

Work and Disability

Basic Concepts



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Work is a central aspect of human life. Not only is work a means by which individuals define themselves in society, but it is also part of the very fabric of societies. The relationship of people to work is interactive, reciprocal, and complex. Specifically, work affects and is affected by individual, economic, social, cultural, and other factors (Blustein, 2008).

Disability often complicates the interrelationships between people and work (Fassinger, 2008). It may affect work productivity and relationships with coworkers. Rehabilitation professionals who provide services to with people with disabilities must therefore understand the complex nature of work to assist individuals in attaining and maintaining work and interacting effectively and appropriately with workplace colleagues. This chapter provides an introduction to the complex relationship between work and disability. It begins with a discussion of the social and psychological aspects of work and continues with a description of current work trends. Finally, an introduction to the remaining book chapters is presented.

Social and Psychological Aspects of Work

Work is central to our lives and well-being (Blustein, 2008; Moos, 1986). Although work was regarded with disdain by some early societies, many

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religions have ascribed spiritual value to work (e.g., work is good for the soul; Neff, 1985). In fact, some religious groups define work as a calling from God (Isaacson & Brown, 2000).

Work has many meanings that vary over time and across cultures (Herr & Cramer, 1992; Neff, 1985). Indeed, work is a complex cultural transaction (Neff, 1985) that has psychological, social, and economic purposes (Herr & Cramer, 1992). Rothman (1998) defined work as “any activity that produces goods or services of value to oneself or others” (p. 6). More specific aspects of work, disability, and career will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Social Aspects of Work

Because work is a social endeavor, it has inherent organizations and cultures. Two types of organizations are those determined by the type of work that is done (i.e., *work roles*) and those determined by the situation or location in which the work is done (i.e., *organizational culture*).

Social Organization of Work Roles

Work roles can be organized in a variety of ways. Two frameworks common in counseling are (a) field and level of complexity and (b) interest (Herr & Cramer, 1992). Another framework, which is more common outside of counseling, classifies work into the following types: professions, white-collar hierarchy, blue-collar hierarchy, sales and personal service work, family farm work, unpaid work, and irregular work, which includes criminal activity (Rothman, 1998).

Professions are groups of occupations in which members are accorded respect and some self-regulation due to their expert knowledge and specialized training. They have some level of autonomy over their affairs, and some have monopoly over certain tasks and services (Abbott, 1988; Rothman, 1998). Accreditation and licensure are means by which professions exercise their autonomy over education, admission to the profession, and scope of practice. Professionals constitute approximately 13% of the workforce (McGaghie, 1993).

The white-collar hierarchy includes executives and other levels of managers, clerical workers, and technicians. Workers in this category are responsible for managing, directing, supervising, and supporting the work of others (Rothman, 1987, 1998).

Blue-collar occupations are those that “involve technical operations performed on, or with, tangible physical products and machines, rather than people or information” (Rothman, 1998, p. 12). Included in this category are craftwork, laborers, and operatives. Operatives are individuals

who operate machines and include vehicle operators, cooks, machine operators, and a variety of service workers (Rothman, 1998).

Family farm work is unique in that it requires a family work unit. The numbers of such units have declined to a level where the government no longer collects data. Unpaid work covers the occupation of homemaker and volunteer work. Irregular work includes criminal activity and off-the-books work (Rothman, 1998).

Organizational Culture

People who work together develop distinct subcultures, membership in which typically involves socialization of initiates (Neff, 1985; Rothman, 1998). In studies of organizational behavior, these concepts have been termed organizational culture and organizational socialization.

Organizational culture refers to “the shared beliefs, expectations, and values held by members of a given organization, and to which newcomers must adjust” (Baron & Greenberg, 1990, p. 296). It is affected by an organization’s founders, its external environment, the nature of its business, and its employees. Organizational culture is a potent force that affects the processes of an organization and the behavior of its employees (Baron & Greenberg, 1990). Evidence of organizational culture can often be seen in language or jargon, artifacts (e.g., tools, uniforms), beliefs, values, norms, and rituals (e.g., rites of passage for promotion; Rothman, 1998).

Organizational socialization is a cultural process that is of particular importance to people with disabilities and those who desire to assist them in obtaining and maintaining employment. It is “the process through which individuals are transformed from outsiders to participating, effective members of organizations” (Baron & Greenberg, 1990, p. 302). It is also the process by which diverse populations—including people with disabilities, women, people of color, and sexual minorities—may become excluded (Fassinger, 2008). Key elements of organizational socialization that practitioners should observe include language (verbal and nonverbal), artifacts (e.g., tools, uniforms, grooming habits), beliefs (e.g., knowledge, myths, stereotypes), values, social and technical norms, and rituals (e.g., rites of passage; Rothman, 1998).

Psychological Aspects of Work

Work and personality are reciprocally interactive, with each mutually affecting the other (Kohn, 1990). Work may ease, cause, or exacerbate psychological or physical problems (Neff, 1985; Quick, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1992). Conversely, individual personality traits may affect the work environment (Kohn, 1990).

The potential effect of work trends has prompted more attention to how the design of organizations and jobs affects individuals. Service sector jobs, which are on the rise, tend to be associated with higher-than-average levels of stress, for reasons that are not yet clear (Landy, 1992). Employers with foresight are recognizing the necessity of attending to human resource needs to maximize the potential contribution of advancing technology in the workplace (Turnage, 1990). Principles of *psychological ergonomics* have been developed, as well as psychological job analysis techniques (Greiner & Leitner, 1989; Singleton, 1989).

Volumes have been devoted to the psychological aspects of work (see, e.g., Blustein, 2006; International Labor Office, 1992; Johnson & Johanson, 1991; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Keita & Sauter, 1992; Muchinsky, 1997; Warr, 1987). For this section, however, we will provide only a brief overview of some of the more salient issues, specifically, (a) work motivation, (b) work and personality, (c) work stress, and (d) job satisfaction.

Work Motivation

“People think, and . . . how and what they think will affect how they behave” (Landy, 1985, p. 366). Applying this concept to work, the study of work motivation is the constant quest for answers to the question of why people work and what will make them more productive. Work motivation is “a broad construct pertaining to the conditions and processes that account for the arousal, direction, magnitude, and maintenance of effort in a person’s job” (Katzell & Thompson, 1990, p. 144). The study of work motivation appears to be the psychological counterpart to the more sociologically oriented meaning of work-studies presented in an earlier section of this chapter.

Work motivation is a multifaceted construct that influences job performance in complex ways (Baron & Greenberg, 1990). Work motivation theories abound and tend to focus on the following constructs: direction of behavior, intensity of action, and persistence of behavior (Muchinsky, 1997). Motivational studies remain important to organizations both for purposes of improving performance and job satisfaction and for finding ways to decrease job stress.

Work and Personality

The connection between work and personality is relatively complex (Kohn, 1990). Some career development theories, which are discussed in Chapter 4, are based on this connection (e.g., Hershenson’s, Holland’s, Super’s, and the Minnesota Work Adjustment Theories). These theories tend to focus on the effects of personality on occupational choice and work adjustment. Additionally, it is thought that personality may have a mediat-

ing effect on the impact of various occupational stressors (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997).

Another focus of study has been the ways in which work affects personality. Factors related to work conditions that affect personality are “a worker’s place in the organizational structure, opportunities for occupational self-direction, the principal job pressures to which the worker is subject, and the principal extrinsic risks and rewards associated with the job” (Kohn, 1990, p. 41). Workers who have passive-type jobs (i.e., low-level demands and low levels of control) have also been found to be passive in their leisure and political activities—unless their work becomes more active, at which time their leisure and political involvement also becomes more active (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Thus, work–personality linkage should be considered both an important antecedent and an important consequence to be considered in career counseling.

Work Stress

Work can provide a sense of well-being and belonging. It can also cause psychological and physical problems (Blustein, 2008). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has recognized psychological disorders as one of the 10 leading work-related diseases and injuries and has presented a strategy for prevention (Sauter, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1990). Gradual mental stress accounts for 11% of all claims, according to a study by the National Council on Compensation Insurance (Hatfield, 1990).

Work stress has been a topic of considerable concern in both psychology and business (see e.g., Baron & Greenberg, 1990; Kahn & Byosiere, 1990; Quick et al., 1992; Quick et al., 1997). Broadly defined, stress is “a pattern of emotional states and physiological reactions occurring in situations where individuals perceive threats to their important goals which they may be unable to meet” (Baron & Greenberg, 1990, p. 226). Prolonged stress may lead to *strain*, which implies such physical and emotional consequences as cardiovascular disease, decreased job performance, or marriage and family problems (Landy, 1992).

Researchers with interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., medicine, sociology, social epidemiology, biobehaviorism, industrial engineering and ergonomics, social psychology, cognitive science, applied physiology, organizational and clinical psychology) have furthered our understanding of work stress. Theoretical models of the relationship between work and mental health incorporate multiple factors of the person and the environment (see, e.g., Blustein, 2008; Kahn & Byosiere, 1990; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Quick et al., 1997; Sauter & Murphy, 1995; Warr, 1987).

In the past, the focus was placed on the individual rather than on the environment. This emphasis is gradually shifting to a more balanced

perspective. Accumulating empirical evidence has shown that certain psychosocial factors of the environment override the power of personal coping techniques (Johnson & Johansson, 1991; Landsbergis & Cahill, 1994). The combination of this research and the difficulty of effecting lasting individual behavioral change suggests that it may be more efficient to change aspects of the environment than the person. Thus, the following five psychosocial factors of the work environment have received the greatest amount of attention from researchers: (a) the amount of control an individual has over his or her work (e.g., schedule, pace, use of skills); (b) the nature of a job's demands (e.g., monotony vs. variety) especially as those demands interact with the level of control; (c) social support, both inside and outside the workplace, which acts as a mediator of stress; (d) conflicts between task demands (especially when time pressures do not permit optimum performance), between work roles (e.g., serving client needs vs. employer interests), and between work and family responsibilities; and (e) degree of uncertainty related to the job (e.g., job security, performance evaluation criteria; Fouad & Byner, 2008; Landy, 1992; Quick et al. 1997; Sauter & Murphy, 1995).

The relationships between individuals, jobs, and stress are complex, and much research is needed. For example, although the nature of a particular job is known to affect the worker's stress levels (Landy, 1992; Sauter & Murphy, 1995), it also appears that the effects of job stressors and the mediating effect of social support vary with career stage; for instance, those at an early stage in their careers may be more affected by job stressors than those nearing retirement (Murphy, Hurrell, & Quick, 1992). In addition, there is a cognitive-appraisal aspect to the stress experience (Quick et al., 1997), which means that what is experienced by some individuals as stressful may be experienced by others as exhilarating. Nonetheless, at this time it is known that work stress can be costly to individuals as well as to business (Quick et al., 1992). Disability may further complicate individual stress reactions. Thus stress, is an important consideration in career planning with people with disabilities (Szymanski, 1999).

Issues relating to work stress are particularly important to counselors and educators who work with people with disabilities in supported employment. Service sector jobs, which are particularly susceptible to job stress, are often sites for supported employment placements. Unfortunately, some individuals with severe disabilities in supported employment may have difficulty in communicating about their job stress. In addition, they may lack the social supports that can mediate job stress. Research on the job stress experienced by supported employees is certainly needed. However, at this time, counselors and educators can at least be aware of potential pitfalls and consider them in planning with people with disabilities (Szymanski, 1999).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a construct that addresses individual attitudes toward a job. It is defined as “affect—or feeling and emotion—resulting from one’s evaluation of the situation” (Dawis, 1994, p. 35). The construct can be positive or negative (i.e., job dissatisfaction). As with many other work-related constructs, links between job satisfaction and productivity are complex (Baron & Greenberg, 1990). For example, although job redesign seems to improve job satisfaction, its effect on performance is less clear (Kelly, 1992).

Job satisfaction is often considered in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, as proposed by Herzberg. Intrinsic factors (e.g., opportunities for advancement and growth, recognition, responsibility, achievement) can promote job satisfaction, whereas extrinsic factors (e.g., supervision, pay, policies, working conditions, interpersonal relations, security) can prevent job dissatisfaction (Baron & Greenberg, 1990). Again, consideration of job satisfaction is an important dimension of career counseling.

Clearly, individual interaction with work is complex and reciprocal. Work can have substantial psychological impact, but so, too, is work affected by the psychological characteristics of workers (Blustein, 2008).

Work Trends and Implications

Work has evolved from a primarily agrarian base to bases in industrial and postindustrial societies, and nations exist in different stages of the evolution. Globalization has hastened the pace of evolution in developing nations and has connected the world’s myriad economies (DeBell, 2006; Edgell, 2006). In the preface to the second edition of his volume on the sociological perspectives for working, Rothman (1998) noted the following:

National economies are being absorbed into a global system that is highly competitive, creating pressures on worker productivity and performance. The drive to make organizations more flexible is prompting employers to choose alternatives to permanent work forces. Consequently, jobs are less secure and a significant share of jobs are filled by temporary workers or people on part-time schedules. These developments have profound implications for job security and career planning. (p. xi)

A few years earlier, Hall and Mirvis (1996) suggested that “the company’s commitment to the employee extends only to the current need for that person’s skills and performance” (p. 17). In recommending a free-agent

approach to a career, they noted that “organizations provide a context, a medium in which individuals pursue their personal aspirations” (p. 21).

Since those observations by Rothman (1998) and Hall and Mirvis (1996), the pace of change has continued to accelerate and jobs have become even less secure. There has been a loss of higher paid jobs and an increase in service and lower paying jobs. In addition, many jobs have been sent off-shore (e.g., call centers in India), and other countries (e.g., China) have been gaining in the production of higher skilled workers (Friedman, 2007). The global connection of the world’s economies coupled with trends such as global warming and overpopulation have had considerable impact on the nature of work and workers (Friedman, 2008). In the following paragraphs, we discuss two of the implications of this situation for people with disabilities and those who serve them: restricted mobility and more limited access to higher education.

Restricted Mobility

Poverty can cause disability, and disability can cause poverty (Lustig & Strauser, 2007). Unemployment, a major consequence of globalization, has led to additional disability (Edgell, 2006). The way out of poverty or underemployment has become significantly more complicated in recent years.

Limited health care access and career mobility has become a critical issue for many workers (Raiz, 2006). Even if workers have good health care coverage, their mobility may be compromised by financial limitations. For example, many employers (e.g., the state of Minnesota) have health insurance policies that limit coverage for the first month or more of a new employee’s tenure. Such situations mean that people wishing to change jobs to move up in the labor market must be able to bridge insurance coverage from one job to the next, sometimes requiring payment of costly premiums. In these situations, where health insurance coverage is critical, both disability and poverty can work against career mobility, which is often necessary both for advancement and security in today’s labor market.

More Limited Access to Higher Education

A college education is a prerequisite for many of the better paying jobs in today’s labor market. However, over the last two decades, state support for public higher education has decreased, resulting in tuition increases and decreased affordability (Rhodes, 2006). Many students whose families cannot fully support tuition and other costs work their way through col-

lege. Others join the Armed Forces as a way to finance their college educations. These options are limited for students with disabilities, thus further limiting their access to higher education and many of the better paying jobs. Next, brief previews of the remaining chapters are presented.

Introduction to the Chapters

The remaining 12 chapters in this book cover legislative background and other contextual matters regarding employment of people with disabilities; vocational theories and research related to disability; counseling interventions, multicultural issues, vocational assessment, labor market information, and accommodation of people with disabilities in the workplace; job placement and job development; outreach through business consultation; and supported employment for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Chapters 2 and 3 primarily deal with contextual issues. Chapter 2, "Legislation Affecting Employment of Persons With Disabilities," presents the legislative and regulatory context concerning employment of people with disabilities. Also addressed are the legislative and regulatory responsibilities of employers in disability nondiscrimination legislation. Covered are such laws as the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, worker's compensation laws, veteran's rehabilitation legislation, as well as more recent laws such as the Workforce Investment Act and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act. Finally, information on state and federal laws relating to sick leave, income maintenance, labor relations, and similar legislation pertinent to disability is presented.

Chapter 3, "Employment Among Working-Age People With Disabilities: What the Latest Data Can Tell Us," reviews the evidence on the employment experiences of working-age individuals with disabilities gained from four large, representative samples of the U.S. population. The authors find that the employment patterns of people with disabilities vary considerably. They conclude that the observed patterns cannot be explained by differences in underlying impairments. Rather, they argue that social-environmental forces determine employment outcomes among various disability subpopulations.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus largely on the individual circumstances of people with disabilities as they navigate the world of work. Chapter 4, "Career Development Theories and Constructs: Implications for People With Disabilities," addresses (a) the history of career development theories applied to people with disabilities, (b) selected theories, (c) an ecological

model for vocational behavior, (d) considerations for diverse populations, and (e) framework for using current theories in practice. To help counselors and researchers interpret theories and conceptualize the career development of people with and without disabilities, the authors introduce an ecological model. The model consists of five groups of constructs—context, individual, mediating, environmental, and outcome—and seven groups of processes—development, decision-making, congruence, socialization, allocation, chance, and labor-market forces.

Chapter 5, “Career Research on People With Disabilities,” deals with concerns over theory-based research, which ultimately is intended to help people with disabilities reach employment. It begins by describing methodological errors in this research area. With the methodological caveats in mind, the authors proceed to review the body of career development research according to the constructs in the ecological model presented in the preceding chapter. To assist researchers, the authors provide 10 recommendations for future research on the career development of people with disabilities. Finally, the authors discuss the continuing gap between research and practice and recommend more emphasis on dissemination of research. The authors strongly support the mission and work of the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (<http://www.ncddr.org>).

Chapters 6 through 9 cover mediating procedures that lead to empowerment of individuals with disabilities within their cultural, social, and environmental life spaces. Chapter 6, “Career Counseling With Diverse Populations: Models, Interventions, and Applications,” introduces several models of career counseling, followed by a discussion of career counseling interventions. Specific strategies and activities are presented. For example, the authors provide information on using career planning systems, interest inventories, career genograms, and portfolios, among other interventions. The last section of the chapter focuses on the INCOME framework. INCOME is an acronym for the process of career counseling: imagining, informing, choosing, obtaining, maintaining, and exiting. The authors thoroughly discuss this model and assert that it will make career counseling more applicable to diverse populations, including members of minority groups, people of diverse sexual orientation, individuals with disabilities, and women, as well as White male counselees.

In Chapter 7, “Vocational Assessment and Disability,” a description of objective vocational instruments, theoretical and conceptual issues in vocational assessment, technical limitations of traditional vocational assessment, and alternatives to traditional assessment are discussed. A major contention is that vocational assessment must be reformed to foster the empowerment of consumers, encourage consumer self-assessment, and emphasize not only consumers’ choices but also implementation of

their choices. The chapter concludes with a call for rehabilitation counselors and consumers to make careful use of a variety of methods, including vocational tests, consumer self-ratings, criterion assessment approaches, ecological assessment, and qualitative assessment. The chapter closes with the assertion that it is only when consumers and counselors work together to assimilate information from a variety of sources that a meaningful, holistic picture of consumers' vocational possibilities can be created.

Chapter 8, "Using Occupational and Labor Market Information in Vocational Counseling," reviews occupational and labor market information to provide rehabilitation counselors with strategies, resources, and tools for helping individuals with disabilities in career exploration, career decision making, and job placement. Topics covered are the role of occupational information in career counseling and job development, sources of occupational and labor market information, national classification systems and resources, state and local resources, computer-assisted resources, and transferable skills assessment and job analysis.

Chapter 9, "Disability and Reasonable Accommodation," reviews varying conceptions of disability, followed by a discussion of disability in functional terms, including information on functional limitations, rehabilitation potential, psychosocial considerations, and cultural perspectives. Next, the authors discuss the incidence and prevalence of major categories of medical disability served by rehabilitation professionals. Categories of functional limitations are covered, as well as mediating factors related to these limitations. Reasonable accommodations in the workplace and categories of reasonable accommodation are presented. Finally, material on accommodating individuals with particular functional limitations in the workplace—specifically, the use of computers in the workplace—is discussed.

Chapters 10 through 13 focus on environmental and outcome constructs related to work and disability. Chapter 10, "Job Placement and Employer Consulting: Services and Strategies," begins by providing a historical overview of job placement in rehabilitation organizations. Next, descriptions of current service delivery models and how each model organizes placement services are presented. After a discussion of basic placement strategies, employer-centered services are described. Current models of demand-side services, as well as the impact of recent legislative initiatives on the delivery of placement services, are covered. The authors conclude with a call for rehabilitation organizations to modify their management approaches in response to the many changes reviewed in this chapter.

In Chapter 11, "Job Development and Job-Search Support," the primary topics covered include consumer job searches; job-search support; and establishment, development, and maintenance of employer partnerships.

The chapter reviews a wide array of tools and strategies for meeting consumers' needs. The authors recommend that rehabilitation counselors learn to function as service contractors or interdisciplinary team facilitators, which is essential for ensuring that consumers receive high-quality job development and job-search support.

Chapter 12, "Vocational Rehabilitation in the Context of Business: Motivation, Management, and Marketing," focuses on the business context that rehabilitation professionals and consumers of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services encounter when consumers seek employment. The authors suggest that VR programs expand their outreach to businesses, moving from local strategies to regional and national strategies. Market-driven management ideas should be applied to VR programs, inducing them to think and act more like businesses. The authors indicate that collaboration with businesses to develop evidence-based practice models will lead to innovative and more effective interventions, as well as a network for technical assistance and program development. The concept of developing a *unitary corporate identity* for the VR profession is advocated.

Finally, in Chapter 13, "Supported Employment," the authors begin with a historical review of the development of supported employment, emphasizing its legislative underpinnings. Next, the authors turn to discussing the core features of supported employment, which are competitive employment, integrated settings, workers with severe disabilities, and ongoing support. Two general categories of models are group models and individual models. Additional models presented include the business-responsive model and employment models for individuals with mental illness. The chapter closes by reiterating the importance of consumer empowerment and consumer control over the supported employment process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As we have discussed in this chapter, work is complex, and its nature is rapidly changing. Employment security is dwindling, and security and upward movement may depend on workers' breadth of skills, resilience, and career mobility. More now than ever before, workers must maintain multifaceted flexibility. Within this context, rehabilitation professionals working with people with disabilities must constantly study the changing nature of labor markets and work environments to support and empower people with disabilities in finding and maintaining work. At the same time, professionals must help those they serve plan strategies to maximize their employability and employment security. The chapters of this book are designed to foster an understanding of the complex interaction

of work and disability. We strongly recommend that professionals couple this understanding with continued study of the rapidly changing nature of the workforce.

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