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Work behavior in the school psychology service: Conceptual framework and construct validity approached by two different methodologies

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Abstract

A conceptual framework for work behavior (WB) in the school psychology service (SPS) in Norway is discussed, focusing on differences at the individual and the systemic level. A four-factor measurement model of selected tasks was hypothesized and empirically assessed by joint application of generalizability (G) theory and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Self-reported WB was investigated among 190 SP counselors in Study 1 and 470 SP counselors within 121 offices in Study 2. The hypothesized four-factor solution was supported. In accordance with international findings, G studies demonstrated that the SPS as a whole allocates different priorities to aspects of WB, in favor of traditional child-centered work when approaching existing problems. A two-level model of factor analysis was tested, indicating little difference between offices in service delivery. On the contrary, the generalizable differentiation between the four hypothesized WB categories as provided by the G framework indicated individual differences among SP counselors in their priorities to aspects of WB. Because higher priority to prevention and systems intervention have been requested in general, future research should explore possible variables that may have an effect on SP counselors choice of different aspects of WB, as well as differences in the associations between aspects of WB on the one hand and important behavioral and attitudinal outcomes among jobholders on the other.

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For some years, a change in the priorities of the school psychology service (SPS) has been called for both in Norway (Anthun, 1999; Birkemo, 1990) and internationally

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(Braden, DiMarino-Linnen, & Good, 2001; Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Timm, 1995; Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Hatzichristou, 1998; Oakland & Cunningham, 1992; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). In addition to continued assessment of individuals and to report writing (work at the individual level), requests have been made for higher priority to prevention and systems intervention (work at the systemic level). Investigations indicate that this is supported by SP counselors in Norway (Anthun, 1999), in the United States (Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Roberts & Rust, 1994; Zins, Johnson, & Thomas, 1995), and at the broader international level (Oakland & Cunningham, 1992). The Norwegian needs have been established in law (NOU, 1995), and national support for the priority change, a 3-year innovation program for the SPS, was initiated in the spring of 2000 (Roland, Fandrem & Westergård, in progress).

Alteration to the priorities of the SPS will most likely affect SP counselors' roles with reference to specific tasks and work behavior (WB). The aim of the present study was to investigate the state of selected aspects of WB at the individual and the systemic level, to see whether they cluster as different/level-specific work tasks, and how the SPS as a whole, the SP offices and the single SP counselors prioritize among them. Such investigations may have importance for future discussions about the focus of further change. It is expected that this will be of international interest as well, owing to the fact that school psychologists throughout the world seem to maintain similar conceptions of their specialty and have a somewhat unified role definition of their profession (Oakland & Cunningham, 1992).

In order to carry out such investigations, it is important to agree on a suitable conceptual framework for tasks and job content in the SPS. In the present article, one way of conceptualizing relevant selected aspects of WB is suggested and empirically investigated.

Conceptual framework

The concept of WB among SP counselors is difficult to define and consequently also to assess. This renders discussion at both the conceptual and empirical level necessary. To some extent, tasks in the SPS have been evaluated (Anthun, 1999; Hall, 1983; Oakland & Cunningham, 1992; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Roberts & Rust, 1994; Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001), but the measures used have mainly consisted of collections of single items with little or no effort invested in delineating a construct domain for measurements (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The conclusivity and comparability of several of these studies may therefore be restricted due to lack of standard instruments or common domain definitions. WB in the SPS may be defined as *the totality of the SP counselors' tasks and operations*, reflecting a broad, possibly multifaceted concept that may be conceptualized in different ways. In the USA, the role of the school psychologist has been roughly divided into four activities: assessment (54%), interventions (24%), consultation and in-service training (20%), and research/program evaluation (2%) (Fagan & Wise, 1994; Roberts & Rust, 1994). In Norway, "the Handbook for the School Psychology Service" (NLS, 1996) describes different ways of conceptualizing the activities, guiding the present research.

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