

Career Assessment: Foundations of Discovery

Innovations in Employment Supports

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Assumptions and bias

An assumption is an explanation we accept before we have enough evidence. Bias is a tendency in how we notice, interpret, or weigh information. Everyone brings prior experience to their work. The responsibility is to examine how that experience affects opportunities offered to the person.

Pattern	How it can appear	A better next question
Confirmation bias	Recording every mistake after deciding a task is too difficult.	What evidence would lead us to revise that conclusion?
First impression	Treating one difficult visit as the person's usual performance.	What changes across time, settings, and supports?
Stereotyping	Recommending a familiar job based on a diagnosis.	What does this person actually enjoy and contribute?
Attribution bias	Calling someone unmotivated when instructions were unclear.	What was happening around the task?
Overgeneralization	Assuming success in one role means every similar role will fit.	Which specific features supported success?

Informed choice and personal preferences

A choice is more informed when the person has understandable information, meaningful alternatives, and opportunities to experience what those alternatives involve. Saying yes to the only familiar option tells us less than comparing options the person understands.

Supporting a decision

- Find out what the person wants to decide and how they prefer to receive information.
- Explain options through plain language, photos, demonstrations, visits, or direct participation. Include what each option would involve day to day.
- Discuss relevant tradeoffs such as schedule, transportation, task demands, pay, and support. Arrange individualized benefits advice when needed.
- Allow time to reflect. Ask what appeals to the person and what concerns them. Check understanding through conversation or demonstration rather than a yes-or-no question alone.
- Document the person's preference, the information used, and any unanswered questions. Revisit the decision as experiences change.

Gathering useful information

Different sources answer different questions. An interview may explain why a task matters. Observation may show how the person approaches it. Records may provide history. Use the sources together and identify where they disagree.

Start with the person

Ask about responsibilities, routines, interests, previous work, and goals. Invite concrete examples: “Tell me about a time you helped something go smoothly.” Explore what the person wants more of and what they would prefer to avoid. Use their communication method and allow time.

Ask supporters for examples

With the person’s involvement, ask familiar supporters what they have actually noticed. Replace “She is good with people” with “What does she do, with whom, and in what situation?” Ask when a skill appears and what support is present. Treat a supporter’s explanation as one source of information.

Review records with context

Look for relevant experiences, established supports, and previous goals. Check dates and circumstances. A report from years ago may describe a situation that has changed. Avoid copying labels into a new summary without current evidence.

Observe meaningful activity

- Record the task, setting, duration, and available instruction or support.
- Describe actions and communication, including initiation, help-seeking, responses to changes, and choices.
- Note environmental features such as noise, pace, interruptions, and who gives directions.
- Ask the person afterward what they experienced and whether they want to repeat or change anything.

Five areas we are trying to understand

The class organizes discovery around five areas. Each activity may produce information in several areas, but a clear question helps you decide what to observe and ask.

Area	What to learn	Evidence to seek
Direction	Where might the person want to go?	Chosen roles, requests to repeat or change, reasons for preferences.
Contribution	What skills and abilities does the person bring?	Specific actions, responsibilities, problem-solving, and completed steps.
Conditions for success	When and where do strengths appear?	Patterns related to pace, predictability, sensory features, schedule, and interaction.
Learning and support	What helps understanding and participation?	Responses to demonstration, directions, checklists, feedback, and available help.
Growth	What could develop with experience or support?	Changes over repeated opportunities, use of skills in another setting, and new goals.

A single activity can reveal several things

During preparation of an online order, a person may choose to organize items, notice an incorrect quantity, ask for clarification, and use a written sequence. Ask whether they enjoyed organizing, using technology, helping a customer, or solving the mismatch. Record which features mattered and which remain uncertain.

Interests and contributions are different

Interest tells us where to explore. Contribution describes what the person may offer. Enjoying sports does not establish a skill in coaching, selling equipment, or maintaining a facility. Experience can reveal whether any of those roles are appealing and what the person brings to them.

Describing transferable skills

Replace “good organizer” with “Grouped supplies by category, checked the list, and identified two missing items.” Then explore how that contribution could carry over to a workplace and what additional instruction or support the workplace would require.

Foundations of Discovery

Breakout Activity

Design a Discovery Experience

With your group, design two purposeful activities for your assigned person.

1. Review your question

What do you need to understand better?

2. Design two activities

Describe the person's actual task and meaningful role.

3. Plan a comparison

Try one change in a condition, environment, or support.

4. Choose your evidence

What will you observe? What will you ask the person?

5. Use what you learn

How could different findings guide the next step?

Scenario: Maya

INTERESTS AND DIRECTION

Maya, 27, wants paid work and says, “I’d like to work with people.” She enjoys researching outings, comparing prices, and explaining options to friends.

At a community event, she enthusiastically welcomed visitors, then asked to organize supplies away from the crowd. She says she enjoyed both roles.

Her team is considering customer service, but they have little information about which parts of these experiences she enjoys.



DISCOVERY QUESTION

What does Maya enjoy, and under which conditions would she want to do more?

Scenario: Denise

CONDITIONS AND ENVIRONMENT

Denise, 45, wants to try work again. She left a café job saying, “Everyone needed something at once.” Her former supervisor said the busy setting was difficult.

At a crowded family fundraiser, she managed the supply table for two hours. During a quiet craft activity, she left after several people gave different directions.

Denise says, “I’m okay being busy when I know what I’m doing.”



DISCOVERY QUESTION

Which conditions help Denise manage demands and show her strengths?

Scenario: Luis

CHOICE AND CONTRIBUTION

Luis, 32, wants to “help things run smoothly.” At family gatherings, he notices missing supplies and brings what people need without being asked.

At a community event, he waited for an assigned task, then completed it. His family suggests stocking shelves because he is “good at putting things away.”

Luis shares preferences through short phrases and photos. He chooses different options when shown stocking, preparing orders, and setting up an event.



DISCOVERY QUESTION

What does Luis choose to contribute, and what helps him get involved?

Scenario: Jordan

SUPPORT AND LEARNING

Jordan, 24, wants “a job where people count on me.” At home, Jordan prepares a familiar snack independently and checks the steps on a phone when needed.

During a new activity, Jordan repeatedly asked, “Is this right?” A supporter answered each time and sometimes completed the next step.

On another occasion, Jordan watched a demonstration, tried the task, and sought help when something unexpected happened. Jordan says, “Show me first, but let me do it.”



DISCOVERY QUESTION

What helps Jordan learn, trust their decisions, and use learning in a new situation?