# A Systems Analysis of Factors that lead to the Employment of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disability in Australia.

Presentation by Peter Smith

CDERP
Evidence Based Employment

Work First
A Customised Approach to Employment

This presentation will examine some of the Data Analysis findings from my PhD Research into disability employment, with particular reference to clients and employment consultants.

The research is supervised by Emeritus Professor Trevor Parmenter, Prof. Patricia O'Brien and Clinical Professor Vivienne Riches.

# Research Rationale

This purpose of the thesis is to explore factors that influence employment outcomes for people with disabilities utilising the Australian Disability Employment Service (DES- ESS) system from the perspective of the client and consultant, giving voice to these factors.

# Sample Size and Research Methodology Rationale

Research was undertaken using a Multiple Perspective Design that resides within the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process.

Clients (n=30) and Employment Consultants (n=30) were interviewed using semi-structured interviews with individuals and small groups.

Thematic analysis using multiple passes was undertaken to highlight the key issues.

# The IPA Analytical Process

1. Reading and reading individual transcripts to identify the matters of concern that are raised by participants.

2. Annotating transcripts with the themes or matters raised.

3. Clustering themes into main and subordinate themes based on connections or conceptual similarities.

4. Clustering participant themes identified into main and subordinate themes. Subordinate themes may be disposed of if the evidence isn't sufficiently strong enough.

5. Writing up of main themes utilising selected participant statements and researcher interpretative commentary.

6. Discussion of identified themes against what is presently known in the literature.

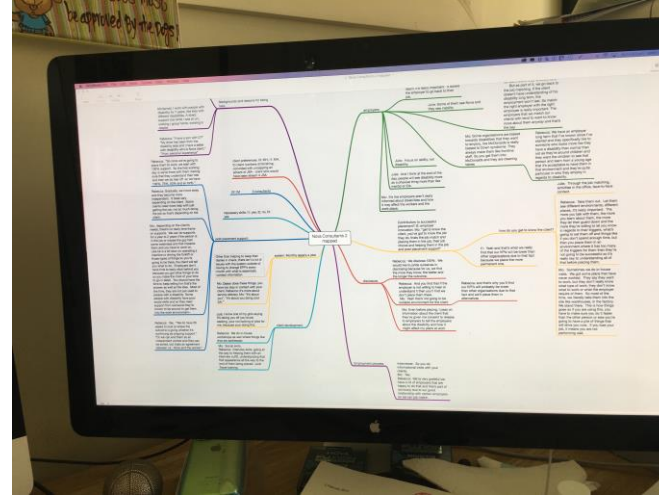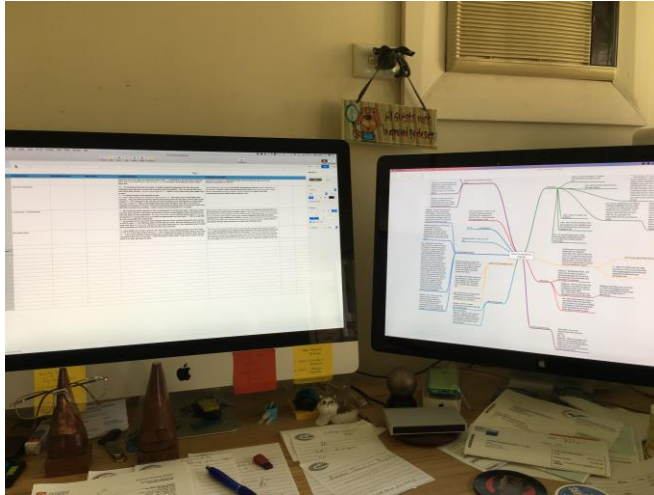7. A reflection on the research to identify further areas for research.

*Figure 5.1.*

# The Reality

- 23 Consultant Themes and 14 Client Themes
- 220 plus rows of data
- Pre-emergent themes
- Emerging Themes
- Sub-ordinate Themes
- Themes

Pre-emergent

Emerging

Sub-ord

Themes

# Old School Process

# Five Themes

Five Themes emerged;

- Relationships

- Processes

- Compliance

- Employers

- Environment

# Relationships

Respect, trust, relationships and understanding, along with limited support and development.

# Clients

Clients highlighted the disconnect between Centrelink and the various transitions that they undertake, illustrating their frustration of having to regularly prove that their lifelong disability still exists.

The client relationship with the consultant shed light on a number of interesting aspects, notably that understanding was more important than specific disability knowledge, which whilst important was secondary to understanding, trust and respect.

# Consultants

Consultants highlighted a lack of disability knowledge, some contradictory positions on training, some wanting it, some not. Peer support in the absence of employer support ranks highly as a factor to offset the lack of trust evident in some work processes.

Both consultant and client appear to hold a position of low expectation of each other, something that's a little confounding, but also telling of a system that doesn't appear to value true understanding of the client derived from any specific evidence based (PC) practices.

The lack of trust was also evident in the relationship between client families and consultants, something that is a known factor in successful employment outcomes, all but missing from the employment process.

# Processes – Service Provider

Processes presented themselves as something of a conundrum in that clients and consultants had comments that suggested that the system presented itself with processes that drove the work.

At the same time there is a lack of processes that seemed to undermine the idea of a system driven by evidence based processes.

# Knowledge Driven Processes

Contradictory views presented by consultants on the need for disability knowledge with most stating a need for it whilst at the same time others pointing out that they didn't have the time to pursue knowledge that would improve their work capacity.

Some consultants indicated that they had access to plentiful training, whilst others in the same organisation highlighted a lack of training opportunities, despite requests.

# Doctor Google

Google appeared as a default position for knowledge acquisition in the absence of real opportunity to acquire the skills needed.

What is clear is that consultants want knowledge, want support from their employer, but are at best getting it in an ad-hoc way, but are conflicted by the need to do their job within the allocated work hours whilst trying to have something of a work life balance.

# Work Experience

Many consultants had a positive disregard for it, despite clients generally having positive views on what it could achieve. Some consultants held the view, that work experience was demeaning to the client.

Overall there seems to be a jointly held view of low expectation of this, with much of the consultant focus simply on job interview skills and searching for what consultants consider to be suitable jobs.

# Compliance Driven System

Compliance is highlighted from several perspectives, with clients highlighting the lack of respect and understanding that exists within the requirements to stay in the program.

Consultants had mixed views but overall saw the compliance requirements of the system as both repetitious and unnecessarily burdensome, holding a position that is broadly consistent with the clients' worldview on compliance.

# Clients and Compliance

Clients highlighted how the compliance requirements showed a lack of respect and that some of the requirements were demeaning to them. Certainly the requirement for Employment Pathway Plans to be changed monthly illustrated a lack of understanding that lifelong disability doesn't change every 30 days.

# Consultants and Compliance

Consultants had mixed views regarding compliance but generally saw much of the requirements as repetitious and an unnecessary burden. There was also the view that the current compliance regime was more about ensuring that fraudulent claims weren't being made and that overall the system didn't trust them.

There is a stated preference for using a holistic approach, but that the current compliance based system acts as a barrier to using this approach, an approach that recognises that unless you address the other barriers in a person's life, than employment is unlikely, indeed unsustainable.

# Employers

"Employers as a theme produced three areas of discussion: Attitude, Disclosure and Subsidies and Quotas.

# Attitude

Consultants held the view that employers where still closed off to the idea of employing someone with a disability, highlighting issues relating to risk, low skills expectation and what can only be described as discrimination in hiring practices.

Clients shared similar views highlighting the universal stereotyping of the capacity of people with a disability still a barrier to employment. Clients almost seemed resigned to this being the norm when it came to employer attitude.

# Disclosure

Disclosure was something of a vexed position with consultants highlighting that it was the clients right to disclose or not, but they as a rule did disclose and that outcomes from this are mixed, possibly bordering on the negative.

Certainly clients had lost jobs as a result of disclosure. This again goes back to employer attitudes to people with a disability and the soft discrimination that exists within the community.

# Subsidies and Quota's

We looked at the impact of subsidies and quota's, with consultant shaving strong views on subsidies, whilst clients held strong views on quota's.

# Consultants and Subsidies

Consultants generally had negative views on subsidies highlighting the distortion in the marketplace between what DES could offer employers versus what mainstream employment services could pay.

There is evidence that subsidies have distorted the marketplace with employers routinely using them as income streams churning through clients when subsidies finish with little regard to longevity of employment.

# Clients and Quota's

Client held strong views that quota's would not be effective and indeed would foster resentment amongst employers making employment a less than ideal experience. This view is starkly in contrast to the prevailing discussion in the media about the need for quota's.

**Cl31:** *"If a company if forced to hire people with disabilities and they really don't want to, they'll make it as hard as they can to make their life unpleasant."*

# Environment

Environment can be considered those factors that have an impact on employment success, but are largely out of the sphere of influence of the employment system. In this theme, I have drawn together issue such as transportation networks, the impact of automation on employment opportunities, Big Business and Human Resources barriers.

# Big Business, Human Resources and Franchises

Consultants talked about how Human Resource (HR) departments and large chains display a certain bias. HR is seen as a bulwark against the hiring of people with a disability due to indifference to what service providers can do to assist them to employ people with a disability, something that is consistent with client observations regarding disclosure.

Whilst business owners may talk publically about their desire to employ people with a disability, it would appear that HR indifference is getting in the way of translating intent to actual action.

# Big Business

Consultants indicated that there were limited opportunities in big box stores, something that is highlighted in much of the literature regarding were to find employment opportunities. It is apparent that whilst some consultants had heard of the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator, they didn't see it as useful.

Consultants also highlighted the rise of automation in large retailers as a factor that is reducing the number of what would be low skilled entry level jobs, that have in the past been good employment opportunities for people with a disability citing the increase in self serve check outs in retail outlets.

# Franchise

Paradoxically there was mention of employer bias towards certain disabilities with McDonalds, the multinational burger chain showing a preference for people with Down syndrome

# Transport

Transport, more specifically unreliable, poorly scheduled train and buses and the absence of public transport outside of the peak periods are also noted as barriers.

Allied with the limited opportunities for employers to provide flexible work schedules that fit into the transport system, particularly in city fringe areas is seen as another barrier to employment.

# Some Thoughts

Barriers exist within provider, employer and the environmental settings that collectively highlight a system that at best is limping along based on good intentions and low expectation.

The evidence highlights a disconnect at every level with a paucity of knowledge and known evidence base practices. A system that lacks trust and respect at multiple levels that is impacting on the role of the system which is to support people with a disability find and maintain employment that meets their needs and ability, along with the benefits that we all take for granted, such as choice and control, relationships and valued status.

# More Thoughts

It is also clear that without the best intentions and unrelenting commitment to the job by consultants, despite the obstacles that challenge them each day, employment outcomes would be worse if not for these characteristics.

# Selected Quotes.
# Holistic Approach

"The whole approach is holistic as far as I'm concerned, it needs to stay like that, and it's disappearing fast. I think it needs to stay holistic because we've got people with major issues at home or they're not linked up services that could support them in other barriers in their life. If that's linked up then work is pretty much sweet, then they can support that"

"But how do you maintain employment when you're not addressing the right barriers"

# Selected Quotes
# Centrelink / System

"No matter what you are doing, booking appointments, job support or working with your client, the paperwork has still got to get done, no matter what happens"

"So using the blanket approach of every thirty days a new EPP doesn't actually recognise that the disability and the variedness of the disability. It needs to be more client focused, more client orientated"

# Selected Quotes
# Work Processes

"But at the same time you would to match the job seeker to the job they really want. But you can't until they are in employment. Which means you may well have to place them into employment to have them fall out of employment"

"A lot of the time you don't have any knowledge of your person, your job seeker that you are with until they get into the workforce because it can quite often be a completely different situation in a job than what it is in your interviews and appointments at the office"

# Selected Quotes
# Training

"Going on Google and the internet and reading about the ten or twelve main disabilities that I work with and understand it, but I've had to also have to pull information out clients, their medication, what are the effects and that's part of my first six weeks of getting to know my clients because their disabilities are individual"

"I would like to have a basic understanding of basic disabilities as in the ones we work with but I'm not paid to be a mental health worker"

# Contact Details

petersmith1@me.com
Mob: 0427813840