
Psychology of Adjustment

MEANING AND DEFINITIONS

The dictionary meaning of the word 'adjustment' is, to fit, make suitable, adapt, arrange, modify, harmonize or make correspondent. Thus, when we make an adjustment between two things, we adapt or modify one or both of them to correspond to each other. In some situations, one of the factors may not be changeable and so the one which is, has to be modified in some way to suit the other. The extension of a ladder by a suitable length to reach an upper story window is a good example of such an adjustment. Wearing of clothes according to the requirements of the seasons is another such example as ordinarily, it is beyond our capacity to change the seasons according to our clothes. Modern technology has, of course, made it possible to adjust the temperature inside dwelling houses and workplaces to harmonize with our needs.

There has been a continuous struggle between the needs of the individual and the external forces since time immemorial. According to Darwin's (1859) theory of evolution, those species which adapted successfully to the demands of living, survived and multiplied while others who did not, died out. Therefore, the adaptation or changing of oneself or one's surroundings according to the demands of the external environment became the basic need for our survival. It is as true today with all of us as it was with the Darwin's primitive species. Those of us who can adapt or adjust to the needs of changing conditions can live happily and successfully, while others either vanish, lead miserable lives or prove a nuisance to society. However, the concept of adjustment is not so simple as adaptation. Psychologists and scholars differ considerably in interpreting its meaning and nature as can be seen from the following definitions:

James Drever (1952):

Adjustment means the modification to compensate for or meet special conditions.

Webster (1951):

Adjustment is the establishment of a satisfactory relationship, as representing harmony, conformance, adaptation or the like.

Carter V. Good (1959):

Adjustment is the process of finding and adopting modes of behaviour suitable to the environment or the changes in the environment.

Warren (1934):

Adjustment refers to any operation whereby an organism or organ becomes more favourably related to the environment or to the entire situation, environmental and internal.

Shaffer (1961):

Adjustment is the process by which a living organism maintains a balance between its needs and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs.

Gates and Jersild (1948):

Adjustment is a continual process in which a person varies his behaviour to produce a more harmonious relationship between himself and his environment.

Vanhaller (1970):

We can think of adjustment as psychological survival in much the same way as the biologist uses the term adaptation to describe physiological survival.

Crow and Crow (1956):

An individual's adjustment is adequate, wholesome or healthful to the extent that he has established harmonious relationship between himself and the conditions, situations and persons who comprise his physical and social environment.

Let us try to analyse these definitions for understanding the meaning and nature of the term adjustment.

In the first definition, James Drever takes adjustment to be the ways and means to help the individual to meet the demands of changed conditions by adapting or modifying his previous ways of doing or facing things. The other three definitions also agree with this opinion that one is required to change one's mode of behaviour to suit the changed situations so that a satisfactory and harmonious relationship can be maintained keeping in view the individual and his needs on the one hand, and the environment and its influence on the individual, on the other. In doing so, as Good's definition states, the individual can either change himself according to the needs of the environment or change his environment to suit his own needs.

Shaffer's definition underlines one's needs and their satisfaction. Human needs are vital, indispensable and urgently requisite. One feels adjusted to the extent that one's needs are gratified or are in the process of being gratified. The individual tries to bring about changes in his circumstances in order to overcome the difficulties in the fulfilment of his needs. Sometimes, he reduces his needs and as a result he may feel satisfied within the limits of his environment. He thus tries to maintain a balance between his needs and his capacity of realising these needs and as long as this balance is maintained, he remains adjusted. As soon as this balance is disturbed, he drifts towards maladjustment.

Gates and Jersild as also Crow and Crow define adjustment as the maintenance of a harmonious relationship between man and his environment. An individual needs to change or modify himself in some way or the other to fit into or accommodate himself with his environment. As the conditions in the environment are changing all the time, adjustment is also a continuous process. For instance, if a girl from the city marries into a rural family and has to live in

3. The Heston personal adjustment inventory developed by Joseph C. Heston.
4. The Mooney problem checklist.
5. Asthana's adjustment inventory developed by H.S. Asthana.
6. Vyaktitva parakha prashnavali developed by M.S.L. Saxena.
7. Sinha's adjustment inventory developed by A.K.P. Sinha and R.P. Singh.
8. Joshi's adjustment inventory developed by M.C. Joshi and Jagdish Pandey.
9. Adjustment inventory for older people devised by P.V. Ramamurti.
10. Teacher adjustment inventory developed by S.K. Mangal.

Characteristics of a Well-adjusted Person

A well-adjusted person is supposed to possess the following characteristics:

1. **Awareness of his own strengths and limitations.** A well adjusted person knows his own strengths and weaknesses. He tries to make capital out of his assets in some areas by accepting his limitations in others.
2. **Respecting himself and others.** The dislike for one-self is a typical symptom of maladjustment. An adjusted individual has respect for himself as well as for others.
3. **An adequate level of aspiration.** His level of aspiration is neither too low nor too high in terms of his own strengths and abilities. He does not try to reach for the stars and also does not repent over selecting an easier course for his advancement.
4. **Satisfaction of basic needs.** His basic organic, emotional and social needs are fully satisfied or in the process of being satisfied. He does not suffer from emotional cravings and social isolation. He feels reasonably secure and maintains his self-esteem.
5. **Absence of a critical or fault-finding attitude.** He appreciates the goodness in objects, persons or activities. He does not try to look for weaknesses and faults. His observation is scientific rather than critical or punitive. He likes people, admires their good qualities, and wins their affection.
6. **Flexibility in behaviour.** He is not rigid in his attitude or way of life. He can easily accommodate or adapt himself to changed circumstances by making necessary changes in his behaviour.
7. **The capacity to deal with adverse circumstances.** He is not easily overwhelmed by adverse circumstances and has the will and the courage to resist and fight odds. He has an inherent drive to master his environment rather than to passively accept it.
8. **A realistic perception of the world.** He holds a realistic vision and is not given to flights of fancy. He always plans, thinks and acts pragmatically.
9. **A feeling of ease with his surroundings.** A well-adjusted individual feels

satisfied with his surroundings. He fits in well in his home, family, neighbourhood and other social surroundings. If a student, he likes his school, school-mates, teachers, and feels satisfied with his daily routine. When he enters a profession, he has a love for it and maintains his zeal and enthusiasm despite all odds.

10. A balanced philosophy of life. A well-adjusted person has a philosophy which gives direction to his life while keeping in view the demands of changed situations and circumstances. This philosophy is centred around the demands of his society, culture, and his ownself so that he does not clash with his environment or with himself.

Theories or Models of Adjustment

Why do some people adjust to their environment and others do not? What are the factors that make an individual adjusted or maladjusted? There are several theories and models describing the pattern of adjustment for answering such questions. Let us discuss some of the important models.

1. The moral model. This represents the oldest view-point about adjustment or maladjustment. According to this view, adjustment or maladjustment should be judged in terms of morality i.e. absolute norms of expected behaviour. Those who follow the norms are adjusted (virtuous or good people) and those who violate or do not follow these norms are maladjusted (sinners). Evil supernatural forces like demons, devils, etc. were blamed for making one indulge in behaviour against the norms (committing sins) while the religious gods, goddess and other saintly great souls were responsible for making one a happy, healthy, prosperous and pious person (adjusted in the modern sense). However, as the medical and biological sciences advanced and scientific reasoning gained a firm footing in the nineteenth century, the moral model was replaced by the medico-biological model.

2. The medico-biological model. This model holds genetic, physiological and biochemical factors responsible for a person being adjusted or maladjusted to his self and his environment. Maladjustment, according to this model, is the result of disease in the tissues of the body, especially the brain. Such disease can be the result of heredity or damage acquired during the course of a person's life—by injury, infection, or hormonal disruption arising from stress, among other things. In the opinion of Lazaras (1976), the correction of adjustive failures or disorders requires correction of the tissue defect through physical therapies such as drugs, surgery and the like.

This model is still extant and enjoys credibility for rooting out the causes of adjustive failure in terms of genetic influences, biochemical defect hypotheses, and disease in the tissues of the body. However, it is not correct to assign physiological or organic causes to all maladapted and malfunctioning behaviour, especially when there is no evidence of physiological malfunction. Such a situation certainly calls for other explanations, viewpoints or models.

3. The psychoanalytic model. This model owes its origin to the theory of psychoanalysis propagated by Sigmund Freud (1938) and supported by psychologists like Adler, Jung and other neo-Freudians.