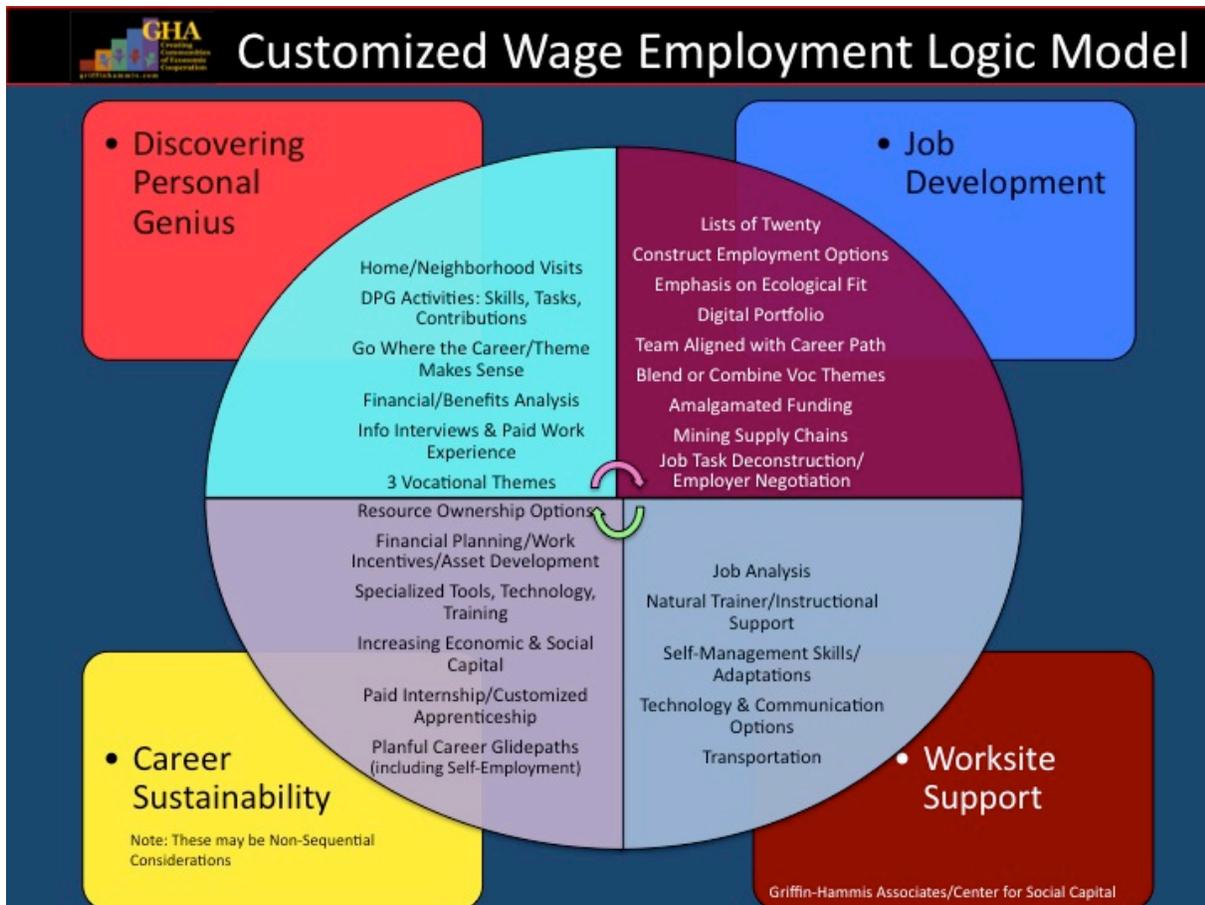


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Bringing Fidelity to Customized Employment Processes

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Albert Einstein once suggested, “Everything should be as simple as possible, and no simpler.” The advent of Customized Employment (CE) lends credence to his assertion. New techniques are generally adopted bit-by-bit, chunk-by-chunk. First people adopt the language by re-labeling old techniques with new names. Gradually, they adopt the methods. And, along the way to assimilation it seems human nature dictates the search for increased brevity and functional shortcuts. Knowing when one has cut too many corners is always challenging. An airline pilot skipping past half the items on the pre-flight checklist, or a heart surgeon reusing un-sterilized scalpels to save a few minutes and dollars are not good ideas. When one’s career is on the line, and when the opportunity to work prevents one from living in isolation and poverty, we need to mind the process variations we install in the name of scalability, cost/benefit, or efficiency. ***Customized Employment is the shortcut.*** The process works and major deviations have significant negative impacts on outcomes.



By no means is it suggested here that the steps and processes represented in the accompanying graphic are the last word in how CE is to be implemented. This is simply where we are after 20 evolutionary years of process refinement.

Briefly, the graphic represents the steps we implement in states and communities, informed and beholden to the work of our colleagues including Marc Gold & Associates, the Rural Institute Transition Programs, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor, and of course many others. All of our organizations have nuanced approaches, but the overall framework is noticeably similar, with a foundation firmly rooted in Discovery, with strong ties to interest-based negotiation, ecological fit, substantial employer engagement, and self-determination. Again, our processes reveal some variation, but the overall approach remains complimentary, inventive, robust, and highly individualized.

The flow chart, or logic model, presented here represents an attempt at bringing some fidelity to the CE process as it evolves as an Evidence-Based Practice (EBP). Our experience in the field, working with school to work transition programs, state and local Vocational Rehabilitation offices, community rehabilitation programs, Workforce systems and America's Job Centers, various systems change efforts including Money Follows the Person and Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, as well as numerous Employment First initiatives serve as the test-bed for our process. And while this structure recommends prescribed tactics, it remains highly flexible and accommodating of individual needs and the system's requirements. The process works especially well within milestone funding systems or project-management approaches to rehabilitation, for instance, but also flexes when amalgamating multiple funding streams and diverse administrative rules. Shortcuts, however, are not recommended.

Briefly, here are the four major components of the process flow-chart:

1. Discovering Personal Genius, which is our particular spin on Discovery (functional, community-based assessment). Generically, "Discovery" is a process that showcases the skills (emerging and developed) and tasks the person performs that lend viability to employment. Activities performed in various real-life environments (i.e. not segregated settings) provide data on skills, tasks, and ecological fitment. We engage employers through structured interviews, job trials, paid work experience, and produce evidence-based recommendations citing the existence of at least 3 overarching Vocational Themes and a detailed report (e.g. vocational profile; Discovery Staging Record).

2. Job Development occurs after the Discovery phase. We recommend that 20 non-redundant companies be listed (initial development of the Lists begins in the Discovery phase) for each Theme. This approach serves multiple functions.

A. It forces employment personnel off Main Street where all the other job developers lurk.

B. The process demands creativity usually after the first 5 or 10 businesses are listed "where others share the same theme are working" because once the most obvious places are added, searching becomes more intense.

C. The process ensures people get to know their communities because they have to ferret out less obvious places of potential employment. With over 22 million owner-operator companies in the United States and with over 11 million companies with fewer than 20 employees, the process is rich in potential. We especially emphasize job development over “job finding” (asking for applications and interviews); we seek out artisanal businesses where new employees learn from “masters” and grow their career potential and importance in the company; we seek jobs that match Themes and foster skill development over jobs that simply match interests a person voices; we avoid the most stereotypical jobs because Discovery seldom points to these (e.g. grocery bagging, paper shredding, for instance); we avoid retail that holds little potential for advancement. (More information on these issues is found in the book: Griffin, at al., The Job Developer’s Handbook).

3. Worksite Support includes thorough job analysis, understanding and using proper systematic instruction, job coaching, and engagement of co-workers on the worksite. This phase also encourages the use of universal and assistive technology, self-management techniques, and the development of reliable transportation and other work-related supports. (We highly recommend Callahan & Garner, Keys to the Workplace).

4. The Career Sustainability quadrant actually shadows all the other phases and is a non-sequential set of considerations and strategies that enhance employability and career growth. Resource Ownership, for instance, springs forth from Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, instructing us to use tools, technology and training that enhances employment. Owning equipment or tools, or a certification, or degree, increases one’s exploitability in the workforce, increasing the likelihood of hiring, retention, and advancement. A recent example is Scott’s Ice Cream in Minnesota. Scott needed more hours at the restaurant that employs him. His work there making ice cream was limited by the capacity of the single ice cream machine. Assisted by Community Involvement Programs, our Joseph P. Kennedy Loan Fund, and a PASS through Social Security, he purchased a commercial ice cream maker. The machine belongs to him and he leverages it the same way workers leverage their college degrees. He now works double the hours he was working, makes considerably more per hour through profit-sharing on sales of ice cream, and also has the potential to grow a small business along with his wage job at the restaurant. Using this tactic is not a requirement of CE, but this, and other tools certainly enhance outcomes.

Also within the framework of Career Sustainability, we use Active Employer Councils (AECs) and Community Action Teams (CATs) to further employer engagement; we solicit families and others to leverage supply chains, social, and economic capital in the development of work, and we use proven methods of asset development and benefits maximization to enhance career potential. In short, what we know is that ***it costs the same to get a bad job as it does to get a good job***. The good job costs more initially, in our experience, but the bad job costs more in money and personal despair the longer it’s patched, redeveloped, and salvaged.

This brief overview of the CE process is quite condensed. For more information visit our website at griffinhammis.com, “like” us on Facebook to get real-time updates and examples, or take one of our on-line classes by clicking on the Relias Learning link on our homepage.



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