

BBI BRIEFS

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

**Promoting the Hiring, Retention and Advancement of
Individuals with Disabilities**

March 2011



Burton Blatt Institute
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

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

Promoting the Hiring, Retention and Advancement of Individuals with Disabilities

Targeted recruitment, effective reasonable accommodation practices and support for affinity groups increase the likelihood of achieving and maintaining an inclusive workplace.

Accessible and Targeted Recruitment

Accessible recruitment practices are those that equitably include people with disabilities in existing recruitment procedures and practices wherever possible, ensure all employment materials are available in alternate formats, and utilize recruitment representatives who are willing to adapt to prospective employees' accommodation needs. In addition, it is often necessary to establish a targeted recruitment policy, and accompanying practices and procedures, in order to specifically solicit and hire workers with disabilities.

Critical components of targeted recruitment include:

- a. Advertising open positions to professional networks, community networks, and affinity groups for people with disabilities
- b. Developing and publicizing materials describing existing accommodations and resources for workers with disabilities
- c. Demonstrating the willingness to provide reasonable accommodations and the commitment to accessible employment options
- d. Actively collaborating with vocational rehabilitation resources and other relevant state agencies to provide detailed descriptions of open positions, and solicit applications from qualified people with disabilities
- e. Networking with relevant student professional associations (whether specific to disability) and campus career and disability services offices to invite applications from new graduates with disabilities, and to advertise accessible hiring practices¹

Careful planning and active participation in targeted recruitment practices are generally beneficial in developing an inclusive culture.² In addition, employers who engage in targeted recruitment are likely to be more competitive and successful in attracting particularly skilled employees with disabilities, as compared to employers whose commitment to accessibility and targeted outreach is relatively weak.³ That is, targeted recruitment can enable employers to more successfully attract the “cream of the crop” — talented workers who perceive accessibility and inclusion to be desirable employer characteristics and who happen to have disabilities.

Reasonable Accommodation

Interviewers also should be familiar with an employer's established policies and practices for providing reasonable accommodations and with the essential functions of the positions available. Essential functions are the fundamental job duties of the employment position under consideration and may include:

- Whether the employer actually requires employees in the position to perform the function
- Whether removing the function would fundamentally alter that position
- Whether the position exists to perform a specific function

- The number of other employees available to perform the job function, or among whom the performance of the job function can be distributed
- The degree of expertise or skill required to perform the function⁴

Understanding the essential functions of a particular job will allow the interviewer to better match the applicant's qualifications, skills and abilities to positions available.

Further information on both accessible and targeted recruitment strategies is detailed in our brief: ***What is an Inclusive Culture?*** In addition, our Toolkit contains an ***accessible recruitment checklist*** and information on ***strategies for working with vocational services*** for people with disabilities.

Peer Support & Affinity Groups

At least some workers with disabilities will face social and interactive challenges relating to workplace peers and to management. Reasons for this dynamic include:

- The stresses of dealing with injury, illness, or certain types of impairments,
- Social differences or awkwardness that may be associated with cognitive, psychiatric or developmental disabilities, and
- The difficulties of confronting stereotypes and misconceptions on the part of peers and supervisors.⁵

As a consequence, employees with disabilities may have a particular need to establish social networks and find peer mentoring and support, with other employees with disabilities. Benefits of disability affinity groups include: information-sharing and strategizing about improving accessibility, efficiency, and quality of work; psychological and social validation; and stress relief.⁶ Management can play a role in enabling positive peer support by allowing work time, modest funding, legitimacy, and/or social encouragement for employees who want to establish an affinity group or network for employees with disabilities.⁷ While not all employees with disabilities will choose to participate in this type of resource, supporting its existence signals to all employees that workers with disabilities are an established and supported part of the work environment.⁸

1 Charles Riley, *Disability & Business: Best Practices & Strategies for Inclusion* 44-45 (2006) [hereinafter Riley] (addressing the particular practices of IBM, Microsoft & Merrill Lynch, in outreach to Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities, and colleges which are known for catering heavily to students with disabilities, e.g. Gallaudet College).

2 Disability Case Study Research Consortium, *Conducting & Benchmarking Inclusive Employment Policies, Practices, and Culture* (2008), [hereinafter Consortium]

3 Id.

4 ADA Title I Technical Assistance Manual, 2.3(a) Identifying the Essential Functions of a Job, available at http://www.adainformation.org/ADAPortal/Employment/Browse_TAM_I/Chapter_II_2-3.html

5 Lisa Schur et al., *Is Disability Disabling in All Workplaces? Workplace Disparities and Corporate Culture*, 48 *Industrial Relations* 381, 385 (2009).

6 Consortium, supra note 2.

7 The Interagency Committee on Disability Research, *Employer Perspectives on Workers with Disabilities*, 15 (2006).

8 See Consortium, supra note 2.

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

Burton Blatt Institute
Syracuse University
900 S. Crouse Avenue
Crouse-Hinds Hall, Suite 300
Syracuse, NY 13244-2130
Phone: 315-443-2863
Web: bbi.syr.edu