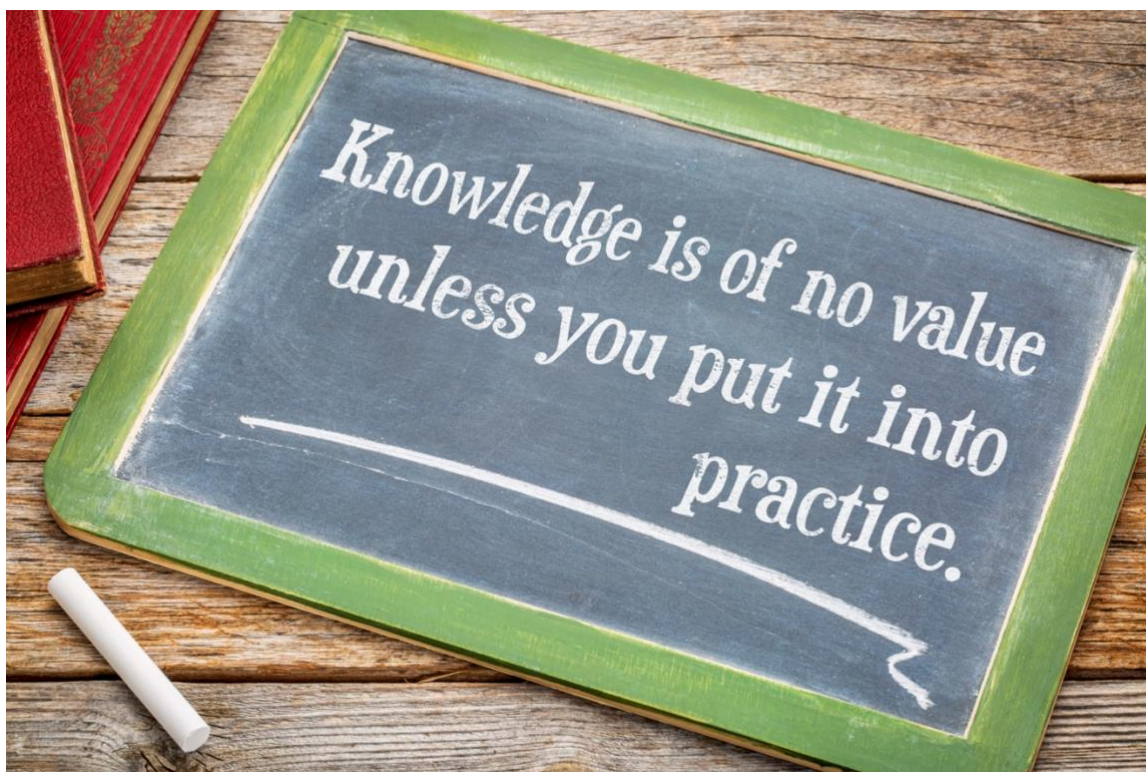


"Customised Employment: A Review of Recent Literature, Emphasising the Impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme"



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Index

Abbreviations	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Background	7
Examining the Literature	8
Peer-Reviewed Literature Outcomes	9
Grey Literature	14
Discussion	15
Limitations	17
References	18

Abbreviations

AAIDD	American Assoc. on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASID	Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability
CDERP	Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice
CE	Customised Employment
DFS	Discovery Fidelity Scale
EBSCO	Primary database of peer-reviewed journals available academia
GHA	Griffin Hammis Associates
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IPS	Individual Place and Support
MGA	Marc Gold and Associates
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
ODEP	Office of Disability Employment Policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PWD	People / Persons with a Disability
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VCU	Victoria Commonwealth University
VPS	Vocational Profile Strategy
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation

Executive Summary:

Despite persistent efforts and good intentions, the integration of individuals with disabilities into the workforce has fallen short compared to their non-disabled counterparts. The transition from segregated, sheltered employment settings to inclusive workplaces with equal opportunities has been slow, with many promises remaining unfulfilled. However, amidst this backdrop, Customised Employment emerges as a promising approach, offering tailored solutions to empower individuals with disabilities and reshape the employment landscape.

Rooted in person-centred principles and individualised planning, Customised Employment represents a departure from traditional employment models. It emphasises flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptability to align with evolving legislative mandates and policy frameworks. Customised Employment aims to craft personalised employment solutions that cater to each individual's unique needs and aspirations.

Emerging research supports the efficacy and fidelity of Customised Employment practices, underscoring their potential to address diverse challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. However, further research, including Randomized Controlled Trials, is needed to establish their effectiveness across various contexts and populations.

A notable feature of Customised Employment is its inclusivity, catering to individuals with various disabilities. It offers a pathway to meaningful employment, including options such as self-employment, micro-enterprise, and entrepreneurship. By fostering reciprocal relationships between employers and employees, Customised Employment enhances workplace culture and productivity.

Comprehensive training programs are essential for employment professionals to ensure effective implementation. While some organisations have adopted Customised Employment principles, there remains to be a gap between adoption and faithful practice. However, progressive entities in Australia are leading efforts to deliver Customised Employment with fidelity to the model through training initiatives and organisational change.

As demand for inclusive employment rises, Customised Employment offers a framework for action guided by a commitment to meaningful, dignified work for all. Embracing Customised Employment signifies a collective commitment to realising the potential of every individual, irrespective of ability, and unleashing innovation and productivity for societal benefit.

Key takeaways from Customised Employment include:

- Flexibility to align with legislation and policy, delivering tailored employment strategies that enhance individual capabilities.
- Growing research support, showcasing its fidelity to the model and effectiveness in diverse disability contexts.

- Need for further research and funding, particularly Randomized Controlled Trials, to establish evidence-based practices.
- Versatility in addressing barriers to employment for all individuals.
- Effectiveness across various disability groups, including support for self-employment and entrepreneurship.
- Fostering reciprocal relationships between employers and employees.
- Essential training for employment staff to effectively implement Customised Employment.
- There is a gap between organisational adoption and faithful practice, with some progressive entities investing in training and change.
- The urgency for change to meet rising demand.
- Contribution to a zero-exclusion mindset, providing meaningful employment opportunities tailored to individuals.

Embracing Customised Employment offers a pathway to fulfilling the promises of inclusive employment, advancing both individual empowerment and organisational diversity.

Introduction

The employment of individuals with disabilities stands at the intersection of human rights advocacy and economic necessity. Globally, legislative measures and adherence to conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), notably Article 27 (United Nations, 2006), have sought to facilitate and validate their integration into the workforce. The gold standard, characterised by open employment with equitable wages and conditions, has spurred substantial government investments worldwide in establishing support services and incentivising employers to embrace inclusivity.

However, despite these concerted efforts, significant disparities persist in employment rates for individuals with disabilities, both in Australia and internationally. Recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) paints a stark picture. While the employment rate for working-age individuals with disabilities (PWD) stands at 48%, their non-disabled counterparts boast an 80% employment rate (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2021). This stagnation in employment rates, particularly pronounced for individuals with disabilities, underscores a pressing need for more effective interventions.

Similarly, across the United Kingdom and Canada, where average employment rates for individuals with disabilities hover around 53%, and globally within OECD countries (OECD, 2022), where the average stands at 44%, persistent gaps persist between mainstream and disability employment (OECD, 2022). Despite incremental progress, the OECD notes that this disparity has remained largely unchanged over the past decade, signalling systemic challenges in addressing employment inclusivity.

In response, Australia has witnessed the evolution of traditional pathways to employment for individuals with disabilities, notably through the enactment of the

National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth, 2013). While the Disability Employment Service and Disability Enterprises have historically been primary avenues, the landscape is shifting towards a broader array of alternatives. These shifts reflect legislative reforms initiated by acts such as the Disability Services Act 1986 (Cth, 1986), a response to seminal reports like the New Directions Report (Cth, 1985). Similarly, in the United States, legislation such as the Developmental Disabilities Act of 1984 underscored the prioritisation of open or supported employment by federally funded state planning councils, echoing global efforts towards greater workforce inclusivity.

Background

Throughout the 1980s, the foundations of what we now recognise as Discovery were taking shape, emerging from environments of sheltered employment and segregated schooling. Led by Professor Lou Brown and his team at the University of Wisconsin, a narrative-based approach known as the Ecological Inventory Strategy was developed to assess student performance and characteristics. This strategy aimed to pinpoint disparities between a student's abilities and the demands of their current and future environments, informing the creation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with a focus on teaching employment skills within real-world community and workplace settings.

In 1986, the concept evolved further with Nesbit and Callahan's creation of the Vocational Profile Strategy (VPS) at Syracuse University. Subsequent demonstrations by Mike Callahan and the United Cerebral Palsy Associations (UCPA) validated the effectiveness of the VPS. Over the following years, various iterations of Vocational Profile and Person-Centered Career Planning methodologies emerged, with Victoria Commonwealth University (VCU) embracing Griffin and Hammis's Vocational Profile and Person-Centered Career Planning manual (1996).

By 1998, Mike Callahan at Marc Gold and Associates (MGA) introduced the term "Discovery" as a replacement for Profile Strategy. Concurrently, Griffin Hammis Associates (GHA) coined "Discovering Personal Genius" (DPG) to describe their Discovery approach, which emphasises identifying vocational themes through evidence for guiding informational interviews.

Both methodologies underscored the importance of person-centred planning in laying the groundwork for customised employment, a process that continues to evolve. This highlights the dynamic nature of the process, continually shaped by emerging evidence.

Towards the end of the last century, Lutfiyya, Rogan, and Shoultz (1988) outlined critical elements of supported or open employment, echoing Callahan's principles:

1. **Integration:** Individuals with severe disabilities should integrate into the workplace, working alongside non-disabled colleagues rather than being employed by rehabilitation agencies. Limiting the number of disabled individuals in a work area promotes integration and minimises stigma.
2. **Paid Work:** Individuals should receive fair compensation for their work, ideally based on productivity and quality.

3. **Individualised Services:** All aspects of supported employment should cater to individual needs, including job procurement, matching, training, and ongoing support.
4. **Ongoing Supports:** Comprehensive support, including transportation, financial management, advocacy, and social skills, should be available as long as needed, with flexibility to adapt to changing requirements.

These principles laid the groundwork for Customized Employment, a term that gained prominence during discussions within the Clinton administration's Committee for People with Disabilities.

Today, various adaptations of Discovery, such as the Individual Discovery Record – Australia (IDR-A) developed by the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP), reflect a commitment to interpreting relevant legislation while maintaining person-centeredness. However, challenges persist in translating person-centred principles into practice, as evidenced by the slow adoption of such practices in Australian disability employment.

In conclusion, person-centred employment practices, which trace back to Carl Rogers' work and have evolved significantly, emphasise the individual's centrality in service delivery. This approach should underpin efforts to design services for individuals facing barriers to full societal participation.

Examining the Literature

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the EBSCO database, employing keywords "customised," "employment," and "disability." The search was restricted to peer-reviewed papers from the past ten years to coincide with the inception of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Initially, the search yielded two hundred and forty-six papers. Removing the peer-reviewed constraint expanded the results to three hundred and seventeen papers. Subsequently, a focused review of abstracts targeting Customised Employment narrowed down the selection to forty-one papers.

Following the initial search, a secondary review of peer-reviewed journals specialising in disability and employment was undertaken. The search in the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation returned one hundred and sixty-five papers referencing Customised Employment. After eliminating duplicates and reviewing abstracts, the count was reduced to 25 papers. Conversely, journals such as Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities yielded four hundred and sixty-four papers on employment, but none matched the keyword "customised." Similar searches in Inclusion Journal and the American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities returned ninety-two and one hundred and ninety-nine papers, respectively, with no focus on Customised Employment.

Further exploration of Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities revealed twenty-one pertinent papers, of which four met the criteria after abstract review.

Exploration of Australian journals, particularly those under the auspices of the Australian Society for Intellectual Disability (ASID), did not yield any relevant results. Similarly, the Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability returned nine hundred and sixty-seven papers on disability employment, which dwindled to twelve upon adding the term "customised." However, none of these papers met the criteria upon abstract examination.

Disability and Society returned one thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight papers on disability and employment, which were reduced to thirty-one upon adding "customised." However, these papers focused on something other than Customised Employment or its practices, predominantly addressing rights, accommodations, marginalised groups, and education.

Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities produced one hundred and five results using the keywords "disability" and "employment," all of which were eliminated upon adding "customised."

Similarly, the Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities initially yielded one hundred and twenty-five papers, reduced to three upon adding "customised." Still, none of these met the criteria after abstract review.

In light of these findings, it is pertinent to highlight a recent update by Riesen et al. (2023), which builds upon their 2015 study examining the literature on Customised Employment as an evidence-based practice. Drawing upon Leahy's (2018) model for levels of evidence, they assert that much of the existing research on Customised Employment remains descriptive, albeit indicating favourable outcomes for people with disabilities. While randomised controlled trials are considered the gold standard, conducting such trials ethically with individuals with disabilities poses challenges. Riesen et al. suggest employing correlational studies and robust indicators as viable alternatives to advance Customised Employment from a promising practice to an evidence-based one.

This discussion will be further elaborated upon in subsequent sections of the report.

Peer-Reviewed Literature Outcomes

The literature on Customised Employment (CE) and Discovery, examined by both academics and practitioners, focuses on addressing employment barriers while establishing an evidence base for practice in specific contexts and opportunities. Harvey et al. (2013) aimed to create a competency model for Customised Employment, emphasising the importance of elements like Discovery. They underscored the necessity for tools to uphold Discovery's integrity and suggested developing an objective measure of CE outcomes to demonstrate the relationship between the

competency model and employment results. Inge et al. (2022) extended this inquiry by surveying disability employment service providers to ascertain prevalent Discovery activities.

Their findings indicated successful outcomes from CE but highlighted the need for a more consistent application of critical CE elements like Discovery and Job Development (Alexander, 2024). They stressed the importance of appropriately training CE professionals and implementing fidelity scales to apply evidence-based elements consistently (Jones et al., 2020). Moreover, Smith et al. (2019) emphasised the role of support and training in provider transformation, illustrating the dual benefits of investing in this area.

Jorgensen-Smith et al. (2017) investigated CE implementation within Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services akin to disability employment service providers in Australia. They concluded that while system change requires extensive effort beyond training, pragmatic considerations are crucial when introducing change strategies, especially in underfunded systems with high caseloads and staff turnover.

Murphy et al. (2014) highlighted the demand for competitive integrated employment (CIE) following the support for the Employment First initiative, with Customised Employment included in its definition. However, many service providers hesitated to transition from day services and socialisation outings to integrated employment. Recognising the emerging principles of Customised Employment, Murphy initiated a hybrid employment service at Worklink San Francisco, utilising braided funding to support open employment. This program, continuing today, blends day service funding with lifestyle support, emphasising a holistic approach to employment.

Reisen et al. (2015) reviewed the literature on Customised Employment, noting the scarcity of empirical evidence and recommending interventions using fidelity measures or replication studies to confirm CE's effectiveness. Wehman et al. (2016) studied participants with ASD engaged in CE, demonstrating its effectiveness in achieving employment and reducing support needs.

Brooke et al. (2018) supported job customisation in promoting long-term employment outcomes for ASD cohorts, stressing the cost-effectiveness of CE due to reduced support needs.

Smith & Parmenter (2023) proposed a personal outcome measure focusing on the impact of employment across various domains. They advocated for measures consistent with individually meaningful employment goals, aligning with the NDIS focus.

Riesen et al. (2022) suggested cost-benefit analysis and personal employment outcome measures to support the efficacy of practices like CE.

Hall et al. (2016) developed the Discovery Fidelity Scale, addressing the need for rigour and fidelity in the emerging evidence for Discovery, a crucial component of CE.

Research has identified gaps in employment specialists' application of CE principles, emphasising the importance of fidelity scales (Inge et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Riesen et al., 2019).

Discovery has also been explored as part of self-employment or social entrepreneurship, with research indicating its link to successful outcomes (Heath et al., 2013). This approach, a subset of CE, offers advantages like individual accommodation and a sense of achievement, warranting further investigation (Ouimette & Rammler, 2017; Parker-Harris et al., 2013).

Inge et al. (2018) conducted a study to define the defining characteristics of customised employment. After sampling twenty-eight subject matter experts, their analysis distilled twelve practices that define customised employment.

These practices are articulated as follows:

1. Meeting the individual at a location of their choosing.
2. Establishing rapport and understanding the individual.
3. Actively listening to the individual.
4. Identifying the individual's interests, skills, and abilities.
5. Conducting comprehensive interviews with the individual's family and friends regarding their interests, skills, and abilities.
6. Observing the individual in various community settings during daily activities.
7. Facilitating the individual's observation of local businesses aligned with their interests, skills, and abilities.
8. Conducting informational interviews with employers from local businesses reflective of the individual's interests, skills, and abilities.
9. Observing the individual performing job-related tasks.
10. Assisting the individual in identifying work experiences to refine or identify job interests, skills, and abilities.
11. Collaborating with the individual, family, and friends to confirm the individual's interests, job interests, skills, and abilities.
12. Negotiating a customised job description.

During their analysis, they found several customised employment practices aligning with qualitative research methods, such as researchers immersing themselves in the environments where the research subjects are engaged. These twelve practices expand upon the elements defined by Harvey et al. (2013). Building on the work of Inge et al. (2018), Riesen & Morgan (2018) investigated employer perspectives on customised employment. They emphasised the importance of reciprocity and mutuality, as highlighted by Luecking, Fabian, & Tilson (2004) and Wehman et al. (2018), in achieving successful Discovery outcomes that meet the needs of both employers and job seekers.

Engaging with a small cohort of business owners, they concluded that employment specialists need to acquire specific business-related knowledge, including finance, risk management, and hiring processes, and adopt a needs-based approach when working

with businesses. These skill sets are often lacking in disability employment, with specific job development techniques such as task analysis and job analysis being rare (Alexander et al., 2017; Alexander et al., 2023). This underscores the necessity of supporting employment staff with research, policy, and training that promote best practices, as noted by Migliore et al. (2018), Remund et al. (2022), and Riesen et al. (2022).

Riesen et al. (2019) reviewed the Discovery Fidelity Scale using an online modified Delphi study to attain consensus from a panel of experts. Conducted over three rounds, the study found consensus on 55 of 60 Discovery tenets, emphasising the importance of a fidelity scale to ensure consistent implementation of Discovery. Simultaneously, CDERP and the University of Melbourne convened a panel of experts in Australia and the USA to review the Discovery Fidelity Scale for application in Australia. Preliminary findings suggest that the US model of fidelity necessitates adjustments to align with Australia's funding model and cultural context, reflecting the emphasis on ensuring adequate funding for Community Integrated Employment (CIE) services in the USA.

Funding remains a contentious issue in the USA, with significant efforts underway to integrate customised employment with programs such as school transition to facilitate funding availability. For instance, Group Guided Discovery, a form of peer work, has been combined with Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to enhance employment transition outcomes, as observed by Salon et al. (2018). The Utah School to Work Initiative similarly blended or braided funding to support students using customised employment, demonstrating the impact of work experience and internships on students with disabilities (Jones-Parkin et al., 2021).

The challenge of providing significant work experiences to students with disabilities extends beyond the USA, with similar issues observed in Australia regarding funding limitations and insufficient opportunities for children with disabilities to access work experiences and planning (Discovery) to create meaningful post-school pathways.

In 2018, a pilot study undertaken by Koomarri (Canberra), Wanniasa High School, and the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP), funded by the Prosser Foundation, delivered a contextualised version of Group Guided Discovery to students at Wanniasa High School. CDERP trained Koomarri staff in customised employment and, with their support, delivered the Group Guided Discovery program to students, providing work experience and facilitating post-course support. The program underscored the advantages of early intervention and the utilisation of multiple work experiences to dispel any doubts parents and participants may have about employment potential (Smith & Stephen, 2018). Importantly, it aligned with O'Brien & Callahan's (2010) assertion that Discovery is a process of knowledge creation regarding an individual's employment interests and conditions for success. However, the persistent lack of funding for schools to offer significant transition support and planning continues to hinder employment pathways for children with disabilities.

Campbell et al. (2024) examined alternative pathways to employment through their examination of work integration social enterprise (WISE), noting customised

employment as a pathway to open employment. While the paper highlighted aspects of customised employment, it is notable for the conflation of customised employment and customising employment, often seen in settings where Customised Employment is viewed as an accommodation. This usually manifests itself in the larger community misconception of Customised Employment as being Discovery and Job Carving.

Taylor et al. (2021) examined the cost-benefit of competitive integrated employment (CIE) compared to sheltered employment within the context of customised employment. They found that while CIE front-loads the cost of extensive employment support, costs diminish over time as supports decrease. In contrast, sheltered employment was found to incur constant costs and was not deemed cost-effective.

Their analysis of twenty-six research papers examining the cost-effectiveness of employment support types indicated that the cost-benefit ratio for individuals supported into employment using a customised approach was even more significant when considering individual outcomes. They concluded that although reforming segregated employment may incur costs, failing to do so would result in the loss of hidden talent within the community.

These findings align with the work of Riesen et al. (2023), who, in their updated paper, found few new research papers, possibly due to stringent inclusion criteria requiring research papers with objective fidelity measures. Nonetheless, their work underscores the evolution and current state of evidence supporting customised employment as an evidence-based practice. Riesen et al. (2023) recommend that future studies examine components of the customised employment process to ensure seamless connections between Discovery, Job Development, and post-placement support, a critical element for job longevity often overlooked in the employment process.

Smith (2023) investigated the role of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in fostering the development and adoption of customised employment as a pathway to meaningful employment. They found that the NDIS plays a significant role in supporting research that validates customised employment practices while promoting their adoption through the development of employment policies grounded in evidence-based practices. The NDIS's development heralds positive change by fostering innovative approaches to employment and disability support, characterised by participant choice and control—an aspect lacking in current employment systems.

However, the literature supporting Customised Employment and Discovery in Australia underscores the contributions of a small group of academics and practitioners in developing the evidence base for practice, largely independent of government support.

The limited database, as highlighted by Wehman et al. (2018), underscores the effectiveness of customised employment in supporting employment for people with significant disabilities, as observed by Riesen, Morgan, & Griffin (2015) and Callahan, Griffin, & Hammis (2011). This emphasises the need for replicable evidence to support the widespread adoption of customised employment.

Grey Literature in Customised Employment

In the global sphere, grey literature proliferates, encompassing a vast array of unpublished or non-peer-reviewed materials. However, within Australia, only a select few reports delve into the efficacy of Customised Employment and its limited trials. Despite its extensive historical roots, Customised Employment remains relatively underutilised, with many service providers adopting its terminology without fully implementing its evidence-based principles. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive training in Customised Employment, meeting the standards acknowledged in the USA, perpetuates this gap in substantive application.

An in-depth environmental scan conducted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Brown & Mallett, 2021) provides valuable insights into current employment interventions and research within Australia. This scan reveals ongoing efforts by CDERP in developing outcome measures, along with the CDERP, University of Melbourne, and Scope partnership's evaluation of Scope's Customised Employment project as the sole active research initiative in this realm. Additionally, notable programs such as CDERP's Work First Employment and Brite's Pathway program stand out as the primary interventions employing Customised Employment, with Brite's program receiving initial support and training from CDERP.

Meanwhile, the University of Melbourne's Future of Work Lab undertook a comprehensive analysis of employment literature from the perspective of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Their findings underscore a glaring gap in direct studies addressing employment barriers within the Australian context. By evaluating various employment models, the report concludes that existing choices often pose systematic barriers to employment. Consequently, the report advocates for increased investment in customised person-centred approaches like Customised Employment, citing CDERP's Work First and Glide In programs as exemplary models (Taylor, 2022).

A seminal study by Smith et al. (2018) delves into the NDIS Funded Innovative Workforce Fund grant project, offering valuable insights into Customised Employment as a potent workforce capacity-building instrument. Through the implementation of the Work First CE training curriculum, staff at four service providers received comprehensive training in delivering Discovery and Customised Employment, thereby benefiting twenty-nine individuals with disabilities. Notably, the project highlighted how Discovery not only enhanced support staff's knowledge and skills but also empowered individuals with disabilities and their families/support networks, who valued the holistic and person-centred approach of Customised Employment.

The transformative potential of Customised Employment is further evidenced by the Koomarri Pilot, which, after adaptation into the Glide In transition program, yielded noteworthy outcomes during trials at the Melton Special School in Melbourne. Building upon these promising findings, the program is currently undergoing revisions based on 2023 outcomes. It is slated for further trials in 2024, supported by limited government funding to substantiate its efficacy through peer-reviewed evidence.

Moreover, the Jobs Victoria Innovation Fund played a pivotal role in supporting a pilot project evaluating the Customised Employment model in two Victorian regions (Broadmeadows and Warrnambool) to bolster employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Despite formidable challenges posed by the pandemic, the project showcased promising outcomes, underscoring the potential benefits of Customised Employment (Smith, 2021). One outcome was an examination of the validity of the CDERP Customised Employment and Discovery curriculum.

Expanding the horizon of employment opportunities, micro-enterprises emerge as a viable avenue for leveraging Customised Employment and Discovery in Australia. The Community Living Project in South Australia stands as a beacon of success, facilitating employment opportunities for a select cohort of individuals with disabilities.

Simultaneously, this initiative serves as an educational platform, raising awareness among families about the spectrum of available employment support options and educating the broader community about the invaluable contributions of individuals with disabilities (Smith & Alexander, 2022). Similar initiatives across various states underscore Discovery's transformative potential in fostering inclusive employment outcomes nationwide.

Self-Employment has been a feature of Customised Employment for some time, with the US-based Center on Self-Employment and its partners producing an excellent guide to Supported and Customised Employment Referral Decision Guide. This document, “Supported and Customized Employment Side by Side Referral Decision Guide”, was developed to support the process of determining how to choose between these two approaches.

The guide provides support by highlighting the following:

- Definitions for supported and customised employment
- Descriptions of who it was designed for and defining features of each approach
- Steps to determine who may benefit from supported or customised employment
- A chart outlining how the employment planning process works within each service
- Key differences in job development for SE and CE
- A referral decision-making flow chart

Discussion

Customised Employment in the USA adopted the legislated WIOA definition. This defines Customised Employment as:

“Customised employment means competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualised determination of the unique strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability. It is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and

the business needs of the employer and carried out through flexible strategies, such as job exploration by the individual and working with an employer to facilitate placement”.

This definition is satisfactory. It highlights the depth of knowledge and complexity of the process by not defining Discovery, one of the essential activities that support ethical practice in Customised Employment. Discovery in Australia is treated as a capacity-building exercise with employment as one outcome. While aligned with the NDIS, this process of capacity-building has been trialled in the DES setting with success by Ulaunch. The capacity-building approach has shown significant benefits to date, with trials highlighting the shift in staff mindsets and its importance to families looking for employment programs that support the growth and development of their children and adults. When aligned with the emerging Employment Counselling process, there is evidence emerging to suggest that this approach enhances and elevates employment outcomes.

Customised Employment has been a subject of significant research attention, primarily led by a small group of dedicated researchers collaborating to establish an evidence base for guiding best practices on a local and international scale. This focused effort has led to the evolution of Customised Employment methodologies, with notable advancements such as Self-Guided Discovery and Group Guided Discovery, tailored to support various demographic groups, including juvenile offenders, in their transitions from school to entrepreneurship. The CDERP-developed Glide-In School Transition program and the DES-specific Blue Print Program are based on Group Guided Discovery.

Despite the recognition of Customised Employment and Discovery methodologies receive, there remains a crucial gap in conducting the trials necessary to elevate them to evidence-based practice status. The emphasis on capacity building inherent in Customised Employment underscores its holistic approach to employment, prioritising the individual at the core of intervention activities.

Echoing the findings of Riesen et al. (2023), there is a resounding call for rigorous studies to be conducted in Australia, characterised by reliability, replicability, and robust peer-reviewed indicators. However, given the limited scope of researchers and practitioners involved in developing the evidence base for Customised Employment, often reliant on sporadic funding, meeting society's expectations for equitable citizenship for people with disabilities within a timely manner presents significant challenges.

Despite these challenges, many service providers have embraced Customised Employment as a viable solution to the disability employment issue. Both small-scale and larger organisations, such as Social Model (Newcastle), Penelope Peardon (Narromine), Work First (Melbourne), Inclusion 21 (Melbourne), Koomarri (Canberra), Abilityworks (Vic), Intelife (WA), Possability, Tulgeen (Bega), Equity Works (Maroochydore), EAT (WA), and Ulaunch has invested in extensive training and integrated Customised Employment into their programs.

These service providers have adopted the CDERP Work First model, which treats Discovery as a capacity-building process with employment as one of its outcomes. This approach takes a holistic approach to employment that is consistent with its origins.

Customised Employment emerges as a flexible and effective employment intervention, demonstrating promise and gradually accumulating evidence to warrant its inclusion among evidence-based practices.

Limitations

The data examined in this report were confined to materials published within the past decade. This timeframe was chosen partly to align with developments following the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in Australia and the authors' expertise as subject matter experts in Customised Employment. However, expanding the temporal scope of research could provide further insights into the longitudinal effectiveness and adaptability of Customised Employment practices in diverse contexts and populations. Additionally, exploring complementary methodologies beyond Customised Employment, such as supported employment programs or employment counselling initiatives, may offer a comprehensive understanding of the broader landscape of disability employment interventions and their respective impacts.

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