

## SHOULD THE VOCATIONAL QUALITY OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES BE EXPECTED? A STUDY OF INTERVIEWS WITH EMPLOYERS

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### ABSTRACT

Intellectual disabilities are the most difficult to find employment among all types of disabilities. In the public's mind, they are more in need of protection which also creates the impression that they can't be independent. However, people with intellectual disabilities also have a desire to work. In this study, a semi-structured interview outline was used to interview six representatives of enterprises that provide jobs for intellectual disabilities, in order to understand their expectations of employees with intellectual disabilities and answer whether intellectual disabilities have the value of work. What are the vocational qualities they should possess for employment?

The results show that: all respondents expressed their understanding and welcome to the employment of people with intellectual disabilities. They also believe that employees with intellectual disabilities are required to have vocational qualities, especially some vocational implicit qualities. The expectations of employees with intellectual disabilities vary from different position of representatives. Based on these findings, the study draws the following conclusions: 1. It is possible for people with intellectual disabilities to find employment to a certain extent. 2. Employers have requirements and expectations on the vocational quality of people with intellectual disabilities. 3. Compared with the explicit quality of vocational knowledge and skills, the implicit quality of people with intellectual disabilities is more valued by employers. 4. Vocational implicit qualities such as communication ability, emotional control ability, habit of following rules, cooperation awareness, safety awareness are emphasized. 5. Vocational education is the most fundamental and effective way to cultivate the vocational quality of students with intellectual disabilities. Short-term psychological interventions are also worth trying.

**Key words:** vocational quality, people with intellectual disabilities, implicit quality

### INTRODUCTION

Vocational quality usually has another synonym 'Professionalism' or 'Professional literacy' which means "the skill, good judgment, and polite behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well (Webster, 1998)". 'Professionalism' is commonly understood as an individual's adherence to a set of standards, code of conduct or collection of qualities that characterize accepted practice within a particular area of activity (McGettrick, 2005). Liu (2022) defines vocational qualities as the vocational skills, vocational attitude and vocational code of conduct reflected by practitioners in specific vocational activities, which is the comprehensive embodiment of professionalism. Over the course of an individual's career, many people may have different jobs. Each job requires a different vocational knowledge and vocational skills. At the same time, in the diversified work, the vocational attitude,

vocational ethics and vocational style of practitioners are profound and necessary. No matter the industry – from customer service to an office job to construction and the trades – all of these jobs have one thing in common: in order to succeed and move ahead, you need to have certain vocational qualities.

Getting a paid job is important for people with disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities are no exception. Working ability is a symbol of individual's self-reliance. However, people with intellectual disabilities suffer more discriminated and misunderstood than other types of disabilities in employment (Karhina et al., 2022). Intellectual disability is defined as “a group of developmental conditions characterized by significant impairment of cognitive functions, which are associated with limitations of learning, adaptive behavior and skills” (Carulla et al., 2011). This disability originates during the developmental period, which is defined operationally as before the individual attains age 22 (Schalock et al., 2021). So, many people with intellectual disabilities have grown up in stigmatized environments. They are one of the most stigmatized and discriminated groups in all areas of life (Morin et al., 2013). In this context, people with intellectual disabilities are often considered unfit for work. But is that really the case?

Studies have shown people with intellectual disabilities also have strong desire for a paid job (Hennessey & Goreczny, 2022). This is not just a social security for their equal rights, but also is beneficial to the society and economy in the long run (Ellenkamp et al., 2016). Some employers considered that employees with intellectual disabilities are usually stable, reliable and competent employees who represent a potentially valuable resource of the labor force (Olson et al., 2001) and they also contribute and add value to the workplace despite their disabilities (Strindlund et al., 2019). It is clear that some of the positive factors in the employment of people with intellectual disabilities are being noticed. Southward and Kyzar (2017) even point out that competitive employment environments are more conducive to individual goals for people with intellectual disabilities. So, what do people with intellectual disabilities reply on to gain employment in a competitive environment? What do employers expect of their vocational qualities? The study attempts to get the answers to these questions by interviewing with employers.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this study is to interview the representatives of enterprise that provide jobs for people with intellectual disabilities to understand the vocational quality needed by ID employee. The ultimate goal is to help people with intellectual disabilities succeed in employment and compete in a competitive environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The interview method is used in this study to obtain information about the vocational quality required by employers for the people with intellectual disabilities. This section will describe the interview process and data processing.

### **Instruments**

The instrument is a semi-structured interview outline. This outline mainly focuses on the interviewees' basic attitude towards the employment of the people with intellectual disabilities and vocational quality expectations.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are representatives of enterprise that provide jobs for people with intellectual disabilities. In fact, there are not many such enterprises. Six representatives from different types of enterprises in Zigong City participated in the interview. The specific composition of participants is shown as follows:

**Tabel 1:** Demographic characteristics of the participants (n=6)

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Proportion (%)</i>
<i>P1</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>general staff</i>	<i>16.7</i>
<i>P2</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>general staff</i>	<i>16.7</i>
<i>P3</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>department head</i>	<i>16.7</i>
<i>P4</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>department head</i>	<i>16.7</i>
<i>P5</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>manager</i>	<i>16.6</i>
<i>P6</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>manager</i>	<i>16.6</i>

*Note:* In order to protect the privacy of the interviewee, P1.. P6 is used instead of the interviewee's name.

### Data analysis

Interviews with enterprise representatives are conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews or online videos. All the interview process are recorded with the consent of the subject, and the voice materials are sorted out later. Then the materials obtained from the interviews were arranged into written materials according to the recordings. These written materials were fed back to respondents to prevent any misunderstandings or misinformation during the interviews.

## RESULTS

### Findings for interviewee's basic attitudes towards the employment of people with intellectual disabilities.

**Table 2:** Summaries of respondents' attitudes towards the employment of people with intellectual disabilities

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Respond</i>
<i>P1</i>	<i>general staff</i>	<i>Attitudes towards employment of people with intellectual disabilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express understanding the importance of employment of people with intellectual disabilities.</li> <li>• Welcome to work with employees with intellectual disabilities.</li> </ul>
<i>P2</i>	<i>general staff</i>		
<i>P3</i>	<i>department head</i>		
<i>P4</i>	<i>department head</i>		
<i>P5</i>	<i>manager</i>		
<i>P6</i>	<i>manager</i>		

*Note:* In order to protect the privacy of the interviewee, P1.. P6 is used instead of the interviewee's name.

In the interview, participants were asked “Do you think it is necessary for people with intellectual disabilities to work?” “What do you think about the employment needs of people with intellectual disabilities?” “Do you mind working with people with intellectual disabilities?”. All respondents expressed an understanding of the employment needs of people with intellectual disabilities and said they would not mind working with them. In more open communication, they also revealed the reasons for accepting people with intellectual disabilities. Some are based on personal sympathy, some are out of rational thinking, and some are based on the practical interests of the enterprise. The details will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section.

**Findings for interviewees' views on the requirement of vocational quality for employees with intellectual disabilities.**

**Table 3:** Summaries of respondents' expectations for the vocational quality of employees with intellectual disabilities

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Respond</i>
<i>P1</i>	<i>general staff</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All expressed positive response that even people with intellectual disabilities should have certain vocational qualities.</li> </ul>
<i>P2</i>	<i>general staff</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of vocational quality</li> </ul>	
<i>P3</i>	<i>department head</i>		
<i>P4</i>	<i>department head</i>		
<i>P5</i>	<i>manager</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirements for the vocational quality of people with intellectual disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree the view that vocational quality is divided into explicit quality and implicit quality.</li> <li>• Rather than explicit quality, they pay more attention to the implicit quality of employees with intellectual disabilities.</li> </ul>
<i>P6</i>	<i>manager</i>		

**Note:** In order to protect the privacy of the interviewee, P1 · P6 is used instead of the interviewee's name.

When asked whether people with intellectual disabilities should have vocational quality requirements, all respondents expressed a positive response. They said that although this special group of people should be treated differently from normal population, it does not mean that there are no requirements for their vocational quality. For enterprises, no matter what kind of employees, they should create their due value. In the open communication, the interviewees agree that vocational quality is divided into explicit quality and implicit quality. They believe that explicit quality such as vocational knowledge and skills is the most basic requirements. For employees with intellectual disabilities, their knowledge and skills are more easily tolerated, instead their implicit quality is valued by representatives. Moreover, representatives in different positions expressed different expectations for employees with intellectual disabilities.

**Findings for interviewee's expectation of implicit quality of employees with intellectual disabilities.**

**Table 4:** The expectations of different positions of enterprise representatives on the implicit qualities of employees with intellectual disabilities

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Respond</i>
<i>P1</i>	<i>general staff</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The expectations of implicit quality of employees with intellectual disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills;</li> <li>Sense of cooperation</li> </ul>
<i>P2</i>	<i>general staff</i>		
<i>P3</i>	<i>department head</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obeying work arrangements;</li> <li>Being at peace with emotions</li> </ul>
<i>P4</i>	<i>department head</i>		
<i>P5</i>	<i>manager</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety consciousness;</li> <li>Following rules</li> </ul>
<i>P6</i>	<i>manager</i>		

**Note:** In order to protect the privacy of the interviewee, P1 · P6 is used instead of the interviewee's name. The responses are presented in the form of keywords.

It can be found that enterprise representatives in different positions have different expectations for employees with intellectual disabilities. General staffs expect that their colleagues with intellectual disabilities are able to communicate, be easy to get along with and cooperative. Department heads

expect employees with intellectual disabilities to obey work arrangements and be at peace with their emotions as subordinates. Rather than work ability, managers pay more attention to the safety consciousness and rule-following behavior of employee with intellectual disabilities. They need someone who is "obedient" and doesn't create "troubles" for them.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Research question 1: How to understand vocational quality in the study?**

Vocational quality is considered as individuals need to complete activities, with the characteristics of the occupational environment, work purpose, maintenance, nobility, stability, occupational basic conditions and attributes of the comprehensive situation (Kang&Tang,2015). According to the 'Quality Iceberg Theory'(McClelland,1973), individual quality can be divided into two kinds: explicit quality and implicit quality. The part above the iceberg is called explicit quality, such as basic knowledge and basic skills, which are relatively easy to understand and measure and can be acquired through training; The following part of the iceberg is called implicit quality, such as an individual's social role, self-image, personality traits and motivation, etc., which are intrinsic and difficult to measure, but play a key role in individual behavior and performance.

On this basis, vocational quality is divided into explicit quality and implicit quality in this study. Explicit quality is factors of vocational quality that can be easily observed, evaluated and measured from an external perspective and can be acquired through short-term education and training, including vocational knowledge, vocational skills and vocational image. Implicit quality is stable and continuous, inherent, with good value, reflecting personal attributes of professional quality factors, need to be acquired through long-term training, practice, training, including vocational awareness, vocational ethics, vocational style and habits (Wang,2016).

### **Research question 2: How to understand the employment possibilities for people with intellectual disabilities?**

Although employment is very important way for people with intellectual disabilities to integrate into society, they are not considered to be suitable for employment. Traditionally, a person with intellectual disabilities has been seen as someone without their own legal capacity and consequently as a subject to be represented, with the family sometimes even substituting them in their rights as citizens (García-Sanz et al., 2022.). However, the intellectually disabled may not be as incompetent as we think.

In a study on the psychological capital of secondary vocational students with intellectual disabilities, it was found that the overall psychological capital level of these students is not so bad as imagined. With proper education and care, they can have good mental quality (Zhang&Kway,2023). The psychological capital are some contents and manifestations of the individual's implicit qualities. The employability of people with intellectual disabilities is not only closely related to their subjective quality of life (Barnes, 2011; Schalock et al., 2005),but also contribute on a social level -- creating a culture that humanizes the workplace and helps workers connect socially (Lysaght et al., 2012). Just as the employment motivation of enterprises is described in the results, some enterprises not only rely on sympathy for people with disabilities, but also consider the employment value brought by employees with intellectual disabilities from practical factors such as preferential policies and corporate culture. In fact, employing people with disabilities allows businesses to produce the same results of labor at less cost and can reduce tax revenues. Therefore, it is entirely possible for the people with intellectual disabilities to find employment.

### **Research question 3: What are the vocational qualities required by the employment of people with intellectual disabilities?**

Although the employment of people with intellectual disabilities is feasible, the prerequisite is that their employability needs to be improved and they must have certain vocational quality. Actually, the

vocational quality requirements of the people with intellectual disabilities are different from those of other types of disabled people.

From the basic view of vocational quality in the study, the implicit quality is more important than the explicit quality for the people with intellectual disabilities. Although some explicit qualities such as vocational knowledge, vocational skills are the most basic requirements to employees, employers pay more attention to implicit qualities such as communication ability, emotional control ability, habit of following rules, cooperation awareness, safety awareness, etc. Different studies have reached more consistent conclusions: cognitive, communication and other vocational abilities among individuals with intellectual disabilities are critical factors in employment (Andrews & Rose, 2010; Holwerda et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2005). These factors, as implicit factors in vocational quality, are reflected in vocational attitudes, vocational behavior habits, vocational ethics, etc.

#### **Research question 4: How to cultivate the vocational implicit quality of people with intellectual disabilities?**

Implicit quality has the character as stable and sustainable, inherent, implicit, good value, basic and essential personal attributes. Such characteristics determine that the cultivation of implicit quality must be a comprehensive, systematic and long-term process. The most fundamental way to meet this requirement is vocational education of people with disabilities. Moreover, only employment-oriented vocational education, closely aligned with industry, can produce a disabled workforce that meets market demand. (Shi & Kuang, 2018). Therefore, in order to improve the vocational quality of people with intellectual disabilities, we should pay more attention to the research of students with intellectual disabilities in vocational education. They are the most likely candidates for highly qualified employees with intellectual disabilities. Besides, some psychological intervention such as group counseling has been proved a certain effect on the students with intellectual disabilities (Song, 2008).

### **IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS**

The findings of this study show that it is not impossible for people with intellectual disabilities to find employment. Employers who provide jobs for people with intellectual disabilities are not entirely in sympathy, they also have requirements and expectations for the vocational quality of these people, and need them to create a certain value. The finding corrected the public's prejudice against the intellectual disabled to a large extent, and promoted the public to re-understand this group.

In addition, the findings further clarified the specific requirements for the vocational quality of employees with intellectual disabilities through the collation of the interview information of enterprise representatives. This is rare in previous studies. In contrast to the traditional emphasis on vocational knowledge and skills, the study pointed that the implicit qualities, such as loyalty and honest vocational ethics, the vocational code of conduct of obeying arrangements and accepting opinions, and the personal traits of optimism, good communication and emotional stability are highly valued by employers.

Finally, the findings also propose to increase the research of vocational education for students with intellectual disabilities, and try to cultivate good implicit quality through short-term training methods of psychological intervention. These propositions are of great significance to the education and development of the students with intellectual disabilities.

### **LIMITATION**

First of all, the sample is limited. Sampling in a city, and the number of enterprises accepting employees with intellectual disabilities is relatively small, so the overall sample size is small. In addition, this study only interviewed representatives of enterprise that provide jobs for people with intellectual disabilities, and did not sample the rest of the companies. If the sample scope can be expanded, it may be more enlightening to analyze the employment factors of people with intellectual disabilities.

Secondly, the research method is limited. Only interview method was used in this study. Although more detailed information can be obtained, standardized questionnaires can be a supplement.

Thirdly, the expansion of the research content is limited. The results of the study mentioned the different expectations of enterprise representatives for the vocational quality of employees with intellectual disabilities. But these qualities are scattered. If a vocational quality model of people with intellectual disabilities can be constructed, it will be helpful to deepen our comprehensive understanding of it.

## CONCLUSION

1. It is possible for people with intellectual disabilities to find employment to a certain extent.
2. Employers have requirements and expectations on the vocational quality of people with intellectual disabilities.
3. Compared with the explicit quality of vocational knowledge and skills, the implicit quality of people with intellectual disabilities is more valued by employers.
4. Vocational implicit qualities such as communication ability, emotional control ability, habit of following rules, cooperation awareness, safety awareness are emphasized.
5. Vocational education is the most fundamental and effective way to cultivate the vocational quality of students with intellectual disabilities. Short-term psychological interventions are also worth trying.

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