

BBI BRIEFS

A publication of the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University

Reasonable Accommodation Policies & Practices

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Overview

The Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University has undertaken a number of projects to study corporate practices and the employment of persons with disabilities. Exploration of these issues, through the development of scientifically rigorous and externally valid research standards, and company case studies derived from these standards, helps to address the gap in field research and strives to positively influence the employment of people with disabilities.

BBI researchers have been examining the employment of persons with disabilities and corporate culture for over 16 years, and have produced a body of scholarly articles investigating the different aspects of these issues, disseminated through a wide range of peer-reviewed publications, newspapers, and magazines.

Americans with disabilities have significantly lower levels of employment than their non-disabled peers. Prior study of employment rates among people with disabilities generally has relied on a “supply-side” approach, analyzing how personal characteristics predict employment and earnings. These models have not sufficiently analyzed variables related to employer demand (and the interaction of employer demand/supply and the environment) as predictors of employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Thus, there is a need to systematically understand demand characteristics for qualified workers with disabilities, particularly as work requirements change over time.

This project, funded by a five-year grant from the U.S Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), sets out scientifically rigorous and evidence-based methods to develop, identify, and evaluate employment demand-side models. It generates new knowledge to better understand market-driven workforce trends: to improve employment outcomes and inform employment practices and policies to prepare individuals with disabilities for the changing needs and requirements of the present and future workforce.

The project weaves together a series of eight targeted and coordinated demand-side research projects, providing new data gathering, data analysis, hiring tools, partnership building, and experimental study, to inform comparison of the efficacy of demand- and supply-side models in understanding and improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Additionally, the sub-projects deal directly with issues of “corporate culture,” including focus groups and town meeting to understand the nexus between disability and corporate culture, as well providing specialized trainings for senior management, department heads, and hiring personnel.

The partnership is an unprecedented nationwide collaboration of economists, statisticians, and leading experts in law, public and disability policy, corporate culture, applied life studies, technology, rehabilitation, and education. Project partners will translate findings into valid and practical tools for large and small businesses in different market sectors to improve employment outcomes for persons with disability.

To learn more go to bbi.syr.edu

Reasonable Accommodation Policies & Practices

Policies related to reasonable accommodation of disabilities are particularly central in ensuring that requests for reasonable accommodation are treated effectively and fairly. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities unless to do so would cause undue hardship. Components of an effective reasonable accommodations policy may include:

- a. Written policies and easily available information on procedures for requesting an accommodation
- b. Minimal, transparent and written procedure for processing accommodation requests
- c. Clear identification of point people involved in evaluating accommodations requests, and a transparent process of negotiating accommodations requests
- d. Internal company disability advocate to assist employer and employees in negotiating accommodation¹
- e. Confidentiality and medical privacy for employees, such that only information about a disability's functional limitations needed to evaluate the accommodation request is solicited and all disability-related information is maintained in separate and confidential files.
- f. Central company funding source, so that any costs of accommodations are not borne by smaller units or divisions² and employees with disabilities are not perceived to be a drain on local resources.

Disability accommodations policies are most effective when they are integrated with other worker accommodations policies such as family needs, health and well-being, life-work balance, or with professional development opportunities.³ In other words, inclusive cultures are generally typified by flexibility and receptivity to meeting all employee requests for accommodations, wherever possible and reasonable. In this type of climate, disability accommodations are not seen as special treatment, but rather just one form of accommodation that all employees can access.

The practice of negotiating and providing accommodations constitutes an additional opportunity for generating an experience of "interactional justice".⁴ Interactional justice refers to the experience or feeling that managers and colleagues with whom one is interacting are behaving fairly, reasonably, and respectfully.⁵ Elements associated with interactional justice include:

- a. Employee perception that requests are welcomed, respected and evaluated carefully
- b. Management flexibility in attempting to meet accommodation requests wherever possible
- c. Commitment to an interactive process, including making a substantial effort to find a mutually agreeable and effective resolution.

Employers may benefit from aggregate documentation and tracking of disability accommodations. Record-keeping on types of disabilities and corresponding accommodations, and longevity of accommodated employment, can be particularly useful. As management personnel shift over the years, record-keeping is particularly helpful in order to ensure that lessons learned from prior successful or refined accommodation practices continue to benefit

workers. Specific assessment of the functionality and comparative success or failure of accommodations can be implemented based on multiple indicators:

- Surveys of employees receiving accommodation
- Work performance, both before and after accommodations are secured, and compared between workers with and without disabilities
- Employee feedback, both written and documented verbal
- Employee retention rates
- Employee advancement rates

The practical and economic benefits of providing reasonable accommodations are substantial, both for employers and employees. While many accommodations are without economic cost, or are low-cost, even those accommodations that involve some expense frequently yield substantial rewards, including the economic benefits of improved productivity and performance and of worker job satisfaction.⁶ It is also possible that the cost of an accommodation can be subsidized by a third party, such as Vocational Rehabilitation, or by tax credits.

More tools and resources related to developing a positive and disability-inclusive working environment, including **model accommodations policies** are available through our Toolkit at the Demand Side Employment Placement Models project website:

UUUU http://bbi.syr.edu/projects/corpculture/demandside_empmodels.htm

1 Consortium.

2 Id.

3 Id.

4 Id.

5 Id.

6 Tatiana I. Solovieva et al, Cost of Workplace Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: With or Without Personal Assistance Services, 2 Disability & Health J. 196, 201 (2009).

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT TO US!

You are invited to participate in a research study examining the benefits and impact for employers of the Employer Demand briefs and toolkit resources. [Learn more about the survey](http://bbi.syr.edu/projects/corpculture/survey.htm) <<http://bbi.syr.edu/projects/corpculture/survey.htm>>

Project Partners



**Center for Research on Collaboratories and
Technology Enhanced Learning Communities**



Program for Disability Research



Disability Research Institute



International Center for Disability Information

**Disability
Statistics
Center**

Disability Statistics Center



Law, Health Policy, & Disability Center

The Demand-Side Employment Placement Models project is a comprehensive research and dissemination grant from the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Grant No. H133A060033. Led by the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, the project is generating a better understanding of market-driven workforce trends, and informing employment practices and policies to prepare individuals with disabilities for the changing needs and requirements of the present and future workforce.

To learn more go to bbi.syr.edu



**‘We can change the world.
The first step is to change ourselves.’**

- BURTON BLATT

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