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## **Corporate Culture and Employment of People With Disabilities: Role of Social Workers and Service Provider Organizations**

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*Corporate culture reflects an organization's value system and impacts the recruitment, retention, and promotion of employees. Individuals with disabilities are positively impacted by a corporate culture that espouses and establishes a diverse workforce as a priority. This article provides an overview of corporate culture and the employment of individuals with disabilities, and presents a case example of the corporate culture of a large not-for-profit disability service organization. With an in-depth understanding of corporate culture and disability issues, social workers can be particularly helpful to applicants and employees with disabilities as well as employers.*

**KEYWORDS** *corporate culture, employment, people with disabilities, service providers*

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The role a company's culture (including its values, norms, policies, and practices) plays in facilitating or hindering the employment of people with disabilities is a crucial area of investigation due to the consistently low employment rates among people with disabilities. Data from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (RRTC, 2008) show that 36.9% of Americans with disabilities aged 21 to 64 were employed in 2007 compared to 79.7% of Americans without disabilities. Further, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) estimates the unemployment rate of people with disabilities to be 14.0%, compared with 8.7% for people without disabilities. When employed, individuals with disabilities have lower wages compared to those without disabilities (Baldwin & Johnson, 2006; DeLeire, 2000; Hale, Hayge, & McNeil, 1998; Kruse & Schur, 2003; Run Ren, Paetzold, & Colella, 2008; Schur, Kruse, Blasi, & Blanck, 2009; Stapleton, O'Day, Livermore, & Imparato, 2005; Yelin & Trupin, 2003) and encounter important workplace disparities (i.e., less job security, training, and participation in decisions) relative to employees without disabilities (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005; Schur et al., 2009).

Although corporate cultures that value a diverse workforce (i.e., reflective of society) play a significant role in increasing the employment of people with disabilities, they have only begun to receive attention (Ball, Monaco, Schmeling, Schartz, & Blanck, 2005; Blanck, 1994; Blanck & Steele, 1998; Blanck & Schartz, 2005; Sandler & Blanck, 2005; Schur et al., 2005). The burgeoning literature demonstrates that disability is only now being recognized as an important form of diversity that returns value to an organization similar to the inclusion of other diverse groups. This article reviews the literature on corporate culture, discusses how social workers can impact organizations' corporate cultures to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, and presents a case example describing the corporate culture efforts of YAI/National Institute for People with Disabilities (NIPD). We conclude with recommendations for social work practice.

## CORPORATE CULTURE

The term *corporate culture* is generally used to refer to the shared values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors within an organization (Schur et al., 2005). Schein (2004) defines the culture of a group to be:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Corporate culture develops through accumulated learning that occurs within an organization, similar to the socialization process that individuals

experience during their life span as they become familiar with the cultural codes (Schein, 2003). Within organizations, corporate culture determines how people interact with colleagues and coworkers, and guides employees' behavioral intentions, attitudes, and behaviors to reach goals in different situations (Appelbaum et al., 2008; Baker, Hunt, & Andrews, 2006; Deshpande, Farley, & Webster, 1993).

Corporate culture has a significant impact on the productivity and performance of its workforce (Denison, 1984, 1997; Want, 2006), economic performance (Kotter & Heskett, 1992), retention and turnover rates and resulting human resource costs (Sheridan, 1992); employee interactions, conflict, and harmony (Irani, Beskese, & Love, 2004), and formal policies and practices initiated within an organization (Schein, 2004). A strong people-oriented culture will nurture a safe and encouraging atmosphere for employees to take initiative and display creativity, while promoting their development within the organization (Xu, 2009). Corporate culture also plays a significant role in shaping employees' ethical values and organizational citizenship behaviors (Baker et al., 2006).

## CORPORATE CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

Diversity is one of the most salient characteristics of this century's labor market (Mor Barak, 1999). Workforce diversity stems from both demographic changes in the United States and civil rights legislation, including the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, that have paved the way for various groups to enter the labor market (Lebowitz, Zischka, Mahon, & McCarley, 1982; Mor Barak, 1999). The sociodemographic composition of the new labor market in the United States "make[s] it clear that managing organizational culture has come to mean managing and working with diverse cultural perspectives" (Mor Barak, 1999, p. 50).

When employers hold negative attitudes and beliefs about the capacities and value of people, they limit diversity and create poor corporate cultures. Rather than attracting and retaining a productive and loyal workforce, such organizations often experience high turnover and missed opportunities by overlooking the benefits of diversity. In contrast, organizations with positive corporate cultures resulting from the recognition of the benefits of diversity experience an improved bottom line: Values beget value (Blanck, 2008).

Because corporate culture builds on shared values, beliefs, and norms, it is important to consider how it impacts and is impacted by an increasingly diverse workforce (Spataro, 2005). Although the theoretical conceptualization of diversity is based on perceptions of differences between individuals due to disparities or dissimilarities in any given attribute (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007), traditional thinking on organizational diversity has focused on demographic characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, and

age (Ball et al., 2005; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Spataro, 2005). These characteristics represent “cognizable groups” protected by law (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2004). A diverse workforce can have a significant impact on organizational performance by bringing diverse experiences and perspectives to the table, increasing the organization’s competitiveness, and promoting creativity and innovativeness (Ball et al., 2005).

Good diversity management practices ensure the value of a diverse workforce is recognized by increasing employee job satisfaction and commitment and reducing absenteeism and turnover (Ball et al., 2005). However, rather than aiming to simply increase the numbers of employees in targeted minority groups, organizational efforts at managing diversity should focus on promoting diverse perspectives and approaches, valuing differing opinions, and positively addressing potential workplace conflicts (Thomas & Ely, 2006). Chavez and Weisinger (2008) referred to this as the need to create an attitudinal change within management from “managing diversity to managing for diversity” (p. 332).

Recent research shows that effective diversity management in the workplace goes hand in hand with inclusion (Roberson, 2006). Specifically, inclusion in the workplace refers to policies and practices that seek to reduce barriers to full participation in the workplace, ensuring that all employees have equal access to and enjoyment of all organizational policies and practices (Roberson, 2006). This broader focus on inclusion and greater access to policies and practices of the organization that reduce barriers are a positive trend and beneficial to people with disabilities.

## DISABILITY AS AN ELEMENT OF DIVERSITY

Title I of the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment practices within covered public and private entities (Blanck, Hill, Siegal, & Waterstone, 2009). The overall mission of the ADA, and as amended in 2008, is to promote the civil rights of people with disabilities, recognizing them as a “cognizable group” that should be included in society. Although not tied directly to the ADA, nearly 20 years after enactment of the law, people with disabilities continue to have significantly lower employment levels than people without disabilities, and lower pay levels if employed (Baldwin & Johnson, 2006; RRTC, 2008). Moreover, Schur et al. (2009) surveyed 30,000 employees from 14 companies and found employees with disabilities experience a number of disparities at work compared to employees without disabilities, including lower levels of pay, job security, promotion, and training.

Recognizing disability as an important facet of diversity in the workforce is a critical first step to improving workplace outcomes for people with

disabilities. Unfortunately, that recognition is lagging, as demonstrated in a review of *Fortune* 100 diversity statements that found most companies failing to articulate disability in their diversity statements (Ball et al., 2005). Even when individuals with disabilities are acknowledged as a distinct group within organizational diversity (see, e.g., Jamieson & O'Mara, 1991), they might be overlooked (Akabas & Gates, 1999; Mudrick, 1991). For example, this lack of attention is evident in the perception of addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities in the workplace as a new terrain for occupational social work (SW) practice<sup>1</sup> (cf. Mor Barak & Bargal, 1999). This approach was criticized by Akabas and Gates (1999), who argued that "as a profession we have paid little attention to the work, or the potential for work, of our clients . . . this has been a disservice to the populations we serve" (p. 164).

As occupational social workers aim to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities, corporate culture is an important facet to consider as it is often contextualized within the broader dominant customs of society (Mor Barak, 1999). Specifically, disability might be seen as a social construct, a relative phenomenon, defined and created by political, social, legal, and economic spheres (Blanck, 2008; Conrad, 1992; Conrad & Schneider, 1981; Oliver, 1990). The degree of tolerance and social reactions toward human differences (and the interpretation of human differences and their meanings) vary across societies and cultures; historically, societies that do not value diversity judge human differences as marks of social or physiological inferiority and disgrace, and their workplaces might reflect similar values (Blanck, 2001, 2008; Bury, 1991; Schur et al., 2005).

## CORPORATE CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Although corporate culture and diversity have been studied for some time now, systematic research on the impact of company policies and practices on the employment opportunities of people with disabilities is limited (Ball et al., 2005; Blanck, 1994; Blanck & Scharzt, 2005; Blanck & Steele, 1998; Sandler & Blanck, 2005; Schur et al., 2005). However, ample research addresses a central aspect of corporate culture, namely employers' attitudes and their role as barriers to workplace inclusion.

Studies show stereotypes, negatives attitudes, prejudice, and employer reluctance to hire and accommodate people with disabilities significantly impact their successful employment (cf. Bruyère, 2000; Bruyère, Erickson, & VanLooy, 2004; Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Dixon, Kruse, & Van Horn, 2003; Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2000; Scharzt, Hendricks, & Blanck, 2006; Scharzt, Scharzt, Hendricks, & Blanck, 2006). Moreover, a recent meta-analysis reveals the clear negative effects of disability on performance expectation and hiring decisions (Run Ren et al., 2008).

Research also shows attitudes are changing and some attitudes are positive (Callahan, 1994; B. M. Cooper, 1991; M. Cooper, 1995), particularly if employers have prior experience with workers with disabilities (Hernandez et al., 2000). For example, Rimmerman (2007) found there is a renewed emphasis on employers' recognition of the significance of employing workers with disabilities in efforts to enhance their community image, strengthen their corporate social responsibility commitment, and increase the diversity of their workforce. Employers have not only expressed more favorable attitudes toward employing persons with severe disabilities in the workplace, but they also view this group as dependable, productive workers who can interact socially and foster positive attitudes on the part of their coworkers (Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993). Unger (2002) reported that almost three fourths (74%) of participating employers believed that the productivity rates of workers with severe disabilities can be as high as those of people without disabilities.

The cost of accommodating workers with disabilities is also identified as a reason that employers are hesitant to hire members of this group (Hernandez et al., 2000). However, case studies with Sears, Manpower, and Microsoft indicate that accommodation costs are often lower than assumed. In addition, these case studies reveal that companies successfully recruited qualified individuals with disabilities through disability organizations and internship and scholarship programs. Furthermore, the availability of job training and workplace supports help such employees obtain permanent positions (Blanck, 1994; Blanck & Steele, 1998; Hendricks et al., 2005; Sandler & Blanck, 2005; Scharz, Hendricks, & Blanck, 2006).

Case studies of major organizations and New Freedom Initiative<sup>2</sup> winners show employers who focus on targeted recruiting and training, leverage internal expertise on appropriate accommodations, and recognize the importance of corporate culture are more successful at including individuals with disabilities into their workforces when compared with competitors (Lengnick-Hall, 2007; McMahan et al., 2004). Importantly, the case studies show that providing central funds for accommodations, structured processes for requesting accommodations, and access to disability information and advocacy further the inclusive environment. Providing support for disability network groups, educating and training new workers, coworkers, and managers around disability issues, conducting community outreach, creating global standards, collecting data related to disability; and explicitly evincing a top management commitment to disability and diversity are common features of organizations that are inclusive of individuals with disabilities.

As researchers continue to examine environments that are successful in recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting persons with disabilities, they find that positive attitudes, commitment to diversity, and an inclusive

corporate culture are hallmarks of these organizations (Blanck, 1994; Blanck & Steele, 1998; Hernandez et al., 2008; Sandler & Blanck, 2005). Results from these studies provide lessons about organizational policies, practices, and systems that value persons with disabilities in a workforce and generate measurable value in return by establishing a business case for the importance of increasing disability diversity in their organizations (cf. Blanck, 2008; Hernandez et al., 2008).

Although case studies examining corporate culture and its impact on disability employment and inclusion are accumulating, there are challenges with synthesizing this body of work. Schur et al. (2005) noted that the literature presents gaps due to variations in methods used to conduct case studies. They made a call for the construction of a paradigm using multiple methods of data collection and analysis determining, in part, that triangulation “helps compensate for the limitations of any one method, reveals potential tensions or conflicts among different levels of corporate culture, and provides validity checks” (Schur et al., 2005, p. 15).

## CORPORATE CULTURE AND DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT CONSORTIUM

Recognizing gaps in the corporate culture and disability literature and seeking to identify and document best practices in inclusive employment, the Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) funded a Research Consortium to develop a standard research design (and conduct case study research) to identify how an organization’s structures, values, policies, and day-to-day practices facilitate the employment of individuals with disabilities. The case studies would validate and document effective policies and strategies within corporations that have had success with recruiting, hiring, retaining, accommodating, and promoting people with disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability and Employment Policy, 2006). The Consortium was led by the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, in collaboration with Rutgers University’s School of Management and Labor Relations and the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, and Cornell University’s Employment and Disability Institute. Partners of the Consortium included Georgia Institute of Technology RERC on Workplace Accommodations, Human Futures Incorporated, and West Virginia University’s International Center for Disability Information.

The Consortium established multiple methods of data collection to evaluate inclusive employment policies and practices in for-profit and not-for-profit corporations and organizations. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected via (a) in-depth interviews with senior managers in human resources, compensation, and diversity; (b) in-depth interviews with



managers and supervisors; (c) in-depth interviews with employees with disabilities; (d) focus groups with employees with disabilities; (e) focus groups with managers; (f) a company-wide employee survey; (g) collection and analysis of written policies relating to disability and diversity (archival analysis); and (h) collection and analysis of available administrative data on disability accommodations and disability-specific initiatives. Whereas the company-wide survey provides quantitative data to enable rigorous benchmarking and company comparison, interviews and focus groups provide qualitative data and the flexibility to adapt the case study to each organization's needs and constraints.

There were a total of eight companies and organizations that participated in this effort. The first wave of data collection is complete and a final technical report will be released by ODEP in 2009. The preliminary analysis supports findings from prior research: Organizations with more inclusive cultures demonstrate higher levels of diversity and reap greater economic (e.g., productivity) and noneconomic (e.g., loyalty) rewards. One participating organization was YAI/NIPD, a large nonprofit organization providing services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Next, YAI/NIPD is presented as one case example to illustrate how corporate culture can impact employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

#### YAI/NIPD, CORPORATE CULTURE, AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Established in 1957, YAI (formerly known as the Young Adult Institute) was founded by parents of adolescents and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the New York City area. At the time, stigma and misperceptions with regard to the disability community were pervasive in mainstream society. Often, disability was equated with illness and elicited notions of dependence and lack of productivity (Charlton, 1998). In particular, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities tended to be viewed as uneducable and unable to work. Rejecting this societal viewpoint, the founding parents of YAI developed an organization with a mission and values that embodied the notion of equality and inclusion. Over the last five decades, the organization has evolved to include trained professionals who support individuals with disabilities as they define and seek to fulfill their personal goals.

Since 1957, YAI has expanded to a network of seven agencies providing individualized services throughout the life span: (a) YAI/NIPD, (b) The New York League for Early Learning, (c) Premier HealthCare, (d) The Corporate Source, (e) Rockland County Association for the Learning Disabled, (f) National Institute for People With Disabilities of New Jersey, and (g) The

International Institute for People With Disabilities of Puerto Rico. Services include early intervention, preschool education, family support services, health care, day rehabilitation, employment training and placement, residential services, and recreation and socialization opportunities. The network provides services to approximately 20,000 individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, and employs a diverse workforce of about 5,500 individuals. This diversity is inclusive of people with disabilities who are employed in positions throughout the YAI network.

Since its inception, YAI has been committed to maximizing the potential of the disability community. This commitment is reflected in YAI's mission statement and corporate culture. Specifically, the values of individualization, independence, inclusion, and productivity are emphasized throughout the orientation and training of employees as well as the development and implementation of programs and services. *Individualization* refers to the belief that services be delivered using a person-centered framework, with particular attention paid to the interests, needs, abilities, and talents of the individuals served. *Independence* reflects the notion that people with disabilities should have a "voice" and choices as life decisions are made, with the goal of encouraging as much self-reliance as possible. *Inclusion* refers to ensuring that every person (regardless of disability status) is included in all aspects of mainstream society. Lastly, *productivity* reflects the potential of those with disabilities to participate and make meaningful contributions to their communities. At YAI, these contributions have included creating competitive employment opportunities both within and outside the organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The fundamental value that individuals with disabilities have the right to be gainfully employed is embedded in the organization's culture. Established in 1985, YAI created the Employment Initiatives Department, which is dedicated to facilitating employment opportunities for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities within the organization as well as the public and private sectors. To fulfill its objectives, the department engages in a number of activities including the following:

- Working closely with YAI's Human Resource Department to identify current openings and recommend qualified graduates of the Employment Initiatives program.
- Establishing meaningful and ongoing relationships with Human Resource departments (and hiring managers) throughout the New York City area to assess their employment needs and recommend prospective candidates.
- Organizing job fairs hosted by YAI whereby public and private sector employers are represented to interview applicants as well as provide feedback.
- Developing customized work plans that reflect the interests and talents of job seekers.

- Overseeing internship and volunteer opportunities to expose individuals to their options and develop their job skills.
- Emphasizing the learning of competitive job skills and appropriate employment behaviors to enable applicants to secure well-paying and long-term positions.
- Offering job placement services in settings that are inclusive and provide equal opportunities for potential employees.
- Providing hands-on training at work sites to individuals with the assistance of employment specialists.
- Assessing the need for reasonable accommodations to applicants and employees with disabilities.
- Providing ongoing employment support, with a minimum of two site visits per month and additional support as needed.

In 1996, YAI strengthened its mission to maximize the productivity of people with disabilities when it expanded its employment services with the creation of The Corporate Source, a separate not-for-profit corporation within the YAI Network. The Corporate Source facilitates further employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities by developing long-term contracts with the government and private sector. With long-term contracts in place, The Corporate Source provides viable job opportunities for graduates of the Employment Initiatives Department (and individuals with disabilities supported by other agencies). The vast services offered by YAI's Employment Initiatives Department and The Corporate Source embody the values of individualization, independence, inclusion, and productivity.

Since 1985, more than 3,500 employment opportunities have been created for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the following areas: administrative and office services, retail and stock, mailroom, warehouse operations, messenger services, food services, and maintenance services. Currently, The Corporate Source employs 302 people with disabilities through 30 contracts in 60 locations throughout New York City, Long Island, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. During the 2008–2009 fiscal year (as our nation faced an economic downturn), seven contracts were added, creating 30 new employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The benefits of competitive employment (irrespective of disability status) are clear. When successfully employed, individuals are able to use and enhance their talents, gain a sense of personal pride through accomplishments, and contribute to overall society. For individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, meaningful work might also enhance their self-esteem and social connections in the community (Belgrave, 1991; Freedman & Fesko, 1996; Krause & Anson, 1997). Individuals with disabilities are not the only beneficiaries of competitive employment; employers also stand to benefit by gaining

reliable and productive employees (Hernandez et al., 2008; Hernandez & McDonald, in press). With this in mind, the YAI employment programs strive to match jobs with the strengths and skills of applicants to help ensure that the needs of both employers and job seekers are met. To date, numerous public and private sector organizations have benefitted from the Employment Initiatives Department and The Corporate Source including the YAI organization, U.S. Customs, Internal Revenue Service, KPMG, McGraw Hill, IKEA, and the U.S. Tennis Open.

Recognizing the need to promote employment opportunities on a broader level, the YAI employment programs established the Business Advisory Council (BAC), which includes representatives from more than 75 prominent companies in the New York City area. These members assist the organization by educating other employers about the benefits of a diverse workforce, facilitating the hiring of Employment Initiatives graduates within BAC companies, and providing information on labor market and employment trends. Each quarter, BAC members meet to learn about and discuss best practices in the areas of disability, diversity, corporate social responsibility, and management. Typically, guest speakers guide these presentations. In addition, through presentations and videos (i.e., *Ready to Work* and *Working Now*), the BAC meetings highlight individuals with disabilities who are looking for work, along with success stories of those already employed.

Most recently, the Employment Initiatives Department established a mentoring program with the Manhattan office of KPMG, an international network offering audit, tax, and advisory services in more than 140 countries. For 3 months, KPMG employees mentor individuals with disabilities seeking employment. These relationships are driven by the mentees and might include a diverse range of employment activities (e.g., learning about career opportunities, searching for job openings, preparing résumés, engaging in mock interviews, job shadowing, dressing for success, identifying necessary accommodations, seeking support, and networking). Although it is expected that individuals with disabilities will benefit from their involvement with this project, the KPMG employees (and their organizational culture) also stand to benefit from the experience.

In sum, the employment of people with disabilities contributes significantly to the corporate culture and success of an organization by diversifying its workforce and increasing employer competence when dealing with clients, customers, and employees of varied backgrounds and experiences. With an explicit commitment to the equality and inclusion of people with disabilities in the general workforce, YAI is an organization that seeks to fulfill the mission of individualization, independence, inclusion, and productivity. The work and accomplishments of the organization (comprised of social workers and professionals from other disciplines) provide examples to help other professionals create diverse workforces.

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN IMPROVING CORPORATE CULTURE

The work and forthcoming findings from the Corporate Culture and Disability Employment Consortium, along with the YAI case example, can inform a multitude of stakeholders critical to the successful hiring, retention, and daily work activities of employees with disabilities (including managers, human resource professionals, disability service providers, and policymakers). However, there are additional stakeholder groups engaged in related professions that play a significant role in further improving the labor market and workplace experiences of individuals with disabilities, such as social workers.

Unfortunately, the area of employment and disability remains relatively neglected in mainstream social work practice, which stands in stark contrast to the core values of the profession to serve marginalized, neglected, and oppressed communities (Barker, 1987). Specifically, the code of ethics for the National Association of Social Workers ([NASW], 1996) states that social workers are to:

promote social justice, promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity, and prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability. (p. 27)

Moreover, the code refers to the field of employment as social workers are to “engage in social and political action to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully” (NASW, 1996, p. 27). It is beyond the scope of this article to propose a broad framework for the role of social workers to promote the gainful employment of individuals with disabilities. However, when attempting to address the role of the profession in influencing corporate culture to reflect values of equity, equality, dignity, and justice (see Schur et al., 2005), suggestions for occupational social work can be set out.

First, for many years, employee assistance programs (EAPs) have been a core intervention for occupational social workers (Bargal & Karger, 1991; Googins, 1975; Kramer, Neiditz, & Eller, 1997; Mor Barak & Bargal, 1999; Sarkar, 2008; Straussner, 1990). Initially, EAPs were designed to support employees by helping them address stressors arising from work or nonwork sources (Bhagat, Steverson, & Segovis, 2007; Mor Barak & Bargal, 1999; Rehner Iversen, 1998; Sarkar, 2008; Straussner, 1990) including family concerns, mental health issues, and financial difficulties (Bhagat et al., 2007).

Moving from a medical to a wellness model of care, EAPs have expanded to offer a wide range of programs addressing psychosocial, relational, and health needs (Oher, 1999). Coinciding with the EAP shift, occupational social workers have the opportunity to play a strong role in assessing corporate culture and promoting inclusive EAP implementation.

Second, the role of administrators and human resources (HR) departments in changing as well as disseminating corporate culture is important (Watson & D'Annunzio-Green, 1996). As evident with YAI, a commitment to diversity that includes disability is critical. This commitment should be explicit in the organization's mission statement and annual report, values, recruitment procedures, orientation and training of employees, and program development and implementation. Occupational social workers could play a significant role in ensuring that what is "preached" is put into practice. The profession might bring to HR units unique skills, expertise, and values to facilitate inclusion for all and respect for diversity (see Mor Barak & Bargal, 1999), including disability.

Finally, Straussner (1990) identified roles for occupational social workers (i.e., consultants, trainers, and program developers) to influence the hiring, retention, accommodation, and promotion of workers with disabilities. As consultants and trainers, social workers can help employers gain a better understanding of disability issues, provision of accommodations, and legislation. As program developers, occupational social workers can initiate programs that promote and maintain inclusionary practices. For instance, Mor Barak (1999) recommended mentoring as a way to bring employees who are different from the organization's mainstream into the inner circles of the organization. Other recommendations include focus groups with members of diverse groups to hear and address organizational needs and workshops to raise awareness of exclusionary behaviors. Via these actions and others, social workers help shape an organization's corporate culture to better reflect the values and norms of a just society.

## CONCLUSION

Corporate culture is a reflection of an organization's value system, and might be an important element of a diversity strategy. Research and practice show corporate culture has a significant impact on the recruitment, retention, accommodation, and promotion of individuals with disabilities. Quantitative and qualitative research on corporate culture and the employment of individuals with disabilities also shows the economic and noneconomic benefits accrued from an inclusive workplace. Social workers have a crucial role to play in promoting the employment of individuals with disabilities and in positively influencing corporate cultures.

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## NOTES

1. Occupational SW has been defined as “a specialized field of social work practice which addresses the human and social needs of the work community through a variety of interventions which aim to foster optimal adaptation between individuals and their environments” (Straussner, 1990, p. 2).

2. “Established in 2002 [during the Bush administration], the Secretary of Labor’s New Freedom Initiative Award annually recognizes non-profits, small businesses, corporations and individuals that have demonstrated exemplary and innovative efforts in furthering the employment and workplace environment for people with disabilities . . . .” (<http://www.dol.gov/odep/newfreedom/index.htm>).

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