

The Impact of a Brief Meeting on Employer Attitudes, Knowledge, and Intent to Hire

What Were We Trying to Learn?

Meeting with employers is an important part of a VR counselor's job. Yet no studies have evaluated the effectiveness of different approaches to these meetings. Two popular approaches are: (a) the dual customer approach, which focuses on building relationships and understanding an employer's needs and (b) the educational approach, which emphasizes sharing information about how people who are B/VI can function on the job. We also wanted to know whether a VR counselor's vision status (blind or sighted) would impact outcomes of the meetings.

We worked with experienced VR professionals to conduct one-on-one meetings with employers. We wanted to know if the approach used or the vision status of the VR professional would impact employers' attitudes toward, knowledge about, or intent to hire people who are B/VI.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

We found that about 44% of the U.S. population with a visual impairment is employed and 10% are unemployed. This compares to a 77% employment rate and 5% unemployment rate for people without disabilities and a 35% employment rate and 12% unemployment rate for people with other types of disabilities.

Specifically, we found that:

- **Meetings between VR professionals and employers had a positive impact on employers' attitudes toward, knowledge about, and intent to hire workers who are B/VI.** After the meetings, employers showed gains in all three areas.
- **The approach used during the meeting only somewhat impacted the effectiveness of the meetings.** Both approaches (dual customer and educational) positively impacted employer knowledge, attitudes, and intent to hire. However, employers retained their gains in knowledge longer if they were part of a meeting that used the educational approach.
- **A VR professionals' vision status (blind or sighted) did not impact the meeting's effectiveness.** Meeting outcomes were positive no matter the professionals' vision status.
- **Intent to hire among employers faded over time.** Directly after the meetings with VR professionals, employers' intent to hire workers who are B/VI increased. But when we followed up four months later, employers' intent to hire had gone back down to about where it was before the meetings happened.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **One-on-one meetings with employers are a good way to improve employer attitudes toward, knowledge about, and intent to hire B/VI employees.** The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires VR professionals to increase engagement with employers in order to boost employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Our study demonstrates that interactions between VR professionals and employers can indeed lead to positive changes.

Research Takeaway

Meetings between employers and vocational rehabilitation (VR) professionals positively impacted employers' attitudes toward, knowledge about, and intent to hire people who are blind or visually impaired (B/VI). During these meetings, VR counselors should use the approach that is most comfortable for them.

- **When meeting with employers, use the approach that's most comfortable for you.** In our study, the approach VR professionals used did not majorly impact the meetings' outcomes. Take every opportunity you can to meet with employers, and use whichever approach or combination of approaches you prefer.
- **Ongoing contact with employers is essential.** In our study, gains in intent to hire people who are B/VI faded over time. The dual customer approach, with its focus on building relationships with employers, may make it easier to maintain contact with employers.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

We worked with 59 hiring managers at a large financial services firm. Two experienced VR professionals, one sighted and one totally blind, worked together to create a script for each meeting approach and then held meetings with each hiring manager. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (approach: dual customer or education) X 2 (VR professionals' vision status: blind or sighted) design.

Participants completed online surveys before the meetings to measure their attitudes toward, knowledge about, and intent to hire people who are B/VI. Employers then completed two online surveys after the meetings, one in the days directly following the meeting and then another four months later.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

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