CAHRS Working Group - Organizational Culture and Employer Practices with Respect to Persons with Disabilities

February 15, 2012 - San Francisco, CA
Hosted by Charles Schwab

Summary

On February 15th 2012, 10 CAHRS Partner company executives and an invited guest executive joined experts from Cornell's ILR School in the second of a series of Working Groups to identify both promising lessons and remaining challenges to more effective hiring, engaging, and advancing employees with disabilities (including recent veterans).

The active conversation blended peer-learning with discussion of sneak-preview results from ongoing research by ILR's Employment and Disability Institute.

The third Working Group on this topic is tentatively scheduled for fall 2012 in NYC. A virtual convening via webcast is planned for the interim.

Important Considerations and Context

✓ Proposed requirements for federal contractors (Section 503 of Rehabilitation Act) may drive more robust reporting on recruiting and hiring people with disabilities.

✓ The Veterans Administration has an active database of approximately 70,000 veterans, including wounded warriors (men and women with service-related disabilities) available for employment.

✓ Most employers invite employees to confidentially disclose their gender, age, and ethnic background on employee surveys for analysis purposes, but less than half invite employees with a disability to do the same.

✓ Demand for wellness programs will rise as the workforce continues to age. Will these be inclusive and accommodating? Obesity is a contributor to excess healthcare expenditures for people with disabilities, compared to their non-obese peers with disabilities.

What gets measured, gets done

Participants of the recent CAHRS Working Group on Organizational Culture and Employer Practices with Respect to Persons with Disabilities provided these answers to the question: "*What is your organization doing to actually measure inclusion [of employees with disabilities]?*" The ways attendees reported tracking progress and identifying opportunities for improvement include:

- Adding question into regular employee surveys to allow for self-disclosure of disability status
  - ➤ This treats disability status the same as other dimensions of diversity, like gender or ethnicity.
  - ➤ Notably higher representation statistics observed in the demographics reported on the regular employee surveys compared to what is computed from the "official" HR records. Likely, both a higher degree of anonymity and a more frequent "ask" contribute to this outcome.

> ➢ Not everyone who has a disability (under an official classification) personally identifies strongly enough as a person with a disability to check that box on the employee survey. One short identification question on the employee survey may not cast the net wide enough.

- Constructing a customized "index" of inclusion to measure the inclusiveness of the work environment. This measure is assessed for individual business units, organization leaders, and domestic regions.

- Measuring return-on-investment on inclusion training

- Tracking how applicants with disabilities found the job posting – "website" is the most frequent response.

- Looking regularly at employee representation in comparison to customer base.

Participants expect that new government regulations will push everyone to look more rigorously at measurement metrics.

Company Snapshot – Breaking down internal walls in the ivory tower

In multiple meetings discussing recruitment of talented college graduates with disabilities, employers have complained about what seems to be the universal disconnect between university offices of services for students with disabilities and university career and placement offices. One company is trying to build a more effective bridge across this gap. This company is looking for one or two universities with which to pilot the creation of processes and practices that get the university's office of services for students with disabilities "to talk to" the career and placement office.

Creating such a bridge will require educating people in career and placement offices about differing disabilities and employer responsibilities toward and interest in hiring graduates with disabilities. Even more challenging will be changing recruiters' attitudes toward active recruitment of graduating talent with disabilities. However, being the leading practice company in this regard, may offer a competitive payoff through securing talented, new employees with disabilities that market rivals are missing.

Take away: Talent priorities are motivating individual employers to proactively push institutions of higher learning to better serve recruiters and simultaneously their students with disabilities.

ERGs – Employee Resource Groups

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for people with disabilities are fewer in number and often more recently established than ERGs around race, ethnicity or gender, but they are making business contributions nonetheless. Participants in this Working Group related the tangible value that ERGs for employees with disabilities provided to their companies.

Participants reported that ERGs for employees with disabilities:

- Impact product design and pre-screen vendors for accessibility of product offerings.

- Reduce recruiting costs by i) increasing retention of employees with disabilities, ii) providing recruitment referrals that appear to be more cost-effective than attending diversity-focused conferences, and iii) helping to demonstrate that the company is an employer of choice for people with disabilities.

- Increase employee effectiveness by driving employee engagement, transferring knowledge, supporting co-workers who are caregivers to people with disabilities, and testing accessibility of training packages before distributing them across the company. One participant mentioned targeted career development opportunities that are associated with their ERGs.

- Contribute to the company's corporate social responsibility serving as advisors to government commissions or offices.

Many participants' companies encourage "ally" employees to join ERGs, not just the employees of the specific ERG demographic, in this case not just employees with disabilities.

Take away: ERGs for employees with disabilities contribute a wide-range of business value.

Research needs highlighted by participants

Better understanding of reluctance to self-disclose

- ➢ What holds people back from self-reporting a disability? Is it different for employees of different ages or levels in the organization? Do people with differing disabilities have differing reasons for not disclosing?

- ➢ How do we encourage disclosure while still respecting that some people don't view their disability as a strong part of their own "self-identity"? For some, they are not afraid to disclose a disability that they may have; they just don't feel that they *do* self-identify as a person with a disability.

Barriers to employment among those with (government-defined) targeted disabilities

- ➢ What keeps a person with a targeted disability out of the labor force versus in the labor force but unemployed? Why do some want to work and can't find employment while others are not seeking employment?

- ➢ What would encourage those not seeking employment to be comfortable enough (motivated) to seek out employment?

Watch for the forthcoming announcement of our next CAHRS working group and webcast.

Related resources available from Cornell ILR's Employment and Disabilities Institute
http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/

- **Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employer Practices**

  http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/p-emprrtc.cfm

- **View the Jan 18th 2012 Webinar|**
  Disability Disclosure in the Workplace: What Employers Should Know

  Online Training with Sarah von Schrader, EDI Research Associate

  Build best practices by learning what workers with disabilities shared about disclosure pros and cons. Results of a survey by the Cornell University ILR School and the American Association of People with Disabilities will be discussed by the researchers.

- **April 26, 2012 Webinar|**
  Disability Focused Employer Resource Groups: Strategies & Best Practices

  In the past decade, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) have become an invaluable tool for attracting and retaining diverse talent and gaining access to new customer markets. Top performing companies have recognized that ERGs are vital partners in supporting the achievement of their business objectives. This webinar will provide information on disability-focused ERGs and the value they bring to organizations. Presenters will highlight strategies and best practices and describe how utilizing these ERGs enhanced their recruitment, community relations, and other business initiatives.

- **On the Issue of Maturing Workforce|**

  The Aging Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities for Providers and Employers

  Judy Young, Assistant Director Training and Development, EDI
  Slide deck from April 12, 2012 presentation to the National Council on Rehabilitation Education

  Preparing for an Aging Workforce

  Jill Houghton, U.S. Business Leadership Network
  Susanne Bruyere, EDI Cornell University
  John Wagner, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida
  Slide deck from August 30, 2011 webinar, AskEarn

From Cornell University

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About

This Summary Report was prepared for use by participants of the CAHRS Working Group - Organizational Culture and Employer Practices with Respect to Persons with Disabilities and CAHRS Partner organizations.

This working group will also contribute to a larger five-year study that is being conducted by Cornell's Employment and Disability Institute in the ILR School and funded by the Department of Education's National on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

The Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS) at Cornell University's ILR School is an international center devoted to advancing the HR function and providing corporate partners with critical tools for building and leading high performing human resource organizations. CAHRS' mission is to bring together partners and the ILR School's world renowned HR Studies faculty to investigate, translate and apply the latest HR research into practice excellence.

For more information about CAHRS working groups and CAHRS partnership, visit www.ilr.cornell.edu/cahrs.

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