

Research Working Group Brief

Improving Employment Outcomes for Employees with Disabilities

Employers looking to have the most talented workforce have well-intentioned programs to help those with disabilities meet their full employment potential yet the workforce participation rate remains well below the non-disabled population – what are the strategies that organizations can use to improve this statistic and have an engaged workforce to meet market challenges?

The Business Issue – Employment of those with disabilities still a challenge

Employers continue to build their workforce to get the best talent to achieve organizational success. This may require diversifying the employee base to include those with disabilities. Employers know this is a talent pool that should be utilized to its full potential; however, there remain significant employment disparities for people with disabilities, who represent a significant portion of the U.S. population. In 2008, the employment rate of working age people with disabilities in the U.S. was 39.5 percent, compared to 79.9 for their nondisabled peers.

Employers report barriers to employment of people with disabilities to be: lack of work experience and skills, supervisors' lack of knowledge about accommodations, perceived cost of accommodations, and attitudes/stereotypes of supervisors and co-workers about people with disabilities. Many of these barriers may be mutable by educating employers on issues of disability, and specifically by providing information on effective workplace policies and practices. Several studies have provided preliminary information on effective accommodation and human resource practices, employment disability discrimination, attitudes toward disability, and workplace culture, but these studies have also produced conflicting results, and have lacked a comprehensive perspective on the workplace. Further exploration of how company policies and practices and the corresponding attitudes of hiring managers, supervisors, and co-workers affect the employment opportunities of people with disabilities is needed to address these barriers.

These studies provide a useful starting point in identifying employer practices and barriers, but further empirical data is needed to more deeply probe the characteristics and practices of employers and behaviors of supervisors that contribute to positive employment outcomes. In addition, research is needed to increase our understanding of how heightened corporate emphasis on organizational and employee productivity in the current economy may disparately impact people with disabilities. Interventions can then be designed to proactively address the barriers identified. Specifically, Human Resource and line managers need answers to vexing questions such as: What kind of organizational structure/managerial strategy is most effective at implementing disability policy? Can organizations help people with disabilities feel more engaged and fully utilized at work? How can employers be better equipped to recruit and retain people with disabilities, including returning veterans?

A Research Working Group to “compare notes” with peer firms

To provide richer understanding of how to better attract, retain, and promote people with disabilities while increasing employee engagement and productivity we are creating this Research Working Group - *Improving Employment Outcomes for Employees with Disabilities*. The group will create cross-functional

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insights for business and policy decision-makers, and increase incorporation of new findings into practice, by convening HR professionals with their non-HR colleagues. A Research Working Group is a rapid and targeted deep dive into an emerging issue. By exploring the issue, peer companies can develop a more robust perspective to inform decision-making and shape and create a platform for organizational action. In the process they will work in a hands-on, confidential environment, with leading thinkers and thoughtful executives steeped in the topic and will be guided by The Conference Board Research Working Group team. A Research Working Group is concluded with a confidential report for participants, and the publication of a Conference Board Research Report. This Research Working Group is being created with partial funding from Cornell ILR with a grant from the US Department of Education. See Appendix for description of the grant program.

This Research Working Group will focus on the following questions:

1. What are the best practices (i.e. organizational structure/managerial strategy) that lead to increased successful participation by the disabled in the workforce?
2. What are the impediments to success and how can they be overcome?
3. What lessons should companies and their stakeholders draw from these best practices and how should they inform training/education initiatives?
4. What does success for the disabled employee look like and how should this be measured?

The members of the Research Working Group may add to this list during its meetings.

Who should join?

Each company will send two executives to participate in the Research Working Group; specifically, a senior Human Resources or Diversity executive with responsibility for developing and implementing workforce strategies as well as a line executive who has been charged with implementing the strategies. This cross-functional composition of this group is critical to uncovering unique insights into differences that may exist across functions in managerial (mis)perceptions about people with disabilities, the obstacles facing managers in the implementation of disability-management practices, the accommodation of employees with disabilities, and the inclusion of people with disabilities. The combination of different stakeholder perspectives will yield more innovative and integrative solutions for ways to improve the effectiveness of affirmative disability practices within organizations and stimulate discussion about the disconnect that is often observed between intended HR policies and their implementation in practice.

The Research Process

Because a Research Working Group is driven by the desires and needs of the participating members, some of the details as to the research process will be determined at the first meeting. However, the process should look much like this:

- ❖ **Analyzing the current state of hiring the disabled** The researcher will prepare a brief for the members of the Research Working Group on the current data around hiring the disabled and look at research around programs that are geared to improving employment outcomes.

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- ❖ **Shedding Light on Best Practices** The Research Working Group and the researcher will look to determine and identify best practice examples of recruiting and retaining disabled employees, reviewing both the programs and the measurement systems. While this task is about identifying concrete individual examples, it will also be important to understand common themes and trends about these best practice examples so that we can suggest big picture considerations to the corporate sector as a whole. Questions to be examined include:
 - What has been tried before?
 - What are organizations participating in the research working group *currently* trying out? What is working? What are the underlying processes and dynamics?
 - How can the lessons from various organizations be related to other organizations?
 - What do thoughtful practitioners and practical researchers advocate to *create conditions* for different outcomes?

The Project Deliverables

At the end of the Research Working Group a full length research report summarizing the work of the group will be produced. The goal will be to translate the results that emerge from the research into actionable knowledge that motivates changes in employer practices. The exact format and content will be decided upon by the Research Working Group members after the first meeting.

The Conference Board Team

Key Project Leaders

Mary Wright – Program Director/Facilitator. Ms. Wright has significant experience linking the public and private sectors. This expertise is leveraged in several ways within The Conference Board where she has a portfolio of responsibilities focusing on TCBs goal of working with business to better serve society. She works in three departments: Human Capital as Program Director for The Conference Board Workforce Readiness Initiative; Conferences as Program Director for the Corporate Community Involvement Conference; and Councils as Program Director for the Business and Education Council. Most of her work focuses on how business engages in preparing the 21st century workforce. She has been the project manager and/or co-author for many of TCBs research and publications including: *Are they Really Ready to Work* — the Conference Board's most successful management report - *Ready to Innovate: Are Educators and Executives Aligned on the Creative Readiness of the U.S. Workforce*; *The Ill-Prepared Workforce*; a Gates grant on to develop the case for businesses to invest in post-secondary credentialing programs; and *Employers and U.S. Public Education – Facilitating an Open Discussion about the Role of Business in U.S. Public Schools*. Current work includes developing Ready to Innovate 2; defining and developing sustainability literacy in today's workforce; developing employer-ready material on improving employment outcomes for employees with disabilities; developing a business-sponsored awareness campaign on education reform with the US Army, the Leader to Leader Institute; and designing a national tool for measuring workforce readiness.

Ms. Wright is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Connecticut College with a degree in Urban Affairs and an M.B.A. in public non-profit management from Columbia University. Before joining The Conference Board, Wright worked for Financial Guaranty Insurance Company, a GE Capital company, as a vice

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president in the Public Finance Department and later in new product development and manager of government affairs.

Peter Linkow, Research Leader – Mr. Linkow is president of WFD Consulting and has over thirty years of experience in research and consulting on achieving competitive advantage through business, talent, diversity, and work-life strategies. Among the companies to whom Peter has provided strategy consultation are Alcatel-Lucent, Cummins, Kodak, Texas Instruments and UBS. He also consults on the dispersed workforce and the challenges related to excessive workload. Among Peter's written works are: *Meeting the Challenges of a Dispersed Workforce: Managing Across Language, Culture, Time, and Location* for The Conference Board; *Winning the Competition for Talent: The Role of the New Career Paradigm in Total Rewards* for Workspan; and *Is Your Culture Aligned with Diversity?* for Profiles in Diversity Journal. Prior to joining WFD, Peter consulted with numerous companies on formulating and implementing competitive business strategies and improving their strategic thinking. Earlier in his career, he was CEO of two organizations serving people with disabilities, and a professor of management at Boston University, where he conducted research on strategy and strategic thinking. Peter received his MBA from Harvard Business School, an Ed.M. from Harvard Graduate School of Education and an M.S. in psychology from Indiana University. He received his bachelor's degree from DePauw University.

Program Information

The Conference Board Research Working Group on *Improving Employment Outcomes for Employees with Disabilities* will begin in the spring of 2011. During the year, Research Working Group members will meet in person for three two-day sessions. The group may also meet virtually for web conferences between meetings.

Meetings:

First meeting: April 18 -20, 2011 (depending on availability of members) in New York City, at The Conference Board

Second meeting: July 2011 – Exact date and location to be determined

Final meeting: October 2011 – Exact date and location to be determined

Participation Fee: The cost of the Research Working Group will be \$7,500 with each participating company sending two executives. Some of the cost of the operating the Research Working Group is provided by the grant from Cornell.

To join or for more information, contact Mary Wright, Program Director at +1 212 339 0285, or mary.wright@conference-board.org.

The Conference Board is a global, independent business membership and research association working in the public interest. Our mission is unique: to provide the world's leading organizations with the practical knowledge they need to improve their performance and better serve society. The Conference Board is a non-advocacy, not-for-profit entity holding 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status in the U.S.

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About the Grant

Cornell University – School of Industrial and Labor Relations has received a grant from Department of Education to create new knowledge on employer practices in the employment of people with disabilities. To address the employment inequalities encountered by people with disabilities, Cornell University¹ will look broadly across America’s workplaces by collaborating with five employer member organizations representing the interests of large Fortune 1000 and small businesses,² and employers across industries. The various organizations are charged with examining current employer practices in high growth, high demand and economically vital business sectors as well as both large and small businesses in a number of different regions. This variety will enable us to discover differences in key business/economy sectors and identify issues for people with disabilities to access job opportunities in growth industries.³ We will also examine the effect of the preconceptions and prior experiences of supervisors, HR professionals, top management, and employees with and without disabilities on workplace culture and the relationship between employer practices and employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Through a series of 13 research and 14 training, dissemination and technical assistance projects, the project will: (a) create new knowledge of specific employer practices most strongly associated with desired employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and the prevalence of these practices; (b) increase knowledge about how these practices relate to employer success in hiring, retention, and promotion of individuals with disabilities; and (c) increase incorporation of these findings into practice and policy by collaborating with employer groups to develop, evaluate, or implement strategies to promote utilization of positive practices identified. The project brings together an impressive team of seasoned researchers and practitioners across a variety of disability, HR, compensation, economics, management interests, and representatives of national organizations representing large and small businesses and willing company partners.

The research findings of this project will serve to inform the development of demand side interventions to improve the employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Results will be disseminated to employer networks reaching employers of different sizes and sectors, HR professionals, supervisors, people with disabilities and their family members and representatives (disability advocacy organizations), RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers (TACEs) serving state vocational rehabilitation agencies; policy makers; current and future researchers and rehabilitation service providers (graduate students); the media and the general public.

¹ The Cornell University team will be led by Cornell University’s Employment and Disability Institute, in collaboration with the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS), Institute for Compensation Studies (ICS), Human Capital Development (HCD) Program, and the Survey Research Institute (SRI).

² Partner employer organizations include: The Conference Board (TCB), Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), and Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC).

³ According to the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, the current growth industries are: advanced manufacturing, aerospace, automotive, bio-technology, construction, energy, financial services, geospatial, health care, hospital, information technology, retail, and transportation (High Growth Job Training Initiative, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, downloaded from <http://www.doleta.gov/BRG/JobTrainInitiative/#TargetedIndustries>, June 13, 2010).

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RWG Application

Improving Employment Outcomes for Employees with Disabilities

Yes, we would like to participate in this Research Working Group. We understand that in order to qualify for RWG membership, our company must be an Associate member of The Conference Board.

The fee for the Research Working Group is \$7,500.

Member Information:	Primary Member	Additional Member
Name:		
Nickname for Badge:		
Title:		
Company:		
Address:		
Email Address:		
Telephone:		
Cellular:		
Fax:		
Assistant's Name		
Assistant's Email:		
Assistant's Telephone:		
How did you learn about this Working Group?	<input type="checkbox"/> Mailing <input type="checkbox"/> TCB Website <input type="checkbox"/> Referral, if so by whom? <input type="checkbox"/> Email promotion <input type="checkbox"/> Email Express <input type="checkbox"/> Director of Associate Services <input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please return this application to **Angie Hughes**, Telephone: **(212) 339-0463**; Fax: **(212) 836-9707**
 Email: angie.hughes@conferenceboard.org

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Membership Status: Associate -Non-Associate	Former Working Group Member: Yes/No	Name of Former WG:	Department Number: 160
Stars Verification: Yes/No	ID Number:	Project Number:	Working Group Leader Approval: Yes/No
Council Membership: Council Name:	Company ID: Invoice Mail Date/Method:	Invoice Request to Accounting:	