RETHINKING DISABILITY IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

WE ALL HAVE ABILITIES. SOME ARE JUST MORE APPARENT THAN OTHERS.

Report from the Panel on Labour Market Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

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THE CHALLENGE

We all have abilities, but some are more apparent than others.

From what we have seen in companies that hire people with disabilities – and from our own experiences as friends or family members of someone with a disability – we know that they can contribute greatly to business and to society. Yet despite an aging population and a looming labour skills shortage, this significant talent pool is being overlooked.

The evidence gathered from our consultations with Canadian private sector companies and existing research has convinced us that there is a business case for employing people with disabilities. This is good news for employers seeking talent, and for the approximately 795,000 working-aged Canadians who are not working but whose disability does not prevent them from doing so. Almost half (340,000) of these people have post-secondary education. We must find ways to engage with and employ these individuals so we can benefit from their education and skills.

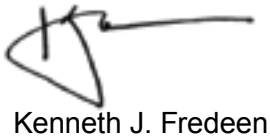
By connecting directly with employers, our panel set out to discover what can be done about the unemployment and under-employment of qualified people with disabilities in Canada. We explored the barriers – some physical and many attitudinal – but chose to focus on the positive. Our goal is to shine the light on best practices and successes among Canadian employers who have welcomed people with disabilities into their ranks. Their examples can help us learn and do better.

Read on, and you'll hear about the real-life experiences of employers and their employees. You'll be impressed with the ingenuity of their solutions, and learn how businesses are measuring the benefits of employing people with disabilities.

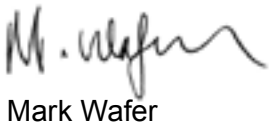
This report is a work of collaboration. We thank the many organizations and individuals who met with us and provided their valuable insights. Working together, we will find better ways to access the skills of Canadians with disabilities, and benefit from their contributions to a stronger economy.

We would also like to congratulate the Government of Canada for taking the initiative to establish this panel, and to thank the members of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the Department of Finance Canada who supported us so well throughout. We were honoured to serve the public and work closely with those who do so day in and out.

Our hope is that through our efforts, employers will understand that an inclusive environment and diverse teams are better for business.



Kenneth J. Fredeen, Chair



Mark Wafer

Gary Birch

Kathy Martin

PANEL MEMBERS

Kenneth J. Fredeen

Mr. Fredeen is General Counsel, Secretary to the Board, and member of the Leadership Team of Deloitte & Touche LLP. Mr. Fredeen is responsible for Deloitte's corporate responsibility mandate and chairs the firm's Inclusion and Diversity Council. He and his legal department were recently acknowledged for their work with the Canadian General Counsel Award for social responsibility. Mr. Fredeen was one of the founding members of Legal Leaders for Diversity, a group of over 70 Canadian General Counsel working towards a more inclusive legal profession.

Dr. Gary Birch

Dr. Birch is the Executive Director of the Neil Squire Society, an organization that develops programs, services and assistive technology for people with physical disabilities. Dr. Birch, who has a mobility disability, is a leading specialist on employment and adaptive technology for people with disabilities.

Kathy Martin

Kathy Martin is Senior Vice President, Human Resources, with Loblaw Companies Limited, where she leads the national people programs, ensuring that Loblaw attracts and retains talented individuals at all levels of the organization. She is also responsible for Loblaw's Diversity and Inclusion strategy and was recently recognized as a 2012 Canadian Diversity Champion by the Women of Influence advocacy group.

Mark Wafer

Mr. Mark Wafer is the owner of six Tim Hortons locations in Toronto. Mr. Wafer and his wife Valarie have employed 84 people who have a disability over the past 18 years. There are currently 35 employees with disabilities in all areas of their business, from entry-level positions to logistics, production and management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2012, the Government of Canada appointed a panel to consult with private sector employers, as well as other organizations and individuals, on the labour market participation of people with disabilities. The panel members were asked to identify successes and best practices in the employment of people with disabilities, as well as the barriers faced by employers, and to report on their findings.

In-person and telephone consultations were conducted with almost 70 employers, and feedback was received from approximately 130 online submissions. Responses came from organizations of all sizes across the country and in a broad range of industry sectors. Findings were shared anonymously with a number of national non-profit organizations and business associations to determine if they resonated with other stakeholders.

While the consultations were the main focus of the panel's efforts, research was also conducted into the business case associated with hiring people with disabilities in Canada and other jurisdictions.

This report is directed at Canadian private sector employers, and offers the following findings:

Many companies are doing great things, but more education and training are needed (see "Employers speak").

While most of the companies we heard from showed a genuine desire to hire people with disabilities, education and training are required to overcome barriers, dispel myths and put theory into practice. As the examples of forward-thinking Canadian companies and their best practices testify, there is significant experience available on which to build.

Hiring people with disabilities is good for business. (see "Understanding the business case").

We heard this from senior and experienced business leaders who recognize the value of an inclusive work environment. Although mainly intuitive, their beliefs are supported by the performance of corporate diversity leaders on the capital markets, as well as data on employee retention and productivity.

It is noteworthy that in 57 percent of cases, no workplace accommodation is required for people with disabilities. In the 37 percent of cases reporting a one-time cost to accommodate an employee with a disability, the average amount spent is $500.

The keys to success are leadership and effective community partnerships (see "Making it work for you").

To increase employment among people with disabilities and access the related benefits, tone from the top and the actions of leaders are imperative. Also critical is identifying community partners who fully understand the business's talent needs and are committed to customer service. To help organizations begin the process of engaging and employing talented people with disabilities, this section also includes a list of initiatives called "Getting started."

EMPLOYERS SPEAK

In our consultations, about 200 Canadian employers shared their experiences and opinions on the subject of recruiting and employing people with disabilities, defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as individuals having:

> **"…physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."**

We found that there is willingness, though at times hesitant, to hire people with disabilities. In almost all cases, great effort is put into accommodating existing employees who acquire disabilities, so the foundation of experience and understanding is there.

Encouragingly, many companies have embraced diversity. They told us:

> *"We actively recruit the best candidate for the position regardless of their disability, whether disclosed or not, and if required provide them with the tools and accommodations to be successful in the job."*

> *"We need to have people in our workforce who can do the job best, and we have found that sometimes that person just happens to have a disability."*

Employers recognize that more accommodations will be needed in the workplace as the workforce ages. We also heard that complying with legislative requirements such as the federal *Employment Equity Act* is only a part of the equation: Success comes from understanding the value an organization gains from creating an inclusive environment.

Most employers take seriously their responsibility to include people with disabilities in the workforce, and are eager to learn how they can do better. Two major cross-Canada employers advised that the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) had recently become the basis for a change in focus and attitude. Noted one, "We will take the opportunity to use the [AODA] requirements to create and/or find training that focuses on the business case and inclusion/diversity. Legislation will be covered, but will no longer be the primary focus."

Create a process that is flexible, proactive and open

Companies told us that solutions must be employee-focused, with those requiring accommodations closely involved in defining their needs. Organizations

should be prepared to respond and build on best practices so that necessary accommodations fall into place without creating an undue burden and delay. By asking **all** employees what accommodation they might require, the burden and the stigma are removed – something that benefits all employees, whether they have an ongoing disability or are suddenly forced to change the way they do their work due to a car accident or sports injury.

Many companies volunteered the importance of awareness training and education for existing staff, particularly recruiting and hiring managers. They specified the value of flexibility, citing experience with work sharing, mobile or remote workers, allowing job applicants or employees to take tests at home, modified duties and schedule/hours, moving an employee who acquired a disability to a position with different responsibilities, and shaping a job to create the most value to the organization.

Lead, communicate and clarify

A significant barrier cited by many companies we consulted was the lack of a diversity champion for people with disabilities – someone who can raise the profile and break down barriers, creating paths to employment.

All the companies we consulted had policies and practices for accommodating existing employees who acquired disabilities. However, most had not utilized this expertise to actively connect with potential new hires. They told us this was because there is no clear and straightforward approach to identifying qualified candidates with disabilities. Community partners and government programs could potentially assist, but employers have limited recruiting time to identify and access potential candidates. The connection between employers and community partners is a significant issue.

Not having inclusive recruiting processes was also noted as a barrier, as it prevents employers from reaching qualified people with disabilities in the first place. Restrictive processes can take the form of websites with small print and other inaccessible design features, as well as selection software that screens for experience and other requirements that many people with disabilities may not have been able to access. To improve their recruiting websites, companies can enlist the services of consultants who are experts in accessible use and/or take advantage of the many online guides available (see “Selected resources”).

Uncertainty about how far to go in terms of workplace accommodation was cited in some cases. Others noted that while genuine job requirements exist, assumptions about disabilities can create unnecessary barriers: We don’t know what we don’t know.

Mental health disabilities were perceived by several companies as being particularly challenging. Employees must self-identify to be accommodated, and many are reluctant to do so if the disability is hidden and/or stigmatized. Several companies commented that colleagues may be less understanding of mental health issues than other more visible disabilities.

Dispel myths

Balancing workplace accommodations with health and safety standards emerged as another perceived barrier. It was generally thought preferable for companies to provide accommodations in administrative and customer service positions than in physically demanding jobs. Also mentioned was the belief that hiring people with disabilities could bring with it legal obligations related to human rights, performance monitoring and discipline. These perceptions are among most common myths about people with disabilities:

Myth: ***Workers with disabilities should be placed in roles where safety is less of an issue because they are more likely to have accidents.***

Reality: Walgreens has two distribution centers with large disability workforces (+40 percent of employees) in Connecticut and South Carolina. In comparison to all other distribution centres in the company, these two had a 40 percent lower safety incident rate, 67 percent lower medical treatment costs, 63 percent lower employee time away from work due to accidents, and 78 percent lower overall costs associated with accidents.[1] Tim Hortons franchisee Megleen Inc. has never made an insurance claim for a work-related injury to an employee with a disability despite employing 85 people with disabilities in 18 years.[2]

Myth: ***Workers with disabilities do not perform well and require extra supervision.***

Reality: A DuPont study[3] showed that 90 percent of people with disabilities rated average or better on job performance. More recently, another study[4] compared workers with and without disabilities in the hospitality, health care and retail sectors, and found that job performance and supervision were similar for both groups.

Myth: ***The cost of accommodating a person with disabilities is prohibitive.***

Reality: In a widely accepted study conducted by the U.S. Job Accommodation Network (JAN),[5] workplace accommodations are shown to be low cost, with 57 percent of participants spending nothing at all. Of those accommodations that did have a cost, the typical one-time expenditure by employers was $500.

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[1] James P. Kaletta, Douglas J. Binks & Richard Robinson, "Creating and Inclusive Workplace: Integrating Employees with Disabilities into a Distribution Centre Environment," Professional Safety, June 2012.

[2] Information provided by franchise owner.

[3] DuPont/Australian Public Service Commission [APSC] "Ability at work: Tapping the talent of people with disability," Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007.

[4] Brigida Hernandez and Katherine MacDonald. "Disability Employment Research, Employer Focus Group Reports," (accessed 13 Nov 2012) available from www.disabilityworks.org/default.asp?contentID=94.

[5] Beth Loy, "Accommodation and Compliance Series Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact," (accessed 24 October 2012); available from http://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html.

Myth: ***Most people with disabilities use wheelchairs.***

Reality: According to 2010 U.S. census information,[6] the wheelchair usage rate among people with disabilities is actually 6 percent – that's about 1 percent of the general population. It is a strong indicator of the power of public communication that the wheelchair icon used on signage has prompted a general belief that most people with disabilities use wheelchairs.

Inspiring stories of inclusive businesses

Increasingly, best practices are breaking down barriers and dispelling myths about people with disabilities in the workplace. In our consultations with employers, many stories emerged of innovative thinking, ingenious solutions and a genuine recognition of the value of inclusion. These are real stories provided by large and small Canadian employers in a variety of industries; they concern employees with a wide range of disabilities. Here are just a few:

Small technology company

An award-winning technology company is in the business of designing, developing, and supporting computer networks. Leading in innovation, this company recognizes that talent comes in many shapes, forms and abilities.

Two years ago, the company created a product that was marketed through virtual means by an employee with a motor disability who operated a computer using a mouth stick. After this individual, unseen by the audience, introduced the new product to rave reviews, they were asked if they would like to meet the presenter – and were shocked to discover that he was a person who is quadriplegic.

Witnessing the audience's response and the product's subsequent success has galvanized the company's commitment to embracing full inclusion.

[6] United States Census Bureau (accessed 07 Nov 2012); available from www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff13.html.

Large financial services co-operative

The business model of a Canadian financial services co-operative places significant importance on inclusive culture, and targets underserved populations as part of its strategy. Recognizing that an under-representation of people with disabilities in its ranks ran counter to its values and business interests, the Board set out to change things. The company implemented training and awareness, conducted an accessible workplace review and gathered metrics. They began attending targeted career fairs and celebrating International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

The co-op's HR managers worked with software vendors to make their application technology fully accessible. Now, applicants with disabilities can make a simple online selection to be contacted to discuss accommodation needs. People who identify that they have a disability are fast-tracked through the system to be interviewed. Tone from the top is unmistakeable: The Board holds itself accountable for ensuring follow through and continuity.

Luxury hotel and restaurant

A luxury hotel and gourmet restaurant in an eastern province employs about 160 people. Part of the community, this organization has employed people with disabilities in various areas for most of it 30-year history, often turning to community partners to seek new talent.

The hotel has developed a number of simple – and ingenious – ways to help guests and other employees work with staff members who are disabled. Notes are placed in rooms to alert guests to the fact that a cleaner is deaf, directing them to the front desk if they need help communicating.

Hotel staff members are equally supportive. In the laundry room, changes to equipment and layout are checked to ensure they will work for a visually impaired colleague, whose guide dog stays in an adjacent but separate room with a bed and water bowl.

The hotel's management believes that high staff engagement is a result of the diverse workforce – people genuinely care about each other. The response from guests to the hotel's diverse workforce has been consistently positive, as evidenced by its leadership market share.

NHL sports organization

On its special events team, a Canadian NHL team hired a number of people with mental health and physical disabilities. Since they joined the organization, there has been a marked reduction in turnover in the 250-strong workforce, as well as increased knowledge of disability issues among supervisors.

The benefits also include a growing level of community support from ticket holders who use a wheelchair themselves – and are now escorted to optimal viewing spots by ushers who also use one. Support from the team's community partner has been a cornerstone of their overall success.

Big Four professional services firm

When a visually impaired chartered accountant interviewed with and then joined a large professional services firm as a co-op student, he brought along his guide dog. His job was to prepare U.S. tax returns using the firm's tax prep software, which had to be modified so it would work with JAWS – a Windows-based program that converts electronic text into speech.

The company took a closer look at the student's job description and realized that the cost of accommodation could be minimized by modifying only the elements of the software used for the bulk of his responsibilities. By applying the "80/20 rule," the firm allowed him to gain the necessary experience in a cost-efficient manner.

With this minor workplace accommodation, the student successfully achieved his Chartered Accountant designation. "There was definitely a learning curve on my part, and on the part of the firm," he admits, "but everyone was highly supportive and focused on finding solutions."

"My story is proof that hiring a person with a disability is not as big a deal as some might think. There may be some barriers that need to be overcome, but there's always a workable solution." He adds, "Give people time and they will figure it out. The most important thing is for everyone involved to maintain a positive, productive attitude."

Medium-sized law firm

A southwestern Ontario law firm hired an individual with an intellectual disability to perform administrative and clerical duties. The position was "job carved," meaning it was created by compiling tasks from other employees that were not integral to their job descriptions. Previously, basic clerical work (such as filing, faxing, setting up meeting rooms and welcoming clients) was being performed by highly paid legal assistants. These tasks were removed from the legal assistant job description, and a full-time job was created.

Four years into the individual's tenure, a review by an outside source determined that the new position had saved the firm the cost of 2.5 legal assistants. Those employees could better concentrate on the work they were trained to do without distraction from other tasks which, though important, could be handled by the employee with a disability.

Major Canadian bank

A manager in one of Canada's big banks was faced with a disability challenge she had not encountered before: An employee with a bipolar disorder was not meeting performance standards. Despite intensive coaching and performance management, the employee's performance was not improving. How could she identify a way to improve this employee's performance and retain him?

Aware that an established employee resource group for people with disabilities existed, she reached out for help. Another employee with bipolar disorder stepped forward, volunteering not only to brainstorm ideas but to act as a peer mentor. This employee pointed out that the core duties required of the job were not conducive to a person with bi-polar disorder – basically, the employee was set up to fail. They worked together to identify another job in the bank that had duties that were more suited to an individual with bipolar disorder. The employee was transferred to the new job and his performance issues were immediately resolved.

Bay Street law firm

When one of Canada's leading law firms set out to revamp its facilities, a strong culture supporting diversity led to a focus on inclusive design. The law firm understood that this would benefit not only their clients, but all members of the organization. Referring both to talented employees and clients, their attitude was: "If we build it, they will come." In their opinion, they have.

The Managing Partner set up a steering committee to meet with the workspace designer. They began by exploring the range of possible disabilities, which led to questions and attention to detail the designer had not encountered in discussions with other professional services clients. "What can we do about table height? Are the temperature controls accessible? Is there sufficient natural light and the right kind of light for people with mental health issues?"

This proactive approach has spread to other areas of the law firm. In hiring discussions, HR people now ask all new employees, "What do you need to make yourself more successful in our firm?" It's a simple question, but one that opens a sensitive dialogue, breaks down communication barriers and leads to innovative solutions.

Accessible workspaces

The stories above demonstrate that **flexibility and open-mindedness are the cornerstones of accommodation**. Modifications to facilities and equipment can also improve the accessibility of a workspace for employees, clients, customers and guests.[7]

Accessibility features can provide benefits to everyone, not just those with a disability.

The large law firm's point of view is well worth considering in this regard: "If you build it, they will come." In the next five years, many Canadian companies will expand their facilities, upgrade, move or build. If your organization is one of these companies, you have a great opportunity to create an inclusive environment. By implementing accessibility features at the initial stage, you are also likely to spend less than in

retrofitting or rebuilding as accommodations are required.

Below are just a few examples of accommodations that can be made to facilities and equipment. This is not an exhaustive list – if you have questions about ensuring accessible workspaces, we encourage you to seek expert advice (see "Selected resources" for more information).

Accessible equipment and workspaces
• Provide accessible communication devices such as hands-free telephones or voice-to-text/text-to-voice translation • Provide document holders to make typing easier • Provide accessibility software such as screen readers or large print • Install carpets or non-slip strips to promote ease of movement • Adjust the height of shared items such as photocopiers, printers and fax machines to promote ease of access and reach
Accessibility of common spaces
• Widen hallways and entrances to workspaces and common areas • Install access ramps and automatic door openers • Ensure that washroom facilities are accessible • Provide designated accessible parking spaces • Install air filters to restrict or limit respiratory or skin irritants • Consider low-glare light, natural light and stronger light for visual disabilities
Meetings/interviews/presentations
• Ensure presentation material is accessible • Provide sign language interpreters/captioners as needed • Change the venue if necessary to promote ease of access
Emergency equipment and procedures
• Install a visual signal to complement the auditory alarm • Ensure workplace emergency procedures are developed to ensure the safety of all staff, including people with disabilities

[7] List is partially based on the guide "Barrier-Free Employers: A Practical Guide for Employment Accommodation for People with Disabilities," (accessed 14 November 2012); available from: http://dawn.thot.net/employment_accommodation.html#accom.

UNDERSTANDING THE BUSINESS CASE

When you think about it, there should be no need to make a case for hiring from a significant and increasingly educated portion of the population.[8] Every person requires or could use some level of accommodation to do his or her job. As innovations like flex-time and ergonomic seating are increasingly expected of every employer, it is our hope that a growing appreciation of diversity means widespread acceptance of a more fulsome list.

We often hire people with disabilities because it is the right thing to do – but it is more than that. Our consultation and literature review opened our eyes to understanding that hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense. Although the research is currently limited and not widely known, the evidence is still compelling.

What companies told us

Most of the companies we consulted have not documented the value, but they understand the benefits that come from hiring people with disabilities. Some spoke of the business case as it relates to talent, others mentioned its market impact. They told us it improves the culture and reputation of a business through community goodwill, and has a "feel good" effect on employees and customers. Companies told us they had an improved ability to attract talented, innovative people, and that there was greater employee loyalty and commitment – critical for retaining corporate knowledge. They also noticed an improved focus on long-term strategic thinking. One firm, a leader in inclusion, said that the company's workforce benefits from "looking like its clients." Another stated that "diversity makes a company more robust, innovative and adaptive."

The belief that employing people with disabilities is good for a company's culture is not limited to large organizations. In our consultations with small businesses, the commitment demonstrated by one is particularly inspiring. This private technology company and its employees with disabilities (more than 50 percent of total staff) have created a number of internationally recognized products. The company spoke of seeing employees' lives change as they became confident members of the workforce; it now champions the hiring of people with disabilities.

What the research told us

Canadian Rich Donovan, founder of Fifth Quadrant Analytics, uses his experience in portfolio and investment risk management to quantify the business case for hiring people with disabilities. His reviews of equity indices demonstrate that on balance, companies with a strong record of hiring people with disabilities do better. To quote Rich, "We have found that companies that perform well in disability are highly responsive to their customers, and thus outperform peers in revenue growth."[9]

[8] The proportion of adults with disabilities aged 16-69 who had a post-secondary degree, diploma or certification increased from 35.4 percent in 1999 to 48 percent in 2010 (HRSDC research, 2012).

[9] The Return on Disability Rating®, Canada (accessed 1 November, 2012); available from: http://returnondisability.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/RoD-Rating-Fact-Sheet-Canada-50.pdf.

His findings are substantiated by several recent case studies documenting measurable advantages associated with workers with disabilities:

- **Walgreens'** management analyzed a total of 31 distinct locations in three distribution centers, including the one in Anderson, South Carolina where 40 percent of employees have disabilities. In 18 locations, the difference in productivity rates was statistically insignificant; in three locations, employees without a disability were more productive; and in 10 locations, employees with a disability were more productive. Walgreens also cited lower turnover rates among its employees with disabilities.[10]
- **Tim Hortons** franchisee Megleen Inc., which operates six stores in Toronto and includes people with disabilities in all aspects of the business, experiences employee turnover of 35 percent compared to the 75 percent industry average. In 2011, absenteeism of Megleen's 35 employees with disabilities (17 percent of the workforce) was zero.[11] In one particular case, the hiring of an employee with a disability led to a 20 percent productivity increase.
- A three-year study at **Washington Mutual** found a turnover rate of 8 percent among people with developmental disabilities, compared to an overall rate of 45 percent in the general population.[12]
- **Marriot** reported a 6 percent turnover rate among persons with disabilities versus 52 percent overall.[13] [14]

The benefit of reduced turnover, cited by all of the above companies, is brought into focus by the cost of hiring and training new employees – or even making an internal transfer. A formula[15] provided by the Corporate Leadership Council places the cost-per-hire associated with five categories of employees as follows:

- Executive: $21,686
- Mid-level: $8,291
- Entry level college: $9,798
- Entry level non-college: $5,436
- Internal: $3,168

In addition to the measurable results, proof of the value of hiring people with disabilities can be found in a number of attitudinal studies. In 2005, a U.S. survey of consumer perceptions[16] towards companies

[10] Kaletta et al., 2012.

[11] Information provided by franchise owner.

[12] Crain's Chicago Business, 2003.13 Talent Knows No Limits (2012) (accessed 08 November, 2012); available from: www.talentknowsnolimits.info.

[13] Talent Knows No Limits (2012) (accessed 08 November, 2012); available from: www.talentknowsnolimits.info.

[14] Overall, Canadian employees with disabilities also have lower turnover rates that other workers. The retention rate of persons with disabilities over the period 1999 and 2007 was 10.5 percent versus 8 percent for employees without disabilities (HRSDC research, 2012)

[15] CLC Recruiting: rIQ Benchmarking Centre, (accessed 21 November 2012); available from: https://hrtools.executiveboard.com/rrriq/RIQ_CostPerHireCalculator.aspx.

[16] N. Romano Siperstein, A. Mohler and R. Parker. (2005). "A National Survey of consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities." Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 22, 6.

hiring people with disabilities found that 92 percent of the American public viewed these companies more favourably. Eighty-seven percent said they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire people with disabilities. In another study[17] of almost 2000 employers conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) between 2004 and 2012, researchers learned that:

- **Most employers report no or low cost for accommodating employees with disabilities.** Fifty-seven percent said the accommodations needed by employees cost absolutely nothing, while 37 percent reported a one-time cost. Only 4 percent said the accommodation resulted in an ongoing, annual cost to the company. Of those accommodations that did have a cost, the average one-time expenditure by employers was $500.
- **Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations.** The most frequently mentioned direct benefits were allowing the company to retain a qualified employee, increasing the worker's productivity, and eliminating the costs of training a new employee. The results of effective disability management and successful workplace accommodations can also be measured in reduced costs for workers' compensation, sick leave, disability insurance and supplementary health benefits, as demonstrated in the following table:

JAN study on employer accommodations	
Top six direct benefits reported after making accommodation	**percent mentioned**
Retained a valued employee	90
Increased the employee's productivity	71
Eliminated costs associated with training a new employee	60
Increased the employee's attendance	53
Increased diversity of the company	42
Saved workers' compensation or other insurance costs	39
Top six indirect benefits reported after making accommodation	**percent mentioned**
Improved interactions with co-workers	66
Increased overall company morale	61
Increased overall company productivity	57
Improved interactions with customers	45
Increased workplace safety	45
Increased overall company attendance	38

[17] Loy, http://askjan.org/media/lowcosthighimpact.html.

Three other compelling benefits emerged from our review of the literature available on measuring the return on investment of hiring people with disabilities. The impact of innovation, filling labour shortages and reaching new customers are described below.

Achieving the innovation advantage

An inclusive workforce has an innovation advantage. Because people with disabilities must develop alternative paths to accomplish common tasks, they are forced to innovate constantly – a skill that can translate to the creation of new processes, products and services. As a CEO of a large accounting firm stated, "There is a war for talent and anyone who intends to win it better realize two things: First, that it is a global war and, second, that if you restrict your search for talent in any way…you will be giving your competitors the edge they need to put you out of business."[18]

Having an "innovation advantage" isn't just a public relations win; it adds shareholder value. In the early 90s, a Harvard study[19] demonstrated that organizations leveraging diversity are better able to adapt to changes in the external environment, and are more innovative in anticipating and responding to these changes. Adaptive cultures dramatically outperformed non-adaptive ones across many indicators, with 90 percent posting increased market valuation compared to 74 percent.

Accessing skilled labour

As mentioned earlier, of the 795 000 people with disabilities who could be – but aren't – contributing to our economy, almost half (340 000) have post-secondary education. The enrolment of students with disabilities has grown at a double-digit rate in many institutions over the last decade. In Ontario alone during the 2010/11 academic year, there were more than 43 000 students with disabilities registered in the post-secondary system.[20] The number of educated young women in Canada has increased in particular, with 15 percent earning university degrees in 2009 compared to 6 percent 10 years earlier.[21] These qualified, capable people can play an important role in filling the forecasted two-thirds of all jobs requiring higher education.

As our population ages and disability rates increase, it will become clear that we cannot afford to exclude this group of working-age

[18] Robert Nicholas, Ronnie Kauder, Kathie Krepsio and Daniel Baker, "Ready and Able: Addressing Labor Market Needs and Building Productive Careers for People with Disabilities through Collaborative Approaches," (accessed 20 November 2012) available from: www.dol.gov/odep/categories/workforce/readyable/readyable.pdf.

[19] John P. Kotter, Corporate Culture and Performance (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1992).

[20] Ontario Ministry of Education, Special Education Update (October, 2012), p. 15, (accessed 22 November 2012); available from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/SpecialEd_Update2012.pdf.

[21] "Highest Level of Educational Attainment of Youth with Disabilities and Implications for Labour Market Outcomes 1999-2009." HRSDC research.

adults from the labour force. One of the trade associations we spoke to cautioned,

"There is a tsunami off the coast and although we don't know when it will hit, we know that as the economy picks up and more people retire, there will be a shortage of talent."

Tapping into a massive customer segment

Currently, close to 40 million Canadians and Americans (650 million worldwide)[22] self-identify as having a disability – a number that will only grow. Add in their family and friends, and the opportunity is massive.

This elevates the business importance of a largely untapped market of people who want to "see themselves" in the products and services they buy, and in the businesses they choose to support.

Businesses cannot market effectively to customers with disabilities if they don't recognize and truly understand their needs. When companies create an inclusive workplace – which includes a strategy for hiring people with disabilities – they build understanding and acquire knowledge. In so doing, they create an identity that employees and customers want to share. They can tap into this market as both an employer and a marketer, and gain a competitive advantage.

[22] Canada: PALS 2006; U.S.: Census Bureau 2011; Global: UN Enable Fact Sheet.

MAKING IT WORK FOR YOU

Increasing employment of people with disabilities is a question of leadership and attitude, of focusing on ability rather than disability. In this section, we'll discuss the two most important factors identified by the companies we consulted for engaging and employing people with disabilities, and provide suggestions for getting started.

Tone from the top

Tone from the top plays a crucial role in putting people with disabilities to work. As gatekeepers of profitability and their company's social responsibility profile, Canadian business leaders and their boards have a huge influence on the agenda. They are concerned about the bottom line, but they also want to do the right thing.

They can – and are – doing both. In our consultations, we encountered a genuine desire for change and a willingness to take action.

While there was general acknowledgment among top executives that hiring people with disabilities is an important element of a comprehensive diversity policy, we were surprised to note that no CEO self-identified as having a disability. We did learn of executive team members with disabilities; however, none had declared their condition or offered to lead a hiring initiative. This may be a question of personal discretion, but it suggests that in many companies, visible leadership for hiring people with disabilities is an opportunity waiting to be seized.

To ensure that the leadership vision of an inclusive and diverse workforce is sustained when a passionate leader moves on, organizations should formalize their commitment to hiring people with disabilities in company policies and guidelines. The role of the board should be to provide oversight and governance of this commitment.

Finding community partners

The second key factor in a successful hiring strategy for people with disabilities is finding the right community partner(s). Across Canada, there are many organizations focused on employment for people with disabilities. Many are private social enterprises or non-profits; there are also numerous programs and agencies operated by governments at all levels.

In our consultations, there was considerable discussion about matching supply with demand – ensuring that work-ready people with disabilities were prepared for the duties required of them by employers. Some respondents indicated that the community agencies they had dealt with lacked sufficient knowledge and understanding of their business needs, resulting in mismatches as well as missed opportunities. Many reported a long turnaround time

for onboarding people with disabilities when working with partners – an issue for managers who seek an easier route to filling vacancies. Several employers identified the need for a “one stop shop” for filling recruitment needs.

Alternatively, others spoke positively about their experiences of hiring people with disabilities through community partners. Clearly, the challenge is identifying the right partner(s) for each employer.

When seeking out a community partner, start with the basics: find out what the organization does, who it serves, and who it works with. How long has it been referring job candidates with disabilities, and for what types of positions? Does it have a specific client base? What does it do when employers want to fill jobs, and what does it expect employers to do? Who are some of the employers the agency has worked with? Are there employer representatives who can discuss their experiences with the agency?

You can find community partners through:

- Community information centres and “211” phone and web services
- United Way/Centraide
- Employment services offered by provincial and territorial governments
- Service Canada: www.servicecanada.gc.ca or 1 800 O-Canada
- Directory of Disability Organizations maintained by the Canadian Abilities Foundation: www.abilities.ca/directory
- Disability-focused organizations in your own community

Once you have narrowed down your selection, assess the expertise of potential community partners by asking them about:

- **Customer focus:** Community partners should view you, the employer, as a customer. They must be prepared to learn about your work environment and labour needs, and provide input on how you can succeed as an employer of people with disabilities who can fulfill these needs. Customer-focussed partners will help remove barriers and create opportunities for job shaping. They should be able to refer job candidates as quickly as you require, and respond rapidly to challenges. They should be committed to building a lasting, mutually beneficial relationship.
- **Talent pipeline:** Community partners should have a process in place for continuously drawing talent and creating a full pipeline. They should engage with both students and youth with disabilities for summer work or paid internships, and with experienced employees. Ask about their sources of talent and connections with community and educational institutions, including universities, colleges, trade schools and high schools. Are they involved in career fairs or similar events which employers can attend?
- **Talent readiness:** Community partners should work with talent to ready them for your work environment. This may require case management and assessment of transferable skills. What steps do they take to find out what jobs the candidates are capable of doing, including their soft skills? What do they do to determine the disability-related accommodations

candidates may require? Ask about the agency's procedures for understanding the job in question. Do their case managers/coaches "job shadow" or perform the specific role at your organization before recommending a potential hire?

- **Recruitment and onboarding:** Community partners should identify the best candidate(s) for the job, and ensure that employers are aware of any accommodations required for job interviews. Once a candidate is hired, the agency should help with onboarding and training activities. Find out if they provide job coaching or mentoring, advice concerning accommodations (including assistive devices and technology and job modifications) and information on programs and resources that could assist the employer and the employee.
  - Working with both the employer and the talent, as in the above point, provides the opportunity for the community partner to get to know the individual and ensures a good fit with the job you are offering.
- **Post-placement support:** Post-placement support is a critical component of job success. Effective community partners ensure that employer and talent goals are being met long after the placement begins, and this involves more than consulting on performance management. Support can be for the employer, the employee, or both, and is based on individual need.
  - Once employees are successful and independent on the job, support can be needed when there is a management change, a change in duties or a need to revisit job accommodations if a person's disability evolves or changes.
  - Another important opportunity for support may arise when a company's workplaces and processes change – for example, when software updates make programs incompatible with assistive technology. With advance warning, expert assistance and time to make adjustments, situations such as this can often be rectified.
  - As with any business partnership, it is valuable to meet with community partners periodically to discuss how the relationship is working. A more formal structure, such as having a representative on the agency's advisory committee, is also an option.

Direct partnerships with **educational institutions** can also be valuable for businesses seeking to hire young graduates with disabilities – and for the students themselves. A major difference between youth with and without disabilities is a lack of work experience. Far fewer students with disabilities have had summer or part time jobs, co-ops, mentoring or apprenticeships – all critical "leads" to permanent employment. When they have had significant work experience while at school, young post-secondary graduates with disabilities find work more quickly and rarely fall out of the labour market – underscoring the need to engage with this group and provide opportunities for early experience.

Several of the companies we consulted commented on the value of connections

between post-secondary institutions and employers. Of note, in a May 2011 review[23] of resources available in Canada and around the world, the Public Service Commission of Canada noted that employers in the financial and communications sectors have found that internships, work experience programs and job fairs focused specifically on people with disabilities are very useful and successful in finding qualified candidates. You may want to take advantage of existing programs that connect corporate clients with talented students and experienced hires.

A number of companies we spoke to mentioned that co-op programs provide particular value, as universities do the pre-work required to ensure a good fit.

Getting started

To develop a strategy for your organization, here are a few suggestions:

1. **Open your mind.** By reading this report, you have indicated your interest. Now we encourage you to consider how the issues surrounding employing people with disabilities apply to your business.

2. **Determine your track record for hiring and accommodating people with disabilities.** How inclusive is your organization? Are you connected with organizations that are linked to this talent pool? What are your own stories, good and bad? Look at the demographics of your organization and customer base; chances are you already employ or serve people with disabilities. This is a great opportunity for you to develop a formal strategy for reaching these important stakeholder groups.

3. **Start with human resources.** Does your HR team include people with disabilities? Are team members sensitive to the issues and trained to hire from this talent pool? Have they reviewed job descriptions with hiring managers to confirm that requirements are genuine?

4. **Check your website.** In today's Internet-based world, a vitally important element of your recruiting strategy is your company's website. Ensure you are not screening out people with disabilities by using inaccessible technology, and that you are providing opportunities to give people with disabilities a fair chance to compete.

5. **Engage and educate your people.** Talent comes in all shapes and forms. Consider establishing and having your leaders sponsor employee networks, where people can feel included as one of many – and where you can learn more about the issues and challenges faced by people with disabilities. Invest in education to dispel myths and give people the facts, tools and language they need to manage and work with people who have disabilities.

[23] Public Service Commission of Canada, Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities: A Literature Review. May 2011. (accessed 25 October 2012); available from: http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/plcy-pltq/eead-eeed/rprt/pwd-ph/index-eng.htm#toc37.

6. **Find community partners.** Reach out to agencies, non-profits, and other organizations focused on training and employing people with disabilities.

7. **Partner with educational institutions.** Establish relationships with offices for students with disabilities at colleges and universities – perhaps those where you already have hiring experience – to recruit students with disabilities.

8. **Collaborate within your industry.** Develop alliances with external associations and agencies and share resources, tools, and best practices you have adopted for workplace accommodations.

9. **Share successes with the world.** Share your organization's experiences on your website, in your annual reports and in your advertising. Not only will you elevate the dialogue, you will benefit from marketplace goodwill and increased access to the massive consumer market made up of people with disabilities.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It's time for Canadian businesses to step up to the challenge of employing more people with disabilities.

With our diverse culture and strong commitment to human rights, we firmly believe that our country has a unique opportunity to play a global leadership role in this regard.

A significant success factor will be our ability to create fully inclusive workplaces. This will require innovation and perseverance, but it will benefit everyone – including existing employees and customers. In the same way that now-familiar accommodations – like an automatic door opener or a "curb cut" where the sidewalk is lowered – make life easier for many, an inclusive workplace can be the starting point for increased engagement and lead to better productivity and a more successful business.

Recognizing that diversity widens our access to innovation in the form of new ideas, products and services, there is greater appreciation and awareness of the complete spectrum of individuality. To find the best person for a job, companies cast their nets wide across this spectrum, sometimes absorbing the cost of hiring internationally. As the number of Canadians with disabilities increases, businesses and their stakeholders can only benefit by including this pool of skilled workers in their search.

Our challenge to you is to discover what some of the most successful businesses in North America already know.

Hiring people with disabilities is great for business.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Strategies and best practices for recruiting people with disabilities

Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities (The Conference Board of Canada) This resource guide contains practical advice on everything from pre-employment considerations to recruitment and selection, appropriate modifications to accommodation and workforce education.

From Disabilities to Possibilities Employers' Guide (Link Up Employment Services for People with Disabilities) This is a guide to hiring and retaining people with disabilities, aimed at frontline managers in Ontario companies and organizations.

The road to inclusion: Integrating people with disabilities into the workplace (Deloitte Canada Annual Dialogue on Diversity Report) This report contains findings from a series of cross-Canada round-table meetings with representatives from the business community, special interest groups, government agencies, and Paralympic athletes.

Recruiting and Retaining Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia - What Every Employer Needs to Know (Government of British Columbia) This document summarizes the business case for recruiting people with disabilities and provides resources to assist employers.

Recruiting Young People with Disabilities: A Hiring Strategy With Bottom Line Benefits (United States Department of Labor) With the advancements in technology, young people with disabilities can do virtually any job that someone without a disability can perform. Expanding the workplace to include young people with and without disabilities is a positive way to help shape the future workforce.

Final Report on Best Practices for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in State Government (The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) This report highlights best practices of nine states that promote the hiring, retention and advancement of individuals with disabilities in state governments.

Resources for web accessibility

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 The World Wide Web Consortium - W3C) This document offers a wide range of recommendations and supporting resources for making Web content more accessible.

Barrier-free E-recruitment: Recruiting Disabled People On-line (London UK Development Agency Employers' Forum on Disability) This site provides information regarding what an organization needs to do to achieve barrier free E-recruitment.

Tips for Designing Accessible Websites (JAN – U.S. Job Accommodation Network) This technical series gives a brief overview of 10 vital tips to consider when designing a web site, including testing and design tips for certain aspects of a web site to ensure that applications are accessible.

Resources for accessible workspace design

CSA B651-12 Accessible Design for the Built Environment[23] (Canadian Standards Association) *The Accessible Design for the Built Environment standard* contains technical requirements for making buildings and other facilities accessible to persons with a range of physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities.

A Place for All: A Guide to Creating an Inclusive Workplace (Canadian Human Rights Commission) This guide was developed to help employers understand their obligations regarding the duty to accommodate and to assist them in creating workplace accommodation policies and procedures.

Understanding Accessibility (Ministry of Community and Social Services, Government of Ontario) This website provides information on the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005 and provides tips on how organizations can make information, buildings and workplaces more accessible.

Disability Reference Guide (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) The *Disability Reference Guide* is a tool to help promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the development, delivery and evaluation of programs, policies and services. The Guide also promotes positive attitudes and raises awareness about disability and accessibility issues.

Accessible Office Virtual Tour (Government of Canada's Office for Disability Issues) The location of the Government of Canada's Office for Disability Issues meets, and in some cases surpasses, the Treasury Board Secretariat's technical standard for accessibility. A virtual tour is available on their website.

Guide to Planning Inclusive Meetings (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) This guide was developed to help planners organize meetings that are inclusive for all participants.

Planning for Safety: Evacuating People Who Need Assistance in an Emergency: A Guide for Building Managers and Occupants (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) This guide provides building managers and occupants with information on the needs of at-risk individuals in emergencies and strategies to help ensure their safety.

Canadian internship programs

The **Ability Edge Program** is a national internship program for graduates with self-declared disabilities run by the Career Edge Organization.

LimeConnect hosts a variety of scholarship programs with its corporate partners - some of which include a paid internship.

[23] Provinces, territories and local governments have regulations and guidelines regarding building standards. Employers should consult with the applicable building authority to ensure they are in compliance with all relevant requirements.

ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

(in person/telephone interviews)

Air Canada
Air Transport Association of Canada
Aroma Mediterranean Restaurant
Assumption Life
Bell Canada
Cameco
Canadian Bankers Association
The Canadian Chamber of Commerce
Canadian Council of Chief Executives
Canadian Federation of Independent Business
Employer Advisory Council - Canadian Human Rights Commission
Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters
Canadian Pacific
Canadian Tire
Ceridian Canada
Clearwater Seafoods
The Cleaning Solution
Cohen Highley
Compusult
The Conference Board of Canada
Deloitte Canada
Dolphin Digital Technologies Inc.
Edmonton Oilers
Ernst & Young Canada
Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP
Grouse Mountain
High Liner Foods
The Home Depot Canada
Home Hardware
Hudson's Bay Company
Husky Energy
IBM Canada
Irving Oil
Jazz Aviation LP
Johnson & Johnson Canada
KPMG - Canada
Ledcor Group
Loblaw Companies Limited
Longo's
McDonalds Canada
Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility British Columbia
MTS Allstream
Navistar Canada Inc.
National Aboriginal Economic Development Board
Newalta
Northwest Territories Power Corporation
Ontario Restaurant Hotel & Motel Association
Pan Pacific Hotel Vancouver
PCL Constructors Inc.
Porter Airlines
PotashCorp
The Prince George Hotel - Halifax
Rosewood Hotel Georgia - Vancouver
RBC Royal Bank
Scotiabank
Shoppers Drug Mart
Sierra Systems
Stantec
Stikeman Elliott
TD Bank Group
Telus
Tim Hortons/The TDL Group Corp.
True North Sports & Entertainment Ltd.
Vancity
WestJet