

***THE SEVEN PHASE SEQUENCE FOR BALANCING  
NATURALNESS AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS***

***A White Paper by Michael Callahan***

The concept of natural supports is closely linked to TASH and its mission. In 1988 TASH members Jan Nisbet and Dave Hagner wrote the watershed article that appeared in the *TASH Journal*: “Natural supports in the workplace: A reexamination of supported employment.” This article basically introduced the concept of natural supports to the disability field. In the years following the introduction of natural supports, the concept went viral. By 1992 Congress accepted natural supports as a means for providing ongoing supports for supported employment. By 1998 Paul Wehman and John Bricout analyzed nine journal articles describing varying approaches and functional definitions of natural supports. They found confusion brewing within the variation.

From the beginning, it seemed that those associated with developing strategies for natural supports confused the issue of developing creative and non-professionalized supports with the concept of accessing and utilizing the natural features of workplaces for support to people with significant disabilities. Wehman and Bricout analyzed article after article, including the definition used by Congress to amend the Rehab Act in 1992, in which natural supports referred to creative strategies developed by human service agencies rather than the actual natural supports available in community workplaces. Many of the early articles described ways to minimize the role of the job coach by finding innovative strategies to access supports from an array of sources such as mentors, parents, advocates, college students and workers from other shifts. These approaches shared the common feature of expanding access to non-traditional supporters under the name of natural supports.

As the concept matured during the mid to late 1990’s, there was a clear shift towards defining natural supports in terms of the workplace rather than in terms of alternatives to traditional job coaching (see Rogan, Hagner & Murphy, 1993; Storey and Certo, 1996; Mank, et. al, 1997 & Unger, et. al. 1997); The last article analyzed (West, et. al. 1997) finally got it just right. These authors suggested that natural supports “refers to the resources inherent in community environments that can be used for habilitative and supportive services.”

This evolved understanding of natural supports dovetailed with that of this author (Callahan & Garner, 1997) which suggests that effective natural supports must acknowledge two powerful forces that affect the success of anyone using integrated community environments – features of naturalness and individual needs. In other words, it’s not enough to simply gain access to naturally existing features of support. We must also assure that the needs of the individual are met. But how do we strike this balance? And which side of the issue do we start with – naturalness or individual? How do we build capacity in community environments to more effectively meet the needs of individuals with significant disabilities? The answer to these tough questions are complex and have been left almost completely to support agency staff – often young and poorly trained – to find their way to naturally referenced success. As you can imagine, we’ve not been extremely successful in our efforts to increase natural supports in community environments.

In the decade and a half since Wehman and Bricout analyzed the state of the art surrounding natural supports, there has been a marked decline in training and scholarly development in this area. Employment has continued to be the focus of most discussion on natural supports although the concept is equally valid during community participation, in one's neighborhood, in school and in post-secondary settings. However, the realm of employment seems to offer the clearest avenue for understanding the complexities of accessing the "resources inherent in community environments."

What is needed is acknowledgement that truly *natural* supports are of the workplace, not of the human service system. And that workplaces are different, comprising unique cultures that must be understood in order to be utilized and developed for natural supports. This begs for a reconsideration of a decades old strategy – job analysis. Job analysis has been used in the support of disability employment since the mid-1960's. In the early days, a job analysis was essentially a training plan to be used to support individuals with disabilities to learn and perform their jobs. Analyses often contained adaptations, adjustments, individualized training strategies and other such solutions to facilitate successful employment for the employee. The reconsideration that is needed is to shift the focus of job analysis to that of a *cultural analysis* of workplaces. In other words, the proper starting point needs to be on the company's culture before we consider the needs of the employee with a disability.

To do this effectively we must look beyond the issue of disability and consider how typical employees are naturally supported. Successful employment for generic employees involves a balancing act of two forces which are often at odds in community workplaces -- the general decisions made by employers regarding the support given to their employees and the specific needs of individual workers. These forces must be balanced by all successful workers in every workplace in our society.

Traditionally the human service field has assumed that the needs of workers with disabilities, especially employees with severe disabilities, could not be adequately met by employers. Therefore most training and facilitation strategies have evolved from a human service perspective rather than from a more naturally defined source. However, employment facilitators have begun to recognize both the possible contributions of employers, if they are included fully in employment supports, and the limiting effects on integration and full participation if they are excluded from natural processes.

## **A ROAD MAP TO SUCCESSFUL NATURAL SUPPORTS: THE SEVEN PHASE SEQUENCE**

This natural supports approach uses a modification of the Seven Phase Sequence for training originally developed by Marc Gold (1980) and revised for natural work environments to help answer these questions. This sequence represents a conceptual model to balance the natural support capacity of community workplaces with the individual needs of employees with significant disabilities. The Seven Phase Sequence

provides a culturally-based road map to be used by human service employment supporters to maximize natural supports and to balance the complex issues raised by the impact of disability.

The first four steps of the Seven Phase Sequence clearly indicate a strong preference for using natural processes to assist supported employees to learn and maintain their jobs. This strategy, and the accompanying job analysis activity to be performed, requires the employment facilitator to carefully examine and utilize all the features of "natural capacity" which exist in a work place to assist all employees to learn and perform their jobs.

## **SEVEN PHASE SEQUENCE FOR BALANCING NATURAL SUPPORTS AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

**(Insert Seven Phase graphic here)**

The backup phases of the Sequence are designed to provide the additional assistance that may be necessary, in as natural manner as possible, to facilitate success of the job in those cases in which the natural procedures are not sufficient. Employment facilitators are faced with providing creative and effective suggestions in Phases 5 - 7 to supplement the natural supports available on a job site. In some cases it may be necessary for the employment facilitator to completely take over the instructional responsibility for an employee.

This perspective results in a new role for employment facilitators and raises challenging questions regarding technical assistance and staff competence. For instance, how can a facilitator offer creative solutions if he/she does not know powerful training techniques? How can a facilitator expect to effectively teach an employee who finds it difficult to learn if the facilitator does not have knowledge of effective strategies which can be individually tailored to meet the needs the employee? How does a facilitator identify and recruit natural strategies typically used by employers to support employees? How can we build support capacity within community workplaces in a way that does not simply focus on disability? These questions much be answered if we are to move forward with natural supports. The Seven Phase Sequence can provide a roadmap.

## **THE BALANCING ACT**

These questions create a paradox for employment facilitators and their service agencies. Facilitators need to reference and support natural procedures and relationships whenever feasible and they need to be able to go beyond natural capacity, at times, to offer employees with severe disabilities access to more powerful and effective supports.

The first key to resolving this dilemma is for the employment facilitator to recognize that there are limits to natural supports and natural capacity. Well-trained employment facilitators will usually have skills and perspectives to meet individual employee needs which are more technically effective than those found in typical employees and supervisors. However, there are many things that human service facilitator can never do

as well as "natural" people on job sites. Those natural contributions often relate to the most critically important aspects of success.

Employment facilitators must therefore recognize that even though they need to possess a range of skills to insure their employee's success, those skills serve a secondary, backup role to all the ways, means, and people natural to the job site. However, unless the facilitator knows powerful training strategies, the role of support can be compromised.

The Seven Phase Sequence provides a clear direction to employment facilitators to initiate instruction using the natural ways, means, and people available to any new employee. However, this is not a lockstep model. The facilitator must carefully weigh the features of naturalness, by using the first three phases of the sequence, in relation to the needs of the employee. Unless there is compelling evidence otherwise, the facilitator should proceed to support, not substitute for, the natural processes of the job site for initial instruction.

## THE NATURAL PHASES

The first three phases of the Seven Phase Sequence provide all the information necessary for the facilitator to consider the features of naturalness which might be used to provide support and direction assisting the employee to successfully perform the job.

**Phase 1** references the **natural ways** in which jobs are performed in work settings. Natural ways include methods of performance for targeted job tasks, step-by-step procedures, the culture of workplace, the manner in which workers interact, the managerial style of the setting, and all other natural features which describe the unique characteristics of performance and behavior desired by the employer.

This phase is crucial because it provides the information necessary for the new employee to "fit in". Employees who perform their jobs in a manner similar to others not only are more likely to be accepted as one "of the gang", it will also be easier for supervisors and co-workers to provide assistance and troubleshoot problems due to the similarity of performance with their jobs.

**Phase 2** requires facilitators to examine the **natural means** used by employers to communicate the natural ways desired for employee performance and behavior. This concept concentrates primarily on the teaching strategies, if any, used by employers to introduce new employees to their jobs and to support them when they need assistance and upgrading. A troubling aspect of this phase is the possibility, even the likelihood, that the means used to teach and support employees will vary from person to person in the work site and the approaches may be unstructured and ineffective. Training procedures will certainly vary among work sites in any community.

Perhaps the most effective way to assess the natural means of job sites is to first, ask the employer to describe the procedures used. Second, observe, if possible, teaching done by

employees in the setting. Finally, and most importantly, ask to be taught how to perform the job tasks by the persons who would naturally assist the jobs to be performed by the supported employee. This approach will provide the employment facilitator with a valid perspective from which to make later decisions in the sequence.

As noted earlier, experienced facilitators will probably conclude that they possess more effective and systematic procedure than those observed in the natural setting. However, it does not necessarily follow that those natural procedures will be insufficient to teach successful performance to the supported employee. There is a strong rationale for the facilitator to take a risk in Phase 4 and allow natural means a chance to be effective. It can even be argued that it would be a reasonable trade-off to accept the lessened performance possible through naturalness over that available through powerful training procedures from the employment facilitator. The Seven Phase Sequence attempts to keep such situations from becoming "either/or" decisions. The back-up phases discussed later will provide all the assistance necessary after natural procedures have been shown to be insufficient.

**Phase 3** asks facilitators to identify and enlist the **natural people** who typically support new employees to perform their jobs. This activity is possibly the most novel aspect of natural supports for traditional providers of supported employment services. In the past, job developers often promised employers that job trainers would provide all the assistance necessary for successful performance and that the employer would have no investment in the initial training and support of the employee. This practice resulted in the isolation of supported employees in their own work settings. The job coach often acted as an interpreter for all the information, rules, policies and activities of the work place for the supported employee. This role placed the job coach between the employer and the employee.

The Seven Phase Sequence asks employment facilitators to get to know all the different people who are responsible, or who may be willing, to provide assistance to new employees and to enlist those persons to provide training and support for the new supported employee.

## **FACILITATING SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE**

**Phase 4** involves the provision of initial and on-going assistance to the supported employee. All the information gained during the first three phases, and in the Job Analysis (described later), is considered in the implementation of this phase. Facilitators must now decide the degree of naturalness which will be used for initial training. It is strongly suggested than unless there are clear indications to the contrary, natural procedures be utilized initially.

### **Implementing Phase 4**

If the facilitator has decided to follow the sequence and allow natural supporters to initiate instruction, it is necessary to plan a strategy to observe the training and to be in a position to offer suggestions and support. This requires the facilitator to be physically at the job site during this initial period. Depending upon the factors determined during the first three phases of the sequence and the job analysis, the facilitator may choose a range of positions varying from a discreet observation point to close proximity to the employee.

Plans also must be considered to offer feedback and suggestions to the natural supporter. Depending on the needs of the employee and the capacity of the employer, the most appropriate strategy for feedback will vary -- as with positioning of the facilitator. It may be necessary to offer almost immediate feedback in some instances, while in others every hour or even longer may be appropriate. When significant problems arise, the facilitator should implement the back-up phase of the sequence for more individualized attention for the supported employee.

### Constraints to the Initial Use of Naturalness

There might be several situations in which a facilitator would consider less natural procedures to initiate Phase 4. Often the roles of the job developer and the employment facilitator are performed by different persons. The job developer may indicate to the employer that the employment facilitator will perform all the initial instruction of the supported employee. In this case the facilitator often finds it necessary to initiate training, involving the natural supporters as much as possible, then fade to them as training allows. It is therefore critical that job development reflects the values for natural supports imbedded in the Seven Phase Sequence.

There may also be instances relating to the specific impact of an employee's disability in which the facilitator may feel that it is necessary to model effective techniques for the natural supporters, for example, in the areas of systematic instruction or behavioral interventions, as a way to teach successful strategies.

There might also be situations which are so fragile in relation to the employer's low expectation of success, or of the employee's or the family's low expectations, that the facilitator might feel that a period of greater instructional control is called for than is available from natural procedures.

Finally, job stations and job sites may require modifications to assure accessibility and productivity for employees with physical disabilities. These modifications are often best made before an employee begins work. The employment facilitator however, should seek ways to include the employer in the solutions to these needs rather than assuming the responsibility independently of the employment setting.

### **MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS: USING THE BACK-UP PHASES**



It is important to realize that regardless of who provides the initial training of the supported employee -- natural supporters or the facilitator -- it is likely that there will be adjustments to be made to the features of naturalness identified in Phases 1, 2 and 3. This is to say that the facilitator should not depend on initial strategies and decisions to be sufficient in facilitating successful employment. During the early days of employment, facilitators must constantly monitor the performance of the supported employee. If initial strategies are not successful, then the back-up phases of the Seven Phase Sequence must be implemented.

Possibly the most significant contribution of the Seven Phase Sequence is its safety net. Rather than blaming acquisition problems on the employee or the employer, the sequence asks employment facilitators to consider increasingly powerful strategies to achieve successful performance. Phases 5, 6, and 7 represent a logical closed loop of decisions which encourage the facilitator to remain positively focused until the employee learns the job.

Another feature of the Seven Phase Sequence is its ability to balance naturalness and the needs of individual employees. The initial three phases are naturally derived and the last three phases allow for more powerful, individualized strategies. However, facilitators must be careful not to switch immediately and completely from natural to individualized approaches. The Seven Phase Sequence provides for a fluid, constant analysis of the ways means and people involved in assisting supported employees to be successful. It is important that if facilitators depart from natural strategies, that it is done in a measured manner by using small, incremental changes from more natural procedures.

**Phase 5** involves supporting, or possibly substituting for, the natural people who are responsible for teaching job tasks. The facilitator must be present on the job site to successfully make this and many other back-up decisions. There are a range of ways in which the natural people on a job site can be supported. The facilitator might: a) demonstrate a more powerful technique, b) negotiate a time for discussion and feedback with the natural supporter, c) offer training information formally or informally, or, d) shadow the natural supporter and offer on-going feedback. These strategies represent only a few of the many ways which natural people can be supported. The facilitator might also feel that it is necessary to substitute for natural people by negotiating for a different co-worker or trainer to provide assistance. It is also possible that personal assistance providers, volunteers, parents or other family members might be appropriate substitutes for natural supporters. Of course the most likely substitute is the employment facilitator. The Seven Phase Sequence allows for direct training by the employment facilitator, but other approaches should typically be considered first.

The decisions made during **Phase 6** involve a reconsideration of the natural means used by employers to teach and motivate employees to perform their jobs. It is likely that many work places will not have a single approach to teaching and motivating, but rather a hodgepodge of approaches individually determined by each co-worker and supervisor.



Facilitators must be careful, therefore, not to generalize too much in this area. The teaching style of one co-worker may differ significantly from another and further yet from a supervisor. In these cases, it is important to consider those various strategies which seem to be working and who uses them. It may be necessary then to offer specific suggestions to specific natural supporters -- each different from the other -- in order to achieve successful performance.

**Phase 7** decisions involve adapting, modifying or negotiating for flexibility in the natural ways that work places operate. Natural ways include task methods, step-by step procedures, rules, customs and the overall culture of the work setting. These decisions are logically considered last because they are often the most consistent and unchanging features of work places. It is necessary, in some instances, however, to negotiate for changes in this area even before the employee begins employment. For example, if the natural way to get paper for a copier in an office is to reach up into the storage cabinet to retrieve the paper, a modification would be immediately necessary for an employee who uses a wheelchair and has limited reach.

### **THE SEVEN PHASE SEQUENCE IN ACTION**

The activity of implementing the plans and decisions made during the Seven Phase Sequence is the first step of a process which is critically important to the success of persons in supported employment. This process involves supporting the direct facilitation of training by natural supporters or providing direct training of the supported employee by the facilitator, as appropriate. The decision of the *way* tasks of the job will be performed, the *means* use to teach the job and *people* assigned for support and supervision. These considerations are covered in Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the Sequence.

### **THE JOB ANALYSIS PROCESS**

Job analysis in supported employment is a human service activity designed to assist facilitators to: a) organize the information to be performed by the supported employee; b) recognize the natural ways, means and people used by the employer to typically perform and teach the job; c) develop a plan for balancing the natural features of support available at the job site with the needs of the employee; and d) form the relationships necessary to accomplish the seven phase sequence.

This activity formally begins after the employer has given approval for the job to begin and before the supported employee begins to work. However, the job analysis begins informally even before the job developer's initial contact with the employer. In order to achieve the maximum benefits of natural supports, facilitators must seek to identify factors of natural capacity as a consideration of which employers to call on. During job development, facilitators must consider the features of natural capacity while negotiating with the employer. Care must be taken to set the scene for employer involvement from

the onset of employment and to distinguish this naturally-referenced approach from more traditional approaches of supported employment.

The actual performance of the formal Job Analysis by the employment facilitator requires a visit to the job site of at least 1/2 day, but ideally one or more days. Generally speaking, the more time the facilitator invests, the more useful the job analysis becomes in facilitating successful performance and enhancing natural supports./

Given the reliance on and attention to natural supports referenced throughout this paper, readers may wonder why a job analysis should be performed by a human service facilitator. The answer, at this time, is that the facilitator's role remains a critical one. The facilitator must be able to make decisions using the Seven Phase Sequence which balance the needs of the employee with the natural support features of the setting. Effectively making these decisions requires that the facilitator be aware of all of the conditions of the work setting and the job expectations of the employee.

The reason that the facilitator's role remains critical to success is the continuing belief that many persons with severe disabilities require supports, beyond those typically offered by employers, to be successfully employed. At this time, the funding and responsibility for the provision of these supports rest with human service agencies. The use of natural supports does not imply that human service supports are bad, but that they are best used to develop and enhance other, more natural supports. Therefore it is vital that employment facilitators be aware of all the conditions and expectations of employment for supported employees.

The usefulness of this approach to job analysis depends on the employment facilitator creating a "chain of logic" throughout the process which results in the maximum use of natural conditions and supports while meeting the individual needs of the supported employee. The sequence of activities used in this process can be divided into three major categories:

- A. Steps performed during job development and before a job site visit;
- B. Steps performed on-site designed to learn and organize the task for decision-making; and,
- C. Steps which enhance the likelihood that the employee will "fit in" the work setting.

The process of performing a job analysis begins with the premise that a well-matched job has been developed for the supported employee and that the employer has agreed, at least to some degree, to the provision of natural supports as suggested by the Seven Phase Sequence. Job development must also effectively negotiate for a set of potentially-achievable tasks which will comprise the employee's tailored job description. This final fitting of the applicant to the job expectations allows the employment facilitator to anticipate any accommodations which must be made in advance by the employer. It is

suggested that initial negotiations for technology, accessibility and job station re-design be based on the belief that the accommodations are in keeping with the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If there are other, more questionable, conditions which might become problematic, it is suggested that the job developer or employment facilitator wait and use the Seven Phase Sequence to resolve any problems.

The steps involving observation and performance of the targeted job tasks are included so that the employment facilitator can gain an accurate mental picture of all the responsibilities of the job. It is from these pictures, and the subsequent content steps which flow from them, that the facilitator will make the decisions on the implementation of the Seven Phase Sequence for initial training of the supported employee.

The final set of steps involves getting a feel for the natural procedures, relationships, politics and other subtle features of the culture of the setting so that the supported employee can be successful as possible during the early days of employment. The facilitator must try to get to know who can and cannot be counted on to provide assistance, who needs to be avoided and who the employee must please in order to stay employed.

A job analysis form is attached to this article and can be used by the facilitator to summarize the findings of the job analysis. This form follows the Seven Phase Sequence and allows the job analysis to follow the perspectives described in this paper.

The facilitator needs to identify the natural ways the employer wants the job performed, the natural means used to teach and maintain the job and the people who are responsible for training new employees. The job analysis form also requires the facilitator to examine relationships among employees, physical requirements of the job, cultural aspects of the setting and other factors relating to successful job performance.

For those employees who will need job site modifications and technology, the facilitator will conduct an accessibility survey and will attempt to identify for the employer any reasonable accommodations which might be covered under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehab Act.

Finally, the facilitator must consider how to best proceed with the use of natural supports in relation to the direct support and training available by the facilitator. This may involve providing information to designated co-workers and supervisors, modeling good training techniques or simply answering concerns and questions by the person(s) responsible for supporting the new employee.

The following pages provide hints for facilitators to use in implementing the Seven Phase Sequence.

# The Seven Phase Sequence The Complete “Roadmap”

