

# Employer willingness to hire people with intellectual disability: The influence of employer experience, perception of work, and social responsibility

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## Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** For people with intellectual disability (ID), competitive integrated employment (CIE) offers many important benefits, including opportunities for inclusion as well as enhanced mental health and quality of life. Yet, CIE outcomes for people with ID are low. One systemic issue that has not been completely studied is employer willingness to hire workers with ID.

**OBJECTIVE:** The aim of this study was to understand factors that effect employer willingness to hire people with ID, including employers' personal experience with ID, corporate social responsibility, and perceptions of work performance.

**METHOD:** This study was conducted in Norway and used a survey design to understand factors that contribute to employer willingness to hire.

**RESULTS:** Four hundred seventy-eight employers responded to the survey. Our findings suggest that employers' perception of work performance, corporate social responsibility, and prior experience hiring employees with ID are key predictors of willingness to hire.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Supporting employers to gain experience with employees with ID in the workplace and understand the benefits of hiring employees with ID is a critical task in the endeavor to promote competitive integrated employment for people with ID.

Keywords: ID, competitive integrated employment, survey research, quantitative, workplace

## 1. Introduction

Employment is an important part of community life for all people. For people with intellectual disability (ID), competitive integrated employment offers many important benefits, including opportunities for inclusion as well as enhanced mental health and qual-

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ity of life (Dean et al., 2018; Garrels & Sigstad, 2019; Voermans et al., 2020). Recognizing the benefits of competitive integrated employment for people with ID, many countries have enacted plans to increase employment outcomes (e.g. the United States' Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme).

In Norway, where this study took place, the Equality and Discrimination Act ensures that people with disabilities are not discriminated against in working life (Ministry of Culture, 2018). To succeed with this objective, the government established a Job Strategy with measures to assist young people under the age of 30 with disabilities on their way to employment (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2013). Some of these measures include financial support for entrepreneurs with disabilities, individual job support, financial support for assistive technology that may help people with disabilities to participate in the labor market, and subsidies for employers who hire employees with disabilities. Yet, employment outcomes for people with ID remain low, highlighting the complex and interrelated systemic factors that impact employment outcomes (Hall et al., 2007). While effective systems of supports that promote competitive integrated employment are critical for enhancing outcomes, another often overlooked factor may be employer's attitudes about hiring people with ID (Luecking, 2011). Further, little is known about the impact of previous employer encounters with disability and the degree to which those previous encounters affect employer attitudes about hiring people with disabilities.

### *1.1. Employer willingness to hire people with disabilities*

Most research on employer willingness to hire focuses broadly on people with disabilities. Little research focuses specifically on people with ID. A review of employers' attitudes towards hiring and retaining people with disabilities suggests that employers hold relatively positive attitudes regarding individuals with disabilities (Burke et al., 2013). A study of 124 managers' attitudes towards employees with disabilities in the hospitality industry confirmed positive attitudes among restaurant managers towards training and working with people with disabilities (Paez & Arendt, 2014).

While employers generally express positive and affirmative attitudes concerning the hiring and accommodations of workers with disabilities,

research suggests that these positive views do not necessarily indicate that employers will hire people with disabilities (Hernandez et al., 2000). Indeed, as identified by Strindlund and colleagues (2018), employer attitudes about the employability of people with disabilities may be multifaceted, characterized by a complex interplay of conceived individual-, workplace-, and authority-related aspects. Hence, positive attitudes toward people with disabilities do not automatically translate into positive hiring decisions, provision of accommodations, and work performance appraisals. In a field experiment conducted by Ameri and colleagues (2018), more than 6,000 fictitious job applications were sent to possible employers. In two thirds of the cover letters, it was disclosed that the applicant had a disability (Asperger syndrome or spinal cord injury), whereas the remaining third of the applications did not mention any disability. In this experiment, the applications where a disability was disclosed received 26% fewer expressions of employer interest, with no significant difference between the types of disability disclosed, which suggests that disability status clearly affects employer hiring intent.

### *1.2. Employer characteristics influencing willingness to hire*

#### *1.2.1. Employer perceptions of work performance*

The study by Amir and colleagues (2009) identified a number of often incorrect assumptions that function as obstacles to the hiring of people with disabilities. According to their study, employers believe that: 1) People with disabilities often require extra time in learning new work tasks; 2) People with disabilities often require some sort of job accommodations to do the job; 3) People with disabilities have trouble getting their work done on time and often need others to help them finish the job; 4) Co-workers are not very comfortable working with people with disabilities; 5) People with disabilities tend to call in sick more often than other workers due to health or personal problems; and 6) People with disabilities have trouble getting along with others on the job. These assumptions were identified as major barriers to the hiring of people with disabilities. Other studies have also found that disability status can affect employer perception of work performance. In presenting employers with hypothetical cases of employees which were introduced by disability status (i.e. ID, psychosocial, or hearing loss),

Nota et al. (2014) found that disability status influenced employer perception of work performance. However, when the description of the case was also accompanied with descriptions of the person's past work experience and strengths, employer perceptions improved.

#### *1.2.2. Employer experience with people with disabilities*

As described previously, positive employer perceptions of workers with disabilities do not always translate to hiring people with disabilities. So, the question becomes, what factors do affect hiring practices? One possible factor is previous experience working with people with disabilities. That is, when employers have prior experience with employees with disabilities in the workplace, they may be more likely to hire such employees on future occasions (Luecking & Fabian, 2000). Relatedly, other research has found a relationship between frequency of interaction with people with ID and willingness to hire, suggesting that employers with more frequent interactions are more willing to hire (Duvdevany et al., 2016). The evidence on the relationship between employer experience with people with disabilities and hiring practices are mixed and warrant further investigation. Some research has found positive associations between employer experiences and hiring practices. In a systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, Lindsay and colleagues (2018) found that employers expressed increased awareness of the value of people with disabilities as a main advantage of hiring them, and managers who worked with disabled youth described that their experiences challenged their stereotypes about people with disabilities.

Other research, however, has not found a relationship between employer experience with people with disabilities and hiring practices. For example Nota et al. (2014) studied employer attitudes to descriptions of hypothetical job candidates with disabilities and found that employer rating of job candidates was not affected by previous experience working with people with disabilities.

#### *1.2.3. Size of business*

A few studies have investigated the degree to which the size of a business influences hiring practices of people with disabilities. The results of these studies have been mixed. Duvdevany et al. (2016) did not find a significant relationship between business size (used as a continuous variable) and employer willingness to

hire people with ID. However, other researchers have found that larger businesses tend to be more willing to hire people with disabilities (Jasper & Waldhart, 2013).

#### *1.2.4. Social responsibility for hiring people with disabilities*

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a business model commonly used in Norway and endorsed by the Norwegian government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016), yet the effects of CSR on hiring practices for people with ID have not been systematically studied. The Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality (2016) describes CSR as a business model in which businesses are expected to assume responsibility for their impact on people, the environment, and the communities and societies in which they operate. While not explicitly focused on hiring practices for people with ID, CSR practices are strongly imbued with a moral imperative, where companies address social issues in order to positively influence consumer attitudes (Porter & Cramer, 2006). This implies that, for many companies, CSR functions primarily as a means to satisfy external audiences.

A company's corporate social agenda may include employment practices, and therefore employers may seek to comply with Article 27 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which states that people with disabilities have the right to work on an equal footing with others, including the right to a freely chosen job within an open, inclusive and accessible labor market. In other words, in a country such as Norway, where business practices also seek to address social issues, companies may see it as part of their social responsibility towards the community to hire people with disabilities, and some companies may take special measures to recruit employees with ID. For instance, businesses in Norway could build a corporate social profile by systematically recruiting people with ID as part of their team. Since the employees with ID work for these companies, the companies manage to align social responsibility with economic business goals of productivity and profit.

### *1.3. Objectives*

While several research studies have explored employer attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities, research studies that focus specifically on hiring practices for employees with ID are scarce. The aim of this study was to understand factors that

influence employer willingness to hire people with ID in Norway. This article also explores the relationship between employers' personal experience with ID and their perceptions of competence of workers with ID. Our study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: *How do employers rate their willingness to hire people with ID?*

RQ2: *What factors affect the willingness of employers to hire people with ID?*

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedures

This study is part of the project "Effective school-work transition processes for students with mild intellectual disability" funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The overarching survey used in this project aimed to (1) map Norwegian employers' experiences with and expectations towards hiring employees ID, and (2) explore factors that may encourage more employers to hire people with ID. An anonymous Internet questionnaire was developed at the University of Oslo's Website for internet surveys. Given that extremely few people with ID are competitively employed in Norway (Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2018), a targeted approach to recruit employers with experiences of employing workers with ID was deemed necessary to enable comparison of responses from employers with and without prior experience of hiring workers with ID. An invitation to participate in the survey was e-mailed to a sample of employers who, based on previous disability employment research in Norway (e.g. Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2018) were considered more likely to have experience with hiring people with ID than the typical Norwegian company. However, not all companies recruited had experience hiring people with ID, which enabled comparison of responses from employers with and without prior experience of hiring workers with ID. The sample of employers was gathered through: (1) industries known to hire people with ID in Norway (e.g. child care centres, nursing homes, and restaurants) in a randomly drawn sample of municipalities representing 15 % of the inhabitants in Norway (1353 employers invited/302 participated); (2) A sample of companies recruited from an initiative that aims to recruit people with ID into competitive integrated jobs (Helt Med; translated: Fully Included), by matching willing employers with

employees with ID (58 employers invited/ 22 participated); (3) All companies who participated in a project established by The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) to promote activity from employers to increase the employment of people with impaired functioning (1119 employers invited/154 participated). No incentive was offered for completing the survey. An automated email reminder was sent to non-respondents within a few weeks after the initial invitation. A total of 2,530 employers were invited to participate in the survey and 478 responded, giving a response rate of 19 percent. Since few people with ID enter the workforce in Norway, our sample is not representative for all employers in Norway, but it is representative of employers who hire people with ID (Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2018).

### 2.2. Data analysis

The STATA software package version 14.2 Special Edition (StataCorp, 2015) was used for statistical analysis. We used confirmatory factor analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the validity of the scales "*Willingness to hire*" and "*Perception of Work Performance*". The measurement model in SEM is a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which allow us to verify the factor structure of observed variables and to test the hypothesis that relationships exist between observed variables and an underlying unobserved (latent) construct. The CFA analyses the degree to which the measurement model in SEM is a good fit to the observed data. Regarding model fit, numerous goodness-of-fit indicators exist to assess a model. Some common fit indexes are the Tucker-Lewis Index ((TLI), also known as Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Standardized Root mean square residual (SRMR) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For this study, we used the following criteria to determine model fit: TLI and CFI  $\geq 0.95$ ; SRMR and RMSEA  $\leq 0.08$  (Schreiber et al., 2006). After determining the fit of the scales, we then measured internal consistency (reliability) using Cronbach alpha. A Cronbach alpha value should have a minimum level of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

We used a multiple regression to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable, "*Willingness to hire*" and the independent variables (i.e. perception of work performance, CSR, prior experience with employing people with ID, personal

experience with people with ID, work sector, and size of company).

### 2.3. Measures

A survey was developed for this project to gather general information about the organizations who hire people with ID, such as (1) employers' personal relationships with people with ID, (2) employers' prior experience hiring people with ID; (3) employers' willingness to hire; (4) employers' perceptions of work performance; and (5) employer attitudes of corporate social responsibility. The survey defined ID based on criteria in the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th edition (ICD-10; World Health Organization, 2016) and ID was described as a "cognitive impairment, which manifests through general learning disabilities and logical and abstract thinking difficulties. People with this condition usually experience challenges with independent functioning, and they often need help to manage their everyday living. [...] In this survey, we focus on people with mild ID who require some support, and not those with more severe impairments."

#### 2.3.1. Employer personal relationships with people with ID

The respondents were asked if they had a family member or if they knew someone with ID. Possible responses included (a) No relationship/knowledge of someone with ID; (b) Know someone with ID in the neighborhood; (c) Know someone in a friend's network or in the family of someone in a friend's network; (d) Have an extended family member with ID; (e) Have a close family member with ID. Respondents could choose more than one option. For analysis the variables were recoded to a new variable recording the person's closest relationship with a person with ID. Further, to maximise the number of respondents in each category, categories b and c were collapsed into one category "Know someone with ID in the neighborhood /in a friend's network", and categories d and e were collapsed into one category "In family/related to someone with ID". Table 1 lists the frequency of responses in each category.

#### 2.3.2. Prior experience hiring employees with ID

In order to assess employers' previous experience of hiring employees with ID, we asked the following yes/no question: "Has your company employed people with ID, either now or in the past?" In our

sample, 127 employers had prior experience with hiring employees with ID.

#### 2.3.3. Employer willingness to hire

The employers were asked to assess on a five point likert scale their degree of agreement on seven different statements regarding their willingness to hire people with ID. The items included (a) People with ID can contribute in a positive way to our business, (b) I see that there are work tasks a person with ID can do in our business, (c) The work we do here is not suitable for people with ID (reverse scored), (d) If the necessary financial support is included, our company will consider hiring people with ID in the near future, (e) If the necessary guidance is included, our company will consider hiring people with ID in the near future, (f) Our company is willing to facilitate work assignments and job descriptions to create job opportunities for people with ID. The SEM model (CFA) is acceptable: TLI = 0.98, CFI = 0.96, SRMR = 0.03, RMSEA = 0.091. All the factor loadings were significant and a reliability analysis gives satisfactory results (Cronbach alpha of 0.88).

#### 2.3.4. Perception of work performance

We developed a scale to measure employer's attitudes towards the work performance of people with ID, based on Nota and colleagues (2014). However, where Nota and colleagues (2014) measured attitudes towards specific job positions and work tasks, we asked employers about their general perception of people with ID's work performance (five items). Work performance items included (a) employees with ID manage to complete a task alone; (b) employees with ID perform work tasks correctly; (c) the work performance of employees with ID will be satisfactory; (d) the employee's ability to pay attention to details will be satisfactory; (e) employees with ID will often make mistakes. Items were rated on a 7-point likert scale, ranging from 1 ("to a very small extent") to 7 ("to a very large extent"). For our data, the SEM model (CFA) fits nicely: TLI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.015, RMSEA = 0.038. All the factor loadings were significant and a reliability analysis gives satisfactory results (Cronbach alpha of 0.89).

#### 2.3.5. Corporate social responsibility

The employers were asked to assess on a five point likert scale their degree of agreement with the following statement: "Hiring people with ID is a social responsibility that the company should take on." We

Table 1  
Description of characteristics of the companies

|  | Freq. | %    |
|--|-------|------|
| Prior experience hiring employees with ID                        |       |      |
| No prior experience hiring employees with ID                     | 351   | 73.4 |
| Prior experience hiring employees with ID                        | 127   | 26.6 |
| Personal relationship with a person with ID                      |       |      |
| No relationship with/knowledge of someone with ID                | 170   | 35.6 |
| Know someone with ID in the neighbourhood/ in a friend's network | 187   | 39.1 |
| In family/related to someone with ID                             | 121   | 25.3 |
| Company size (number of employees)                               |       |      |
| 10 or fewer  | 84    | 17.6 |
| 11 to 15   | 89    | 18.6 |
| 16 to 20   | 92    | 19.2 |
| 21 to 30   | 82    | 17.2 |
| 30 or more   | 131   | 27.4 |
| Work sector  |       |      |
| Industry/construction  | 65    | 14.0 |
| Retail and warehousing   | 27    | 5.8  |
| Hotel, restaurant and catering                                   | 28    | 6.0  |
| Education/kindergarten   | 218   | 46.9 |
| Health and social services                                       | 57    | 12.3 |
| Other services   | 70    | 15.1 |

use this statement as a gauge of the employers *Corporate Social Responsibility*.

#### 2.4. Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (approval number 380880). Because the online questionnaire was developed using a secure and anonymous solution for internet surveys, the collected data could not be traced back to individual respondents.

### 3. Results

Table 1 describes the characteristics of the companies included in this study. Seventy percent of our sample had no prior experience hiring people with ID. However, over sixty percent of the sample had some personal relationship with a person with ID.

#### 3.1. RQ1: How do employers rate their willingness to hire people with ID?

Table 2 shows descriptive information and the results from the reliability analysis on two scales: Willingness to Hire and Perception of Work Performance. The average score for Willingness to Hire was 3.39 out of a possible 5 points, while the average for Perception of Work Performance was 3.94 out of

a possible 7 points. For both scales, reliability was high.

For the item that addressed Social Responsibility, the average score was 3.72 out of a possible 5 points.

Table 2 shows further that perception of work performance, CSR and prior experience of employees with ID all have moderate positive correlation coefficient (pearsons  $r > 0.4$  &  $< 0.6$ ) with willingness to hire. Perception of work performance and CSR also have moderate positive correlations, while prior experience has a significant, however weaker, positive correlation with CSR and work performance perception.

#### 3.2. RQ2: What factors affect the willingness of employers to hire people with ID?

The multiple linear regression analysis in Table 3 shows employers' perception of the work performance of people with ID is the main contributor ( $\beta = 0.42$ ) to explain employers' willingness to hire persons with ID, followed by CSR ( $\beta = 0.30$ ). Employers who have prior experience hiring employees with ID is another predictor of willingness to hire. A relationship with a person with ID in their private network does not significantly explain any of the dependent variables. The number of employees in the company has some isolated significant effect on *Willingness to Hire*, as did some work sectors.

Table 2  
Correlations and descriptive data for scales, CSR and prior experience of employees with ID and Reliability Data for Scales

|   | Willingness to Hire | Perception of Work Performance | CSR     | Prior experience |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Willingness to Hire   | 1.00                | –                              | –       | –                |
| Perception of Work Performance  | 0.59***             | 1.00                           | –       | –                |
| Hiring people with ID is a social responsibility the company should take on (CSR) | 0.52***             | 0.41***                        | 1.00    | –                |
| Prior experience of employees with ID   | 0.40***             | 0.34***                        | 0.30*** | 1.00             |
| <i>N</i>  | 462                 | 465                            | 474     | 478              |
| mean  | 3.39                | 3.94                           | 3.72    | –                |
| SD  | 0.98                | 1.3                            | 1.1     | –                |
| min   | 1                   | 1                              | 1       | 0                |
| max   | 5                   | 7                              | 5       | 1                |
| Cronbach's alpha  | 0.88                | 0.89                           | –       | –                |

\* $p < 0,05$ ; \*\* $p < 0,01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0,001$ .

Table 3  
Multiple linear regression analysis predicting the *Willingness to hire*. Reporting unstandardised beta values (b), standardised betas (beta), *p*-value and explained variance ( $R^2$ )

|   | b      | $\beta$ |
|---|--------|---------|
| Perception of Work Performance  | 0.32   | 0.42*** |
| Hiring people with ID is a social responsibility the company should take on (Coperate Social Rresponsibility) | 0.27   | 0.30*** |
| Prior experience of employers with ID   | 0.43   | 0.19*** |
| Relationship with person with ID (No relationship ref.)   |        |         |
| Neighborhood/friends network  | –0.06  | –0.03   |
| Family/related  | –0.12  | –0.05   |
| Size (employees. 10 or fewer ref)   |        |         |
| 11 to 15  | –0.19  | –0.08   |
| 16 to 20  | –0.11  | –0.04   |
| 21 to 30  | –0.10  | –0.04   |
| 30 or more  | –0.24* | –0.10*  |
| Work Sector (Industry/construction ref)   |        |         |
| Retail and warehousing  | –0.20  | –0.05   |
| Hotel. restaurant and catering  | 0.63** | 0.15**  |
| Education/Daycare   | 0.29*  | 0.15*   |
| Health and social services  | 0.31*  | 0.11*   |
| Other services  | 0.29*  | 0.10*   |
| Constant  | 0.96   | –       |
| $R^2$ (adjusted)  |        | 0.48    |

\* $p < 0,05$ ; \*\* $p < 0,01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0,001$ .

## 4. Discussion

Enhancing employment outcomes for people with ID is a complex endeavor involving interactions between many stakeholders, including people with ID, family members, workforce support providers, employers, and others (Shogren et al., 2020). This study approached employment outcomes from an environmental perspective by investigating factors influencing employers' willingness to hire people with ID. We found three main factors influencing employer's willingness to hire people with ID: perception of work performance, corporate social

responsibility, and prior experience working with people with ID. To a lesser extent, the size and sector of business also contributed to willingness to hire.

### 4.1. Perception of work performance

In our study, employers' perceptions of the work performance of people with ID constituted the largest contribution to explain their willingness to hire employees with ID. We measured perception of work performance using items related to problem solving and general performance. Employers are naturally concerned with how all employees perform in

the company, making such expectations about work performance critical factors for employment. Nota and colleagues' (2014) study of employer attitudes toward the work inclusion of people with various disabilities, suggested that employer attitudes toward workers with ID were rated more positively than towards workers with other disabilities. However, this was primarily in terms of being likable and socially accepted, and less so for work performance. Our study furthers this work on employer perception by focusing on the contribution of problem solving and general performance. This indicates that when supporting people with ID for the workforce, focusing on problem solving, for example by enhancing self-determination (Shogren et al., 2015), can enhance employability more so than teaching discreet job tasks that may vary between employer to employer. Interventions that promote self-determination and careers, such as the Self-Determined Career Design Model (SDCDM; Wehmeyer et al., 2003; Shogren et al., 2021) may be useful for career counsellors, transition specialists, and other supporters seeking to support employment for people with ID.

Employer perception of barriers for hiring people with ID have been shown to be more strongly related to a perceived lack of necessary skills (Kocman et al., 2018). Kocman and colleagues (2018) found that perceived lack of skills was evaluated by employers as the most important supply-side issue that hampered the integration of people with ID into competitive integrated employment. Thus, our findings confirm the results from Kocman and colleagues (2018). Knowing that perceptions of work performance play a significant role in employers' willingness to hire employees with ID and also that employers respond favorably to strengths-based descriptions of workers with ID (Nota et al., 2014), indicates the importance of supporting workers with ID so that employers can realize the important contributions that workers with ID can make within the workplace. Further, job coaches and other practitioners commonly support people with ID to develop resumes to highlight work experience, however little research examines the effectiveness of resumes or other approaches to highlighting work experiences. While building resumes is seen as a needed practice, and indeed, many employers require a resume during the application process, it is possible that there are other, more effective ways of highlighting experience. For example, a video resume may be an effective method for highlighting job-specific competencies (Kelley & Buchanan, 2017).

#### 4.2. *Corporate social responsibility*

In our study, we also investigated companies' willingness to hire employees with ID from a CSR perspective as this is an important factor in Norwegian business practices. CSR explained close to a third of the total of the employers' willingness to hire. In this survey, employers were asked whether hiring people with ID was a social responsibility the company should take on. As Porter and Kramer (2006) argue, CSR is to a large extent a moral obligation which affects a company's reputation. In Norway (where this study was conducted), the objective of inclusive employment for all is a priority for the government, and businesses are expected to act ethically and exercise social responsibility (Ministry of Children and Equality, 2016). This finding taken in isolation could be interpreted as employers indicating that they have a moral obligation to hire workers with ID, however when taken in context and coupled with our finding that perception of work performance is the primary driver of willingness to hire workers with ID, this finding could also be interpreted as employers understanding the competitive advantage of hiring people with ID, and recognizing workers with ID's value as employees.

Porter and Kramer (2006) make a case for a move from CSR to corporate social integration, where a company's social agenda benefits society and vice versa. All of a company's activities will have positive or negative social consequences, and therefore, companies should strive to anchor their strategies for CSR solidly in the mutual interdependence that exists between the company and society. For instance, discrimination of employees with ID limits the pool of potential workers, whereas an inclusive recruitment policy makes use of all available human resources. Based on this new way of thinking about CSR, Kramer and Porter (2011) coined the concept of "shared value", which indicates that a company's policies and practices to enhance its competitiveness may simultaneously enhance the economic and social conditions in which the company operates. Within this framework of shared value, employer business decisions can not only be interpreted as a moral obligation. Rather, CSR becomes a framework for businesses making competitive business decisions, and when businesses decide hiring workers with ID as part of that social agenda, they recognize the business advantage to hiring those workers as well as social need for workers with ID to be employed.



### 4.3. *Prior experience*

Our study found that prior experience of working with people with ID highly contributed to an employer's willingness to hire. Of note, we also studied the extent to which a personal relationship of a person with ID influenced willingness to hire, but no statistically significant relationship was found. This distinction adds nuance to previous research findings related to the relationship between prior experience with people with disability and hiring practices (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Lindsay et al., 2018; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Nota et al., 2014). Namely that it is not just prior experience, but prior working experience that influences the willingness to hire.

This finding, taken together with the importance of employer perception of work performance, illustrates a need in the field: identifying effective ways to increase the experiences of employers with workers with ID. For example, work-based experiences, supported by employment specialists, have the potential to enhance employment outcomes for people with ID and also raise employer perception of the benefits of hiring people with ID (Joshi et al., 2012; Test, 2009).

### 4.4. *Size and scope of business*

Limited research has been conducted to understand the characteristics of businesses that hire people with ID, and the work that has been done has been inconclusive (Duvdevany et al., 2016; Jasper & Waldhart, 2013). Our finding that larger businesses with over 30 employees are less likely to hire people with ID could be an indication of increased complexity of human resource systems that present a barrier to employment for people with ID. However, given the limitations regarding our sample (described below) these findings as well as our findings relative to scope of business should be interpreted with caution.

### 4.5. *Implications for research*

This study represents an important step in understanding employers willingness to hire people with ID. While the findings are important for the field, more research is needed to advance practices. More research is needed to identify effective practices for enhancing employer willingness to hire. For example, are workers with ID more likely to be hired if they use resumes or video resumes with their application? Or, is participation in an internship or short

work experience more effective than a video resume for enhancing employment outcomes? Additionally, it is possible that some of our findings were specific to the Norwegian context. For example, corporate social responsibility is a Norwegian initiative, and therefore important in business practices in Norway. However, it is possible that social responsibility does not effect practices in the same way in other countries. Finally, our research explored employer willingness to hire, however more research is needed to understand actual hiring practices. Exploring these and other research questions are needed to enhance employment outcomes for people with ID.

### 4.6. *Limitations*

Despite the fact that the present study has a decent sample size that allows for some generalization of its findings, the response rate for the survey was relatively low, only 19%. However, Hellevik (2016) argues that even surveys with a response rate as low as 4 % have scientific value. Additionally, we recruited employers based on our knowledge that they were positive to or had prior experience with hiring employees with ID. Hence, the employers and the companies in this study may not be representative for the typical Norwegian company. Moreover, while we made sure to provide a definition of ID in the survey, we had no possibility to check whether respondents had a similar understanding of the condition. Nonetheless, we believe that findings from our study yield important information about employer willingness to hire people with ID, and therefore, this study may contribute towards the goal of equal employment for all.

## 5. **Conclusion**

Despite efforts to increase the labor market participation of people with ID, they remain seriously underrepresented in competitive integrated employment. This article studied Norwegian employers willingness to hire employees with ID. Three main factors were identified as contributive to this willingness, namely: (a) employers' perception of the work performance of employees with ID; (b) prior experience with hiring employees with ID; and (c) corporate social responsibility. These findings underscore the importance of supported employment services and job coaches, as these may help to build bridges between employ-

ers and employees with ID. Providing employers with evidence-based information about the possibilities and benefits of hiring employees with ID may then be a relatively straightforward but all-important task in the endeavor to promote competitive integrated employment for people with ID.

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### Conflict of interest

None to report.

### Ethical approval

The project “Effective school-work transition processes for students with mild ID” was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (approval number 380880, date 11.06.2020).

### Informed consent

Participants were informed that the survey was anonymous, were given details about the survey, and were informed that their completion of the survey constituted their consent.

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