

Employing Persons with Disabilities: A Model of Successful Corporate Culture Change

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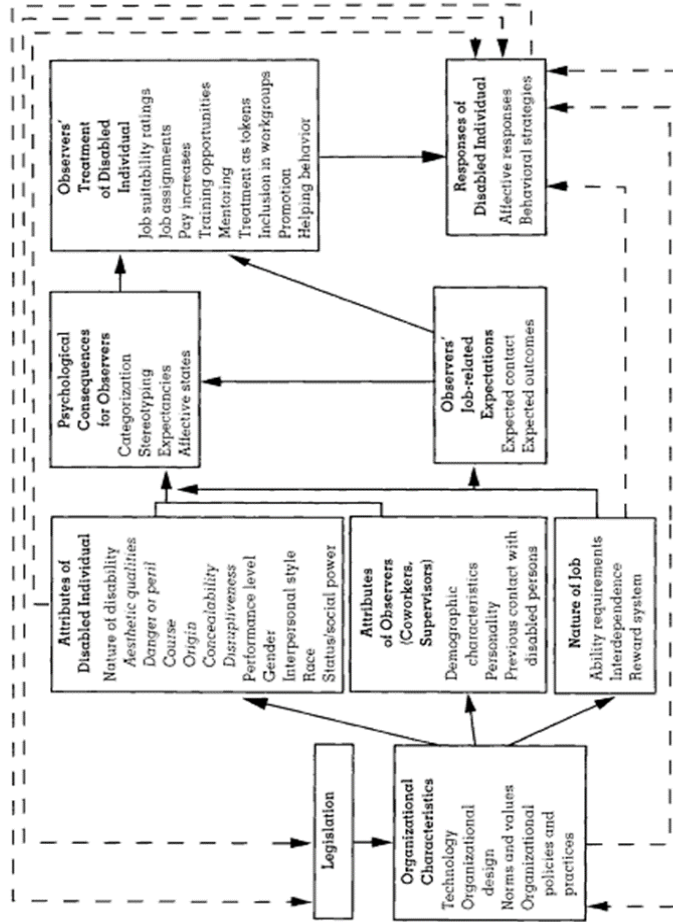
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Introduction

Disability continues to be an underrepresented category of persons within the work force. A World Health Survey shows employment rates of 52.8% for men with disability and 19.6% for women with disability compared to 64.9% for men and 29.9% for non-disabled women respectively (World Health Organization 2011, 237). Those disabled experience much higher levels of unemployment. Most organizations behaviour in respect to persons with disabilities remains unchanged due to beliefs about capacity, coworkers and management reluctance, customer acceptance etc. Yet there has been some success in integrating persons with disabilities into the labour force both in the North and in the South. Some recent disability specific scholarship, particularly Kalargyrou (2014) show an example of success in integrating person with disability into the work force. Kalargyrou suggests that Barney (1991) and Grants (1991) theory on a resource based approach holds promise as a way of promoting employment of persons with disabilities into the mainstream labour force.

FIGURE 1
Model of Factors Affecting the Treatment of Disabled Individuals in Organizations



The first part of this memo looks at various factors discussed in the literature which impact successful integration of persons with disabilities into the work force. That will be followed by looking at the Kalargyrou (2014) study of Walgreens' and Mohegan Sun Resorts' practices, which I suggest as a model of success. I then look at literature on disability in the leisure and hospitality industry in general and cross industry comparisons. That is followed by a consideration of the Canadian literature on the leisure and hospitality industry and the literature on disability and employment in Canada in general.

A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled employees in organizations

Collette and Stone (1996) developed a model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled employees in organizations. While it is not a model for success, it does show personal, environmental and organizational factors that affect how persons with disabilities are perceived at work and therefore some of what needs to be addressed for them to be successful.

A climate of justice

A climate of justice is an important aspect of the corporate climate that impacts the employment of persons who are traditionally marginalized from participation. It reflects collective beliefs about distributive justice (pay and accommodations), procedural justice (policies and procedures) and interpersonal justice (being treated with respect, dignity and sensitivity) and is shaped by corporate structures (Schur et.al 2009, 384). The justice climate has been connected to performance, job attitudes and citizenship (Schur et.al 2009, 384 citing Liao and Rupp 2005, Rupp, Bashur and Lio 2007)



Supervisor and coworker attitudes

Supervisor and coworker attitudes play an important part in the employment experience (Schur et.al 2009, 385, Schur et.al 2005, 10). Corporate commitment in and of itself is not sufficient, if supervisors and fellow employees do not accept the disabled worker disability, initiatives will fail (Schur et.al 2005, 10). These attitudes are affected by stereotypes, discomfort in being around persons with disabilities, strain caused by communication difficulties, personality, and prior experience with disabled persons (Schur et.al 2005, 10).

Schur et.al (2014) show that corporate culture impacts accommodation in two ways. There is a correlation between granting accommodations and the employees' positive attitude and the likelihood of retention of the employee (607, 613) but furthermore the effects of accommodation are moderated by coworker support, which is more likely in a supportive environment (Schur et.al. 2014, 608-609, 615). Managers also influence the inclusiveness of the work place (615).

Middle managers need to be committed to these values for successful integration of workers with disabilities and need to use a reward system to reinforce their participation (Shur et.al 2005). Choice of supervisors is a key to success.

Organizational values

Fit with organizational values impacts job satisfaction and turnover (Shure et.al 2009, 385). Persons with disabilities do less well in bureaucratic and competitive environments (Shure et.al 2009, 385, Stone and Collella 1996, Shure et.al 2005, 12). They do better in flexible organizations that value diversity and in organizations that work on customized needs as compared to those with strict equity



(Shure et.al 2009, 386). The key is the flexibility of the work environment.

Shure et.al (2009) show that factors of pay, job security, levels of supervision, participation in decision making, and formal and informal training contribute to negative disability employment experiences but don't fully explain it. Their research suggests that corporate culture is important for example, treating people with dignity and respect or being fair and responsive to employee needs (Schur et.al 2009, 402).

Disabled workers do better in less stressful work environments where they fit in better (Schur et.al. 2005).

Job characteristics that focus on required characteristics rather than ideal characteristics are more likely to foster employment of people with disabilities (Shur et.al, 2005, 12).

Organizational Behavior

The failure to incorporate employees with a disability is impacted by corporate behavior. Management practices are behaviors (Wooten & James 2005, 126), which can be adapted through learning (125). "Organizations learn by encoding inferences from past experiences into routines that guide behavior" (Wooten & James 2005, 125 citing Levitt & March 1988). Learning involves: "knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and development of an organizational memory" (Wooten & James 2005, 125 citing Huber, 1991) Diversity management has been dominated, to date, by ethnicity and race "because the adoption of human resource management policies is driven by workforce competition and pressure from dominant coalitions" (Wooten & James 2005, 126 citing Macy, 1996; Stone & Colella 1996). So organizations may lack knowledge and routines that incorporate disabled persons (Wooten & James 2005, 131, citing Blank et.al 2003).



Some scholars have suggested that the theory of planned behavior can be used to understand employer perceptions with respect to employing persons with disabilities (Jasper & Waldhart, 2012 580). They argue that behavioral intention can be accounted for through examining three factors: 1) ones own beliefs – behavior beliefs, 2) significant others beliefs and social pressure – normative beliefs and 3) beliefs about resources and skills necessary to perform the behavior – control beliefs. To the extent these beliefs are favorable, the more likely the intention to engage in the behavior (Fraser et.al 2009, 422). Jasper and Waldhart identify the following as the most supportive practices (in the leisure and hospitality industry) (587):

- Behavior beliefs- tax credits and flexible work schedules
- Normative beliefs- disability awareness and top management commitment
- Control beliefs – mentoring

In their study control beliefs about ability to do the job were the most striking perceived challenge (589) and there are still normative issues particularly around concern for customer attitudes and aesthetics (589).

Frazer et. al. (2009) found (424):

- Behavioral concerns including fear of potential litigation, loss of revenue and fear of affording changes for physical accommodation.
- Normative concerns including coworker and management attitudes
- Control beliefs – around effectiveness and efficiency of contact with vocational rehabilitation

Behavioral concerns were more salient to small companies, with normative concerns more relevant to midsize companies. All companies, independent of size, were concerned with the control issue (425).



Management

Senior management that is visibly committed to supporting employment of persons with disabilities improves outcomes (Shur et.al 2005, 13).

Accommodations

Accommodations can cause animosity among coworkers, particularly in workplaces that are equity ruled as opposed to need ruled and where the workplace is highly regimented and uniform (Shur et.al. 2005, 13) however, this effect is related to workplace culture, as studies show that accommodations can have a multiplier beneficial effect on other employees (Schur et.al 2014: 614-615).

Studies also have shown that 71% of accommodations cost \$500 or less according to American studies (Houtenville & Kalargyrou 2012, 42 citing Lengnick-Hall 2007, Gröshl 2007, 672 citing Hammett 2003, Houtenville & Kalargyrou 2012, 177 citing Meinhart 2012, Schur et.al. 2014).

Another barrier to workplace accommodation is that human resource personnel and employment agencies are not sufficiently trained in the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities and in accommodation strategies (Donnelly and Joseph 2012, 4, 11). Human resource staff in organizations with insufficient human resource personnel may not have the time to deal with accommodations (7).

In accommodating employees with disabilities a conflict with union seniority rights may occur, which could be another barrier to employment.

It is noteworthy that studies have found that a substantial number of non-disabled employees also receive accommodations in the work place (Shur et.al., 2014 614, Shartz et. al. 2006). This may



serve to normalize the idea of accommodations “within a broader culture of flexibility” and to diminish the sense of disability accommodation being expensive (Shur et.al., 2014 596-597).

Diversity

Research has not shown a clear path for managers to follow to manage diversity (Spatro 2005, 25). In most organizations corporate culture is characterized as a culture of differentiation, as opposed to a culture of unity or a culture of integration. It places emphasis on personal characteristics (Spatro 2005, 31) and those employees who possess these characteristics valued by the organization possess more influence with their peers (31). Organizational values shape this preference. In a corporate where disabled workers are less valued than nondisabled workers the culture is generally unmanaged (35). Diversity in this climate of differentiation requires management (32). Implications are if the disabled worker is not as valued as the nondisabled worker integration of the disabled worker will be unlikely (35). A culture of integration fosters the recognition of diversity to enable creativity and provides the greatest opportunity to integrate diversity. It is a challenge for managers to establish such a culture (33) and to manage diverse opinions, however it also may provide the greatest opportunity to tap a ever more diverse work force.

Having a diverse pool of applicants has been shown to provide competitive advantage (Houtenville & Kalargyrou 2012 citing Government Accountability Office 2002; Chi-Geng & Qu 2003; Earnworks 2009)

Surprisingly, only 40 percent of corporate diversity plans include disability in the United States (Donnelly and Joseph 2012, 3). Including disability in a corporations’ diversity plan will demonstrate managements’ commitment to disability inclusiveness (4). Only 42% of fortune 100 companies include disability in their diversity statement and only 15% have supplier diversity policies



(Ball et.al 2005, 98). As Ball et.al (2005) say it is possible that person with disabilities are not benefiting from the rise of diversity management and that companies are not benefiting from a truly diverse work force (Ball et.al 2005, 115).

Social Responsibility

Surveys show that that 92% of consumers felt more favorable towards companies that employed persons with disabilities and 87% would prefer to give there business to such an organization (Houtenville & Kalarydyrou 2012 citing Siperstein et, al. 2005). Kuo and Kalargyrou (2014) found that consumers had a “moderate positive purchase intention” for restaurants employing a significant amount of persons with disabilities under certain occasions (with family and friends vs. business and romantic occasions (Houtenville and Kalargyrou 2014, 177, citing Kuo and Kalargyrou 2014).

Mandal and Ose, looking at disability and social responsibility in Norway found “that the behavior and actions of enterprises might be more important for their efforts vis-à-vis people with disabilities than factors that are more or less given in advance, such as sector, industry and company size” (Mandal & Ose 2015, 185). Even in a social democratic state like Norway, where government plays a greater role in social responsibility than in North America, there is recognition that corporations have a significant role to play (170) such that have agreements on more inclusive work life with corporations, which gives them access to Work Life Centers to support their inclusive efforts.

Creating a welcoming environment for employees will also create positive brand imaging and reputation for corporate citizenship (Jasper & Waldhart, 2012).

Transportation



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Inadequate transportation for persons with disabilities can jeopardize their timely attendance and their job performance (Donnelly and Joseph 2012, 7). Employers can work to create reasonable transportation accommodation plans (8).

Litigation

In the U.S. literature the threat of discrimination and wrongful litigation is a persistent factor in workplace integration, arising out of experience with the *American with Disabilities Act* (Wooten & James 2005). In Canada, the Ontario Human Rights Commission reports that on average up to 50 per cent of their claims are on account of disability, primarily in respect to employment. Wooten & James point out that organizations often attempt to decouple themselves from the situations of negative or embarrassing information about corporate practices through defensive postures and therefore fail to reflect and learn from the situation (Wooten & James 2005, 134).

Best Practices

Walgreens and Mohegan Sun Resorts

Kalargyrou's research on Walgreens' and Mohegan Sun Resorts' disability initiatives provides some recommended best practices.

Business case:

Studying Walgreens and Mohegan Sun Resort, Kalargyrou used the findings of Barney (1991) and Grants (1991) that tapping into unused resources can lead to a competitive advantage. In summary the argument is by tapping into an untapped resource, in this case employees with disabilities the corporation can gain a competitive



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advantage and increase profitability (Kalargyrou 2014, 122, Adapted from Grant 1991). Grant argues that by identifying this resource; then creating capabilities in creating a culture of inclusion leads to a sustained competitive advantage of a bigger pool of applicants and benefits the corporations sense of corporate responsibility. The strategy is proactive recruitment of persons with disabilities, which results in lower turnover, higher attendance, improved corporate reputation and therefor decreased cost and higher profits. Kalargyrou 2014, 122, Adapted from Grant 1991).

Kalargyrou's (2014:123-126) review of the literature suggests the following benefits of employing persons with disabilities

- Persons with disabilities have a lower turn over rate
- An environment which promotes psychological safety may result in hirer employee engagement and productivity and lower turn over for all employees
- Persons with disabilities have below average absentee rates in general
- Persons with disabilities are an average or above average in terms of safety risk
- Persons with disabilities have a positive effect on coworkers
- Perceived barriers to hiring disabled persons can be overcome with skills and awareness training

Results:

Walgreens experienced lower turnover with this group of employees steaming from a work place that respected and cared for its workers. They experienced increased loyalty as a result of proactive recruitment of workers with disabilities and extensive training (Kalargyrou 2014, 129). They experienced higher attendance mostly resulting from pride of their work place (Kalargyrou 2014,132).



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Psychological safety increased (Kalargyrou 2014:132):

- through the culture and support of the company.
- through basic values of courtesy and respect set by top leadership and their commitment to the initiative (Kalargyrou 2014, 138)
- through employees feeling more engaged when they can provide their disabled colleagues informal training

Management benefitted from working with increased levels of ability and became more empathetic (Kalargyrou 2014,133)

Productivity and safety were higher as long as there was the right job placement (i.e. match of ability to skills required) and training (Kalargyrou 2014, 134).

Stereotyping diminished with prolonged contact and the right leadership in supervisory positions and by holding persons with disabilities to the same standards as other employees (Kalargyrou 2014, 135)

Best practices (Kalargyrou 2014, 135-136) included:

- open-mindedness
- training,
- accommodation
- clear management
- matching abilities with the position
- partnering with local agencies and disability groups
- using champions and ambassadors
- holding the same standards for all employees
- educating management and non management about persons with disabilities



The table below is reproduced from Kalargyrou 2014, (133) summarizing best practices, benefits and challenges:

TABLE 2 Best Practices, Benefits, and Challenges of Employing Workers with Disabilities

Practices	Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership commitment • Right management style • Training (e.g., skills, safety, disability awareness, etc.) • Accommodation • Matching abilities with positions • Partnering with local agencies and disability groups • Establishing disability champions and ambassadors • Holding all employees (abled and disabled) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower turnover • Loyalty • Better attendance • Psychological safety • Competitive advantage • Safety for some employees with disabilities is important since they have experienced first-hand physical pain. Safety is ensured when the necessary training and the right job placement are provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotyping/skepticism • Productivity challenges when there is a mismatch between position and abilities



accountable to the same standards		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequent formal and informal performance appraisals• Dedicated department/person (depending on the size of the company) assisting employees with disabilities (e.g., training, accommodation, etc.)		

Comparators

Hospitality Industry

Kalargyrou and Volis (2014) studied eight companies in the hospitality industry with successful disability employee integration programs and found similar conclusions to the Kalargyrou (2014) study in respect to best practices:

1. Establishing a diversity inclusion council, team, foundation or task force is valuable for raising awareness and integration practices. They can be important in recruiting,



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hiring and supporting employees with disabilities (Kalargyrou and Volis 2014, 449). Education and disability awareness promotional events produce increased acceptance (444). They develop employment strategies, establish inclusion goals and implement metrics (446).

2. Establishing relationships with social services, vocational rehabilitation agencies and organizations promoting disability awareness aids in identifying and recruiting candidates (444).
3. Most of the companies surveyed provided disability awareness training to non-disabled employees (445).
4. Some of the organizations surveyed used formal and informal performance appraisals for feedback hold employees accountable (447).

The study also found similar benefits to the Kalargyrou (2014) study in respect to loyalty, motivation, attendance, and productivity. It reduces turnover and creates consistency, which contributes to profitability (Kalargyrou and Volis 2014, 447-448). It signals a more caring corporation, which improves overall employee trust and productivity (448). In having diversity it may make the service more responsive to a more diverse population. Employing persons with disabilities also contributes to a positive company image, improved marketing initiatives, and appearance of concern for social sustainability (448). There are findings “that consumers demonstrate a positive purchase intention and prefer to give their business to hospitality companies that employ workers with disabilities. (448 citing Kuo and Kalargyrou 2014).

Bergisu and Balta (2011) conducted a three stage Delphi study of the Turkish hospitality industry and came up with similar principles as the Walgreens and Mohegan examples. They conclude that hiring considerations should be based on merit not disability. They also recommend training and orientation for new hires, training all employees about disabilities, adopting the work environment and placing the right worker in the right position (Bergisu and Balta 2011, 48).



Jasper and Waldhart (2011) looked at U.S. federal survey data of the leisure hospitality industry and came to similar conclusions, with fear of ability to perform and the cost or perceived cost of accommodations as the top concerns (Jasper and Waldhart 2011, 591). These concerns were more significant for smaller firms (591). The data reveals that the most appealing practices for leisure and hospitality firms to hire persons with disabilities are employee and manager attitudes, job mentoring and financial incentives (591). Therefore, top management commitment is vital and disability awareness training can be helpful (589-590), as can providing greater awareness of the true costs of accommodation to employers (589).

Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2012) analyzed the responses of 320 leisure and hospitality companies. Overall only about 22% of the industry (surveyed) employs persons with disabilities and only 15% recruits for disabled workers specifically (Houtenville and Kalargyrou 2012, 45). Houtenville and Kalargyrou analysis of the industry in general finds the following:

- The most frequent concern was the cost of employing persons with disabilities (Houtenville and Kalargyrou 2012, 46)
- Second was potential lack of experience and skills (46)
- Larger companies were less concerned with cost and more with supervisor discomfort managing workers with disabilities (around discipline and lack of information about persons with disabilities 46)
- Larger companies were more likely to hire persons with disabilities (46)
- Most frequently cited challenge is that the work might not be effectively performed by persons with disabilities, followed by the cost of accommodations (48) – Larger companies were more concerned with the uncertainty of accommodation cost than the actual cost (49)



- Retention was most likely to encourage employers to hire based on more attention to the bottom line or increased productivity (47)
- The top strategies identified to facilitate hiring were: employer tax credits/incentives, flexible work schedules, disability awareness programs and training existing staff (48), with incentives and flexibility being favored by small companies over mentoring and disability awareness (50).

“Overall our results suggest that providing employers and managers with information about the capabilities and performance of workers with disabilities...would increase the employers’ confidence in hiring them” (50). There are still biases to overcome about capabilities and accommodations (51).

Cross Industry Comparison

Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2015) analyzed survey data on 3126 firms, and found that construction and manufacturing were less likely to hire, have recently hired or recruit persons with disabilities than leisure and hospitality companies (Houtenville and Kalargyrou 2015, 173-175). Companies in the information services sector were more likely to hire workers with disabilities (174). This sector and government were more likely to recruit workers with disabilities (174-175). Companies in manufacturing, transportation and warehousing were the most likely to have attitude issues from coworkers and supervisors and attitude issues were less likely an issue in government, retail, and financial organizations (176).

Customer attitudes were less likely to be an issue in all sectors other than leisure and hospitality and retail (176), where direct customer contact is required (176).



The public sector is more likely to recruit persons with disabilities than the private sector (Houtenville and Kalargyrou 2015, 169, citing Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma 2008).

Companies in non-leisure industries were less likely to report cost of accommodations as a challenge in hiring, although a number of sectors did report workers compensation and health insurance as a factor (176). Kaletta et. al. (2013) also raise this as a potential issue.

The nature of work as being too challenging for persons with disabilities is reported to be a factor in hiring persons with disabilities most by construction and manufacturing and least by, professional and business services, information and financial activities (176)

Hospitality Industry in Canada

In contrast, Gröschl (2007) studied 42 hotels operating in Canada and found the following issues and barriers to hiring disabled persons:

- Limited legal pressure to employ persons with disabilities
- Limited communication between the organizations and employment agencies which allows for fostering stereotypes (681),
- Complexity in defining disability (684)
- Limited awareness, understanding and communication between persons with disabilities and non disabled persons limits recruitment and integration (684)
- Preferences for employees dealing with customers for aesthetics and self-presentation skills (682)
- Preference for employees who can work part time and work swing shifts (680)
- Beliefs that there is a high cost of training and accommodation and that there would be low productivity (679-680)



Other Canadian Literature

There is only one report in Canada that considers employer attitudes towards persons with disabilities (Fredeen et al., 2013). They found that: 1) education and training are required to overcome barriers and myths perceived by employers (that disabled employees have greater risk to health and safety standards and the perception of risk regarding increased legal obligations with respect to human rights issues, the cost of accommodations, and the requirement for extra supervision), 2) to recognize the value of diversity and inclusion in their workforce, and to achieve increased employment of persons with disabilities; 3) to accomplish this leadership from the top of organizations is key (Fredeen et al., 2013, p. p. 4, 7).

This lack of data on employer attitudes is corroborated by implication in a 2011 Canadian literature review produced by the Public Service Commission of Canada. The report reported, that with respect to the Federal Public Service: “The recruitment rate for this employment equity (EE) group has been lower than their WFA [workforce availability], while their separation rate is more than double their recruitment rate” (Equity and Diversity Directorate, Policy Branch, 2011, section I).

The Library of Parliament produced a background paper in 2013 that was entitled *Persons with Disabilities in the Canadian Labour Market: An Overlooked Talent Pool*. It reported that small- and medium-sized establishments may have greater challenges in assuring accessibility and accommodation, and that “these challenges can be as much about misconceptions as about the feasibility of addressing them,” they do not identify any further literature (Chantal, Lafontaine-Émond, & Pang, 2013, p. 4).

The Federal Office of Disability Issues at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada carried out a scoping review I 2013 (Shaw, 2013) . They found 38 articles and 19 grey literature



documents as being significant, but of these, only five were identified as being located in Canada and most rat reviewed employee perspective rather than employer attitudes (Shaw, 2013, p. 6).

The review found that “[t]he four predominant systemic barrier clusters were Attitudinal barriers, Employer barriers about performance skill and capacity, Employer lack of awareness of disability and the management of disability related issues in hiring and retention, and Lack of integration of services and policies to promote hiring and retention” (Shaw, 2013, p.4).

Conclusion

Successfully employing persons with disabilities will require corporations to appreciate the need and benefit of diversity and the need to change their corporate beliefs and cultures. It will require corporations to learn to overcome preconceived ideas about employing persons with disabilities and appreciate that in doing so they derive a competitive advantage in terms of less turn over, greater loyalty, less absenteeism and safety and therefore less recruiting and retraining costs and greater productivity, as well as an improved psychologically safe environment in which all voices are valued and improved corporate reputation.

A model of success starts with management understanding there is a business case for hiring individuals with disabilities and to be aware that the negative factors perceived about hiring persons with disabilities are due to misinformation and stereotypes. Success requires creating an accepting culture of routines that incorporate disability.

A number of practices have been identified that have lead to success in incorporating persons with disabilities into a work force. It is important that senior management set the tone and be visibly



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supportive of hiring persons with disabilities Secondly, it is important to assure the right persons with the appropriate commitment and sensitivity are in supervisory roles. Matching the employee's skills and accommodations to the job assures a proper fit and chance of success. Providing pre-employment training enhances success. Similarly, disability awareness training for other employees helps eliminate misunderstandings about accommodations and reduces stereotypes. Informal mentoring from coworkers benefits both parties. Associating with vocational services dealing with disabilities and disability awareness groups provides a source to recruit a more diverse work force and a source of useful information. Holding all employees equally accountable fosters trust amongst coworkers and useful feedback for the employee. Disability awareness committees and disability champions help create the appropriate environment to successfully integrate employees with disabilities. Creating this environment creates a psychologically safe environment, which all workers benefit from. These findings are summarized in the chart below.

The literature demonstrates that where these initiatives are undertaken everyone wins: the disabled worker, the corporation and coworkers, but there is much to do before this is realized on a wider scale in Canada. There is also a need for further scholarship about employing workers with disabilities in Canada, as this literature is considerably underdeveloped relative to the American literature.



Awareness



Business Case



Top Management Demonstrates visible Commitment



Assure supportive managers are in key positions

Communicate the vision



Diversity committee



Disability Awareness Training



Mentoring



Hold employee accountable

Relationship with social services, Vocational Agencies, Disability Advocacy Groups



Pre-employment training



Assure right fit between ability and required skills



Accommodations



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