PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENT DISABILITIES IN SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT SETTINGS: A METHODOLOGICAL CHANGE

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Key words

Person with disability, sheltered setting, employment, main obstacles.

Summary

In this article we intend to explore individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in sheltered employment settings, the barriers they face when dealing with certain tasks and the difficulties they have in adjusting to them. With this purpose, we consider some barriers or difficulties produced by the combination of their personal traits, task work and employment settings.

Employment may generate improved lives and greater skills, but we must remember that a lifelong learning is a key tool in the development of the competences in order to face some labour market changes.

Our goal is to improve certain methodological strategies in order to develop the social and professional competences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Accessing the labour markets can be extremely taxing for disabled people, even more if the nature of their disabilities is intellectual.

Several factors are like obstacles to the inclusion of intellectual disabled people into the work settings. These factors include: (1) *personal*; coming from the disability itself and related to competence learning and development; (2) *social*; produced by a negative classification of competences and potentials; and (3) *labour*; stemming from the difficulties in responding to the requirements of dynamic, changing and competitive employment.

In Spain, the Special Work Centre (SWC) constitutes an alternative to social and labour integration of intellectual disabilities into sheltered employment settings. Their aim is to provide appropriate and continuous training for their

workers, promoting their personal and professional development to help them with the changes in the work settings.

SWCs are regulated by LISMI (1982) and the Royal Decree 469 (2006). Their main objective is to perform a productive work, developing a management regulated by the same standards and requirements applied to any company. To achieve that, their structure and organization must conform to those of any ordinary company. In these centers, the maximum number of disabled workers cannot exceed 70 % of the total workforce, excluding non-disabled workers in charge of personal and social adjustment of disabled workers. SWC presents a mixed and complementary nature: labour and social. From a labour point of view, their goal is to recruit disabled people with a legal level of disability (between 33 % and 65 %). In the social side, their aim goes beyond labour relationships, providing personal and social adjustment services as rehabilitation, therapies, formative or cultural services. Training centers cannot be limited to admitting people for training with the sole criterion of success in finding employment. A person is a whole and must be looked holistically (Cedefop, 2003)

There are several reasons to suggest that cognitive and adaptive behavioural deficits can interfere with the ability of people with intellectual disabilities to achieve their employment goals (Chwen-Yng, 2008). For persons with intellectual disabilities, disturbances have been documented in essentially all aspects of cognition, including measures of attention, memory, visual perception, language, and executive function (Fidler, Most, & Guiberson, 2005; Palmer, 2006; Purser & Jarrold, 2005; Vicari, 2004). The impact of cognition on work performance is more evident in other diagnostic groups characterized by cognitive impairment, such as schizophrenia (McGurk & Mueser, 2004). These studies showed that lower levels of cognitive functioning (cognitive skills, executive functions, verbal memory, and vigilance) are associated with more hours of job support and more contacts with employment specialists (McGurk & Mueser, 2006).

Specifically, the main obstacles we found are (Artigas-Pallerés, 2003; Bonal & Caparrós, 1994; Collet, 2003 and 2004; Dunn, 1973; Fenning et al, 2007; Jurado, 1993, 2007a and 2007b; Millas & Calderón, 2005; Shaw et al., 2005 Zetlin & Murtaugh, 1990):

- Lack of social skills (teamwork, communication, interpersonal relationships).
- Limited language.
- Low self-esteem.

- Emotional maladjustment.
- Low formative level (slower learning processes).
- Lack of basic competences and trouble to acquire them.
- Adjustment difficulties.
- Lack of flexibility.
- Low stress tolerance.
- Difficulties in improvising.
- Anxiety in unexpected and uncontrolled situations.
- Trouble performing difficult and non-repetitive tasks.
- Degree of dependence.
- Lack of self-determination and initiative.
- Difficulties with self management.
- The social benefits they obtain act as an inhibitor of labour integration.

In general, we identified obstacles of the following types:

- *Architectural*. Physical obstacles preventing the integration of people with physical or sensorial disabilities.
- *Social* and *cultural*. Social stereotypes belittling the capabilities and potential of disabled people, especially intellectual disabilities.
- *Educative*. Low formative levels, especially in individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- *Legal*. Lack of more specific regulations for the labour integration of disabled persons in non-sheltered employment settings.

The goal of this study is the identification of formative needs to guide and define actions into the SWCs, in order to improve the personal and professional conditions of intellectually disabled people. So we need to consider some matters like workplace requirements, their differential conditions, and the SWC. However, this process must be implemented from a point of view of basic competences starting with the job task and the workers' personal and professional situation.

2. PROCEDURE

2.1 SAMPLE

The study arises from the requirements of the *Coordinadora de Tallers per a Minusvàlids Psíquics a Catalunya*; a private non-profit organization acknowledged by the government, with 63 centers (occupational centers, special work centers and supervised home). The *Coordinadora* is as a mediator between the social and labour integration sectors of intellectual disabled people.

- Sample in the study: 17 SWC (26.98 % of total number of centers).
- Sample population: 229 workers in the 17 SWCs.

2.2 INSTRUMENTS

Three types of instruments have been used for this study:

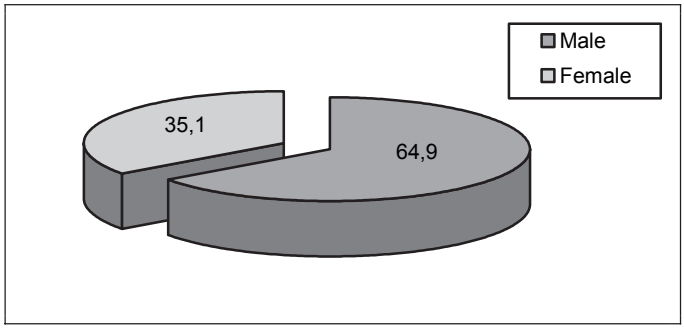
- Questionnaires: have been delivered to 90 % of the employment specialists and 10 % of the workers in the SWCs. The items are related to: personal, formative and professional variables; need analysis, initial and continuous education; and degree of mastery and importance in the basic competences (linguistic communication, mathematics, interaction with the environment, digital, labour, learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and social and civic).
- Interviews: conducted with employment specialists and managers in the 17 SWCs. It comprises the following sections: Description of professional tasks, motivation, education, activities and skills, improvement of the workplace.
- Observation of workplaces according to the different professional families in the SWCs.

3. RESULTS

3.1.1 Personal variables

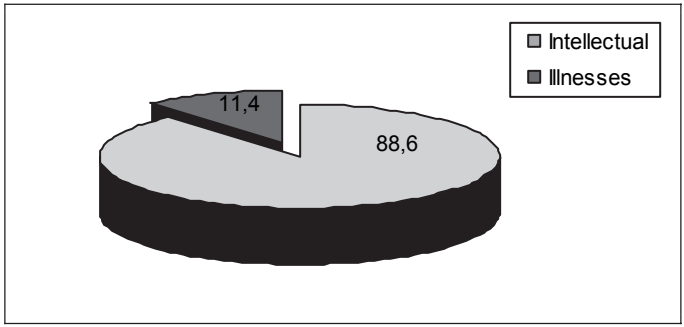
64.9 % of the sample is male and 35.1 % is female. This data is supported by studies performed in Cataluña by the ONCE Foundation (2004), where we can find that in 1996-2001 male hiring represents 58.5 %, and female hiring 42 %.

Graph Gender



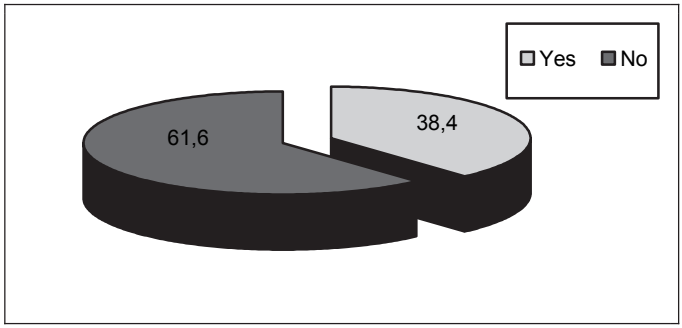
In the **type of disability** there is a clear prevalence of intellectually disabled people; representing 88.6 %; and 11.4 % with mental illnesses (schizophrenic, psychotic...).

Graph Type of disability



Finally, 38.4 % of the individuals in the sample received some medical **treatment**.

Graph Receiving medical treatment

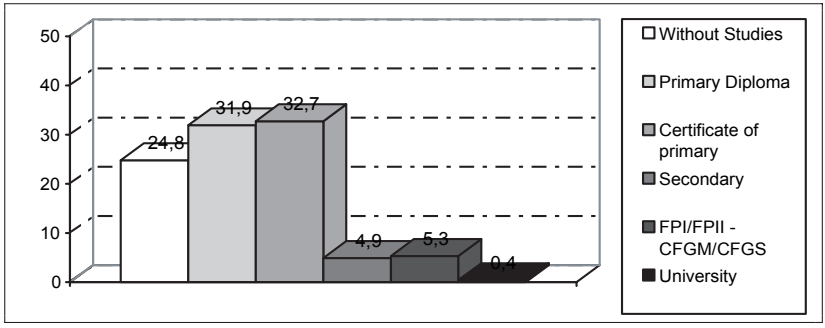


3.1.2. Formative variables

64.5 % of individuals have basic or primary education in the Spanish educative system: 31.9 % have a primary education diploma and 32.7 % a certificate of primary education. Only 10.1 % have secondary education, and less than 1 % went to the university

It is important to note that the percentage without education in our sample is 24.8 %.

Graph Degree of studies



3.1.3. Professional variables

We identify mainly nine **professional families** in the SWC

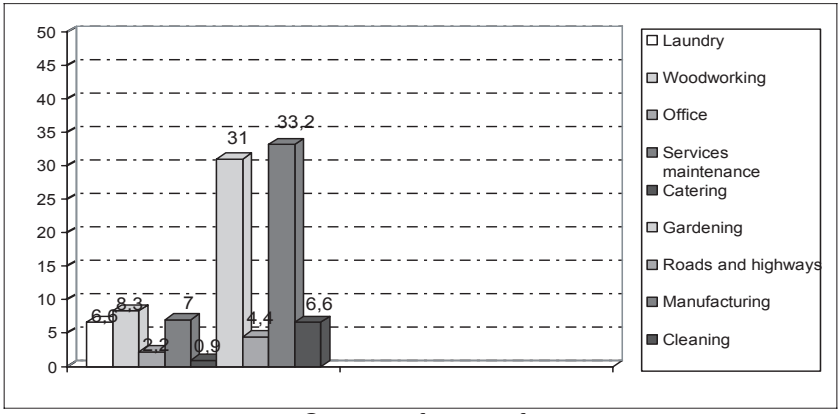
The more representative is manipulating/assembly (33.2 %) and gardening (31 %). The others professional families vary between 4 % and 8 % of the total in the sample, except for professional families directly related to service and customer service areas; office and catering; representing only 2.2 % and 0.9 %.

Another area to be considered in the professional variables is some **distinctive professional tasks**, as shown in the following table:

Table Professional families and their representative tasks

PROFESSIONAL FAMILY	REPRESENTATIVE PROFESSIONAL TASKS
Laundry	Ironing, folding and packing clothes; management, pickup and delivery of orders and invoice handling.
Woodworking	Chain tasks in wood production: supplies, stacking, gauging, frame mounting, nailing, milling, polish, pressing, drilling, cutting, etc.
Office	Switchboard operation, mail handling, copying, auxiliary services tasks and customer service.
Services maintenance	General maintenance, cleaning, cartridge control, toner replenishment, etc.
Catering	Dining room and kitchen cleaning, table waiting and food service.
Gardening	Park and garden maintenance, and basic cleaning and care tasks for green area maintenance with specialized machinery, tools and products.
Roads and highways	Highway maintenance, signal installation and flagging.
Manipulating/ assembly	Assorted tasks according to product: manipulation and testing of windows, switch and electric circuit installations, serigraphy, labelling, quality control etc.
Cleaning	Cleaning of offices, homes, production facilities, automobiles, washing tunnels and basic parking lot maintenance.

Graph Professional families



Finally, the workers consider some strong and weak features in their professional tasks. Some of these are shared by all the professional families, and some are specific to each family.

Table Strong and weak areas common to all professional activities

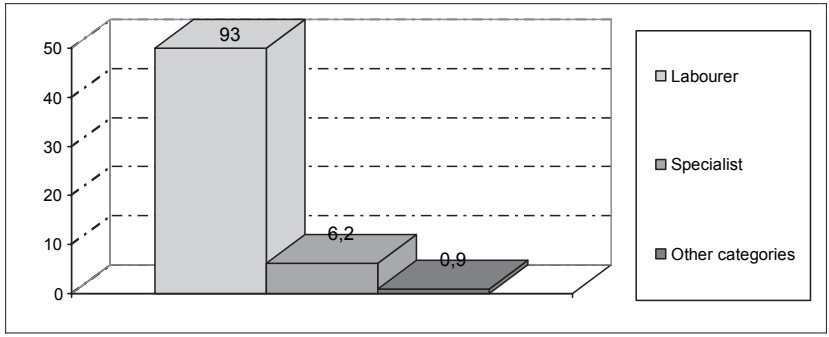
STRONG features	**WEAK or IN NEED OF IMPROVING features are:**
Perseverance, responsibility and willingness	Monotony and lack of initiative
Quality of work	Distraction and lack of concentration
Interest and motivation	Slowness in the performance
Task diversity and possibility of changing activity	Low self-esteem
Team work	Non-competitive wages
	Troubles in learning new tasks and adapting to them
	Need of constant support

Table Specific strong and weak areas in each professional family

PROFESSIONAL FAMILY	STRONG features	FEATURES TO IMPROVE
Laundry	*Type* of *activity* (know how to iron, fold, pack clothes...).	*Physical strength, re*sistance *ability*.
Woodworking	*Personal traits* (flexibility, learning ability, curiosity...) *Type of activity* (tools, materials...)	*Low adaptability* to the workplace and teamwork. *Lack of* motor and emotional skills.
Gardening	Relationships with fellow workers. Traits of the *person* (physical strength, physical and cognitive skills). The workplace (time, resources, tools, appropriate environment).	*Type* of work (tired and exposed to environmental conditions) *Traits* of the *person* (emotional instability, low tolerance to frustration...)
Manipulated	Type of activity. *Machinery operation*. Learning skills.	*Personal characteristics* (excessive sensitivity, lack of civility, dependence.)
Cleaning	*Punctuality in* the job Sociability.	*Allow the influence* of other workers.

According to the **professional categories** of the subjects in the sample 93 % belong to the labourer category, 6.2 % to specialist and the remaining 0.9 % to other categories.

Graph Professional category



In reference to **working hours** we see that 44.2 % of the sample work in the morning (6.00/7.00 h – 14.00/15.00 h); 7.2 % in the afternoon (14.00/15.00 h – 21.00/22.00 h); and 48.6 % in a split working day (8.00/9.00 h – 17.30/18.00 h).

In type of **work contract**, 92.1 % have an open contract, compared to 7.9 % of temporary workers.

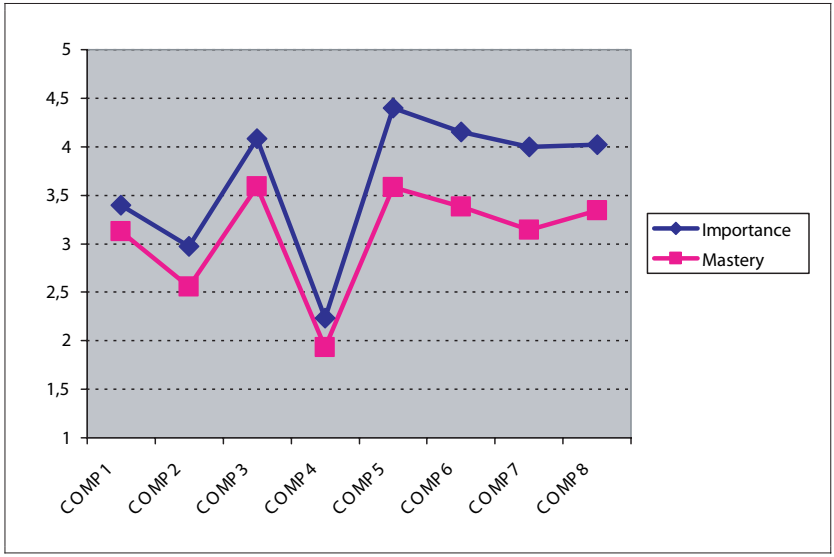
In **wages** the earnings are, in general, low. 70.6 % thinks it is not enough, 29.4% say it is.

In **support needs** in the workplace 53.1 % need three types of support, in any professional activity. These are:

- Verbal, gesture and/or emotional support.
- Supervision and/or control on the task.
- Support to organize and assign tasks.

In the variable, **continuous education** in and for the employment, 72.1 % in the sample receives some training, which is adequate and sufficient.

Graph Importance and mastery in basic competences



In reference to the level of **mastery and importance of basic competences** (linguistic communication –comp1-, mathematics –comp2-, interaction with the environment –comp3-, digital –comp4-, labour –comp5-, learning to learn –comp6-, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship –comp7- and social and civic –comp8-), digital competence receives the lowest degree of importance and labour competence the highest. This result is consistent with the main professional profile of SCWs. When the disagreement between importance and mastery is greater, the need of training is greater too.

4. CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of formative and professional variables allows us to think that there is a relation between the professional categories (93 % are *labourers)* and *formative levels* (64.5 % have a primary studies). There is no doubt that one of the main disadvantages for people with some disability (low formative level) has an important impact on the professional category.

57.1 % of the workers in the sample think they have some *possibility* of *promotion* in the company, and 42.9 % think they do not. However, their motivation is high; almost 92 % think so. We must remember that work helps disabled people access more open and competitive social and labour settings.

In reference to the *conditions* in the workplace at the sheltered centers we can note that:

- Trainers plan the tasks, provide guidelines to the workers and assign tasks to be performed according to their level of autonomy. This gives the disabled workers more confidence in their functions and job responsibilities. This hinders the capacity of self-determination.
- The climate and environment in the workplace are positive. Safety rules are observed and the workers receive personal protection equipment. However, disabled workers suggest an improvement in accessibility to help them overcome the architectural obstacles.
- There are some jobs, like gardening, which are well respected by workers and the institution, but do not improve promotions or wages.
- There is an evident need to increase the self-esteem of disabled workers, one of their main obstacles.

- It is important to promote off job activities and provide guidance on the use of free time to improve the social skills.

Finally, the training of workers needs to adapt to possible changes in the workplace and improve their efficiency. This efficiency will depend on the task and/or professional family and their personal development. Formative requirements could range from courses related to the environment, ecology, use of machinery, safety, to social skills, management, accounting, languages or computer.

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