MAPS
MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASSESSMENT OF PROVIDERS AND SYSTEMS

Inclusive Employment – Will We Know It When We See It?

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Background & Objectives

Research of the past 30 years has established supported employment (SE) as the "gold standard" in vocational programming for persons with disabilities, and criteria exist to determine the fidelity of placement programs relative to accepted best practice.[2,4] As a result, SE as been adopted internationally as a best practice by service providers in the intellectual disability field. **But is SE reflective of inclusive employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities**? Typical outcomes used to determine the success of SE placement programs reflect integration, but fail to address inclusion in meaningful ways.[11]

Integration has been defined in the literature as physical presence in locations that are frequented by the general public[7]. In their 2003 literature review concerning integration and people with intellectual disabilities, Cummins and Law identified that the most frequently used measures of social integration were 1) the number of activities undertaken within the community, 2) the number or objective character of personal relationships, 3) the frequency of access to community resources, 4) the number of leisure activities engaged in outside the home, and 5) subjective well-being. This suggests that indicators of integration typically involve counts of observable elements of community participation. In the context of employment, these may include factors associated with SE fidelity measures, such as the number of placements obtained in community settings and the number of hours worked in integrated settings.[11]

Although important, these measures do not reflect key elements of **inclusion**. For example, a meta-analysis by Hall[10] of 15 qualitative studies that examined how persons with disabilities experience social inclusion revealed 6 key factors: (1) being accepted and recognized as an individual beyond the disability; (2) personal relationships with family, friends, and acquaintances; (3) recreational, leisure, and other social involvements; (4) appropriate living accommodations; (5) having employment; and (6) having appropriate formal (service system) and informal (family and caregiver) supports. Factors that allow for a sense of inclusion *within* the work context have been poorly articulated.

An ecologically based model of inclusion has been proposed by the authors in order to capture the broad range of factors that comprise inclusion.[6] The model posits social inclusion as an interaction between environmental factors and personal characteristics of an individual that allow access to public goods and services, participation in preferred social roles, recognition and trust as a contributing community member, and access to a support network. Key to the model are reciprocity and a subjective sense of belonging. When considered in the context of employment, the model suggests work roles that represent individual choice, recognition and validation by others, and support, all provided to the degree needed and valued by the individual. What is lacking is empirical evidence of factors representing inclusive employment, and metrics indicative of services and conditions needed to achieve it.

The goals of this study were 1) to identify central features of inclusive employment for adults with ID, 2) to identify existing outcome indicators and benchmarks across the spectrum of productivity-related options, and 3) to create a draft set of standards for monitoring success in achieving inclusive employment outcomes.

Methods

A scoping review of the research literature and other trade documents was used to identify papers relevant to the research questions. The search strategy criteria were:

- empirical research published in English between 2000 – 2010
- at least one study component focused on employment of persons with intellectual disability
- results for subjects with intellectual disability reported separately

As Figure 1 indicates, a total of 245 documents were initially identified, from which papers relevant to the research questions were selected. Data were extracted from these papers, charted, summarized and qualitatively analyzed (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005).

Finally, features identified as contributing to choice, sustained participation, and a sense of belonging at work were highlighted and linked to aspects of our model of social inclusion.
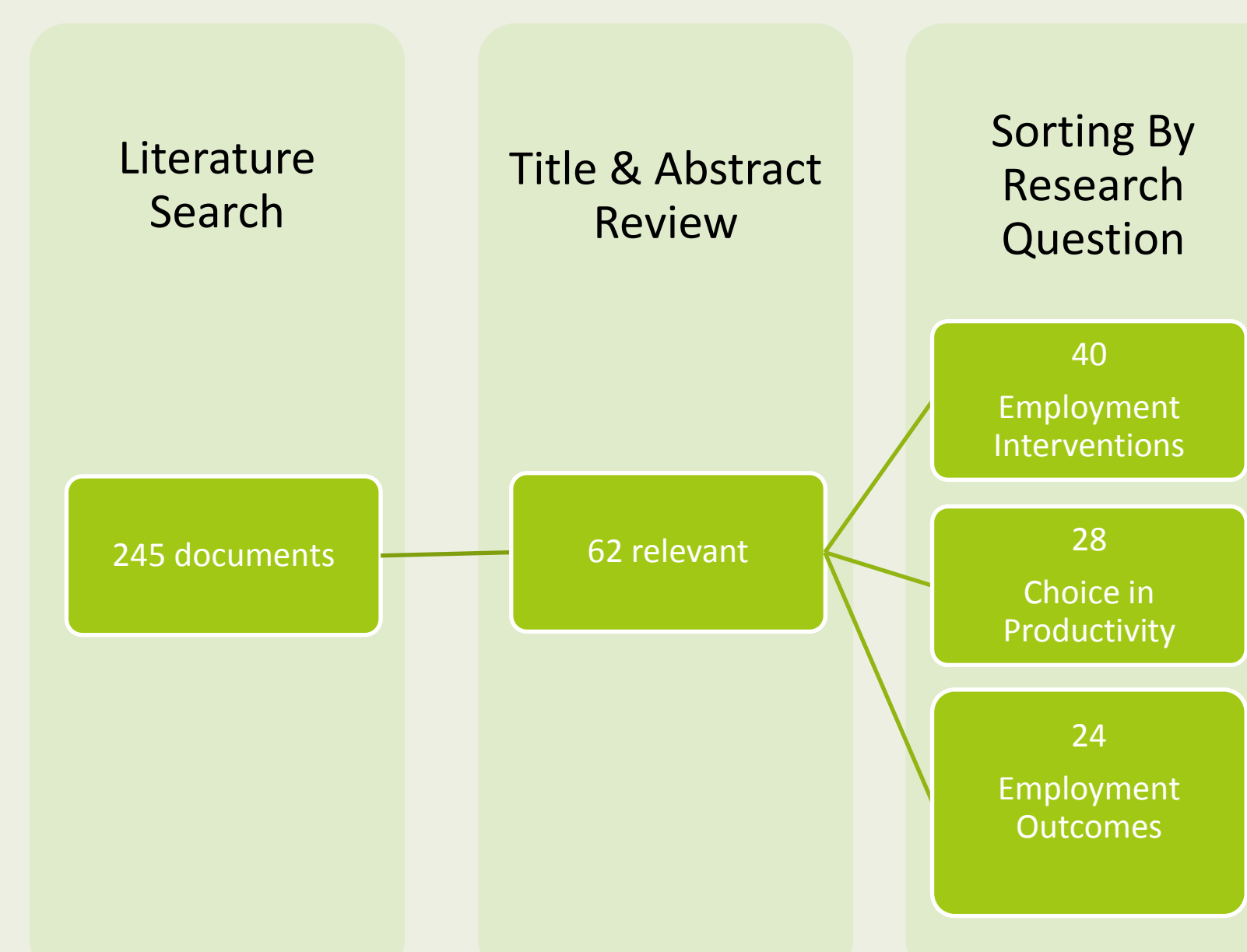

Literature Search → 245 documents
Title & Abstract Review → 62 relevant
Sorting By Research Question → 40 Employment Interventions, 28 Choice in Productivity, 24 Employment Outcomes

Figure 1. Scoping review process

Results

Community-based Employment Outcomes: The majority of studies conducted over the past 20 years have examined job development strategies, consumer-job matching, supported employment outcomes, use of natural supports, and worker satisfaction in supported vs. sheltered settings. Reported rates of competitive employment vary greatly across datasets, and appear dependent on the metrics in use and the information source (e.g. census data vs. agency reporting). Figure 2 shows national figures reported by government studies on employment of workers with ID. High rates in Australia likely reflect a national employment policy that allows payment of workers in open employment at lower than minimum wage if work is not at a competitive rate. Low weekly work hours (averaging 13 – 15 hrs/wk) are reported in most jurisdictions.[12, 14]

Choice & Skill Matching: A limited number of papers addressed actions, strategies or conditions contributing to choice and self determination in career planning, recognition of work contributions, and sense of belonging. Two studies[3,8] examined system-level placement strategies to address the tendency to reward numerical outcomes, which may favour the most able job candidates, and often result in low level, undesirable jobs. Another[13] demonstrated the success of a highly resourced British program in securing full time jobs. These studies and many others demonstrate the need for flexible, intensive programing that emphasizes skill development and an individualized approach.
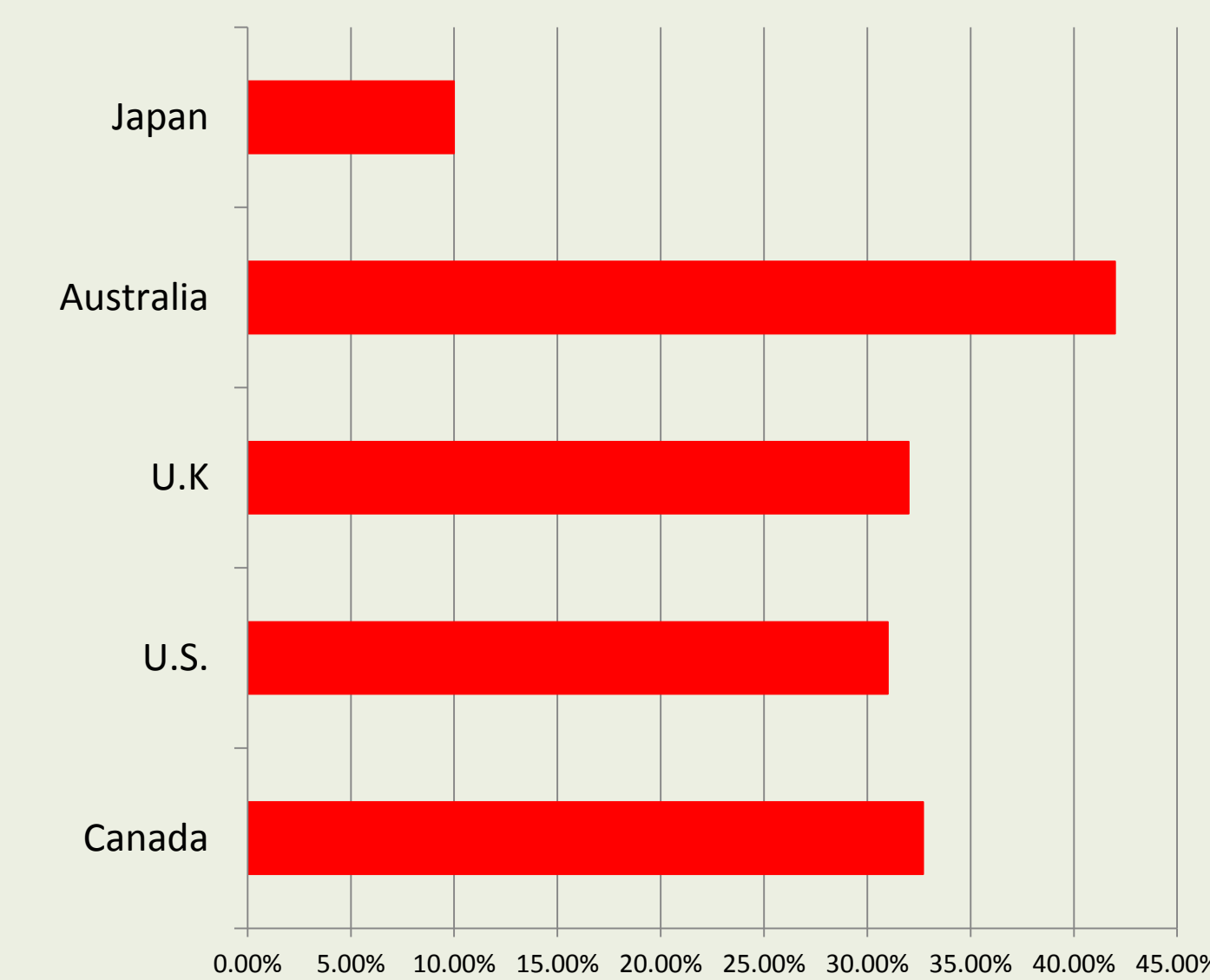

Figure 2. Paid employment rates as identified through national studies. Figures reflect the percentage of people with ID in the labour force (i.e. actively seeking or holding employment) in paid jobs. Australia numbers include people working at less than minimum wage.

Best Option for Inclusion? — Individual Community Placement, Group Community Placement, Self Employment, Sheltered Employment, Social Firm/Business

Figure 3: A full array of work options exist, with varying potential for inclusion.

Inclusive Employment Several work options continue to exist for people with ID (Figure 3), and while individual community placement may on the surface offer the highest degree of integration, evidence is weak as to what factors foster true inclusivity in any setting. In fact, one study[9] raised questions concerning the success of worker psycho-emotional outcomes in community vs. sheltered settings. Another study[5] examined workplace conditions that foster inclusion, and identified inter-dependency of jobs, opportunities for social interaction on the job, and strategic leadership as common features. It is likely that inclusion is achievable through a variety of work options, depending on the structure of the job, the nature of the workplace, and the frequency and types of interactions with others. Likewise, lack of choice, poor job match, social isolation and ultimately low worker satisfaction may be observed in any of these options.

Table 1 shows a preliminary set of indicators that may reveal inclusion in productivity and vocational planning, based on measures and best practices identified in the literature.

Domain	Indicator	Key Elements of Inclusion Addressed
Vocational Preparation/ Transition Services	Transition staff/teachers are trained in strategies to increase self determination	Supports & Services
	Vocational goals and preparation needs are determined in collaboration with parents, school personnel, community workers, and the individual	Personal Characteristics & Skills
	Focused training is provided in pre-vocational and vocational skills relevant to individual goals and aptitudes	Personal Characteristics & Skills
	Intensive evaluation and training are provided to individuals with severe disability	
	Individual receives several job tryouts to enhance work skills	Personal Characteristics & Skills
	Individual is involved in multiple job tryouts to promote exposure to and understanding of a broad range of work options	Personal Expectations, Choices & Needs
	Multiple viable work options are identified in the job search process	Personal Expectations, Choices & Needs
	Collaborative, non-coercive, and individualized support is available from key trusted individuals in selection of jobs	Supports & Services
	Training is provided in job interview skills	Personal Characteristics & Skills
	Client-centred marketing and job development strategies are used	Supports & Services
Employment	An individualized approach is used in job matching and support	Supports & Services
	Placement of workers into jobs is based on individual readiness rather than extensive agency-based job trials	Supports & Services
	Ongoing follow-up and job support is available	Supports & Services
	External supports are used to shape job and build internal job supports and social connections	Supports & Services Sense of Belonging
	Natural supports are fostered in the workplace	Supports & Services
	Worker expresses and demonstrates job satisfaction	Personal Expectations, Choices & Needs
	Placement & support workers model social interaction suitable to workplace	Supports & Services Sense of Belonging
	Worker expresses and demonstrates job satisfaction	Personal Expectations, Choices & Needs
	Workplace supervisors and coworkers are trained in and/or demonstrate support skills	Supports & Services Valorization Trust & Reciprocity
	Work involves inter-dependency of tasks between workers with and without ID	Trust & Reciprocity
	Match between job tasks & worker skills allow worker autonomy	Competency
	Work involves regular contact with people without disabilities	Environment
	Workplace/job provides natural opportunities for social interaction between workers	Environment
	Company policy supports job flexibility and worker accommodation	Environment
	Company policy supports diversity	Environment

Future Directions

Because little evidence exists concerning measurement of inclusion in work, the items identified in Table 1 remain theoretical. Additional work is needed to test and refine the indicators identified through the review, and to operationalize data collection procedures. Data collection may include both quantitative and qualitative measures, and will require consideration of feasibility and data validity. Further investigation should compare the nature and levels of inclusion achieved in different employment scenarios, and in productivity alternatives such as volunteerism, social business, and work at less than minimum wage.

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