EXPLORING SUCCESSFUL HIRING AND RETENTION PRACTICES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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INTRODUCTION

- People with disabilities (PWD) continue to be less connected to the labor force compared to people without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

- PWD experience negative stigmas, specifically amongst employers, around PWD's ability to perform job duties and interact with coworkers, or concerns about the misconceptions of additional costs associated with hiring PWD (Bezyak, Iwanaga, Moser & Chan, 2021; Yaghmaian et al., 2019).

- Focus of our research is to better understanding of employers' perspectives on PWD that could provide insights into how employers may be able to improve the employment outcomes for people with disabilities.
PREVIOUS LITERATURE

• Perceptions of PWD directly impact the hiring and retention of PWD
  • Hiring Process
    • Henry et al., 2014; Houtenville and Kalagryou, 2015; Ju et al., 2012; Kaye et al., 2011; McDonough et al., 2021
  • Knowledge of Disability
    • Chan et al., 2010; Copeland et al., 2010; Habeck et al., 2010; Sprong et al., 2019
  • Employer Infrastructures impacting hiring and retention of PWD
    • Erickson et al., 2014; Rudstam et al., 2013
GAPS TO FILL

- Previous research has largely focused on applying quantitative approaches when exploring employers’ perceptions of hiring and retaining PWD.
- Rich information can be gained by allowing employers to personally expand on their hiring and retention practices of PWD.
RESEARCH AIM

- Aim: Identify strategies that are successful in facilitating increased employment and retention of people with disabilities

Research Question

What are common themes amongst exemplary employers that provide inclusive work environments and promote the hiring and retention of people with disabilities?
METHODS

• Semi-structured interviews
• Selected 4 employers to participate. Interviewed both direct hiring managers and senior management.
• All interviews took place via Zoom and were recorded and transcribed
• Themes were developed using the phrenetic iterative process.
RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Hiring Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development and Advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainings that Go Beyond Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Design of Accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability as a Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence to Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THEME 1: EMPOWERING HIRING MANAGERS

• Exemplary employers invest a considerate number of resources to empower hiring managers to effectively meet their needs
• Most evident during the hiring process
• Adaptable interviewing practices to best allow the hiring manager to assess candidates on what is actually needed to perform a job
THEME 2: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT

• Employers invest in developing PWD skills
• Employers hire PWD in positions that have career advancement opportunities
• Employers have PWD in leadership roles within their organization
THEME 3: COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- Employers invest in partnerships
- Seek experts in the community when in need
- Don’t need to be an expert in disabilities to hire a person with a disability
THEME 4: TRAININGS THAT GO BEYOND AWARENESS

- Trainings focused on inclusion
- Trainings that established an expectation that all employees were responsible for an inclusive environment
THEME 5: UNIVERSAL DESIGN OF ACCOMMODATIONS

• Actively seek ways to develop universal accommodations that are beneficial to all employees

• Actively sought to address stigmas around accommodations
THEME 6: RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

• Prioritized responding to accommodation requests, one company had a 24 hour turnaround time for all accommodations in practice

• Employers stated that it was about validating PWD but also best way to maximize productivity of employee
THEME 7: DISABILITY AS A DIVERSITY

• Employers valued and sought out ways to ensure PWD were represented
• Employers sought out feedback from employees with disabilities
• Developed groups and presented leadership opportunities to help foster growth of PWD
THEME 8: CONFIDENCE TO FAIL

• Accepted that there may be times when things don’t work out
• Seek feedback on failures and try to improve
• View failures as an opportunity to grow
DISCUSSION

• *Habeck et al (2010)* research indicate that employers with great awareness of the American with Disabilities Act also had greater commitment toward including disability as a diversity initiative.

• *Solovieva, Dowler & Walls (2011)* research indicated along with having relatively low cost when implementing workplace accommodations, there are also numerous indirect benefits for implementing workplace accommodations including an increase in interactions with co-workers, increase and company productivity, amongst others.
This study provides insight into what exemplary employers are doing. It is our hope that this research can be used practically by other employers to improve hiring practices, provide structure around supporting PWD, and developing inclusive work environments for PWD.
LIMITATIONS

- Limited Sample Size
- Focused on Exemplary Employers
- All Employers from Large Organizations
FUTURE RESEARCH

• Understand hiring and retention practices of exemplary employers at smaller businesses
• Expand on the themes of this research to test effectiveness of these practices
• Impacts on retention rates of employees with disabilities; Cost/benefit analysis
• Further examination of whether these exemplary practices differ across disabilities