

Inclusion and beyond

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Summary

It is generally recognized that employment contributes to psychological wellbeing and health gains. There is even a scientific tendency to consider work as medicine. And although the labour market shortages are intense and growing, people with limited work capacity face difficulties in finding and keeping a job. In this dissertation, I define people with limited work capacity (LWC) as a very diverse group of people with a large variety of skills and competences, who cannot find and keep paid work that fits their capacity without support in the current labour market. In line with the view of the social-relation model of ICF-framework that assumes that people are not disabled as such, but disability arises only from a poor person-environment fit, limitations in work capacity should also be considered in relation to contextual factors that do not match that person's actual capacities. As a result of technology-driven and economically driven developments, the work requirements in the labour market have increased significantly in recent decades. Consequently, the competences of a growing group of people do not match with the demands of the labour market, which has a 'disabling' effect on people. Thus, limited work capacity should not be viewed as a feature or characteristic of an individual, but rather as something that arises from the interaction between the individual and their work context. In order to increase inclusion of this group of people into paid work that fits their capacity, insight into their work capacities in relation to work outcomes is needed. Validated assessment instruments and measures for this target group were lacking. In addition, as the title of this dissertation indicates, I want to go beyond inclusion and enable people with LWC to contribute to society on the long term according to their capacity. Because this group of people cannot find and keep a paid job in the current labour market without help, they receive professional guidance, for example through supported employment and individual placement and support (IPS). These approaches address support aimed at successful inclusion in an organization, and training of the necessary skills after placement. However, a methodical approach to monitor and guide the process of developing skills and behaviours aimed at improving work performance and professional development is missing. A methodical approach aimed at improving work performance of people with LWC is crucial because meeting the performance standards is an important requirement for extending the contract. To date, instruments and measures needed to achieve this aim are lacking. This dissertation aims to fill this gap so that professionals in the field can use a methodical approach in supporting people with limited work capacity. For that reason, this dissertation focuses on the assessment of capacities, skills and development potential that is required for sustainable inclusion in paid work of a large group of people that has been ignored thus far. The following central research question is formulated: How can the work capacity of people with limited work capacity (LWC) be measured in relation to work outcomes, and how can their development be monitored during work?

Aiming to answer the research question, insight is given into how work capacity should be viewed. I build upon the definition of Sengers and colleagues (2022). They define work capacity as a dynamic multidimensional phenomenon that is based on both individual aspects and effects of the interaction between individual, psychosocial, behavioural and environmental conditions. This definition meets a number of essential theoretical criteria. It acknowledges the role of the environment that determines the outcome in interaction with individual characteristics. This recognition is in line with the approach to work analysis of Roe and Zijlstra (1991), which is based on the action regulation theory. In their view, the interaction between the characteristics of an individual (e.g. capacities) and the individual's work situation (e.g. work requirements) is essential for work outcomes at the individual level (e.g. development) and at the organizational level (e.g. productivity). Furthermore, Sengers and colleagues (2022) view work capacity as a dynamic phenomenon that develops under influence of both the individual and their context. The recognition that people can develop their work capacity and that this development is dependent on contextual factors is in line with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory assumes that all humans have a natural tendency to develop themselves, and therefore seek and engage in challenges in their environment, which provokes learning and development. Finally, the acknowledgement of the dynamic interaction between persons and their environment corresponds to the learning dimension of the job demand-control model (Karasek, 1979).

Three research questions, aimed at the development of instrument for the assessment of work capacities of people with limited work capacity, and measures that can monitor their development of work capacities over time, were formulated. These are discussed in chapter 2, 3 and 4.

Chapter 2 addresses the first research question of this thesis: What are the most relevant measures for psychological resources in relation to work outcomes, and what is needed to make these measures accessible and reliable for people with LWC? This chapter builds on a solid knowledge base about assessment of psychological work resources of the general population in relation to (future) work demands from the discipline of work and organizational psychology, and combines this with insights about the specific needs of the target group from the discipline of occupational rehabilitation. Measures were selected that are assumed to predict work outcomes (e.g. work performance) in literature, specifically mental ability, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, and coping. These measures were made accessible for people with LWC through simplifying the language level and avoiding metaphorically written language. In addition, observer-report measures were developed in order to address the concerns of professionals in the field of occupational rehabilitation (such as job coaches and vocational experts)

about the ability of people with LWC to reflect critically on themselves and to provide accurate answers on self-report questionnaires. Therefore, these observer-ratings served as a reference to self-ratings in this study. A pre-test was conducted to test the comprehensibility, relevance and suitability of scales for people with LWC. Subsequently, two studies were conducted. In study 1, the dimensionality and reliability of adapted self- and observer-reported scales were explored. In study 2, new data were collected from both sources for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results indicate that when measures are tailored to this target group, people with LWC seem to be just as capable as their significant other to provide adequate answers to questionnaires regarding psychological work resources. To conclude and answer the first research question: the adjusted self-report and the observer-report questionnaires for mental ability, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, and coping are reliable measures and well suited to assess the work capability of people with LWC.

Chapter 3 aims to answer the second research question: What are the most relevant work outcomes of people with LWC, and how can the relation between the psychological resources and these work outcomes be explored in order to test the predictive validity, and thus validate the measures? Since adequate and sustainable inclusion of people with LWC is dependent on meeting performance standards, a measure for task performance of Williams and Anderson (1991) was selected. This scale is commonly used in the general population, and has been adapted to the target group. In addition, since work behaviour was considered a second important work outcome, I adapted the work behaviour inventory (Bryson et al., 1997) to make the scale more suitable for the broad group of people with LWC. The two adapted scales for the assessment of work behaviour and task performance served as criterions in order to test the predictive validity of the measures for psychological resources for mental ability, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, and coping (see chapter 2). To test the predictive validity statistically, data was collected from four sources at two time points. People from the target group and their significant other (e.g. the individual's relative or personal coach) completed questionnaires addressing psychological resources when the individual from the target group started working (T1). The workplace mentor and the supervisor of the person from the target group served as sources for the outcome variables work behaviour and task performance, and completed questionnaires after 4 weeks of work (T2). Subsequently, the criterion-related validity was examined through multiple regression analyses. In addition, in order to investigate the relative importance of various predictor variables, a relative weight analysis was conducted. Overall, results indicate to a large extent the validity of the psychological resources in predicting work behaviour and task performance of people with LWC. To conclude and answer the second research question, this study yielded insight into the most relevant work outcomes of people with LWC, specifically work behaviour and task performance. Moreover, exploration of the relation between the psychological resources and these work outcomes indicated good predictive validity of the psychological resources, specifically mental ability, conscientiousness, self-efficacy, and coping. Furthermore, this study indicated that when measures are tailored to people with LWC, this group of people is just as capable as the general population to accurately predict their work behaviour and task performance. Nevertheless, the results showed some small differences regarding the individual predictor-outcome correlations between the self- and observer-rating forms. The finding that the 'self-perspective' differs from observers' perspective in our study is consistent with the findings in the general population.

Chapter 4 addresses the last research question of this thesis: How can the development in work capacity of people with LWC be measured during work, and to what extent is their development influenced by contextual factors? In literature, mental ability (or cognitive functioning) and work behaviour are viewed as key factors for employment success. Therefore, development of these aspects in people with LWC was explored while they were working. Moreover, 'acceptance' and 'support' are indicated as contextual factors that can influence the development of our target group. In order to investigate these assumptions, data was collected at three time points after the target group started working. People with LWC as well as their workplace mentor completed questionnaires using self- and observer-rating measures for cognitive functioning (or mental ability) and work behaviour. They completed these questionnaires at three time points over a period of 4 months from the moment the individual with LWC started working. In addition, the target group completed a questionnaire measuring the degree to which they felt accepted and supported in the workplace. In order to explore the development of people with LWC, the change over time for the five factors of cognitive functioning (planning and organizing, learning and memory, adaptability, concentration and problem solving), and the three factors of work behaviour (work accuracy, social behaviour, and work pace) was analysed. A growth curve modelling approach was used for the statistical analysis. Results showed significant development over time for both self- and observer-rated cognitive functioning, specifically planning and organizing, learning and memory, problem solving, and for self-rated adaptability and concentration. Development over time emerged for the self-rated work pace, which is a work behaviour dimension. Moreover, the growth curves on self-rated variables of learning and memory, work accuracy, social behaviour and work pace were moderated by workplace acceptance and support. To conclude and answer the third research question, with the help of validated self- and observer-rating measures for cognitive functioning (or mental ability) and work behaviour, it is possible to measure the development of people with LWC over time. Moreover, results also indicated that workplace acceptance and support significantly influenced self-rated development of learning and memory, work

accuracy, social behaviour, and work pace. Their development was affected in such a way that individuals who reported high workplace acceptance showed an increase in self-rated learning and memory, work accuracy and social behaviour over time. In contrast, individuals who reported low workplace acceptance showed a slight decrease in these determinants over time. Moreover, individuals who reported receiving high levels of support showed a more pronounced increase in work pace over time, while the growth curve flattened for people who reported low levels of support. This study provided initial insight into growth patterns of cognitive functioning and work behaviour of people with LWC, and how this is affected by workplace acceptance and support.

Finally, *chapter 5* provides a summary and an overview of the main findings of each chapter, and discusses the scientific and practical implications and the main conclusion of this entire dissertation. This dissertation yielded insight into the work capacity and development potential of a large group of people that has been ignored up till now. It concerns a very diverse group of people with a large variety of skills and competences that do not match with the work requirements of the current labour market. However, this dissertation indicates that with the help of the new instrument, people can be included in work that fits their work capacities, and that they are able to develop their work capacities in a supportive work climate. Moreover, contrary to what is generally believed, when using measures tailored to the needs of people with LWC, this group is just as capable as the general population to provide accurate answers on self-report measures for psychological resources. This also implies that science can now rely on validated measures to study psychological resources of this understudied population in relation to work outcomes. Being able to assess and monitor the psychological resources of the group of people with LWC is very important because they might be indispensable for the labour market in the near future. Not only do we need *all* people to contribute to society, but we need a larger variety in perspectives in the quickly changing world of work that demands for new and different skills and competences in particular. The development and validation in this dissertation of a new instrument also implies that practitioners can make use of this instrument, called the Maastricht Work Capacity Monitor (MW©M), in order to realize a good person-job fit for people with LWC. Moreover, with the help of this instrument, practitioners can facilitate the development process of people with LWC during work. With respect to directions for future research, chapter 5 emphasises the importance of replication. I believe a solid scientific base will empower human resources practices to assess the work capacity of this specific population in order to create a better person-job fit. In turn, this will help to encourage organizations to include individuals with LWC in paid employment at their own level of work capacity. This way, science can contribute to the universal right and the societal mission of integrating everyone who has the capacity and willingness in good and sustainable work. Finally, the main conclusion of this dissertation is provided in chapter 5. I conclude that with the newly developed instrument, the path is paved to include people with LWC in work that fits their capacity, and to go beyond inclusion and thus facilitate their development during work. This supports the natural developmental tendency of each individual, and can smoothen the path to sustainable employability of people with LWC.