

Customized Employment Competency Model

This document is a brief description and presentation of the Customized Employment Competency Model. The document first describes customized employment (CE) as both a concept (for example, how the practices of CE differ from those of other employment strategies) and a process (that is, the four essential components of CE). A diagram illustrating the nine CE competencies and four CE components follows. Next, the CE components, and the tasks within each component, are displayed. Finally, the competencies are presented along with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that make up each competency. Lastly, some recommended ways in which the model may be used are provided.

As stated on the Office of Disability Employment Policy website, "Customized Employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job seeker and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both." Thus, CE:

- Is the outcome that results from an individualized, person-centered process.
- Results in a customized job that will meet the needs that the individual has for employment, the conditions necessary for his or her success, and the needs that the business has for valued, contributing employees.
- Differs from the typical employment practices used by Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) personnel and Supported Employment (SE) job developers, which aim first to successfully place job seekers within the context of competitive hiring processes and then to provide supports as needed to maintain employment.
- Can only be successful if the job seeker is treated as an individual who is free to make choices about his or her life's direction; is afforded respect and dignity; is assumed to have competencies that, if not readily obvious, can be discovered; is given access in natural settings with minimal intrusion; and is provided with high quality employment opportunities and services.

Due to job seeker complexities, identifying and coordinating an optimal fit between the job seeker, the job tasks, the supporting environment, and the employer requires that persons providing CE services see things from a different vantage point than those typical of VR personnel or SE job developers.

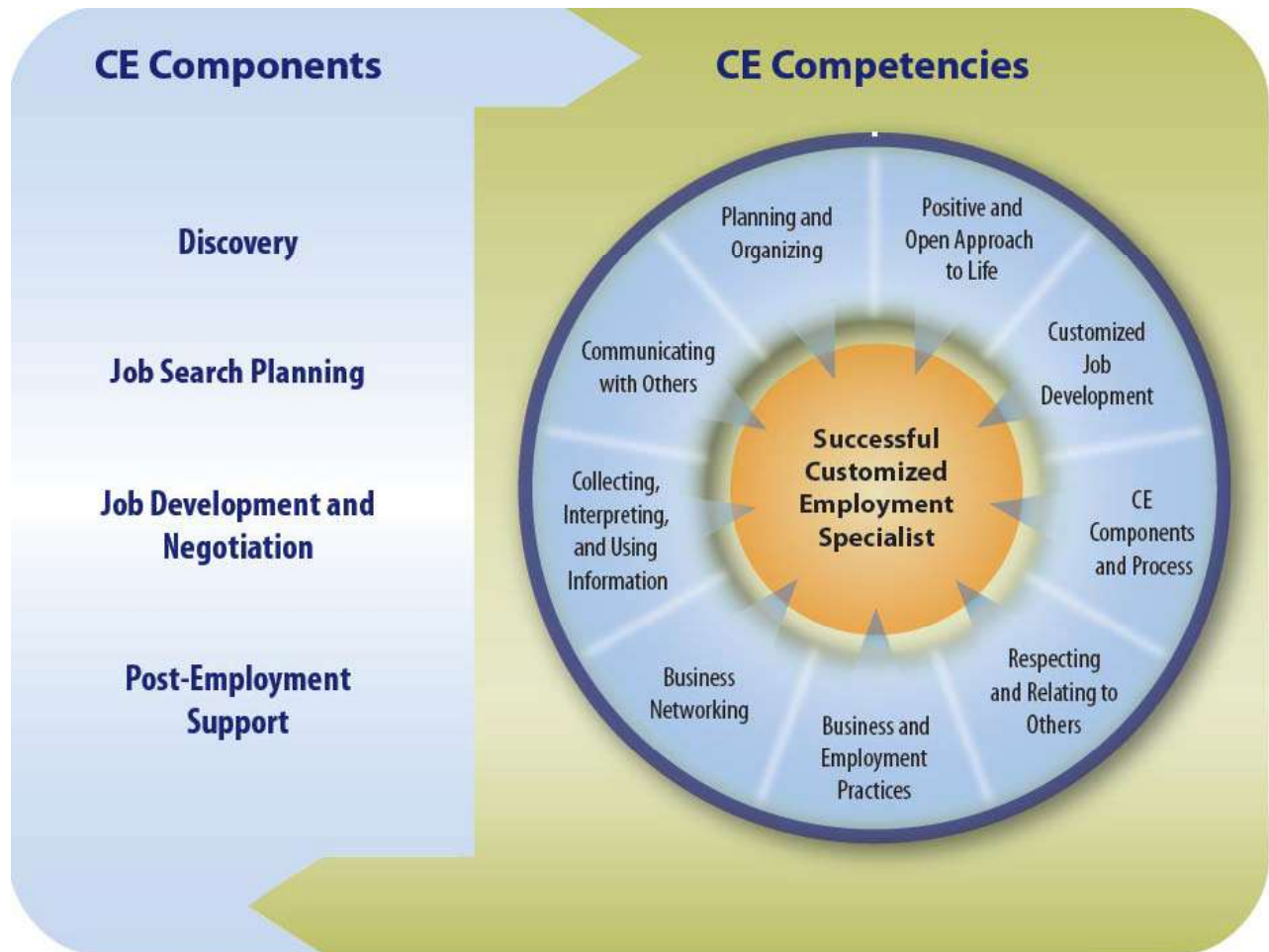
CE is a process-driven concept with four essential components:

- **Discovery** - Gathering information from the job seeker and the CE support team (a group of multiple partners, including the employment specialist who all jointly take some responsibility for the job seeker's needs; however, the job seeker is the ultimate decision-maker) to determine the job seeker's interests, skills, and preferences related to potential employment that guide the development of a customized job.
- **Job Search Planning** - Using the information learned about an individual job seeker in Discovery to develop a plan toward a meaningful employment, determine a list of potential employers, and conduct an analysis of benefits.
- **Job Development and Negotiation** - Working collaboratively with the individual and the employer to negotiate a customized job; the provision of supports; and the terms of employment that will match the individual's interests, skills, conditions necessary for success, and specific contributions, and will fill the unmet needs of an employer.
- **Post-Employment Support** - Setting up on-going post-employment supports and monitoring the employment relationship to ensure satisfaction of both the individual and the employer.

Those providing CE services must have a range of competencies within these four components that enable them, in collaboration with the job seeker and the employer, to complete the tasks involved in CE. In some settings, CE services are provided by an individual employment specialist (that is, the key person who is working with the job seeker to develop a meaningful employment). In other cases, a team may provide the services.

Distilled from the input of numerous experts in the field, the diagram below illustrates the four CE components and the nine competencies needed by employment specialists and the CE support team to successfully provide CE services to job seekers.

Customized Employment Competency Model



The diagram lists the four components of the CE process; Discovery, Job Search Planning, Job Development and Negotiation, and Post-Employment Support. The nine competencies needed by the CE specialist are shown in a wheel formation with each one of the nine competencies as a spoke of the wheel. The nine competencies are; Positive and Open Approach to Life; Customized Job Development; CE Components and Process; Respecting and Relating to Others; Business and Employment Practices; Business Networking; Collecting, Interpreting, and Using Information; Communicating with Others; and Planning and Organizing. In the center of the wheel are the words “Successful Customized Employment Specialist.”

While the job seeker is the driver of the process, the employment specialist needs the nine competencies to enable them to direct, assist and support the job seeker to success. The competencies are presented in the circles around the CE specialist. The bidirectional arrow between the CE components and competencies represents the reciprocal relationship between them.

The tasks that are included in each component and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that make up each of the competencies are provided in the following tables. Please note that the titles of the CE competencies do not necessarily relate to any particular step or task in the CE process and multiple competencies may be required for a single task.

Because CE is person-centered, driven by the interests, strengths, and conditions for success of each individual, it will differ slightly each time it is implemented. Not all of the tasks will be performed in the same sequence with each job seeker, and some of the tasks may not need to be performed at all. In addition, because CE is comprehensive and occurs over time, it often requires support from a number of funding sources; these may differ depending on factors such as an individual's state and agencies.

While the CE process used with each individual may vary, it is intended to be a process that is coherent and logical where each step or task builds logically on all previous steps or tasks.

Customized Employment Components and Tasks

The information below contains the tasks that may be completed during each of the CE Components.

DISCOVERY: *Gathering information from the job seeker and the CE support team to determine the job seeker's interests, skills, and preferences related to potential employment that guide the development of a customized job*

1. Explain the CE process and the activities that may be involved in individualized, customized job development to the job seeker and family.
2. Anticipate, consider, discuss, set-up, and coordinate the financial supports that are required to implement and maintain the CE process, involving an integrated service coordinator or others with expertise with funding issues, as necessary.
3. Complete any forms and paperwork necessary to initiate the process with the job seeker or to initiate funding supports for CE services (for example, identification, address, photo release, access to information and records, and release to use information gathered in Discovery).
4. Identify a profile format or template for recording and capturing relevant job seeker information from the Discovery process.
5. Identify and involve a support team (delegating roles to team members as needed) that can help identify the individual's strengths, interests, preferences, skills, and support needs, as well as provide expertise, valuable input, and resources into the process of attaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
6. Begin the Discovery process with the job seeker, which should define the job seeker's ideal conditions of employment, learning characteristics, interests, preferences, contributions, task competence, and support needs. (If desirable, the personal profile may be started, but it should be continuously updated and revised as new information is learned).
7. Observe the job seeker perform activities in a variety of settings, such as the job seeker's home, school, and the neighborhood and community within which the job seeker functions, taking care to document information about the job seeker's interests, support needs, successful support strategies, and performance with notes and pictures.
8. Participate with the job seeker in a novel or unfamiliar activity, as well as family activities or routines, documenting with notes and pictures information about the job seeker's interests, performance, successful support strategies, and interactions with others.
9. Interview people who know the job seeker well to gather and document information about the job seeker's interests, support needs, and performance in various activities.
10. Review relevant records and information available from other sources to learn more about the job seeker.

11. Integrate the information gathered during Discovery, and revise or complete the personal profile with the job seeker. Continually update it with information about identified skills and workplace contributions, as well as possible vocational areas of interest (to include self-employment options).

JOB SEARCH PLANNING: *Using the information learned about an individual job seeker in Discovery to develop a plan toward a meaningful employment, determine a list of potential employers, and conduct an analysis of benefits*

12. Present the personal profile to the job seeker to obtain his or her preliminary review.
13. Conduct a CE plan development meeting with the job seeker and the CE support team to review and discuss the results of Discovery; to map out an initial plan for seeking and negotiating a CE situation for the job seeker; and to assign tasks to various team members based on members' strengths, contributions, and knowledge of potential employers.
14. Develop a plan for employment development activities with the job seeker based on his or her identified employment interest areas, skills, support needs, and so on to include a list of potential employers and task list. This may also include identifying a leader or coordinator from the CE support team for employment development activities.
15. Discuss with the job seeker his or her preferences and develop a plan for disclosure of the disability to include timing and manner in which to discuss the disability with the employer.
16. Develop a strength-based portfolio or resume with the job seeker that represents his or her skills and abilities (contributions) for potential employers.

JOB DEVELOPMENT AND NEGOTIATION: *Working collaboratively with the individual and the employer to negotiate a customized job; the provision of supports; and the terms of employment that will match the individual's interests, skills, conditions necessary for success, and specific contributions, and will fill the unmet needs of an employer*

17. Present the job seeker, and CE as needed, to the employer in a manner establishing his or her value to the organization (that is, specifically connect the individual's strengths to organizational needs).
18. Set up informational interviews with potential employers.
19. Conduct informational interviews and participate in tours of businesses with potential employers to learn about the businesses, their operations, the business cultures, the work environments, and current or anticipated future opportunities and challenges facing each business.
20. Determine potential needs of an employer using information gathered in informational interviews and tours to determine a business need.
21. Identify social networks, strategically enter those networks, and act as a bridge to develop social capital (that is, relationships which can be leveraged to match the job seeker's interests and strengths) for the job seeker.
22. Develop a formal or informal CE proposal with the job seeker that fills the employer's business need with the job seeker's contributions.
23. Contact the employer to schedule a customized job development meeting with the employer.
24. Conduct a customized job development meeting with the employer and job seeker to negotiate a customized job description, job supports, and terms of employment (for example, hours, pay).
25. Analyze how to maximize naturally occurring supports, building on the organization's training and development programs to ensure that the job seeker will have adequate on-going support resulting in continuing meaningful employment.

POST-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT: *Setting up on-going post-employment supports and monitoring the employment relationship to ensure satisfaction of both the individual and the employer*

26. Assist job seeker in reporting benefits and monitoring impact of employment on benefits based on the benefits plan developed during Discovery.
27. Maintain close contact with both the employee and employer during post-employment job training to resolve problems and continue to evaluate performance, work behavior, and production (for example, set up regular meeting schedule).
28. Prepare and maintain employment records.
29. Renegotiate, as needed, with the employer regarding tasks, additional responsibilities, promotion and career advancement, increased wages, and support provided after job starts.
30. Support problem-resolution processes by coaching the employer and the employee, while respecting the business culture, organizational processes, and policies and procedures.

31. Maintain close contact with the employee and employer during the tenure of employment to ensure satisfaction and quickly resolve issues as they arise.

Customized Employment Competencies* - The information below contains the knowledge, skills and abilities that make up each of the CE Competencies.

1. Positive and Open Approach to Life

Abilities

- Ability to work independently
- Ability to react quickly in situations
- Ability to receive criticism or negative feedback
- Ability to tolerate frustration (that is, is patient)

Other Characteristics

- Desires to work in community
- Desires to help others
- Stays calm in crisis situations
- Takes initiative
- Is persistent
- Is open (that is, is willing or enthusiastic to try new things and is open to new ideas)
- Is optimistic (that is, focuses on the most positive aspects rather than on perceived difficulties or shortcomings)
- Is flexible (that is, is able to adapt to fit changing situations or to meet needs of others)

2. Customized Job Development

Knowledge

- Knowledge of systematic instruction appropriate for people with disabilities
- Knowledge of support strategies that can help the job seeker be successful
- Knowledge of local transportation networks

Skills

- Skill in teaching others how to do something
- Skill in interpreting how the job seeker's complexities impact work skills, including needed supports
- Skill in applying knowledge learned about the job seeker (for example, their interests and skills) during the Discovery process to later CE steps and activities
- Skill in researching information through a variety of media sources, such as internet, library, and so on.

Abilities

- Ability to translate specific behaviors and skills in a given situation into general capabilities
- Ability to set goals individually or in conjunction with others
- Ability to direct others toward the completion of a goal
- Ability to combine various pieces of information about the job seeker to identify a job match or vocational theme (that is, inductive reasoning)
- Ability to break down a process into individual components

3. CE Components and Process

Knowledge

- Knowledge of the CE process and activities (for example, Discovery, informational interviews, job shadowing, job tryouts) and how it differs from other employment practices and strategies (for example, supported employment)
- Knowledge of person-centered, strength-based planning techniques appropriate to job seekers with disabilities
- Knowledge of the intent, purpose, and potential outcomes of CE
- Knowledge of various types of portfolios and resumes
- Knowledge of available funding and resources for job seekers, such as self-financing options through Social Security, and how to braid, blend, and otherwise coordinate and leverage the funding sources
- Knowledge of state and local agencies that serve people with disabilities and the services provided

- Knowledge of customized employment job development strategies (for example, job creation, job carving, job restructuring, job sharing)
- Knowledge of the forms and documentation required by the organization and the state governing bodies and accreditation entities
- Knowledge of various income support and benefits and how work impacts those benefits
- Knowledge of resources on benefit planning including those available through SSA and the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA)

Skills

- Skill in identifying long-term support and funding requirements for job seekers

4. Respecting and Relating to Others**Skills**

- Skill in interacting socially with others
- Skill in being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do (that is, social perceptiveness)

Abilities

- Ability to work as part of a team
- Ability to build and maintain relationships with others
- Ability to put others at ease

Other Characteristics

- Values connecting with people
- Is culturally sensitive
- Has a world view that all people can work and that people with disabilities can contribute to the workplace
- Treats others with respect and dignity
- Is curious or interested in learning about others

5. Business and Employment Practices**Knowledge**

- Knowledge of principles and procedures for personnel recruitment, selection, and training
- Knowledge of standard business practices (for example, business etiquette, resumes, job applications)
- Knowledge of work flow and work processes

Skills

- Skill in determining how a system, business, or job should work to identify operational improvements as potential negotiating points for a customized position
- Skill in monitoring or assessing performance of oneself, other individuals, or organizations to make improvements or take corrective action
- Skill in using common computer word-processing and presentation software

Abilities

- Ability to facilitate meetings or discussions
- Ability to identify unmet workplace needs
- Ability to imagine how a job or business process will look after it is changed or its parts are moved or rearranged (that is, visualization)

Other Characteristics

- Is professional or displays professional character

6. Business Networking**Knowledge**

- Knowledge of local community and community employers near job seeker's home
- Knowledge of the range of strategies that can be used to make connections with potential employers
- Knowledge of self-employment and resource acquisition strategies and micro-enterprise centers
- Knowledge of economic trends locally and nationally

Skills

- Skill in persuading others to change their minds or behavior
- Skill in negotiating a win-win solution

Abilities

- Ability to build networks of social contacts with others (for example, disability providers, peers, employers) in order to develop social capital
- Ability to coordinate actions in relation to others' actions

7. Collecting, Interpreting, and Using Information**Skills**

- Skill in systematic inquiry (that is, asking questions to get to key issues)
- Skill in updating and integrating new information and knowledge

Abilities

- Ability to observe, identify, and interpret relevant information
- Ability to generate a number of ideas about a topic (for example, potential places of employment that match job seeker's areas of interest)
- Ability to come up with unusual or clever ideas about a given topic or situation or develop creative ways to solve a problem (that is, creativity)
- Ability to use logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems (that is, critical thinking)
- Ability to tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong; may not involve solving the problem, only recognizing that there is a problem (that is, problem sensitivity)

8. Communicating with Others**Skills**

- Skill in communicating orally
- Skill in communicating with people with disabilities in various ways (for example, non-verbal methods, such as sign language)
- Skill in active listening (that is, giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate and not interrupting at inappropriate times)
- Skill in written communication

Abilities

- Ability to comprehend written material
- Ability to present information logically and in an organized manner
- Ability to speak in front of a group of people

9. Planning and Organizing**Skills**

- Skill in maintaining and keeping records

Abilities

- Ability to manage a variety of job demands
- Ability to organize steps into a logical sequence
- Ability to set priorities and manage competing demands
- Ability to look beyond the immediate details to see the bigger picture

Other Characteristics

- Is detail-oriented and thorough

*Note: Competencies are displayed in order of importance as calculated from expert ratings of KSAO importance.

Implementation of CE Competency Model

The CE competency model can be used in several ways to increase awareness and utilization of CE and to increase the skill and capabilities of employment personnel for engaging in this type of employment strategy. Some of the recommended ways in which the model may be used include:

- As a shared framework for defining, thinking about, and using CE
- As a means to help establish standards and/or standardize practices and expectations across service providers
- As a description of CE that will assist in distinguishing CE from other employment strategies
- As a guide for individual development and training in CE
- As a tool in recruitment efforts
- As a realistic job description
- As a foundation for developing a hiring or selection program for employment specialists.

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