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Design for Improved Workplace Inclusion: An exploratory study of stakeholder needs

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Abstract

The ERGO WORK project is a collaboration between academic and industrial partners in six European countries, Belgium, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, UK. The project is focused on understanding and tackling the barriers to workplace inclusion. Entry to jobs is still restricted by the suitability and design of the workplace, equipment and the job itself, with those with disabilities having much lower employment rates than non-disabled people [1]. A survey was undertaken to explore the perceptions and needs of stakeholders in the 6 partner countries. The online survey was completed by 520 participants. As this was an exploratory survey descriptive statistics rather than tests of statistical inference were undertaken. Whilst the sample is small, the results indicated a variable position across countries.

In every country except the UK, over half of the disabled participants agreed with the statement 'disabled people are not well accommodated in terms of workplace design'. And in all countries, the disabled participants rated their workplace lower, felt less included and were less happy at work than non-disabled participants. The results suggest more adaptations are needed to create workplaces that fit employee needs. The most common workplace adaptation in every country was physical adaptation to the buildings. Adaptations to individual work-areas, such as furniture, peripherals and software were less common. There appears to be more awareness of the issues faced, and potential design solutions for those with physical impairment, and less about sensory impairments, mental health needs or intellectual impairments. Better knowledge is needed about potential adaptations and design approaches. The general awareness of the topics of ergonomic design and inclusive design was found to be low. These results are now being used to inform the development of new curriculum content and collaborative industrial projects in Poland and Slovenia to improve inclusion.

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