

## A Strategy for Changing Employers' Implicit Attitudes Towards Individuals who are Blind

### Key Terms

1. **Implicit bias** is a negative attitude or prejudice that a person doesn't realize they hold.
2. An **educational approach meeting** focuses on sharing information about blindness and low vision and addressing concerns employers have about employing a blind person.
3. A **dual customer approach (DCA)** meeting focuses on building a relationship with an employer by asking questions about their company and its needs, treating the employer as a customer who will be provided with a service.

### What Were We Trying to Learn?

Research shows that negative employer attitudes lead to fewer job opportunities for blind people. Implicit attitudes about the inability and dependency of people who are blind can contribute to a lower employment rate.

Because it is not socially acceptable to show prejudice and laws forbid hiring discrimination, employers are unlikely to openly express negative attitudes or beliefs. We wanted to know if employers hold a more hidden, implicit bias towards blind people regarding their competence on the job.

Also, we wanted to know if a meeting between a vocational rehabilitation (VR) professional and a hiring manager could positively impact implicit attitudes about the competence of people who are blind. We looked to see if the approach used in the meeting (educational or DCA) and whether or not the VR professional was blind would lead to different outcomes. Finally, we wanted to know if these impacts would last over time.

### How Was This Project Carried Out?

Fifty-seven hiring managers who work for a financial services company in the South had one-hour meetings with a VR professional. There were four possible ways for the meeting to be held:

1. Sighted VR professional, educational meeting approach
2. Sighted VR professional, DCA meeting
3. Blind VR professional, educational meeting approach
4. Blind VR professional, DCA meeting

The hiring managers' implicit attitudes were measured before and after the meetings using a special test designed to uncover implicit bias.

### What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

1. An hourlong, one-on-one meeting with a VR professional significantly improved hiring managers' implicit attitudes about the competence of people who are blind. This improvement lasted for at least four months after the meeting.

### Research Takeaway

A single, brief meeting with a VR professional positively impacted employers' implicit attitudes toward people who are blind, and this positive change lasted over time.

2. The type of approach used for the meeting did not lead to different results. Both the DCA and educational approaches can be effective at improving implicit attitudes.
3. In a follow-up analysis, we found that meeting with a VR professional who is blind was effective at improving employers' implicit attitudes, while meeting with a sighted professional was not linked to improved attitudes.

## How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

1. Communicating with employers about the abilities of people who are blind can improve their implicit attitudes. Even one brief meeting can have a positive, lasting impact. So, take every opportunity to connect with employers.
2. Exposing employers to competent blind people may lead to a more significant impact on implicit attitudes. Here are a few ideas:
  - a. Including a blind professional in a meeting with an employer, either as a one-on-one meeting or as part of a team of sighted and blind professionals.
  - b. Giving a tour of a job site or agency where a person who is blind does a job similar to those at the employer's company.
  - c. Creating a trial work experience for a blind person at the employer's company.
3. Create follow-up opportunities with employers to build ongoing relationships. This allows you to keep reinforcing positive concepts about people who are blind.

## Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

McDonnall, M. C., & Antonelli, K. (2022). [Changing employers' implicit attitudes about the competence of people who are blind](#). *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 116(3), 361-372.

For more information about this project, visit the [project overview page](#).

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