

## Intermediate results of the application of an evidence-based method: the Work Intellectual Disability Environment

### Work Intellectual Disability Environment: applicazione di un modello evidence-based all'accompagnamento al lavoro. Risultati intermedi.

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Over the last few decades, employment for persons with disabilities has been one of the most discussed topics within the radical change in the emerging disability paradigm. The article describes the situation from the point of view of statistical data and contemporary scientific debate. The main evidence-based methodologies for the work placement of persons with disabilities are then systematized, focusing primarily on the description of the WIDE-Work Intellectual Disability Environment method, developed by the Centre for the Rights and Independent Living of the University of Turin. Some pilot data on this method are reported, examining especially the companies' point of view and the way the experimental methodology was put into practice.

**Keywords:** Right to work, intellectual disability, UN Convention, place-and-train, adulthood

**Background**

*Employment for persons with disabilities: from therapy to right*

abstract

Revisione sistematica

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(a. meta-analisi; b. Evidence Based Education)

- 1 The whole text is the result of the close and fruitful collaboration between the authors. For the present work, the background and open question paragraphs were written by Nataschia Curto and the wide and conclusion paragraphs were written by Cecilia M. Marchisio.

Employment for persons with disabilities is a particularly interesting topic both for the scientific community and for policy makers. Over the last few decades, this field has undergone a radical change that had an impact not only on the methodology, but also and foremost on the new framework and paradigm. (Shakespeare, 2013).

In a relatively short time – less than 30 years of history – employment for persons with disabilities has changed from being perceived as a therapeutic possibility (the old "ergotherapy") to being considered as the tool of a socializing educational path, up to being recognized, in this century, as a right.

The UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities indeed states, in Article 27, that persons with disabilities have a right to enter the labour market on an equal basis with others and to work in an environment that is "open, inclusive and accessible" (UN, 2006).

Also from a psycho-pedagogical point of view, the importance of the work environment for persons with disabilities is becoming a shared belief (Bond et al., 2001). For a person with a disability, to be employed does not only mean to have a job: as for any other person, work is a fundamental dimension of identity (Adorni, Balestrieri, 2016). In addition to this function and the one connected to sustenance, no dimension has a greater power than work to provide an adequate and recognizable social and community inclusion (Buzzelli, Berarducci, Leonori, 2009). In recent years, after the approval of the UN Convention, the importance of this dimension has been increasingly stressed, even for those persons who are mostly marginalized: those with severe and/or intellectual disabilities (Burns et al., 2008) and those with relational disability (Mc Laren et al., 2017).

Even though, as it often happens in the social field, the available data are not always updated to the most recent years, the latest statistics are unambiguously alarming. In 2012, the European employment rate of persons with disabilities was lower than 50%, with 22% fewer employed workers compared to persons without disabilities of the same age (Priestly, 2012). This figure, which already appears worrying, drops to 28% fewer workers if we look at persons with severe disabilities, and it becomes even lower for workers with intellectual disabilities (Greve 2009). The Piedmont regional data do not differ from the European ones: in 2015, for example, out of 813 internships, only 187 produced work placements, i.e. 23% (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2018). In the same year, the traineeships started thanks to special initiatives, such as for example the Regional Disability Fund, also saw minimum recruitment rates: out of 1,256 internships only 120 (9%) resulted in open-ended contracts. In addition to the data, we shall consider that these outcomes are related to people already selected as potential workers, therefore they refer to the range of persons with disabilities with fewer difficulties.

The concern about the lack of access to the labour market for persons with disabilities is so widely spread that, already ten years ago, the European Union had set the goal for the "Europe 2020" development programme advocating 75% employment rate for all citizens, including persons with disabilities (Grammenos, 2014). The European indication follows the direction set by the UN Convention, emphasizing the need to provide "reasonable accommodation" in order to facilitate access to employment (Moody, 2017). The theme of "reasonable accom-



modation", and in general of the adaptations necessary to allow a person with disabilities to access work *on an equal basis with others* (UN cit.) is one of the key elements. From the perspective of the UN Convention, it is no longer a question of making the person competent enough to work in a given environment, but rather a question of changing the environment in order to enable that person to work.

### ***Supporting the employment of persons with disabilities***

The employment of persons with disabilities typically takes place in two different areas: general labour market employment and sheltered employment (Koletsis et al., 2009). The paradigm of the UN Convention suggests that the environment to be made accessible to workers with disabilities should be a mainstreaming context (general labour market) and not a special environment (sheltered work), calling into question the traditional models of integrated employment.

This questioning attitude, however, does not imply a lack of previous elaborations: as regards the support measures to employment in the traditional labour market, for example, the majority of European countries – including Italy – has had a quota system for years, according to which large companies are obliged to employ a given proportion of employees with disabilities. While on the one hand there is no doubt that the obligation to hire a certain proportion of workers with disabilities often proves to be a good incentive, on the other hand the literature shows that these policies are not necessarily effective and, above all, they alone are not sufficient to solve the underemployment of persons with disabilities (Greve 2009 cit.). Essentially, if obligations and incentives may be a good tool in the hands of those who support and promote work integration, there are nevertheless numerous other components of a cultural, methodological and contextual nature that in the end influence the outcome of said incentives (Shima, Zolyomi, Zaidi, 2014).

For these reasons, for several years now the scientific community and the policy makers have shared the necessity to put forward new ideas and innovative strategies to ensure that the right to work of persons with disabilities can be recognized and effectively implemented (Hashim, Ishak, Hilmi, 2017).

Currently, at the European level, the prevalent way to employ persons with disabilities is to hire them in dedicated companies that provide work in a protected environment (Wistow, 2007). The so-called "sheltered work" – or protected work – is still today often the first choice when it comes to facilitating the employment of persons with disabilities, particularly in the case of intellectual ones (Migliore et al 2008). This widespread preference is part of a larger paradigm, within which traditional support of persons with disabilities is often defined. This paradigm can be summarized in the train-and-place formula (Jäckel et al., 2017).

According to the operating models of this paradigm, persons with disabilities must first learn a series of skills and achieve some basic requirements. Only after reaching them can they be placed in authentic professional and independent living situations where, according to this model, they will be able to use the skills learned (Corrigan, McCracken, 2005). The methodologies and services provided

by the train-and-place paradigm build what is called a "continuum of care" (Corrigan, McCracken, 2005 cit.). It is a gradual and protected programme, specifically designed so that people can progress slowly in a training environment organized in progressive stages, with the final aim to be ready for professional integration or independent living. Throughout the support process within the continuum of care, these persons are not exposed to authentic situational demands until the operator considers them ready to cope with them (Rinaldi et al., 2008). Usually there are different stages of training in artificial environments (centres, facility-based programmes aimed at fostering autonomy, laboratories...) ranging from the "safest and most restrictive" ones to employment in the real world or independent living (Carling, 1995).

Although it has long been known that programmes of transition to adulthood based on this paradigm do not facilitate work and life in the real world (Howard et al 2010), the continuum of care remains a widespread model. One of the reasons for this may be of a cultural nature: the continuum of care tends to reproduce a model in which the primary need is to keep the person in a protected place, leaving them to deal exclusively with the dimensions of existence that they have previously shown to be able to manage. The paradigm thus implies a clash between the train-and-place method and the UN Convention's view, according to which, for example, independent life is a right, and therefore the access to supported employment programmes cannot be regulated by requirements or skills learned while training (Madans Loeb Altman, 2011). On the other hand, already many years before the approval of the Convention, the international literature had unanimously questioned the effectiveness of this type of paradigm (Twamley Jeste Lehman, 2003).

The main weakness the literature identifies in train-and-place programmes is the assumption concerning skills transfer. In the criticism of train-and-place models we notice that, at best, the participants in these programmes achieve the goal of acquiring the most relevant skills to live, work and socialize in a supervised, protected and dedicated environment that has no match in the real world (Olsheski, Rosenthal, Hamilton, 2002). The assumption that once a competence is learned in a protected context, it will automatically be transferred to an authentic context is not supported by scientific evidence. In addition, it has been disproved by statistics showing the outcomes of integrated employment and independent living experiences conducted with these methodologies (Rosenthal, Dalton, Gerver, 2007). Furthermore, in terms of skills acquisition, the literature shows how the motivation provided by the authentic context has no match in a protected context (Drake, 2017). This element generates a very high threshold effect: only people who have fewer difficulties actually manage to activate the learning of complex skills in a simulated environment. Furthermore, the literature also emphasizes the importance of the relational dimension: in the step-by-step model, every level change contains the implicit request for a substantial adaptation at the relational level. At each step, people change environment and group, cutting off their ties and replacing these connections with a new group of people in a different environment (Reme et al., 2018). If this adjustment may constitute a stressful element for a typically developing person, it becomes an insurmountable barrier for those whose disability belongs precisely to the relational sphere (Viering et al., 2015).



There is therefore a significant discrepancy between the evidence of the scientific literature, which shows the ineffectiveness of the train-and-place methodologies, and the widespread use of these methodologies in practice.

However, since we are dealing with deep-seated models and policies around which the services have often been built and organized, even when confronted with decades of literature they probably need a further push to change these working methods. The push came with the approval of the UN Convention and the consequent request, at the policy level, to increase the employment of persons with disabilities, which led to reconsidering integration programmes and methods, with greater attention to effectiveness.

In this perspective, in the last few years the scientific community has supported the approaches based on the place-and-train paradigm, which aims to place people in normal jobs without prior training, but with *in vivo* support (Vuckadin et al., 2018). Coherently, several studies show that adopting a place-and-train paradigm is more effective (Kinoshita et al., 2013) and offers better results both in the general context of achieving independent life, and more specifically in the work environment, which is the focus of this article (Suijkerbuijk et al., 2017).

The place-and-train paradigm promotes the rapid placement of persons with disabilities in real-world workplaces, followed by *in vivo* support. According to the place-and-train perspective, the achievement of life and work objectives is closely connected to the authenticity of the situations and the real-life relevancy of the programmes. The operational models of the place-and-train paradigm aim to envision (and therefore to teach) skills not in an isolated way but always in an integrated way, with context adaptations and the authentic demands of real-life situations (Druss, 2014).

In the most recent years, this paradigm has been explored with the perspective of the right to mainstreaming employment brought by the UN Convention; the most advanced European realities have left behind the "sheltered work" method and are moving towards a model called "supported employment". This method of employment support does not entail finding specific companies or contexts where persons with disabilities can be integrated; on the contrary, it puts in place operative support onsite modalities aimed at accessing real job opportunities in the general labour market, by offering continuous and focused support from the very first moment (Wistow, 2007 cit).

At the international level, nowadays, a type of supported employment called Individual Placement and Support – IPS (Bejerholm Larsson Hofgren, 2011) is particularly effective. IPS is currently considered one of the most relevant measures for effectiveness in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities in the life project perspective (Cramm, Finkenflugel, Kuijsten, 2009).

The main features of IPS are:

- It operates within a place-and-train paradigm, without prior education or training (Metcaffe et al., 2017).
- It provides the worker and the company with continuous and flexible support (Reme et al., 2018).
- It develops a series of adaptations based on the needs of each person with a disability (Griffin et al., 2008).

- It designs and implements a combination of training and support activities both inside and outside the company (Becerra et al., 2018).

The combination of the UN Convention at the level of rights and the IPS at the methodological level makes it possible to rethink the role of work within the life project of the person with disabilities at an operational level, thus overcoming the vision of work integration as a mere "activity" among others, having a mainly occupational purpose.

## Open questions

At a first glance, what has been explained so far may appear to be inconsistent: over the past years, in literature there has been evidence of an effective methodology for the employment of persons with disabilities, and yet their employment remains a critical area.

Although the literature regards the place-and-train models as most effective, a difficulty in accepting this paradigm and the consequent greater diffusion of train-and-place models is detected at a global level (Giesen, 2007). This problem of implementing an evidence-based policy for integrated employment seems to have different motivations, which we will try to summarize below.

### *Social barriers and local support*

An analysis of the literature shows that one of the elements that mostly influences the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream labour market is the presence of social barriers. In particular, the perception of inability and the discrimination against persons with disabilities as workers are still widespread (Kuznetsova Yalcin, 2017). Thus, a sort of vicious circle is set up, so that culturally it is difficult to see the disabled person as a worker. Due to this prejudice, we tend to lean towards train-and-place models that appear more "protected", but which often have negative outcomes, and therefore we end up supporting the idea that persons with disabilities cannot work in a normal context. In this regard, there is a widespread prejudice, unsupported by scientific evidence, according to which the protected context and the authentic context are directly linked: failure to prove to be a good worker in a protected context is seen as a test proving that one would not be a good worker in an authentic context either. This view is very popular among common people and it may also affect some of the experts.

Moreover, an anecdotal element is often added in support of the scarce possibility that persons with disabilities may be included in the general labour market: namely, being aware of failures in integrated employment projects. In this regard, the literature highlights that most integrated employment programmes lack sufficiently systematic actions to facilitate the so-called "local support" (Wilson, 2003), i.e. the support provided by the work environment and the colleagues. This type of support, which in train-and-place models is not particularly stimulated, is a fundamental element of the place-and-train paradigm: it must



be made available in the workplace, in a convenient and economical way (Becerra et al 2018 cit). As Ohtake (2001) and Ellenkamo et al (2016) point out, the design and implementation of this type of support is determined not only by the nature of work tasks, but also by the needs of disabled workers, by the characteristics of colleagues, and by the workplace culture. Consequently, these types of support must be necessarily imagined and tailored to suit each person's needs. The theme of support in the workplace and by the workplace is crucial: several studies show that the success of integrated employment depends to a greater extent on the organizational environment of the company than on the characteristics of the individual (Hashim et al., 2017cit).

The importance of paying a more or less marked attention to building local support is an example of how, in order to switch from a train-and-place model to a place-and-train model, it is not enough to reverse the order of words, but we need to put in place a consistent and methodologically based system to support the second paradigm. The specific actions needed for the activation of local support are an example: this element is marginal in the planning of a train-and-place intervention, in which the person is supposed to enter the workplace with a pre-acquired of abilities and competences, while it is a pivotal point in every place-and-train model. Here, too, we probably suffer the consequences of the fact that the place-and-train model is seen as "more difficult", and therefore we tend to evaluate the failure of a train-and-place project as proof of certain failure of a prospective place-and-train one, without accounting for the specific features of each model.

As noted above, the two models are not directly linked, but they are two paradigmatically different approaches that lead to different results, even when the same people are involved.

### *Intellectual disability*

In the field of work integration methodologies, a particularly critical area seems to be that of workers with intellectual and/or relational disabilities. The data show, as we have seen, a further underemployment in this area. One of the reasons for this criticality may be found in the difficulty to imagine and design context adaptations in this specific situation. In fact, the concept of accessibility is widely understood as far as motor disability is concerned, whereas when dealing with intellectual disability, the tendency is still to attribute the impossibility of performing a task to the characteristics of the person and not to the presence of barriers in the context. Cognitive and relational barriers are not only immaterial, and therefore often invisible, but they are difficult to identify for a person with typical development.

While motor tasks are easily classifiable in order of difficulty, cognitive tasks are more difficult to classify. This is one of the elements that makes persons with intellectual disabilities even more marginalized in the labour market: it is relatively easy to understand how to make a work environment accessible to a worker with motor disability – such as guessing what shelf is too high or which climb is too steep – but it is not equally easy to make a work environment accessible to a worker with intellectual disability, because a series of technical competences

are needed. Moreover, even before these, training is required to understand that the impossibility for a person with an intellectual disability to perform a task may not be due to the abstract "incapacity" of the person, but to a barrier present in the environment. This makes it difficult to imagine adaptations and reasonable adjustments that may allow the person to exercise their right to work in the same context as everyone.

### **Companies**

Another reason why place-and-train methodologies struggle to spread can be traced back to a struggle in the world of social workers to relate efficiently with the corporate world. Place-and-train methodologies are in fact more demanding for the operator, because it is not a question of providing a company with a sufficiently prepared worker with disabilities, but it is a matter of fully and actively involving the company in the process, by participating in the corporate culture, understanding the dynamics, negotiating adaptations. The lack of communication that often hinders the cooperation between the two worlds is also highlighted by extensive research: first of all, after gathering the evidence collected by the operators, the big obstacle to the integration of workers with disabilities seems to come precisely from the companies' attitudes, whereas after a more in-depth analysis of the literature, a more complex scenario emerges (Bond, 2017).

Often the train-and-place integrated employment method is favoured by operators, who mention, among other things, that it would be a "lighter" request for the company compared to a place-and-train project, which involves on-site training (therefore in the company). The operator, who expects the company to reject a worker with a disability, considers a "light" intervention more acceptable in this sense. However, if we look at the literature that investigates the companies' point of view, we can see how the demands from the workplace do not favour the recruitment of already trained workers with disabilities, but instead greater on-site support (Killackey et al., 2018 ). Moody et al. (2017 cit.) note that the employers interviewed are concerned about lacking the necessary knowledge to adapt their work environments, while according to Furuoka et al (2011) the entrepreneur who employs a disabled worker is mainly preoccupied with encountering difficulties in the first phase of recruitment due to the process of adapting the job to the persons' needs.

Other data show that employers see an opportunity in the integration of a person with disabilities: 88.2% of the managers interviewed in the Disability and Work survey on the experience of Italian executives (2018) declares that, when the employment is supported, managing a person with disabilities produces a managerial and organizational improvement that benefits all the other employees. So, if on the one hand Italian managers declare themselves open to the inclusion of workers with disabilities, it is also interesting to notice that the cultural tendency seems to be in line with the perspective of the UN Convention. Most managers, in fact, are not in favour of the introduction of a specific figure (the disability manager) who deals with disabilities. They propose, instead, a "disability management" model (which fits into the broader perspective of diversity management). It is a widespread organizational model in which the adaptations





necessary for the integration of workers with disabilities are managed through a broader organizational involvement, with a model shared and adopted by the whole management (Williams Westmorland, 2002).

However, despite the many signs of openness, even from the point of view of companies, the type of disability is a critical area. Still from the analysis of the point of view of Italian managers, 90% consider the management of a person with intellectual disability in the company to be potentially difficult, compared to 35% who consider it difficult to manage a worker with motor disability.

## Work Intellectual Disability Environment- WIDE

### *The first steps*

Starting from the scientific evidence and the open questions that emerge from the literature and from the experiences in the field, in 2016 the research group called Centro Studi per i Diritti e la Vita Indipendente (Studies Centre for Rights and Living Independently) of the University of Turin developed the WIDE method – work intellectual disability environment.

The first pilot experiments that provided the basis for the development of the method arose in the context of a broader research project on possible ways of implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: the Vela project, conducted between 2014 and 2016 by the Department of Philosophy and Educational Sciences of the same university (Marchisio Curto 2016).

From the very beginning, the WIDE structure tended to integrate the evidence gathered in the literature about the most effective methodologies for work integration, consolidating them in an approach that answers the critical questions that remained open.

In this sense, also the research on the methodology and the development of the model operates within a paradigm that we could define "grounded": by accompanying and rigorously monitoring the programmes, we face the criticalities that gradually emerge. Starting from these, methodological solutions are elaborated that are then experimented in the next programmes. Therefore, the researcher also employs a similar model to the place-and-train one, which we could define "place and think"; the researcher is not called to elaborate a complete methodology first and then experiment with it, but they gradually build the elements starting from the onsite experience, systematically collecting the critical issues and the solutions that emerge, thanks to those involved in the integration programmes.

This choice concerning the development of the method is allowed by the fact that the elements on which the WIDE method is based are already largely supported by scientific evidence (Burns et al., 2007) and by robust data. Today the priority is no longer to demonstrate the effectiveness of the place-and-train approaches, but rather to investigate and refine the aspects that can influence the gap between what the literature has been saying for years and the models that are widespread at the practical level. The primary focus on the transfer of practices has led to the choice of proceeding with-micro experimentation, gradually building up the details of the method in close contact with the actors who usually

take part in this process, in order to avoid elaborating a new model that is validated in the literature but systematically disregarded in practice.

The first experiments (Marchisio, Curt, 2017) and subsequent modifications have led to the development of a methodological approach that today has found its stabilization both through further experimentation and through training programmes aimed at transferring practices.

For the purposes of this article, we can sum up the main features that the WIDE method derives from the two key paradigms – the UN Convention and the place-and-train ones –, the characteristics it assumes from the IPS model and the elements it elaborates in a new way to respond to critical issues that still have no answer.

### ***The evidence-based elements***

On a broad paradigm level, the WIDE method fully embraces the perspective of the UN Convention, in particular regarding the idea of the nature of work in the life of persons with disabilities. In this sense, the already widely theorized overcoming (Rotelli, 2009) of the vision of work as a therapeutic element is consolidated. The same can be said for the overcoming of the conception of work as a socio-rehabilitative activity that over the years has often implicitly led to underestimating the ineffectiveness of train-and-place models.

In fact, in those contexts where work for persons with disabilities is understood as a possible activity among others, with a predominantly occupational value, the critical points of methodologies that allow for pseudo-work experiences but rarely result in employment are quite difficult to discuss. It is only, in fact, within a perspective that considers work for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with other adults, in all its complex economic, relational, psychological and social dimensions, that the lack of authentic work contexts, fair remuneration and true contractualization show the seriousness of the situation that the literature denounces. If we do not adopt this paradigm, we run the risk of not perceiving the underlying need for an effort to identify and experiment more effective methods of integration. At the operational level, the consequences of this paradigm are:

- a consistent and transparent preliminary negotiation with the company, concerning the prospects of hiring the worker after the initial training period and the choice to include people in training only in companies that take employment into consideration as a possible outcome;
- no prior assessment of the person's abilities, since the UN Convention proclaims work a right whose access cannot be limited but must instead be supported.

Still speaking of baseline paradigms, but at a more specific level, the WIDE method follows, as mentioned, the place-and-train paradigm, together with its fundamental principles: authentic context, on-site experience and *in-vivo* accompaniment are the core of the methodology.



The resulting consequences in terms of methodological choices are:

- work in unprotected and non-specific contexts (mainstreaming companies);
- the first work environment in which the person is placed is already the one in which there are prospects for employment;
- the initial internship is activated on an equal basis with persons with typical development in terms of duration and remuneration;
- no preparatory programme and no work-related training and sheltered workshops for basic skills are provided, neither in the form of a classroom or in the form of facility-based programmes aimed at fostering autonomy.

At a strictly methodological level, WIDE largely adopts the aspects of proven effectiveness of the Individual Placement and Support, among which the main ones are:

- support from specialized personnel takes place *in vivo*, when needed;
- support is provided at the workplace, when needed;
- support is planned and implemented in a personalized way, integrated with respect for the person and the job;
- no generic disability training is planned and provided; all support and training are adjusted on the specific characteristics of the specific person in the specific company.

The basic structure of the WIDE method draws on the main evidence that the literature proposes with respect to employment support, and at the same time some innovative elements have been built hands on to deal with the open questions and the critical points mentioned in the introductory part.

### ***From criticality to innovation: social barriers and local support***

Concerning the theme of social barriers, the WIDE method puts in place specific and systematic actions to prevent the criticalities that usually emerge in this area. The two main critical areas are, as mentioned above, the presence of a confused and negative image of the ability of persons with disabilities to work and the lack of systematic actions to activate support by natural contexts (local support).

The first criticality is prevented through systematic work:

- training before entering the work environment, accompanied by a broader cultural work carried out also thanks to the creation of video material that documents the successful experiences;
- gradual and systematic involvement of colleagues in the life project of the disabled person with gradual cultural support to formulate an independent answer to the question "why does this person have to work?".

The second aspect gives rise to what can be considered the heart of innovation brought by the WIDE method, namely the centring on the adaptation of contexts aimed at activating the natural working environment as a support. The tutor

specialized in the WIDE method, in fact, works to make the context capable of supporting that person to become a worker and not to make the worker capable of performing a job.

It is well known that the integration of workers with disabilities introduces elements of complexity into company contexts, which need integrated and targeted support to better manage the situation (Cottini Fedeli Zorzi 2016). This type of supports constitutes the centre of the individual support that WIDE puts in place and that is actualized through:

- the observation, breakdown and direct analysis of the job proposed by the company for the worker in the place, time and with the real people the job entails;
- the identification of potential and critical elements in the encounter between that specific task and that specific worker, thanks to an intensive exchange with colleagues;
- the planning, the negotiation with the company and the realization (also material) of context adaptations necessary to make it not only accessible but also supportive to the disabled worker;
- "one-to-one" training for all colleagues involved in material, relational and cognitive adaptations necessary to enable the disabled person to be a good worker;
- the noticing and paying attention to the context and not to the worker's performance: not observing "if they do it" but changing the context so that "they are put in the condition to do it".

### *From criticality to innovation: intellectual disability*

The evidence of the effectiveness of the IPS methodology has also allowed, during WIDE experiments, to focus on an area of greater difficulty: the inclusion of workers with intellectual and relational disabilities without limits of support needed.

In fact, workers with intellectual disabilities are expected to be more difficult to manage since there is little cultural awareness of their right to an independent life. In addition, when an employee with intellectual disability is included, the barriers to remove are no longer exclusively physical or architectural, but also include the mode of communication, the attitude, the accessibility from a cognitive point of view of materials, environments and work tools, the styles and the complexity of language (Marchisio Curto, 2016 cit.)

The corporate environment, if left to itself, is not prepared to accept workers who, for example, have limitations in logical and abstract thinking, memory and communication, such as workers with intellectual disabilities (Nord 2016). This kind of difficulty is often less evident than sensory or motor deficits and sometimes difficult to decode for untrained people. Even if the integration programmes are designed differently based on the need for support, the context and the characteristics of the individual, supporting a person with intellectual disability remains a programme based on the need to eliminate barriers (Medeghini et al., 2013), and integrated employment is no exception. In general,



it is widely accepted that the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities requires more complex interventions (Canevaro, 2013). For these reasons, the tried and tested programmes conducted with the WIDE method all concern people with intellectual or relational disabilities and establish specific actions aimed at:

- removing cultural barriers and creating fertile ground for the activation of local support, by modifying the collective imagination related to the adult life of people with intellectual disabilities, bringing it closer to what is stated in the UN Convention (possibility to choose where and with whom to live, right to marry and build a family, the right to equal pay ...);
- making contextual barriers visible, since the ones pertaining to the relational and cognitive dimension often remain invisible to non-experts;
- proposing specific adjustments and strategies that allow work colleagues to experience first-hand the changes that occur when the context is made accessible;
- systematic and tight monitoring of the relationship between changes in context and work performance/resolution of critical issues, with the aim to sensitize colleagues in order to improve future local support.

### ***From criticality to innovation: firms***

Finally, among WIDE's innovative elements there is one that tries to resolve the critical issues that arise when dealing with companies. In fact, we cannot disregard this aspect if we want to develop and disseminate a methodology that aims at non-protected integrated employment even for people with intellectual disabilities. For this purpose, the method provides:

- the collection of requests, expectations and corporate culture connected to disability;
- the monitoring of the modification of these elements during the integration aimed at the early detection of potential and critical issues;
- the activation of intense primary support for the construction and adaptation of the task through the involvement in natural contexts;
- support to the different organizational levels to create a real *disability management*;
- the prevention of criticality and immediate, specific and targeted response to the difficulties highlighted.

The aspects listed constitute the frame of the methodology, which is articulated in a system of training, support, accompaniment, and monitoring, aimed at allowing the worker with intellectual and relational disabilities to fulfil their right to work on an equal basis with others.

## Conclusions

The WIDE method seems to have the potential to constitute an innovative and effective approach to such a critical issue as the employment of people with intellectual disabilities in non-protected contexts, according to the direction indicated by the international literature. The most significant challenge in the coming years is to identify increasingly effective ways to put this approach into practice and to consolidate its innovative aspects.

In particular, it is essential to continue the experiments, even by stressing the most challenging variables, such as the complexity of the condition of the integrated person, so as to offer a contribution to issues that still appear controversial in the contemporary debate.

Looking at the research and the experiences carried out since the method began to be tested, the main critical points can be summarized by observing the perspectives of the different actors.

From the operators' point of view, a criticality is confirmed, considered as primary by the literature: the application of the approach on a large scale. In fact, there is a widespread lack of professional and cultural awareness regarding the implications and ineffectiveness of models based on a continuum of care that operate within a train-and-place paradigm. In this sense, the contribution of the academic world proves extremely important both in terms of gathering and making international indications available, and in terms of developing training programmes that are able to fulfil the need for concreteness of the operators and at the same time to the need to use evidence-based models in practice. The training experiences conducted up to now, which were mentioned in the context of this work, show that more effective programmes involve small numbers in a gradual and collegial construction of the new practice, rather than immersive paths of a more frontal nature which despite being faster, seem to produce less stable learning.

In broader terms, it also appears urgent to continue the pursuit of a systematic cultural work that contrasts the still widespread difficulty in civil society to start considering persons with disabilities – including intellectual ones – as adults. In this sense, alongside the pilot experiments, a research work on the modalities, the means and the styles of investigation seems fundamental.

In addition to the plan of cultural changes and training programmes, it is still evident that organizations working in the field of disability are imagining and constructing social innovation starting from the organizational model and not only from the operator's behaviour. The difficulty in transforming the widespread train-and-place approach into place-and-train models seems to depend largely on the resistance to accept that this is a paradigm shift, precisely in the terms in which it was defined by Khun, namely a slow evolutionary process during which the basic assumptions change with respect to how one approaches a problem (1962).

Instead, a widespread rhetoric of "starting from an existing project" often persists, based on which even those who are willing to change the practices are in great difficulty when discussing how to modify the conceptualization of prob-



lems. In other words, the field of possible practices may also be explored creatively by looking for new answers, but there is an insurmountable limit that prevents us from changing the questions. Organizations often appear willing to undertake training courses that lead to changes in the methods and attitudes of their operators, but they are systematically less aware and interested when system changes are proposed that affect the organizational level. In this sense, it will be interesting to follow the results of the training course started in the province of Brescia, which experiments with the involvement of all organizational levels.

On the one hand the critical points prove to be still substantial, while on the other hand some elements can be identified that could act as a keystone fostering change. In the already widely diffused psycho-pedagogical area of life project support (Pavone 2009), the paradigm borrowed from the idea of recovery (Kil-laspy et al 2011) may work as an interesting frame). The concept of recovery is the basis of those systems in which persons are replaced by services (generally speaking, we are not referring to a specific service), stressing the need for the reacquisition of citizenship rights, but above all on the importance of exercising those rights (Mezzina 2013). The recovery paradigm makes it possible to build different ways of imagining programmes in our world that are not necessarily based on a level of performance that the person must reach – at a cognitive, social-functional or physical-motor level – but which aims to build support where it is needed, so that the person can enjoy full citizenship. This model, already used by the best mental health services in the world (Marin Bon 2012), may be a useful starting point to allow a more fluid link between the rights paradigm brought by the UN Convention and the daily operating practice.

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