



ACCOMMODATING DIFFERENTLY ABLED IN THE WORKFORCE: NEED, EFFECTIVENESS AND STRATEGIES TO INCORPORATE DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

Differently abled people or persons with disability in the workforce poses a challenge as well as source of potential before the organisation in terms of providing equal employment opportunity and enhancing organisational performance. Therefore, this paper highlights the need to develop an approach for including differently abled in the thereby enhancing employee morale, employee productivity and overall job satisfaction. It suggests the need to incorporate differently abled in the workforce, the effectiveness of including differently abled on the individual and organisational performance and finally it suggests strategies to incorporate diversity in the workplace by including a strata of differently abled in the workforce.

Keywords: *Differently Abled Workforce, Workforce Diversity, Need for diversity, Strategies for diversity*

Introduction:

The World Health Organisation Report (2011) asserts that the proportion of disabled people in the total population is approximately 15% and the major part of which falls in the developing nations. The ILO defines a disabled person as “an individual whose prospects of securing, returning to, retaining and advancing in suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of a duly recognized physical, sensory, intellectual or mental impairment”. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 “An individual with a disability is a person who: has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. Major life activities include functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, bending, communicating, and working.” The major part of disabled people lies in the developing nations and it poses a challenge to manage and accommodate such diverse workforce in terms of providing equal opportunities and scope for employment. For example, World Bank Report ‘People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes’ (2007) signifies a fall in the employment rate from 42.7% in the year 1991 to 37.6% in the year 2002. Thus, there is a need to develop a systematic approach for the accommodation of Differently Abled people or persons with disability in the organisations. This paper will discuss as to why there is a need to assimilate Differently Abled in the workforce and what gains can be expected in terms of

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efficiency. The last part will discuss about various strategies to incorporate diversity by creating a heterogeneous pool of workforce including the Differently Abled Persons.

Need and Effectiveness of strategies for Differently Abled People in the Workforce:

Differently abled people serves as a great source of potential and diversity in the organisation (Macy, 1996). According to the Census of India (2011), the population has a varied mix with around 4 lakh people falling in the Differently abled or persons with disability (PwD) category. With the growth rate of around 17% in the population during the year 2001-11, India is becoming one of the contenders of being the next superpower along with the contribution of its diverse workforce which includes Differently abled persons. The reduction of cultural and demographic barriers helps in the creation of a diverse talent pool of employees across the globe and it helps in rising the acceptance level of differently abled diversity. (SHRM, 2009) Disability in people assigns a greater weight on employment, because persons with disability are often secluded socially (Hall, 2010) and the employment opportunities provided results in tackling this isolation (Isaac et al. 2010). World Report on Disability (2011) asserts that the employment rate is only 53 % and 20 % for men and women with disabilities respectively. While the proportion of non-disabled men and women in the working employed population is 65% and 30% respectively. Hence, there is a need for an all-round approach for the inclusion of disabled people in the workforce. The uneven and unjustified proportion in employment raises questions on the effectiveness of the policies to accommodate diversity in the organisations. Regulations and interventions by the government in the employment policy matters of the companies helps to maintain a diverse workforce but the overall effectiveness of the programmes is questionable. The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, reinforces the organisations to employ 5% of the total employees from the disabled category. There are various other measures taken up to ensure employment opportunities for the disabled. Vocational rehabilitation centres (VRCs), Special Employment Exchanges and organisations like National Employment Service are formed with a vision to provide employment opportunities to the disabled. These organisation look up and assess the remaining capacity of the disabled persons and provide them with necessary training which enables them to be employable in the job market. Even after all the regulations and legislations, the reality check on paper tells us a different story. United Nations Report (2007) claims that as much as 74% out of the total disabled persons are unemployed in India, which poses a serious question on the legislations and the welfare schemes formulated and applied by the Government and other organisations. While there are initiatives taken by many MNCs like Proctor & Gamble to include persons with disability in the workforce, yet the scope is limited. Employment opportunities for Disabled in the MNCs is available only if the normal routine work is not affected or the company does not have to make changes in the overall infrastructure (Hempbill & kulik, 2016). According to the World Report on Disability (2011) by World Health Organisation, there are several challenges that persons with disability are facing to make themselves employable in the job market:

- I. Dearth of education/training or Economic resources available among PWDs,
- II. Dissenting attitude of employer,
- III. Lack of flexibility by PWD employees due to non-adjusting changes required at work place,
- IV. Social disgrace because of prevalent superstition for PwD employees.

Strategies to accommodate Differently Abled People in the organisation:

Various policy changes can be incorporated and applied in the organisation in order to accommodate differently abled people in the organisation. This will require an all-round holistic change on the part of the organisation as a whole.⁶

- 1) Architectural Changes:
 - a) Creation of ramps and automatic sliding doors;
 - b) Wide doors and broad corridors to render wheelchair movement easy;
 - c) Signage – Braille and/or Bright light boards with large font alphabets;
 - d) Audio system installed at lifts, floors and emergency exits;

- e) Lowering the height of work platforms, tea/coffee machines, and alarm bell;
- f) Toilet modifications according to Universal Design;
- g) Suitable adaptations in chairs/table and lighting system;
- 2) Individualistic Adaptations:
 - a) Work assignments in electronic format for hearing and mobility impaired;
 - b) Audio-taped or Braille text for visually challenged;
 - c) Adaptive equipment as per the need;
 - d) Computers with voice output, spell checkers, specialized software;
 - e) Interpreters, real time captions, note-takers for hearing impaired.
- 3) Education and awareness:
 - a) Workshops to create sense of empathy towards PWD people;
 - b) Manuals and worksheets to spread awareness about physical and non-physical disabilities – to eradicate orthodox beliefs;
 - c) Encouraging group/team work to foster equality;
 - d) Creating such scales of performance that measures conduct towards differently-abled.
- 4) Special Employment Service Providers:
 - a) Job-search support such as resume preparation, training assessment;
 - b) Render co-worker and employer support;
 - c) Career counselling or employment related assistance;
 - d) Furnishing information related to workplace modifications required, details of support services/NGOs

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