

Inclusion and beyond

Citation for published version (APA):

van Ruitenbeek, G. M. C. (2023). *Inclusion and beyond: assessment and monitoring development of the work capacity of people with limited work capacity*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20231214gr>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2023

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20231214gr](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20231214gr)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Impact addendum

A

This dissertation aimed to explore how the work capacity of people with limited work capacity (LWC) can be measured, and how their development during work can be monitored. People with LWC are defined as a very diverse group of people with a large variety of skills and competences, who cannot find and keep a paid job that fits their capacity in the current labour market without help. Insight into the work capacities of people with LWC is needed in order to help them find paid work that fits their work capacity. Moreover, in order to enable them to contribute to society according to their capacity on the long term, support is needed for the development of their capacities while working. Therefore, measures for psychological work resources for the general population found in literature were selected. Subsequently, these measures were adapted to the needs of people with LWC through simplifying the language level and avoiding metaphorically written language. Findings indicated that the adjusted measures for psychological resources, specifically mental ability, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, and coping, were reliable measures and well suited to assess the work capability of people with LWC. Moreover, this study largely supports the validity of measures for psychological resources in predicting work outcomes such as 'work behaviour' and 'task performance'. In addition, contrary to what professionals in the field of vocational rehabilitation (such as job coaches and vocational experts) generally expect, findings indicate that when measures are tailored to people with LWC, this group is able to reflect on their own behaviour and provide adequate answers in questionnaires just like everybody else. Finally, the validated measures for cognitive functioning and work behaviour were used to measure development of people with LWC during work over time. Results showed significant development of people with LWC over time in several dimensions of cognitive functioning and work behaviour. Their development was influenced by the degree to which they felt accepted and supported in the workplace.

This dissertation is relevant for the discipline of work and organizational psychology (WOP) and the discipline of occupational rehabilitation. The discipline of WOP can now rely on validated measures to study psychological resources of this understudied population in relation to work outcomes. With the help of these measures, WOP can get more in-depth information about development patterns of people with LWC and the factors that can hinder or facilitate their development in the workplace. A solid scientific base can empower human resources practices to assess this group's work capacity and to support their development during work. In turn, this will help to encourage organizations to sustainably include individuals of this population at their own level of work capacity in paid employment. The discipline of occupational rehabilitation can make use of the insights and measures presented in this dissertation to focus on capacity instead of incapacity of people. Moreover, the changes in work and work demands in the labour market necessitate focusing on psychosocial functioning and psychological resources, instead of only focusing on biomedical functioning in work capacity assessment. The findings and the instrument that derive from this dissertation may help to make this necessary shift and incorporate psychosocial functioning and psychological resources in relation to work outcomes in this discipline.

This study contributes to societal challenges as the instrument that derives from this dissertation supports sustainable participation of people with LWC in paid work. This is necessary in order to reduce government spending regarding social benefits. Furthermore, it contributes to the universal right to participate in work (United Nations, 2006) of people with limited work capacity. Moreover, since citizens have a duty to work according to one's capacity in the Netherlands (Dutch participation act), being able to assess work capacity is relevant. This study contributes to the societal mission of integrating everyone who has the capacity and willingness to work in good and sustainable work as advocated by the OECD and the Netherlands Council for Government Policy. Finally, being able to assess and monitor the psychological resources of people with LWC

is very important because they are indispensable for the labour market. In times of labour market shortages and quickly changing work, the labour market constantly demands new and different skills and competencies. Therefore, not only do we need *all* people to contribute to society but we need a larger variety in perspectives in particular.

The Dutch Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) supported the research project. The instrument that derived from this dissertation is developed *for* and *with* professionals in the field of vocational rehabilitation (such as job coaches and vocational experts). The purpose of the instrument is to fill a gap they experienced with respect to a methodical approach to support people with limited work capacity aimed at sustainable inclusion. Sustainable inclusion of people with limited work capacity in regular organizations is dependent on an adequate person-job fit and adequate vocational guidance during work. A person-job fit necessitates insight into a person's capacities in relation to work outcomes. Adequate vocational guidance requires insight into the relation between work resources and work outcomes (behaviour and task performance), and how this develops during work. A methodical approach aimed at improving work performance of people with LWC is crucial because meeting performance standards is an important requirement for extending the contract. The short duration of employment contracts for people with LWC is a major concern in practice. The newly developed instrument, called the Maastricht Work Capacity Monitor (MW©M)⁵, is accessible for professionals in vocational support practices. With help of this instrument, professionals can improve their vocational support practices and assess work capacity in order to realize a good person-job fit for people with LWC. Moreover, with the help of this instrument, practitioners can facilitate the inclusion and development process of people with LWC during work⁶. This development process generally takes place in the workplace where mentors or supervisors try to coach people with LWC. With the help of the MW©M, effective learning and development can be facilitated with involvement of all stakeholders. The MW©M meets the requirements with respect to involvement of the target group and giving formative, accurate, concrete, specific, frequent, and/or goal-oriented feedback.

Furthermore, the findings of this dissertation are also important for practitioners and professionals in the field, because these findings indicate that people with LWC are as capable as the general population to reflect on their own capacities when communication is clear and understandable. Professionals should change their beliefs that people with LWC have difficulties reflecting critically on their behaviour. Professionals should take notice of the perspectives and insights of people with LWC regarding their own developmental process. Just as anyone in the general population, it is possible that they over- or underestimate their capacities in comparison to observers, but in the end their assessment appears to be no less accurate. When there are differences in assessments between an individual and their observer, this can help to get a clearer view of one's capacities. People with LWC and their observers can learn from each other when they evaluate and discuss their different viewpoints. This can provide a clearer picture of strengths and weaknesses, and it can provide insight into the elements of performance that need to be improved.

Last but not least, the findings and the instrument that derive from this dissertation are highly relevant for people from the target group themselves. With the help of this instrument, they can be supported in finding work that fits their capacity. Moreover, the instrument facilitates improvement of work performance and professional development during work, which meets their

⁵ See for more practical information: <https://www.inclusiearbeidsorganisatie.org/methoden-instrumenten/maastrichtse-werkcapaciteit-monitor-mwcm>

⁶ Such as follow-up care that professionals in regional employer services in the Netherlands need to provide to people with LWC according to the SUWI act (2020).

natural developmental tendency. The MW©M facilitates people with LWC's inclusion in their work capacity assessment and their development process, which complies with the statement 'nothing about them, without them'. Altogether, this can smoothen the path to sustainable employability of people with LWC, which increases the chance that they can earn a living and that employment contributes to their psychological wellbeing and health gains.