recognition of the importance of promoting greater independence and community integration for individuals with disabilities. Integrated employment settings emphasise inclusion and participation in mainstream workplaces alongside individuals without disabilities.

Today, the approach to sheltered workshops varies across different regions and jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions have implemented policies and initiatives to phase out sheltered workshops in favour of integrated employment options. These initiatives often involve providing support such as job coaching, workplace accommodations, and skills training to facilitate the transition of individuals from sheltered workshops to integrated employment settings.

However, it is important to acknowledge that sheltered workshops continue to exist in some communities and serve as a viable option for individuals with disabilities who may benefit from a more structured and supportive environment. Efforts are underway to enhance the quality of services provided in sheltered workshops and ensure that individuals have access to a range of employment options based on their preferences, abilities, and support needs.

Integrated Employment

Integrated employment refers to the practice of individuals with disabilities working alongside individuals without disabilities in regular workplaces, rather than in segregated or sheltered environments. In integrated employment settings, individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to perform a variety of job tasks and roles that match their skills, interests, and abilities, just like their peers without disabilities.

The key principles of integrated employment include:

- **Inclusion:** Integrated employment promotes the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce, fostering a diverse and supportive workplace environment where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and succeed.
- **Equality:** Integrated employment emphasises equality of opportunity, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to the same employment opportunities, rights, and benefits as their neurotypical counterparts.

- **Individualised Support:** Integrated employment recognizes that individuals with disabilities may require different types and levels of support to succeed in the workplace. Support services such as job coaching, accommodations, and skills training are provided based on the unique needs of each individual.
- **Community Integration:** Integrated employment facilitates the integration of individuals with disabilities into the broader community, promoting social connections, relationships, and participation in community life beyond the workplace.

Integrated employment is often seen as a preferred alternative to sheltered workshops or segregated employment settings, as it promotes greater autonomy, independence, and self-determination for individuals with disabilities.

Integrated employment also has a variety of attributes and different methods of support. Integrated employment is also referred to as community-based employment, competitive employment, open employment, customised employment, inclusive employment or supported employment. This type of employment is characterised by a community-based setting where individuals work alongside coworkers, regardless of disability. The wages are comparable to those of all coworkers, and the support model follows a place-train-support approach (Janero et al., 2002).

Customised Employment

Customised employment refers to competitive integrated employment, for person with a significant disability, that is based on an individualised determination of the strengths, needs, and interests, and is designed to meet the specific abilities of the person with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer (Inge et al., 2022).

Customised employment is a relationship between an employer and an employee that is negotiated to meet the needs of both parties. It is based on an exchange of specific contributions by the employee for pay by the employer at or above minimum wage. Customised employment is a universal employment strategy and is especially useful for employment seekers with significant life complexities and barriers to employment, such as severe disability (Inge et al., 2022).

Customised employment represents a paradigm shift in how employment services are delivered to individuals with disabilities. Instead of trying to fit individuals into existing jobs, customised employment focuses on creating job roles that are specifically tailored to the strengths, abilities, and preferences of each individual. This may involve conducting comprehensive assessments to identify the individual's skills, interests, and support needs, as well as exploring creative solutions for job creation and workplace accommodations. One of the key principles of customised employment is the emphasis on collaboration between the individual, vocational rehabilitation professionals, and potential employers. This collaborative approach allows for a thorough understanding of the individual's capabilities and the identification of potential job opportunities that align with their strengths and interests. Employers are encouraged to think creatively about how they can customise job roles to accommodate the unique abilities of individuals with disabilities while meeting the needs of their business.

Today, customised employment is recognized as a promising practice for promoting meaningful employment outcomes and community integration for individuals with disabilities. It is increasingly integrated into vocational rehabilitation programs and supported employment services across various settings, including public agencies, non-profit organisations, and private sector initiatives. The person-centred approach of customised employment underscores the importance of recognizing the unique talents and contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Best Practices for Inclusive Employment

Accessibility and Accommodations

Employers play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive workplace environment where individuals with intellectual disabilities can thrive. Prioritising accessibility and providing reasonable accommodations are essential steps in ensuring that all employees, regardless of their abilities, can fully participate and contribute to the workforce. Let's delve into some real-life examples of accessibility measures

and accommodations that can support individuals with intellectual disabilities in the workplace:

1. Physical Modifications

- Installing wheelchair ramps, handrails, and elevators to ensure access to all areas of the workplace.
- Adjusting desk heights, door widths, and workstation layouts to accommodate individuals who use mobility aids or have physical limitations.
- Creating designated quiet areas or sensory-friendly spaces where employees can take breaks and manage sensory sensitivities.

2. Assistive Technologies

- Providing screen readers, speech-to-text software, and magnification tools for individuals with visual impairments to access digital information and documents.
- Offering ergonomic keyboards, specialised mice, and adaptive computer software to assist employees with motor skill challenges in navigating technology and completing tasks.
- Utilising communication devices, picture schedules, and visual aids to support individuals with communication difficulties in expressing themselves and understanding instructions.

3. Flexible Work Arrangements

- Allowing for flexible scheduling options, such as telecommuting, part-time work, or modified hours, to accommodate individuals with varying energy levels and transportation needs.
- Implementing job-sharing arrangements or task rotations to provide opportunities for skill development and accommodate diverse abilities and preferences.
- Offering remote work options and virtual meeting platforms to facilitate participation and collaboration for employees who may face challenges with commuting or social interactions.

4. Training and Support

- Providing disability awareness training and resources for supervisors, coworkers, and support staff to promote understanding, empathy, and effective communication.
- Designating mentors or peer support networks to offer

guidance, encouragement, and assistance to individuals with intellectual disabilities as they navigate workplace tasks and social dynamics.

- Partnering with vocational rehabilitation agencies, disability advocacy organisations, and community resources to access specialised services, job coaching, and ongoing support for employees and employers alike.

Training and Education

Providing training and education for both employers and coworkers is essential for fostering an inclusive work environment. This may involve disability awareness training, communication strategies, and promoting a culture of respect and understanding.

Creating an inclusive work environment requires a commitment to ongoing training and education for both employers and coworkers. By investing in disability awareness training, communication strategies, and promoting a culture of respect and understanding, organisations can foster an atmosphere where all individuals, regardless of their abilities, feel valued and supported. Let's explore some real-life examples of how training and education can enhance accessibility and accommodations in the workplace.

1. Disability Awareness Training

- Providing comprehensive disability awareness training sessions for all employees to increase understanding and empathy towards individuals with disabilities.
- Offering workshops and seminars facilitated by experts or individuals with lived experiences to address common misconceptions, stereotypes, and barriers faced by individuals with disabilities.
- Incorporating interactive activities, case studies, and real-life examples to illustrate the diverse range of disabilities and the importance of inclusion in the workplace.

2. Communication Strategies

- Implementing training programs focused on effective communication techniques and strategies when interacting

with individuals with disabilities.

- Teaching employees how to use person-first language and respectful terminology when referring to individuals with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect.
- Providing guidance on how to engage in meaningful conversations, ask appropriate questions, and offer support without making assumptions or judgments based on disability.

3. Promoting a Culture of Respect and Understanding

- Encouraging open dialogue and discussion forums where employees can share their experiences, concerns, and perspectives related to disability inclusion in the workplace.
- Recognizing and celebrating diversity through inclusive events, awareness campaigns, and employee recognition programs that highlight the contributions and achievements of individuals with disabilities.
- Creating opportunities for collaboration, teamwork, and mentorship among employees from diverse backgrounds to foster mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation for each other's unique talents and perspectives.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Collaboration between employers, government agencies, non-profit organisations, and community stakeholders is essential for creating pathways to employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. By working together, stakeholders can identify barriers, share resources, and develop innovative solutions to promote inclusive employment practices.

Establishing effective partnerships and fostering collaboration among employers, government agencies, non-profit organisations, and community stakeholders is pivotal in creating meaningful pathways to employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. By leveraging collective expertise, resources, and networks, stakeholders can identify barriers, share best practices, and develop innovative solutions to promote inclusive employment practices and facilitate workforce participation. Let's delve into real-life examples of partnerships and

collaboration initiatives:

1. Employer Engagement Programs

- Collaborating with local businesses and industries to create internship programs, apprenticeships, and job shadowing opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Developing employer toolkits and resources that provide guidance on recruiting, hiring, and retaining individuals with disabilities, including information on reasonable accommodations and workplace inclusion practices.
- Facilitating employer forums and roundtable discussions where businesses can exchange ideas, share success stories, and address common challenges related to disability employment.

2. Government Agency Partnerships

- Partnering with vocational rehabilitation agencies, state departments of labour, and workforce development boards to coordinate services, funding, and support for individuals with intellectual disabilities seeking employment.
- Aligning policies and initiatives to promote inclusive hiring practices, remove systemic barriers, and incentivize employers to hire and retain individuals with disabilities through tax incentives, grants, and workforce training programs.
- Collaborating with disability advocacy groups and legal organisations to ensure compliance with disability rights legislation, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act.

3. Non-profit and Community Organization Collaboration

- Forming partnerships with disability-specific non-profit organisations, such as advocacy groups, independent living centres, and disability service providers, to offer job readiness training, skills development programs, and career coaching services.
- Establishing community-based job clubs, peer support networks, and mentorship programs that connect individuals with disabilities to meaningful employment opportunities, social networks, and community resources.
- Engaging faith-based organisations, civic groups, and

philanthropic foundations in awareness campaigns, fundraising efforts, and volunteer initiatives aimed at promoting disability inclusion and economic empowerment.

Economic and Social Benefits

Beyond the moral imperative of inclusion, the decision to employ individuals with intellectual disabilities brings forth a multitude of tangible economic and social benefits. These benefits not only enrich the workplace environment but also contribute to the overall success and sustainability of businesses. Let's explore in detail the economic and social advantages of embracing disability inclusion in the workforce, supplemented with real-life examples:

1. Enhanced Employee Satisfaction and Productivity

- Inclusive workplaces that prioritise diversity and disability inclusion often experience higher levels of employee satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty.
- Research studies have demonstrated that employees who work in environments where diversity is valued and respected are more motivated, committed, and productive.
- For example, a study conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity found that companies with diverse workforces reported 2.3 times higher cash flow per employee compared to those with less diversity.

2. Increased Innovation and Problem-Solving

- Embracing diversity, including individuals with intellectual disabilities, fosters a culture of creativity, innovation, and problem-solving within organisations.
- Diverse teams bring together a variety of perspectives, experiences, and ideas, leading to more innovative solutions and approaches to business challenges.
- Companies that actively seek out diverse talent pools are better positioned to develop products, services, and strategies that resonate with a wide range of consumers and markets.
- For instance, Microsoft's Autism Hiring Program actively recruits individuals on the autism spectrum for roles in software engineering, data analysis, and cybersecurity, recognizing the

unique talents and contributions they bring to the organisation.

3. Improved Customer Relations and Market Adaptability

- Businesses that embrace diversity and disability inclusion are better equipped to understand and meet the needs of a diverse customer base.
- Employing individuals with intellectual disabilities can enhance customer relations, promote brand loyalty, and drive business growth by tapping into previously underserved markets and demographic segments.
- Companies that demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion often enjoy stronger reputations, increased brand awareness, and a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining both customers and top talent.
- For example, Starbucks' "Diverse by Design" initiative aims to create inclusive stores and workplaces where customers and employees of all backgrounds feel welcome and valued.

Acknowledgements

This chapter was developed in the scope of the No Barriers to Employment project (2022-1-SE01-KA220-ADU-000089826).

References

- Inge, K. J., Sima, A. P., Riesen, T., Wehman, P., & Brooks-Lane, N. (2023). The Essential Elements of Customized Employment: Results From a National Survey of Employment Providers. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 66(3), 170-185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00343552221088256>
- Jenaro, C., Mank, D., Bottomley, J., Doose, S., & Tuckerman, P. (2002). Supported employment in the international context: An analysis of processes and outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 17(1), 5–21.
- National Disability Rights Network. (2012). *Segregated and Exploited: the Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work*. NDRN.
- Nelson, N. (1972). Workshops for the Handicapped in the United States: An Historical and Developmental Perspective. *Physical Therapy*, 52(5). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ptj/52.5.601b>