FOREWORDS

For over twenty-five years DES providers have worked tirelessly to promote the cause of open (competitive) employment and fought hard for the creation of a specialised employment service for people with disability. The program’s genesis was very much in welfare and focused almost exclusively on the job candidate.

Australia’s labour market has since changed dramatically and is now characterised by skills and labour shortages plus non-traditional forms of employment. Employers, especially large employers, are increasingly aware of the business and ethical imperative for diversifying their workforce by accessing the hidden talent pool that is people with disability.

The interest of large employers in employing candidates with disability represents a paradigm shift for DES providers that often work exclusively with small to medium sized businesses. This project provides an opportunity to refine practices and service delivery models in response to feedback from large employers who wish to employ candidates with disability.

Disability Employment Australia welcomed the opportunity to partner with AHRI on this project that focuses on the ‘employer liaison capabilities’ required to better form long-term relationships with employers and to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for people with disability and their employers in the open labour market. We commend the Australian Government and Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations for funding this initiative.

Lynette May
Chief Executive Officer
Disability Employment Australia

AHRI is delighted to be making a contribution to improving the impact of Government policy initiatives in the critical area of disability employment. Improving the workforce participation of the two million or so Australian citizens with a disability has been a high-priority aim of government for several years.

Australia now has an exemplary national Disability Employment Strategy and more than enough dutiful pronouncements have been made about what a good thing that is. The time has passed for talking about why employing people with a disability is a good idea. There is bipartisan agreement on that in Australia. It is now time to talk about how to do it better and to actually make it happen.

It is my belief that human resource professionals can make a valuable contribution to improving how employers recruit people with disabilities and this project is testament to that belief.

In association with Disability Employment Australia, I trust that the capability framework and training program that is the final outcome of this project will take us a step further in making real progress.

Serge Sardo
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Human Resources Institute
This report is an outcome of a project funded by the Australian Government through the Innovation Fund.

The project was jointly conducted by the Australian Human Resources Institute and the Innovation Fund panel member, Disability Employment Australia.

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The backdrop against which this project was conceived centred around a research exercise that the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) conducted through 678 respondents from its member database during July and August 2011 on employer attitudes to Disability Employment Services (DES). The study was published under the title Recruiting People with a Disability: An Employer Perspective, and found three key barriers that prevent the employment of people with a disability:

1. Negative workplace perceptions
2. Lack of employer knowledge and awareness
3. A disconnect between the capabilities of Disability Employment Service providers and the expectations of business through the prism of in-house human resources and recruitment practitioners.

It is the third of these employment barriers on which this project was founded.

While a minority of employers spoke well of Disability Employment Service providers, many reported a DES provider tendency to represent the needs of their clients from a health and welfare perspective whereas employers were looking for providers that understood the business imperatives of the employer organisation and spoke the language of business. A strong refrain in the findings was the employer disappointment and impatience at having job seekers referred to them where the matching of job seeker to job criteria was inappropriate.

At the same time as receiving these findings, AHRI was conscious that a standard high-level capability adopted by most commercial recruitment agencies is knowledge of the business of the employer, along with other capabilities such as key account management and relationship building. In evaluating the research findings, AHRI appreciated that many of the DES providers come from a case-management background within a social/community work model, rather than a business background.

In the event, the project idea was generated by a desire to redress the disconnection entailed in the findings between what employers are looking for when they set out to employ a person with a disability and what DES providers are, with the best of intentions, offering. As far as AHRI was aware, there was no availability of standardised job criteria that would redress that specific disconnect in the disability employment context, and the project was therefore intended as an innovative attempt to fill that gap and hence to improve the incidence of successful recruitment and retention in the workforce of job seekers with a disability.

The project idea that came out of that contained two key objectives:

1. To raise the capability level of employment consultants within the DES provider system so that they:
   - are more attuned to the mindset and language of business
   - are better informed about the requirements of in-house HR and recruitment functions
   - are better able to match job seekers with a disability to the job criteria of employers
   - skilfully develop business relationships with in-house HR and recruitment managers
   - adopt standard key account management methods in their relationships with business.
2. Through the development of a targeted training program, the employment officers of DES providers are:
   - exposed to a standardised job criteria framework that is consistent with the ways in which in-house HR and recruitment managers operate
   - introduced to the ways in which in-house HR and recruitment managers conduct their business
   - introduced to techniques that enable them to improve the ways in which they manage the interface between job seeker clients with a disability and client organisations
   - better able to reduce the divide that persists between the working models of DES providers and HR and recruitment managers

The key over-arching objective of the project is to facilitate the suitable placement of greater numbers of job candidates with disability in sustainable employment.
In designing the methodology for this project the team applied three pertinent underpinning principles:

- To not reinvent the wheel and repeat existing programs
- To ensure the people on the ground involved in recruiting and placing people with disabilities are extensively involved
- To ensure all conclusions should be born from rigorous data and scrutiny

As a result the project included the following steps:

1. A desktop research review that brought together existing relevant literature and assessed the existence of related programs
2. Two focus groups that looked at the perspectives of HR managers and DES employer liaison officers respectively, and established the architecture of the capability framework
3. A survey of the respective databases of AHRI and Disability Employment Australia to validate the findings of the focus groups
4. The development of a capability framework bringing together the focus group and survey data
5. The appointment of an instructional designer and the drafting of a training program for DES employment consultants based on the capability framework
6. Conducting a pilot training session using the draft training program.
The project required the facilitation of a group of up to 12 HR managers for a half-day focus group to obtain their views and opinions on the qualities and capabilities that they seek when engaging recruitment officers. At the same time the facilitation of up to 12 DES practitioners was conducted to obtain their perspectives on the skills they require in working with the business community.

The two sessions posed the following questions for participants to workshop:

1. What are the top five things that DES providers in general do well in placing people with disability? What are the top five things DES providers don’t do well?

2. Recognising that employment officers with dual roles require capabilities related to providing support for the job seeker, and capabilities related to working with employers to find jobs and place PWDs, what are the employer related skills and capabilities essential for employment consultants (rating them in order of importance 1–10)?

3. Ideally, what would need to change about how DES providers work with employers (e.g. structures, processes, business models)?

4. What, if anything, could DES providers learn from private recruiters?

5. What, if anything, could HR practitioners learn from DES practitioners?

Following the two focus group sessions, a plenary session was conducted attended by both facilitators that brought the observations of the separate groups together to discuss areas of agreement and areas of disconnection.

The two focus groups and the plenary session indicated a surprisingly high level of cross-over agreement from the two groups in terms of the issues they observed as well as a number of areas that were opened for further discussion.
**APPROACH AND FINDINGS**

**EMPLOYER LIAISON OR CASE MANAGER?**

One of the key outcomes of the focus groups was the clear distinction in functions that are required to effectively place people with disability in sustainable employment. It was apparent that effective case management was essential in order to prepare and support people with disability for employment. However, working with employers to find and place people with disability requires a distinct set of activities with their own capabilities.

The first role is strongly focused on the business relationship with the employer and the consensus view was that it gains greatly by the person in the role being able to build a relationship over time so that the role of consultant to the business can be adequately performed. It includes offering well executed recruitment services to the employer as well as educating the employer with respect to the disability employment area and how the employer can gain access to support services and get assistance with induction and other functions.

The case management role is focused on the person with disability with a view to counselling, training and preparation for employment which may include coordinating vocational training. This role is not primarily focused on the employer (particular in the early stages of case management) and arguably requires a distinct set of skills that are largely different to some of those required in employment consultant roles.

There was robust debate within the focus groups as to whether in fact these roles can be performed by the same person. The general consensus was that in an ideal world it was best to have separate people conducting each role. However, pragmatically this could not always be achieved, particularly in regional areas where resources are scarcer. It was strongly acknowledged, though, that whether one person or two, the skillsets identified in this project should remain as a minimum requirement of the employment consultant role.

**Note:** The scope of this project is solely focused on the employment consultant role and has not explored the case management role in any further detail. This in no way diminishes the importance of case management as a disability employment service.
WHO’S THE CLIENT?

When the members of each group were asked who they consider the client to be the responses were often divided. The DES focus group members tended to see the person with disability as the client and the business was a means to achieving the client’s objective of gaining employment. The HR focus group members saw themselves as clients and expected the employment consultant to understand that. From the HR group’s perspective the person with disability was a job candidate looking for work in their organisation, and the employment consultant’s role was to meet the objective of finding a suitable candidate for the role.

Focus group members agreed that this one difference in perception between DES providers (the person with disability is the client) and HR practitioners (I’m the client) has the potential to dramatically influence successful employment outcomes. It generally steered the type of training provided to employment consultants and the relationships they developed with their two clients: the employer and the job candidate.

WHAT LANGUAGE DO YOU SPEAK?

During the focus group workshops it became apparent that the language used throughout the recruitment process was often different between the DES and HR groups, and in some cases different within their own sector. It was recognised that these differences in language added extra challenges in meeting employment outcomes. One common example was the actual terminology for achieving an employment outcome from DES practitioners was the word “placement” that was expanded to the expressions “placement services” and “post-placement support”. HR practitioners almost always referred to this as “recruitment”, “recruitment services” and “on-boarding” for the period immediately after a person with disability commences employment which in DES language is typically referred to as “post-placement support”.

The focus groups identified the need for employment consultants to align their terminology and language with employers to create greater collaboration and consistency in services.
The questions that made up the survey that followed the focus groups were compiled with the intention of testing the focus group assumptions by exposing the matters raised with wider groups of stakeholders from both constituencies. It was distributed during May 2012 to the databases of AHRI and Disability Employment Australia.

A total of 378 responses to the survey were received as indicated in Figure 1 which shows that nearly half the responses (45%) were from HR practitioners and a third from disability employment practitioners.

In reporting on skills required to maintain effective employer relationships, 70% of the sample group nominated rapport with the employer and a long-term relationship, 69% nominated consulting skills enabling solutions to employer problems, 55% nominated researching and understanding the employer’s business and environment, and 53% nominated verbal communication skills.

Key Survey Finding
THE SURVEY

KEY FINDINGS

- 30% of HR practitioner respondents report working with one employment consultant undertaking both functions, 14% two separate roles and 17% report variability depending on provider and location. 40% don’t know.

- 37% of DES provider respondents report that the two roles are performed by one person, 29% report separate roles and 28% report variability depending on location or other factors.

- 30% of DES providers believe it’s possible for one person to perform both functions, 37% believe there should be separate roles, and 33% believe it can be done either way.

- 34% of DES providers report staff turnover rates annually of between 10% and 30%. 10% report turnover of more than 30%.

- In reporting on skills required to maintain effective employer relationships, 70% of the whole sample group nominated rapport with the employer and a long-term relationship, 69% nominated consulting skills enabling solutions to employer problems, 55% nominated researching and understanding the employer’s business and environment, and 53% nominated verbal communication skills (with only 22% nominating written communication skills).

- In reporting on the main recruiting service, 91% of the whole sample group nominated matching candidate skills, aspirations and experience with job requirements, 65% marketing a candidate to an employer, 60% marketing the benefits of employing a person with a disability and 50% ability to undertake a candidate capability analysis.

- In reporting on the main monitoring service, 72% of the whole sample group nominated ability to understand job performance and outcome requirements, 63% nominated problem solving skills, 62% ability to assess job training needs and coordinate training, and 31% nominated administrative skills and familiarity with compliance and funding documentation.
THE SURVEY

SOME DETAILED FINDINGS

As can be seen from Figure 1 there were slightly more HR practitioners who responded to the survey. The “other” category generally includes line managers and the like who have been involved in disability recruitment of some type.
Perhaps the most salient observation that can be drawn from Figures 2 and 3 is the large variation in qualifications levels and disciplines amongst DES practitioners surveyed. Nearly one third have Certificate 4 or less while approximately 40% have a tertiary qualification. There is also a large variation in disciplines studied ranging from business administration through to disability support services.

The large differences in education levels and disciplines may reflect the absence of any minimum entry requirements within the sector.

This is further exemplified in the wide array of job titles for what appears to be the same function. Some examples include disability services business developer, disability services officer, employment consultant, and employer engagement consultant.

While the survey sample is not considered representative, amongst practitioners within the sector there was general consensus that the employer liaison role is particularly well defined, which in many ways affirms the objectives of this project.
WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANTS?

The focus groups and subsequent survey data confirmed the existence of a typical set of functions that all employment consultants are required to perform as part of their role. The following is a high-level summary of each function:

**Establishing and maintaining employer relationships**

This was seen as critical to achieving employment outcomes because DES practitioners need to focus heavily on creating job demand through effective long-term relationships that provide repeat opportunities. More than 70% of survey respondents believed that “developing a rapport with the employer and a working relationship for the long term” was the single most important function of an employment consultant.

**Providing recruitment services**

While not all that common in DES language, it was clear that employment consultants did in fact provide recruitment services (often described as “placement”) and that the term “recruitment” should be more readily used to describe this important function. Some comments to describe this service from survey participants include:

“I actively market job seekers, including their skills, knowledge, experience etc. Similar to mainstream recruitment agencies.”

“Act as an advocate for a person with a disability to gain employment and educate employers on the capabilities of a person with a disability.”

“Disability services should actively engage both the employer and the employee with up-to-date information on what is available.”

“I assess both hard and soft skill requirements for the position.”

**Management of on-boarding activities**

Commonly referred to as “post-placement support”, the integration period following employment presents a variety of challenges that employment consultants and HR practitioners need to manage to ensure a successful employment outcome. HR practitioners have well-established practices and systems that employment consultants need to understand and work within. Survey results confirmed the importance for employment consultants to manage this function effectively. Some survey participant comments include:

“Continue follow-up with employer - training, support or awareness training for staff members to assist the disabled person to integrate e.g. how to communicate with a hearing impaired person.”

“Ensure employee and job match is appropriate. Where there is a mismatch that cannot be rectified, withdraw the employee.”

“Provide on-the-job support to client especially at beginning of placement. Meet with employer and co-workers to gain understanding of task requirements and to support them to learn about the new employee if needed i.e. disability awareness training.”

**Ensuring sustainability**

It’s common knowledge that the first six months of any new recruitment is critical to the long-term sustainability of that employment. This is even more critical for people with disability who may require additional support and services. Focus group participants and survey respondents confirmed the need for employment consultants to have a long-term focus and provide high-level monitoring during the period immediately post-employment.
THE SURVEY

WHAT ARE THE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANTS?

A unique set of competencies was identified for each of the functions listed on page 14. Survey participants were asked to rate each competency from an extensive list identified in the focus group. The results were then used to cluster the competencies into categories assigned to each function. These competency clusters were identified as:

Core employer liaison competencies
- Relationship management skills
- Consulting skills
- Problem solving skills
- Coaching and mentoring
- Research and analysis skills

Employer relationship competencies
- Business savvy
- Business development skills
- Sales and marketing skills

Recruitment service competencies
- Job analysis and design skills
- Workplace analysis skills
- Capability analysis skills
- Job matching and customisation skills

On-boarding process competencies
- On-boarding and induction skills
- Understanding of the employer’s HR function and processes

Monitoring, reviewing and liaison competencies
- Managing employer vs employee expectations
- Ongoing review and feedback of performance and key result areas
- Liaison and coordination skills

Value-adding service competencies
- Education and training skills
- Strong understanding of disability employment
THE SURVEY

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES NEEDED IN EMPLOYER LIAISON ROLE

Respondents were asked to select the five attributes from a list that they believe are of most value to a person in the employer liaison role. Table 1 sets out the 307 responses to that question, and shows that positive attitude (51.8% of respondents), emotional intelligence (49.2%), passion for the disability employment sector (47.9%) lateral thinking (38.4%) and well organised time management (36.8%) are the five top selections. These skill sets did indeed dominate the draft capability framework and provided strong emphasis on managing the employer effectively and providing high-level consulting services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPTION</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion for the disability employment sector</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral thinking</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well organised/good time management</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes initiative</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable of flexibility</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>26.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person-centred focus</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>25.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical capability</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivation</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong work ethic</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team player</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outgoing nature</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of authority</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ONE ROLE OR TWO ROLES?

There was much discussion within the focus groups as to whether the two functions of employer liaison officer and case manager carried out by DES providers were best handled as one role or two separate roles.

HR and DES practitioners were both invited to offer written comments on why they believe the activities carried out under the employer liaison role are best done by one or two people. Of the 102 written responses, a sample follows:

“As an employer, we just want to employ capable and skilled people to our organisation. We don’t really think about the supports that are available to people, indeed it is not of our concern and we really don’t need to know about all the other relevant functions. As employers, we need to know what our responsibilities are, how we can make it easy for applicants and managers, how we can cut through the red tape and get on to the job of employing skilled capable people.”

“A case manager is more involved with the candidate and is able to provide comprehensive one-on-one support. If they have to do both employer liaison and case management, I think the level of support provided will deteriorate.”

“The key is getting the right outcomes. The two roles require quite different skill sets so if running a joint role you would need a person who brings both sets of competencies. It may be more effective to have different roles to focus on connecting, educating and bringing in potential employers while the case manager can focus on the people placed in organisations.”

“Only if they have the capacity and are able to manage both roles.”

“I think for consistency purposes there should be one person working with the employer and employee - this avoids confusion and misinformation.”

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**TABLE 1. PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED OF A DES PRACTITIONER CARRYING OUT THE EMPLOYER LIAISON ROLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td>159</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</table>

**FIGURE 4. HAVE ONE OR TWO PEOPLE CARRIED OUT BOTH DES PRACTITIONER FUNCTIONS?**

- One role performing both functions: 29.6%
- Two (or more) separate roles: 14.2%
- It varied depending on the provider and/or location: 17.2%
- Don’t know: 39.6%
THE SURVEY

DES PROVIDER ORGANISATION FUNCTIONS

Figure 5 shows that more than a third (37.3%) of DES provider organisations in the sample combine the two functions into one role and more than a quarter split the functions into two roles (28.6%), with another quarter (27.8%) varying the mix depending on location and other things.

As a corollary to Figure 5, DES practitioners were asked whether they believe one or two roles was best. Figure 6 shows that more than a third (36.5%) believe separate roles are necessary and less than a third (30.2%) believe one role works effectively, with exactly one third believing it can be done either way.
The role of employment consultants is a complex and challenging one and has been gradually redefining its scope and capability requirements as the labour market expectations and client base expanded to include a greater consciousness of both employers and job candidates. This project has attempted to provide clearer definition and identify the essential elements of the role, the end outcome being a well-defined capability framework that can be used by DES providers when recruiting for and developing employment consultants.

The capability framework set out in Figure 7 provides a high-level overview of the final results of this project. The Employer Liaison Capability Framework expands further on each of the competency clusters.

A one-day training program has also been developed based on the framework. Both the framework and the training materials will be made available to DES providers.

**NEXT STEPS**

To capture the perspectives of DES consultants and HR practitioners, and bring their inputs together into a capability framework and training program has been a rewarding experience, not just for the project sponsors, Disability Employment Australia and the Australian Human Resources Institute, but also for the voluntary participants in the focus groups and the generous respondents to the national survey.

Disability Employment Australia and AHRI undertook the project under the auspices of DEEWR because they share a strong commitment to boosting the confidence of Australian employees in the employment of Australians with a disability. The project revealed that one reason employers are not adequately engaged is that many are not made aware of the benefits of sourcing employees from that cohort, nor in many cases are employers approached in ways that maximise the likelihood of job seekers with disability being successfully recruited into suitable and sustainable employment. While acknowledging that Government has an obligation to better lift the national profile of disability employment, it is equally true that the representatives of government who are working with employers on an individual basis are fully trained to work effectively for the mutual benefit of job seekers and employers.

The project outcomes have the potential to make a difference in an area of public policy that has continued for many years to make little real headway. The test is now to ensure that the message gets out to DES providers around the nation so that the merits of the training are communicated, sessions are scheduled, and DES consultants in large numbers take up the training opportunity. The time for talk in this area is over; it is now time to take more effective action and get real results.

**CONCLUSION**
CONCLUSION

FIGURE 7. CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK ARISING FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEY

EMPLOYER LIAISON CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK

EMPLOYER LIAISON ESSENTIALS

CORE COMPETENCIES OF AN EMPLOYER LIAISON
• Relationship management skills
• Consulting skills
• Problem solving skills
• Coaching and mentoring skills
• Research and analytical skills

DESIRED ATTRIBUTES OF AN EMPLOYER LIAISON
• Effective communication skills
• A positive attitude
• Emotional intelligence
• Passion for the disability employment sector
• The capacity to think laterally
• Strong organisation skills
• Good listening and feedback skills
• Self-confidence and resilience
• Honesty and integrity
• Person centred focus
• Business outcome focus

EMPLOYER LIAISON FUNCTIONS

Develop & maintain effective employer relationships
Provide recruitment services to the employer
Work with employer to manage the on-boarding process
Monitor, review and liaise with the parties to ensure sustainability
Deliver value adding services for the employer and employees

EMPLOYER LIAISON FUNCTION COMPETENCIES

• Business savvy
• Business development skills
• Sales and marketing skills
• Job analysis and design skills
• Workplace analysis skills
• Capability analysis skills
• Job matching/customisation skills
• On-boarding/induction skills
• Understanding of the employer’s HR function and processes
• Managing employer vs employee expectations
• Ongoing review and feedback of performance and key result areas
• Liaison and coordination skills
• Education and training skills
• Strong understanding of disability employment
Paper made carbon neutral from 100% recycled post consumer waste.