



APPLICATION OF THE TRIPLE-E EMPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK TO DECIDE ON THE EMPLOYABILITY OF YOUNG ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract:

Young Adults with Special Needs (YASN) face many challenges in work environment. Factors such as no work prior experience, difficulties completing work duties, poor communication, linguistic and social skills, all ultimately lead to low self-esteem. Besides, employers hiring such individuals with YASN may not be ready due to their lack of understanding of their disabilities. In order to enhance more opportunities for employability, the author of this paper proposed an application of the Triple-E framework for YASN. This framework builds on three components of (1) Employee, (2) Employer, and (3) Environment which is discussed in this paper. It is hoped with this framework; both the YASN and employers are better aware of their positions and hence turn employment into a meaningful work journey that will benefit both parties.

Keywords: employment, employability, special needs, Triple-E framework, young adults

Introduction

There are many Young Adults with Special Needsⁱ (YASN) who are looking for a job so as to utilise their skills as well as to earn a living in the community. However, not all YASNs will be able to become gainfully employed. For those with disabilities ranging from severe to profound degree of severity, many of them would end up in therapeutic

ⁱ The term Young Adults with Special Needs, (YASN for short) refers to those with learning disabilities, physical, sensory, developmental and intellectual impairments as well as socio-emotional behavioural disturbances such that they are unable to function normally or appropriately in the mainstream context such as in school or workplace.

community or residential nursing homes being taken care by professionals (e.g., nurses, social workers, community therapists, and occupational therapists). However, some better-equipped community homes do also provide some form of in-house sheltered, structured and/or supported employment for their residents with special needs and may also involve the families of these residents (for more detail, see Lim & Chia, 2017). Those with disabilities ranging from mild to moderate degrees of severity may find some form of workplace employment with guidance provided by job coaches or special needs community therapists. For many, if not all, of us without special needs, upon completion of our ten to fourteen years of education, we would be out to the work force looking for a job and start a career. However, a YASN's path in looking for a job is often filled with challenges. Questions like is there a company who will employ YASNs, salaries issues, duration of stay in the job, retrenchment during bad times or even the possibility of going to a sheltered workshop. Since YASNs are facing so many challenges in the working world, it pays to prepare YASNs as they transit from one level of education to the next and finally exploring what it means to be an adult in a working world.

This paper presents a special focus on YASNs where they are often treated as an insignificant group of people who faces serious social and civic unfair differences in the society. According to UNICEFⁱⁱ (2013), although YASNs have rights to education as compared to those without disabilities, only 10% of all children are in school (UNESCOⁱⁱⁱ, 2007). Out of this percentage, 5% who started the education managed to complete their primary education. The rest left because they did not seem to benefit from this formal learning experience. There are many barriers to education. UNICEF (2013) stated several of the reasons. Firstly, social stigma and biases dictate that the parents of the children with disabilities have low expectations of them. This reduced their chances of completing their studies. Secondly, most schools are not designed to accommodate special needs students. The lack of ramps, proper toilets facilities, good support for communication systems and transportation to take in special needs students are evident. In addition, even while those more abled YASNs can move on to secondary level, they would encounter further challenges like the absence of teaching resources, availability of teaching staff as well as family support for these students with special needs.

ⁱⁱ UNICEF stands for United Nations Children's Fund. For detail, visit <https://www.unicef.org/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. For detail, visit <http://en.unesco.org/>.

However, things may seem to be brightening up on one end. In recent years, there is a growing trend in inclusive education. According to UNICEF (2013), the idea of inclusion comes in a form of children spending time growing and learning within their family and community rather than in some remote schools. The inclusive education curriculum caters for students with multiple forms of disabilities. This form of education actually suits students better since it addresses individual's learning conditions in the entire process. According to Edward (2005), it is better for children to be educated together with their peers. This enables them to learn at a right pace, thereby becoming contributing members in their communities. Inclusive education has its advantage since it provides YASNs with better access to a learning curriculum and hence enhanced skills acquisition.

This paper focuses on presenting the set of skills needed by both the employers and employees with special needs such that with better expectations between both parties come better work collaboration, thus making work meaningful. In this paper, the term YASNs is used interchangeably with employees with special needs (ESNs).

1. What is Disability?

The Centre for Enabled Living, also known as SG Enable, is an organisation in Singapore that is set up for the purpose of helping YASNs so as to ensure that they are gainfully employed. This organisation exists to provide information and referral services for the YASNs. Apart from ensuring the YASNs transit smoothly from their different life stages, this organisation also helps to equip the YASNs with skills and thereby increasing YASNs' chances of employment

According to SG Enable (2015), people with disabilities are defined as *“those whose prospects of securing, retaining places and advancing in education and training institutions, employment and recreation as equal members of the community are substantially reduced as a result of physical, sensory, intellectual and developmental impairments”* (para.1). In other words, in Singapore, disabilities are being categorized under four types as mentioned in the SG Enable definition. For example, a person with physical disability refers to someone *“either with a total or partial loss of bodily functions, such as the ability to walk or fine motor skills, or a total or partial loss of a part of the body”* (SG Enable, 2015, para.3). For another example, a person with sensory disability refers to an individual who is either visually or hearing impaired.

For the case of YASNs, even given with their disabilities, they would also want to gain working experiences so as to make a living for themselves and be contributing individuals in the society. According to Wehman (2011), work for YASNs promotes

self-esteem and perceived self- competence. That leads to eventual better socialising skills, communication and financial literacy.

2. Triple- E Employment Framework

To be gainfully employed, an individual has to possess not only work skills such as relevant work knowledge and experience, communication skills and technical competence, it is equally important to also have the acceptance from prospective employers, fellow colleagues, and the society at large for individuals with special needs. Hence, the author of this paper would like to apply the triple-E employment framework as proposed by Chia and Kee (2013) for YASNs. The modified model is shown in Figure 1 below.

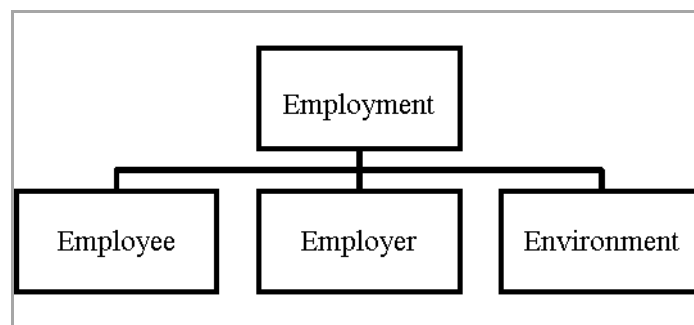


Figure 1: Triple-E Model of Readiness for Employment (Chia and Kee, 2013)

In order for YASNs to be employed meaningfully, there are three important factors that must exist so as to ensure that there is inclusive employment for them. The three components are Employer, Employee and Environment will be briefly described in the following sections.

2.1 Employee

It is important for new entrants to the job market to have an understanding on certain job requirements in all workplaces that guide the worker on how best he can perform on the job. It pays to either inform or train any worker to have the right work attitude and aptitude so that the worker will at least know these requirements and always tries his best to exhibit these qualities for all kinds of employment. But what are work attitude and aptitude defined as?

According to Chia and Kee (2013), attitude is seen as the worker's perception about the job he is holding and how he behaves in the work place as well as how best he performs on the job. Aptitude is often referred to as the worker's temperament in doing his work. A positive aptitude on the job at his workplace will relate correspondingly to a good attitude. Another requirement not mentioned above but

equally important for employment is Altitude. Altitude gives an indication on how far the worker is prepared to put effort in his work so as to achieve his potential. Hence, having good work attitude, aptitude and altitude are vital work habits that any worker should cultivate. Any lack on the above qualities will result in the employer's dissatisfaction of the work done, missed opportunities for progression or even termination of the employee's job.

Having spelt out clearly what a ready employee should have in order to be ready for employment, how then can an employment centre or teachers as job training programs facilitators know and advise YASNs either they are ready employees or even start work (even if it means to work only for short weeks of attachment) in a workplace? Teachers' observations and feedbacks constitute excellent sources of information. Based on the daily work done by the YASNs, this will give an overall view of the YASNs' level of readiness. Based on the observations and shared discussions, a strength and weakness tabulation can be established so as to give the YASNs an understanding of the type of work that suits them most appropriately.

In addition to teachers' written or verbal feedback, another source to get useful feedback on students' work readiness will be through a standard assessment evaluation protocol.

One such standard assessment tool is the Adaptive Behaviour Diagnostic Scale (ABDS). The primary purpose of ABDS is to assess a YASN's adaptability to different types of situations as well as to determine the intellectual abilities and understanding the severity of the YASN's disability. Suitable for use between the ages of 2 through 21, the ABDS uses an interview-based rating scale that assesses the adaptive behaviour of individuals with or suspected of having intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, mental or behavioural health condition or other similar concerns (see Table 1 for a brief description of the assessment domains of ABDS).

Table 1: The 3 Assessment Domains for Adaptive Behavior

Domains	Skills Areas Assessed
Conceptual	Competence in language, reading, writing, money, time, number concepts
Social	Interpersonal skills in social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, follows rules, avoids being victimised and social problem solving
Practical	Activities of daily living in occupation skills, use of money, safety, health care, schedules / routines

2.2 Employer

Just like the employee who needs good work attitude, aptitude and altitude in order for him to perform his best, employers can also do their part by adopting some good industrial practices so as to support students with special needs that enable them to do well in the work place. For instance, employers can conduct work place orientation for their prospective employees so as to enable them to have a better understanding of the organisation they are working. Similarly, employers should have a clearer understanding of students with special needs. Specifically, people with autism spectrum disorder work best when there are clear structures for them to understand how their job can be done. People with dyslexia, on the other hand, work well with diagrams that show simple and uncluttered instructions.

Like the ready employee, a ready employer is an organisation where Awareness, Acceptance and Accommodation are part of the organisation's working policy. Awareness refers to the knowing that the company has an inclusive employment policy. In this inclusive work employment, employees with special needs come with that variety of disabilities, for instance, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Down syndrome and dyslexia. It is important that companies are fully aware of their prospective employees' special needs conditions and from there make a decision to whether or not employ them or not. Decision made includes the understanding that these employees with special needs can work and contribute to the organisation.

Acceptance, on the other hand, refers to not just the group of top management acceptance of having employees with special needs but most, if not, all levels of staff in the organisation to fully accept that they have colleagues with special needs. They show respect and patience with them and work harmoniously as a team. Events such as Purple Parade for persons with special needs and the ASEAN^{iv} Paralympics Games are some that portray Singapore to be an inclusive society.

After accepting that the company's inclusive employment, accommodation comes in as deliberate arrangements made to facilitate the work flow especially for workers with special needs. For instance, instructions are always made simple and accompany with pictures to explain for the things to be done. Alternatively, a worker with Autism is able to cope with work much easier due to the structured work schedule appearing as a visual format and thus enabling him to know what to expect and know how to do.

^{iv} ASEAN stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (founded on 8 August 1967) – a regional organization comprising 10 countries – whose aim is to promote inter-governmental cooperation and facilitate economic integration amongst its members.

2.3 Environment

According to Chia (2013a), a ready environment is a workplace where the design of the workplace takes into consideration the principles of universal design where the workplace is made barrier-free and user-friendly to all. For instance, an employee with autism spectrum disorder should be provided with a structured work system and work schedule presented visually with explicit instructions so that he/she knows what and how work is to be done and completed. Likewise, employee with dyslexia works best with simple pictures pinned up and less words on such visuals.

Originated in the field of architecture with the aim to provide access to physical structures for individuals with physical disabilities, the concept of universal design was conceptualised in 1997 by a group of architects, designers, and engineers. From then onwards, the establishment of the principles of universal design had influenced environmental design, products, and communication (North Carolina State University, 1997). There are seven principles governing universal design and it consists of the following (North Carolina State University, 1997):

Principle 1: Equitable Use

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

- It provides the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- It avoids segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- Provisions for privacy, security, and safety are equally available to all users.
- The design is appealing to all users.

Principle 2: Flexibility in Use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

- It provides choice in methods of use.
- It accommodates right or left handed access and use.
- It facilitates the user's accuracy and precision.
- It provides adaptability to the user's pace.

Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

- It eliminates unnecessary complexity.
- It is consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- It accommodates a wide range of literacy and language skills.

- It arranges information consistent with its importance.
- It provides effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

Principle 4: Perceptible Information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

- It uses different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- It provides adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- It maximizes "legibility" of essential information.
- It differentiates elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- It provides compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

Principle 5: Tolerance for Error

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- It arranges elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- It provides warnings of hazards and errors.
- It provides fail safe features.
- It discourages unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

Principle 6: Low Physical Effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

- It allows user to maintain a neutral body position
- It uses reasonable operating forces.
- It minimizes repetitive actions.
- It minimizes sustained physical effort.

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

- It provides a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.

- It makes reaching to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- It accommodates variations in hand and grip size.
- It provides adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

3. Conclusion

In this short paper, the author has applied the Chia-Kee Triple-E employment framework for YASN with the three components of (1) Employee, (2) Employer, and (3) Environment and it forms the theoretical framework of inclusive employment. It is never too early to start preparing a teen for adulthood into employment. Hence, the Triple-E framework of readiness of YASNs for employment serves as a good collaboration between the employers and employees with disabilities. Only through a good understanding and respect between the two parties and sharing common workplace beliefs (Chia, 2013b, p. A28) will it lead to a good working environment for inclusive employment and thus turning this model into a reality working framework that benefits YASNs as a whole.

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