Educational Resources on Inclusive Employment for Food Service Employers: Insights from Employees with Disabilities and Employers

Educational Resources on Inclusive Employment for Food Service Employers:

Insights from Employees with Disabilities and Employers

by

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Abstract

Background

A study by Olsen (2022) noted that one of the largest barriers in the employment of individuals with disabilities was the lack of reasonable adjustments that could be made. This includes changes such as alternative equipment, reductions in the workload of a task, or changes in the way an employer communicates with an employee. Requests for such accommodation can be stigmatized or perceived as too difficult and impact one's chance of sustaining employment.

Objective

This capstone project was conducted to advocate for increased employment opportunities for employees with disabilities (EWD) due to a general lack of knowledge among employers on practical workplace accommodations and to fill gaps identified in literature on information from the perspective of EWD. The goals of this capstone project include: 1) to inform employers within the food industry on practical workplace accommodation for EWD; 2) gather insights from EWD on their own workplace support; 3) advocate for increased work opportunities for EWD with educational resources on workplace accommodation.

ACOTE Area

This project falls under the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) categories of Research, Advocacy, and Education. It evaluated processes in place at several food service businesses to accommodate individuals with disabilities, referenced literature to develop an educational resource for other employers, and advocated for increased employment among this population.

Methods

The multimethod approach of this project involved semi-structured interviews with three employers and twelve employees, observation hours at each business site, and a thorough literature review of work accommodations that can be easily applied within the food industry. Convenience and purposive sampling were utilized to recruit employees and employers to ensure that the businesses had experience employing individuals with disabilities and were accessible for in-person observation visits around Atlanta, Georgia. Two expert opinions were also recruited for this study to provide feedback on the educational resources. A qualitative analysis was conducted to evaluate the interview responses among employers and employees, and the expert opinion feedback was utilized to analyze the effectiveness, accuracy, and appearance of the educational resource.

Results

Similar support techniques among the employers included flexible scheduling, task adaptations, group training, and adapted hiring techniques. Employees highlighted the value of supportive employers and coworkers, a positive work environment, clear task instructions and structures, and individualized accommodations. Clear communication between the employer and employee and utilization of a strengths-based approach were stressed as important factors. Reported challenges were transportation and social barriers, which are often problem-solved by the employers to the best of their ability.

Conclusion and Relevance

This study highlights which strategies have been beneficial for food service employers working with individuals with disabilities and how employers with disabilities perceive their support system in the workplace. The findings revealed that understanding among employers of the employee's ability level led to greater job satisfaction and comfortability for the employee.

The development of educational resources throughout this project aims to guide other food service employers to continue similar practices while understanding the reason accommodation might be provided.

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Introduction

Individuals with disabilities face significant challenges in obtaining and sustaining competitive employment, and they are often faced with the option of sheltered work or more segregated areas due to limited accommodations made by employers (Park & Park, 2019). Jobs in the food service industry are a common entry-level job; however, it is a fast-paced environment in which individuals with disabilities may encounter barriers with the responsibilities they are to perform. These individuals are underrepresented in this sector of work for a multitude of reasons, being that individuals are fearful of the difficulties they will have; employers lack knowledge on ways in which they can support those individuals in the workplace, and employers are avoidant of inclusive hiring due to perceptions of their employment coming with a high cost. Previous research has shown how employers can benefit from continued education in workplace accommodation and inclusive strategies, which also plays a role in the underemployment of these individuals (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023). To bridge this gap, the development of educational resources on workplace accommodations for employers while interviewing individuals with disabilities on their perceptions, employers can become more well-equipped to support more diverse populations.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Disability as a Limiting Factor to Employment

While the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 has made great strides towards social inclusion and accessible environments, there still remains some gaps in this policy, in which individuals face extreme challenges in settings such as the workplace (Umeda et al., 2017). While the rate of disability among working-age adults has risen in recent years, it is important to address the reasons for which these individuals experience unemployment or challenges for a variety of reasons (Carr & Namkung, 2021). Limiting factors are often out of the individual's control, including aspects such as exclusive hiring practices, misperceptions among the management of businesses, or a lack of effort and knowledge into providing employee accommodations for different ability levels. On the other hand, barriers pertaining to an individual's ability level can include deficits in learning comprehension, social communication, sensory sensitivities, physical mobility, visual impairments, and more. These aspects of functioning not only become more evident within a community environment, but especially one in which they become a minority, which can hinder the way an individual performs under a set of standards for an occupation.

Social Limitations

Employers often want to see that their employees have strong social skills, especially in settings in which good customer service is heavily emphasized. This is an area where individuals with a developmental disability, which is a condition characterized as "intellectual disability, physical disability, or both, that occurs before the age of 22 and causes functional limitations," commonly experience obstacles (Jacob et al., 2022). Specifically, difficulties with social communication and social skills are one of the most significant characteristics of intellectual and

developmental disability (Jacob et al., 2022). Deficits in executive functioning, or "higher-order processes such as working memory, flexibility, inhibition, both behavioral and emotional control, initiation, and planning that are critical for goal-directed behavior," are common in individuals with developmental disabilities (Fong & Iarocci, 2020). This can impact emotional and cognitive strategies for regulation in a social environment as well as the ability to read social cues.

Challenging behaviors, such as aggressive movements and disruptive actions that are frequently observed in these populations, may also affect their social communication and cause public distraction (Desrochers & Fallon, 2014). Other limitations related to specific diagnoses, such as withdrawn behavior or limited eye contact, often related to autism spectrum disorder, can interfere with social interactions in the community and often be stigmatized (Brown et al., 2020). Sensory issues, which can present as difficulty responding to certain stimuli in the environment or experiencing other deficits in relation to sensory systems, can also impede social interactions.

Sensory Disabilities

Sensory disabilities can include limitations such as visual impairments, deafness or being hard of hearing, or having sensitivity to sensory experiences in the environment such as smells, tactile sensations, and sounds. Aside from social factors, individuals can experience sensory processing disorders along with a developmental disability, which involves difficulty "detecting, modulating, interpreting, and/or responding to sensory experiences" (Passarello et al., 2022). This typically causes an individual to experience a low threshold for stimuli in environments such as restaurants, grocery stores, shopping centers, and doctor's offices. An individual may be unable to communicate their distress from sensory overstimulation or react by performing self-

injurious actions, having emotional outbursts, or performing aggressive behaviors due to difficulty regulating their feelings (Passarello et al., 2022). These manifestations can be more evident as individuals with disabilities age and enter adulthood or the workforce in which social engagement is more expected. Additionally, environmental sensory stimuli can often be unpredictable in the workplace, which can be problematic for individuals with these sensitivities. Pertaining to other factors that may not comfortably allow an individual to function in a work environment, mobility limitations can also impede individuals from navigating their surroundings if an environment is inaccessible.

Mobility Limitations

An accessible workplace is one that allows any individual to physically maneuver around the environment as well as have equal opportunities in the previously discussed areas. Limitations in participation within the workplace are not due to disability related functioning alone, since an important factor is also the dynamic interaction between the contextual environment in which an individual moves (Neven & Ectors, 2023). Studies have shown that people with mobility impairments are more likely to experience exclusion in the areas of transportation and community settings that may further impact societal participation (Neven & Ectors, 2023). A study conducted with 144 individuals with mobility disabilities identified that common barriers to acquiring accommodations in the workplace include a lack of employer knowledge on ADA regulations, employee's fear to request accommodations due to stigma, employee's fear of the cost to cover accommodations, and their fear of a long wait time between requesting and receiving accommodations (Shengli et al., 2022).

Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disability (ID) can be characterized as having "deficits in intellectual and adaptive functioning" and can include being unable or having a difficult time processing information, learning new or essential skills, and experiencing deficits in social interaction skills (Jacob et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2020). These factors can create increasingly limited opportunities in areas such as employment due to stigma from employers and complex cognitive factors required to operate in certain occupational settings. Intellectual disabilities can contribute to additional difficulties within a workplace setting due to most jobs, regardless of the setting, typically being very dynamic and requiring flexible thinking (Carlson et al., 2020). Specifically, strategies to improve social engagement have been shown to be beneficial in the workplace for individuals with disabilities (IWD), since social inclusion is an area often in which IWD might be excluded (Cheng et al., 2018).

While individuals with disabilities have become increasingly integrated into the community with accessibility, support programs, and other resources, many still lack personal knowledge, enabling environments, and skills in some respects that limit their independence and ability to pursue their goals (Gross et al., 2020). Competitive employment is an area of adulthood in which many demands are placed upon employees that may be limited by an individual's disability without proper mobility support, learning adaptations, sensory accommodation, or other needs they may find more success with.

Employment Practices as Limiting Factors

Employer Misperception of Employee's Capabilities

While individuals might require additional support, employers often fail to look past this and recognize their strengths or consider the asset that they could make to their team. While

many employers have little knowledge on disability-related needs pertaining to the workplace, this can lead to employer misperceptions such as underestimating someone's workplace skills due to surface level factors or perceiving the cost of their employment to be higher with the inclusion of accommodations (Baker et al., 2018). Employers may have few opportunities to interact with IWD, and this can result in a lack of understanding or correct knowledge as to what these individuals' skillsets may look like. If employers have uncertain feelings regarding IWD for this reason, it can lead to social avoidance and less integration within an employment setting due to assumptions that they are not fit for the workplace (Baker et al., 2018). Surface level social communication barriers observed in an interview can impede employers from acknowledging the extent of individuals' capabilities. Therefore, if individuals with disabilities do not "outshine" others that might have strong social communication skills and personalities from an interview standpoint, their workplace strengths and capabilities may be overlooked or misperceived (Lindsay et al., 2014).

Other misconceptions are that employers have been known to associate safety risks or accidents with IWD, or that an employee with a disability will be less productive than other employees (Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019). A common misconception from employers is also that IWD will be costly to hire, which is incorrect considering that the majority of the costs for accommodations, if any, are often very low (Baker et al., 2018). Contrary to these misperceptions and despite the barriers to their employment, individuals with disabilities have been known to have successful careers and excel as role models and mentors in the workplace (Wong et al., 2021).

Management Practices

Management practices, such as a greater priority for efficiency demands and productivity, can impact the employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019). Unfortunately, prior discussed misperceptions may cause supervisors to deem these individuals as having lesser capabilities, so they may overlook them in the hiring process or prevent them from having promotion opportunities due to prioritization for the most optimal work output. This would put employees with disabilities at an unfair disadvantage compared to someone without a disability, and it would be considered unfair treatment if they were not placed in positions that match their capability level or appropriately promoted for their skill sets (Aichner, 2021).

Further referencing opportunities to excel in the workplace, performance feedback for individuals with disabilities can often be skewed positively or negatively. Employers may be influenced by general stigma in the provision of feedback to employees either in a positive way by being overly kind for societal validation, or negatively by having lower expectations (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023). Individuals should be provided accurate performance evaluations and placed into work responsibilities that accurately match their ability level, meaning they have a productive role and are not being provided with "busy work." Management practices such as flexibility in scheduling, inclusive business strategies, matching an employee's responsibilities with their strengths, and tailored individual performance evaluations are helpful in counteracting these barriers. However, these examples are only a small portion of what can be done to accommodate individuals, and many businesses are hesitant to implement even those (Lee et al., 2024).

Gaps in Current Supports in Place for Employees with Disabilities

Current Support

Current strategies that are being used to counteract the barriers experienced for individuals with disabilities include training in inclusivity in the workplace, accommodations to meet their needs for any difficulties they may have within a work environment, and supported employment services that help integrate individuals initially into the work setting. Efforts currently in place to develop inclusive employment environments often lack fluid approaches, considering relational and dynamic aspects of the environment that still exude exclusion (Shaw et al., 2022). For example, if employers provide opportunities to high-functioning adults with disabilities that require no accommodation as a way of practicing workplace inclusion, they can still systematically exclude more marginalized individuals with disabilities that require more continuing education for themselves and intensive training to hire (Shaw et al., 2022).

Additionally, employers sometimes have so much focus on how to accommodate individuals and their capacity, rather than their strengths, achievements, and potential they have in relation to a productive role in the workplace (Shaw et al., 2022). Furthermore, it has been shown that employees are more likely to perform optimally at work when they follow a leadership focusing on their strengths, rather than traits that may set them back from others (Wang et al., 2023). The measures currently being taken to address these issues are often shallow, and there are still needs to address stronger workplace inclusivity, employer education to counteract misperceptions, and better implemented training opportunities for workplace success.

Although there is extensive research on why workplace accommodations are necessary, there is little research on employees' perception of whether they feel as if they are receiving enough support in the workplace or how they feel they could receive additional support. As individuals with disabilities are often in a minority position, advocating for themselves can be

difficult as they might fear their needs to come across as burdensome. Therefore, it is important to promote educational resources to employers on how accommodation can be easily implemented and how management strategies can mitigate exclusion.

Workplace Inclusivity

Employers have identified the need for additional education on how to provide performance feedback and appraisal to their employees with disabilities and how to support their employees with disabilities at different stages of employment, such as the event of job termination or general career development (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023). Additional disability-specific education would serve to combat generic stereotypes, further educate on the practicality of worksite accommodations, and reduce the likelihood that there will be generalized assumptions made upon the hiring and initial training processes. There may be further hesitation on what inclusivity within a team environment might look like depending on the presenting symptoms of different individuals, so improving relationships between employers and support services can strengthen this knowledge and work participation among employees with ID (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023).

Workplace buddy systems and mentorship have also been shown to be beneficial connections for individuals with disabilities to become well integrated into a workplace and relate to their coworkers, while ensuring their work responsibilities are appropriately meeting their ability levels (Morris et al., 2024). While businesses have strived to create more inclusive environments within the workplace by using training courses, employer strategies, and educational training, they should also discuss different types of disabilities rather than topics that only provide a general overview on traditional disability awareness topics (Baker et al., 2018). These efforts not only promote improvements within everyone's job performance but also

mutual respect within the workplace to ensure that employers and co-workers can support one another.

Accommodation

Disability-inclusive employment often means accommodating employees to meet their unique needs. If an individual in a wheelchair is unable to enter a workspace due to a flight of stairs or an individual is unable to work on a company's technology system due to auditory or visual impairments, equal opportunities for employment are not truly being given (Blanck, 2020). Accommodation may be necessary if individuals become overstimulated with aspects such as a loud environment or have learning or comprehension difficulties (Helena et al., 2023). Examples of accommodation might include having additional time to complete a task, being provided with task lists or prompts to help keep an individual attentive to their work, or adaptations made to a task due to sensory deficits. Workplace accommodations can not only promote an increased sense of belonging for those individuals at their worksite but also help promote more favorable work outcomes and employment sustainability (Lee et al., 2024). More research needs to be done on the ways in which different industries incorporate and successfully implement disability-inclusive accommodations, due to creative solutions being utilized for different individuals (Blanck, 2020). Discovering unique practices and promoting awareness of accommodation already in use by businesses that employ individuals with disabilities is important to educate other employers within the same industries to reduce their hesitancy towards hiring individuals with disabilities.

While progress has been made towards inclusive workspaces and diversity strategies, many barriers exist when employers are not knowledgeable in and initiative-taking about the ways in which individuals with disabilities can fit into the dynamic of a business. Opinions of

these employers and employees with disabilities are valuable to educate other employers and individuals on what accommodations have shown to be effective and what IWD's preferences would be in relation to an accommodative workplace. Future research should focus on interventions and strategies that are long-term oriented, consider the unique needs of an individual, and their appropriate fit with a productive role in the workplace based on an active collaboration between the employer and employee with a disability.

Chapter 2: Needs Assessment

Needs Assessment for Employment Support for Individuals with Disabilities

1. Introduction

This needs assessment was conducted to identify the gaps in the ways that employers perceive their ability to provide support to employees with disabilities. Through the methods of an informal literature review, Likert scale and open-ended questions with employers, this assessment aimed to highlight the areas in which employers expressed a need for improvement and the actions that can be taken to facilitate improvement. With further analysis of this information, areas in which there is a greater need for support among the realm of employment for individuals with disabilities that attention can be drawn to, were identified. Existing literature also identifies needs in areas such as awareness of necessary accommodation, increased disability education, and misperceptions towards individuals with disabilities.

2. Current Research

Existing literature presents a need for more resources on disability education for employers. Employers have often been known to hold misperceptions of individuals with disabilities such as the idea that they would have lower job performance, safety problems or on-the-job accidents (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Creating an environment where employers can learn the ways in which disability may impact an individual in the workplace and how they can navigate providing reasonable accommodations shows potential to lessen those misperceptions or the degree to which those individuals' employment rates are impacted by their disability label. Increased education and desensitization towards disability among employers would ensure that disability is more integrated in an organization's policies and procedures (van Niekerk et al.,

2022). In addition, employers often have a lack of awareness of the number of employees with disabilities within their applicant pools, which education could improve to ensure that employers are more attentive of the support they are to give (Bonaccio et al., 2020). Furthermore, speaking with employers about their firsthand experiences and concerns may continue to improve support for employees in the workplace setting.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Three employers of individuals with disabilities were recruited via phone call and email to participate in this study. Convenience and purposive sampling were the recruitment methods for the employers, due to the intention of the study being to discuss workplace accommodations with employers that aim to provide work opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This is to intentionally seek employers that are more knowledgeable and experienced in managing a wide variety of ability levels and conditions. To be included in this study, employers or managers must have been at their business for a minimum of 1 year and have a minimum of 6 months of experience managing or overseeing an employee with a disability. This was determined to ensure that the individuals being interviewed had an expansive amount of experience overseeing different individuals with disabilities and were able to provide a widespread amount of relative information.

3.2 Methods

Three employers were recruited to participate in a semi-structured interview. They represented a variety of food service businesses: a pizza restaurant, a bakery, and a coffee shop. They were interviewed via phone and Webex on how their businesses prioritize accessibility,

accommodations, culture, career opportunities, and advocacy for their employees. Likert scale and open-ended interview questions (Table 1) served as the model to measure how the participating employers currently make efforts to meet the needs of their employees with disabilities. The interviews lasted 30-45 minutes, and the semi-structured format allowed employers to elaborate on certain topics and strategies they utilize within their business.

Table 1. Needs Assessment Interview Questions for Employers

Please describe any experience you have working with individuals with disabilities.

What is your current role/job title?

Please respond to the following statements according to the following Likert Scale ratings:

a. 1 - Strongly disagree
b. 2 - Disagree
c. 3 - Neither agree nor disagree
d. 4 - Agree
e. 5 - Strongly agree

Accessibility

1. I have made changes to the physical environment of the workplace on account of an employee's ability level.
    f. If so, please elaborate.

Accommodation

2. I have made changes to a task or the demands which it requires due to an employee's ability level.
3. The duration of shifts has been modified at my workplace in an effort to accommodate employees with a disability.
4. Employees at my company have felt comfortable coming to me when a task is challenging or frustrating.
5. I have collaborated with other employers with similar mission statements regarding ways in which to accommodate our employee population.

Culture

6. Employees at my workplace feel comfortable asking for assistance from other employees on the team.
7. I have implemented a buddy system for employees to utilize to ensure further support for employees that have difficulty performing a certain task independently.

    Have you seen differences among employee skills after the use of a buddy system? If so,

    a. Why or why not?

Career Opportunities

8. I provide my employees with opportunities for career advancement based on observations and their ability to manage their current tasks.
9. I provide my employees with opportunities for career advancement based on productivity levels and performance reviews.

Advocacy

10. I have held community events for my business for the purpose of advocacy and social inclusion for my employees.
    a. If Agree or Strongly Agree, list facilitators and barriers to holding these events.

Other

11. What are the biggest challenges you have faced?
12. What has worked well within your business model?
13. What are your current goals that you would like to achieve for your business or employees?
14. What are any barriers you anticipate encountering in achieving these goals?
15. Is there anything else you think I should know?

4. Analysis

The results of this survey were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree", as well as a qualitative analysis performed on the open-ended questions. Survey participants were asked to respond to the survey questions with their level of agreement towards each statement and expand on their experience relating to the question, if applicable.

5. Results

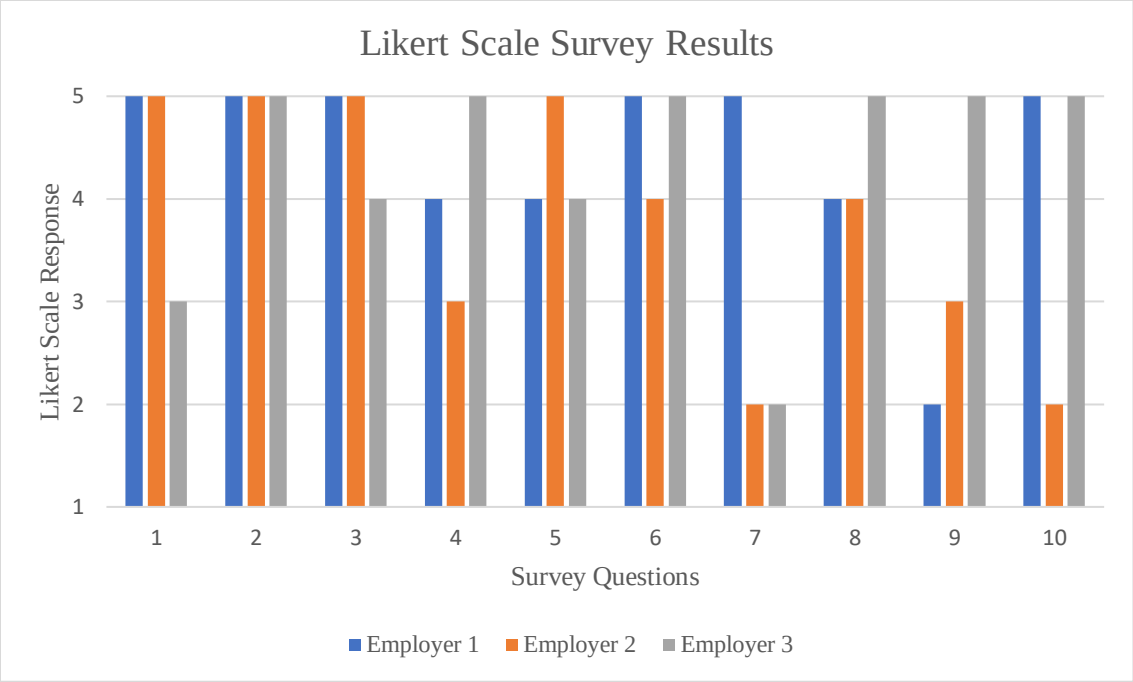

Figure 1. **Likert Scale Survey Results.** Employer responses to the series of Likert scale questions (1 – Strongly Disagree, 5 – Strongly Agree).

All employers reported at least "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to 50% of the accommodations suggested within the survey (Figure 1). The survey topics that were disagreed with included collaborating with other employers with businesses that involve similar missions or utilizing a buddy system among their employees, which was discussed as being preferred methods to run their business model. One employee reported "Neither agree nor disagree" to changing the physical environment to be more accommodating due to the small physical area of the business, however, the employer reported ensuring that community areas are accessible prior to their employees visiting to work an event.

The interviews revealed the different adaptations employers have implemented to accommodate employees with disabilities, such as adjusting work responsibilities and the

physical environment to meet the needs of individuals. Employers all shared similar experiences of learning how to meet certain employees' needs as they go and wanting other employers to be aware of these individuals' capabilities. The employers all shared a mission to provide employment opportunities for all individuals, regardless of ability level, and an area for growth that was mentioned is spreading education on the ways in which they support their employees to other companies. An overall need was expressed among employers to aid these individuals' career advancement.

Career Development

Employers of individuals with disabilities expressed a need for greater support to obtain and sustain employment beyond the opportunities provided at their businesses. Their employees either wish to stay at their current workplace or seek other professional development opportunities to further advance their career. Therefore, one employer explained that she can make as much of a difference as she can and empower individuals within her business, but at the end of the day, this population still faces the difficulty of job attainment due to society's misperceptions of their skills.

Experience of Employers

Previous experience working with individuals with disabilities among the employers interviewed ranged from working in special education, being a parent to a special needs child, being a special needs bus driver, and being a special needs sports coach. These firsthand experiences, along with trial-and-error methods of strategies such as buddy systems, physical, social, or emotional accommodations, contributed to higher reported confidence levels and creativity with their abilities to support individuals in the workplace.

Accessibility

All employers that were interviewed agreed that they made changes to the physical environment of the workplace on account of an employee's ability level. Changes included lowering the to-go window in the restaurant and relocating into a larger building to accommodate wheelchair access. Other considerations for the population they intended to cater towards included aspects such as adult-sized changing tables for customers and parents as well as visible directional signs and spacious environmental layouts.

6. Discussion

Employers acknowledge that the support they have in place for their employees allows individuals to reach their potential, but other employers lack the experience to understand what meeting these individuals' needs might look like within a work environment. Another aspect that was discussed was how businesses with disability-targeted populations spark growth among the industry by sharing creative solutions with each other and inspiring inclusion. However, the desire for employers to support the ability for individuals with disabilities to obtain employment after the career opportunities they offer at their facility identifies the need to better prepare general employers to accommodate employees with disabilities. Creating better resources for those who have less experience with disability can increase the likelihood that they will employ individuals with disabilities in the future and be more comfortable supporting them in the workplace.

7. Conclusion

This needs assessment highlighted crucial areas in which employers of individuals with disabilities can educate others within the industry on to promote disability advocacy and

individuals' career advancement. Firsthand experience and creative methods to accommodate this population are beneficial to share with other employers within the service industry to promote greater job employment and sustainability for individuals with disabilities.

Chapter 3: Theories and Models

Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) Model

Figure 2. **Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) Model.** Performance, Environment, Occupation, and Performance are elements to determine the resulting occupational performance and participation (Themes, 2016).

The Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) Model (Figure 2) is one that unpacks the relationship between a person, their environment, and an occupation to evaluate how those factors may support performance and participation. The person's factors are inclusive to aspects pertaining to their life experiences, values and interests, and skills and abilities. This may include what is important to the individual as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, and sensorimotor skills (Schell & Gillen, 2018). Life experiences and an individual's history may also contribute to their personal factors such as the family and support system they have or do not have. The environment includes anywhere that occupations may take place, and this can mean physical features, a cultural environment, or a social environment. This factor of the model

can serve as either a facilitator or a barrier to the performance of occupations. The occupation component of this model differs from similar models such as the PEO and EHP by being defined as observable behaviors which may consist of multiple actions that are goal-directed rather than more simple components of a task. Occupational performance within this model results from how the three factors fit and work together, so it is important to evaluate each separately to see which aspects may play a role as a barrier or facilitator.

This project's emphasis is on workplace accommodations for individuals with disabilities in the context of the food service industry, and this is applicable to the PEOP model being that it is client-centered and relates to what the individual wants to do, while considering the necessary aspects that may hinder or assist their performance. This project takes into consideration the perspectives of employees with a disability, who have personal factors to consider due to their diagnosis and what their support system looks like in an employment setting. Individuals with disabilities face barriers in the context of their work environment due to having more unique needs than what other employees might require. The ways in which individuals with disabilities receive or have access to support in the workplace can not only impact their performance in the workplace, but their performance in the workforce, and whether they are able to sustain employment. Therefore, it is important to consider how the environmental contexts can look different for these individuals and cause their performance to significantly differ by providing them with the accommodation necessary.

The environmental factor of this model is also very influential due to the variety of types of jobs in the service industry, since this can influence the demands of occupations performed within that sector. To differentiate the use of this model from similar concepts such as PEO and EHP, the occupation component of individuals working in restaurants is more extensive than

simple units of a task. Working in the service industry involves different behaviors and tasks that are directed towards a goal, whether it is making a customer's coffee, completing cleaning tasks in an area of the store, or navigating a customer's question or complaint. This area of occupational performance would closer be defined as goal-directed actions that are meaningful to extend over a period to consistently maintain a productive work environment (Schell & Gillen, 2018). Like occupational therapy, workplace accommodations relate disability and function and address how one can reach the most independence in their environment. Occupational therapists are fit to address the topic of workplace accommodation since they specialize in the knowledge of disability and function, while considering how it plays a role in the interaction among the activities one participates in and their environment (Schell & Gillen, 2018). Employees' independence should be optimized, while ensuring that they have the proper environmental support to excel in their work performance.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 *Project Design*

The design of this capstone project was to evaluate how businesses and employers accommodate individuals with disabilities, specifically in models that prioritize inclusive employment strategies. It was also to obtain the perspectives of the employees on their work experience and the type of support they find to be most beneficial to them in the workplace. The investigator conducted observations in each business to evaluate the work accommodation provided to employees as well as interviews with staff members to obtain a better picture of the workplace dynamic. The project aimed to advocate for improved workplace accommodation by creating educational resources for other food service-based employers in the community.

Additionally, this study intended to understand the content that employers of individuals with disabilities would deem valuable to be included in an educational presentation, specifically targeting employers who do not regularly manage employees with disabilities on how to accommodate certain disabilities. The study also assessed the perspectives of employees with disabilities, focusing on whether they feel adequately supported, how their previous experiences have compared, and whether they believe additional support could enhance their workplace experience. This research aimed to address the needs of employers by providing comprehensive information on how best to support employees with disabilities, specifically in the food industry, in a variety of ways. It also aimed to highlight employees' views on whether their current workplace meets their needs, with the goal of identifying potential areas for improvement. Through this education, employers will benefit by gaining insight into how workplace accommodation can support specific disability-related needs, improve efficiency, and foster inclusiveness, all while offering feasible solutions that can be implemented effectively.

4.2 Participants

Convenience and purposive sampling were used to recruit employer participants for this study due to the investigator going to each site in person to conduct observation hours and interviews. These sampling methods were also used to ensure that the businesses recruited were likely to have experience employing individuals with disabilities. Therefore, all participants were employers of businesses around the perimeter of Atlanta, GA. A total of three employers participated in the study. They represented a variety of businesses within the food industry including a bakery, pizza restaurant, and coffee shop. The businesses varied with two being non-profits and one being a for-profit business. Employer participants were recruited via email and word of mouth. To be eligible for this study, employers or managers must have worked at their business for a minimum of one year and have at least six months of experience managing or overseeing an employee with a disability. This criterion was determined to ensure that employers have sufficient experience training individuals with disabilities in the workplace and could provide insight into the ways in which they have seen differences between the use and disuse of accommodation among their employees.

Employees were recruited from the same companies as the employers interviewed. Therefore, convenience and purposive sampling were also used for employee participants due to the employee population being more likely to utilize workplace accommodations. A total of twelve employees participated in this study, with several employees recruited from each of the three participating businesses. Employee participants were recruited by word of mouth via their employers and the investigator while conducting observation hours at each worksite. Eligibility criteria were that employees had been working at their current place of employment for at least one month prior to the start of the study. This was to ensure that they were either finished or

well-integrated into their jobsite training to further utilize the accommodation that is provided to them and formulate an opinion on whether they feel that they are sufficient.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit experts, and the investigator recruited via word-of-mouth and email. Inclusion criteria for expert opinions for the educational resource were that they have either worked at their business for at least one year and have at least six months of experience managing an employee with a disability or have been a licensed occupational therapist practicing for at least one year in the field.

4.3 Site Description

The sites for this capstone project consisted of several restaurants that aim to provide employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities. Similarly, they are all around the perimeter of Atlanta, GA, and employ individuals with a wide range of ability levels and experience.

SliceAbility is a pizza restaurant in Cumming, GA that started in 2022, whose mission is to employ a "group of people in our community who find it difficult to gain employment" (*Sliceability*, n.d.). They recognize different work abilities by paying attention to each employee's uniqueness and accommodating them accordingly. The owner, Jeni Smith, was inspired to open this restaurant after working with a community-based vocational instruction program, providing job training to students with special needs at a local school system.

Special Kneads and Treats Bakery is a nonprofit organization in Lawrenceville, GA focused on providing special needs adults opportunities to learn new skills and "develop a sense of accountability and pride" (Special Kneads and Treats, n.d.). They support food ministry co-ops, elderly care facilities, small local businesses, and community outreach programs by donating birthday cakes to less fortunate families. This business is owned by Michael and Tempa

Kohler, who have experience working with individuals with special needs and have a child of their own with a developmental disability.

Java Joy was created "as a way to provide meaningful employment for adults with disabilities while giving the community one-of-a-kind opportunities for engagement" (*Java Joy*, 2022). They are just one of the programs offered by the non-profit ESP Inc. (formerly Extra Special People, Inc.), which is a program based in Athens, GA with a mission to provide individuals with disabilities and their families with transformative experiences.

As these sites aim to provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, this project's goals align similarly being that the goal of creating more educational resources on employee accommodations is to increase the number of employers willing to hire individuals with special needs. These sites all reported to have lengthy wait lists and are unable to hire the number of individuals they would hope to reach, purely due to their facility's needs and finances, so educating other food service employers on how they can easily accommodate these populations can be a start to widen the opportunities. SliceAbility is launching a non-profit program to fund job coaches for individuals to be able to gain employment opportunities in other settings, which aligns with my project goals being that job coaches are an expensive resource for many individuals with special needs to obtain. Therefore, programs that raise funding for individuals to gain these opportunities or educate other employers directly on the ways in which they can increase inclusivity within a workspace are steps in the right direction to advocate for these individuals.

4.4 Data Collection Procedures

4.4.1 Employer Educational Resource Development

To promote the necessary education for food service employers concluded by the initial needs assessment, the investigator combined physical, social, and systemic accommodation discussed in the workplace in the form of an electronic resource (Appendix 4). To develop this resource, the investigator used a multi-method approach involving observation hours and semi-structured interviews with employers and employees at each worksite as well as an in-depth literature review on common workplace accommodations that can be applied to food service settings. Observation hours at each worksite were intended to observe formal and informal strategies employers use to support individuals with disabilities, or ways in which the work environment may be more suited to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

The interviews were designed to identify common practices among employers that apply directly to entry-level food service roles that other employers in the community can be informed on. Data included in the educational resource was drawn from employer interviews rather than employee interviews due to the questions applying more directly to accommodative practices used in their workplace rather than personal narratives and perceptions of their accommodation experiences. The content in the educational resources ranged from inclusive practices used in each business to specific disability accommodations across various aspects of employment. The content included photographs to further describe how physical accommodation is implemented, unique examples of employees' accommodation in each workplace, and general tips on how the employers provide ongoing support across one's employment.

4.4.2 Interview Design and Content

Semi-structured interviews with three employers and twelve employees across the three participating businesses were conducted for data collection. The interviews conducted with employers lasted 2-3 hours and were conducted in person on topics relating to different

categories of accommodation within their business including the following categories: mobility, social communication, training and hiring, visual abilities, sensory abilities, hearing abilities, and other categories not previously mentioned (see Appendix 5). They were also encouraged to share what they would tell employers who have little experience working with individuals with disabilities. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed for follow-up questions and exploration into key concepts raised by the interviewees to gather a deeper understanding of accommodative practices and specific strategies in use for their current employees. However, the investigator followed a consistent set of questions with each participant to maintain and direct the interview flow.

The employee interviews lasted 1-1.5 hours and were conducted in person on personal experiences with accommodation, job training, management support, and general job satisfaction (see Appendix 6). They were able to expand upon workplace culture, opportunities for advancement and personal goals, and how previous work experiences compared to current, if applicable. Interviews questions were adapted with each employee to resemble a more conversational approach and allow for further explanation due to the varying intellectual levels of the participating employees.

4.4.3 Expert Opinion Feedback

After the creation of the educational resource, experts were recruited to ensure the accuracy, cohesiveness, and relevancy of the content. Once experts agreed to participate, they were asked to complete a written questionnaire (Table 2) to review the following aspects of the educational component:

Table 2: **Expert Opinion Feedback Questionnaire**

Question

1. How practical do you think this collection of resources would be to provide for employers in the food service industry in terms of educating them on realistic accommodation?
2. How do you feel that the formatting of this could be laid out more professionally or in a more interactive manner?
3. Do you feel that the categories this is broken down into accurately reflect the aspects of workplace accommodations in this type of work setting? Would you consider a different way to organize the content?
4. Based on your expertise, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach or type of educational resource?
5. Do you feel that these resources use enough "laymen's terms" or terminology that food service employers would be familiar with if they do not have experience with individuals with disabilities?
6. Do you feel that these resources encourage employers to seek new solutions to include employees with disabilities and accommodate them in the ways that they deem necessary?
7. Are there any other aspects of accommodation or inclusion that you feel would be important to include in any section?

4.5 Analysis

4.5.1 Interview Analysis

Written interview transcripts were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify common themes across the employers' responses. This type of analysis was chosen to allow for a deeper comprehension of common perceptions, implementation processes, and accommodations in place to support employees. The themes identified for the employer interview analysis were intended to correlate with the different areas in which employers provided workplace accommodation.

The student researcher independently coded the written transcripts to determine recurring themes. Based on these themes, a set of subthemes were created to describe more specific criteria due to the widespread area of topics covered in the interviews. The order in which these themes were included highlights the prominence or importance of such data among the interviews. Larger themes were more prominently discussed between employer and student researcher.

4.5.2 Employer Educational Resource Analysis

The experts provided open-ended feedback, and a qualitative analysis was completed to compare themes and feedback provided by the two reviewers. Due to the small number of expert opinion reviewers, many of the changes suggested by them were made to the educational resource or added in an alternative way that the investigator deemed appropriate. Expert reviewers found the resource to be practical, accessible, appealing, and to have accurate content, aside from the few changes suggested. The expert consensus was to include key details and descriptions, but to take out superfluous wording on research studies.

4.5.3 Expert Revisions and Finalization

Two experts were recruited to review the educational component and provide feedback. Results from the Expert Opinion Feedback Questionnaire were considered, and the investigator edited the educational component accordingly. Feedback from the experts included notes on shortening the content to make it more concise and easier to appeal to the reader, creating bolder headers to differentiate the tips to employers from their descriptions, and putting scholarly sources into the footnotes to reduce the wording on each page.

Theme 1: Condensing Information

One expert suggested that the educational resources be condensed due to an extensive amount of information, and another expert suggested that any educational resources will need to be comprehensive. It was discussed how readers may not have as much interest in applicable studies, while important, as much as the unique ways in which employers have accommodated their employees.

Theme 2: Formatting of Educational Resource

Revisions that were suggested on the formatting of the resource by one expert included headers that stood out more among the descriptions provided below each accommodation to enable it to read more easily for viewers. The other expert suggested that the singular resource be converted into several separate documents, with each applying to various aspects of accommodations such as “Sensory Accommodations” or “Social Accommodations”.

Theme 3: Practical Applicability

Feedback was positive regarding the practical applicability for these resources, as it was discussed that an electronic format is easily accessible and more appealing to the reader with images, figures, and personal stories. It was also noted that there were more specific directions to find information such as directions on obtaining a mobility specialist or FCC phone. The business owner gave helpful corrections to ensure that information was accurate according to accommodations seen in their own business.

4.6 Ethical Consideration

The survey protocol and procedures were approved through exempt-level review by the GSU Institutional Review Board. Informed consent forms were obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, with parental consent being obtained as needed. Participants were informed of the study being voluntary and their right to withdraw or skip answering a question at any time. All personal identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts, as the student researcher kept them with codes in a password-protected database.

Chapter 5: Results

Employer Interview Findings

Theme 1: Hiring, Training, & Scheduling

1.1 Group training.

"All of the training here was done in groups since it was before the restaurant opened. It was helpful for all the employees to try different jobs to figure out what their strong suits were." (Employer 1)

Two employers reported using group hiring and training processes, which were beneficial for several reasons, being that it was more efficient for employees to try dissimilar roles initially and discover what they found to be more challenging. Both of these employers described how repetitive practice was embedded into the group training, in which they reported that employees benefited a lot from, allowing them to have additional time to learn new skills and determine which role in the workplace best suited their strengths. One employer reported using group interviewing processes to create more of a general discussion and reduce feelings of pressure, and two employers reported that they preferred performing one-on-one interviews due to some individuals not being as verbal or eager to speak up in a group setting.

1.2 Buddy Systems

"...typically, volunteers can be buddies, or I will supervise individuals that are lower functioning or require more assistance for their job." (Employer 2)

Overall, businesses had a similar pattern of providing initial supervision for employees as they learn and allowing them to take on more tasks independently as they progress. For example, one business has a buddy system, in which individuals start at a certain level that requires more supervision, and work their way up to less supervision, with pay incentives as they become more

independent. The employees change shirt colors as they "move up", which motivates the employees to work towards a goal. Additionally, this helps to inform other individuals in the business how much assistance the employee might require based on their current level. One participating business was a non-profit, so they have volunteers come in daily that can dedicate more time to overseeing employees or function as a job coach, prompting them as necessary for their assigned task.

1.3 Modified Shifts/Scheduling

"If people need to leave for a health reason, I am flexible. I encourage breaks when employees say they would like to leave but also say that any other job would not allow them to be flexible like that." (Employer 3)

Employers reported having increased flexibility with scheduling shifts and allowing breaks with this population than they would with individuals without disabilities. One employer reported that they embed breaks into their training sessions for employees as a form of accommodation, which can be used as restroom breaks, movement breaks, or snack breaks. Pertaining to scheduling, all employers reported that they have some individuals that request to work shorter shifts due to health reasons, health appointments, or transportation availability. Another aspect of scheduling that was reported to be more helpful with individuals who rely on transportation, is maintaining a consistent schedule. This way, individuals and employers can rely on their schedules staying consistent week to week. Two employers have employees work a consistent day and time each week, and one employer keeps the scheduling consistent, but varies more due to being a for-profit business.

Theme 2: Professional Development

2.1 Professional Growth

"...he came to us saying he needed a day off for his interview, and we told him that, for the record, you should not tell your current employer that you have an interview for a different job." (Employer 2)

Since many of these employers expressed that this is many of their employees' first job, some reported that they help with resumes, interviewing skills, and advice on how to proceed with applying for another job. One employer has begun providing employees with skill checklists, portraying an individual's proficiency in each kitchen task, as a form of a resume to show future employers. While employers describe being accommodating, they still adhere to professional standards to ensure their employees are aware of common professional standards upheld within a business.

2.2 Timeliness

"I have had issues with employees being late, missing their shifts, or receiving last minute texts from parents that their child is not going to be able to make their shift." (Employer 3)

This is a topic that was discussed as being difficult to address, especially due to the number of individuals with disabilities that are unable to drive or transport themselves to work. All three employers reported having individuals dropped off at their business too early in some instances and too late other times. Employers have explored several ways to address this, whether it be having a discussion with the employees' most frequent mode of transportation, discussing it with the employees themselves to ensure their transportation is on time, or providing them with a strike system to encourage being on time or having a consequence. One employer sought an opportunity to discuss this issue with another business owner that also employs individuals with disabilities to share solutions and advice on handling this.

Theme 3: Ability Level

3.1 Adapting Tasks

"Being patient and figuring out something for everyone to do is important. Individuals just need to be given an adequate amount of time to learn." (Employer 2)

All three businesses reported that they had adapted work tasks due to varying ability levels of their employees. One business had less of a need to do so in most cases, which is due to the third being a smaller business with fewer tasks that end up being independent or not directly overseen. A common adaptation that was seen in all settings was the inclusion of images into their point-of-sale system to aid individuals in placing orders and locating menu items, improving the efficiency with which employees can place orders. Two businesses had adopted a cashless business model to accommodate individuals with poor fine motor skills to have the ability to manipulate change and bills or individuals with intellectual disabilities that find it challenging to compute change accurately. One business had incorporated a point-of-sale system that provides the user with photos of each bill and coin that make up the necessary change to provide back to the customer after inputting the cost of their items and the amount of money given. This aids the user in quickly finding the appropriate change to hand the customer, while alleviating the stress of having the customer wait while they calculate the correct amount. All employers similarly recognized providing their employees with additional labeling for areas to avoid confusion, which included signs with directions to make different variations of coffee, labels for ingredients in a salad bar, and labels for areas to place clean and dirty dishes.

3.2 Task lists/Models

"Lists help remind employees of the task they should be completing." (Employer 1)

For some individuals, employers reported that it is helpful to provide a list of tasks for them to follow each day to stay productive and independently move through their different

responsibilities without requiring further instruction from the employer. Two employers reported providing employees with personal task lists, while one employer reported providing general task lists for employees to follow based on their job description. Two employers reported that some individuals found physical models to be helpful to follow instructions more easily for tasks such as bundling silverware, placing stickers in a certain orientation on items, or counting inventory (models for counting groups of ten). This was reported to be helpful for individuals when initially learning a new task or for individuals that have attention, intellectual, or behavioral deficits.

Theme 4: Physical Environment

4.1 Transportation

"I have to remind parents that when I employ their child, I am also employing them (for transportation)." (Employer 3)

Similarly to timeliness, employers reported that transportation is a complicated issue to address if individuals do not have someone available to take them to work. Two employers reported seeking local resources in the community for discounted transportation services to support employees that are unable to transport themselves or easily access transportation. One employer reported that some employees who work on the same day have begun a carpool, which can provide individuals with a tax break when transporting an individual with a disability. However, employers often must communicate with parents or guardians if there are difficulties with transportation, and this is an issue they continuously strive to improve.

Theme 5: Social Environment

5.1 Workplace Culture

"The employees are all close friends and there is a good workplace culture!" (Employer 3)

As the businesses that participated in the study have much experience with individuals with disabilities, the workplace culture was a positive experience from the perception of all three employers. All three employers reported that most of their employees are comfortable expressing that a task is difficult, and they feel comfortable asking their coworkers if they need help or would like help. All employers felt as if their employees have a friendly workplace in which they are excited to come to and consider their coworkers to be friends.

5.2 Social Interaction Skills

"We encourage friendship among our employees by planning extracurricular events and encouraging a social life." (Employer 3)

"Some individuals (referring to their employees) take negative feedback from customers very personally and it can mess with their confidence. Some people are not very receptive to communicating with individuals with disabilities, and this can affect customer service." (Employer 3)

Employers have often needed to find alternative positions for individuals that have more difficulty in social settings. For example, positions that individuals have done that may be considered more "socially secluded" include bussing tables, dishwashing, prepping orders in the kitchen, etc. One employer provided a helpful prompt by the cash register to begin taking orders for employees that might need reminders about what to say or how to begin taking an order. One employer reported that some of their employees more heavily experience difficulties if customers are angry or upset with their service, which would be a situation in which a manager or coworker would step in to assist with that conversation.

Theme 6: Sensory Accommodations

6.1 Visual Aids

"We have ingredient lists and table numbers on yellow paper for employees with visual deficits to more easily see from far away." (Employer 1)

Employees reported implementing several aids to assist with individuals with visual deficits. One employer has adapted an employee's workspace in several ways, providing a textured line with tape for the employee to feel with their cane while navigating into the entryway of the building. They have also added textured buttons on the microwave for the employee to feel which number they are pressing. One employer mentioned yellow signs for menu ingredient lists in the kitchen for greater ease of reading and large yellow table numbers for individuals to see when they are running food.

6.2 Sensory Sensitivities

"I have had some employees gradually work into washing dishes (due to sensory sensitivities/disliking the texture), progressing from wearing gloves at first and now he wipes tables with a wet wipe." (Employer 1)

"We have had some individuals get overwhelmed with noise, so I encourage them to take breaks or listen to music." (Employer 3)

When discussing whether employers provide accommodations to employees with auditory sensitivities, one employer reported that they do not allow employees to wear noise-cancelling headphones or music playing headphones due to safety reasons within the workplace. If an employee is unable to hear, it can become a safety issue if someone is unable to get their

attention or if there is an emergency in the workplace. Therefore, employers were more likely to encourage taking a break in a quiet area to decompress if they become overstimulated, before returning to their workspace. Some employers reported allowing ear plugs at times but like to encourage breaks rather than using these as accommodation. Another form of accommodation for auditory sensitivities was how one employer placed covers on all the chair legs in the dining room, to reduce the volume of chairs scooting in and out throughout the day for those that it bothers.

Employee Interview Findings

Theme 1: Perception of Accommodations Received

1.1 Coworker/Employer Assistance

"Having (the employers) here makes everything easier." (Employee 1)

Employees reported receiving direct assistance from their coworkers and employers as a form of accommodation in several ways. Supervisors, which included interns or managers, had more of a direct role over accommodations across all businesses, while coworkers often assisted each other as they saw necessary or as buddy systems might be in place. One employee has Tourette's syndrome, and they reported that they appreciate when their employer or coworkers assist them at the cash register if they are having a tough time articulating what they need to say. Another employee reported having their coworkers check to see if any food items that they are working on are burned in the kitchen due to their visual deficits. All twelve employees interviewed expressed that they felt comfortable communicating with their employers if they were having difficulty with a task or needed additional assistance.

1.2 Equipment/Workspace Accommodations

"I come in and leave my guide dog in the back room. I follow the textured tape to make my way over to the table using my cane." (Employee 4)

"I use a talking scale to weigh ingredients, which tells me how many grams of an item are on it." (Employee 4)

This employee also described how their beginning employment was a learning experience for both them and their employer, which allowed them to be more appreciative of the problem-solving and patience from the employer's end to navigate the best solutions. Eleven out of twelve employees interviewed reported at least one way in which they utilize equipment or workspace accommodation to perform their jobs more easily. Five employees reported taking advantage of task lists that employers implement either around the workplace or give them personally to remember all the things they need to do for a given shift.

1.3 Broken Down Tasks

"I tried the salad station, but I got frustrated trying to figure out what goes in each one." (Employee 2)

Eight employees reported that they were initially given a task in the workplace that their employers decided was not best for them for a variety of reasons, or a certain task required adaptations due to initial difficulty. One employee reported difficulties with reaching higher items or lifting heavy items while sitting in their wheelchair, and another employee reported difficulties with running food or working on the pizza line due to their more limited levels of energy to exert throughout the day. Learning or socialization difficulties that employees reported included making too many mistakes on the cash register or having difficulty understanding orders due to customers speaking quickly. To downgrade the difficulty of their work tasks,

employers may alter responsibilities or jobs due to the employee's capability level, which may involve creating or breaking down tasks. Examples of these that employees reported included labeling cake mix bags in the bakery, greasing pans, putting cupcake tins in pans, sorting sprinkles for bakery items, preparing coffee, and labeling to-go boxes in the pizza restaurant.

Theme 2: Previous Employment

2.1 No Previous Employment

"I was given (interview) questions that were a little difficult for me to understand, and I did not feel as comfortable as I do here." (Employee 7)

"I never got far enough to where I felt comfortable to share more about myself and accommodations I needed." (Employee 1)

Six of the twelve employees interviewed expressed that this was their first job, with three who had prior employment experiences reporting difficulties with their prior companies. Five employees reported that they had difficulties applying for employment prior to their current job and did not have interviews leading anywhere prior to their current job. Employees that reported that it was their first job reported higher levels of nerves or fears prior to starting their current position.

2.2 Current accommodation was improved from previous experience.

"Training here was a lot easier than my previous job because we split into groups and practiced without customers here - (previous job) training did not feel like training and was overwhelming and difficult." (Employee 12)

Five employees elaborated on how the process of group training was beneficial, being able to practice dissimilar roles before the restaurant officially opened without the additional pressure of training in front of actual customers. Regarding the initial processes of employment, one employee reported that the interview questions at her previous job were exceedingly difficult to understand, and this created more difficulty in the process of her obtaining the job. Another employee reported that they felt as if they were receiving more respect at this workplace and that they feel more comfortable asking for assistance than they did at their previous worksite, due to the nature of their supportive employers and coworkers.

2.3 All experiences have met their needs.

"I worked at (previous job) with a job coach, who was mostly there to observe and answer any questions I had." (Employee 11)

Three employees reported having prior employment experiences through transitional programs and were satisfied with their experience, having integrated services or job coaches to meet their additional needs. One employee reported that they were provided task lists at their other job as accommodation to assist them in staying on task, which they have translated to her current workplace as well as her home environment. Employees that had previous experience reported having a greater confidence level with their skills, especially those that were employed in a similar business setting prior to their current one.

Theme 3: Fears or Concerns

3.1 Personal Skill Level

"I was nervous because it was a new place, and I was nervous about learning how to make pizzas." (Employee 2)

As employees with previous experience reported a greater confidence level with their skills, individuals with little to no employment experience reported greater fears or worries prior to beginning their current role. One employee reported having worries for other people, knowing that their place of work is a special environment. They described how they were initially worried that customers would not be understanding of the different ability levels that work there, such as one occasion on which a customer assumed that a nonverbal employee that works there was ignoring them and became frustrated. Seven employees reported having worries or fears when they began their job either related to not knowing what to expect due to it being their first job or related to their own ability level or needs that they have in relation to their work. Worries reported in relation to employee's ability level included learning new skills, meeting new coworkers, requiring a seeing-eye dog, having difficulty focusing, or being nervous about overthinking tasks.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Contextualization

Many general employers in the community have a lack of knowledge on disability and reasonable accommodations that can be made to counteract the challenges individuals might experience in the workplace (Olsen, 2024). Comparing the ways in which these employers implement accommodation and inclusive practices while also considering the employee's perspectives is immensely important to explore ways to foster inclusion in the workplace. These results showed that employers displayed similarities among their business models in aspects such as inclusive interviewing and group training techniques, physical and sensory accommodation, accommodations based on differing ability and intellectual levels, and accommodations based on various levels of social skills. The employers in this study were all very experienced in working with individuals with disabilities, so they were knowledgeable in how to accommodate them and support them in the workplace. They aimed to foster an environment in which individuals feel comfortable asking their employers and coworkers for assistance and identify when changes need to be made to accommodations for an employee.

Mutual engagement in the employment process is often more productive and beneficial for an employee requiring accommodations to achieve employment sustainability (Helena et al., 2023). Compared to other studies exploring employers' experiences managing employees with disabilities, businesses in this study collaborated with local businesses to advocate for individuals with disabilities. Hosting field trips for transitional programs and supporting galas and fundraisers for other local businesses are common ways in which they can do so (Lindsay et al., 2019). Other similarities were that human assistance is commonly provided to employees as a form of an accommodation, which can include managers themselves, coworkers, or formal job

coaches, which were less seen in the businesses included in this study (Sundar, 2017). Many of the accommodations addressed across these three businesses have been seen in previous studies in a variety of ways including changes to the physical environment, changes to a job or task requirement an employee is to perform, accommodations for sensory impairments and sensitivities, and technology or equipment (Blanck, 2020; Sundar, 2017).Different hiring techniques have also been known to be used as an accommodation, due to individuals with disabilities often being able to show their own personality or connect with employers more through a conversational interview rather than a strict set of questions that may confuse a candidate with intellectual disabilities (Morris et al., 2024).

Since this study focuses only on businesses in the food service industry, it differs from other studies on workplace accommodation by not discussing aspects such as allowing employees to work from home or have ergonomic keyboards/computer captioning systems, due to the nature of the food industry and in-person job demands (Sundar, 2017). The food industry also differs in a common accommodation that is provided with service dogs, being that it can be against health safety codes to have service animals in or around a kitchen area (Lindsay et al., 2019). However, one of the employers reported how they navigated this by allowing an employee to keep their service dog in a crate in the backroom of the restaurant when the employee comes in.

Other differences seen in this study compared to other research were that the employers did not emphasize the process of individuals requesting accommodation as much as getting to know the individual and accommodate them accordingly. This may be due to the businesses in this study being smaller or since food industry businesses tend to be smaller companies, not necessarily requiring individuals to go through a formal accommodation request process. Other

studies have shown that employees are not always aware of how to formally request accommodations, but the participants in this study had a more casual approach to asking for additional assistance or job modifications (Shengli et al., 2022). Additionally, the companies included in this study did not outsource any companies to assist individuals (i.e. job coaches, vocational rehabilitation workers), and most of the employers implemented accommodation early on in their employment, adjusting them as needed, which differs from some previous research that discusses typical accommodation processes.

Other studies included a large emphasis on inclusive training, which the results of this study slightly differed from (Bonaccio et al., 2020). For the businesses interviewed in this study, inclusion training was not as majorly stressed due to the missions of the businesses already being centered around inclusion and fitting the workplace to meet the needs of the individuals. The population of individuals in these businesses is already a majority of those who have a disability, so the employers ensure that inclusivity is their priority with the actions that they take, not necessarily leaning into the employee education aspect of inclusion.

6.2 New Insights

Previous studies have not looked at employees' perspectives on their accommodation and previous experiences with accommodation, specifically within the realm of food service. Therefore, this study was impactful to further understand how the individuals perceive their support system to be and how they would advocate for themselves in a new employment setting. When employees were asked what general information about themselves, they would share with a new employer, many discussed their strengths and work ethic rather than how they would disclose their disability and the accommodation they might need. This identifies a greater need for employers to be knowledgeable in how they can accommodate individuals accordingly, even

when employees may not voluntarily disclose their disability themselves. This study also revealed new information by portraying new and unique accommodations these businesses provided and suggesting strategies that apply directly to other businesses in the food service industry.

6.3 Limitations

Another limitation might be that the employers and businesses involved in the study all center their businesses around accommodating others and providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Therefore, the employers were more experienced with disabilities and knowledgeable in the ways in which to accommodate them appropriately. While this may be more difficult to generalize to other businesses that are more integrated with individuals without disabilities, it was helpful for creating an educational resource on the most inclusive and optimal strategies that experts would recommend.

The time frame of this project being 14 weeks impacted on the investigator's ability to visit a greater number of sites. Therefore, the number of sites participating in the study is a limitation, however, this was due to the investigators choosing to devote more time observing, interviewing employees, and interviewing employers at three locations rather than dispersing to a greater number of businesses. Only using three businesses gave a smaller outlook on how employers who center their businesses around employment opportunities for individuals provide support in unique ways. With greater emphasis on these three businesses, a limitation would be that there are more ideas currently in use among similar business models, with different employers modeling the ways that work best for them and their employees to operate daily. While this research was beneficial for seeking how employers who are experienced with disability accommodate their employees, it might have little generalizability to the world of more

integrated workplaces. The same accommodation would apply and be useful, but differences might be seen in workplaces in which there are more individuals without a disability and those who benefit from accommodation are seen as a minority.

Another reason for this limitation is that businesses that aim to provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities are isolated geographically and relatively rare across the industry. Therefore, due to the 14-week time constraint of this project and the researcher observing and interviewing the employers and employees in person, this limited the researcher's ability to travel and visit more sites outside of the perimeter of Atlanta.

6.3 Clinical Relevance

The clinical relevance of this study is that these perceptions obtained from the interviews and information included in the educational resource can be used for other employers to reference when looking for ways to additionally create an inclusive work environment and accommodate individuals with specific needs. The employers in this study promoted group training protocols, accommodative interview processes, buddy systems, sensory adaptations, and adaptations such as broken-down tasks to enable more individuals to have productive roles.

6.4 Future Directions

Future directions for this study could be interviewing employers from more integrated businesses, with a greater diversity among employees with and without a disability. This would be helpful to build a more inclusive educational resource on ways in which employees without disabilities can be accommodating and supportive, while being accepting of the necessary support that their coworkers receive. Another future direction would be to promote more educational sessions with employers in the community, which could be optional or included in DEI training, which could involve more interactive components for employers to be able to

provide more solutions on how they might adapt work tasks in their business for individuals with disabilities.

Chapter 7: Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice and Education

Practice

Occupational therapists look at how individuals can function optimally within their environment or participate in occupations in new and adaptive ways. Occupational therapists are trained in workplace ergonomics and contribute recommendations and knowledge on how to adapt an environment to support engagement in an occupation (Young et al., 2019). Therefore, occupational therapists are appropriate to play a role as mediators in the process of developing recommendations for individuals with disabilities, to advocate for workplace inclusion and aid individuals in their ability to perform occupations, despite external factors. Occupational therapists can educate younger patients prior to entering the workforce on ways in which they can perform common workplace tasks, despite their disability, or use these educational resources as a basis to form assessments around determining which workplace accommodation might be appropriate for an individual.

They can also collaborate with employers to seek these resources and be more open-minded in their hiring practices, pursuing alternative options for accommodation to enable employees with disabilities to succeed. The outputs of this project have the potential to improve inclusive practices in the workplace, enabling employers to learn from the ways in which employees with disabilities can be supported in the workplace.

Education

Pertaining to implications for occupational therapists' education, this can show that promoting employee advocacy towards requesting accommodations for themselves in the workplace can be a critical area to address. Due to few employees mentioning how they would explain their disability to a new employer, it can be stressed how important educating patients on

self-advocacy can be. This project also informs occupational therapists how the employers in this study demonstrated their readiness and capacity to support individuals with disabilities in the workplace. This can aid OTs in further preparing individuals to become the most independent in an employment setting, while considering the realistic amount of support that employers might be able to provide in that workspace.

Chapter 8: Sustainability Plan

Sustainability of the educational information embedded in this project is important to contribute to the inclusive nature of food service businesses with the goal of increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Thus far, efforts made to sustain the outcomes of this project include sharing the finished educational resources with all three employers at the participating sites involved in this project. This allowed the businesses to learn new accommodations the other participating sites have adopted and inspire advocacy and sharing of the resources with local businesses they collaborate with. There are several ways in which this can be done with the contributions of stakeholders to facilitate progression within the employment of individuals with disabilities.

Outcomes to Sustain

1. The educational resources included in this project are important to continue promoting to motivate more employers to learn ways in which they can promote inclusion in their workplace and expand the population to which they hire. For promotion purposes, if any others would be interested in using this resource or gaining access to this resource for their business, they are able to contact the student investigator for further information at erintilleryg@gmail.com.
2. Collaboration of employers with expertise in managing individuals with disabilities with other employers in the community that might benefit from continued education on supporting individuals with disabilities in the workplace.
3. Integration of more inclusive resources on disability and accommodations into existing onboarding and training for general food service businesses.

Stakeholders & Roles

Advertising this resource and interview discussions can motivate other businesses with similar mission statements to create resources on the ways in which they support their employees, promoting a more widespread output of knowledge as to how employers can be accommodating in unique ways in different businesses. Their role would be to continually advocate for increased employment opportunities for their employees and other individuals with similar ability levels. This can be promoted by sharing stories of their employees on social media and adaptations of different work tasks to show how different individuals fit into a productive role in the workplace.

Job coaches and vocational rehabilitation workers can facilitate the education of employers by implementing these resources when they train employers in proper ways to support individuals with disabilities. They have a clear role in translating the ways in which accommodation should be made to optimally support an individual. They can also work with employees to improve their own abilities to advocate for their own needs and the forms of support they would perform their best within the workplace. This would promote their independence when entering a new role or practice effective communication with their managers to uphold their personal needs.

Goals for Stakeholders and Leaders Continuing this Research

1. Establish a way in which each site involved in this study can advertise this resource to either a supported employment agency or local business to promote further employment opportunities for their employees and advocate for disability inclusion. Encourage the sites or supported employment agencies to participate in career fairs to collaborate with local businesses on inclusion strategies.

2. Identify a way in which this educational resource or similar workplace accommodation can be incorporated into employer DEI training to encourage innovative solutions to finding a productive role for any individual in the workplace. Consider less job screening that might exclude individuals with disabilities and practice conversational interviewing techniques.
3. Identify at least three local food service businesses to provide an educational presentation to on the perspectives of employees on their own use of workplace accommodations. Evaluate their perspectives on how they aim to address inclusion in their business, whether they have concerns regarding accommodations, and how they can incorporate additional forms of support within their own businesses.

Long-term Impact

Sustainability of these resources matters to increase the amount of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and inspire employers to produce unique ways to foster an inclusive environment in their workplaces. The results of this paper and the educational resource created are a learning opportunity for employers to see how individuals with disabilities perceive their opportunities and understand how affordable and rewarding it can create a supportive work environment.

This resource can continually be updated by supported employment agencies or transitional programs to provide to employers that individuals are commonly hired from after using their resources. Due to this resource only discussing three businesses that provide employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities, other businesses in that realm may continue this project by creating their own unique resource or adding onto the content produced through this study.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

This study aimed to provide an in-depth analysis on the workplace accommodations provided by employers among three food service businesses and evaluate the perceptions of employees within those businesses. The findings of this study highlighted similar themes across the three businesses that are considered expert opinions on accommodating individuals with disabilities, being that the three business owners have a wide range of experience employing different populations. The themes for accommodations commonly seen across the three businesses fell under the categories of hiring, training, & scheduling, professional development, ability level, physical environment, social environment, and sensory accommodations. The themes seen among the employee interviews across the three businesses included perception of accommodations received, previous employment, and fears or concerns.

Employer interviews addressed many similar aspects in which they provided accommodation; however, a similar difficulty that was addressed among the three businesses was transportation. This was the most reported area that is difficult to provide accommodation in, being that it is most of the time out of the employers' hands. Other similarities were how employers implemented unique hiring and training methods, adapted tasks, or provided lists as reminders for individuals, and fostered an environment in which their employees felt comfortable asking for help.

Employee interviews addressed similar fears or concerns that they had regarding the initial start of their employment. They discussed how they had initially attempted certain tasks that needed to be adapted for them, how they utilize support within the workplace to perform their job, and how they initially had fears or concerns over starting either due to it being their first job or previous work accommodation not meeting their needs. It was also noted among the

employee interviews that initially, many individuals did not seem to advocate their needs to an employer in terms of job accommodation, however, they expressed being able to ask for help if necessary.

Overall, this study was beneficial to combine resource development with direct feedback from employees and employers. Future emphasis might be placed on more integrated workplaces to develop a more elaborate educational tool or expand to different service industry sectors to continue to support the employment of individuals with disabilities across more fields.

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Appendix 1 - Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives	Short-term Objectives	Learning Activities
1. The student will gather information on workplace accommodations for disability and relate it to occupation-based interventions.	1a. The student will obtain information on the different types of accommodations for disability within three different food service companies who employ individuals with disabilities.	1a. The student will interview employers or managers at each establishment to gain a more specific understanding of the accommodation provided (why someone may need certain adaptations) and develop categories based on which area of the workplace it correlates (e.g., cashier, food preparation, cook, server).
		1b. The student will undergo a mock onboarding at three food service businesses who employ individuals with disabilities to better understand the resources and support provided by the employers.
	1b. The student will research how identified accommodation might support an individual's deficits across workplace occupations and how occupational therapy has been used within an employment setting.	1b. The student will reference research articles and AOTA resources for additional scholarly background information on supported employment and workplace accommodation.
		2b. The student will complete the AJOT Continuing Education: Environmental Modifications and Supports for Participation Among Adults Aging with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Scoping Review.
		3b. The student will reference podcasts and books to explore more about current occupational therapy techniques used in a workplace setting.
2. The student will identify strengths and potential weaknesses of existing workplace support for employees with disabilities.	2a. The student will identify the perceptions of three employers at food service businesses that employ individuals with disabilities on the support they provide their employees.	2a. The student will conduct open-ended interviews with employers on whether there are barriers to providing certain accommodation for their employees that they see a need for.
	2b. The student will identify the perceptions of employees at food service businesses that employ individuals with disabilities on the support that they are provided and	2b. The student will interview employees on whether they feel that the support that they receive in the workplace is sufficient, whether they feel their performance has changed due to accommodation, and if they feel there

	whether they feel that it enables them to work efficiently.	are ways in which their workplace performance could be better supported. Include whether they had prior employment support and how this contributed to their training or ability to sustain competitive employment.
3. The student will create an educational resource on adaptations provided within the work environment in the food service industry to provide to other employers that do not specifically target hiring individuals with disabilities.	3a. The student will conduct a qualitative analysis of the interviews to draw common themes and provide more summarized information among the three visited sites.	3a. The student will compare the accommodations across the three companies and draw conclusions on the solutions each employer utilized to support different employee deficits.
		3b. Compare and contrast the perceptions of employees versus employers on how the existing support within each business caters to their needs and modify the ways in which they can complete each task. Conclude whether the employees perceive themselves to be adequately supported in the workplace or where employers may be able to further accommodate them.
	3b. Display how the modifications found within the study provide a better work environment and ease identified barriers. Associate common job duties with how accommodation may be provided in that area if an individual is experiencing difficulties.	3b. Provide photos and descriptions within a presentation to further show how physical or nonphysical adaptations have been provided within a workplace.
	3c. Obtain an expert opinion on the developed educational handbook to ensure its accuracy and standard of quality to be provided to other employers.	3c. Identify an additional expert in the community who has worked with adults with disabilities either in a workplace setting or in a job training setting to improve preparatory skills. Edit educational resources according to their feedback and suggestions.

Appendix 2 - Supervision Plan

Doctoral Capstone Experience Roles and Responsibilities	
Student will demonstrate at minimum:	Site mentor will demonstrate at minimum:
1. Perform tasks in a safe and ethical manner and adhere to the site's policies, including those that relate to employees and customers. 2. Apply knowledge from research, the classroom, and prior fieldwork experiences along with guidance from site mentors. 3. Demonstrate appropriate and timely communication with the site. 4. Adhere to requirements for attendance and required capstone hours. 5. Demonstrate positive and respectful interactions and interpersonal skills with site mentors, employees, and other individuals who may participate in this capstone project. 6. Complete the Midterm Doctoral Capstone Experience Evaluation form and send it to site mentors during week seven. 7. Complete the Final Doctoral Capstone Experience Evaluation form and send it to site mentors during week fourteen.	1. Model and reinforce professional behaviors. 2. Adhere to the site mentor guidelines for this capstone project. 3. Review and sign the GSU Doctoral Capstone Time Log and Objective Monitoring Form each week. 4. Review and sign the Midterm Doctoral Capstone Experience Evaluation form during week seven. 5. Review and sign the Final Doctoral Capstone Experience form during week fourteen. 6. Meet with the student on a consistent basis either in person or virtually to review progress and provide guidance.

Supervision Items	**Site Mentor:** Jeni Smith, Tempa Kohler, Michael Kohler	**Research Faculty Mentor:** Yi-An Chen
Scheduled meetings	Bi-weekly meetings will be performed in person or virtually with the site mentor and student. The bi-weekly meeting will vary each week depending on the site mentor's availability.	Weekly meetings will be performed virtually with the site mentor and student. The weekly meeting will be set for the same day and time, which is to be discussed prior to the first week of fieldwork.
Communication methods	The student and site mentor will communicate via email, calls, virtual meetings, and/or in-person meetings.	The student and site mentor will communicate through email and virtual meetings.

Specific Requirements of the project	The student will keep a journal of activities completed to track progress made each week towards goals and learning objectives. The student will document this on the GSU Doctoral Capstone Time Log form, which is to be signed by the site mentor each week.	
Timeline of Deliverables	See Progress Plan	
Types of expertise desired from mentors	As I will be alternating between my sites for the duration of the project to interview employers and employees, I will need routine supervision between the two site mentors. I chose these mentors for their experience working with individuals with disabilities and expertise in providing workplace accommodation as they see fit in the food service industry.	I expect to need routine supervision from my faculty mentor, as neither of my site mentors are certified occupational therapists. Therefore, I will need her supervision and routine feedback over our weekly meetings. Her expertise in research will be supportive and important as I structure my educational component to the project and cater the project towards the field of OT.

Appendix 3 - Summary Pages

Problem:

Individuals with disabilities face significant challenges in a competitive employment environment and are often employed in sheltered work or segregated areas due to limited work accommodation (Park & Park, 2019). Their employment opportunities are commonly restricted due to limited social and communication skills, mobility limitations, sensory deficits, and intellectual disabilities, as well as employers' misperceptions that they are unqualified or unproductive compared to average staff members, (Baker et al., 2018). Previous research has identified the need for employers of individuals with disabilities to provide adequate support for onboarding, additional job accommodation, career development, socialization, and disability awareness education to other employees (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023). Employers would benefit from additional resources to effectively train employees with disabilities and improve their job retention. Practical implications for implementing accommodations in the workplace are needed to further educate employers on how they can best provide support to these individuals.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an educational resource in the form of a booklet for employers to support workplace success and productivity when employing individuals with disabilities.

Specific Aims

1. Conduct interviews with employers who hire individuals with disabilities to understand how they implement workplace accommodation. In this project, we will be working with employers from three food services companies, as businesses in this industry commonly hire individuals with disabilities. Additionally, an increasing number of companies in this field have

recently developed inclusivity initiatives focused on individuals with disabilities. We will conduct in-person interviews and on-site observations with employers from each company to determine what adaptations assist individuals in completing their work responsibilities and support their physical, emotional, or social deficits.

2. Conduct interviews with employees with disabilities to understand their experiences on the accommodation and support services provided by their employer and any previous employers or programs. We will interview recruited employees about the adaptations or workplace accommodation they currently receive or have previously received and have them provide feedback on how they feel as if their needs are being met.

3. Create an educational booklet on workplace accommodation that can benefit individuals with varying functional ability levels. After gathering results from interviews with the employees and employers, we will categorize several types of work accommodation, provide examples of how they are implemented in different businesses interviewed, and explain how each one can support individuals with unique needs, helping them succeed in their job environment.

4. Ensure the practicality and value of the developed educational booklet. We will share the booklet with a job transition service that trains individuals with disabilities for various professions. We will conduct interviews with representatives from this service site to gather feedback on the booklet's effectiveness and make any necessary content modifications.

Output

An educational booklet on the workplace accommodations and how they assist individuals with disabilities will be the output of this project. This educational resource will be expertly reviewed

and organized to provide examples of workplace adaptations, benefiting employers in supporting individuals with disabilities.

Outcomes

Increasing support resources for employers who hire individuals with disabilities could create more potential job opportunities. These resources would reduce hesitancy in the hiring process by providing more knowledge on how to support employees with disabilities and advocating for their needs, including insights into whether employees feel their needs are being met.

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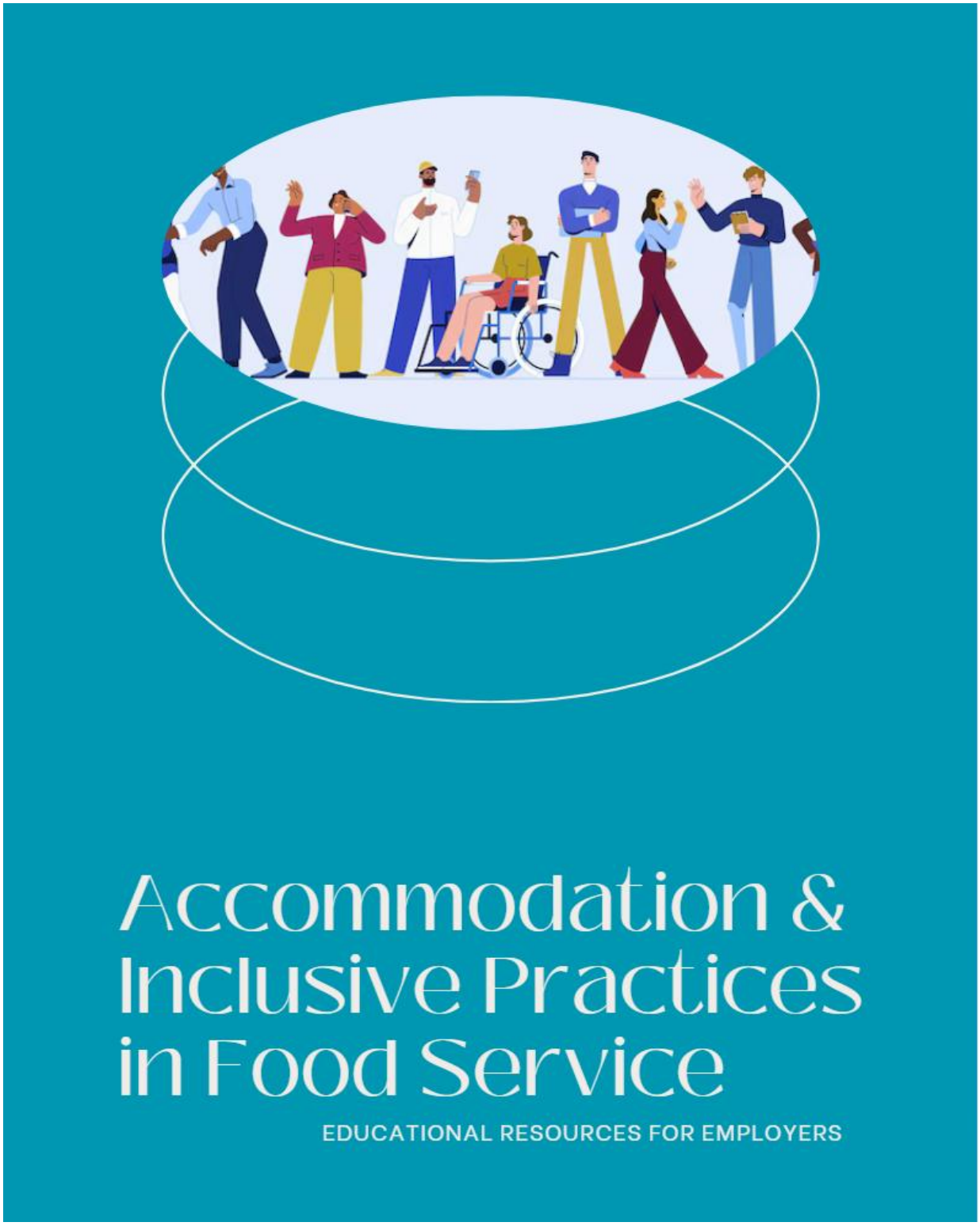
Appendix 4 - Educational Resources



Hiring, Training, & Scheduling

Interviews

COMMUNICATE WITH THE PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEE PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW TO INQUIRE ABOUT ANY NECESSARY ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW PROCESS.

This creates more of a welcoming environment because it acknowledges that, as an employer, you are informed on disability rights and open to accommodation. This proactivity helps the employee feel more reassured that they will be able to obtain the support they need from an employer.

BE OPEN TO OFFERING TO SHARE THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH AN INDIVIDUAL BEFOREHAND.

Some individuals who identify as neurodiverse report that they are uncomfortable with unanticipated questions, so it is often beneficial that they are given an opportunity to review the questions in advance to be better prepared to answer them.

CONSIDER MORE OF A CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH AT THE BEGINNING OF AN INTERVIEW IF YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT AN INDIVIDUALS' ABILITIES AND STRENGTHS.

All three employers interviewed reported that their employees have varying functional ability levels, but they agreed that standardized questions for each employee would not have been the best method to determine individuals' strengths. Varying the interview techniques used can create more of a free flowing conversation and avoid an anxiety-inducing environment for the individual. Walking interviews have been shown by researchers to effectively combine a qualitative interview with spatial and sensory cues that enable the discussion to be prompted by spatial cues and stimuli in the environment. This enables the employee to feel as if they are in a less formal discussion and allow the conversation to flow more naturally towards the aspects of the environment that the individual may find interest in or relate to.

(Pionke, 2023); (Eric Pines, 2024, 7:10); (McFarland et al., 2024)

1

Accommodations Surrounding Ability Level

Poor Fine Motor Coordination

CONSIDER CASHLESS OPTIONS OR OPT FOR A SYSTEM THAT ASSISTS WITH CURRENCY COUNTING.

For individuals with poor fine motor coordination, or the ability to perform delicate hand movements, manipulating money and coins to give a customer can be challenging. Individuals with intellectual disabilities can also find it difficult to compute the math to make change for a customer. This promotes the idea of a cashless system or cash alternative system as a more practical solution. Providing the option to round up purchases to the nearest whole dollar is also an option to accommodate for making change, which can be for tip opportunities or donations towards other organizations or nonprofits a company might be partnered with.

Figure 1. This business has transitioned to a cashless system to reduce difficulties with change manipulation for employees with poor fine motor coordination or difficulty computing change.

Figure 2. This business has developed a software that provides photos of each bill and coin and calculates the accurate amount of change for a purchase by showing the correct bills and coins to give a customer.

("Dexterity and fine motor skills: What causes dexterity issues?") 1

Accommodations Surrounding Sensory Needs

Sensory Sensitivities

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can often present with sensory sensitivities, which, according to the DSM-5, can mean individuals can have hypo- or hyperreactivity to different sensations in the immediate environment and fixate on aspects such as loud noises, smells, and textures. Hypersensitivity can be linked to psychological side effects like anxiety and stress as well as physiological side effects like headaches and nausea. There are several ways in which you can address this hypersensitivity depending on the ways in which it is presented.

CONSIDER ALLOWING FORMS OF NOISE CANCELLATION.

Auditory stimulation can be an unpredictable factor with loud music, unpredictable noises, or customers and employees yelling. The use of noise cancelling headphones, earplugs, or a breakroom or office to provide a space for regulation if someone is feeling overwhelmed or anxious are ways that an individual can be accommodated for this. Noise cancelling headphones may be a safety concern if an individual cannot hear in an emergency situation or if a coworker is trying to get their attention. If this is foreseen to be an issue, it might be best that an individual take breaks whenever they become overwhelmed with environmental noises or stimuli.

Figure 1. This business uses "socks" on their table and chair legs to soften the amount of environmental noise when their customers scoot their chairs in and out since this is a noise that some individuals would be hypersensitive to.

(Weber et al., 2024)

1

Physical Environment Accommodations

Workspace Adaptations

INCLUDE PHOTOS FOR MENU ITEMS ON THE POS SYSTEM.

In a study reviewed by Khalifa et al. (2020), problematic behaviors among individuals with ASD employed at a coffee shop were found to be reduced after factors such as visual schedules, picture cues, and reduced noise in the environment were implemented. For individuals with intellectual disabilities, it may be a helpful accommodation to implement photos to aid in their ability to make decisions and select the proper items for a customer's order. Especially under pressure taking customer orders in a rush, this will enable employees to make decisions more easily and become less confused with a wide array of options.

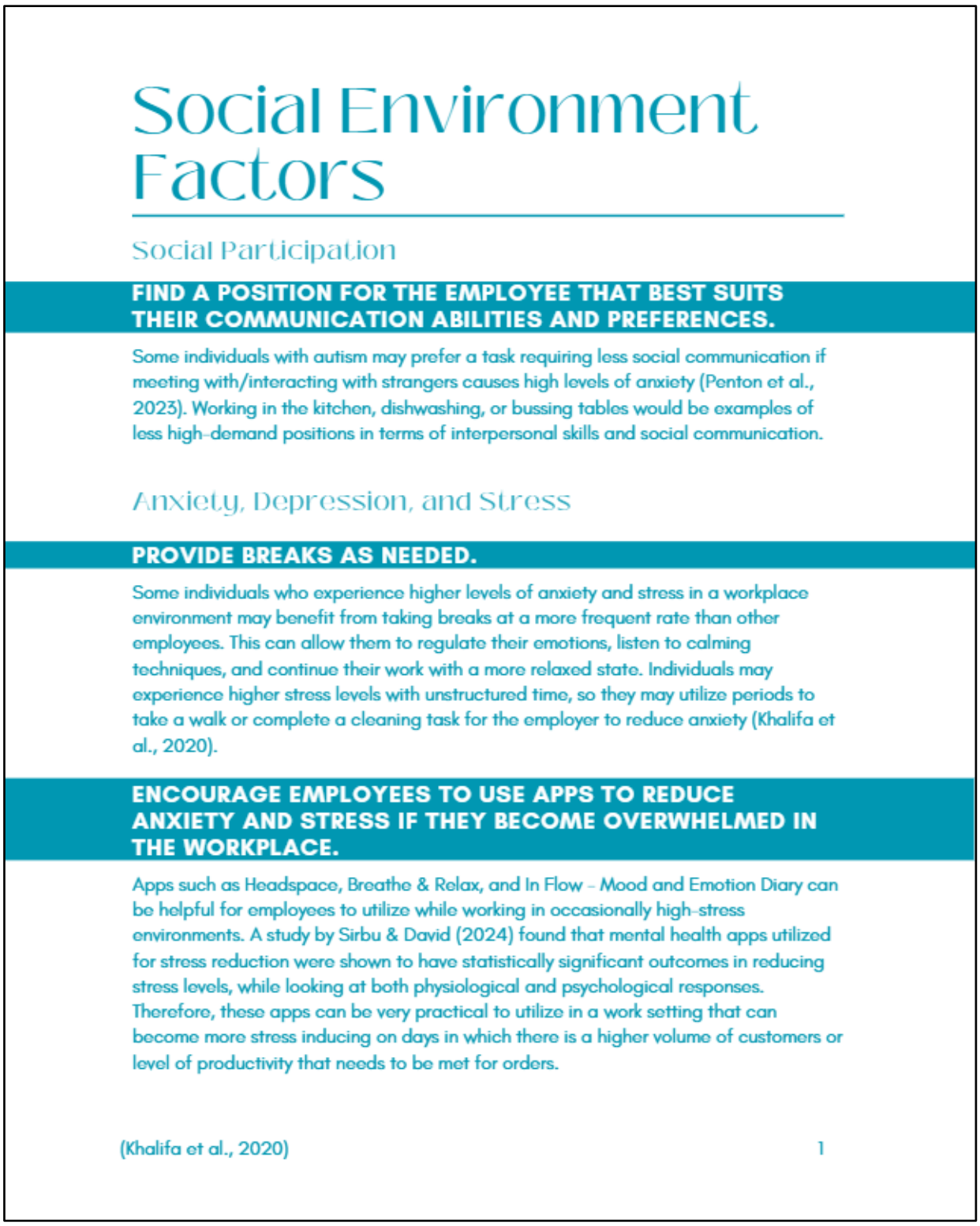
Figure 1.

LABEL INGREDIENTS AND PROVIDE VISUAL INSTRUCTION TO AVOID CONFUSION.

Labeling ingredients by their respective areas can minimize decision making when an individual is putting together food items in the kitchen. This business in Figure 3 has labeled their salad bar with the product names along with their best by dates to make it more clear when they need to be changed out. The recipe lists in Figure 2 are helpful reminders for employees to know which ingredients go in each salad and in yellow for individuals who have visual impairments to more easily see them.

Figure 2.

Figure 3.



The above are previews of the educational resources and each section it entails. If you are interested in accessing the full resource, contact Erin Tillery at erintilleryg@gmail.com.

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Appendix 5 – Employer Interview Questions

Accommodation

1. Describe ways in which you have changed a work task or the demands in which it requires due to an employee's ability level.

2. Describe physical accommodation and/or work tasks that you might have provided for the following deficits:

Visual deficits

Social interaction difficulties

Sensory sensitivities

Difficulty with learning new skills

Executive functioning challenges

Mobility limitations

3. Describe how you may have needed to modify the duration of shifts in an effort to accommodate employees with a disability.

4. Describe challenges that you have encountered with employees obtaining transportation to their shifts and any solutions that you might have implemented in an effort to support this.

5. Describe how comfortable your employees are within a work environment and whether they typically express that a task is challenging or frustrating.

6. Describe how the initial training of employees with a disability might look different than that of a person without a disability.

7. Describe how you may have previously collaborated with other employers with similar mission statements and whether you were influenced by any new ideas.

Culture

8. Describe how the workplace culture looks within your business and whether employees typically ask others for help.

9. Describe any buddy system you might utilize and how this can influence the integration of employees into the workplace.

Advocacy

10. How do you feel that the food service industry might differ in the ways in which employment positions can promote these individuals' strengths (social interaction with customers, repetitive tasks, etc.)?

11. How do you feel that the food service industry might differ in the ways in which employment positions can bring out these individuals' weaknesses (sensory overstimulation, learning challenges, etc.)?

12. Describe your perception of how your employees feel towards obtaining other job opportunities.

13. What advice would you have for an employer that does not have experience with individuals with disabilities?

General Employer Q&A

14. What has worked well within your business model?

15. What goals do you currently have regarding how you would further support your employees, and are there any barriers preventing you from achieving these goals?

Appendix 6 – Employee Interview Questions

1. Do you have previous work experience?

2. What is your current role/job title?

3. What made you want to join this company?

4. Was there any information about yourself that you felt was important to share with your employer when you began to work here?

5. Did you have any worries or fears when you began to work here? Why or why not?

6. Have you applied to work for other companies? How was that experience?

7. Describe the tasks you have at work and whether anything helps to make your tasks easier.

8. Why did you or your employer decide that this role was best fit for you?

9. Were you assigned any other roles within the workplace before deciding that they were not the best option?

Training

10. How would you describe your training experience for this position? Do you feel that it met your needs, or would you have liked more support in the initial training for this job?

11. Did you have job training before working here? This can be through any program, or a training received through your school.

Accommodation

12. Do you feel comfortable asking your employer for help if a task is too difficult or overwhelming to learn?

13. Do you feel comfortable asking your coworkers for help if a task is too difficult?

14. Have you ever gotten overwhelmed during a day at work? If so, what did you do to calm yourself or what are some things that you could have done?

15. How many hours do you work each week? Why does this schedule work best for you?

16. What is your favorite and least favorite part about your role?

Culture

17. Describe how the workplace looks at your workplace and whether employees typically ask each other for help.

18. Are you part of a buddy system at work? Describe this and how it has impacted your ability to complete work tasks.

Advocacy

19. Do you plan to obtain another job within the food service industry? If so, which one?

20. Is there anything that you feel would be difficult about getting a new job? Why or why not?

21. What would you tell a future employer that does not have any experience working with individuals with disabilities?

General Employee Q&A

22. What is something that you are proud of that you have accomplished while working here?

23. If any, what are some goals you currently have regarding the workplace and how you might be able to improve?

24. Is there anything else you feel that I should know?