

Gis' a Job

(you don't have to take us home)

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Introduction

This presentation will explore some of the issues and values around work and impairment. It will focus on both the supply of work and the demand for work. The paper looks at both structural issues around the supply of work and psycho-social issues around the demand for work.

In particular, the presentation will suggest that disabled people should demand more support from government to help them gain access to the full range of work that non-disabled people have access to.

It will be suggested that if disabled people are to achieve social justice in the UK, we have a right to demand a much more significant contribution from government to help us access those employment opportunities that other people take for granted. Equally, perhaps controversially, it will be suggested, that disabled people also have responsibilities to examine their own attitudes to work; albeit with considerable more resources both structural and personal to draw on than has been the case to date.

Big Conversation

Let me begin with some background.

Last winter, the Labour Party ran a consultation exercise. It was promoted as The Big Conversation (<http://www.bigconversation.org.uk/>). One of the questions being asked as part of this exercise was one that is central to the movement's aims and it was this;

“Should we extend better help to get into work, training and rehabilitation for sick and disabled people in exchange for increasing responsibilities to find an appropriate job?”

The background information for this question was set out on the website – which I quote:

‘One of the most contemptible aspects of the Conservatives’ record was the attempt to disguise their employment failure by consigning an ever-growing army of people to incapacity benefits (IB). The numbers on IB, now stable, trebled between 1979 and 1997. Many on IB are not able to work and here the government’s task is to ensure a decent standard of living, good quality services and community engagement.

But one million of the 2.7 million now claiming Incapacity Benefit say they do want to work. And changes in the labour market including the use of new technologies and the rise in

service jobs should enable us to help the many who want to work fulfil their ambition.

We are already providing this extra support through the New Deal for Disabled People and through the Pathways to Work pilots that try out new ways of combining help with jobs, skills, financial incentives and rehabilitation for those on Incapacity Benefit.

We have also introduced a single work-focused interview and a follow-up every three years for those claiming Incapacity Benefit. New civil rights for disabled people and the Disability Rights Commission act to combat discrimination. We are leading the world in this area, but we need to be more ambitious still.

Barriers to work are considerable. Once someone is on Incapacity Benefit for one year they only have a one in five chance of returning to work within five years. Around 40% of people on Incapacity Benefit have no qualifications. So we need to address employer discrimination, skill levels, rehabilitation services, co-ordination between GPs and Job Centre Plus and financial incentives’.

(This question was an item that formed part of question 03

“How do we do more to tackle poverty and inequality?”)

Part of my work with unemployed disabled people is helping them make the best of what feeble help is out there in their search for a return to work. And, the question asked by the Labour Party as part of the Big Conversation is one that I have been churning over in my mind for several years now.

Rights and Responsibilities

The phrase 'rights and responsibilities' occurs to me when I do this. The 'right' to help to obtain work, including perhaps a personalised job brokering service for some. And, 'responsibility' to do all that one can to get work - including perhaps retraining and working at a lower paid job than may have been the case in the past.

And, in many ways this could be seen as a key purpose of society, to empower its people. If I may quote Justin Dart, an American disability activist;

“The purpose, the absolute responsibility of society is to empower all of its members actually to produce and to live the good life”. (Justin Dart).

The architects of the social model of disability thought working was important also:

“All the other situations from which physically impaired people are excluded are linked, in the final analysis, with the basic exclusion from employment”

(UPIAS 1976: 15-16)

Professor Mike Oliver has expressed similar views:

“Work is crucial....when we are excluded from work we are excluded from a whole range of personal and social relationships and this is important for the development of our sense of self”.

(From “The Sociological Imagination” a teaching video drawing on C. Wright Mills book of the same name. 1996)

But that phrase; “Rights and responsibilities” – it’s the kind of phrase that might worry some in this room.

Abilities and Needs

It’s the kind of phrase that some people in this room may imagine is a mask for suspect intent. Often, it might be argued, by those coming from the right.

However, in this employment context, it might equally be argued that Marx said something similar – and many of you will be familiar with this phrase of his,

“From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs”.

(K.Marx: Critique of the Gotha Programme)

I will say that again for anyone unfamiliar with it – “From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs”.

Marx may well have focussed on money as means, but it seems reasonable to argue that means could be assets or resources or abilities or potential.

It could be argued that these two phrases – that is, “Rights and Responsibilities” and “Needs and Abilities”, could be used interchangeably in different contexts. For example, ‘my need for support to help me get work, and, my responsibility to contribute what I can according to my abilities’.

Citizenship

But, you know, working, and being helped to do so, is not about right wing ideology or left wing ideology. It is more about **citizenship**. It is more about valuing each other. It is more about community and working together or even solidarity.

The sociologist T. H. Marshall (Citizenship and Social Class 1950) had a lot to say about citizenship. He argued that it was a process.

- That process began with civil citizenship, which embraced freedom of speech, faith and thought, the right to own property and access to the courts.
- The process moved then political citizenship, which included the right to be elected and exercise political power.
- The **final aspect was social citizenship**. This aspect included access to education, social services and, **paid work**. For good measure, he also argued that these rights included **obligations and responsibilities**.

One million unemployed disabled people

I would like now to elaborate on some contextual issues. Let me first remind people that there are about one million disabled people, identified by the labour force survey, who are unemployed who could work and would like to work. (Labour Force Survey 2000).

In passing, let me briefly refer to a recent but small-scale study by a two physiotherapists working at Leicester General Hospital. They compared work outcomes for a group of patients experiencing chronic low back pain. The comparison was between a group in receipt of Incapacity Benefit with a similar group in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance. Their study revealed no difference in their capacity or actual return to work. The study suggests that for some recipients the label incapable is wholly inappropriate and currently, moving people onto IB, excludes them from just the services that could bring about a return to employment. This study suggests that just leaving IB claimants to fend for themselves is just not a defensible option.

Returning to the larger picture. At a recent meeting with senior managers from the Department of Work and Pensions, they cast doubt over the validity of the 1 million figure, suggesting that a fair proportion of respondents were providing a socially desirable response. This suggests that the number of disabled people wishing to work is less than that 1 million figure. (DWP personal communication 10th February 2004). The truth is we do not know, and in any event there are getting on for 3 million disabled people of working age who are not working – and who is to say who might work and who might not. Those outcomes are plainly not impairment dependent.

Discouraged workers

This group of unemployed disabled people are not identified as actively seeking work and might be described as Discouraged Workers. Many writers have referred to the concept of discouraged workers over the years and not just in the context of impairment. The Office for National Statistics defines the term for its purposes as:

“People who believed no jobs for them were available”.

In the disability context we might also say – that people believed there were no jobs available that they would be appointed to and not discriminated against.

For these reasons, they have largely given up applying for jobs. The main reason for this seems to be that many of them have had consistently negative experiences in the job search process over a sustained period. Yet, when asked “would they like to work”? Will still say that would like to.

You know, if we say people incapable by paying them an allowance called ‘incapacity benefit’, its small wonder that many people internalise that value. To my mind the concept of incapacity benefit is wrongheaded. A more appropriate term on this analysis is unemployment benefit or something similar. Incapable I am not.

Comfort Zone

On training courses we have run for long term unemployed disabled people, it has emerged that those negative experiences have often contributed significantly to restricting people's lives so much, that, in reality, their 'comfort zone' is now too small to embrace employment with all the risks that returning to work implies.

By risks, I mean issues such as:

- not being able to cope socially
- not having the right clothes
- believing they have forgotten how to do certain tasks
such as transferring telephone calls,
- that the technology has moved on (e.g. setting up voice
mail)
- that they can't use computers
- they won't be able to find the time
- of being worse off
- of not getting back onto particular benefits if things
don't work out.
- that neighbours, friends and family may think there was
nothing 'wrong' with them in the first place, and so on.

Let me say that these are not assumptions on my part but what hundreds of unemployed disabled people have told me and my colleagues.

Networks

Other researcher's talk of the "social capital" we develop from employment. This consists of formal and informal networks, group memberships, community, and civic engagement and levels of trust in others. Researcher's note how this is declining for all groups, but it seems especially so for disabled people. (Labour Force Survey 2000) Whatever the reason, disabled people still get fewer opportunities for a job or anything approaching a career.

Do not want to be who they are

A couple of years ago a well known BBC radio producer, Colin Hughes, presented a programme in the 'Hate' series for Radio 4 entitled "Why people hate disability" in which he concluded that people did not hate disability, they just wished it would all go away. It was clear that many disabled people had internalised this view of themselves – that they wish their disability would just go away. They did not want to be the person they were.

The length of time this feeling lasts differs but is well documented and let us not forget that the vast majority of people acquire their

impairments in adulthood. (Colin Hughes Radio 4 on 12th June 2001.
(See also the work by Kubler-Ross (1978) on the rejection of self)

Because our beliefs drive our behaviour, if people become someone they do not want to be, it is not surprising that the same people do not wish to place themselves in situations that draw attention to that and have these feelings repeatedly confirmed.

Broader influences

We should not ignore broader cultural influences in this context either. We can all point to the hundreds of media stories about stress at work and trend toward early retirement, and the affect that has on people's motivation to work – given the perceived barriers I have referred to.

Acquired impairments

Just to restate, about 85% of disabled people acquired their impairment in adulthood. Approximately 3 million of the 9.8 million disabled people in the UK have a significant impairment. (National Statistics – the so called 'severe disability') It is reasonable to argue therefore, that the number of unemployed disabled people vulnerable to this feeling of discomfort about who they are, could be very large indeed.

This psychological side of impairment appears more significant than some might imagine. And, few disability commentators are wholly dismissive of the potential value of embracing this individual perspective;

”It [the Social Model] does not automatically mean that individually based interventions are of no value and are always counterproductive” (Colin Barnes 2000)

Various institutions are asking for more support to be given to help disabled people remain in work and return to work. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) place a strong emphasis on working closely with disabled people. They argued that there must be effective personalised support to overcome the barriers that exist everywhere;

“Each disabled person should be entitled to an ‘individual participation package’. (“Transforming Disability into Ability” OECD 2003)

The TUC released a paper last December (Disabled People, Work and Poverty, 2003) in which they show that Britain spent less than one fifth of the EU average on support for disabled people returning to work.

Since coming to power this government, under the New Deal programmes, has spent 15 times as much on getting young people into work as it has on disabled people. An average of £1,570 for young people compared £100 for disabled people.

The TUC also show that Britain is some way behind the best in the world in terms of employment rates among disabled people and quotes the USA, Sweden, Canada, Norway and Switzerland as countries we could learn from.

In particular, the TUC argues that we should aim for employment rates of 60% instead of the 49% currently achieved in the UK. The European Union encourages member states to aspire to a figure of 70%.

In passing, the TUC argue that the government must advertise the Access To Work to employers. I think we would argue that it must be advertised to disabled people.

Benefits trap

Often, unemployed disabled people say to researchers that they do want to work, but it is not worth working because they will be no better off financially. This situation is often described as the 'benefits trap'.

Let us examine that statement for a moment. Speaking generally, comparatively few people remain at the same wage level throughout their lives and most get higher pay as a result. Therefore, the benefit trap has a more limited short term affect than first appears.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that working will involve financial costs for the worker, particularly important perhaps in the case of people who have not worked for some years, for example; clothes, shoes, haircut, perhaps new glasses, even starting to buy a daily newspaper again. (The government seems to acknowledge this with the introduction of the Job Preparation premium of £20 per week for 6 months.)

Equally, it could be that the benefit trap argument just might deployed sometimes to maintain individuals 'comfort zones'. This could have an element of post decision rationalisation.

Working at a lower level

The other argument sometimes put, is the idea that because, before the onset of an impairment, an individual worked and earned at a given level that following the impairment they are not prepared to such work at a lower level. As if having had one level of job somehow removes any responsibility to work at another level.

In this context, sometimes unemployed disabled people need help to move on from being a ‘soldier’ or a ‘welder’ so that they can refresh their assessment of themselves.

Valuing everyone

We should all blame ourselves at least partly for that view. For too long I have heard so many people dismiss the contribution of others in work – “their only a waiter” or “she only work’s in a shop” or “he’s only a road sweeper”. If society is going to be effective, economically and cohesive, we need all our people and we need to value their contribution.

Recap

Just to recap so far. I am arguing that there are abilities and needs. I have touched upon the argument that we have a responsibility to contribute what we can from our abilities.

Importantly, I have argued that we should not necessarily accept that a person is doing all they can to get a job because there are sometimes psychological factors which may obscure motives around work, even to themselves. (Lord Nicholls in identifying “subconscious motivation” in our behaviour in Nagarajan v London Regional Transport – House of Lords, 1999)

Needs

Let me move on to say a few words about needs.

CIPD study

When the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development asked 600 Human Resource managers what were the difficulties they experienced in increasing the numbers of disabled people in their organisations, they said there were three things that stood out.

The first was reasonable adjustments:

This proved to be the least of the problems. Delays and poor service were an issue but much less of an issue than many expected.

The two issues that caused real difficulties were:

1. The attitudes of co-workers to toward disabled colleagues
2. The lack of skills and experience of disabled applicants

I suggest, that the government can help with these two issues – both the attitudes and the lack of skills.

Firstly, the government could put more responsibility on employers to train and educate their staff in respect of impairment and equality.

This would not be so different from the proposed requirement on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity as set out in the Disability Discrimination Bill 2003.

Secondly, the government could provide a service that would broker and negotiate job placements so that disabled people could then be trained up, at the work place, to address this skill set shortfall.

In my view, this is the core component of the government led support. Such a process is permissible under the DDA and all parties can still agree that the placement and training will not lead to a confirmed job if the trainee fails the probationary period. Such a process also eliminates discriminatory questions about a person's impairment during the selection arrangements.

Many firms are reporting a shift in training expenditure toward this type of in-house training now. (<http://www.21stcenturyleader.co.uk/>)

Lastly, the issues that I raised about our comfort zones will need to be embraced by this job search support process as well. As a first step, the issue has to be understood better and then respected as an issue for the individual. In order to improve business efficiency and effectiveness the US, UK, and in numerous other countries, many large corporations have invested significant resource in training their managers who have felt comfortable in their historic roles to broaden their horizons, take greater responsibility and empower them to advance their careers. These motivational programmes based on cognitive behavioural psychology have been extremely effective to both the organisation and the individual.

Why should long term unemployed disabled people not benefit from the same opportunities? Should government not invest in adopting similar approaches to empower disabled people to embrace the rights and responsibilities that citizenship provides?

This would mean that such support programmes should employ many disabled people who can inform the programme in a way that non-disabled people will not be able to.

Expensive?

People listening to me at this point might well say but this sounds expensive – is it going to be worth it? Well, at the moment, we know the government spends more per head on getting non-disabled people back to work than it does on getting disabled people back to work. Yes it will be expensive, it could cost up to £5,000 per person. But, don't forget that this is less than the investment Treasury make every year in keeping each individual disabled person out of work by providing Incapacity Benefit.

Social Justice

Also, very importantly, writers such John Rawls (A Theory of Justice 1971) have been very influential in convincing policy makers that a straight forward cost benefit analysis will not deliver social justice in diverse, mature economies. To achieve social justice for disabled people will mean treating them differently and spending apparently

disproportionate amounts of money to achieve a greater measure of social inclusion.

Past discrimination

And, arguably, unemployed disabled people should be allocated additional resources to rejoin a labour market that in many cases excluded unfairly in the past and doubly so for those that also went through a disempowering educational experience.

Mindset

It would not be right to leave this argument there. One of the issues that any mechanism of support in helping disabled people get back into a job will have to address is what appears to be the prevailing national mindset about disabled people. The mindset that we cannot compete in the workplace. Let me say a few words about that.

Industrialisation

Interestingly, when work was industrialised and the age of mechanisation and production lines came in, it was an opportunity to set up the production system so that disabled people could operate within it. It was an opportunity that was largely missed and disabled people were excluded from work more comprehensively than ever before. The development of the mindset that disabled people are not really full members of society, began in earnest. (The Sociological Imagination 1958)

But, in fact during the war years 1941 to 1945 officials from labour exchanges around the country interviewed over 426,000 disabled men and women and appointed over 310,000 for work. (Humphreys and Gordon 1992) This demonstrates that when organisations want to employ disabled people they will find a way of doing so.

Scientific Management

But the process of industrialisation did not stop there. What appears to have cemented our exclusion from work was probably the fine-tuning of the industrial process – something that became known as “Scientific Management”. This included such things as:

- Time and Motion studies
- Organisation and Methods
- Measured work
- And the whole concept of “one best way” to do things

New Work Environments

But the last 15 to 20 years have seen much of this work environment rolled back.

Firstly, we have seen a massive shift away from mining, heavy industry and manufacturing and into more accessible work

environments for many such as commercial, financial and other office based service environments.

Secondly, the old discipline of scientific management has little to offer these new service environments. This is specifically why corporations have invested so much in encouraging their staff to take greater responsibility with a view to securing greater reward.

Lastly, there is a new cultural value of inclusion (supported, significantly by the DDA) and valuing difference, which is slowly taking root. This new value has no place for the “one best way approach”.

Increase in employment levels

As we saw earlier these changes in the work environments have already raised employment levels among disabled people over the last few years from around 44% to 49% of the working age population.

(Department of Work and Pensions 2003)

Let me make it clear that many of the disabled people working are not just those with less significant impairments either (TUC 2003). Although I am not suggesting that opportunities are equal in some way. We know for example that you are much more likely to be in

employment if you have a hearing impairment than if you have a learning difficulty. (Disability Rights Commission 2003)

Summary

By way of a summary let me say that I am arguing the following:

That the reality of work opportunity has changed significantly over the past 15 to 20 years. Yet our own mindset and that of managers, employers and government has not.

That mindset is still focused on the idea that disabled people cannot compete effectively in the job market. I am saying that we can compete, but many of us are now discouraged and deskilled. We need significant support to address that, both on the supply side and the demand side. Disabled people will not achieve full citizenship and social justice without it.

By way of a closing remark, these arguments do not, of course, preclude other interventions and approaches such as those discussed by other speakers and writers here today. Indeed they would run in compliment with them.

Thank you for listening.

End of presentation

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