A Study on a Clarification of Factors Influencing Competitive Employment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to clarify the factors influencing the competitive employment of persons with intellectual disabilities based on the theory of "competence," the ability which effectively allows one to influence the environment. The analysis reveals the following findings: (1) the development of working competence brings out "the development of the will and ability to work," "the development of positive and objective self-recognition," "the development of socialization," and "the promotion of the will to live independently"; (2) the factors obstructing competence development are three-fold as follows: "the supporter-centered support," "the supporters' negative attitude regarding the competitive employment of persons with intellectual disabilities," and "the lack of both supportive system and supportive environment for the supporters."

In conclusion, two findings are clarified in this study. First, if persons with intellectual disabilities receive appropriate responses, they will be highly likely to succeed in participating in the competitive workplaces and retaining their jobs. However, secondly, if they receive inappropriate responses, they will be highly likely to fail getting competitive employment and suffer from poor job retention.

Key Words
Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, Employment Support, Competence, Attachment

I. Introduction

1. Purpose

The authoritative research institution on the employment issue for persons with disabilities is the Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities (JEED). Its former organization was the Employment Promotion Association for Persons with Disabilities. According to the reports researched by JEED, the studies of competitive employment for persons with intellectual disabilities are classified as follows.

- Studies on vocational capability based on the current environment such as job training conditions.
- Studies for clarifying the factors of employment from the viewpoint of companies.
- Studies on understanding the vocational ability of persons with intellectual disabilities from the viewpoint of supporters.
- Case studies on finding methods to support vocational skills.
- Case studies on actual conditions of vocational career development.
- Studies on supportive methods for community-based living (including work life).

Though there are differences of viewpoint and objectives, the purposes of these studies can be summarized into two points. The first point is to clarify the present issues by finding the factors of employment for persons with intellectual disabilities. These studies have focused on the low vocational ability, the lack of
social skills of persons with intellectual disabilities, and the lack of understanding of society and the companies towards their employment. The second point is to find out the methods to support successful employment for persons with disabilities. These studies are mainly case studies or experimental studies. The contents are mostly on effective vocational skill training, supportive skills, and the study of systems and policies.

Past studies have indeed advocated for enabling persons with intellectual disabilities to work in competitive workplaces. However, I think that there are two important viewpoints which are not in the aforementioned studies. First, to increase social development of persons with intellectual disabilities should be considered as a success factor for employment. Second, methodology to assist their social development should be established. Many people may agree that a majority of studies have regarded persons with intellectual disabilities as "employees who lack abilities and always need special support." In fact, many studies have focused on exploring methods of training or supporting them since researchers view that there are problems of "insufficiency or shortages" of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Workplace maladaptation is considered to be the most serious problem for job retention of the disabled. Unfortunately, the discussions concerning the independence of persons with intellectual disabilities are often extremely limited or pessimistic. However, I have met persons with intellectual disabilities who made strides in social development, which have led them to attain successful employments. While facilitating their vocational skills, a number of supporters have considered social development as a part of the support process for persons with intellectual disabilities. In short, support for persons with intellectual disabilities based on "promoting their social development" may help "to compensate for their insufficiency." Moreover, it nurtures the human relationships between the supporters and the persons with intellectual disabilities, which also helps to promote further social development.

Another aspect of social development is environmental adaptation. It is the ability to manipulate and learn about the workplace and living environments. While people adapt themselves to the environment, they learn about the environment, which makes it easy for them to adapt better. Persons who succeed at these two abilities are able to coexist with their given environment. As for persons with intellectual disabilities, they were considered incompetent, having low or no ability to manipulate and learn about the environment. However, after conducting research over the years, I realized that they are capable of achieving these abilities. Moreover, persons who succeed in achieving these abilities are also capable of attaining employment in competitive workplaces. A cyclical relationship between the supporters and the supported persons can be observed in the process of social development. In other words, persons with intellectual disabilities also have positive effects on the supporters in this process as much as the supporters do to them.

2. Key concept—"competence"

In this study, the ability to effectively manipulate and learn about the environment will be called "competence". According to Ego-psychologist, White (1959, 1963) he proposed that competence is an ability which is instinctive or innate, is able to be learned and is the ability to manipulate the environment effectively by oneself. The concept of competence has been interpreted in various ways. They can be classified as follows:

- Competence is an ability to manipulate the environment (as an object) effectively.
- All human beings possess the ability of "competence" which is instinct and the result of learning.
- Competence develops and degenerates in the dynamic relations, that is, the interaction and feedback between the subject and the environment. When the feeling of efficacy is accumulated, competence develops. On the other hand, the competence stops developing or degenerates when it is not accumulated.

The environment includes a creature and non-creature environment. If the former is a human being, then the interaction between the subject and the environment is called "social competence." Although infants cannot show their needs clearly through words,
infants have “social competence” because they are capable of sending “signals” through behaviors such as crying, smiling, moving limbs, etc., to ask for attention from their protectors or mothers (Ainsworth & Bell 1974, pp. 98-99). When they need care, infants work on the environment by sending the “signals.”

Ainsworth & Bell (1974, pp. 99) also points out that this ability is important throughout the entire life span. When people need support, they send out signals to their surroundings. It is important for environmental adaption.

In short, I define “competence” as ability which influences the environment purposely in the reaction between a creature (other individuals or groups) environment or non-creature (productive or cultural activities) environment.

I think that past studies were less conscious of or gave low estimates of competence of persons with intellectual disabilities. However, from my research, the development of competence was found in the persons with intellectual disabilities who succeeded in working at competitive workplaces. Those who promoted the development of competence are the supporters who succeeded in continuously inspiring the supported to have a feeling of efficacy in many ways.

The development-based support theory can be found in the theory of “client-centered” social work practice. This theory has two aims. The first aim is to provide support using the concept of a-the client-centered approach. The second aim is to empower the clients with their overt and potential abilities. The key concept of this study is “competence” as a social development. This study’s aim is to clarify the factors which influence persons with intellectual disabilities to work in competitive workplaces. In the process of clarifying the mechanism of development and barriers of competence, I will try to raise a new perspective of supportive methods for the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities.

II. Research Method

1. Participants

To clarify the dynamic interaction between persons with intellectual disabilities and the environment, I conducted interviews with 25 participants. Participants included persons with intellectual disabilities, their mothers, representatives from sheltered workshops, company co-workers and employers, and staff members of the group homes and dormitories for workers with intellectual disabilities.

The characteristics of the participants were as follows:

There were ten persons with intellectual disabilities from various backgrounds, two females and 8 males. The age groups were 20’s (n=2), 40’s (n=2), and 50’s (n=2). The degrees of disability were mild (n=5) and moderate (n=1). They lived in “Aftercare Center” (the equivalent of a dormitory for the workers with intellectual disabilities) (n=5) and in a group home (n=1). The range of average salary was between 80,000 to 160,000 Japanese yen a month. Except for one person, all were working in competitive workplaces at the time of the study. The one person who was not employed at the time of the study had a career in competitive employment for 34 years.

There were six mothers. The age groups were 50’s (n=2), 60’s (n=3), and 70’s (n=1). Their occupations were housewives (n=3), a self-employed business owner (n=1), a part-time worker (n=1) and a masseuse (n=1).

There were thirteen supporters. They were representatives of sheltered workshops (n=7), staff members of group home (n=2), a staff member of an Aftercare Center (n=1), company employers (n=2), and a co-worker (n=1).

The representatives of sheltered workshops were 4 males and 3 females. The age groups were 30’s (n=2), 40’s (n=1), 50’s (n=3), and 60’s (n=1). The characteristics of the workshops they represented were small-scale sheltered workshops (of which one of them was not built based on the law) (n=3), sheltered workshops for the persons with intellectual disabilities (of which one
of them had a dormitory) (n=3), and a day care rehabilitation center for persons with intellectual disabilities (n=1).

The staff member of an Aftercare Center was male and in his 20's.

The employers were 2 males; one in his 30's and the other in his 50's. One was from the food industry. The other was from a water-quality test company.

The co-worker was a male in his 50's from a bookbinding factory.

2. Method of interview

I conducted semi-structured interviews. For persons with intellectual disabilities, I asked about their life histories and experiences as persons with intellectual disabilities. I also asked the details of their work situations and problems in the workplace. For mothers, I asked about their lives as mothers of children with intellectual disabilities. Especially, I asked for details about their children's progress at work. For representatives of the sheltered workshops, I interviewed them about their careers and their thoughts about competitive employment. Also, I asked them about the situations and issues of the job support system in their institutions. For the co-workers, I asked about the process, motivation, and future issues of supporting persons with intellectual disabilities at work. For employers, I interviewed them about their personal experiences, processes, actual conditions, and other issues about hiring persons with intellectual disabilities. For staff members of group homes, I asked about the conditions of supporting work and community life for persons with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, I asked about the process, motivation, and future issues of supporting them.

Interviews varied; ranging from 1-5 times, and a total of 35 minutes to 13 hours per interview. The interview period started in February 2003 and ended in January 2005. I recorded all the conversations of the interviews on a mini-disc (MD) after receiving each participant's consent. I also wrote down literally what was recorded, and they were used as materials for this study.

3. Method of analysis

The materials for analysis were from the interviews. They included narratives, facial expressions, tone and silence from the participants. By adopting this analysis method, I grasped the real images of the participants.

Moreover, to gain a deeper understanding of the participants, it was important to read what they said and did not say to me in the interviews. As Laing (1973, pp. 13) said that all men are invisible to each other. It is difficult to figure out what people do not verbalize. However, Inoue (1992, pp.31) insisted that people always attempt to "understand the experiences of others," and to "interpret the perceivable data" such as "the words, facial expressions, and behaviors of others." People intend to approach the feelings of others. In the practice of social work, it is necessary to interpret narration based on "sympathy" (Nakamoto, 2004). Therefore I adopted the method of clinical psychology called "the comprehension (ryoukai)" which was proposed by Togawa (1973, pp. 14-18).

III. Result and Discussion

The aim in this chapter is twofold: 1) to clarify the mechanism of development and the barriers of competence and 2) how this mechanism influences the competitive working of the people with intellectual disabilities. In section 1, I describe the signals of competence. In section 2, I discuss the development of competence as a factor of success for working in competitive workplaces. Furthermore, in section 3, I discuss the barriers of competence as factors contributing to unsuccessful cases in competitive workplaces.

1. Signals sent from competence

Persons with intellectual disabilities always send signals to the surroundings and manipulate the environment through signals. The signals are not only for self-adaptation, but also for influencing the environment. Sometimes the influence is negative, but sometimes it is positive. The power of competence is to draw out sympathy and get on the impression from the related person.
(1) Signals to adapt to the environment

Some behaviors of persons with intellectual disabilities are regarded as "problem behaviors." However, they may be signals of self-adaptation in the workplace and/or maladaptation to the environment.

Co-worker A said that B who has an intellectual disability and autism shut himself in the restroom over 20 times a day at the start of employment. In another case, Employer C shared that an employee with an intellectual disability crossed his legs, flourished the dishcloth and stood absent-mindedly in the beginning. Moreover, in another case, employee D used to be absent without permission from work.

Generally, the companies evade dealing with these behaviors since they are feared as interference at work. However, the supporters received these behaviors as signals of maladaptation to the environment and self-adjusting. For example; frequent toilet breaks for B were created until B was accustomed to the workplace. As a result, B was able to secure successful employment at a competitive workplace.

(2) Signals which draw out the sympathy and get on impression from the supporters

1) Behaviors for establishing good relationship

In general, persons with intellectual disabilities tend to be thought as unintentionally passive, however, they are capable of actively appealing to surroundings. In one of the cases, there was an co-worker who was feared by others at the workplace. In the past, this co-worker had bullied B. However, B was the only one who was "attached" to him while other employees avoided contacting with the bullying worker. With time, the bullying worker's attitude towards B changed for the better, and he became an important supporter for B. B seemed to understand that the bullying worker could not get along well with others because of his unfortunate childhood. B showed his understanding to this worker through his nonverbal behaviors. In this case, B was able to continue his employment successfully on his own.

2) A short greeting with affection

Employer C said that greetings like "good morning" from employees with disabilities are filled with much more "heart and affection" than from others. This kind of affection can also be found between long-married couples. The relationships between the supporters and persons with disabilities are sometimes just like the long-married couples. It can be presumed that this kind of affection was born as a result of intimate and long interpersonal relationships. Persons with intellectual disabilities are also capable of building this kind of relationship.

3) Understanding of the supporters from the supported

In the interviews, supporters said that the reasons for them to keep on supporting persons with intellectual disabilities are twofold: hearts of gratitude and trust from them. Staff member E, who also runs a group home repeatedly shared with me the following words from a user with a smile, "After I grow up, I want to be a person like E... help people." These words touched E's heart and encouraged him greatly since he used a part of his retirement allowance to build this group home against his wife's opposition. Therefore, their understanding can be considered as the heartiest support for the supporters.

4) Teaching the supporters the significance of life

Director F of a day care rehabilitation center for people with intellectual disabilities used to support persons with disabilities working in competitive employment. Director F said "I could feel my humanity enriched in the process of providing support for them." Furthermore, he told me that he began to think about what life and happiness is as he leads a life with people with intellectual disabilities. How many people inspire others to think about their lives deeply, and teach others the significance of life vicariously through their own? Persons with intellectual disabilities have such ability.
2. Competence development as a success factor of competitive employment

People with intellectual disabilities develop various competences through daily life. This development helps lead them to success in employment at competitive workplaces. These developments were achieved only in supportive environments where the disabled could have the feelings of efficacy. In this section, I describe two findings: 1) What kind of development of competence leads to attaining successful employment in competitive workplaces; 2) What kind of support brings out those developments?

(1) Development of competence found in persons with intellectual disabilities

1) Development of working abilities and working will

In the past, G had bitter experiences in competitive workplaces. For this reason, even though he had working abilities, he strongly refused for 13 years to go work for competitive workplaces. However, G started to change his mind after using “Aftercare Center.” The factors behind the change are twofold. The first factor was G’s effort. The second factor was due to a sufficient supportive environment created by his mother, the company, and “Aftercare Center.” Especially, the staff of “Aftercare Center” assumed an important role between the company, G and G’s mother. The company cooperated closely with the “Aftercare Center.” Because of this staff’s support, G smoothly adapted to the work. G told me that he sometimes felt difficulties at work, but was happy to get a job. He also hoped that he could recall what he learned at work more. His words show that G’s motivation was high. Appropriate and continuous support helped to develop his competence, which led to G’s successful employment.

2) Development of objective and positive self-recognition

H resigned twice due to troubled relations at work. According to Staff E of the group home, H sometimes turned up his nose at others unconsciously. At first, H did not accept the advice from Staff E who worried about her relationship at work. She stubbornly believed that she was a victim of discrimination against persons with intellectual disabilities.

When H started to trust Staff E, whose character was fair and sincere, she began to accept the advice from Staff E and made an effort to change herself. This change led to a good relationship with other workers in the company. The co-worker who had given H a discriminatory remark before later told H that she “changed a lot.” They developed a friendship where they went out together and exchanged birthday presents. H, who had problems with others in the workplace for many years, changed progressively with Staff E’s help. After accepting Staff E’s support, her objective self-recognition was developed. She had always thought that she had a lower pay than able-bodied employees because of her disability. However, she started to recognize the pay differed only because of work abilities.

The objective self-recognition assisted H to understand the situation in the workplace. Also, it helped her make progress with her relationships with other employees. This effective result led to H’s positive development of self-recognition. In other words, this improved her confidence, which helped her willingness to learn higher vocational skills to gain a higher salary.

3) Development of socialization

Persons with intellectual disabilities nurture the roles of different age groups and responsibilities to the family through work. In the interview, I’s mother, Mrs. J, said that her child started to give New Year’s gifts to his nephew and niece purchased by his bonus salary from work. Moreover, I recognized that I’s income was an important financial support for the family. On these changes, Mrs. J said joyfully, “It happened because he learned something from participating in society”, and “He has grown up.” The disabled employees learn how to behave as members of society in the interactions with other employees in the competitive workplace.
4) Promotion of the will to live independently

There are a lot of persons with disabilities who wish to continue working at competitive employment, even though sometimes the workplace is hard for them. The major reason is because they hope to live independently. K lived alone in an apartment after moving out of the “Aftercare Center”. He did not get along well with his superior at the workplace, and he felt stressed. However, he said that he wished to keep the job because he wanted to remain independent. He said that living in the apartment made him feel “comfortable and free.” I got the same answer from other interviewees who lived in group homes and dorms for workers with intellectual disabilities. They enjoyed having leisure and making purchases. One participant went fishing every Sunday regardless of the weather. Another saved his salary to buy his favorite computer games and have dates with his girlfriend.

Thus, salary gained from work gave their life more freedom and also enriched their lives. Moreover, these results furthered their development, too.

(2) Factors supporting competence development

The competence development explained in the earlier chapter cannot be achieved without feelings of efficacy. The supporters’ responses are important for the development of competence. This section will discuss five factors concerning this kind of support.

1) A belief that persons with intellectual disabilities are able to participate in the competitive employment

One thing that impressed me very much in the interviews was a thought common among the supporters who succeeded in assisting persons with intellectual disabilities work in competitive employment. They all affirmatively believed that persons with intellectual disabilities have the rights and abilities to work for a competitive workplace. Representative L of a small-scale sheltered workshop who developed the workplaces for persons with intellectual disabilities emphasized enthusiastically, “simple work … carrying heavy luggage … there must be the work for these children. Because support based on this belief, M had become a responsible worker. He used to cry at work and run away to a vacant lot nearby when he first joined the company. I find that a strong belief enables the supporters to continue supporting them with great patience even though the results do not appear right away.

2) A belief that competitive employment promotes development

Director N of a sheltered workshop, who was formally a teacher at a special school for children with intellectual disabilities, said “They become wiser and learn to use words skillfully after they start participating in the society.” I was a good example of someone who “developed socially.” Furthermore, H learned to use words skillfully and made progress in communication skills. According to the belief that competitive employment helps the development of the disabled, the supporters keep providing support patiently even though their abilities are low at first. And their beliefs were fulfilled in the end.

3) A belief that competitive employment enables persons with intellectual disabilities to become independent

Gaining salary helps persons with intellectual disabilities to achieve independent living in the community. The supporters, who succeeded in supporting them, not only wished them to attain independent living, but also wished them to have independent minds. For this purpose, they provided lots of support. As for the latter, Employer C said that persons with intellectual disabilities can gain “pride” and “confidence” through competitive employment. Therefore, Employer C emphasized that job retention was significant, irrespective of the working hours. It meant that mental independence was developed through work. Owing to this belief, we can see the employer C kept assisting employee M until he grew up and could adapt to work life. Employer C believed that work stimulated mental independence, and it promoted independent living.
4) Supporter as a partner

However, if the above-mentioned belief is only the supporter's wish, but not the supported's, it can be harmful. Successful supporters persistently make sure their viewpoints are shared also with the supported (i.e., partnership and sympathy).

Co-worker A behaved as a close partner to B, who has intellectual disabilities so that B has an established position in the company. Group home staff member E said, “Every person with disabilities has his/her own dreams and desires, however he/she cannot fulfill them by himself/herself.” I can see the attitudes of co-worker A and staff E as partners to persons with intellectual disabilities. Both of them are partners to fulfill the dreams and desires of the supported. Due to this kind of attitude, supporters also tolerate their problematic behaviors. They consider those behaviors as a signal of maladaptation, and comprehend their real needs including unspoken needs. Thus, the supporters provided support appropriately with both current and long-term viewpoints in mind depending on their needs.

5) Affectional bonds

Bowlby, who is famous for the “Attachment Theory,” which describes the relationship between a mother and her child. He insisted that human beings have a propensity to make strong affectional bonds with particular others (Bowlby, 1977, pp. 201). Moreover, it is said that parents' attachments develop the competence of infants and babies (Otaki, 1982). This kind of relationship can also be seen between supporters and persons with intellectual disabilities.

The group home managed by E was initially financed through his retirement allowance and unemployment insurance money because the group home did not obtain any subsidy at first. A user, who learned that E was having difficulties managing the operating expense, offered him a part of his own bonus salary, “You do not have salary now, so I give a part of my bonus salary to you.” E told me about this episode as if it just happened yesterday although it occurred many years ago. I think that this episode was deeply etched in his mind because he was moved by the user’s heart. In an old, small, two-story house, five persons supported each other as they quarreled and discussed their worries. They were like family without blood relationships. Here, I perceived the existence of strong “affectional bonds.” In successful cases, I have found that “bonds (kizuna)” are formed in these relationships even though there is no blood relationship. Because of these bonds, supporters make an effort to understand the meanings lurking behind the signals from persons with intellectual disabilities. I believe that these invisible “bonds” connect them deeply and tightly. These invisible “bonds” were also often referred to as a motivator for the supporters.

3. Factors obstructing competence development are the failure factors of competitive employment

Sometimes the decline in, or barriers to competence happen while competence is making progress. Even successful cases have some kind of prior experience with failure in competence development. The most important barrier to competence development was the absence of supporter with appropriate responses.

(1) Decline/obstruction of competence

1) Loss of the will to work

It is thought that people can take on the challenge to work in a competitive workplace as long as a chance is given to them regardless of whether they have high motivation or not. However, it is very difficult for the people with a history of painful work experiences to try working again.

G had worked for a container manufacturer for 8 years. His mother, Mrs. O, told me that she guessed her son had a difficult time during those eight years, because she would find some marks on his face and body from beatings several times. She guessed that it must have been a “painful experience” for him although he never spoke about it. I can tell that the impact of this negative experience has deeply and strongly influenced G, because he kept refusing to
work at a competitive workplace for as many as 13 years. The accumulation of the failure feedback (Weisz, 1999) urges powerlessness, and declines or hinders the development of competence. Negative work experience hinders G’s willingness to work for competitive employment again.

2) Obstruction of the formation of the will to work
Representative P worked for a small-scale sheltered workshop. Most of the workshop users did not wish to participate in competitive employment. They came to the workshop without experiencing competitive employment after graduating from the special school for persons with intellectual disabilities. The report from the National Council of Social Welfare and National Social Employment Center Association (2000) showed that among participants of residential sheltered workshops 38.3% experienced competitive employment and 61.7% did not experience competitive employment. Approximately 56% reported that he/she, “wanted to go out of the sheltered workshops and work in the companies” and 43.9% of them answered that he/she “did not want to do so.” On the contrary, among the participants of daycare sheltered workshops, 21.3% had competitive employment experience and 78.3% did not have any experience. Approximately 33% answered he/she, “wanted to go out of the sheltered workshops and work in the companies” and 67% of them answered that he/she “did not want to do so.” It can be thought that not having the experiences of competitive employment influences the formation of the working motivation.

3) Obstruction of affirmative and objective self-recognition development
H explained that the reason of her experience of work failure was because, “Other workers did not teach me how to work, because I was a resident of a dormitory for workers with intellectual disabilities, and I was regarded as an intellectually disabled. Also, because I couldn’t remember things quicker.” H had also been bullied several times because of her disability in the past. She could not save herself from the bullying by her co-workers at her first workplace. These negative experiences in life form a “negative self-image” (Shimizu, 1999). And as a result, it becomes a significant issue when it comes to challenging competitive employment (Kosciulek, 1998, pp. 110-112).

However, the workplaces do not always urge negative/unobjective self recognition of persons with disabilities. They can be the place for their affirmative/objective self recognition if the appropriate support was offered as evident in E’s support. In short, the lack of understanding persons with disabilities and their workplace conditions could be a factor in hindering their developments of affirmative/objective self-recognition.

4) Decline of development of socialization
Q has autism and was sometimes yelled at, at his previous workplace. Hence, he gave his mother his firm intention of resigning from work. His mother, Mrs. R went to the company for advice, but was unable to change the situation. Since Mrs. R was anxious about her son gaining another employment opportunity after resignation, and finding means to support the cost of living, Mrs. R made her son “endure” this hard situation. As a result, Q stayed on for more than 3 years. In that period of time, he sometimes bit his mother from stress at work. Mrs. R endured these behaviors because she felt sorry that she could not help Q in this difficult environment. Gradually, her son started to express his feelings by shouting loudly. By this time, Q’s competence declined considerably. For this reason, relational problems occurred soon after Q joined the present company. It was just after Q used Aftercare Center. We can assume that inappropriate support decreases the growth of socialization. Moreover, it negatively influences both the job retention and the occupational change.

(2) Support which obstructs competence development
The lack or shortage of effective support obstructs the development of competence.
1) Support based on the convenience/belief of supporters

Because the staff member of the group home pressed her belief, which was unsuitable for G, G lost the motivation to communicate. She was a mother of a child with disabilities. She worried about G and his future and told him to imagine the situation after his mother dies. The staff tried to support G to live independently from his mother as soon as possible since he lived with her for more than three decades. Their relationship was deep. The staff member ignored G’s mental health entirely, and moreover, she insisted that G and his mother’s relationship was a serious problem. As a result, G gradually spoke little, and finally lost the will to communicate.

2) Passive belief towards competitive employment

When supporters, who act as “partners” to persons with intellectual disabilities, have passive attitudes regarding competitive employment, the competence development of the supported person is likely to be obstructed. Workers at Representative P’s workshop receive about 7,000 yen per month as wages. The staff do as not assist their users to challenge competitive employment. Reasons were, “They have insufficient work ability,” “Their parents do not wish [competitive employment],” and, “There are not enough workplaces where they understand persons with disabilities.” These reasons are not unusual, and of course, are not meant to be malicious. However, those who succeeded in providing support were able to overcome these problems. The challenges they took on were as follows. First, they found out and developed the abilities of the disabled persons as much as possible (Employer C and Co-worker A). Secondly, when parents did not wish competitive employments for their children, showing parents of the disabled successful cases helped improve their viewpoint of competitive employment (Representative N of a sheltered workshop). Thirdly, they created practice opportunities to promote understanding of persons with disabilities in the companies (Representative L of a sheltered workshop). Supporter’s negative support expectation hindered the competence development of persons with intellectual disabilities.

3) Lack of both supportive system and supportive environment

—“supporters who are at a loss”

The supporters who understand and provide support to persons with intellectual disabilities may experience a burn-out as a result. I call these supporters, “the supporters who are at a loss.”

Q’s decline in social development occurred because he did not receive appropriate support while he was experiencing serious problems of job retention. The reason for this result was due to his mother, Mrs. R’s own convenience. On the other hand, she was also doing her best to solve the problem. I believe that the issue here is insufficient support to the supporter. Therefore, a helpless supporter and the environment which lacked support were obstructing factors of Q’s competence development.

VI. Summary and conclusion

The aim of this study is to attempt to find a new perspective of employment support methodology which centers on persons with intellectual disabilities. The purposes of this study are twofold: 1) to clarify the key concept of “competence” as a social development; 2) to clarify the factors, which influence persons with intellectual disabilities to work in competitive workplaces.

To clarify the dynamic interaction between persons with intellectual disabilities and the environment, I conducted interviews with 25 participants. Participants included persons with intellectual disabilities, their mothers, representatives of sheltered workshops, company co-workers and employers, and staff members of the group homes and dormitories for workers with intellectual disabilities. The findings are as follows:

1. “Signals sent from competence” include “signals to adapt to the environment” and “signals which draw out the sympathy and get on impression from
the supporters.” In addition, the latter one can be classified as “behaviors for establishing good relationship,” “a short greeting with affection,” “understanding of the supporters from the supported,” and “teaching the supporters the significance of life.”

2. “Competence development is success factor of competitive employment.” The development includes “development of working abilities and the will to work,” “development of objective and positive self-recognition,” “development of socialization,” and “promotion of the will to live independently.” Furthermore, “factors supporting competence development” are “a belief that persons with intellectual disabilities are able to participate in the competitive employment,” “a belief that competitive employment promotes development,” “a belief that competitive employment enables persons with intellectual disabilities to become independent,” and “supporter as a partner.” The last one is the “affectional bonds” connecting the supporters and the supported.

3. “Factors obstructing competence development are the failure factors of competitive employment.” Those are “decline/obstruction of competence,” “loss of the will to work,” “obstruction of the formation of the will to work,” “obstruction of affirmative and objective self-recognition development,” “decline of development of socialization.” Furthermore, “Support which obstructs competence development” is threefold: 1) “support based on the convenience/belief of supporters”; 2) “passive belief to wards competitive employment”; 3) “lack of both supportive system and supportive environment—supporters who are at a loss.”

In conclusion, two findings are clarified in this study. First, if people with intellectual disabilities receive appropriate responses, they will be highly likely to succeed in participating in the competitive workplaces and retaining their jobs. Secondly, if they receive inappropriate responses, they are highly likely to fail getting competitive employment, and suffer from poor job retention.

Future studies should examine the following: 1) Refine the concept of competence; 2) Construct the support theory for persons with intellectual disabilities that is based on the strength of their development.

Note
1) Refer to the annual research reports of Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities.
2) “The supporters” in this paper mean people who support persons with intellectual disabilities.
3) “The supported persons” in this paper mean persons with intellectual disabilities.
4) There are various perspectives of competence in social work practice theory. The viewpoint of social worker’s education and training (Clark and Arkava, 1979; O’Hagan, 1996), the viewpoint of “the cultural competence” (Mcllhaiver, 1997) which makes a point of supported persons’ culture, the viewpoint of “the daily life competence” (Oda, 1999) of the supported, especially for older adults, and the viewpoint of “ecological competence” (Maluccio, 1981) which is derived from the ecological perspective.
5) Moreover, when I consider the non-creature environment as a subject, competence means that they intently interact with the environment, like achieving tasks, etc. According to this definition “competence” was referred to the concept of “learning motivation” (Maehara, 189).
6) Giving respect to interviewees’ words, I wrote down some words used by the various supporters which were inappropriate expressions such as “infantilizing” persons with disabilities. However, I used them in this paper. The reasons are twofold. One is that the words illustrate the relationship between the persons with disabilities and their supporters. Second, the interviewees shared raw feelings for persons with disabilities. That shows they trust me. This increased the reliability of the material.
7) “Comprehension (ryoukai)” is a method for understanding others with one’s own viewpoint. It includes three processes. First, “The comprehension of consciousness,” second, “The comprehension of the relation between the phenomena,” and third, “The recurrent of the comprehension psychology.” Refer to Togawa’s (1973) “Comprehension (ryoukai).”
8) This research uses the method of qualitative research. The aim of the research is to clarify “What is X, and how does X vary in different circumstances, and why?” (Pope and Mays, 1996, pp. 3). To deepen and increase the understanding of what was spoken and unspoken by the interviewees, I adapted a methodology of the ego psychology called “comprehension.” Although the collected raw material was enormous, I did not handle them equally. Words, even though they may only be short phrases, were commonly
found among the interviewees. I will consider them to be important materials.

References


National Council of Social Welfare and nationwide social employment center association (2000) Report concerning international research on the strategy to help the disabled person to go out of sheltered workshop institution etc and fulfill the independent living in the community.