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Employers' Revelation of Decision-making Keys for Employing People with Visual Impairment: Mixed-method Analysis of Employers' Motivations

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Abstract

Background: People with visual impairment or blindness (PWVIB) face many barriers related to employment. Although literature explores employers' concerns regarding the employment of PWVIB, stating the concern and developing a solution are different. **Objectives:** Employers' solutions to concerns regarding hiring PWVIB have not been surveyed. This study addresses the gap by surveying employers to determine practical solutions and developing the Solutions for Improving Employment of People with Visual Disabilities (SIEPVD) model. **Methods:** We employed a mixed-method design based on the 975 completed surveys from employers with hiring authority. We also identified and tagged major themes and developed an empirical model. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the model's goodness of fit. **Results:** Findings highlight the need for evidence of job capabilities such as financial incentives, information provision, and adequate job vacancies. Evidence of financial incentives directly and positively affect employers' attitudes toward hiring PWVIB. Financial incentives also mediate information provision and job match with employers' attitudes toward hiring PWVIB. **Conclusions:** This is the first study to perform employers' integration by creating solutions to increase PWVIB's employment rate. Results may help PWVIB in its employment efforts. Thus, the approach when applying for jobs or attending interviews should be reviewed. Practical contributions are discussed.

Keywords: visual impairment; rehabilitation; employment; work; disabilities

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Introduction

People with visual impairment or blindness (PWVIB) have many barriers to employment (Zapata, 2020). In the marketing field, the best practice of marketers is to ask customers not only about their current experience but also about how to improve the product (Williams, 1993) or even ask them to create and submit ideas (Leimeister et al., 2009). Employers acknowledge that the best way toward productivity and profitability is the commitment of the workforce (Ijiola, 2018). However, PWVIB experience work discrimination (Victor et al., 2017) and low employment rates (Taylor et al., 2006).

McDonnall et al. (2019) investigated employment rates of people who are blind or visually impaired, using estimates from multiple sources between 1994 – 2017. They report that employment rates for people with visual impairments have not significantly increased over time and that only 44% of the U.S. population with a visual impairment is employed; these findings underline the serious problem of PWVIB. Previous studies explored employers' concerns regarding the employment of PWVIB (e.g. Kaye et al., 2011), but understanding the concerns is only the first step. Moreover, no study has yet surveyed employers for solutions to their concerns about hiring PWVIB. That is, similar to the customer integration in the value creation process (Leimeister et al., 2009), we perform employers' integration by creating solutions to increase PWVIB's employment rate. In this study, we address the gap by conducting surveys with employers and asking them for solutions that may reduce the concerns and elevate the employment rate of PWVIB.

Productivity and profitability are the two key metrics for measuring the efficiency of a business firm (Grover, 2020) and are, therefore, primary business goals. Employers want employees that can get the job done. Therefore, when considering PWVIB candidates, the first concern is if the disability will become an obstacle to productivity. Such a concern will not be diminished by measures such as legal obligations for equal employment (Harpur, 2012) or even by governmental financial incentives for employers hiring persons with disabilities (Gröschl, 2007). Anti-discrimination legislation has not yet improved the hiring practices of workers with disabilities but has increased employers' concerns about their financial and/or legal obligations (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). Although these proactive measures are valuable and important to fight PWVIB employment discrimination, in this study, we highlight another approach to directly encounter employers' concerns and improve their motivation to employ PWVIB. We will investigate direct and possible mediation effects on the employers' attitude to employing PWVIB, and specifically, the effect of the requirement for evidence and financial incentives.

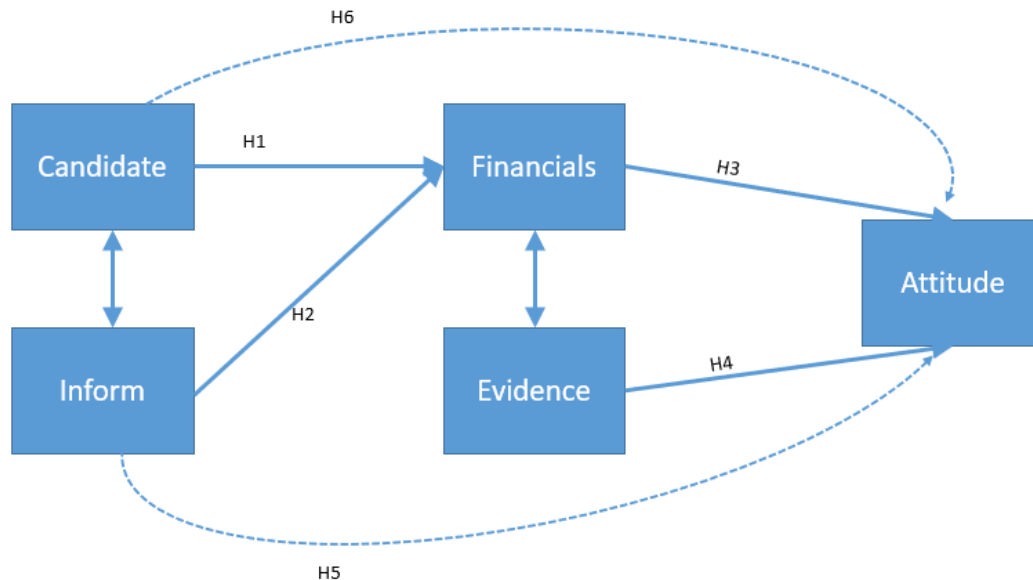
We employ a mixed-method design, incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods. Thus, offering more robust research with rich support. We present an empirical model comprising a system of relationships and assessed using Path Analysis (Lleras, 2005).

The first part of the manuscript presents the theoretical background. The second part describes the methodology used and the techniques employed for both the qualitative and quantitative analysis. The third part holds qualitative examples from the respondents, presented to offer richer support for the research findings. The fourth part presents the results, followed by the discussion chapter, which discusses the findings as well as practical implications. The final part comprises the limitation and future extensions to this research.

Hypothesis development

For this research, we develop the solutions for increasing employment of people with visual disabilities (SIEPVD) research model (Figure 1), which elements will be presented in this part of the paper.

Figure 1
SIEPVD research model



Source: Authors' work

Need of evidence

Work Capability Assessment (WCA) for people with disabilities may be performed using three forms (Geiger, 2018): Expert assessments, which are common and have some degree of legitimacy. Demonstrated assessments, where the employer looks at people's actual experiences in the labor market. Structured assessments match people's capacities to the functional demands that are required in existing jobs.

As employers do not know the employee's marginal productivity of labor at the time of hiring, nor the employee's value over time, many uncertainties are expected (Perufo et al., 2018). Therefore, employers try to evaluate the ability of a candidate to perform the job.

Prior experience in a corporate context is typically advantageous for job candidates (Rivera, 2011). However, in many countries, large companies are forced by the law to recruit people with disabilities (Tamako, 2007; Carvalho-Freitas et al., 2015). Research showed that generic work experience does not lead to superior firm performance (Grilli, 2011), and even specific work experience does not always affect performance (Rosita et al., 2019). Therefore, prior work experience may not be indicative of work capability and may not be sufficient evidence for the employer as a measure of the ability of a person with visual impairment disabilities (VID) to perform the job adequately.

Similarly, employers use prior salary information as an indication of a candidate's worth (Farrell et al., 2017). According to Marginal Productivity Theory, each individual gets paid based on his or her contribution to the employer's revenue (Pressman, 2014). This case may be true, except for significant income inequalities (Klees, 2017). Specifically, people with disabilities are often underpaid and overworked (Drew et al., 2011), thereby eliminating prior salary as an indication of job capability.

Specifically for PWVIB, employers' concerns for job capability resulted throughout history in a much lower employment rate than people with other disabilities (Taylor, 2011). Therefore, we can hypothesize that the ability to provide employers with any kind of proof or evidence that PWVIB can perform the job may be a key to improving employers' attitudes toward employing them.

- *H1. Evidence for the ability to employ PWVIB positively affects the attitude to employ them.*

Financial incentives

Typical financial incentives include (Lunt et al., 1994): work subsidies paid to either employers or employees to make up for lost productivity, wage subsidies, which can take the alternative form of a tax credit, and one-off grants payable to employers when they take on a disabled people. Worldwide examples include wage subsidies in Norway and tax incentives in India (Chhabra, 2021).

According to the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), stress arises when an individual loses resources or fails to gain resources. A manager would, therefore, naturally try to avoid any risks. Furthermore, according to the expected value and expected utility theories, people rationally decide to derive the best possible outcome (Soh, 2010). Hence, when hiring an employee, the company pays non-recurring costs related to activities, such as recruitment, selection, hiring, medical assessment, and contracts (Perufo et al., 2018). As the desired level of education and experience increases, the process becomes more expensive (Perufo et al., 2018). Expenses are often higher regarding people with disabilities, specifically with VID, because the employer needs to implement proper accommodations at the workplace (Rumrill Jr et al., 1997). Accommodations refer to the need to modify, adjust, and change the workplace to hire PWVIB (McDonnall et al., 2014). Hiring PWVIB will also incur expenses regarding assistive technology required for PWVIB (Amurani, 2019), including screen enlargers, speech synthesizers, screen readers, text scanners, Braille displays, Braille digital converter, and speech browsers (Stirbens et al., 2010). Finally, studies showed that financial incentives have a positive effect on employing people with disabilities (Wuellrich, 2010). In addition, a focus on financial incentives may cause additional variables, such as information on VID or job match, to be redundant, and vice versa. We, therefore, hypothesize the following:

- *H2. Financial incentives to employ PWVIB positively affect the attitude to employ them.*
- *H3. Information about VID negatively affects financial incentives to employ PWVIB.*
- *H4. Job match of PWVIB negatively affects financial incentives to employ PWVIB.*

Financial incentive mediation information to attitude

The lack of information regarding PWVIB was previously underlined as the main factor for the negative approach to hiring PWVIB (McDonnall et al., 2014). Even when organizations and individual employees are interested in assisting people with low vision, their lack of knowledge and training undermines their intentions (Richards et al., 2010).

However, information about VID can be easily obtained if the employer desires; therefore, the lack of information may not be enough to affect a negative attitude. Financial risk is also one of the most dominant concerns for discrimination (Brouwers et al., 2020), and without financial incentives, the financial risk remains. That is, lack of VID

information may affect a negative attitude in cases where the lack of information increases financial risk concerns. We, therefore, hypothesize the following:

- H5. *Financial incentives mediate the impact of the information about VID on the attitude to employ them.*

Financial incentives mediation job match to attitude

Identifying the appropriate person for the job and matching strengths and abilities to the requirements of the position are important for successful hiring and retention (Kuo et al., 2014).

Successful assimilation of people with disabilities in the workplace is common (Blanck, 1998). However, economic subsidies are sometimes required to persuade employers to implement adaptations at work (Ehn et al., 2020). This notion indicates that a job candidate with a visual impairment that may be suited for the job may not suffice to affect employers' positive employment attitude. Moreover, financial incentives are needed to influence employers' motivation to employ the candidate. This finding is corroborated by the risk compensation theory, which assumes that people have a constant level of risk that they are ready to accept (Salminen, 2005). Based on the above statements, we develop the following hypothesis:

- H6. *Financial incentives mediate the relationship between the job match requirements and employers' attitudes toward employing PWVIB.*

Methodology

Data

A survey was distributed In July 2020 using online panel data (OPD) to employers with hiring authority. That is, owners of companies, human resources managers, or any other manager with hiring authority. OPD has been largely embraced by scholars owing to its many benefits over traditional convenience samples (Porter et al., 2019). Ethics committee approval was given. We asked the following open-ended question: "in your opinion, what would encourage an employer/business to consider a candidate who is blind or visually impaired for employment?"

We also added a closed-ended Likert scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*) with questions requesting the respondent's opinion: "Organizations/Employers would prefer employing a person without a disability over a visually impaired/blind person."

A total of 975 completed questionnaires were collected: 551 (56.5%) were females, and 424 (43.5%) were males. The age range is as follows: 529 (54.3%) were between 25 and 40, 292 (29.9%) were between 41 and 50, and 154 (15.8%) were between 51 and 65. Moreover, employment status is as follows: 38 (3.9%) were part-time employees, 717 (73.5%) were full-time employees, and 220 (23.6%) were independent.

Qualitative survey methodology

We employed a mixed-method design, which supports the extraction of unique insights (Ploum et al., 2019).

First, we manually overviewed all responses and identified major themes from the open question. Each text was tagged appropriately for belonging to one or more of the research themes (Eckhaus et al., 2018a). These variables are presented in Table 1. The responses were binary tagged (Davidovitch et al., 2019); that is, each theme was tagged 1 if the response belonged to the theme and 0 otherwise.

Two coders tagged the themes in parallel. Cohen's kappa was used to assess the inter-consistency between them, showing a high strength of agreement, as follows.

0.96 ($p < 0.001$) for *Financials*, 0.93 ($p < 0.001$) for *Inform*, 0.89 ($p < 0.001$) for *Evidence*, and 0.93 ($p < 0.001$) for *Evidence*.

Quantitative survey methodology

Table 1 presents the research instrument used in this research.

Table 1
Research instrument

Variable code	Variable description	Research item
Financials	Respondents claim the need for financial incentives and support for the firm's ongoing productivity for employing a person with VID. Tax benefits, participation in the cost of accessibility or provision of accessibility equipment, accompaniment and training on behalf of the state, and some kind of acknowledgement will benefit the company's branding and reputation	1-answer belongs to the theme; 0-answer does not belong to the theme
Inform	Candidates are educated and provided with relevant information on the requirements for PWVIB to enable their successful assimilation into the workplace	1-answer belongs to the theme; 0-answer does not belong to the theme
Evidence	Respondents indicate the need to receive some kind of evidence for the capability of a candidate with VID to perform the work requirements. For example, employers may talk to the person's previous employers, personal acquaintance with the candidate, or a trial period backed up legally by the state, allowing them to fire the person with no repercussions.	1-answer belongs to the theme; 0-answer does not belong to the theme
Candidate	The candidate pertains to the person with VID professional background and skills, and the job vacancy possibilities for the candidate	1-answer belongs to the theme; 0-answer does not belong to the theme
Attitude	Employers' attitude toward employing PWVIB	Respondents are asked to express their attitude towards the question: "Organizations/Employers would prefer employing a person without a disability over a visually impaired/blind person", with the responses: 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

Source: Authors' work

We then generated empirical variables from the tagged categories and developed the solutions and developed the (SIEPVD) model. We employed structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the model's goodness-of-fit (Coskun-Setirek et al., 2017; Eckhaus et al., 2018b; Eckhaus, 2019). Specifically, we used path analysis, which is a special case of SEM, where there is no latent variable in the model (Park et al., 2021). In cases where the researcher intends to examine the causal and effect relationship between several independent and dependent variables, SEM is the best

method to be used (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Hair Jr et al., 2014; Fan et al., 2016). This statistical analysis allows the investigation of causal and effect relationships of the variables simultaneously (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010).

The model fit was estimated using CFI, TLI, NFI, RMSEA, SRMR, and CMIN/DF. Typically, the considered cutoff values for a perfect fit are ≥ 0.95 for TLI and NFI, ≥ 0.97 for CFI, ≤ 0.05 for RMSEA and SRMR, and ≤ 2 for CMIN/DF (Erden et al., 2020). Correlations were placed in the model between *Candidate* and *Inform* because they both share an effect on *Financials* and between *Financials* and *Evidence* because they both share an effect on *Attitude*. The model, therefore, presents double arrows between the variables accordingly.

We used AMOS v.26 for SEM and mediation analysis and SPSS v.26 for other statistical operations.

Results

Qualitative survey results

In what follows, we provide qualitative examples for the relationships presented in the model, that is, every effect modelled, to offer an elaborate and more detailed study.

Effect of evidence on attitude

Examples of employers' suggestions for evidence of the candidates' capabilities to perform the job and how this evidence may affect the attitude to employ them are as follows:

Respondent No. 60 (33, M, project manager) suggests, "give examples of organizations where there are employees with a visual impairment so that employers will see that the boogeyman is not as big as they think". Interestingly, the term "boogeyman" is also used by respondent No. 101 (31, F, textile branch manager), who argues that "start with an integration through an association or something like that, so that managers will see that the boogeyman is not so bad and then they will employ more [people VID]."

Respondent No. 145 (41, M, financial manager) then suggests "talk with the candidate's previous employer" to receive evidence of the candidate's capabilities.

Effect of financial incentives on attitude

There are many examples of the financials' effect on attitude. For example, Respondent No. 2 (38, F, laboratory manager) suggests that "It could be that if the state supports him [the employer] or gives him [the employer] a grant for it [for employing a person with VID], it will affect [the employers' attitude]." Many other respondents argue similarly to respondent No. 123 (40, F, events manager), that is, "a monthly grant from the state and financial assistance in making the office accessible."

Financial incentive mediation effect job match and attitude

Respondent No. 149 (36, F, procurement and import) explains that "If the visual impairment restricts the person from doing the work in a good, accurate, fast, and safe manner, do not think there will be an incentive that will encourage the employer to employ the person. If the disability does not limit the candidate, then a financial grant or something of the sort, or perhaps advertising the brand in the media." This respondent clearly expresses the mediation, that is, the negative relationship between *Candidate* and *Financials*, including the positive attitude to employ the person due to *Financials*.

Respondent No. 262 (M, 36, security officer) also explains that “Understanding that the output from this employee [a person with VID] will be the same as a regular employee, otherwise a type of compensation from the state.” This respondent explains that financial incentives (*Financials*) are not necessary if the candidate is qualified (*Candidate*); otherwise, *Financials* affect the *Attitude*.

Financial incentive mediation effect between information and attitude

When speaking of the need for information, many respondents do not even mention financial incentives (thus the negative relationship between *Inform* and *Financials*). However, they tie the willingness to employ PWVIB with job productivity (thus the effect on the firm performance). For example, Respondent No. 486 (32, M, content director) stated that “Almost every position in the organization requires abilities that an employee with a visual impairment might get tangled with. If it was clear to me as an employer how this would not be a problem or that it had a plausible solution, it would make it easier for me to employ [PWVIB] candidates.” This respondent underlines the need for information regarding possible solutions that exist. The respondent also stresses the importance of the firm's productivity owing to the candidate's capabilities. These factors are the final decision criteria that affect employers' attitudes in hiring a candidate.

Respondent No. 614 (48, F, department manager) adds, “if someone with a visual impairment were to come and I would get an explanation about the limitations of the impairment and understand that it is not problematic in terms of performing the job assignment, I would not need additional encouragement.” This respondent highlights the importance of information and its negative relationship with *Financials*, that is, the inessentiality of financial incentives if proper information regarding PWVIB at work is available. However, the respondent also strengthens the need for productivity to employ the candidate and that productivity is the final key for hiring the candidate.

Quantitative survey results

Table 2 presents the Spearman correlations, means, and standard deviation values among the variables tagged from the open question, as well as the Likert scale measuring the attitude towards the employment of PWVIB candidates. Figure 2 shows the SIEPVD model's standardized estimates.

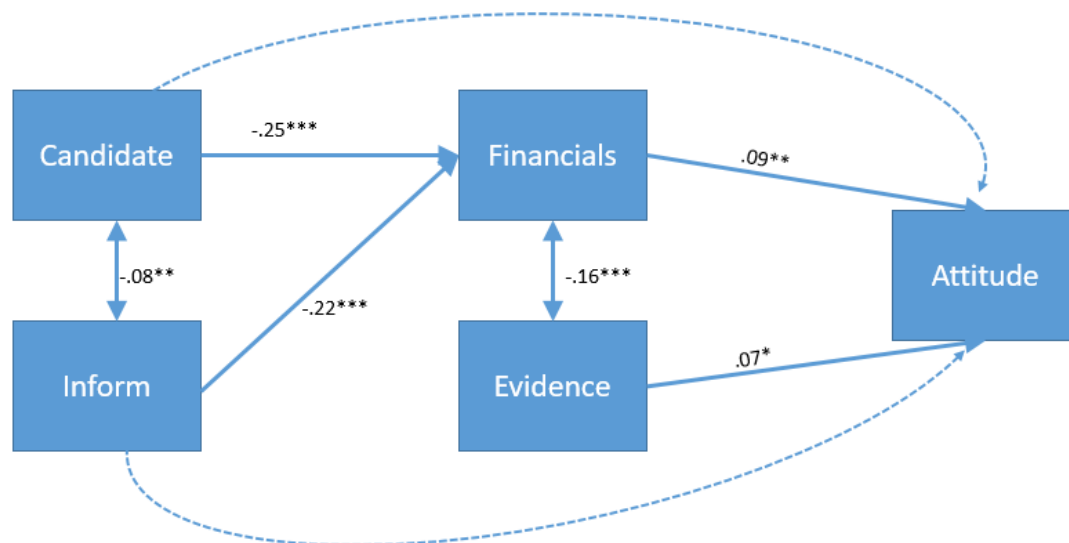
Table 2
Correlation Matrix, Means, and SD

	<i>Financials</i>	<i>Inform</i>	<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Attitude</i>
<i>Financials</i>	-				
<i>Inform</i>	-0.20***	-			
<i>Evidence</i>	-0.16***	0.02	-		
<i>Candidate</i>	-0.23***	-0.8**	-0.04	-	
<i>Attitude</i>	0.07*	-0.05	0.05	-0.01	-
Mean	0.70	0.24	0.10	0.12	4.23
SD	0.46	0.43	0.30	0.32	0.9
N	682	233	101	113	-

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: N refers to the number of respondents that expressed the theme, which is therefore different for each of the variables since responses do not include all the variables in each of the texts.

Figure 2
SIEPVD Model Standardized Estimates



* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: dotted line implies mediation.

The hypothesized model showed a good fit: CMIN/DF = 1.36, $p > 0.05$, CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.02, TLI = 0.98, and SRMR = 0.02. All hypotheses were supported.

Table 3 presents the SEM model results. *Candidate* and *Inform* negatively affect *Financials* (H3 and H4, respectively), and *Financials* and *Evidence* positively affect *Attitude* (H2 and H1, respectively).

Table 3
SEM model results

Model link	Std coefficients	Significance	Hypothesis
<i>Evidence</i> → <i>Attitude</i>	0.07	*	H1 supported
<i>Financials</i> → <i>Attitude</i>	0.09	**	H2 supported
<i>Inform</i> → <i>Financials</i>	-0.22	***	H3 supported
<i>Candidate</i> → <i>Financials</i>	-0.25	***	H4 supported

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Mediation effects were assessed using the bootstrap approach and are as follows. *Financials* mediation on the indirect effect of *Inform* on *Attitude* (H5) was significant ($\beta = -0.02$, $p < 0.01$). Bootstrapped confidence interval (CI) is $[-0.035, -0.008]$. *Financials* mediation on the indirect effect of *Candidate* on *Attitude* (H6) was significant ($\beta = -0.02$, $p < 0.01$). Bootstrapped CI is $[-0.04, -0.009]$. Notably, there was no direct effect between the *Candidate* and *Inform* to *Attitude*.

Discussion

The research results indicate that all the hypotheses were supported. Among them, the two mediation hypotheses are particularly interesting. There was no direct effect between *Candidate* and *Inform* to *Attitude*, which implies that a full mediation occurred. This result underlines the importance of financial incentives as the “bottom line” from employers' perspectives. That is, the candidate's match to an adequate

job position, or even information, is not enough on their own to affect employment attitude, and some kind of financial or productivity reassurance is essential. These findings are corroborated by the prospect theory (Kahneman et al., 1979), which posits that peoples' decision-making is based on the evaluations of losses and gains, with more emphasis on losses. That is, risk aversion is a dominant part of the cause of the negative attitude of employers to employ PWVIB. In the absence of experience, the assumed axiom of lower productivity and risk aversion takes over (Johnson et al., 1988). Findings show that providing some kind of capability evidence may lower the risk levels' perception and improve the attitude toward employing PWVIB.

This study offers important contributions for supporting PWVIB and improving their employment rate, as well as for staff responsible for employment in organizations. First, to understand the root cause and the proper solution to take, one needs to start by asking the right questions (Shereshewsky, 2001; Serrat, 2017). Many studies have discussed employers' concerns about employing PWVIB. This study, however, to our knowledge, is the first to perform employer integration in the solution. That is, we directly seek the proper solutions from the target population, employers with a negative attitude toward employing PWVIB. This targeted population should be the first to ask about what would change their mind. The response was then investigated empirically and qualitatively. In addition, ample research has been done on the employment of people with disabilities (Dispenza, 2019; Miethlich et al., 2019). Kisi et al. (2021) highlight two main categories of employers' concerns: direct factors- issues directly impacting the employer and the immediate work environment, and indirect factors- which usually have to do with attitudes regarding the impact on the work environment. In addition, known factors that support the employment of PWVIB include financial incentives, as well as utilization of post-employment services (Jang et al., 2013). Still, as McDonnall (2019) argues that "very little empirical research has been conducted to establish best practices and guide service delivery in terms of employment assistance for people with visual impairment" (p. 479), this is the first study that presents and empirically investigates the impact of the provision of evidence, as well as the direct and indirect effect of financial incentives, from the employer's point of view.

Second, employers' lack of knowledge (McDonnall et al., 2020) and financial reasons (Crudden et al., 1999) have been previously discussed in the literature as root causes for PWVIB unemployment. However, results brought to the surface a considerably more important key decision factor for employing PWVIB—employers' need for evidence for job capability. This finding highlights the need for revisiting the candidate approach when applying for jobs or attending job interviews. Employers use job interviews for the assessment of skills (Huffcutt et al., 2001), and candidates' interviewing capabilities may be important (Tay et al., 2006). However, the results of this study show that presenting employers with evidence of job capabilities may have a much higher success for PWVIB to get hired. Although job capability evidence may also profit candidates of the general population, results underline that this evidence is particularly important for PWVIB. The study, therefore, has practical implications for PWVIB.

Limitations and future research

In this study, we have presented several key employers' decision-making factors for employing PWVIB. To extend our current study, future studies may offer further tuning to employers' motivations for hiring PWVIB by focusing on employer demographics. In addition, in this study, we have investigated one culture; future studies may extend

the findings of this study by investigating different cultures, industries, and types of businesses, which could offer different results.

An interesting direction for future study may be the extension of this study by investigating the types of work and their effect on the level of risk avoidance, the need for evidence, and the general attitude of employers. For example, research may investigate employers' attitudes and motivations for hiring PWVIB for "learning by doing" jobs versus other types of jobs. Learning by doing means learning from experiences resulting directly from one's actions versus learning from watching others perform, read, or listen to instructions, descriptions, or lectures (Reese, 2011).

Another interesting future research extension of this study is to explore the effect of academic performance on employers' motivation to hire PWVIB. That is, future studies may investigate if academic achievements offer evidence for job capability or reduce the fear of risk in their employment. Credentials required by an employer to qualify as valid measures, such as a degree, a minimum class rank, grade point average, graduation from a college of at least some minimum quality, or a combination of these (Wise, 1975), should also be investigated.

Future studies may also extend this research to the issues of sustainability and productivity of PWVIB employment, as well as organizations' effect of digital transformation (Bach et al., 2018; Tomićić Furjan et al., 2020) on the employment of PWVIB.

Finally, with about as many as 10% of the respondents indicating the desire for job capability evidence, future studies that will investigate directions for identifying the types of employers' acceptable evidence for PWVIB's capabilities at work may help to lower the employer's risk avoidance of hiring PWVIB. They may also be highly valuable in the research or practice of work rehabilitation for PWVIB.

Work satisfaction may significantly affect a person's happiness (Eckhaus, 2021). This study focuses on the employment of PWVIB, but the results are not limited to this niche. Future studies that will extend this research to other types of disabilities would provide further research support for increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities. In addition, there is still a great need for more comprehensive research comparing the employment of people with and without disabilities and research considering the employment of people with various disabilities.

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