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The Process for Building a Support System at Workplaces for Persons with Disabilities — A Study on the Process and Method of Forming Natural Supports —

[Research Report No. 85] Summary

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■ Composition of the research　report

■ Background to this study

In recent years people have begun pointing out the importance of providing a support system in the workplace environment surrounding workers with disabilities in order to keep persons with disabilities established in the workplace, and how to build such a support system has become the topic of active debate.　Support for employees with disabilities, particularly from their supervisors, coworkers and related people, is called "natural supports" in the field of vocational rehabilitation.

The need for natural supports is also very clear.　If supports necessary for helping persons with disabilities to get jobs become established in the workplace and are provided only by a job coach or other employment assistance provider, the following problems will arise:

○ Persons with disabilities and the business places will depend too much on the job coach.　For that reason, it will be difficult for the job coach to fade out from the workplace.

○ Since the employee assistance providers cannot be removed from the workplace, the number of cases where they can give support will naturally be limited.　If they intend to give support to many cases, then they must extract themselves from one workplace, even though both the disabled person and the business place will be in trouble in the absence of such assistance providers.　That is the only way that they can actually give support to many cases.　They will therefore be unable to give sufficient follow-up in individual cases.

○ If employment assistance providers do not leave the workplace and intend to give one-to-one support over a long period, then there will be problems in terms of costs and effects of the measure.

○ This will also be a problem from the philosophical standpoint of true "normalization."

Then, what should employment assistance providers do if they want to form natural supports in the business place?　To be sure, many business places actively working on hiring persons with disabilities have begun to emerge in recent years, and there are now cases of business places conducting appropriate employment management, even if employment assistance providers do not take such pains or come up with ideas to "form" such supports.　Conversely, there are cases where natural supports manage to be "formed" within the business place as assistance providers make various contacts with the business place, as well as other cases where such various contacts still fail to form such natural supports.　In either case, natural supports ― despite how the term sounds ― are now being "formed."

How should assistance providers form such natural supports?　And how are natural supports formed within the business place?　Very few empirical studies have been conducted to answer such questions. The process for forming natural supports, in particular, is believed to involve complex interactions between the persons with disabilities, the corporation that received them, and the assistance providers. But few empirical studies that take those interactions into account have been conducted concerning the

formation of natural supports.   At the same time, even though no empirical studies have been conducted, individual assistance providers and the people responsible at business places are honing their "skills" of forming natural supports (in some cases, unconsciously) while accumulating valuable experience.

■ Purpose

This study is intended to clarify the process for forming natural supports based on the background described above.   The study specifically intends to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are assistance providers doing and experiencing when natural supports were not smoothly formed, but manage to be formed anyway?
(2) What are assistance providers doing and experiencing when conducting certain activities by using various imaginative ideas, but without natural supports being successfully formed?
(3) In corporations considered active in hiring persons with disabilities, what do coworkers of the business place in daily direct contact with disabled persons experience when receiving them?

■ Method

Interviews   were conducted for employment assistance providers (job coaches and vocational counselors serving persons with disabilities) and the people responsible at business places who are considered well experienced in forming natural supports, regarding their experience in forming natural supports at their business places and their experience in receiving persons with disabilities.   The data was tape-recorded with all contents being later transcribed and analyzed.

The analysis was conducted in reference to a method called the   " Modified Grounded Theory Approach "   Unlike the method of simply summarizing the contents of interviews, this method offers the following advantages:

- It can generate a theory (framework) that explains the process nature of a phenomenon having complex interactions.
- The method draws upon the data portion to make concepts and categories.   At such time as the concepts and similar cases are being searched, a check is made for opposite cases.   Making a simple summary of the contents of   interviews has generally been criticized, since only the portions convenient for proving what the researcher wants to prove may be extracted in an attempt to create an explanatory framework.   This analysis method counters such criticism.   It also minimizes any pre-established conceptions of the analyzer.
- The transcribed data is analyzed (entailing both time and trouble), but an elaborate analysis can be conducted.

■ Research period

Fiscal 2006 to 2007

■ Results

● *What are assistance providers doing and experiencing when natural supports were not smoothly formed, but managed to be formed somehow?*
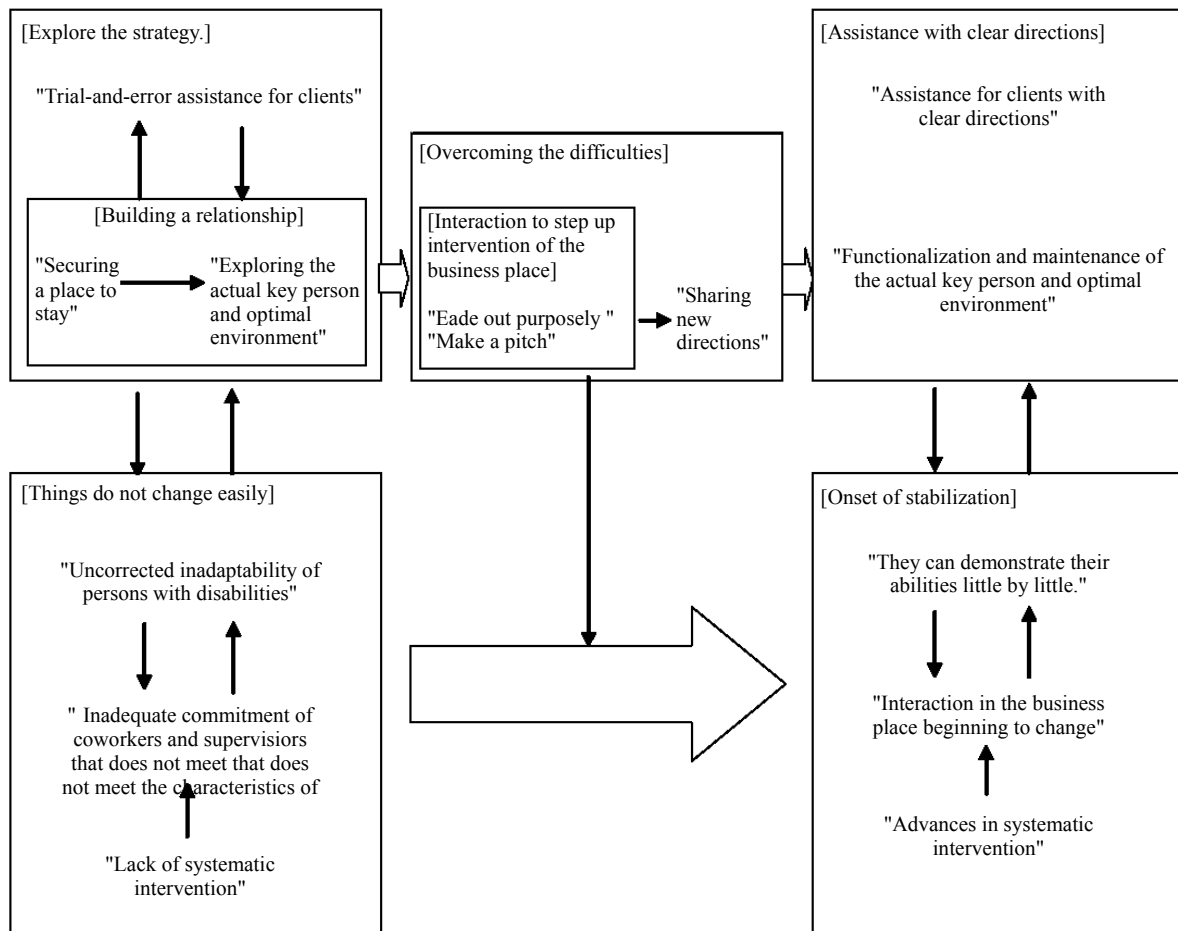
Fig. 1 shows the results.

[Explore the strategy.]

"Trial-and-error assistance for clients"

[Building a relationship]

"Securing a place to stay"

"Exploring the actual key person and optimal environment"

[Things do not change easily]

"Uncorrected inadaptability of persons with disabilities"

" Inadequate commitment of coworkers and supervisiors that does not meet that does not meet the characteristics of

"Lack of systematic intervention"

[Overcoming the difficulties]

[Interaction to step up intervention of the business place]

"Eade out purposely "
"Make a pitch"

"Sharing new directions"

[Assistance with clear directions]

"Assistance for clients with clear directions"

"Functionalization and maintenance of the actual key person and optimal environment"

[Onset of stabilization]

"They can demonstrate their abilities little by little."

"Interaction in the business place beginning to change"

"Advances in systematic intervention"

Fig. 1   Assistance process for a group of cases where natural supports managed to be formed

[Description of Fig. 1]
Assistance providers in contact with the vicious circle between persons with disabilities and their host corporation begin by working to enter and observe that situation.   They will also conduct activities that encourage the host corporation of persons with disabilities to step up its intervention, and then provide negotiations and other opportunities for sharing directions between the host corporation and assistance providers.   A good circle will then be initiated between persons with disabilities and their host corporation.   The assistance providers will then interact with persons with disabilities and their host corporation in order to make that circle stable.

What are assistance providers doing and experiencing when conducting certain activities by using various imaginative ideas, but natural supports end up not being successfully formed?
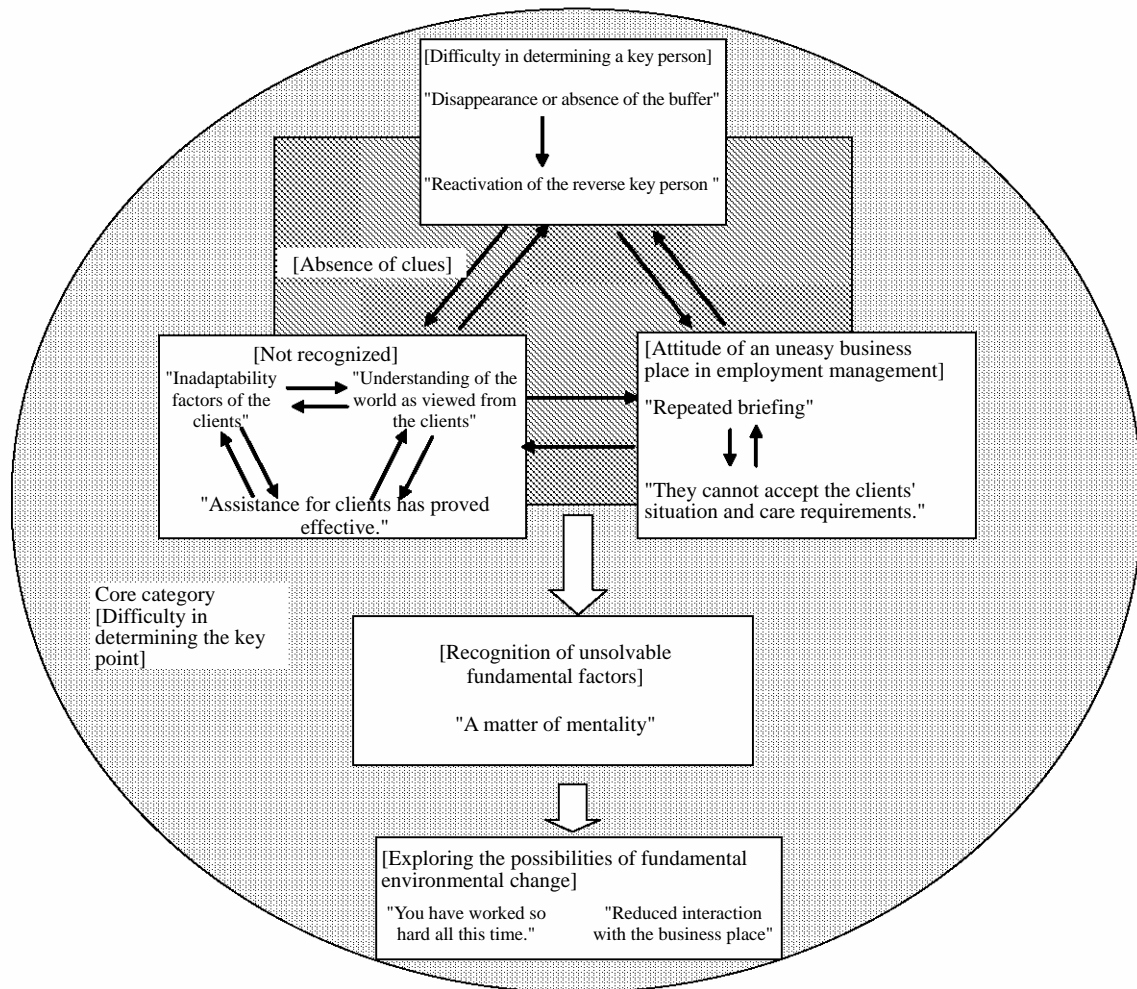
Fig. 2 shows the results.

Fig. 2   Analysis results of cases where natural supports are difficult to be formed as viewed from assistance providers

[Description of Fig. 2]
In an attempt to reach a satisfactory level between persons with disabilities and their host company, assistance providers work to assist persons with disabilities and their host corporation.   However, they cannot easily find clues and their "front line" lasts a long time.   Given the time involved, the vicious circle between persons with disabilities and their host company will intensify.   As they continue their activities, assistance providers will notice a fundamental problem with the situation.   Thus, they will consider it difficult to handle that situation, and while acknowledging previous efforts made by persons with disabilities, will seek the next environment.

In corporations considered active in hiring persons with disabilities, what do coworkersof the business place in daily direct contact with persons with disabilities experience when receiving them?
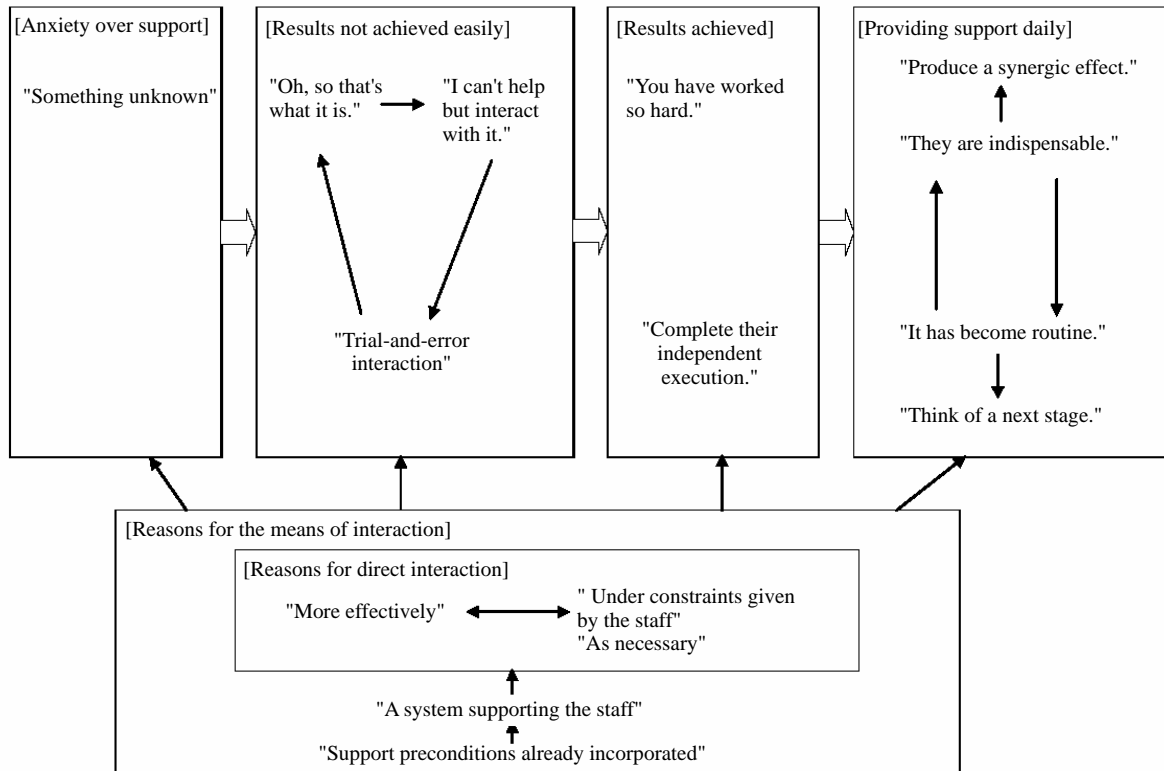
Fig. 3 shows the results.

Fig. 3   Process of reception of persons with disabilities by persons responsible at the host company

[Description of Fig. 3]
They initially feel uneasy about the disability itself in that they do not know how to interact with it. However, as they overcome the problems, they find fewer reasons for their uneasiness.   Results may not be yielded quickly, but gradually emerge.   And when   persons   with disabilities who are becoming more independent need support, the persons responsible will provide that support on a daily basis. Viewing this process from the standpoint of anxiety, they will find fewer reasons for anxiety as the process progresses, but those reasons will not necessarily disappear entirely.   Their understanding of persons with disabilities will also change from something unknown to people they should interact with, which is indispensable.   Moreover, this process of interaction is based on principles of the host company in hiring persons with disabilities, the system of the staff, and the attitude of those responsible at the host company who wish to achieve better results.

■ Elements common to the results

The presence of "circulation" between the persons with disabilities (also referred to as "clients" in this document) and the host company who has received them (also referred to as the "host business place") is an element common to the results.　That is, in situations where natural supports have yet to be formed or are difficult to form, it has been demonstrated that a vicious circle exists between both parties and, at the same time, as natural supports are formed, a good circle develops and becomes established between both parties.

■Implication for practice

● Hints and lessons for forming natural supports useful to assistance providers
  - In situations where natural supports are not well formed, a vicious circle occurs between the clients and host business place.
  - The degree of "systematic intervention" by the host business place may influence whether there is a vicious or good circle between the clients and host business place.
  - "Securing a place to stay"—the initial stage of [Establishing a relationship] between the job coach and host business place—is a purposeful act.　However, that act in itself is not the purpose.
  - Establishing a relationship with the host business place for clients goes from "securing a place to stay" to "seeking the actual key person and optimal environment."
  - What is important is not to identify a formal key person but the actual one.
  - It is important in forming natural supports to seek and find the actual key person, and then explore and discover the optimal environment where clients can demonstrate their abilities.
  - Other necessary measures

● Hints and lessons for those responsible at the business place to form natural supports
  - Regardless of whether they have any previous experience, personnel at the host workplace for persons with disabilities have anxiety about how to interact with disabled persons.
  - The anxiety felt at the time of reception is even deeper than that of the staff in charge of personnel. This is because they must ultimately solve problems on the site.
  - The anxiety felt by site staff at the time of reception declines as they begin interacting in a manner oriented toward problem-solving, and their interest shifts from anxiety over interaction to how to solve problems.
  - The skills of persons with disabilities gradually improve by repeating the following cycle: The people responsible recognize the actual aspects. ("Oh, so that is what it is all about.") → They feel the need to interact. ("I can't help but interact.") → They interact in a trial-and-error manner ("trial-and-error interaction").
  - Continuing this cycle may result in [Results not achieved easily] and is never an easy task.
  - Their method of guidance may "sway" a little or they may show a readiness to think together with persons with disabilities who encounter trouble at work or something else; thus, that their efforts may not produce effects so quickly.　Based on a long-term outlook, however, these efforts will help the persons with disabilities learn how to act autonomously.

■ Limitation and recommendation for future research

The author interpreted and analyzed data from the Interviews　and were able to present a hypothetical framework concerning the process of forming natural supports.　Still, this study involved the following constraints: (1) Using data from interviews　(talks given by data providers) prevented the interviewees from talking about their detailed concrete acts. ("Talks" always involve such constraints.); (2) some analysis results were not achieved from sufficient numbers of samples (in particular, the reception process of persons with disabilities by those responsible at the host company, as described in Chapter 6 of this report).　To make the hypothetical framework even more valid, it is necessary to make the hypothetical framework more sophisticated by means of a follow-up study.　In addition to make the results of this study easier to use in practice, a checklist, manual and other documentation should be developed based on this study.

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