

## Theory of Work Adjustment

The founders of the theory of work adjustment, Dawis, Lofquist and Weis (1968), postulate that the individual has certain biological and psychological needs that he or she expects to be fulfilled by occupational work. At the same time, the individual has abilities to fulfil certain occupational requirements. The 'work personality' thus encompasses both needs and abilities.

If a job holder meets the requirements of a job, reinforcement occurs, leading to job satisfaction and renewed positive assessment of work behaviour by superiors. If the job demands change and the individual can no longer perform adequately. As a result, negative feedback, up to and including dismissal, occurs if timely adjustment is not successful. Before adjustment occurs, the professional must endure a certain amount of non-adjustment. How much non-conformity he or she tolerates before making an adjustment defines his flexibility.

Active adaptive behaviour focuses on changes in the work environment and its reinforcement mechanisms. In reactive behaviour, the person tries to change to better meet the demands.

The behavioural tendencies that emerge over time in relation to such adjustment requirements characterise a person's adjustment style. Effective counselling assistance in career planning is not possible without knowledge of the factors that characterise this style, namely flexibility, activity or reactivity and perseverance, even in difficult adjustment processes.

The theory of work adjustment can be characterised by the following selected notes (from the perspective of the individual) (cf. Dawis 1996, p. 89):

- I Work adjustment is shown in each phase by a correspondence of job satisfaction and satisfactory work and performance behaviour.
- II Satisfactory work and performance behaviour is determined by the correspondence between individual abilities and the requirements at the workplace.
  - IIa Knowledge of a person's abilities and occupational performance behaviour allows conclusions to be drawn about the requirements of the work environment.
  - IIb Knowledge of the requirements at the workplace and the employee's work and performance behaviour allow conclusions to be drawn about the employee's abilities.
- III Job satisfaction is related to the reinforcement of the employee's values by his/her work environment.

- IIIa Knowing the reinforcements in the employee's workplace and their job satisfaction allows conclusions to be drawn about their individual value system.
- IIIb Knowledge of the individual value system and job satisfaction allows conclusions to be drawn about reinforcement mechanisms in the workplace.
- IV Duration of employment is positively related to job satisfaction and satisfactory work and performance behaviour.
- V The likelihood of adaptation needs in the work environment is negatively related to the employee's work and performance behaviour.
- VI The need for individual work adjustment has a negative impact on job satisfaction.

The theory of work adjustment has led to the development of a number of instruments to measure job satisfaction and work and performance behaviour. This approach, which, unlike other theories, does not only refer to the individual but also to his or her occupational and work environment, is gaining importance, especially with regard to lifelong career counselling of professionals. This is the case both in public or private career counselling and in company personnel management.

## References

- Dawis, R.V. (1996). The Theory of Work Adjustment and Person – Environment – Correspondence Counselling. In: Brown, D. et al. (2002), 75-120.
- Dawis, R. V., Lofquist, L. H., & Weiss, D. J. (1968). A theory of work adjustment (A revision). Minnesota studies in vocational rehabilitation Nr. XXIII. University of Minnesota.