

STUDY OF EMPLOYERS PERCEPTION ON EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper explores to understand employer's attitudes and perspectives in employment of people with disabilities which represents a largely untapped talent pool worldwide. Although employment of people with disabilities can be beneficial for companies, the potential of organizations employing them and gaining a competitive advantage has rarely been investigated.

Methodology: An exploratory study was conducted through primary and secondary research which includes companies across different industries. The aim of this research paper is to capture employers' experiences, concerns and perceptions while hiring people with disabilities. The primary research comprised of a survey through questionnaire. A multiple regression model was used to analyze the data. Sample size of the data was 102.

Findings: Variables such as challenges faced by employers, access to talent pool of people with disabilities, access to technology and infrastructure, number of disabled people existing in the organization, disability friendly environment, hiring concerns were considered. Originality/Value: The paper contributes to the literature on employment and disabilities especially through the systematic review of factors that determine the challenges, readiness to hire people with disabilities, technological resources and infrastructure used, hiring aspects and concerns, unique initiatives taken by organizations.

Key words: Employment, People with disabilities, employers

Introduction

Governments and non-governmental bodies across the globe are relentlessly working on identifying and advocating policy changes to encourage the employment of disabled people, from moving away from traditionally held views of charity and welfare to those of productivity and employability. However, people with disability face the same predicament in employment everywhere and continue to be vastly underrepresented in the workforce owing to the age held fears, myths, and perceptions.

In India, The Persons with Disabilities Act (Act, 1995) mandates that 3% of jobs in the public sector should be reserved for individuals with disabilities, yet only 0.54% of this reservation was filled (Census, 2011). Out of the 0.54%, the private sector had only 0.28% of jobs (Ramachandra, et al., 2017). People with disabilities form less than 0.5% of the workforce in India's leading organizations. An interesting fact that comes to the fore is that there was a larger proportion of the employed disabled population in agrarian areas (69%) in contrast to metropolitan towns and cities (31%), probably due to the high availability of agricultural work (Naraharisetti & Castro, 2016). In the urban scenario, disabled people are often contemplated as incapable members of the lot (Naraharisetti & Castro, 2016). Myths overflow, which involve that persons with disabilities are incompetent to accomplish any job or assignment and accommodating such people at the workplace incurs additional cost to the company.

Disability is a term which is broadly used for people with impairments, constrained activities and restricted participation (WHO, 2011). It can be physical, mental, cognitive, sensory, intellectual or developmental and can differ in type, seriousness, time span and stability (Csillang & Gyori, 2019). There can be two forms of persons with disabilities – one in which the person was born with an impairment and developed social capital along with

mental preparedness to deal with his/her disability with the support of their loved ones (Csillang & Gyori, 2019). The other form is the one which was obtained towards the later period of the individual's life and where the person utilized prior life experiences and capabilities to battle with this recently attained disability (Csillang & Gyori, 2019).

Most people with disabilities need an honorable and productive life. Employment provides remuneration as well as scope for communal engagement. This is also particularly imperative for people with special needs. Despite knowing the importance of employment, people with disabilities face everyday challenges in acquiring employment opportunities ranging from social, attitudinal, physical, infrastructural and economic barriers inducing workplace disparities (Heera & Devi, 2016). Physical barriers include lack of accommodation in infrastructures such as lifts, elevators, stairs, accessible washrooms, parking lots and service counters make it difficult for the person with a disability to actively participate in an organization and community as a whole (Csillang & Gyori, 2019). Disabled people also have to face social barriers in which they are less likely to get fully educated and employed (Naraharisetti & Castro, 2016). They are often perceived as people with an inferior pay grade, fewer learning and training opportunities and lesser control over making decisions in the organization (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). Attitudinal barriers that people with disabilities face at the workplace from the employers and peers create stereotypes such as associating them with negative influence (Ang, 2017). Technological and communication barriers is another type of challenge that people with disabilities have to face in their personal and professional environment (Csillang & Gyori, 2019). Economic barriers include inadequate access to financial resources, limited access to funding and banking services (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011).

Combine all of these and it creates a lack of confidence and over-dependence on family members and friends, lack of skills, competencies, creativity, qualifications and experiences tantamount to the personal barrier and often lead to a decrease in motivational levels of people with disabilities which in turn makes them feel less capable and challenged to opportunities (Csillang & Gyori, 2019).

However, today the notion of disability has transcended from individual impairment to a more social spectacle (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). It can be inferred that it is a transition from a medicinal model to a social model in which the society views the people as being disabled. According to Persons with Disabilities report published in 2011 by the International Labor Organization, 73.6% of the disabled population in India is outside the labor force (Shenoy, 2011).

This research paper aims to understand the hiring concerns and issues confronted by organizations while deciding to employ people with disabilities; the progress in adapting new technology to assist the differently abled people to work in their respective jobs. The kind of business strategies and organizational policies that support disability inclusion at all organizational levels will also be explored.

Literature Review

To combat the employment issues of individuals with impairments or disabilities at the national level, there are legal policies created by government of different countries to enhance inclusion of such people in the workforce. Some of these are reservation systems, tax and cash incentives to the employers who hire disabled people, anti-discrimination policies, appointment of a Liaison Officer to manage recruitment of disabled people along with providing them the necessary facilities (Heera & Devi, 2016).

With the increase in population in developing countries, the number of people with disabilities is also growing (ILO, 2011). The introduction of disability in organizational diversification planning is a positive occurrence but at the same time, it is important to understand the business perspective towards employing differently abled individuals and what is the organizational purpose behind employing disabled people (Heera & Devi, 2016). Research suggests that there are some factors that influence the hiring decisions of disabled people such as the employer's awareness about the type of disability, perceptions about the performance of work, concerns regarding the cost of accommodation, training, health insurance and travel expenses (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo,

2011). According to research, proprietors who have an exposure of working with individuals with impairments have a positive response towards including a disabled workforce (Henry, Petkauskosa, Stanislawzyka, & Vogt, 2013). They also believe that there is lack of awareness and access to tap the disabled talent pool (Henry, Petkauskosa, Stanislawzyka, & Vogt, 2013). Employers have also expressed concerns regarding the fear of legal procedures and unawareness of legal stipulations while hiring disabled people (Heera & Devi, 2016). Demand-side factors such as the manager's attitude, intention, motivation and subject norms have an influence in the hiring of people with disabilities (Araten-Bergman, 2016). Employers who have got the chance to previously work with people with disabilities perceive them as people who tend to bring in new ideas and perspectives, contribute to an improved workforce with same or higher productivity levels as the non-disabled employees, have lower absenteeism rates, higher retention rates, high efficiency and great learning capabilities (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). The inclusion of the disabled workforce will have an effect on the company's profitability and turnover rates, retention and attrition rates, return on investment, company image, brand value, stakeholder value (Ang, 2017). Many organizations have noticed that by hiring the disabled workers, they have been able to recognize, target and attend their consumers or clients with disabilities in a better and efficient manner (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019).

Employers also realized that there will be an aging workforce, a significant number of their present employees may have developed disabling conditions (Henry, Petkauskosa, Stanislawzyka, & Vogt, 2013). Adapting to technological infrastructure to support such employees would be cost friendly and help in creating new opportunities for them (Henry, Petkauskosa, Stanislawzyka, & Vogt, 2013). B2B networking and establishing relationships with employers who have been following hiring practices and conquering challenges to employ people with disabilities would be beneficial as managers and executives would get the chance to gain more from them by means of meetings, organization visits, interviews, one on one discussions (Henry, Petkauskosa, Stanislawzyka, & Vogt, 2013).

Research suggests that organizational virtue encourages a feeling of importance, congruity and versatility (Cameron & Caza , 2002). Virtue theory could be evocative in exploring employment experiences for people with disabilities. It likewise incorporates integrity, empathy and boldness which impels a learning procedure through which an individual is headed to interface with the social network (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). The theory would approach towards the treatment of people with disabilities in the organization with a more universal and common point of view which is applicable to all the employees in the organization (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). There are some aspects that impact the treatment of people with disabilities in organizations, namely, individual attributes (personal characteristics of the employer and employee), ecological attributes (law and enactment) and hierarchical attributes (reward and recognition systems, strategies) (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). Virtue could help in enacting such systems. For instance, people with disabilities may dither to request convenience because of fear of stigmatization; the result could be that the business is ignorant of the individual's handicap and there may be an adverse impression about the individual's lackluster showing. Additionally, the associates would see the people with disabilities as clumsy and incompetent (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). Whereas, an organization that supports and fosters the use of virtue would encourage an inclusive and diverse culture for everyone including people with disabilities (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). This theory is also utilized in various Human Resource applications, one of them being recruitment (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). In such a case, the firms would want to post job openings in alternative formats and carry out smooth application procedures that are attainable to both individuals with and without disabilities. They may want to include disabled people in the firm's websites and recruitment materials so that they are recognized by people working in the firm and the clients associated with the firm (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011). If the people with disabilities candidate is selected, then he/she may be evaluated through a fair and bias free screening process. Virtuous organizations would ask people for accommodation and would have basic conventions that revolve around the behavioral assessments and job responsibilities (Barclay, Markel, & Yugo, 2011).

Employment experiences may differ according to the disability type, age, gender, educational qualifications and regional areas (Narahariseti & Castro, 2016). According to cognitive and self-efficacy theories, it can be said

that the self-motivation and belief of employees is influenced by the surroundings of work attained within the work group (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). There are two sorts of hindrances made by social persecution for social consideration, that is, obstructions to doing (structural disablism) and boundaries to being (psycho-emotional disablism) (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). Due to this, people with disabilities are prone to function in more callous working conditions than those without disabilities which prompts absence of individual assets (psychological capital, self-assessment), trust, certainty and regard (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). As indicated by self-efficacy theory, enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states are the four values through which viability is accomplished. (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). Therefore, the learning atmosphere of an association which comprises of people with disabilities ought to be given additional consideration and care as the expectation to learn and adapt by these individuals must be remembered with the goal to help them flourish for progress at working environment and have a similar growth as people without disabilities.

A disability-friendly corporate culture is imperative for the consolidation and development of individuals with special needs into the workforce. Social inclusion in teams and strong team climate enables team learning behaviors such as receiving feedback, having open-end discussions, seeking help from peers, reflecting on results, collaborating, observing, imitating and understanding the specific skills required to do the job (Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2018). New technologies can be utilized for organization-wide sensitivity training. The organizational climate can be enhanced by inventing new employee engagement strategies for inclusion of the disability group as a result of which they have a strong sense of belongingness towards the organization (Policy, 2015)

VRIO framework is based on Value, Rarity, Imitability and exploitation by the establishment (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). As per VRIO framework, the work of people with disabilities offers a shared value to the organization as people with disabilities are faithful, devoted and qualified (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). They can be recruited if there is a lack of skilled labor in the market. It likewise improves the status of organization through corporate social responsibility activities (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). It is rare to have a successful incorporation of people with disabilities and adopt the disability friendly culture by competitors (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). Greatest usage of people with disabilities assets by an organization can be achieved with the assistance of special exercises and changes such as adaptable work time and deliberate profiles (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). For example, individuals who suffer from autism can provide solutions to software troubleshooting problems, deaf people can make use of their taste buds and apply for the role of connoisseur, blind people with a distinct sense of touch can take up professions such as physiotherapists or masseurs (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). The recruitment and engagement of people with impairments as a differentiation and value creating strategy can profit the organization as it doesn't lessen as a human asset and can be moved to various products, services and technologies (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019).

It is important to comprehend the strategies recommended by proprietors to enhance new opportunities for individuals with inabilities. Research shows that organizational values and policies should be designed in such a way that employees with disabilities feel respected and privileged for their contributions in accomplishing organizational goals through their capabilities and talent (Policy, 2015). The employer materials should reflect a strong sense of commitment towards hiring and recognizing the contributions of the disabled people. Promotion of the disabled workforce's achievements on the company brochure and website or story telling of the current disabled employees in the organization can influence prospective applicants, both disabled and non-disabled, to join the organization because of its positive work culture and strong diversity and inclusion practices (Policy, 2015). HR managers and line managers can set periodic review meetings with employees for discovering the barriers in terms of training needs, performance evaluation and open-end discussions for employee needs for providing a better work environment. Exit interviews can be conducted in an efficient manner to gauge the specific reasons for the disabled people leaving the organization and to fulfill the gaps identified for better employee satisfaction and retention rates. Companies can partner with leading agencies and Employee Resource Group (ERG) for people with disabilities for tapping into this unidentified talent pool and hire them as interns/part-time workers/full-time workers. Firms can benefit from the employment of differently able

individuals as patrons are more expedient to patronize the business, proficient candidates are more likely to join a workplace that staunchly believes in diversity and inclusion (Policy, 2015). Small companies often seek outsourced HR practices for inclusion which can bounce back because of unclear objectives, lack of communication and follow up meetings, improper planning and inappropriate standards (Policy, 2015). It is imperative to understand the need of inclusion of a disabled workforce and its impact on the business from a key perspective. (Policy, 2015)

The objective of this research paper is to analyze the different demographic variables that employers keep in mind while taking hiring decisions for distinctively capable individuals. This can include the type of disability, age, gender, qualification, cost of accommodation and infrastructure, cost of training and development. Also, the kind of organizational culture and technologies needed to foster the growth of individuals with disabilities would be taken into account.

Methodology

Design

The study for the research comprised of literature review, qualitative research and quantitative research. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection were given equal weightages.

Sample

Convenience sampling method was used to collect data from working professionals across different industries belonging to different age groups. 102 responses were received from the survey questionnaire. Majority of respondents were from the IT sector. Other sectors included oil and gas, consulting, media and entertainment, construction, healthcare, banking and finance.

Method

The survey was administered as a web-based self-completion questionnaire comprising of 12 questions including both Likert scale and open-ended questions. The Likert scale responses were categorized on a scale of 1-5. The qualitative data analysis was done by creating codes and themes for each of the responses. A thematic analysis was done using Excel. The survey was designed to study the perceptions about hiring people with difficulties in different organizations and the use of adaptive technologies to make a disability friendly environment. Cronbach's Alpha test was used to check the accuracy and internal consistency of the questionnaire. A value of 0.770 was secured through the Cronbach's Alpha test.

Findings

The study found that 30% of the respondents were very likely to embrace individuals with disabilities in their respective organizations whereas 8% were somewhat unlikely to incorporate individuals with disabilities. However, 57% of the respondents mentioned that the number of disabled people in their respective organizations ranged from 0-20, and 18% of the respondents had more than 100 disabled employees in their respective organizations.

A majority of the respondents (46%) were somewhat likely to face challenges while hiring people with disabilities. Some of the hiring concerns included attitude of co-workers and customers towards people with disabilities, lower productivity levels, lack of training of supervisors, lack of skills and experience, overall cost of infrastructure and accommodation. 71% of people believe that it is very important to train both managers and co-workers to proactively work with people with disabilities so that they feel included at the workplace.

The study also showed the hiring aspects that employers would look at while employing people with disabilities. Educational qualification, disability type and legal procedures for hiring disabled people was given utmost priority, whereas, age and gender was given the least priority.

Additionally, one-third of the respondents feel that their organization has a disability friendly environment. It was also found that 40% of the organizations had the means to access the talent pool of people with disabilities via hiring agencies, NGOs and partnerships with other organizations. 29% of the respondents claimed that their respective organizations had the right resources, technology and infrastructure to support the nature of work of people with disabilities. At present, 43% of the organizations use chatbots to provide support and resolve queries for people with disabilities. Text to speech converter is used by 40% of organizations. Some of the other technologies adopted by organizations are text to screen readers, advanced wheelchair facility, AI and voice recognition platforms, service that retransmits emergency alarms or sounds into color coded flashes.

This study also includes some unique initiatives taken by organizations to encourage incorporation of individuals with special needs. Based on the thematic analysis, it was found that 25% of employers accentuate on the importance of having a culture which is flexible and bias-free, especially to aid to the needs of the differently abled workforce. 19% of respondents stressed on having access to a universal business infrastructure, while 15% highlighted the initiatives taken by their companies in upgrading to assistive technologies, use of AI and applications which can be accessed by all. Employers emphasized that one on one HR interaction with specially abled workforce helps companies understand their problems in a better manner. Other employees within the organization are trained and educated to conduct themselves in a congenial and unbiased manner with their disabled peer workers. Some companies also encourage having an entire team of deaf and mute people, wherein they are facilitated with moral and technical support to perform their jobs. Webpages and apps for speech recognition using Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning are made accessible to all employees irrespective of disability type and age. Employer recommended strategies also include having flexible work time for their disabled employees and increase hiring people with diverse disability types. Frequent diversity and inclusion campaigns, talks and advertisements are conducted by companies to ensure awareness of the misrepresented groups and spread influential messages about equality. Employers also suggested that highlighting the work done by people with disabilities every quarter across all employees within the organization, in the form of emails or rewards and recognition programs, can help in boosting the morale and confidence of disabled employees. Exchange company programs helps HR and hiring managers to gain exposure and seek guidance from their external peers. This builds a network and creates an effective form where people across different industries can share ideas and resources to innovate inclusion policies and strategies in their respective organizations. Some organizations also believe in providing a platform for disabled people to become entrepreneurs by gauging their skills and passion. Assistive technology, reserved parking lots, ramps and elevators to facilitate comfortable movement of disabled people is given importance across different industries.

Statistical Analysis

Data

All the data collected from the survey was entered in a tabular format in an excel file and then imported into the SPSS software for analysis. Multiple Linear Regression model was used to statistically examine the data. The intention of this study is to identify the willingness of employers to include people with disabilities (dependent variable) based on (independent variables) the challenges faced while hiring disabled people, disability friendly culture, access to talent pool of disabled people, access to technology and infrastructure, importance of training managers and peers. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study is as follows: H_0 : There is no significant correlation between the (dependent variable) willingness of employers to include people with disabilities and (independent variables) the challenges faced while hiring disabled people, disability friendly culture, access to talent pool of disabled people, access to technology and infrastructure, importance of training managers and peers.

Result and Analysis

Figure 1: Results of Regression Statistics

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.540 ^a	.292	.255

Figure 2: Results of ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.970	5	5.794	7.914	.000 ^b
	Residual	70.285	96	.732		
	Total	99.255	101			

a. Dependent Variable: WillingnessToInclude

b. Predictors: (Constant), TrainManangersPeers, DisabilityFriendlyEnvironment, FaceChallenges, AccessResourcesTechnology, AccessTalentPool

The following can be interpreted from the above result:

1. The R squared value of 0.292 indicates that 29.2% of variation in the (dependent variable) willingness of employers to include people with disabilities can be explained by the (independent variables or the predictors) the challenges faced while hiring disabled people, disability friendly culture, access to talent pool of disabled people, access to technology and infrastructure , importance of training managers and peers .
2. The p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance value of 0.05 which indicates that there is a significant correlation between the dependent and independent variables.

Figure 3: Result of running Regression on variables

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.015	.695		.022	.982	-1.365	1.395
	FaceChallenges	.207	.102	.187	2.035	.045	.005	.409
	DisabilityFriendlyEnvironment	.261	.105	.299	2.484	.015	.053	.470
	AccessTalentPool	-.158	.125	-.166	-1.265	.209	-.405	.090
	AccessResourcesTechnology	.265	.125	.256	2.122	.036	.017	.512
	TrainManangersPeers	.377	.117	.281	3.232	.002	.146	.609

a. Dependent Variable: WillingnessToInclude

The following are the interpretations of coefficients:

1. A 1% increase in challenges faced by employers to hire people with disabilities increased the willingness to include disabled people by 0.207%.
2. A 1% increase in having a disability friendly environment increased the willingness to include disabled people in the workforce by 0.261%.
3. A 1% increase in access to talent pool decreased the willingness to include disabled people in the workforce by 0.157%. The p-value of this variable is greater than 0.05 and hence it does not prove to be a significant factor in willingness to include people.

4. A 1% increase in access to technology, resources and infrastructure increased the willingness to include disabled people in the workforce by 0.264%.
5. A 1% increase in training managers and peers increased the willingness to include disabled people in the workforce by 0.37%.
6. The p-value for four out of five independent variables is less than the significance level of 0.05.
7. The overall p-value is less than the significance level of 0.05 (when confidence interval is 95%). Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected as there is a significant correlation between the independent and dependent variables.

Discussion

According to literature review, it was emphasized that a disability friendly corporate culture is an enabler for people with disabilities to perform to the best of their abilities. This aligns with the results of our research as well. This kind of a corporate culture makes the people with disabilities more connected with the systems, procedures and people around them. Our research results also suggest that sensitization training and workshops should be given to both employers and employees in an organization. The results also indicate that employees with disabilities are perceived to be hard working, productive and innovative. An open and growth mindset is observed from the employers' point of view, as they are more willing to accept people with disabilities. The diversity and inclusion strategies adopted by the companies is also another driver to employ people with disabilities. Nowadays, organizations are giving weightage to emotional, physical and technological infrastructure to all employees. This gives people with disabilities the strength, confidence and motivation to overcome challenges faced by them. This also creates new channels for supporting and motivating employees with disabilities in contrast to just providing a physical infrastructure or a universal point of view in a single direction only.

Conclusion and recommendations

Organizations have realized the importance of including a skilled and qualified disabled workforce. New technological interventions and business strategies are playing an influential role in facilitating people with disabilities with the right resources to showcase their talent and perform tasks. A disability friendly work culture and positive attitude is essential for growth and inclusion. Awareness workshops and programmes to remove unconscious biasness while recruiting people with disabilities can ensure that the deserving candidate be given the opportunity to showcase his/her talent. By including people with disabilities in their workforce, companies also tend to gain competitive advantage. The findings from this study indicate a change in mindset of employers who are more open to include such diverse people in their organizations. Research also suggests that real-time feedback from employees could help in shaping an inclusive environment. The hospitality industry is quite ahead in constituting a physically challenged workforce followed by the IT industry. Companies have also started introducing merit-based hiring policies and programme through which the differently abled workers would be taking up managerial roles. It is also found that the people with disabilities worker harder than those without disabilities and have a growth mindset. Access to infrastructure does not just mean providing accommodation to the disabled employees but also to consider having a universal office infrastructure, buildings, entrances, signages, parking, restrooms, canteens with features such as braille writing in their menus. External audits help in gauging the level of progress in terms of infrastructure. Having an inclusive culture tends to boost the morale of the specially abled workforce which in turn helps in higher productivity and positive business outcome for the organization.

Limitation

Future research should consider identifying job roles for particular disability types according to the changing needs of business and upsurge the number of disabled people in the organization. The experiences of people with disabilities who are working or have worked needs to be considered as this would help companies in

performing an effective gap analysis as to where they stand and what needs to be done to provide a more healthy and inclusive disability friendly culture.

Acknowledgement

This research would not have been possible without the extended support and encouragement provided by my parents, friends and the revered faculty of my institute. I would also like to thank my mentors for their continuous guidance and feedback

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