



LEADING DIVERSE WORKFORCES: PERSPECTIVES FROM MANAGERS AND EMPLOYERS ABOUT DYSLEXIC EMPLOYEES IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

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Published: International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Dyslexia Special Edition

STUDY SUMMARY

As a specific learning disability that affects literacy, dyslexia can present unique challenges for employees in the workplace. However, employees often feel reluctant to disclose dyslexia, for fear of stigmatisation and discrimination. When employers are not adequately aware of the challenges associated with dyslexia, and workplaces feel psychologically unsafe for employees to disclose, both productivity and employee wellbeing can be affected.

This study explores the experiences of managers working with dyslexic employees, and looks at how workplaces can become more aware and supportive of 'hidden' disabilities like dyslexia.

PARTICIPANTS

This was a small but in-depth study that explored the experiences of four managers; three female and one male. Two of the participants owned their own business and two participants held senior leadership positions within organisations.

Three of the participants had a family member with dyslexia. The fourth participant had received formal education about dyslexia via an online training course as part of their workplace training.

KEY FINDINGS

All participants noted the challenges dyslexia presented for their employees in the workplace. These included challenges associated with emailing, writing reports and taking longer than expected to complete tasks.

None of the workplaces associated with the participants had formal processes in place to support employees following a disclosure of dyslexia, and none had formal training available for workplace leaders in how to support learning disabilities. Participants described having to work out for themselves what support should and could be provided.

Participants felt there should be greater awareness of learning disabilities such as dyslexia in the workplace to prevent discrimination against employees. While some managers had noted positive support from colleagues in response to disclosure of dyslexia, others felt there was still a stigma attached to the term that could prevent employees from feeling safe to disclose.

“...There needs to be the stigma removal of dyslexia because I think they’re very cautious about sharing with others in case they’re treated differently...”

All participants felt that employees with dyslexia could thrive if appropriate training and support was provided to enable managers and other leaders to provide adequate support for their employees.

IMPLICATIONS

When dyslexic employees had access to reasonable adjustments in the workplace, managers felt they could succeed as well as other employees. Yet Australian workplaces generally lack the psychological safety required to facilitate disclosure of learning disabilities like dyslexia. This leads to employees ‘hiding’ their dyslexia, foregoing the support that would help them meet expectations.

By raising awareness of dyslexia and other learning disabilities and providing adequate training and support to managers and other leaders, employees with dyslexia will be more likely to thrive. Ultimately, this will improve workplace productivity.



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