

Disability in the workplace: Barriers to employment & retention - Culture Amp

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Executive Summary

This article examines workplace barriers faced by individuals with disabilities through the lens of ableism. The author argues that systemic and individual biases create significant employment and retention challenges across the employee lifecycle. Drawing on statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics showing 80% of individuals with disabilities were not in the labor force in 2020, compared to 30% for those without disabilities, the article identifies four key barriers: hiring bias, fear of negative judgment, lack of workplace accessibility, and unwillingness to provide reasonable accommodations. The piece incorporates personal experiences from Ola Ojewumi and Regina Walton to illustrate these challenges. The author contends that despite misconceptions, most working-age people with disabilities want to work but face systemic exclusion that forces underemployment and poverty. The article concludes by advocating for collective action to dismantle these barriers.

Key Insights

1. Research shows 76% of respondents demonstrate implicit preference for people without disabilities, including those with disabilities themselves
2. Over half (50.5%) of workplace accommodations cost employers nothing, with most others requiring less than \$500 investment
3. One-third of survey respondents with disabilities report experiencing negative workplace bias, with 47% believing they would never achieve leadership roles

Practical Takeaways

- Implicit bias testing reveals widespread preference against people with disabilities that affects workplace decisions
- Most reasonable accommodations are either free or low-cost, contradicting employer concerns about expense

Frameworks Mentioned

Implicit Bias Tests (IATs) — Testing methodology to measure unconscious biases, specifically mentioned in relation to disability preferences

Critical Analysis

Strengths include legitimate statistics from credible sources and valuable personal narratives that illustrate systemic barriers. However, the article exhibits clear advocacy bias, presenting a one-sided narrative without exploring counterarguments or organizational perspectives. The selective use of statistics and the prescriptive tone ('must intentionally and actively break down barriers') reveal the author's agenda rather than neutral analysis. The personal anecdotes, while compelling, are not systematically collected data.

Organizational Practice

The article describes Culture Amp's approach to disability inclusion content and references Michelle Kim's work with hundreds of companies on DEI efforts as CEO of Awaken, though specific organizational practices are not detailed

Strategic Implications

The article suggests organizations face significant legal, reputational, and talent acquisition risks by maintaining current disability exclusion practices, while indicating that accommodation costs are lower than commonly perceived, potentially shifting cost-benefit calculations for inclusive hiring strategies

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