

Employer Perceptions Toward Hiring People with Disabilities

by

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Background

- Work Roles
 - Work roles provide opportunities to experience being part of society, being a useful member of society, and being appreciated for what one does.
- The concept of the term “Disability”
 - Obstacle embedded in the very language that describes them
 - Workers’ Compensation program
 - Social Security Disability Insurance program
- Reasonable accommodations vs. Excuses

Background

- Stensrud study
 - Participants viewed disability primarily from the perspective of accommodations
 - Did not think of people that had disabilities, but did not request accommodations, as having disabilities.
 - Their conceptualization of people with disabilities included those who created problems for the organization because they asked for accommodations, asked for accommodations and did their job, or obviously had disabilities and were exemplars of hard workers

Background

- Perception of co-workers
 - If advancement and accommodations were correlated in any manner, co-workers would be concerned about the fairness of the promotion
 - Negative perceptions of an IWD suggest to employers that an applicant brings too much risk to a job and should be avoided
 - Employment hiring based on “least risky applicant”
 - The risks people bring as a potential employee are considered more than a person’s potential

Need for the Study

- Individuals with disabilities (IWD) often experience limited employment opportunities, challenging lifestyles, fluctuating health status, and subpar pay rates (Kontosh, Fletcher, Frain, & Winland-Brown, 2007).
 - A major obstacle facing these individuals is gaining access to employment.
- Poverty
 - The poverty rate for the disability community exceeds the rate for the general population.
- Diversity
 - Diversity of the American workforce suffers when the disability community is not represented
- Productivity
 - Socioeconomic and psychological well-being

Statement of Research Problem

- Stigma and discrimination continue to exist in the workforce toward both hiring and working with individuals with disabilities. The focus of this research, was the lack of information related to managers' perception toward hiring and working with individuals with disabilities.

Research Questions

1. What are the demographic characteristics (age group, educational level, type of organization) of managers who hire or make recommendations to hire PWD?
2. What are the types of employing organizations or businesses for respondents in this study?
3. To what extent do managers have a very favorable (as indicated by strongly agree) or favorable (as indicated by agree) perception of hiring PWD?
4. To what extent is there a correlation between social desirability and employer perceptions?
5. What do managers report as their greatest challenges in hiring/working with people with PWD?
6. What do managers report as their greatest benefits in hiring/working with PWD?

Statement of Hypothesis

- H_01 : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean score on the Employer Perceptions Toward Hiring People with Disabilities and the test value of 120.
- H_02 : There is no statistically significant correlation between social desirability and perceptions.

Research Design: Methods and Procedures

Source of Data (Population/Sample)

- The sample for this study will be hiring managers who are directly involved in the hiring or who make recommendations to hire employees in local communities. These will be individuals who are members of the Auburn-Opelika, AL Chamber of Commerce.
- Managers who are directly involved in training and placement of employees in their local communities.

Research Design: Methods and Procedures

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study will be the Employer Perceptions Toward Hiring Individuals with Disabilities (Kraska, 1998). This is a 30-item questionnaire that asks participants' perceptions of individuals with disabilities. Each item is scored on a five-point Likert-type scale as follows: Strongly Agree = 5; Agree = 4; Undecided = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1. The maximum possible total score is 150 and the minimum possible total score is 30.

- The validity of the Employer Perceptions Toward Hiring Individuals with Disabilities survey for this study was established by a panel of experts.
- Instrument reliability will be established using Cronbach's alpha.
 - Cronbach's alpha for reliability was .89.

Research Design: Methods and Procedures

Data Collection Procedures

- The researcher will obtain the email addresses from the Auburn-Opelika, AL Chamber of Commerce website. The researcher will then record the email address of each hiring managers into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Once potential participants are identified using a table of random selection, the selected hiring managers' email addresses will be uploaded into the Qualtrics survey platform with the questionnaires for emailing.
- The researcher will contacted each hiring manager electronically listed on the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet explaining the purpose of the study, the reason they were selected, assurance that their involvement would be anonymous, and the link to the survey. The surveys will be formatted for Internet delivery and hosted through Qualtrics.com.

Results

Research Question 1

- The total number of managers in this study was 29. Forty-one percent of the sample was 56–65 years of age. The majority of the managers in this sample were female (55.2%) and White (93.1). The highest level of education completed by the majority of the sample was a bachelor degree (37.9%), and the majority of the sample did not have a disability (96.6%). Hiring managers who had more than 20 years of experience comprised most of the sample (44.8%). Most of the sample had hired PWD in the past (41.4%), and most of the sample has worked with PWD (72.4%). About one-third of the sample described the type of organization/business/agency they work for as Other (34.5%).

Results

Research Question 2

- Ten of the respondents did not classify the type of organization, business, or agency that they worked for. However, eight worked in the Service industry, while only one worked in Manufacturing.

Research Question 3

- There was a statistically significant difference in manager perceptions of hiring individuals with disabilities based on their collective scores on the Employer Perceptions Toward Hiring People with Disabilities attitude scale: $t_{(14)} = 13.86$, $p = .00$; mean = 88.67, SD = 8.80.
- Employer responses toward hiring people with disabilities were less than positive

Results

Research Question 4

- There was no statistically significant correlation between social desirability and perceptions.

Research Question 5 and 6

- Those common themes for greatest challenges were communication difficulties; perceptions and assumptions made regarding the PWD, whether the PWD would be accepted by co-workers, and concerns about whether the PWD would be able to keep pace with the job demands. The common themes for greatest benefits were the increase in diversity, new perspectives being brought to the job, learning to be patient and compassionate toward PWD, and realizing that PWD can be dedicated hard workers.

Significance of the Study

- By specifically examining employer perceptions, rehabilitation counselors will be better able to understand the process by which businesses recruit for workers.
- Highlight that employers who have had previous experience with employees with disabilities are typically satisfied with the experience, but may still be hesitant to hire people with disabilities (Luecking, 2008).
- There is a need for refocused job development strategies and disability employment advocacy (Luecking, 2008).
 - Job development needs a stronger focus on the context of the employers' enterprises and organizational processes
- Putting PWDs to work would lower the costs of disability
- The emotional and social benefits of working may be much more impactful than the economic benefits (Smart, 2009, p. 136).

Implications

- The assumption can be made that in general, respondents held less than positive views toward hiring PWD as indicated by their responses of less than agree/strongly agree on the survey items.
- There is also the implication that since none of the respondents had a disability, they may not have been aware of the contributions that PWD can make in the workplace.
 - This speaks to the broader focus of this study, hiring managers could benefit from special staff meetings and/or seminars to become aware of PWD and related employment issues.
- Previous research shows that PWD are typically unemployed or under employed (Combs & Omgig, 1986), meaning that if the companies that participated in this study hire PWD, they may be highly unlikely to hold a position in which they would be in charge of hiring decisions.
- Furthermore, the results of this study imply that efforts to minimize employment discrimination continue to fall short even with the education and media attention that is focused on PWD, which includes acceptance and value of diversity.
- Importance of “Contact”

- According to Krupa (2007), job seekers with a disability can preempt and counter employer judgment by using self-advocacy statements and a well-constructed resume.
- Many employers are unaware of the positive statistics regarding PWD's work ethic and productiveness and how that contributes to company productivity and profitability (Krupa, 2007).
- Providing such information to employers can improve employment for PWD.

- Training initiatives to educate employers about work-related issues (rights, accommodations, etc.) for PWD could help to reduce employer liability concerns.
- Employers should also be informed that reasonable accommodations are intended to ensure that PWD have employment rights that are equal, not superior to, people without disabilities (Stensrud, 2007).
- Studies similar to the present study may be useful in creating and maintaining more positive perceptions toward hiring PWD.

- There are additional opportunities for research that includes addressing what is taught in college and university courses and programs when it comes to hiring and working with PWD.
- This would be especially useful for human resources and business management programs of study (Stensrud, 2007).
- These educational programs could include training aimed at reducing stigmatizing attitudes by possibly providing personal contact with PWD (Kontosh, L.G., Fletcher, I., Frain, M., & Winland-Brown, J., 2007).

- Such educational interventions can even extend to high school student curriculum to emphasize accurate information about disabilities and PWD to prevent stigma before it develops (Spagnolo, A.B., Murphy, A.A., & Librera, L.A., 2008).
- As higher education continues to become more diverse, future studies using new graduates of human resources and business management programs might reveal a change in hiring managers' attitudes toward PWD.
- The focus of this study may be useful to policy makers in higher education institutions and business practices as they work to improve perceptions toward hiring PWD.

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Thank you