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# Bringing Fidelity to Customized Employment Processes

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# Customized Employment: The Path to Quality

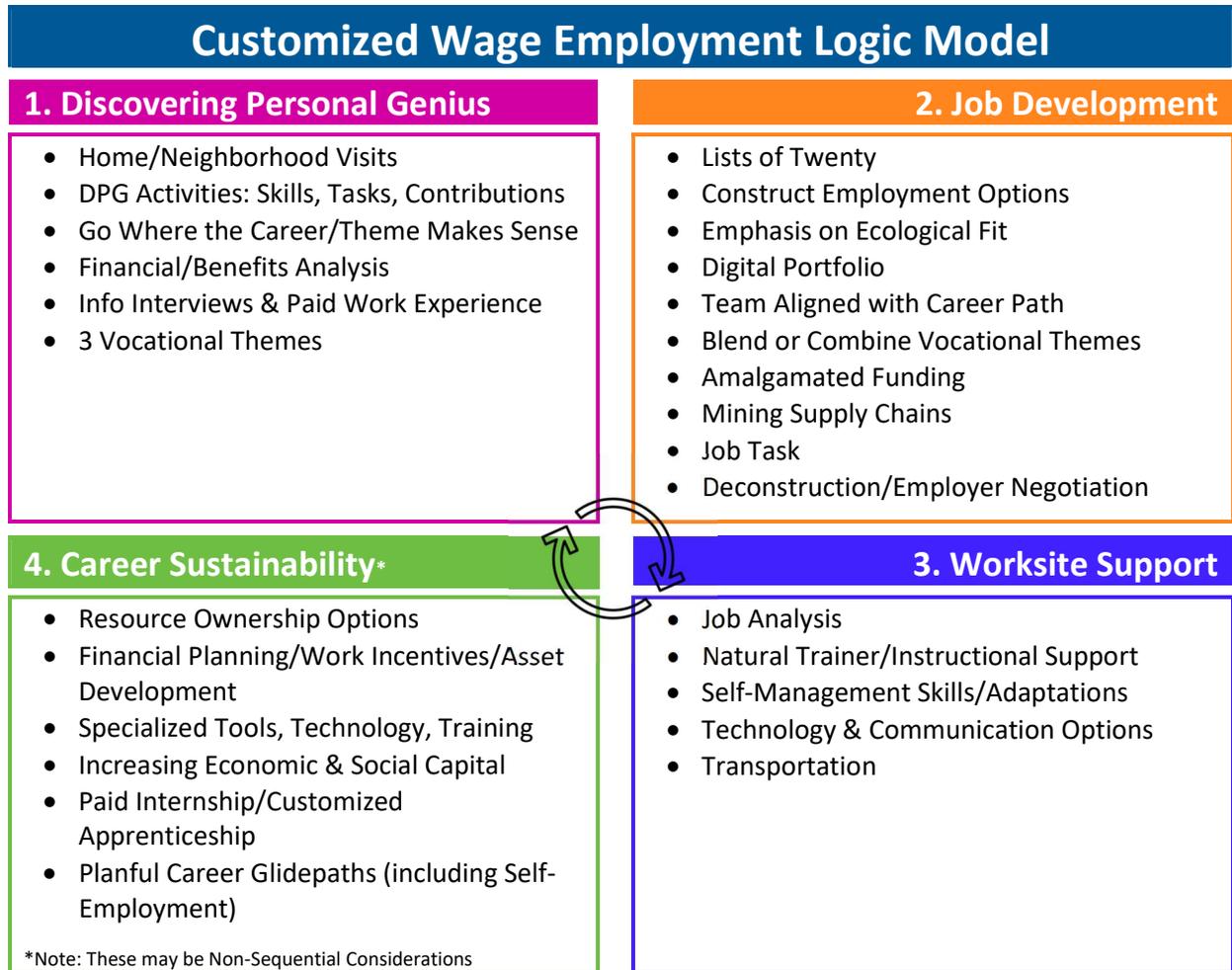
Albert Einstein once suggested, “Everything should be as simple as possible, and no simpler.” The advent of Customized Employment (CE) lends credence to his assertion. New techniques are generally adopted bit-by-bit, chunk-by-chunk. First people adopt the language by re-labeling old techniques with new names. Gradually, they adopt the methods. And, along the way to assimilation, it seems an inevitable part of human nature to search for ways to save time and identify functional shortcuts.

Knowing when one has cut too many corners is always challenging. An airline pilot skipping past half the items on the pre-flight checklist, or a heart surgeon reusing un-sterilized scalpels to save a few minutes and dollars are not good ideas. When one’s career is on the line, and when the opportunity to work prevents one from living in isolation and poverty, we must beware the temptation to alter the process in the name of scalability, cost/benefit, or efficiency and remember this: ***Customized Employment is the shortcut***. The process works and major deviations have significant negative impacts on outcomes.

The flow chart, or logic model, discussed in this article represents an attempt at bringing some fidelity to the CE process as it evolves as an Evidence-Based Practice (EBP). Griffin-Hammis Associates’ (GHA) experience in the field, working with school to work transition programs, state and local Vocational Rehabilitation offices, community rehabilitation programs, Workforce systems and America’s Job Centers, various systems change efforts including Money Follows the Person and Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, as well as numerous Employment First initiatives serve as the test-bed for the GHA process. And while this structure recommends prescribed tactics, it remains highly flexible and accommodating of individual needs and the system’s requirements. Shortcuts, however, are not recommended.

Briefly, the CE logic model represents the steps GHA has implemented in states and communities, informed by the work of our colleagues including Marc Gold & Associates, the Rural Institute Transition Programs, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor, and of course many others. All of these organizations have nuanced approaches, but the overall framework is noticeably similar, with a foundation firmly rooted in Discovery, with strong ties to interest-based negotiation, ecological fit, substantial employer engagement, and self-determination. Though each process reveals some variation, the overall approach remains complimentary, inventive, robust, and highly individualized.

# The Customized Employment Logic Model



The remainder of this article will explore each of these four components in more detail.

# CE Logic Model: The Process

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## 1. Discovering Personal Genius

**Discovering Personal Genius** represents the unique spin on Discovery (functional, community-based assessment) pioneered by GHA. Generically, “Discovery” is a process that showcases the skills (emerging and developed) and tasks the job-seeker performs that lend viability to employment.

Activities are performed in various real-life environments- not segregated settings- to provide data on skills, tasks, and ecological fitment. Employers are engaged through structured interviews, job trials, and paid work experiences. The information gathered throughout is used to produce evidence-based recommendations including: the identification of at least 3 overarching Vocational Themes, and a detailed report (e.g. vocational profile; Discovery Staging Record).

## 2. Job Development

**Job Development** occurs after the Discovery phase. The target is to identify 20 non-redundant companies (initial development of the Lists begins in the Discovery phase) for each Theme. This approach serves multiple functions:

- A. It forces employment personnel off Main Street where all the other job developers lurk.
- B. It demands creativity because once the most obvious places are added (usually the first 5-10 businesses), searching becomes more intense.
- C. It ensures people get to know their communities because they have to ferret out less obvious places of potential employment. With over 22 million owner-operator companies in the United States and with over 11 million companies with fewer than 20 employees, the process is rich in potential.

GHA strongly emphasizes job development over “job finding” (asking for applications and interviews). The GHA approach to the job development process:

- Seeks out artisanal businesses where new employees learn from “masters” and grow their career potential and importance in the company;
- Seeks jobs that match Themes and foster skill development over jobs that simply match interests a person voices;
- Avoids the most stereotypical jobs because Discovery seldom points to these (e.g. grocery bagging, paper shredding, for instance);
- Avoids retail that holds little potential for advancement.

More information on these issues is found in the book: Griffin, et al., [The Job Developer’s Handbook](#).

### 3. Worksite Support

**Worksite Support** includes thorough job analysis, understanding and using proper systematic instruction, job coaching, and engagement of co-workers on the worksite. This phase also encourages the use of universal and assistive technology, self-management techniques, and the development of reliable transportation and other work-related supports. (The Callahan & Garner book, [Keys to the Workplace](#), is a highly recommended resource).

### 4. Career Sustainability

**The Career Sustainability** quadrant shadows all the other phases. It includes a non-sequential set of considerations and strategies that enhance employability and career growth.

Resource Ownership, for instance, springs forth from Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, and calls for the use of tools, technology and training that enhances employment. Owning equipment or tools, or a certification, or degree, increases one’s exploitability in the workforce, increasing the likelihood of hiring, retention, and advancement.

A recent example is Scott's Ice Cream in Minnesota. Scott needed more hours at the restaurant that employs him. His work there making ice cream was limited by the capacity of the single ice cream machine. Assisted by Community Involvement Programs, the Joseph P. Kennedy Loan Fund, and a Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS) through Social Security, he purchased a commercial ice cream maker. The machine belongs to him and he leverages it the same way workers leverage their college degrees. He has doubled his weekly hours, makes considerably more per hour through profit-sharing on sales of ice cream, and has the potential to grow a small business along with his wage job at the restaurant as well. Using this tactic is not a requirement of CE, but this, and other tools certainly enhance outcomes.

Within the framework of Career Sustainability, GHA also uses Active Employer Councils (AECs) and Community Action Teams (CATs) to further employer engagement. Families and others are solicited to leverage supply chains, social, and economic capital in the development of work. GHA uses proven methods of asset development and benefits maximization to enhance career potential.

In short, what we know is that ***it costs the same to get a bad job as it does to get a good job***. The good job costs more initially, in our experience, but the bad job costs more in money and personal despair the longer it's patched, redeveloped, and salvaged.

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*This article provides a condensed overview of the CE process. For more information visit our website at [griffinhammis.com](http://griffinhammis.com), "like" us on Facebook to get real-time updates and examples, or take one of our on-line classes by clicking on the Relias Learning link on our homepage.*

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