

CAHRS Working Group - Attraction, Retention and Reward for Employees with Disabilities

October 14, 2011 - New York, NY
Hosted by Aetna

Summary

On October 14th 2011, nine CAHRS Partner company executives joined experts from Cornell's ILR School in the first of a series of Working Groups to discuss opportunities and barriers related to hiring, compensating, and advancing employees with disabilities (including recent veterans).

The conversation allowed for ample interaction and peer-learning, identifying both promising lessons and remaining challenges.

The next Working Group on this topic is tentatively scheduled for February 2012.

Customer and talent statistics are compelling

- There are over one billion people (consumers and employees) with disabilities worldwide.
- A new generation of veterans is (re)entering the workforce. Since 2001, about 1.64 million US soldiers have been deployed and over 43,000 are now veterans with disabilities, or wounded warriors.
- Aging workforces mean organizations need to better equip themselves to include persons with disabilities.
- Employees with disabilities report experiencing less "fit" between their skills and their jobs than their nondisabled peers, a challenge to both engagement and productivity.

Metrics – Asking does make a difference

Diversity and inclusion metrics are advancing. When it comes to employees with disabilities, however, the state of metrics is lagging behind. Unlike gender or ethnicity/race, disability status is rarely included among the personal demographic questions on organizations' employee surveys. But for federal contractors, new requirements are spurring interest in how to improve self-disclosure of and metrics regarding employees with disabilities.

One leading company who *is* including disability status on their employee culture survey found that the share of employees who reported having a disability more than tripled the statistic calculated from the official HR disclosure records.

Take away: More "safe places" where employees feel comfortable self-disclosing a disability are needed if metrics regarding employees with disabilities are to keep pace with expanding diversity objectives.

The challenge of inclusion on a global scale

Executing a global diversity strategy seems to present special challenges when it comes to employees with disabilities. Cultural views of disability and employment vary widely across the globe. More companies are seeking global diversity training materials that address inclusion of employees with disabilities. Experts at Cornell's Employment and Disability Institute are being asked to turn education and training materials originally created for a U.S. audience into something that is globally applicable to help fill this knowledge gap.

More frustrating to global companies than the lack of training materials is, perhaps, the cross-country inconsistency in enforcement mechanisms and regulatory practices regarding employees with disabilities. Some countries levy significant fines on employers not meeting quotas set for employees with disabilities. Some participants in the Working Group echoed what Cornell researchers have heard before – many companies seem simply to throw up their hands and accept that such fines are just a “fixed cost” of doing business in these countries. Many companies do not even know the full tally of these fines across their global operations. And in this could be an opportunity. Fully tallying the cost of noncompliance fines globally could quantify one of the financial gains to be got by building workplaces around the world that are more inclusive of employees with disabilities.

Take away: Collaborating across the organization to calculate the global cost of noncompliance with local regulation regarding employees with disabilities may reveal new supporters for strengthening the inclusion agenda.

Company Snapshot – An open, accepting, and curious recruiter secures a top candidate

A phone interview turned into the successful hire of a top engineering candidate because one recruiter let her curiosity lead her. The job candidate looked great on paper, but something was amiss on the phone interview. In the post-interview debrief, the company's representatives wondered openly if the person on the phone was even the actual applicant who applied for the job. Instead of crossing the candidate off the list, one of the recruiters decided to probe further. Curious at the disconnect between what the company's recruiters had expected and what they heard on the phone interview, the recruiter dug deeper. She learned the strong engineering candidate was deaf. The applicant had made his own accommodations for the interview. He had not asked the company for an accommodation or disclosed his disability to the company. The curious recruiter worked with the candidate to provide accommodation for the rest of the interviewing process. The candidate was ultimately selected and successfully hired. The new employee has not only brought top talent and diversity to his team, but also a more collaborative energy that's improved the team's overall functioning.

Take away: Better training of recruiters and strengthening candidates' willingness to ask for accommodation can secure top talent that might otherwise be regrettably overlooked.

Progress measured

Participants of the recent CAHRS Working Group on Attraction, Retention and Reward for Employees with Disabilities created the following list of metrics that could help answer the question “*In five to ten years, how will we know that we’re doing a better job including employees with disabilities?*”

- ✓ Presence of and employee participation in an Employee Resource Group related to disability
 - Participation includes employees with and without a disability
- ✓ Recruitment of talent with disabilities from “pedigree” colleges and universities
- ✓ Ease of hiring and on-boarding employees with disabilities
 - Plug and play processes in place
 - Shortened time from application to hire for candidates with disabilities
- ✓ Employees with disabilities are larger representative share of total employee base
 - More in senior management self-disclose a disability
- ✓ Metrics for tracking progress on inclusion of employees with disabilities become as common as those for tracking progress by gender or other dimensions of diversity
- ✓ Increased numbers of interns with disabilities
 - Enhance full-time offer acceptance rates for interns with disabilities
- ✓ More offices of student services for students with disabilities are involved in recruiting process

Challenges for further discussions

After a day of discussion, the list of pending challenges had grown long. Participants expressed that addressing the following through future CAHRS convenings or research would be beneficial.

- What is the best way to make a full-spectrum business case for inclusion of employees with disabilities?
- How will progress goals be set within the new regulations for federal contractors?
 - *Will goals be location-based?*
 - *Will there be benchmark data available?*
 - *How will goals be structured to encourage increased hiring of employees with disabilities at higher levels?*
- What are the particulars of workplace culture that make employees with disabilities more comfortable with self-disclosure?
- How can we improve the focus on eliminating the friction in the system which holds back employees with disabilities? What engagement indexes and terminologies can help?
- How can managers become better advocates for inclusion of employees with disabilities and avoid the Employee vs. Manager syndrome?
- How do return-to-work programs affect perceptions of people with disabilities, and how can negative stereotypes of return-to-work programs be reduced?
- How can we better attract and *find* talented candidates with disabilities?

- How can the pipeline of college students with disabilities be strengthened?
 - *How can students with disabilities get the coaching they need regarding interviewing to best secure the best-matched and success-promoting jobs?*
 - *How can the campus offices of career services and students with disabilities service coordinate better?*
- What are more effective ways to engage advocates within the work environment for people with disabilities? How can we replicate for people with disabilities the success of LGBT and Allies?

Watch for the forthcoming announcement of our next CAHRS working group on the topic: **Organizational Culture and Employer Practices with Respect to Persons with Disability**, February 15th, 2012.

Related resources available from ILR

- ILR on Policy: A Conversation with Kathleen Martinez, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
View the Oct. 2011 webcast: [ILR on Policy: A Conversation with Kathleen Martinez](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/events/connect/KathleenMartinez-10122011.html) (<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/events/connect/KathleenMartinez-10122011.html>)
- From the Employment and Disability Institute <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/>



<http://www.askearn.org/>

Disability Statistics: Online Resource for U.S. Disability Statistics



<http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/>

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About

This Summary Report was prepared for use by participants of the CAHRS Working Group - Attraction, Retention and Reward for Employees 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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