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FACTORS RELATED TO SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT OF ADULT DEAF WORKERS

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WHAT IS VOCATIONAL SUCCESS?

This paper concerns "Factors Related to Successful Employment of Adult Deaf Workers." On the face of it, describing these factors seems an easy task. All we have to do is name a number of factors that are commonly regarded as work success barometers. Here are some examples that come readily to mind. You are successful if:

Your job pays good money; you are carrying-out the work role that you think society expects of you; you got the job of fire-spotter you've always wanted; you work in a nice place that has plenty of heat in winter and plenty of air-conditioning in summer; your boss is good to you; you are self-employed and have a sizeable clientele; your co-workers like you and they are great to be with; you've held your job for two, five, or ten years and have a pension coming and feel secure job-wise; you like to do the work; your job enables you to boss others; you are left alone to do your job in your own way – within reason of course; your mother or wife likes the job you have and you want to please her by staying at it; you stand a good chance of becoming foreman, supervisor, chief, or office manager; your boss appreciates you . . . and so on.

We could keep adding to this list and when we decide to stop we would have probably 1,000 or more different "success factors." If we are interested, we could do some factor-analysis and reduce the 1,000 factors to a more manageable amount, say, five or six hundred or so.

If we look closely at all these factors, we would be forced to the following conclusions:

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SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

1) No worker, deaf or non-deaf, is going to need all those factors in order to be able to define success for himself; he may need one, two, or at most a few.

2) No occupation is going to cooperate in making all those factors available for all its workers, or some of its workers, or even one of its workers.

3) Granted, some occupations will have available for some workers some of those factors.

4) We can only hope that most deaf and non-deaf workers somehow will get into the occupation that happens to contain the factors they need in order to experience vocational success.

What all this means, in the long run, is that the individual worker defines his own job success, or rather, he needs and tries to look for certain things in his work environment that will give him the feeling and thought of success.

RESEARCH, OPINION, AND THE DEAF WORKER

The foregoing prompts us to raise the following basic questions: What systematic knowledge do we have about vocational success and the factors that contribute to it? In general, or in particular, do the work needs of the deaf differ substantially from those of the non-deaf? If they do, is the difference worth dwelling upon? We must turn to the field of vocational psychology and inquire of the researcher and the practitioner whether there are any answers to these questions at this time.

Researcher

The true role of the deaf adult in employment is simply not known. The comment made by Terman in 1965 in his overview of research that had been undertaken on the vocational adjustment of the deaf is still applicable today. He stated:

Many of the studies in the field of the deaf have been tabulatory (reporting where people work, what they do, and how they like what they do) and have not taken measures to fit such data into theoretical frameworks. Some offer data pertaining to such other areas as social relationships, community activities and communication skills, with no underlying concept or group of concepts employed to make meaningful the relationship between work adjustment and these somewhat tangential areas. (Lerman, 1965, p. 13).

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

For example, the predominantly survey-type research alluded to by Lerman tells us the following things:

- 1) approximately 75-80% of employed adult deaf are in skilled or semi-skilled occupations;
- 2) approximately 6% are in professional or related occupations;
- 3) the deaf are regarded as "satisfactory" workers by their supervisors and employers;
- 4) the deaf have generally stable job records;
- 5) the deaf are situated, by earning power, "somewhere" above the median of the general population;
- 6) "verbal skills proficiency" is a factor that figures in the successful employment of deaf professionals (Boatner, Stuckless, and Moores, 1964; Crammatte, 1968; Dunn, 1957; Furfey and Harte, 1964; Justman and Moscovitz, 1963; Lunde and Bigman, 1959; Rainer, Altshuler, and Kallman, 1969; Zabell, 1955).

The research cited here does not give us the kind of information we are looking for, e.g., the determinants of employability among the deaf, particularly with respect to the variables related to personality, work knowledge, and work attitudes. Also, we are not helped to know what are the deaf worker's perceptions of his work-role and adjustment. Hence, we cannot claim with enough certainty that the deaf, as a group, either are, or are not successfully and satisfactorily employed.

Practitioner

The practitioner may have a wealth of information and insight to give us about successful employment of the deaf. He has derived his knowledge from actual experience with the deaf worker. He may be an educator who has placed and followed deaf people on jobs, or a vocational counselor, or a rehabilitation counselor, and so on. From the many practitioners, some who have contributed their opinions to the literature, the following factors have been recognized as important to successful employment.

Communication: The ability of the deaf worker to make known his wants, thoughts, and feelings to his supervisors, co-workers, and superiors, in effect, to get the message across rather than to dwell on the method of doing so.

Interpersonal Relations: The ability to not just "get along" with co-workers, supervisors, foreman, etc., but to engage in wholesome "give and take" with them while making allowances for their foibles, idiosyncracies and limitations, and enjoying their positive qualities.

Pride: In one's own technical skills that get the job done right; in one's competence; in one's ability to hold one's own in the inevitable competition.

Self-acceptance: To know sufficiently well one's work strengths and limits and to order one's working goals around this realization.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Identity: To try to be oneself fully without the bother of pretending that one can “hear and be just like everyone else.”

Intelligence: Enough to understand what non-deaf people at work don't know about deafness or the deaf.

Tolerance, Strength and Perseverance: The emotional strength to accept and deal firmly and positively with the misunderstanding of one's motives and behavior, with prejudice and bias, and with outright rejection.

Self-concept: To be convinced of one's worth, worthiness; that one is needed and useful to others as well as to oneself.

Deaf Worker's Values

This list of general factors is quite enlightening. Together with our original “list” they would seem sufficient enough so that the possession and implementation of some of them would surely make anyone feel successfully employed. But, again, we cannot be sure that the deaf worker would subscribe to them, nor to what degree, nor that he is even aware of most of them.

One important reason for this state of affairs is that neither the researcher nor the practitioner has ever really permitted the deaf worker to tell us what *he* thinks and feels about his work life. They (the researcher and practitioner) have shown a cognitive awareness of the “problems” the deaf face in their work. However, they have rarely, if at all, asked the deaf person to tell them what he wants from his work, what satisfactions he thinks should accrue to him from his work, and what successful employment means to *him*. They have been much more tuned in to the “needs” of the organization employing the deaf person, i.e., of the employer, than to the needs and values and aspirations of the deaf worker himself. In so doing, what they have helped accomplish is the forced integration of the deaf worker into the success syndrome of any given organization. In other words, the deaf person's conception of vocational success and satisfaction is likely to be a reflection of his employer's. Hence, the success factors valued by the employing organization may be different from the factors valued by the worker.

Of course, both the needs of the deaf worker and the needs of the organization are important, and we find too often that they are inevitably in conflict (Argyris, 1957). Also, neither the organization nor the worker could survive if they fully behaved as the other wanted them to (Harrell, 1958).

What needs to be done is to find ways to reduce the gap between what the worker and the employer need, to satisfy the important needs of both while not compromising the needs of either.

With respect to the deaf worker, however, it is time we started finding out what he really wants and needs from his work. We already know enough about the employer and what he expects and needs from the deaf worker.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

THE NEED FOR THEORY

It is apparent, by now, that we are looking for a theory of vocational adjustment which accounts for both psychological factors that motivate the person to work from within and environmental factors that motivate him from without. We are also in need of a methodology that allows the individual to report his own perceptions of these factors.

Motivation/Hygiene Theory

The motivation/hygiene theory, conceived by Herzberg and his associates (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959) has generated a body of research which contains all the above elements. Moreover, the results of their research, conducted on populations in blue collar through professional occupations are remarkably consistent. My own doctoral dissertation on "The Motivation to Work In Deaf Teachers of the Deaf" utilizes the motivation/hygiene theory and its methodology. I will briefly outline the theory and the results of some of the research based on the theory, including my own. My feeling is that this kind of research will provide us with a better understanding of factors important to any worker.

This theory posits that the individual worker's self-actualization needs are satisfied by a set of factors, called '*motivators*', that are separate and distinct from a second set of factors, called *hygienes*, that satisfy the individual's health and safety needs.

Factors appearing as *motivators* are: achievements, recognition, responsibility, advancement, possibility of growth, work itself.

Factors appearing as *hygienes* are: status, job-security, personal life, salary, interpersonal relations (superiors, co-workers, subordinates), supervision-technical, company policy and administration, and working conditions. (See Appendix A for factor definitions.)

This theory also posits that motivator factors are much more likely to increase job satisfaction than they would be to decrease it. Factors that relate to job dissatisfaction very infrequently increase job satisfaction.

Methodology

Essentially, the subjects of the research studies based on the motivation/hygiene theory were asked to give their own stories about their attitudes toward their job. Their stories were content analyzed and the factors extracted.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Results

The results of the many studies were consistent in that workers in different occupations revealed that they were satisfied with their jobs when they experienced the factors of achievement, responsibility, recognition, possibility of growth, and work itself; and felt dissatisfied when the factors of company policy and administration, supervision-technical, interpersonal relations, and working conditions intruded.

Teachers of the Deaf

The results of one research study (Vescovi, 1971) showed that deaf teachers of the deaf also perceived psychological factors (motivators) as job-satisfiers and environmental factors (hygienes) as job-dissatisfiers. They valued the factors achievement, recognition for achievement, and pride or self-esteem. The factors dissatisfying them were named as school policy and administration, supervision-technical, and interpersonal relations with superiors.

Compared to the professional accountant and engineer who valued the factors of responsibility and advancement, the deaf teacher did not appear to value these factors. On the whole, however, this study clearly showed that these deaf teachers of the deaf, most of whom were pre-lingually deafened, had demonstrated that they had a basic need for self-actualization, i.e., for higher order values of achievement, recognition for achievement, worthwhile work, and pride or self-esteem. It remains to be determined whether this conclusion also applies to other deaf workers in different occupations, particularly in the unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled trades where most of the employed deaf are evidently concentrated.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided no "definition" of successful employment of deaf workers. We think it is apparent, considering how little organized knowledge we have on the subject, that it would be dishonest to pretend that we can define it. We hope, though, and this was the intention in writing the paper, that this discussion about success factors and the needs of the deaf worker will be viewed as a start toward intensive and meaningful research and other inquiry into the value and need systems of the deaf worker and his relation to his vocational adjustment.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

**APPENDIX
DEFINITION OF FACTORS – MOTIVATION**

Achievement

1. Successful completion of job, or aspect of it.
2. The having of a good idea – a solution to a problem.
3. Added prestige for the Company
4. Vindication – demonstration of rightness to doubters or challengers.
5. Failure in job, or aspect of it.
6. Seeing results of work.
7. Not seeing results of work.

Recognition

1. Work praised – no reward.
2. Work praised – reward given.
3. Work noticed – no praise.
4. Work not noticed.
5. Good idea(s) not accepted.
6. Inadequate work blamed or criticized – no punishment.
7. Inadequate work blamed or criticized – punishment given.
8. Successful work blamed or criticized – no punishment.
9. Successful work blamed or criticized – punishment given.
10. Credit for work taken by supervisor or other.
11. Idea accepted by Company.

Possibility of Growth

1. Growth in skills – objective evidence.
2. Growth in status (advancement) – objective evidence.
3. Lack of opportunity for growth – objective evidence.

Advancement

1. Received unexpected advancement.
2. Received advancement (expected or expectation not mentioned).
3. Failed to receive expected advancement.
4. Demotion.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Responsibility

1. Allowed to work without supervision.
2. Responsible (for his own efforts).
3. Given responsibility for the work of others.
4. Lack of responsibility.
5. Given new responsibility – no formal advancement.

The Work Itself

1. Routine.
2. Varied.
3. Creative (challenging).
4. Too easy.

DEFINITION OF FACTORS – HYGIENE

Status

1. Signs or appurtenances of status.
2. Having a given status.
3. Not having a given status.

Job Security

1. Tenure or other objective signs of job security.
2. Lack of objective signs of security (i.e., school instability).

Salary

1. Received wage increase (expected or expectation not mentioned).
2. Received unexpected wage increase.
3. Did not receive expected increase.
4. Received wage increase less or later than expected.
5. Amount of salary.
6. Wages compare favorably with others doing similar or same job.
7. Wages compare unfavorably with others doing similar or same job.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Interpersonal Relations – Supervisor

1. Friendly relations with supervisor.
2. Unfriendly relations with supervisor.
3. Learned a great deal from supervisor.
4. Supervisor went to bat for him with administration.
5. Supervisor did not support him with administration.
6. Supervisor honest.
7. Supervisor dishonest.
8. Supervisor willing to listen to suggestions.
9. Supervisor unwilling to listen to suggestions.
10. Supervisor gave credit for work done.
11. Supervisor withheld credit.

Interpersonal Relations – Subordinates

1. Good working relationship with subordinates.
2. Poor working relationship with subordinates.
3. Good personal relationship with subordinates.
4. Poor personal relationship with subordinates.

Interpersonal Relations –Co-workers

1. Liked people he worked with.
2. Did not like people he worked with.
3. Cooperation of people he worked with.
4. Lack of cooperation on the part of his co-workers.
5. Was part of a cohesive group.
6. Was isolated from group.

Supervision – Technical

1. Supervisor competent.
2. Supervisor incompetent.
3. Supervisor tried to do everything himself.
4. Supervisor delegated work well.
5. Supervisor consistently critical.
6. Supervisor showed favoritism.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FACTORS

Company Policy and Administration

1. Effective organization of work.
2. Harmful or ineffective organization of work.
3. Beneficial personnel policies.
4. Harmful personnel policies.
5. Agreement with company goals.
6. Disagreement with company goals.
7. High company status.
8. Low company status.

Working Conditions

1. Work isolated.
2. Work in social surroundings.
3. Good physical surroundings.
4. Poor physical surroundings.
5. Good facilities.
6. Poor facilities.
7. Right amount of work.
8. Too much work.
9. Too little work.

Factors in Personal Life

1. Family problems.
2. Community and other outside situations.
3. Family needs and aspirations salarywise.

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