

HOW TO GUIDE: On and Off the Job Support

Introduction

Everyone requires support when starting a new job. The provision of good support on and off the job is crucial for many people with disabilities or other disadvantages to obtain and maintain paid employment in the open labour market¹.

On and Off Job Support is stage 5 in the 5 Stage Process of Supported Employment². Effective support on and off the job is one of the core elements of Supported Employment which makes it different from traditional placement services. Research has proven that supported work sites are more stable than unsupported work sites of the same people with disabilities³.



¹ See also EUSE Position Paper “On & Off Job Support”

² For more information on the 5 stage Supported Employment process see also EUSE (2005): European Union of Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards

³ Doose, S. (2007): Unterstützte Beschäftigung – Berufliche Integration auf lange Sicht. Lebenshilfe Verlag, Marburg

On and off the job support is related both to starting a new job and maintaining the job over a period of time. The support that is provided is dependent on the individual needs of the employee. Some people need support to learn a new task in the company and prefer to have an Employment Support Worker regularly on the job site while others need support to take over a new professional role or deal with issues with co-workers and prefer to receive job support outside the work place.

To define the appropriate type and level of support, the Employment Support Worker should consult with the employee, employer, co-workers, and selected individuals involved in the employee's life. This should be done regularly to ensure that the support is effective and valued. It is important to make the role of the Employment Support Worker clear and transparent for all people involved.

Where and when the support should be provided and by whom is dependant on the employees' needs and the employers' resources. The amount of support available on the work site varies from company to company. The Employment Support Worker should only give support on the job when the natural support available in the company is insufficient to meet the needs of the employee. This also applies to support provided off the job. The Employment Support Worker should try to foster natural support outside the workplace, i.e. referring the employee to professionals who can help with economic or family matters, language problems, mental health issues etc.

In addition to supporting the employee directly, the Employment Support Worker should also give support to the co-workers and supervisors in the company. This form of support can assist the co-workers to train and support the new employee and the employer to make company procedures accessible for persons with disabilities or other disadvantages. Effective Supported Employment will recognise the company requirements and provide guidance for adaptations and changes that facilitate the successful employment of people with different abilities.

When the type and level of support has been defined, it should be documented in an individual action plan which should state who is responsible for what actions and the timescale. The plan should be agreed upon by all parties involved. The plan should be revised and updated regularly according to the employees' development and current needs.

Process and Methodology

The following model indicates the action steps that are suggested to provide good support to an employee with a disability or other disadvantage. During the whole process, the Employment Support Worker will have to be conscious that time and the level of support required is dependent on the employee, the co-workers, the employer and their needs.

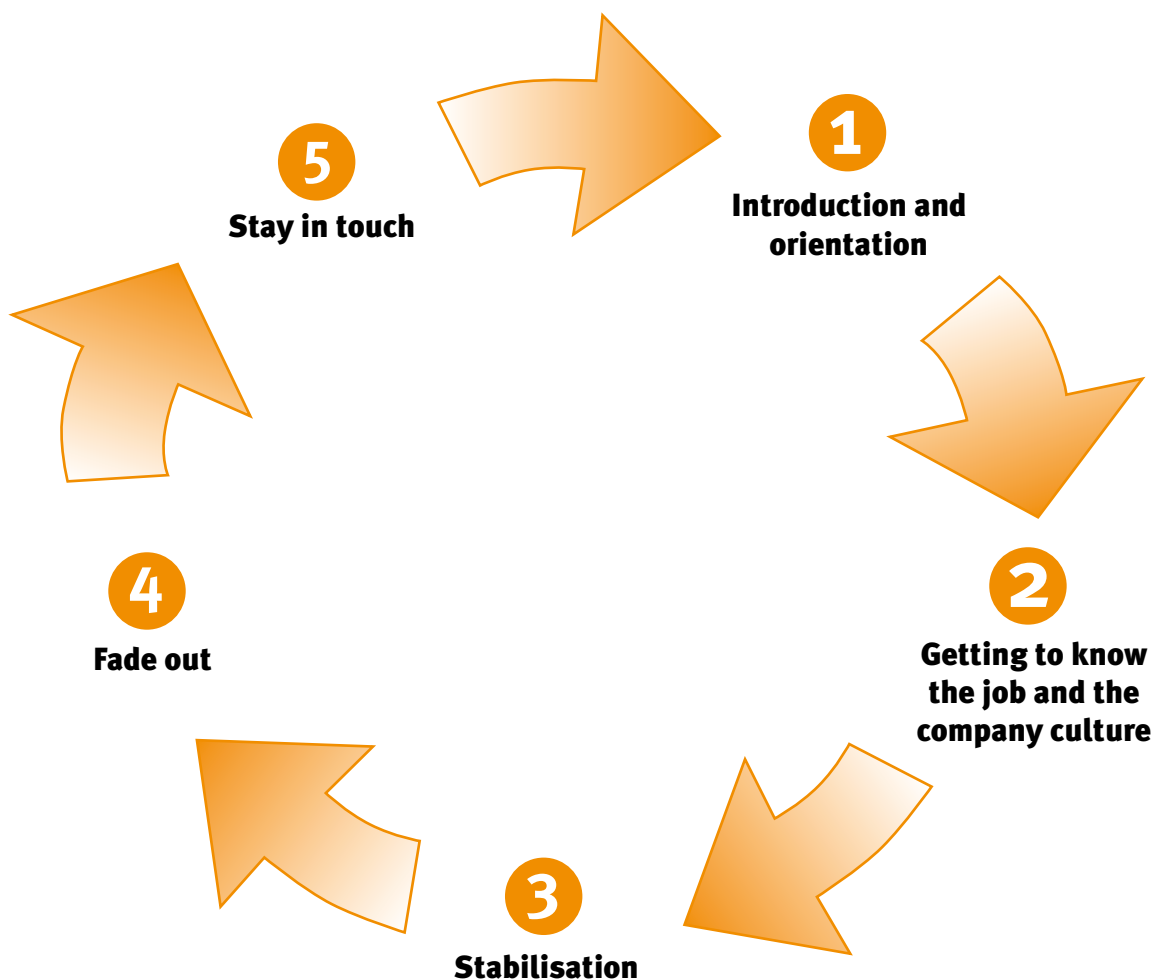


Figure 1: *The process of job support*

1. Introduction and Orientation

The introduction and orientation phase starts when the employee begins to work in the company. The goal of this phase is that the employee is introduced to the co-workers and supervisors. The employee is informed about his/her expected tasks and important aspects of the company. At the end of this phase an individual action plan of the required training and job support should be agreed.

The job support could be viewed in the context of diversity management. The general question is how the company can accommodate people with different abilities and needs so that they can work successfully and feel valued as part of the organisation. The employee is supported to participate in all regular employee introduction, probation, performance and development procedures. Job support assists the co-workers to train and support the new employee as much as possible, the employer 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.

From early in the process, the Employment Support Worker should be looking to foster natural supports. For example, a co-worker in the company can be asked to act as a mentor in order to facilitate the inclusion of the new employee. The mentor should take on the task voluntarily and have the required social and professional skills. A mentoring system could be a valuable tool that the company could use to include all new employees in the company. This is natural supports.

The Employment Support Worker needs to involve the employee, employer, co-workers, and selected individuals involved in the employee's life to define what supports they will require. If there are problems in the employees personal life (i.e. regarding health, housing, economic issues, family matters or other obstacles) the Employment Support Worker should refer to specialists for professional help with these problems.

In order to make a detailed action plan the Employment Support Worker should define the gap between the employee's current skills and the job requirements. When the employee knows his/her tasks and the employer has outlined the support/training normally given, the Employment Support Worker and the employee should examine and discuss the tasks. The employee should, in as much detail as possible, try to explain how much help he/she will require in addition to the normal support given by the company. The employee should say how, and by whom he would like to have the extra support/training. The Employment Support Worker and the employee should then have a meeting with the employer to discuss how and by whom the extra support on the job site should be given; these discussions develop an Individual Action Plan.

The Individual Action Plan should be detailed and should state who is responsible for what actions and the timescale. This plan should address work issues as well as personal issues that could affect the employee's performance at work. The roles and tasks of all involved parties should be noted and communicated to everyone. If there are any areas for concern or improvement these should also be noted and the individual(s) responsible for working on these areas should be informed. The Employment Support Worker could use positive examples from previous situations to address any issues.

There will be continuous reflection during the support process. This important element requires the Employment Support Worker to communicate with relevant parties to ensure that the support is effective and needed. During this period the Employment Support Worker should build trusting, professional relationships with all stakeholders, thus ensuring that everyone is happy and feels supported. Care must be taken to ensure that any support strategies and adaptations that the Employment Support Worker implements, must fit to the company culture.

2. Getting to know the job and the company culture

In this phase the emphasis is on learning the task, building working relationships with co-workers and getting a greater understanding of the company culture. One goal of this phase is that the new employee can perform the task according to the company standards and his/her abilities. Another goal is that the employee is accepted as a valued co-worker and included in the work team.

The Employment Support Worker can do an initial task analysis to outline who is the best person to inform and train the employee to perform a certain task. In some cases the Employment Support Worker will work on-site with the employee while in other situations the mentor/co-worker or other persons in the company will be the best person to demonstrate the role.

The following questions are essential in completing the task analysis:

- What are the steps of the task?
- What is the order of the steps?
- What is the content of the task in the work process?
- Where are contact points with other co-workers?
- What is the usual time frame for the task?
- What material is needed for the task?
- Is there a perfect (or personalised) way of doing the task in the company?
- What are the potential problems?
- How do I know that the task is finished successfully?

For training of new tasks, the regular procedures of the company should be used as much as possible and made accessible to the employee. The Employment Support Worker assists the co-workers to train and support the new employee as much as is practicable. The mentor can take an important role in this phase as an expert of the tasks, the company procedures and possibilities for adaptations. The Employment Support Worker coordinates the process based on the individual action plan, organises meetings with all the parties involved and makes sure that the employee receives the support needed.

It is important also to assist with the facilitation of social inclusion. This should be done in a subtle way that is determined by the employee and the culture of the company. The mentor could play a main role in this process. Where possible, the employee should receive training and coaching in social codes and social skills that are essential to the job. This can be done through role play or peer support.

It is important to make all aspects of the company accessible and encourage the employee to regularly get involved in the company process. This means that the employee should attend those meetings that are natural and necessary for his/her job, even if this means having an interpreter or requiring someone to take notes, etc. This will ensure that the employee gets a better understanding of what is going on in the company.

The Employment Support Worker uses their observations in the work place as a basis of feedback for the purpose of development. This can also be used for problem solving. On the strength of an effective Vocational Profile, it is anticipated that the right person will be matched with the right task. However during this phase it is sometimes necessary to adjust the tasks to the employee's abilities and needs. It will be an advantage for the Employment Support Worker to be in the company for this to happen effectively and to work closely with the mentor, co-workers and the employer. Strategies for adjusting the job tasks include; job carving; job stripping and job enrichment:

Job carving is when the tasks of the new employee are taken from the job descriptions of different existing jobs in the company. In that way a new job is created that fits to the abilities of the supported employee. The other employees in the company have more time to do other tasks, which they are qualified for or better suited to do.

Job stripping is taking away some tasks from the regular job description that are difficult to do for the employee because of his disability, e.g. reading or carrying heavy objects. In exchange, the person might take over other tasks from his/her co-workers.

Job enrichment is the adding of new tasks to the job description according to abilities of the employee or to foster inclusion in the company, e.g. in a job with little contact with co-workers during the day, the task of collecting mail in the company is added to allow the person to have more contact with co-workers.

If the job match is not correct or the role cannot be changed or developed, the Employment Support Worker, in consultation with the employee, should look to switch to other tasks, be transferred to another division, or in the end change the workplace.

The role of the Employment Support Worker will also be that of a mediator between the employee, employer and co-workers. The issues may vary and it is imperative that the Employment Support Worker maintains their professionalism at all times.

Different forms of support

On and off the job support can take place in many forms. It is the responsibility of the Employment Support Worker to ensure that the type of support is designed to meet the needs of the employee and is acceptable to the employer. The Employment Support Worker should assist the employee to make informed and realistic choices about how, when, where and by whom the support shall be provided.



Consultancy is often used in providing support to the employee and the employer. The Employment Support Worker has a greater level of expertise in particular areas than the employee and the employer. By making knowledge and information available to both the employee and the employer, the Employment Support Worker will assist them in making informed choices about what they wish to do.

Counselling is a more intensive and longer lasting form of support than consultancy. Counselling is an interactive process which has the aim of helping the employee to move towards problem solving. Counselling as a support form is often offered to people who have emotional or mental health issues. In the counselling process the Employment Support Worker supports the person in focusing on the successes, and redefining the "failures" as opportunities for learning and improvement.

Advice as to where further information can be obtained is one form of support that the Employment Support Worker should offer in areas where they do not have the expertise. Support is given by providing contact names, addresses and telephone numbers of the experts and sometimes actually helping them to make the first contact.

Learning the employee new skills can be done in several ways. Some people will benefit from the traditional learning methods offered by the employer. People with moderate or severe learning disabilities however will often need individualised, systematic instruction in order to learn the skills of the job.

Training refers to the repeated practice that is necessary to improve a skill. It may be necessary to improve in terms of the quality of job performance or in terms of the speed of performance. Training leads to improvement through continual evaluation of performance, feedback and adjustment. Some people have poor self-evaluation skills and are unable to provide self-feedback necessary for improvement. In these situations, the support of a trainer can be invaluable in evaluating the completed product, giving feedback about what worked well and what changes are needed and in monitoring the speed of work.

Assistance on the job can be necessary on a long-term basis for performing certain tasks e.g. reading and travel assistance for a blind person, a sign interpreter in meetings for deaf people or a personal assistant for a person with a severe physical disability.

Adaptations and Restructuring are sometimes required to enable the job seeker to perform well in the job. Employment Support Workers should be able to identify suitable tools, assistive technology, aids and adaptations for the employee because of their disability. While some of the adaptations might include special technical equipment for people who are hearing or sight impaired, some tools are rather simple but can be effective. Adaptations can include:

- Help for structuring (symbols, photos, colours instead of writing)
- Supports for orientation (task flow charts, plan, task cards, to do list)
- Technical tools (such as a calculator, talking clock, dictaphone, etc.)
- Help for remembering
- Self evaluation tools (such as self control tools, checklists and competence grids, work diary)

Restructuring the job may be necessary for some employees who are unable to perform the tasks independently and using the same method as other employees. People with physical disabilities can be supported by adaptations of the tasks. This might be done by changing the method i.e. doing the steps of the task in a different order or putting in new steps – or of introducing aids, such as specialised tools and equipment.

3. Stabilisation

This phase starts after the employee learns to do all the tasks correctly. The goal of this phase is the further development of the employee's skills and relationships with the co-workers. It is important to address potential problems as soon as possible.

There should be regular meetings or talks with the employee and the employer. Discussions could include the evaluation of current performance and establishing new goals, with the Employment Support Worker reviewing the action plan continuously.

During this period it may be helpful for the Employment Support Worker to undertake a job evaluation which could include asking the following questions:

- Have the support strategies been helpful for the employee and the co-workers?
- Have the goals of the support been reached?
- What should be changed?
- What support is still needed?

4. Fade Out

The aim of this phase is to reduce the level of job support. Experience shows that employees with disabilities and disadvantages have very different support needs on the job. Some employees may require it for many years, while others just need support to get started with their work. In some countries the duration of job support is limited by the funding agency, whilst the concept of Supported Employment states that the support should be available as long as necessary.

Nevertheless it is important to plan to fade out the external job support as much as possible. This can be done by encouraging independence at all times and involving co-workers e.g. as mentors. The best type of support is invisible support, the Employment Support Worker should be available but not in the frontline. The employee needs to be able to develop and should be seen and valued for their skills from the earliest point.

At the end of this phase the employee, employer and Employment Support Worker should agree on the form and level of support that is required in the future and what action to take in case of any problems or crisis.

5. Stay in Touch

In this phase the Employment Support Worker should be available when needed, but it is also important to actively stay in touch with the employee and the company as agreed before. This allows the Employment Support Worker to identify potential problems or changes before they become a crisis. Even if the job has to be terminated, an early contact with the Employment Support Worker allows the opportunity to search for a new job immediately.

The Employment Support Worker can also assist the employee to plan for lifelong learning and career development. 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. Supported Employment services should see career development and job progression as an integral part of the Supported Employment process and seek to resource this activity appropriately. It is important to work in partnership with employers and educational services to broker learning opportunities that help to empower individuals so that they can take advantage of wider vocational and social opportunities through higher personal aspirations.

Moreover it is good practice within Supported Employment to maintain a positive partnership and healthy contact with employers. There are different, creative ways of the Supported Employment agency to involve employers regularly in a positive way. Satisfied employers are a valuable source for new jobs or referrals.

Reflective Questions

The following questions are intended to initiate further discussion and should help practitioners and Employment Support Workers to reflect their methods and approaches.

- What is the role of the Employment Support Worker during this process?
- When providing support, it is important to ask yourself, how would I like to be supported on the job?
- When supporting an employee, how can you ensure that you do not put your values across as theirs? Have I respected their values throughout the process?
- As an Employment Support Worker, what role do I have in providing support to the employee and employer?
- How do I deal with conflicts of interest? If the employee no longer wants support or if you can no longer provide support due to funding and the person needs support.
- What are the issues I must address in trying to facilitate career development or job progression?

Tips for On and Off the Job Support

This How to Guide was developed by practitioners for practitioners. Therefore the listed "Useful Tips" and "Things to Avoid" should help readers to benefit from the authors' experience and knowledge.

Useful Tips:

- Be sure that everyone understands what their role is and that you clearly understand what your own role is
- Be sure that the employer and the employee know how, when and where to contact you
- Be careful how you give advice – ask the questions and let the employee find the answers themselves
- Respect the employer's workplace and make appointments for any visits
- Show an interest in the workplace and the people working there
- On and Off the Job Support is not therapy. Try to ensure that the person has other supports in place for different aspects of their lives

Things to Avoid:

- Avoid putting your values on the person
- Avoid doing anything for the person that they can do for themselves
- Avoid visiting employees without good reason. Keep the support relevant and structured depending on the employee and employer

Relevant EUSE Position Papers:

- On and Off the Job Support
- Career Development and Progression