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Work as a Continuum

Only a few days ago a colleague of mine asked if I’d read this report and what my thoughts were on it. His interest was aroused by his understanding that the minister was going to respond to this in coming days, which to be honest came as a shock, as I thought that this had happened a year ago and I’d thought that the report was buried when Tony Abbott had his Malcolm moment.

Having recently read the US Dept of Labour Report into improving disability employment outcomes, I thought that it was worth second look. In the intervening period since its release I’ve been working on a variety of research reports including work on developing a social entreprise model of open employment, work on developing a new tool for measuring employment outcomes, my own PhD research in the DES system and of course my work on customised employment and visits to overseas services that deliver disability employment. All of these events naturally allow you to develop your perspective, so with that in mind these are my thoughts on the report.
The DES Provider System.

The report seems to emphasise that DES providers should consider reframing themselves as mainstream service providers, based on what I'd consider the dubious premise that JSA (now Job Active) providers delivers better results. Remember there's lies, damn lies and statistics. The authors of the report state; “While clients of DES providers can choose to access Employment Providers, there should be more effective linking between the two types of providers. This is particularly important for many DES clients that have difficulty in finding meaningful work that matches their skill levels because mainstream employment services often have access to a greater diversity of jobs, including skilled positions.” (pp152) There's a few things that I take issue with, but let's start with the notion of what is meaningful work. To my knowledge Job Active and DES actually don't measure what is meaningful work, indeed there is no recognition that work, and employment are different things. If they define meaningful by how long a client stays in a job placement, then it is at best a questionable measure, at worst a complete misrepresentation of "meaningful" work.

Secondly the idea that Job Active has access to a greater diversity of employment and skilled positions is a complete furphy devoid of any real evidence. It also supports the notion that employment services are simply about plugging people into a job, rather than looking at using evidence-based practices that lead to real work with real career prospects that match the individual and their preferences to a suitable employment setting. Job Matching and Career Development are more name than established practice in employment services.

Finally, what are skilled positions and how do you know whether the client has any skills, if you don't have any evidence-based processes to truly understand the client?

Disability Awareness Training.

This is something of a holy grail in employment services. But you'd have to ask why that after 30 odd years of disability awareness training, why haven't employment rates gone up. There can't be anyone on the planet who isn't aware of disability, so why haven't employment rates improved? Maybe it might be a simple case that business is immune to the message (crying wolf to many times) and have simply switched off, so that they
can focus on their business? Rich Luecking said it best a few years ago when he said enough of the disability awareness training, time to move onto something more effective.

**Social Entreprise / Social Businesses.**

The fact that they managed to separate this into two different business types highlights the fact that globally we don’t have a clear definition of what a social entreprise is. Certainly there are research efforts underway to define this, but the report from my perspective simply muddies the water. A social entreprise is a business with a social purpose that invests in that purpose. The report muddies the water by referencing profits and not for profits and distribution of capital. The authors to my mind have confused themselves by adding layers of comment that simply reinforce their own particular understanding.

Our research project into social entreprise has developed a definition which defines a social entreprise by its characteristics.

Ultimately whether you want to call it a social entreprise or a social business is a moot point. It’s whether the business is addressing a social need that is the decider.

**The NDIS.**

Only got a brief mention, but it is clear to me that they don’t see a role for the NDIS in mainstream services. Given the arbitrary and non sensical nature of the divide, i.e., capacity to work measured in hours, I wonder if this is simply about protecting your own yard. After all if they consider that the barriers to people in DES accessing Job Active as a constraint, then why not remove the barriers to NDIS clients accessing the “superior services” that they highlight as a feature of the Job Active providers?

**Big Business.**

Please no more championing what big business does and recommending more awards. Big business in reality aren’t big employers of people with a disability. Name me one big business that has a workforce that is representative of the community at large? Where’s
the business with 20% of its workforce having some type of disability? Do I have to say more?

Often, we see large business lauded by vested interests about their diversity policy and how they employ large numbers of "Australians." I could name a few biggies that are held out as examples, all of whom are also guilty of destroying local employment with mass sackings in the name of efficiency, usually around dividend and profit time. Focus on local business and you'll get better long-term results.

**Micro-Business.**

Good to see that it gets a mention. The vast majority of business that exists today is a micro-business. That is a business that employs its owner and one or two other people. At least the report had something positive to say about them, noting that;

“Micro businesses are responsible for employing around 20 per cent of individuals. Due to their small size, micro businesses tend to be more embedded in their local communities. Research suggests many micro businesses are active contributors to community capacity building.”

“As a business entity, they have proven successful in facilitating innovation and entrepreneurship and serve as a supporter of community development by investing in local areas and contributing to community initiatives.”

Personally the figures regarding the number of micro-businesses in Australia is as odds with global figures, but that’s a moot point. Given that big business is in reality a small employer, more famous for destroying local employment and exporting it overseas, the hope for the future for most Australians lays in creating your own employment, not in increasingly technology driven, labour exporting big business. The reports comment regarding innovation and small business is interesting in that it’s the opposite of what the government is doing by throwing money at big and foreign businesses to innovate. Innovation starts locally by small business developing their niche, that’s were the support should be. Think about that for a minute!

**Conclusion.**
Personally, what we have today is a result of years of vested interests protecting their patch at the expense of the clients and the failure to use of evidence-based practices. The head of a large DES provider recently opined that we know what works, now we simply need to be free to do it. So time to stop producing glossy reports for government and simply get on with focusing on introducing evidence-based practices and really personalise your approach to employment. The answer doesn’t lay with government, it exists within you, if you’d be bold enough to let it out.

This is what happens when I have a Sunday morning to spare!

Community and Provider Partnership Program

At our 2017 Retreat, those in attendance had a discussion concerning how do we compel the NDIA to adopt a Work First approach. We examined the various participants; academics, providers, NDIA, parents and youth. Our conclusion was that parents and participants were the best positioned to inform the government of their needs and push the government to change its agenda to meet their needs. In this case - employment supports.

How do we do this?

An educated and informed society is a powerful society, so we concluded that our best course of action was to support parents and participants to develop self-advocacy skills
around employment by educating and supporting them. The education comes from staging education programs around Australia that focus on teaching parents and participants about the use of Self-Guided Discovery to facilitate employment outcomes. By developing a better understanding of the employment process - in effect taking control of it - parents and participants are empowered to advocate for the supports they need to pursue employment outcomes.

We recognise that not all parents and participants will want to go down this path alone and that they will need support. Support from providers who respect participant choice and control. Support from providers who will walk along beside the participant, who understand the Self-Guided process and will support the participant. In a sense they are creating a position of mutuality - one confident self-advocates know that they will have competent trained providers who know what their journey looks like.

The Pathway Forward.

Our response has been to create a Community and Provider Partnership Program, an alliance between CDERP and providers and community that focuses on delivering education and support for participants to learn and understand the process of Self-Guided Discovery. Using the technical knowledge and skills of CDERP and combining it with providers and community we educate and support participants to develop a better understanding of their employment dream and the supports needed to pursue employment in the community. Unlike most education programs, we don’t just teach and leave. Participants have the strength of knowing that there is a provider that understands them and their needs and is there to support their journey.

The Outcome.

Better educated and informed parents and participants, armed with the evidence to drive planning discussions with the NDIA. Strong self-advocates with community and provider support to enable them to make their employment dream come true!

Over time we will create strong narratives around participants and parent success and the providers and communities that supported and enabled their dreams.
For **CDERP**, our challenge is to find community and provider partners willing to accept the challenge to inform and educate the community nationally.

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**Customised Employment – A Catalyst for Change**

I recently spoke at a forum and whilst waiting to speak I was asked what I was talking about. When I responded, “Customised Employment” my inquirer responded, “Oh you mean job carving”. Let's kill this myth right now, Customised Employment (CE) isn't job carving, job carving is a small part of the CE process, but if you're starting with job carving, then let me tell you that you’ve got the wrong address!

Customised Employment starts with the individual in their home and goes from there. We're starting by finding out who the job seeker is and what are their ideal conditions of employment. Job carving, well we might get to that, but in reality, only after we've worked through other employment possibilities, after we've worked out the client's skills and abilities and looked at the client holistically.

Over the past few years of working in different employment settings in Australia and overseas, we’ve gathered a substantial evidence base and learnt a bit ourselves. When we look at Customised Employment it's easy to see the trees and not the forest. That forest is Customised Employment acting as change agent across the entire employment domain.
What do we know? At the outset, CE isn’t simply about training some staff and letting them go, that’s a recipe for disaster and a waste of money. If you want to do something innovative in the Australian context, then you need to make the commitment and invest in your staff and your business. No short-term fixes that’s for sure.

Customised Employment will change every aspect of your business and everyone that you serve, make no mistake about that. That said, the community and clients are hungry for a real personal centred, client-controlled employment service. The NDIS is driving higher expectations and will increase the levels of self-determination and self-advocacy amongst clients and family. DES will not be immune to the rising community expectations – which in itself should highlight that just doing what you always did or what everyone else is doing is akin to burning $100 bills to keep warm (the old paper ones anyway). Add to that the evolving capacity of forward thinking ADE’s to deliver open employment services to their clients and their strong community linkages, you can see that same old same old won’t cut it.

Our experience tells us that CE works across five domains in service delivery; Organisation, Staff, Individual Job Seeker, Family and Global Systems. It will change your organisations culture, focus and relationships. It will challenge staff beliefs, priorities and ideas about what they’ve been doing. Yes, some will leave, but hey if you don’t believe that everyone has the capacity to pursue employment, then maybe you’ve been short changing clients and yourself.

The relationship that you have with the individual and their family will change in ways that will surprise you. We are constantly amazed at how parents are now learning more about their child’s capacities that ever before. Parents now see a world of boundless opportunity, not more limiting processes that seeks to categorise their child and put a handbrake on opportunity. Did I mention Career Counsellors who use CE, that’s another exciting story!

Systems that support organisations will change as you reinvent your business and develop an approach that better suits the new operating environment and relationships that are emerging. You might be struggling to keep pace with the employment systems, but if you shifted your focus to the client, the client’s real needs and not see the client as
fodder for your bottom-line you might just get a surprise. With most of our clients we’ve developed new systems models that provide a clear focus on their business activities, and it’s this clarity of vision, of purpose that will drive innovative practices that involve the community.

CE has evolved over recent years and now has models that are appropriate in different employment settings; from schools and transition, DES, ADE and NDIS settings and works with any cohort of clients with barriers to employment.

Let me tell you a story.

We all have local shops and I’ll bet you know each one, even if you’ve done nothing more than walk past on the way to your favourite café. That’s what you should strive to be, something that is part of the local community, everyone knows what you do and will say hello to you. At the other end of the scale is the ubiquitous Westfield’s. Most people go there, but they sit separate from the local community in part due to size but mostly because well they’re busy impersonal destinations. Every-time you visit you see a walled-up spot that has a big sign telling us that a shiny new exciting business is coming to this space. We all go wow and don’t give it another thought. Another thought about what was there before or what happened to them, they’re soon a distant memory.

So in a crowded employment space, who do you want to be? The shiny new soon forgotten bauble or the local who everyone knows and will go to when they need your service offering. I know what I want to be, how about you?

Footnote: In 2019, you can read about CE as a catalyst for change when our book reaches the bookshop shelves.
Customised Employment in the USA

In late August we jet off to the USA to attend the Centre for Social Capital’s annual invitation only Customised Employment Retreat. For me personally this is now an annual pilgrimage to meet with and discuss the future of disability employment in a different setting.

This year the tentative schedule looks like this;

Our overall theme will be Fidelity & Ethics: Staying True to the Mission and Meaning of Discovery and Customised Employment. This year our intent is to again create an atmosphere of sharing and reinforce the idea that whoever shows up are the right folks, whatever is discussed is the right topic, and whatever is resolved is the right conclusion. As with all past events, and as Peter Block has written, we want to most of all create an environment that allows for designing an alternative future. In these serious times, we seek opportunity and adventure. Based on last year’s discussions we will begin by highlighting promising practices from across the country and will provide time for a set of structured discussions of the main theme.

Throughout the event we hope to have discussions relating to the core fidelity and ethical constructs of CE:

1. Discovery isn’t Discovery if shortcuts are taken

2. Promising CE while pursuing old employment strategies
3. Providing Staff with the tools to do the job right

4. Employer Engagement is not the same thing as Marketing

5. Key aspects of Provider Transformation

Now to add more value and as if there isn't enough, we'll be visiting organisations along the way that provide customised employment as part of their offering to not just people with a disability, but also veterans and others with barriers. It'll be great learning.

This type of event is foreign to Australia in the field of disability employment, which is why we're staging our first one this year in October. Open to all, we want to start a discussion and inform the future of disability employment.

**Customised Employment Organisational Implementation Model (CEOIM)**

Customised Employment represents a significant advancement on traditional employment models. While it would be easy to suggest that it can be embedded in any organisation by simply training staff, evidence and local experience highlights that this approach would in all likelihood result in the failure of the process to successfully embed with any fidelity and integrity to the model. We call this the broken watch method of CE – its right twice a day!
Depending on the size of the organisation, it may be advisable to start with a pilot study. This is certainly the case with large complex organisations that have multiple cultures and geographically diverse settings.

Irrespective of the size of the organisation, it is important that an organisational study be undertaken to ensure that the training and support processes are contextualised to the organisation. This process also supports full management buy-in, a factor considered integral to the successful implementation of CE within an organisation. It further allows for the proper deployment of personnel and financial assets to support the implementation.

The process of implementing a Customised Employment program into an organisation would follow the nominal process outlined in Fig 1.

![Organisational Study](Organisational%20Study)

Fig 1.

The organisational study allows for the gathering of information from employees and clients to determine what it is they value in the organisation and to have a level of input into the change process, thereby ensuring that they have a voice and some ownership of the change. Added to this is the capacity to understand the nuances that exist within the organisation and how the various parts of the organisation interact both in a business sense and in a cultural sense.

This process will allow for the correct identification for the appropriate site to establish the pilot and the participants that need to be involved and supported. The process itself can take up to a month to undertake and report, depending on the complexity of the
organisation, however it does set the scene for action. Added to this it is a valuable document on which to plan and contextualise the pilot process to an organisation.

Depending on the organisation it would likely provide a timeline of three months from start of the study to commencement of a pilot program. This allows for internal organisational discussions and resourcing of the pilot.

The pilot program itself is likely to have a timeline of twelve months from commencement of training to results, which is consistent with the evidence for Customised Employment and our practice experience. Results may come sooner, however this is very much dictated by the setting and clients.

Evaluation and scaling up again is dependent on the organisation and setting, however one of the outcomes of the pilot is the development of internal CE experts who can lead with support the roll out of CE across the organisation.

When you add to this the research process that should be wrapped around every pilot, there is a larger contribution to the evidence base for disability employment.

Customised Employment is a unique process that is about individualising the CE process to the person, so it should be that CE will look different in every organisation. The principles and practices are the same, but the application will be nuanced to your setting.
Defining the Future of Disability Employment
Through the Lens of Person Centred Practice

In 2015 in my submission to the DES Framework Review I wrote the following opening statement regarding person centred practice in disability employment.

“Any review of the current program needs to start with defining what the program is about. At present the program suffers in that it is presented as a person-centred program to support people with disability enter the workforce, yet when examined against accepted definitions of person-centred practices, the program fails to satisfy even the most generous definitions of person-centred practice, as illustrated by the following comments.

Amado and McBride (2002) developed a framework for human services that propose to provide long term support for people with disabilities should support.

- **People to discover and move toward a more desirable future.**
- **Protect and promote five valued experiences: sharing ordinary community places and activities, contribution, expanding relationships, being treated with respect and having a valued social role, and choice.**
- **Offer needed help in ways that support and strengthen community competence.**

Stirk and Sanderson (2012) noted that person-centred practice is a philosophy of practice that goes to the heart of the culture of a service organisation. Schalock and
Verdugo (2012) made the point that individuals receiving services will have their own unique view of what a person-centred service is.

Collectively, these positions highlight the difficulties that the current program has in relation to being person-centred. It fails due to not having a clear vision and guidelines that allows service providers to alter their culture to reflect the notion that a person-centred practice is defined by the unique method that it delivers individualised service to a person with a disability.

The program of the future must clearly articulate to service users and staff what a person-centred program is, how it will operate, what the program can and will do, have sufficient flexibility to meet client expectations and provide a framework that allows staff to operate in a truly person-centred way.”

Nearly a year later reflecting on this, I wonder how many people with a disability have been engaged in the process of defining a new system of disability employment practice? Some time ago a friend of mine noted that the issue with person centred practice is that the minute you try to manualise it, it fails. Given that how person centred a program is has a large subjective element based on the recipients experience of the system, I wonder if the solution to person centred practice in disability employment lays in two areas; how an organisation responds to the individual and how we assess the outcome?

How do we achieve this? From the organisation perspective possibly the solution is found in proper training in person centred practice and the actual planning methodology, followed by a comprehensive review of current practice to ensure that procedures reflect staff understanding. Granted it might require some changes in the way that the organisation operates, but it shouldn’t conflict with compliance measures and it has the potential to improve client engagement with the process.

Measuring outcomes will require a new paradigm. The current system of star ratings isn’t a true outcome reflection in any system that reflects clients but is simply a guide to who plays the system effectively. It doesn’t measure quality in outcome and the impact of the employment achieved or whether it is valued by the client. Yes, you could mount a case that clients are excited about getting a job, but what about in six week or six
month’s time. What about the impact of the clients new found employment on the other aspects of the client’s life? There’s probably a pervasive argument that it’s not part of the DES program or concern, but if I continue to fall out of jobs and require ongoing investment to start the process again, then clearly, we have a problem that hasn’t been identified.

I would argue that an outcome measure that examines and measures social inclusion and social cohesion, along with quality of employment is a better measure of a program that affords a person-centred approach and better guide for clients in a system that allows clients to choose their DES provider. Yes by all means measure compliance, which really is an audit exercise, but a system that offers itself as person centred would and should measure client factors in order to define success. The more we understand the client equation, then the less likely clients are to repeatedly fall out of employment.

Something to ponder!

Disability Employment as a State Based Initiative

Today I was reading through the Oregon State based Transformation Project on disability employment called Employment First. This is a project driven and funded by the state of Oregon in the USA, with financial help from the Federal Government to make open or integrated employment the norm, rather than an optional extra in someone’s life. It occurs to me that we still haven’t really taken this approach in
Australia, preferring the easy way out of sheltered workshops (phasing out when?) - yes, I know they're called ADE’s now, but if it looks like a -- well you know the rest.

In simple terms, the program is about transitioning existing sheltered workshop participants over a nine-year period into open or integrated employment settings from 2013 to 2022, impacting on the approximately 18,500 participants in sheltered workshops in that state. The total figure isn't too far short of the 20,000 participants in ADE’s nationally in Australia, so in that sense this program can provide some good directives for Australian governments to look at. It is expected that 7,000 people would access employment services over the project period.

There is to my mind a very clear statement of intent, this being:

"The Employment First Policy makes the following policy statement:

"In order to achieve the intent outlined in the framework of this policy, employment opportunities in fully integrated work settings shall be the first and priority option explored in the service planning for working age adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While all employment service options are important and valued, integrated employment is more valued than non-employment, segregated employment, facility-based employment or day rehabilitation in terms of employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual or other developmental disabilities."

"For those who successfully achieve the goal of employment in an integrated setting, future service planning must focus on maintaining employment, as well as the consideration of additional career or advancement opportunities. For those not yet achieving employment, annual service planning must include and reflect employment opportunities as the first and priority service option explored."

This is a non-ambiguous statement and makes clear what the outcomes of the program should be. To be honest it’s one of the clearest statements I’ve read and is certainly ahead of some of the statements that are issued by governments in Australia.

The starting point after some discussion was to engage subject matter experts in customised employment to assist with technical matters and then implement two Pilot projects. The first is designed to improve job acquisition for transition age students, the
second to facilitate the transformation of facility-based employment providers to integrated employment service providers.

This project is the outcome of a government executive order that sets strategies to be followed by DHS and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to further improve Oregon’s systems of designing and providing employment services to individuals with I/DD, including a significant reduction over time of state support of sheltered work and an increased investment in employment services.

To accomplish this, the Order specifies a number of strategies and outcomes including, but not limited to:

- Providing employment services to working age individuals with I/DD in sheltered workshops and transition aged students with I/DD in public schools. The number of persons to receive employment services over the 9-year term of the Order is at least 7,000;
- Implementing new policies about no longer purchasing or funding vocational assessments in sheltered workshop settings effective 7/1/14 and no longer purchasing or funding new sheltered workshop placements for certain individuals with I/DD after 7/1/15;
- Establishing and implementing employment service policies that are evidence-based or based on individual capabilities, choices, and strengths;
- Developing policies and procedures for implementing Career Development Plans;
- Establishing core competencies for the provision of Employment Services and policies that require purchasing of services from qualified providers;
- Developing Outreach and Awareness programs for individuals with I/DD and their families;
- Implementing a number of state actions related to updating policies and administrative rules, designating a state-wide Employment Coordinator, supporting training and technical assistance providers, and adopting an “Integrated Employment Plan”;
- Implementing provisions specific to the Department of Education, including:
The provision of transition technical assistance to include the development of competencies for teachers, administrators, and other education service providers;

Implementing an outreach program for students, families and local communities;

Designating staff specialists to focus on systems-change efforts in schools and communities;

Establishing a Transition Technical Assistance Network; Partnering with VR and ODDS for tracking and documenting efforts;

Supporting proposed legislative or rule changes related to contracting with providers to prohibit the purchase of employment or vocational assessments in sheltered workshops.

- Requiring interagency collaboration documented through the use of written agreements or memorandums of understanding and requiring provisions in contracts with Community Developmental Disability Programs (CDDPs) and Support Service Brokerages (Brokerages) related to compliance with the Order;
- Developing and implementing a quality improvement initiative to evaluate the quality of employment services provided;
- Monitoring the progress of implementing the order through data collection, data analysis, and quality improvement activities;
- Involving stakeholders in the execution of the Order by developing a Stakeholder Policy Group to make recommendations to State leadership on such areas as outreach, provider capacity, training, progress for assessment and discovery, and outcome metrics.

There are a number of things we can learn, such as transition starting in school, not after school. Only evidence-based practices will be supported, an end to anecdotal “we know best practices, because we’ve always done it is way” methods. The other stand out is the focus on career planning, not just a job which is our process here. And before you scream, our system is set up for jobs, not careers because well we don’t pay providers for that or in actual fact they don’t go that far because there’s no money in it for them, yet these same people all have career plans - funny about that!
What is clear from this is that open employment isn't simply a Federal government issue, but one that requires a bold State/Federal co-operation to disrupt the status quo that is being supported by industry players that are gaming the government to support their industry, an industry that preys on the emotions of the vulnerable and their families, an industry that offers nothing but a continuation of the status quo for their own ends, who prefer their unique form of government welfare to survive.

I look forward to seeing our combined state and federal governments plan in writing, writing that puts it on the wall that government welfare aimed at supporting the providers will come to an end and that only those providers that can provide innovative, evidence based open employment solutions will be supported. Those that put the client first and in control of their destiny. Time of the clients to have their voice heard and given prominence over the provider cadre of welfare recipients.

I'll finish by saying that this isn't about throwing the baby out with the bathwater, but about finding innovative time certain solutions so that we can move to open employment first as out starting point. How the existing ADE / Sheltered workshop providers deal with that is something for them to invest in themselves and create innovative pathways to employment that go beyond rebadging ADE’s and coming up with a new version of work crews. We just need the government to support the individual and provide a gentle legislative shove to the providers to get their act together and join the new millennium.

Who'll grasp the nettle and leap forward and who will ring their lobbyist to maintain the status quo? Seems like a marketing opportunity in the making.
Disability Employment Retreat 2016

In late October, the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice held its annual think tank. A group of passionate people came together for three days to work through some of the issues that confront and plague the delivery of disability employment services. I've assembled the group thoughts into a document which I've pasted below. It's amazing the depth of discussion and insights that can take place when the setting beside the Yarra River up in the valley at Warburton bathes you in sunshine and fresh air.


- Loved the critical discourse, openness and depth of discussions.
- Like-minded people out their looking to improve outcomes.
- Intent of the NDIS – take a proactive view.
- Need to see clear short sharp messages.
- The possibility to critique what is missing.
- Bust out of institutional thinking about the NDIS. • Engage outside voices.
- Reassure staff that the old way of working is possible, rather than mainstream approaches.
- Be alert to the extent that policy defines our reality.
- Don't accept being defined by policy.
- Take the time and energy to define the right questions regarding disability employment questions.
- The need for meaningful discourse.
- The right questions can be transformative.
- Peak bodies represent the status quo – downwards.
- Evidence based conversation – refreshing.
- Environment – solutions focused discussions.
- Being part of the future of best practice.
- Agent for change.
- Beginning of a new frontier.
- Evidence based ideas make a difference.
- Diverse grounded discussion.
- Opportunity to open a window of change.
- Little things do matter.
- Confidence about change.

**Discussion about the entry point to disability employment – the assessment.**

Whilst this was set up as a debate for and against, it seems that we arrived at a consensus that something better is needed. I've listed the points raised by the two groups without any reference to whether they were the “for” or “against” team.

**Group One.**

- No assumptions in the information gathering stage.
- Discovery – about finding out what we need to know by exploring. Existing assessments are too narrowly focused.
- The assessment drives the intervention.
- What is limiting the skills?
- Outcomes measurements pre and post.
- Need to better understand how to support someone.
- It should be a process were everyone learns.
- The need for better trained and experienced staff.
- Use parent knowledge to advocate and empower.
- Need for self-advocacy
• Need for job prep for people with a disability.

**Group Two.**

• Do we need an assessment – yes!
• Start of a person-centred journey.
• Assessment is designed to knock everyone out of the game.
• Getting to know the person thoroughly.
• Need to be holistic, cumulative, portable and sensitive.
• Starting point – need for a bigger tool so that the first interview is meaningful.
• Technology parallels key outcomes (CD/DVD usage).
• Communication tool – input from significant others, other third parties (psych, allied health pro).
• Evidence based – leads to better interventions, support to employers. Need for an executive summary for quick reference.
• Reduce / remove repetition between agencies.
• Reduce wasted time.
• Needs to build on the evidence base.
• Needs to be functional – Why?
• Environment – conditional factor that needs further investigation.
• Tool for employment seeking with employers.
• A matching tool for support needs of the individual.

**Discussion Topics Covered.**

Whilst we had set out an agenda to guide the sessions, as a think tank we let the discussion go where it wanted without any time limits. The setting, the ambiance promoted open frank honest discussion based on evidence and not anecdote. Sessions were forward focused and sought ideas and answers for the future and it was refreshing to see the innovation that comes from being open to new ideas and not concerned with what was. Too often public discourse is focused on what’s wrong and hand wringing without any thought to what could be.

Our discussions covered:
• DES and its future.
• Customised employment and how to make it the norm, not just another name that people use to cover the same old ways of doing things.
• The NDIS employment settings and policy against actual practice.
• SLES and its intent, it’s failings and what to do with it to make it meaningful.
• Systemic Training methods.
• Discovery and the development of the Discovery Fidelity Scale.
• What DES should look like and its real purpose, along with its current limitations and absence of a client focused / person centred approach and what this means to outcomes.
• The role of peak bodies in protecting the status quo, rather than advancing the evidence base for better practice.
• The lack of the client voice in employment services.
• Social Entreprise and how it is being appropriated by the sheltered workshop / ADE movement to dress up an old dog without actually moving to full economic participation of clients – they're still capture and keep organisations, not pathways to full open employment which means full award wages.

What is interesting is the breadth of topics, which are interlinked, but also driven by the participants.

With so much depth to the discussions, it was important to take time to breathe. This we did in fine style participating in Fly Fishing Casting training and of course our evening away sampling the Yarra Valley. There was also the obligatory pit fire by the Yarra and the ritual burning of marshmallows.

All agreed that it was a brilliant experience and we look forward to the 2017 Retreat at the Oscars by the Yarra at the same time in October. But before that, we've got a study tour of customised employment settings in the USA in June, 2017 to get through.
Disability Employment Staff

A Discussion of Recruitment, Development and Retention Best Practices.

In late 2015, I attended the annual disability employment think tank hosted by the Center for Social Capital, the not for profit affiliate of Griffin-Hammis Associates. Held at a wilderness lodge in Idaho, the purpose is to get people away from technology and to speak freely about emerging trends in our field. In 2015, the focus was on staff, an important factor in the success of our work with clients.

We looked at seven areas of concern and discussed potential solutions and emerging practices. What did we discover? Amazingly or should I say not so surprising in the setting that we worked, over two hundred practice ideas and solutions emerged from our group of 40+ individuals involved in different aspects of disability employment. The findings are too voluminous to discuss in the limited space of this forum.

What I can say is that the findings and ideas are extraordinary in both their depth and simplicity, highlighting that no single person has all the answers and that by sharing and opening engaging in discussion about the future of disability employment, solutions to everyday and complex challenges that we face can be found.

Of course one of the commonest issues facing disability employment in Australia is the cloak and dagger manner in which service providers guard “their secrets”. Guess what? Your secrets are not worth keeping to yourself and the sector and by extension clients would be better off if you’d open up and share what works, what doesn’t and what we need to do to create a new paradigm.

I’m off to the USA to attend this year’s invitation only event in August and I’m taking one of the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice associates with me. We’ll be primed when we get back and will share some of what we discovered in the USA when we host the first of our annual disability employment think tanks in October this year.
Exciting times lay ahead of us with the NDIS priming the future of Disability Employment Services and we look forward to disrupting the conversation and building a new client centred disability employment paradigm. Join us!

Disability Employment, Transitions and the NDIS

I have just returned from the USA where I was accompanied by a group of colleagues to visit Disability Employment organisations and attend the annual APSE Conference in Portland where I spoke on transitioning ADE’s to Open Employment. I am fortunate to have an extensive network of colleagues in the USA that are at the forefront of Customised Employment and the transition movement, along with leaders in the development of evidence-based practice who freely share advice, information and resources.

What did we learn? We visited sites in San Diego, Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle, spending time in the field and with executives with extensive histories in disability in general and employment in particular. Despite all the negative press regarding the pending implosion of disability supports in the USA, the organisations that we visited have had and continue to hold a view that they just need to get on with it and find alternative funding pathways. Customised Employment and Discovery are pretty much mandatory practice in the USA, but like most practices run the risk of people adopting the name only or shortcutting the practice and undertaking what I generously described as "slim" training in this area. You cannot learn Customised Employment in 2 days, and it is for this reason that the Discovery Fidelity Scale is being adopted to ensure Discovery is properly implemented and doesn’t fall into the abyss that Person Centred Practice has in employment services.

We found that organisations have developed a collaborative approach to practice placing the client first. Competition has not worked, so the focus is on the client and working with each other to maximise their strengths to ensure that clients get meaningful employment outcomes. There is a zero-exclusion policy in progressive organisations and the idea of benchmark hours is seen as an exclusionary practice.
Organisations work closely together to ensure that the client comes first, and that the industry moves forward, the opposite of what happens here, sadly. The idea that you have a special sauce that gives you an advantage is well plain dumb. Relationships dominate all areas of practice and community. Staff do not work out of expensive edifices, mostly they work out in the field where the clients and jobs are, definitely start in the client’s home with family and involve the community.

Our system that forces participants to start again as they move through our system is viewed with disdain and bewilderment. Especially when you consider that we have transition programs that prevent you from taking up a job until you transfer to DES defies the notion of transition on the client’s terms. Yep, that’s person-centred and client controlled – not!

Sheltered workshops or ADE’s are viewed as dinosaurs with many states well along the way of transitioning to open employment settings. Almost all have adopted Customised Employment and are achieving great employment outcomes for clients, on the client’s terms where hours are not the focus, meaningful employment is. In Australia, our focus is on hours, but in a rapidly changing work environment, the focus needs to be on meaningful employment. We saw many examples of people previously considered unemployable, working meaningful jobs in the community, which entailed fewer hours than they previously worked in institutions.

After three weeks immersed in the US disability employment scene, we have come home with lots of lightbulb moments. I recorded over a dozen interviews with leaders in practice, met inspiring people who are confidently marching forward focused on the client, invigorated by time with colleagues in the US and a wealth of new resources and collaborations to support our work. I am looking forward to returning in a few weeks to spend more time with colleagues in the US and work in various state programs.

More importantly, we know we are on the right track with our work locally and approach our transitions projects with vigour and a renewed sense of confidence. Personally, I am taking this into my final version of my thesis, and it will certainly inform our current research and outcomes.
If you want to see one of the interviews that I conducted, you will find it on the CDERP Facebook page. Debbie Ball and Maureen Carasiti from Easterseals Workfirst tell it like it is, raw and focused on the client. We will progressively post additional videos, but some will stay as our client training resource material.

Disability Employment: Looking Back at our 2017 and Forward to 2018

When we started 2017, it looked like it might be an interesting year. It was to a degree insanely busy. 2018 looks like being busier than last year. Last year we are consulting, research and development projects. I even managed to spend four months overseas working, which pretty much looked like every month from May onwards I was overseas. What did we achieve? well I guess others can judge that.

As many will know we work with the Griffin Hammis group in the USA, the world leaders in Customised Employment and have a technical alliance that has us sharing IP and researching together to improve disability employment practice. That led to a number of research projects starting last year, the most significant from a practice perspective has been the contextualization of the Discovery Process and Discovery
Fidelity Scale to match Australian conditions, most obviously our funding methods. This project is reaching the final stages of consensus on the practice changes which we expect to trial shortly.

We’ve contextualised the US program material, adding our bits for training and our training practice has revealed that training consultants in the use of Customised Employment from a fidelity perspective require a minimum of five days followed by twelve months of mentoring. This is consistent with the evidence base that illustrates that consultants need twelve months to fully understand the process. You can shortcut the process but that’s like buying used oats after the horse has eaten the new ones. Not really advised! As Cary Griffin points out Customised Employment is the shortcut. If you visit our Facebook (CDERP) page you can watch Cary talking about the evolution of Customised Employment.

To further support this process, it is clear that unless an organisation is fully invested from the board down, then training staff is a waste of time. The organisation must change as well, and it is for this reason that we have developed with the support of colleagues at Transcen Inc., an organisational transition program that will support long-term change that underpins and supports staff.

What else have we been up to, well, we completed a review of the School Leavers Employment Support (SLES) scheme for the government and have conducted a number of organisational reviews for providers looking at their future course under the We’re currently in the last six months of our IWF Grant program looking at how to transition ADE staff to deliver open employment outcomes for ADE’s clients utilising Customised Employment. This project is yielding excellent learning outcomes and will be a blueprint going forward for organisations.

Last year we had of trips overseas, including a brilliant West Coast USA trip that saw a small group visit disability employment service providers in San Diego (which included field work), Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, including attending the APSE conference and presenting. In August we headed back with Peter Rhodes and visiting providers across a number of states and meeting with state and federal government officials to discuss how they support disability employment. I went back in
November to attend the Transition Institute program at the University of Vermont. This is a leading program that works with organisations transitioning from sheltered employment to open employment.

In between, we manage to hold our annual disability employment retreat in October - an outstanding success I might say. We’re currently processing the outcomes and working on a green paper. December saw us in New Zealand, where I presented my new disability employment systems model to an enthusiastic audience at the Disability Matters conference at the University of Otago, Dunedin.

What’s happening is 2018, well I finished my PhD in January looking at disability practice and the DES system. We’re working on some new projects that involve school transition to employment and I start the travel merry go round in February with New Zealand to work on Customised Employment projects, then I’m overseas for a stint every month from then on. I’m lucky that I have great colleagues at the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP) to support our work and allow me the time to move around. This year we head back to APSE in June and I’ve decided that whilst were on the east coast to take full advantage of it and spend time with east coast providers and researchers. Looks like an opportunity for another small group trip.

In 2018, we plan on moving the goal posts further toward client choice and control using empirical evidence and the support of our global network. The NDIS, the ADE review and the continuing evolution of DES provide consumers with a unique opportunity to influence government to honour its obligations under the UNCRPD, Disability Services Act and the NDIS Act. The status quo hasn’t been that successful, although I’m sure providers will say otherwise but treat yourself to a look at the long-term outcome data, so it must change! Now’s the time for community partnerships to push to the front of government thinking!
Disability Employment: Walking into the Future
Looking Backwards

In 2018, we start another chapter in the evolution of disability employment in Australia. DES has a new contract that promises limited reforms and improvement – stopping short of real choice and client control, The NDIS takes the ADE sector one step closer to its individualised future but stops short of offering real choice to NDIS participants when it comes to seeking out employment.

It’s been interesting watching providers taut figures and reasons why participants should come to them for service based on what has been shown to be quite rubbery interpretations of what employment is. Of course, employment success isn’t being successful at transitioning clients from one program to another, but this one regularly shows up with a recent study highlighting this as an established practice.

I’ve been travelling overseas extensively this year looking at best practice and well not so best practice in employment services, all of which is material that we’ve used in our research work for organisations and government.

DES is an interesting “beast”. It has so much potential yet regularly returns outcome figures that are largely unchanged over the life of the DES industry. It is a quasi-market and not subject to free market – client forces – something at odds with government philosophy, but consistent globally with the administration of employment services. Could DES survive without government constantly intervening? No, highly unlikely given the wide diversity of business practices and seemingly high overheads that exist in the current system. We’ve seen the stampede of providers to the NDIS to collect their pot of gold for delivering employment services, only to discover that the DES model doesn’t work in the NDIS environment and of course, the inactivity that we’ve seen in our research into provider practices in that arena. That’s not surprising, as DES isn’t really structured for an individualised world. Time to rethink your business model for that one.
ADE’s present something of a conundrum, in that they have significant assets that could be directed towards their real purpose of being employment training centres. Is that happening? Not really – there are a few ADE’s that are grasping the nettle and moving into the future, but equally there are many that are simply rebadging themselves as social enterprises without making any real change to their practices. They’ll be easy to spot as they’ll rush through the door to get hold of the new wages assessment tool when and if it becomes available in February 2018. They’ll be closely followed by the brigade that believes that the future is simply the past with a new assessment tool.

ADE’s have the opportunity to grasp the future like their counterparts in the USA and move into the future, a future that sees them as part of a continuum of employment training, support and placement using evidence-based practices that stand up to scrutiny and the integrity of practice based on empirical evidence. If they simply change the names and definitions of what they do, it won’t pass muster, nor should it.

Employment Services for people with a disability shouldn’t be dependent on silos of programs, but a continuous – seamless process directed by the client and underpinned by provider collaboration and support. It’s easy to view employment through the lens of programs, but that’s a bit like a phantom pregnancy – all image and no action.

Employment services is part of a system – a system that needs equilibrium based on collaboration across consultants, employers, providers and government with the client at the centre and the focus of our efforts with the family sitting around the whole system providing the protective factors that ensure that their sons and daughters are afforded our best efforts and evidence to deliver what they want, not simply grist for the employment mill.

Next week, we’re gathering for our annual disability employment think tank in the Yarra Valley for three days of discussion and to try and use the evidence to come up with solutions for the future of true client-driven, directed and owned employment. I’m pretty sure our group of participants from all areas of disability employment; parents, people with a disability, ADE’s and DES providers, government and academics will have plenty to discuss and chew over as we hopefully enjoy some spring sunshine working out in the open fresh air beside the Yarra River. I know I certainly have a lot to share from my 2017 learnings so far and equally a lot to learn through collaboration.
Imagining a Better Disability Employment
Future in 2018

In late 2015, myself and a group of like-minded colleagues, founded the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP) with the express view towards building a strong evidence base for disability employment in Australia. We recognise that over the years there had been a number of researchers working and making valuable contributions in this vital area, but no real collective focus by any one institution. At the urging of overseas and local associates, we decided to step up to the mark. Daunting no doubt when you start with only the best intentions and no financial support other than our own resources and a plan to change the future. At the start of our third year, we are starting to see the fruits of our labours come to bloom.

This month, the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation published the first of our papers on Social pathways for Australian Disability Entreprises (ADE’s). This paper explores the characteristics of a social model for ADE and outlines what they should look like. The follow-on paper will look at four entreprises that have taken this pathway.

If you look at our website or any of my previous posts you would know that we have a technical and working relationship with Griffin Hammis Associates in the USA that informs our work in the area of Customised Employment. I’ve known Cary Griffin for a number of years and spend time with him and his associates in the USA every year. Cary was one of the people that urged me to start CDERP and supports our work with a
technical and research alliance that is manifest in one of our current research projects that contextualizing both the Discovery Process and the Discovery Fidelity Scale to the Australian setting. This work is being led by CDERP’s Lauren Pavlidis and is soon to start validity trials in Australia. You can expect to see the research outcomes later in the year and it is already feeding into our training work.

In my thesis work, I started developing new disability employment outcome measure based on Social Quality Theory. I am pleased to say that Peter Rhodes from CDERP has taken over this program and will use it to underpin his PhD. Look out for update soon this over the coming years. Another outcome of my thesis has been the development of a new disability employment system model. During my research, I found that no model properly accounted for the disability employment system and this new model has been shown internationally and will be one of my focuses over the coming years. The School Leaver Employment Support review that we undertook in 2017 for the government will be supported nicely by the model.

As you would be no doubt aware the government is holding an ADE inquiry, which I have spent time developing a response to, which builds on CDERP’s current fieldwork with ADE’s and my research outcomes. As part of the development of that submission and what we have seen at the DES workshops, I have developed a new ADE pathway model which will be included in our submission and will develop into a separate body of work. I am fortunate that I have a good body of colleagues and workmates that provide valuable input and comment to make what we do better.

Collectively we are building a comprehensive body of work which shows in our work with organisations in transition and disability employment practice. This year you will see our work in transitions become more apparent, our customised employment training becomes available in certificate Melbourne University and overseas in the form of a diploma. Both these two training outcomes mirror our work within organisations and support our whole of organisation transition practices. We have some great supporters here and overseas that allow us to work in the field getting our “hands dirty”, which is what really underpins what we do. Fieldwork and practice are the bedrock of our work.
Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

Today the committee released its final report to the USA Secretary of Labor. Established in September 2014, the primary purpose of the work of the Committee was to address issues, and make recommendations, to improve the employment participation of people with I/DD and others with significant disabilities by ensuring opportunities for Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). This is a brief summary highlighting what are to me some of the key points.

The committee define competitive integrated employment as work performed on a full or part-time basis (including self-employment) for which an individual is:

1. Compensated at not less than federal minimum wage requirements or state or local minimum wage law (whichever is higher) and not less than the customary rate paid by
the employer for the same or similar work performed by other individuals without disabilities;

2. At a location where the employee interacts with other persons who do not have disabilities (not including supervisory personnel or individuals who are providing services to such employee) to the same extent that individuals who do not have disabilities and who are in comparable positions interact with other persons; and

3. Presented, as appropriate, with opportunities for advancement that are similar to those offered other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

The report noted that; Increasing CIE for individuals with I/DD as well as those with other significant disabilities is a widely shared goal, but one for which a truly comprehensive federal strategy has yet to be defined and implemented.

For people with I/DD or other significant disabilities, center-based employment, also called sheltered workshops, have long been used as a place to provide “prevocational” services for people deemed as either unemployable in CIE or as “needing training” to prepare them for eventual CIE in their communities.

However, center-based employment has been shown to rarely result in CIE, and most participants in center-based employment are paid substantially below minimum wage. Currently, an estimated 228,600 people with I/DD and other significant disabilities are being paid subminimum wage under certificates issued by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Wage and Hour Division (WHD).

Consistent with what evidence tells us, they report; ”Models have shown repeatedly that people previously considered ‘unemployable’ can work, can be productive and can achieve independence. Thus, investing in this approach is a wise use of public funds.” In light of these truths, finding ways to make CIE accessible for individuals with I/DD and other significant disabilities should be a shared priority of federal and state governments and disability community stakeholders.”
“Creating opportunities, removing barriers, and expecting a substantial improvement in the workforce participation rate of individuals with I/DD and other significant disabilities are all essential elements to ensure full economic participation and self-sufficiency. Working adults with disabilities are two times more likely to be living in poverty than their non-disabled peers. CIE is a pathway out of poverty that changes expectations about income production, savings, and economic mobility.”

In the area of practice implementation consistent with our research they note that the application of evince based practice is sketchy at best. It’s not uncommon to find services that state they are one thing actually just using the term to mask what is essentially “their version of evidence-based practice.”

They reported; “Even when services are intended to result in CIE, the design and implementation of services are not reflective of Evidence Based Practice (EBP), that is, practice grounded in research and shown to be effective. For example, there is considerable research support for providing experience in community-based workplaces performing actual work tasks as a tool for exposing individuals to career and employment options and as a way of determining work preferences and teaching work skills.”

“However, this EBP strategy is inconsistently applied, or alternative and ineffective strategies are employed, such as “work readiness training” in sheltered workshops, which compounds the ongoing challenge service providers face in successfully engaging employers who might hire individuals with significant disabilities. These circumstances point to an obvious need for elevating the skills of practitioners in the field who are supporting individuals with significant disabilities in seeking and obtaining CIE.”

“Delivering services that result in CIE requires a highly skilled workforce reaching a standard that has yet to be set nationally. In order to develop this workforce there needs to be access to quality training and a rebalancing of funding to pay professional wages that acknowledge the need for high standards to achieve high CIE outcomes.”

In the area of workforce development they made a number of recommendations such as;
CIE capacity-building for service provider staff needs to be driven by a common standard by which performance can be developed, supported and measured so that:

i. Pre-service and in-service training, ideally framed by certification standards, and technical assistance related to the expectation, value and outcome of CIE and skill development to facilitate CIE is provided at various levels, including:

ii.

1. Workforce development/employment and education/training service staff of all WIOA core programs and key partners at all levels of employment (i.e. executive, supervisory, and direct service personnel)

2. State agency workforce development/employment and education/training vendors

3. Certification, licensing, and quality assurance personnel associated with respective state agency workforce development/employment and education/training partners

4. Teachers and educators at all levels (early learning, pre-K, K-12, special education, higher education), and

5. Medical professionals who treat individuals with disabilities, including individuals with acquired disabilities (e.g. doctors, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, medical specialists, trauma medical staff, etc.)

ii. Pay scales for disability support professionals take into account certification standards so that these professionals are compensated at a rate that reflects their responsibility and expected competence in delivering services that support CIE. An effective employment system that supports CIE is contingent on the performance and retention of skilled disability support staff. The return on the federal investment in services that support CIE is consequently enhanced.

Additionally the following was recommended;

a. Nationwide web-based, centralized instruction must be developed and implemented in order to mandate that all public workforce system employment services personnel
become certified to ensure the continuity of the provision of quality services to businesses and people with disabilities, in particular to people with I/DD and significant disabilities.

b. Educational online initiatives should include, but not be limited to: all employment services personnel within the public workforce system and directed to AJC management and staff, business service representatives, Workforce Development Board members and staff, state workforce executives, and vocational rehabilitation staff.

c. Leads to a certification credential for both current and new employment services personnel working within the public workforce system

d. Certification requirements should build on existing standards, such as those established by the Association for Persons Supporting Employment First (APSE) Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) exam, and augment any other existing professional standard requirements, e.g., Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification and appropriate remuneration have been discussion points domestically for some time.

Significant among the recommendations was that transition service should start at the age of 14, something that I’ve long believed would rid our current system of the inconsistencies that abound in the delivery of school transition services. It is suggested that:

1. Students with significant disabilities to leave school either employed or with a post-school employment plan that leads to employment;

2. Students with significant disabilities to participate in transition programs that include integrated work experience, internships, apprenticeships or similar job experiences.

Additionally they recommend;

a. setting of transition goals that are based on CIE first and “presumed employability” of all individuals,
b. a requirement for a minimum of one competitive integrated job prior to high school exit that is documented as a transition service,

c. required participation of both the state vocational rehabilitation services agency and the state intellectual/developmental disabilities agency at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings of transition-age youth, and/or or other agencies responsible for providing or paying for transition services,

d. prohibition of Section 14(c). subminimum wage employment or services as an allowable transition service or post-school outcome, and

e. the age of concentrated transition planning to begin no later than 14. Families should also be supported through the following measures;

i. Information to families of students with disabilities about strong predictors of post-school success, to include paid, community-based, integrated work experiences prior to school exit.

ii. **Family engagement strategies to include:**

1. support for the whole family in working toward shared goals for their children, 2. a clear role for family participation,

3. a role for successfully-employed self-advocates and their families to mentor students and their families from diverse cultures who are learning about their own possible career pathways,

4. career exploration opportunities,

5. building students’ self-advocacy and self-determination skills, including making informed financial decisions and improving financial capability,

6. progress monitoring at key transition stages en route to achieving job of choice (from early intervention, middle school, high school, to post-school, and including CIE and postsecondary education), and
Individual Agency in a Post Capitalist Society - Employment for All

I recently came across Rifkin’s article published in November last about the potential demise of capitalism and it got me thinking about society, government and employment in the future.

One of the hallmarks of capitalism is its relentless drive to minimise costs and increase income. Business will always chase cheap labour around the globe, making it largely impossible for developed societies to compete at this level and also maintain the existing standards of living. We’re witnessing this in Australia with the ongoing assault on wages and conditions by government and business via the Fair Work Australia framework and the use of various instruments that allow business to circumvent local conditions by employing people under the various (nefarious?) visa arrangements.

What seems to be missing from this assault on local conditions is an understanding that by driving down labour costs you also reduce the capacity of the local market to absorb your product, thereby reducing sales potential and so on the cycle goes. Allied with this we have successive governments that have proven unable or inept at managing the country’s finances and repeatedly don’t seem to understand that business is one up on
them and is just applying the generous rules governments have put in place that facilitate both profit shifting and the ability to move labour globally.

So where does this leave the future of employment, a vexed question that both government and its employment service providers seem not to be able to answer.

Now consider this. Once we drive down wages to levels that force people to reconsider their life goals, then things change. We’re currently witnessing a trend back to wholesome clean food that we know the providence of. For many people this means community gardens and reinventing the old family veggie plot. With the potential for our government to foolishly spread the GST to veggies and food, this move will amplify the move to grow your own, negating the governments income drive and accelerating the trend to people simplifying their lives and choosing experience and health over asset accumulation. Can you see the trend emerging?

Throw in an increasingly casualised workforce of permanent part-timers and people with multiple jobs and you can really see something developing that hasn't existed before and should scare the hell out of government and big business.

Allied with increasing numbers of unemployed, the increasing use of the internet for all manner of trade, the rise of community sharing and the simple life you can see people rethinking what is meaningful employment for them.

The internet gives many professionals the opportunity to work from home or remote locations. Casualisation and contract work has meant that for many people, the idea of working in one place for 40 hours a week to earn a reasonable income is, well passé! and well risky. There's no such thing as permanency, so why not take control of your working life. You can quite comfortably string together a few contracts that give you the freedom to work the hours you want and earn the income you desire to have your version of a simple life and away you go, the best of both worlds - a good income and the freedom to choose.

For the government it means less control and to a degree it makes government less relevant and maybe why younger people have disengaged from the political process.
What about the future of employment? Well the internet is a playing field leveller, it means that you no longer have to have a university education to earn good money, all you need is a great idea that fills a niche and away you go. Consider the number of people that make a living simply sharing information through their blogs and websites and the associated advertising revenue that it creates for them.

What about everyone else? Well, I think this is the start of the micro business - one-person employer generation. Self-employment, which gives you a reasonable income that meets your family needs, allied with a simpler life supported by community engagement is our future. For the government, the notion that giving money and tax breaks to business to employ or buy something to stimulate the economy and therefore tax revenue is like burning dollar bills - rather pointless.

Self-employment doing something that you like doing is the future of employment for everyone, including the unemployed. Don't get me wrong, there is always going to be big business employment opportunities, but this is where job service providers should be going. Government, big business and our banks need to open their eyes to the changing dynamic in society - control is devolving back to the community. They ignore it at their peril. You can access Rifkin's article at;

Is Social Entreprise the New Black?

Some months ago when I started my current research program into social entreprise as a possible driver for open employment for people with a disability, a colleague in the USA stated he hated the use of the term “social entreprise” because it could be bastardised and used to dress up a sheltered workshop or Australian Disability Entreprises (ADE) as they are called in Australia, without making any changes to how they operate or the outcomes that they achieve. I could see his point and it gave me pause to think what I might find.

After all we’d already moved away from the “sheltered workshop” terminology to Australian Disability Entreprises to make them more acceptable and to a degree this was successful in part due to the lack of community awareness of what an ADE is. Social Entreprise is a whole new term with a trendy proposition – a business aimed at community benefits! For ADE’s and their not for profit owners, it fits with an enlightened community, particularly for not for profits who have religiously engaged in a war on the “for profits” entering their sector, you know the one – charities. How dare they make a profit from community service work!

Not for profits of course make a profit, the difference is that all their profits must go towards furthering their stated cause rather than paid out in dividends to shareholders
and in the event that they are wound up, the assets go to a like-minded not for profit.
Now a number of our not for profits if they were listed companies would rank right up there in the top 100 companies, so let’s get away from the fallacy that they’re little businesses.

Social Enterprises have been around for the better part of thirty years serving a variety of causes but lack a clear definition of what a social entreprise is. Efforts have been underway for some time to create a common definition, but I wonder if this will simply be an exercise in semantics?

When I started my research I looked at a variety of lists of social entreprises in Australia to see if there was a common thread. Disappointingly what I’ve found is thousands of sheltered workshops or ADE’s now listed as social entreprises that appear no different in how they operate today to when they were largely formed. This sadly confirms some of my colleague’s suspicions about social entreprise and to a degree is consistent with much of the language that exists in the disability employment community in that terminology is adopted to describe practice with no relationship to real evidence-based practice.

What would you expect to see in a real social entreprise that operates in the disability space? Well for me that would include evidence-based practices, a community benefit focus, full award wages, career options, training and development, choice, on the job support and a profitable business. Oddly that’s not too dissimilar to what we’d all expect in a respectable employer.

Will we see real social entreprise evolve in Australia or will we continue to see the rise of faux social entreprise? Me, I’m an optimist, so I think that with full support from the boards of ADE’s, a move to change the culture and the utilisation of all the service providers assets, including lifestyle services, supporting the social entrepreneur within, we can move to true social entreprise models of open employment.

Where do you start? Why not start by having a look at what exists within your organisation and contrast that with successful social entreprises.
I’d like to see social entreprise not be the new black or this season’s fashionable entity, but simply an entreprise that quietly goes about changing society, the lives of the people that work within them and be seen as a valuable community partner.

This is something that I think we might explore at our Disability Employment retreat in October.

**Job Assessment - What Assessment?**

I was thinking about JCA’s, the process and the number of inappropriate assessments that are turned out. You could argue that it’s the clients fault because they provide the evidence but given the time frame in which they’re conducted you could equally argue that it’s the assessor’s inability to understand the client that is at fault. Ann Neville wrote in 2011 that her research had shown that it was the mismatch between disability and the assessors qualifications. I won’t argue with that as I’ve seen assessments signed off by exercise physiologists, whose training in the area of intellectual disability would be slim at best, non-existent at worst.

But it raises the question as to why assess in the first place. Certainly the JCA process with its deficits approach effectively means that the client is disadvantaged from the start. But again why assess and why send in a report to the employment consultant that has the capacity to prevent the consultant from seeing the real person.
I would argue that if DES is to truly operate in a person-centred way, using customised employment strategies, then JCA’s are of no value. Before you scream blue murder, ask yourself to clearly explain the difference between someone with a benchmark of 8 hours and 9 hours? Better still explain it to someone who doesn’t work in the DES system.

Customised employment practices require the use of Discovery, of developing an understanding of natural supports and integrating them, understanding the client in their own environment and understanding the client from a functional perspective. None of these factors can be understood or explored in the current assessments processes and this is only the start of the customised employment process.

It seems to me that the system is mismatched with the client and that process is more important that truly understanding the client. It might be easier to change the system and let consultants do their job in a true person-centred manner.

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Maintaining Fidelity in Customised Employment

Customised employment has been rapidly gaining ground over the past decade in the USA as a result of the efforts of people like Cary Griffin and his people at Griffin Hammis Associates and Michael Callahan at Marc Gold and Associates.
Across the USA and Australia there are many people that proclaim that they use Customised Employment and its key process of Discovery. The evidence suggests that for many this is simply a name and for some a process that they can short cut to suit themselves. The reality is that there are no shortcuts to job development and successful outcomes - you must use the entire process.

In order to protect the fidelity of the process and to ensure that the process of customised employment is properly implemented, a discovery fidelity scale is being developed. Lead by Dr. Stephen Hall from Griffin Hammis, a consortium of academics, practitioners and disability councils, this project is moving rapidly to validity and reliability testing. Once validated it will provide an empirically validated measure as to whether Discovery has been properly implemented - in short whether you are actually using all the steps required to be truly using Customised Employment processes.

With Discovery now a legally mandated process in the USA, the development of the Discovery Fidelity Scale holds out the promise that those that say they are using customised employment will truly be customised employment specialists. The scale itself will only be available to those who have completed training in its application, something that will be available when the scale is finally validated.

At present the working model isn’t available publicly or able to be distributed. However we at CDERP will be reviewing the scale at our October retreat in order to provide input into its development and application globally.

This is one of the many things that we’ll be working on at our retreat. I’m presently in the USA looking at how customised employment is done and have just spent the last few days with Cary Griffin at the annual Griffin Hammis invitation only retreat for experts in customised employment. I’ve got a bucket load of stuff to share with CDERP people and our retreat attendees. It’s going to be fun and the next year is full of promise, which includes a disability employment study tour of the USA in June that culminates with presenting at the APSE 2017 conference in Portland. We’ll be detailing more of that trip at our retreat.

If you’re wondering who the guys in the photo are, that’s Cary Griffin expressing his brotherly love for me. Told you it was going to be fun!
Measuring the Success of Disability Employment

For many years now Disability Service providers have been awarded stars ranging from one to five to signify how successful they were at producing employment outcomes. For all intents and purposes this is the only measure that clients have to gauge the success of the provider, but is it truly a measure of the employment success?

Surely there are other factors that should be considered in determining the success of the outcome, factors such as the end benefit of employment. It could be argued that outside of whether they found you a job are irrelevant, however ask yourself whether you’d stay in a job if it didn’t provide other benefits beyond a wage.

Employment for employments sake lacks merit. Employment that provides tangible benefits such as career progression, inclusion, cohesion, empowerment and quality of life benefits are some of the hallmarks of quality employment. None of these factors are currently part of the measure of success in rating the providers in the DES system and why not. At a guess I’d say that it’s simply the fact whilst we might like to think that DES is different from mainstream employment services, it isn’t. It’s a job service designed to plug you into a job quickly so that government can reduce welfare outlays. Cost reduction is always the governments agenda and well rightfully so, as the capacity to pay for services isn’t infinite.
That said, there should be a better way to measure employment outcomes that also considers the social quality of those outcomes in terms of the impact of employment on the client long term. Employment in itself isn’t simply about an income, but about the intangible effects that employment brings to the individual and the community at large. It is this relationship with the other or environment that determines the type of society that we have.

So how do we create a better outcome measure that reflects government priorities and client ambitions?

At the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP) we’re undertaking a project to develop a better outcome measure utilising social quality theory as our framework. As part of this research, we need to define what the parameters actually mean to people. These parameters are the four pillars of social quality theory, being Social Inclusion, Social Cohesion, Empowerment and Socio-Economic Security. Now it might be easy to say that we actually understand what these four factors mean, but do we? What do they mean to you, what do they mean to someone with a disability, we don’t know until we actually have that discussion with the community.

It’s a bit like work and employment, they appear to be the same, but they’re not!

Where to from here? Peter Rhodes from CDERP is currently outlining the first part of the research into defining these parameters, which will lead to a research project to development of a consensus view that we can work from and test. We expect to start this conversation in general terms at our disability employment retreat in October, 2016. From here, it will move to the broader community, before drilling down in the disability community. Join us in this exciting project!
Strengthening an Inclusive Pathway for People with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Families

The USA President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities released their final report of 2016. They focused on four areas to determine how a new path can be forged for people with ID to be included in all aspects of society as full participants and full opportunities for an engaged life. These areas are: Family Engagement, Federal Education Policies, Transition and Self-Determination and Supported Decision-Making.

With particular reference to employment they made a series of recommendations, which I have posted here verbatim.

People with ID have one of the lowest rates of participation in the workforce of any subgroup in the country, if not the lowest. Their rate is far lower than any group of colour and lower than almost all subgroups of people with disabilities. As summarized by the Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities in their Interim Report (2015), youth with ID are less likely than their peers to graduate from high school, less likely to pursue postsecondary education, more likely to participate in sheltered-workshops and significantly more likely to be unemployed for much or all of their adult lives.
Research during the past fifteen years has clearly identified the factors that increase the likelihood of youth with disabilities securing a job. Work-based experiences in competitive integrated employment are the number one factor affecting the likelihood of a person with a disability securing competitive integrated work after they leave school (Carter et al., 2012; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Test et al., 2009).

Other factors that contribute to the higher likelihood of securing a job after school are early connections to vocational rehabilitation services (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Schall et al., 2015), instruction and practice in self-determination activities (Berry et al., 2012; Getzel & Wehman, 2005), participation in the general education curriculum during high school (Berry et al., 2012), and family expectations (Wehman, 2013).

A number of pilot projects conducted over the past decade have resulted in youth with ID achieving jobs in competitive integrated settings at the 60–70 percent level, compared to the 14–18 percent level of most adults with ID. Projects such as Partnerships in Employment (PIE) sponsored by AIDD (Partnerships in Employment National Transition Systems Change Project, 2016), Project SEARCH (Schall et al., 2015), Transition Systems Integration Model (Certo et al., 2009), and the Seamless Transition Model (Luecking & Luecking, 2015) have all been successful at increasing the employment outcomes of young adults with ID.

In addition to strategies cited above for increasing the likelihood of employment after pre-K–12 education, participation in service learning, such as the activities conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), can provide pre-employment skill-building to increase workforce participation (Spera et al., 2013). National service experiences provide young adults with ID with experiences and skill development similar to that gained through paid work in integrated settings. Those who complete a service term for one of the CNCS programs are eligible to receive an education award that can fund postsecondary education or pay down college debt. In addition, national service members may receive modest living allowances during their service terms that can assist with launching young people with disabilities into the workforce. While they should not be a substitute for paid work experiences, volunteer experiences can lead to employment and, as such, can be a strategy for increasing workforce participation for young adults with ID.

Despite the clear knowledge that has been gained about what factors can be implemented to increase the likelihood of employment for young adults with ID, availability of these strategies across the country varies greatly (Carter et al., 2009). Policies are needed to support the use of the strategies that have been identified through evidence-based research. The following recommendations highlight key points from the aforementioned publications (see footnote on page 56) and are designed to increase the likelihood of youth with ID securing and retaining employment as they transition from pre-K–12 schooling into adulthood.

Recommendations: Employment

Recommendation #42: The U.S. Department of Labor should continue to support States to expand their Employment First initiatives.

As of the writing of this Report, 46 states have initiated Employment First activities (APSE, 2016). However, these initiatives vary greatly. The U.S. Department of Labor should provide technical assistance to ensure such strategies, as customized employment and supported employment, make it possible for people with ID to work in competitive integrated settings.

Recommendation #43: The U.S. Department of Education should issue guidance that encourages schools with transition-age youth with intellectual disabilities to participate in work-based learning.

The work-based learning experiences provided to young people with ID should be in integrated settings where they are able to learn and implement job skills. Youth with ID should also have the opportunity to experience paid work at competitive wages in an integrated setting.

Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities (set to be released in September 2016).
A framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community living.

Recommendation #44: The U.S. Department of Education should issue guidance to states and local school districts to ensure that secondary and postsecondary career and technical education (CTE) programs are accessible to students with disabilities and that such students are recruited for CTE programs.

The U.S. Department of Education, through the issuance of guidance and in the absence of reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, should direct secondary public schools and postsecondary programs using federal CTE funds, to develop strategies to recruit, enrol, retain, and graduate students with disabilities. Such guidance should include strategies for states to develop technical assistance for local school districts and state community colleges to serve students with disabilities, including those with ID. The Department should also offer guidance to local school districts to promote the inclusion of CTE programming in the IEPs of youth with ID, when the program is consistent with the student’s academic and transition goals.

Recommendation #45: The U.S. Department of Education should issue guidance that promotes at least one 10-week-minimum, paid, work-based experience in an integrated workplace setting.

As part of their transition plan, students with ID should have at least one work-based learning experience in a competitive integrated setting. Students should not be placed in subminimum-wage settings for either pre-employment training experiences or work-based learning experiences. Based on the interventions used in the “Youth Transition” and the “PROMISE” studies a 10-week paid work experience should be made available for all transitioning youth with ID.

Recommendation #46: The U.S. Department of Education should combine the use of IDEA Part D funds and ESSA Title II funds to create competitive grants for the purpose of developing new teacher and school leader workforce cohorts at the local level knowledgeable about strategies for increasing competitive integrated employment among students transitioning from pre-K–12 schooling.
These cohorts can be developed through the creation of institutes, seminars, or long-term professional development experiences that provide educators with information about program models, curricula, and intervention strategies which, based on robust research findings, are likely to increase the chances of employment for students with intellectual disabilities. Such institutes should have at least the following components:

- examples of the impact of high expectations from teachers, counsellors, school leaders, and other school personnel on the employment of students with intellectual disabilities;

- information about the impact of work-based learning and experiences in competitive integrated employment for students with intellectual disabilities;

- the effect of parent and family member expectations on the employment of students with intellectual disabilities;

- education in benefits counselling, to be able to accurately talk with youth with ID and their family members about the impact of working on SSI and other benefits; and

- train-the-trainers instruction in each of the above areas to enable cohort participants to effectively communicate the information to their school colleagues.

Recommendation #47: The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) should issue guidance to state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services regarding effective strategies for collaborating with local school districts to develop transition plans for students with intellectual disabilities beginning at age fourteen.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration should clarify with state VR programs, the role of VR counsellors in the transition of youth with ID. State agreements, such as the one developed by Tennessee, should be implemented to ensure that local schools and VR services coordinate the services they provide (Tennessee Interagency Transition Agreement, 2012).

Recommendation #48: The U.S. Department of Education should update guidance and enforcement of IDEA indicators 13 and 14 to promote the path toward competitive integrated employment for youth with intellectual disabilities.
The U.S. Department of Education’s reporting requirements related to the implementation of IDEA include a set of indicators about which local school districts and state education agencies must provide outcome data. Indicators 13 and 14 address transition planning and activities, and postschool outcomes, for students with disabilities. PCPID recommends that, as part of indicator 13, families receive quarterly updates on a student’s progress toward achieving postschool outcomes, including participation in work-based learning activities. The President’s Committee also recommends that the U.S. Department of Education monitor states and their oversight of local school districts regarding annual assessment of postschool outcomes for all exiting students, reporting on their postschool outcomes for at least five years. The Department should work with states to establish goals for local school districts related to student participation in postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment. Local school districts not achieving those goals should be provided with support and technical assistance from their state education agency.

Recommendation #49: The U.S. Department of Education should issue guidance to update the IEP process to guide teams, including family members, to include goals that are outcome-based and inclusive of postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment.

During the transition period of a youth with disabilities, including youth with ID, local school districts are required to convene IEP teams annually to review and update IEP transition goals, and include postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment goals as appropriate for the student.

The U.S. Department of Education should provide guidance for state education agencies and local school districts to ensure the provision of training for IEP team members on the most up-to-date evidence-based practices related to achieving postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment. Local school districts should be provided with strategies to track and report progress toward such goals from the start of transition planning for all students with disabilities. Data should be collected and reported by disability category.
What stands out for me is the acknowledgment about the merit of work-based learning and the use of work experience prior to leaving school. One of the flaws in our current system (and there are many) is the separation of school and employment. Transition should start earlier in high school and not be a distinct project post school. Transition should be viewed as the attainment of life and employment skills pre-ending of school not viewed as something that takes place post school, like entering university to learn about your career and gain those skills. I'm hopeful that the system of the future for DES and NDIS employment will begin earlier in high school (age 14) and be a seamless transition replete with work experiences, evidence-based practices and customised approaches. The current systems are neither person centred or holistic and certainly have little respect for a self-determined career or future. Paternalism should be dead and buried, but sadly it isn't. It continues to be a replay of that old "Father Knows Best" sitcom from the 50's/60's and who wants to watch that again.

The report may be about the USA situation, but there's much we can learn from it.

You can find the full report at:
http://www.acl.gov/Programs/AIDD/Program_Resource_Search/docs/PCPID-Report-2016.pdf
The NDIS and Employment

One of the areas of support available within the NDIS is that of support to find and maintain a job. Recently you may have noticed a rise in the number of ads for the School Leavers Employment Support (SLES) program, many of the ads from Disability Employment Services (DES) providers now moving into the NDIS space.

SLES is of course a remake of the state-based Transition to Work (TTW) programs that were designed to assist students to transition from high school to employment, a program that by any assessment was a mediocre success at best. The new version starts with a teacher delivered functional work assessment for students with permanent disability. From here of course there is a visit to a planner and then the opportunity for the student who has qualified for the NDIS supports to talk with one of the providers about using their services. Most of the providers have put up glossy websites touting their credentials and reasons to use their services. Most offer work experience and an array of reasons to connect with them.

Without going into the mechanics of the process of becoming eligible to access the supports and of course the $20K plus funds available to pay the provider there is an elephant in the room that no one will talk about.
Given the failure of the DES system to manifestly improve employment rates amongst people with a disability, what makes anyone think that the DES providers will make a difference in the NDIS arena?

One of the promises of the NDIS was the opportunity for people with a disability to exercise real choice and control over their life and destination. These types of parameters don't exist in practice within the DES system and aren't likely to be displayed by DES providers working in the NDIS space. Why, well because it will require a radical change in culture within the provider system, something that isn't possible by simply saying we've changed and made a pretty website.

Evidence based practice requires that providers function in a true person-centred manner and adopt the practice of customised employment if they are to really work within the client driven and controlled NDIS environment. For disability employment service providers, this is something that they've yet to demonstrate capacity to deliver. There are of course a few exceptions within the DES system.

The NDIS held out the promise of true client driven and client-controlled practice and outcomes, outcomes that include career planning and real work for real pay. It includes self-employment for those that want it and ownership of entreprise. Rebadging old systems that only marginally worked and allowing the programs to be driven by marginally effective providers isn't innovative and doesn't bode well for the future of employment under the NDIS.

I fear that what we are witnessing is a repeat of the sheltered workshop movement rebadging themselves as disability entreprises and now of course the current flavour of the month; social entreprises, without making any real change to how they operate other than a new logo and a fresh coat of paint.

Change is possible, and outcomes can improve, but it will require real innovation and real change. There is one opportunity for change and improvement, but it won't come from the old providers, but that's another story.
Work and Identity

"Work is a very serious matter in almost all respects, whether it is work in the shelter of our home or work in the big, wide, dangerous world. Through work, human beings earn for themselves and their families, make a difficult world habitable, and with imagination, create some meaning from what they do and how they do it. The human approach to work can be naive, fatalistic, power-mad, money-grubbing, unenthusiastic, cynical, detached and obsessive. It can also be selflessly mature, revelatory and life-giving; mature in its long-reaching effects, and life-giving in the way it gives back to the individual or society as much as it has taken. Almost always it is both, a sky full of light and dark, with all the varied weather of an individual life blowing through it."

David Whyte - Crossing the Unknown Sea; Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity.

I wonder if in our fervour to place people with a disability into what we perceive as their ideal job - a safe job - do we deny the individual the opportunity to experience work at its fullest and by default the opportunity to grow and live their life?

I wonder if in this compliance driven system have we lost sight of the value of work to the individual beyond just a job?

Work as a Continuum

In recent times it has become common to see the role of various employment programs as part of a continuum of employment. It generally goes something like this;

School – Transition to Work – Australian Disability Entreprises – DES.

Somewhere in here, we might add vocational learning, NDIS or even leave out the ADE, all of which seems to make the peak bodies and providers all warm and happy. But look again and what do you see?
The most obvious factor is that the person is missing, followed by the other fact – it’s about programs and transitioning between programs. So, our continuum of work is, in fact, nothing more than a continuum of programs or specifically how the individual will transition between programs. Outcomes in some cases for providers can be achieved simply by moving between programs – a curious case of an employment outcome being a transition with no employment for the individual, just another program to make you “job ready”.

What would happen if we adopted a different approach and made the individual the key focus and not the program? What if the continuum was reimagined as an individual continuum? What if the focus was a career and independence?

What about this idea that work was a continuum of work experiences, work-based learning, vocational learning in-situ and that every period of unemployment was simply another opportunity within the individual continuum to add new skills as part of a career?

In the mid-nineties, Schmid (1995) introduced the concept of Transitional Labour Markets (TLM) that proposed a different approach to how we view employment. Schmid suggested that our opinion of employment, and in particular full employment, should change to reflect a more sustainable view of employment that included domestic and voluntary work and that people are always in transition that included training and /or the accumulation of competencies during these changes. Unemployment can be viewed as another career transition to be managed, taking what could be described as a holistic view of the individual and the institutions that support transition through policies (Brzinsky-Fay, 2010; Reci and De Bruijn, 2006).

This underscores the role of employment and training as a pathway to inclusion in society. This is also consistent with the view that continuous learning is part of the process of transitional labour markets and an aim of social policy (Schmid, 1995), potentially highlighting a better pathway from school to employment by combining work preparation with school transition services pre-school exit rather than our current approach of post-school transition to work programs which commence post-school.
It supports the proposition that school transition programs should have employment as a potential outcome shaped by the individuals desire, not simply by economic philosophy (Schmid, 2007), particularly given that school is essentially about preparing someone for a life in the community that includes the expectation that employment or work is a normal part of living in the community.

Reci and De Bruijn (2006) noted that Schmid's Transitional Labor Market model was based on;

...the assumption that by the right support of the institutions, individuals should be facilitated to make smooth transitions from one life domain to the other. The smooth transitions between life domains would improve the functioning of the labour markets and would also offer individuals the possibility to find an optimal combination of their working careers, care duties, education and free time. (p2)

The outcome of our efforts should be a self-determined individual in control of their destiny without interference from the system, working or working towards their career choices and not simply a job to suit a program outcome. Programs come and go, but the individual is the continuum.

Part of this article has been reproduced from my PhD thesis.
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