

BBI BRIEFS

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

Impact of Management on the Inclusion of Employees with Disabilities

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Burton Blatt Institute
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

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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.” These include focus groups and town meetings 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 disabilities.

To learn more go to bbi.syr.edu

Impact of Management on the Inclusion of Employees with Disabilities

Inclusive Policies

Inclusive policies contain provisions and guidelines that support the full integration of all employees, including those with disabilities, into the workplace. The measure of whether a policy is inclusive is, essentially, its outcome – meaning that when the policy is implemented as intended, it helps to generate a work environment in which no employees are excluded, marginalized, treated unfairly or prevented from accessing any resources, responsibilities, opportunities or benefits of employment.

Management practices are therefore crucial in ensuring that policies are given meaningful substance, rather than solely indicating a commitment to inclusion on paper. In some instances a policy may, on its face, be written to facilitate inclusion of all employees. But when implemented, supervisor or management behaviors, attitudes, or lack of consciousness about disability nevertheless may result in a negative outcome or experience for workers with disabilities.¹ For more background on the elements and meaning of an inclusive workplace culture, see our brief: [**What is an Inclusive Culture?**](#)

The Role of Management

The quality of the relationship between management and employees with disabilities has been identified as a critical factor in developing an inclusive workplace culture.² Research indicates that a primary problem in supervisor/employee relations involves paternalistic attitudes towards workers with disabilities.³ Workers with disabilities are comparatively more likely to be treated as if they are children, or less capable of autonomy, based on supposedly benevolent or protective assumptions.⁴ In companies demonstrating inclusive practices, paternalistic treatment is less likely to be reported, with corresponding positive impact for job satisfaction.⁵

Implementing a policy and plan for delivering manager training relating to inclusion is a critical means to debunk stereotypical assumptions about the capabilities, independence, and skill sets of people with disabilities.⁶ Developing workplace norms and operations that meet the needs of all workers—requiring that managers understand and be receptive to meeting the needs of workers with disabilities—is also a critical managerial diversity behavior.⁷

Further, manager behavior towards disability and requests for disability accommodation has broader influence on all workers.⁸ For example, when employees with disabilities are disciplined or berated by a supervisor for doing things differently, it not only reinforces a stereotype that workers with disabilities are less competent or do not pull their weight, but it also may increase anxiety among all employees that the need for medically-related time off or work style differences, whether disability-related or not, are not acceptable.

Inclusive practices involve a dynamic wherein employees generally enjoy comparatively higher quality relationships with management and where employees with disabilities are not excluded or disadvantaged from these relationships with management, compared to those without

disabilities.⁹ Unfortunately, it is common for employees with disabilities to experience disproportionately lower quality relationships with management as compared to employees without disabilities.¹⁰ Management relationships with employees range from “low-quality” economic exchange relationships typified by minimal employee motivation to do more than just what is formally required in their job parameters, to “high-quality” social exchange relationships which involve mutual respect, reciprocity and worker investment in the workplace.¹¹ Managers therefore should be encouraged to overcome social or interactive barriers in order to enable stronger, positive relationships with employees with disabilities.

For more information see our Toolkit at the **[Demand-Side Employment Placement Models project website.](#)**

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.](#)

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

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

- BURTON BLATT

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

2 *Id.*

3 *Id.*

4 Ronald Bayer, *Workers' Liberty, Workers' Welfare: The Supreme Court Speaks on the Rights of Disabled Employees*, 93 *American Journal of Public Health*, 540, 541 (2003); Peter Blanck & M. Marti, *Attitudes, Behavior, and the Employment Provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act*, 42 *Villanova L. Rev.* 345, 362 (1997).

5 Consortium, *supra* note 1.

6 *Id.*

7 *Id.*

8 *Id.*

9 *Id.*

10 *Id.*

11 *Id.*