

Employers' Views of Workplace Supports:

**Virginia Commonwealth
University Charter
Business Roundtable's
National Study of
Employers' Experiences
with Workers with Disabilities**

**Foreword by: Tom Donohue, President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce**

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Foreword

by: Thomas J. Donohue, President & CEO, U.S.
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With the challenges employers face today in finding enough qualified workers to fill jobs across America, we need more people with disabilities to enter the mainstream of employment. But despite laws designed to address employment discrimination and reasonable accommodations, employment rates for the disabled have changed very little since the 1980's. There are 15 million unemployed Americans with significant disabilities, many of whom have skills and are ready to work. In fact, sixty percent of this population report that they want to work. What can we do, as employers to assist these individuals become productive workers, taxpayers and help strengthen our economy?

This research report, Employers' Views of Workplace Supports, is a candid look at employer perceptions, concerns and experiences in working with the disabled. This document provides a host of reasons why employers should tap into this talented pool of potential workers. Hiring the disabled is good for businesses' bottom line and is critical to supporting the financial needs of many qualified individuals.

Working in collaboration with the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation helps educate Chamber members on many issues that impact the disabled. In addition, the Business Leadership Network provides access to information and resources to help recruit, hire and advance workers with disabilities.

The Chamber will continue to pursue and support this important issue and will strive to lead the business community in moving more of the disabled from dependency into the workplace.



Thomas J. Donohue

Introduction

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Millions of people with mental, physical, sensory, and health-related disabilities want to participate in the community and the workplace. However, most are being denied this opportunity for reasons such as limited expectations and attitudes of professionals in the field, the unwillingness of business to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, lack of sufficient funds for training and placement, and government disincentives to work. To counter this discrimination, there is a civil rights movement occurring today in the United States for adults with disabilities who historically have been either unemployed or grossly underemployed.

The problems experienced by individuals with a disability can be overcome and will continue to be overcome dramatically in the future, especially if the United States economy improves and there is a steady increase in job creation. A recent N.O.D./Louis Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities (2000) indicated that two out of three persons with disabilities are not working. These statistics are simply unacceptable, as well as highly inconsistent with the research and innovative practices currently in place in some parts of the country that clearly illustrate the potential for people with disabilities in the workplace. Astute professionals, advocates, and individuals with disabilities themselves are also aware of the possibilities for this population.

Clearly, society is not openly opposed to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, experience suggests that business people can and will be highly accommodative, given sufficient labor demand. However, professionals in the field, such as special educators, rehabilitation counselors, adult basic educators, and vocational evaluators, do not seem to have high vocational expectations for individuals with disabilities. Their limited expectations are shaped by antiquated or inadequate training experience and lack of exposure to the possibilities created by the right program. In a very real

sense, this civil rights movement is a plea to professionals and employers in the field to seriously evaluate their methods of delivering vocational services and creating work opportunities.

The research contained in this monograph looks extensively at what employers in major corporations think about recruiting, hiring, and training aspects of workers with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), performance, productivity, and supports are analyzed from the viewpoint of the employer.

Employment for Individuals with Disabilities:

The Impact of the ADA

The ADA creates new opportunities for people with disabilities who wish to enter the labor force. This historic law will have a major impact on individuals with disabilities who have previously not been employed. Owens (1991) notes:

The ADA is really a straightforward law, best understood in the context of this nation's renewed drive for individuality. People in this era have fought against being limited because they are members of a category—ethnic, racial, or gender. Instead they have insisted on being considered as individuals who pursue their own purposes. Persons with disabilities seeking employment are marked by their purpose. They are looking for an opportunity to do work in exchange for pay. Disability as an entitlement to a fair chance to perform in accordance with abilities deserves an investment in time and money at least comparable to disability as an entitlement to compensation. (p.21)

The regulations detailing the rules for implementation of the ADA were released on July 26, 1991, by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). As of July 26, 1992, under the proposed EEOC regulations, state and local governments and private employers with 25 or more employees, employment agencies, and labor

unions are prohibited from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. Employers and other covered entities with 15 or more employees were covered by the regulations after July 16, 1994.

To avoid any confusion or misinterpretation, the ADA defines an individual with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as caring for oneself, breathing, learning, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, or working. An individual with a disability can also be a person who has a record or such impairment, or is regarded as having such impairment.

To be protected by the nondiscriminatory provisions of the EEOC regulations, an individual with a disability must be qualified and able to perform the essential functions or tasks of the position held or desired, with or without reasonable accommodations. Employers are required to make an accommodation to the known disability of a qualified applicant or employee, if it would not impose an undue hardship as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense. Such factors as an employer's size, financial resources available to the specific site, and the nature and structure of its operations are considered. The availability of assistance from other sources to offset the costs of accommodation—such as federal, state, or local tax credits or deductions, and state vocational rehabilitation agencies—are also be taken into consideration.

An analysis of the economic impact of the ADA regulations indicates that reasonable accommodation expenses are normally quite low, with the cost of approximately 70% of such accommodations averaging less than \$100. The process of determining an appropriate reasonable accommodation is an informal, interactive, problem-solving technique involving both the employer and the qualified individual with a disability. While significant guidance is provided by the regulations, the dynamics of the process preclude a prescriptive approach to the subject.

Employers cannot ask job applicants about the existence, nature, or severity of a disability, but they can ask about an applicant's ability to perform specific job functions. A job offer may be conditioned on the results of a medical examination, but only if the examination is required for all newly hired employees having similar jobs.

Employees and applicants currently engaging in the illegal use of drugs are not covered by the ADA or its regulations if an employer takes action on the basis of such use. Tests for illegal use of drugs are neither prohibited nor encouraged. Employers may hold illegal drug users and alcoholics to the same performance standards as other employees.

Employers can refuse to assign an individual to a job involving food handling if the individual has an infectious or communicable disease that has been determined by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to be communicable to others through food handling. The infectiousness and communicability of the disease cannot be eliminated by reasonable accommodation. With this provision, individuals with HIV or AIDS are protected from discrimination.

Employers may establish qualification standards that will exclude individuals who pose a direct threat to the health and safety of the individual or others, if the risk cannot be lowered to an acceptable level by reasonable accommodation. However, an employer may not simply assume that a threat exists. Employers are required to establish, through objective, medically supportable methods, that substantial harm could occur in the workplace.

Work and Quality of Life

Employment is a major aspect in the lives of people with or without disabilities. Type of employment, earnings, and advancement opportunities directly affect a person's self-perception, society's evaluation of a person, and a person's financial and social freedom. Meaningful work that pays a fair wage is a key part in the quality of life a person enjoys.

Consider more closely some of the previously mentioned points. For example, how much does type of employment affect a person's behavior and the behavior of society towards that person? Frequently, entry-level manual labor is seen as less desirable and more physically straining than office work, assuming the amount of wages is equivalent. However, consider the prospect of a person who is restricted to a developmental adult day program than only serves persons with mental and physical disabilities and does not allow an opportunity for employment. A person in such a limited position might find an entry-level manual position very attractive, not only financially but also socially, in terms of family and community acceptance. The opportunity to make friends who do

not have disabilities would be a major advantage of involvement in non-sheltered employment. Therefore, type of employment can be an important factor in self-evaluation.

The amount of earned income is another critical factor that can affect the quality of life. If people with disabilities work for free or volunteer their services all the time, their outlook and society's perceptions of them will be different than if they earn a wage comparable to that earned by workers without disabilities who perform the same job. Generally, the more money a person earns, the more freedom s/he has to purchase desired and/or necessary items in the community and to establish personal independence. A person with a disability who earns \$5 per week in a day program or sheltered workshop will probably have a lower perception of himself or herself than a person who earns \$190 per week as a micrographics camera operator. Unfortunately, many people with disabilities earn very little money, and this becomes a real problem by lowering their self-perception.

The opportunity to switch jobs and move to a more favorable work setting, which includes better work conditions, job stability and increased income, must also be assessed when looking at the importance of employment in the lifestyles of people with disabilities. Advancement and career mobility are other opportunities that need to be available to people with disabilities. Most important, certain types of jobs in real work settings that yield a decent wage often lead the way to better jobs and more pay.

The Costs of Not Employing People with Disabilities

In considering the seriousness of the unemployment problem for people with disabilities, it will be helpful to review the costs of unemployment to society, business and, most important, to individuals with all types of disabilities. It is not difficult to see how the impact of this high level of unemployment can affect thousands of people with and without disabilities. The points that follow address some of the adverse effects that occur when meaningful employment opportunities are not made available to capable individuals.

Human Dignity

Human Dignity and self-worth of individuals with disabilities are not enhanced if they are not given the opportunity to seek and gain employment. As previously stated, the opportunity and ability to work in a real job that

pays a fair wage is a major aspect of life, not just for people with disabilities but for all people. It is apparent after talking with individuals with disabilities and their friends that sustained employment is a critical avenue to other successful aspects of life such as health, friendship, self-esteem, and a feeling of purpose. Employment is often the key to improving self-perceptions, reducing feelings of loneliness, and moving toward a richer quality of life.

Family Concerns

The concerns and doubts experienced by families and friends of people with disabilities must also be considered. These concerns often center around such questions as, "What will happen to my son or daughter after I'm gone?" or "Will my son or daughter be able to get a job after completing school?". These are legitimate and serious questions that sustained employment can help address. While a job may not solve all problems or erase all concerns and doubts, it will be a major step in the right direction. Families need support and assistance in helping individuals with disabilities enter the labor force.

Earning Power

As noted earlier, wages for individuals with disabilities are far below average. Earning competitive, unsubsidized wages would provide the person with the opportunity to have more independence in his or her life. Even at minimum wage levels of \$5.15/hour, the wage accumulation over time is considerable and allows persons with disabilities to have spending money for housing, meals, and other discretionary items. Often, fringe benefits are also made available, such as free uniforms, free meals, better parking conditions, and paid vacation or holiday time. Overall, wages and benefits allow for greater independence on the part of citizens with disabilities and help to improve their quality of life.

Economic Benefits to Society

Wages earned by citizens with disabilities typically flow back into the local and state economy. The impact of this economic benefit should not be minimized. When combined with the taxes, it is apparent that significant reductions in the employment rate for people with disabilities would quickly become a considerable benefit for state and federal budgets and the general economy.

There are other economic benefits of employment as well. For example, the costs for taxpayers to subsidize

restrictive “pre-vocational” or work adjustment programs, which often do not lead to employment of people with disabilities who have the potential to work, are significant. In addition to those program costs, the Supplemental Security Income savings can be tremendous for those who are able to work. While it is vitally important to not take Social Security Disability Benefits from people in need, it is also fiscally and morally necessary to help those who can work to achieve this dream. Employment service agencies need to continue in a direction that fosters joint development of training efforts with industry. These training efforts need to culminate in employment that is not government subsidized.

Expectations of Family and Friends

The attitudes and expectations of family, friends, professionals, and above all, citizens with disabilities are negatively influenced when people with disabilities are continually denied the opportunity to earn decent wages and have a meaningful job. Society often views others in the context of whether or not they have a job, the amount of money they earn, the longevity of their employment situation, the type of work they perform, and so forth. Chronic unemployment of people with disabilities, when it is frequently not necessary or warranted, casts an unfair light on the capabilities of these individuals.

Chronic Unemployment of People with Disabilities, Employers and the ADA

Employers and the ADA cannot provide jobs for every person with a disability. The ADA does, however, provide a framework for improved employer attitudes, reduced discriminatory practices, and overall increased awareness and communication among employers concerning the vocational capabilities of people with disabilities. Listed below are some of the more obvious benefits that will accrue to individuals with disabilities who wish to work through the presence of the ADA:

1. It is against the law for businesses to discriminate in their hiring practices against an otherwise qualified person with a disability.
2. The concept of reasonable accommodation is in federal law as a means through which the employer must try to overcome the limitations of the potential employee with a disability when, with an accommodation, that individual can perform the critical functions of the job.

3. Workplace environments need to be made accessible so that people with physical and/or sensory disabilities can be integrated, increasing the likelihood of employment for many persons with disabilities.

The implications of the ADA for changing the high unemployment rate of people with disabilities are still unknown. It remains to be seen how businesses will react over time and, even more pertinent, how the United States economy improves. A poor economy will not yield sufficient jobs for any people who are unemployed, whether they have a disability or not. It also remains to be seen if people with disabilities who were previously denied entry into the work force will try again with the presence of the ADA.

It is the purpose of this monograph to describe results from a major research study on how employers from large corporations perceive the work capacity and performance of workers with disabilities. Despite all of the focus on the ADA over the past decade, there are many other factors in the workplace that affect hiring rates and long-term tenure of workers with disabilities. This monograph holds extensive data on how businesses in the US feel about workers with disabilities.

References

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Chapter 1

Employers' Attitudes Towards People with Disabilities in the Workforce: Myths or Realities?

by: Darlene D. Unger

A review of literature on employers' attitudes toward workers with disabilities was completed. Factors that may impact employers' attitudes toward people with disabilities in the workforce are provided as well as a description of the methodologies used in the investigations. Although decades of employer attitudinal research have generally produced inconsistent findings due to variations in research design, results indicate that employers who have previous experience with workers with disabilities have favorable perceptions of these individuals in the workforce and a willingness to hire them.

Major legislative and philosophical forces during the past 30 years have attempted to enhance the participation of working-age Americans with disabilities in the competitive labor market. The public policy initiatives related to employers and work disability began in 1970 with the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). The OSHA was followed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, state workers' compensation enactments of the 1980s and 1990s, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) of 1999 (Hunt, 1999).

The forces that have both paralleled and provided the impetus for passage of much of the legislation include the following: (1) significant changes in thinking regarding the vocational rehabilitation and employment potential of Americans with disabilities; (2) the evolving role of employers in addressing disability in the workplace; and (3) the civil rights movement. For persons with significant

disabilities, who might have once been viewed as unemployable, these societal trends have fostered a shift from a medical model emphasizing a clinic or center-based approach of "fixing" or "curing" people with disabilities to the present emphasis on capabilities, choice, and workplace supports in maximizing the work potential of people with disabilities. Recently, other factors have also contributed to a positive outlook regarding the employment potential of Americans with disabilities desiring to work. These factors include favorable economic conditions and a strong demand for labor.

Yet, despite increased laws designed to address employment discrimination and provide for workplace accommodations for qualified workers with disabilities, the employment rate of individuals with disabilities has increased very little since the late 1980s. A series of studies conducted by the National Organization on Disability (NOD), in collaboration with Louis Harris and Associates (1998), reported an actual increase in the unemployment rate from 66% in 1986 findings to 71% in 1998. The unemployment rate of people with disabilities is especially disheartening because the studies found that an overwhelming majority (72%) of unemployed persons with disabilities indicated that they preferred to work (1998). Also, representatives from business and industry identified recruitment and selection of qualified workers as their top concern for the new millennium (Bureau of National Affairs [BNA], 2000; Miller, 2000). In a time marked by a critical demand for labor and significant economic expansion and prosperity, it is discouraging that members of our nation's largest minority, people with disabilities, are not participating in the labor force to the same extent as their peers without disabilities.

Employers play a critical role in addressing the high unemployment rate experienced by persons with disabilities. A number of researchers have identified employer attitudes toward people with disabilities as an important factor in the staggering unemployment rate of persons with disabilities (Blanck, 1998; King, 1993; Smith, 1992). Although employers' attitudes toward individuals with disabilities have been studied extensively, the research has produced inconsistent findings. Factors identified as positive attributes by some employers (e.g., attendance, safety, productivity) have been cited as concerns by employers in other studies (Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, VanderHart, & Fishback, 1996). Because of inconsistency in methodology, it is difficult to compare and derive conclusions based on the results of previous research. A plausible explanation for these mixed results is that employers were not categorized by characteristics that might influence their perceptions of people with disabilities in the workforce. Investigations have identified a variety of business, respondent, and applicant-worker characteristics that may impact employer perceptions of people with disabilities in the workforce (see Table 1 below).

The purpose of this article is to review the empirical literature related to employers' perceptions of people with disabilities in the workforce and to identify characteristics that might impact employer perceptions.

METHOD

Data Collection Process

The literature reviewed was drawn primarily from the fields of vocational rehabilitation, psychology, mental retardation and other developmental disabilities, and mental illness. Research on employers' attitudes toward persons with disabilities spans almost half a century, commencing with studies investigating their attitudes toward workers with cardiac limitations (Lee, Rusk, White, & Williams, 1957; Olshansky, Friedland, Clark, & Sprague, 1955; Reeder & Donahue, 1958) and former mental health patients (Olshansky, Grob, & Malamud, 1958). For the purpose of this study, the literature reviewed was published from 1982 to 2000.

Table 1: Factors Investigated in Employer Attitudinal Research

Employer, Respondent or Worker Characteristics	Relevant Research
Disability of Employee or Applicant	Blanck, 1998; Diska & Rogers, 1996; Fuqua, Rathbun, & Gade, 1984; Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Johnson, Greenwood & Schriener, 1988; Marcouiller, Smith & Bordieri, 1987; McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag, 1991; Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, VanderHart & Fishback, 1996; Phillips, 1975; Shafer, Hill, Seyfarth, & Wehman, 1987; Shafer, Kregel, Banks, & Hill, 1988; Thakker, 1997
Previous Experience with Workers with Disabilities	Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, & Levy, 1992; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; McFarlin et al., 1991; Phillips, 1975
Size of Employer	Ehrhart, 1994; Gade & Toutges, 1993; Greenwood & Johnson, 1987; Levy et al., 1992; Levy et al., 1993; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Nietupski et al., 1996
Sector of Business or Industry	Diska & Rogers, 1996; Ehrhart, 1994; Gade & Toutges, 1993; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Nietupski et al., 1996; Thakker, 1997

The process for identifying research on employers' attitudes about workers with disabilities began with a search of electronic databases (i.e., ERIC, Dissertations Online, PsychLit). Keywords included employer attitudes, workers with disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness, handicapped, business and disability, developmental disabilities, vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, and employment. To be included in the review, the study had to involve data gathered from community-based employers or organizations regarding their perceptions of persons with disabilities in the workforce or their actual experiences with workers with disabilities. A total of 24 studies were reviewed. The first section of the literature review addresses factors or characteristics that may impact employer attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce. It is followed by a review of the methodological differences in the research and a summary of key findings.

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ESULTS

Disability of Employee or Applicant

Several studies have explored employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce according to the type or severity of the disability (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1988; McFarlin et al., 1991; Thakker, 1997). The results indicate that employers expressed greater concerns over employing persons with mental or emotional disabilities than employing persons with physical disabilities. For example, Fuqua et al. (1984) examined eight disability areas using a mail survey sent to randomly selected urban employers. The disability areas included blindness, cerebral palsy, paraplegia, emotional problems, epilepsy, amputation, deafness, and mental disabilities. Employers expressed the greatest concern toward employing individuals with mental disabilities and blindness and were least concerned about hiring individuals with epilepsy.

Findings from a survey of Fortune 500 companies concur with the results reported by Fuqua and colleagues (1984). Over 90% of the respondents responded affirmatively to hiring individuals with physical disabilities or hearing impairments, 39% responded affirmatively to hiring individuals with severe physical disabilities, and 20% responded affirmatively to hiring applicants with severe

mental disabilities (McFarlin et al., 1991). Similarly, employers from a variety of businesses and industries located in Arkansas and Oklahoma believed that workers with mental disabilities and emotional disabilities were of greater concern than workers with physical or communication disabilities (Johnson et al., 1988).

Although McFarlin and colleagues (1991) found that attitudes toward workers with disabilities tended to be more positive with respect to turnover, absenteeism, and work performance, their results contrast with other reported findings (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1988). For example, over two-thirds of the executives in the study conducted by McFarlin et al., (1990) agreed with statements indicating that workers with disabilities perform as well and have lower turnover rates than their counterparts without disabilities, whereas findings from other studies revealed employers' concerns with the productivity or performance of workers with disabilities (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1988).

Findings regarding the social skills of workers with disabilities and their ability to interact or get along with coworkers were also inconsistent in studies investigating different disability types. In some instances, employers expressed little concern with coworker acceptance or the ability of workers with disabilities to interact with coworkers (Fuqua et al., 1984; McFarlin et al., 1991). In contrast, employers did express concerns regarding the social skills of workers with mental, emotional, or communication disabilities and their ability to function as part of a team (Johnson et al., 1988). Employers were least concerned with the ability of persons with physical disabilities to socialize with coworkers and work as part of a team.

In more recent studies, employers have not only expressed more favorable attitudes toward employing persons with severe disabilities in the workplace but also viewed workers with severe disabilities as dependable, productive workers who can interact socially and foster positive attitudes on the part of their coworkers (Levy et al., 1993). Almost three-fourths (74.4%) of the employers believed that the productivity rates of workers with severe disabilities can be as high as those of workers who are not disabled. The perceptions of employers reported by Levy and colleagues (1993) contradict the findings of prior employer attitudinal research (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1988). However, it is unclear how much the idea of social desirability influences employer responses.

Although all three studies were conducted prior to the implementation of ADA employment regulations, the response rate reported by Levy and colleagues (1993) was extremely low (6.2%) despite a larger sample size ($n = 418$) than that of Fuqua et al., McFarlin et al., (1991) and Johnson et al., (1988).

Specific Disability Population

Employer attitudes toward a specific disability population have also been studied extensively. For example, prior to the effective date for employer compliance with the Title I employment regulations of the ADA, Minskoff, Sautter, Hoffmann, and Hawks (1987) surveyed employers across nine different industries regarding their attitudes towards individuals with learning disabilities. One-third of the respondents indicated that they would not knowingly hire an applicant with a learning disability. Employers were less positive in their attitudes toward hiring persons with learning disabilities and affording them special consideration than toward hiring the disabled population in general. Yet, almost three-fourths of the employers (72%) were willing to give individuals with learning disabilities special considerations that they would not afford to coworkers without disabilities.

Employers willingness to make accommodations for workers with disabilities is also illustrated by employers who have hired persons with mental retardation. Employers in several studies have indicated that workers with mental retardation may require extra time and effort to be integrated into the workforce (Nietupski et al., 1996; Shafer et al., 1987). Results of a recent study indicated that 79% of the employers perceived the amount of training and supervision for workers with mental retardation to be greater than for nondisabled coworkers (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000). Yet, employers in that same study reported that employing persons with mental retardation brings other benefits to their business such as enhancing their organization's public image and promoting diversity in the workplace.

Employers may be willing to allow less-than desired performance by employees with mental retardation in exchange for reliable attendance and low turnover (Blanck, 1998; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988) or dedication to work (Johnson et al., 1988; Nietupski et al., 1996). Thus, employers may be willing to devote more time to training and supervision or to sacrifice productivity

in exchange for a reliable, dedicated employee or for other benefits such as increased workforce diversity and demonstration of corporate social responsibility.

The reporting by businesses representatives of actual experiences with employing workers with mental retardation has also assisted in dispelling other long-standing myths and misconceptions about employing persons with disabilities. For instance, employing persons with mental retardation does not result in an increase in health insurance rates or workers' compensation claims (Blanck, 1998; Olson et al., 2000; Shafer et al., 1987) or pose a safety risk in the workplace (Blanck, 1998; Olson et al., 2000). Employers with experience in supervising persons with disabilities also indicated they were pleased with the individuals' work quality (Nietupski et al., 1996) or work performance (Marcouiller et al., 1987).

Previous Experience with Individuals with Disabilities

Employers who have had previous experiences with individuals with specific disabilities, such as deafness (Phillips, 1975), mental retardation (Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982), epilepsy (Gade & Toutges, 1983), and psychiatric disability (Diksa & Rogers, 1996), also reported more favorable attitudes toward hiring applicants with the same disability. For example, in a study of employers' attitudes toward hiring individuals who are deaf, the results indicated that employers with previous experience employing individuals who are deaf have more positive attitudes toward hiring such a person again (Phillips, 1975). However, employers with limited or no experience hiring persons who are deaf expressed concern over worker safety (Phillips). Gruenhagen (1982) reported comparable findings in a study of fast-food restaurant managers regarding their previous experience with individuals with mental disabilities, their attitudes toward hiring them, and their opinions about their place in society.

In another study, drawing from a sample of Fortune 500 companies, McFarlin et al. (1991) found that the more exposure respondents had with employees with disabilities in their own workforce, the more positive their attitudes. Two studies that focused on employers' attitudes and preferences for hiring individuals with severe disabilities reported similar findings (e.g., Levy et al., 1992; Levy et al., 1993). Employers who had previous positive experiences with individuals or workers with severe

disabilities, reported more favorable attitudes toward individuals with severe disabilities in the workplace. The results were similar despite differences in the samples. One sample was composed of predominantly smaller employers located in a limited geographic area (e.g., Levy et al., 1993), and the other was a national sample composed of Fortune 500 companies with a majority of the businesses employing more than one thousand employees (e.g., Levy et al., 1992).

Data for the previous studies were collected from employers prior to the implementation of the employment regulations of the ADA. The results of a similar study conducted after the full implementation of the employment provisions of the ADA reported conflicting findings in this area. In conducting face-to-face interviews with 170 randomly selected employers located in a large metropolitan area, researchers failed to identify a relationship between employers' previous experience with hiring individuals with disabilities and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994). Regardless of previous experience with persons with disabilities, the employers reported favorable attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Size of Employer

Many studies suggest that there is an increased likelihood of larger employers being more willing to include people with disabilities in their workforce because of the variety of jobs available, and greater personnel and economic resources (Blanck, 1998; Collignon, 1986; Kemp, 1991). Yet, findings in the area of employer size and perceptions of persons with disabilities have been fairly inconsistent. The results of research conducted prior to the implementation of the ADA indicate that larger employers typically hold more favorable attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce (e.g., Gade & Toutges, 1983; Greenwood & Johnson, 1987; Levy et al., 1992; Levy et al., 1993).

Research conducted after the implementation of the ADA failed to identify a relationship between employer size and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce (Ehrhart, 1994; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994). For example, in a national study of employers' attitudes toward persons with disabilities across size and industry, no relationship was established between size of employer and attitudes toward workers with disabilities (Ehrhart). Regardless of the size of business, employers reported

favorable attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce. Research utilizing the same instrumentation as the measures used in Ehrhart's study also found no relationship between employer size and attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994).

Sector of Business or Industry

Similar inconsistencies have been found in investigations of the relationship between the type of industry and employer attitudes toward persons with disabilities in the workforce. Findings from studies conducted prior to and after the implementation of the ADA's employment regulations failed to confirm a relationship between type of industry and employer attitudes toward hiring persons with disabilities (Ehrhart, 1994; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994).

Yet, more recent studies have produced mixed findings. For example, employers representing eight types of industries differed on their perceptions of workers with psychiatric disabilities (Diksa & Rogers, 1996). Social services professionals differed from those in the transportation, utilities, and communication industries on scores on the symptomatology subscale (i.e., symptomatic and behavioral manifestations of the psychiatric disorder and the effects of medication), administrative concerns, and work performance. For instance, employers in the social service industry expressed lower levels of concern than employers representing other industries with such characteristics as an employee lacking enthusiasm, exhibiting bizarre behaviors, and having a poor memory. Yet, Nietupski et al. (1996) and Thakker (1997) were unable to identify a significant relationship between type of industry and attitudes toward workers with disabilities.

A series of investigations of the experiences with workers with disabilities of one employer in the chemical manufacturing industry reported favorable results regarding the contributions of these employees. In 1958, DuPont conducted its first in a series of investigations to assess the job performance of workers with disabilities in comparison with those without disabilities. Findings from the initial investigation indicated that DuPont supervisors generally rated their workers with disabilities as good as nondisabled employees on measures of attendance. In many areas, such as safety, motivation, and job performance, supervisors reported workers with disabilities performed better than those without disabilities.

The results of the DuPont study also demonstrated that hiring people with disabilities did not contribute to an increase in compensation costs or lost-time injuries and that most employees with disabilities did not require any special arrangements. If modifications were necessary, they generally involved minor adaptations. Supervisors participating in subsequent studies conducted in 1973, 1981, and 1990 have continued to depict DuPont's employees with disabilities as safe, productive, and dependable workers. Interestingly, the DuPont study has not been conducted since the ADA employment regulations have been in effect.

Although numerous studies have investigated different organizational or worker variables that affect employer perceptions of persons with disabilities, the results have generally been inconsistent. Employers have expressed concerns about workers with disabilities in many areas, including productivity, absenteeism, turnover, interpersonal situations on the job, and fears about costs, including accommodations and increases in insurance rates. These concerns are potentially unfounded in that many respondents are surveyed about their perceptions of persons with disabilities and may not have had direct experience working with or supervising employees with disabilities.

In contrast to myths and stereotypes, employer ratings have indicated that workers with disabilities have average or above-average performance (Blanck, 1998; Du Pont, 1993), safety records (Blanck; DuPont; Shafer et al., 1987), and attendance. (Blanck; DuPont; Shafer et al., 1987). Respondents in these studies were supervisors of an employee with a disability and more than likely interacted with workers with disabilities on a daily or weekly basis. These respondents assessed overall worker performance based on personal experience. Lastly, findings have consistently demonstrated that employers who have previous experience with workers with disabilities are more willing to hire persons with disabilities (Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982; Levy et al., 1992; Marcouiller et al., 1987; McFarlin et al., 1991).

Methodology

The perceptions of the business community toward persons with disabilities in the workforce have been investigated through a variety of research methodologies.

Researchers have studied employers' perceptions of persons with disabilities predominantly by surveying employer representatives who have the responsibility of hiring or supervising (e.g., Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Ehrhart, 1994; Johnson et al., 1988; Levy et al., 1993; Marcouiller et al., 1987). Samples have also consisted of employers drawn from local (e.g., Gruenhagen, 1982; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Phillips, 1975; Thakker, 1997) regional and national geographical areas (e.g., Blanck, 1998; Levy et al., 1993; Petty & Fussell, 1997) (e.g., Ehrhart, 1994; Levy et al., 1992; McFarlin et al., 1991). Methods for collecting data have included mail surveys (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Gade & Toutges, 1983), where findings often revealed low return rates in comparison to research utilizing telephone (e.g., Diksa & Rogers, 1996), or face-to-face interviews (e.g., Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Unger, 1993), which often reported higher participation rates.

These variations in research design have produced inconsistent findings in that factors identified as benefits in one study may be expressed as concerns by employers in other studies, making it difficult to compare results and derive conclusions across studies. Yet, the results have identified several perceived employer benefits and concerns in hiring people with disabilities (see Table 2 on the following page). The benefits and concerns expressed by employers of workers with disabilities may have implications for public policy makers, employment service providers, and individuals with disabilities in addressing the labor force participation of this population. The following section reviews methodologies used to investigate employer perceptions of persons with disabilities in the workforce and summarizes key findings and implications of employer attitudinal research.

Type of Research

Researchers primarily utilized quantitative research designs to investigate employer perceptions of persons with disabilities in the workforce (e.g., Ehrhart, 1994; Levy et al., 1992; Nietupski et al., 1996; Shafer et al., 1987). Of the 24 studies reviewed, only Pitt-Catsoupes and Butterworth (1995) reported findings resulting from qualitative data collection strategies. Using separate focus groups of supervisors of workers with disabilities, coworkers, and human resource personnel, they identified factors that facilitated or inhibited the employment of individuals with disabilities.

Table 2: Employer Perceived Benefits and Concern Towards Employing People with Disabilities

Benfits & Concerns	Relevant Research
Work Performance / Quality	Blanck, 1998; Diksa & Rogers, 1996; DuPont, 1993; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Marcouiller et al., 1987; McFarlin et al., 1991; Neitupski et al., 1996; Petty & Fussell, 1997; Phillips, 1975; Pitt-Catsoupes & Butterworth, 1995; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988
Productivity	Blanck, 1998; Fuqua et al., 1984; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Levy et al., 1993; Levy et al., 1992; Marcouiller et al., 1987; Petty & Fussell, 1997; Shafer et al., 1987
Safety	Blanck, 1998; DuPont, 1993; Fuqua et al., 1984; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Johnson et al., 1988; Nietupski et al., 1996; Olson et al., 2000; Phillips, 1975; Shafer et al., 1987
Dependability / Dedication	Blanck, 1998; Fuqua et al., 1984; Levy et al., 1993; Nietupski et al., 1996
Attendance or Punctuality	Blanck, 1998; DuPont, 1993; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Marcouiller et al., 1987; McFarlin et al., 1991; Nietupski et al., 1996; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988
Community Image / Corporate Social Responsibility	Nietupski et al., 1996; Olson et al., 2000; Pitt-Catsoupes & Butterworth, 1995; Shafer et al., 1987
Turnover / Retention	Blanck, 1998; Johnson et al., 1988; McFarlin et al., 1991; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988
Appearance	Gruenhagen, 1982; Marcouiller et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988
Coworker Acceptance / Ability to Interact as Part of a Team / Social Skills	Blanck, 1998; Ehrhart, 1994; Fuqua et al., 1984; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Levy et al., 1993; Marcouiller et al., 1987; McFarlin et al., 1991; Petty & Fussell, 1997; Phillips, 1975
Lack of Necessary Job Skills / Experience	Gruenhagen, 1982; Nietupski et al., 1996; Petty & Fussell, 1998; Pitt-Catsoupes & Butterworth, 1995
Financial Incentives	Blanck, 1998; Shafer et al., 1987
Costs (workers compensation, accommodations)	Blanck, 1998; Fuqua et al., 1984; McFarlin et al., 1991; Olson et al., 2000
Extra Training and/or Supervision	Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Marcouiller et al., 1987; Nietupski et al., 1996; Olson et al., 2000; Petty & Fussell, 1997; Pitt-Catsoupes & Butterworth, 1995; Shafer et al., 1987

Existing findings derived from quantitative research on employers' attitudes toward persons with disabilities were most often drawn from descriptive or correlational research. Several of the reviewed studies investigated employers' perceptions across various combinations of factors (Blanck, 1998; McFarlin et al., 1991; Shafer et al., 1987; Thakker, 1997). These variables can generally be categorized in three areas: organizational, respondent, and worker characteristics. Commonly analyzed organizational characteristics include such factors as type of industry, size of workforce, and geographic location of business. Respondent characteristics are attributes of the organizational representative being surveyed or interviewed, such as job title, previous experience or contact with people with disabilities, length of time with the organization, level of educational attainment, and gender. Worker characteristics focus on factors associated with a person with a disability, such as type and severity of disability, gender, and job title.

Although all of the studies provide descriptive statistics, only a limited number completed analyses using inferential statistical procedures. In some instances, this shortcoming can be attributed to data collected from a limited number of employers, rendering a number of statistical procedures inappropriate. Additionally, there is very little commonality across studies in terms of the type of variables that are investigated. Eleven studies have investigated a specific disability (e.g., Blanck, 1998; Diksa & Rodgers, 1996; Gade & Toutges, 1983; Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982; Marcouiller et al., 1987; Minskoff et al., 1987; Olson et al., 2000; Phillips, 1975; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988). Others have studied a number of different disabilities (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1988) or referred to persons with disabilities in general (McFarlin et al., 1991; Levy et al., 1993; Ehrhart, 1994).

Outcomes from research analyzing the relationship between the same variables have also produced conflicting results across studies. For instance, a number of studies reported mixed findings in examining the relationship between employer size and attitudes toward people with disabilities (Ehrhart; Gade & Toutges; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Levy et al., 1993; Nietupski et al., 1996).

Inconsistent findings can also be attributed to variations in the size of the areas from which samples were

drawn, as well as in procedures used to gather data. In the vast majority of the studies, mail surveys were the predominant method utilized in gathering data. A limitation with the use of mail surveys is the low response rates generally reported in employer research using this data collection technique. In many instances, the findings from the reviewed research indicated that mail surveys conducted with businesses and organizations in limited geographical areas (e.g., Shafer et al., 1987; Thakker, 1997) reported much higher return rates than research utilizing mail surveys with national samples of employers (e.g., Ehrhart, 1994; Olson et al., 2000). The response rates for findings from regional samples of employers ranged from 6.2% (Levy et al., 1993) to 61% (Thakker), and the response rates for national samples of employers ranged from 6% (Olson et al.) to 38% (McFarlin et al.). Furthermore, very few studies that utilized mail surveys have reported any characteristics of nonrespondent data.

Overall, researchers utilizing telephone surveys experienced greater success in gathering data, as they frequently reported much higher participation rates in comparison to those for mail surveys. The findings also indicated that the most effective method in achieving a high participation rate was to collect data from employers through face-to-face interviews. For example, results reported by a limited number of researchers demonstrated high employer participation rates when data were collected through face-to-face structured interviews (e.g., Johnson et al., 1988; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Kregel & Unger, 1993). However, conducting in-person interviews with a large number of employers across diverse geographical areas may be very labor intensive and not economically feasible.

One of the critical shortcomings with the existing research on employers' perceptions toward workers with disabilities is that the majority of the studies surveyed employer representatives who may have been responsible for hiring or supervising but who did not necessarily have actual, firsthand experience in working with employees with disabilities (e.g., Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Levy et al., 1993; McFarlin et al., 1991; Olson et al., 2000). Of the 24 studies reviewed, only 7 involved samples composed predominantly of supervisors or managers with direct experience with a worker with a disability (e.g., Blanck, 1998; Dupont, 1993; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Petty & Fussell, 1997; Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth, 1995; Shafer et al., 1987; Shafer et al., 1988). Results from studies that surveyed

direct-line managers or supervisors indicated that they were generally satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities (Blanck; Dupont; Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth; Shafer et al., 1987). Furthermore, employer representatives who had previous experience in supervising or managing workers with disabilities expressed fewer concerns about hiring applicants with disabilities and reported more favorable perceptions of workers with disabilities.

Summary of Findings

Despite the identified limitations in the methodology used by previous researchers, several key points can be highlighted from the results of research on employers' perceptions of people with disabilities in the workplace. These findings include the following:

- The type and severity of disability may impact the extent to which persons with disabilities are included in the workforce. For instance, employers expressed more concern with hiring individuals with mental or emotional disabilities as compared to individuals with physical disabilities. This finding may have direct implications on the willingness of applicants or workers with "hidden" disabilities to disclose them or request accommodations. All of the findings resulting from research investigating employers' attitudes across different types of disabilities were based on responses from employer representatives who have had little direct experience supervising or managing workers with disabilities (eg., Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1987; Thakker, 1997).
- To some extent, employers appear willing to sacrifice work performance or work quality in exchange for a reliable, dependable employee. However, it is unclear the extent to which other factors, such as economic and labor market conditions or coworker perceptions, might influence an employer's willingness to support or sustain a worker with a disability who may be perceived as less productive.
- Employers report several concerns surrounding the work potential of employees with disabilities that may be derived from existing myths and misconceptions and not from their direct experiences with workers with disabilities. These myths and misconceptions may frequently result in an applicant or employee with a disability not being recognized as a "qualified employee with a disability" under the provisions of the ADA.

- Increasingly, there appears to be a renewed emphasis on employers' recognizing the significance of employing workers with disabilities in an effort to enhance their image in the community (e.g., Olson et al., 2000; Nietupski et al., 1996), strengthen their commitment to corporate social responsibility, (e.g., Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth, 1995), or increase the diversity of their workforce so that it reflects that of the general population.
- Relative to other employers, those who have previous experience with workers with disabilities report more favorable perceptions of persons with disabilities in the workforce and a willingness to hire individuals with disabilities.
- An overwhelming majority of studies of employers' attitudes toward workers with disabilities have been completed with managers who have the capacity to hire or supervise. Very few studies were conducted with front-line supervisors or employer representatives who had actual experience supervising or evaluating the work performance of employees with disabilities. Senior management and human resource professionals play a pivotal role in developing and implementing business policies and practices directed toward integrating people with disabilities into the workforce. Yet, first-line supervisors may be called upon to assess worker performance and address potential support needs of workers with disabilities. Additionally, supervisors' desire and ability to integrate and support people with disabilities is influenced by the extent to which (1) organizational responses and practices match formal policies; (2) visible activities or business strategies reflect a commitment to include individuals with disabilities in the workforce; and (3) senior management embraces values and strategies that include a commitment to including and retaining individuals with disabilities in the workforce (Balser, 1999; Thakker, 1997). Future research efforts need to be directed at both corporate or senior management and direct-line supervisors.

Conclusion

Employers have identified both benefits and concerns regarding the employment potential of people with disabilities. Prior experience with workers with disabilities tends to produce more favorable perceptions and a willingness to hire persons with disabilities. However, although a majority of employer representatives may agree with the idea of hiring people with disabilities,

this agreement may not transfer to a willingness of employers to consider individuals with disabilities as job applicants for their own company (Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986). Also, many business executives believe that more should be done in their company and into others to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce (McFarlin et al., 1991).

Perhaps there has not previously been a time in history in which prosperous economic conditions, emerging technology, and progressive disability-related legislation

coexisted to generate a more promising employment outlook for persons with disabilities. Employers are increasingly faced with managing a diverse workforce, and many have strengthened their efforts in the area of corporate social responsibility. The employment experiences of persons with disabilities during this time may provide an indication of the extent to which employer attitudes present significant barriers or opportunities for the employment of millions of Americans with disabilities desiring to participate in our nation's labor force.

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Chapter 2

Human Resource Professionals and the Employment of People with Disabilities: A Business Perspective

by: Darlene D Unger, Paul Wehman, Satoko Yasuda,
Leanne Campbell, & Howard Green

Organizations often rely on human resource professionals to develop or implement policies and procedures as they pertain to diversity, disability, and accommodation in the workplace. As such, human resource professionals play a pivotal role in the inclusion and retention of persons with disabilities in the workforce. An investigation into human resource professionals' perceptions of barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities and organizational policies and procedures as they pertain to disability in the workplace was completed with 46 human resource professionals.

Results indicate that employers have taken several measures in an effort to integrate persons with disabilities into their organizations. Yet, employers believe they could do more to hire persons with disabilities.

In the last decade, the prosperous economy of the United States has created over 19 million new jobs and an unemployment rate at its lowest point in 29 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 1998). An average of approximately 250,000 to 300,000 new jobs were created each month during much of the 1990s. (Anonymous, 1998). The unemployment rate was at or below 5% from April, 1997 to September, 1998, the lowest since 1957. Further, it is projected that during the next 10 to 15 years, the workforce will grow more slowly than at any other time since the 1930s (Fischer, 1995). Due to changing economic and demographic conditions impacting the American workforce, employers across the nation are continuously struggling to identify and retain qualified workers. In order to remain competitive in the global economy, businesses and organizations will consider

previously underemployed or marginally employed individuals as a source of labor (Uhalde, 1999).

State of the Nation

- Nineteen million new jobs
- Unemployment rate at the lowest point in decades
- Decline in new labor market entrants

Labor Force Participation of Persons with Disabilities

One potential source of labor in the United States is the estimated 30 million working-age persons with disabilities (U. S. Census Bureau, 1997). Employment data on people with disabilities indicate that they do not participate in the labor force, nor benefit from participation, to the same extent as their nondisabled peers. For example, a recent report indicated that only 34.6% of individuals with disabilities were employed, compared to 79.8% of those without disabilities (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993). Individuals with moderate disabilities were nearly twice as likely to be looking for work or on layoff as people with no disabilities, and those with severe disabilities were nearly three times as likely (Department of Labor [DOL], 1999). Among workers with college degrees, only 52 percent of those with severe disabilities reported labor market activity compared to 90 percent of those with no disability (DOL, 1999). These labor force findings are especially discouraging in light of the results from a recent survey in which the overwhelming majority (80%) of

unemployed, working-age adults with disabilities wanted to work(Harris, 1994).

Additionally, workers with disabilities are more likely to hold two jobs, work part-time because they can not find full-time employment, and be self-employed and earn less per hour, per month, and per year (Kruse, 1997). Although a number of factors impact the extent to which individuals with disabilities participate in the labor force, the unemployment rate and widespread underemployment of people with disabilities are particularly troubling when one considers the fact that employers are competing for valuable human resources and are offering attractive incentive and benefits packages in an effort to recruit and retain workers.

Labor Force Participation of Americans with Disabilities

- Thirty million working-age persons with disabilities.
 - 34.6% of Americans with disabilities are employed vs. 79.8% of nondisabled Americans.
 - Likelihood of being unemployed increases as the severity of disability increases.
-

Social and Economic Costs of Disability

Employment is often the key to improving self-esteem, reducing feelings of loneliness, and moving toward a richer quality of life (Brolin, 1985). Unemployment not only affects individuals with disabilities negatively in regards to their self-esteem, but the high unemployment rate also places a burden on society as the public payments for disability have soared in the last 20 years. For instance, the number of working-age people with disabilities receiving Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits has increased dramatically from 4 million in 1985 to 6.3 million in 1994 (General Accounting Office, June 1996). This creates a huge problem since it leads to enormous expenditures associated with long-term retention on Social Security cash benefit. In FY 1997, the number of people receiving benefits rose to 8 million, resulting in expenditures of 89 billion dollars. Kruse (1997) estimates that if one million more of the 54 million Americans with

disabilities were employed, the nation would save \$286 million annually in food stamp use and \$1.8 billion annually in Social Security Income benefits.

Despite the passage of progressive laws designed to ease the entry of persons with disabilities into the workforce, as well as advances in rehabilitation and technology, the unemployment rate of people with disabilities remains at an unconscionably high level. Significant legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) (ADA), the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act, are intended to help alleviate employment discrimination, improve workforce training and employment programs, and expand health insurance provisions for job seekers with disabilities. Innovations, such as telecommuting, use of the Internet and computer technology, and mobile telecommunication devices also play an important role in making the workplace accessible to individuals with disabilities (Mabilleau, Szlamkowicz, & Masse, 1997; McCormick, 1994; Perry, 1994). At no previous time in our nation's history has the legislative and economic conditions coalesced to produce a more favorable employment outlook for the millions of Americans with disabilities who desire the opportunity to compete in the labor market.

In order for people with disabilities to capitalize on the favorable economic conditions, they must pursue employment with the businesses that drive the economy in their communities and make organizational representatives aware of their interests and capabilities. Job seekers and human service professionals that assist people with disabilities in participating in the workforce must frequently interact with the "gatekeepers" of the businesses or organizations in which they are seeking employment. Oftentimes, individuals with disabilities or human service professionals must correspond with representatives from organizations' human resource departments or in smaller businesses, those individuals whose job responsibilities include the functions typically associated with personnel or human resource management.

Role of Human Resource Professionals

Human resource professionals serve three vital functions within organizations: 1) **advisory**-gathering facts, diagnosing problems, providing solutions, and

offering objective assistance and guidance on employee-related matters; 2) **service** – providing service to the organization, its employees, and the public; and 3) **control** – reviewing and measuring performance and developing, communicating, and implementing organizational policies, procedures, and rules (SHRM, 2000). In terms of promoting the employment of people with disabilities, as well as retaining and promoting existing employees with disabilities, human resource professionals play a pivotal role.

Role of Human Resource Professionals—

- **Advisory** -- gathering facts, diagnosing problems, providing solutions, and offering objective assistance and guidance on employee-related matters.
 - **Service** -- providing service to the organization, its employees, and the public
 - **Control** -- reviewing and measuring performance and developing, communicating, and implementing organizational policies, procedures, and rules.
(SHRM, 2000)
-

In many large businesses, a designated human resource professional is responsible for both interpreting and communicating legislation and state and government regulations, such as the ADA or the Family Medical Leave Act, to other members of the organization. They may frequently be called upon to respond to questions and offer consultation with both management and staff on organizational policies and procedures as they pertain to various aspects of employment-related laws such as affirmative action and providing reasonable accommodations. Employees and supervisors may also seek the assistance of human resource professionals to address or resolve work performance issues. Given their position within the structure of organizations and their job functions, human resource professionals have a unique opportunity to either advance or prohibit the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Their perceptions or interpretations of organizational policies and procedures as they pertain to the ADA, disability, diversity, and discrimination may influence how workplace personnel respond to the requirements of the ADA or employees with disabilities. Additionally, the extent

to which employers have implemented formal policies and procedures in addressing the employment regulations of the ADA may provide an indication of the effort to which employers may go in an attempt to include people with disabilities in their workforce. The results of recently conducted research demonstrate employers' awareness of the law, despite limited knowledge of the ADA employment provisions, as well as minimal organizational efforts directed toward implementing the ADA beyond mere compliance with the law (Balser, 1999; Curry, 1996; Lewis, 1996; Thakker, 1997). Findings demonstrate that to some extent employers have adopted or altered formal policies or procedures in an effort to comply with the law (Balser, 1999; Curry, 1996; Harlan & Robert, 1998; SHRM/Cornell, 1999). For instance, one study found that a limited number of employers altered formal policies or procedures (e.g., Curry, 1996) while other findings have indicated that employers have implemented several measures to comply with the law despite these efforts having little impact on the employment outcomes of workers with disabilities (e.g., Balser, 1999) or supervisors' adherence to the law (e.g., Harlan & Robert, 1998; Thakker, 1997).

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- Employers have adopted or altered formal policies or procedures in an effort to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Balser, 1999; Curry, 1996;
Harlan & Robert, 1998; SHRM/
Cornell, 1999

YET

- The existence of disability policies has limited impact on:

Employment outcomes
for workers with
disabilities

Balser, 1999

OR

Supervisors adherence
to the law.

Harlan & Robert, 1998;
Thakker, 1997

The willingness of employers to alter their behavior to comply with the law may depend on their attitudes regarding the law and towards people with disabilities (Braddock & Bachelder, 1994; Ehrhart, 1994; Moore & Crimindo, 1995). Many advocates for individuals with disabilities believe that the Americans with Disabilities Act may make employers change their behavior, but it will do little to change their attitudes and perceptions towards America's disabled population (Harris, 1998; Pati, & Bailey, 1995). Unfounded myths and misinformation may contribute to employers' skepticism in hiring otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities. One such example is the fear of increased costs of insurance when employing people with disabilities. A number of individuals have identified employer attitudes towards individuals with disabilities as an important factor in the staggering unemployment rate of people with disabilities (Blanck, 1998; King, 1993; Smith, 1992). Yet, findings indicate that many employers who have hired individuals with disabilities report favorable experiences with employing people with disabilities (Blanck, 1998; Diska & Rogers, 1996; DuPont, 1990; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman & Levy, 1992; Shafer, et al., 1987).

Many advocates for and individuals with disabilities believe that the Americans with Disabilities Act may make employers change their behavior, but it will do little to change their attitudes and perceptions towards America's disabled population.

(Harris, 1998; Pati, & Bailey, 1995)

People with disabilities represent an underutilized source of labor, but there is uncertainty surrounding the extent to which employers view people with disabilities as a viable labor source in addressing their human resource needs (Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, & DiLeo, 1997; Unger, in press). There is limited research that describes human resource professionals' awareness and knowledge of resources available to assist employers with identifying and supporting people with disabilities in their workforce. Further, research on the extent to which human resource professionals believe existing organizational practices prohibit or advance the employment of people with disabilities is also lacking. Due to the unique role human resource professionals play within their organizations, it is

critical to determine their perceptions of organizational performance in relation to implementing policies and practices pertaining to disability. The purpose of this research was to describe policies and practices of organizations that have employed people with disabilities and to identify perceptions of human resource professionals towards organizational efforts to include individuals with disabilities in their workforce, as well as barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities.

METHOD

The design of this study was non-experimental, descriptive research (Cambell & Stanley, 1963). A total of 43 businesses, operating throughout the nation and representing a diverse mix of industries participated in the research. Trained interviewers conducted structured telephone interviews with 46 human resource professionals lasting approximately 30 minutes to 1-hour and 45 minutes. This analysis is part of a larger study of employers' perceptions of workers with disabilities and their knowledge and utilization of accommodations (Unger, 2001) in which both human resource professionals and supervisors within the same businesses were surveyed.

Participants

A purposive sampling procedure was used in order to identify employers who knowingly employed people with disabilities or had been recognized for disability-friendly work cultures. Employers were solicited from the Society of Human Resource Management, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Leadership Networks affiliated with the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. Representatives from these organizations provided names and contact information for employer representatives or businesses that might be willing to participate in the research. Potential employer participants were also identified from a report published by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1998) that contained a listing of private sector employers who were recognized as effective employers in implementing and complying with employment discrimination legislation. Infrequently, employer representatives also assisted in the identification of other businesses that might be willing to participate.

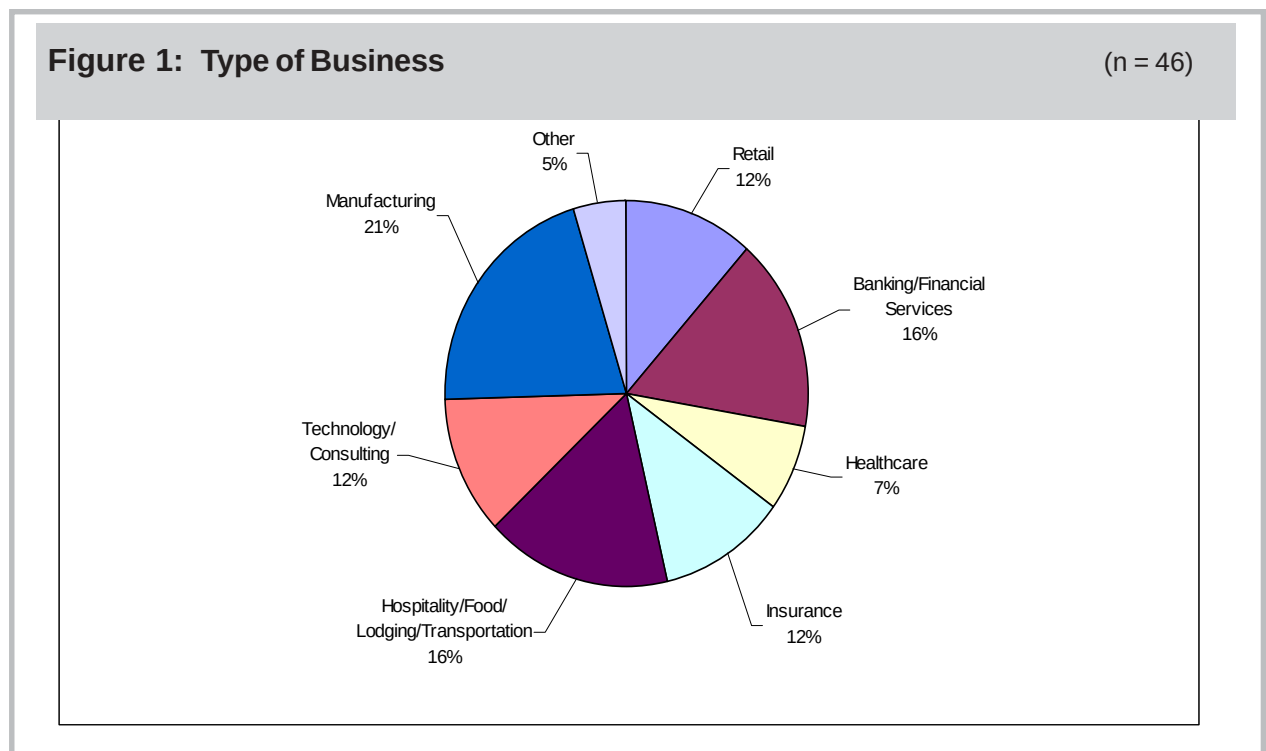
The first step involved contacting the designated organizational representative and describing the purpose of the study, what would be required of employers, and the criteria for participation. Oftentimes, a one-page description of the study was faxed, e-mailed or sent through the mail to the contact person for review. In some instances, referral was made to a more appropriate individual within the organization who possessed greater knowledge about organizational policies and procedures pertaining to disability.

Once a commitment to participate was obtained, the name, phone number and mailing address of the contact person was collected so that information pertaining to the research could be mailed. The packet of information contained a letter identifying the purpose of the research, a one-page description of the study, and one Human Resource Questionnaire.

Of the 76 businesses contacted 43 participated in the research, representing a participation rate of 56.58%. Several employers, who initially agreed to participate, were unable to after receiving the packet of information. Reasons cited by employer representatives included the inability to secure approval from the organization's legal department, limited organizational resources to devote to collecting the information, and concerns regarding the time it would take to complete the survey.

Employers -- The participating businesses were diverse in terms of types of industry and geographic location. A breakdown of participating employers, categorized by industry type is contained below in Figure 1. Employers were predominately larger employers, in terms of the size of workforce, with the average number of employees per business being 36,168 with a median of 12,000 employees. The range for the size of workforce for participating businesses was from 25 employees to 200,000 employees, with only four organizations reporting that their workforce consisted of less than 1000 employees.

Human Resource Professionals -- Human resource professionals were responsible for a variety of human resource functions including compensation, benefits management, health and safety, and organizational development and training. At least one-half of the respondents indicated having responsibilities in the following areas: disability (60.87%); employee relations (58.70%); employment/recruitment (52.17%); and diversity (50%). To a far lesser extent, human resource professionals also participated in other activities typically associated with an organization's human resources department. For example, less than one-third reported their responsibilities to include: administrative (28.26%); compensation (26.09%) organizational developmental (19.57%); legal (17.39%); benefits management (15.22%); health/safety and security (17.39%); and industrial relations (13.04%).



Instrumentation

Description

The Human Resource Questionnaire, was used to identify 1) organizational policies and practices pertaining to disability and accommodation and 2) employer resources available to address the support needs of employees with disabilities. The designated human resource professional within each business or organization was responsible for the completion of this instrument through a structured-telephone interview conducted by the researcher.

Questionnaire Development

Item Generation and Selection

The initial items included in the instrument were developed by a review of the literature pertaining to: 1) employers' perceptions toward Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act and organizational efforts directed toward implementing the ADA; and 2) employer attitudes toward people with disabilities in the workforce. From a preliminary literature review, several categories emerged that provided guidance in the development of questions or specific sub-scales that were used in instrumentation.

The draft survey was then reviewed by a panel of experts, modified, and pilot-tested. Representatives from the VCU Charter Business Roundtable, the Presidential Task Force on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, the President's Committee on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Society of Human Resource Management, the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research, the American Telecommuting Association and employers were mailed a draft of the instrument and were asked to provide recommendations on the content of the instrument. Participants were also provided with a description of the proposed study and were asked to provide feedback on the survey items, as well as recommend changes or additions to the instrument. Additionally, the panel of experts and individuals with disabilities, advocates for people with disabilities, and representatives from business and professional trade associations met in Washington, DC to thoroughly review and provide comment on the content and format of the items included in the questionnaire. As a result of the meeting, the instrument was revised until there was agreement on the format and content of the instrument

to insure that it appropriately addressed the purpose of the research.

After the format and the content of the Human Resource Questionnaire were finalized, the instrumentation and procedures were pilot-tested with a large employer located in central Virginia. A structured-telephone interview was conducted by the researcher with the designated human resource professional. During the telephone interview, the human resource professional responded to questions contained on the Human Resource Questionnaire, and commented on the clarity and ambiguity of items, time for completion and any difficulties experienced responding to survey items.

Following the pilot-test of the instrument and procedures, minor changes were made to the format of the Human Resource Questionnaire. The final 11-page instrument consisted of 48 items categorized into the following areas: respondent demographics (2-items); organizational characteristics and workplace culture (9-items); disability-awareness employer characteristics (21-items); ADA characteristics (10-items); and employees with disabilities (6-items). Response format for the survey items included forced-choice, likert-scale type, and open-ended.

Procedure

Once commitment was obtained from employer representatives, a human resource professional within each organization was identified to participate in a 30-45 minute structured-telephone interview to respond to questions on the Human Resource Questionnaire. Then, the researcher mailed the designated human resource professional a letter containing a brief description of the study and notifying the human resource professional that the researcher would be contacting him or her to arrange a time for conducting the interview. Additionally, a Human Resource Questionnaire was included with the letter sent to the designated human resource professional.

Structured-telephone interviews were completed with 46 human resource professionals representing 43 businesses. In some organizations, more than one human resource professional participated. For instance, one organization had three human resource professionals participate and another organization had two human resource professionals participate in the research. Overall, the duration of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 1-

hour and 45 minutes. The length of the interviews varied depending on whether the respondent had reviewed or completed the survey prior to the structured-telephone interview.

-
- **Sample** -- 46 Human Resource Professionals representing 43 businesses
 - **Instrumentation** -- Human Resource Questionnaire
 - **Procedures** -- 1 hour and 45 minutes structured-telephone interviews with Human Resource Professionals
-

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and measures of central tendency, were calculated for responses to survey items. Categories were developed for responses to open-ended survey items, and the items were subsequently coded for data entry. Data was entered and analyzed using Microsoft Access.

Results

Employer Policies and Practices that Promote or Inhibit the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Their Workplace

Figure 2 on the following page contains a description of the extent to which human resource professionals believe the policies of their organizations reflect a commitment to include people with disabilities in their workforce. As the data indicate, human resource professionals agreed most strongly with the idea that organizational policies reflected a commitment to return workers who are temporarily disabled back to work and to retain existing employees with disabilities. However, human resource professionals were somewhat less certain that the policies reflected an attempt to attract applicants with disabilities or to provide workers with disabilities opportunities for career development and advancement.

Thus, it is not surprising that when human resource professionals were asked to rate the performance of their organizations on several disability-related factors, the three areas receiving the lowest mean scores involved providing workers with disabilities opportunities for promotions (3.27), hiring individuals with disabilities (3.16),

and recruiting people with disabilities (3.09) (see Figure 3 on the following page). Yet, human resource professionals believe their organizations are doing an adequate job of negotiating reasonable accommodations, handling termination of workers with disabilities, and assigning individuals to jobs that match their abilities.

Addressing Attitudinal Barriers and Creating an Inclusive Work Culture -- Human resource professionals also indicated that existing organizational policies reflect an attempt to reinforce managers who embrace diversity-related values and eliminate bias through education and training on disability-related factors (see Figure 2). The vast majority of the businesses also (84.78%) reported the existence of diversity management training programs within their organizations. Perhaps even more encouraging, disability was addressed as a component of the diversity management training program in more than four-fifths (86.49%) of the organizations reporting the existence of diversity management training programs.

As the data in Figure 3 demonstrate, human resource professionals believe their organizations are doing an adequate job of creating more inclusive work cultures. This idea is reflected in the mean scores for measures on organizational performance pertaining to creating a disability-friendly work environment and developing a work culture that embraces diversity. However, there is some indication that organizations could also improve or enhance their efforts in this area. For example, despite the reported availability of disability-awareness or sensitivity training by a majority of the organizations (84.78%), less than half of the businesses (39.47%) report the availability of training to all members of their workforce or that the training is mandatory.

Orientation to Disability Issues and the AdA

Human resource professionals indicate that their organizations have taken several measures in response to the Americans with Disabilities Act. For example, over three-fourths of the organizations reviewed organizational policies (89.96%) or revised organizational policies (80.43%). More than half of the organizations reported developing new organizational policies (63.04%), providing disability-awareness training (63.04%), and distributing pertinent disability information (59.52%). To a lesser

Figure 2: HR Professionals' Perceptions of the Extent to Which Organizational Policies Reflect a Commitment to Include Persons with Disabilities in Their Workforce (n = 46)

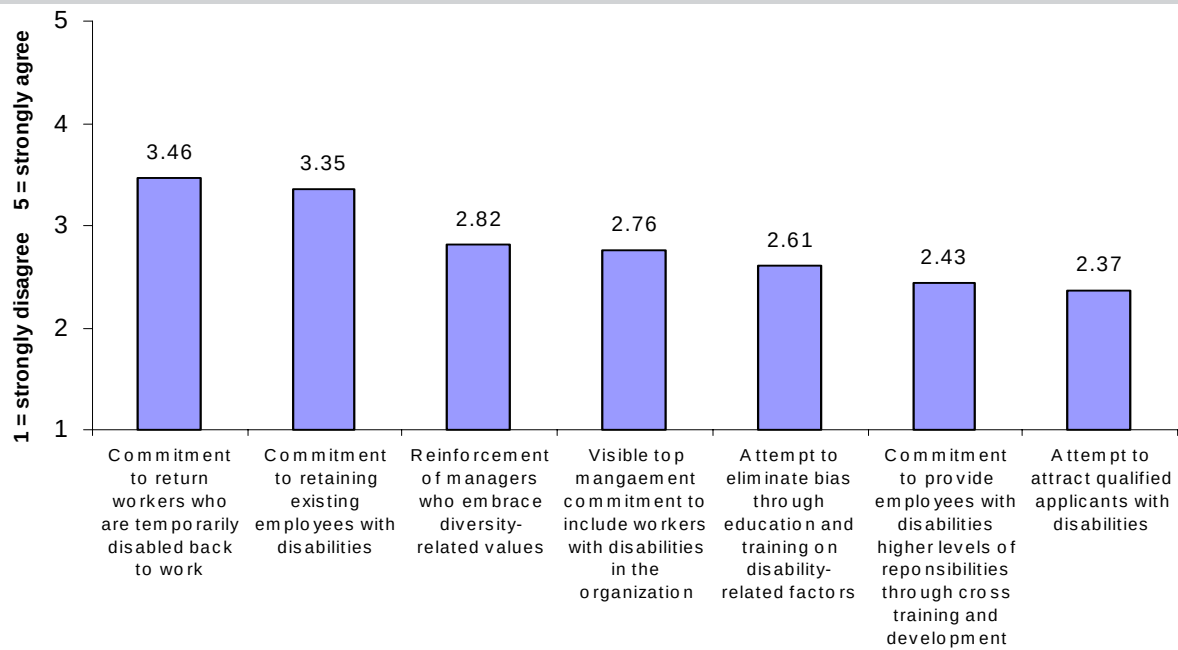
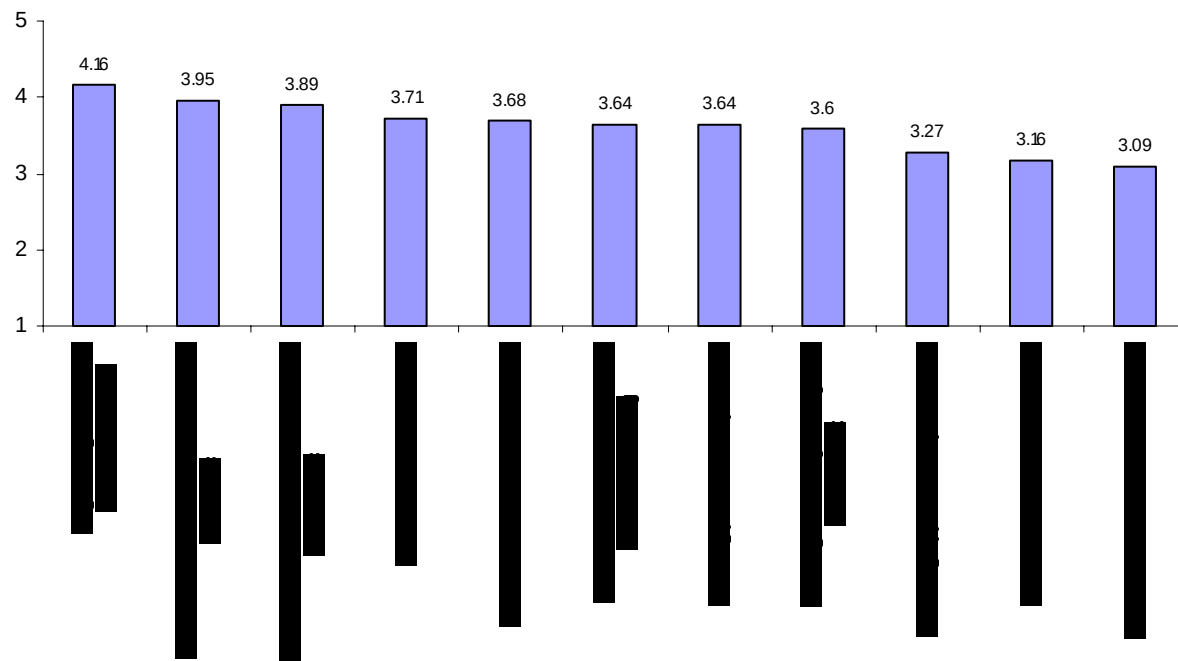


Figure 3: HR Professionals' Perceptions of Organizational Performance and Employee Relations Regarding Employees with Disabilities (n = 46)
(1 = needs improvement -- 5 = we're doing a good job)



extent, organizations also engaged in other activities, such as assigning a person (41.30%) or establishing a new office (15.22%) to be in charge of ADA implementation and compliance.

Human resource professionals report the presence of a variety of ADA related-training activities for their employees. For instance, almost all organizations provide training on non-discriminatory recruitment and hiring practices (93.48%), non-discrimination in the disciplinary process of termination (91.30%), procedures for identifying and securing accommodations for employees with disabilities (88.89%), and identifying essential job functions and developing written job descriptions (76.09%). However, respondents also indicated that human resource professionals are the most prevalent beneficiaries of such training activities in comparison to managers and other workplace personnel. These findings are similar to those reported in previous studies (e.g., Lewis, 1997; SHRM/ Cornell, 1999).

Human resource professionals indicated that training in these areas is often conducted at either new employee orientation or training, on an as-needed basis, or upon promotion to a managerial or supervisory position. In rare instances was training in any of the ADA topics conducted on an on-going basis. For six of the seven identified training areas, the most prevalent response from

human resource professionals was that training was provided on an as-needed basis. When training was provided on a more consistent basis, such as annually, the focus of the training was reported to be disability-awareness and sensitivity training.

Figure 4 below displays data that reflects organizations' orientation to the ADA and factors related to implementing the ADA. Interestingly, human resource professionals most strongly agreed that the potential costs associated with accommodations are worth the investment. They also believe that employees with disabilities are valuable members of their workforce.

Barriers to Employment for People with Disabilities

Human resource professionals were asked to identify the most significant barriers to employment for people with disabilities. The mean scores were calculated for responses to eight survey items (see Figure 5 on the following page). Interestingly, human resource professionals did not view the costs that were associated with employing people with disabilities as barriers in employing these individuals in participating organizations. Employer attitudes were not viewed as a significant barrier, an area that is oftentimes identified as the greatest barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities.

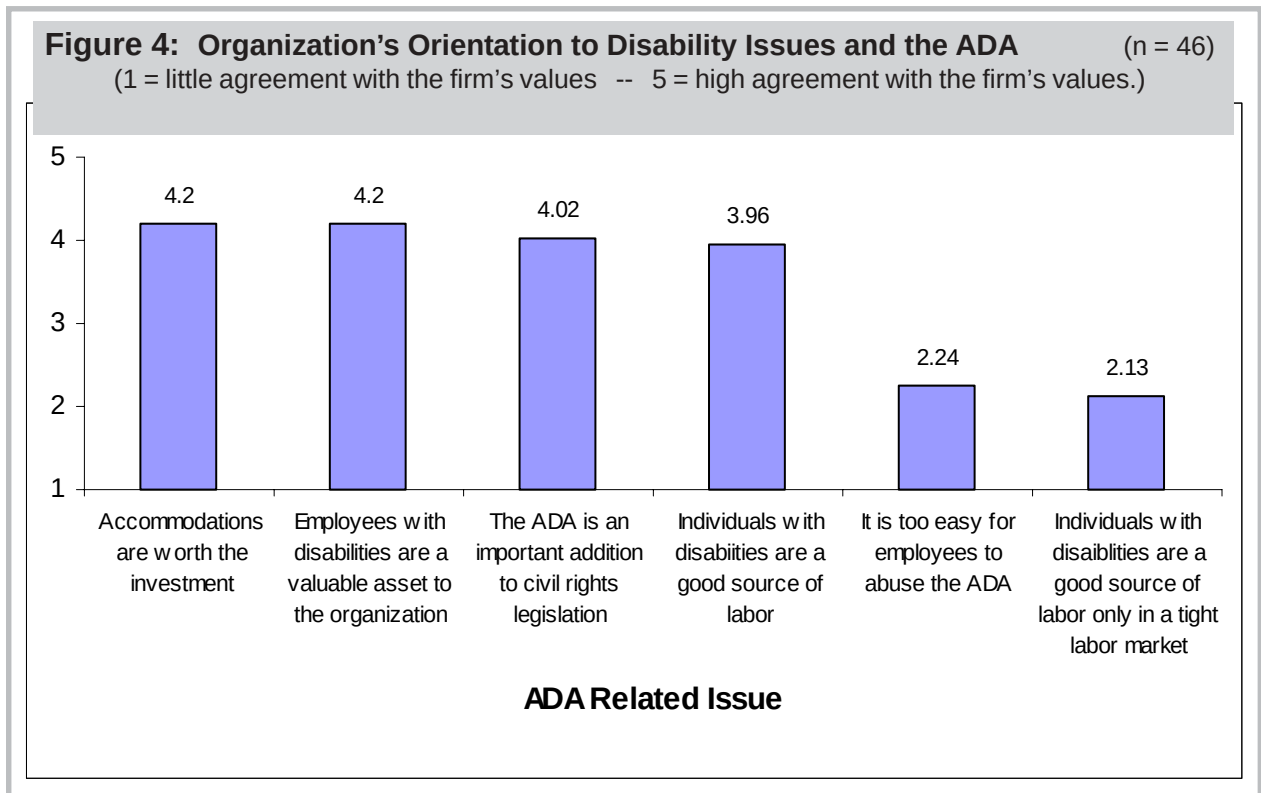
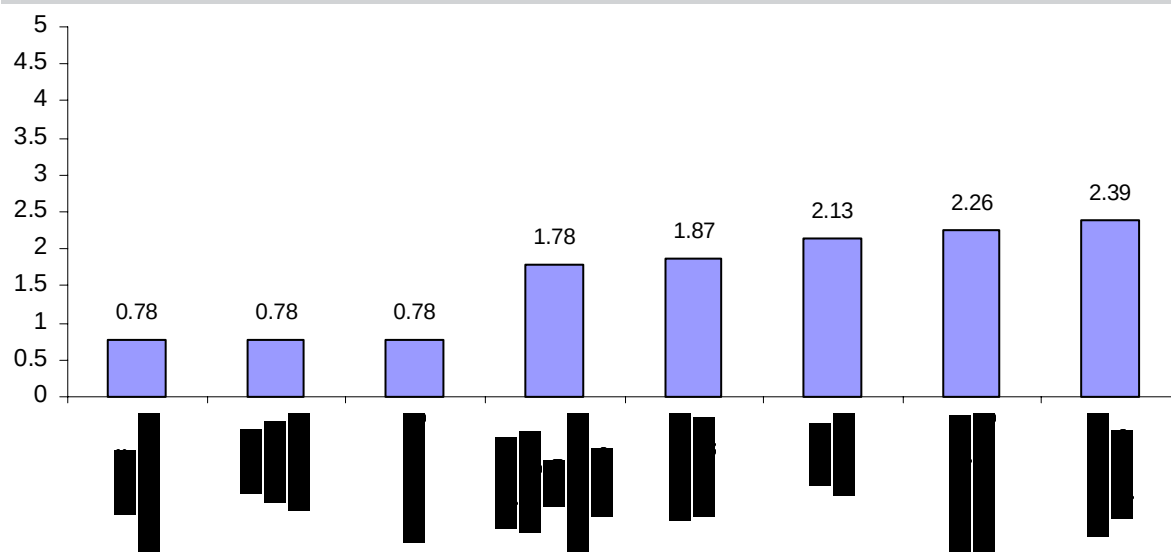


Figure 5: HR Professionals' Perceptions of Barriers to Employment or Advancement for People with Disabilities in Their Organization (n = 46)
(1 = not a significant barrier -- 5 = significant barrier)



Perception of the Job Skills of Employees with Disabilities and Workplace Impact

Human resource professionals' perceptions of the most significant barriers to employment for people with disabilities provide underlying evidence that many members of organizations may believe people with disabilities lack the necessary skills, education, and training to succeed in today's workforce. However, these three most significant barriers are the same barriers that many nondisabled persons often encounter in their attempts to participate in the labor force (Passmore, 1994).

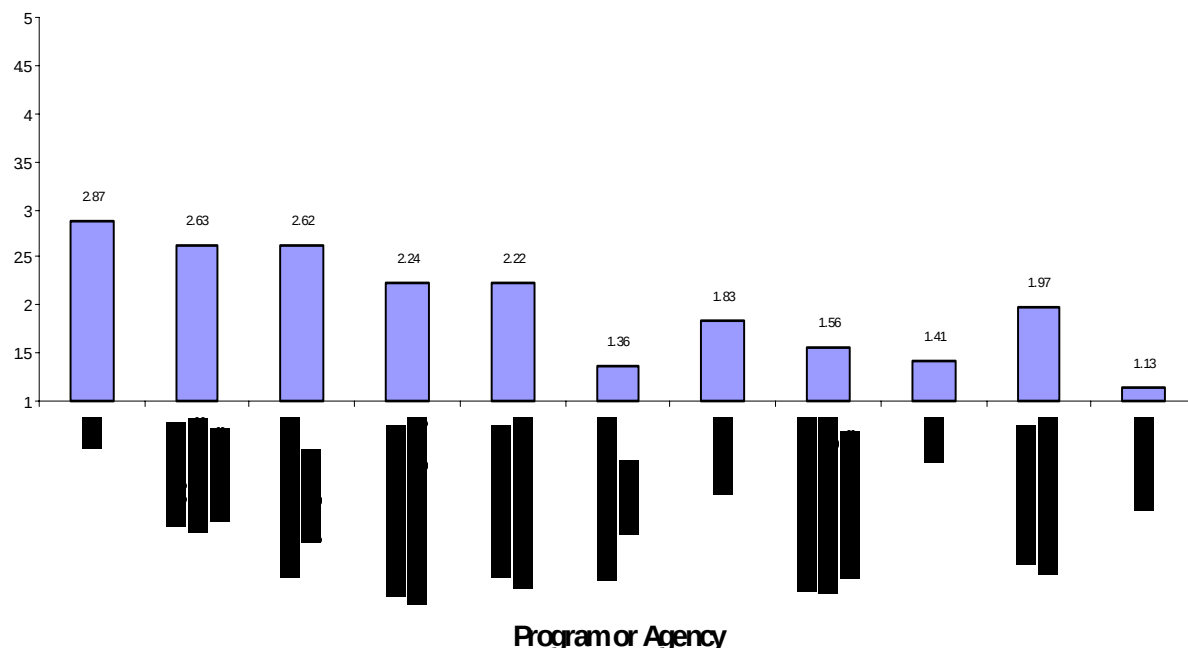
The data also indicate that human resource professionals may have reservations about how employees with disabilities will impact coworker relations and employee morale. For instance, aggregated mean scores for responses to likert-type scale (higher number indicated stronger disagreement with survey item) items pertaining to coworkers, accommodations, and employees with disabilities indicated that human resource professionals were most concerned with coworkers' reactions to the work performance (3.28) and the provision of accommodations (3.65) for employees with disabilities. They were less concerned with whether employees with disabilities would request accommodations when they might not be needed (3.87) or to justify inadequate job performance (3.93).

Role of Human Resource Professionals in Identifying and Providing Accommodations

Human resource professionals identified their role in the accommodation process as being a consultant and information source. A majority of the human resource professionals reported working with supervisors (93.48%) and employees with disabilities (86.96%) to identify and secure accommodations. Slightly less than two-thirds (60.87%) of the respondents indicated having responsibility for referring individuals to external resources to assist in the accommodation process. The data reflect the critical role human resource professionals play in supporting individuals with disabilities in their workforce.

When asked about their awareness and utilization of a variety of programs or agencies that provide training or assistance to people with disabilities seeking employment, human resource professionals indicated they were somewhat familiar with these programs or agencies (see Figure 6 on the following page). It is important to note that the agencies or programs most familiar with human resource professionals were those that most often seek out employers or the business community. Human resource professionals report less familiarity with programs or agencies that offer technical assistance to the business community, such as the Disability Business Technical Assistance Centers (DBTAC).

Figure 6: HR Professionals' Familiarity with Programs or Agencies (n = 46)
(1 = not very familiar -- 5 = familiar)



DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to provide a preliminary assessment of how human resource professionals in corporate America perceive their respective organizations' performance in relation to including people with disabilities in their workforce. Human resource managers can be considered in many ways as the gatekeepers to employment for people with disabilities, as well as all other potential employees who are seeking employment. When initial inquiries are made about a job within a business or when job applications are filed, it is the human resource professional, personnel director, or personnel specialist who reviews the application and then determines as to whether the applicant meets the minimal qualifications for employment and identifies which department the application will be sent. Usually the specific job application that is being considered within a department is pre-screened and forwarded by a human resource professional for the front-line supervisor to evaluate. Most companies that have a least 50 to 100 employees will utilize this type of applicant prescreening, referral, and

selection. The majority of the 43 companies polled in this study have considerably more than 100 employees.

Human resource professionals have an important role in helping to implement the employment selection process and developing replacement and succession plans for employee advancement and retention within organizations. They have the unique perspective of interacting with all departments and communicating with employees in all levels in the organizational structure on a regular basis, including top management, as well as front-line supervisors. Additionally, complaints related to equal employment opportunity practices, affirmative action violations, and issues pertaining to the Americans with Disabilities Act and reasonable accommodation, as well as discrimination, are all generally routed directly or indirectly through human resource professionals. Therefore, it is essential to understand human resource professionals' perceptions of existing policies and practices pertaining to disability within their corporations.

In this study, a large number of items were identified by human resource professionals that provide us with definitive feedback on how they viewed the salient issues related to the employment of people with

disabilities. For example, after a review of preliminary data, it is clear that the Americans with Disabilities Act is not the barrier that some have indicated it might be; it is also clear that many of the government-funded human service agencies that specialize in employment activities for people with disabilities are not well known by human resource professionals who might benefit from this expertise. The preliminary results of this study yielded at least six major areas that warrant review. A brief discussion of each of these areas follows.

1. Employer Policy and Attitudes

Employers have taken significant steps to address existing stereotypes and attitudes towards workers with disabilities (Unger, 2001). For example, diversity management training programs that contain a component pertaining to disability in the workplace exist in many organizations (McFarlin, Song & Sonntag, 1991). Furthermore, many human resource professionals believe their organizations are doing a good job of creating a disability-friendly work environment, as well as reinforcing managers who embrace diversity-related values (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1992).

However, it is possible that those companies who did not feel this way or did not have disability specific training programs, or did not perceive their organization as disability-friendly may have chosen not to participate in the research. Furthermore, the quality of diversity management training programs, or the effectiveness of these programs in driving organizational change, is unknown. Finally, it is unclear whether a company that has a diversity management training program is necessarily hiring that many more people with disabilities, or creating sufficiently more employment opportunities in comparison to organizations which lack such programs.

It is encouraging that such a large percentage of human resource professionals are sensitive to the need for diversity training and have chosen to include a focus on disability in this activity. However, one could argue that in order to really provide substantive impact in this area ongoing technical assistance to front-line supervisors is needed. Our survey was not sensitive enough to determine the specific qualitative factors of different diversity management training programs. However, anecdotally, we

know that most corporations have included disability with other specialty groups protected by equal employment opportunity legislation, such as women, and individuals representing different races or religious beliefs, in their diversity management training programs.

In organizational and systems change, attitudes tend to follow behavior change rather than vice versa (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000). Therefore, the more disability-sensitive training programs and affirmative action/equal employment practices for workers with disabilities that are successfully implemented, the greater the likelihood that attitudes towards the work potential of people with disabilities will improve. This is a long-term process that will not be remedied with one law over a relatively short time-period. It will take several years involving corporations representing a wide spectrum establishing not only policies, but also more importantly, managerial practices from the top-down or corporate level that are consistent and demonstrated to be effective.

2. Organizational Policies and Workplace Supports

Businesses feel they are doing a good job of supporting workers with disabilities and arranging reasonable accommodations. There appears to be a very strong commitment to assist temporarily disabled workers in getting back on the job, as well as retaining existing employees with disabilities. The median response from all 46 human resource professionals was 1.00, a perfect agreement score. Furthermore, organizational policies of management seem to suggest that there is an opportunity for workers to be cross-trained and receive additional professional development. However, many human resource professionals believe their organizations could expand their efforts in this area.

Existing organizational policies provide a framework to assess organizational response and performance regarding employee relations with workers who have disabilities. There is strong evidence from human resource professionals that reasonable accommodations can be negotiated effectively and termination issues adequately handled. Also, assigning individuals to appropriate jobs is not a problem. Certainly, these are also issues that are handled initially by the front-line supervisor, not representatives from the human resource department.

It may be that supervisors are in a better position to make these judgements. Discrepancies between human resource professionals and supervisors exist on their organizations' ability to provide accommodations or respond to the support needs of worker with disabilities (Harlan & Robert, 1998; Pitt-Catsoupes & Butterworth, 1995). Future research into front-line supervisor perceptions of organizational performance and employee relations regarding workers with disabilities is warranted.

Recruiting applicants with disabilities was cited by respondents in the survey as the area most in need of improvement regarding organizational performance relating to people with disabilities (Wagar, 1992). This is a very significant finding in that human resource professionals are not saying that they view individuals with disabilities as unable or incompetent; instead, they are concerned about locating qualified individuals and generating a large enough pool of applicants from which to select the most appropriate candidates. Without knowing precisely where to recruit qualified workers with disabilities, it is not surprising that many human resource professionals are struggling with how to get qualified people with disabilities into the most mutually beneficial working environments within their company (e.g., Stein, 1993).

3. The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act does not appear to be a major barrier for these 43 large businesses in their relations with employees. The human resource professionals that responded feel they understand and support the intent of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Further, employers indicated that complying with the provisions of ADA has not been difficult and that their employee training programs cover several areas that sufficiently address ADA issues (Jackson, 1993; Thakker, 1997). However, training could be provided on a more consistent basis to their workforce. In light of these findings, it is important to keep in mind that the self-selected nature of employer participants may have impacted the results. For instance, it is probable that employers who believed their organizations were more proactive in implementing the ADA and recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities chose to participate in the research.

Figure 4 indicates there are several key items in which human resource professionals indicated high levels

of agreement, reporting median scores of 4 out of a perfect score of 5. These areas included the ideas that accommodations were worth the investment; the ADA is an important piece of civil rights legislation; and the idea that individuals with disabilities represent a good source of labor. One limitation of the findings in this area is the inability to control for the response set of social desirability (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997), where participants may respond in a favorable manner to questions of a politically sensitive topic. Yet, when analyzing these results, one needs only to review the plethora of business literature published prior to, or shortly after the passage of the ADA (see e.g., Barnard, 1992; Creasman & Butler, 1991; Darkey, 1990; Jay, 1990; Morrissey, 1991) to realize the progress some employers have made in an effort to proactively implement the ADA. In light of the business community's initial opposition to the ADA, it is encouraging that employers view the ADA favorably and have taken several measures to implement the ADA. The finding that businesses support the role of ADA and that accommodations are worth the investment are critical steps toward increasing employment for persons with disabilities (Walters & Baker, 1995).

This finding is, of course, positive and certainly consistent with what the founders and early pioneers associated with the ADA would have wanted to see 10 years later. The ADA has been the most publicized disability law within the last 20 years and was hailed by many as the great civil rights law that would end all employment discrimination and increase the employment rates of persons with disabilities (Pati & Bailey, 1995). In fact, as the Louis Harris Poll (2000) has indicated, people with disabilities continue to be unemployed at a rate in excess of 60%. As noted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2000) in its most recent report, it is clear that the ADA has not eradicated unemployment rates. However, understanding the legal provisions of the ADA as well as the general intent is a positive step. The more that corporations understand that disability is an area protected by federal law and expect enforcement of legislation by state and federal government, then the greater the likelihood that there will be employment opportunities for persons with disabilities (McClellan, 1996). However, despite encouraging response to statements about the ADA, the issue remains: How many persons with disabilities are actually being hired, promoted, and retained in corporate America?

4. Costs of Employing Working with Disabilities

The costs of employing workers with disabilities were not viewed as a significant issue for employers in this survey. The costs of accommodations, the additional supervision that may be required and specific workplace training were not viewed as substantive obstacles to employment for persons with disabilities. In fact, a review of Figure 5 indicates that: a) cost of accommodation, b) cost of additional supervision, and c) cost of training were viewed as minimal barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities in the participating 43 corporations. In contrast, human resource professionals indicated that the lack of education, training and specific job skills, and related experience were all viewed as potential obstacles to employment. This response has definite implications for human service providers and One-Stop Career Centers as they reach out to work with business and industry.

These findings are also significant in that one of the most often cited criticisms of the ADA is that the cost for reasonable accommodation would be high, thereby making it far too expensive for companies to hire individuals with disabilities. It is important to remember that the respondents in this preliminary survey were from larger corporations that may have greater financial and internal resources available to support their workers in comparison to business with less than 100 employees. Another factor to consider in light of the findings is that supervisors or managers of employees with disabilities might respond to items concerning the costs of accommodations quite differently than human resource professionals. This might especially hold true, if the costs of accommodations are attributed to a manager or supervisor's work unit, as opposed to cost being attributed to a more general organizational budget. Nevertheless, it is significant that cost was definitively not considered an obstacle.

5. Relationships Between Resource Professionals and Human Service Agencies

One of the most disconcerting findings of these preliminary results is that employers have limited awareness of the wide variety of human service programs intended to promote employment of people with disabilities. While there is a general awareness and familiarity with vocational rehabilitation and supported employment, as indicated in Figure 6, we did not get a sense that these

programs were major sources of recruitment, training, or technical assistance from our interviews with human resource professionals. For example, the One Stop Career Centers, which federal labor legislation has identified as a potential gateway to the workforce for workers with special needs, showed less than average familiarity by these 46 human resource professionals. Even the state employment commissions were not viewed as a resource for employers.

Some business representatives have complained that they do not know where to find workers with disabilities (Brooke et al., 1998). In fact, there may be so many programs dispersed throughout a given community that the human resource professional would not begin to know how or where to look for contact and program information. In fact, many of these human service agencies are not recruiting to send their clients to work.

Nationally, this is a very real issue: How to best enhance the movement of appropriate labor, people with disabilities, into human resource offices filling out applications and interviewing for jobs. From our telephone interviews with human resource professionals, there appears to be a very strong desire or willingness by the business community to hire and support individuals with disabilities in their workforce. The majority of employers reported being involved in various disability specific recruitment activities, such as the Business Leadership Networks and disability-specific job fairs, yet they still reported experiencing difficulty in identifying or recruiting applicants with disabilities. Despite employer involvement in these activities, the data also indicate that employers believed they could improve or expand their recruitment efforts.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study have provided important new information on human resource professionals' perceptions of barriers to employment for people with disabilities in their workforce. Human resource professionals do not believe that the cost of accommodation is an important issue, nor do they view the Americans with Disabilities Act as a major obstacle in the employment of people with disabilities. At the same time, they are very concerned about the most effective recruitment

strategies to entice individuals with disabilities to join their workforce. They indicate that they are unable to find qualified applicants, especially for skilled and professional positions.

Human resource professionals clearly have very limited knowledge about the types of human service programs that are available such as employment programs offered through One Stop Career Centers, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, and other government-funded employment training programs that assist people with disabilities. The government has made enormous investments in assisting individuals with disabilities with their employment needs. Yet, it is clear that a disconnect exists between human service programs and the business community they serve. Human resource professionals in corporate America are not connecting with these programs. There needs to be more effective communication and greater collaboration between human service programs and the business community in an effort to reduce the high unemployment rate of persons with disabilities. Employers would like to know more about how to implement reasonable accom-

modations and workplace supports but at the same time they believe they are doing a pretty good job in this area. There has been an increase in the amount of diversity management programs that have disability specific components. However, it is not clear how intense these programs are and what kind of long-term impact they may have on the recruitment, hiring, and career advancement of employees with disabilities in the company's workforce.

Clearly, the organizations participating in this research have made considerable inroads in developing and implementing organizational policies and procedures pertaining to persons with disabilities in their workforce. Yet, it is unclear the extent to which these policies and practices impact the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their organizations. It is also important to remember that the participating businesses may have considerable more economic and internal resources to devote to the recruitment and retention of persons with disabilities. These findings may serve as an important benchmark for other organizations looking to expand or diversify their workforce or to develop policies and practices to retain or include persons with disabilities in their workforce.

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Chapter 3

How Do Front-Line Supervisors in Business Perceive the Performance of Workers with Disabilities?

by: Darlene D. Unger

Front-line supervisors often have responsibility for assessing employee work performance and addressing productivity issues. Yet, much of the findings regarding employers' perceptions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce are derived from workplace personnel who have little or no experience with actual employees with disabilities. In this study, 255 supervisors of employees with known disabilities were surveyed about their experiences with employees with disabilities in their work units. Findings indicated that supervisors were quite satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities and that their performance was similar to that of their nondisabled coworkers. However, supervisors' perceptions of employees work performance differed based on the perceived functional limitations of the employee and their personal experiences with disability.

Employers' attitudes toward people with disabilities in the workforce have been extensively studied (Kregel & Unger, 1993). The results indicate that the expressed attitudes of employers toward applicants or workers with disabilities are often contradictory (see e.g., Fuqua, Rathburn, & Gade, 1984; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, & Levy, 1992; Phillips, 1975). Some investigators have reported that employers rate the work performance of employees with disabilities quite favorably, while other studies have found just the opposite; employees with disabilities are sometimes rated poorly in comparison to other employees. Despite an abundance of research, there is uncertainty surrounding employers' perceptions of the ability of applicants or workers with disabilities to contribute to organizational productivity and profitability.

The differences in the expressed attitudes of employers can be attributed to the variety of research

methodologies utilized to investigate their perceptions of people with disabilities in the workplace (Unger, 2001). Prior research in this area has identified a variety of organizational, respondent, and worker characteristics that may influence employer attitudes. One of the most critical factors impacting the results of employer attitudinal research focuses on characteristics of respondents representing participating organizations, specifically, their previous experiences and degree of contact with people with disabilities in their organizations. The manner in which "previous experience" has been defined varies widely across studies, making it difficult to compare results.

Furthermore, in some studies, organizational representatives were questioned about their perceptions of hypothetical employees or applicants with disabilities as opposed to their direct experiences with workers whose disabilities have been disclosed. The fact that much of the existing research examines employers' attitudes based on hypothetical applicants with disabilities (see e.g., Bricourt & Bentley, 2000; Christman & Slaten, 1991; Millington, Szymanski, & Hanley-Maxwell, 1994; Smith, Edwards, Heinemann, & Geist, 1985) or their perceptions of persons with disabilities in the workforce in general (see e.g., Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Levy et al., 1993) contributes to conflicting information regarding the employment potential of people with disabilities.

Similarly findings often reflect the views of executives, human resource professionals, or workplace personnel who do not interact on a daily basis with employees with disabilities (e.g., Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993; Levy et al., 1992; Phillips, 1975) as opposed to supervisors or managers with direct experience in managing or support-

ing workers with disabilities. Surveying human resource professionals or workplace personnel who lack direct experience or interaction with employees with disabilities may also result in a variety of myths and misconceptions pertaining to the work capabilities or performance of individuals with disabilities.

The front-line supervisor, the person having the most direct and immediate supervisory contact with the worker, is a key determinant of successful long-term performance and retention of all employees. It is usually this person who must resolve interpersonal conflicts, productivity issues, and work habit problems. Findings have demonstrated a critical link between supervisor or managerial behaviors and employee outcomes, such as satisfaction (Church, 1995; Ting, 1997), organizational commitment (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, Donaldson, 2001), and work performance (Mott, 1972). Yet, we know relatively little about how supervisors feel about employees with disabilities. This is further complicated by the fact that not all workers choose to disclose their disability.

Organizational representatives are seldom asked to evaluate the performance or work habits of an actual employee whose disability has been disclosed. Instead, employers are questioned about their willingness to hire or their perceptions of the work potential of people with different disability labels (e.g., Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Levy et al., 1993; Levy et al., 1992; McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag, 1991; Millington et al., 1994). Although respondents may indicate that their organizations have hired people with disabilities in the past, their first-hand experiences may not be reflected in their responses to questions regarding the work performance of employees with disabilities (Johnson, Greenwood, & Schriener, 1988).

Employers who have first-hand experience with working with employees with disabilities report favorable assessments of their work performance and work habits. For example, employers who have hired workers with disabilities through employment support programs were satisfied with work performance of workers with disabilities (Kregel & Unger, 1993; Petty & Fussel, 1997). Additionally, workers with disabilities hired through supported employment programs also received satisfactory supervisory ratings in several work-related areas including attendance (Shafer, Hill, Seyfarth, & Wehman, 1987), dedication (Neitupski, Hamre-Neitupski, Vanderhort, & Fishback, 1996; Shafer, et al., 1987), safety (Shafer, et al.,

1987), work quality (Neitupski, et al., 1996), and job retention (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997).

Employers with direct experiences with workers with disabilities have also rated the work performance of these employees the same as or better than the performance of nondisabled employees (DuPont, 1990; Graffam, Smith, Shinkfield, & Polzin, in press; Marcouiller, Smith, & Bordieri, 1987; Reisman & Reisman, 1993). For instance, the DuPont Corporation has surveyed managers or supervisors of employees with disabilities on four separate occasions, commencing in 1958, regarding the work performance of employees with disabilities. The results of their research efforts in 1958, 1973, 1981, and 1990 have consistently demonstrated that employees with disabilities are equivalent to other DuPont employees in job performance, attendance, and safety. Findings from the most recent study (DuPont, 1990) indicated that the majority of employees with disabilities were rated average or above average in safety (97%), attendance (86%), and performance of job duties (90%).

Existing myths and misconceptions pertaining to the work potential of individuals with disabilities may be derived from the fact that little research exists that describes the experiences of workplace personnel who have direct interaction with workers with disabilities on a frequent basis. Supervisors play an increasingly important role in assisting employees with disabilities in the workplace. Therefore, the purpose of the investigation was to address shortcomings in prior employer attitudinal research by surveying a national sample of employers and by examining:

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- 1) supervisors' assessment of the work performance of employees with known disabilities and comparing their work performance to coworkers without known disabilities;
 - 2) the relationship between supervisor characteristics (e.g., prior experience with workers with disabilities and length of time as a supervisor of the employee with a disability) and their assessment of employee work performance; and
 - 3) the relationship between functional characteristics of workers with disabilities and supervisors' assessments of employee work performance.
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METHOD

This analysis is part of a larger study of employers' experiences with workers with disabilities and their knowledge and utilization of accommodations in which both human resource professionals and supervisors within the same business were surveyed (Unger, 2001). A total of 43 businesses participated in the larger research. The sample for this study represents responses from 255 supervisors employed by 35 of the businesses that participated in the larger study.

Sample

A purposeful sampling procedure was used in order to identify employers who had knowingly employed persons with disabilities or had been recognized for disability-friendly work cultures. Employers were solicited from the Society of Human Resource Management, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Leadership Networks affiliated with the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. Representatives from these professional organizations provided names and contact information for employer representatives or businesses that might be willing to participate in the research. Potential employer participants were also identified from a report published by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1998) that contained a listing of private sector employers who were recognized as effective employers in implementing and complying with employment discrimination legislation.

The first step was contacting the organizational representative and describing the purpose of the study, what would be required of employers, and the criteria for participation. Each business was asked to identify 10 supervisors who at the time of the research supervised an employee with a known-disability or had supervised an employee with a disability within six months of the survey. In some instances, referral was made to a more appropriate individual in the organization who possessed greater knowledge about workplace disability. The contact person was responsible for identifying supervisors, disseminating and collecting Supervisor Questionnaires, and returning questionnaires to the researcher.

Initially, 43 employers agreed to participate in the research. However, after Supervisor Questionnaires were

disseminated, 8 of the 43 employers were unable to participate. Reasons cited by employer representatives included the organizational contact persons' inability to identify employees with disabilities; workplace policies; time commitment; supervisors' unwillingness to complete the questionnaire; and mergers or some type of workforce restructuring. The mean number of Supervisor Questionnaires returned per business was 5.93 surveys.

Instrumentation

The Supervisor Questionnaire was completed by supervisors or managers who were responsible for supervising employees with known-disabilities and designed to assess supervisors' perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities, as well as their knowledge and utilization of accommodations. The 11-page instrument consists of 45-items categorized into the following areas: respondent demographics, employee with a disability characteristics, work performance, accommodations provided for employees with disabilities, and supervisors awareness and utilization of accommodations. Response format for questionnaire items included forced-choice, likert-scale type, and open-ended.

Additionally, the Supervisor Questionnaire was designed to insure that when supervisors responded to items pertaining to an employee with a disability, they reflected on the items as they pertained to one specific employee. In instances where the supervisor managed more than one employee with a disability, the supervisor was instructed to respond to the survey questions based on experiences with the employee whom they had supervised the longest. A detailed description of the development of the questionnaire appears in Chapter 1 of this monograph.

Procedure

Within each business, the organizational contact person, typically a designated human resource professional, was responsible for identifying supervisors who at the time of the study supervised an employee with a disability or had supervised an employee with a disability within the previous six months. Once completed questionnaires were collected, the organizational contact person routed the surveys to the researcher in a pre-addressed, postage paid envelope.

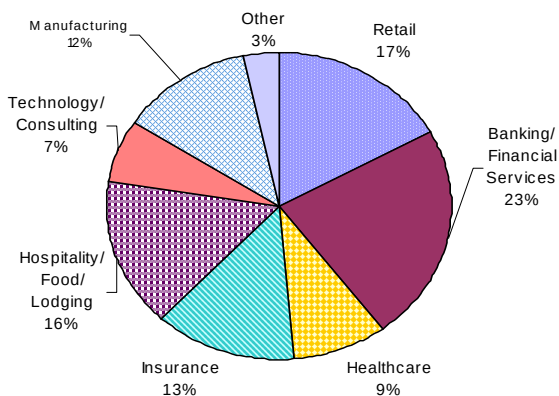
RESULTS

Information was gathered from 255 supervisors of employees with known disabilities within 43 large businesses. The results provide a description of supervisor characteristics, functional characteristics of their employees with disabilities, supervisors' assessment of work performance, and the work performance of employees with disabilities as compared to their nondisabled coworkers. The results also provide a description of the relationship between: a) the functional level of employees with disabilities and supervisors' ratings of work performance; and b) supervisors' personal experience relating to disability and their ratings of employee work performance.

Employers

The participating businesses were diverse in terms of types of industry and geographic location. The percentages of supervisors per industry are contained below in Figure 1. Employers were predominately larger employers, with a mean workforce size of 36,168 and a median of 12,000. Only four organizations reported their size of workforce being less than 1000 employees.

Figure 1: Supervisor Participants Per Type of Industry
(n = 255)



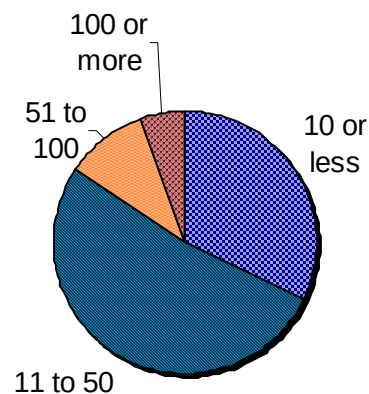
Supervisors of Employees with Disabilities

Slightly more than half (56.08%) of the supervisors reported being employed by their company for at

least 10 years. The majority of supervisors indicated they had been employed in their current position for at least one year but less than five (54.12%). Respondents have also spent considerable time in a supervisory position as the vast majority (75.10%) reported having five or more years experience as a supervisor and more than half (54.12%) reported at least 10 years experience as a supervisor.

Employees responsible for supervising. As depicted in Figure 2, less than one-third (32.14%) of the supervisors were responsible for managing 10 or less employees, with approximately one-half of the respondents (52.38%) supervising a unit consisting of 11 to 50 workers. More than two-thirds of the supervisors (69.17%) indicated that they either do not have an employee with a disability or they have one employee with a disability that they presently supervise. Due to the criteria for employer participation, it is possible to have supervisors who did not presently supervise an employee with a disability. However, all supervisors had supervised an employee with a disability within the last six months. Slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents (26.72%) reported having supervised the employee referenced in their survey responses for less than one year, with the greatest number of supervisors (42.91%) indicating they have been the supervisor of the referenced employee for at least one year but less than three.

Figure 2: Number of Employees Directly Reporting to Respondent
(n = 255)



Supervisors' personal experiences relating to disability. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (61.5%) reported either sharing a disability or having an immediate family member, relative, or friend with a disability. As illustrated in Figure 3 below, more than one-third of supervisors reported having a friend (33.73%) or neighbor or community member (36.08%) with a disability. Interestingly, about one-fourth of the respondents reported having an immediate family member (23.92%) or relative (27.06%) with a disability. The data indicate that supervisors may have frequent contact, or interactions, with individuals with disabilities outside of the workplace.

Employees with Disabilities

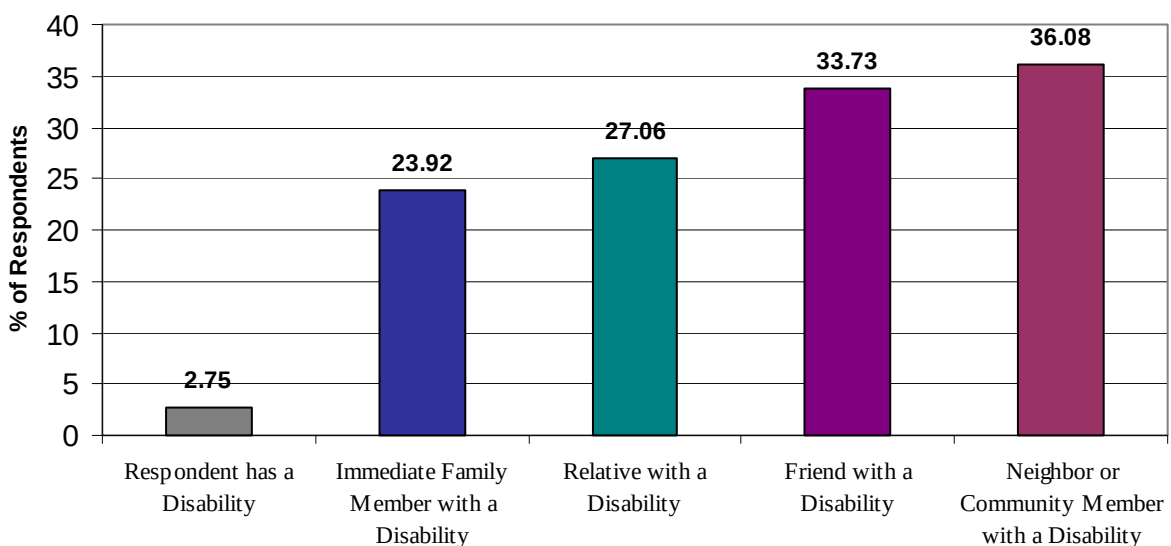
The 255 supervisors responded to items that addressed the functional characteristics of a specific worker with a disability they supervised. The functional characteristics of employees with disabilities were defined by seven measures that describe the extent to which employees with disabilities required assistance in completing certain activities (see Figure 4). Over one-half of the supervisors indicated their employees with disabilities required some level of support in performing the essential functions of the job (57.25%), managing his or her work day (52.96%), or making decisions on the job (51.76%).

Work Performance of Employees with Disabilities

Employee performance assessment. The 255 supervisors indicated they were satisfied with the work performance of the worker with a disability in the areas of timeliness of arrival and departure, punctuality, attendance, and consistency in task (see Figure 5). However, supervisors reported less favorable ratings regarding the individual's work speed. Additionally, work performance measures that reflected general worker behavior (e.g., timeliness, punctuality, attendance) were rated higher than items that reflected characteristics associated with specific job functions such as work speed and task consistency.

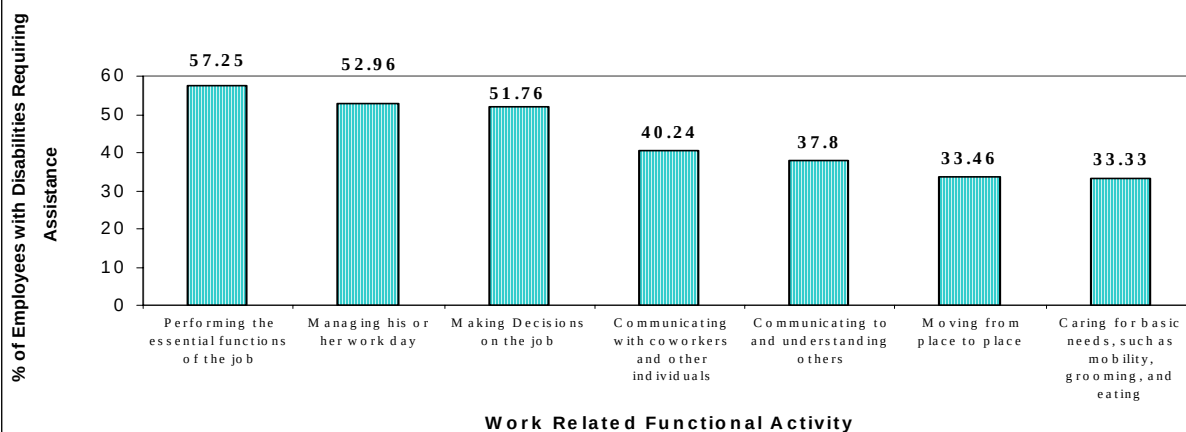
Employee performance assessment compared to coworkers. Mean scores were also calculated and ranked for six measures of employee work performance in relation to the performance of their nondisabled coworkers. Supervisors indicated that the work performance of employees with disabilities was the same as or better than coworkers on almost all of the measures of work performance (see Figure 6). In the areas of punctuality, attendance, work quality, task consistency, and overall proficiency, supervisors rated the work performance of employees with disabilities the same or better than coworkers. In the area of work speed, supervisors

Figure 3: Personal Experience Relating to Disability (n = 255 respondents)



* % of total greater than 100 respondents could check more than one response.

Figure 4: Extent to Which Employees with Disabilities Required Assistance in Completing Certain Activities (n = 255 supervisors)



indicated that workers with disabilities performed about the same as coworkers. Performance measures that directly pertained to job duties or tasks (e.g., work speed) were rated less favorably than measures pertaining to general work habits or characteristics (e.g., attendance, punctuality).

Supervisors' Personal Experiences Relating to Disability and Perceptions of Employees Work Performance.

For the purpose of data analysis, all respondents who reported having any personal experience with persons with disabilities, or having a disability, were grouped together as were respondents who reported no personal experience related to disability. This resulted in two categories for the variable personal experience relating to disability. Work performance was analyzed on an individual basis, with five measures pertaining to employee work performance (Figure 5) and six measures pertaining to employee work performance in comparison to coworkers (Figure 6). Additionally, an index of employee work performance was developed which consisted of the five individual work performance measures.

The data indicate that supervisors with no experience relating to disability were more satisfied with the work performance of workers with disabilities in each of the five work performance areas when compared to supervisors reporting a personal experience relating to disability. However, only the attendance measure produced a statistically significant finding ($t = .018$, $df = 231$, $p < .05$). Supervisors with no personal experience relating

to disability indicated greater satisfaction with the attendance of employees with disabilities than supervisors reporting a personal experience relating to disability.

The Employee Work Performance Index was created using the five individual work performance measures. Cronbach Alpha computation for index reliability indicated that the work performance measure of speed was inconsistent with other work performance measures and therefore was eliminated. The Cronbach Alpha computation for the subsequent index produced a reliability coefficient of .86. A mean Employee Work Performance Index score was computed for each respondent by summing the scores for the four individual work performance measures and then computing a mean score.

Using the means of the Work Performance Index for each group of supervisors, significant differences were also found ($t = .0288$, $df = 225$, $p < .05$) between supervisors with personal experiences relating to disability and supervisors with no personal experiences relating to disability regarding their perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities. Interestingly, supervisors with no personal experiences relating to disability were more satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities in comparison to supervisors who reported a personal experience with disability.

Supervising Employees with Disabilities

Slightly more than one-third (34.90%) of the supervisors believed they provided more supervision to

employees with disabilities than they did to nondisabled employees. Of the 89 supervisors who indicated that employees with disabilities required additional supervision, almost half indicated that employees with disabilities had difficulty staying on task (44.94%). Supervisors also suggested that employees with disabilities required

additional supervision in order to complete work on time (34.83%), remember all of the required job duties (29.21%), and not be disruptive to coworkers (17.98%). Other reasons identified were increased reporting requirements and the employee's need for assistance and feedback.

Figure 5: Supervisors' Assessment of the Work Performance of Employees with Disabilities (n = 255 supervisors)

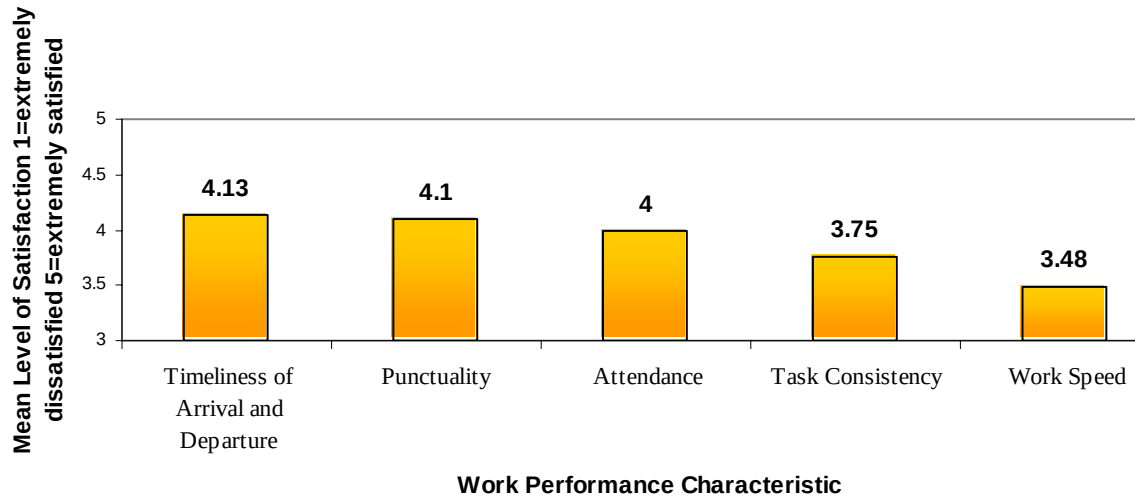


Figure 6: Supervisors' Assessment of the Work Performance of Employees with Disabilities Compared to Coworkers (n = 255 supervisors)



Relationship Between Functional Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities and Their Supervisors' Perceptions of Work Performance

In order to investigate the relationship between employees' functional characteristics and supervisors' perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities, t-tests were completed for each of the seven functional characteristics measures with each of the five individual measures of work performance. No significant relationships were found between four of the functional characteristic measures and any of the five measures of supervisors' perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities. These functional characteristics included the extent to which employees with disabilities required assistance or help in: (1) caring for basic needs (e.g., mobility, grooming, eating); (2) communicating to and understanding others; (3) moving from place to

place; and (4) communicating with coworkers and other individuals.

However, the results of t-tests for the functional characteristics of managing the work day, making decisions on the job, and performing the essential functions of the job revealed significant relationships with each of the work performance measures. Table 1 below contains the mean scores of supervisors' perceptions of the three categories of functional characteristics of employees with disabilities for each work performance measure. As the data indicate, supervisors who did not perceive employees with disabilities as needing assistance in managing work day, making decisions on the job, and performing the essential functions of the job, rated the work performance of employees with disabilities higher than supervisors who perceived employees with disabilities as needing assistance in the three functional areas.

Table 1: T-Tests for Functional Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities and Supervisors Perceptions of Work Performance (n = 255 supervisors)

Functional Characteristics	Needs Assistance	INDIVIDUAL WORK PERFORMANCE MEASURES				
		Timeliness of Arrival & Departure	Attendance	Punctuality	Consistency in Task	Work Speed
Managing Work Day	No	4.47*	4.37*	4.38*	4.25*	3.96*
	Yes	3.87	3.73	3.89	3.30	3.05
Making Decisions on the Job	No	4.43*	4.31*	4.35*	4.21*	3.88*
	Yes	3.86	3.72	3.87	3.33	3.11
Performing Essential Functions of the Job	No	4.38*	4.34*	4.33*	4.24*	4.01*
	Yes	3.95	3.76	3.93	3.89	3.09

NOTE: * = For all items -- p = < .0001 and all degrees of freedom are at least 242, p < .05

DISCUSSION

It is widely believed that many employers are reluctant to hire persons with disabilities due to their lack of knowledge about disability or their fears and apprehension regarding persons with disabilities (Hall & Hall, 1994; Macy, 1996; Pati & Bailey, 1995; Peck & Kirkbride, 2001).

Various misconceptions or conflicting information regarding the work performance of individuals with disabilities are often based on beliefs about the capabilities of persons with disabilities, not first-hand experiences. The purpose of this investigation has been to provide a description of the work performance of employees with known disabilities from the perspective of their supervi-

sors, the individuals who are in the most appropriate position to evaluate their performance.

In this study, the 255 supervisors of employees with disabilities were quite satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities. The investigation also identified relationships between specific supervisor characteristics, employee characteristics and work performance. A discussion of five key findings, as well as the implications for vocational rehabilitation and supported employment providers, and future research follows.

Supervisors View Workers with Disabilities as Capable and Productive Employees

Supervisors are satisfied with the overall work performance and productivity of employees with disabilities. They describe these workers as conscientious, consistent, dependable, and prompt employees. Workers with disabilities perform as well as, or better than, their nondisabled coworkers. Additionally, supervisors perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities were not affected by the length of time they were responsible for supervising employees with disabilities.

These findings should assist in addressing the widespread myths and misconceptions pertaining to the work potential of employees with disabilities. In these large, national businesses, workers with disabilities are viewed as exceedingly capable employees whose work performance contributes to organizational productivity and profitability. The reported experiences of the 255 supervisors of workers with disabilities reinforce the positive findings from prior research on employers' direct assessment of the work performance of employees with disabilities (see e.g., Blanck, 1998; DuPont, 1990; Graffam et al., in press; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Shafer et al., 1987).

Facing Productivity Issues of Workers with Disabilities

Though the overall assessment of the work performance of employees with disabilities was quite favorable, there is some evidence that supervisors may have reservations about the ability of employees with disabilities to complete job duties and responsibilities in a timely manner. In all of the analyses conducted in the area of work performance, work speed was consistently rated lower than other measures of work performance, despite supervisors' general satisfaction with the work speed of employees with disabilities.

Businesses continue to remain concerned about the productivity of workers with disabilities. However, this should not be surprising since the 1990s were clearly the decade of enhanced business productivity. There is increasing pressure for businesses to get the most work output per unit of employee. Why should this be any different for employees with disabilities? This concern could be viewed positively in the sense that businesses are growing increasingly "color blind" to the type of disability, race, or color of a given person if they can be productive and get the job done in an effective and efficient manner. Businesses are under pressure to maximize their profits and this often translates into either reducing expenses or getting the most out of each worker in a 40 to 50 hour week. For qualified individuals with disabilities, who are matched to appropriate jobs, there may be a very attractive long-term relationship between the business and individual. However, the burden remains on the individual with a disability, the supporting agency, and to a certain extent the business to capitalize on this opportunity.

Supervisors Have Different Perceptions of the Work Performance of Employees with Disabilities Based on the Perceived Functional Limitations of These Employees

Despite employers' satisfaction with the work performance of workers with disabilities, employees with different functional limitations were rated less favorably on work performance measures. Supervisors who perceived employees with disabilities as needing assistance with specific job-related tasks, such as managing one's work day, making job-related decisions, and performing the essential functions of the job, were less satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities. In contrast, employees with disabilities with functional limitations in the areas of mobility or communication received more satisfactory work performance ratings.

These findings may suggest that supervisors are more effective in meeting the support needs or accommodation requests of employees with less severe disabilities. For employees whose support needs might not be readily apparent (e.g., individuals with cognitive disabilities or mental illness), or involve overcoming communication or workplace environmental barriers versus specific job-related functions, supervisors may experience difficulty in recognizing that a job performance problem exists and

then identifying and securing effective accommodations. The inability of organizational personnel to adequately address the support needs of workers with disabilities may result in substandard work performance and possible termination.

Personal Experiences of Supervisors Dramatically Effect Their Perceptions of Employees with Disabilities

The majority of supervisors participating in this study had some level of contact with people with disabilities outside of the work setting. Many indicated having a family member or relative with a disability or knowing someone within their community with a disability. Thus, it is not surprising that supervisors' contacts and experiences with persons with disabilities were related to their assessment of employee work performance.

However, it is interesting that supervisors with no personal experience relating to disability were more satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities than supervisors who reported personal experiences relating to disability. The perceptions of supervisors with no personal experiences relating to disability may reflect a tendency to respond to politically sensitive items in a socially desirable manner. In contrast, supervisors who have a history of experiences with persons with disabilities were rigorous in their assessment of the work performance of employees with disabilities and may have higher expectations based on their personal experiences.

Employees with Disabilities are Committed and Dependable Employees

Surprisingly, many supervisors were not involved in the hiring of employees with disabilities, as many employees were already working in their current positions prior to the supervisors' arrival in the department or unit. It is reasonable to assume that employees with disabilities in this study may have relatively stable work histories with their specific departments or work units. The majority of supervisors (73%) report supervising employees with disabilities within their organizations for at least one year, with almost one-third (30%) of supervisors reporting that they supervised employees with disabilities for at least three years but less than 10 years. Additionally, supervisors indicated that employees with disabilities appear to

be committed and reliable employees. Thus, the employees with disabilities in this study may have experienced less frequent job changes due to promotion, reassignment, transfer, or termination in comparison to other workplace personnel.

On one hand, this finding could be viewed favorably in that employers value the commitment and dedication of their workers with disabilities and may not view workers with disabilities as "job hoppers". As employers attempt to recruit potential employees from a shrinking labor market and control the costs of turnover, employers have increasingly viewed employee retention as a top priority. Employers have identified the organizational commitment of employees with disabilities as a benefit of hiring persons with disabilities (Graffam et al., in press; Neitupski et al., 1996; Shafer et al., 1987). Further, employers may be willing to accept less than maximum productivity from an employee in exchange for other work behaviors or traits that are valued by the employer, such as dedication, employee commitment, and job retention (Graffam et al., in press; Shafer, et al., 1987; Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997).

However, the fact that workers with disabilities are committed and dedicated employees may not result in increased opportunities for career advancement, promotions, and job transfers. For instance, Mank and colleagues (1997) found no relationship between longevity on the job and higher outcomes in terms of wages and socialization for employees with disabilities. Employers have also indicated that workers with disabilities possess limited skills, which limited the possibility of future advancement (Bolton & Roessler, 1985). Further, the existence of a "glass ceiling" for women and other minorities has been well documented (Gallese, 1991; Morrison & VonGlinow, 1990). Yet, little is known about the extent to which employees with disabilities pursue career advancement opportunities or encounter barriers to advancement similar to other minority populations in the workforce.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several implications for vocational rehabilitation and employment support providers. These implications are related to capitalizing on the personal experiences of workplace personnel in

identifying accommodations and supporting employees with disabilities, and in addressing employers' concerns about people with disabilities in the workforce.

Vocational rehabilitation and employment support providers should recognize the fact that many supervisors and other workplace personnel have personal experiences with individuals with disabilities outside of the workplace. Therefore, workplace personnel may be an important resource for job-specific accommodation information and in facilitating the use of natural supports. With the increased emphasis on the use of natural supports in the workplace, supervisors play a pivotal role in integrating and supporting workers with disabilities. Further, it has been argued that employees with disabilities who have more typical work experiences as compared to coworkers without disabilities in the same workplaces have higher wages and increased workplace socialization than employees who receive extensive support from human service professionals in the work setting, regardless of one's disability (Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 1999). Vocational rehabilitation and employment support providers should maximize the use of supervisors and other workplace personnel who have personal experiences with people with disabilities outside of the workplace in an effort to improve employment outcomes for workers with disabilities.

The findings also suggest that supervisors may have difficulty in effectively remedying performance problems of workers with more significant support needs. Supervisors are an invaluable resource in describing work processes and procedures within their business units, but they may have limited knowledge about the variety of accommodations available to assist employees with disabilities in performing the essential functions of their jobs and completing their job duties in an efficient manner. Human service professionals should work collaboratively with supervisors to identify strategies for identifying disability-related performance problems and then securing and implementing effective accommodations.

The findings from this investigation also provide valuable information about the employment capabilities of persons with disabilities. When conducting job development or marketing activities, supported employment professionals should be able to more convincingly address employer concerns about hiring persons with disabilities. The findings provide evidence to address

employer concerns about having to make productivity concessions for an applicant with a disability.

Directions for Future Research

This study also has a number of implications for future research regarding both the work performance and career advancement of employees with disabilities and the employers' knowledge and utilization of workplace supports. This investigation highlighted the fact that supervisors of employees with disabilities in these 43 employers are satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities. Yet, there is also a need to validate the findings that pertain to supervisors' perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities in comparison to the work performance of their nondisabled coworkers. Though supervisors participating in this study indicated that employees with disabilities perform the same as, or better, than their nondisabled coworkers, direct comparison of the work performance of employees with disabilities with nondisabled coworkers is warranted. For example, findings generated from a study that compares the work performance of employees with disabilities to the performance of non-disabled employees, in the same job, on objective work performance measures, may further substantiate the results of this investigation.

Additionally, the findings from this study describe the work performance of employees with disabilities as rated by their supervisors. Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of information available in these large businesses regarding the work performance of all employees. In many organizations extensive evaluations of employee work performance are conducted on an annual basis and often information is gathered from a variety of organizational sources such as coworkers, supervisors and middle management. Analyzing the evaluations of employees with disabilities and comparing their evaluations with that of their non-disabled workers should assist in determining the extent to which employees with disabilities contribute to organizational productivity and profitability.

There is also a need to investigate if a relationship exists between supervisors' knowledge about disability and accommodations and their assessment of work performance. This study provides evidence that supervisors gave less favorable ratings to the work performance of employees with disabilities who needed

assistance in managing one's work day, performing the essential functions of the job, and making job-related decisions as compared to the ratings of employees who did not need assistance in these areas. We do not know the extent to which accommodations were needed or provided to address the perceived functional limitations of workers with disabilities in these areas and the relationship of these accommodations to work performance. Future research on employers' knowledge and utilization of accommodations is warranted

Study Limitations

There are possible limitations in this research that should be noted. First, the sample of 43 businesses, which was not randomly chosen, may not be representative of all employers or supervisors of employees with disabilities. For instance, the self-selected nature of employers who indicated having employed workers with disabilities may have identified employers who were more proactive in their approach to supporting people with disabilities than other employers. Similarly, selection is also a concern in regards to human resource professionals having to identify supervisors or managers to participate in the study. Human resource professionals may have chosen supervisors or managers that they believed would report more favorable experiences with supervising workers with disabilities.

A second limitation focuses on the confidential nature of disability disclosure. Initially, during the construction of the instruments and consultation with members of the expert panel, it was decided that human resource professionals or supervisors should not disclose the disability of employees who would be referenced for the study. Despite having data that describes the functional limitations of employees with disabilities, the lack of precise diagnostic information on the disabilities of employees referenced in this study limits the generalizability of the findings.

Further, the confidentiality and disability disclosure factor presents another limitation in that human resource professionals were required to identify employ-

ees with disabilities within their organizations so that they could then identify supervisors. It is likely that human resource professionals were able to identify employees with disabilities because the employees had either self-disclosed their disability, requested accommodations, or received workers' compensation or short-term or long-term disability.

However, there may be some discrepancies between supervisors and human resource professionals regarding disability in the workplace and the functional limitations of employees with disabilities. Though both human resource professionals and supervisors were instructed to use the ADA's definition of disability, not knowing the specific disabilities of employees referenced in this study remains a limitation.

Lastly, the inability to control the response set of social desirability represents another limitation. This is especially true in this study when supervisors were responding to questions regarding a potentially sensitive area, such as employing individuals with disabilities, as well as one in which there exists potential for litigation due to non-compliance with the employment regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this research demonstrate that employees with disabilities are capable and productive employees whose work performance contributes to organizational productivity and profitability. The favorable work performance assessments from supervisors with direct experience in managing workers with disabilities should assist in addressing the various myths and misconceptions pertaining to the work capabilities of individuals with disabilities. However, the findings also raise additional questions about the capacity of organizations and workplace personnel to address potential performance issues of employees who may have more challenging support needs.

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Chapter 4

Employers' Knowledge and Utilization of Accommodations

by: Darlene D. Unger and John Kregel

Despite the recognition among employers that providing accommodations to applicants or employee with disabilities has been a wise business decision, little is know about the resources that employers access to identify and develop effective accommodations in the recruitment, hiring and retention of employees with disabilities. Human resource professionals and supervisors were studied to determine the extent to which businesses were aware of the vast array of workplace supports available to assist people with disabilities to participate in the workforce. The results of these findings indicate that these business professionals were confident in their ability to meet and support the needs of employees with disabilities. Yet, despite this strong level of confidence a large majority of supervisors indicated that they did not have the authority to secure accommodations for workers with disabilities.

In 1990, Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in an effort to break down barriers to community and workplace participation for individuals with disabilities. However, many have questioned the effectiveness of the legislation in helping to advance the labor force participation of people with disabilities. There is little empirical evidence that ADA mandated measures have resulted in larger number of qualified individuals with disabilities entering the labor force (Hall & Hall, 1994; Johnson & Baldwin, 1993; Rosen, 1991; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001; Wells, 2001). The employment rate of individuals with disabilities (32%) has not increased since the law's inception and continues to lag far behind that of people without disabilities (81%) (N.O.D./Harris, 2000). Yet, Blanck (1998) maintains that other measures of the effectiveness

of the ADA are also needed, such as employers increased use of workplace supports and accommodations as business strategies to attract and retain qualified workers with disabilities.

Increasingly, employers have demonstrated their capacity to provide accommodations to workers with disabilities. Results from several studies have provided descriptions of the types and costs of accommodations employers have implemented in the workplace to address the support needs of workers with disabilities (Blanck, 1994; Blaser, 1999; Buckhauser & Daly, 1996; Collignon, 1986; Electronic Industries Foundation, 1992; Granger, Barron, & Robinson, 1997; Harlan & Robert, 1998; Harris, 1987; McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag, 1991; Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2001; SHRM/Cornell, 1999). Table 1 on the following page contains descriptions of the variety of workplace accommodations that employers have provided to workers with disabilities. Overall, these findings indicate that employers appear willing to grant accommodations that are perceived as straight forward, inexpensive, one-time only, not time consuming, or easy to make as opposed to requests for accommodations that require a sustained effort or permanent change in work arrangements (Granger et al., 1997; Harlan & Robert, 1998; Michaels, Nappo, Barrett, Risucci, & Harles, 1993).

Initial fears expressed by many representatives from business and industry regarding the costs of implementing the ADA, and specifically costs associated with providing reasonable accommodations, have not been substantiated. The consistent finding from multiple surveys of employers has been that expensive job modification or accommodations are rarely needed by

workers with disabilities (Blanck, 1994; Collignon, 1986; Granger, et al., 1997; Olson, et al., 2000; Pitt-Satsouphe & Butterworth, 1995). For many employers, the costs of making accommodations have proven to be extremely reasonable. According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), about one-half (52%) of the accommodations made by employers cost less than \$500 to implement (JAN, 1995). The data were collected between July of 1994 and June of 1995, a period in which JAN received a total of 79,860 calls, with the vast majority of calls originating from private employers (61%).

Table 1: Factors Investigated in Employer Attitudinal Research

Coworkers	Balser, 1999; Granger et al., 1997; McFarlin et al., 1991
Adapting or altering the workplace	Granger et al., 1997; Harlan & Robert, 1998; McFarlin et al., 1991; SHRM/Cornell, 1999
Making changes to employees' schedules	Blanck, 1994; Burkhauser & Daly, 1996; Electronic Industries Foundation, 1992; Harlan & Robert, 1998; McFarlin et al., 1991; SHRM/Cornell, 2000
Restructuring job duties or changing job descriptions	Burkhauser & Daly, 1996; Granger et al., 1997; Harlan & Robert, 1998; SHRM/Cornell, 2000
Providing specialized training and orientation	Blanck, 1994; McFarlin et al., 1991
Purchasing equipment	Burkhauser & Daly, 1996; Electronic Industries Foundation, 1992; Harlan & Robert, 1998; SHRM/Cornell, 2000
Transportation or parking	Collignon, 1986; Harlan & Robert, 1998

Interestingly, many reports indicate that employers efforts at providing accommodations exceed mere compliance with the reasonable accommodation

provisions of the ADA (e.g., Blanck, 1994, 1998; Granger et al., 1997). Some employers are increasingly recognizing that providing accommodations for workers with disabilities often brings other unintended benefits to organizations (Blanck, 1994; Collignon, 1986; Johnson & Baldwin, 1993; Magill, 1997; Montvale, 1988; Weaver, 1991). For instance, providing accommodations for employees with disabilities contributes to an increasingly diverse workforce whose composition mirrors the American population. When an employee is injured on the job or needs some type of additional support to perform the job, accommodations assist in retraining productive and qualified employees.

Similarly, accommodations enhance the economic value of the organization through savings in workers' compensation and other insurance costs (Hall & Hall, 1994; JAN, 1995). For instance, the cost of an employee's, health-related absence is estimated to be 150 percent of that employee's daily compensation, plus any type of wage replacement benefit such as salary continuance and disability payments (Watson & Wyatt, 2001). Lastly, oftentimes accommodations provided to workers with disabilities are utilized to assist non-disabled coworkers to better perform the duties of their jobs (Blanck, 1998; Blaser, 1999, Hall & Hall, 1994; Pitt-Catsouphe & Butterworth).

Despite the recognition by employers that providing accommodations to applicants or employees with disabilities has been a wise business decision, little is known about the resources that employers call upon to identify and develop effective accommodations in order to recruit, hire, and support applicants with disabilities or to assist individuals who become disabled while employed. Furthermore, there are numerous types of workplace supports that have been successfully utilized in assisting people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. For instance, agency-mediated, business mediated, government mediated, and applicant or employee mediated supports represent broad categories of support available to assist individuals with disabilities in accessing and maintaining employment (see Table 2 on the following page) (Wehman, 1998). Yet, we know very little about employers' knowledge and utilization of these supports or even their own organizational resources utilized to integrate people with disabilities into their workforce.

Table 2: Types of Workplace Supports

Workplace Support Category	Examples of Workplace Supports
Agency Mediated Supports	Job Coach Assistance Assistive Technology Compensatory Strategies Counseling Substance Abuse Services Medical Services Specialized Transportation Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Business Mediated Supports	Job Restructuring Workplace Accommodations ♦ environmental modifications ♦ assistive technology ♦ schedule modification Coworker Mentoring ♦ job task training and support ♦ social support Job Creation
Government Mediated Supports	Social Security Work Incentives Tax Credits
Employee Mediated Supports	Personal Care Attendant Peer Mentors Social Support Needs Civic Associations and Organizations

In addition, many representatives from business and industry have expressed concerns about the ability of their organizations to meet the potential support needs of applicants or employees with disabilities (Callahan, 1994; Casper, 1993; Gilbride, Stensrud, & Connolly, 1992; Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth, 1995; SHRM/Cornell, 1999). Human resource professionals have indicated that they have limited knowledge or experience in supporting employees with disabilities in their workforce (Casper, 1993; Curry, 1996; Lewis, 1997; Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth, 1995). Yet, human resource professionals are often the primary recipients of ADA and disability related training within organizations (Lewis, 1997; SHRM/Cornell, 1999) and are often viewed as a source of information or assistance by other workplace personnel in

identifying and securing accommodations (Bruyere, 2000). Also, there is uncertainty regarding first-line supervisors' ability to identify and develop accommodations for employees with disabilities (Gates, 1993; Harlan & Robert, 1998; Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth, 1995; SHRM/Cornell, 1999).

There is also evidence that employers' willingness or ability to provide accommodations may be related to the support needs of workers with disabilities. For example, employers have indicated their willingness to provide accommodations to address mobility impairments, difficulty with concentration, and personal appearance concerns (Michaels et al., 1993). In contrast, they are less willing to provide accommodations for persons to address support needs in the areas of self-direction, work skills, or work tolerance (1993). Employers have also

expressed difficulty in providing accommodations for employees who have visual or hearing impairments (SHRM/Cornell, 1999).

Despite evidence that many organizations are providing accommodations for employees with disabilities, managers and supervisors within these organizations may possess limited knowledge of disability, accommodations, and the ADA. Subsequently, employee requests for accommodations may go unaddressed or be denied due to the supervisors' limited knowledge of accommodations. Research that describes employers' knowledge and utilization of accommodations and the extent to which organizations are able to provide accommodations to address the support needs of workers with disabilities is lacking. Therefore, the purposes of this investigation were to: 1) describe employers' knowledge and utilization of accommodations to address the support needs of workers with disabilities; and 2) investigate the relationship between functional characteristics of workers with disabilities and supervisors' confidence in providing accommodations.

METHOD

Human resource professionals and supervisors within the same organizations were surveyed to determine the extent to which businesses were aware of the vast array of workplace supports available to assist individuals with disabilities with participating in the workforce. Additionally, the study describes the capacity of organizations to address the support needs of workers with disabilities, as well as the specific accommodations provided to workers with disabilities.

Participants

A purposive sampling procedure was used in order to identify employers who had knowingly employed persons with disabilities or had been recognized for disability-friendly work cultures. Employers were solicited from the Society of Human Resource Management, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Leadership Networks affiliated with the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities. Representatives from these professional organizations provided names and contact information for employer representatives or

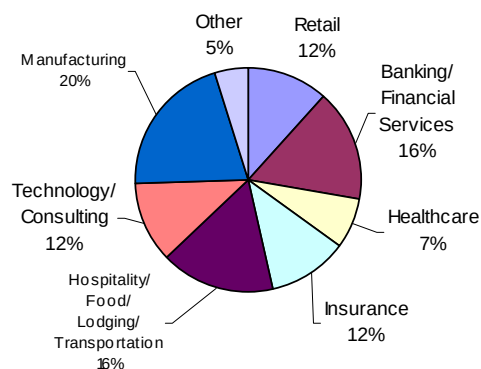
businesses that had indicated a willingness to participate. Potential employer participants were also identified from a report published by the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1998) that contained a listing of private sector employers who were recognized as effective employers in implementing and complying with employment and discrimination legislation.

Of the 76 businesses contacted, 43 participated in the research, representing a participation rate of 56.58%. Reasons cited by employer representatives for nonparticipation included the inability to secure approval from the organization's legal department, limited organizational resources to devote to collecting the information, and concerns regarding the time it would take to complete the survey. A total of 46 human resource professionals and 255 supervisors, representing 43 businesses, participated in the research.

Employers

The participating businesses were diverse in terms of types of industry and geographic location. The percentage of participation of businesses from each of the seven industry types is depicted below in Figure 1. Employers were predominately larger employers in terms of size of workforce, with a mean size of workforce for participants of 36,168 and a median of 12,000. Only four organizations reported their size of workforce being less than 1000 employees.

Figure 1: Type of Business and Employer Participants
(n = 43)



Human Resource Professionals

Human resource professionals reported being responsible for a variety of human resource functions including compensation, benefits management, health and safety, and organizational development and training. At least one-half of the respondents indicated having responsibilities in the following areas: disability (60.87%); employee relations (58.70%); employment/recruitment (52.17%); and diversity (50%). Human resource professionals also participated in other activities typically associated with an organization's human resources department, but to a far lesser extent. For example, less than one-third reported their responsibilities to include: administrative (28.26%); compensation (26.09%); organizational developmental (19.57%); legal (17.39%); benefits management (15.22%); health/safety and security (17.39%); and industrial relations (13.04%).

Supervisors of Employees with Disabilities

Supervisor demographic information.

Slightly more than half (56.08%) of the 255 supervisors reported relatively long tenures with their respective organizations (employed for at least 10 years). The majority of supervisors indicated they had been employed in their current position for at least one year but less than five (54.12%). Respondents have also spent considerable time in a supervisory position as the vast majority (75.10%) reported having five or more years experience as a supervisor and more than half (54.12%) reported at least 10 years experience as a supervisor.

Employees responsible for supervising. Approximately one-third (32.14%) of the supervisors were responsible for managing 10 or less employees, with one-half of the respondents (52.38%) supervising a unit consisting of 11 to 50 workers. More than two-thirds of the supervisors (69.17%) indicated that they either do not have an employee with a disability or they have one employee with a disability that they presently supervise. Due to the criteria for employer participation, it is possible to have supervisors who do not presently supervise an employee with a disability. However, all supervisors had supervised an employee with a disability within the last six months. Slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents (26.72%) reported having supervised the employee referenced in their survey responses for less than one

year, with the greatest number of supervisors (42.91%) indicating they have been the supervisor of the referenced employee for at least one year but less than three years.

Supervisors' personal experiences relating to disability. Interestingly, a majority of the supervisors expressed having personal experiences with disability outside of the workplace. Almost two-thirds of the respondents (61.57%) reported either having a disability, or having an immediate family member, relative, or friend with a disability. The data indicate that supervisors may have frequent contact, or interactions, with individuals with disabilities outside of the workplace.

Employees with Disabilities

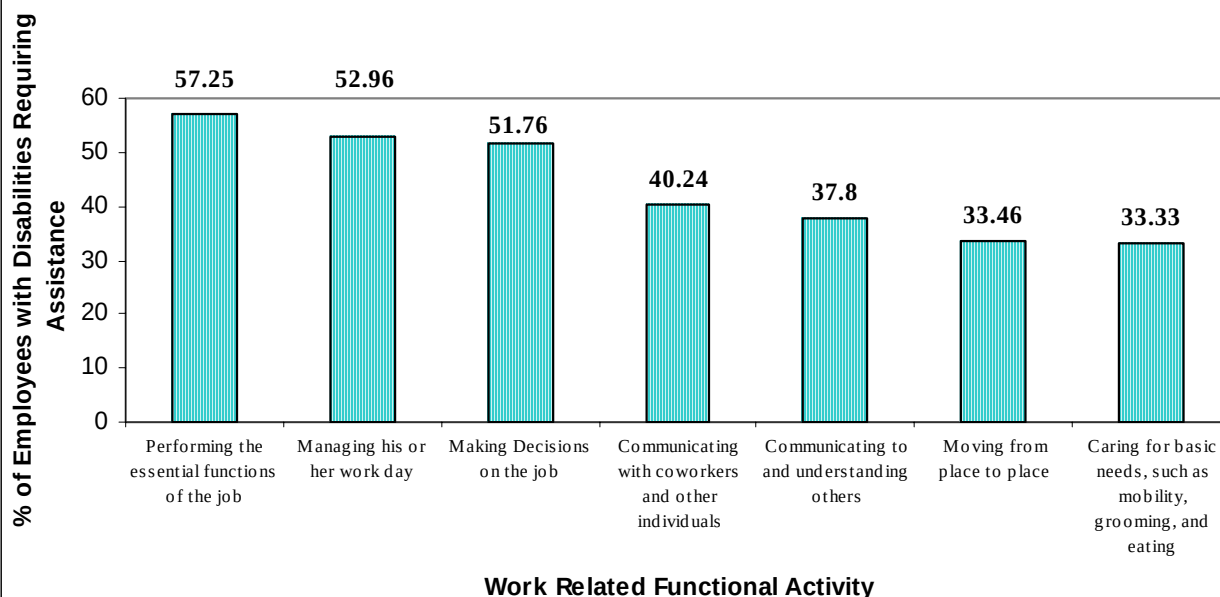
The 255 supervisors responded to items that addressed the functional characteristics of a specific worker with a disability whom they supervised at the time the survey was completed or within six months of the date of completing the survey. The functional characteristics of employees with disabilities were defined by seven measures that described the extent to which employees with disabilities required assistance in completing certain activities. The activities included in the seven measures consisted of: (1) caring for basic needs, such as mobility, grooming, and eating; (2) communicating to and understanding others; (3) moving from place to place; (4) managing one's work day; (5) making decisions on the job; (6) performing the essential functions of the job; and (7) communicating with coworkers and other individuals. The variable is divided into two levels with one level indicating that the employee needs assistance in the functional area and the other level indicating that no assistance is needed. Figure 2 on the following page reports the frequencies for supervisors who indicated that their employee with a disability required assistance with the specific functional activity. Slightly more than half of the employees with disabilities required some level of assistance in performing the essential functions of the job (57.25%), managing their work day (52.96%), or making decisions on the job (51.76%).

INSTRUMENTATION

The Human Resource Questionnaire was used to provide a measure of the degree to which businesses or

Figure 2: Functional Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities

(n = 255 supervisors)



organizations were proactive in including individuals with disabilities in their workforce, as well as employer resources available to address the support needs of employees with disabilities. For example, the questionnaire addressed employer characteristics, such as the existence of disability-related training activities, organizational adherence to the American's with Disabilities Act, commitment from top or senior level management, visible activities that contribute to an inclusive organizational culture and knowledge and utilization of workplace accommodations. The designated human resource professional within each organization was responsible for the completion of this instrument through a structured-telephone interview conducted by the researcher.

The Supervisor Questionnaire was completed by supervisors or managers who were responsible for supervising employees with known disabilities and was designed to assess supervisors' perceptions of the work performance of employees with disabilities, as well as their knowledge and utilization of accommodations. The instrument contained items that addressed supervisor characteristics, employee work performance, functional characteristics of employees with disabilities, workplace

integration, and accommodations provided to employees with disabilities.

Additionally, the Supervisor Questionnaire was designed to insure that when supervisors responded to items pertaining to an employee with a disability, they reflected on the items as they pertained to one specific employee. In instances where the supervisor managed more than one employee with a disability, the supervisor was instructed to respond to the survey questions based on his or her experiences with the employee whom he or she has supervised the longest.

Questionnaire Development

Item generation and selection. The initial items included in the instruments were developed by a review of the literature pertaining to: 1) employers' perceptions of Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act and organizational efforts directed toward implementing the ADA; and 2) employer attitudes toward people with disabilities in the workforce. From a preliminary review of the literature, several categories emerged that provided guidance in the development of questions or specific subscales that were used in instrumentation.

The draft surveys were then reviewed by a panel of experts, modified, and then pilot-tested. Representatives from the VCU Charter Business Roundtable, Presidential Task Force on the Employment of People with Disabilities, President's Committee on the Employment of Adults with Disabilities, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Society of Human Resource Management, National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research, American Telecommuting Association, and employers were mailed a draft of the instruments and asked to provide recommendations on the content. Participants were also provided with a description of the proposed study and asked to provide feedback on the survey items and recommend changes or additions to the instruments.

Additionally, the panel of experts and individuals with disabilities, advocates for people with disabilities, and representatives from business and professional trade associations met in Washington, DC to thoroughly review and provide comment on the content and format of the items included in the questionnaires. As a result of the meeting, the instruments were revised until there was agreement on the format and content of the instruments and to insure that they appropriately addressed the purpose of the research. The instrumentation and procedures were pilot-tested with a large employer located in central Virginia.

Pilot-test. Following the pilot-test, minor changes were made to the content and format of the Human Resource Questionnaire. The final 11-page Human Resource Questionnaire consisted of 48 items categorized into the following areas: respondent demographics (2-items); organizational characteristics and workplace culture (9-items); disability-awareness employer characteristics (21-items); ADA characteristics (10-items); and employees with disabilities (6-items). Response format for the survey items included forced-choice, Likert-scale type, and open-ended.

Minor changes were also made to the content of the Supervisor Questionnaire. The final 11-page instrument consisted of 45 items categorized into the following areas: respondent demographics; employee with a disability characteristics; work performance; accommodations provided for employees with disabilities; and supervisor awareness and utilization of accommodations. Response format for questionnaire items included forced-choice, Likert-scale type, and open-ended.

PROCEDURE

Once commitment was obtained from employer representatives, a human resource professional within each organization was identified in order to participate in a 30-45 minute structured-telephone interview to respond to questions on the Human Resource Questionnaire. Then, the researcher mailed the designated human resource professional a letter containing a brief description of the study, a Human Resource Questionnaire and the corresponding number of Supervisor Questionnaire.

Human resource professionals were also responsible for identifying supervisors who at the time of the study supervised an employee with a disability or had supervised an employee with a disability within the previous six months. The human resource professionals were able to identify supervisors who met this criteria because employees from supervisors' work units had either requested accommodations or self-disclosed their disabilities. A total of 255 completed Supervisor Questionnaires and were returned to the researcher.

Structured-telephone interviews were completed with 46 human resource professionals representing 43 businesses. One organization had three human resource professionals participate and another organization had two human resource professionals participate in the research. Overall, the duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1-hour and 45 minutes. The length of the interviews varied depending on whether the respondent had reviewed or completed the survey prior to the structured-telephone interview.

RESULTS

The results provide a description of employers' perceptions of the ability of their organizations to address the support needs of workers with disabilities, their knowledge and utilization of accommodations, and accommodations provided to employees with disabilities. The results from each respondent type, human resource professionals and supervisors, are described independently. Human resource professionals identified sources of organizational assistance in the accommodation process. Supervisors' knowledge and utilization of

accommodations and the accommodations provided to employees with disabilities are also presented. Additionally, inferential statistics were used to investigate the relationship between supervisors' confidence in identifying and developing accommodations and the functional characteristics of employees with disabilities.

Data describing human resource professionals' knowledge of resources to assist in the accommodation process, organizational contact for identifying accommodations, and role in the accommodation process were collected from items contained in the Human Resource Questionnaire. Data describing supervisors' awareness and utilization of accommodations, sources of assistance with identifying and implementing accommodations, and accommodations provided to employees with disabilities were drawn from responses to items contained on the Supervisor Questionnaire.

Employers' Perceptions of Their Organizations' Ability to Support Workers with Disabilities and Provide Accommodations

Human Resource Professionals

Human resource professionals rated their organizations' performance quite favorably on several aspects of employee relations pertaining to employees with disabilities. For instance, the majority of human resource professionals indicated that their organizations were successful in: negotiating reasonable accommodations (82.6%); assigning individuals to jobs that match their abilities (69.57%); implementing return-to-work procedures (60.87%); training employees with disabilities (60.87%); and handling performance problems (60.87%). Additionally, more than three-fourths of the human resource professionals (80.43%) did not view the costs of providing accommodations as a major barrier to employment for people with disabilities in their organizations.

Organizational sources of assistance in the accommodation process. In a majority of the organizations (84.78%), human resource staff were available to assist supervisors in providing accommodations for workers with disabilities. However, several additional organizational resources were also available to assist with the accommodation process. More than half of the human resource professionals (54.35%) claimed that safety or ergonomic staff could assist supervisors with identifying accommodations. To a lesser extent, disability manage-

ment and benefits staff, unit managers, legal counsel, and occupational health were also identified as organizational resources that could assist supervisors with the accommodation process.

Organizational contact for identifying accommodations. Despite having several sources of assistance available to supervisors, human resource professionals in more than three-fourths (78.26%) of the organizations indicated that supervisors should contact the organization's human resource staff (see Figure 3 on the following page). In less than one-third of the organizations, human resource professionals identified occupational health or medical clinic staff (32.61%), safety or ergonomic staff (30.43%), and disability management or benefits staff (30.43%) as other organizational contacts for supervisors when assistance is required in identifying accommodations.

The role of human resource professionals in the accommodation process. Human resource professionals described a variety of activities they engaged in to identify and provide accommodations for workers with disabilities in their organizations. The majority of respondents reported working with supervisors (93.48%) and employees with disabilities (86.96%) to identify potential accommodations. Additionally, human resource professionals referred individuals to appropriate internal (76.09%) or external resources (60.87%), and provided counseling (63.04%).

Supervisors of Employees with Disabilities

Supervisors' confidence in identifying and developing accommodations. Supervisors also expressed confidence in their ability to identify and develop accommodations for workers with disabilities (see Table 3). Almost two-thirds (60.39%) of the supervisors were confident in their ability to identify and provide accommodations for employees with disabilities. Although a small percentage of supervisors still expressed reservations about their ability (15.29%) or authority (6.27%) to identify or develop accommodations. Interestingly, despite supervisors confidence in identifying and developing accommodations, less than one-fourth (22.75%) of the supervisors had the authority to secure accommodations for employees with disabilities.

Figure 3: Supervisor Contact if Assistance is Needed with Accommodations (n = 46 HR Professionals)

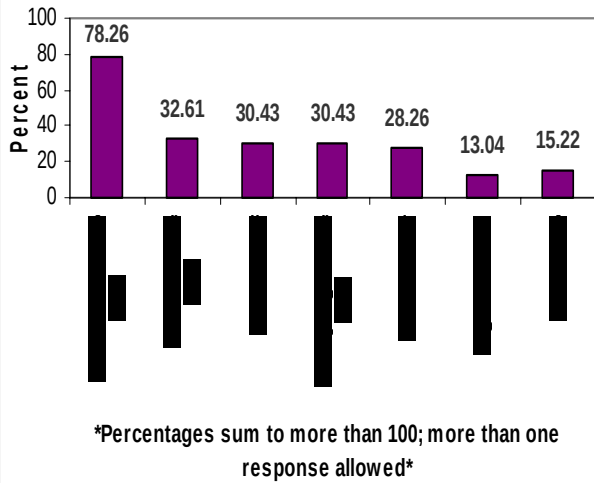


Table 3: Supervisors' Confidence in Identifying and Developing Accommodations (n = 255 Supervisors)

Confident in Ability to Identify and Develop Accommodations	60.39%
Authority to Identify and Develop Accommodations	22.35%
Reservations in Ability to Identify and Develop Accommodations	15.29%
Other	7.84%
Reservations Regarding Authority to Identify and Develop Accommodations	6.27%

More than one response allowed; percentages sum to more than 100

Supervisors' confidence in providing accommodations and functional characteristics of employees with disabilities. For each of the seven functional characteristic measures pertaining to employees with disabilities, a Chi Square Analysis was performed to compare the two levels of assistance to the two levels of

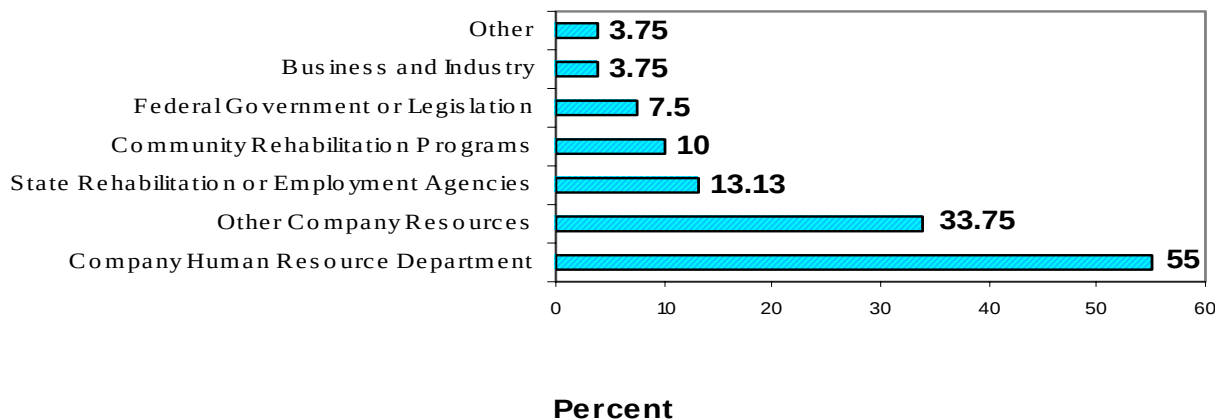
supervisors' confidence in identifying and developing accommodations. Statistically significant effects were found for the functional characteristics of communicating to and understanding others ($\chi^2 = 5.88$, $p < .05$); making decisions on the job ($\chi^2 = 4.50$, $p < .05$); and communicating with coworkers and other individuals ($\chi^2 = 4.95$, $p < .05$). There were no statistically significant effects found when the functional measures of caring for basic needs, moving from place to place, managing the work day, and performing the essential functions of the job were compared to supervisors' confidence in identifying and developing accommodations. The results of the Chi Square analyses indicated that supervisors of employees who are perceived as needing assistance with communicating to and understanding others, making decisions on the job, and communicating with and understanding coworkers are more likely to feel confident in their ability to identify and develop accommodations for employees with disabilities than supervisors who indicated that employees with disabilities did not require assistance in the three functional areas.

Supervisors awareness of accommodations.

Almost two-thirds of the supervisors (62.74%) indicated that they were aware of resources to contact or sources of assistance when accommodations were needed for employees with disabilities. Yet, the 160 supervisors who indicated an awareness of resources to contact most often identified resources within their organization as a source of assistance when seeking information on making accommodations (see Figure 4 on the following page). Sources of assistance in the accommodation process that were external to the organization, such as the State Department of Rehabilitation Services, were also identified by supervisors as a source of information but to a lesser extent than their own company resources.

Sources of assistance in providing accommodations. Supervisors indicated they sought assistance from several organizational representatives or external agencies in arranging accommodations for employees with disabilities. Supervisors most often cited their human resource professionals (78.43%), and to a lesser extent the disability coordinator (24.31%), or other supervisors (22.35%). Resources external to the organization identified by supervisors included ADA and disability-focused websites, community employment programs, and state Department of Rehabilitation Services. The

Figure 4: Resources Identified by Supervisors when Accommodations are Needed (n = 160 supervisors)



Percentages sum to more than 100; more than one response allowed

finding that supervisors most often identified human resource professionals as a source of assistance in the accommodation process is consistent with the finding from human resource professionals that identifies members of the human resource staff as the designated organizational contact for arranging accommodations.

Accommodations Provided to Employees with Disabilities

Supervisors responded to five items pertaining to the provision of accommodations for a specific employee with a disability. The survey items solicited information on accommodations made to employees in five training areas: job duties, schedules, work assignments, and work area. When supervisors reported providing an accommodation for an employee with a disability in a specific area, they were asked to respond to additional questions that focused on the reasons accommodations were needed, types of accommodations provided, and the cost of accommodations.

Work-Related Areas Where Accommodations Were Needed for Employees with Disabilities

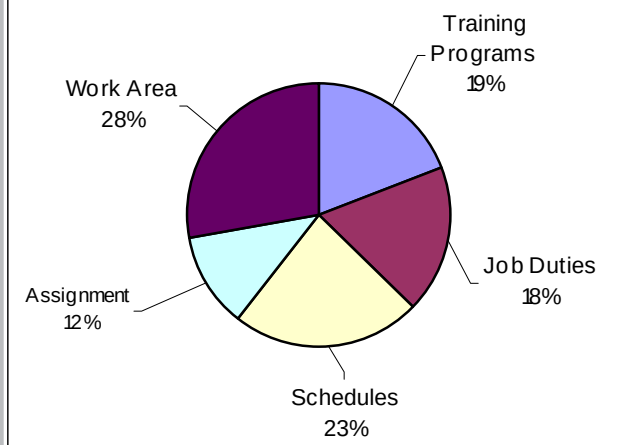
Supervisors reported providing a total of 402 accommodations to the 255 employees with disabilities

across five employment areas: training programs, job duties, schedules, work assignments, and work area. The greatest number of reported accommodations were made to employees' work areas, including existing facilities, equipment, or work stations, followed by changes to employees' schedules (see Figure 5 on the following page).

Reasons Accommodations Were Needed by Employees with Disabilities

Employees with disabilities most frequently needed accommodations to address functional limitations associated with performing work skills. This finding was consistent across four of the five employment categories including job training (54.55%); job duties (57.53%); work assignments (51.06%); and work area, equipment, or workstation (29.46%). When employees with disabilities needed some type of modification or change in their work schedules, employees most often needed the accommodation to address work tolerance concerns (34.41%), which was described as requiring employees to sustain work activities for designated periods of time. Supervisors often indicated that employees with disabilities needed accommodations to address issues related to work tolerance, as it was the second most identified reason

Figure 5: Area Where Accommodations Were Needed for Employees with Disabilities
(n = 402 accommodations provided)



overall. Supervisors perceived employees with disabilities as needing accommodations in the area of work tolerance because they had difficulty staying on task or employees had physical or mental conditions (e.g., carpal tunnel, back problems) that made working for sustained periods of time difficult.

Costs of Accommodations

Across all five categories of accommodations made to employees, supervisors indicated that accommodations were relatively inexpensive. In a majority of the instances (77.90%) of providing accommodations within each of the five categories, supervisors reported the costs of accommodations to be less than \$100.00. The data indicate that in a small number of incidences, employers had to make structural changes to their offices or buildings that drove up the costs of the accommodations in the work area category. Many supervisors were also fairly accurate in assessing the potential cost of accommodations, as the majority (65.5%) indicated that the costs of accommodations were about the same as they had expected. Additionally, accommodations were most often paid for by the organization or the employees' work units. In rare instances, accommodations were paid for by the employee or external sources, such as the Department of Rehabilitative Services.

DISCUSSION

Organizational representatives are confident in their ability to meet the support needs of employees with disabilities. Both groups of respondents, human resource professionals and supervisors, indicated that they believed their organizations had the capacity to address the support needs of employees with disabilities. For instance, human resource professionals identified several resources within their organizations that could assist with identifying and developing accommodations for workers with disabilities. Likewise, supervisors acknowledged the fact that workplace personnel such as representatives from the disability management program, safety or ergonomics department or legal counsel were available to assist in the accommodation process. It is believed that the presence of disability management programs helps to address the lack of supervisor knowledge regarding disability (SHRM/Cornell, 1999). It is also encouraging that the majority of human resource professionals (82.6%) rated the performance of their organizations quite favorable in relation to providing accommodations to employees with disabilities.

Additionally, the majority of supervisors (60.39%) expressed confidence in their ability to identify and develop accommodations to address the support needs of workers with disabilities. Supervisors' confidence in identifying and developing accommodations may increase the likelihood of effective accommodations being identified and implemented. For the supervisors in this study, the vast majority were extremely confident in their ability to address the support needs of workers with disabilities and felt comfortable in doing it.

This finding is encouraging in light of the results of previous investigations completed with workplace personnel regarding supervisors' ability to accommodate people with disabilities. For example, human resource professionals have indicated that supervisors' limited knowledge of accommodations represent a barrier to employment for people with disabilities in their workforce (Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, 1999; SHRM/Cornell, 1999). Supervisors have also indicated that even though they were able to assess employee performance problems and identify

potential solutions, they were often unsuccessful in securing needed accommodations (Pitt-Catsouphes & Butterworth, 1995)

Despite supervisors' confidence in identifying and developing accommodations for employees with disabilities, an alarming majority of supervisors indicated that they did not have the authority to secure accommodations for workers with disabilities. Oftentimes, supervisors may be the initial point of contact for an employee who requests an accommodation. If supervisors do not have the authority to obtain necessary accommodations for members of their work unit, than employees' requests for accommodations may go unaddressed by supervisors. As a result, the organization may encounter a number of issues involving work performance and employee relations. For instance, failing to respond promptly to an employee's need for accommodation may contribute to coworker perceptions that the worker with a disability is hurting the performance of their work unit. Supervisors' knowledge of a variety of workplace accommodations, their confidence in identifying effective supports, and having the authority to secure accommodations that adequately address the support needs of workers with disabilities are several factors that may impact the inclusion, retention, and advancement of employees with disabilities.

Employers have limited awareness of the variety of workplace supports available and rely almost exclusively on internal organizational resources to address the needs of applicants or employees with disabilities. Human resource professionals play a pivotal role in integrating and retaining persons with disabilities in the workforce. The results of this study indicated that many organizations relied heavily on human resource professionals as the primary source of information and assistance in identifying and developing accommodations for employees. For instance, even though supervisors expressed confidence in their ability to identify and develop accommodations, the majority of supervisors (78.43%) also identified human resource professionals as the organizational contact person from whom they sought assistance when accommodations were needed for workers with disabilities. In many organizations, human resource professionals are often the critical contact for other workplace personnel in an effort to secure accommodations (Bruyere, 2000; Unger, Wehman, Yasuda, Campbell, & Green, 2001).

More than three-fourths of the human resource professionals (78.26%) also indicated that supervisors should contact the organization's human resource professionals in instances when accommodations are needed for workers with disabilities, despite the availability of other organizational resources. Interestingly, many of the participating businesses have well-established disability management programs that may contain components related to workplace safety and ergonomics. Yet, neither disability management programs or safety and ergonomic staff were widely viewed as a source of assistance in identifying and developing accommodations for workers with disabilities.

Additionally, it is reasonable to believe that if businesses are not utilizing disability management programs as a resource for employees with disabilities during the accommodation process, than these programs represent an untapped resource when considering feasible accommodations and job modifications for potential applicants with disabilities. It may be alarming that many of the participating organizations have disability management programs, but fail to recognize or utilize these programs in providing accommodations to workers with disabilities.

Similarly, supervisors in this study identified a limited number of supports external to their organization that are available to assist persons with disabilities in the workplace. For example, supervisors rarely identified representatives from the state department of rehabilitation agency or employment agencies as a source of information or assistance in the accommodation process. Very few supervisors identified government tax credits, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the Disabled Access Credit and the Tax Deduction to Remove Transportation and Architectural Barriers, or ADA and disability-focused websites, as a source of information or assistance in identifying and developing accommodations. Supervisors had limited knowledge of the availability of tax credits as a source of assistance in employing and supporting people with disabilities in their workforce.

Some employers have viewed the disability-related tax incentives as more trouble than they are worth, citing a cumbersome application process and skepticism surrounding the Federal agency (i.e., the Internal Revenue Service) that manages the application process (O'Leary & Dean, 1998). We know from supervisors'

descriptions of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities that they are not using the tax credits to recoup some of the costs associated with making structural changes to the workplace, or collaborating with rehabilitation professionals to identify accommodations to address limitations in work skills.

It is also evident that employers in this study do not view the myriad of government-funded employment and training programs or disability-related technical assistance centers as a source of assistance in supporting persons with disabilities in their organizations. In situations when vocational rehabilitation and supported employment providers have been successful in assisting individuals with disabilities with securing employment, employers still do not view these disability-employment providers as sources of information or assistance on disability and workplace issues such as arranging accommodations, addressing performance problems, or return-to-work.

The majority of employers in this study indicated they could adequately address disability in the workplace relying primarily on organizational resources. Therefore, they may have had little need for any of the services available through the disability-related employment training programs or technical assistance centers. Even still, some employers may not view these programs as sources of assistance in addressing disability in the workplace or may remain unaware of the services these programs offer. For example, employers who have knowingly employed a worker with a disability through the state vocational rehabilitation program reported very limited knowledge of the services offered by the vocational rehabilitation agency (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000).

Functional Characteristics of Employees with Disabilities and Accommodations Provided to Workers with Disabilities. In addressing disability in the workplace, organizations provided a number of accommodations to employees with disabilities to address limitations in several employment-related areas, such as employee training, work assignments, work areas and schedules. Overall, these accommodations were relatively inexpensive (e.g., less than \$100) and most often involved changes in job duties, functions, and or work processes or purchasing materials or equipment.

Though a number of organizations have taken a proactive approach to disability in the workplace, it is

unclear the extent to which the breadth and depth of employers' knowledge of accommodations have been tested. Anecdotally, we know from the supervisors' descriptions of accommodations provided to employees with disabilities, that despite providing a number of accommodations, the accommodations appear very limited in scope.

Thus, supervisors may be comfortable in addressing the support needs of employees with disabilities when they are able to readily address employees' need for accommodations or have direct interaction or control in arranging and implementing the accommodations. In contrast, supervisors may be less sure of their ability to address functional limitations of employees with disabilities when it necessitates structural changes to the work environment, providing non-job function related assistance, and altering aspects of jobs or positions resulting in deviations from typical organizational descriptions, standards, or norms. Adding further credibility to this funding is the fact that only a very small percentage of supervisors believed they had the authority to grant necessary accommodations to employees with disabilities, despite the majority of supervisors indicating confidence in their ability to provide accommodations.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this investigation have several implications for vocational rehabilitation, supported employment providers, and employers. These implications pertain to increasing employers' knowledge and awareness of the variety of workplace supports that are available to assist persons with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Providers

Development of public-private partnerships that assist employers in addressing workplace disability. Rehabilitation professionals and employment support providers have primarily focused on providing services to job seekers and assisting them in accessing employment. The major thrust of vocational rehabilitation services has been entry into the labor market for persons with disabilities. Yet, to employers in this study, they

represent an untapped resource in that regard (see e.g., Unger, et al., 2001) and an even more limited resource in addressing the support needs of existing workers who are injured or become disabled while employed. These findings validate the fact that more effective efforts need to be directed at insuring that business representatives are aware of programs that assist people with disabilities in accessing and maintaining employment (Bush, 2001; Buys & Rennie, 2001; Gilbride, et al, 2000; Presidential Task Force, 1999). The results of this study may also provide evidence that rehabilitation and employment support providers are not effectively marketing the wealth of services they can provide to the business community.

New service delivery models, consisting of private and public partnerships in which human service agencies focus solely on supporting businesses, need to be developed and implemented. For instance, rehabilitation and employment support providers should work collaboratively with organizational representatives in addressing disability in the workplace. As a result, the focal point of services would shift to managing disability in the workplace in which direct assistance would be provided to employers in addressing the support needs of workers or applicants with disabilities, unlike the existing vocational rehabilitation service model where the primary emphasis is on securing employment.

Efforts to provide comprehensive rehabilitation-related consultation services to the business community should be encouraged. These services need to be viewed by employers as a proactive approach to tapping an underutilized source of labor--people with disabilities (Buys & Rennie, 2001; Gilbride, et al., 1992). Included in these approaches should be an emphasis on marketing rehabilitation services as one method for diversifying a company's workforce, assisting employers in addressing the support needs of workers who are injured or become disabled while employed, and communicating the unintended benefits of accommodations. Most importantly, rehabilitation and employment support providers should be able to convey to employers the business case for hiring individuals with disabilities and returning workers who become injured or disabled back-to-work. The costs (e.g., lost productivity and absenteeism) to employers for not returning employees who become injured or disabled back to work has been well documented (Chelius, Galvin, & Owens, 1992; Hunt, Habeck, Owens, & Vandergoot, 1996; Watson Wyatt, 2001).

Providing technical assistance and training to employers. There is a need for increased employer awareness regarding the variety of services and tax incentives that are available to assist employers with recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities in their workforce. Typically, representatives from employment support providers or vocational rehabilitation professionals should be able to provide information and resources in this area. However, employers' skepticism surrounding government involvement in business activities have made some employers reluctant to consider using government-sponsored programs such as supported employment, (Owens-Johnson & Hanley-Maxwell, 1999), vocational rehabilitation, or tax incentives for providing accommodations or employing people with disabilities (O'Leary & Dean, 1998). Many employers who have no prior experience with these programs appear to value and give greater credibility in information originating from their own affiliations with professional trade or industry associations, local Chamber of Commerce, or the Society of Human Resource Management (Nietupski, Harme-Nietupski, Vanderhart, & Fishback, 1996; Owens-Johnson & Hanley-Maxwell, 1999).

Therefore, rehabilitation and employment support providers should work collaboratively with representatives from their local Chamber of Commerce, the Society of Human Resource Management, and other professional business and trade associations to provide information, or training and technical assistance to employers. The dissemination of information, through business and professional organizations, on work supports and assistance in identifying qualified applicants with disabilities should receive increased attention and credibility by employers.

In providing technical assistance and training to business and industry, rehabilitation and employment support providers should also acknowledge the wealth of organizational resources, including workplace personnel and existing disability-related programs, that are available within businesses to address disability in the workplace. In the past, rehabilitation professionals or employment support providers have marketed themselves as being the primary source of information and expertise on workplace assistance as it pertains to the individuals with disabilities to whom they provide services. Increasingly, rehabilitation professionals and employment support providers are working collaboratively with employers to address the

support needs of workers with disabilities, due in part to the emergence of innovative workplace supports such as natural supports and assistive technology.

However, often times they may overlook existing employer or organizational resources, such as disability management programs or occupational health professionals that are available to provide assistance. Vocational rehabilitation and employment support providers need to capitalize on the expertise of these organizational representatives when securing employment and implementing accommodations for people with disabilities.

Though employers in this study indicated that their organizations were handling workplace disability remarkably well, there was some indication they may have difficulty addressing the support needs of applicants or workers who have more significant functional limitations. When employees with disabilities needed assistance in managing their workday or performing job-related tasks, organizations were less confident in their ability to address their support needs. Training and technical assistance should be directed at employers to assist them in meeting the needs of the employees with disabilities that their businesses have expressed the least experience or confidence with in identifying workplace supports.

Employers

Increase workplace knowledge of accommodations. Employers indicated they are quite confident in their ability to identify and develop accommodations for workers with disabilities. Yet, there is some indication that supervisors may have difficulty in providing adequate accommodations for workers with more significant support needs. It is also reported that supervisors make the final decision on accommodations (Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, 1999). For these reasons, insuring that the appropriate organizational representatives, whether it is human resource professionals or supervisors or managers, possess the knowledge and capabilities to identify and secure accommodations is critical.

Business and industry representatives need to expand considerably their knowledge of accommodations to address the support needs of workers with significant disabilities and persons who experience difficulty in performing job-specific duties to the employers' expectations. Technical assistance and training activities should

focus on promoting greater awareness of accommodations, knowledge of accommodations that address specific functional limitations, and sources of external assistance in the accommodation process. Within their own organizations, businesses could promote the awareness of accommodations that have been demonstrated to be effective in addressing work performance issues. For example, workplace accommodations that have been successful for employees with disabilities often times result in unintended benefits for other members of the workforce in terms of increasing productivity or improving performance.

Additionally, internal tracking of accommodations, or data pertaining to accommodations, would assist employers in identifying potential problem work areas that may lead to injury or disability. Many businesses lack information systems to track accommodations, disability experience and business impact (Collignon, 1986; McFarlin, et al., 1991; Watson Wyatt, 2001).

Dissemination of effective accommodation practices. Lastly, employers who have successful accommodation strategies need to share their practices and experiences with representatives from other businesses. For instance, organizations should use their affiliations with business, trade and professional organizations, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and SHRM, to disseminate information to other businesses. Sharing successful business and disability strategies provides an opportunity for other employers to develop or modify existing disability-related practices.

CONCLUSION

The fact that employers are addressing disability in the workplace and believe they have the capabilities and resources to address the support needs of workers with disabilities is especially encouraging. Yet, employers have very limited knowledge of the variety of workplace supports available that could potentially assist them in employing people with disabilities and assisting employees who become injured or disabled in returning to work. The ability of organizations to expand their knowledge of workplace supports and address disability in the workplace will assist them in attracting and retaining valuable human resources in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

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Chapter 5

Workplace Supports: A View from Employers Who Have Hired Employees with Significant Disabilities

by: Darlene D. Unger

This article describes employers' assessment of the types of workplace supports available in their businesses, the workplace accommodations provided to supported employees, and the role of human service providers in facilitating those accommodations. Employee support needs in the areas of employee training and benefits, career advancement, and work culture were addressed by the 53 employers who participated in the study. The results indicated that employers are capable of providing workplace accommodations for workers with significant disabilities, drawing on existing employer resources. The data indicated that employers are going beyond mere compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 "reasonable accommodations" provisions; employers reported responding to employee needs in such areas as career advancement, changing something about one's job, and social integration. Often, supervisors and coworkers played instrumental roles in providing support to coworkers with disabilities.

Supported employment has afforded an increasing number of people with significant disabilities an opportunity to enter and compete in our nation's labor force. Since the inception of supported employment as a federal program with the authorization of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments in 1986, the number of individuals receiving these services grew from 10,000 individuals in 1986 to 139,812 people in 1995 (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1998). As supported employment experienced rapid growth and employers became increasingly aware of the employment potential of people with disabilities, increased efforts were directed toward identifying and

developing supports that in the workplace to assist individuals with disabilities in both learning how to do their jobs and maintaining employment.

The job coach model of supported employment (see, e.g., Rusch, 1986; Wehman & Kregel, 1985) has been the mechanism through which individuals with significant disabilities often obtain competitive employment. In this model, the job coach has typically been the primary provider of support to an individual with a disability for the duration of the individual's employment. However, commencing with the early days of supported employment implementation, the job coach model has always embraced the idea of using coworkers and natural cues in the work environment to provide assistance to individuals with disabilities (Moon, Goodall, Barcus, & Brooke, 1986; Rusch & Hughes, 1989; Wehman, 1981). As supported employment gained acceptance among its customers, the role of the job coach evolved from being the primary provider of support to the role of a facilitator to assist individuals with severe disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive employment (Brooke, Inge, Armstrong, & Wehman, 1997; Fabian & Luecking, 1991; Unger, Parent, Gibson, Kane-Johnston, & Kregel, 1998). As the role of the job coach evolved, employers reported favorable perceptions of supported employees (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Shafer, Kregel, Banks, & Hill, 1988) and supported employment (Kregel & Unger, 1993; Petty & Fussell, 1997). Increasingly, employers were more comfortable in collaborating with job coaches/employment specialists and rehabilitation professionals to identify and develop accommodations in the workplace for their employees with disabilities.

Workplace Supports

Regardless of the size of the business, employers offer many types of support to their employees. It is important for supervisors and coworkers to recognize that the support needs of employees with disabilities are similar to the variety of employment-related issues that occur among individuals with no known disabilities (Miano, Nalven, & Hoff, 1996). In addressing the support needs of employees with disabilities, efforts should be directed at identifying and accessing accommodations that may be available within the employment setting. Examples of these business-mediated supports are:

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- (a) workplace accommodations such as assistive technology, job restructuring, and schedule modification;
 - (b) coworker and employer supports; and
 - (c) employer-sponsored programs and policies such as return-to-work policies, disability case management, and company policies regarding family and/or medical leave (Wehman, Bircout, & Kregel, 1999).
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According to Hanley-Maxwell and Millington (1992), accommodations that exist in workplaces include wellness programs, employee assistance programs, basic skills training, coaching, mentoring, and apprenticeships. Often, employers may not be aware of these inexpensive and unobtrusive accommodations or supports that may be readily available within their businesses and can be utilized to provide support to employees with disabilities.

Supports also exist outside of the workplace that can be accessed or utilized to assist people with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining employment. However, there is uncertainty surrounding employers' level of awareness and access to these types of employer or workplace supports. These supports include: (a) government assistance in the form of financial incentives or federally funded job training and employment programs such as supported employment, and (b) training and technical assistance pertaining to employment policies and workplace supports designed to ensure access and/or maintain individuals with disabilities in employment (O'Leary & Dean, 1998). Many employers may be unaware that various types of workplace supports exist or that resources and assistance are available from outside one's place of

employment. For instance, employers may be unaware of resources such as the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the Business and Disability Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs), or vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services, which can assist employers or people with disabilities in identifying and/or developing accommodations or providing employment-related support.

Employers may be aware of resources but because dissemination of disability-related information may be fragmented and uncoordinated, employers may be confused by the abundance of information (O'Leary & Dean, 1998). This confusion is especially alarming given that Butterworth and Pitt-Catsouphes (1997) found that human resource administrators, supervisors, and coworkers who had worked with employees with disabilities expressed concerns about not having the resources (e.g., time, money, experience, and expertise) to adequately support their employment. Employers may express a willingness to hire people with disabilities, but they may have concerns and reservations on how to identify and develop supports to assist with integrating them into the workforce, especially applicants with significant disabilities.

Employers and the Employment Regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act

Employers expressed concern surrounding the implementation of Title I of the ADA (Pati & Bailey, 1995). Employers' fears regarding the ADA may have been derived, in part, from the lack of specificity regarding their responsibilities for providing "reasonable accommodations." Under the ADA, employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations that will enable individuals with disabilities to successfully perform their jobs when accommodations can be provided without an employer sustaining an "undue hardship." Some professionals contend that the ADA's reasonable accommodation requirement is unlikely to maximize the employment of people with disabilities because it provides incentives to resist accommodations (e.g., Rosen, 1991; Williams, 1993). For instance, the cost of a reasonable accommodation is linked to economic analysis: employers weigh the accommodation cost against the resources the employer has and the benefit received from employment (Blanck, 1997). An employer whose only goal is to maximize profit might not hire an applicant with a disability who requires an accommodation unless the cost is minimal.

It is a well-documented fact that one of the greatest concerns expressed by employers regarding reasonable accommodations is the perceived cost they might incur. (Moore & Crimando, 1995; United Cerebral Palsy Association [UCPA], 1993). With the majority of the accommodations costing little or nothing, employers still expressed concerns about the cost or the difficulty in providing accommodations (UCPA, 1993). However, Granger, Baron, and Robinson (1997), reporting on the types of accommodations costs for employees with psychiatric disabilities, described job accommodations as being nonintrusive, not too costly, and often causing only subtle shifts in workplace procedures that employers might make for valued employees without defined disabilities. Even businesses that may be limited in personnel or funds should be able to find innovative ways to effectively accommodate applicants with disabilities (Magill, 1997).

Despite employers' concerns pertaining to the ADA and reasonable accommodations, the percentage of employers who claimed to have made an accommodation for an employee with a disability increased from 51% in 1993 to 81% in 1995, according to a recent study (Harris et al., 1995). Additionally, a study by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN, 1994) revealed that 69% of employees with disabilities required no special assistance and that half of the accommodations made cost less than \$500 to implement (52%), with the typical cost being about \$200.

Since the implementation of the employment regulations of the ADA, much research has emerged that explores employers' attitudes toward the ADA and the costs incurred in accommodating workers with disabilities. However, descriptions of the types of accommodations available in the workplace and the potential of employers to meet the needs of employees with disabilities are limited. Further, with increased employer initiatives directed toward improving the work environment to retain valuable human resources in this period of a shrinking labor market, a variety of resources are available in the workplace to assist all employees learn how to do their job, maintain their employment status, and advance in their careers.

Increasingly, employers are called on to deliver a number of supports to enhance the quality and productivity of their workforce, as well as to retain valuable employees. The purpose of this article is to describe the types of workplace accommodations provided to employees with

significant disabilities that help them learn and maintain their jobs and enable them to pursue career advancement opportunities. Additionally, the role of the human service provider in assisting and identifying workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities is explored.

METHOD

Sample

Data were collected from employers for individuals with disabilities hired from October 1993 through September 1998. The purpose of the Natural Supports Demonstration Project was to develop and implement a natural supports approach for achieving competitive employment outcomes for transition-age youth with significant disabilities. Natural supports were defined as any type of support that assists individuals in participating in the community and work environment of their choice. The seven-step community and workplace model (Parent et al., 1994), which incorporates the use of natural supports, individual choice, and self-determination into the existing supported employment service delivery system, was implemented with all individuals placed into supported competitive employment by project employment specialists. Individuals were referred to the project by parents, rehabilitation counselors, and special educators. Participants represented a variety of disability labels and resided in rural, suburban, and urban areas in a southeastern metropolitan city. The mean age reported for individuals was 23 years with a range of 20 to 38 years. Table 1 on the following page contains a description of demographic characteristics of the 37 individuals employed by the employers who participated in this study.

A total of 53 businesses participated in the study, with 16 individuals having worked at one or more businesses during the time frame for the study. A majority of the employers (62.3%) represented small businesses, employing less than 100 employees (see Table 2 on the following page). Prior to the individual's first day of work, the business representative responsible for hiring the individual was asked to complete the Employer Support Questionnaire (developed by VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Project staff).

Table 1: Employee Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender: Men	24	64.9%
Women	13	35.1%
Race: Asian	1	2.7%
Black	9	24.3%
Hispanic	1	2.7%
White	26	70.3%
Primary Disability Label		
Mental Retardation	19	51.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury	6	16.2%
Mental Illness	11	29.7%
Other	1	2.7%

Table 2: Employer Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Size of Business:		
small (99 or less employees)	33	62.3%
medium (100-999 employees)	18	34.0%
large (1000+ employees)	2	3.8%
Type of Business:		
restaurants and cafeterias	17	32.1%
industrial	3	5.7%
service provider	3	5.7%
commercial/retail	18	34.0%
education	6	11.3%
health	3	5.7%
lodging	3	5.7%

The generation and selection of questions included on the instruments involved recommendations from the project's advisory committee, which consisted of individuals with disabilities, parents, rehabilitation counselors, educators, employers, and community representatives. Input collected from the advisory committee was used to develop initial drafts of the survey instruments.

Instrumentation

Data were collected with two different instruments, the Employer Support Questionnaire and the Community and

Workplace Support Form, developed by the VCU-RRTC. The instruments have been previously validated and found to be highly reliable and correlated with positive employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Unger et al., 1998). The development of the instruments consisted of a three-step process:

- (a) generation and selection of survey items,
- (b) review by expert panels, and
- (c) a pilot test of the instruments.

Employer Support Questionnaire

The initial draft of the Employer Support Questionnaire was field-tested with employers in the pilot study of the VCU-RRTC to ensure clarity and potential for capturing the necessary information. The instrument was completed by a business manager or supervisor who hired a person with a disability through a supported employment program, prior to their first day of employment. During the pilot study, feedback on the clarity of the instrument was obtained from employers and community representatives. From their input and the results of the pilot study, the instrument was modified and reviewed by a panel of employers and rehabilitation professionals.

Content of the Employer Support Questionnaire

The final version of the seven-page Employer Support Questionnaire consisted of 32 forced-choice questions, 9 of which requested additional information regarding the employer's response. The purpose of the form is to identify potential supports available from the employer or within the employment setting that might assist an employee with learning and/or completing his or her assigned job duties. Additionally, the form addresses the type of assistance available to employees in the area of training, advancement, and social or recreational activities, as well as examining the typical work routines of employees. Once an employer representative completes the form, the employment specialist and employee with a disability reviews the form to identify potential sources of support for to address anticipated or future support needs.

Content of the Employer Support Questionnaire

The initial draft of the Community and Workplace Support form was developed by the VCU-RRTC with assistance from an advisory committee, consisting of individuals with disabilities, parents, rehabilitation counselors, educators, employment specialists, advocates, employers, and community representatives. It was then field-tested with the participants to ensure clarity and the potential for capturing the necessary information. During the field testing portion, feedback was obtained from employment specialists administering the form, individuals with disabilities, and family members regarding the clarity of the instrument. On the basis of their input, the instru-

ment was modified and reviewed by the project's advisory committee and rehabilitation professionals familiar with strategies being studied.

The Community and Workplace Support Form consists of approximately 14 forced-choice questions. The questions address:

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- (a) the type of support needed or desired,
 - (b) support resources that have been identified,
 - (c) support option selected,
 - (d) individuals primarily responsible for arranging or accessing the support,
 - (e) individuals primarily responsible for providing support,
 - (f) the role of the employment specialist in addressing the support need,
 - (g) the costs of providing the support, and
 - (h) the person primarily responsible for over-seeing the monitoring of the support.
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The purpose of this form is to identify the supports needed and used in meeting the individual's needs and the type of assistance the employment specialist provided to address these needs.

Workplace Accommodation

For the purpose of this study, workplace support is defined as any type of assistance or support provided to employees in or outside the work environment that assists them in the employment process, pre-employment interviews, job training, career advancement or job changing, and employment retention. A workplace support can be internal (e.g., coworkers, company checklists, wellness programs, etc.) or external (e.g., tax credits, supported employment, etc.) to the work environment, with the common feature being the support assists individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment and career advancement. Internal supports are available in the work setting or from existing programs offered by the employer. External supports are identified or developed from sources outside the employment setting.

Support Need

Support needs are defined assistance required or desired by an individual that, aids or facilitates participation in community and employment environments. Learning how to do the job, obtaining transportation to and from work, remembering how to complete required job duties,

socializing with coworkers, and picking up and cashing a paycheck are examples of support needs. A support need is identified anytime assistance might be needed or obstacles encountered that impede or limit participation in community or work environments. Support needs may be identified by the employment specialist or communicated by the individual or anyone involved in his or her life, such as family members, friends, employer, or coworkers.

Data Analysis

The Employer Support Questionnaire was completed prior to the individual's first day of employment by a representative from the business who was primarily responsible for hiring the new employee with a disability. The Community and Workplace Support Form was completed by an employment specialist when a support need was identified for an individual during the supported employment process.

Data were collected for 37 individuals who were employed in 53 different businesses. During the period of the study, 31 different support needs were identified for individuals that required some form of employer or workplace support. Support could be provided by the individual, employment specialist, or other workplace personnel. When an individual provided his or her own support, it meant that he or she had the primary responsibility for implementing or accessing a needed accommodation.

RESULTS

Employer Characteristics

Overall, 53 employers hiring individuals with significant disabilities participated in the study. These 53 employers consisted of businesses from the food and hospitality industry, grocery and department stores, human services (e.g., hospital, day care, nursing home), and industrial and manufacturing. The majority of businesses employed fewer than 100 employees at the location where the individual worked. A number of businesses reported previously employing people with disabilities.

Identified Employer or Workplace Support Needs

During the study, the participating employers and consumers identified 31 different types of support needs. The identified needs were categorized into four areas:

- **Employee training** needs focused on an individual's ability to learn and perform the job and encompassed activities such as skill acquisition, completing regular job duties, performing independently, and other activities.
- **Career advancement** needs addressed an individual's ability to advance in or between jobs and included activities such as learning additional duties, pursuing opportunities for promotion, and other related needs.
- **Employee benefit** needs focused on enabling the individual to take advantage of benefits provided by the employer, such as sick leave, pay raises, and employee assistance programs.
- **Workplace Culture** focused on the ability of the employee to assimilate into the culture, social structure, and routines of a specific work setting.

The relative percentages of reported needs in each of four categories are shown in Table 3 below. Almost two-thirds of the identified employer or workplace support needs identified were in the area of employee training (63.1%). Identified employer or workplace support needs under employee benefits (14.3%), career advancement (6.0%), and workplace culture (22.0%) were much less prevalent than needs identified under employee training.

Table 3: Employer Reported Support Need Categories

Category	Percentage
Employee Training	63.1%
Employee Benefits	14.3%
Career Advancement	6.0%
Workplace Culture	22.0%

Employee Training

As indicated in Table 4 on the following page, the most frequently identified employee training needs for individuals were learning how to do the job (32.8%),

remembering how to do the job (16.1%), completing job duties (14.6%), and signing in and out of work (13.1%). Others identified employer or workplace support needs addressed by employers included recording and monitoring work schedule and hours, getting along with coworkers, addressing communication issues, requesting time off, taking lunch and breaks, and pursuing career advancement opportunities.

Table 4: Employee Training Needs
(n = 198)

Category	Percentage
Learning how to do the job	32.8%
Remembering how to do the job	16.1%
Completing all regular job duties	14.6%
Signing in and out of work	13.1%
Orienting around the workplace	8.6%
Being able to perform infrequent duties	5.6%
Arranging follow-along	5.1%
Addressing fatigue or stamina	2.6%
Distractability management	
Handling a crisis at work	.5%
Advocacy	.5%

Employer Training Strategies. To identify ways in which employers responded to these employee training needs, information was obtained on the strategies used to address training and performance issues. Data collected from the Employer Support Questionnaire indicate that the majority (90.6%) of employers paired new employees with seasoned coworkers to do the training. Employers also provided supervisor instruction (54.7%), orientation

meetings (34.0%), and company videos (30.2%) to train new employees.

In addition to the employers, the employment specialists also identified a variety of employer or workplace supports available for employee training in the participating businesses, in addition to what employers had recognized. Table 5 on the following page summarizes all employer or workplace supports that were identified by employment specialists, employers, and workplace personnel to address individual support needs in learning the job. The most frequently cited employer or workplace support available was the use of a coworker mentor (40.9%), followed by the employment specialist providing initial training (31.3%). To a much lesser extent, other employer or workplace supports were also available to provide training to new employees, including supervisors, retired persons, college students, and volunteers.

Role of the Employment Specialist in Addressing Training Needs. Supervisors (40.0%) and coworkers and other workplace personnel (36.9%) were reported as the primary providers of support to individuals with disabilities in learning how to do the job. Employers reported that the employment specialists were the primary providers of support to the individual with a disability in only 13.8% of the cases. Though the employment specialist was not providing training to the employee, he or she was still instrumental in assisting workplace personnel in training the new employee. For instance, the employment specialists would advise or demonstrate the best way to provide training to the employee based on their knowledge of the skills and abilities of the individual with a disability.

Duration of Training. A majority of the employers typically allocated almost 3 weeks to initial training of new hires (53.8%), with slightly more than one fourth of the employers (28.8%) devoting as much time as needed to new employee training. However, an overwhelming majority of the employers (92.3%) reported offering ongoing training for all employees in the form of coworker mentoring, company videos, and supervisor instruction. The idea that ongoing training or coworker mentoring is available at a majority of the businesses is encouraging in light of the fact that remembering how to do the job and learning how to do the job were frequently identified support needs by supported employment participants.

Table 5: Accommodations Available in the Workplace Employee Training (n=198)

Supports for Learning How to do the Job	Frequency	Percentage
Coworker mentor or coworker training	81	40.9%
Employment Specialist	72	31.3%
Supervisor Instruction	33	16.7%
Company Orientation - videos	33	16.7%
Standard company training procedures expanded/ modified/extended	24	12.1%
Restructuring job duties, making accommodations, developing compensatory strategies	20	10.1%
Training provided by a retired person	3	1.5%
College student/volunteer	3	1.5%
Classroom training	3	1.5%

Career Advancement

A majority of the employers (92.3%) offered assistance to employees in changing job responsibilities through career advancement or lateral job changes. However, fewer employers (44.2%) offered assistance such as instructional classes or departmental training to afford individuals the opportunity to advance in the company.

For the individuals participating in the study, pursuing career advancement opportunities, changing something about their job or changing jobs, and learning to do something new at work were rarely identified as key support needs as shown in Table 6. This could be attributed to the short period of time captured by the study.

Employer Benefits

Reported support needs in the area of employee benefits are summarized in Table 7 on the following page. Slightly more than half of the employers offered paid vacation and one-third offered paid sick and holiday leave for full-time employees. However, when employees identified support needs such as requesting time off, calling in sick or late to work, and arranging work schedule or hours, employers accommodated individual requests if it did not disrupt the operation of the business. For example, less than one-fourth of the employers (17.0%) indicated that employee schedules are permanently set and more than two-thirds (67.9%) indicated that employee schedules are determined on a weekly or monthly basis.

Table 6: Career Advancement Support Needs (n = 19)

Category	Percentage
Pursuing career advancement opportunities	42.1%
Learning how to do something new at work	31.6%
Finding a different or second job	15.7%
Resigning from work	5.3%
Changing something about the job	5.3%
TOTAL	100%

Transportation is one most frequently cited barriers to employment for persons with disabilities (Unger et al., 1998; West et al., 1998). Employers in this study revealed a small percentage of employers (15.4%) provided or arranged transportation for their employees. The employers who provided or arranged transportation frequently indicated that they assisted employees in identifying coworkers who carpool or assist in transporting coworkers who need a ride to and/or from work.

Table 7: Employee Benefits Support Needs (n = 54)

Category	Percentage
Calling in sick of late	48.1%
Purchasing / selecting / maintaining uniforms	14.8%
Picking up and cashing a paycheck	14.8%
Requesting time off from work	13.0%
Receiving a raise or increased benefits	5.6%
Addressing sexual issues	3.7%
TOTAL	100%

Workplace Culture

Employers reported a small number of different support needs in the area of workplace culture. These support needs are identified in Table 8. The employer's ability to deal with disruptive or problem behaviors by the employee was identified most frequently in this area. Other needs addressed social interaction issues such as getting along with coworkers and addressing communication problems, as well as scheduling the employee's time (arranging work schedules and taking lunch or breaks).

Certainly the arrangement of the workplace and the contact among employees throughout the workday may enhance or prohibit the ability of coworkers or other personnel to provide any type of support. Several questions on the Employer Support Questionnaire addressed the typical routines of coworkers and their physical proximity in the work environment for identifying potential sources of support for individuals with disabilities. Almost three-fourths (71.2%) of the employers reported that coworkers were in a close proximity to each other throughout their workday. Furthermore, the majority of employers (61.5%) reported that assistance was available for employees throughout the day from other coworkers. In almost three fourths of the businesses, employers also claimed that supervisors were readily available to provide assistance to employees.

Table 8: Work Culture Support Needs (n = 622)

Employee Need	Percentage
Dealing with aggressive, disruptive, or problem behaviors	24.2%
Arranging work schedules / hours	22.6%
Taking lunch and/or breaks	19.3%
Getting along with co-workers	11.3%
Recording and monitoring schedule / hours	9.7%
Addressing communication issues	9.7%
Participating in social activities during work hours	1.6%
Developing friendships	1.6%
TOTAL	100%

DISCUSSION

The results of the study describe employers' assessment of workplace supports available within their businesses, workplace accommodations provided to employees with disabilities, and the role of human service providers in facilitating those accommodations. Employers indicated that a variety of workplace accommodations were available within their employment environment. This finding is consistent with information reported in professional literature (e.g., Hanley-Maxwell & Millington, 1992; Wehman et al., 1998). Increasingly, employers are being relied on to provide training to employees with disabilities. Because some employees will require accommodations that will extend throughout the course of the individual's employment, employers are beginning to identify and develop formal and informal types of support within the workplace to provide assistance to their employees.

For people with disabilities employed at participating businesses, workplace accommodations were provided

to address a variety of identified support needs in the areas of employee training, career advancement, employee benefits, and workplace culture. This is encouraging since, under the ADA guidelines, employers are only required to provide reasonable accommodations that would enable qualified individuals with disabilities to perform essential job functions. The types of workplace accommodations provided by employers in this study go beyond the legal concept of reasonable accommodation. For example, though almost two-thirds of the employee support needs occurred in the area of employee training, employers also accommodated numerous support needs in other areas.

These findings are promising given the fact that businesses represented in this study are relatively small; almost two-thirds of the businesses where employees with disabilities were working employed fewer than 100 employees. Typically, smaller businesses do not have extensive human resource staff, disability management programs, employee benefit services, or the resources that might be available at larger companies. The small employers' ability to provide workplace accommodations to address the diverse needs of their workforce contradicts the belief that workplace accommodations represent overwhelming challenges to small businesses and that they are less flexible in providing accommodations (Mills, 1997).

One might infer that if businesses employing 100 or fewer employees have a variety of workplace accommodations available within their workplaces, then businesses employing larger numbers should, at the minimum, be able to provide similar accommodations. Many large corporations have well-developed and effective human resource and/or disability management programs (Akabas & Gates, 1993; Hunt, Habeck, Owens, & Vandergoot, 1996) to assist supervisors and other personnel in identifying and developing accommodations and resources that, arguably, smaller, independently-owned employers might not have access to and/or the financial or human resources to support. Consistent with the findings reported by Granger et al. (1997) and Miano and colleagues (1996), the majority of accommodations provided to employees with significant disabilities in this study were readily available in the employment environment and/or facilitated by employment specialists.

Costs of Workplace Accommodations

The results of this study support the findings of other research showing that the costs of the majority of accommodations are not prohibitive (e.g., Blanck, 1992; Daly & Bond, 1996; Presidents Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities, 1994; JAN, 1995). Additionally, employers making accommodations for employees with disabilities often find the accommodations are effective and useful for other workers, thereby enhancing the economic value of the company (Kregel, 1999; Magill, 1997).

A number of accommodations for employees in this study relied on either modifications of pre-existing resources (e.g., training materials, equipment), work routines, or assistance provided by co-workers or other work personnel. In situations where accommodations involved the actual purchase of items, equipment, or services, the costs were nominal. For instance, an individual employed at a restaurant received a "carry-all" to enable her to retrieve all of the necessary condiments from the back in one trip so she could more expediently restock the lobby area. Another employee benefited from the use of a watch with numerous alarms to prompt him to the next task or to take a break and return from break.

Employment Specialist's Role in Facilitating Workplace Supports

The data resulting from this study also reflect the critical role the employment specialist plays in facilitating workplace accommodations. Just because a support is available does not mean that employees with disabilities can easily access the accommodation. For example, over one-fourth of the employers (28.9%) in this study reported that one of benefits offered to employees was access to an employee assistance program. However, employee assistance programs were not reported as an accommodation in addressing the variety of support needs for employees with disabilities. The employer may be aware the program exists but may be less familiar with the services offered through the program, or how employee assistance programs can be used in less typical capacities (e.g., job carving, job restructuring, modifying employee schedules, etc.) to provide workplace accommodations to employees with disabilities. Supervisors may also dismiss the em-

employee assistance program as a potential source of accommodations because they believe the services offered through the program cannot meet the support needs of the employee with a disability.

In order to maximize existing employer supports, employment specialists and human service personnel must be able to identify, assess, negotiate, and modify accommodations or supports existing in the workplace, while considering the abilities and preferences of the employee with a disability. The extent to which employment specialists can assist employers to recognize accommodations available in the work setting should assist in alleviating employer's concerns and apprehension surrounding the idea of "reasonable accommodation" and the idea that accommodations are costly. By developing partnerships with employers, employment specialists and rehabilitation professionals play a critical role in the identification and development of workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities.

As demonstrated by the responses to questions on the Employer Support Questionnaire, employers may be knowledgeable about accommodations available within their organizations. However, results also confirm, they are less aware of how to access, modify, and utilize the resources identified within their businesses to provide accommodations to employees with disabilities. The experiences of employment specialists indicate that employers are not unwilling or unable to provide workplace accommodations, but they may not (a) be aware that the accommodation need exists, (b) know how to best assist individuals with disabilities in identifying and developing workplace accommodations, and (c) be able to formulate some type of workplace accommodation that might address the individual's needs.

Employers may also overlook workplace accommodations readily available within or through their businesses. The ability of employment specialists to collaborate with employers and other workplace personnel is critical in identifying and developing existing employer supports. In most instances when a support need was identified, such as assisting employees in remembering how to do their jobs, or punching in and out of work and taking breaks, the employer had both the capacity and the resources available to provide accommodations to workers with disabilities. However, their limited experience in the areas of employing people with significant disabilities and

identifying and developing workplace accommodations may prohibit their ability to identify and develop needed accommodations already available.

For instance, a large national department store chain developed a formal training program designed to address the problem of illiteracy in its workforce and training new employees. Prior to implementing the training program, in which they desired to retrain entry-level workers such as cashiers, snackbar attendants, and others, they revised the employees' training manuals by removing almost all the words and replaced them with photos, diagrams, and icons. The training manual, with photos, diagrams, and icons, could be modified to aid an employee with a disability in remembering how to complete all necessary job tasks. It is vital that supervisors and co-workers understand that the support needs of employees with disabilities are analogous to the variety of employment-related issues that occur among individuals with no apparent disabilities (Miano, et al., 1996). Further, employment specialists can assist employers with matching or modifying existing workplace accommodations to address support needs of employees with disabilities.

Role of Supervisors and Co-workers in Providing Workplace Supports

The data also confirm the instrumental role of supervisors and coworkers in providing support to coworkers with disabilities. Supervisors and coworkers were the primary providers of support for individuals with disabilities in a number of areas, including learning how to do the job, completing regular job duties, being able to perform infrequent duties associated with the position, learning how to do something new at work, and taking lunch and other breaks. These findings are consistent with the ideas described in the supported employment literature that advance and/or describe the use of workplace personnel to provide support to employees with significant disabilities (e.g., Fabian & Luecking, 1991; Hagner, Butterworth, & Keith, 1995; Unger et al., 1998).

The employment of people with disabilities is evolving, due in part to more favorable employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce, workplace cultures that embrace workforce diversity, assistive technology, progressive laws designed to ease the entry of people with disabilities into the workforce, and

the perseverance of individuals with disabilities. In the mid-1980s, supported employment and human service professionals were uncertain whether people with severe disabilities could perform to the expectations of employers or whether employers would embrace the idea of individuals with disabilities in their workforce. In an effort to get people with significant disabilities into the workforce, employment specialists and human service professionals convinced skeptical, but willing, employers of their ability to identify appropriate jobs and then to provide the necessary training and support to ensure that the individual would be successful in performing his or her job. Now, after the success of thousands of Americans with disabilities, supported employment providers find themselves collaborating with potential employers who feel confident and are willing and able to provide training and support to individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

SUMMARY

The results of the present study depict employers who have gone above and beyond mere compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. By addressing a variety of employee support needs for the duration of the employment relationship, employers have demonstrated the

willingness to provide accommodations that assist in retaining valuable employees. Not only are employers providing support for initial job site training, they are also assisting employees with disabilities in pursuing career advancement opportunities, accessing inhouse employee workshops and personal development seminars, and assisting in or arranging their transportation.

Overall, the findings of this study parallel the results of other research describing the types of accommodations in the workplace for people with disabilities. For example, Granger and colleagues (1997) described the types of job accommodations provided to employees with psychiatric disabilities as benign and relatively nonintrusive; often subtle shifts in workplace procedures are made that employers, who wish to keep valued employees, might also make for those without defined disabilities. The present findings are unique because they demonstrate that employers are quite capable of providing workplace accommodations for workers with significant disabilities by drawing on existing employer resources. Additionally, this study has shown that the types of workplace accommodations provided by employers in the survey go beyond the legal concept of reasonable accommodation and address employee needs in such areas as career advancement, changing something about one's job, and social integration.

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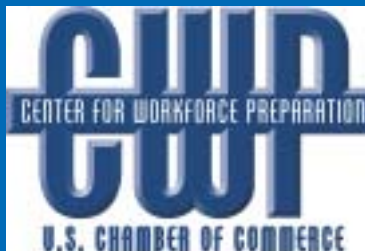
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