



Tenure, satisfaction, and work environment flexibility of people with mental retardation [☆]

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Abstract

In the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), Dawis and Lofquist (1984) hypothesize that Employee satisfaction (ES) and flexibility of the work environment moderate the functional relationship between satisfaction in the work environment (WS) and the correspondence between job requirements and employees' abilities. In addition, they hypothesize that tenure in a job is a joint function of ES and WS. This Person–Environment Fit framework has not been tested to support job placements of candidates with mental retardation (CMR), except for Melchiori and Church (1997), whose results partially support other aspects of the TWA. Fifty-two CMR were placed in 53 natural work settings. In total, 61 matches based on commensurate measures were made and data were collected for 16 weeks after job placement. Results show that ES is a mediator while flexibility of the work environment is not. ES and WS together contribute to predict tenure.

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1. Introduction

Since the late 90s, a paradigmatic shift is operating in the field of mental retardation. The 10th edition of the definition and classification standard in mental retardation (Luckasson, 2002) has marked a shift towards recognition that an individual's disabilities cannot be understood without the knowledge and understanding of the environment's impact. This shift is not limited to mental retardation (Pledger, 2003). Without disavowing the biomedical model (Gill, Kewman, & Brannon, 2003), many scientist and practitioners in psychology now view more generally the concept of disability as "a function of the person within the environment" (Brandt & Pope, 1997, p. 64). Recognition that environmental factors shape the disability experience (Pledger, 2003) creates a theoretical, methodological, and practical vacuum that must be filled to fully address people with disabilities' needs. From a theoretical point of view, new theories or better conceptual models must be developed and tested to account for the multifaceted role the environment plays in the disability experience (Pledger, 2003; Tate & Pledger, 2003). Consequently, research methodology and new instruments must capture all the relevant data (Luckasson, 2002; Tate & Pledger, 2003). These conceptual and methodology issues interact in part because concepts and assessment of those concepts must be aligned. In other words, one cannot retrofit instruments designed to measure the individual into a conceptual framework aimed at addressing the interplay of individual and environmental factors. One needs to develop the model first, then the instrument or develop both simultaneously. This has implications for test reliability, validity, and norms (Olkin & Pledger, 2003; Tate & Pledger, 2003) and should be addressed by the use of commensurate dimensions (Edwards, 1991). On the practical side, an assessment drawn from a broader socioecological context (Tate & Pledger, 2003) may reveal that the individual is not be the only or best target of rehabilitation efforts. The environment may also be a focus of intervention. Practitioners used to focus their attention on the individual may now need to consider the environment more thoroughly and more systematically.

On the one hand, scientists and practitioners in the field of mental retardation have not, except for Melchiori and Church (1997), applied a Person–Environment Fit (P–E Fit) framework to address issues of tenure and satisfaction despite the fact that employment integration of people with mental retardation is understood and practiced based on the premise that its success relies on an optimal fit between a person and his/her work environment (Fortin & Carrier, 2000; McDermott & Butkuss, 1999). On the other hand, I/O psychologists and, to a lesser extent, vocational psychologists, have not integrated people with mental retardation as participants in their research (e.g., Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003). Consequently, theories, frameworks or paradigms based on P–E Fit and used to maximize tenure and satisfaction in people without mental have not been applied and tested to employability issues of people with mental retardation. This is a gap this paper aims to address.

In I/O psychology, P–E Fit is defined as the joint effect that multiple individual and environmental factors have on employment outcome (Edwards, 1991).

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