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Disability and Employer Practices: Research Across the Disciplines

Abstract

[Excerpt] This book has three related purposes:

1. To raise the visibility of the critical issues surrounding equitable employment for people with disabilities, with a focus on workplace policies and practices.
2. To provide evidence of the importance of applying the very best science available to address these issues across all facets of the problem.
3. To illustrate how combining scientific efforts from the different disciplines to work closely on a common purpose, as well as the intimate involvement of key stakeholders, can provide extraordinary results that inform needed changes to policy and practice.

Keywords

employment, workers with disabilities, workplace policies

Disciplines

Disability Law | Labor and Employment Law | Labor Relations

Comments

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DISABILITY AND EMPLOYER
PRACTICES

Research across the Disciplines

SUSANNE M. BRUYÈRE, EDITOR

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DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT: FRAMING THE PROBLEM, AND OUR TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Susanne M. Bruyère, Sara VanLooy, Sarah von Schrader,
and Linda Barrington

This book is about the employment of people with disabilities in the United States and the important role of employer practices. Scenarios like the following play out in American workplaces daily:

- An HR recruitment professional in a large electronics company is asked to design a strategy to identify several hundred qualified individuals with disabilities within six months to fill positions across the organization's job categories in an effort to meet the 7 percent hiring target now required of U.S. federal government subcontractors.
- A Deaf package handler working for a mail delivery company successfully executes his job but cannot participate in company meetings without sign language interpretation services. He is afraid to ask for this assistance in case others would think less of him for needing it, or worse yet, he might lose his job after making this request.
- An HR talent acquisition professional for a large multinational technology company that has successfully employed over one thousand people with disabilities through hiring and effective medical leave and

return-to-work policies finds that there has been 65 percent turnover among these employees in the last year and needs to identify the reasons why.

- A successful longtime high-level executive in an advertising company who disclosed to his company that he has progressive multiple sclerosis, so that he could take intermittent leave when needed, learns that he has not been given the incremental salary increases given to others in comparable positions within the firm.
- An HR diversity and inclusion professional is asked to establish an employee resource group for individuals with disabilities in an effort to create a more inclusive climate for these individuals. She finds that few people are willing to come to the group, because they are uncomfortable identifying themselves as people with disabilities.

These scenarios are drawn from the range of challenges we have encountered in our work to increase access to and equitable inclusion in the workplace for people with disabilities. They accurately demonstrate the dilemmas faced by employers and the human resource professionals within companies who are tasked to create a diverse workforce that includes individuals with disabilities. A significant gap remains between ideal workplace disability policies and current realities. To improve this situation, effective disability-inclusive policies and practices must be pervasive in the workplace and throughout the employment process, including recruitment and hiring, compensation and benefits, workplace accommodations, retention, promotion, and advancement.

Underpinning this discussion is the recognition that there is no consensus on the best approach to address the challenge of incorporating the measurement of disability status within surveys and administrative records. There is no single, universally accepted definition of disability (Livermore and She 2007). Numerous definitions have been used over time—some focusing on medical conditions, some on functional limitations, and some on limitations on the ability to work. Mashaw and Reno (1996) counted over twenty definitions of disability used by public or private benefit programs, government agencies, and statisticians. Two prominent conceptualizations of disability dominate discussions. One defines certain conditions as disabling and counts people with those conditions as disabled. The other conceptualization views disability as an impairment that limits a person's capacity to function at work, in society, or in daily life.

A frequently applied framework of disability is the World Health Organization's (2001) International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF). This model views disability as a decrease in the ability to functionally engage and participate in the activities of life. Such decreases in function are seen as resulting from interactions between various health conditions and the environment in which they are experienced (Jette 2006). Although the sources of data from national and administrative surveys and original research herein described use an array of definitions, this framework is the one upon which this book lies philosophically. The heart of this book is built upon the belief that it is the environment and the nature of how we view and interact with people with disabilities that create disability, and not the nature of a person's impairment itself.

The Disability Employment Conundrum

People with disabilities make up at least 10 percent of the U.S. working-age population, yet national workforce participation statistics reveal that people with disabilities are not accessing employment at anywhere near the rates of their peers without disabilities. U.S. employers are missing out on a large portion of the available labor force. In 2013, the employment rate of Americans ages twenty-one to sixty-four with disabilities was 34.5 percent, compared to 76.8 percent for people without disabilities (Erickson, Lee, and von Schrader 2014). Unequal employment opportunities for people with disabilities result in a loss for this population, as they may not be able to access the financial security and community integration that come with working at a good job. People with disabilities who are employed earn less than nondisabled workers, and the earnings inequality increases among those with more education (Yin, Shaewitz, and Megra 2014). Top talent may be missed if employers are not prepared to hire and retain candidates who may have disabilities. Even among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, people with disabilities are employed at far lower levels than their nondisabled peers (58 percent vs. 85 percent, respectively) (Erickson et al. 2012, 278). By increasing our understanding of employment disparities and how employer practices are related to these disparate employment outcomes, we may be able to guide practice to bridge this gap.

Highlighting research approaches to build this type of understanding is the goal of this volume.

The intent of Sections 501 and 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and later Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), was the improvement of employment outcomes and the elimination of employment discrimination against individuals with disabilities. These groundbreaking laws affirmed that equal employment opportunity is a right of people with disabilities and led to important changes in employer practices around disability (Bruyère, Golden, and VanLooy, 2011). Despite the passage of the ADA, the employment gap (as well as gaps on other key economic indicators) between people with and without disabilities has remained significant over time (Bjelland et al. 2011). Recessionary periods have tended to make the situation even worse; for example, the recent “Great Recession” disproportionately affected workers with disabilities, with a 9 percent decrease in the representation of individuals with disabilities among the employed population in the United States (Kaye 2010). While employment for people without disabilities is on the rise again, the situation for workers with disabilities has not been as quick to bounce back (Kessler Foundation 2014).

These statistics not only confirm the existence of employment disparities for people with disabilities in the United States; they also reflect the loss to the American workforce of a significant pool of talent that remains largely untapped. A 2010 survey by the Kessler Foundation and the National Organization on Disability (NOD) reported that more than half of individuals with disabilities who were not employed said that lack of work or not being able to find work was the reason (Kessler/NOD 2010a). This is problematic not only for the individuals with disabilities who are unable to access work, but also for employers and the public welfare more broadly. The percentage of adults ages twenty-five to sixty-four receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits doubled between 1989 and 2009, from 2.3 to 4.6 percent. At the same time, “cash payments to SSDI recipients (adjusted for inflation) tripled to \$121 billion, and Medicare expenditures for SSDI recipients rose from \$18 billion to \$69 billion” (Autor 2011, 5–6). In 2008, sixty-three federal programs spent more than \$357 billion, and states spent \$71 billion, on programs to support working-age people with disabilities (Stapleton and Livermore 2011). Many are individuals with prior employment histories who are seasoned workers, who

have been forced to leave the workforce because of a significant health condition, illness, or accident that resulted in a disability. These are often individuals who might be employed if the workplace was receptive to accommodations that would enable them to remain at work and if public policies were designed in a way to support return to work without prematurely removing all SSDI safety nets (Burkhauser, Butler, and Kim 1995; Stapleton and Livermore 2011). Therefore, the importance of addressing the issue of the employment of individuals with disabilities goes beyond furthering the goal of all individuals' having equal employment opportunities, to reducing the escalating costs of social programs that may actually be disincentives to work for people with disabilities. Considerable research has been conducted on barriers to employment for people with disabilities, but significant knowledge gaps remain. In particular, more research is needed to examine the employer's side of the employment relationship to understand what is behind the continuing disparity in employment.

The Focus of This Book

This is no simple problem; many forces impact employment disparities for individuals with disabilities. In this volume, we describe the approaches and findings of a transdisciplinary team of researchers at Cornell University who are working to better understand employment disparities and how employer practices are related to employment outcomes and workplace experiences of people with disabilities.

Disability employment has traditionally been studied from the point of view of the "supply side," examining the medical, educational, psychological, and vocational inputs that affect a person's functioning and job skills (Chan et al. 2010). This approach, however, ignores the fact that labor market outcomes such as employment are determined when the *supply of* individuals' labor aligns with *demand for* labor on the part of employers. Our research has demonstrated that these resulting labor market outcomes are very different for people with and without disabilities. Regulatory policies are an attempt to level the playing field on which market outcomes are determined, influencing both individuals' opportunities and employer practices. Figure 1.1 represents a simplified version of the many forces influencing employment outcomes. While it is essential to understand the

entire context in which employment outcomes exist, we focus this research initiative on employer practices that may impact outcomes. Specifically, we are conducting research on a wide range of aspects of the employment process, including recruitment and hiring, technology and accessibility, total compensation, workplace inclusion, and retention and promotion, with the goal of better understanding what is working and what may serve as a barrier to full access to employment for people with disabilities.

From 2011 through 2015, the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) provided funding for a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employer Practices Related to Employment Outcomes among Individuals with Disabilities (EPRRTC) to the Employment and Disability Institute in the Cornell University ILR School.¹ This project's goals were (1) to create new knowledge about employer practices around disability, (2) to increase knowledge of how these practices relate to successful hiring, retention, and promotion of individuals with disabilities, and (3) to assist employers in incorporating these findings into policy and practice. Before describing

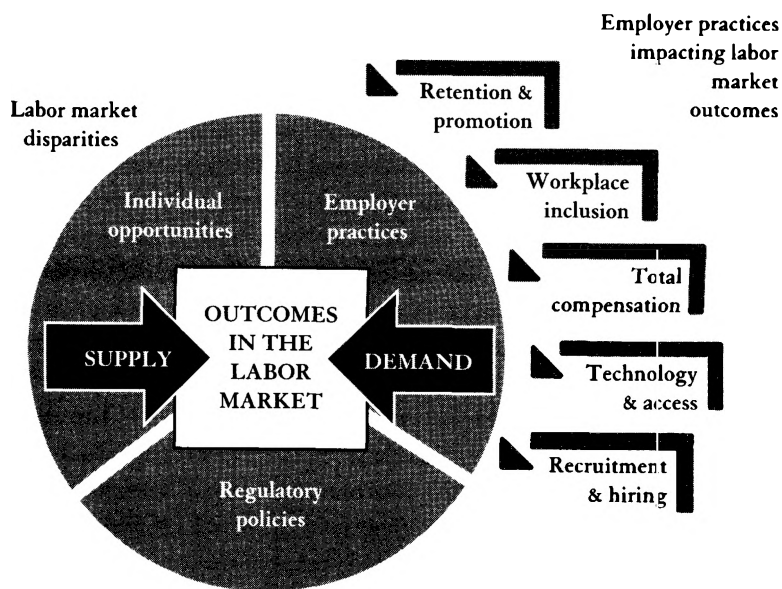


Figure 1.1 Labor market outcomes: individual disparities and employer practices

how our team approached research on employment practices that may ameliorate employment disparities, we must take a step back to describe the current context of and barriers to disability employment and why this research is so desperately needed.

Current Labor Market Context

While disability employment disparities have been present for years, there is an increasing urgency to address these issues as demographics shift. With an aging workforce and increasing numbers of veterans who became disabled in overseas conflicts, American workplaces must be better equipped to deal proactively with the attendant needs for accommodations and a disability-inclusive culture.

Aging Workforce, Returning Veterans, Students with Disabilities

By 2020, it is anticipated that nearly one in four Americans in the civilian labor force will be over the age of fifty-five (Toosi 2012). With the age of workers increasing, the incidence, severity, and duration of disability among workers is also likely to increase. To deal with these demographic changes, employers are being encouraged to align their benefits plans, physical facilities design, administrative procedures, and workplace culture to support and retain older workers (Vargo and Grzanowicz 2002). Although many employers are thinking about such changes, far fewer have actually begun to put needed changes in place. A 2013 study conducted by Cornell University and the Disability Management Employers Coalition revealed that although 86 percent of employers polled were concerned about the impacts of an aging workforce, only 36 percent addressed aging in the design of their disability and absence management programs (von Schrader et al. 2013).

In 2013, there were 21.4 million veterans age eighteen or over. Nearly one-half were veterans of World War II, the Korean War, or the Vietnam War; these veterans were all at least fifty-five years old, and over 70 percent were over sixty-five (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014c). Among younger veterans, for the 2.8 million who served during the Iraq War (2003 onward), the unemployment rate in 2013 was 8.8 percent for men

and 9.6 percent for women—much higher than the rates for the 3.2 million veterans of the Persian Gulf War (First Gulf War) era (1990–2001), which were 5.7 and 5.3 percent, respectively (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014c). In 2013, about 15 percent of all veterans had a service-connected disability. Among veterans of the Iraq War, nearly 30 percent reported a service-connected disability, and 70 percent of that group were in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014c).

Two specific disabilities have become “signature disabilities” for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan—traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In 2008, RAND reported that the studies it analyzed found that up to 15 percent of service members were affected by PTSD. Research on the prevalence of TBI is lacking, but the numbers may be roughly similar (RAND 2008). A 2009 study used modeling to predict that up to 40 percent of active military and up to 32 percent of reservists may ultimately exhibit PTSD symptoms (Atkinson, Guetz, and Wein 2009).

Findings from a study conducted by Rudstam, Gower, and Cook (2012), which asked employers about their knowledge of returning veterans with disabilities, suggest that many employers believe employing veterans with disabilities would benefit their organizations. Yet most employers are largely not aware of, and therefore do not use, the available resources that would enable them to find, recruit, hire, and accommodate veterans. Also, employers demonstrated significant gaps in knowledge related to hiring and accommodating employees with PTSD and TBI (Rudstam, Gower, and Cook 2012).

Another demographic that is now influencing the nature of the workforce and will necessitate an increased awareness of disability and accommodation in the workplace is the generation of potential workers born after the passage of the ADA. These youth and young adults, or the “ADA generation,” as they have been called by Senator Tom Harkin, “have attained unprecedented education levels in inclusive settings and have an expectation to be included as valued members of the American workforce” (U.S. Senate 2013, 2). They have been educated and participate in a society made more accessible and accommodating by the ADA, and they are aware of the rights the ADA affords them. They have had more equitable access than preceding generations not only to educational opportunities, but also to the social and cultural riches of community life such as movie

and entertainment venues, public libraries, museums, health facilities, sports facilities, and other recreational, cultural, and athletic opportunities made possible through the provisions of the ADA.

Although physical and programmatic access to educational preparation has improved as a result of regulatory changes like the ADA and also the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, inequities in opportunities for workforce participation remain for these young workers. Disparities in workforce participation begin in the teenage years; teenagers (between ages sixteen and nineteen) with disabilities had a labor force participation rate 3.5 percentage points lower than their peers without disabilities in 2013. This gap increases with age, rising to a 29-percentage-point difference among those ages twenty to twenty-four, and a 45.5-point difference for people ages twenty-five to thirty-four (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014d, table 1). Disparities are even larger for racial and ethnic minorities with disabilities. Young veterans with service-connected disabilities also have lower employment rates than their nondisabled counterparts (U.S. Senate 2013).

Pervasive inequality in employment, income, and poverty calls for our attention to directly address this issue. Employment for individuals with disabilities should be an important area of concern for the American people and policy makers, as people with disabilities are largely an untapped labor force. Changing demographics that include an aging workforce, significant numbers of veterans with disabilities, and increasing numbers of young people with disabilities who expect to be able to use their talents in the workforce make this a compelling item on our national agenda. Identification of the barriers to full employment and the facilitators that can lead to meaningful and lasting change in employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities is critical.

Employer Barriers to Employing People with Disabilities

In surveys and focus groups, employers frequently identify “pipeline problems” as barriers to employing more people with disabilities; that is, they point to a lack of qualified applicants, or a lack of experience or necessary skills and training in the applicants with disabilities they attract (Broussard 2006; Bruyère 2000; Bruyère, Erickson, and Horne 2002a; Lengnick-Hall, Gaunt, and Kulkarni 2008; Linkow et al. 2013; Rivera 2012). Employers

also indicate that their own lack of knowledge about accommodations, the perceived cost of accommodations, and the attitudes and stereotypes about disability held by supervisors and coworkers also create barriers to employment for people with disabilities (Able Trust 2003; Blanck and Schartz 2005; Brannick and Bruyère 1999; Bruyère 2000, 2002; Dixon, Kruse, and Van Horn 2003; Domzal, Houtenville, and Sharma 2008; Gilbride et al. 2003).

Rivera (2012) looked at the hiring of diverse employees in elite firms by interviewing 120 hiring decision-makers at top-tier firms. She found that the majority believed their hiring processes were fair and attributed existing disparities in their workforce to “the pipeline.” With this conceptualization, their diversity programs have focused on increasing the number of applicants they have to choose from, rather than on reducing bias in their decision-making processes. Rivera highlights a key issue with diversity practices in the companies she studied—there was a gulf between the recruiting process, which was primarily designed and conducted by the HR staff, and the final hiring decisions, which were made by the “revenue-generating professionals.” This is similar to Bruyère’s finding (2000) that in private-sector organizations, the immediate supervisor was most often cited as the final decision maker about accommodations, even though the majority of disability nondiscrimination training had been focused on HR personnel.

Much of the experimental research to date focuses on attitudes toward applicants and employees with disabilities and attitudes about disability itself. While employers generally report feeling positively toward people with disabilities, they also express concerns about hiring and accommodating that are at odds with their stated willingness to employ them (Burke et al. 2013). Many researchers report that the attitudes of supervisors and coworkers have a strong effect on the experiences of employees with disabilities (Bruyère, Erickson, and Ferrentino 2003; Colella 1996, 2001; Colella, DeNisi, and Varma 1998; Florey and Harrison 2000; Hernandez, Keys, and Balcazar 2004; Schur et al. 2014). A number of studies focused on employment discrimination claims (Bjelland et al. 2010; McMahon, Shaw, and Jaet 1995; Moss, Ullman, Starrett, et al. 1999) find that while alleged unlawful discharge complaints are most common, employees with disabilities perceive discrimination throughout the employment process—from hiring to on-the-job harassment to unlawful termination.

While employer surveys have generally found that employers express positive attitudes toward the idea of hiring people with disabilities (Colella and Bruyère 2011), these findings do not seem to translate to real-world behaviors, perhaps because respondents to such surveys tend to give socially desirable answers (Colella and Stone 2005; Unger 2002) or because the respondents may not be the people making the decisions (Colella and Stone 2005; Rivera 2012). Ren, Paetzold, and Colella (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of experimental studies of HR judgments of people with disabilities. They found that disability had a clear negative effect on performance expectations and hiring decisions, and that the negative effect was worse for mental disabilities than physical disabilities.

Fewer studies have focused on measuring employer practices and related outcomes (U.S. Department of Education 2010), and very little research has considered the question of how company policies and practices affect the employment of people with disabilities (Disability Case Study Research Consortium 2008). Studies seeking answers to the question of how best to improve employer practices around disability employment have frequently asked employers about their perceptions of effectiveness of practices, rather than whether the practice has actually been implemented in their workplace (Erickson et al. 2013).

Need for New Research on Disability-Related Employer Practices

The next step to improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities will require researchers to draw from a multiplicity of informants and use a variety of data sources and analytical models. By analyzing organizational data and eliciting the perspectives of key organizational leaders, human resource professionals, managers, coworkers, and individuals with disabilities themselves, we can reach a deeper understanding of the remaining barriers to full employment and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workplace, and we can find ways to successfully address them. Only by gathering insights from each of these contributors to the experience of disability in the workplace can we more accurately plan needed next steps to address employment disability discrimination and exclusionary practices.

Many of the barriers identified by employers regarding the hiring of individuals with disabilities may be reduced or overcome by educating

employers on issues of disability, and specifically by providing information on effective workplace policies and practices. Further research on how company policies and practices and the corresponding attitudes of coworkers, supervisors, and hiring managers affect the employment opportunities of people with disabilities is needed to inform the development of evidence-based practices to address these barriers (Disability Case Study Research Consortium 2008; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen, and Nijhuis 2013).

Little measurement has been done to date to determine whether the identified practices in the management of diversity, and especially disability diversity, show real-world promise in improving employment rates for people with disabilities. Yang and Konrad (2011) state that “implementation is an under-researched area in diversity management” (16). They go on to recommend that investigation is needed on organizational practices, such as “the number of practices, the extent to which the practices extend across the entire organization, and the consistency with which people managers use diversity management practices.”

A recent scoping review of the research literature around employer responses to disability in the workplace found that the number of studies on the topic has increased significantly since 1991 (Karpur, VanLooy, and Bruyère 2014). More and more employer research is being done, but it is still largely concentrated on studies of attitudes toward disability, it widely employs hypothetical scenarios administered under laboratory conditions rather than real-world data, and it relies heavily on survey methodologies to capture employer behavior. Most studies have analyzed self-reported perceptions of employer practices without placing these reports in the context of evidence from employer secondary data. Employer data could objectively verify perceptions of workplace practices, but this approach has not previously been widely pursued. And, importantly, these studies are being published primarily for an audience of service providers rather than employers, such that their findings are not reaching the audience that is the ultimate decision-maker in employment matters (Karpur, VanLooy, and Bruyère 2014). The existing literature focuses largely on describing employer practices in order to make recommendations for service rehabilitation delivery systems, support promising practices in vocational rehabilitation, and address barriers to implementation within those service-driven environments. Just 27 percent of the examined literature published between 1990 and 2010 was intended for an employer audience (Karpur,

VanLooy, and Bruyère 2014). The scoping review also revealed a paucity of publication outlets for disability research that reach employer audiences. This fact underscores the importance of engaging employers throughout the process of both developing and translating research on employer practices, as the creation of inclusive practices and policies within work environments is critical to the successful career navigation and economic parity of people with disabilities.

Importance of a Transdisciplinary Perspective

Numerous scholars have pointed to the desirability, if not the necessity, of combining diverse approaches and findings from multiple disciplines to study complex and multifaceted social issues (Kessel and Rosenfield 2008; Nissani 1997; Pitt-Catsoupes, Kossek, and Sweet 2006; Qin, Lancaster, and Allen 1997; Rosenfield 1992). New research is needed that not only focuses on the perspective of the employer and draws from the multiple perspectives within the workplace, but also draws from a wider variety of analytical methodologies and data sources. Disability employment inequity is an issue that is multifaceted and interfaces with many fields and functions in intricate ways on multiple levels, such as employment policy, law, human resource studies, rehabilitation medicine, vocational counseling, and workplace policy and practice, to name a few. Such complex problems necessitate solutions that are informed by perspectives from multiple backgrounds that individual disciplinary perspectives might otherwise be unable to provide.

Research on the employment of people with disabilities has been conducted in numerous individual areas such as legal studies,² economic policy,³ vocational rehabilitation counseling,⁴ industrial and organizational psychology,⁵ and disability management.⁶ More recently, Schur, Kruse, and Blanck (2013) provide an overview of the many ways in which people with disabilities have historically been excluded from full participation in community and economic life, drawing from literature across the social sciences, including economics, political science, psychology, disability studies, law, and sociology.

Significant gaps remain between the empirical evidence of disparities and barriers and the identification of real-life interventions that will improve the hiring, workplace retention, and advancement of individuals

with disabilities. Simply describing the issue from the viewpoints of different fields has not been sufficient. To date, few if any studies have sought to bring these multiple perspectives together in the field of employment and disability in a systematic way to shed greater light on the issues, identify key factors to resolve barriers, and positively impact employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Truly transdisciplinary approaches to researching how to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities are critically needed. The term “transdisciplinary” is being used here purposefully. The approaches detailed in this volume are pointedly attempting to transcend the limitations of singular-disciplinary or even multidisciplinary approaches and perspectives that have been applied to employment inequities for people with disabilities.

Wickson, Carew, and Russell (2006) identify the key characteristics of transdisciplinary research as problem focus, evolving methodology, and collaboration. Pohl (2011) distinguishes transdisciplinary research from other research approaches in that it is not focused as much on the evolution of knowledge in a particular disciplinary field, but rather on the application of effort to a comprehensive and multi-perspective approach in order to achieve a better understanding of real-world problems. Other authors identify the distinguishing features of transdisciplinary research as the inclusion of nonacademics, and a focus on the problem rather than individual disciplines, with no individual discipline being seen as having intellectual precedence, thereby requiring effort on the part of the researchers involved to open up their approaches to creative ways of applying their perspectives to a new way of thinking.

Our Cornell team is purposely transdisciplinary, and there are aspects of the model of transdisciplinary research that particularly guide our approaches and thinking. From the outset, our team focused on a clearly defined real-world problem: disparities in the employment of people with disabilities, and specifically how employer practices impact these pervasive disparities. Our approach stresses the importance of dialogue among disciplinary perspectives, stakeholder involvement throughout the research process, and effective translation of the acquired knowledge.

Diverse Disciplinary Perspectives

Our team includes individuals who work and have expertise in the fields of business, economics, econometrics, education, environmental design and

analysis, human resources, management, industrial/organizational psychology, public health, rehabilitation psychology, research methods, survey design, educational measurement, statistics, and vocational rehabilitation counseling. In addition, we engaged staff with a rich array of demonstrated skills and experience in website design and database development, videography, and social media to assist with our extensive knowledge translation activities. Each of these disciplines and areas of expertise offers a unique perspective that can inform our core areas of research—employer practices as they relate to employment disparities for individuals with disabilities—as well as our extensive efforts to disseminate research results to our target stakeholders.

Each of our team members was purposefully selected to address distinct issues of focus for the research described in this book, as well as to inform across-research efforts more broadly, contributing to a truly transdisciplinary approach in our work. Our economist colleagues assisted us generally by identifying relevant information from many large secondary/national survey and administrative datasets, by conducting analyses across the many identified datasets from which we drew relevant information about the status of people with disabilities in the U.S. workforce, and by documenting the extent of continuing economic and employment disparities. The more specialized labor market and compensation expertise of our economist colleagues also enabled us to examine with better precision the disparities in pay, as well as total compensation considered more broadly, between individuals with disabilities and their nondisabled peers.

Our colleagues with business, human resources, and management expertise greatly informed our research design and data collection efforts with employers during our research working groups and targeted membership surveys with multiple national employer representative associations. These colleagues also greatly facilitated access to employer associations and networks and individual employers for organizational case studies.

Our inclusion of the expertise of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology was very helpful to our employer focus groups described above, but even more critical to our in-depth case studies of particular companies. I-O psychology is the scientific study of the workplace. In its application, the rigor and methods of psychology are applied to issues of critical relevance to business, including talent management, coaching, assessment, selection, training, organizational development, performance, and work-life balance (Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology 2015). In these efforts,

we conducted focus groups and key informant interviews, but in addition we surveyed the company workforce, enabling us to capture a much more nuanced understanding of the combination of policies, practices, and workplace climate factors that are most influential for improving employment outcomes of people with disabilities throughout the employment process.

One of the areas of focus for this research was the impact of health benefits on the employment behavior of individuals with disabilities. Our colleagues in the fields of public health, vocational rehabilitation, and rehabilitation psychology provided both cross-cutting and targeted expertise to these efforts. These proficiency areas also more broadly informed the work across the projects, affording a disability-informed perspective to the research. Colleagues with no disability-focused research experience welcomed seasoned disability expertise to inform their research design, implementation, and interpretation efforts.

Members of the team with econometrics, research methods, statistics, survey design, measurement, evaluation, and related expertise contributed to distinct studies, but also regularly consulted across research projects, affording others the benefit of their rigorous methodological knowledge. Statisticians and measurement experts worked between project groups to discover ways to think about existing data, combine datasets, and analyze survey data. These new insights into mathematical models for real-world observations enriched our findings and supported discoveries of patterns in our data.

The rich array of disciplinary and methodological expertise described here has enabled our team to conduct rigorous and relevant research using many data sources and methodologies. What has made it a truly transdisciplinary experience, however, has been the regular and systematic sharing of expertise and viewpoints throughout all stages of the research process. From issue identification, hypothesis building, and research design formulation, through research execution and analysis, research team members regularly discussed their progress and their challenges in implementation and interpretation of findings with others on the research team, as well as with key stakeholders, to maximally inform the work they were conducting.

These transdisciplinary collaborative efforts have been equally important in the knowledge diffusion phases of this work, where we have

enriched our dissemination strategies through an informed transdisciplinary perspective in selecting key results for target audiences, as well as the mediums and networks by which distribution can most effectively occur. This has been the area where researchers, website designers, database developers, social media experts, and a strong administrative support team have not only transcended but truly leveraged disciplinary and expertise differences to create outstanding research that can be maximally accessed by others through online tools; an extensive website offering videos by our scientists, policy makers, and employers who use our research; and many related research briefs and scientific publications. The information about stakeholder involvement that follows here further illustrates how we have worked to maximize the intent of true transdisciplinary research.

Stakeholder Involvement in the Research Process: From Inception to Translation

The incorporation of participatory research methods is seen as paramount in a transdisciplinary model (Stock and Burton 2011). Participatory research is rooted in the idea that research must be done *with* people, rather than *on*, or *for*, people, and has been seen as a desired approach in the past several decades when working with individuals with disabilities (Whyte 1991; Bruyère 1993; Turnbull, Friesen, and Ramirez 1998). Such an approach is characterized by involving stakeholders in research design and data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as well as in the dissemination of the research findings. This approach emphasizes the construction of “communities of inquiry” that evolve around issues that are significant for the co-researchers (Reason and Bradbury 2008). Similarly, transdisciplinary research is said to be characterized by involvement of nonacademics from the very beginning, affording them the opportunity to “influence boundaries and methods” (Stock and Burton 2011, 1101).

Through building stakeholder networks and conducting research informed by the ultimate knowledge user, the transdisciplinary process has the potential to help bridge the knowledge-to-practice gap. When describing an evaluation of a transdisciplinary process, Walter et al. (2007) note that there is “an influence of a transdisciplinary process on the decision-making of stakeholders, especially through social network building and the

generation of knowledge relevant for action” (325). This highlights not only that transdisciplinary research is an effective model to address complex social problems, but also the importance of sharing findings to inform needed change. The involvement of stakeholders in addition to academics in the research process can increase the stakeholders’ awareness of, and ultimate adoption of, the research findings.

The chief “voice” being sought at an intimate level in this work has been that of employers from a variety of sectors, sizes, and industries. But, within that inquiry, the perspectives of various workplace actors, such as company leadership, equal opportunity officers, and human resource professionals, as well as supervisors, coworkers, and individuals with disabilities themselves, have been an integral part of the process. Knowledge gained from various ways of soliciting information from these stakeholders has contributed to an iterative process of incrementally informing and refining this research and also pointing more decisively to informational products that will contribute to needed workplace changes. “Knowledge translation” is a term first used by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in 2000, to conceptualize the issues involved in ensuring that research findings are ultimately implemented by the people who are in a position to do so. Knowledge translation has been described as “an interactive process underpinned by effective exchanges between researchers who create new knowledge and those who use it” (Sudsawad 2007, 2). Like transdisciplinary and participatory action research, it emphasizes the involvement throughout the research process of non-researchers who are stakeholders in the subject of the research. Knowledge translation can be conceptualized as a cycle whereby researchers are informed by stakeholders, then inform their stakeholders about new knowledge, and finally learn from the application of that knowledge. Graham et al. (2006) describe this as a “knowledge to action cycle” and emphasize the collaboration between knowledge producers and knowledge users (see figure 1.2).

In conceptualizing a research project, beyond developing a good understanding of what has already been done and what questions remain, it is important to ask the ultimate users of research, those who we hope will use the research to make changes, what they most need to know. This crucial part of knowledge translation is often overlooked, but can ensure that the audience with whom you plan to share the research has a part in identifying the questions of interest, which can make research more impactful (Rudstam et al. 2013).

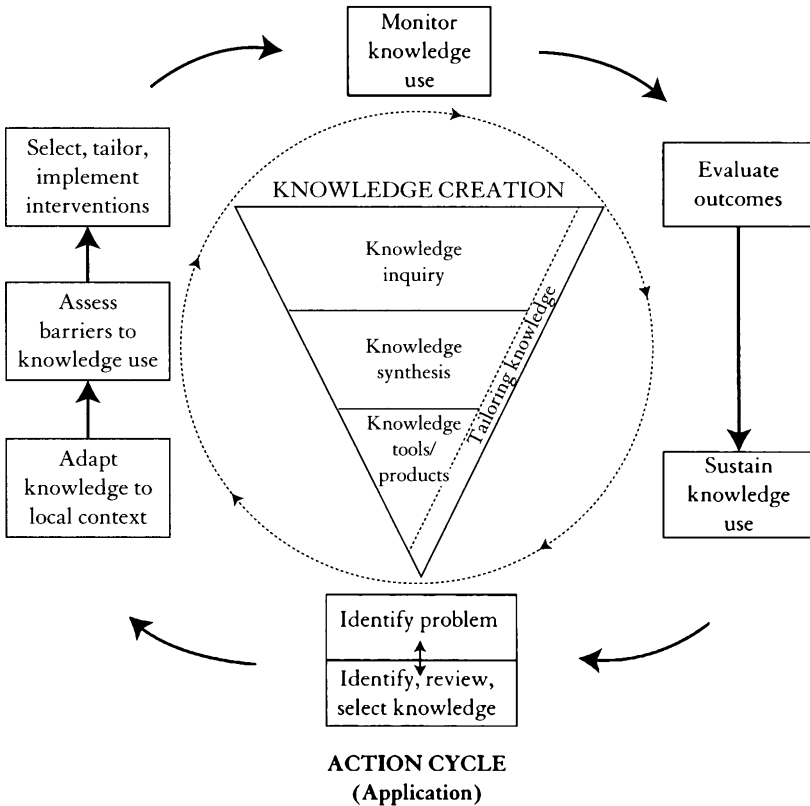


Figure 1.2 The KT cycle

Source: Graham et al. 2006.

Overview of Our Approach

In the remaining chapters of this volume, we describe the individual and cumulative efforts of a team of Cornell University researchers to address the problem of employment disparities for people with disabilities, using a transdisciplinary approach. Our team has drawn from a wide variety of data sources and employed an array of differing research methodologies to accomplish its intended tasks. Being purposely transdisciplinary in our approach has enabled our researchers to broaden the scope of their investigations and transcend some of the limitations experienced when addressing employment disparities with traditional unidimensional or unidisciplinary

approaches. Across all these efforts, we have worked closely with critical stakeholders to bring about desired longer-term success in improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, including key representatives of individual employers and employer associations, disability advocacy organizations, federal policy makers, and rehabilitation and disability employment service providers.

Figure 1.3 graphically presents our initiatives and approaches to building new and relevant knowledge to inform change. Beginning with a scoping review that mapped existing research, and with a series of employer working groups, our initiative framed the challenges and issues of improving labor market outcomes for people with disabilities through the lens of employer practices. Involving stakeholders in this framing (and throughout our initiative), we shaped multiple and transdisciplinary streams of research to understand disparities in labor market outcomes between individuals with and without disabilities and assess workplace practices that impact these outcomes. We continued the transdisciplinary approach and stakeholder involvement through the translation and dissemination of initiative results, striving to most effectively improve employer practices and advance the world of work for people with disabilities.

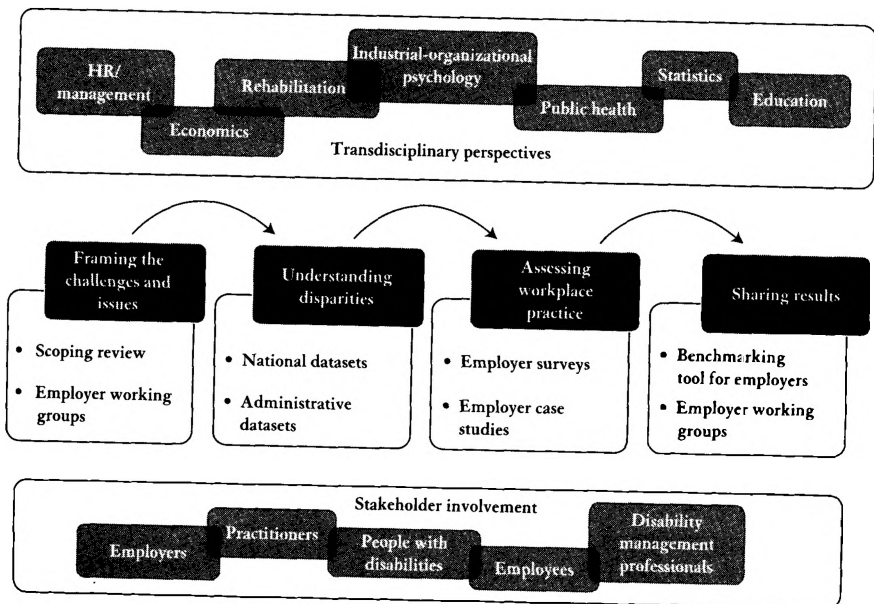


Figure 1.3 Employer practices and advancing the world of work for people with disabilities

This volume explains the various research methodologies and data sources that we have used to do so, provides relevant examples of related research using these datasets or methodologies that have informed our work, describes key findings that can inform employer policies and practices in minimizing employment disabilities discrimination and maximize employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and makes recommendations about additional approaches and data sources that are available for future research, policy analysis, and field-based applications.

These pages represent the expertise and methodologies of a diversity of fields. Some of the approaches described are in-depth reviews of organizational policies and practices literature; analysis of national survey datasets and administrative datasets from federal agencies and business organizations; focus groups of members of business associations; interviews with key informants; surveys of human resource professionals, and of individuals with disabilities; and in-depth organizational case studies. It is not our intent in this volume to provide an in-depth treatise on any of these methodologies. We recognize that in purposefully trying to present the breadth of our efforts, we are depicting a somewhat superficial treatment of each of the methodologies used. To address this potential limitation, we provide references/referrals to related sources for a more comprehensive treatment of many of the methodologies that we discuss here.

In addition, we describe the ways in which we have attempted to approximate the central core value in transdisciplinary research of involving multiple stakeholders across all facets of the research process, as well as resulting knowledge translation to real-world problems. Our intent in doing so is to encourage other researchers to consider some of the various research approaches and datasets that we have found useful in our efforts, to describe findings from our specific research efforts, and to share the transdisciplinary knowledge gained by our approach and proposals for its real-life application in the work environment. A brief description of each of the chapters follows.

Involving Employers in the Research Process

In chapter 2, “Engaging Employers as Stakeholders,” Linda Barrington outlines the premise of this work as a whole, presenting methods for directly involving employers in the research process. This is the critical basis of the work described in this volume, since employers both provide key

information in the research process and are the chief audience for dissemination of our findings if they are to effect meaningful workplace change over time. In addition, the research team early on and throughout the research process intimately engaged the employer perspective. Often, those attempting to address employment inequities for people with disabilities view employers solely as the *object* of change rather than as stakeholders in the change process. Barrington discusses the value of intimately involving employers in research that examines workplace barriers for people with disabilities, exploring the belief that if researchers hope to truly understand the issues at hand, and subsequently to effect changes in the workplace based on their findings, employers themselves must be involved more directly.

Chapter 2 reviews the characteristics of employers that should be considered when trying to better understand workplace policies and practices. Barrington also considers challenges in working closely with employers, such as gaining buy-in early in the research process, gaining the trust of the organization, identifying a key organizational contact, and negotiating continued participation in the research process. Research protocols such as assurances for the protection of human subjects can also present unique challenges. Chapter 2 ends with selected “lessons learned” from our own research over the past several years in working across many employer interests.

Using National Survey Datasets

Researchers studying employer behaviors often need to approach their subject from multiple vantage points, especially when there is no single data source with complete coverage of relevant information. Large national survey and administrative datasets that provide information on employers and employment can provide otherwise absent perspectives (Nazarov, Erickson, and Bruyère 2014).

In chapter 3, “Exploring National Survey Data,” William Erickson, Arun Karpur, and Kevin Hallock provide a broad overview of some interesting and important national datasets and how they can help inform research on the employment of individuals with disabilities. They first outline a selected set of available national survey data sources that

cover both employer practices and disability status and therefore inform about select factors related to the employment of people with disabilities. They then present a subset of sources, some of which are linkable, that include demographic data on individuals, disability status of individuals, and information on labor market outcomes including employer practices. They discuss the difficulties in using such data sources and describe some novel efforts they have made to take advantage of existing data sources in furthering the study of employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Finally, they describe some of the specific findings of empirical work that take advantage of the sources they have previously described and collected.

Administrative Datasets Informing Employer Practices

Hassan Enayati and Sarah von Schrader consider the applications of administrative datasets in chapter 4, "Using Administrative Data." Administrative data are generally collected by an organization in the course of its regular operations. Their fundamental purpose is to document institutional transactions or practices, and these datasets are maintained by many types of organizations, from government agencies to independent businesses of all sizes.

Administrative data are particularly useful simply because they already exist; no additional effort is needed to generate a dataset. Also, they are generally updated regularly with new information, which makes them ideal for longitudinal studies. Their comprehensive nature and the need for accuracy of organization-relevant variables imposed by business necessity are advantages. However, data of interest to researchers but less relevant to organizations may be less complete or not collected in administrative records. Also, administrative data often do not include counterfactual populations for comparison or socio-demographic control variables, so researchers must locate proxy data for their ideal variables.

Enayati and von Schrader continue their chapter by presenting examples of specific administrative datasets with utility for researchers interested in examining employer practices, and conclude by discussing the value of integrating detailed administrative data with survey data.

Use of Surveys to Inform Employer Practices

William Erickson, Sarah von Schrader, and Sara VanLooy address survey research in chapter 5, "Surveying Employers and Individuals with Disabilities." They examine this frequently used approach with an eye to understanding its strengths and limitations, presenting practical approaches and considerations specifically with regard to gathering information about employer practices and disability employment issues. One of the primary strengths of surveys is the ability to collect data from a large population to address specific research questions and to explore emerging issues that are not addressed in existing national survey data. There are several challenges to using a survey approach, especially with regard to accessing the most appropriate informants and sampling in such a way that allows generalization to a known population. While surveys can be tightly targeted, making them ideal for the collection of quantitative information, they are not as effective for the more in-depth, qualitative information that is best collected through interviews or focus group approaches.

The chapter begins with a discussion of surveys as a primary data collection approach for disability and employment data and discusses several possible types of survey informants for employer practices research, each of whom have access to different types of information and provide different perspectives. The authors then provide an overview of some key considerations that can affect the generalizability of results, including sampling approaches, survey administration mode, and strategies to increase response rate. Of course, as the perspectives of individuals with disabilities may be the focus of a survey, special considerations in surveying individuals with disabilities are discussed.

Use of In-Depth Case Studies in Private and Public Workplaces

In chapter 6, "Conducting Case Studies," Lisa Nishii and Susanne Bruyère review the purpose of case study research as a complement to the cross-organization studies described in the previous chapters, with in-depth data collected from employees *within* organizations. The authors begin with a discussion of how a case study can complement the previously described methodologies. Within-organization research can examine internal factors that are not usually captured in administrative, national, or

cross-organization datasets, and can study the interactions between individual experience and organizational context in great detail. There are numerous subjective perceptions, attitudes, and experiences about which researchers can learn only by asking employees themselves. The experience of each employee with managers and coworkers, and the environment created by the synthesis of policy, practice, and attitude within the organization, shape the final employment outcome.

This process can be examined with a case-study approach, using individual and multilevel analyses, combining the results of survey responses from employees from varying levels of the organizations. The authors also consider the value of combining the results of organizational survey efforts with findings from the interviews of key personnel such as senior managers and supervisors, and focus groups of employees with and without disabilities, and managers who perhaps have or have not had an opportunity to supervise an individual with a disability.

Knowledge Translation, and Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

In chapter 7, Susanne Bruyère, Ellice Switzer, Sarah von Schrader, Sara Van-Looy, and Linda Barrington trace the pathways from knowledge creation to knowledge diffusion that can be used to fully realize the benefits of a transdisciplinary model. They describe the advantages and challenges of traditional dissemination approaches such as conference presentations and the publication of scholarly articles, as well as newer approaches such as webcasts, webinars, blogs, and social media. Bruyère et al. describe their efforts to disseminate the knowledge about employer practices and behaviors that was acquired in the course of this research in order to persuade employers to make real changes and implement best practices, as well as to inform the disability advocacy community and individuals with disabilities themselves which practices to encourage employers to adopt in their respective workplaces.

Chapter 7 also summarizes the ways in which the transdisciplinary team involved in this research worked across their respective expertise, data sources, and methodological approaches to learn from and inform their own work and the cumulative findings across all research activities. The scientific knowledge gained, along with the personal and professional