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Article: Job Site Training and Natural Supports

Some Suitable Answers - Rob McInnes

1. **Concerns about unbridled provision of support** – Can result in negative outcomes including fostering of a human services perspective within natural settings (e.g. coworkers seeing a supported employee more as a social services client than as a coworker), difficulty in fading (because the employee relies so heavily on their support worker), limited natural assistance and social interactions (because the employee is not well-integrated into the workplace culture) and increased costs (because natural supports are not taken advantage of).
2. **Variety of natural supports & variety of companies** – Every company is different. Even if they are producing identical goods or services, they have different methods of doing so. Factors such as different training methods and different workplace cultures can influence how easily natural supports can be put in place.
3. **Natural supports and the discrepancy between “skill acquisition and supports”** – While a given set of skills are required by an employee to be successful on the job, the existing supports available in a particular workplace may not be enough to train and sustain the employee on the job. There may be a gap that will have to be filled in other ways (e.g. enhancing the available supports to meet the employee’s needs or direct support from the human services worker).
4. **“Natural Validity” and “Instructional Power”** – Natural Validity refers to the degree to which a training approach can approximate and accommodate the teaching strategies and other support features already available in a community setting/workplace. Instructional Power refers to the amount of assistance, individualization, effort and creativity needed to teach the skills necessary for any given individual to participate successfully in community-based, integrated settings.
5. **“Critical Factors” in determining support** – These include the applicant’s skills, needs and preferences; the apparent support capacity of the setting; the complexity of the job; and the attitudes of coworkers and supervisors.
6. **Seven Phase Sequence**
 - a. Phase 1 – Determine the Method – discover the way in which the task/routine is typically performed in a given natural setting.
 - b. Phase 2 – Decide on Content Steps – identify the steps into which the job would be divided for the purpose of teaching a typical employee in that workplace.
 - c. Phase 3 – Training and Motivating Strategies – Instructional techniques that mirror the company’s typical instructional techniques should be used. Similarly, feedback and behavioral reinforcement techniques should not be atypical or strange within that workplace.

- d. Phase 4 – Training and Data Collection – Training should begin based on the analysis of natural methods conducted in phases 1 – 3. During this phase, the effectiveness of the selected training strategy is assessed. If training is not proving to be effective, the next three “Power Phases” should be considered...
 - e. Phase 5 – Redo Training & Motivating Strategies – assuming that the procedures identified in Phase 3 are not effective for the employee, alternate strategies might be used (possibly including ones that are artificial or not “natural” to that workplace.)
 - f. Phase 6 – Smaller Steps – Phase 2 might be revisited and tasks broken into smaller tasks that make them easier to learn by the employee.
 - g. Phase 7 – Different Way – while changing it as little as possible, a different way of doing the task might make the employee more successful on the job (e.g. arranging parts differently, labeling items with coloured stickers, etc.)
7. **Case Study** - (Your own observations)
8. **“Benevolence Trap”** – Employees with severe disabilities can be locked into roles of perpetual dependence on the good works and support of others. By their overbearing “help”, human service workers and coworkers can foster perpetual dependence of people with disabilities - rather than supporting them to attain their own levels of competence and contribution which are needed, valued and respected by others.
9. **Natural Supports: disturbing and exciting** – In our excitement about using natural supports in the workplace, it is possible to neglect the real needs of persons with disabilities. While it is exciting to “mine” the various natural supports available in any given workplace, it is possible that those supports alone will not be sufficient to meet the training and support needs of a given employee. Careful application of approaches like the Seven Phase Sequence ensure that, natural or not, the employee is provided with the resources they need to be successful on their new job.