**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

# Integrating the Unemployed through Customized Training

## A Quick Look

People with disabilities often face barriers with securing and maintaining employment. Customized training is a successful approach to assist those with disabilities in overcoming these barriers by providing them with individualized, deliberately calculated, short-term, intensive training. This article describes the principles and components of customized training, while also acknowledging its limitations, and the role it has in meeting the needs of workers, employers, and the “rapidly changing demands of a knowledge-based economy.”

## Key Findings

* Short-term preparation and specific skills training are hallmarks of customized training. It is here that customized training differs from more traditional training approaches.
* Under customized training, designated organizations conduct thorough job searches in the community, then work with local employers to identify what jobs they have available and what skills are needed to fulfill those positions.
* Then, organizations provide necessary training for those identified positions. Training modules can range anywhere from 16 to 160 hours. Sometimes the organization will provide the training, other times they will partner with another institute who will deliver the training.
* Once training is complete, prospective workers are then paired to the positions that match their newly-acquired skillsets - and, since it is in the employers’ interests to higher those with job-ready skills, it is expected they will be hired.
* Although customized training has been vastly successful in a number of settings and economies, it is not without its limitations:
  + Due to its rapid job placement approach, customized training is often categorized as a “work first” model - which some argue is not an ideal approach in that it prematurely places workers in jobs that they are not yet adequately prepared for. However, the authors of the article argue that customized training is not a “work first” approach, but rather, a “skills first” approach. Nevertheless, the mislabeling of it as a work first approach may turn people off to the idea of customized training.
  + Customized training is often criticized as being “too narrow” in scope, meaning that rather than training workers with general skills that may be applicable to a broader array of jobs, its specific training nature limits the range of jobs that workers can get.
  + Customized training is not typically useful for those with severe or significant disabilities.
  + Due to its intensive, highly personalized approach, customized training programs are typically only able to serve small numbers of people at a time.
  + Some of the jobs for which customized training take place are low-paying jobs, or ones that pay minimum wage.

## Putting It Into Practice

* Despite its limitations (the majority of which can be counterargued as strengths), customized training remains a viable option for capable yet struggling job seekers.
* Organizations that provide customized training should be competent in labor market analyses and job searches. This extends beyond help wanted ads and online postings; coordinators should network and spend time in the community, talk with employers face to face to establish connections, and learn of positions that may not have been advertised.
* Organizations that provide customized training should regularly audit the training that they themselves provide to prospective workers and be familiar with other training offered in the community, such as programs at local community colleges or technical centers. They should be prepared to swiftly refer clients to those institutions when a promising job is identified.
* Once the initial process is complete and workers are employed, organizations would do well to keep in contact with the employee to follow up with their experience and assist them in their growth and removal of any on-the-job barriers.

## Learn More

This is not a research study, but a description of the principles and components of customized training, while also acknowledging its limitations, and the role it has in meeting the needs of workers, employers, and the changing demands of a knowledge-based economy.

## Source

Torjman, S. (2000). Integrating the unemployed through customized training. Canadian Public Policy, 26 (s1), 221-233.

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*The contents of this article summary were developed under a grant, the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment, H264K200003, from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.*