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What enables inclusion in the workplace: An attributional analysis from diverse perspectives

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Abstract

The inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life is an issue of basic civil rights. There is currently a gap in inclusion and disability research at work in how to incorporate the different experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities into the inclusion framework. The first step is identifying a difference, which could theoretically be done through Actor-Observer theory. The current study aimed to assess whether employees with disabilities perceive inclusion at work differently to employees without disabilities, and if this relationship could be explained through attribution theory. A questionnaire that used a reversal technique (as per Storms' 1973 reversal) placed employees with and without disabilities as both Actors and Observers by switching positions in two given scenarios. Through the participation of 93 employees in a range of occupations, two measures with psychometric properties looking at workplace culture and attitudes were distributed. Findings showed when participants with disabilities were placed as 'Actors' they responded that 'situational' factors (e.g. policies) were more important for inclusion than did the comparison group of employees without disabilities (Observers). When roles were reversed in a different scenario, employees with disabilities (Observers) responded significantly more strongly to dispositional items (i.e. rated others as more likely to think negatively or positively) for one factor, and showed a trend of responding more strongly to the dispositional factors in general compared to the employees without disabilities (Actors). The current exploratory study showed support for the use of actor-observer theory in identifying that differences in viewpoints (actor/observer) contributed to a difference in perspective that prevented understanding of barriers to inclusion. Findings demonstrated that in order to create meaningful change, the perspectives of people with disabilities must be considered to address the attribution of responsibility in policy and practice at work.

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