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ABSTRACT

The purpose of Project COMPETE is to use previous research and exemplary practices to develop and validate a model and training sequence to assist retarded youth to make the transition from school to employment in the most competitive environment possible. The study reported in this project working paper sought to identify potential factors that affect employers' decisions to hire mentally retarded workers. Six occupational clusters were targeted: food service, custodial/janitorial, housekeeping, laundry work, groundskeeping, and general labor, and representatives from 84 employers agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted with individuals responsible for hiring personnel. In the interviews, employers were asked to specify the degree to which a list of factors would affect their willingness to hire a retarded person. The five incentives ranked highest in having an affect included: probability of regular attendance, ongoing availability of person to call for assistance, high probability of long-term employment, availability of person for on-site training, and pre-job training. The two lowest incentives were subminimum wage and tax credits. Remaining factors (civic responsibility, positive public relations, and funded on-the-job training) may affect willingness to hire. Also examined were employer responses by occupational cluster. (JDD)

C·O·M·P·E·T·E

Community-Based Model for Public-School Exit and Transition to Employment

AN ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYER INCENTIVE RANKINGS RELATIVE TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF RETARDED PERSONS

Patricia L. Sitlington
Joseph R. Easterday

Working Paper #85-6

Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped

School of Education Indiana University Bloomington

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Project COMPETE (Community-based Model for Public School Exit and Transition to Employment) is one of 13 service demonstration projects funded to investigate secondary education and transition services for severely handicapped youth. COMPETE is a cooperative effort between the Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped at Indiana University, and agencies in Columbus, Indiana: Developmental Services, Inc., and the Bartholomew County Special Services Cooperative.

The purpose of COMPETE is to develop and validate a model that applies the results of previous research and exemplary practices. Project COMPETE is developing a training sequence to assist moderately, severely, and profoundly retarded youth in making the transition from school to employment in the most competitive environment possible. COMPETE is also concentrating on establishing formal linkages between the rehabilitation center and the public school system in order to ensure a totally integrated continuum of preparation for youth from secondary through post-secondary levels.

The attached working paper is one product of this project. For more information on Project COMPETE please contact any of the project staff listed below.

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Preface

This paper is one of a series dealing with an analysis of community work environments relative to the employment of the severely handicapped. It presents the results of the segment of the employer interview that focuses on the incentives perceived as most important by employers. The paper briefly reviews previous research involving employers, describes the data collection and analysis process, summarizes the results of this analysis, and draws some basic conclusions.

Two other working papers in the Project COMPETE series are also related to gathering information on employment environments. Working Paper #85-3: "Conducting a Labor Market Trend Analysis: Process & Results," presents a detailed description of the sources of information, types of data to be gathered, and the identification of potential occupational clusters relative to the employment of severely handicapped individuals. Working Paper #85-4: "Conducting an Analysis of Community Work Environments Relative to the Employment of the Severely Handicapped," describes a system of analyzing community work environments ranging from a general labor market analysis of an entire community through analysis of critical functions for a specific job.

An Analysis of Employer Incentive Rankings Relative to the Employment of Retarded Persons

The transition of handicapped youth from school to work has been identified as major priority of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS; Will, 1984). The OSERS view of transition involves three major components: (a) the high school foundation; (b) employment opportunities; and (c) the bridge between these two components, which may involve the provision of no special services, time-limited services, or ongoing vocational support throughout the individual's life. If this transition is to be successful, we as educators must provide not only a sound foundation for our secondary programs, but also a sound bridge from these programs to the world of employment in the least restrictive environment. In order to establish and maintain this bridge, we must have a broad-based knowledge of the world of work and what motivates potential employers to hire retarded youth.

A number of authors have investigated the attitudes of employers toward the handicapped (Combs & Omvig, 1986; Ferris & Gilmore, 1983; Gratty, 1982; Gruenhagen, 1982; Hoskin, 1977; Ligato & Unterwagner, 1975; Pati & Adkins, 1980; Stewart, 1977). The results of these studies have been mixed, with some studies indicating a high percentage of negative attitudes, while others yielded more favorable acceptance of persons with handicaps. Other studies (Frongillo, 1985; Rusch, Schutz, & Agran, 1982; Wehman, 1981) have investigated the competencies needed for obtaining and maintaining employment.

Only two studies, however, could be found that obtained employer input on the factors that affect their decision to hire a handicapped worker. Mithaug (1979) mailed a questionnaire to the Fortune 500 companies asking what

type of handicapped persons each company would consider hiring and the factors that would affect future decisions to hire these workers. A total of 43 companies responded, ranging in size from less than 2500 employees to more than 50,000; the majority of these companies (N=38) were manufacturing firms. Each respondent was asked to rate each of 26 factors as definitely affecting, maybe affecting, or not affecting their decision to hire a handicapped person. The top five factors were, in descending order: ability to perform job, productivity, compliance with affirmative action, absenteeism, and positive public relations. Among the lowest rated factors were, in ascending order: approval of customers, existing numbers of handicapped at the company, difficulties in firing and laying off, preference for people who find their own jobs, and cost of health and insurance plans.

In another study, Riccio and Price (1984) conducted a survey involving 99 employers from five major U.S. cities. The employers had provided job training sites to supported employment clients participating in the Structured Training and Employment Transition Services Demonstration Project (STETS), funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The employers were asked the following open-ended question: "When you were first asked to bring on a STETS participant, what were your reasons for deciding to do so -- aside from reasons you would normally have for bringing on a new employee?" By far, the most frequent employer response was altruism, a desire to help the participant or the community, which was cited as a reason by 77.8% of the respondents, and as the only or most important reason by 53.2% of the employers.

The employers were also asked to rate four factors on a three-point scale of very important, somewhat important, or not at all important. These factors were: (a) wage subsidies; (b) program (STETS) assistance in training and

monitoring participants; (c) the Targeted Job Tax Credit; and (d) clients' prior work training in STETS. Training and monitoring assistance was rated as very important by 56.6% of the employers and somewhat important by 18.2% of the respondents. Prior work training in the STETS program was rated next highest, as very important by 38.5% and somewhat important by 19.3%. Wage subsidies were rated as very important by 34.5% of those surveyed and somewhat important by only 9.1%. Finally, only 19.3% felt that tax credits were a very important factor, while 22.8% rated it as somewhat important.

The purpose of the present study was to identify potential factors that affect employer's decisions to hire a mentally retarded worker. This research was conducted in Columbus, Indiana, a midwestern community of approximately 30,000 residents. The research was carried out in conjunction with Project COMPETE: Community-based Model for Public School Exit and Transition to Employment, a federally funded service demonstration project.

Method

The investigation of employment incentives was conducted as part of the employer interview process implemented by Project COMPETE. In turn, the employer interview is part of a six-step employment survey sequence including: (a)conducting a general labor market trend analysis to identify occupational clusters offering the greatest promise of employment; (b) generating a list of potential employers in each of these clusters; (c) making initial telephone contact with employers to set up an in-person interview; (d) conducting an employer interview to obtain general information about the business, gauge employer attitudes and expectations toward hiring the retarded, and identifying specific job opportunities; (e) performing an intermediate analysis of potential jobs to identify and describe relevant conditions and

requirements of those jobs; and (f) conducting a critical functions analysis of the specific job to identify specific behaviors the worker must perform in order to complete the job. The steps are described in more detail in two Project COMPETE Working Papers (Easterday & Sitlington, 1985; Sitlington & Easterday, 1985); sample forms are also provided.

Sample

Using the results of the labor market trend analysis Project COMPETE staff identified six occupational clusters upon which to target placement efforts: (a) food service; (b) custodial/janitorial; (c) housekeeping; (d) laundry work; (e) groundskeeping; and (f) general labor, e.g., kennel attendant, truck loader, inventory stocker. Each of the clusters was chosen because it: (a) represented stable or expanding employment opportunities within the targeted community; (b) typically required little or no previous work experience; and (c) had no specific educational or advanced skill training qualifications.

Two staff members familiar with the community generated a list of 119 potential employers. Each place of employment was contacted by phone, and 93 employers (78%) agreed to an in-person interview. Results of the interview process indicated that 9 of these employers had no jobs that project staff felt met the three selection criteria. Thus, the final sample consisted of 84 employers (71%). The mean numbers of employees in the businesses interviewed was 49, with a range of 1 to 1170 employees. Only 8 of the businesses had 100 or more employees. The individual interviewed in each business was the person responsible for hiring personnel.

Interview Instrument and Procedure

The interview instrument was a three-page recording form consisting of three sections: (a) basic information on the business, including peak periods, number of employees, high turnover positions, and desired training for entry level/minimum wage positions; (b) worker requirements, including what makes them want to keep and get rid of an employee; and (c) interest in working with the disabled. All interviews were conducted in person and required approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Near the end of the interview the employer was told, "Retarded people are people who learn more slowly than others. How would each of the following factors affect your willingness to hire a retarded person?" The last page of the interview form was then given to the employer. On this page, listed vertically, were the following factors: (a) positive public relations; (b) subminimum wage; (c) high probability of regular attendance; (d) tax credits; (e) funded on-the-job training; (f) ongoing availability of person to call for assistance; (g) availability of person for on-site training; (h) high probability of long-term employment; (i) pre-job training; and (j) civic responsibility.

Next to each factor were the number 2 (indicating "definitely affect"), 1 (indicating "maybe affect"), and 0 (indicating "not affect"). The employer was asked to read each factor and respond by circling the number corresponding to the degree each factor would affect his/her decision to hire a retarded person. The employers were encouraged to seek clarification on the procedure or regarding any of the categories.

All employers were assigned to one of three interviewers and each interviewer arranged his/her own interviews with potential employers. Two of

the interviewers were staff members of the local rehabilitation facility participating in Project COMPETE, and one was the secondary special education teacher of the moderately retarded adolescents participating in Project COMPETE. Before beginning the data collection process, the interviewers were trained by one of the authors (JRE). Each of the survey items was reviewed to ensure consistency across interviews and interviewers. The item-by-item review process was repeated once each month.

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that affect an employer's decision to hire an individual who is identified as retarded. For the purposes of this study, retarded people were defined as those "who learn more slowly than others." The population of this survey consisted of 119 potential employers in the following job clusters: (a) general labor; (b) custodial/janitorial; (c) food service; (d) groundskeeping; (e) laundry occupations; and (f) housekeeping. Of the 119 potential employers, 93 (78%) agreed to a personal interview. Of these, 84 (71%) employers had jobs that project staff judged could be carried out by retarded individuals and which fell within one of the six targeted clusters.

Table 1 presents the employer ratings of the most commonly used incentives, in terms of how each incentive would affect their willingness to hire a retarded person. Employers were asked to respond : (a) definitely affect; (b) maybe affect; or (c) not affect. Each of these responses was assigned a rating of 2, 1, or 0, respectively.

For purposes of interpretation, a mean rating of 1.5 or better was used to identify factors rated as having a definite effect. The top four incentives meet this criteria: (a) probability of regular attendance; (b) ongoing

Table 1

Employer Responses Related to Degree that Incentives Would Affect Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker (N = 84 Employers)

Incentive	Definitely Affect (2) No. (%)	Maybe Affect (1) No. (%)	Not Affect (0) No. (%)	NR[a] No. (%)	Mean
Regular Attendance	82 (98)	1 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1.96
Person on Call	67 (80)	8 (10)	9 (11)	0 (0)	1.69
Long-Term Employment	66 (78)	5 (6)	11 (13)	2 (2)	1.67
Person for On-Site Training	61 (73)	10 (12)	13 (15)	0 (0)	1.57
Pre-Job Training	55 (65)	14 (17)	14 (17)	1 (1)	1.49
Civic Responsibility	49 (58)	12 (14)	22 (26)	1 (1)	1.33
Public Relations	49 (58)	13 (15)	22 (26)	0 (0)	1.32
Funded O.J.T.	44 (52)	15 (18)	25 (30)	0 (0)	1.23
Tax Credits	33 (39)	12 (14)	39 (46)	0 (0)	.93
Subminimum Wage	22 (26)	9 (11)	53 (63)	0 (0)	.63

[a]NR = No Response

Note. Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding process.

available of person to call for assistance; (c) high probability of long-term employment; and (d) availability of person for on-site training. In addition pre-job training also ranks high as an incentive for employers. The two lowest incentives are subminimum wage and tax credits. The three remaining factors, civic responsibility, positive public relations, and funded on-the-job training are rated as maybe affecting employers' willingness to hire.

The distribution of responses across the rating categories of definitely, maybe, and not affect provides another view of the importance of specific factors. Clearly, the probability of regular attendance is a strong incentive, with 98% of the employers stating that it would definitely affect their willingness to hire a retarded person. The responses spread out much more broadly as one moves down the table, although the top four factors are still rated as definitely affecting willingness on the part of three-fourths of the employers. Again, tax credits and subminimum wage are low, with only 39% and 29% of the employers, respectively, indicating that these factors would definitely affect their willingness to hire the retarded. Appendix A presents the distribution of employer responses for each of the specific clusters.

Table 2 presents the mean employer responses broken down into five of the six occupational clusters. The sixth cluster, housekeeping, was not included because of the small number of employers interviewed (N=3). Responses for the groundskeeping and laundry clusters should also be interpreted with caution because of small numbers of employers in these areas. The data presented in Table 2 can be summarized both in terms of the number of factors that were rated as having a strong effect (mean of 1.5 and above) and the order of the factors in the ranking continuum of each cluster. The review of mean responses by cluster indicates that employer rankings tend to hold across all clusters,

Table 2

Mean Employer Responses (by Cluster) Related to Degree that Incentives Would Affect Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

		Cluster				
Incentive	Total (N=84)	General Labor (N=32)	Custodian/ Janitors (N=20)	Food Service (N=16)	Grounds (N=7)	Laundry (N=6)
Regular Attendance	1.96	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.57	2.00
Person on Call	1.69	1.75	1.75	1.62	1.28	1.67
Long-Term Employment	1.67	1.44	1.94	1.75	1.43	2.00
On-Site Trainer	1.57	1.75	1.50	1.56	1.14	1.17
Pre-Job Training	1.49	1.45	1.70	1.38	1.28	1.50
Civic Responsibility	1.33	1.06	1.55	1.31	1.28	2.00
Public Relations	1.32	1.31	1.40	1.25	.86	1.50
Funded O.J.T.	1.23	1.12	1.15	1.44	1.00	1.67
Tax Credits	.93	.97	.70	1.31	.57	.67
Subminimum Wage	.63	.59	.50	.81	.57	1.17

Note. Responses are omitted for the housekeeping cluster because of an extremely low number of respondents (N = 3), but are included in the Total.

with the following minor variations in locations of rankings in the continuum for each cluster. Employers in the food service cluster ranked funded on-the-job training as their fifth factor. Employers in businesses related to groundskeeping rated attendance as the only factor of great importance, but remained fairly in line with the order of all of their rankings. The employers in laundry-related businesses departed the most from the order of rankings, rating civic responsibility as one of the most important factors, along with funded on-the-job training. It is interesting to note that tax credits and subminimum wage were rated as the two lowest categories across all clusters, with the exception of food service.

Discussion

The results are interesting in terms of the factors that were the most important and those that were the least important. The five highest rated factors relate to characteristics of the worker (attendance and long-term employment) and components of ongoing support provided by a training program (person on call; person for on-site training; and pre-job training). The three lowest rated incentives relate to financial incentives (subminimum age, tax credits, and funded on-the-job training). It is also interesting to note that over half of the employers felt that eight of the ten incentives would definitely affect their willingness to hire the retarded and that employers seldom choose the "middle of the road" response of "maybe affect."

It is difficult to compare the current results with those of previous studies, since the factors being rated are not consistent across studies. The finding of the high importance of attendance, however, is consistent with that of Mithaug (1979); public relations, however, was rated in the top five (of 26) factors in his study and ranked seventh (of ten) in the current data. The

findings of this study, however, are very consistent with those of Riccio and Price (1984). They found assistance in training and monitoring participants to be top rated, followed by prior work training in their project. They also found that wage subsidy was rated as very important by only 34.3% of their employers, and that only 19.3% rated tax credits as very important.

In interpreting these results it should be remembered that the employers interviewed represented businesses with entry level positions which were primarily in personal service occupations. The results may have been different for occupations requiring more advanced skills or jobs in other occupational clusters. As noted previously, the mean number of employees in the businesses interviewed was 49, with a range of 1 to 1170 employees. Only 8 of the businesses had 100 or more employees. Size of the companies, as well as their midwestern location, may have also affected the responses.

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APPENDIX

EMPLOYER INCENTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

AND

EMPLOYER RESPONSES BY OCCUPATIONAL CLUSTER

Name of Firm _____

III. INTEREST IN WORKING WITH DISABLED

1. Has your business hired disabled workers in the past? Y___ N___

   If so, what types of disabilities did they have? _____

   _____

2. Retarded people are people who learn more slowly than others. How would each of the following factors affect your willingness to hire a retarded person? Please respond to each factor with: Definitely Affect (D); Maybe Affect (M); or Not Affect (N).

		D	M	N
a.	Positive public relations	2	1	0
b.	Subminimum wage	2	1	0
c.	High probability of regular attendance	2	1	0
d.	Tax credits	2	1	0
e.	Funded on-the-job training	2	1	0
f.	Ongoing availability of person to call for assistance	2	1	0
g.	Availability of person for on-site training	2	1	0
h.	High probability of long-term employment	2	1	0
i.	Pre-job training	2	1	0
j.	Civic responsibility	2	1	0

Table A

Employer Responses to Factors Which Might Affect the Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

Cluster: General Laborers (N = 32 employers)

Item	Definitely Affect (2)	Maybe Affect (1)	Not Affect (0)	NR	Mean
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
A.	19 (59)	4 (13)	9 (28)	0 (0)	1.31
B.	7 (22)	5 (16)	20 (63)	0 (0)	.59
C.	32 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.00
D.	14 (44)	3 (9)	15 (47)	0 (0)	.97
E.	16 (50)	4 (13)	12 (38)	0 (0)	1.12
F.	27 (84)	2 (6)	3 (9)	0 (0)	1.75
G.	27 (84)	2 (6)	3 (9)	0 (0)	1.75
H.	21 (66)	4 (13)	7 (22)	0 (0)	1.44
I.	21 (66)	3 (9)	7 (22)	1 (3)	1.45
J.	15 (47)	3 (9)	13 (41)	1 (3)	1.06

Note. Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding process.

Table B

Employer Responses to Factors Which Might Affect the Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

Cluster: Custodians/Janitors (N = 20 employers)

Item	Definitely Affect (2)	Maybe Affect (1)	Not Affect (0)	NR	Mean
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	NO. (%)	
A.	12 (60)	4 (20)	4 (20)	0 (0)	1.40
B.	5 (25)	0 (0)	15 (75)	0 (0)	.50
C.	20 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.00
D.	5 (25)	4 (20)	11 (55)	0 (0)	.70
E.	9 (45)	5 (25)	6 (30)	0 (0)	1.15
F.	17 (85)	1 (5)	2 (10)	0 (0)	1.75
G.	13 (65)	4 (20)	3 (15)	0 (0)	1.50
H.	17 (85)	1 (5)	0 (0)	2 (10)	1.94
I.	15 (75)	4 (20)	1 (5)	0 (0)	1.70
J.	13 (65)	5 (25)	2 (10)	0 (0)	1.55

Note. Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding process.

Table C

Employer Responses to Factors Which Might Affect the Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

Cluster: Food Service (N = 16 employers)

Item	Definitely Affect (2)	Maybe Affect (1)	Not Affect (0)	NR	Mean
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
A.	9 (56)	2 (13)	5 (31)	0 (0)	1.25
B.	5 (31)	3 (19)	8 (50)	0 (0)	.81
C.	16 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.00
D.	9 (56)	3 (19)	4 (24)	0 (0)	1.31
E.	9 (56)	5 (31)	2 (13)	0 (0)	1.44
F.	12 (75)	2 (13)	2 (13)	0 (0)	1.62
G.	11 (69)	3 (19)	2 (13)	0 (0)	1.56
H.	14 (88)	0 (0)	2 (13)	0 (0)	1.75
I.	9 (56)	4 (25)	3 (19)	0 (0)	1.38
J.	9 (56)	3 (19)	4 (25)	0 (0)	1.31

Note. Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding process.

Table D

Employer Responses to Factors Which Might Affect the Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

Cluster: Groundskeepers (N = 7 employers)

Item	Definitely Affect (2)	Maybe Affect (1)	Not Affect (0)	NR	Mean
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
A.	2 (29)	2 (29)	3 (43)	0 (0)	.86
B.	2 (29)	0 (0)	5 (71)	0 (0)	.57
C.	5 (71)	1 (14)	1 (14)	0 (0)	1.57
D.	1 (14)	2 (29)	4 (57)	0 (0)	.57
E.	3 (43)	1 (14)	3 (43)	0 (0)	1.00
F.	4 (57)	1 (14)	2 (29)	0 (0)	1.28
G.	4 (57)	0 (0)	3 (43)	0 (0)	1.14
H.	5 (71)	0 (0)	2 (29)	0 (0)	1.43
I.	4 (57)	1 (14)	2 (29)	0 (0)	1.28
J.	4 (57)	1 (14)	2 (29)	0 (0)	1.28

Note. Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding process.

Table E

Employers Responses to Factors Which Might Affect the Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

Item	Definitely Affect (2)	Maybe Affect (1)	Not Affect (0)	NR	Mean
	Cluster: Laundry (N = 6 employers)				
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	
A.	4 (67)	1 (17)	1 (17)	0 (0)	1.50
B.	3 (50)	1 (17)	2 (33)	0 (0)	1.17
C.	6 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.00
D.	2 (33)	0 (0)	4 (67)	0 (0)	.67
E.	5 (83)	0 (0)	1 (17)	0 (0)	1.67
F.	4 (67)	2 (33)	0 (C)	0 (0)	1.67
G.	3 (50)	1 (17)	2 (33)	0 (0)	1.17
H.	6 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.00
I.	4 (67)	1 (17)	1 (17)	0 (0)	1.50
J.	6 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.00

Note. Percentages do not always equal 100 due to rounding process.

Table F

Employer Responses to Factors Which Might Affect the Decision to Hire a Mentally Retarded Worker

Cluster: Housekeeping (N = 3 employers)

Item	Definitely Affect (2)	Maybe Affect (1)	Not Affect (0)	NR	Mean
A.	3	0	0	0	2.00
B.	0	0	3	0	0.00
C.	3	0	0	0	2.00
D.	2	0	1	0	1.33
E.	2	0	1	0	1.33
F.	3	0	0	0	2.00
G.	3	0	0	0	2.00
H.	3	0	0	0	2.00
I.	2	1	0	0	1.67
J.	2	0	1	0	1.33

Note. Percentages not computed due to low N.