

# Are Disability Inclusive Practices Truly Inclusive? A Thematic Analysis of Current Practices

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## ABSTRACT

The current study is a systematic review of the existing literature on inclusion of Persons with Disability (PWD) at the workplace. Inclusion and wellbeing of employees with disabilities has been a focal point of research in the field of workplace diversity. However, over time, the existing disability inclusion practices in organizations have been subjected to criticism in terms of their effectiveness. The objective of the review majorly draws from this premise. The review explores the effectiveness of the existing practices suggested in literature and those implemented in organizations. A thematic analysis of relevant literature ranging from the period 2010 to 2019 was carried out in order to find inclusion practices at the individual, group and organizational level. The key themes that emerged were: Organizational Culture, HR policies, use of Assistive and Immersive Technology and Human Processes embedded within the organization. The review was able to generate an understanding of the factors that influence disability inclusion and the growing need for sensitization of abled employees and managers to create an inclusive environment. It was also observed that there was a lack of qualitative research done in the area of inclusion practices at the workplace. The implications drawn from the review is mostly three tiered in nature, involving formulation of a strategic plan and creating a supportive organizational climate through organizational, managerial and co-workers support.

**Keywords:** Inclusion practices, Persons with disabilities, HR policies organizational culture, Assistive technology

## 1. Summary

Organizational research on the benefits of having and managing a diverse workforce has gained much needed attention in the past few decades. Companies belonging to varying sectors of the economy have acknowledged the requirement of a diverse workforce to perform well in the global market<sup>1</sup>. It is seen that organizations, while referring to the term 'diversity', mainly talk of racial, ethnic, cultural and gender components. Inclusion of Persons with Disability (PWD) is not perceived to be a part of having a diverse workforce<sup>2</sup>. Before delving into the matter of disability inclusion, it is very important to have a standard

definition for disability. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Even though PWD are acknowledged to be one of the largest minority groups across the globe, as per report of 2017, only 45 countries have anti-discriminatory policies and provisions for disability employment. Moreover, even in European countries and the United States, which have looked into and devised policies for disability employability, there still exists a 40% gap

in terms of employment rates as compared to those who are not disabled United Nations, 2017. This hints at how even among the most educated and developed nations, there exists a prominent divide in the policy design and implementation which serves as a barrier to inclusion of PWD at the workplace.

Another important yet unnoticed requirement for disability inclusion is the building of an inclusive organizational climate. According to Thomas and Ely (1998)<sup>3</sup>, inclusion needs to be understood in terms of feelings and actions which demonstrate a sense of belongingness. It must create an environment where individuals feel valued and encouraged to add value through their differences. In most cases it is seen that organizations pay more heed towards external policies of inclusion rather than focusing on building an inclusive climate within the organization<sup>4</sup>.

Hence, it is seen that in spite of the advances in the policies, practices and provisions made for PWD, the implementation and effectiveness is still being questioned. This paper aims to review and critically analyses the existing disability inclusion practices and to make recommendations for increasing its effectiveness.

## 2. Key Themes

### 2.1. Organizational culture

The first key theme identified from the review was disability inclusion at the cultural level of an organization. Two out of the ten articles under review highlighted the issues of disability inclusion in the context of organizational culture, making it one of the major themes that required analysis. In terms of disclosure of employment of PWDs, lack of quality information was one of the major concerns highlighted in a study done by Khan, Kakabadse, Skouloudis and Dimopoulos (2018)<sup>5</sup>. The study further mentioned how organizations have commercialized disability inclusion and have focused on awareness incentives and charitable contributions rather than having a descriptive and quantitative metrics on PWDs helping stakeholders to assess their performance and take decisions accordingly. Another noteworthy issue noticed in the study of inclusion practices in the workplace culture by Hagner, Dague and Phillips (2014)<sup>6</sup> is the lack of flexibility in transportation of PWDs which ultimately kept them away from annual dinners and off-site socializing events organized by the company, thus hampering employee bonding. The study also shed light on how employment specialists view inclusion difficulties to be beyond their role and function and hence, pointing out more barriers than solutions. This shows how organizations still have a long way to go in terms of internalizing an inclusive and accepting culture in terms of PWDs.

### 2.2. Assistive and immersive technology

This theme is based on two reviews papers addressing the current and prospective challenges and trends when using technology as a social enabler for PWD.

The systematic literature review of internet communication technology based applications and/or digital services by Manzoor and Vimrulan (2016)<sup>7</sup> which is a review of 46 relevant research published between 2010-2016 in Scopus, ACM Digital Library Articles, Jonkoping University's Library databases, the technology enablers for PWD were identified as communicative technology, adaptive technology, assistive technology, instructional technology, web technology, tele-rehabilitation technology, internet based technology, mobile

technology, speech recognition technology, gerontology, virtual technology, electronic technology, electronic technology, access technology, social media technology, wearable technology, GPS technology, screen reader technology, game technology, voice recognition and 3-D printing.

These technologies were being used to enable individuals experiencing cognitive disability, physical disability, visual impairment, intellectual disability, elderly, Parkinson's diseases and disability in general. Although these were suggested in many studies, there was no mention of how these technologies are different or similar to each other. Most technology enablers have been only explored in terms of improving and increasing the interaction between the individual with PWD and their caregiver/teacher. The reviews on mainstream adoption of technologies that enable PWD and its marketability to be integrated actively in the labor market, social activities, educational and training activities are limited and have not been studied empirically<sup>7</sup>.

When introducing AI into organizations to keep up with the needs of the digital age, it requires a conscious effort to involve individuals from PWD background to ensure fairness. According to a study conceptualizing a roadmap for fairness in AI and funded by Microsoft organizations will need to do a risk assessment of AI systems for PWD to improve user experience, reduce harms of allocation, biased representation, denigration and stereotyping in social integration using technology<sup>8</sup>. Social systems like biometric authentication, security systems, interview support software and social and environmental applications must consider having an architecture integrating several models like computer vision, speech systems and text processing to accommodate the limitations of depending on only a particular system. Techniques and practices like Outlier detection, Evaluation of the system through aggregate metrics, using data that do not capture true use cases etc. used for building AI systems have an inherent bias. Organizations will need to collaborate to create datasets for establishing benchmarks, to ensure privacy, reduce potential harm and get consent from PWD. Evaluation of existing systems can help create guidelines for new design, datasets, algorithm technologies and error metrics by taking into account the usage scenario and legal implications.

Therefore, the ease of implementing adoption and integration of these technology enablers can be understood broadly as the individual and socio-technical systems level in the organization:

#### 2.2.1. Individual level

- User ability to interact
- Level of disability
- User's ability to use and adopt digital innovations.

#### 2.2.2. Social-technical systems level

- Infrastructural limitations
- Economic restrictions for incorporating, training and evaluating sociotechnical systems
- Absence of clarity for creating process and procedures on specification of system, level of data security, protection of privacy
- Individual differences like type of disability, age, gender, culture and socioeconomic background investing in social technological systems as an organization.
- Provisions under social insurance systems.

### 2.3. Human processes

Study of disability inclusion in the light of the human processes operating in an organization was noticed in three out of ten articles under review, making it one of the key themes of this paper. Put in simpler terms, human processes are the Organizational outcomes of interpersonal interactions in the workplace. Social inclusion of PWD has been a paramount concern and can be viewed from the Organizational, employee and employee perspective, thus giving birth to three sub themes under human processes itself. Each of the three articles covers one of these perspectives.

**Employer perspective.** In terms of employer perspective, Nota, Santilli, Ginevra and Soresi (2013)<sup>9</sup> have emphasized on how the type of disability influences employer work attitude. The findings of this study revealed how employers were more negative towards people with psychological problems (like extreme aggressive behavior) rather than people with intellectual disabilities (such as Down syndrome) due to the lack of awareness about most psychological disorders. These employers also showed rated employees with disability positively in terms of 'social worth' and used it as a means of compensation for negative performance ratings.

**Employee perspective.** In terms of the subjective experiences of PWD at the workplace, in terms of the employee's perspective, Snyder, Carmichael, Cleveland and Thorton (2010) have successfully given a comprehensive view on negative experiences of PWD in terms of overt and subtle discrimination, procedural injustice, job satisfaction and perceived Organizational and supervisor support. As per the findings of this study, it is seen that employees with non-physical disabilities had more negative experiences in terms of subtle discrimination and procedural injustice, which can be attributed to the lack of awareness about non-physical disabilities.

Another factor contributing to this finding is the invisibility of these kinds of disabilities, which makes provisions and accommodations made for disabled employees seem less justified<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, the results reveal how controlled job classification doesn't necessarily lessen differences in subjective experiences of PWD and other non-disabled employees.

Perceived supervisor support and positive co-worker attitude plays a crucial role in achieving higher rates of participation and job satisfaction level among PWD.

### 2.4. HR policies

As mentioned earlier, perspectives of the employer regarding people with disabilities are affected by factors such as lack of awareness<sup>9</sup>. A study by Groschl (2007)<sup>11</sup> concerning HR policies and practices affecting the integration of persons with disabilities in the hotel industry in major Canadian tourism destinations found that employers also perceive the costs of accommodating and training disabled employees to be high, whereas in real life, this was not the case. Moreover, the study found that, in the hospitality industry, managers' preference for self-presentation skills of employees tended to hinder their hiring of disabled people.

HR policies in an organization are shaped by the values, perceptions and beliefs of individuals, departments and societies. HR policies are one of the organizational variables that affect hiring and employment of people with disabilities (Stone and Colella, 1996). According to Lengnick-Hall (2007)<sup>12</sup>,

hiring and retaining people with disabilities enhances the productivity of their organization. Their study focusing on the untapped potential of people with disabilities vouches for the implementation of policies that help in hiring and retaining such employees. Organizations worldwide implement disability employment policies in order to accommodate employment of people with disabilities. However, a variety of factors, such as those mentioned above play a role in the proper implementation of these policies. For instance, in the hotel and hospitality industries in Spain and Brazil, the implementation of recruiting policies for potential employees with disabilities was affected due to the non-existence of an umbrella term for disability and the variations associated with the word disability<sup>13,14</sup>. The extent to which a person is disabled was also found to be a challenge faced while developing a comprehensive recruiting policy. Moreover, simply inserting disabled employees into an organizational setting does not promote inclusivity. The effective integration of such individuals into the working environment is also essential.

The study by Kulkarni (2016)<sup>15</sup> found that career development in organizations for employees with disabilities could be enhanced by including a few activities in HR policies such as the usage of right terminology at the workplace, implementation of sensitization programs for both disabled and non-disabled employees and focusing on building ability building programs, to name a few. Moreover, human resource personnel who viewed on the career progress of disabled employees on the basis of merit and non-differentiation, rather than providing special provisions and exceptions to the disabled employees, were found to have successfully engaged with disabled employees. By doing all these, talent of disabled employees can be utilized and enhanced.

## 3. Discussion

The need for social inclusion of PWD is supported by the:

- Moral case (Reducing discrimination and creating equal opportunities).
- Business case (economic value and benefits).

Some of the advantages for Organizations include, attraction and retention of talent, higher productivity, stronger cultural vibe, higher motivation, enhanced innovation and improvement of corporate image<sup>16</sup>. Accenture in 2018 reported that Organizations that are disability inclusive outperform across five financial indices: revenue, net income, profit margin and shareholder returns.

Disability needs to be viewed as a result of interaction between people living with impairments and the barriers, they experience due to the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment. Disability is redefined as a limitation of the individual to fully engage and interact in the workspace due to barriers in the environment that fails to accommodate and include them. It is important to accept this view in order to conceptualize and create a truly disability inclusive workplace and society irrespective of the nature of the disability.

### 3.1. Approach

In order to make social inclusion of PWD both feasible and flexible, new approaches like design thinking and human-centered approach can be adopted. Design thinking uncovers explicit and tacit needs and human-centered approach is



beneficial to comprehend both marginalized and privileged individuals in social environments.

Success when it comes to social inclusion of PWD depends on the extent to which interventions are customizable, divergent and can tolerate contradiction and ambiguity<sup>17</sup>.

The strength of this approach is that:

- It stresses on empathy which results in solutions that make PWD empowered employees while improving the overall culture and performance.
- It is solution focused (Optimistic)
- It gives room to improve overall design of products, services, process, procedures, strategies and infrastructure (User centric design)
- It involves individuals organizations and society from various expertise. (Holistic and collaborative)
- It gives room to innovate, test and redesign based on feedback. (experimental, experiential and iterative).

This approach will hence have implications for strategy, policy organizational culture, overall performance and productivity, designing of work spaces and technologies and research.

#### 4. Building Disability Inclusive Culture Through Policies and Practices

Organizations need to create an environment which is inclusive of disability to encourage self-identification in individuals who aspire to be a part of the Organization or are already part of the Organization through confidential process.

- Awareness and actual disclosure of employment of PWD by Organizations becomes important at the Organizational cultural level.
- Commitment to the cause from top management has a huge role in creating and following through with disability inclusion as part of Organizational strategy.
- It is good to ensure representation for PwDs in decision making at various levels and boards when consciously creating inclusion.
- Recruitment policies, training and development, performance evaluation for PWD must all be established as part of process and Strategic management of talent before hiring individuals.
- The effectiveness of culture of inclusion can be identified using descriptive and qualitative inputs from the members in the Organization.
- Benchmarking of Organizational on standardized indexation on a yearly basis will help in improving policies and practices in the country.
- Organizations will need to collaborate to create datasets for establishing benchmarks that contribute to design and technology, hence protecting privacy, reducing potential harm and getting informed consent from PWD becomes crucial.
- Organizations will have to clarify confidentiality limits when creating process and procedures on specification of system, level of data security, protection.
- Importance of terminology is also of relevance to human

resource practitioners. For example, as respondents highlighted the term 'differently abled' is more appropriate than any other when addressing these individuals.

#### 5. Role of Workspace Design and Accommodation for Physical and Social Inclusion

Creation of provisions for reasonable accommodations modifications and adjustments to job and work environment Lack of flexibility in transportation of PWDS hampering employee bonding. Hence team building activities must look at these opportunities and ensure they are planned well to include the individuals. As workspaces are undergoing digital transformation some of these initiatives will ensure fairness and counter possible discrimination on technology<sup>8</sup>.

- Empirically study the user friendliness for social integration, labor market, training and social activities.
- User experience risk assessments of AI systems
- Reduce harms of allocation, biased representation, denigrating stereotyping when designing HR systems.
- Having an integrative architecture for systems for processes that are automated and digitized in Organization
- Evaluation of existing systems to create guidelines for new design, datasets, algorithm technologies and error metrics by taking into account the usage scenario and legal implications.

#### 6. Awareness and Training for Attitudinal and Communicational Inclusion

This should happen at employee, managerial and top management level to overcome barriers of attitudinal and communicational nature to facilitate a cultural and Organizational change that affects the company's vision, leadership, strategy, policies, practices, measurements and communications<sup>10</sup>.

Often PWDs become victims of prejudice that PwDs do not have the ability to execute a diverse range of activities. Employers may fear that coworkers will react negatively to working with PWDs and thereby lower productivity, increase labor costs and make their organizations less profitable. Managers preference individuals with lighter disabilities and search for disabilities that may be hidden in order to comply with the Law of Quotas to hire PwDs.

Often PwDs get allocated in exclusionist sectors. These barriers further lead to lack of development in PwDs' careers in companies. Coworkers may fear a negative effect on work-related outcomes, fear a negative effect on personal outcomes and may fear that some disabilities are contagious (even when they are not). People without disabilities also may feel resentment regarding accommodations and special treatment received by PWDs. Coworkers may feel awkwardness, discomfort, ambivalence and guilt about how they should interact with PWDs. This reaction may result in avoidance behavior and exclusion of PWDs. Hence, the actionable here are:

- Building awareness about disabilities especially hidden disabilities and assistive technologies
- Training on how to effectively work with PWD and basic disability etiquette.
- Immersive training using VR can also be considered to increase engagement and make trainings more experiential.

- Feedbacks from the attendees about their perceived confidence and actual performance to include and empathies when working with a PWD can further inform and upgrade the above-mentioned interventions
- Feedbacks from PWDs can also be gathered on perceived barriers in social inclusion and effectiveness while working on teams.

## 7. Limitations

One of the major limitations of this review is the fact that only 10 primary articles were included even though they were the only articles found to be relevant to the aim of the literature review. Moreover, most of the articles reviewed had a common limitation of having a small, non-representative sample, limiting the generalizability of this paper. Lastly, in many of the articles, data was collected from employers and managers whose responses often were biased in terms of social desirability.

## 8. Conclusion

Social inclusion of PWD in the workspace and Organization requires a multidisciplinary solution focused approach. A commitment to the cause at the individual, group and environmental level can make their inclusion a reality. Design and technology has huge potential in making social inclusion for PWD a reality but both needs individuals and organizations who empathies with PWDs and are committed to their inclusion.

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