

A Job Retention Model for Individuals with Mental Retardation

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This structured literature review examines the literature and addresses issues of job retention for adult workers with moderate to mild mental retardation (MR), investigating the relationships between work-related social behaviors, self-determination, person-job congruency of individuals with MR, and their job performance and job satisfaction with the intent to improve job retention. The conceptual framework introduces a proposed model for improving job retention for individuals with MR.

Keywords: Job Retention, Job Performance, Workforce Development

Job retention is a critical component in the efforts to assist individuals with moderate to mild mental retardation (MR) to maintain long-term employment and, hence, move from dependency to self-sufficiency (Roessler, 2002, Rusch, 1986). Job retention is also a challenging aspect of workforce development and one with no agreed-upon standard for effectiveness (Roessler, 2002). Among the 54 million adults with disabilities in the United States, 33 million have a severe disability and 10 million need assistance in their daily living (U.S. Department of Census, 2000). Eighty percent of adults with disabilities report they want to work (Taylor, 1994), but over 75% remain unemployed (Harris & Associates, 2004; U.S. Department of Census, 2000). Only 35% of people with disabilities are employed full- or part-time compared to 78% of those who do not have disabilities (Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities, 2004). Strohmer, Grand, & Purcell (1984) identified a hierarchical order of social and work acceptance of individuals with disabilities based on the type and severity of their impairments. Mental retardation and mental illness have consistently been identified as the least accepted disability (Harris' Survey of Americans with Disabilities, 2004), resulting in greater social distance and less opportunity for social and employment integration (Lyons & Hayes, 1993). Labeling individuals as mentally retarded adversely affects employer expectations of their job success (Millington, Szymanski, & Hanley-Maxwell, 1994). This low employment rate for individuals with MR stems from poor job retention, an individual's ability to remain employed for an extended period of time once he/she has learned the job (Trach, Rusch, & DeStefano, 1987). While approximately 74% of individuals with MR remain employed six months on the job and 67% after one year, less than 49% are employed 12 months after placement (Kregel, Wehman, Revell, & Hill, 1989). Job retention outcomes for people in vocational rehabilitation indicated that 25% of those successfully placed in jobs are no longer employed 3 months following closure and approximately 50% are not employed 12 months following closure (Gibbs; 1990).

Problem Statement

While job retention for individuals with MR is important, many are unable to maintain their jobs and thus remain under-employed (Pimentel, 2001). How can we improve job retention for individuals with moderate to mild MR? The purpose of this paper is to examine the literature around job retention in adult workers with MR, identify important factors that improve job retention and to propose a job retention model for individuals with moderate to mild MR. A discussion of the importance of job retention for both the individual and organization will be discussed. Factors influencing job retention for individuals moderate to mild MR including the work environment and individual factors will be presented. Following is a discussion on how work-related social behaviors, self-determination, person-job congruency, job performance, and job satisfaction can lead to successful job retention. The paper concludes with a job retention model of interrelated variables to improve job retention for individuals with moderate to mild MR and a discussion around the challenges for HRD.

Method

A structured literature review was conducted followed by a content analysis of the literature. Abstracts and articles were read and categorized by external and internal factors influencing job retention in individuals with MR. Tables were created to organize by these factors. Cognitive mapping was used to create a mental model of the overall meaning of the text. A graphic map depicts the relationships between concepts. Cognitive mapping lends itself to the comparison of semantic connections across texts and attempt to represent the relationship(s) between ideas, beliefs,

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attitudes, and information available to an author within a text. These relationships can be represented as logical, inferential, causal, sequential, and/or mathematical relationships (Palmquist, Carley, & Dale, 1997).

Importance of Job Retention

New legislation, The Employer Work Incentive Act for Individuals with Severe Disabilities (1570 IS, 109th Congress, 2005) challenges corporate America. The purpose of this Act is to promote employment opportunities for individuals with severe disabilities and MR, by requiring Federal agencies to offer incentives to government contractors and subcontractors that employ substantial numbers of individuals with severe disabilities. This legislation will expand competitive employment opportunities for individuals with moderate to mild MR by offering businesses an incentive to employ these individuals and provide both a competitive salary and good health care benefits. Senators Roberts introduced this legislation and Kennedy because of their deep committed to help Americans with severe disabilities seek and maintain employment. "We challenge the private sector and the business community to take the initiative and actively work to employ individuals with severe disabilities (Senator Roberts, 2005, in press)."

Without system change in the form of legislation and strong advocacy, individuals with MR are unable to overcome the barriers need for full inclusion, yet it doesn't stop with legislation, it takes people and organizations to effect the change and herein lies the gap. American with Disability Acts of 1990 (ADA) and other federal initiatives have failed to improve the employment of individuals with MR as fewer these individual are employed today then prior to the execution of ADA. While work and employment provides individuals with MR improved independence, quality of life, social well-being, there are benefits to corporations as well. People with MR offer an untapped pool of productive employees for businesses looking for creative staffing solutions in a tight labor market (Petkauskos, 2005). Individuals with MR provided a pool of qualified workers able to file the shortage of people seeking entry-level positions (Wehmeyer & Kregel, 1998). Employing individuals with MR improves an organizations competitive advantage through a diversified workforce (Holmes, 2005). People with disabilities have a unique perspective that a smart employer can take advantage of. "Customers also have disabilities and by employing people with disabilities, companies can learn about that target market (Holmes, 2005)." Additionally, tax incentives and government contracts are awarded more frequently to those organizations employing individuals with disabilities (1570 IS, 109th Congress, 2005). Companies that employee people with disabilities are seen as acting in a socially responsible manner and viewed more positively by the community (Holmes, 2005; Vondracek, Learner, & Schulenberg, 1986).

Whether organizations employee individuals with MR due to the need to fill entry-level positions, create more competitive advantages through a diverse workforce, or seeking tax incentive, HRD faces new challenges. In order to ensure the long-term successful employment of individuals with MR, considerable research, planning and facilitating their participation in the workforce have to encompass the multiple needs that HRD must address to improve job performance and overall organizational performance. There is a need for an integrated approach that merges the individual and the organizations' systems perspectives (Habeck, 1999) such as job retention and performance models.

Job Retention Factors

Job retention is affected by external factors of societal and cultural issues and supported work environment and internal factors of individual's job attitudes and behaviors. The societal and cultural issues of economic factors, labor market conditions, legislation, societal attitudes and climate (Wright, 1980), poor infrastructure including physical and family setting, transportation and housing - all partially contribute to poor job retention (Wehman & Kregel, 1998).

Job retention is decreased by work environment and organizational factors such as employer ignorance and bias (Rusch, 1986), lack of opportunities, poor placement, inadequate job-match, and career development, and deficiencies in restructuring jobs and training programs to accommodate individuals with MR (Lagomarcino, Huges, & Huges, 1999). Poor job retention can be partially attributed to the failure of vocational rehabilitation practices, such as prevocational training programs, sheltered workshops and transitional employment, to provide integrated paid employment for people with MR (Wehman, 1996; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998). Even supported employment (SE), which has been identified as the most promising approach to integrate, paid work environments (Rusch, 1986) has not provided for long-term job retention (Konig & Schalock, 1991). Persons with MR face the lack of qualified programs that prepare productive workers with appropriate work behaviors and attitudes (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986).

While societal, cultural and work environments affect job retention, the major factors contributing to poor job retention for working adults with MR are internal individual factors. A combination in appropriate work-related social behaviors and poor job performance accounts for 70% of job separations (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986; Hill, Wehman, Hill, & Goodall, 1996). Successful job retention for adult workers with MR is directly related to the degree of worker's behavior and attitudes including person-job congruency (Rosseler, 2002), self-determination (Wehman & Kregel, 1998), work-related social behaviors, performance (Hill et al., 1996; Greenspan & Shultz, 1981), and job satisfaction (Rosseler, 2002; Wright, 1980).

Internal Individual Factors Influencing Job Retention

Performance and job retention of individuals with MR is complicated by internal individual factors such as nonintellectual factors of an individual's mental retardation. Sheltered home and community life only contribute to the poor work maturation process and a poor work personality (Gellman, 1961). Strategies for improving work personality include job matching to ensure that individuals are suitable to the job, work environment, and work culture (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991) and a person-centered approach to improve self-determination skills. Proper work personality contributes to the further development of self-determination and self-management skills (Wright, 1980). Additional individual factors that affect job retention include work behaviors, job performance, and job satisfaction.

Mental Retardation

Mental retardation is a restriction in cognitive and adaptive functioning. Restrictions in cognition affect knowing associated with common sense and all forms of reasoning, including motivation, apprehension, acquisition, retention, recall, generalization, performance, and feedback (Wright, 1980). Slow or impaired adaptive behaviors impede maturation, learning, and/or social adjustment, thus limiting such essential daily activities as being mobile and getting along at work and at home with people and obligations (American Association of Mental Deficiency [AAMD], 2002).

Work personality

Vocational changes result from alterations of both behavioral and attitudinal components of the personality patterns through work and life experiences (Wright, 1980). Competitive employment requires workers to be able to cope with a variety of behavioral demands (Neff, 1976), including not only the know-how required by specific work tasks, but also an elaborate set of attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and feelings referred to as the work personality. Work personality manifests through the work maturation process and an individual's attitudes and behaviors (Neff, 1976).

Work Maturation

Work maturation is a process of developing work personality - behavior patterns exhibited in a work situation or the manner in which an individual enacts a work role (Wright, 1980). High work maturation increases one's employability and leads to work satisfaction and work retention. Immaturity causes a high turnover rate in the unskilled jobs for which so many people with MR are forced to compete (Wright, 1980). Work maturation is learned through a socialization process that begins at birth. The family originally provides the behavioral patterns and motivational systems that induce children to achieve and become productive. School continues the process of learning the responsibility of work and relationships with peers and authority figures away from home. Household chores are later succeeded by after-school and summer employment, which helps gradually develop work personality and prepares children for the pressures and tensions of a formal work life as an adult. However, the process of work maturation for individuals with moderate to mild MR is often disrupted by parental attitudes and separation at school (Gellman, 1961). The birth of a child with an apparent disability induces parental attitudes of over-protection or rejection. Parents often deprive their children of the complexity of family chores and responsibilities. Limiting these activities hinders their development of a sense of productivity and work satisfaction. School brings segregation and isolation. Lower standards for individuals with MR diminish the achievement drive. Prejudice restricts opportunities for summer or after-school work. Having learned how not to work, these individuals see themselves as unproductive and unable to work (Gellman, 1961). As young adults, individuals with MR lack the knowledge and experience that underpins a work personality or appropriate job attitudes and effective work behaviors (Gellman, 1961). Undependability and immaturity cause a high turnover rate in the unskilled jobs (Wright, 1980).

Strategies to improve work personality include job matching and self-determination - a person-centered approach to work programs. This person-centered approach helps individuals with MR explore their work preferences and job market and match their work, social and personal strengths to job requirements (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991) empowering individuals with MR to make reliable choices about their abilities and the jobs of interest. The person-centered planning approach (Mount & Zwernik, 1988) provides individuals with MR a means to move away from professionally determined life outcomes toward empowerment and self-determination of planning for

their employment, recreation, education, and housing outcomes (Turner, 1995). Person-centered approaches are intended to organize and guide the self-determination efforts of an individual with MR, his or her family members, and service providers as they work collectively to assist the individual in pursuing his or her interests, desires and goals (Mount & Zwernik, 1988). It is planning the best quality future for a person based on strengths, preferences, and dreams for a lifestyle (O'Brian & Lovett, 1992). This person-center approach furthers self-determination in individuals with MR and must be considered in the job matching process

Job Matching

Job matching assesses and matches a person's interests, characteristics, skills and abilities (both behavioral and cognitive) with the job requirements and work environment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991). Successful job matching increases employee job satisfaction and job performance (Berkell, 1987; Konig & Schalock, 1991) leading to higher job retention (Roessler, 2002). Job matching strategies help people with MR identify their abilities as well as their needs (self-determination) and acquire positions in which correspondence or congruency exists between needs and activities and skill and requirements (Roessler, 2002). The person-job matches that is a prerequisite to job tenure and obtaining competitive employment (Lofquist & Dawis, 1991; Super, 1990). Without careful planning and job match individuals too frequently are shunted into low-paying, unsatisfying jobs that offer little hope for advancement.

Self-Determination

Successful job retention incorporates the principles of self-determination. Attributes associated with self-determination include self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, self-regulation, decision-making, autonomy, goal setting, consumer choice and control over what affects one's life (Wehmeyer, 1996; Wehmeyer & Kelchner, 1997). These terms are all a process of discovery of individual aims, aspirations and skills that empower the individual to make choices about their careers and work (Biklen, 1988). Self-determination (Wehmeyer et al., 1998) in the employment search process can enhance competitive employment opportunities, job retention and job satisfaction for people with MR (Mount & Zwernik, 1988). Self-determination fosters people with MR to rely on their knowledge about the structural relationships among occupations and to be able to plan their careers (Wehmeyer et al., 1998). While establishing job match and self-determination concepts enhance job retention as well as job performance and satisfaction, they do not encompass the unexpected on-the-job barriers that arise due to interpersonal conflicts and/or productivity problems. Hence, attitudinal and behavioral factors must be addressed for individuals with MR to obtain and retain employment (Wright, 1980).

Work-related Social Behaviors

The most common cause of job loss among individuals with MR is a combination of unacceptable work-related social behaviors (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Lagomarcino, Huges, & Rusch, 1989) and poor work performance. Surveys conducted with adult workers with MR concluded that a combination of job performance and work-related social behaviors account for 70% of job separation (Hill et al., 1996). These job behaviors included: (1) work-related social behaviors, (b) job-related routines, and (c) job performance factors.

Work-related Social Behaviors required for successful job retention include: (a) social awareness (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986), (b) temperament (Kregel et al., 1989), and (c) personality characteristics (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000). *Social awareness* includes the understanding of people, getting along and appropriately interacting with supervisors and co-workers, offering assistance and giving positive comments. Additionally one must understand of the work environment and is able to provide information about the job (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Hanley-Maxwell, Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Renzaglia, 1986). *Temperament* includes adaptive behaviors, subordinate and aberrant behaviors (Hill, Wehman, Hill, & Goodall, 1986; Kregel et al., 1989), ability to deal with the pressures and stress of the job (Salzberg, Agran, & Lignugirs/Kraft, 1986), and self-control (Wright, 1980). *Personality characteristics* refer to appearance and good hygiene, time management, being cooperative and flexible (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Hanley-Maxwell, Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Renzaglia, 1986), and the ability to accept constructive criticism, value honesty and conform to socially acceptable standards of truthfulness (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000) as well as expressing appreciation and courteousness.

Job-related Routines and Behaviors are daily life skills that are not part of the job but are vital to successful job performance (Callahan & Garner, 1997). These routines may occur either on-site or off-site and include transportation (the ability to get to and from work); personal and work scheduling; and financial management including banking and budgeting skills (Bellamy, Rhodes, Mank, & Albin, 1988; Callahan & Garner, 1997; Rosenberg & Brady, 2000). The availability of transportation allows productive and independent living for individuals with MR. Employment opportunities may be superfluous if they are not within easy access to public transportation or if the distance and complexity of travel are beyond the physical or mental capacity of the individual (Wright, 1980). Good work-related social behavior affects job satisfaction and improves performance, which leads

to job retention (Mueser, Becker, & Wolfe, 2001). Furthermore, job satisfaction leads to improved job retention in the non-disabled population (Mueser et al., 2001)

Job Performance

Forty-five percent of individuals with MR are not working because of inadequate job performance (Roessler & Bolton, 1985). Employers fear that individuals with MR show poor work performance; however, their productivity is equal to or better than the average entry-level position, with proper placement and job match (Leach, 2000). With appropriate work-related social behaviors, workers with MR adapt and adjust quickly and satisfactorily to the conditions of the job. They often surpass the production records of other employees, and their safety and attendance record are substantially the same as for workers without disabilities (Wehman & Kregel, 1998; Wright, 1980).

Performance outcomes consider job responsibility and task production (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000; Sitlington & Easterday, 1992; Wehman & Kregel, 1998; Wright, 1980). A lack of job responsibility has been also identified as the primary cause of job loss followed by inadequate task production and poor work-related social behaviors (Lagomarcino et al., 1989).

Job responsibility means one's commitment to a job and includes work motivation and taking initiative, ability to follow directions, company procedures and safety regulations (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000), and ability to ask for assistance (Salzberg et al., 1986), to maintain positive work attitude, taking pride in one's work and wanting to work, neatness at work place, and dependable and responsible by meeting work schedules, good attendance and being punctuality (Sitlington & Easterday, 1992).

Task production refers to the ability to perform specific work tasks that require appropriate quality and quantity of work. Quality of work (error rate) is an employee's ability to work at the accepted standard for accuracy and engage in quality control assessment when finished with a task. Quantity of work (production rate) is an employee's ability to work at an accepted rate and pace of productivity (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000; Wright, 1980). Task production is also affected by the ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally, which allows employees to express themselves and understand each other while performing a task (Martin, Elias-Burger, & Mithaug, 1987).

For an individual with MR, appropriate work-related social behaviors and job performance not only improves job retention, but also is believed to increase job satisfaction. This enhancement of job satisfaction is a major step to maintaining employment and retaining one's job (job retention). Roessler and Rumrill (1998) theorized that among persons with MR, greater numbers of work-related social barriers reduce job mastery (performance) and job satisfaction and that reduced performance and satisfaction leads to job loss. Therefore job retention strategies to improve job retention in individuals with MR should not only focus on and training and support for the improvement of work-related social behaviors and job performance, but measures of job satisfaction as well (Roessler, 2002).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the degree to which people like their jobs and the feelings a worker has about his or her job or job experiences in relation to previous experiences, current expectations, or available alternatives (Spector, 1997). Job facets that affect job satisfaction include: (a) other people, such as coworkers or supervisors; (b) nature of work itself and job conditions; (c) rewards, such as fringe benefits, pay, appreciation, recognition, personal growth, and security; and (d) organizational context, such as the organizational structure, policies and procedures, and communication (Locke, 1976; Spector, 1997).

Research on job satisfaction is limited in population with disabilities. However, research of job satisfaction in the non-disabled population identifies only a minimal relationship between job performance (increases in employees' productivity) and job satisfaction (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Talkington & Overbeck, 1975). However, observations of employees with MR suggest job satisfaction correlates highly with improved job retention (Mueser, et al., 2001) and performance (We, 1998). Additionally, job satisfaction increases intrinsic motivation, personal well-being (Petrovski & Gleeson, 1997), lowers work-related accidents, stress and discord within work groups (Talkington & Overbeck, 1975), lowers absenteeism, tardiness, grievances, and turnover, which is costly to the organization (Porter 1962; Talkington & Overbeck, 1975). Job satisfaction is seen as a direct cause of such work-related social behavior as attending work, maintaining quality standards, seeking improved work methods, and cooperating with other employees. Many studies have explored effects of job satisfaction, job performance, job retention, work motivation and individual's behaviors on people without disabilities (Porter 1962; Talkington & Overbeck, 1975); however, research on whether job satisfaction affects job performance and job retention in the population of MR is limited.

Conclusion: Job Retention for Adult Workers with Moderate to Mild MR.

The conclusion of this literature review is that adult workers with MR that have high job satisfaction (JS) coupled with high job performance (JP) [both predicted by various of work-related social behaviors (WRSB), person-job congruency (P-J fit) and a self-determination approach (SD)] are more likely to maintain long-term employment (job retention). This long-term job retention will maintain high levels of job satisfaction, further improving performance, self-determination and sustaining appropriate work-related social behaviors. The relationship between person-job congruency, self-determination and work-related social behaviors of the worker provides material on which forecast of job performance, job satisfaction and job tenure and effectiveness can be based (Wehman & Kregel, 1998).

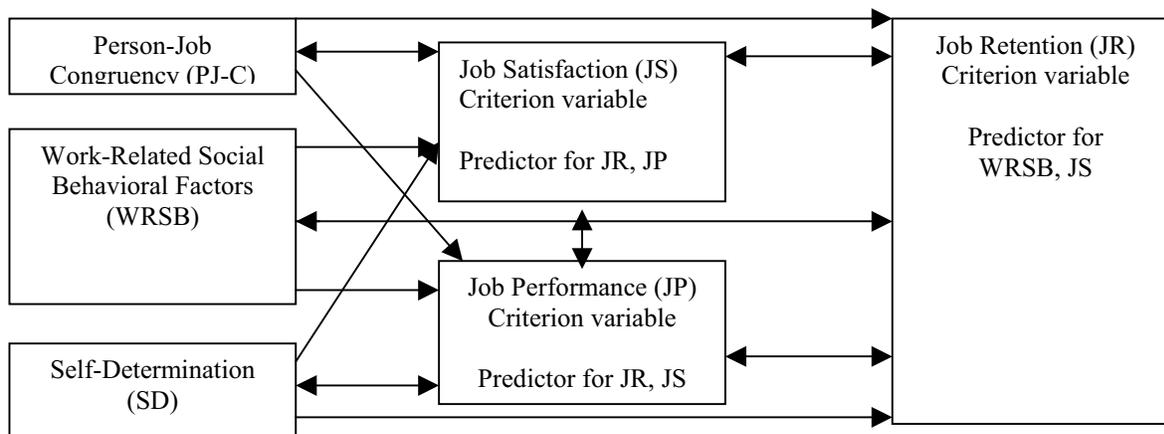


Figure 1. *A Proposed Model of Job Retention for Workers with MR*

Based on the theories and concepts found in the literature a new conceptual model of job retention has evolved (see Figure 1). Roessler's (2002) 3M Model of job retention for individuals with disabilities addresses person-job congruency (job-match), the importance of job satisfaction and the development (maturity) and maintain (mastery) good work behaviors that allows one to perform job duties and cope with the stress and idiosyncratic situations that arise at work. However, Roessler's model does not deal with self-determination nor performance, both important factor for job success of individuals with MR. Neither Roessler's model nor other research address the interrelationships between the various components affecting job retention such as how job retention affects ones work-related social behaviors, ones job satisfaction or performance. Improving job retention rates of adults with MR requires the use of many types of interventions and strategies that focus on the interrelatedness of all variables affecting job retention.

HRD Challenges

HRD's principle purpose is a system perspective to improve organizational performance through increased productivity, efficient work processes, and individual contributions (Swanson & Arnold, 1996). Those constructs that provide outcomes of improved human performance and individual contribution such as person-job "fit", job satisfaction, self-determination (actualization); personality characteristics and behaviors, etc, have been researched in the general population, but differ for individuals with MR. For example, research in the non-disabled populations has shown job satisfaction does not necessarily improve performance (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Although, in individuals with MR, research suggests the opposite, that job satisfaction does affect and improve job performance (Wehmeyer, Kelchner & Richards, 1994). Thus, the training and career development strategies for individuals with MR may require modification based on various behaviors and work constructs as they relate to workers with MR. As more individuals with MR are employed in the open labor market, it becomes important for HRD to understanding how their work behaviors and outcomes can improve job performance, job satisfaction, and job retention thereby improving overall organizations performance (Roessler, 2002). An understanding of these behaviors and outcomes will enable paraprofessionals, HRD practitioners, and managers to further develop strategies to acquire and maintain constructive training and support programs to assist people with MR for occupational growth (Lancioni & O'Reilly, 1998). Furthermore, focused efforts on training and instructional techniques for individuals with MR are important to promote generalization, discrimination, and maintenance.

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