

Employers' Attitudes And Concerns About The Employment Of Disabled People

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This study investigates the attitudes and concerns of employers about hiring individuals with disabilities in Saudi Arabia through a questionnaire distributed to different employers in the country. Responses indicated that they are favorable to the employment of workers with disability. However, they do not have a clear policy regarding the employment of such type of workers. Productivity, work performance and lack of employee skills were mentioned as top reasons for not employing a disabled person.

Field of Research: Human Resource Management

1. Introduction

Employer decision to hire and retain an employee can be influenced by a variety of factors. The study examines factors that influence employer decisions to hire and retain a person with a disability. According to the Americans with Disability Act (1990), a person is considered to have a disability if he (or she) has a "physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his (or her) ability to carry out normal day to day activities". "Substantial" means "more than minor" and "long term" means "has lasted, or is expected to last, 12 months or more". "Normal day to day activities" refers to an individual's "mobility; manual dexterity; physical co-ordination; continence; ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects; speech; hearing or eyesight; memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; perception of the risk of physical danger".

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According to Ledman and Brown (1993), people with disabilities are the nation's largest minority, and the only one that any person can join at any time. Disability in the Arab World is growing as a result of mainly three reasons: violence, poverty and malnutrition, and blood marriage (Kabbara, 2003). He added that "people with disabilities are endowed with abilities and potential that will make them effectively participate with other social groups in achieving comprehensive development of the Arab World, in particular if they have equal opportunities and suitable training and rehabilitation conditions". In Saudi Arabia, there are laws to accommodate people with disabilities, but society is still free to notify job applicants with handicaps that they cannot hire them specifically because of their condition (Arab News, 2008). According to the same source, businesses can be sued in civil court for discriminating against disabled people under national anti-discrimination laws. Such discrimination lawsuits in Saudi Arabia are virtually nonexistent. The article continues with a practical example of a Saudi employer who hired disabled Saudi men because they count as four Saudi employees for the purpose of abiding by the quotas of Saudization (i.e. the national policy that requires a certain percentage of workers of businesses to be filled by Saudi nationals). So, people with disabilities in the Arab World need special treatment and legislation to integrate them in society and provide them with opportunities to participate in the development of their countries. Al-Gain and Al-Abdulwahab (2002) mentioned that 3.73% of the population in Saudi Arabia has functional disabilities. Al Essa et al. (1997) found that 50% of parents had no knowledge of the causes of their children's diseases, their symptoms and their inheritance patterns. The main purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate the attitude of Saudi employers toward the employment of disabled people.

2. Literature Review

Employment is playing a vital role in our lives since it presents a way for our social inclusion and a source for gaining the necessary financial resources needed for our well-being. This statement is viable for normal people as well as disabled people. Nevertheless, studies have shown that negative attitudes regarding the employment of disabled people are still noticed from employers and resulting in discrimination in the hiring process and ineffective rehabilitation placement methods (Kilbury et al., 1992; Satcher, 1992; Shapiro, 1994; Scope, 2003).

Levy et al. (1992) studied the attitudes of 341 Fortune 500 corporate executives towards the employability of persons with severe disabilities. They found that attitudes were favorable to persons with disabilities and to their employability, both in terms of advantages for the individual and lack of disadvantages for others in the work setting. Tse (1994) studied 38 employers' expectations and evaluation of the job performance of employees with intellectual disability in Hong Kong. He found that employees were characterized as reliable, responsible, honest and well-motivated. They were also considered to be efficient and able to

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observe safety rules. Ravaud et al. (1992) reported that discrimination against job applicants on the basis of disability was higher in larger organizations.

Reisman and Reisman (1993) studied the degree of satisfaction of workplace supervisors toward the performance of employees with a learning disability. The findings show that the targeted employees' performance was rated better than the general workforce in punctuality, attendance, and ability to accept constructive criticism, but less positively in memory, social skills, learning transfer, following directions, and attention. Kregel and Unger (1993) indicated in their research that employers hold generally favorable attitudes toward the employment potential of individuals with disabilities.

Hartlage (1974) studied the factors affecting employer receptivity toward the mentally retarded. He found that there were significant differences among the types of industries and size of industry (larger industries were more receptive). Olson et al. (2001) said that employees with mental retardation are perceived to cost more than employees without disabilities. Graffam et al. (2002) studied the factors that influence employer decision in hiring and retaining an employee with a disability. Their sample included 643 employers, each of whom had employed a person with disability. They grouped the factors into four categories including individual factors, management factors, cost factors, and social factors. They found that individual factors were rated most important, management factors and cost factors were rated moderately important, whereas social factors were rated least important. The present study investigated the attitudes of employers and their concerns about hiring a person with a disability.

3. Methodology and Research Design

The sample for this study is selected from private companies in Saudi Arabia, having employed a person with a disability during the period from 2004 to 2008. Saudi Arabia is considered a pioneer country in the Arab world for the rehabilitation of disabled people, since there exists a certain consciousness and practical moves toward expanding national facilities for the employment of this class of the population. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to companies. The items of the questionnaire were either from the literature review (mainly from Graffam et al. (2002) and Hurstfield et al. (2003)) or developed by the author. The data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 16.0).

4. Discussion of Findings

The main purpose of this research was to determine the attitude of Saudi employers toward the employment of disabled people. A total of 27 cases were analyzed for this paper. This small sample size is explained by the difficulties encountered in the distribution process and the rate of cooperation from the companies. Nevertheless, since no similar study exists in the region, this study

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can be considered as a pilot and opens the door for future researches to be conducted in the region, using larger samples.

4.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by sector of activity, length of service and total number of employees. Of the 27 respondents, 21 (78%) were in the services sector, followed by 4 (8%) in the manufacturing sector and 2 (4%) in the agriculture sector. The distribution by size shows that most companies (85%) have more than 100 employees. Concerning the date of establishment, 17 companies (63%) were in service between ten and twenty years. Table 1 also shows that 23 companies (85%) have a human resources or personnel department.

Table 1
Respondents Details

Variable	Count	Variable	Count
Business		Having a HR or Personnel Department	
Agriculture	2	Yes	23
Manufacturing	4	No	4
Services	21		
Date of Establishment		Number of Employees	
Less than 5 years	1	Less than 50	2
5-10 years	5	50-100	2
10-20	17	100-200	10
More than 20 years	4	More than 200	13

4.2 Recruitment and Hiring Practices

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their recruitment and hiring practices. Table 2 shows that around 60% said that they normally advertise job vacancies. The press and internet seem to be the most favorable advertising channels for these companies. Concerning the recruitment methods, respondents said that job application forms, Curriculum Vitae and face-to-face interviews are the most common methods used. Occupational tests are quite spread method among these companies while telephone interviews are not widely used for recruitment purposes.

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Table 2
Recruitment Practices

Variable	Count	Variable	Count
How vacancies advertised		Normally advertise job vacancies	
Press	8	Yes	16
Job Centre	4	No	6
Recruitment agency	3	Do not know	5
Internet	9		
Word of mouth	3		
Recruitment Methods			
	Yes	No	Do not know
Job application forms	22	3	2
CVs	24	1	2
Occupational tests	17	4	6
Telephone interviews	9	15	3
Face-to-face interviews	26	0	1

4.3 Employment of Disabled People

Respondents were asked if they have employed an individual with disability during the past 5 years, and if yes, what kind of disability they had. Sixty-three percent said that they had employed disabled people during the past 5 years. The kind of disability, as shown Table 3, goes from vision (1 case), mobility and dexterity (7 cases), learning (1 case), hearing (5 cases), and speaking (5 cases). A broad question was asked as to whether organizations were aware of laws concerning the employment of disabled people. Only 11 (40%) said they have knowledge about such laws. Of the 27 respondents, 10 respondents expressed a favorable attitude for the employment of workers with disability. Another surprising finding was noticed when respondents were asked whether they have a policy regarding the employment of disabled people. Only 18% said that they do have such policy in their companies.

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Table 3
Employment of Disabled People

Variable	Count	Variable	Count
Have employed an individual with Disability during the past 5 years		Aware of laws concerning the employment of disabled people	
Yes	17	Yes	11
No	10	No	16
Kind of Disability			
Vision	1	Hearing	5
Mobility and Dexterity	7	Speaking	3
Learning	1		
Favorable for the employment of workers with Disability		Have a policy regarding the employment of disabled people	
Yes	10	Yes	5
No	4	No	11
Do not know	13	Do not know	11

4.4 Factors Affecting the Employment of Disabled People

Respondents were asked to show their concerns when hiring individuals with disability, compared to hiring a non-disabled person. Four factors were identified. These are: "individual" factor, "management" factor, "cost" factor, and "social" factor. Each of these factors was measured by a number of observed variables. For example, the factor labeled "individual" was measured by 8 items, as Table 4 shows. These variables were operationalized on a 5-point likert-type scale where 1= Very Low Importance, 2 = Low Importance, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Important and 5 = Very Important. Table 4 shows simple descriptive statistics in terms of mean and standard deviation for all observed variables.

Individual Factors: Inappropriate social behaviors and loyalty to the organization were recognized as the most important individual factors taken into consideration when hiring disabled people, followed by the work at a satisfactory standard and the performance of most of the assigned task.

Management Factors: According to respondents, hiring disabled people was not part of their long-term plan. Having a negative previous experience and the availability of a large skilled workforce are also important factors to be considered for not hiring such type of employees.

Cost Factors: Employers expressed their concern over occupational health and safety expenses and the higher rate of absenteeism associated with the employability of a person with disability.

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Social Factors: The belief in social responsibility and the concern about negative responses by customers appear to be important factors employers recognize when deciding to hire disabled people.

Table 4
Factors Affecting the Employment of Disabled People

	Items	Mean	SD
Individual Factors			
1	Inappropriate social behaviors	4.500	0.534
2	More loyalty to the organization	4.500	0.755
3	Work at a satisfactory standard	4.000	0.755
4	Undertake most of the assigned tasks	4.000	0.534
5	Difficulty adapting to changes	3.875	0.640
6	Appropriate hygiene	3.625	1.302
7	Being the best person for the job	3.250	1.488
8	Work rate similar to others	3.250	1.281
Management Factors			
1	Long-term plan by the employer	4.125	0.991
2	Negative previous experience	4.000	0.925
3	Availability of a large skilled workforce	4.000	1.309
4	Employer involvement in planning work integration	3.500	1.309
5	Availability of additional assistance	3.500	1.069
6	Concern about difficulty in terminating employment	3.125	0.834
Cost Factors			
1	Concern over Occupational Health and Safety Expenses	4.625	0.744
2	Higher rate of absenteeism	4.500	0.755
3	Availability of training to co-workers	4.000	0.755
4	Availability of subsidies/incentives for employers	4.000	1.195
5	Concern over duty of care responsibilities	3.625	0.744
6	Extra supervision	3.500	1.309
7	May require extra training	3.500	0.925
8	Access to a productivity-based wage	3.375	1.187
9	The cost of workplace modifications	3.375	0.916
Social Factors			
1	Belief in social responsibility	4.250	1.164
2	Concern about negative responses by customers	4.125	1.125
3	Effective disability awareness campaigns	4.000	0.755
4	Enhanced community image	4.000	0.916
5	Pressure to employ other disadvantaged people	4.000	0.925
6	Ability of staff to work with person with a disability	3.875	0.991
7	Discomfort of others over observable disability	3.625	1.407
8	Lack of social integration in the workplace	2.875	1.552

4.5 Reasons For Not Employing Disabled People

The respondents were asked to rank the three top reasons for not employing any disabled individual using a scale from 1 to 3 (1 = Highest, 2 = Second highest, 3= Third highest). The classification was done according to the largest reason mentioned as "highest", then "second highest" and followed by "third highest". Table 5 shows that productivity is the main concern that employers expressed as a reason for not employing disabled individuals, followed by the work performance/quality and the lack of necessary job skills/experience as the second and third highest reasons employers consider as a determinant for not hiring such type of people. Respondents said that financial costs, appearance, attendance or punctuality, community image, and turnover and retention represent low concerns or reasons for not employing disabled people.

Table 5
Ranking of Top Reasons for not Employing Disabled People

	Highest	Second Highest	Third Highest
Productivity	7	9	2
Work performance/quality	6	6	5
Lack of necessary job skills/experience	6	2	6
Safety	4	0	4
Coworker acceptance/teamwork /social skills	2	0	0
Dependability/dedication	1	2	0
Extra training or supervision	1	1	2
Financial incentives	0	2	1
Appearance	0	1	1
Attendance or punctuality	0	1	1
Community image	0	1	0
Turnover and retention	0	0	2
Costs (worker's compensation, accommodations)	0	0	2

5. Conclusion

The present paper demonstrates employers' attitudes toward the employability of disabled people in Saudi Arabia. One limitation of the present study is that the

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small size (N=27) which may represent a bias when interpreting the results. The lack of cooperation expressed by many companies has led to this result. Although the results of this study may not be statistically significant, they can serve as an effective pilot study for understanding the expected factors to be considered when hiring disabled people. As mentioned by Al-Gain and Al-Abdulwahab (2002), there are a number of difficulties associated with conducting research on disability related issues in Saudi Arabia. This research appears not to be the only study with such limitation. Kregel and Unger (1993) in their study on employer perceptions of the work potential of individuals with disabilities collected only 46 responses. They admitted that their results should be viewed cautiously and a preliminary information subject to further replication and verification.

In conclusion, it is very important for decision makers to increase the level of awareness about such social problem as the employability of disabled persons. Laws should be clear and understood by employers and incentives are to be considered by companies which hire such kind of employees. On the other hand, employers should consider reasonable accommodation to be included in the workplace when hiring a disabled person, such as altering the person's working hours, allowing the person to be absent during working hours for rehabilitation, assessment or treatment, giving the person more training, acquiring or modifying equipment, modifying instructions or reference manuals, modifying procedures for testing or assessment the performance of this category of employees, and giving him a physical access to the workplace such as special doors, paved way, etc..

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