

Chapter 9

Organizational Diversity: From Workforce Diversity to Workplace Inclusion for Persons With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

An employer, according to Tran (2008), must utilize a systematic approach in predicting who is likely to succeed as a potential employee; in so doing, employers must acknowledge that potential employees, person without a disability and person with a disability, are unique individuals and not machines. Employees' performances rely not only on technical skills, knowledge, skills, and abilities (aka KSAs) but on the other characteristics, also known as the "O" in KSAOs that person without a disability and person with a disability bring themselves. Such other characteristics are more credible and reliable in predicting and determining the probability of a potential employee's success. Other characteristics, must not only be identified, but carefully examined and assessed. Validation in focusing on these other characteristics is apparent.

INTRODUCTION

Regarding those individuals with a disability, major legislative and philosophical forces during the past 30 years have attempted to enhance the participation of work-age Americans with disabilities in the competitive labor market. The public policy initiatives related to employers and/or work disability began in 1970 with the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). OSHA was followed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, state workers' compensation enactment of the 1980s and 1990s, the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) of 1999 (Hunt, 1999).

Furthermore, a review of literature on employers' attitudes toward workers with disabilities was completed by Unger (2002), and based on this literature review, factors that may affect employers' attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce are provided. Although several key themes emerged, decades of employers' attitudinal research has generally produced inconsistent findings, due to variations in research design.

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Organizational Diversity

The forces that have both paralleled and provided the impetus for passage of much of the legislation include the following: (1) significant changes in thinking regarding the vocational rehabilitation and employment potential of American with disabilities, (2) the evolving role of employers in addressing disabilities in the workplace, and (3) the civil rights movement. Therefore, for persons with significant disabilities who might have once been viewed as unemployable, these societal trends have fostered a shift from a medical model emphasizing a clinical or center-based approach of *fixing* or *curing* people with disabilities to the present emphasis on capabilities, choice, and workplace supports in maximizing the work potential of people with disabilities.

However, despite increased laws designed to address employment discrimination and provide for workplace accommodations for qualified workers with disabilities, the employment rate of persons with disabilities has increased very little since the late 1980s. A series of studies conducted by the National Organization on Disability (NOD), in collaboration with Louis Harris and Associates (1998), reported an actual increase in the unemployment rate from 66% in 1986 to 71% in 1998.

The unemployment rate of persons with disabilities is especially disheartening because these studies found that an overwhelming majority (72%) of unemployed persons with disabilities indicated they preferred to work and because representatives from business and industry identified recruitment and selection of qualified workers as their top concerns for the new millennium [Bureau of National Affairs (BNA), 2000]. More recently, in 2015, a total of 17.5 percent of persons with a disability were employed the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. In contrast, the employment-population ratio for those without a disability was 65.0 percent. The employment-population ratio for persons with a disability edged up in 2015, and the ratio for persons without a disability continued to increase. The unemployment rate for persons with a disability fell to 10.7 percent in 2015, and the rate for those without a disability declined to 5.1 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Furthermore, according to the highlights from the 2015 data (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016):

1. Persons with a disability were about three times as likely as those with no disability to be age 65 and over,
2. For all age groups, the employment-population ratio was much lower for persons with a disability than for those with no disability,
3. Unemployment rates were higher for persons with a disability than for those with no disability among all educational attainment groups,
4. In 2015, 32 percent of workers with a disability were employed part time, compared with 18 percent for those with no disability, and
5. Workers with a disability were more likely to be self-employed than those with no disability.

In a time marked by a critical demand for labor and significant economic expansion and prosperity, it is discouraging that members of our nation's largest minority, persons with a disability, are not participating in the labor force to the same extent as their peers without disabilities. The purpose of this chapter is to clearly define and address the original intended usage of terms among academicians (researchers), businesses (practitioners), and the law (politicians) respectively regarding diversity, global diversity, workforce diversity, cultural diversity, and multicultural diversity. Upon having a clearly defined understanding of terms and their original intended usage, strategy in identifying knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) within diversity (Tran, 2008; Tran, 2012, 2015c, 2016c) will

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