Rhetoric and Reality of Disabilities Management in Organisations: A Strategy to Manage Employee Turnover

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Abstract

In this era of competition, management is interested in attracting and retaining competent employees in their organisations. In addition, management and other stakeholders are worried on how to manage workforce with disability effectively in their organisation. Employee disability is one element of workforce diversity which needs to be nurtured and managed effectively in organisation. Organisations which have effectively promoted diversity in organisation are in a position to attract and retain best talents in their organisation to cope with any changes in the business environment. A lot of research has been done on managing of workforce diversity in organisation but there is limited research on managing disability workforce in organisation. To fill this gap the paper purports to investigate the challenges, strategies and importance of managing employees with disability effectively in organisation. The methodology adopted in this study is to review critically the published articles.The study contributes to the body of knowledge by inspiring managers to n understand and appreciate the role played by workforce with disability in organizations.

Introduction

Several researchers have agreed that persons with disabilities face and will continue to face discrimination at workplaces (Maxwell, 2004; Knapp & Faley, 2006; Woodhams & Danieli, 2000; Jones & Schmidt, 2004; Beegle & Stock, 2003; Dibben *et al.,* 2001; Newton *et al.,* 2007). Disability is one aspect of human resource diversity management which refers to the social effects of physical or mental impairment. This definition, known as the 'social model' of disability, makes a clear distinction between the impairment itself (such as a medical condition that makes a person unable to walk). Similarly, disability is defined as the physical incapacity, either congenital or caused by injury, disease especially when limiting a person's ability to work or a lack of some asset, quality, or attribute, that prevents a person from doing something' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 9 Ed.). Discrimination on the basis of person disability status has been found in the studies by scholars (Perry et al., 1998; Taylor & Walker 1997; Bennington et al., 2000). This has lead to unemployment or other forms of under-utilisation of human resources (Crow *et al.,* 1998; Taylor & Walker, 1998; Bennington *et al.,* 2000). On the other hand, America Disabilities Act (ADA) states that not all individuals raise to the level of disability and much impairment are difficult to classify (Knapp & Faley, 2006). Knapp & Faley posits that, ADA goes on to state that first an individuals must show that they have a metal or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Second, individuals must show that they have a record of impairment, and lastly, individuals must show that they are regarded as having impairment. From these argument ADA defines "a qualified disabled individual" as an individual with a disability who, with or without a reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position that such individual holds or desires

Therefore, this paper investigates the challenges, strategies and benefits of promoting employees with disability in organization in this era of globalization.

Previous Studies and Conceptual Framework

Woodhams & Danieli (2006) stated that, historically disabled people have been defined with reference to biological property. The discrimination of those who deserve access to societal and workplace disability employment policies employment policies, from those who do not, has taken a number of forms always emphasising the biological. This is biological model of disability, since the emphases, those biological factors such as congenital inheritance, and diseases as the major cause of disability. While other scholars dismiss the biological models, they embraced the social models of disability, since they argue that disability is asocial construct and can only exist in an environment that devalues difference. Whereas the biological model casts disability as a negative experience, the social model highlights the positive dimensions of being disabled.

Most researchers (Woodhams & Danieli, 2000; Kaplan, 1999; Lawrence & Alam, 2000) have tried to look at the disability from different models which make case for disability management in the organisations. Kaplan (1999) and Hagan and Wellington (1992) have reviewed literatures on disability, citing different models which provides for social model, medical

model, rehabilitation model, and disability model. It is good to summarize the models thus; the moral model, which historically old, but associated to cultural norms and prejudices that is characterised by stigmatisation of disabled persons. Such stigmatisation ranges from being viewed as shameful, sinful to being cursed by bad omen. These feelings alone are scornful of people with disability by the society to which they should see the next that should be catering for their needs. In some countries particularly Africa, some communities associate disability with bad omen befalling a family or the community to which such disabled person belong to. These assertions make disabled persons to think of themselves as out-cursed persons who do not deserve to live a normal life as non disabled persons do.

The disability model argues that the disability of individuals as normal and is caused by structural arrangement of the environment of the disabled persons. It recognises social discrimination as one of the most significant problem that is experienced by the persons with disability. Furthermore, the model tries to move away from the cultural notion that disability is a shame and sin, but caused by the built environments. The rehabilitation model, argued that, persons with disabilities can actively participate in various activities of the organisation. In addition, the model views disabled person as people who should remain passive recipient of services and charity from the rest of the community in segregated institutions such rehabilitation centres as it is the case with most developing countries of Africa.

From the perspectives of various models, there is need for one to strike a balance to provide the disabled persons with equal opportunities as non disabled persons. This means coming up with an approach that ensures the dignity of the disabled persons without labelling them. For instance, Lawrence & Alam, (2000) posit that people with disabilities can be involved in decision making about their lives rather than passively accepting services as diagnosed on the basis of disabilities.

Conceptual Framework of Disability Management

The conceptual framework of managing workforce diversity effectively in an organisation is indicated in figure 1. The framework indicates that there are drivers which influence management to manage workforce with disability in organisation effectively. However, in the process of managing workforce with disabilities in organisation effectively there are faced with many challenges. These challenges include lack of policy formulation and implementation and lack of facilities to cater for disabled employees. Since, management are interested in attracting and retaining employees of high calibre whether, disabled or not they are compelled to come up with various strategies to lessen the challenges faced in managing disability workforce in organisation. These strategies include providing facilities to cater for the needs of the disabled workforce, good working environment, providing transportation, parking lots and many others. Therefore, by management putting in place various strategies to lessen the challenges faced by disabled workforce, then the organisation stands to benefit in terms of in managing their working effectively and this will lead to high degree of increases innovation and creativity, reduction of employee intention to quit and promotes good employee relations. However, if management fails to put in place proper strategies to manage workforce with disability it will lead to high labour turnover, low degree of innovation and creativity and industrial disputes.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework on Managing Work Force Disability
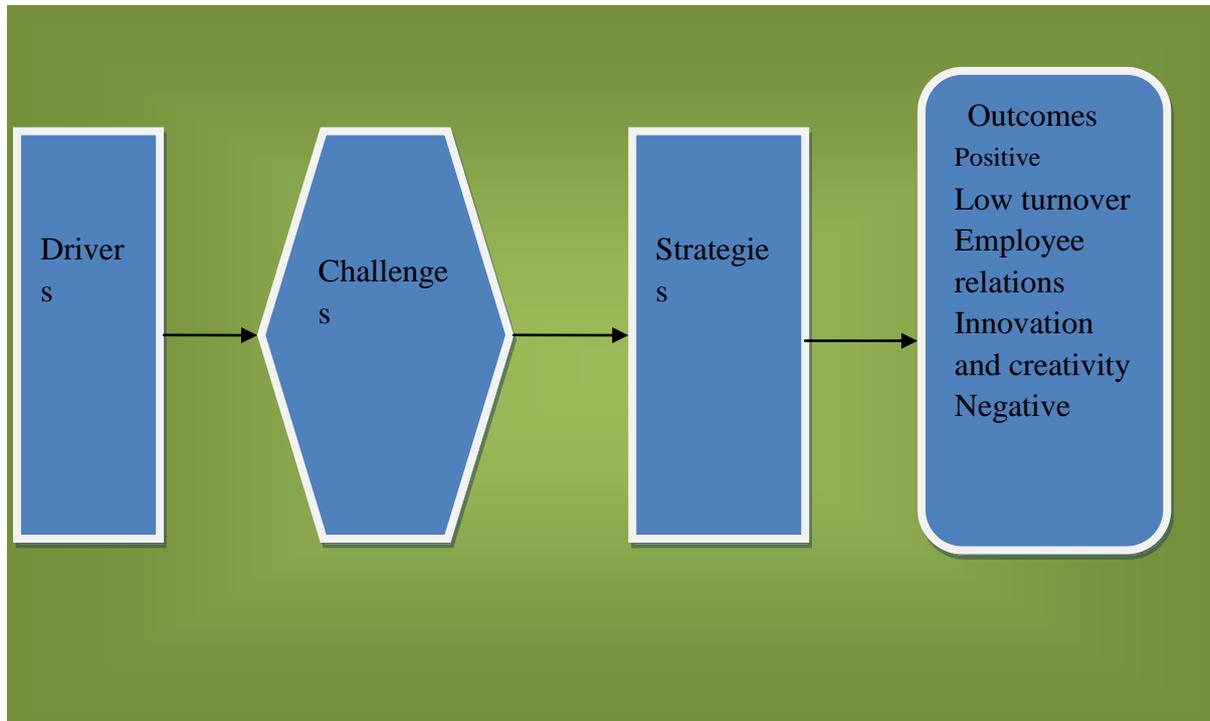
The Benefits of Disabilities Management in Organisation

The importance of effective human resource disabilities management from the organisation perspectives are, as globalisation is increasing, work force dwindling this group can help alleviate the shortage of manpower in organisations. Secondly, effective human disabilities management is likely to meet the needs of diverse customers, improved decision-making, reductions in costs associated with turnover and lawsuits, increased productivity, quality improvements, enhanced creativity and innovation. Thirdly, the organisations can adopt the social model approach by giving chance to disabled and those employees who will become disabled, as they seek to develop a socially responsible approach to employment and, that employing disabled people can enhance business profitability and dramatically improve the quality of life of individuals (Dibben *et al,* 2006). Fourth various viewpoints can facilitate unique and creative approaches to problem solving, thereby increasing creativity and innovation, which in turn lead to better organisational performance (Allen et al., 2004). Fifth, the business case for disability is that people want to buy from people who are like them; this means that organisations can appeal to the disabled persons by focus on the niche market that can be provided by these groups. Campbell (1996) point that, disabled people are equally productive, remain with employers for longer periods and tend to have better than average safety records

Equality is treated as instrumentally valuable in fighting poverty and destitution, and as necessary to self-respect, collaboration, solidarity and community (Lutz, 2001). This will result in improving the lives of persons with disabilities it removes over reliant on charity Organisations can take the opportunity of employing persons with disabilities as part of their

corporate social responsibilities, since this will be seen by the community where the organisation is doing business as giving back to them in form of employing persons with disabilities.

Challenges in Managing Disability Workforce

 Persons with disabilities obviously have various health problems that can potentially limit their productivity and thus their employment status. In addition, the disabled may also face lower and employment levels due to employer prejudice or statistical discrimination (Beegle & Stock, 2003; Dibben *et al.,* 2001). Beegle and Stock further argued that, the regulations requiring reasonable accommodation on the part of the employers also make it more it costly to employ disabled workers. The disabled worker must not only be paid his wage, but must also be provided a potentially costly accommodation that the firm would not have provided in the absence of the legislation, resulting in a decrease in the relative demand for disabled workers. With increased competition, globalisation, high quality products and services, most organisations find it difficult to employ people with disabilities simply because they cannot perform to their full potentials, while at the same time they are paid equally for the same work as their counterpart nondisabled persons. This supposition has been also supported by researchers (Beegle & Stock, 2003; Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001; Mudrick, 1997; DeLeire, 2000; Dibben *et al.,* 2001). The latest statistics of the size of the disabled population in relation to employment suggests that they are still significantly marginalised employment group (Woodhams& Danieli, 2000).

However, a part from the problems associated with the various legislations, the disabled persons are also faced with problems when they find the workplace designed according to nondisabled persons' requirement. Most buildings, work design, parking lots and transport systems particularly in developing countries have been made without taking into account that in our midst also exist the disabled persons with special needs different from nondisabled persons. Lutz (2001) for example opines that, human beings are all similar, but by no means alike when it comes to physical or mental characteristics. On this premise the disabled should treated with some degree of speciality. This has been corroborated by scholars such as (Jones & Schmidt, 1995; Newton *et al.,* 2007).

Another challenge facing the disabled workers is that, organisation internal policy and practices may be rigid and lack of commitment to disability policy at senior management level among organisations (Dibben *et al.,* 2001).

Disabilities management poses great challenges to both the government as well as organisations. Whereas government view it as its social responsibility to provide reasonable support to the disabled persons, organisations view it in terms of the contributions made by employing such persons. The productivity of the disabled persons becomes the norm for offering employment by taking into accounts the persons' physical characteristics against the job physical requirements (Newton *et al.,* 2007).   For instance, Jones & Schmidt (2004) points out the challenges of disabilities management as:

Policy issues concerning organisation's overall approach to employment of people with disabilities and a number of practical issues relating, for examples, to the recruitment process;

to the accommodation of existing employees who have become disabled during the course of their employment; to the provision of a suitable working environment; and to the retention of employees and the provision of career ladder opportunities.

Strong positive commitment from the organisation chief executive, the board of directors and the senior managers must be vigorously disseminated to all levels of organisation in order to create a supportive climate, which encourages, values and supports the employment of people with disabilities.

Workplace technology and increase use of technology also has been found to be posing a real challenge to both the employers and persons with disabilities. Disabled persons may find themselves rendered jobless with either complexity of the technologies, or simply the technology has altered the way the job is performed which imposes other requirements for them to perform (Knapp *et al.,* 2006; Jones & Schmidt, 2004). This may call for the employer to provide for training in order to retain such affected disabled workers (Jones & Schmidt, 2004). At the same time, technology can also be used to enhance the productivity of the disabled and create new opportunities for them.

Woodhams & Danieli (2000) argued that impairments can vary in terms of severity, stability (temporariness) and type. They further argued that, the environment can also play an enabling or obstructive role. The same individual who is severely disabled in one environment can be much less so in another. Attempts to accurately measure the size of the disabled population thus can flounder in the face of so many variables.

Strategies to Manage Workforce with Disabilities

Several studies (Campbell, 2004; Dibben *et al.,* 2001; James *et al.,* 2006) have suggested that the ideal ways to manage disabilities is to make some adjustment in the workplace that would accommodate the persons with disabilities as follows; focus on the person NOT the disability; buildings and facilities made accessible; Job application process adjusted; selection tests/inventories reviewed; workplace aid and adoptions; support staff; modified work schedules; Training and promotions; restructuring tasks and duties and reassignment.

However, the above principles lend to the better management of disabilities in organisations by creative adjustable work environment that will accommodate these groups still employers need to accept that, indeed managing disabilities goes beyond these parameters. For one, the organisations should ensure that there is post of Director Disabilities to oversee the recruitment and integration of the disabled persons in the organisation. Secondly, to oversee any other adjustments in the areas such as work design, building, parking lots, and transportation are in place in accordance to disabled workers needs. Thirdly, should not see these arrangements as driven by the legislations, but take them as part of their corporate social responsibilities in which they have participate in fully. Fourthly, the costs associated with the integration of disabled worker should not be taken as liability to the organisation, but as an income that would be offset by loyalty and good reputation that the organisation will enjoy from the community where it operates. Hence the development of clientele base from these community.

The best practices of disability management, cited in the literatures have demonstrated that, managing disabilities   it needs a combination of law and government agencies (Dibben *et al.,*

2001; Newton *et al.,* 2006; Lawrence & Alam, 2000; James et al., 2006) to encourage employers to adopt better policies that will ensure effective management of disability in organisations. While, these laws and organisations policies may improve the situation for the disabled persons, there is also need for joint labour- management committees to look into the real problems and challenges faced by the persons with disabilities at workplace(Shrey, 2006). The joint labour-management committees will facilitate positive collaboration working relationships that are necessary between the employer, union, disability management coordinator, supervisor and external health care provider. Jodoin & Harder (2004) also corroborated the above suggestions. However, voluntary disability management has not been given weight in the foregoing debate by scholars since it argued that, the employers will focus their efforts on at risk employees they value most, while ignore other employees simply they are viewed less in terms of the jobs they occupy. Lack senior management commitment has also been cited as failure to seek for voluntary disability management (Thornton, 2003; Dibben *et al.,* 2001).

From the literatures we have identified that most researchers argued that, disability management require both combinations of legal framework as well as voluntary. Without the other, one cannot succeed. Researchers assert that, crafting legal framework alone is not enough without rigour in its implementation. They argue that, employers should take steps towards accepting responsibility for making reasonable adjustment and accommodation at the workplace. Strong commitment from top management in promulgated organisational policies addressing the disability issues.

Conclusions and Implications

Careful analyses of the related literatures still paint a gloomy picture of the status of persons with disability management in organisation. Although, most organisations have attempted to enact disability policies, still they have failed to provide effective means of addressing the implementation process. Similarly, the effectiveness of the legislations could not be felt, since the costs of complying with the Act were large enough to reduce the demand for disabled workers and undo its intended effects. Hence, there is need for strong use legislations and government agencies to encourage employers to establish effective disability management policies in organisations.

 The   various legislations in place reveals some degree of government interventions, but failed to address the actual workplaces limitations. There is prevalent of workplace prejudices among the employers, and the effects of built environments that have not been effectively addressed by the legislations. Thus Lutz (2001), 'equality is treated as instrumentally valuable in fighting poverty and destitution, and as necessary to self-respect, collaboration, solidarity and community.'

The contribution of this viewpoint is that it will inspire managers and other policy makers to come up with various interventions to promote workforce with disability in their organisation. In addition, it will provoke managers in various organisations to appreciate the role of workforce with disability, since disability is not inability. In addition, this preliminary work will broaden the literature on managing workforce diversity effectively in organisation.

Finally, non-governmental organisations and other human resource practitioners would be inspired also by this work to come up with various approaches on how to assist the disability workforce in their organisations.

The limitation of the study is that it needs to be contrasted with empirical findings to get a holistic view on how to manage workforce with disability in organisation. In addition, there is need for triangulation approaches to be used with empirical findings to get concrete conclusions on how to manage workforce diversity in organisation.

Recommendations to Manage Workforce with Disability in Organisation

1. There should be a policy in place to manage disabilities in organisation. Policy formulation in any organisation should have provisions on how disability workforce is to be managed in their organisation.

2. Financial incentives. Financial incentives should be put in place by management to promote disability workforce in organisations. For instance stock ownership, spots a wards and many others. This will motivate and retain disability workforce in organisations.

3. Programs geared towards career development and advancement of employees with disability should be encouraged by management. In addition, this approach will prepare them to cope with any changes in the work environment.

4. Flexibility working hours. Disability workforce should be encouraged to have flexibility working hours which to a certain degree will minimise stressors caused by inflexibility working hours. In addition, the employees with disability should be allowed to have reduced responsibilities.

5. Good organisational climate. Disability workforce needs to work in environment which is conducive. Therefore, there is need to put in place various facilities which will make them to move from one place to another in the workplace without much difficulty. Similarly, there is also need to have good supervision in place at all levels of management.

6. There should be always benchmarking measure to manage disability workforce programs in organisation for the purpose of cost savings.

7. There is need for alignment disability management strategies with organisational strategies to enhance better management of workforce with disability.

8. Regularly review of disability management programs and policies should be encouraged in organisations

9. Management and employee should support employees with disability. This will be done by coworkers offering assistance with child care, meals and rides to medical appointments.

10. Building and parking lots should be designed in a way that it caters for the interest of the workforce with disabilities.

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