

Employers' Attitudes Towards Hiring and Retaining People with Disabilities: A Review of the Literature

Jana Burke,¹ Jill Bezyak,² Robert T. Fraser,³ Joseph Pete,⁴ Nicole Ditchman,⁵ and Fong Chan⁴

¹ *Mariposa Professional Services*

² *University of Northern Colorado*

³ *University of Washington-Seattle*

⁴ *University of Wisconsin-Madison*

⁵ *Illinois Institute of Technology*

This selective review provides an overview of salient research findings related to employers' attitudes towards disability and prospective influences on employers to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Research studies included for review are mainly those which investigated employer attitudes towards disability as predispositions to hiring people with disability. Selected studies were classified into three categories including hiring and accommodating employees with disabilities, work performance, and affective reactions and behavioural intentions of employers. Excluded from the review were studies that investigated other factors influencing employer attitudes toward disability. Altogether 34 research studies from the period of 1987 until 2012 were included in the review. Primary databases for the review included ProQuest, Ebscohost, Lexus Nexus, ERICK Database and the Sage Sociology Collection. This review of the demand-side employment literature suggests employers hold relatively positive attitudes regarding individuals with disabilities. However, employer affective reactions and behavioural intentions of employers towards disability in the work setting were less positive and negatively impact hiring decisions, provision of accommodations and work performance appraisals. Employer attitudes represent an important demand-side factor impacting full participation in competitive employment for individuals with disabilities. While employers report generally positive attitudes toward disability, hiring practices may still be discriminatory. Use by rehabilitation professionals of demand-side strategies with employers would likely result in higher rates of work participation by people with disabilities.

Keywords: employer attitudes, attitudes, disability, employability

Correspondence pertaining to this article should be directed to Fong Chan, Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 403 Education Building, 1000 Bascom Mall, Madison, WI 53706. E-mail at chan@education.wisc.edu.

Rehabilitation researchers and scholars consistently recognise the need to consider contextual and environmental factors in the development of efficacious and effective psychosocial and vocational rehabilitation practices. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF; WHO, 2001) model has gained wide acceptance among international rehabilitation health researchers and professionals as a framework that can be used to support a systematic approach for understanding chronic illness and disability across cultures (Chan, Tarvydas, Blalock, Strauser & Atkins, 2009). In fact, one of the major emphases of the ICF model is the effect environmental factors have on full community participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life, including employment. Competitive employment and other meaningful work activities are fundamental to the well-being of people with and without disabilities (Dutta, Gerverey, Chan, Chou & Ditchman, 2008). Compared to persons who are employed, those who are unemployed tend to experience higher prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders, use alcohol more frequently, and report lower scores on self-esteem and quality of life measures (Dutta et al., 2008). Recognising the value of work in people's lives, vocational rehabilitation professionals have consistently advocated for employment as a fundamental human right.

Yet, the employment rate of people with disabilities remains remarkably low compared to the general population. The economic downturn in recent years has further exacerbated these workforce disparities. In the United States, the most recent government figures indicate that only 17.9% of persons with a disability age 16 years and older are employed, compared to 63.7% of persons without a disability (US Department of Labor, 2012a, 2012b). Moreover, about two-thirds of the unemployed persons with chronic illness and disability indicate that they would like to work but cannot find employment (National Council on Disability, 2007). Unemployment and underemployment problems facing people with disabilities have been made more acute due to the recent financial crisis. The recession has a disproportionate impact on workers with disabilities, with the number of employed workers with disabilities declining at a rate of about two to three times that of workers without disabilities (Fogg, Harrington & McMahon, 2011; Kaye, 2010). Low employment and the recent financial crisis are critical examples of contextual factors that significantly impact employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Given the role these contextual factors play in contributing to employment outcomes, the traditional supply-side approach (i.e., providing medical, psychological, educational, and vocational services to improve functioning, physical stamina and job skills) without taking into account organisational behaviours, employer needs and the changing labour economy is no longer adequate for achieving meaningful employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Chan, Strauser, Gerverey, & Lee, 2010). In other words, supply-side employment models ignore variables related to employer demand (and the interaction of employer demand and the environment) as predictors of employment outcomes for people with disabilities. As such, the need to consider demand-side behaviours and how these employer practice factors interact with personal factors to affect job placement of people with disabilities and return-to-work success of injured workers is increasingly becoming an important research topic

in vocational rehabilitation (Chan et al., 2010; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1992; Habeck, Hunt, Rachel, Kregel, & Chan, 2010).

Employment demand is indeed changing due to shifts in the fundamental economic structure (Chan et al., 2010; Grizzard, 2005), which includes high unemployment rates due to an economic recession and further hinders employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Demand-side employment research can help identify the largest or fastest growth areas of employment opportunities and the skill sets needed for available jobs. Employers are less risk averse in occupations where the demand is high and the supply of qualified workers is low. Preparing people with disabilities for these occupations will likely increase their chances of being hired. The organisational structures of many major companies are also changing. The organisational chart is now flatter (team-based), and the emphasis is on flexibility, productivity, and workplace socialisation skills (Chan et al., 2010; Gilbride & Stensrud, 1992). As a result, rehabilitation professionals must provide assistance to people with disabilities with attention to these recent changes, along with additional barriers to employment as described below.

The US Department of Labor-The Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL-ODEP) conducted a focus group study with employers in 13 major metropolitan areas representing a variety of industries, company sizes and for-profit and not-for-profit organisations to ask employers what they consider as the most important issue affecting the poor hiring and job retention climate for people with disabilities (Grizzard, 2005). The most common answer given was that employers needed more accurate and practical information to dispel preconceptions and concerns about hiring and retaining people with disabilities. DOL-ODEP conducted a large-scale survey as a follow-up to their focus group study (Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma, 2008) to examine employer perspectives on the employment of people with disabilities. Nearly three-fourths (72.6%) of the companies participating in this study cited a major challenge to hiring people with disabilities is that they cannot effectively perform the nature of the work required. Additionally, health care costs, workers compensation costs and fear of litigation are cited as major challenges by small and medium-sized companies. Amir, Strauser and Chan (2009) conducted a focus group study with employers in two large Midwest cities. Participants in their study identified many positive attributes and good reasons for hiring people with disabilities. However, negative attitudes of co-workers or supervisors and the lack of supply of qualified workers with disabilities were frequently cited as major barriers to hiring and retaining people with disabilities. Misperceptions that were held by many employers identified by Amir et al. (2009) include:

- People with disabilities often require extra time to learn new work tasks.
- People with disabilities often require some sort of job accommodations (e.g., specialised equipment, facility modifications, adjustments to work schedules or job duties) to do the job.
- People with disabilities have trouble getting their work done on time and often need others to help them finish the job.
- Co-workers are not very comfortable working with people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities tend to call in sick more often than other workers due to health or personal problems.
- People with disabilities have trouble getting along with others on the job.

Both the DOL-ODEP and Amir et al. (2009) studies concluded that before demand-side employment can become truly effective, research on employer perceptions and attitudes toward hiring and retaining persons with disabilities is needed.

Goals of the Review

The purpose of this article is to examine attitudes of employers toward hiring individuals with disabilities by reviewing the employment and rehabilitation literature. Chan, Lee, Yuen and Chan (2002), describe attitudes as consisting of cognitive, affective and behavioural components. These components influence one's thinking, feelings and behaviour toward the referent. More specifically, this study explored employer attitudes as an environmental factor impacting participation in competitive employment by individuals with disabilities in order to improve understanding regarding this phenomenon and increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Specifically, this review focuses on the hiring process, provision of accommodations, work performance, and affective reactions and behavioural intentions toward employees with disabilities. From the evidence, this review concludes with implications for practices to address employer focused interventions to enhance the work participation of people with disabilities. The specific goals of the reviews were to address the following questions:

1. What are employer attitudes toward hiring and accommodating individuals with disabilities and how do these impact employment outcomes?
2. How do employer attitudes regarding work performance impact the employment of people with disabilities?
3. How do the affective reactions and behavioural intentions of employers at small, medium, and large companies impact employment of people with disabilities?

Method

The authors employed a selective approach to conduct this review of the literature (Helewa & Walker, 2000). The process involved the formulation of the specific questions, a preliminary review of the literature, identifying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, selecting and accessing the literature, assessing the quality of the literature, and analysing and reporting the findings (Green, Johnson & Adams, 2006). This approach was chosen in order to provide a strong, foundational source of information on the topic. The guidelines used were less stringent than those of a systematic literature review, and as a result, it falls lower in the hierarchy of evidence. Despite the lack of stringent guidelines, the current review provides a strong knowledge base for rehabilitation professionals that is easily understood and applicable to practice.

Specifically, a review of vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation counselling, psychology, sociology and business literature served as the foundation for the investigation of employer attitudes toward people with disabilities within the organisational context

of competitive employment. Several inclusion criteria were used to identify relevant research. Articles incorporated into the review were published in the United States from 1987 through 2012. The specific search terms used in this investigation include *attitudes towards people with disabilities, attitude, perception, disability, handicapped, employability and vocational rehabilitation*. Combinations of these terms were also used in the search process. The authors accessed several online resources in order to select quality articles on this topic. Specifically, the online search tools used include ProQuest, Ebscohost, Lexus Nexus, ERICK Database and the Sage Sociology Collection. In addition, the articles incorporated into the review were described as well-designed, empirical studies with clear objectives, participant selection procedures, operational definitions of employer attitudes, and a thorough discussion of data collection and analysis. Studies were excluded from the investigation if they did not meet the criteria described above. Upon completion, the review yielded 34 well-designed studies on the topic area.

Attitudes toward Hiring and Accommodating People with Disabilities

The following qualities are associated with positive and negative attitudes held by employers towards hiring people with disabilities: hiring and accommodations, work performance, affective reactions and behavioural intentions.

Positive Attitudes toward Hiring and Accommodations

Thirteen studies reviewed described positive attitudes held by employers toward workers with disabilities in the hiring process, which include those by Colorez and Geist (1987), Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman and Levy (1992), Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis and Levy (1993), and Weisenstein and Koshman (1991). Findings from these studies indicate both employers and vocational rehabilitation professionals hold moderately positive attitudes toward hiring individuals with disabilities. Global attitudes of employees with disabilities also appear to receive positive ratings from employers rather than specific attitude measures.

Trait oriented studies which examined disability type and personality characteristics with specific attention to work behaviour found that members of a local employer group reported that they considered similar work traits when evaluating job candidates with and without disabilities. For example, a survey of executives of Fortune 500 companies demonstrated positive employer reactions to hiring people with severe disabilities including autism, cognitive impairments and psychiatric disabilities (Levy et al., 1992). Other studies reported employer positive attitudes towards possible career advancement of people with disabilities (Kregel & Unger, 1993). In a study based in the United Kingdom, Stevens (2002) found that employers expressed positive attitudes about applicants with disabilities, although very few respondents had actually hired members of this group. Participants, however, did indicate interest in accepting applications from prospective employees.

Christman and Slaten (1991) reported employer ratings of traits such as intelligence, dependability, stability and potential for success among employees with disabilities. Macan and Hayes (1995) examined interviewers' evaluations of applicants with disabilities and concluded that employers preferred candidates to disclose their

disability to allow discussion of potential work-related issues during the interview. Respondents also indicated they liked the ability to openly address applicants' qualifications without avoidance of the disability discussion.

Millington, Reid and Leierer (1997) reported people with disabilities to be rated higher than individuals without disabilities applying for the same position in terms of satisfactoriness, job knowledge, trainability, dependability and motivation. Social desirability appeared not to be an influence on employer self-reported attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities (Nordstrom et al., 1998).

Employer experience focused studies include those by Morgan and Alexander (2005), Morgan and Russel (2003), and Olson Cioffi, Yovanoff and Mank (2001). For example, Olson et al. (2001) observed employers with experience working with people with mental retardation to hold positive attitudes towards them as employees. Employers with experience hiring individuals with developmental disabilities valued consistent attendance, diversity in the workplace, reduced turnover and collaboration among co-workers provided by this employee group (Morgan & Russel, 2003). Additional research by Morgan and Alexander (2005) indicated that among employers who hired individuals with developmental disabilities, a majority reported that the employment experience had often worked out well. These employers reported that they were also more likely to hire individuals with developmental disabilities again.

Negative Attitudes toward Hiring and Accommodations

While there is a strong indication of positive attitudes toward hiring individuals with disabilities, nine of the studies reviewed revealed negative attitudes and beliefs among employers. For instance, while the previous studies reviewed have suggested positive employer attitudes towards individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, results from a study by Millington, Szymanski and Hanley-Maxwell (1994) indicated that the label of 'mental retardation' in a case vignette negatively affected employers' ratings of work skills related to hiring and employment selection. Bricout and Bentley (2000) asked human resource (HR) personnel to evaluate and make hiring recommendations for applicants with and without disabilities. Respondents rated the candidate without a disability as being more employable and hireable. In a Hong Kong study, employers were asked to respond to four hypothetical applicants for clerical positions – one without a disability and the other three with depression, hearing loss and a mobility impairment, respectively (Pearson et al., 2003). Employers offered a job interview to the applicant without a disability twice as frequently as to the other three applicants.

Research employing survey methods also uncovered negative findings related to hiring practices and provision of accommodations for individuals with disabilities. In one study, HR personnel of Fortune 500 companies expressed negative attitudes towards the employability of people with disabilities with attention to the cost of accommodations and an inability to promote from within the organisation (McFarlin, Song & Sonntag, 1991). Additionally, 66% of small business employers have never hired workers with disabilities (Harrison, 1998). These small business respondents also expressed concerns regarding matching skills and job needs, supervision and training time, and costs related to safety and medical insurance premiums.

Studies have also considered employer concerns with regards to hiring workers with disabilities and related factors. These studies involve national research efforts by the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and additional studies conducted by staff and consultants of the Northwest Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Center (Fraser et al., 2010; Fraser, Ajzen, Johnson, Hebert & Chan, 2012). A common concern expressed was people with disabilities could not perform work across both physical (e.g., shipyard labour) and desk occupations. Other concerns related to fear of legal problems, employee and co-worker safety, attendance, negative work attitudes, adverse impact on co-workers and health insurance costs. The cost of accommodations for people with disabilities was a prominent concern (Fraser et al., 2010; Fraser et al., 2012).

A second larger study was conducted by Domzal and colleagues (2008) through a contract with ODEP, US Department of Labor. This involved a large interactive telephone survey using a representative weighted sampling of 3,797 respondents, with a 51.4% response rate. In addition to 12 sectors of industry, findings were analysed by company size: small companies (5–14 employees), medium-sized companies (15–249 employees) and large companies (250+). Findings related to feelings and perceptions about hiring people with disabilities included the following:

- Only 19% of the companies reported employing people with disabilities.
- Approximately 3% of large companies reported employing people with disabilities.
- Health care costs, workers' compensation and fees relating to litigation were cited as more challenging for companies designated as small and medium-sized, and supervisor uncertainty about how to take disciplinary action was cited as a concern most often by large companies.
- Nearly three-fourths (72%) of all companies cited the nature of their work as too challenging for people with disabilities.
- Attitudes of co-workers and supervisors were among the least frequently cited challenges.
- Companies that did not recruit employees with disabilities cited persuasive information was needed regarding performance productivity of workers with disabilities and how hiring people with disabilities can benefit a company's bottom line.
- Larger companies were more likely to actively recruit people with disabilities (33.8%) vs. smaller companies (7.8%), with small and medium-sized companies requiring persuasive information on work productivity and performance of employees with disabilities.

With results of the literature review indicating both positive and negative attitudes related to hiring and providing accommodations to individuals with disabilities, it is evident that this continues to be an area of concern which significantly impacts the ability of individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment. Table 1 provides a summary of the results presented on hiring and accommodations.

TABLE 1
Results of Hiring and Accommodation Studies

Author(s)	Year	Positive Results	Negative Results
Bricout & Bentley	2000		Worker qualifications
Colorez & Geist	1987	Global attitudes Hiring	
Christman & Slaten	1991	Personality traits Work behaviour	
Domzal et al.	2008		Fear of litigation Global attitudes Hiring Worker qualifications
Fraser, Ajzen, Johnson, Hebert, & Chan	2012		Accommodations Cost Employability Fear of litigation Worker qualifications
Fraser et al.	2010		Accommodations Cost Employability Fear of litigation Worker qualifications
Harrison	1998		Employability Worker qualifications
Kregel & Unger	1993	Career advancement	
Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, & Levy	1992	Global attitudes Hiring	
Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy	1993	Global attitudes Hiring	
Macan & Hayes	1995	Worker qualifications	
McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag	1991		Employability
Millington, Reid, & Leirer	1997	Worker qualifications	
Millington, Szymanski, & Hanley-Maxwell	1994		Disability type
Morgan & Alexander	2005	Disability type	
Morgan & Russell	2003	Disability type	
Nordstrom, Huffaker, & Williams	1998	Hiring	
Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank	2001	Disability type	
Pearson et al.	2003		Hiring
Stevens	2002	Application process	
Weisenstein & Koshman	1991	Global attitudes Hiring	

Work Performance

In order to address the second research question, several studies reviewed provided crucial information regarding employers' attitudes towards individuals with disabilities related to work performance. This research question also yielded mixed results, with studies reporting both positive and negative employer attitudes toward work performance of employees with disabilities.

Positive Attitudes Toward Work Performance

When reviewing work performance, eight studies described positive attitudes among employers. Levy et al. (1993) indicated that employers of smaller companies hold more positive attitudes towards the employability of individuals with severe disabilities. In fact, respondents considered these employees to be dependable, productive workers who encouraged positive workplace morale. When asked for recommendations for successful job searches by job seekers with disabilities, HR professionals in a study by Perry and Rutherford (1995) believed individuals with severe disabilities were employable and felt their organisations were creating inclusive work environments. In a survey of front-line supervisors interacting with workers with disabilities on a daily basis, these supervisors reported satisfaction with the work performance of people with disabilities, specifically in the areas of timeliness, punctuality, attendance and consistency in task (Unger, 2002). Front-line supervisors considered the job performance of workers with disabilities equal to or better than the work of employees without disabilities.

The overwhelming majority of employers with experience hiring workers with disabilities expressed consistent satisfaction with the impact these individuals had on their organisations (McLoughlin, 2002). Respondents cited benefits including high levels of cooperation, generally good work habits, low absenteeism and high quality of performance. A focus group study of HR managers and supervisors indicated that employers had made a commitment to hire people with disabilities, seeing them as a real asset to their organisations (Pitt-Cattsouphe & Butterworth, 1998). Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans and Peterson (2000) found that employers who hired people with disabilities were not only pleased with their performance, but they also indicated a willingness to hire candidates with disabilities in the future.

A regional survey of employers found that 80% of respondents had employees with disabilities and were regularly providing necessary accommodations (Able Trust, 2003). Attitudes of these employers were generally positive with respondents believing that employees with disabilities were dependable, loyal, punctual, and possessed the ability to help advance the organizations' interests. Participants also expressed that employees with disabilities performed adequately, practiced safe work habits, were valuable team members, required no extra supervision, were not frequently absent, and were dressed and groomed appropriately. Employers in the Information Technology sector supported the employment of people with disabilities and not only indicated a willingness to hire qualified applicants with disabilities, but respondents also believed individuals with disabilities were able to perform as well as people without disabilities (Greenan, Wu & Black, 2003).

Negative Attitudes Toward Work Performance

Despite these positive results, four studies reviewed exposed negative attitudes regarding work performance of individuals with disabilities. For example, a study conducted in Australia, suggested that employers were less satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities (Smith, Webber, Graffam & Wilson, 2004). While ratings of employees were generally average, employers consistently rated employees without disabilities higher on all aspects of performance. In a national survey of Fortune 500 corporate policies towards hiring people with psychiatric disabilities, findings indicated that very few companies actively recruit or acknowledge the needs of employees with psychiatric conditions (Jones, Gallagher, Kelley & Maceri, 1991). Representatives from these organisations expressed concern regarding on-the-job behaviour, job skills and legal considerations related to implementation of policies regarding these workers. Further, this study found that employees with physical disabilities were preferred to workers with mental health concerns. Diksa and Rogers (1996) documented additional reactions towards employing workers with psychiatric impairments, indicating employers were concerned with employees' specific mental health problems, the impact on workplace morale, and job performance. Specifically, employers based their ratings of employees on existing symptoms, behaviour manifestations of the impairment and medication side effects. Research focusing on perceptions of mental illness in the general public is also important to note, finding that often people are unwilling to engage in an interaction with individuals having mental health concerns and equate mental illness with propensity for violence (Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, Stueve & Pescosolido, 1999).

Employers had similar negative reactions towards individuals with communication impairments. In a study by Barrette, Garcia and Larouche (2002), employer respondents doubted the ability of people with communication impairments to adequately perform in a work setting requiring rapid communication. Employers believed that most electronic devices used in the workplace (e.g., telephone, public address system, etc.) could not be adapted to the needs of these workers. Participants also expressed generally negative attitudes and believed employees with communication impairments would be unable to handle positions that required high productivity and a heavy workload. Despite positive findings discussed regarding the impact of attitudes regarding work performance, negative attitudes related to work performance of individuals with disabilities still represent an environmental barrier to full participation in competitive employment. Table 2 displays the results of studies reviewing the impact of work performance on employment of people with disabilities.

Affective Reactions and Behavioural Intentions

The final research question focuses on the impact of employers' affective reactions and behavioural intentions related to the employment of individuals with disabilities with five studies reviewing this area. Berry and Meyer (1995) measured both the attitudinal and situational dimensions of affective (i.e. emotional) reactions towards people with disabilities in the workplace in an effort to better understand workplace dynamics related to the integration of people with disabilities. They found that negative reactions to workers with disabilities were related to the respondents' general attitudes towards

TABLE 2

Results of Work Performance Studies

Author(s)	Year	Positive Results	Negative Results
Able Trust	2003	Organisational asset Work performance	
Barrette, Garcia, & Larouche	2002		Communication problems Global attitudes Workload problems
Diksa & Rogers	1996		Behaviour problems Disability side effects Workplace morale Work performance
Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson	2000	Work performance Future hiring potential	
Greenan, Wu, & Black	2003	Work performance Future hiring potential	
Jones, Gallagher, Kelley, & Maceri	1991		Behaviour problems Limited job skills
Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy	1993	Employability	
McLoughlin	2002	Work performance Organisational asset	
Perry & Rutherford	1995	Employability	
Pitt-Cattsouphe & Butterworth	1998	Organisational asset	
Smith, Webber, Graffam, & Wilson	2004		Work performance
Unger	2002	Work performance	

people with disabilities and potential discomfort interacting with people with disabilities. Both general attitude and level of discomfort independently influenced reactions of employers towards workers with disabilities. In another regional survey, employers with no experience hiring people with disabilities expressed generally positive attitudes toward these job candidates (McLoughlin, 2002). Positive attitudes, however, did not overcome doubts related to actual hiring practices. Specifically, respondents in this study indicated fears that customers and other employees would find workers with disabilities 'offensive'.

Positive emotional reactions toward employees with disabilities are highlighted in several studies we reviewed. In Canada, researchers found that respondents showed strong support for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace (Freeze, Kueneman, Frankel, Mahon & Nielsen, 2002). In fact, participants believed employees with disabilities are punctual, reliable, committed, conscientious and motivated to work. Australian employers indicated a desire to be socially responsible and hire people with disabilities (Graffam, Shinkfield, Smith & Paulsen, 2002). They

indicated, however, that the applicant's disability did not play a role in the overall hiring decision as personnel selection was based on performance measures including reliability, quality and productivity. In this case, employers held favourable opinions toward qualified applicants who had the requisite skills and attributes regardless of disability.

Influence of Work Context

Work context factors such as organisation size and normative beliefs of the senior managers have also been investigated in order to better understand the impact on attitudes towards employees with disabilities. Contrasting small (30 to 100 employees), medium (101 to 500 employees), and large (500 or more employees) organisations, Fraser and colleagues (2012) found small company representatives had the widest range of beliefs. They had positive behavioural beliefs relative to the commitment and loyalty perceived among workers with disabilities, altruistic feelings relative to hiring workers with disabilities, and the benefits of federal financial incentives for hiring. However, they expressed fears related to losing revenue, becoming involved in litigation, and difficulties relating to physical and structural barriers at worksites. In terms of perceived control, small companies expressed concern regarding the difficulty contacting professionals in the state-federal vocational rehabilitation system and, if available, the actual effectiveness of this contact. They also reported concerns related to perceptions of not being able to physically accommodate workers with disabilities at the worksite.

Mid-sized companies in the Fraser et al. (2012) study expressed themes that were similar to smaller companies including concerns related to state vocational rehabilitation systems, along with the need for financial incentives in hiring. For both small and mid-sized companies there was a belief that people with disabilities could not physically do the work. There were a number of different additional themes cited by mid-sized companies including the behavioural belief that employee referrals through vocational rehabilitation agencies would be less qualified and have a poorer employment history than other applicants. Additionally, mid-sized companies shared normative beliefs about mid-level and team managers becoming oppositional due to concerns about productivity, additional training time needed, and accommodations. Lack of co-worker receptivity and co-worker discomfort were perceived as another negative factor. Surprisingly, the medium-sized employer representatives did not express a number of the concerns stated by small companies, namely those related to possible litigation, reduced productivity and difficulties with physical accessibility at the worksite. Mid-sized employers also did not cite the positive, altruistic benefits related to hiring of workers with disabilities that were shared by small company employers (Fraser et al., 2012).

Finally, the large company group shared only minimal overlap with small company concerns. On the other hand, they were similar to mid-sized companies echoing the normative belief that convincing departmental and team managers that employing workers with disabilities would be a worthwhile practice remained a challenge. Additionally, although large company HR personnel were well-exposed to qualified workers

with disabilities, there was significant concern about the efficiency and effectiveness of contact with vocational rehabilitation.

Normative beliefs or perceived approval of a company's president or senior management was most hiring qualified workers with disabilities. This was the case when senior management believed that hiring people with disabilities increased the company's diversity profile, facilitated the establishment of a working collaboration with a centralised vocational rehabilitation agency, provided tax credits and other hiring incentives, prevented disability discrimination lawsuits, and secured loyal and appreciative employees. There were also a number of perceived controlled beliefs significantly related to hiring outreach activity. These include receipt of supportive communication from senior management about vocational rehabilitation agencies, knowing whom to contact in the vocational rehabilitation field, consistent contact with a centralised vocational rehabilitation agency having applicant profiles, and hiring incentives/tax credits. Although these behavioural and controlled beliefs were significant, the normative influences of the management/ownership were the most important predictor of behaviour (Fraser et al., 2012). These factors predicting employer behaviour must also be considered with the range of affective reactions discussed previously, and findings of the literature review indicate both significantly impact employment decisions.

Lessons Learned

Employers generally express positive attitudes and willingness to hire applicants with disabilities, yet this still exceeds actually hiring. Over a decade after their publication, this gap still persists. With a current employment participation rate of 17.9% among individuals with disabilities and estimates of two-thirds of people with disabilities wanting to work, there is an obvious inconsistency between positive employer attitudes reported in the literature and the low employment rate of people with disabilities (US Department of Labor, 2012a, 2012b).

However, the positive attitudes of employers towards people with disabilities are also not consistent with the Department of Labor report which found that less than one out of every five of the companies in their 2008 survey reported employing people with disabilities (Domzal et al., 2008). This review of the employers' attitudes toward disability research suggests the majority of the employers are generally positive about people with disabilities, suggesting that there may likely be two extreme groups of employers – those who are either overly optimistic or pessimistic about the reliability, quality and the productivity of people with disabilities. The negative attitudes expressed in the literature highlight areas that need to be addressed in order to improve participation of individuals with disabilities in competitive employment. Fear of legal problems, employee and co-worker safety, attendance, negative work attitudes, adverse impact on co-workers, and the cost of health insurance are relevant issues for employers to hire individuals with disability (Fraser et al., 2012; Solovieva, Walls, Hendricks, & Dowler, 2009).

Education of employers is needed to increase awareness regarding possible preferences to hire individuals without disabilities, and increased awareness may positively impact current misperceptions. Such education would include accurate information

about the actual cost of accommodations, along with the ability of individuals with disabilities to effectively receive training, supervision and meet specific job needs. Consultation from vocational rehabilitation providers could also provide employers with accurate information related to legal concerns and the implementation of policies regarding workers with disabilities.

When providing education and relevant information, a strong focus on employers' hiring intentions or actual behaviour vs. general attitudes toward people with disabilities will prove advantageous. Providing support to beliefs that hiring qualified workers with disabilities increases the company's diversity profile, leads to the establishment of a working collaboration with a centralised vocational rehabilitation agency, and facilitates the provision of tax credits and the ability to secure loyal and appreciative employees may significantly improve employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Specifically, increased attention regarding strategies to obtain and maintain consistent contact with vocational rehabilitation professionals is necessary. Fears regarding a lack of contact by rehabilitation professionals must be dispelled in order to fully support participation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Finally, it is important to note that employers are part of the general public. Efforts to change public stigma toward people with disabilities has received much attention, particularly in the psychiatric disability literature. Research findings suggest that there is strong evidence that contact between the general public and people with psychiatric disabilities may be an effective approach for addressing prejudicial attitudinal change (e.g., Corrigan et al., 2001, 2002; Wood & Wahl, 2004). Yet, efforts to apply contact intervention strategies with employer groups to improve attitudes have not been well studied in the literature.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This literature review is not without limitations. As previously indicated, the method employed was not systematic or exhaustive, and as a result, the highlighted factors influencing employer attitudes toward disability may not be fully represented. Although a great deal of care was taken to categorise the studies according to the three major themes addressed, there may have been some degree of error in this process. In addition, additional influences on employer attitudes toward disability were not investigated as part of the review process. The review also spans a timeframe of 25 years. The focus of research in this area has certainly shifted in this timeframe, which may hinder the ability to clearly identify current themes.

In order to more fully explore this topic, a systematic review of the literature is necessary. Exploring all current influential factors in a variety of academic research databases would certainly yield beneficial information. Conducting a review over a shorter and more recent timeframe may also provide more specific information regarding current, influential factors on employer attitudes toward disability. This information may then be more easily applied to rehabilitation practitioners, educators and researchers.

Continued research on employer attitudes toward disability is warranted and greatly beneficial. Areas of future research include investigation of the impact of education efforts targeted at employers and the sustainability of positive changes in

perceptions resulting from education efforts would provide much needed information. In addition to investigating the interventions to improve employer attitudes, additional research related to behavioural intentions of employers would prove useful, and data collected across states and regions would improve the generalisability of findings.

Conclusion

The current review examined employer attitudes toward hiring and retaining workers with disabilities. Specifically, the review examined influential factors including the hiring process, provision of accommodations, work performance, and affective reactions and behavioural intentions toward employees with disabilities. Similar to previous research, results indicate employers need accurate information to dispel misperceptions regarding hiring and retaining employees with disabilities (Grizzard, 2005). In order to successfully increase employment rates for people with disabilities, which often results in improved quality of life for these individuals, continued research on employer perceptions and development of related interventions is necessary.

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