

Cognitive work hardening helps many people return to work

Mental health claimants, post-concussion, cancer survivors benefit from this intervention!

Long term disability insurance carriers are familiar with cognitive work hardening (CWH) as a treatment intervention that prepares people to return to work following a medical leave from work that has been mental health in nature.

People recovering from a depression have benefited from CWH due to its ability to address many sequelae of depression such as (mental) fatigue, cognitive challenges, and behavioral/interpersonal issues. CWH has also been utilized with people with other diagnoses who need assistance with RTW preparation due to similar struggles. These include people with post-concussion and cancer survivors who typically face challenges with (mental) fatigue and cognitive abilities.

Consistent with occupational therapy principles that promote a client-centered approach and a focus on occupation, CWH is an occupationally-based intervention that considers a client's functioning from different perspectives thereby employing a holistic approach to address occupational performance issues. RTW barriers are addressed and take into consideration a person's strengths, limitations, and need for job accommodations.

CWH aligns with an occupational therapy model; namely, the Person Environment Oc-

cupation (PEO) Model which espouses that occupational performance (OP) is shaped by the dynamic interdependence of persons, occupations, and environments (Law, 1996). See Figure 1.



Figure 1. Elements of occupational performance

The Person can refer to an individual client, group of clients, or an organization. The Environment includes cultural, social, and physical factors that affect occupational performance. Occupation encompasses tasks and activities in which a person engages while carrying out various roles in multiple environments (Strong et al., 1998).

The PEO Model enables occupational therapists to determine when there is a less than optimal PEO 'fit' which helps drive interventions aimed at narrowing gaps and

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Adeena Wisenthal is a registered occupational therapist and founder of ERGO-Wise, specializing in helping people on mental health (and other related) disability leaves get back to work.

Adeena's doctoral research provided support for cognitive work hardening and confirms a clinical approach that won her the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapist's Innovative Practice Award.

Cognitive work hardening: A bridge back to work!

Cognitive work hardening is a bridge between home/disability and the workplace.

Cognitive work hardening helps people return to work following an episode of depression.

Cognitive work hardening prepares people to return to work following a medical condition in which cognitive abilities and/or stamina may be affected (e.g., cancer survivors, post concussion).

Cognitive work hardening helps restore a worker identity which facilitates return-to-work.

Cognitive work hardening

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improving congruence of PEO transactions (Strong et al., 1998). It is the dynamic transactional nature of the three elements (person, environment, occupation) that comprise CWH and render it an effective intervention for RTW preparation. CWH uniquely considers the whole person and seamlessly weaves the various elements of a person's functioning together in order to achieve a composite of the person which drives RTW preparation.

CWH addresses issues pertaining to the Person such as a client's cognitive abilities, communication style, and coping strategies. Work simulations are consistent with Occupation and can comprise structured versus non-structured tasks, basic versus more complex tasks, and job specific tasks that align with a person's pre-disability work. Elements of the Environment round out the CWH intervention by consideration of the workplace environment to which a client is returning (e.g., multitasking, competing priorities, deadlines) and home environment (e.g., caregiving needs, household chores).

CWH casts a wide net when it comes to people returning to work who are struggling with the cognitive, behavioral, and coping issues that it is so well designed to address (see Figure 2).

References

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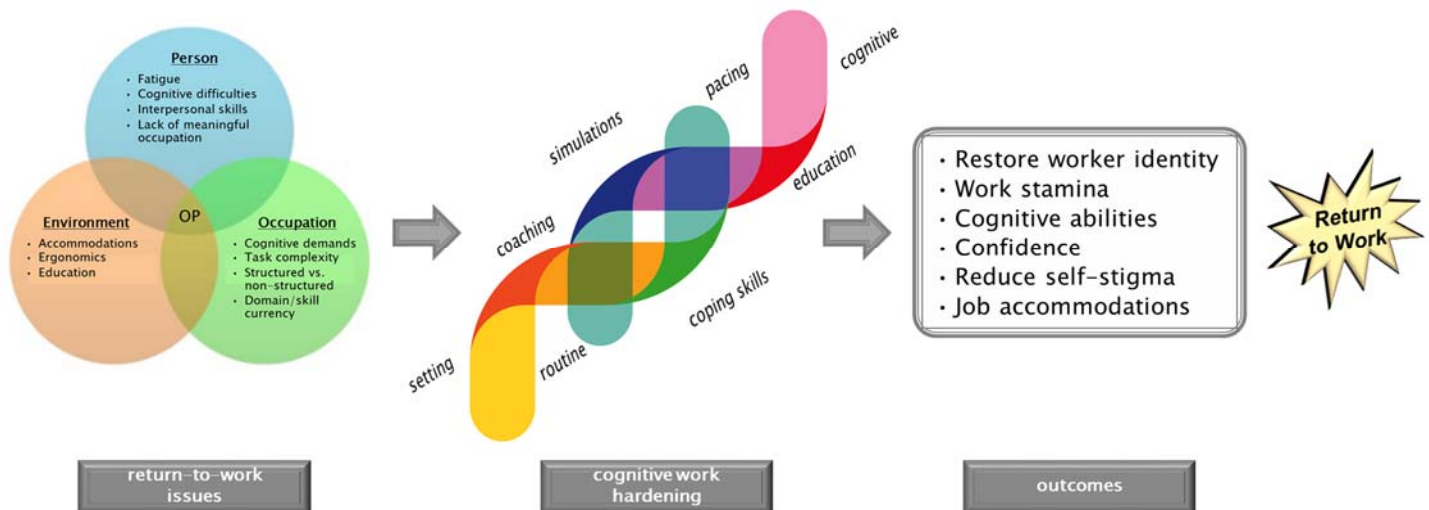


Figure 2. Cognitive work hardening addresses multiple elements required for return-to-work preparation

ERGO-Wise's hallmark **cognitive work hardening program (bridge2work™)** has helped hundreds of clients return to work by helping them rebuild cognitive abilities needed to meet job demands, adjust to a work schedule, and address coping strategies including effective communication and organizational skills.

Services are provided within a non-clinical
simulated work setting

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