

Leaders with Disabilities as Role Models for more Workplace Inclusion

Groß, Rebecca; Rhein, Karoline; Bauer, Jana F.; Heide, Marie; Niehaus, Mathilde
Chair of Labour and Vocational Rehabilitation, University of Cologne, Germany

BACKGROUND AND AIM

People with disabilities frequently encounter personal and organizational barriers that hinder their equal participation and inclusion in employment and the labour market. Also, companies often have a need to raise awareness regarding the employment of people with disabilities and the need to develop inclusive structures, practices and cultures within the company.

In our project "Leading by example! Strengthening workplace inclusion with role models" we focus on the potential of **leaders with disabilities as role models** for other people with disability (Bandura, 2021; Schwuchow & Gutmann, 2010; Gibson, 2004) and how they contribute to inclusive structures within companies.

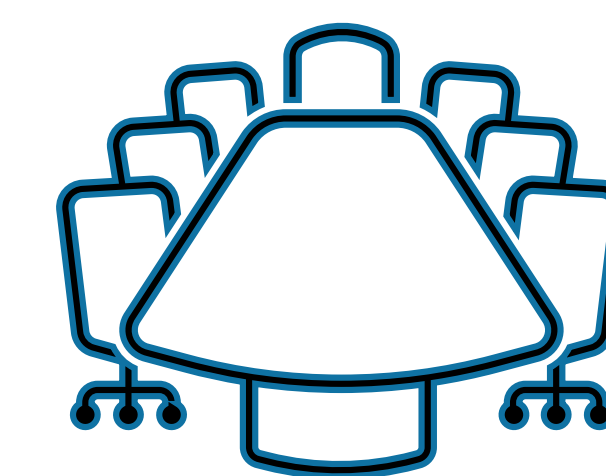
The opportunities of promoting role models within companies are not well-documented either in research or in practice. We are therefore researching the following question:

What opportunities do different groups of people see in leaders with disabilities being visible as role models in companies?

METHODS

We conducted 2x4 focus group discussions with applicants, employees, leaders, and organizational stakeholders with and without disabilities.

The discussions were transliterated and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.



RESULTS

The results show that many positive effects can be achieved at various levels if the topic is approached sensitively and included in an overall strategy.

Individual level	Organizational level	Societal level
- Dealing with one's own impairment in a strengthening way & empowerment - Increasing self-efficacy and satisfaction - Supporting the decision to disclose one's own disability - Influencing the application process of job applicants - Effecting the career planning of employees <i>"If someone runs ahead [...] then it's easier to follow that person, not to have to reach them, but then I also run faster."</i> - Appreciating leaders with disabilities	- Changing corporate culture and structures - Increasing the proportion of severely disabled employees - Increasing applications <i>"And then I saw, okay, someone with a wheelchair is already working there. That means I probably have a chance, because intellectually I'm just as suitable for the job."</i> - Underlining the importance of the topic through public acknowledgement	- Dismantling stereotypes <i>"And I think if leaders with disabilities do a good job, it simply counters the stereotype that people with disabilities are not so resilient, they can't do it and they have enough to do with their own disability."</i> - Normalizing disabilities

CONCLUSION

The analyses show, if the topic is approached sensitively, role models can have positive effects on various levels and help companies become more inclusive, attract more employees with disabilities and get people with disabilities into work better. We are creating a toolbox in the project, to support companies in developing and implementing the right strategy for them.

References

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