

# **A Human Resource Development Performance Improvement Model for Workers with Mental Retardation in Supported Employment**

Sandra L. Fornes, Tonette S. Rocco, Howard Rosenberg, and Jo D. Gallagher  
Florida International University, USA

**Abstract:** This literature review discusses the factors for successful job retention of adult workers with mental retardation, including external factors related to work environments and internal issues of the individual worker. Through the synthesis of the literature, a performance improvement model for supported employment is discussed based on Holton's (1999) human resource development/performance improvement model.

Among the 54 million adults with disabilities in the U.S., 33 million have a severe disability and 10 million need assistance in their daily living (U.S. Department of Census, 2000). Most individuals with disabilities want to work and are capable of exceptional job performance (Bellamy, Rhodes, Mank, & Albin, 1988; Konig & Schalock, 1991) and equal to people without disabilities in terms of productivity, turnover rates, absenteeism, and accident rates (Parent & Everson, 1986), yet over 75% of them remain unemployed (U.S. Department of Census, 2000).

Organizations looking for creative staffing solutions in a tight labor market benefit from employing people with disabilities and mental retardation (MR) (Petkauskos, 2005). A pool of qualified employees could and should include individuals with MR who are able to fill the shortage of employees seeking entry-level positions. Employing individuals with MR improves the organization's competitive advantage through a diversified workforce (Petkauskos, 2005). Additionally, these organizations receive tax incentives and government contracts and are viewed as socially responsible (Vondracek, Learner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Whether organizations employ individuals with MR due to fill entry-level positions, create a more competitive advantage, or receive tax incentives, human resource development (HRD) faces new challenges.

## **Problem Statement**

Poor job retention and performance of adults with MR leads to their high unemployment rates. Their job retention is decreased by work environment and organizational factors, such as employer ignorance and bias (Rusch, 1986), lack of opportunities and role models, poor placement, inadequate job-match, and career development (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 (Wehman, 1986). Even supported employment (SE), which has been identified as the most promising approach (Rusch, 1986), has not provided for long-term job retention (Konig & Schalock, 1991). Furthermore, poor job performance combined with social behavioral factors is a major cause of job loss for individuals with MR (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Lagomarcino et al., 1989). The purpose of this paper is to adapt Holton's (1999) human resource development/performance improvement (PI/HRD) model to the employment of workers with MR. First, we will present an overview of the relevant literature on the external and internal factors that influence successful employment, followed by Fornes, S. L., Rocco, T. S., Rosenberg, H., & Gallagher, J. D. (2006). A human resource development performance improvement model for workers with mental retardation in supported employment. In M. S. Plakhotnik & S. M. Nielsen (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual College of Education Research Conference: Urban and International Education Section* (pp. 32-38). Miami: Florida International University. [http://coeweb.fiu.edu/research\\_conference/](http://coeweb.fiu.edu/research_conference/).

a discussion of the Holton's model, and conclude with the presentation of the adapted model and implications for HRD.

### **Method**

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycInfo, and ABI Inform were selected with the assistance of a reference librarian as most representative of education, psychology, and business. Abstracts and articles were read and categorized by external and internal factors influencing job retention in individuals with MR. Tables were created to organize the data. Cognitive mapping was used to create a mental model of the overall meaning of the text. Cognitive mapping lends itself to the comparison of semantic connections across texts and attempts to represent the relationships between ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and information (Palmquist, Carley, & Dale, 1997).

#### **External Factors Influencing Successful Job Retention**

External factors affecting job retention include: (a) job matching, work environment, and work culture (Holland, 1985) and (b) a support system that provides ongoing training and support to maintain job skills and valued work behaviors and attitudes (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986).

##### *Job Matching*

Congruency between an individual's interests, skills, abilities, personality characteristics and the job and work environment improves job satisfaction, job performance (Konig & Schalock, 1991; Leach, 2002), work motivation (Berkell, 1987), and long-term employment (Holland, 1985). This person-job congruency may be more critical to employment success than specific job skills (Berkell, 1987). Workers with MR should be empowered to make reliable choices about their job interests. This ability to chose is developed through learning to express their work preferences and matching their work, social, and personal strengths to job requirements (Leach, 2001). Job matching includes analysis of work settings and behavioral expectations followed by placement and adjustment of one's performance to achieve congruency.

##### *Support System*

The continuous availability of support following job placement is a hallmark of the SE model. The amount of time or activities conducted by an employment specialist to enable employees with MR to obtain, learn, perform, and maintain a job and job skills is directly related to their success in job retention (Wehman et al., 1989).

On-the-job training allows for rapid placement into paid community employment instead of a lengthy sheltered employment. These individuals are more likely to be employed in 9 months and work full-time in 15 months. They also achieve superior outcomes, such as higher employment rate, higher job satisfaction, and lower absenteeism (Wehman, 1986). Employees in SE socialize more with non-disabled co-workers, are more often competitively employed, and earn higher wages than the individuals in mobile work crews or clustered group.

Natural support promotes co-worker involvement as a means to provide consistent, ongoing training and follow-up services in an integrated work setting (Nisbet & Hagner, 1988). Natural support is any assistance, relationship, or intervention that allows a person with MR to maintain and advance in a job. Non-disabled co-workers serve as observers, trainers, associates, ongoing supervisors, advocates, and instructional program developers (Rusch, Hughes, & Johnson, 1991) and assist employees with MR in building productive work habits and social skills. These relationships and the support of the organization influence integration, job satisfaction, employment success, and job tenure of individuals with MR (Hill, Wehman, Hill, & Goodall, 1985). Increasingly, employers (e.g., Pizza Hut, Inc, MacDonalds, the Marriott

Corporation) have realized that the skills co-workers learn when assuming support roles benefit the company as a whole (Nisbet & Hagner, 1988; Rogan et al., 1993).

Community-based vocational education is an effective approach in delivering vocational education and training to individuals with MR which provides services in community work settings rather than in conventional school environments. Preparation of students with MR for life in integrated work and living situations should include experiential opportunities in dealing with the demands and expectations of these environments (Wehman & Kelchner, 1997). Individuals with MR often do not understand the unstated rules of the workplace, many of which relate to social interactions and social reciprocity. They also need to learn when the situation is different and the same (Wehman et al., 1986) which occurs more frequently when instruction takes place in the real world situations. Learning to perform certain behaviors and interacting with a variety of people in natural work settings increases the likelihood of performing those behaviors in novel settings (Lagomarcino et al., 1989). Community-based instruction within work environments bridges the gap between classroom learning and competitive job placement (Bellamy et al., 1988).

### **Internal Factors Influencing Successful Job Retention**

A combination of inappropriate work-related social behaviors and poor job performance accounts for 70% of job separations (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986; Hill, Wehman, Hill, & Goodall, 1985). Successful job retention for adults with MR is directly related to their behavior and attitudes, including person-job congruency, self-determination (Wehman & Kregel, 1998), work-related social behaviors, performance (Hill et al., 1985; Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981), and job satisfaction (Wright, 1980).

#### *Individual Work Behaviors and Attitudes*

Social behaviors related to specific interactions at work (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986) include (a) social awareness, (b) temperament and aberrant behaviors, and (c) personality characteristics (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000). Social awareness includes the ability to get along and interact with supervisors and co-workers and to understand the work environment (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Hanley-Maxwell, Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Renzaglia, 1986). Temperament and aberrant behaviors include insubordinate and aggressive behaviors, idiosyncratic behaviors (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981; Hill, Wehman, Hill, & Goodall, 1985), and the inability to deal with the pressures and stressor of the job (Salzberg, Agran, & Lignugirs/Kraft, 1986). Personal characteristics refer to absences, tardiness, being uncooperative (Greenspan & Shoultz, 1981), and the abilities to accept criticism, job responsibility (Lagomarcino et al, 1989), to take initiatives, to following directions, to ask for assistance (Salzberg et al., 1986), to take pride in one's work, and to value honesty and standards of truthfulness (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000).

#### *Personal Development – Person Centered Approach*

Successful job retention is based on the principles of a person-centered approach, a process of discovery of individual aims, aspirations, and skills that focus on the individual rather than service provision constraints (Leach, 2002). Services are driven toward changes that lead to increased work effectiveness based on principles of employees' (a) understanding of the relevancy of work required behaviors to their employment situation, (b) self-determination, (c) social and economic inclusion, (d) choice and independence, (e) learning about work in work, and (f) self-evaluation of their status (Leach, 2002; Rosenberg & Brady, 2000).

The majority of job retention strategies foster individuals with MR to depend on the employment specialist (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986. Individuals with MR need assistance in personal development to explore their personality characteristics and skills, to learn to take personal

responsibility, to develop self-esteem, and to learn to communicate effectively (Konig & Schalock, 1991). Personal development includes self-knowledge and awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy and appreciation, planning and decision-making, performance and adjustment, and self-monitoring and evaluation (Wehmeyer et al., 1998). Individuals with MR can enhance their autonomy during job searching by learning self-management skills which allow them to provide themselves with cues, create records of their work, evaluate their own performance, and provide themselves with feedback (Lagomarcino et al., 1989).

#### *Work-required Job Duties*

Among work-required job duties and skills, both verbal and non-verbal communication abilities are important to job placement and retention (Martin et al., 1987). Work required job duties and the abilities to perform specific work tasks require appropriate quality and quantity of work. When faced with alterations in routine, employees must maintain quality and quantity of work with appropriate work and social interactions. Safety also must be considered in work activities. When an individual develops work goals based on personal interests, abilities and barriers, they remain longer on the job (Rosenberg & Brady, 2000).

#### *Daily Living Skills / Life Skills*

Daily living skills, including managing financial resources, understanding work schedules, knowing days off and holidays, and scheduling personal activities, are required for successful job retention (Bellamy et al., 1988).

#### *Family*

Individuals with MR become more successful in finding employment when their family is actively involved in their work life (Hill et al., 1985). Therefore, efforts to secure family involvement in all SE planning and decision making need to be a priority (Chadsey-Rusch, 1986).

### **A HRD Model for Performance Improvement in Supported Employment**

Program approaches in SE share concerns and responsibility of providing opportunities for individuals with MR to obtain paid work in an integrated setting and access continual support to maintain employment. Holton's (1999) performance improvement – human resource development model (PI/HRD) is used to illustrate a synthesized model for SE programs. The PI/HRD model (Holton, 1999) includes four domains (i.e., mission, process, critical subsystems, and an individual).

#### *Mission Domain*

Performance is measured by the outcomes (i.e., products or services) rather than by the processes (i.e., procedures) (Holton, 1999; Gilbert, 1978; von Beralanffy, 1968). The objectives derived from the systems mission specify the expected outcomes (Holton, 1999). In SE the mission is to provide competitive, integrated employment for individuals with MR. This mission reflects the system's relationship with the external environment, such as the relationship individuals with MR have with external organizations, the community, and individuals without disabilities. The notion of mission is particularly relevant to SE because of the focus on the valued outcomes which serves as the needed conceptual framework for clarifying the similarities across all SE approaches and providing a foundation for program planning and management (Bellamy et al., 1988).

#### *Process Domain*

Process is the specific ordering of actions or value chain, by which the system converts energy (input) from the environment into products and services (outputs) used by the system itself or by the environment (Rummler & Brache, 1995). Process can be modified in response to

feedback about the system performance. To provide successful SE, an organization must create the opportunity for competitive integrated employment within an integrated system through (a) identifying what work needs to be accomplished and what employee abilities and skills are required (analysis), (b) designing the requirements for individuals with MR to perform and redesign the job itself if necessary (design), (c) developing the job and the supported program based on design information (develop), (d) integrating the employees with MR into the social and physical environment of the job and meet the employees' ongoing support needs (implement), (e) evaluating if the work is performed according to the employer's requirements and the SE environment and system (evaluate). Finally, the feedback process maintains the organization's capacity to offer SE. By accomplishing all these processes and outcomes, the organization will succeed in its mission domain of successful job placement and job retention leading to long-term integrated, competitive employment for individuals with MR.

#### *Critical Sub-systems Domain*

While the mission domain defines performance outcomes relative to the external environment, the critical sub-systems domain defines them relative to internal outcomes that do not always directly connect with the external environment (Holton, 1999). Each sub-system may be part of many processes and not all sub-systems will be critical to the accomplishment of the system's mission (Holton, 1999a). For example, with a SE team, performance becomes an outcome of the critical sub-system of an effective team. Qualified individuals (e.g., job coaches, counselors, advocates, family members) must work together to create competitive paid employment for the individuals with MR to meet their goals.

#### *Individual Domain*

The individual domain aims to improve individual performance through expanding expertise (Holton, 1999). The essence of PI practice has been the improvement of individual human performance, particularly through expanded human expertise, which is believed to result in enhanced organizational performance (Holton, 1999a). The model focuses on individual performance through optimizing learning and expertise (Holton, 1999). This optimization takes place through training and non-learning interventions, such as incentives and consequences, feedback, information, work conditions, work redesign, and resources required for the individual to function in the system (Holton, 1999).

### **Implication for HRD**

The purpose of HRD is to improve organizational performance through increased productivity, efficient work processes, and individual contributions (Swanson & Arnold, 1996). The constructs that improve human performance and individual contribution (e.g., person-job "fit", job satisfaction, and self-determination) have been researched in the general population but may differ for individuals with MR. For example, this research has shown that while job satisfaction improves job retention, it does not necessarily improve performance in the non-disabled population (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985). In individuals with MR, research suggests the opposite (Wehmeyer, Kelchner, 1997). Thus, the training and career development strategies for individuals with MR may require modification based on various behaviors and work constructs and their relationship to workers with MR.

An effective model and infrastructure should integrate HRD to move people with disabilities into an integrated paid employment environment. Holton's (1999) PI/HRD model is a system in which HRD can affect organizational change to improve traditional and non-traditional organizational learning of individuals with MR. Implementing SE requires the coordinated efforts of several groups, each with unique perspectives, needs, and responsibilities: employers

who provide job opportunities; HRD that provides career development, training, and support; state and local agencies that fund, regulate, and evaluate programs; parents and advocates who choose among services and provide assistance outside the workplace; and persons with disabilities who choose whether or not to participate in particular jobs or programs (Bellamy et al., 1988).

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