

# Employer's attitude towards hiring differently abled people and the underlying reasons

Preeti R. Chechani, Research scholar, Sardar Patel University Vallabh Vidya nagar Anand Gujarat India,  
Dr.R.P. Patel, Professor, Sardar Patel University Vallabh Vidya nagar Anand Gujarat India.

**Abstract :** The unemployment rate of the differently abled population is consistently high across geographical sections. Various reasons contribute towards the poor representation of the differently abled people in the main stream workforce. The attitude employers have regarding disability hiring is among the most prominent ones. The study attempts to elaborate the underlying reasons with empirical evidences.

**IndexTerms -** *business fears, Disability, Differently abled people, Employment, Employer's attitude, workplace accommodation.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The recent years have seen a very strong wave of change in the way education and vocational trainings were delivered. These changes were in the direction of positivity, integration and inclusion of the differently abled people in various fronts. To reach the next level of complete acceptance of the differently abled people at all fronts of life can only be reached by demolishing the many barriers.

Understanding disability is an important step in deciphering the problems related to the employment of differently abled people and the relation of the employers attitude towards the same.

"Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations"(WHO,2017).

Disability is defined as the result in the life experience of an individual because of the interaction of the external environmental factors and the bodily impairments. Employment remains the most important factor in the process of mainstreaming the marginalized populations. Differently abled people are subject to discrimination since ages in all walks of life including education and employment as well. A gain full employment can help them generate a living for themselves and make these people self -sufficient. The adversities posed by the job market often push these people to margins. A little help and positive attitude towards them can go long way to help the come out of their comfort zone and venture in the world of opportunities.

The factors which can affect the job market experiences of the differently abled people can be categorized in three broad sections. The first is the problems at individual level the second being the characteristics of a particular job and the third is the employer's outlook regarding disability hiring. The study strives to understand the third factor which deals with the employer's attitude regarding hiring differently abled people. The factors ranges from the tangible ones like cost of accommodation to the intangible ones like fears and perception among the employers. The following part of the paper is attributed to a brief of the different factors.

### Cost of accommodation

Accessible workplaces can enable the differently abled people perform better to achieve their full potential. Small modifications like handrails, ramps, accessible furniture and sitting arrangements etc. can make the differently abled employee almost independent in their day to day work life. Further assistive technology has also proved to be immensely helpful in enabling the differently abled people to adjust at workplace. Software specially designed to help visually impaired people has opened a lot of new job profile for these people. Many employers are hesitant in employing differently abled workforce as they are reluctant to put extra financial resources for the accommodation related changes. But there are evidences which showed that the employers have begun to value the contribution of the differently abled worker more than the cost of accommodation.

A study conducted in Australia in the year 2002 showed that employers who had experience working with differently abled people gave more importance to performance than the cost which occurs in accommodating the differently abled workers while taking decisions related to recruiting and retaining them. The authors claimed that the employers were more interested in working with the employment service provider to help the differently abled aspirants like a partner. The employers gave more importance to the impact on overall organizational performance while hiring differently abled people (Graffam, Shinkfield, Smith, & Polzin, 2002).

In contrast there are studies which show that the employers have the misconception that they have to make a lot of alteration in their workplace to make it accessible and that requires a lot of capital. They think is a financial burden which can influence their profit and loss balance. This is a big reason behind the reluctance shown by the employers for the disability hiring initiatives (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011).

### Past experiences

Contact with the differently abled people is very helpful in understanding them as an individual. It is the best way to understand their strengths weaknesses and aspirations. The stigmas attached to the capabilities of the differently abled people have always deterred their growth. They are kept out of the mainstream as they are thought to be highly dependent non-productive individuals. Fortunately due the growing awareness and activism more organizations have started experimenting with hiring differently abled people which is helping in removing the stigmas. The myths and misconception can only be removed with actual experiments. If the employers do not take decision based on their own experiences the situation would never improve.

Employers who had past experiences of hiring and working with differently abled talent were even more willing to sustain the practice of inclusion (Diksa & Rogers,1996).

### Type of impairment

The different disability demands for different approaches in accommodation. Some differently abled people have less accommodation requirement while others have more depending on the type and severity of the disability or impairment. The concerns of the employers vary from the safety and performance levels of the individual employees to the cost of accommodating them at the workplace.

Employer organizations showed high level of concerns and skepticism while hiring people with intellectual disability in comparison to people with physical impairments (Diksa & Rogers,1996).

One approach to address the issue could be searching a best fit job profile for the individual differently abled aspirants according to the impairment and the demands of the job duties.

### **Legal obligation**

The different laws have been there to protect the interest of the weaker sections of the society. These laws are empowering the differently abled people against the discrimination and atrocities but sometimes they work as a negative force as well. The employers show reluctance in hiring differently abled people in the fear of unnecessary legal proceedings. They fear that by employing differently abled people they will have to bear the financial consequences of any type of workplace injuries and other mishaps (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011).

### **Lack of awareness**

The attitude of the employer organization plays a big role in recruitment decisions related to differently abled people. If the top management shows willingness the doors to the workplace opens earlier for the differently abled people.

Ignorance regarding the various factors related to the differently abled workers leads employers to take decisions based on irrational perceptions while hiring the differently abled people. To generate awareness the activists and NGOs can play a great role of communicators. But the importance of the firsthand experience of working with the differently abled people cannot be denied.

In a study conducted with a sample of fortune 500 companies in 1991 it was found that the willingness of the employers to have differently abled people in their workforce was positively influenced by their previous positive experiments of hiring them. The study found that the people working executive positions in the sample companies admitted there is a huge scope of improvement in the direction of integrating the differently abled talent pool in the company's human capital (McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag,1991)..

Doubts about the capability of differently abled workers

Employers often have negative perception regarding the capability of the differently abled people. And this prejudiced mindset workers as a deterrent in creating an inclusive work environment.

The employers often feel that hiring differently abled people will bring extra burden of understanding training and accommodating them. The employers show reluctance in hiring the differently abled people as they are skeptic about the legislative obligations for accommodation requirements. They have doubts regarding the cost which will occur while making the accessibility related modification. The employers depend on the long prevailing stereo type as they lack familiarity on the subject of successful accommodation of the differently abled people. They visualize differently abled people as less capable frequent absentees (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011).

### **Fear of unknown implications**

The employers have their own fears related to hiring differently abled people. The perception of the employers is that they will have to bear the cost of the employee even if they do not perform. They fear that if they hold a differently abled worker accountable for nonperformance they have to justify their action on various grounds while they can easily do that with a non-disabled employee. The wise solution to this is in knowing the demands of the business world. The activists should not only protect the differently abled people but also understand the perspective of the employers as equal stake holders (Peck & Kirkbride,2001).

The attitude of employer plays a prominent role in shaping the recruitment and retention policies for the differently abled workers. The negativity carried by the employers has kept the differently abled people out the main stream work forces since long. The employers believes that the differently abled employee requires more time and attention and they are not able to perform all the job duties properly (Peck & Kirkbride,2001).

### **The company image**

There are a lot of corporates which started hiring differently abled people as corporate social responsibility initiatives and later carried the practice forward. The effect of hiring differently abled people made a positive impact on the company's image. The customers perceived the companies as fare and responsible by looking at their inclusive policies. This resulted in positive business outcome for companies.

Companies now are hiring more and more differently abled people and communicating their inclusive practices to the customers as well to gain positive customer response. This practice is benefitting the companies in two ways.at one hand they are finding a reliable and sincere work force from the untapped talent pool of the differently abled population. While at the other hand the customers are feeling strongly positive about their work practices (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler & Parker,2006).

### **Conclusion**

Differently abled people have been subject to social exclusion and poor economic conditions. Their very basic rights are a compromised every day because of different reasons they are not accountable for. The government initiatives largely are related to their rehabilitation which is done in separation and not with the main stream programs for the rest of the population. To remove the hurdles it is important that there are integrated efforts from all the stake holders of society including government, NGOs, educationist, employers and disabled and non-disabled people as well. The onus of protecting the weaker sections is on the rest of the society and it is more of a responsibility and not just a philanthropic exercise. Differently abled people are often marked as non-productive. This makes them confined to their boundaries feeling deprived of the opportunities to prove otherwise. The freedom to move work and lead a fulfilling social life with economic independence is a dream too far for many differently abled people. The inclusion of the differently abled people in the economic activities makes sense as the cost of keeping this big section of society out of the labor force creates negative impact on the overall utilization of human resources. If the acceptance of these people increases the situation will automatically improve (Isaac, Raja, & Ravanan, 2010).

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