A Preliminary Investigation of Factors Affecting Employment Motivation in People With Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract Relatively small numbers of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) are engaging in paid employment and those who are tend to be working only part-time. This preliminary study addressed the question of what factors motivate people with ID to work. The issue was investigated in a sample of 10 young work-age adults attending supported learning courses at a further education college in England. Participants were asked directly about their feelings through a focus group. A set of questions with additional prompts was used to elicit responses, and cards and scales were used as visual aids. Participants were asked about what factors motivated them to work and what factors deterred them from working. Thematic analysis of the transcribed tapes revealed three major themes that affected participants' motivation to work: monetary gain, social aspects, and perceived competence. More detailed research is needed in order to validate these findings with a larger, more representative sample.

Keywords: focus groups, intellectual disabilities, motivation, supported employment, thematic analysis, work

INTRODUCTION

Employment is important not only for financial reasons; it also has significant effects on one's psychological health. Graetz (1993) found that people who were employed reported significantly fewer health problems than people who were unemployed. Being employed is also beneficial to people with intellectual disabilities (ID; Griffin, Rosenbergh, & Cheyney, 1996; Stenfert Kroese, Kahn, & Hearn, 2000). However, in the UK, only 11% of people with ID are engaging in paid employment and those who are tend to be only working part-time (Department of Health, 2001). In order to improve the employment rates for people with ID, it is important to determine what factors motivate people with ID to work and what factors deter them from working. Identifying the factors that are involved can help organizations to promote certain factors and remove barriers to employment.

Several general factors have been identified as affecting employment outcomes for people with ID. One factor is support from family or carers (Beyer, Kaehne, Grey, Sheppard, & Meek, 2008). Another factor is vocational training or work experience; this has been found to increase the likelihood of a person with ID obtaining and upholding a job (Beyer et al., 2008). Other factors that have been identified include severity of ID (Bass, Drewett, & Corden, 1996) and difficulties with typical recruitment methods (Broad, 2007). Additionally, a person's motivation appears to be

important. McConkey and Mezza (2001) found that a lack of motivation appeared to be a barrier to employment for people with ID who were using day centers. Motivation has been found to be a predictor of employment success in the general population (Wanberg, Kanfer, & Rotundo, 1999) so it is unsurprising that it is also a factor in employment for people with ID. It has also been suggested that people with ID may have lower aspirations in terms of employment than people without ID (Walker, 1982).

Several employment agencies use motivation as a key criterion when accepting referrals, since they consider it so important (Beyer & Kilsby, 1997). In a study of 200 people with ID who used a supported employment agency, it was found that the only significant predictor of employment success was their levels of motivation, which were assessed by staff running the scheme (Rose, Saunders, Hensel, & Stenfert Kroese, 2005).

Additionally, a study of 60 people with ID using a supported employment agency revealed that those who went on to gain employment had, at first interview, been significantly more motivated by status aspiration than those who did not obtain work (Hensel, Stenfert Kroese, & Rose, 2006). Furthermore, those who did obtain employment had rated themselves at first interview as significantly less happy than those who did not later get a job. This suggests that people with ID who are less happy than others with ID are more motivated to improve their circumstances by seeking work. These studies suggest that motivation may be an important factor in employment success for people with ID; however, participants were already using supported employment agencies and were already actively seeking employment. As a result, they may have higher motivation to work than unemployed people with ID who are not using agencies. Another issue

with previous research is that studies tend to rely on the opinions of staff at agencies rather than on those of people using the services directly.

Research now needs to identify what factors actually motivate people with ID to work as well as what factors deter them. One such de-motivating factor may be the loss of social welfare benefits that is involved when working, known as the "benefits-trap" (Beyer & Kilsby, 1997). The present research was a preliminary study used to address the question of what factors motivate people with ID to work and what factors deter them. This was investigated in a small sample of young adults attending a further education (FE) college (i.e., a postcompulsory education facility providing work-based learning). Participants were asked directly about their feelings via the use of a focus group.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 10 young work-age adults who had mild ID and attended supported learning courses at an FE college on the edge of a city in England. There were two groups of 5, consisting in total of eight males and two females, aged from 18 to 22. Of the 10 participants, eight lived with their parents or family, one with a "carer," and one in a residential home. Students were recruited through the special needs teaching provision of the college. They were told by their lecturer that they had the option of participating in the research or continuing with the tutor group, which would run in parallel. See Tables 1 and 2 for further information about participants.

Procedure

Participants sat at a table with the moderator and a note-taker. The discussion was taped using a digital recorder. A set of questions was used with additional prompts to find out more about responses. Cards and scales were used as visual aids. Questions were asked about what factors motivated participants to work and what factors deterred them from working; these are shown in Table 3. There was no time limit so the discussion ended naturally once all topics had been discussed. Each session's recordings were transcribed. The notes from each session were used to aid transcription to ensure accuracy and to note anything that the tape missed, such as silent assent or disagreement. The project was reviewed and approved by the University Ethics committee.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to establish themes that arose in participants' speech in the two transcripts. This was done by following the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their account of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke define a theme as something that "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set"

(p. 82). In this case, themes were aspects of working that participants consistently expressed to be important. A tally chart was created recording the number of occurrences of each theme. Greater weight was given to topics that participants discussed without being prompted or asked about.

ANALYSIS

The majority of participants said that they would like to work in the future. When asked how likely they thought it was that they would get a job, participants were unsure, with responses clustering around the "maybe" point on the scale. When asked how motivated they were to work, responses were mixed, but mostly indicated high motivation for work. The mean scores for each scale are in Table 4.

Thematic Analysis

Three main themes that affected participants' motivation to work were evident: (1) monetary gain; (2) social aspects; and (3) perceived competence. These are illustrated in Figure 1.

Monetary gain   All participants expressed a belief that money was an important factor. Some participants discussed monetary gain in terms of survival, whereas some referred to the idea of *earning;* participants acknowledged that they would have to work for their money, and they focused on this aspect rather than solely on the end result of the monetary gain. The idea of earning appeared to be a positive prospect for participants. Money was also discussed in terms of the pleasure of having money.

Social aspects   Many different social aspects were discussed in terms of motivating factors, including making new friends and helping others. Additionally, most participants said that they wanted to work to make their family happy. Participants also indicated that negative attitudes from others would deter them from working. This included bullying from other staff and feeling judged at interviews.

Perceived competence   The third theme was participants' beliefs about their abilities in relation to working. Participants were aware of their personal difficulties and judged jobs accordingly. For example, office work was unpopular with most participants, as they felt that they would not be able to do aspects of the job such as "paperwork." Therefore, participants' beliefs about their abilities deterred them from seeking particular jobs. Participants also expressed confidence in some of their abilities and were motivated to work within jobs that they felt able to do. For example, one participant said he was "good at I.T." and that he could do the job of a waiter well.

Support was also important to all participants. They were motivated to work by the prospect of being supported whereas the possibility of little or no support deterred them from working. This appeared to be related to perceived competence; for example, when asked if they would need support when working, one participant replied, "I would because I wouldn't be able to

TABLE 1
Information about Group 1

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Sex/age	Male (19)	Male (19)	Male (21)	Male (22)	Male (19)
Ethnicity	British Caucasian	British Caucasian	British Caucasian	British Caucasian	Asian
Disabilities	Mild ID; Immature behavior	Mild ID	Mild ID; Asperger syndrome; Speech impairment	Mild ID	Mild ID; Cerebral palsy
Additional details from tutor	Attended a special school; Not expected to undertake a work placement	Attended a special school post-16; Has undertaken a work placement at school	Attended a special school; Not expected to do work placement	Attended a special school; Not expected to do work placement	Attended a special school; Would like to do a work placement, this is a possibility
Time at college	In 4th year at the college	In 1st year at the college	In 3rd year at the college	In 3rd year at the college	In 4th year at the college

TABLE 2
Information about Group 2

	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Sex/age	Male (19)	Male (18)	Female (18)	Female (20)	Male (18)
Ethnicity	British Caucasian	British Caucasian	British Caucasian	British Caucasian	British Caucasian
Disabilities	Mild ID	Mild ID	Mild ID	Mild ID; Speech impairment	Mild ID; Autism
Additional details from tutor	Learning practical crafts (brickwork and woodwork)	Learning practical crafts (brickwork and woodwork)	Learning cookery skills	Learning hairdressing skills	Learning practical crafts (brickwork and woodwork)
Time at college	In 3rd year at the college; 2nd year of current course	In 3rd year at the college; 2nd year of current course	In 3rd year at the college; 2nd year of current course	In 2nd year at the college; 2nd year of current course	In 3rd year at the college; 2nd year on current course

TABLE 3
Structure of questions

Basic structure of questions

1. Have any of you had a job before?
2. Would you like to have a job in the future?
3. What do you think you would like about having a job?
4. What things would you not like about having a job?
5. Do these factors make you want to work? (Cards shown)
   a) Earning money
   b) Being independent
   c) Learning new skills
   d) Meeting new people
   e) Having status
   f) Making your family happy
   g) Doing something you enjoy
   h) Achievement/success
   i) Being accepted
   j) Helping people
6. Do these factors put you off getting a job? (Cards shown)
   a) Having to travel to work
   b) Having to do things yourself
   c) Feeling unable to do the work
   d) Having to tell people about your learning disability
   e) Negative attitudes from others
   f) Not receiving benefits
7. Scales of 0–10 (3 scales used)
   a) How much would you like to have a job in the future?
   b) How likely do you think it is that you will have a job in the future?
   c) How motivated are you to work in the future?
8. Do you feel that having a job is important?
9. Have you thought much about work before today's discussion?
10. Do you think your family and friends would like you to get a job?
11. Is it important to you that you're supported when looking for a job?
12. What do you think about working for a long time?—Do you think you would like to work everyday or just a few days a week?
13. Do you think working would make you happy in the future?
14. What do you think you will do when you finish college?
15. Would you like to work in any of these areas? (Cards shown)
    a) Office work
    b) Caring for others
    c) Beauty
    d) Physical work
    e) Working in a shop
    f) Catering
    g) Delivering

cope on my own." Participants expressed a desire to be supported while looking for a job, while getting to work, and while working. They identified college staff, job center staff, Connexions workers (a UK public service providing career advice and support), and their parents or carers as sources of support.

Other factors   Other factors that were mentioned by a minority of participants included the amount of physical effort involved and the duration of the working day; some participants were deterred from working by the idea of having to put in physical effort, working long hours, and getting up early. Some participants also commented on job enjoyment, and they said they would quit a job if they did not enjoy it. In terms of motivating factors, some participants also expressed a desire to learn new skills through working. Additionally, one participant expressed that work was important because it gives people somewhere to go and something to do.

DISCUSSION

Three main factors were found to affect motivation to work for this sample of students. First, all participants were motivated to work by the prospect of monetary gain. Little research has highlighted this before, but people with ID may be as motivated by money as the general population. The Shaw Trust, a national charity in the UK, supports people with ID with several aspects of employment, including financial advice. This involves evaluating the financial benefits of employment using a "better-off-in-work calculation" as well as checking to see if they can receive top-up money when they begin working, such as tax credits and Return to Work credits. People with ID can also gain access to financial support to help cover work-related costs, including child care and travel. The present findings support the use of such schemes in the UK and internationally.

Second, various social aspects affected employment motivation. Positive social aspects, such as making friends, were discussed in terms of motivating factors, while negative social aspects, such as bullying from other staff, were discussed as deterrents. This links to the finding that friendships and social contact through work are important factors in job satisfaction for people with ID (Shanly & Rose, 1993). Additionally, concerns about negative attitudes relate to the finding that people with ID are aware of being stigmatized and that they distance themselves from services that stigmatize as well as from other people who have ID (Jahoda & Markova, 2004). Although this research was not directly about employment, the findings show how people with ID can be deterred from living normal lives.

The social theme supports areas of supported employment such as mentoring. One participant expressed concern about being judged at interviews; this view supports the need for assistance with interview techniques by supported employment agencies. Additionally, supported employment agencies aim to promote social inclusion of people with ID in the workforce; the present findings support this contribution.

Third, perceived competence was an important factor since participants' confidence in their abilities affected whether or not they felt able to do certain jobs. Being supported was a big aspect of this theme, as participants said this would help them to do

TABLE 4

Mean scores for each scale out of 10

Scale	Group 1 mean	Group 2 mean	Total mean
How much would you like to work in the future?	9.8	8.4	9.1
How likely do you think it is that you will work in the future?	5.8	6.2	6.0
How motivated are you to work in the future?	8.8	7.2	8.0

Note: For each scale, 0 was the lowest score and 10 was the highest; for example, when asked "how much would you like to work in the future," 0 indicated no desire to work and 10 indicated maximum desire to work.
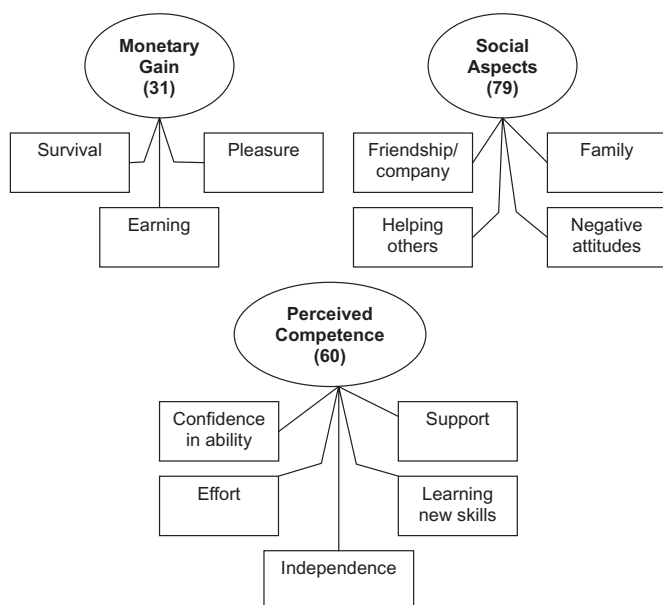

FIGURE 1

A thematic map of the three themes. The numbers in brackets represent the number of "mentions" for each theme.

things that they would not be able to do alone, such as looking for a job and traveling to work. This supports the finding that people with ID have a continued need for support from someone they trust (Reid & Bray, 1997). This theme also supports the use of ongoing assistance in supported employment. Although support was important to participants, none of them expressed awareness of supported employment when asked about sources of support. It may be useful to educate young people with ID about what support is available to them. This may result in greater motivation to work from a younger age.

Additionally, an important aspect of perceived competence was confidence in ability. Since self-esteem has been found to be low in people with ID (Szivos-Bach, 1993), supported employment agencies and educational institutions may need to focus on promoting self-confidence and positive self-esteem in people with ID.

One participant said work was important because it would provide a "base" and get her out of the house. Stenfert Kroese et al. (2000) found that the most common reasons given for wanting a job by people with ID were "getting out of the house" and "something to do." Stenfert Kroese et al. also found that too much work and too many hours was one of the main causes of stress in employed people with ID. Ways in which participants felt this could be overcome was people being more friendly at work, taking on less work and having more help. This supports the social and perceived competence themes identified in this study.

An important point to consider is the social and economic circumstances of the participants, as this can affect motivation to work. Of the 10 participants, eight lived with their parents/family, which is typical of students in this age group. In comparison, one participant lived with a carer and one lived in a residential home. It is possible that individuals whose social and economic circumstances depend on care organizations may be less motivated to work, due to the promise of economic support. However, the majority of participants expressed a desire to seek employment, and this desire appeared to be just as strong, if not stronger, in those individuals who did not live with their parents.

In closing, the findings indicate three main factors that affected employment motivation in a sample of FE college students with ID. These were: monetary gain, social aspects, and perceived competence. Due to the preliminary nature of the present research and the restricted sample, the findings should be taken with caution and as a pilot to further, more in-depth, research. The participants in this study were considered to have mild ID; people with more severe ID may differ from these participants in terms of employment motivation due to the increased difficulties they face. In order for the findings to be generalized, a more extensive study is needed, which should involve a larger sample of people with mild to severe ID and people who were not already undertaking FE.

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