

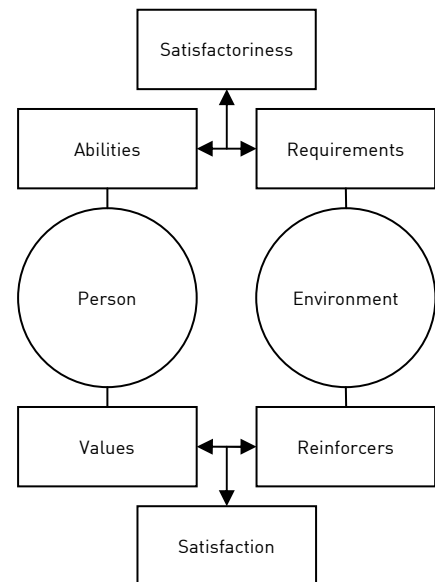
Theory of work adjustment

This is sometimes referred to as the **Person–Environment Correspondence Theory**. It was originally developed by René Dawis, George England and Lloyd Lofquist from the University of Minnesota in 1964.

The more closely a person's **abilities** (skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours, etc.) correspond with the **requirements** of the role or the organisation, the more likely it is that they will perform the job well and be perceived as **satisfactory** by the employer.

Similarly, the more closely the **reinforcers** (rewards) of the role or organisation correspond to the **values** that a person seeks to satisfy through their work, the more likely it is that the person will perceive the job as **satisfying**. They list six key values that individuals seek to satisfy:

- **Achievement** — conditions that encourage accomplishment and progress
- **Comfort** — conditions that encourage lack of stress
- **Status** — conditions that provide recognition and prestige
- **Altruism** — conditions that foster harmony and service to others
- **Safety** — conditions that establish predictability and stability
- **Autonomy** — conditions that increase personal control and initiative



The degrees of satisfaction and satisfactoriness are seen as predictors of the likelihood that someone will stay in a job, be successful at it and receive advancement.

The theory acknowledges that the correspondence between person and environment may not be perfect — perhaps because the person chose the wrong career or the employer chose the wrong candidate. Even a good correspondence may change over time. The person's skills might develop so that they outgrow their role or their priorities may change because of non-work commitments. The nature of the job or the nature of the rewards an employer is able to offer may also change. The **flexibility** of a person or an environment will determine the extent to which they can tolerate any lack of correspondence between abilities and requirements and/or values and reinforcers. Flexibility will vary from individual to individual and from environment to environment. Internal factors, such as personality or organisational culture, will influence the level of flexibility, as will external factors, such as the availability of alternative options. When the lack of correspondence is so great that flexibility is no longer viable, some form of adjustment often takes place.

- **Active adjustment** by the individual involves them trying to change their working environment. They may seek to change the content of the job, and therefore its behaviour requirements, to better reflect their abilities. Alternatively, they may try to alter the reinforcements of the job by seeking to gain different rewards, e.g. better working conditions or greater variety or responsibility. Active adjustment by the environment may involve trying to change the person's abilities through training or trying to change their values or expectations in some way.
- **Reactive adjustment** may involve the individual trying to change their behaviours to better suit the environment or by changing their personal priorities or work values. Similarly, the environment may change the responsibilities of a role to better suit the natural strengths of the individual or change the rewards to attempt to increase job satisfaction.

Persistence is defined as the extent to which individuals or environments will keep trying to adjust before giving up. When no further adjustment is possible, something more dramatic happens — the person leaves the job or they are fired.

Basic reading

Dawes, R.V. & Lofquist, L.H. (1984) *A Psychological Theory of Work Adjustment*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dawes, R.V. (1994) The theory of work adjustment as convergent theory. In Savikas, M.L. & Lent, R.W. (eds) *Convergence in Career Development Theories: Implications for Science and Practice*. Palo Alto: CPP Books, pp. 33–43.

Developed by David Winter at The Careers Group, University of London (www.careers.lon.ac.uk)

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Using TWA

Questions (for use with individuals or as group discussion stimulators)

- To what extent have you looked at the mix of abilities you have and compared them with the mix of abilities required by the roles you are considering?
- To what extent have you prioritised your values and examined how much they will be satisfied by the rewards of the roles you are considering?
- Have you thought about the demands of the whole working environment rather than just the role?
- How much have you found out about what it takes to be successful in this role and within this organisation?
- Are the qualities that determine success within the organisation the same as those that enable you to do a good job in that particular role?
- Aside from doing a good job, what other qualities or abilities will you need to demonstrate to succeed in the working environment?
- Have you thought about the rewards available in the whole working environment rather than just from the role?
- Have you thought about what it is like to do this job within this organisation within this economic climate?
- How do you think you will cope if the job demands things from you that you find hard to deliver?
- How much variation in the potential rewards from the role are you willing to tolerate?
- What sort of changes will you need to make to yourself in order to fit better with the role or the organisation?
- What abilities do you need to develop?
- How can you develop abilities that will make you more successful?
- How might you need to change your expectations in order to find the job more satisfying?
- How much scope do you have to change the role to suit your strengths or to make it more satisfying?
- How proactive can you be in taking on different responsibilities or challenges within the role?

Techniques

Sorting values

- List the values (achievement, comfort, status, altruism, safety and autonomy) — possibly on cards.
- Get individuals or small groups to discuss how important they are to career satisfaction.
- Get them to discuss how they would determine the extent to which a role/environment was likely to satisfy those values. What questions would they ask?

Making it better

- Present a job description for a reasonably mundane or uninspiring job
- Get the participants to discuss ways in which they could adjust the job to make it more interesting, challenging or worthwhile, e.g. volunteering for extra responsibility, offering to reorganise filing systems, etc.