

Work Customization

Creating Employment Opportunities
For People with a Disability in Today's Workforce



inside front cover

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Diversity Includes.



**New Brunswick
Association for
Community Living**

**Association du
Nouveau-Brunswick
pour l'intégration
communautaire**

On se ressemble.

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Introduction

This guide is designed for employment specialists and job developers who work to assist people who have a disability to secure and sustain employment within their communities.

Many people with disabilities successfully compete for and obtain employment through a traditional job search and hiring process. They are able to do or learn the tasks associated with existing job openings – sometimes with such support or other accommodations that may be required. Other individuals, however, may not be able to complete the essential functions and tasks of existing jobs as they are defined by businesses and employers. This can lead to frustration for job seekers and employment specialists who are trying to compete on the open job market. Some individuals may be seen as being unqualified or lacking in the skills necessary to work in the community. Both job seekers and employment specialists often become discouraged when they cannot find jobs.

Increasingly, the concept of work customization or customized employment is gaining popularity as a way to create new employment opportunities for people with a disability. While not a new concept, work customization strategies are attracting greater attention as employers increasingly struggle to meet their labour market needs. Indeed, work customization is being used to support a variety of employees to work in ways that are tailored to their own circumstances and needs.

Through this guide work customization will be explored in a number of ways. An overview of work customization will be provided along with a description of who will most benefit from this approach. Work customization practices and strategies will be reviewed along with the principles that help to guide the actions of employment specialists as they use this approach. Lastly, the work customization process will be explored. This process involves four essential steps that should be fully understood prior to engaging in this job development approach.

Employment in Today's Economy

You're just about to customize and enjoy your burger.

A job at Harvey's is no different. Custom jobs live here.

Standard is lame. Get it how you want it.
(Harvey's Restaurant job poster)

The workforce of today is evolving. The global and developing service based economy is forcing changes to the 9 to 5 employment model. Jobs are available that do not fit this model and some jobs no longer need to be performed at a specific workplace.

In addition, the workforce is aging. Many workers are retiring or will retire over the coming years. In New Brunswick, many younger workers are leaving the province to secure employment opportunities in other provinces and countries. While population growth has been identified as a real need and an important goal, many sectors of the economy are facing increasing difficulty finding workers who are qualified to fill available positions.

With greater competition for workers, new approaches are required to address labour market demands. Many available jobs are still defined by multi-duty functions and responsibilities as well as terms based primarily on employer demands. Increasingly, however, employers are recognizing



that there is a need to be more *flexible* in their approach to hiring the people they require (as indicated by the Harvey's job poster quoted at the beginning of this section). Workers are looking for more autonomy and customization in developing the terms and conditions of their employment. In addition, workers who have been traditionally excluded from the labour market are increasingly being offered opportunities to fill job vacancies in many sectors of the economy.

Employer flexibility in the hiring process is a great opportunity to secure work for people with a disability (and particularly for people who have more difficulty competing for jobs on the open labour market). Flexibility may involve a number of considerations such as job duties, work hours, employment expectations, and the ways and places in which work is accomplished. Employment specialists and job developers need to be prepared to identify and develop these opportunities and to work effectively with job seekers and employers to address their mutual goals and needs.



Connecting People with Opportunities: An Overview of Work Customization

What is Work Customization?

Work customization is a process of individualizing an employment relationship between a job seeker and an employer so that the goals and needs of each are addressed. It is an employment arrangement that is based on:

- Determining the unique strengths, interests and needs of the job seeker; and
- Determining the labour and business needs of an employer. (U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), 2006).

Many employers customise work relationships for their employees by considering a person's circumstances, strengths and preferences. The difference with work customization in this context is that it typically starts *before* a person begins a job – usually through a process of negotiation that results in a mutually beneficial employment relationship.

What are the Essential Elements of a Customized Job?

A customized job is one that is designed from the outset to fit the person (as opposed to the person having to fit an available job). It can involve many elements including:

- Hours and place of work;
- Identified job duties and responsibilities; and
- Work expectations.

Typically, a customized job for a person with a disability involves a “set of tasks that differ from the employer's standard job descriptions” (U.S. Department of Labour, ODEP, 2006). The job still involves tasks that are essential to the workplace and that add value to the employer's business or operation. These are not “charity” positions but real jobs that contribute to the overall operation and productivity of the business.

Who Will Benefit Most from Work Customization?

It is critical to remember that many people with a disability can compete for and successfully do jobs that are available on the open job market. These

individuals may still need some assistance in securing employment and may also require accommodations to successfully undertake and complete their job tasks.

Work customization will be of most benefit under the following circumstances:

- For job seekers who constantly struggle in securing employment in the day-to-day competitive job market.
- For people whose abilities would likely not be recognized through a typical employment application and interview process.
- For people who face barriers to employment including:
 - People with fewer skills or education
 - People who may have difficulty with some job tasks or responsibilities
 - People who lack adequate childcare or transportation resources

Deciding when to pursue work customization on behalf of a particular job seeker will require a solid understanding of the person's unique abilities, preferences and needs as a potential worker. This aspect of the work customization process is reviewed later in the section *Knowing the Job Seeker and Exploring Employment Possibilities*.

What is the Difference between Work Customization and Supported Employment?

With supported employment the process of securing employment is "driven by what jobs are available, advertised, or easy to find in that community" (Community Living British Columbia (CLBC), 2008). With work customization, emphasis is placed on getting to know the job seeker without "preconceived ideas of appropriate work or what is typically available in the local job market" (CLBC, 2008). This approach involves the discovery of the individual as the "driving force" in the job development process. As a result, work customization leads to highly individualized jobs that create a beneficial relationship between the job seeker and employer.

What is the Difference between Work Customization and Job Accommodations?

In a general sense, a customized job is an important accommodation for a job seeker who may not have an opportunity for employment. Without the

agreement to create such an arrangement the person would continue to face significant barriers to entering the labour market.

More specifically, however, there is an important distinction between the two concepts that should be understood. Work customization involves identifying and tailoring a person's work duties and terms of employment that match his or his skills and the business needs of an employer. Job accommodations seek to further address difficulties that may be encountered in successfully completing assigned job tasks.

Some, but certainly not all, employees with a disability may need accommodations in the workplace (even when a job has been customized) in order to become and remain productive and efficient workers. Accommodations will depend on the individual hired and the requirements for the job to be done.

Defining what is needed is the first step of the job accommodation process. Answering the following questions may be helpful:

- What in the workplace might make it difficult to the new employee to be as effective and productive as possible?
- What can be done, what changes or accommodations can be made to reduce or eliminate any causes of the difficulties identified?

Very often, accommodations are simple changes that are not costly. Accommodations may include obtaining or modifying equipment or devices, providing extra time to complete job tasks, providing cues and prompts to enable workers to remember the sequence of job tasks, and so on.



Work Customization Principles and Indicators

As you seek to explore and develop customized work opportunities for people that you represent, keep the following principles in mind. They will serve to keep the process focused on the important aspects of the work customization process.

- In customized employment, an employer voluntarily negotiates specific job duties and employee expectations.
- The negotiated employment relationship addresses the strengths, interests and needs of the job seeker and the workforce needs of the employer.
- When designing customized employment, a job seeker is the primary source of information and decides how he or she will explore the job market.
- The job seeker controls the planning process for customized employment that captures his or her preferences, interests, and connections in the community.
- Prior to planning, time may be required to uncover the job seeker's unique abilities, interests and needs.

- Work customization results in jobs that fit the individual and therefore have the potential for advancement for job seekers who have been excluded from the workforce.
- In customized employment, work occurs in an integrated and individualized work situation in the community and results in pay at the prevailing wage for the job being completed.

(Adapted from: *Customized Employment: Practical Solutions for Employment Success*, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2005)

In addition to the above principles, there are a number of important indicators of successful work customization:

- In a customized job the employee has a "personalized" job description and/or other work terms and expectations that did not exist prior to the negotiations with the employer.
- The employee is making a "tangible" contribution to the employer's business or organization.
- The employee is hired and paid directly by the employer (although the hiring and interview process may be based on a negotiated arrangement facilitated by an employment specialist).



Work Customization Practices and Strategies

Work customization may involve a number of practices and strategies. The key starting point is that each customized job is a *personalized* employment relationship that is tailored to the unique abilities and interests of the job seeker and to the needs of an employer. Below is a brief description of a number of strategies that may be used to create a customized job that address a real business need and that highlight potential impacts on employer productivity and results.

1. Developing a negotiated job description.

This strategy involves a review of all of the tasks in a work setting and the negotiation of a job based on the selection of one or more tasks that form a new, personalized job description. An analysis of the current tasks and how they are performed within the workplace is often an important component of developing a negotiated job.

Example: A local discount department store was having difficulty with its shoe department - shoes were not getting on the shelves on time and the shelves were constantly disorganized and messy. Shoe sales were poor. The store manager realized it was an area that needed improvement, but other employees were either too busy or not interested in the tasks associated with the shoe section.

A local employment agency introduced the store manager to Michelle, a young woman with an intellectual disability who wanted to work in a retail store. While Michelle could not do all the tasks associated with working in retail sales, she was very capable of stocking the shoe shelves and keeping them maintained.

Moreover, it was a job she enjoyed. The employer agreed to hire Michelle to do this customized part-time job that matched her skills and interests.

Shortly after Michelle was hired, shoe sales increased

From: Nova Scotia Association for Community Living

2. Developing a “created” job description. This strategy involves the creation and negotiation of the job based on the unmet needs in an employer’s workplace. In this strategy, a workplace analysis will be conducted to determine what, if anything, needs to be done that is routinely left unaccomplished by the employer’s current employment arrangements. Alternatively, the job could be one in which a new role is created that enhances the employer’s business or operation.

Example: Noah is a 23-year-old man with significant developmental and physical disabilities. He is able to get around in a motorized wheelchair with a slight touch of his left hand. Noah’s employment specialist, Kelly, talked to him about having a person-centered career planning meeting where he would call the shots. He decided to try it and invited his two best friends, his parents, his vocational rehabilitation counselor, and Kelly to the meeting. The discussion focused on Noah’s abilities and capabilities rather than what he couldn’t do.

Noah wanted a job where he could socialize with others, work part-time, and be no more than 30 minutes from his home. Noah mentioned that he enjoyed going to the local mall very much and felt like this would be an ideal place to try. Since Noah said that he wanted a job where he could move around and meet a lot of people, Kelly suggested the idea of delivering food.

The idea was to create a delivery service with one of the restaurants in the mall. First a survey was conducted with retail workers at the mall to ascertain whether they would pay more for a delivery service and which restaurant they would like delivery from. The results of the survey found that 60% of retail workers from the three largest stores in the mall would pay more for a delivery service. The retail personnel had only 30 minutes for lunch, and a delivery service would allow them more time to relax and eat. The restaurant of choice was identified and a proposal presented to the manager.

The manager was able to sell the idea to the restaurant’s owners, and Noah was hired. His job entailed going around in the mornings to get coffee and muffin orders, delivering those items, and then getting and delivering lunch orders midday. This job satisfied Noah’s need to be with others and have a job where he was moving around, and it increased the employer’s business.

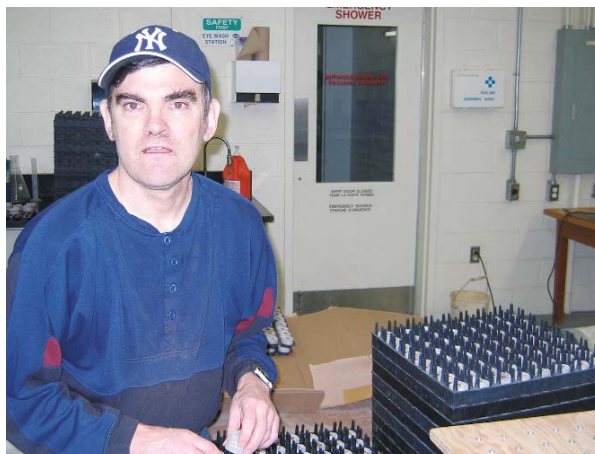
From: When Existing Jobs Don’t Fit: A Guide to Job Creation, National Center on Workforce and Disability, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts, 2004.

3. Carving a job. A “carved” job involves the negotiation of a job description that is based on the tasks of a single job within a workplace. In this respect, the carved job will contain one or more, but not all, of the tasks from the original job description (U.S. Department of Labor, ODEP, 2006).

Example: A local motel is dealing with a 200% turnover rate of its house cleaning staff. The owner is worried about the drop in customer service and satisfaction that can arise from an understaffed team but also cannot afford to continually hire new employees. Once a new hire is identified, a week is often required to provide proper training. This pulls the head house cleaner from regular duties and causes more overtime. When the process is completed, the cost to the owner could range from \$500 to \$2,000, largely in hidden cost. If the motel employed five cleaners and continued to suffer a turnover rate of 200% then the owner stood to lose upwards of \$20,000 a year.

An effective remedy to this problem would be to carve out less productive or duplicative efforts to make all workers more productive. Such tasks could include: stripping beds, emptying trash cans, stocking the supply carts and replenishing towels to the towel carts. This would create employment for an individual with an intellectual disability while making the overall team much more efficient. The increased productivity could dictate that the next vacancy not be filled, guaranteeing full employment for those remaining, while securing the need for the newly created assisting position.

(Griffin, Cary. *Facing the Future: Best Practices in Supported Employment: “Job Carving as a Job Development Strategy.”* 1996. Training Resource Network Inc. pp. 37- 38)



4. Negotiating hours and the location of work. With this strategy, an employment relationship is personalized so that the hours and/or location of work match the ability and needs of the job seeker. For example, some job duties may be able to be performed from a person’s home if leaving the home is difficult or if a job seeker prefers to work from home. Likewise, work hours can be adjusted to suit a job seeker’s needs (for example, if the job seeker gets too tired or can only be at the workplace at a certain time of the day).

Creativity is often the hallmark of developing a customized job by using these and other strategies. As each customized job will be unique, there is no particular formula that needs to be followed. There are, however, a few important steps in the process of developing customized employment opportunities. These are reviewed in the following section.

The Work Customization Process

Creating customized employment opportunities will meet with more success if job developers and employment specialists are able to facilitate the development process. This process typically involves the following steps or elements:

- Getting to know the job seeker and exploring employment possibilities;
- Developing a customized employment plan with the job seeker;
- Identifying and negotiating employment opportunities with local employers; and
- Supporting the employment opportunity once it has been established.

Each of these elements will be reviewed in greater detail.

1. Knowing the Job Seeker and Exploring Employment Possibilities

Work customization starts with knowing and understanding a person and his or her “ideal conditions of employment”. Some refer to this process as discovery (University of Montana, Rural Institute). During this process emphasis is placed on getting to know the person rather than looking for employment. Information about the person’s “interests, strengths, environments or activities

where they are at their best, supports that are effective for them, and present levels of performance, is gathered through a series of activities, interviews and observations” (University of Montana, Rural Institute, on-line).

Getting to know the person also involves understanding the person’s “unique contributions” and then later matching these to a relevant employer and job. In this context, a person’s potential contributions involve his or her:

- Skills (present and potential)
- Personality traits
- Interests and preferences
- Previous experiences
- Other strengths or ‘valued attributes’ (Griffin and Hammis, 2002)

Determining a person’s contributions may require time for discussion, interaction and planning. At times, it may be difficult to discover the contributions of people who have a disability. Taking time to explore and understand the person’s strengths, interests, preferences and needs is critical. It is also important to understand any potential barriers to implementing a customized work opportunity with the job seeker.

“Person centred” exploration and planning can be a very useful way of getting to know people well and to support people to guide the planning process. Person-centred planning refers to a number of approaches for assisting people identify their own visions and personal goals. Some key characteristics of this type of planning include:

- Learning about a person’s dreams, interests, talents, and what makes him or her unique;
- Assisting a person to identify his or her own vision of what he or she would like to do by asking, “What do you want?”;
- Continually focusing on the person for whom planning is being done and on his or her expressed wishes;
- Helping people to identify concrete dreams and goals and the ways to achieve these.

Further information about person centred planning can be found in the guidebook *Agents of Opportunity: Facilitating Community Participation for People with Disabilities* (New Brunswick Association for Community Living, 2005) or by visiting the website www.inclusion.com.

Planning for and Facilitating Customized Employment

Working to develop a customized employment opportunity requires a maintained focus of the job seeker’s strengths, interests, and needs for supports to “determine the conditions under which the job seeker with ‘shine’ as an employee” (U.S. Department of Labor, ODEP, no date). As a facilitator of this process, employment specialists will be required to:

- Believe that the job seeker can work
- Model confidence in the job seeker’s abilities to others
- Use a variety of strategies to understand the job seeker’s history and what will be required for success
- Emphasize the job seeker’s contributions and interests

(Adapted from: *Customized Employment: Applying Practical Solutions for Employment Success*, Vol. 2, U.S. Department of Labor, ODEP, no date)

In addition to the job seeker’s strengths, interests and employment related needs, planning needs to focus on other considerations such as:

- What is important to the person in a job or work situation?
- What will motivate the person to work and be successful?



Planning needs to involve some or all of the following steps:

- Spending time with the job seeker and other people who know the person well enough to offer positive information and insights.
- Learning about the person in various environments (such as busy and quiet places, indoors and outdoors, etc.).
- Assisting the person to learn about different types of jobs through strategies such as visiting a variety of work-sites, job shadowing, or temporary work experience opportunities.

In carrying out these activities, you may want to use a combination of conversation (with the job seeker, family members and others who are close to the person), interviews (particularly with other service providers and professionals who may know the person well), and observation. With observation, employment specialists will want to pay attention to:

- The time it takes the job seeker to do activities or to move from one place to another;
- The job seeker's interactions with others – both with people who are familiar and people who are strangers;
- The job seeker's way of making and communicating decisions;
- The job seeker's response to cues and prompts and how much the person relies on these strategies to undertake various activities;
- How the job seeker accomplishes tasks and what, if anything, frustrates the person;



- If the job seeker likes to do manual activities and to use his or her hands, how is this done (What activities? How quickly/slowly does the person perform the task? What help is needed? How well is the task accomplished? How long the person can work at the task?)

By learning as much as possible about the job seeker, a picture will begin to emerge about the kind of work that the job seeker can perform and the type of work environment that will be a good fit for the person.

2. Developing a Customized Employment Plan

Once a clear picture of the person has been developed, a plan for developing a customized work opportunity can be developed. It is critical that the job seeker direct the development of his or her own plan. This documented plan becomes the “blueprint” for the job seeker's employment search. A customized employment plan should involve the following elements:

- A description of the job seeker's strengths, qualities, and interests.
- An overview of the job seeker's potential contribution to a workplace or employer.
- A ‘task list’ that details the tasks that the job seeker can do, with or without additional support. (Some job seekers may only have one or two specific tasks that they can do for an employer while others may have a longer list of potential tasks they can promote).
- An outline of potential employers to be contacted. This can include a description of any personal connections to people who may be able to facilitate contacts with an employer. It may also include a summary of tasks that are known to exist within the employer's workplace that may link with the job seeker's task list.
- An identification of the supports and accommodations that will be required to find and keep a job (and how those will be provided).

(Adapted from: *Customized Employment: Practical Solutions for Employment Success*, U.S. Department of Labor, ODEP, 2005)

Once the plan is developed it can be used in a variety of ways. It can be used as a portfolio of the job seeker's strengths and abilities and form part of the person's resume. It can also form the basis of a proposal to a specific employer who will be approached to discuss possible employment opportunities.

3. Identifying and Negotiating Employment Opportunities

As the job seeker's plan begins to take shape, employment specialists can start the process of identifying specific employers that might fit the person's interests and skills. There are three possible steps that might be necessary in the work customization process:

- Identify (in a broad way) potential employers that might fit the job seeker's goals.
- Identify those employers that are the most promising prospects for employment and gather information about these employers.
- Approach an employer with a proposal to hire the job seeker using a work customization strategy.

For some job seekers this process may not take long as there may be a specific employer that is identified early in the planning process. In addition, as an employment specialist you may already have gathered a lot of information about the employer's workplace and labour needs.

Gathering Information about Workplace Practices and Employer Needs

Successful work customization requires an understanding of the business or organization and its operations. In most situations, this will require that employment specialists spend time with employers to gather information and to identify specific opportunities for customized employment.

Remember that at this point the goal is to gather information about potential opportunities. Avoid talking about customized employment or a specific job seeker until you have been able to determine how a customized relationship may be able to address an employer need or provide ideas for improving the employer's overall operation.

There are a few strategies that help to uncover important information about employer operations and needs.

Ask Key Questions. During an interview with an employer directed questions may help to reveal opportunities for customized employment. Consider using the following questions:

- What tasks in your business/work setting are sometimes left undone or unfinished?
- Do your employees have any duties that take away from their main area of expertise?



- What job tasks presently assigned to employees could be re-assigned to allow employees to spend more time on more central tasks?
- Do you regularly pay overtime or need temporary work services?
- Are there regular challenges to getting work done?
- Is there a particular area where you need more help?
- What is your real workforce need?
- As an employer, are you willing to be flexible in assigning job tasks and other employment terms in order to (i) better address your labour needs, or (ii) create a more efficient or productive business?

(National Center on Workforce and Disability, Institute for Community Inclusion, 2004)

Observe Business Operations. Observation can also be an effective way of identifying potential opportunities for customizing a job. Observing a business' operations may take some time and require being on the work-site on more than one occasion. Some business operations may be public places that can be observed (at least in part) before you meet with an employer. Most often, however, you will need to ask for the employer's permission to observe the work-site. When conducting your observations, look for areas of the workplace or the operation that may pose some specific problems for the employer, such as:

- What are the varieties of tasks that make up the functions of the business or operation?

- When is the workplace most busy (time of day, week, etc)?
- Are there tasks that are not being done (or only being done sporadically) because of time constraints?
- Are there any activities or tasks that take employees away from more important or critical duties?
- Are their tasks that could be done more efficiently or more often?

(Adapted from: *When Exiting Jobs Don't Fit: A Guide to Job Creation*, National Center on workforce and Disability, Institute for Community Inclusion, 2004)

It is also important to observe the workplace culture. What is the atmosphere? How do people work together? Is it the type of environment that would welcome the job seeker that you have in mind? Workplace culture is often critically important to ensuring the success of work customization opportunities.

Develop a List of Tasks and Potential Jobs. After speaking with the employer and observing the workplace, you will be able to develop a list of tasks and jobs that might form the basis of a customized job. This list can be an important “tool” in negotiating a customized employment opportunity for a job seeker. It will provide an outline of potential tasks or jobs that might be “reassigned, established, or restructured” for a specific job seeker (U.S. Department of Labor, ODEP, no date). Depending of the workplace and job seeker you have in mind, the list may be short or more extensive.



Characteristics of an Effective Task List

A Good Task List:

- Is based on the employer’s needs and job seeker’s skills
 - Should be specific , avoiding general and avoid terms like “filing”, “photocopying”, and “cleaning”
 - Presents the tasks in the order of their importance to the employer
 - May include tasks across a number of different jobs and departments to demonstrate the flexibility of customizing a position
 - Highlights benefits to the employer
- (From, *Customized Employment: Applying Practical Solutions for Employment Success*, Volume 2 (U.S. Department of Labour, ODEP, no date)

Negotiating With Employers

Once the background work has been done, the next step in the process is to negotiate a customized employment opportunity. Negotiation may involve defining the job seeker’s duties and responsibilities, performance expectations, time and hours of work, and other issues such as training and support that may be required.

Apart from knowing and understanding the job seeker and the needs of the employer, negotiation may also require other skills and strategies in order to reach a successful conclusion. Here are a few suggestions to consider as you negotiate with employers:

- **Use employer language and avoid language and jargon with which the employer is unfamiliar.** Employers will better understand discussions about workplace efficiency and productivity than they will about “job carving”. In many respects, employers will not care too much about the specific work customization strategies as they will about how it will affect and improve their current operation.
- **Be clear about what you are negotiating.** Remember, there are two main participants who are central to the negotiation: the job seeker and the employer. The job seeker has something of value to offer the employer, while the employer has a need or issue that can be addressed by the job seeker’s contribution. Your role in this is secondary in the sense that you are the “go-between” for both parties. The negotiation is not

about you or your agency (although you need to be clear about how you can help the employment process to succeed).

- **Present a specific proposal.** Based on the knowledge you have gained about the job seeker and the employer, present a clear proposal to the employer about what the job seeker will be able to do to support the employer's operation. The proposal should outline the job seeker's skills and what specific tasks he or she can perform for the employer. It may also outline how it will benefit the employer in terms of improved efficiency, productivity, etc. If the employer does not readily accept the proposal, it may form the basis for further discussions and negotiations and a revised proposal. Remember, this is a negotiation process.
- **Anticipate the employer's questions.** Some employers may have questions relating to hiring a person with a disability. This may involve concerns about the person's ability to do the job, training or safety, or about what will happen if there are difficulties.
- **Describe your or your agency's role in creating a successful employment opportunity.** Employers may be more willing to negotiate and agree to customize a job when they understand how you or your agency will support the new arrangement (see Step # 4 below).
- **Be prepared to highlight how the employer will benefit.** This may be the best "hook" that you have in the negotiation process. As you may be helping people with some significant barriers to employment, employers may need to be reminded that this is about helping them with their operation.

4. Supporting the Employment Opportunity

The final step in the work customization process is supporting the employment opportunity once it is secured. Depending on the circumstances of the job seeker and the needs of the employer, supporting the employment opportunity may involve a number of important actions. As the support strategies described below have been covered in other resources, they are only briefly described here.

- **Assist with identifying and developing any job accommodations.** In the exploration process with the job seeker, job accommodations may

have already been identified. Once a specific job has been secured, it will be necessary to determine if those or other accommodations will be required. Work with the employer to help develop these and put them in place.

- **Assist with job training.** Ideally, job training will be provided by the employer (usually through a supervisor or co-worker). If so, assist this process by identifying strategies that will make the training more successful. There are a variety of types of assistance that can be offered (if they are needed) when training a new employee to learn a job. These include physical cues, verbal cues, demonstrations, samples, picture cues and physical assistance. They also include strategies such as reinforcement, correcting mistakes promptly, and fading training support. These are more fully described in the resource *Employ Ability: An Employer Guide to Hiring and Training Workers with an Intellectual Disability*, published by NBACL (see the Reference and Resource List). Some employers may prefer that training be provided by an external "coach" or mentor. This training support will use many of the same strategies listed above. It is important that this type of support does not interfere with the new employee's relationships with co-workers. Usually, external job trainers will fade and reduce their support as quickly as possible.



- **Monitor and support (as necessary) the on-going employment relationship.** As customized employment arrangements are specifically designed jobs for people who face difficulties in the competitive job market, they may require close monitoring. This is particularly true in the early stages of the job. “Checking in” with the new employee and the employer will help to identify and address any problems that may arise. Over time, the new employee and the employer may feel comfortable with calling if there is something that needs to be addressed.

Organizations that primarily operate centred or sheltered based services will need to change staff roles and job descriptions in order to properly facilitate customized work opportunities. For further information, see *Customized Employment: Q & A: Changing Staff Roles* (included in the References and Additional Resources section of this guide).



Reviewing the Benefits of Work Customization

Work customization can have many benefits for both individuals looking for work and employers.

Benefits for individual job seekers:

- Recognizes the person’s unique strengths, interests and needs
- Provides a chance to contribute to the local economy and labour market
- Provides opportunities to learn new skills within a work environment

Benefits for employers:

- Helps to address current employment dynamics such as labour shortages and high turnover rates
- Helps to increase business/organization efficiency and productivity by:
 - Using the skills of all employees to the best advantage.
 - Re-assigning job tasks to match employees’ skill levels (e.g. moving tasks from more skilled employees to less skilled employees).
 - Re-organizing work responsibilities for better flow and productivity.
 - Identifying unmet needs within the workplace that can be addressed through a negotiated/ customized job.
 - Increasing customer satisfaction
- Helps employers to better reflect the diversity that exists within our communities.

These benefits highlight the importance of work customization as a “win/win” proposition for job seekers, employers, and our communities. In today’s economy, work customization is an important work force development strategy that maximises opportunities for everyone involved.

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