



Introduction

In the last 18 months ITC-Welcomgroup has employed 120 persons with disabilities (PWD). The process of recruiting disabled employees began initially as a CSR initiative but we soon learned the business case in recruiting PWD and this then became a regular HR process. We have also realised that a barrier free environment is crucial ingredient of inclusion and therefore, we have done access audits to incorporate accessibility improvements in our existing infrastructure. All our future hotel properties will be based on principles of Universal Design. Our overall experience has taught us that with the right sensitisation of managers and customisation of induction programmes, recruiting PWD can easily become a mainstream activity.

This booklet is aimed at sharing our experiences with the rest of the corporate world and laying down a step by step guide to demystify the perceived complexities around employing persons with disabilities.

I can see, and that is why I can be happy, in what you call the dark, but which to me is golden. I can see a God-made world, not a man-made world.

- Helen Keller



Disability and Employment

1.1 Why Does Disability Matter?

- Because over 20 million people (according to 2001 census), who constitute 2.13 percent of country's total population, suffer from disability in India. However, the WHO pegs this figure at 70 million – you probably already employ someone in this category and they may be among your employees.
- Because discrimination against disabled people is not just unethical, it's also unfair and a huge waste of human potential.

Important Facts:

- 73 percent of the business houses do not have any CSR policies to employ physically-challenged people in their organizations
- A 1999 survey by National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People revealed that private sector employs a mere 0.28 percent people with disabilities, while the public sector employs 0.54 per cent. Multinational Corporations had hired only 0.05 per cent disabled people in India.
- With the ratification of the UN Convention on rights of persons with disabilities, the Indian government has declared its commitment to apply rights based legislation to the private sector soon.

1.2 The Business Case

Many organisations are already addressing disability, often as part of a wider diversity strategy. They recognise that diversity within their workforce brings many business benefits and is a central factor in determining efficiency, productivity and overall business success.

The case for including disabled people in a diverse work force is compelling. Employers of disabled people have consistently found that:-

- They have been able to widen the pool of recruits, which is especially useful where the skill pool is limited or employees are in short supply.
- Disabled people are as productive and reliable as other employees.
- Disabled people in work tend to have better attendance records, stay with employers longer and have fewer accidents at work.
- Most only require minimal and very basic adjustments at work.
- Staff morale and team development are enhanced when businesses are seen to be equal opportunity employers.
- They have been able to retain employees' valuable skills, experience and expertise within the organisation, at the same time avoiding the costs of recruiting and training new people.
- Organisations accessible to disabled customers are more accessible and appealing to all consumers and stake holders.
- Improves the public image of the organisation by showing that, apart from economical benefits, it also pursues social objectives.

1.3 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS)

- **Should recruiting disabled employees be a CSR activity or a regular HR process?**
When recruiting for regular posts, this should be taken as a regular HR exercise with a disability employment policy ingrained in all procedures and steps of recruitment.
- **What types of jobs are/aren't suitable for people with disability?**
People with disability work successfully in a wide range of jobs, industries and professions. Just like people without disability, it depends on the skills, training and qualifications of each individual.
- **Will it cost more for insurance and compensation to employ someone with disability?**
No. The cost of corporate insurance will remain the same. As for compensation costs, studies have shown that people with disability are much less likely to be involved in accidents and make claims than workers without disability.
- **If special equipment or modifications and adjustments are needed in the workplace, they would be expensive?**
Most people with disability do not need expensive equipment or modifications.
- **Will people with disability take more sick days because of their disability?**
There is no evidence to support this. If anything, people with disability have shown to have higher attendance records.



- **Will I have to spend more time training and supervising a person with disability? Will someone always have to help them?**
Not if the person with disability has the appropriate skills for the job. If they do need extra training or support, it will generally only be during the induction period.
- **Where can I source disabled job seekers?**
Use services of Disability Employment Specialists, local NGOs and special employment exchange.
- **Whom do I contact for improving accessibility at workplace and for assessing the need for assistive aids?**
Access Consultants will be able to assist you with identifying solutions for workplace adaptations.
- **How can I be sure that a person with disability will 'fit in'? How will coworkers respond?**
Disability Employment Specialists will look over the work site and liaise closely with management to ensure any concerns are met before the person starts work. If necessary, they can provide training in disability awareness to co-workers.
- **How should a person with disability be treated at work?**
With respect and dignity – just like any other employee.
- **What happens if it doesn't work out?**
The odds are high that it **will** work out – research shows that people with disability perform well and have a high retention rate. However, if things don't work out, your normal procedure for dealing with performance problems applies.

Instead of comparing our lot with that of those who are more fortunate than we are, we should compare it with the lot of the great majority of our fellow men. It then appears that we are among the privileged.

- Helen Keller



Making it Work - a step by step guide

This section outlines the step-by-step process to becoming an equal opportunities employer.

STEP 1

Skill Matching – Identifying suitable jobs

The first step towards employing persons with disabilities (PWD) is to do a skills charting of all the job profiles available within the organization. This exercise will enable identification of job roles that may be carried out by PWDs and will also indicate the types of disabilities that may be suitable for particular job profiles. Following is an example of a Skills Matix for the hospitality industry.

Profile	Physical Disability		Speech & Hearing Impaired		Vision Impaired	
	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe
Team Leader/Manager	•	•	•		•	•
Cashier	•	•	•		•	•
Receptionist	•	•	•		•	
Front Office/ PR Manager	•				•	
Restaurant Manager	•				•	
Travel and Tour In-charge	•				•	
Reservations (Non Voice Based)	•	•	•	•	•	•

STEP 2

Recruitment Policy

Develop a formal **disability policy** to ensure equal job opportunities and non-discrimination in recruitment, promotion, transfer, career development and training. The purpose of this



procedure is to take positive measures to prevent not only overt acts of discrimination on grounds of disability, but also conditions and requirements which might have a discriminatory effect.

This will enable the employer to ensure that there is no direct or indirect discrimination.

The document should include all policies, procedures and practices that the line managers and HR personnel may refer to as a resource to ensure that decisions on recruitment, selection, training, promotion and career management are based solely on objective and job related criteria. Having a formal policy in place will ensure that non-discrimination becomes a normative process that is ingrained in the recruitment and employment procedures of all departments and sub-divisions within the organisation.

STEP 3

The Selection Process

i) Using person specifications and job descriptions

A person specification sets out the criteria needed to do a particular job. Using a person specification will help to cut down reliance on irrelevant and potentially discriminatory criteria in the selection process. Person specifications should be based on a current job description for that job, which is usually an explanation of how the jobholder fits into the organisation or business, together with a breakdown of experience and skills needed for the job. Both the person specification and the job description should be reviewed each time they are used to make sure they are still relevant.

Example of a discriminatory job advertisement - A job is advertised stating that the successful applicant should have a driving licence. The job involves visiting people in the local area. Asking for a driving licence could deter disabled people from applying when they could be capable of doing the job even though they could not drive, for example by using public transport. Therefore this would be discriminatory. Stating instead that applicants must be willing to travel would still indicate that this is a requirement for the job. However, this does not specify how this should be done and therefore will not exclude people who cannot drive because of their disability.

Criteria should be ranked to show order of importance, and essential and minor requirements should be clearly distinguished. Separating essential and minor tasks will help you to think about what aspects of the job could be reassigned to another person if that was a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person.

The essential skills for an office assistant's job might include communicating with customers, data input and filing. However, a minor task such as posting letters could be done by anyone and could be reassigned if necessary.

I seldom think about my limitations, and they never make me sad. Perhaps there is just a touch of yearning at times; but it is vague, like a breeze among flowers.

- Helen Keller

ii) Accessible Recruitment Advertising

The employers must make an effort to make sure that the recruitment process attracts applications from as many qualified people including people with disabilities. Some tips to achieve this include:

- Include a welcoming and encouraging statement in your advertisements to encourage disabled people to apply for jobs. This is a public statement of policy and intent indicating the organisation's commitment to equal opportunity in the recruitment procedure and in job advertisement, examples of this include:
 - ◆ 'We welcome enquiries from everyone and value diversity in our workforce'
 - ◆ 'We are willing to consider flexible working arrangements'
 - ◆ 'Candidates considered solely on their ability'
 - ◆ 'We are an equal opportunity employer'
- Include the 'disability-friendly corporate logo' developed by National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People or the 'two ticks symbol' if you have signed up to this.
- Include references to relevant policies – for example, if you have a guaranteed interview scheme where you interview all disabled applicants who meet your selection criteria.



- Think about where you place your advertisement. Will it reach disabled people?
 - ◆ Consider using specialist referral agencies who work exclusively with disabled job seekers,
 - ◆ specialist publications read by lots of disabled people,
 - ◆ through the local disability NGOs and
 - ◆ placing advertisements on the Internet.
- Consider paying referral incentives at a higher rate to existing employees who introduce disabled job seekers.
- Making the advertisement can be accessed in various mediums – in print, and on the internet.

iii) Application Forms

Particular care should be taken to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated in the way that you deal with applications.

Application forms should be reviewed to ensure that they can be made available in alternative formats. Required formats will depend on an individual's needs, personal preferences and access to technology and may include large print, audio tape, email, Braille, floppy disk or CD. Alternative format applications should ask for the same information as standard format applications. It is the best practice to include a statement to this effect in standard formats, such as:

This application form is also available in alternative formats. Please contact (give the contact name, telephone number and email address and, if possible, fax and mobile phone number, of a particular person who has been briefed on what is required) to request your preferred format.

Application forms should not ask for unnecessary information that could put a disabled person in dilemma. For example, remove questions about having a driving license or about health conditions, unless these are very specifically relevant to the job, as identified in the person specification.

Make sure an opportunity is given for applicants to tell you about alternatives to work-related experience as some disabled people may have been unable to follow traditional career paths. Examples might include experience gained in a voluntary capacity, in unpaid work or through life experiences.

Give applicants the chance to tell you – through a standard question included on the application form – whether they require any special provision or facility at the interview. Sharing this information at an early stage should help to reassure the disabled person and will help you to arrange suitable provisions for the interview. This information must never be used as part of the selection process, unless you operate a guaranteed interview scheme. A suggested wording is given in below:

We will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process for persons with disabilities.

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or a health condition?

Yes No

What adjustments do you require in order to attend the interview?

iv) Short-listing Criteria

Criteria used for short-listing the job applicants should not discriminate against disabled people. These must be necessary to the job and must not place people with disability at a disadvantage in the selection process.

Everyone in the short-listing process should understand that applications from disabled people must be treated fairly, whether these are submitted in standard or alternative formats.

When you know that the applicant is a disabled person:

- Take account of how reasonable adjustments could enable the disabled person to meet the requirements of the person specification.
- Assess whether or not the person meets, or would meet, your criteria with these reasonable adjustments in place.
- Be flexible when thinking about how these criteria can be met by a disabled person – the question is, can they be met, not how.

In particular, look at how some frequently used criteria may discriminate and how it would be possible to make adjustments that would enable a disabled person to work just as effectively as anyone else.

Below are some examples of some criteria that might be potentially discriminatory:

- *A full driving license is often a standard requirement – is it really necessary? Does the person doing the job really need to be a driver, or can the job be done using public transport or a personal driver?*
- *Asking for experience of a particular type of computer software can exclude people. Many people use adapted technology with its own software. This might have a different name but usually does the same job, so rejecting a disabled person on that criteria could be discriminatory.*
- *Asking for an 'attractive' person for a customer-facing job is likely to be discriminatory – and which is likely to be more 'attractive' to customers, a pretty face or a helpful and cheerful personality? Rejection of a person with a disability would be discriminatory if it was on the basis of not fitting your criteria for what is 'attractive'.*
- *Making a decision based on an assumption about all people with a particular condition.*
- *Asking for qualifications that are not relevant or significant in terms of a particular job. If a disabled person does not have this qualification, for example if he or she has attended a special school where the opportunity to get the qualification was not available but they nevertheless have equivalent competence derived from work or life experiences, it would be reasonable to waive this requirement.*

You should assess individual application and decide a shortlist, taking account of the priority order of criteria from the person specification. If a guaranteed interview scheme is being used, all disabled people who meet the minimum criteria should be interviewed. If too many applicants meet the minimum criteria and secondary selection criteria are needed, care must again be taken to make these non-discriminatory. The best practice is to focus on positive action, so secondary criteria could favour disabled applicants.

v) Interview

a) Arranging Interviews

You must attempt to make reasonable adjustments where these are needed in the arrangements you make for the interview process. Adjustments are as individual as the people who need them. The main types of adjustments will involve:

- **Overcoming problems associated with physical features of your premises** – for example, arrangements may need to be made to use a ground floor room or to provide accessible car parking
- **Making other arrangements to ensure disabled applicants are not disadvantaged** – for example, reception staff will need to be briefed to ensure accessibility for any disabled people who will be attending the interviews; an induction loop or a sign language interpreter may be needed if you are interviewing a deaf applicant or tests may need to be modified in accessible formats for visually impaired applicants to ensure that they are fair.

All application forms and letters of invitation for the interview should ask candidates if they have any specific access needs for being able to attend and take part in the interview.

The need for reasonable adjustments should have been identified if you have taken a best practice approach by asking applicants about disability as part of the application process. If an applicant has declared a disability, you should make contact and ask about reasonable adjustments. This should be done as soon as you know these are needed, as some arrangements can take time – for example, organising a sign language interpreter for an interview with a deaf applicant.

b) Briefing the interviewers

Interviewers must ideally have attended a disability equality or awareness training. They should be briefed on disability and the organisation's disability recruitment policy. A suggested briefing is given below. In addition, interviewers may also find it useful to have training on 'communicating confidently with disabled job applicants'.

Disability briefing for interviewers:

- not to discriminate against disabled people.
- not to treat disabled people less favourably than they would treat others, for reasons related to disability
- not to discriminate in the way arrangements for and offers of employment are made and as a result of any physical features of the premises used for employment purposes
- to make reasonable adjustments to remove any substantial disadvantage faced by someone with a disability or health condition, which might include allowing appropriate support or facilities for the disabled person at interview and more interview time if there is discussion of issues related to disability and reasonable adjustments at the interview.

c) Interviewing

All interviews and other selection procedures should be objective and non-biased. As an interviewer, your goal is to select the best person for the job. Because of this, you don't want to miss the potential of disabled applicants.

Do not let your own assumptions and misunderstandings about disability get in their way – people with disabilities often develop innovative solutions to carry out everyday tasks, with or without technical aids or personal support.

It's also important that disabled people get a fair chance to tell you about their capabilities and potential during the interview. Any questions about someone's particular condition should only relate to their ability to do the job. It can be very useful to allow the person to guide you through their qualities and limitations, as they know their needs better than anyone else. This will help you to find out whether the person needs an adjustment and what this might be.

You should ask all applicants the same key questions and follow these up depending on the individuals' answers. You should also keep a record of each interview. You should objectively assess each applicant immediately after individual interviews. A standard procedure should be used and selection must be based on the agreed criteria.

Account should be taken of any reasonable adjustments that might be made to help disabled applicants do the job, for example by reassigning some minor duties to other employees or being flexible with working practices. Remember that selection should be based on the applicant's capability after reasonable adjustments have been made.

Examples of reasonable adjustments

A call centre normally employs supervisors on a full-time basis. A woman with Rheumatoid Arthritis applies for a job as a supervisor. Because of pain and fatigue relating to her condition she asks to do the job on a part-time basis. The call centre agrees. The hours of work offered amount to an adjustment to working practice.

An applicant for an administrative job appears not to be the best person for the job but only because her typing speed is too slow as a result of arthritis in her hands. If a reasonable adjustment – perhaps an adapted keyboard – would overcome this, her typing speed could be as good as other applicants. Therefore, it will be reasonable, on account of her typing speed with a standard keyboard, for the employer to allow the applicant to bring her own adapted keyboard or to provide one for use during the test.

STEP 4

Workplace Adjustments

It is recommended to invite successful applicants to look around the workplace when they are offered jobs, to assess the need for adjustments and to explore how these can best be carried out.

There are three kinds of reasonable adjustment that might need to be considered, individually or in combination:

Working arrangements - The way the work is done, managed or organised.

For example, if it is not possible or extremely difficult for the employee to attend meetings away from site, providing teleconferencing or video-conferencing as an alternative. Another example would be to allow the employee to work from home some or all of the time, in order to avoid or cut down on the health impact of travelling.

Working hours - Altering the times the employee works to accommodate time off for treatment or rehabilitation. This could vary from full-time flexible working, to part-time or job-share arrangements.

Other arrangements - This type of reasonable adjustment includes everything from equipment and personal assistance through to major alterations to the building. In reality, the most common reasonable adjustments in this category are likely to be such things as orthopaedic chairs, ergonomic keyboards and computer software.

Examples of workplace adjustments:

The design of a particular workplace makes it difficult for someone with a hearing impairment to hear, because the main office is open-plan and has hard flooring. This substantial disadvantage, caused by the physical features of the workplace, is removed by relocating the person in an adjoining section, which is situated in a smaller, carpeted room.

Before a man who is deafblind starts a new job he comes into the workplace to see what is required. He and his employer agree on what needs to be done. His employer arranges for paperwork to be provided in Braille, trains colleagues to communicate with him and provides disability equality training to his manager and colleagues.

It may be appropriate to get advice and information on support from an Access Consultant or a Disability Employment Specialist. This should be done as soon as possible because the process for securing adjustments can be slow.

It may also be necessary for the disabled person to return to the workplace, prior to actually starting work, to ensure that adjustments are suitable and complete.



i) Infrastructural Accessibility

One of the most important barriers is accessibility at office that includes adjustment and modification of machinery and the adaptation of the work environment to provide access to the place of work, to facilitate the employment of individuals with disabilities.

To make the office environment accessible, the ideal situation will be to have an environment that is universally designed. Taking a mainstream approach to disability will:

- Help you to anticipate adjustments that will be beneficial to many people, including those with disabilities and health conditions.
- Save money on retrofitting.



- Enhance your reputation as a advanced, disability-friendly and proactive organisation or business.
- Ensure consideration of disability becomes part of 'business as usual'.

Access Audits

An access audit is regarded as the first step towards improving accessibility. An Access audit is an important tool to identify barriers, within a building but also external areas such as play spaces, car parking etc. The audit provides a "base-line" assessment against which initial recommendations can be made. With the results of the access report, service providers are better equipped to bring key personnel and management to specific meetings to discuss what they are able to achieve within short and long-term time frames.

The elements covered in an access audit depend on the type and nature of the environment and services under consideration. Buildings and sites vary considerably and, although there will be common elements between particular types, no two will be exactly the same. Generally the elements covered in an Access audit include:-

- *Getting to the premises* - access from road or car park, lighting, signage, surfaces and street furniture
- *Getting into the premises* - entrance, steps, thresholds, doors, lobby/reception area, seating, and lighting
- *Getting around the premises* - corridors, doors, stairs, lifts, signage, floor surfaces, tonal contrasts and lighting
- *Using the services in the premises* - toilets, washrooms, changing and bathrooms, bedrooms, eating areas, bar, room layout, lighting, heating, switches, handles, seating, furniture, telephone, alarm, health and safety issues, management and staff attitudes
- *Exploring alternative ways of providing access to services* - where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a service to be accessed. For example, offering a home service, installing a call bell for help at an approved height, providing a piece of equipment or offering extra assistance from trained staff
- *Getting out of the building in an emergency* - fire exits, emergency routes, lighting and warning systems and safe refuge

- *Communication systems* – communication and instruction materials both printed and websites, training materials and manuals, instruction sheets, etc.

A complete accessibility audit involves visiting the venue, completing an access survey, taking photographs and discussions about other access issues with the management. The cost of an Access audit will vary depending on the nature of the business or undertaking. Generally the service is charged on an hourly fee basis plus travel costs, and normally informal discussions take place to determine the requirements and cost. It is important to ensure that the appointed body commissioned has ample experience in access auditing. It is not enough for the auditor to be a registered architect, engineer or building surveyor.

ii) Assistive Devices

Assistive devices are technical tools or services such as alphabet boards, text telephones, or text-to-speech conversion software used to assist people with physical or emotional disorders in performing certain actions, tasks, and activities. These can be crucial to the functioning and performance of an employee with disability at work place. Below are examples of most commonly used devices:

a) Assistive Listening Devices

INDUCTION LOOP SYSTEMS

Induction loop systems enhance communication for hearing aid users by reducing the background noise and amplifying useful information. There are various models available and options include portable, desk-top, under-counter and discreet personal units, and kits that can be installed to cover individual workstations or entire meeting rooms.

PORTABLE AMPLIFIER WITH HEADPHONES

The built-in or add-on microphones provide stereo sound amplification for general listening. It makes listening to conversations easier, whether in the cafeteria, in small groups or meetings. Some models come with an option to pick up sound from environments where an induction loop system is installed.

b) Computer Aids

With the help of some adaptations and specialist softwares most people with vision impairments are able to use the office computers independently. Following is a list of the commonly used aids to enhance accessibility of computers in the office environment.

SCREEN MAGNIFICATION LENS

Magnification lenses come as plastic sheets that can be placed in front of the computer screen, and offer various levels of magnification. Some models can be clamped in front of the computer monitor. However, the magnification quality achieved using the lens is not as good as the one achieved by using screen magnification software.

LARGE PRINT KEYBOARDS

There are two large print keyboards available. There is a standard size keyboard available with large print on the keys, which is 400% larger letters compared to standard keyboards. The keyboards are available in black letters with white or yellow background and white letters with black background.

VOICE RECOGNITION SOFTWARE

Voice Recognition Software enables the user to have an alternative to typing text into a computer. This is a possible solution for people who have difficulty with their hands or who have dyslexia and is not usually the recommended option for a person who is blind or partially sighted who can learn to touchtype. This is because the combination of equipment that is required to make voice in and voice out work together is expensive and requires extensive training.

SCREEN READER SOFTWARE/SCREEN OUTPUT SOFTWARE

A standard computer, whether laptop or desktop, can be adapted by adding a screen reader, which enables the computer to 'talk'. The screen reader will speak the text in its focus and the user navigates through menus, dialog boxes, edit fields and so on. The computer is controlled by a standard keyboard using key combinations called keyboard shortcuts, instead of a mouse.

STEP 5 Induction

i) Phased/ Supported Induction

It is best practice to give an induction to all those entering new jobs. Induction is likely to be the new recruit's first chance to meet colleagues, find his or her way around the premises and to learn about your organisation. Everything will be new and unexpected issues may arise.

Be sensitive to people who take time to be open about the effects of a disability and make sure that reasonable adjustments are taken into account for this phase of the employment. As always, these will largely depend on the individual concerned and, ideally, should have been identified before the person starts work for you.

Some disabled people may take longer than other employees to settle into a job. It may be appropriate to allow a longer induction period than usual for some employees. This is particularly relevant when reasonable adjustments are being tried out.

In some situations, it may be appropriate to assign another member of staff under a 'Buddy System' to support and mentor the new employee for a specified period of time. *For example some people experiencing a condition such as Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism, may find it difficult to interact and communicate with other people. A reasonable adjustment might include (with the individual's consent) briefing colleagues about the person's needs and organising a mentor or buddy in the workplace.*

A few companies, with support from Disability Employment Specialists, have successfully tried hand-holding and supporting disabled employees through the induction phase. This has assisted in the ongoing identification and resolution of issues until the disabled employee is comfortable in the new work environment.

Care must be taken to encourage independence and confidence in the disabled person and to avoid causing resentment from other colleagues.

In some situations, it may be appropriate to assign another member of staff under a 'Buddy System' to support and mentor the new employee for a specified period of time. *For example some people experiencing a condition such as Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism, may find it difficult to interact and communicate with other people. A reasonable adjustment might include (with the individual's consent) briefing colleagues about the person's needs and organising a mentor or buddy in the workplace. Because people with Asperger's often interpret written and verbal communication in a very literal way, it may be helpful to check back that someone has understood any new information or instructions.*

A few companies, with support from Disability Employment Specialists, have successfully tried hand-holding and supporting disabled employees through the induction phase. This has assisted in the ongoing identification and resolution of issues until the disabled employee is comfortable in the new work environment.

Care must be taken to encourage independence and confidence in the disabled person and to avoid causing resentment from other colleagues.

ii) Ensuring Support from Colleagues

Consider providing disability equality training for line managers and immediate colleagues, and sensitise them about the person, their disability and the reasonable adjustments that are being made. This is especially important if the success of these adjustments relies on cooperation from other people. This input should be done at the right time and sensitively, so that colleagues do not see the person as a potential threat or problem, or the adjustments as favouritism.

STEP 6

Managing performance and disability

In some organisations and businesses, the responsibility for performance and disability management lies with HR staff, a disability coordinator or someone else with specialist knowledge. In most cases, however, responsibility will lie with a line manager who may not have the special skills and knowledge. For this reason it is important to implement a standard, well-defined procedure.

Disability management should be put into practice in all aspects of recruitment, selection and employment, including performance. To do this effectively, you must also ensure that all your policies, procedures and practices are supportive to both the process and to disabled people in the workplace.

The disability management approach should all relate the factors that need to be considered, including:

- How the individual's disability is showing or may show itself in the workplace
- How these effects can be removed by making reasonable adjustments
- How reasonable adjustments will be implemented and assessed for effectiveness.

Disability management process

Stage 1

Identify employees who need management or support related to disability.

Stage 2

Initiate and manage the interview, assessment, decision-making and review process.

When managing disability or a long-term health condition with a new employee, discuss with the person where adjustments are required and what these might be. This will involve:

- Examining the person specification and job description to identify key tasks and capability standards for that individual in that job
- Arranging assessments with specialists such as Access Consultant, Ergonomics Expert and Disability Employment Specialist
- Collating reports to interpret and evaluate assessments to decide which adjustments are reasonable and appropriate.

Stage 3

Reasonable adjustments should be implemented and tested to evaluate their effectiveness for the individual in that particular job.

Stage 4

Where no effective reasonable adjustment can be found **consider redeployment** as an alternative to dismissal.

Step 7

Career Development

One common mistake is to overlook someone with a disability for promotion to management or a supervisor position because they cannot carry out some of the tasks due to their impairment. It is best practice to carry out regular performance reviews to provide a chance to discuss whether someone could carry out the tasks associated with promotion or transfer.

Some disabled people may need help to develop confidence in their abilities to undertake management training or other promotional opportunities offered to them. When appropriate, provide targeted training specifically for disabled people, for instance, by offering proactive personal development if you want to encourage disabled people to apply for supervisor or management positions.

In addition, consider making reasonable adjustments, perhaps by assigning some minor tasks of the role to another member of staff. It would probably be reasonable to swap some, which cause difficulties or are impossible, with other members of a team or department. This flexible approach means that you can capitalise on people's abilities and not be held back by unimportant limitations.



i) Mentoring

A mentor is a wise and reliable adviser. Mentoring is a useful way to encourage and support people's career development and can be particularly useful in providing an opportunity outside the usual line management relationship to build confidence and to explore areas of weakness confidentially.

In some cases it may be useful for the individual to be mentored by another disabled person, perhaps where that person has successfully moved up the career ladder. However, just because both people are disabled, they are no more likely to be able to relate to one another's life experiences than people who are non-disabled. For this reason all mentors, whether disabled or non-disabled, should go through disability equality training prior to becoming a mentor.

ii) Buddy System

A buddy system is another type of mentoring, where a particular individual is assigned to look out for another.

- This could include working alongside someone while learning the job or providing someone to go to, if there is a problem.
- This is a useful type of support system both in the short and the longer term for some disabled people. It will always be useful for a disabled person to know who to turn to if a problem arises and should prevent any problems being ignored or becoming unnecessarily difficult.
- However, the support should be regularly reviewed so that dependency is not created. A planned withdrawal should be agreed and monitored.

Step 8 Augmenting Skills of Disabled Job Seekers

The biggest problem faced by the sensitised and equal opportunity employers today is a lack of suitable skill pool amongst disabled job seekers. There is a mismatch in the skills that the present day job profiles require and what the special schools, vocation training centres and sheltered workshops preach. This lack of appropriate training has resulted in a reduced employment potential of persons with disabilities.

i) Experiential Methods

Organisations can assist in improving employability of disabled job seekers by offering activities that expose individuals to invaluable realities, dynamics, and idiosyncrasies of real work environments. The following experiential methods can help disabled candidates not only develop appropriate skill sets but also determine the types of positions to explore in the job seeking process. By assisting in capacity building and enhancing employability of disabled job seekers, employers increase the available pool of suitable employees.

- **Job Tours** – These involve meeting with the employer, not for a job interview, but simply to gather more information about the business and available job profiles. Touring various businesses exposes the job seeker to a variety of jobs and work environments.

- **Job Shadowing** – Job Shadowing involves spending time observing an individual as he/she performs a job. This can last for an hour, an entire day, or a series of days, depending on the nature of the job and the level of interest of the job seeker. It is a wonderful way to increase job seekers' knowledge of a field; it also provides the opportunity to gain experience interacting with employers without the pressure of a hiring decision.
- **Work Experience, Placements/Internships** – Offering Work Experience Placements/Internships to disabled people can give them a chance to build their confidence and capacity for work and to try out new roles. For employers, offering work experience means that you get a chance to 'try out' the person without committing yourself to employing them permanently.

To tap into an appropriate target pool of disabled job seekers in your local area, you should offer the above schemes in conjunction with disability organisations, vocational training/rehabilitation centres and disability employment specialists.

ii) Industry Specific Training Modules

The employers can assist in capacity building by:

- Sensitising the vocational training centres and NGOs to include training programmes to meet the specific skill requirements of their industry/ sector
- Developing e-learning modules of the specific skill sets required by them. These e-modules could be distributed through the organisation's website.
- Working in collaboration with Disability Employment Specialists to develop in-house training modules

The above activities may be taken up either as HR exercises or as CSR initiatives.

I can see, and that is why I can be happy, in what you call the dark, but which to me is golden. I can see a God-made world, not a manmade world.

- Helen Keller

Disclaimer

The advice in this document is based on experiential learning at ITC. ITC neither endorses the contents nor takes any responsibility regarding the accuracy or effectiveness of the information provided herein.

