A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIRING/HR MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE WITH VISUALLY IMPAIRED EMPLOYEES:

THE SOCIO-TECHNICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This research paper aims to provide a qualitative analysis of hiring managers' perspectives on the recruitment and employment of visually impaired employees. The study delves into the perspectives of hiring managers, exploring their attitudes, challenges faced, and successful strategies in fostering visually impaired persons to be included. To promote diversity and inclusivity in the workplace this research contributes to the development of more effective and informed policies. We found that even after so many policy schemes and support from the government the organizations are not ready to hire visually impaired persons.

Keywords: Visually impaired employees, hiring managers, diversity, inclusion, qualitative analysis, employment barriers.

1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, more than 2 billion people globally have issues with their eyesight, such as near or distant vision impairment and in case of India, the data reveals that there are 4.95 million blind and 70 million visually impaired persons. When we compare with the 79% persons who do not have disabilities, we will find that only 44% of the persons who are blind or are visually impaired are employed (Who, 2023). In the current time, the discourse and discussion regarding D&I (Diversity & Inclusion) has gained several new facets of its own, bringing forth the demand for organizations to employ persons with physical disabilities such as visual impairment (Bhaskar et. al., 2023). It is to be noted that visually impaired persons face greater challenges at work, when compared to the physically impaired persons as to perform any given work, in congruence with the desired levels of quality, a strong and sure eyesight is needed which if found lacking, creates its own share of unique challenges for such employees arising from the external factors related to the infrastructure of the workplace and the perceptions of the society and from the internal factors such as the specific needs and capabilities of the visually impaired people. Organizations who are willing to employ such persons need to address these challenges to create a level playing field, enabling the visually impaired employees to contribute to the success of the organization through the promotion of innovation, creation of a empathetic and positive work environment and provision of opportunities for the utilization of their unique skill sets. An organization which enables this, is sure to attract quality visually impaired talent.

2. Literature Review

One of the key pillars of social inclusion and economic freedom is the gainful employment of persons with disabilities as these people have the talent, but due to their physical challenges, they face barriers, which prevent them from exhibiting them in a complete basis. Several research studies have identified the relationships between health, socio economic status and the participation of the labor force for the identification of the factors, which could lead to the gainful employment of persons with disabilities in a significant way. Schuring (2013) has found that poor health and weaker socio-economic status can cause the labor force to exit due to reasons such as unemployment, forced retirement and disability pensions. This could suggest that individuals with disabilities face higher barriers to employment due to their unique situations in life and their socio-economic circumstances in life.

In addition, several research studies have also found challenges of a specific nature for persons suffering from certain kinds of disabilities, for example – 1) Multiple Sclerosis, a health disorder, where the body's immune system attacks the myelin sheath covering the nerve cells

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falsely identifying it as a foreign object, resulting in fatigue, poor performance in cognitive tests and in a few extreme cases, severe neurological impairment, resulting in poor performance at work which ultimately results in loss of employment (Strober, 2012). 2) Stroke induced depression was found to result in poor performance at work due to impaired cognition, functional difficulties which could affect a person's future in his job (Ayerbe, 2011). These findings reveal the complex relationship between a person's health condition and his employment outcome and can have significant implications for persons with disabilities.

Lindsay (2018) has stated that an organization can benefit by employing persons with disabilities due to the benefits such as increased profitability, quality talent retention, reduced training costs, etc. which could act in the favor of organizations hiring individuals with disabilities.

Of late, interest in the creation of a fair, equitable and diverse workplaces and organizations is on the rise and many prominent companies are affirming their commitments to the DEI Agenda (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) for the creation of a workplace which is more different and unique than before, enabling the generation of job opportunities for large classes of people. Organizations who employ individuals with disabilities will resonate well from the DEI perspective as they are taking the concrete steps for the creation of a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Burke (2013) have stated that employers have a positive attitude regarding individuals with disabilities and Hartnett (2011) have found that that employers are willing to employ and promote persons with disabilities in the workplace. These findings work in support of the suggestion that there is a gap in between the positive attitudes held regarding the individuals with disabilities and the actual behavioral intentions in the workplaces. Vornholt (2018) have highlighted the importance of understanding the important factors related to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Chan (2010) have stated that positive employment outcomes can be increased for individuals with intellectual disabilities who have been a part of the programs offered in the colleges and universities. The findings suggest that there is a need for addressing the 'demand side factors' and for the provision of educational opportunities, designed in congruence with the unique and specific needs of the students/individuals with disabilities, in order to improve their chances for securing gainful employment.

3. Objectives of the Research

- To explore hiring managers' attitudes towards employing visually impaired employees.
- To identify challenges faced by hiring managers in the recruitment process.
- To analyze successful strategies implemented by hiring managers for inclusivity.

4. Methodology

The researchers selected the methodology of qualitative data collection for the purpose of the research. 25 Hiring managers and CEOs were interviewed by the researchers, through the questionnaires administered through google forms.

4.1 Focus group discussions
The researchers conducted focused group discussions with the samples. Two groups of samples were formed by the researchers for the purpose of the focused group discussion. One group consisted of the samples who had employed visually impaired individuals as employees in their respective organizations and the other who did not employ such individuals as employees in their organizations. Through the discussions, data was acquired for covering the relevant points in the research by the researchers.

4.2 Observational mapping
The data so gathered was subjected to the observational mapping analysis for the demarcation of the common observations and loopholes found in the data. The results were utilized for presentation of the data in form of insights for further weighing and presentation in percentile formats.

4.3 Further analysis and refinement of the secondary data
The insights acquired from the processing of the raw data through observational mapping was collated with the secondary research literature for the further refinement of the data into usable information, which was the further used for the generation of results into the study.

5. Results
Exploring hiring managers' perspectives on employing visually impaired individuals reveals a nuanced understanding of their attitudes, challenges, and considerations. Various factors influence the inclusion of visually impaired individuals in the workplace. However, there are several barriers to be crossed as many doubts and questions can be asked, particularly regarding the ability of the visually impaired individuals' abilities in performing the duties and responsibilities of the jobs, which is a serious barrier impeding the efforts of the visually impaired individuals in their efforts for seeking gainful employment. The major challenge faced by HR professionals in the recruitment process can be summed

up in this question - "Exactly what job or what responsibilities can the visually impaired individuals fulfill in the workplaces?" This is the critical question that is asked, as majority of the workplaces may not be ready for such employees with no physical space and digital tools. Some of them are concerned about effective communication within the team especially if they are not familiar with adaptive technologies and other communication methods. Only a few hiring managers have forward thinking and recognize the potential for innovation and creativity that visually impaired employees bring to the team. Some of them consider hiring visually impaired employees as a commitment to legal and ethical compliance with anti-discrimination laws and equal opportunity employment.
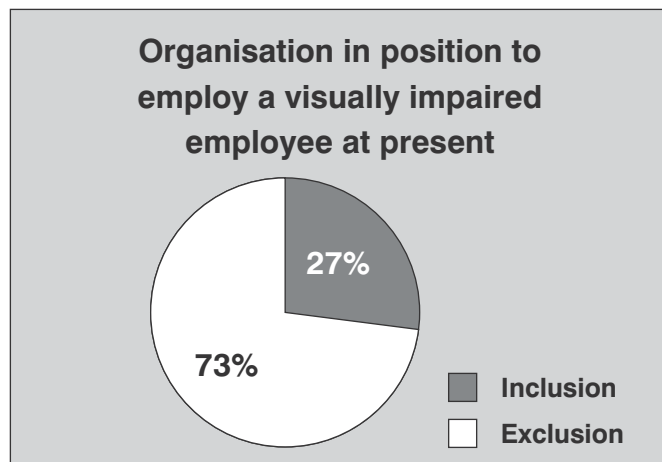

Fig. 1. Organization in a position to employ a visually impaired employee at present as per the survey

The average size of visually impaired persons that the hiring manager thinks can be employed in the institution as a proportion to the total workforce is 1 to 2 %. However, those organizations that hire visually impaired employees have some successful strategies implemented by hiring managers for inclusivity such as management decisions and policies for recruiting persons with disabilities including the visually impaired. They provide technological support to visually impaired employees so that they can work independently just as sighted employees. The technological support may include providing screen reading software, document scanners, etc. They broadly identify the task or role that can be performed by visually impaired employees at the workplace. Some of the organizations also endeavor to arrange and organize special training for visually impaired employees and sensitization workshops/sessions for other sighted employees who are likely to deal with or interact with the visually impaired employees.

6. Conclusion

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have risen far above their prior status as 'buzzwords' and are guiding the hiring policies in several organizations around the world. The word 'Equity' can be understood as the practice for the recognition and addressal of issues creating barriers and disadvantages so that solutions to the lacunae can be found, enabling the creation of more chances for disadvantaged individuals in securing gainful employment. Of late, several organizations have expressed their willingness to employ the physically handicapped individuals, who have demonstrated their talents and skills in performing the jobs. But, it is not so easy for the visually handicapped individuals for securing good employment opportunities due to the unique challenges that have arisen as a result of their ocular condition. Accommodating visually impaired employees involves implementing practices that promote inclusivity, accessibility, and equal opportunities in the workplace. It is unfortunate that the practice of employment of the visually impaired candidates is the exception, not the norm as very few HR Incharges/ Hiring managers and CEOs are willing to employ visually impaired employees.

Efforts by the Government of India such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 have been initiated, but the results of such endeavors are not resonating with the industry as majority of the organizations have not done much efforts for employing visually impaired persons which needs to change and this should begin with the senior most echelons of the organizations, who can create the necessary space and work environment which can enable a visually impaired individual to perform gainful work such as braille enabled computers and readers, voice command activated smart devices, etc. as through such means, the visually impaired individuals can perform on par with their colleagues in the workplaces. Organizations that prioritize diversity and inclusion not only create a more equitable workplace but also position themselves for long-term success, resilience, and positive societal impact.

7. Recommendations

The researchers would like to make the following recommendations, for improving the situation for the visually impaired individuals in their quest for securing gainful employment opportunities:
1. Creation of sub-policies in favor of the visually impaired individuals' efforts for seeking employment through the creation of job and employment opportunities in favor of them as a part of the company's D.E.I. Policy under the 'Equity' vertical
2. Encourage the treatment of visually impaired employees with empathy and not sympathy which could lead to such individuals being assigned with work suited to their unique situations in life.
3. Create a culture within the organization that seeks to reduce and eliminate the prejudicial judgment and bias

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regarding the visually impaired individuals in the organizations so that the chances of them facing ridicule and scorn for their condition in life will be reduced, enabling them a chance to perform their work with dignity.

4. Enable the provision of Braille and Voice command enabled smart devices and screen readers, enabling the visually impaired individuals to perform their work on a same level of quality like their visually sound colleagues. The provision can also include a requirement for the visually impaired employees to be accountable to themselves and to their organizations by making full use of such devices to deliver the desired levels of quality and quantity in their jobs.

5. Encourage a culture of open communication with the visually impaired individuals to make them feel comfortable and valued in the organization as such an initiative can enable them to feel motivated to increase the levels of value they provide to the organization, through the quality of their work.

6. Encourage the creation of a culture which can increase the chances of the visually impaired individual employees to be accepted and included within the formal and informal social groups and cliques in the organization as such encouragement can increase their zeal for delivering the desired level of results in their jobs

8. Managerial Implications & Scope for future research

Through this research we aim for the following implications- This study is an attempt to dispel the myths or the fears in the minds of hiring managers or HRs about recruitment of visually impaired employees. By giving suggestions and recommendations this research paper can contribute to opening the pathways for more organizations for improving the chances for the visually impaired individuals for seeking gainful employment so as to enable them a equal playing field in life as their visually sound colleagues.

There is scope for future research which can do a deep down analysis into the unconscious biases that prevail at workplaces that affect persons with disabilities especially persons with visual impairment. What are the technical advances that are available at present that can help the visually impaired employees to work and be recruited as any other sighted individual and be equally productive for the organization? There is also a scope to find out what the qualities or the skill sets required by the visually impaired employees to seek employment in all the organizations and this can ultimately also help give indication or suggestions for various government-run skill-building programs or schemes and for other education institutes.

4. Limitations of the study

The study has been written within the limits of a specific timeframe that could place boundaries into the depths of analysis. Other limitations such as – changes in the organizational landscapes, challenges associated with sampling, disparities into the levels of technological access, the actual nature of the work and even perception variability. Other factors such as varying degrees into the levels of visual impairment and non-uniform professional backgrounds could influence experiences differently.

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