

Emotions, communicational process and inclusion of people with disabilities in the work context

DOI: 10.46932/sfjdv2n2-211

Received in: March 1st, 2021

Accepted in: May 30th, 2021

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this research focuses on understanding how the labor market integrates people with disabilities (PwD), understanding their emotions and how they manage them throughout the work day, and knowing how communication is processed in the workplace. The following specific objectives were then defined: to know the degree of awareness that disabled workers have about their emotions in their daily interactions in the workplace, and to analyze the communicative interactions of PwD in the work environment.

A mixed methodology was chosen, using qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative methodology used semi-structured interviews, and the quantitative methodology used a questionnaire. The sample was made up of 50 disabled workers and 314 co-workers of the same (n=314), employees of the Auchan Portugal Group.

The results showed that: of the four dimensions under study (*General Perception of Hiring, Emotional Intelligence, Interpersonal Communication and Integration/Insertion in the workplace*) the great majority of PwD co-workers agreed or totally agreed with the items of the four dimensions, which suggests a positive score with the themes under study, the PwD are able to identify the emotions that most characterize the day-to-day at work, but most disguise the discomfort felt and do not clearly communicate to the other what emotion they felt, most PwD communicate to the other the behavior that caused them discomfort, PwD do not consider the communication channels confusing, most PwD feel integrated in the company and state that no specific adaptation has been made, most of the interviewees suggest a greater sensitivity on the part of the employer and work adapted to the person and his/her disability.

Keywords: disability, labor market, inclusion, emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of people with disabilities (PwD) at work is a long and two-way process, in which these people should seek to develop themselves and society should, in turn, seek to reduce barriers to their social participation. Laws play their role as inducers of the PwD inclusion process, but they are not enough to ensure effective inclusion (Garcia, 2014). Most of the hiring of PwD is done by law enforcement and inspection agencies (Hammes & Nuernberg, 2015). Companies allege that full compliance with the law

is not possible, especially those with a large number of employees, since they report that they cannot find PwD capable of performing the available functions (Monteiro et al., 2011), or that architectural adaptations are difficult or too costly (Moghazy & Sheriff, 2017). In addition, the negative perception that companies have towards hiring PwD is perhaps the biggest barrier. This negative perception focusing on disability and its limitations, rather than on skills and potential, creates obstacles in the skills of PwD to enter the labor market and advance their careers (de Beer et al., 2014). Disability is still strongly linked to the idea of incapacity, in which PwD are responsible for their condition, presenting a stigmatizing view (Violante & Leite, 2011).

In any case, it is known that many companies have disrespected the law or have complied with it in order to achieve only their economic goals (Souza et al., 2019). Thus, a vision persists, especially in the business world, in which what matters is strict compliance with the law, hiring the recommended number of PwD. From this viewpoint, a series of obstacles or barriers, outside their scope of action, such as lack of qualification or urban access difficulties, have served to justify the difficulties in following the law (Simonelli et al., 2020).

On the other hand, inclusion is a responsibility of all areas of society, being a process to include, in an integral way, those who are marginalized due to their limitations, as is the case of PwD. Inclusion is a necessarily social issue (Simonelli et al., 2020).

Work have a great importance for the life of each individual, as it is a fundamental activity for personal fulfillment, develops self-esteem, social interaction, sense of relevance and ability, as well as the construction of identity and autonomy (Toldrá et al., 2010). The reasons that point to the need to explore the meaning of work for PwD are justified by the effects that work causes in the lives of these people, since they leave the condition of social isolation and dependence on others to create their own bonds in other spaces, with other people and performing other activities (Lima et al., 2013). Unfortunately, even when they manage to enter the labor market, PwD continue to face a range of obstacles related to the physical conditions in the workplace that are not always the most appropriate, conditioning the performance of their functions (Andrade et al., 2017); with the communication failures between supervisors and colleagues; with the conflicts resulting from the lack of specific knowledge about disability by colleagues (Scott et al., 2015); with the lack of skills and adequate training to properly deal with this population (Souza et al., 2019).

Therefore, the general objective of this research focuses on understanding how the labor market integrates PwD; what emotions they feel and how they manage them throughout the work day; and how communication is processed in the workplace. The following specific objectives were then defined: to

know how aware disabled workers are of their emotions in their daily interactions in the workplace; and, finally, to analyze the communicative interactions of PwD at work.

The study of the challenges and the daily experiences of PwD in the labor market is extremely important to understand that despite legislative advances, there are still many barriers in reality that prevent these people from having a life in the corporate environment. Therefore, addressing these issues will help to understand the daily challenges of people with apparent limitations. The research has its relevance by bringing a new look on the subject, not with the intention of exhausting the subject, but to stimulate other research and future interventions in this area.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE INCLUSION OF PWD IN THE LABOR MARKET

Castro and Berro (2017) affirm that the PwD is often characterized as an individual with limitations and that, due to these limitations, they face many difficulties in their inclusion in the social and labor worlds. The importance of the inclusion of PwD in the labor market goes beyond a simple opportunity to exercise a profession, perform tasks and have a salary, it is the promotion of respect and social inclusion.

The main challenges in including PwD in the job market are many, starting with accessibility in the physical environments of companies and public spaces, followed by the lack of confidence of employers towards professional performance, among others; and because of this, the inclusion process in real life is an eminent challenge for this population. PwD are still at a disadvantage when it comes to finding appropriate jobs, and this situation is mainly due to prejudice on the part of employers who often believe that these people are not capable of performing as efficiently as non-disabled workers, or that they are simply not a source of added value for the organization. These fixed thought patterns and corporate cultures prevail in most companies, having a significant impact on the lives of PwD who are looking for a job or are currently working (Ali et al., 2011). Conde & Sainz (2017), in their study of PwD employment found that PwD had lower activity rates, higher unemployment rates, and lower salaries than other workers.

However, Aichner (2021) identifies a number of advantages of employing PwD for organizations, such as lower absenteeism and turnover rates, a more positive organizational climate, increased productivity, and higher levels of innovation. In addition, PwD are characterized by higher levels of motivation at work, being loyal and friendly to colleagues and customers, and higher levels of job satisfaction. Employees with intellectual disabilities often work in a more focused and precise way, which is why they perform repetitive tasks well (Conza & Juric, 2013). In the study by Analuiza et al., (2020) results showed that PwD were seen by employers as more enthusiastic, more engaged and competitive in

assigned tasks, and their hiring was an asset to the organization. In addition, the number of customers with disabilities is increasing and becoming an important target segment for many companies. So, having employees involved in product development and other strategic management and marketing functions will certainly help to better understand customers with disabilities (Aichner & Shaltoni, 2018).

Despite all these advantages, PwD still have difficulties in labor inclusion. Many PwD hold less skilled jobs even though they have the skills to perform more complex functions (Shahin et al., 2020). This population still suffers discrimination regarding hiring, job and career growth and promotion opportunities (Rodrigues, 2011).

2.2 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)

Emotional intelligence (EI) concerns the ability to identify, express, understand, use, and manage emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). There is strong evidence that EI plays an important role in work-related outcomes (Gong et al., 2019; Suleman et al., 2020).

In regard to workers with disabilities, emotions build their subjective world, so from understanding them, it is possible to help them develop their potential, recognizing them in their entirety (Alvim & Rodrigues, 2015). According to Coutinho et al. (2017), employees with disabilities often do not have the opportunity to express their opinions and emotions, and those who do end up being ignored by their employers. The reality that they are often discriminated against by employers, as well as by colleagues, due to misconceptions about their abilities, prevents them from openly expressing their opinions and emotions (Coutinho et al., 2017). In addition, emotional reactions such as feelings of anxiety and depression, anger, and self-pity have been reported by PwD due to the discrimination experienced at work (Pérez-Garín et al., 2018).

In this sense, IE can help PwD improve their empathy and their approach with co-workers (Nguyen et al., 2018); give them the opportunity to show their true talent, succeed, and stay longer in the job (Hashim et al., 2019). On the other hand, EI can help employers and colleagues of the PwD to improve the work environment to make it more favorable for the PwD (Ma et al., 2018). In Diaz and García's (2018) study, PwD who showed higher levels of EI developed strategies that allowed them to cope with various difficulties at work, and therefore good emotional management is quite necessary to prevent these people from suffering physical and/or emotional consequences.

2.3 INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION (IC)

Interpersonal communication (IC) is a form of communication that promotes the exchange of information between two or more people, assuming, necessarily, the minimal existence of a sender and a

receiver (Bach, 2019). It is the capacity a person has to understand, communicate, and connect with people or groups (Whetten & Cameron, 2011).

At the organizational level, communication should flow in a way that includes all workers, because the smooth functioning and good relationships within the organization depend on it. PwD need help in their integration, so it is essential that internal communication transmits to the worker in question and his colleagues positive feelings towards the organization, making him understand that inclusion also depends on the actions of each one (Pereira, 2015). Some studies have shown that one of the greatest difficulties for PwD in integrating into the company is associated with communication, which is very confusing and not very flexible (Borges et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2017). Often, these people remain isolated in the workplace, communicating very little with colleagues and employers, which makes it more difficult for them to integrate, ending up being excluded from several functions, even leading to their dismissal or abandonment of the position (Barbra & Mutswanga, 2014; Nota et al., 2013). Furthermore, depending on the type of disabilities, some PwD may present communication barriers, which often prevents them from achieving certain positions and performing tasks (Sartika & Devita, 2020). In the study of Ribeiro (2015) it was found that the great part of the employees with disabilities (hearing), had difficulties in communicating properly with colleagues without disabilities, which gave rise to constraints. These people should be empowered to be involved in the process where communication involves and embraces them, even those who do not have functional speech or writing (Dudas, 2013). Companies that provide individual support to their employees with disabilities, clearly and objectively transmitting to them the values and vision of the organization and helping them integrate into the work environment, showed a greater permanence of these individuals in employment (Ripat & Woodgate, 2017; Scott et al., 2015).

3 METHODOLOGY

In the present study a mixed methodology was chosen, with the use of qualitative and quantitative research. In the qualitative methodology, we used semi-structured interviews, and in the quantitative methodology we used a questionnaire. Disabled workers were interviewed and a questionnaire was applied to PwD co-workers.

3.1 SAMPLE

The sample was formed by 50 workers with disabilities (n=50) and 314 co-workers of the same (n=314), employees of the Auchan Portugal Group, a group of hypermarkets that assumes an example of good practice in the area of recruitment and integration of PwD.

Most of the participants with disabilities were male (60%), between 40-49 years old (46%) and between 30-39 years old (28%). With regard to the type of disability, about half of the participants had Mental or Intellectual Disability (50%); followed by participants with Physical or Motor Disability (32%); with Visual Disability (10%) and Hearing Disability (8%).

Of the PwD co-worker participants (N=314), the vast majority were female (74.5%), were between 30-39 years old (38.2%) and between 40-49 years old (37.9%).

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

For data collection the semi-structured interview with open and closed response questions was used, as well as a questionnaire with closed response questions. Interviews were carried out with 50 workers with disabilities. The interview script prepared for the employees with disabilities consisted of five blocks of questions, and some of these blocks of questions contained sub-paragraphs (block 2, 3 and 5). The initial part of the interview contained the sociodemographic characterization of the interviewee (name, age, gender, academic qualifications, type of disability, and number of months/years of work experience).

We chose a questionnaire with closed answers to the co-workers of people with disabilities, applied through Googleforms. The questionnaire contained, in the initial part, socio-demographic data, academic qualifications, marital status, and socio-professional data - professional position, area of work, and place of work. The possible answers were on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of four groups of questions: the first group contained 8 questions, the second 6 questions, the third 6 questions, and the last 7 questions; with the purpose of evaluating the following dimensions: *General Perception of Hiring*, *Emotional Intelligence*, *Interpersonal Communication*, and *Integration/Insertion*.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews conducted were submitted to content analysis in order to extract the relevant information. For the coding of responses, NVivo 10.1.10., a software used for qualitative and mixed-methods research (Bringer et al., 2004), was used. For statistical treatment of the data, the SPSS 24 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program was used, which is considered an extremely powerful tool for manipulating and deciphering data collected through questionnaires (Gogoi, 2020).

4 RESULTS

4.1 ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO PwD CO-WORKERS

The internal consistency of the dimensions under study was reasonable because its Cronbach's alpha is between 0.70 and 0.80, except for the dimension "Interpersonal Communication", whose coefficient was weak ($\alpha=0.608$) but is close to the acceptable value (Pestana & Gageiro, 2008).

The results of the questionnaire to PwD co-workers, namely on the four dimensions under study: *General Perception of Hiring*, *Emotional Intelligence*, *Interpersonal Communication*, and *Integration/Integration in the workplace*, indicated that the vast majority of PwD co-workers agreed or totally agreed with the items of the four dimensions, which suggests a positive score on the topics under study.

In the dimension *General Perception of Hiring* the item "Hiring PwD contributes to the social responsibility of the company" was the one that obtained the highest degree of agreement from almost all the participants (92.7%); and in the following two items, although on average neither agreed nor disagreed, a part agreed or totally agreed with "PwD have more difficulty understanding or performing a task" (30%); and "PwD have less productivity" (23.6%).

In the *Emotional Intelligence* dimension, the item "When the PwD talks about an important event in his/her life, I am sensitive to his/her feelings and emotions" was the one that obtained the highest degree of agreement, with 89.2% of the participants agreeing or totally agreeing with this fact.

In the *Interpersonal Communication* dimension, the item "The PwD does not adopt inappropriate attitudes/behaviors in the organization" about half of the PwD co-workers disagreed or totally disagreed with this fact (51%) and neither agreed nor disagreed (33.8%); and in the item "Co-existence with the PwD improves the organizational climate" part of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed with this fact (42%).

In the dimension *Integration/Insertion* in the workplace, the majority (77.1%) agreed that "The PwD is well integrated into the organizational environment"; 71.7% agreed that "All co-workers accepted well the PwD"; and 82.2% agreed or totally agreed "with the legislation that obliges companies with 75 or more workers to hire a PwD".

4.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PwD INTERVIEW

The results of the PwD interview revealed that the feeling/emotion that most characterizes the daily life at work of PwD was Pride, especially the pride in having a job, in being autonomous and having the possibility to contribute to society.

In what concerns the occurrence of a situation that usually originates a more intense emotion, most of the participants referred "Being called attention for your work" (32%); "Indifference, discrimination and exclusion" (16%) and "Getting angry with a colleague" (16%).

About half of the participants do not clearly tell the other what emotion they feel (52%); and they mask the discomfort of the emotions they feel (58%), but tell the other what behavior caused them the discomfort (54%).

Regarding the satisfaction of the participant's needs and expectations regarding organizational communication, the majority consider organizational communication to be accessible (78%); they do not consider the communication channels to be confusing (86%); they reveal that the organization's values and vision have been transmitted in a clear way (90%); that there is a continuous and collaborative interaction with the person in charge (86%); and with colleagues (88%).

Regarding the distribution of suggestions to change communication in the company, approximately half of the participants would not change anything (48%); followed by the participants who suggested "More human treatment and less technological" (16%); "There is a professional with sensitivity to communicate with PwD"(12%); "Change the mindsets of superiors" (10%); "Adapt communication to everyone" (8%); and "Hold weekly team meetings" (6%).

Concerning the distribution of the current job position, most of the participants entered through entities (76%), feel integrated (88%); orientation was carried out verbally (100%); attended vocational training (96%); and no specific adaptation was performed (90%).

Regarding the distribution of the question "What would like to see changed, in order to provide a greater professional insertion to the citizen with disabilities", most of the participants referred "More job opportunities" (52%); followed by " Greater sensibility from the employers" (42%); and "Work adapted to the person and to his/her disability" (40%).

5 DISCUSSION

The results of the questionnaire to PwD co-workers, namely on the four dimensions under study: *General Perception of Hiring; Emotional Emotional Intelligence; Interpersonal Communication; and Integration/Insertion* in the workplace, indicated that the vast majority of PwD co-workers agreed or totally agreed with the items of the four dimensions, which suggests a positive score positive score with the themes under study. These results are in line with those of several studies found in the literature that indicate that many PwD coworkers and managers have a very positive overall perception about working with this population (Seva et al., 2020; Rosemond, 2018; Lanzo, 2018; Burke et al., 2013). For example, in Morgan & Russell's (2003) study, employers with experience hiring employees with disabilities pointed

to advantages such as their consistent presence, diversity in the workplace, low turnover, and the collaboration among all co-workers that these employees provide.

The results of the interview conducted to PwD indicated that the emotion that most characterizes their daily lives is Pride, specifically the pride in having a job, being autonomous, and having the possibility to contribute to society. Also in the study of Santos and Carvalho-Freitas (2018), which aimed to assess the meanings of work for people with acquired disabilities, the results showed that the feelings attributed to work by these people were: pride, independence and survival, pleasure and life satisfaction, usefulness, and personal appreciation. The situations that usually generate intense emotion in a work context were "Being called attention for their work"; "Indifference, discrimination and exclusion", leading to a feelings of sadness and frustration. Similar results were found by Jokić and Bartolac (2018) who found that the experience of having a disability negatively influenced the participants' emotional well-being, especially in increasing stress levels, due to experiencing discrimination in many areas of their lives, including at work. The results showed that most PwD do not clearly tell the other what emotion they feel and mask the discomfort of the emotions they feel. These results are in harmony with those of Sherbin and Kennedy (2017) who found that a large proportion of PwD do not have the possibility to expose their ideas, emotions and feelings in the work environment.

Regarding organizational communication, PwD consider it accessible; they did not find the communication channels confusing. Most participants also consider that the organization's values and vision were clearly transmitted; that there is a constant and collaborative interaction with the person in charge and with colleagues. According to the findings of some studies, companies that provided individual support to their employees with disabilities, transmitting to them clearly and objectively the values and vision of the organization and helping them integrate into the work environment, showed a greater permanence of these individuals in the job (Ripat & Woodgate, 2017; Scott et al., 2015).

In terms of their current job, most participants entered the labor market through specific entities, which is in line with the results of studies in the field that showed that most PwD enter the labor market through specific entities (Lindsay et al., 2017; Guimarães et al., 2017); most of them feel integrated, which is in line with the results of the study of Abreu and Moraes (2012) that showed that disabled employees were satisfied with their social integration in the company; they attended vocational training and no specific adaptations were made. Regarding this last result, some studies showed that one of the biggest barriers felt by PwD at work concerns the fact that companies did not make specific adaptations, which caused a more difficult integration and difficulties in interpersonal relationships with colleagues (Galle & Mengden, 2016; Mendes & Pavarini, 2016).

As for what they would like to see modified in order to provide greater professional insertion of PwD, the majority named "More job opportunities", being in line with the results of the study by Meltzer et al. (2016) in which PwD reported that they had no choice about the places to work, i.e. they had few employment options available; followed by "Greater sensitivity on the part of employers", being in congruence with the results found by Velarde-Talleri et al. (2018) in which participants drew attention to the issue of the need for greater sensitivity on the part of companies in hiring this population, often seen as unfavorable to the organization; and "Work adapted to the person and their disability." In the study by Kim et al. (2020), workers whose workplaces had more disability-adapted facilities were more likely to perceive them as safe and had higher job satisfaction, and were therefore more likely to want to keep their current jobs compared to those whose workplaces offered fewer adapted facilities.

6 CONCLUSIONS, RESEARCH LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This research allowed us to get to know a little of the reality experienced by PwD in the workplace, including their emotions, the communication in the company, and their inclusion process. It was also possible to get to know the side of the colleagues who worked with PwD on a daily basis. Regarding emotions, it is very usual for PwD to develop certain issues such as low self-esteem, low self-confidence, increased levels of stress and anxiety, etc., due to the several barriers they face in the work inclusion process. In this sense, emotional intelligence can be an important tool in this process, because knowing how to deal with one's own emotions is crucial to overcome day-to-day challenges. It was possible to verify in this study that one of the emotions that PwD feel is pride in their work, which highlights its importance in their lives.

Concerning communication, its study is also important, in that it constitutes a barrier when information is not available to all, either because it does not exist or because it is not presented in an accessible way. These gaps in communication may appear when, for example, the non-disabled person doesn't understand the language of the disabled; or simply because they don't have enough knowledge about the disability and are afraid of how to deal with this population. In this follow up, we emphasize the need for PwD colleagues to receive adequate training before working with these people. However, it should be noted that communication is often influenced due to the prejudice of the non-disabled themselves, so that awareness and sensitization campaigns on this issue should be carried out in order to deconstruct misconceptions about disability and reduce stigma. In this study it was possible to realize that the issue of communication was ensured within the company, since the majority considered it accessible and clear.

With regard to inclusion, it was concluded that most of them entered the company through specific entities, which, despite being positive, reflects the difficulty this population has in finding work by themselves, having to seek help for that purpose. Many companies still hesitate to hire a PwD, for several reasons already mentioned, and the role of these entities is precisely to help them and make them aware of the hiring process of this population. However, it should be noted that companies should realign their actions and values for the effective inclusion of PwD, without having to use specific entities. In this study, it was also possible to conclude that although most of them feel integrated in the company, no specific adaptation was made, an issue that should be taken into account since it is important for a good inclusion of PwD.

Finally, we conclude that PwD would like to see more job opportunities, greater sensitivity on the part of employers, and work adapted to their person and disability. It is important that companies change their mindset, be more sensitive and stop being resistant to employing a PwD, because with the right support these people are able to adapt to the demands of the professional functions. More employment support programs should be carried out so that access to work for all people with skills is guaranteed.

The main limitation of this study is related to the time factor, in that a time limit was imposed for the elaboration of this study. Another limitation is related to the small sample size of the interviews conducted with PwD as workers. In addition, the fact that most of the workers with disabilities have more than 10 years of work in the company may have made them present a more positive view than the real one. Therefore, in future research, it would be interesting to develop assessment instruments that have lower levels of face validity in order to obtain more truthful and reliable answers from the interviewees. In addition, applying the assessment instruments to a larger number of PwD, as well as to a larger number of PwD colleagues may help in obtaining more conclusive results. It should also be noted that since in this study the participants had already been in the labor market for some time, there is the possibility that they may have been complacent about their work, and that if people who had only been in the job for a short time were interviewed, they might have indicated other perspectives. The fact that the sample consisted mostly of workers with intellectual disabilities can also be considered a limitation, as this population may present some difficulties in understanding and expressing feelings, conditioning the speech during the interviews.

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