

Determinants of Employment Outcomes: A Conceptual Model for Persons with Disabilities

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Employment outcomes for persons with disabilities have been studied in a Malaysian work setting. Drawing from theories on Ambivalence Response Amplification, Exchange, and Norms of Career Mobility, a conceptual model has been proposed for employment outcomes. The study has brought out eight propositions about the relationship between organizational experiences and employment outcomes with particular reference to persons with disabilities.

Introduction

A review of the extant literature reveals that studies on disability are sparse in the management discipline. The employment outcomes of Persons With Disabilities (PWD) have not been examined from the management perspective in Malaysia. A study of employment outcomes for persons with disabilities was therefore undertaken in a Malaysian work setting. As explained below, a conceptual model of employment outcomes for PWD can be developed on the basis of theoretical justifications drawn from the following well-known theories:

- Norms of Career Mobility (Turner, 1960)
- Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)
- Ambivalence Response Amplification Theory (Katz and Glass, 1979)

Rationale for the Conceptual Model

Development of the conceptual model is based on the following facts/assumptions:

- Persons with disabilities are defined as those who are able to maintain their jobs despite their impairments.
- Empirical research on the influence of disability on the relationship between organizational experiences and employment outcomes has generally not been reported.

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- There is a great deal known to us about unfair treatment and bias across gender and other characteristics such as race. Safilios-Rothschild (1970) has reported that there are basic similarities between the disabled and other minority groups. Studies on minority groups therefore have implications for study on PWD.
- Colella and Varma (2001) have reported that disability issues are uniquely different. Finkelstein (1998, p. 9) has brought out that each form of discrimination has its own unique characteristics.
- Having a disability may not always be disadvantageous.

Understanding the factors of career outcomes or success has long been a topic of interest to individuals and organizations. Consequently, a host of outcome predictors have been identified in the past studies. Many of these studies, which were conducted on the mainstream society, are found in the management discipline. On the other hand, research efforts that examined the employment outcomes of the disabled population are mostly confined to disciplines like social psychology, special education, rehabilitation psychology and sociology. Some of the outcome predictors identified in the past disability studies include independent living skills variables (Dunlap and Sands, 1989), handicap-based social-psychological factors (Bressler and Lacy, 1980; and Stone and Colella, 1996), worksite integration (Gaylord-Ross and Chadsey-Rusch, 1991) and attributes of co-workers (Stone and Colella, 1996). Seemingly, limited attention is paid to disability issues in the management literature (Colella and Varma, 2001). Specifically, the role of organizational experiences in explaining differential outcomes for Persons With Disabilities (PWD) remains largely unexplored.

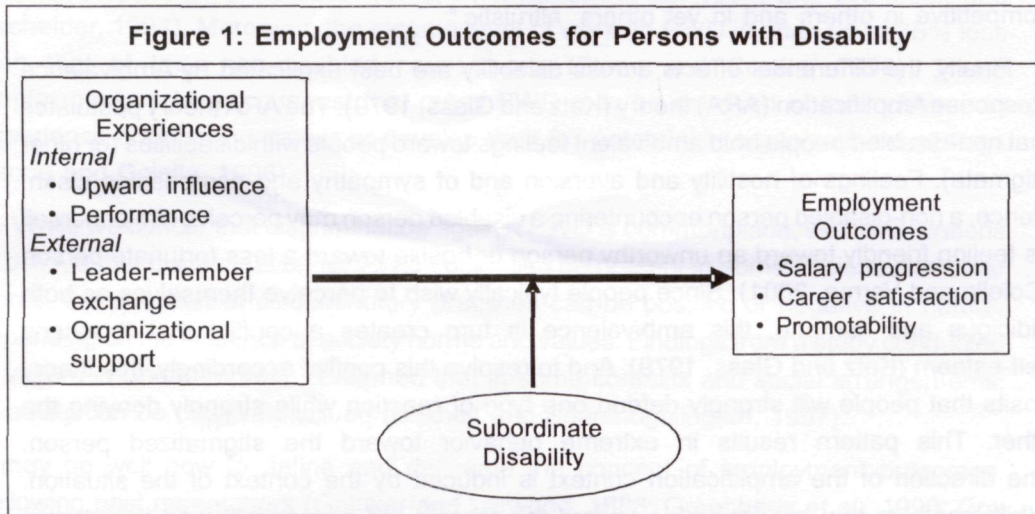
In Malaysia, there is a growing number of PWD in gainful employment as a result of various initiatives and mandates given by the government as well as interest groups. Still, a substantial number of PWD is excluded from gainful employment. But more noteworthy is that little is known about how these employed PWD compare in career behaviors and outcomes with their non-disabled counterparts. A pertinent question therefore arises—"How are PWD's employment outcomes in comparison to those of the non-disabled population and what are some of the contributing factors to these outcomes?" We are aware of no research in the Malaysian context that has addressed this issue from the management viewpoint.

In the hope of bridging the underlined gap in research, we propose a model of factors affecting the employment outcomes of PWD. It has been argued that further development of theory to ascertain the relative importance of outcome predictors deserves research attention (Wayne *et al.*, 1999), particularly so when disability is concerned.

Overview of the Model

The proposed model (Figure 1) suggests a set of potential influences of employment outcomes (assessed along salary progression, career satisfaction and promotability).

These influences are all subsumed under the general heading, "Organizational Experiences" (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990). Organizational experiences are further categorized as 'internal' and 'external'. Internal organizational experiences refer to experiences that result from employees' own actions and behaviors, whereas external experiences are those caused by external agents, such as supervisors or the organization. Accordingly, internal experiences are operationalized as upward influence and performance, whereas external experiences are represented by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and organizational support. The model also indicates that the relationships just noted are moderated by subordinate disability. Subordinate disability is included to confirm if differential employment outcomes could be explained by disability.



Underlying Theories

It is proposed that Turner's (1960) norm of career mobility systems provides the dominant theoretical basis for the model as a whole. Turner (1960) draws a distinction between two systems of career mobility. One is based on a contest-mobility norm while the other is based on a sponsored-mobility norm. Under the contest-mobility norm, the employee faces a system of fair and open contest for career advancement. This suggests that the employee's effort on the job and human capital are crucial in the attainment of favorable employment outcomes. On the contrary, the sponsored-mobility norm assumes a system in which high levels of support and guidance are provided for only selected individuals (Rosenbaum, 1986). Although the contest-mobility and sponsored-mobility norms may appear to be competing perspectives that could lead to exclusive career mobility system, the two systems may instead have 'cumulative' effects on employment outcomes (Rosenbaum, 1986). Most studies (e.g., Judge and Bretz, 1994; and Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994) have investigated variables representing both norms in piecemeal fashion. These studies collectively suggest that individuals may achieve career success under both the contest-mobility norm and sponsored mobility norm (Wayne *et al.*, 1999). Accordingly, we propose that favorable employment outcomes may be based on additive effects of the contest-mobility and the sponsored-mobility norm.

In addition, exchange theory (Blau, 1964) offers the theoretical justification for the relationship between organizational experiences and employment outcomes. The proposed model adopts both social and economic exchange theory. When describing the differences between the two exchanges, Blau noted that “only social exchange tends to engender feelings of personal obligation, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not” (1964, p. 94). A rather fitting definition of exchange theory for the purposes of this paper comes from Chadwick-Jones (1976, p. i) who posits that “the theory deals with social process not merely as a matter of rewards and costs but as a matter of reciprocal behaviors, of different degrees of reciprocity, unequal power, and the social conditions for interpersonal behavior—as complementary in some situations, competitive in others and in yet others, altruistic.”

Finally, the differential effects across disability are best explicated by Ambivalence Response Amplification (ARA) theory (Katz and Glass, 1979). The ARA theory postulates that non-disabled people hold ambivalent feelings toward people with disabilities (or other stigmata). Feelings of hostility and aversion and of sympathy and compassion clash. Hence, a non-disabled person encountering a disabled person may perceive him or herself as feeling friendly toward an unworthy person or hostile toward a less fortunate person (Colella and Varma, 2001). Since people typically wish to perceive themselves as both judicious and humane, this ambivalence in turn creates a conflict that threatens self-esteem (Katz and Glass, 1979). And to resolve this conflict accordingly, this theory posits that people will strongly defend one type of reaction while strongly denying the other. This pattern results in extreme behavior toward the stigmatized person. The direction of the amplification context is induced by the context of the situation. While contexts that are favorable toward the stigmatized person will lead to extreme positive responses, unfavorable contexts will result in extreme negative responses. For instance, encountering a disabled person behaving positively would lead to more positive reactions than encountering a non-disabled person behaving in the same manner. On the contrary, encountering a disabled person behaving negatively would lead to more negative reactions. The ensuing section will detail the linkages encapsulated in the proposed model.

Propositions

The over 500 million PWD in the world (Neufeldt and Albright, 1998; and The Lancet, 2006), with about 300 million residing in Asia and the Pacific (Perry, 2002), are among the poorest of the poor in all societies (Jayasooria, 1989; and Neufeldt and Albright, 1998). In recent years, many governments have initiated various intervention efforts to assist PWD improve their economic situation. Yet, studies have generally shown that the employment rates and advancement of this population leave much to be desired (Blanck, 1997; Ipsen, 2006; and The Lancet, 2006). In Malaysia, for instance, out of an estimated 2.4 million who found a job in the past 10 years, only 3,523 PWD were recruited in the private sector (Hooi, 2001), suggesting the fact that the population of PWD remains

an untapped human resource (Salleh *et al.*, 2001). Also, according to World Bank reports, exclusion of PWD in a medium-income country like Malaysia can result in an estimated loss to the gross domestic product between US\$1.68 to US\$2.38 bn (Perry, 2002).

Kanter (1977), in an early theoretical examination of organizational discrimination, posited that minorities, women and token employees are likely to experience restricted access to opportunity and power within organizations. This will result in lowered growth prospects, aspirations and commitment. There is sufficient empirical support to speculate that PWD suffer similar fate as do other marginalized groups. For instance, it has been reported that PWD are largely employed in part-time, low-status jobs that offer little opportunity for advancement (Havement *et al.*, 1984; and Braddock and Bachelder, 1994). Moreover, the income level of working PWD is often up to 35% less than that of their non-disabled counterparts (Stone and Colella, 1996). These employment problems suggest that many PWD may be deprived of their chance to experience a satisfying career or develop their full potential in organizational settings (Stone and Colella, 1996).

While we concur that discrimination against PWD is commonplace, we have reasons to believe that discrimination for PWD could also be present in some societies. In other words, the direction of discriminatory practices can be positive or negative in nature, depending on the influence of society norms and values. Findings from a study conducted in Vellore in Southern India confirmed that in some contexts and social arrangements, disability can be positively valued (Bakheit and Shanmugalingam, 1997).

It may be well now to define and delineate the concept of employment outcomes. Following past researchers (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990; Cox and Harquail, 1991; Judge and Bretz, 1994; Judge *et al.*, 1995; and Wayne *et al.*, 1999), employment outcomes are considered from both objective and subjective perspectives. The contention is that these two components are related, yet distinct constructs in that they differ in terms of their antecedents (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; Cox and Harquail, 1991; Wayne *et al.*, 1999; and Ng *et al.*, 2005).

For objective dimension, salary progression is seen as one of the most salient criteria against which individuals evaluate their careers, since pay increases as one's career progresses (Gerhart and Milkovich, 1992; and Maume Jr., 1999). As opposed to the objective measures, subjective outcomes refer to an individual's subjective reactions to his or her own career and are most commonly labeled as career or job satisfaction (Gattiker and Larwood, 1988; and Judge *et al.*, 1995). Career satisfaction appears to be the most significant aspect of subjective employment outcomes, as those who are dissatisfied with their career or current jobs would not be regarded as experiencing positive employment outcomes. Research has also suggested that relevant others may make judgments about individual's career outcomes based on objective indicators (Jaskolka *et al.*, 1985). It follows that an important 'other person' assessment will be the supervisor's judgment of the subordinate's promotability (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990).

Promotability, hence, represents the second subjective indicator of employment outcomes (Wayne *et al.*, 1999).

Upward Influence

Prior studies have consistently found that different influence tactics lead to different effects (Higgins *et al.*, 2003). For instance, research findings have indicated that while self-focused tactics have little or no bearings on supervisory reactions, supervisor-focused tactics are more effective (Ansari and Kapoor, 1987; Wayne and Liden, 1995; Wayne *et al.*, 1997; and Colella and Varma, 2001). Similarly, Judge and Bretz (1994) found that employees who used more supervisor-focused tactics experienced significantly higher level of objective career success (i.e., salary, job level, number of promotions with the current organization and number of promotions throughout the career) and greater career satisfaction. The implication is that the use of soft tactics such as ingratiation may be more rewarding as they are means by which the supervisor's liking toward the employee is increased. Similarly, employing rational tactics like rational persuasion, exchange of benefits and personalized help may also be worthwhile (Ansari, 1990). In contrast, the use of strong tactics such as defiance, assertiveness and manipulation has been found to be negatively related to target liking and career outcomes (Judge and Bretz, 1994). And indeed, the use of strong tactics in Malaysian society that dislikes "overt display of anger and aggressive behavior" (Abdullah, 1992, p. 10) could prove detrimental to one's career outcomes. The above discussion suggests the following proposition:

P1: Upward influence tactics are related to employment outcomes. Specifically, soft tactics and rational tactics are positively related to employment outcomes, whereas strong tactics are negatively related to employment outcomes.

With regard to the interaction effect of influence tactics and disability, one research finding is noteworthy. Colella and Varma (2001) reported that subordinates' disability status interacts with ingratiation to impact LMX quality. To put it simply, ingratiation had stronger impact on supervisors' LMX ratings when the subordinate had a disability. Colella and Varma (2001) offer ARA theory (Katz and Glass, 1979) in support of this finding. According to this theory, if the supervisor reacts positively to certain tactics, this reaction will be even more profound when the subordinate has a disability. As mentioned earlier, different upward influence behaviors will bring about different effects. Soft tactics and rational tactics are deemed to put employees with disabilities in positive contexts, whereas the reverse is true for strong tactics. Be it negative or positive, the context will in turn magnify the impact of these tactics on employment outcomes.

In the Malaysian context, as long as people's behavior does not threaten the base value of society, those who demonstrate weakness are often seen as deserving of compassion and magnanimity from those in position of authority (Ismail, 1988; and

cited in Kennedy and Mansor, 2000). And given this social orientation of “helping the helpless” in Malaysia, the use of soft tactics in particular could be even more worthwhile for employees with disabilities than for their non-disabled counterparts. It is thus proposed that:

P2: Subordinate disability moderates the relationship between upward influence tactics and employment outcomes. Specifically, the positive impact of soft tactics and rational tactics on employment outcomes is greater for employees with high disability as compared to those with low disability, whereas the negative impact of strong tactics on employment outcomes is greater for employees with high disability as compared to those with low disability.

Performance

Across career theory and research, performance along In-role Behavior (IRB) has been widely researched and constantly found to be an influential predictor of favorable employment outcomes on both objective and subjective dimensions (Stumpf and London, 1981; and Judge and Bretz, 1994). With respect to Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), past studies have evidenced that OCB enactment does indeed have a positive impact on a number of individual work outcomes (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). Among these are favorable performance evaluations and the attainment of organizational rewards that include pay raises and promotions (Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994; and Allen and Rush, 1998). Hence, the following is proposed:

P3: Performance is related to employment outcomes. Specifically, IRB and OCB are positively related to employment outcomes.

Performance is believed to have important influence on how a person with a disability is perceived and treated (Colella, 1996; and Stone and Collela, 1996). Hence, it is contended that subordinate disability moderates the relationships between IRB and the three dimensions of employment outcomes. This argument could again be supported by ARA theory. Based on this theory, supervisors who react positively to high levels of IRB performance will have more positive reactions when subordinates have disabilities. However, in the event of these subordinates performing poorly, supervisors are expected to react more negatively than they do to subordinates without disabilities. A study by Gibbons *et al.* (1980) has in fact found that performance had a stronger impact on the evaluations of a person with a disability. Because good subordinate performance in terms of IRB should lead to more favorable employment outcomes for all subordinates (regardless of their disability status), this effect is expected to be even more pronounced when the subordinate has a disability.

Likewise, subordinate disability may moderate the relationship between OCB ratings and individual outcomes such that the variables are more strongly related for employees with disabilities than for those without disabilities. These proposed relationships are

believed to reflect differences in the OCB expectations for employees with disabilities and those without disabilities. People with disabilities are normally stereotyped as helpless, dependent, distant and aloof (Fichten and Amsel, 1986; Makas, 1988; and Stone and Colella, 1996). Therefore, extra-role behaviors such as altruism, courtesy, conscientiousness, sportsmanship and civic virtue may be less expected of this group than the non-disabled group. Hence, when employees with disabilities perform OCB, they put themselves in a good light and are likely to be rewarded to a greater extent as compared to their peers without disabilities performing the same behavior. Thus:

P4: Subordinate disability moderates the relationships between performance and employment outcomes. Specifically, the positive impact of IRB and OCB on employment outcomes is greater for employees with high disability as compared to those with low disability.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

One particularly crucial work experience of employees is the relationship they develop with their supervisors. Under Turner's (1960) sponsored-mobility norm system, some employees receive more attention from their supervisors (Dreher and Bretz, 1991) than do others. The nature of this relationship, widely known as leader-member exchange (LMX), will inevitably determine the kind of treatment that an employee receives from the supervisor (Liden *et al.*, 1993). Accordingly, high quality LMX involves a high level of loyalty, contribution, leader's support, respect, and affection (Liden *et al.*, 1997) that in turn has remarkable influence on career outcomes (Wakabayashi *et al.*, 1988; Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994; Gagnon and Michael, 2004; Martin *et al.*, 2005; and Schyns *et al.*, 2005).

Consistent with the exchange theory, high LMX members who receive more support may in fact be empowered to perform at higher level (Wayne *et al.*, 1997; Hui *et al.*, 1999; Schriesheim *et al.*, 1999). They may ultimately be rewarded via favorable employment outcomes that include salary increases (Wakabayashi *et al.*, 1988; and Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994), higher career satisfaction (Scandura *et al.*, 1986; and Schriesheim *et al.*, 1998), and promotions (Wakabayashi *et al.*, 1988; Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994; and Liden and Maslyn, 1998). The above discussion leads us to the following:

P5: LMX is positively related to employment outcomes.

As previously noted, non-disabled people tend to form stereotypes that include competence-related attributions such as helplessness and dependency about people with disabilities (Fichten and Amsel, 1986). Irrespective of the accuracy of these perceptions, it is believed that weak and helpless people are likely to gain compassion, generosity and help from those in positions of authority (Berkowitz and Conner, 1966; cited in Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Ismail, 1988; and cited in Kennedy and Mansor, 2000). Perhaps, this norm of "helping the helpless" is particularly prevalent in Malaysia. Malaysians are often described as caring, charitable, accommodating, patient, and

as having strong humane orientation (Abdullah, 1992; Kennedy and Mansor, 2000; and Ansari *et al.*, 2004) toward the less fortunate segment of the population such as the disabled. Hence, it seems plausible that disability will enhance the impact of LMX on employment outcomes. In other words, employees with disabilities are likely to benefit more from their LMX relationships as compared to their non-disabled peers, such that these relationships will lead to more favorable employment outcomes for them. It is hence postulated that:

P6: Subordinate disability moderates the relationship between LMX and employment outcomes. Specifically, LMX is more strongly related to employment outcomes for employees with high disability as compared to those with low disability.

Organizational Support

While LMX has earlier been viewed as a form of support, the organization offers another potential source of support. However, the latter is believed to be “a more global construct and one that is more complex than simply one’s relationship with his or her supervisor” (Andrews and Kacmar, 2001, p. 352). Supportive organizations are perceived as those that care about the welfare and needs of their members (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). In addition, supportive organizations are more likely to value members’ contributions with praise and recognition, and these organizations even reward beyond what is dictated by formal policies (Wayne *et al.*, 1997; and Andrews and Kacmar, 2001).

The exchange theory states that when the needed support is made available to an employee, there exists an imbalance in the exchange between the employee and the source of support. In other words, an employee who receives support from an organization is likely to reciprocate by displaying positive work behaviors. As evidenced in several studies, organizational support is likely to enhance career satisfaction (Carter, 1992) as well as induce affective commitment towards the organization, and as such employees are less likely to leave (Wayne *et al.*, 1997). They may also be empowered to perform well (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). These employees’ good performance is subsequently rewarded with positive outcomes such as favorable promotability assessment or salary growth. Alternatively, the support given may directly help employees perform better, and their good performance will eventually be rewarded through more favorable employment outcomes. The following proposition is thus advanced:

P7: Organizational support is positively related to employment outcomes.

It is believed that the impact of organizational support on employment outcomes will be even more profound for employees with disabilities than for those without disabilities. The existence of imbalance in the exchange between the employee in question and the source of support may be more significant for the former. As such, when a disabled employee receives support, there is a greater likelihood that his or her career satisfaction will be enhanced.

Perhaps more importantly, there also exists the tendency to reciprocate more through positive work behaviors. Evaluation data comparing employees with and without disabilities working in organizations that offered some kind of support programs have uncovered some interesting phenomena. It has been found that employees with disabilities: (a) perform equally well if not better than the non-disabled employees; (b) have lower absenteeism or turnover rates than their peers without disabilities; and (c) actually have better safety records than their non-disabled counterparts (Ellner and Bender, 1980; and Greenwood and Johnson, 1987). Due to ambivalent feelings that non-disabled people typically hold for disabled people, positive work behaviors of a disabled employee may then induce extreme positive responses from the organization that may include rewarding those behaviors. It follows that the reverse is true for the display of negative work behaviors. Hence:

P8: Subordinate disability moderates the relationship between organizational support and employment outcomes. Specifically, organizational support is more strongly related to employment outcomes for employees with high disability as compared to those with low disability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Eight propositions have been advanced in this study for empirical verification. It is hoped that further research would be conducted on the employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in different work settings. The following approach is recommended:

- Multiple sources of data are desirable to minimize bias. For example, IRB and OCB ratings can be obtained from the supervisor or peers, whereas the quality of LMX relationships can be gauged from supervisor and subordinate's perspectives.
- Measurement of disability should be done on a continuum since it has been argued that "...disability (is) not a dichotomy such as man or woman...but rather a continuum along which we can make an arbitrary dichotomy" (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970, p. 112). Also, the new paradigm or social model of disability no longer views disability in isolation from human functioning, but in a broader context that encompasses the total environment (Ustun *et al.*, 2001; and Pledger, 2003). This suggests that disability would be better measured by employing a person-environment interaction conceptualization. Unfortunately, disability has been generally viewed dichotomously or categorically in prior research (e.g., Bressler and Lacy, 1980; and Colella and Varma, 2001).
- Future research on disability-related issues should give careful consideration to the choice of research methods employed if understanding

of the experiences of disabled individuals in organizations is to be greatly enhanced (Stone and Colella, 1996). For instance, unobtrusive methods (e.g., observation) have been suggested to work well if true perceptions of the non-disabled are to be more reliably gauged (Colella and Varma, 2001). □

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