




**Disability, Diversity, and Inclusion:  
Lessons Learned from Industry Leaders**

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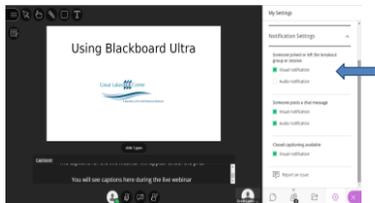
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# DISABILITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED FROM INDUSTRY LEADERS

Tuesday February 18, 2020

**DISABILITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT COLLEGE OF APPLIED HEALTH SCIENCES**

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Funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (grant number 90DP0091-02-00)

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## Agenda

- 1 Key policies supporting disability employment.
- 2 Recent research on disability in the workplace.
- 3 The business case for disability inclusion.
- 4 Findings from research on organizational strategies that position disability as diversity.
- 5 Discussion and recommendations for practice.
- 6 Questions.

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## Overview

**ADA Great Lakes Center research project**  
One of four research projects on ADA implementation  
<http://www.adagreatlakes.org/Research/>

**The Goal of this Project**  
To improve understanding about organizational factors that lead to excellence in ADA compliance, implementation, and disability programming.

**Steps in the Project**

- Review of Corporate Social Responsibility Reports.
- Qualitative interviews.

**Purpose**

1. To identify how leaders in the region recruit, support, and retain people with disabilities.
2. To explore how disability is approached in Diversity and Inclusion efforts.
3. To understand lessons learned and key takeaways for businesses interested in inclusion efforts.

**In their own words (quote from interview)**

"...[T]oo many times it is viewed that diversity inclusion is about gender and race and ethnicity, whatever. But that disability is not seen in some ways, it's not even brought to the table... as you look at the workforce that's coming up, there is not a lot of people and we all know that disability is the largest gapped, untapped resource that's out there. So, I believe that larger companies, maybe even medium size, are at least starting to think about it and looking at where are they going to find that talent."

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## Methodology

**Research Questions**

1. How is disability included in broader diversity efforts?
2. What strategies do organizations use to implement and promote disability as diversity?

**Review of Corporate Social Responsibility practices**

- Companies that scored 100% on 2016 USBLN (aka Disability:IN) Disability Equality Index.
- 2015/2016 corporate social responsibility report or equivalent.
- Public facing reporting (e.g. found on company's website).

**Interviews with Disability and Inclusion professionals**

- Representatives of organizations recommended for disability inclusion efforts.
- Key knowledge of multiple aspects of organizational strategies.

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## Disability employment in the U.S.

- People with disabilities participate in the labor force at a much lower rate compared to people without disabilities in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

People without disabilities	<b>77.3%</b>	People with disabilities	<b>33.3%</b>
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- People with disabilities are also more likely to be under employed than people without disabilities, as almost twice as many PWD have part time employment.<sup>2</sup>

People without disabilities	<b>17%</b>	People with disabilities	<b>33%</b>
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- Employment continues to be a major issue for PWD and point of advocacy.

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## Policies to promote workplace/workforce inclusion

- Several policies have been developed to address these disparities.

**Title I of the ADA** <sup>3</sup>

- Prevents discrimination on the basis of disability.
- Secures reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

**Employment First** <sup>4</sup>

- State lead initiatives that draw on multiple strategies to encourage community based, competitive employment for people with disabilities.
- 40 states have Employment First policies or legislation.

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** <sup>5</sup>

- Enhances regulations on activities done by state systems to encourage competitive employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

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## Policy impact and areas of concerns

Implementation barriers associated with policies and related research:

- 1 Focus on complying with the law, rather than moving beyond compliance and changing workplace cultures.
- 2 Misunderstanding of accommodations and rights as "special treatment".
- 3 Traditional focus in research and practice on the "supply side" of employment rather than "demand side" of employment. 4,7

**Supply side:** focus on individuals for training, skill building, and other ways to prepare people with disabilities for employment.  
**Demand side:** focus on employment environment to explore market needs and skillsets that employers want in employees.

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## Supporting disability inclusion: Research trends

Research is shifting towards identifying business practices that enhance disability inclusion in the workplace rather than individual attributes.

Commonly reported business practices linked to inclusive workplaces.

 Flexible management 8	 Understanding of workplace accommodations 9	 Employee engagement initiatives 10	 Diversity training 11	 Top level buy-in 8,11,12
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## Disability and organizational culture

- Diversity and inclusion are complex concepts that are impacted by organizational culture and employment practices. Disability is not typically considered part of workplace "diversity."

**DIVERSITY:** differences in experiences, thoughts, and demographics of employees 13

**INCLUSION:** "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265)

- 82% of sampled organizations from our research (received accolades for disability inclusion) included disability in diversity and inclusion statements 14
- While disability is increasingly becoming a focus of business diversity and inclusion initiatives, it is still often overlooked as a dimension of diversity 15, 16

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## Shifting towards disability as diversity

Reasons for businesses have disability inclusion initiatives. <sup>17</sup>

**Compliance with public policies**

- Comply with regulations.
- Shown to have a limited effect on HR or other business practices.

**Social responsibility**

- Employers seek social legitimacy.
- Disability inclusion seen as the "right thing to do" by the public.

**Benefits of inclusion**

- Business case for diversity and inclusion.
- Benefits of diversity and inclusion strategies outweigh potential costs.

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## The business case for diversity and inclusion

- Diversity is not just a "good thing to do" but is recognized as "good business".
- Market value in fully supporting diverse employee base to match diverse markets.
- Disability groups largely untapped as source of innovation.

*Diversity and inclusion strategies have been shown to:*<sup>11</sup>

  
 Increase customer bases.

  
 Recruit top talent.

  
 Encourage innovative thinking.

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## Business case – Employer benefits

- Other research has identified specific benefits unique to including employees with disabilities.

Employees with disabilities have been shown to have longer tenure, which decreases turnover costs.<sup>18</sup>

Providing accommodations can:

- increase productivity,
- increase likelihood of employees to stay with the company,
- improve employee morale and job satisfaction.<sup>19</sup>

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# METHODS AND APPROACH

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## Corporate social responsibility reports

Reviewed strategies found in 34 publicly available CSR reports from companies recognized for their disability inclusion efforts.

**88%** headquartered in the U.S.

**88%** Listed on the Fortune 500

**Most common industries**

- Healthcare
- Aerospace
- Technology
- Financial Services
- Airlines

**All companies had more than 4000 employees.**

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## Organizational interviews

Qualitative in-depth interviews with representatives of 11 large organizations (5000+ employees) located in Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

### FAST FACTS

- All have a disability-based employee resource group (ERG)
- Five have paid positions working on disability inclusion
- Nine explicitly include disability in supplier diversity initiatives.

**Industries include**

- Insurance
- Financial services
- Accounting and consulting
- Healthcare
- Medical technology

**Roles of interviewees include**

- Human resources
- Diversity & inclusion
- Disability & inclusion
- Recruitment specialists.

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# HOW DO BUSINESSES APPROACH DISABILITY AND INCLUSION?

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## Commonly reported CSR strategies

Strategy	Percentage
Employee resource group related to disability	68%
Highlight disability inclusion awards	59%
Supplier diversity	44%
List disability benefits package for employees	24%
List employee accommodation resources	21%
Disability specific employee training	12%
Philanthropic giving and community partnerships	47%
Customer outreach and accommodations	35%
Targeted recruitment	29%
Disability included in D&I section	68%

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## Approach to diversity & inclusion (D&I)

*[In their own words] "So disability is one of the big eight...dimensions of diversity. And so, that's one that we have woven into our [diversity and inclusion] strategy."*

- All of the organizations interviewed have existing D&I infrastructure, and a specific commitment and effort towards supporting a diverse workforce.
- Disability is integrated into broader D&I efforts through:
  - Corporate Social Responsibility planning.
  - Employee Groups and internal communications.
  - Broader Diversity Council initiatives.
  - Recruitment.
- Three key strategies identified by all interviewees: Communities of Practice, Employee Resource Groups, and Senior Leadership Buy-in.

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## Findings 3: Senior leadership buy-in

**What is senior leadership buy-in?**

- Expressed support and participation in disability inclusive strategies from top level senior leadership.
- All organizations strongly recommended the need for senior leadership buy-in for disability inclusion to:
  - Set the tone within the organization.
  - Raise awareness of the disability inclusion issues.
  - Ensure other members of the organization were also committed to disability inclusion efforts.
  - Gain support and resources to accomplish disability inclusion activities.

**What does senior leadership involvement include?**

- Executive sponsors of Employee Resource Groups (some assigned, others volunteer with a personal connection).
- Diversity councils or other groups comprised of senior leaders that set strategic direction.
- Senior leaders participating in diversity inclusion activities (such as self-identification campaigns).
- Senior leaders participating in communities of practice (such as local disability inclusion strategies).
- Designated senior leader roles for disability inclusion (such as providing budgets, approving activities, spreading awareness, and providing direction on disability inclusive strategies).

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## In their own words

"I think that people can only be successful with top down. I really do. I think you need to have the leadership support, the tone at the top, and I know these are all cliché phrases... But it's true. Having them push D&I as something that's part of the core of the firm and our core values, those are the types of words we use. And I think a majority of the people at the firm believe in that as well. But it's because the top down has been so vocal on this topic."

"I think a lot of it ... starts with the senior management of organizations as long as they're supportive and provide the resources. I think ...if [employees] can see that their leaders are supportive on [disability inclusion] efforts... then I think it gets spread across the firm... it can kind of be embraced more so."

"I think it starts with the top of the house and through that engagement, we... continue to work through our senior HR partners and our business leaders on a country level. We've got various steering committees ...So, it's not just one team driving [disability inclusion initiatives]. It's truly a partnership working with the senior leaders from the business and HR perspective to determine... the rollout plan."

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## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Collaboration for disability inclusion

What can be done to better support disability inclusion in the workplace?

- Business networking groups to share strategies and resources, facilitated through advocacy organizations, public agencies, and businesses.
- Working groups and conferences on regional and national levels to enhance information sharing and thought leadership.
- Partnerships and internal dialogue through development and use of internal audit tools, like Disability:IN and National Organization on Disability.
- Training and consulting on disability inclusive strategies by advocacy groups and other experts.

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## Discussion and key recommendations

- Start with "low hanging fruit" through business to business networks, and conversations with local Communities of Practice.
- Review diversity and inclusion strategies: is disability included alongside other aspects of diversity, inclusion, and identity?
- Disability inclusion is an *ongoing and evolving* process.
- Explore the business case for disability inclusion. Internal organizational efforts mirror external markets. Transformative potential of internal practices.
- Find a balance to sustain growth. Find a champion but don't let them be your only resource. Find a community partner but don't let them be your only network. Top-down commitment is essential but only one part of the process.

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## Recommendations *In their own words*

"I think the most basic level...if an employer can get employees in similar situations together just to provide support to one another, I think that's a great start. I think that the ideal level, the most mature level, this needs to be integrated across the employee life cycle...part of recruiting, ...part of the onboarding, ...part of the ongoing development. Making sure the employees are aware of the support that's out there, throughout their entire duration at the company."

"Disability etiquette. I think that's something that a lot of people don't have, they don't grasp, they don't even know that they need to learn about it, and as much as you can raise awareness at your firm, make sure people are treated the way that they want to be treated. Teach people what that means, because a lot of times people mean well... So it's, in my mind, the best thing is that we start doing it; openly having conversations about differences, and not making it taboo, on the contrary, encouraging uncomfortable conversations to take place."

"...how do we get connected and build that strong thought leadership, best practice sharing, better understanding, because every organization is going to be built a little bit differently. And they're going to have their different approaches, but I'm a firm believer of understanding your organization well enough to know what's going to work well, what's not, and how do you infuse a little bit more of that stuff that's going to work well into your existing environment and slowly start to change culture in a positive way."

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## QUESTIONS?

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