

Small Business Needs for Information Regarding the Employment of People with Disabilities

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Masters of Science Degree
With a Major in

Vocational Rehabilitation

Approved 2 Semester Credits

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ABSTRACT

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Vocational Rehabilitation Dr. Robert Peters 12/01 41 Pages

American Psychological Association (APA) Manual used in this study

This study investigated whether small business employers have a need for more information about hiring and employing people with disabilities. Seventy-three small business employers in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa participated in the study by responding to a questionnaire mailed to them in October. The results indicated that small business employers do have a need for more information. While the majority is willing to hire an individual with a disability, few have done so and few feel prepared to do so in the future. The implications of the findings for vocational rehabilitation agencies were discussed.

TITLE PAGE

ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Hiring People with Disabilities

One purpose of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was to ease the task of gaining and maintaining employment for people with disabilities. Yet the majority of this population is still unemployed. Past research (Diksa & Rogers, 1996; Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993; Stone & Colella, 1996; Florian, 1980) has focused on employers' attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities. Studies have found that employers' attitudes towards people with disabilities improve as employers gain experience and information about working with an individual with a disability. Employers with less experience often believe that people with disabilities are less efficient or costs to hire workers with disabilities are increased. These attitudes and the high unemployment of people with disabilities have become the focus of vocational rehabilitation (VR). VR works to implement programs, gather community support, assist individuals, and employers in the employment process. The process of hiring an individual with a disability, beginning with the first interview and application can be a difficult task. The perceived difficulty of this process and of accommodating an individual with a disability has made employers wary about hiring. Many employers have made use of VR and other supports but not all employers have the same access to these resources because of finances or location.

Disability Legislation

Legislation exists to promote equity for people with disabilities. Historically disabilities were perceived as evil, as some sort of punishment. Beginning in the 1800s, changes in the perception of disability and changes in government began. Government became more

representative and began to address social issues. Workers compensation was the first government initiative that put the focus on the individual and not on some higher power that caused the disability. Societal changes also began to occur. Movements to help the poor and disadvantaged grew. Other government initiatives included the Soldiers Rehabilitation Act of 1918 that called for services for injured soldiers. The Smith Fess Act of 1920 began the first public rehabilitation program, providing services for people with disabilities. In 1935, the Social Security Act provided a pension for those who could no longer work and provided benefits to adults and children with disabilities. The Randolph Shephard Act of 1936 provided funding for people with visual impairments. In 1943, the Bardon LaFollette Act established that people with mental retardation are covered by the Social Security Act. A large piece of legislation the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its following amendments have had a long-term, deep impact on rehabilitation and fundamental civil rights for people with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act was the basis for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Americans with Disabilities Act

The ADA consists of five sections that attempt to reduce discrimination against people with disabilities in all aspects of daily life. It is the third in a series of legislation to attempt to reduce discrimination. The predecessors to the ADA are the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Title I of the ADA prohibits employers, employment agencies, labor organizations, and joint labor management from discrimination in the selection, testing, hiring, and promotion of new and current employees. Equal opportunity is given to persons with disabilities. Workers with disabilities shall be provided reasonable accommodation when appropriate (Fersh & Thomas, 1993; Spechler, 1996; Fiedler, 1994; Lindsay, 1990). Title II prohibits discrimination

against a person with a disability by a department or agency of any state or local government as well as in all public transportation systems. Title III prohibits discrimination of people with disabilities in retail stores, restaurants, parks, grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, and the professional offices of physicians, lawyers, bankers, and other service providers. Title IV gives the people with disabilities, specifically people with sensory impairments, access to telecommunication. Title V allows states to be subject to lawsuits for violations of the ADA (Fersh & Thomas, 1993).

Title I is the portion of the ADA most focused on employment. Title I includes information on the discrimination of people with disabilities, essential functions, reasonable accommodation, and undue hardship. The ADA comes complete with a definition of these terms. Disability is defined as:

1) A person who has a physical or mental impairment, which substantially limits a major life activity, 2) Has record of that impairment that is used by the employer to discriminate against the individual, and 3) Is regarded by others as having such an impairment, whether impaired or not (this category includes AIDS/HIV) (Fersh & Thomas, 1993; Spechler, 1996; President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1993).

To determine if the disability is substantially limiting in a major life activity three things are considered

1) The nature and severity of the impairment, 2) The duration of the impairment, and 3) The permanent or long-term impact, or expected impact resulting from the impairment (Fersh & Thomas, 1993; Fiedler, 1994).

There are three basic requirements of the ADA. These three require employers to make employment decisions based on ability, treat applicants the same, and provide reasonable accommodation to people with disabilities. Employers are not allowed to use employment tests or other standards that tend to screen out applicants with disabilities (Fersh & Thomas 1993; Spechler, 1996). It is possible for an employer to deny a job based on disability if the essential functions of the job cannot be met with reasonable accommodation. Essential functions are defined as job duties intrinsic to the position, they may be the reason the job exists. Functions may also be essential to a job if there are a limited number of employees among whom the job can be done, and/or the function is highly specialized (Spechler, 1996; Fiedler 1994).

Reasonable accommodation may be provided to allow an individual to complete the essential functions of the job. It is defined as a modification in job tasks or a modification in the workplace to allow the employee with a disability to complete the job. Reasonable accommodations may include making facilities accessible, job restructuring, flexible job leave policies, modified equipment, interpreters, and modifying training and policies. Accommodation may become unreasonable when it causes undue hardship for the employer. Undue hardship is said to occur when accommodation is unduly expensive, disrupts the workplace, or it fundamentally alters the nature or the operation of the business. Factors used to determine undue hardship include the nature and cost of the accommodation, the resources and the size of the business, the type of business, and the impact the accommodation would have as well as the outside funding available (President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1993; Spechler, 1996; Fiedler, 1994; Fersh & Thomas, 1993; Lindsay, 1990, Janero & Ketay 1999).

The Americans with Disabilities Act was amended in 1998, the amendments were called the Workforce Investment Act, which extends the ADA for 5 years. The Workforce Investment Act streamlines vocational rehabilitation programs, expands consumer choice, improves due process, and increases high quality employment options (Schroeder, 1998).

Rehabilitation Act Amendments

Prior legislation pertaining to persons with disabilities includes the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It established guidelines to serve people with disabilities, required inclusion of the consumer in the rehabilitation process, and focused on providing and finding the right services for successful job placement. This act mandates affirmative action in federal hiring, an architectural barrier transportation compliance board, and affirmative action for companies with federal contracts. It also prohibits employers with federal funds from discrimination based on disability. This became the foundation for the ADA. The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 helped support the vocational rehabilitation system. It emphasized access to vocational rehabilitation services and employment for people with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act Amendments through 1998 brought a change in terminology to focus support on people with the most significant disabilities, defined substantial impediment to employment, increased emphasis on informed consent, established the individual employment plan, and linked agencies and services to create a comprehensive system.

The two last pieces of legislation pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities are the Disabled Access Credit (DAC) and the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit (TJTC). These two laws create employer incentives toward hiring persons with disabilities. The DAC is a tax incentive for small businesses. The small business becomes eligible for 50% of expenditures for

complying with the ADA. The TJTC offers employers up to 40% of the first year wages of employees of nine target groups including people with disabilities. In order for this to take effect, the employers must contact a vocational rehabilitation office for a voucher (President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1993).

Employers Attitudes and Perceptions

Few studies have attempted to determine why employers develop negative attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities. One study found that employers with previous experience and policies towards hiring people with disabilities were less concerned about performance factors. Employers with less education about the needs of people with disabilities and no existing policy are more concerned with the consequences of hiring people with disabilities (Diksa & Rogers, 1996). Another study found that employers felt that the presence of individuals with disabilities creates no adverse effects in the workplace. Employers also felt that incorporating people with disabilities in the workplace was an economic benefit, but were concerned about how other employees might react to a co-worker with a disability and about the cost of accommodations (Kregel & Unger, 1993). These studies do not indicate that employers have negative attitudes but rather have a need for exposure to information about people with disabilities.

Successful employment occurs when employers and individuals have access to knowledge about hiring people with disabilities. Such information can be obtained from public and private vocational rehabilitation agencies. Yet, employers may not be getting all the information and the help that they need. This lack of knowledge may have led to the misperceptions regarding the employment of people with disabilities. Few studies have explored and asked employers what information they are lacking about people with disabilities, if more

information would be useful, where they are getting their information currently, and whether the information they are getting is useful (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000; Hendricks, Dowler, & Judy, 1994; Greenwood, Schriner, & Johnson, 1991; Young, Rosati, & Vandergoot, 1986; Cole & Bragman, 1983).

These studies have also focused on large employers and where they receive their information regarding hiring and successfully employing people with disabilities. These employers admit that they are able to hire consultants and are able to send their human resource professionals to conferences and training sessions. Large companies also have legal services to decipher and advise the company on the legislation. Few studies have focused on small employers, their experiences with hiring a person with a disability, and how and where they are obtaining their information regarding people with disabilities. Small employers in small towns may have much more difficulty because often there are not agencies devoted to issues of hiring people with disabilities located within those small towns. People with disabilities live in all sizes of towns and have a need for employment everywhere, therefore it is necessary to ensure that there is enough access to information for all sizes of employers. To determine how, where, and what information small employers are receiving about employing people with disabilities it is necessary to go right to the source, to the employers.

People with Disabilities

There are a significant number of people with disabilities in the United States; the majority is unemployed. In January of 1994 an article published by the census titled Americans with Disabilities defined disability as difficulty in performing functional activities (seeing, hearing, talking, walking, climbing stairs, and lifting/carrying a bag of groceries), activities of daily living (getting in or out of bed or a chair, bathing, getting around inside the home, dressing

themselves, using the toilet and eating), or other activities relating to every day tasks of socially defined roles, estimated there were 49-million non-institutionalized Americans with a disability. (McNeil, 1994). One in five Americans has some sort of disability and one in ten has a severe disability. It is estimated that 34 million adults have a functional disability; an inability to lift 10 pounds, walk three city blocks, see words on newsprint, hear conversation at a normal level, be understood by others, or climb a flight of stairs. The employment trends of people with disabilities are also tallied. Only 77% of persons with a non-severe disability and only 26% with a severe disability, between the ages of 21 and 64 are employed (U.S. Census Bureau, 1994; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1997; McNeil, 1997). Moreover, people with disabilities are likely to have a low income, little or no health insurance, and are more likely to rely on government aid (McNeil, 1997). The high unemployment rate of people with disabilities may partially lie in that employers do not have the resources and information necessary to successfully hire an individual with a disability.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) works to assist people with disabilities in employment and employers in hiring. Their knowledge and assistance can be beneficial to employers when hiring an individual with a disability. Employers today are struggling to find employees who will fit within their organization because workers today have more choices. There is an untapped labor market of willing workers who have disabilities. To access this source of employees, though, it is important to have the right information to make the hiring and employment process as successful as possible. Vocational rehabilitation agencies also work to implement programs and gather community support for persons with disabilities. Successful vocational rehabilitation professionals will build a relationship with the employer and the employee to make the transition

into the workforce as smooth as possible. The goal is to find the right job that will become long-term.

Definitions

Disability

Disability is defined according to the ADA: “1) A person who has a physical or mental impairment, which substantially limits a major life activity, 2) Has record of that impairment that is used by the employer to discriminate against the individual, and 3) Is regarded by others as having such an impairment, whether impaired or not (this category includes AIDS/HIV)” (Fersher & Thomas, 1993; Spechler, 1996; President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1993).

Job Analysis

Job analysis is defined as, “A process to identify and determine in detail the particular job duties and requirements and the relative importance of these duties for a given job. Job Analysis is a process where judgments are made about data collected on a job” (HR: Guide to the Internet 2001). Job analysis may include a description of the physical demands of the job, essential functions, educational requirements, and environmental demands (HR: Guide to the Internet 2001).

Accessible

A work place becomes accessible when all people with disabilities have access to it. This includes entrances, exits, workstations, break areas, meeting areas, and restrooms.

Reasonable accommodation

Reasonable accommodation is defined as a modification in job tasks or a modification in the workplace to allow the employee with a disability to complete the job.

Reasonable accommodations may include making facilities accessible, job restructuring, flexible job leave policies, modified equipment, interpreters, and modifying training and policies.

Accommodation may become unreasonable when it causes undue hardship for the employer (President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1993; Spechler, 1996; Fiedler, 1994; Fersh & Thomas, 1993; Lindsay, 1990, Janero & Ketay 1999).

Supported Employment Services

Supported employment is defined as: "Employment of a person with a disability so severe that the person needs ongoing training and support to get and keep a job in which: 1) the person engages in paid work in a position removed from the service vendor's site where individuals without disabilities who do not require public subsidies also may be employed; 2) public funds are necessary to provide ongoing training and support services throughout the period of the person's employment; and 3) the person has the opportunity for social interaction with individuals who do not have disabilities and who are not paid caregivers" (Minnesota Statutes, 268A.01, p. 2, 2001).

Limitations of the Study

As in any study a number of limitations can be identified that may influence the study. One concern is that the questionnaire may have been perceived as confrontational, it may have discouraged some employers from filling it out, even though that was not the intent. One limitation of the methodology discussed above was the lack of reliability and validity data on the questionnaire. It is unknown if this questionnaire is truly measuring what it needs to and if the results would remain the same if filled out by others at another point in time. The study is also limited in scope because it is focused on the Midwest, results may not be generalizable to other parts of the country. Finally, due to the nature of the delivery of the questionnaires, some may

have been lost, delayed, or sent to incorrect destinations. It is possible that companies listed on the website for each community may no longer exist or have moved to different locations. In addition, many questionnaires may not be sent back by employers because of general non-interest, the dislike for unexpected and unwanted mail, and lack of time to read and fill out the questionnaire. Unfortunately, the willingness to send back the questionnaire may have also been affected by the recent troubles with the United States mail system and terrorism.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine whether small business employers have a need for more information about hiring and employing people with disabilities. To determine if small employers have knowledge about employing people with disabilities it is necessary to go right to the source, to the employers. A questionnaire has been developed to ask small businesses in three small midwestern towns about hiring and employing people with disabilities. The questionnaire will determine if employers have information about legislation, accommodations, supported employment, and hiring procedures. The questionnaire will also determine if the employers have a need for information beyond what they already have obtained and if they feel the information they are receiving is beneficial and of good quality.

Research Questions

Five questions were addressed by this research. They were:

1. What specific information do employers feel they need?
2. What information do employers have?
3. Is the information coming from VR, personal knowledge, books, or a specialist?
4. Is the information beneficial and helpful?
5. How can the information be enhanced to better suit the needs of employers?

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This chapter explores the research that has attempted to determine where employers are getting information about hiring people with disabilities and what services employers are seeking. Many studies have also attempted to find out what attitudes employers hold about hiring people with disabilities and have found that with more exposure to people with disabilities negative attitudes decrease. Finally, this chapter discusses how necessary it is for VR to develop relationships with employers to assist them in hiring and including people with disabilities.

Hiring People with Disabilities

A 1994 study by Ford attempted to determine where employers received information about the ADA and their training in hiring people with disabilities. Participants were also asked what services they needed to employ people with severe disabilities and in what areas they were lacking information. Responses included lack of information about supported employment, disability, building modifications, employer benefits, laws, funding, rehabilitation technology devices and services, and service providers. When participants were asked whether they were able to provide the rehabilitation technology necessary to employ an individual with a disability, 74% said they were not. When asked to state why, 23% said lack of funds, 22% indicated lack of expertise, 19% did not know where to go for training, and 14% stated it was due to low priority, lack of time, lack of feedback, or personal constraints. Twenty-six percent of employers surveyed said they had never made a referral to a vocational rehabilitation agency for an employee with a disability. When asked why, 36% said they did not even know it was possible, 24% did not know where to refer to, 26% said it was not their job, and the remaining 14% stated it was not in their best interests or in the best interests of the employee with the disability (Ford,

1994). The results of this study indicate that employers need more information and assistance in employing people with disabilities.

Some employers do seek out services to assist in hiring a person with a disability, as found in a 2000 study. This study determined that those who had sought out vocational rehabilitation services found them effective, but wanted more contact and stronger relationships (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000). Another study polled Projects With Industry (PWI) personnel on employers' needs. The PWI personnel were chosen because of their close working relationship with employers. This study found that employers desired assistance for job modification, restructuring, accessibility modification, disability awareness training, and were receptive to help in other areas (Greenwood, Schriener, & Johnson, 1991). Another study analyzed calls made by employers to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). The results indicated that employers were concerned about understanding the ADA, job accommodation, and retention of a current employee with a disability. The study found that of the employees and employers who contacted JAN, 50% of the employees and 61% of the employers understood the ADA and 25% of the employees and 39.9% of the employers recognized the impact of accommodation. Other concerns expressed by employees and employers included employer/employee conflict, cost of accommodation, and agency problems. It was found that employers called JAN more about retention and improvement of employees, while employees called more about new job positions. Employers and employees inquired about assistance regarding managerial/professional positions more than technical/sales/administrative support, operators/laborers/ fabricators, service, and lastly precision/craft repair positions. The largest numbers of calls to JAN were about understanding and implementing the ADA. Employers and employees seemed to be most concerned about their rights and duties under the law (Hendricks,

Dowler, & Judy, 1994). This study took an indirect approach to finding employer needs. Other studies have sought out and asked employers directly about their hiring needs.

One, twenty year old study looked at the information desired by employers when hiring people with disabilities. This study focused on the need for information about specific disabilities, rather than the need for information about the hiring process as a whole, beginning with the initial interview to supported employment and accommodations. The results indicated that rehabilitation professionals need to first supply information about disabilities to employers, focusing on the effect of the disability as it relates to the job and on the functional limitations of the disability. This information should be provided after initial contact but before hiring. This study found that rehabilitation professionals need to work harder to provide employers with information about disabilities (Cole & Bragman, 1983). In 1986 Young, Rosati, and Vandergoot asked employers their opinions of rehabilitation services. Specifically, what employers thought of the services they used and which services they believed needed to be changed to better serve their clientele. The majority surveyed had knowledge of the rehabilitation system. They found rehabilitation services beneficial in areas of placement referral, work hardening, vocational training, work adjustment, vocational and social counseling, and as information providers. Vocational services were least helpful in areas of job analysis, job restructuring, and client follow-up. Employers stated that the biggest problems concerning rehabilitation services were lack of information regarding job-ready applicants, training, and other services. There was also some confusion about what services were offered by VR. Recommendations made by employers to solve the problems included employer training related to the employment of people with disabilities, and advertising and marketing of services provided by VR that are beneficial to employers. This study found that employers approached rehabilitation agencies when they had a

position to fill and rarely for other services or information (Young, Rosati, & Vandergoot, 1986). This study determined that employers use vocational rehabilitation services, but only for certain needs.

Employers Attitudes

While some studies have explored the need employers have for information, other studies have investigated employers' attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities. One study on employers' attitudes made use of a scale developed by Kregel and Tomiyasu (1994). This scale measured the attitudes of 170 employers toward workers with disabilities and towards the ADA. The results of this study found that while 96% of the 170 employers interviewed knew of the ADA, only 36% said they would support mandated quotas for hiring people with disabilities. The employers were asked about their satisfaction and previous experience with people with disabilities in the workplace; 73% had previous experience. Of that 73%, 78% were satisfied with the performance of the worker with a disability, 11% were somewhat satisfied.

Overall, this study found employers to have a positive attitude towards people with disabilities. The employers did acknowledge that in order for the transition into the workforce to be successful they needed to provide a good effort. On the other hand, employers did not feel they had to create jobs or employ persons with disabilities themselves. They did feel assistance would be necessary to hire a person with a disability, but few felt it would be too expensive. In addition, although these employers saw people with disabilities favorably, they believed the hiring of a person with a disability would depend on the extent or severity of the disability. The employers also expressed some personal concerns, which included fears of not being able to

communicate with the employee and fear of the employee with a disability making special demands (Kregel & Tomiyasu, 1994).

A similar study conducted by Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, and Levy in 1993 in the state of New York found that 60% of 418 employers had a positive or neutral personal experience with employees with disabilities. Yet, this study wanted to find out if employers had a favorable attitude toward developing programs to help in the employment of people with disabilities. Government agencies were more favorable towards developing a program, as were larger companies. Companies with lower annual sales, run by college graduates, made up of more women, and companies that have had positive previous experience with employees with disabilities were also favorable toward developing programs (Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, and Levy, 1993).

A study done by Ford (1994) attempted to determine where employers received their information about the ADA and other answers about hiring people with disabilities. From the 54% of people who said they did have experience with people with disabilities 13% said they got their training from books, 13% from journals, 22% from seminars and conferences, 17% from their work, 22% from the people they work with, 6% from some form of higher education, and 7% from other sources (Ford, 1994).

Building Relationships

Evidently, while the ADA and other legislation work to reduce discrimination it is still necessary to assist employers on how to meet the standards it demands. Employers seem satisfied with the hiring of people with disabilities, but the unemployment rate remains high. VR is doing its best to work with employers and people with disabilities for job placement and assistance, but it remains necessary for everyone to work together to achieve the common goal of

reducing discrimination in the workplace. One way to achieve this goal is to work with employers to determine their needs for information and assistance.

Developing relationships between vocational rehabilitation agencies and employers will increase communication and benefit both. Employers will receive assistance in the logistics of hiring an individual with a disability and VR will more successfully place clients into open positions within those companies. Accommodation is one area where employers struggle to know what is necessary and how to implement it. When accommodating workers with disabilities it is important for companies to realize that they do not have to do it on their own. It is suggested that companies take a proactive approach. Some suggested guidelines are

- 1) Designate a company representative to oversee ADA compliance.
- 2) Create and maintain cooperative relationships with other companies and community resources.
- 3) Ensure that all company policies are compatible with ADA prescriptions...
- 4) Consult rehabilitation professionals to assist in the formulation and review of accommodation options, and preparation of work and non-work environments. (Mullins, Rumrill, & Roessler, 1994, p. 16)

Employers are often unaware of what the guidelines are for making their business accessible. Factors to keep in mind when determining accessibility include: Designated handicap accessible parking spaces, ramps and pathways, doors that are at least 36 inches wide and are easily opened, elevators, clear pathways to bathroom, and other public areas, appropriate signage, and an emergency system with both audible and visual cues (President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 2000). Factors to keep in mind when preparing for and conducting the interview are: accessibility of the interview site, avoidance of questions both written and spoken about the disability or

other medical issues, only job related questions, avoid speculation on how the individual would perform the job, and no testing that reveals physical or mental impairments. If the employer needs to know if the individual would be able to perform a function of the job the interviewer may ask but only if it is an essential function of the job, the interviewer may also ask about reasonable accommodations. All questions must remain job related, focusing on the technical and professional skills and abilities of the applicant (President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 2001).

All the dos and don'ts of hiring someone with a disability can be overwhelming, but employers must keep in mind that they are not alone; there are resources to assist them with this process. As stated in a 1996 article "Employers need preparation, orientation, and support to comfortably recruit and integrate workers with disabilities into the workplace" (Tilson, 1996, p. 77). The relationship between rehabilitation agencies and employers is based on trust, time, knowledge of what the agencies have to offer, and strong customer service. Employers are more willing to develop relationships when they have something to gain from the relationship (Tilson, 1996). A significant benefit to employers besides the support and information is the opportunity to employ qualified and motivated individuals. This leads to reduced turnover, consistent productivity, economic incentives, legal compliance, and a diversified workforce (Fry, 1997). Financially, forming partnerships with VR agencies makes sense as well, because employers gain support and knowledge about working with people who become injured on the job and VR professionals can work to fill open positions. VR also has the ability to design and implement training programs to prepare candidates for the job, saving the employer time and money. Employers also benefit by receiving disability management assistance. This

includes assistance with accommodations, transferring and promotion of an employee with a disability, the organization of functions to include people with disabilities, handling of case management issues, and ensuring the perks of employment are available to people with disabilities (Fry, 1997). Once initial relationships have been established, the potential for new relationships through referrals is endless (Nietupski, Verstegen, Hamre-Nietupski, & Tanty, 1993; Mank, 1996).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the subjects under study, how they were selected, and what instrumentation was used to collect the information. The instrument will be discussed as to its content, validity, and reliability. Data collection and analysis procedures will also be detailed. The chapter will conclude with limitations of the methodology.

Description of Participants

The participants for this study were systematically selected from a list of employers provided by the city chamber of commerce in each of the three small towns. The small towns included were in Northern Wisconsin, Southern Minnesota, and Northern Iowa. The population of the communities ranged from approximately 3000 to 9000 people.

Sample Selection

The employers were selected systematically from a list of employers provided by each community's chamber of commerce. Questionnaires were sent to the contact individual listed on the chamber of commerce website.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire developed specifically for this study was used to gather information. The questionnaire included a confidentiality statement and cover letter regarding the nature of the research. Initial questions included number of employees, number of employees with disabilities, services currently provided to employees with disabilities, and their knowledge of the ADA. In addition, questions related to where employers have received their information on employing people with disabilities, what information they feel they need regarding hiring people

with disabilities, their knowledge of the resources available, their use of those resources, and if they believe the resources were beneficial. Questions were yes, no, Likert, and open-ended. There were no measures of reliability or validity for this instrument due to its recent development. The instrument does possess good face validity. This questionnaire was developed in part by referring to the Employment Equity Audit – Questionnaire created by the Canadian Human Rights Commission (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2000)

Data Collection

The questionnaire was mailed out to the selected businesses in the three cities in October of 2001. Included with the questionnaire was a cover letter describing the study and requesting participation, as well as a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. The participants were asked to return the questionnaire two weeks after receipt.

Data Analysis

All appropriate descriptive statistics were utilized in analysis of the data. Frequencies of responses, means, and standard deviations will be provided.

Limitations

As in any study a number of limitations can be identified that may influence the study. One concern is that the questionnaire may have been perceived as confrontational, it may have discouraged some employers from filling it out, even though that was not the intent. One limitation of the methodology discussed above was the lack of reliability and validity data on the questionnaire. It is unknown if this questionnaire is truly measuring what it needs to and if the results would remain the same if filled out by others at another point in time. The study is also limited in scope because it is focused on the Midwest, results may not be generalizable to other parts of the country. Finally, due to the nature of the delivery of the questionnaires, some may

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CHAPTER 4

Results

This chapter will present the results of the questionnaire developed for this study. The demographic information and descriptive statistics will be reported first. Data collected on each of the research hypotheses will then be given.

Demographic Information

The sample for this study consisted of 73 of 300, returned surveys a 24% return rate. Three hundred surveys were mailed to small businesses in the midwestern towns of Decorah, Iowa, Belle Plaine, Minnesota, and Ladysmith, Wisconsin.

Question 1

Question 1: Are employers aware of legislation pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities? Descriptive statistics were run on the data pertaining to this question. The results indicate $x = 1.602$, $sd = .492$; responses arrayed as 29 (40%) yes, 44 (60%) no.

Question 2

Question 2: Have any of your employees become disabled in the workplace?
The results indicate $x = 1.917$, $sd = .276$; responses arrayed as 6 (8%) yes, 67 (92%) no.

Question 3

Question 3: Are you aware of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973?
The results indicate $x = 1.438$, $sd = .499$; responses arrayed as 41 (56%) yes, 32 (44%) no.

Question 4

Question 4: Are you aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990?
The results indicate $x = 1.150$, $sd = .360$; responses arrayed as 62 (85%) yes, 11 (15%) no.

Question 5

Question 5: Are you aware of local and state laws pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities? The results indicate $x = 1.397$, $sd = .492$; responses arrayed as 44 (60%) yes, 29 (40%) no.

Question 6

Question 6: Are you aware of the laws regarding termination of an employee with a disability? The results indicate $x = 1.452$, $sd = .501$; responses arrayed as 40 (55%) yes, 33 (45%) no.

Question 7

Question 7: Has your company done a job analysis of each position? The results indicate $x = 1.575$, $sd = .497$; responses arrayed as 31 (42%) yes, 42 (58%) no.

Question 8

Question 8: Do you have a complete description of each position? The results indicate $x = 1.5$, $sd = .503$; responses arrayed as 36 (49%) yes, 36 (49%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question. For clarification respondents who answered yes to question eight were asked if the description of the position includes a description of physical demands 31 or 42% said yes, essential functions 38 or 52% said yes, educational requirements 31 or 42% said yes, and environmental demands 21 or 29% said yes.

Question 9

Question 9: Are you willing to hire an individual with a disability? The results indicate $x = 1.055$, $sd = .230$; responses arrayed as 68 (93%) yes, 4 (5%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 10

Question 10: Is your application process accessible to individuals with visual or other sensory impairments? The results indicate $x = 1.6$, $sd = .493$; responses arrayed as 28 (38%) yes, 42 (58%) no, 2 no response, 2 people did not respond to this question.

Question 11

Question 11: Do you feel prepared to hire an individual with a disability? The results indicate $x = 1.416$, $sd = .496$; responses arrayed as 42 (58%) yes, 30 (41%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 12

Question 12: Are you aware of what questions may or may not be asked during the interview? The results indicate $x = 1.424$, $sd = .497$; responses arrayed as 42 (58%) yes, 31 (42%) no.

Question 13

Question 13: Is your workplace accessible to people with disabilities? The results indicate $x = 1.126$, $sd = .335$; responses arrayed as 62 (85%) yes, 9 (12%) no, 2 did not respond. For clarification, respondents who answered yes to question thirteen were asked specifically what was accessible in their workplace this included entrance and exits 62 or 85% said yes, workstations 44 or 60% said yes, break rooms 39 or 53% said yes, and restrooms 45 or 62% said yes.

Question 14

Question 14: Are you willing to consider job modifications? The results indicate $x = 1.222$, $sd = .418$; responses arrayed as 56 (77%) yes, 16 (22%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 15

Question 15: Have you provided accommodations for an employee with a disability? The results indicate $x = 1.718$, $sd = .453$; responses arrayed as 20 (27%) yes, 51 (70%) no, 2 people did not respond to this question.

Question 16

Question 16: Have you implemented steps to remove identified barriers to employment in the workplace? The results indicate $x = 1.608$, $sd = .491$; responses arrayed as 27 (37%) yes, 42 (58%) no, 4 people did not respond to this question.

Question 17

Question 17: Do you have a process to ensure that all new policies and procedures are reviewed so they do not create any new employment barriers? The results indicate $x = 1.591$, $sd = .495$; responses arrayed as 29 (40%) yes, 42 (58%) no, 2 people did not respond to this question.

Question 18

Question 18: Do you have written policies on accommodating people with disabilities? The results indicate $x = 1.791$, $sd = .408$; responses arrayed as 15 (21%) yes, 57 (78%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 19

Question 19: Are these policies being communicated to current and new employees? The results indicate $x = 1.808$, $sd = .396$; responses arrayed as 14 (19%) yes, 59 (81%) no.

Question 20

Question 20: Have you ever used supported employment services? The results indicate $x = 1.746$, $sd = .438$; responses arrayed as 18 (25%) yes, 53 (73%) no, 2 people did not respond to this question.

Question 21

Question 21: Are you aware of the services provided by supported employment agencies? The results indicate $x = 1.541$, $sd = .501$; responses arrayed as 33 (45%) yes, 39 (53%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 22

Question 22: Are you aware of the services provided by vocational rehabilitation agencies? The results indicate $x = 1.638$, $sd = .483$; responses arrayed as 26 (36%) yes, 46 (63%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 23

Question 23: Have you ever used vocational rehabilitation services? The results indicate $x = 1.847$, $sd = .362$; responses arrayed as 11 (15%) yes, 61 (84%) no, 1 did not respond.

Question 24

Question 24: Do you have an in-house specialist to assist in the hire and employment of people with disabilities? The results indicate $x = 1.847$, $sd = .362$; responses arrayed as 0 (0%) yes, 72 (99%) no, 1 person did not respond to this question.

Question 25

Question 25: This company has sufficient knowledge of the ADA and other laws pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities. The results indicate $x = 2.863$, $sd = 1.228$; responses arrayed as 10, 14% strongly agree, 21, (29%) agree, 20, (27%) unsure, 13, (18%) disagree, 9, (12%) strongly disagree.

Question 26

Question 26: This company has been able to obtain the information it needs regarding hiring people with disabilities. The results indicate $x = 2.780$, $sd = 1.057$; responses arrayed as 8, (11%) strongly agree, 23, (32%) agree, 22, (30%) unsure, 19, (23%) disagree, 3, (4%) strongly disagree.

Question 27

Question 27: This company is able to successfully accommodate employees with disabilities. The results indicate $x = 2.917$, $sd = .1.277$; responses arrayed as 11, (15%) strongly agree, 19, (26%) agree, 18, (25%) unsure, 15, (21%) disagree, 10, (14%) strongly disagree.

Question 28

Question 28: This company has the ability to provide education to other employees about working with an individual with a disability. The results indicate $x = 2.835$, $sd = 1.213$; responses arrayed as 10, (14%) strongly agree, 23, (32%) agree, 16, (22%) unsure, 17, (23%) disagree, 7, (10%) strongly disagree.

Question 29

Question 29: This company has enough knowledge about hiring and employing people with disabilities. The results indicate $x = 3.027$, $sd = 1.201$; responses arrayed as 10, (14%) strongly agree, 14, (19%) agree, 20, (27%) unsure, 22, (30%) disagree, 7, (10%) strongly disagree.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will include a discussion of the results of the study and conclusions. This chapter will conclude with some recommendations for further research.

Discussion

The results indicate that the majority of employers surveyed had never before employed an individual with a disability, only 40% had. Even fewer employers have had an employee injured in the workplace, 4%. These results suggest that very few employers in small towns have experience working with people with disabilities. This compares to a 1994 Kregel and Tomiyasu study of 170 employers in a large metropolitan area that found that 73% of employers had previous experience with an employee with a disability. Employers did indicate that they were aware of legislation pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities. Fifty-six percent were aware of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 85% were aware of the ADA, 60% were aware of varying local and state laws, and 55% were aware of laws surrounding the termination of people with disabilities. These results are consistent with a 1994 study by Hendricks, Dowler, & Judy, the majority of employers surveyed, 61%, understood the ADA (Hendricks, Dowler, & Judy, 1994).

Responses were varied when employers were asked about the accessibility of, and their confidence in their hiring process. Ninety-three percent of employers did say that they were willing to hire an individual with a disability, yet only 58% felt prepared to do so. Part of making the hiring process accessible and smooth for both the employer and then prospective employee is to conduct a job analysis for each position, this may include a description of

physical demands of the job, essential functions, educational requirements, and environmental demands. This is beneficial to employers because it breaks down the job into measurable parts and identifies the essential functions as defined in the ADA. Identifying the essential functions allows the employer to make an informed and legal decision on whether or not to hire an applicant with a disability. Having a job description also benefits the applicant it allows them to be able to self-select according to their abilities and the requirements of the job. Responses to the questionnaire on whether the company had a complete description of each job were split, 49% said yes, 49% said no. Of those employers who said yes, only 42% said the description included a list of physical demands, 52% included a list of essential functions, 42% included a list of educational requirements, and 29% included a list of environmental demands. Only 38% of employers surveyed felt that their application process was accessible to individuals with sensory impairments. Over half felt they were aware of what questions were appropriate to ask during an interview.

An important part of employing an individual with a disability is ensuring that the work place is accessible and the appropriate accommodations are made. Eighty-five percent of employers felt that yes their work place was accessible to people with disabilities. For clarification, respondents were asked to identify specifically what areas were accessible. Of those employers that indicate that their work place was accessible, 85% said indicated entrances and exits were accessible, 60 % said workstations were accessible, 53% said break rooms were accessible, and 62% said the restrooms were accessible. The majority, 77% of respondents were willing to consider modifications to the workplace to accommodate employees, 27% had already implemented accommodations. Only 37% of respondents reported that they have implemented steps to remove barriers in the workplace. Twenty-one percent of the respondents said that they

have policies in the workplace concerning the accommodation of people with disabilities; only 19% said that they were communicating those policies to their employees. Forty percent said that they review policies and procedures before implementation to ensure that they do not create barriers in the workplace.

When employers were asked if they had ever made use of services created to assist individuals with disabilities in the workplace very few answered that they had. Twenty-five percent indicated that they had used supported employment services, but 45% said that they were aware of the services provided by supported employment agencies. Thirty-six percent of respondents were aware of the services provided by vocational rehabilitation agencies, but only 15% had made use of those services. This is similar to a study of employers in the Midwest where 22% of employers stated they had contact with vocational rehabilitation (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000). This is in contrast to studies involving larger employers where the majority had heard of vocational rehabilitation and its services (Young, Rosati, & Vandergoot, 1986; Cole & Bragman, 1983). None of the respondents reported having an in-house specialist to assist in the employment of people with disabilities.

A series of Likert style questions was asked to determine the quality of the knowledge and information employers have been receiving. Forty-three percent of respondents felt that they did have sufficient knowledge of the ADA and other laws pertaining to the employment of people with disabilities, 27% were unsure, and 30% felt they did not have sufficient knowledge. Again, 43% of employers felt that they have been able to obtain the information they need, 30% were unsure, and 27% felt that they were not able. Slightly fewer 41% felt that they would be able to successfully accommodate an employee with a disability, 21% were unsure, and 35% felt they would not be able. Forty-seven percent of respondents felt they were able to provide

education to employees about working with an individual with a disability, 25% were unsure, and 25% felt they would not be able to provide education. Finally, 33% of respondents felt that they had enough knowledge about employing people with disabilities, 27% were unsure, and 40% felt they did not have enough knowledge.

A series of open-ended questions were included to capture the candid thoughts of respondents as they filled out the questionnaire. The size of employers ranged anywhere from 1 to 2700, the average size was 69 employees. When asked if the information regarding the employment of people with disabilities was beneficial, 35 or 48% responded yes, seven responded no. Five of the respondents were unsure if the information was beneficial or found it beneficial occasionally. A few stated they have no information and a few found the information interesting, and helpful but wish that they had more. Specifically, one employer felt that all the information on regulations overshadowed information outlining positive suggestions for hiring an individual with a disability. Another respondent desired information that is specifically catered to small business in rural communities in a simpler format and on a smaller basis.

When asked how the information can be enhanced to better suit the needs of the employer responses were varied. Responses included the desire for the government to focus on smaller companies, information on programs and services, pamphlets, quick reference sheets, more training, internet sites, health information, more information on visual and sensory impairments, and mailings with updates. One respondent said that because of the small size of the business it was hard to imagine being able to offer a person with a disability many hours. The respondent felt that the job was too physical, undirected, and too individualized. Another stated that their business has no information on hiring people with disabilities because they have not needed to look into it, they will not know until they are faced with the situation.

When asked what information the respondents felt they were lacking 10 of 24 respondents (42%), felt they were lacking everything, that they had no information regarding the employment of people with disabilities. Other respondents desired information on reasonable accommodations, unreasonable accommodations, rights and responsibilities as an employer, laws, where to call for support, technical information, samples of written policies, information on changes in laws, what facilities are hiring people with disabilities, and information on visual and sensory impairments. One respondent felt confident that their parent company would provide them with the needed information if they decided to hire an individual with a disability. Overall, most respondents desired more information about hiring an individual with a disability. Again, this is consistent with previous studies of larger employers (Cole & Bragman, 1983).

Conclusions

Although the sample size was small, the results are similar to what was expected. Small businesses do seem to have a need for information regarding the employment of people with disabilities. While small employers seem willing to hire people with disabilities fewer feel prepared to do so, this is supported by the responses to the questionnaire. Less than half have employed an individual with a disability, less than a third felt their application process was accessible. Just over a third have implemented steps to remove barriers in the workplace, and only a fifth have policies on hiring. Less than half of employers were aware of supported employment, vocational rehabilitation, and their services. Over half of the respondents were unsure or felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge of legislation and the process of hiring an individual with a disability. Over half were unsure if they would be able to accommodate an employee and stated they were not able to obtain adequate information. These results suggest that vocational rehabilitation agencies need to work to create relationships with small businesses

to provide them with the information they need and desire and also to open avenues of employment for their clients.

Recommendations for further research

Several suggestions are offered for further research on the needs of small businesses regarding the employment of people with disabilities. These are:

1. Replication using a larger sample could enhance the results for possible generalization.
2. Modification of the survey instrument to determine reliability and validity.
3. Modification of the survey instrument to gather information that is more specific about how they feel they could benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.
4. Modification of the implementation of the survey. It may be beneficial to conduct face-to-face interviews to capture the true opinions of employers and to have the ability to ask follow-up questions.

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