DISABILITY AND EMPLOYABILITY: CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

THROUGH INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

by

Claire McElvaney

Liberty University

A Dissertation Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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Dr. Margaret Gopaul, Ph. D., MSCP, Committee Chair

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Dr. Linda Jean Whingter, Ph. D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Individuals with disabilities (IWDs) have had an alarmingly low employment rate despite introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other legislation meant to enable workplace inclusion. This low employment rate seemed illogical as employed IWDs have often demonstrated extremely high work engagement and organizational loyalty. Prior research indicated that organizations were willing to hire IWDs but were concerned regarding potential costs and training issues. Because lifelong unemployment has often resulted in segregation and depression for those with disabilities, this research sought to determine if educational intervention, i.e. a presentation designed to address some of the myths regarding costs and training, might alter how IWDs were perceived as potential candidates for employment by those in human resources positions. A quantitative study was conducted utilizing staff from local businesses. Pre-and post-educational intervention assessments to gauge the subjects' perception of employability of IWD's portrayed in various scenarios and with differing behavioral symptoms were utilized. Areas examined included measurement of employability, ranking observable versus non-observable disabilities, and desire to connect with local vocational rehabilitation programs. ANOVA tests indicated that there was a statistically significant increase in perception of employability post-intervention. Observable versus non-observable disability-related behaviors did not seem to make a difference. More than half of the subjects were interested in learning more about local vocational programs. This indicated that educational intervention appeared to be effective, suggesting that more widespread research of this type should be conducted.

Keywords: disabilities, human resources, educational intervention

Copyright Page

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to our children, Anika, Olivia, & Ethan McElvaney. Their early journey in life was rocky due to Autism, and at the time I thought that I would be their guide and teacher; clearly I was wrong. My beautiful children became my teachers instead. They taught me the beauty and the blessing of very simple words, especially "hello", "mine", and "cookie", and they taught me how to laugh and enjoy silly jokes, squish hugs, and experimental kitchen projects. For the joy they have brought my life, and for teaching me that special needs really just means extra special, and for God's understanding that what I thought I wanted was not what I needed most, I will be forever grateful.

Acknowledgments

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Individuals with disabilities (IWDs) traditionally defined as adult individuals with mental, developmental, physical, or intellectual disabilities, have historically faced an alarmingly high unemployment rate, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States 2019 labor statistics showed that only 19.3% of IWDs were gainfully employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Revelation of the employment rate was astonishing when compared to the 66.3% rate of employment for non-disabled peers. Voermans et al. (2020) noted that despite numerous work preparedness programs for IWDs, participants who completed the programs had extreme difficulty obtaining gainful employment. This begged the question: *Why*?

Rohmer and Louvet (2018) found that there was a stigma associated with having a disability, and that stigma included an assumption that IWDs would be incompetent in the workplace. Despite this misattribution of ineptness, IWDs often demonstrated high levels of efficiency and engagement once they were provided with paid work opportunities (Anand & Sevak, 2017). In fact, IWDs had such gratitude for employment that they were highly loyal to their workplaces. This was particularly interesting when one considered that many businesses experienced high rates of turnover when "regular"/neurotypical employees were not offered higher compensation or growth opportunities (Schaap & Olckers, 2020). According to Moore et al. (2020) IWDs had lower absentee rates than neurotypical peers, and this, combined with their loyalty, commitment, and engagement, suggested that hiring supervisors might find IWDs to be

ideal candidates for various company roles. Yet, despite such potential as model

employees, IWDs continued to face high unemployment rates.

Background

Life satisfaction for IWDs, similar to life satisfaction for their neurotypical peers,

was often increased by securing and maintaining paid employment as it provided an

increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy (Almalky, 2020). Amado et al. (2013) noted that

many IWDs often have had little or limited social interaction outside of their homes or

segregated settings (i.e., setting designed specifically for IWDs), so work provided an

additional opportunity for social interaction and the associated self-esteem development.

Tait et al. (2020) suggested that an IWD's work history directly impacted an individual's

interpretation regarding their quality of life; this demonstrated that it was vital to

understand the numerous moving parts that create employment opportunities for IWDs.

Americans with Disabilities Act

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), civil rights legislation

intended to protect IWDs from discrimination, was signed into law; thereby allowing

those with disabilities the same access to work, training programs, compensations, and

firing protections as enjoyed by the nondisabled peers (Victor et al., 2017). This act

would be further amended to protect those with disabilities as various court battles

ensued, resulting in the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, which was formally enacted in

January of 2009 (Emens, 2012). The challenges and changes since the introduction of the

ADA in 1990 came about because many businesses protested the broad definition of

disability and sought to narrow that meaning. Judiciaries often assigned meanings

inconsistent with the original ADA language, and the ADA Amendments Act restored that less specific definition (Emens, 2012).

Despite the initial legislation and subsequent amendments, thousands of complaints were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as a result of discriminatory practices in hiring and the workplace (McMahon et al., 2017). Ameri et al. (2017) conducted a field experiment, sending IWDs in as employment candidates, and found that regardless of disability type and work experience level, many of their candidates did not receive interest from potential employers. This was concerning because, in modern society, many individuals were defined by their purpose in the world, something that was noted as coming from meaningful contributions via the workplace (Walker & Rogan, 2007).

Quality of Life

Most individuals' identities seemed to be built around what they "do" each day, be it attending school, working, raising a family, or all of the above; IWDs were often denied such opportunities for various reasons, and had a lower quality of life as a result (Walker & Rogan, 2007). Paid employment was thought to provide increased mental and physical health benefits, proffering daily structure and increasing happiness and life satisfaction (Modini et al., 2016; Shuring et al., 2017). Along with decreasing both anxiety and depression, paid employment had been demonstrated to increase one's autonomy and promote personal growth and development (Modini et al., 2016). Unfortunately, these benefits were inadvertently denied to IWDs who, due to their disabilities, were often not viewed as viable job candidates by potential employers (Ameri et al., 2017). This was despite the fact that numerous job training and job

coaching programs existed just so that IWDs can experience the latent benefits of competitive employment.

Training and Accommodations

Many high school/post-high school programs had a variety of classes and workshops that taught job-related skills and prepared IWDs for the potential social interactions; unfortunately, there were not enough of these programs to meet the number of adults with disabilities (Sosnowy et al., 2018). Even those IWDs who were able to participate in such programs often ended up facing life-long depression, as few competitive work opportunities existed. The opportunity to practice and apply learned skills *in situ* was not available, so the hope and expectations resulting from hard work training for employment were dashed (Stafford et al., 2017). Odds of finding gainful employment increased slightly based on familial socioeconomic status and the size of the local community (Chan et al., 2018). Yet, it was still rare for IWDs to obtain and maintain long-term employment.

Vocational programs provided a much-needed opportunity for learning workplace skills despite the potential difficulty of finding employment after completion. Programs could take place in a variety of settings, including classrooms and at businesses. Job trainers were particularly beneficial in assisting IWDs with learning the routines and expectations at the workplace and can scaffold the experiences until they were no longer needed on site (Almalky, 2020; Ellenkamp et al., 2016). Having trainers at the employment location allowed for the acquisition of routines as well as proactive addressing of potential concerns by employers as the trainers could provide targeted guidance and strategies (Wong et al., 2020). Training programs and job coaching were at

no-cost to employers and allowed for higher numbers of positive experiences for IWDs and employers alike.

Some businesses may have preferred not to have outside trainers; in this case, a viable option would have been utilizing a mentoring program. Workers with disabilities could also have been paired with nondisabled peers; this would have facilitated both task completion, and workplace social cohesion as the IWD and mentor would have found opportunities for social engagement during the mentoring process (Meacham et al., 2017). This also would have prevented the limited interactions with workplace peers, allowing IWDs to understand better unwritten social rules and expectations in the work setting while also helping them build better workplace social support. Those training IWDs had found great benefit from assisting the individuals to understand that mistakes made at work were opportunities for personal growth, thus reframing failure as learning (Nygren et al., 2016). More importantly, teaching workers with disabilities to access existing workplace supports often led to extended employment (Cheng et al., 2018).

Workplace accommodations, including flexible schedules, job-sharing, and job crafting, promoted workplace longevity and capability without cost to the employer (Kuznetsova & Bento, 2018; Villotti et al., 2017). Policies needed to be clear so that all employees would know what can be requested and who would be responsible for deciding on accommodations (Telwatte et al., 2017). Many employees would have found benefit from job crafting whether or not an employee had a disability as it reduced the potential for worker exhaustion and allowed workers to complete tasks more efficiently (Gordon et al., 2018; Vermooten et al., 2019). However, many businesses reported concerns regarding costs related to accommodations (Bastas & Altinay, 2019).

There appeared to be a lack of awareness regarding accommodations-related community funding opportunities and tax incentives related to hiring IWDs (Fraser et al., 2010; Lindsay et al., 2018). Scott et al. (2018) demonstrated software guides for employers that were easily accessible and beneficial for supervisors, while Scott et al. (2017) determined that many employers did not see higher costs for training IWDs compared to training costs for nondisabled workers. As the costs were not higher, yet cost-related concerns were discussed, this suggested that potential employers might not be aware of the actual costs involved in hiring IWDs. Therefore, it was plausible to believe that barriers created by fears of higher training costs could be dispelled under the right circumstances.

Bias Towards IWDs

Many employees with disabilities reported feeling that another barrier to employment of those with disabilities is the misperceptions and stigmas related to disability (Ramchadra et al., 2017). Concerns regarding the impact of stigma in the workplace were so significant that many IWDs actively hid or downplayed their disabilities and accommodation needs to avoid generating a negative image (VanLaar et al., 2019). Many in the workplace based their assumptions regarding IWDs on good and bad past interactions with those with disabilities (Hernandez et al., 2020). Those IWDs with higher levels of functioning often found themselves more relatable for nondisabled peers, perhaps because they were seen as being somewhat similar (McConkey et al., 2021). But many families were concerned that negative biases towards IWDs would result in their loved ones being mistreated or misunderstood in workplace settings (Nevala et al., 2019).

To help counter such biases, job coaches and job support personnel would need to actively work to facilitate positive workplace interactions and assist if issues arose. They could ascertain whether or not job crafting or adjusted work tasks would have been beneficial and would have been able to tailor training and task assignments to address an individual's particular skill sets (Petrou et al., 2015; Rashid et al., 2017). While it seemed logical that specific work settings would be more welcoming to IWDs than others, Yoon et al. (2020) found that artists with disabilities received fewer benefits, less mentoring, and more periodic promotions than were offered to neurotypical peers. This served as a reminder that education regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs might be needed in several realms and settings.

It was suggested that part of this imparting of information would need to include an opportunity to address the myth that IWDs were being given advantages not enjoyed by their nondisabled peers, an idea that might have bred workplace resentment (Vornholt et al., 2013). Although it was not unusual for mistakes and adverse events to occur in any workplace setting, such instances were often attributed to IWDs, even if they were not involved (Vornholt et al., 2013). Therefore, management models needed to accept IWDs and establish clear workplace policies so that all employees would understand what was expected. Timothy 4:12 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011) clearly stated that one must set an example for others to follow. By modeling acceptance of those with disabilities and providing expected standards of respect, Biblical directives would be upheld.

Ideal Employees

Those managers who had employed IWDs found them dedicated employees who were both loyal and engaged. This seemed to be partly due to the IWDs' gratitude for finding gainful employment (Werner & Hochman, 2019). Many IWDs, especially those with mental or intellectual disabilities, enjoyed the mundane tasks often shunned by nondisabled peers, including stapling and filing papers. Their efforts in these necessary yet time-consuming tasks allowed workers with high-level skill sets more time to devote to complex tasks. This loyalty and engagement were demonstrated via the low absentee rates for IWDs, an issue often reported for nondisabled workers (Pérez et al., 2018). The enthusiasm and commitment shown by workers with disabilities usually had a positive and uplifting impact on the workplace, allowing employers and fellow employees an opportunity to benefit from increased morale (Kuiper et al., 2016).

However, despite such positive benefits and the potential for employers to gain loyal, dedicated, and enthusiastic employees, employment rates for IWDs remained low. Many IWDs prepared for job-related tasks and professional work setting through the various training programs only to face disappointment due to the lack of paid employment opportunities after completion (Domin et al., 2020). Before the Covid pandemic, many community forums were held to connect businesses to potential employees with disabilities, but unemployment for IWDs maintained its staggering rate (Carter et al., 2016). Though many companies reported good intentions towards hiring IWDs, such intentions seemed at odds compared to the actual hiring rate of IWDs (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Hemphill et al., 2016). This was why additional research was crucial to understanding why the disconnect between expressed intent to hire and actual hiring rates existed.

Problem Statement

The problem was that even though many IWDs sought employment and numerous job training programs, the employment rate for IWDs continued to be less than one-third of that of their nondisabled peers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Businesses did not appear to be aware of the benefits of hiring IWDs as they expressed concerns about training and accommodations costs (Bastas & Altinay, 2019). Current research indicated that potential employers often seemed to accept stereotypes regarding incompetency among those with disabilities, believing the idea that such individuals were unable to fulfill employment obligations (Rohmer & Louvet, 2018). Yet, research also indicated that some employers expressed good intent regarding hiring IWDs (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Hemphill et al., 2016). This suggested that employers might be hesitant to hire IWDs despite their best intentions because of concerns regarding costs and low job performance levels. Lifetime unemployment and rejection often resulted in higher rates of depression and hopelessness for IWDs (Brown et al., 2016). This made it imperative to determine if directly addressing potential employer concerns about hiring IWDs could improve the perception of employability when one considered a person with a disability as a potential employee.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative survey study was to examine how education regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs impacted employers' estimations of employability when considering job candidates with a disability.

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

Research Questions

RQ1: Did the employability ratings of IWDs depicted in scenarios increase after

education regarding the benefits?

RQ 2: Were IWDs deemed as more or less employable based on the portrayal

of specific disability types?

RQ 3: Would employers be interested in learning about local job training

programs and vocational placement programs after learning about the

benefits of hiring IWDs?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Employability ratings of IWDs would increase if employers

were provided with education regarding the benefits of hiring employees with

disabilities.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals with observable disability-related behaviors would be

 deemed less employable than those with disabilities not easily observed.

Hypothesis 3: After receiving information regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs,

employers would express interest in receiving information regarding local job

training and vocational programs.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Like most studies, this research would be incomplete instead of serving as a

foundation for future efforts. Unfortunately, it was not unusual for hiring supervisors

already familiar with the benefits of working with IWDs to participate in research

regarding employment for those with disabilities (Lysaght et al., 2016). Because this

research investigated the impact of educating potential employers about the advantages of

hiring IWDs, it would be difficult to know if the educational information had a positive

effect. The Hawthorne Effect would also be an issue. Lysaght et al. (2016) noted that hiring managers would be concerned that responses might be used in future lawsuits, so they would be less candid in the way they answered questions. Answers from those in organizations whose values included adhering to the ideals of Corporate Social Responsibility would also be overly-favorable towards those with disabilities as such companies often work to promote inclusion well beyond what was required by law (Alborno & Gaad, 2012). The pre- and post-surveys utilized for this study would be anonymous. Participants would be advised during the consent process that they could withdraw at any time. If they withdrew from the study prior to completion, their pre-survey results would be discarded.

It also was important to note that IWDs could be unintentionally marginalized through this research. The scenarios used and the training discussed had the potential to reinforce some of the negative stereotypes. It was possible that subjects might overgeneralize some of the behaviors portrayed, assuming them to be consistent with all individuals with that particular disability. McDonald (2012) found that most research focused on the negative aspects of a disability rather than the positive contributions someone with a disability could make. While it is anticipated that the educational portion would help subjects understand the workplace and societal benefits of IWDs, that could not be guaranteed.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

This study was a first step in helping to meet two needs, the needs of empowerment and a better quality of life for IWDs and the requirements of community business leaders to find dedicated employees. To meet these needs, one needed to

consider Empowerment Theory, Circumscription and Compromise, and Transformative Learning. Empowerment Theory was a concept first attributed to Paolo Freire's work to educate peasants in 1960's Brazil (Mohajer & Earnest, 2009). This theory addressed the need for self-direction regarding goal-design and attainment on personal and professional levels (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). Empowerment was not provided to IWDs; it was gained, often through collaboration with others, so that one could improve one's quality of life. Community integration was an integral part of empowerment at the community level (Mohajer & Earnest, 2009). This could be achieved through obtaining gainful employment; identification of oneself based on one's work was a normative part of fulfilling social expectations (Walker & Rogen, 2007).

Gottfredson's (1981) Theory of Circumscription and Compromise suggested a developmental process connected to one's social roles. Circumscription was when an individual dismissed specific functions based on whether or not those roles were consistent with their self-concept (Gottfredson, 1981). Compromise surfaced when individuals choose roles due to ease of access over suitability and preference. When one considered IWDs and their desperate search for employment opportunities, Gottfredson's theory suggested that many IWDs were forced to compromise, accepting the available job over preferable but unavailable work opportunities. But for compromise to be an option, job opportunities would first have to be created.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory suggested that adults constantly question and reassess prior knowledge throughout their lifetime, challenging preconceived notions, thereby acquiring enhanced knowledge (Saskia & Ted, 2020). As individuals recognize incongruencies in their cognitions, their discomfort would rise, and

eventually, their cognitive dissonance would require them to let go of past assumptions, transforming them into new cognitive schemas. This concept of Transformative Learning Theory supported this researcher's plan to introduce new knowledge regarding IWDs in the workplace so that it counteracted prior suppositions. This was consistent with Proverbs 1:5 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011), wherein the Bible directed believers to seek knowledge constantly.

It was essential to recognize that this research was based on Malachi's declaration of God's concern for justice and ridding others of oppression, as was discussed in Malachi 3:5 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011). Malachi revealed that God would punish anyone who turned away those in need or anyone who tolerated inequity. Boloje and Groenewald (2014) discussed what many considered Malachi's call for social justice and Christian's social responsibility to help those most in need. Thus, this research was based on the idea that as a Christian, I needed to seek to reduce social injustice by addressing the underemployment of IWDs who often faced long-term psychological distress, including depression and self-esteem issues because of societal rejection (Brown et al., 2016).

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Definition of Terms

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The following was a list of definitions of terms that used in this study.

Disabilities – Disabilities was a broad term that referred to mental, physical, or social barriers that might inhibit one's participation in community settings (Friedman, & VanPuymbrouck, 2021).

Accommodations – Accommodations were steps taken to promote inclusion of those with disabilities in the community (Friedman, & VanPuymbrouck, 2021).

Employability – This referred to interpersonal skills, capability to perform job-related tasks, and ability to receive instructions (Gouvier et al., 2003).

Job crafting – Job crafting referred to an adjustment of job roles through redesign of cognitive or performance tasks (Petrou et al., 2015).

Job training – Job training included pre-employment training, both vocational programs and job coaches (Bastas & Altinay, 2019).

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Significance of the Study

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There was a noticeable lack of research regarding the successful employment of IWDs, because so few IWDs were employed (Geiger et al., 2017). IWDs often faced the misconception that they would be less productive and a distraction in the workplace rather than an asset (Rohmer & Louvet, 2018; Soctt et al., 2017). Gouvier et al. (2003) noted that disability type was directly related to whether IWDs were considered suitable job candidates. But hiring IWDs would increase workplace diversity, which was known to be beneficial for both morale and productivity (Hofhuis et al., 2015).

Based on the Transformative Learning Theory, information that contradicted prior experiences and knowledge would lead to a new understanding (Saskia & Ted, 2020). For this reason, this study would be providing a new vision of IWDs, demonstrating how they would be beneficial to their organization. This schema would help businesses understand that IWDs were loyal employees with a strong desire to work (Kuiper et al., 2016), who had a low absentee rate (Pérez et al., 2018) and that the tools and training for IWDs already existed (Scott et al., 2018). In addition, Lindsay et al. (2018) found that many employers of IWDs experienced greater profits, tax benefits, and higher morale. This information would help educate potential employers about the potential value of

hiring IWDs and would contradict the biases against IWDs in the workplace, as demonstrated by Gouvier et al. (2003) and Rohmer and Louvet (2018).

The most significant impact of this study would not be something immediately visible. It was anticipated that increased awareness regarding the positive aspects of hiring IWDs would lead businesses to recruit IWDs through local job training programs actively; a list of local programs and contacts was provided at the conclusion of the study. IWDs were desperate to find work and, once hired, were both engaged and loyal to the employers (Kuiper et al., 2016). Employment had been shown to provide empowerment and a better quality of life for IWDs (Almalky, 2020). By ascertaining the impact of information and how it would improve the perception of IWDs as viable candidates for employment, it was possible that educational interventions could be modified in the future to help build understanding regarding the value of IWDs in modern society.

Summary

The mission of this research seemed simple at first glance, as the chief aims were to identify reasons hiring managers might have for not employing IWDs and then address such concerns. Unfortunately, this was actually a complex undertaking that was not quickly completed with one research study. It was anticipated that hiring supervisors might be unaware of the benefits of hiring IWDs, or they might be unfamiliar with the various programs that assisted with training. Regardless of the reason, this research proposal attempted to help improve the quality of life for IWDs. They faced depression and hopelessness as a result of being unable to find employment (Brown et al., 2016). In order to appropriately conduct this research, it was important to examine the academic literature regarding IWDs, the relevant legislation, and current organizational concepts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Examination of the literature regarding disabilities was a monumental task. It could cause one to be reluctant to reduce the wide variety of literature available to basic components. Yet, there needed to be a targeted examination to help demonstrate the need for the proposed research. One must bear in mind that the diversity of articles regarding adults with disabilities and employment issues seemed to support the idea that employment was still a contentious topic, and generalizable solutions had yet to be discovered. Current literature suggested that many employers were open to the concept of employing IWDs. Also shown in contemporary literature was the desire of IWDs to find gainful employment. The low employment rates for IWDs seemed bizarre compared to such research, suggesting that it was crucial to understand what may be preventing hiring managers from actively recruiting those with disabilities who desperately wished to work.

Description of Search Strategy

Liberty University's online library database was utilized to research literature discussing individuals with disabilities and their employment. Search terms included intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, Autism, and employment of individuals with disabilities.

Review of Literature

IWDs often seemed to encounter stigmas and misunderstandings that could create a barrier to employment and advancement once employed (Carvalho-Freitas & Stathi, 2016). Neurotypical employees might have been uncertain of what an IWD would be like or how well that individual might fit into the workplace; that uncertainty might have led to discomfort with the idea of working with an IWD. This could have been due in part to

the tendency in modern society to focus on and identify a person with a disability by what they could not do rather than what they could do. In addition, humans often considered one's actions and flaws in an in-group versus out-group manner so that flaws of the in-group were seen as a natural consequence of humanity. In contrast, flaws of the out-group were viewed as more damning (Koval et al., 2012). Applying that concept to neurotypical workers versus an outgroup consisting of IWDs suggested that mistakes made by those with a disability might be seen as being more egregious. This might have contributed to many misunderstandings about the potential ability to work among IWDs.

Neurotypical adults were socially identified based on their occupation and hobbies, as was discussed in Walker and Roagn's (2007) *Make the day matter! Promoting typical lifestyles for adults with significant disabilities.* Yet, IWDs often had difficulty obtaining employment and were inadvertently denied the respect given by contributing to American society. One might have considered the relegation of IWDs to special needs day programs, sheltered workshops, or home care setting a form of modern segregation. For adults with disabilities, the multitudinous years of social isolation and lack of work opportunities were most likely both mentally and emotionally damaging (Brown et al., 2016). Andersén et al. (2018) found that IWDs who underwent vocational training and were given employment opportunities noted higher self-efficacy and independence, which suggested that helping IWDs train for and find work would also help bolster their chances at a better quality of life overall.

Adults with disabilities often have had milestones that differ significantly from their neurotypical peers (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020). IWDs usually did not follow the normed path of graduating high school and moving on to a college or job that their

neurotypical peers follow. In fact, many IWDs often would not graduate with a diploma at all; many were simply "aged out" of their high school programs. The type of disability made an enormous difference. Individuals with a physical disability were more likely to take college classes than those with a learning or intellectual disability (Chatham & Randolph, 2020). Even if a post-secondary degree was earned, IWDs often were not able to find gainful employment. Their unemployment rate, even with that degree, was almost double the rate of their neurotypical peers.

It seemed to be that IWDs face employment challenges due to implicit bias against those with disabilities, concerns regarding costs associated with hiring an individual with a disability, employee engagement, and commitment, or costs for accommodations (Baker et al., 2018). Although bias against those with disabilities was not always overt as it was socially unacceptable, negative attitudes towards IWDs were present if difficult to detect (DiMarco et al., 2018). Many businesses appeared to lack awareness regarding the advantages of hiring IWDs, and that lack might have been preventing them from tapping into a pool of workers who were both loyal and engaged. Because misconceptions regarding IWDs and the lack of such individuals in the workplace might have been impacting their active recruitment and hiring, as suggested by Baker et al. (2018), one needed to understand both disabilities and the benefit of IWDs in the workplace.

Disabilities and their Impact

Over 61 million adults in the United States were noted as having some form of disability (Zhao et al., 2019). In the past disability has been used as an umbrella term that included physical limitations, mental impairments, and developmental disorders that

somehow interfered with or limit one's ability to function in normal activities of daily living (Bindawas & Vennu, 2018). In addition, many disabilities had a detrimental impact on an individual's ability to have autonomy with regard to life decisions, and often IWDs have a poorer quality of life overall.

Many in society may have been unaware that the visibility level of a disability has an enormous impact on one's self-perception (Shpigelman & HaGani, 2019). Some disabilities have been historically referred to as being invisible, meaning that although they impaired functioning, the fact that someone had a disability was not openly observable. For example, an individual who had a mental illness and might have been coping with the related symptoms, but as they had not disclosed their diagnosis to others around them, society may have had a negative reaction to what might have been perceived as an abnormal behavior such as rocking or calming oneself.

Those with mental illness often coped with lower self-esteem and higher anxiety as a result of the stigma surrounding having a mental illness diagnosis (Schuring et al., 2017). They may not have not disclosed their struggles to avoid being maligned by hurtful stereotypes, which often shaped perceptions of what mental illness meant (Shpigelman & HaGani, 2019). Additionally, because social negativity typically surrounded those who must rely on others for assistance without an apparent reason, individuals with invisible disabilities might have self-isolated or faced ostracization. Usually, disability types that were not openly exhibited faced a loop of societal stigma compounded by the resulting low self-esteem and an inability to find and maintain a solid, contributing position in society. It has been important to remember that adults in a community were often deemed respectable, in part because they could be independent

and maintain a contributing role. So, a lack of paid work opportunities would have inhibited an IWDs chance to build a better quality of life (Walker & Roagn, 2007). Individuals with physical disabilities have also reported damaged self-esteem; this has been depend partly on how others reacted to their particular physical disability (Shpigelman & HaGani, 2019). The ability to find gainful employment regardless of whether a disability was visible or invisible has been partly reliant on businesses upholding the tenants of various legislative measures to prevent discrimination.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The discussion of the rights of IWDs in the workplace was a somewhat modern topic that benefitted in part from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), anti-discrimination legislation initially adapted in the United States in 1990 (Forber-Pratt, 2018). The ADA went through a few transformations over the last three decades, but the overarching directive protected the rights of IWDs in realms such as work, transportation, and public settings. By requiring the removal of barriers to workplaces and educational institutions and increasing accessibility, the ADA made it so that an increased number of IWDs could attend post-secondary schools and apply for work at different places of employment (Forber-Pratt, 2018).

The ADA sought to equalize access for everyone so that those with disabilities might enjoy the same opportunities as those without disabilities (Murphy, 2021). Yet, despite this legislation, some IWDs continued to face barriers to engaging in sports, work, and activities. One of the challenges came from the level of a person's impairment and whether the criteria for ADA to be applied was relevant in specific cases (Koen et al., 2017)

For example, diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) continued to rise. Yet, many individuals with an ADHD or an ADD diagnosis would not fall under the protection of the ADA because those individuals were not severely limited by their ADHD or ADD so that it kept them from engaging in life activities. Koen et al. (2017) noted that the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) had loosened this restriction somewhat by allowing for protection if the person was perceived as having some form of impairment whether or not the impairment was formally noted. Courts supported this concept and stated that so long as requested accommodations were not overly burdensome in a workplace, accommodations must be made available (Koen et al., 2017).

It was noted that although many were supportive of anti-discrimination legislation and the access to the community it can provide, there were efforts to circumvent their requirements. In 1999 the *Olmstead v. LC* decision was issued to support the rights of IWDs to live in community settings (Kanter, 2012). The state of Georgia wanted to force certain individuals with disabilities to live in an institution rather than in the community, arguing that their need for assistance was beyond the scope of community supports and was financially unreasonable. The Supreme Court refuted Georgia's claim and demonstrated that institutionalizing those with mental disabilities directly defies the ADA. As *Olmstead* allowed those with disabilities the right to live in the setting deemed least-restrictive (Kanter, 2012), this provided greater opportunities for those with disabilities to integrate with their communities through work and social interaction.

Before ADA, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 aimed to ensure that any organization that received federal funding could not stop IWDs from participating in their

programs (Murphy, 2021).   This pre-ADA legislation also encouraged the hiring of

IWDs by having minimum suggested IWD hiring target numbers and by providing job

training programs. However, despite what became a long-held legislation preventing

discrimination against IWDs, employment of IWDs continued to be extremely low, in

part due to attitudes towards those with disabilities (Vornholt et al., 2018).

Bias against IWDs

Despite the ADA and subsequent amendments, those with disabilities often

encountered barriers in the workplace due to prejudice against those with disabilities

(Friedman & VanPuymbrouck, 2021). Some of this came from prejudice surrounding

having a disability. Rohmer and Louvet (2018) noted that IWDs were often assumed to

be less competent than their neurotypical peers. This view would automatically devalue

IWDs when considering them as potential candidates for the workforce. For those with

disabilities, positive work traits were not easily identified compared to negative work

traits simply because of having an identifiable disability (Rohmer & Louvet, 2018). Many

with disabilities were thought to have less personal warmth, which would preclude them

from consideration for any job that involves interacting with the public. Even the specific

disability itself would make a difference.

Gouvier et al. (2003) noted that suitability for specific job types was determined

by the candidate's particular kind of disability. Individuals with physical disabilities were

thought to have greater capacity for handling customers and complex job tasks, yet

individuals with social or cognitive disabilities were not. Gouvier et al.'s (2017) study

involving 272 business students, i.e., those who might one day be in a position to

influence employment at various businesses, viewed physical disability as being

substantially more work-capable than developmental disability or mental illness. One must be concerned that such bias was generalizable and painted a bleak picture for potential employment opportunities for those with disabilities. Indeed, even when an IWD obtained employment, they were often not provided a chance to expand their role.

The stigma of having a disability became a solid barrier to not just obtaining and maintaining workplace roles but to advancing or earning additional workplace responsibilities (Ramachandra et al., 2017). Despite various laws against discriminating against an individual based on their disability, openly having a disability could be a brick wall barrier to employment. Carvalho-Freitas and Stathi (2017) noted that even those who somehow moved past the disability-employment barrier might have faced additional hurdles once employed, as often they were segregated from other employees and not offered advancement or role expansion commensurate with those of their neurotypical peers, a pattern that continued as the years progressed.

Interestingly (or alarmingly), many IWDs actively worked to hide or downplay their disability to avoid the associated stigma (Benoit et al., 2013). Those with mental or social disabilities who could conceal their disabilities would do so to avoid requesting needed accommodations, risking success to avoid the misperceptions associated with a particular diagnosis (VanLaar et al., 2019). Unfortunately, this potentially impacted work performance, but it was deemed preferable to admitting one had a disability. Worries of how supervisor and coworkers might alter their estimations of one's work role potential often caused (and continue to cause) IWDs to self-sanction and restrict themselves in the workplace (VanLaar et al., 2019). As if this were not disturbing enough, IWDs may have gone further and socially disengaged to avoid revealing some disability that made them

part of an out-group at work. Looking back at Koval et al. (2012), one could see that flaws for those who were considered a part of the outgroup might be seen as more indicative of incompetence than flaws for those in the in-group of workers without disabilities. Was it any wonder that someone wanted to hide that they were different?

Levinson et al. (2017) suggested that this attempt to self-sanction and avoid revealing one's need for accommodations could be harmful over the long run. Those who deliberately dampened their true selves often withdrew socially due to the anxiety associated with actively disguising such personal aspects, another pattern that has continued (Levinson et al., 2017). Potential workplace stigma had become a haunting concern that negatively impacted work performance (VanLaar et al., 2019). Eventually, workers with disabilities would choose to leave organizations as a result of the storm surrounding both the biases against those with disabilities and one's personal fears of harm as a result of disclosing. This suggested that corporations needed to model acceptance of those with disabilities, thereby increasing employee retention (Casad & Bryant, 2016). Even if there was no open disapproval of having a disability, workers may become disengaged due to fears related to stereotype threat. Scott et al. (2018) found that concerns regarding working with an IWD could often be successfully addressed via training and communication, both of which could help facilitate a healthy and supportive working environment.

Training IWDs for the Workplace

Many in corporate positions reported thinking of hiring IWDs as a unique event requiring specialized onboarding, yet most businesses already had a variety of training strategies available and at different levels of complexity depending on the job and the

workplace. Employee onboarding has often included watching videos, attending workshops, and reading materials. Many such tools have been considered sufficient for integrating IWDs into the workplace. Bastas and Altinay (2019) noted that employee development has often routinely adjusted to fit the individual needs of an employee, suggesting that there has not been an undue burden for minor adjustments that might be needed to train employees who needed specific accommodations. Because the ADA required accommodations for any business with more than 15 employees, adjusting training materials if needed would have demonstrated a willingness to uphold such legislation (Koen et al., 2017). Yet when one looked closely, it was possible to see that fears of needed specialized training and the related costs were somewhat unfounded as the pre-existing systems would most likely be adequate. The person's specific disability-related needs could sometimes impact reading comprehension or information processing, but adjustments could be made on an as-needed basis.

Rabel and Stefaniak (2018) noted that one highly effective practice of onboarding includes mentorship. This has allowed the new employee an opportunity to follow their mentor/role model while learning both what was required in the job and the social expectations of that particular work setting. This form of employee development, a cognitive apprenticeship approach, increased employee engagement and helped workers address deficiencies as needed (Rabel & Stefaniak, 2018). Mentoring was already utilized in businesses across the world, and it would be effective for all employees, including IWDs. Almost everyone has sought out advice or mentorship from a work peer at some point in their career. This socially integrated form of training has been highly beneficial and, more importantly, quickly adapted to fit an individual's needs. Meacham et al.

(2017) found that individuals with intellectual disabilities performed exceptionally well as the result of a mentoring program, and the skills were able to generalize to other work settings. The combination of informal social training and formal task-directed training helped the workers with intellectual disabilities to gain confidence and work efficacy.

There has also been work training that takes place before IWDs find employment, and this pre-training could be invaluable. In addition, many high schools and adult day programs have had curriculum dedicated to preparing those with disabilities for various types of employment (Stafford et al., 2017). Such curriculum has varied based on program participants and has often addressed everything from personal hygiene to social interaction skills. Almalky et al.(2020) noted that many such programs, often called transition programs because they help the students move from the classroom to the community, could be beneficial. Still, families of participants desired greater involvement by local businesses. However, the absence of internships and job role availability for those who complete such programs has been frustrating for all involved.

Program trainers have been willing to train participants with disabilities *in situ* to tailor the onboarding to the specific needs of the IWD, so resistance based on training costs has been illogical. Villoti et al.(2017) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the effectiveness of such support might have for long-term job performance. IWDs showed that having that type of assistance allowed them to maintain higher job performance standards. This longitudinal study took place in a social business setting, i.e., a business specifically targeting the employment of IWDs. It showed that when those with disabilities were provided an opportunity to work and provided adequate support, they could perform well.

Employers might have been unaware that transition programs and various training formats already existed and were readily accessible to those who inquired. Many vocational programs would welcome the opportunity to allow their participants the chance to practice their skills in an actual workplace and would gladly partner with an organization in order to help the adults in their programs achieve the life purpose associated with having paid employment. Those organizations who did not want trainers on site could access computer programs such as the Integrated Employment Success Tool (IEST), which has been available at no cost to employers and could provide needed information to help employers who were onboarding those with special needs, yet often such tools have been underutilized (Scott et al., 2018). Brunetti and Corsini (2017) found that *in situ* trainings were highly beneficial for low-level tasks and those individuals who that company hired within two months of that training maintained their job role knowledge, so whether an outside facilitator or HR specialist became involved, organizations have had an excellent opportunity to maintain their workforce. Understanding that IWDs, just like their neurotypical peers, could be competent employees with the proper training caused one to wonder why businesses failed to actively seek out IWDs to fill employee roles when so many stores and restaurants constantly posted "help wanted" signs.

Employee Shortages

It is no secret that in the United States, during the era of COVID, there have been employee shortages that have impacted businesses' abilities to weather the financial damage from the viral storm. Even before the virus hit, companies were expressing concerns regarding maintaining their employee numbers. Labor shortages have been seen

in countries throughout the world, and the impact of not maintaining an adequate workforce damaged more than the financial aspects of a company; it damaged the engagement and commitment of the few employees who remain (Krajcsák & Kozák, 2018). Employees have often experienced greater workplace engagement in part due to the relationships with their coworkers; fewer coworkers have meant less interaction, thereby reducing engagement and loyalty (Krajcsák & Kozák, 2018).

One must consider that it may have been beneficial for organizations to learn that IWDs have had lower rates of employee turnover when compared to non-disabled peers when provided with needed accommodations (Villotti et al., 2017). Kuiper et al. (2016) found that although minor accommodations such as a shorter workday might be required, IWDs have been so grateful for the opportunity to have paid employment that they have been incredibly loyal once hired. Better still, their high levels of engagement and commitment often spread throughout the workplace, making it a win-win situation for employers and employees alike. IWDs then gained the emotional, social, and financial benefits associated with paid work, and the employer gained positive morale for most of their workforce as non-disabled employees often reported finding inspiration by witnessing the effort of their disabled coworkers (Kuiper et al., 2016). Even concerns that absenteeism might be an issue have appeared to be unfounded, as IWDs usually have seen lower absentee rates than their nondisabled coworkers (Pérez et al., 2018). Having engaged and loyal workers would go a long way towards addressing worker shortages, yet another benefit to the workplace comes through something just as important: increasing workplace diversity.

About Human Resources

The bulk of HR literature appears to be geared towards addressing ADA and accommodations needs. This is important to note because if the majority of journals discussing HR practices have been geared towards addressing concerns or issues that could result in an inability to work efficiently, it might have left images of those with disabilities as being more of a liability than an asset. Cavanagh et al. (2017) performed a literature review that examined articles published from 2000 through 2015 to investigate themes related to HR management practices and workers with disabilities. For each of the 82 papers discussed, three key terms were identified. Out of these papers, only five had favorable key terms such as promotions, career, and fringe benefits (Cavanagh et al., 2017). In comparison, 12 articles discussed terms such as accommodations, support, or customization, terms which could be considered suggestive of encumberments or work. Another 14 had negative terms such as prejudice, discrimination, and stigma. This indicated that much of the modern HR literature has not promoted the positive aspects of hiring IWDs.

Alcover et al. (2018) discussed the need for HR to provide support systems to help address the emotional needs of IWDs in the workplace. They mentioned that designing a strong support system could also help the workers with disabilities increase their autonomy and lessen familial dependence. This would then lead to increased self-esteem and allow workers to integrate more firmly at the workplace. The intention behind this was made clear: HR has been instrumental in providing needed support and accommodations to meet workers' needs. Yet if someone from HR was unfamiliar with the wide variety of needs for IWDs and the variety of skills levels, this idea that a

worker's autonomy and emotional well-being were a part of one's job role might have seemed a bit daunting.

Zhu et al. (2019) noted that HR has always carried a great responsibility to assist new employees with integration into the organization. Workers with disabilities tended to have greater longevity at companies where inclusion has been modeled by management and supervisors (Zhu et al., 2019). Unfortunately, despite ADA and other legislation targeting the inclusion of IWDs, workers with disabilities continued to experience discrimination at work despite their ability to thrive under the right conditions. Businesses that openly demonstrated supportive policies and proactively train management regarding inclusionary tactics were more likely to experience the benefits of high-performing workers with disabilities (Zhu et al., 2019).

Marques et al. (2020) noted that management may have had mixed feelings regarding the needed inclusionary practices. While some supported the idea of complete integration, others believed that workers with disabilities should be segregated entirely from those without disabilities (Marques et al., 2020). Although there seemed to be a consensus that hiring IWDs could provide a positive corporate image, managers did not agree regarding the worthiness of requiring inclusion training. This has been unfortunate because such training could be beneficial for all involved. Often managers, in an attempt to be sympathetic to those with disabilities, have treated workers with disabilities so differently that it became difficult for them to integrate with their coworkers (Marques et al., 2020). This why training has been determined to be so necessary, as it could help everyone understand how to be supportive without appearing to be enabling.

HR has played a powerful role in the inclusion of workers with disabilities as they have been the ones who could suggest and develop the needed training programs (Meacham et al., 2017). For example, when taught about accommodations and diversity benefits, managers were more likely to have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of IWDs (Phillips et al., 2016). Such training also helped managers understand the potential that those with disabilities possess by including concepts related to having IWDs in leadership roles. Supervisors have been seen as the role models for those under their supervision, so by helping them learn to model the correct attitude and behaviors towards IWDs, they would then be able to promote inclusion and respect for all coworkers.

Those in HR would be considered the key to successfully including IWDs and how to maximize their potential. Often, they have been aware of accommodations and intervention methods of which others may not be informed (Beatty et al., 2018). Their expertise could help management recognize that IWDs have great potential and benefit for organizations. Instead of emphasizing the negative aspects of a disability, they could help organizations recognize the skills that those with disabilities offer. But first, they needed and continue to need to shift their focus away from concerns regarding accommodations and towards maximizing the capabilities of all workers regardless of whether or not they have a known disability (Beatty et al., 2018).

It has been demonstrated that those who were already receptive to working with IWDs usually participate in HR workshops and diversity training; HR could use this to identify potential ambassadors to help introduce inclusion directives to their peers (Kulkarni et al., 2018). It has also been beneficial to have follow-up workshops or set up goals to help employees gain awareness of the impact that their words and actions might

have had. In this way, HR would have been able to uphold the tenants of the ADA, could have highlighted the abilities rather than the disabilities of workers and could have facilitated greater inclusion as workplace diversity as an invaluable asset.

Diversity in the Workplace

Many hiring managers might have been cautious regarding hiring IWDs because of concerns related to the impact of increased workplace diversity. Many have thought of workplace diversity as a gender or ethnicity issue, but diversity has also included the integration of disabled coworkers. Hoisl et al. (2017) found that workplace homogeneity dampens workplace adaptations and creativity, essentially doing more harm than good. Increased diversity of work teams meant less groupthink, thereby reducing one of the innovation challenges. By having a variety of backgrounds and mental sets through diverse workers, companies would see the benefit of lessening project stagnation.

Organizations with a growth mindset have found that diversity was integral to meeting strategic goals (Guillaume et al., 2017). While increasing diversity on project teams has sometimes incurred longer development times, the product of the diverse team effort usually had greater longevity and broader applications overall (Choudhury & Haas, 2018). IWDs, regardless of skill level, have brought an invaluable perspective that increases diversity and offers an avenue to examine projects and products from a different angle, which could facilitate output that fits an organization's long-term aims.

To mitigate coworkers' concerns regarding increased diversity, management needed to concentrate on teaching workers about the many benefits of a diverse workforce (Hofthuis et al., 2015). Explaining the background and purpose of diversity programs and emphasizing the benefits to the organization as a whole, would help

alleviate concerns that workers might have had as the workforce makeup was altered. In addition, management need to provide a role model of acceptance so that workers would do the same. An organization's core values should have been crafted to emphasize a culture of respect and acceptance as that would have eased the anxiety that might prevent receptiveness to different types of workers (Lozano & Escrich, 2017). It could be theorized that companies would be more likely to see positive integration of diverse workers when respect for the workers is emphasized over respect for financial gain. This respect would help build on an important business concept, the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is considered a term meaning when companies promote the welfare of those in their organization and communities, and studies have demonstrated that corporations with high levels of CSR also see higher engagement and commitment from workers (Asrar-ul-Haq et al.,2017). Furthermore, Li et al. (2021) noted that consumers often wished to align themselves with companies with high levels of CSR, thereby suggesting that to maintain consumers' financial interest, a company must make a concentrated effort to show a social conscience. What better way to do this than by supporting workplace diversity by hiring individuals with disabilities? Employers have long needed committed and engaged employees and they relish the opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to supporting and bettering the community. Yet still, many businesses have not seemed to pounce on the opportunity to satisfy these requirements by hiring those with disabilities who were so desperate for gainful employment. It might have been that concerns regarding costs associated with

hiring IWDs were holding them back. Fortunately, this concern could potentially be addressed by imparting education regarding the cost/benefit potentials (Scott et al., 2017).

Costs of Accommodations

Many human resources (HR) staff have assumed that accommodations for IWDs would be costly, yet that was untrue. Under the ADA, reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities must be made, but the ADA emphasized that associated costs should not create a financial burden for those involved (Koen et al., 2017). Despite that the fact that requests for needed accommodations must be considered by one's workplace, many with disabilities have not made the necessary requests for flexible scheduling or work setting accommodations because of concerns regarding employer or coworker backlash as a result (Villotti et al., 2017). Those with visible disabilities, including mobility issues, have usually found it easier to obtain accommodations, while those with invisible disabilities often faced resistance to accommodation requests.

Darcy et al. (2016) noted that discrimination against those with disabilities was more likely to be seen if the person had mental health issues or HIV AIDS. Such situations often required a threat of legal action or lodging a formal complaint to comply with basic accommodation requests. It may be that the idea of a potential lawsuit was part of the concern regarding the hiring and accommodations for an IWD, when in fact, basic compliance with ADA and state standards would preclude such legal issues and related costs. Thus, HR staff should proactively consider and address potential worker accommodations needs and challenges so that they may be handled quickly and inexpensively.

Kuznetssova and Bento (2018) found that most employers were willing to comply with the legal statutes and local regulations that required reasonable accommodations. Many managers noted that low-cost accommodations, including work schedule flexibility and telecommuting, maintained expected levels of job performance and allowed those with disabilities to continue working. To avoid an air of workplace resentment when complying with legal directives for worker accommodations, it has been important for organizational leadership to model their acceptance and backing of upholding the ADA standards. The key to positive worker integration has been demonstrated as having a compassionate workplace.

Scott et al. (2017) found that many businesses did not incur an extra cost due to accommodating workers with disabilities. In their study examining 59 employees with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), training costs were similar to those of their non-disabled peers (M=184.21, M=175.75, p=.64), and there was no significant difference in training cost for those with ASD versus those without (M=255.76, M=231.23, p=.34) (Scott et al., 2017). HR staff have already trained in how to address particular concerns of workers in a way that supports both employees and the organization, and their expertise would be invaluable when working to integrate disabled and non-disabled employees (Beatty et al., 2019).

Morash-Macneil et al. (2018) found that many IWDs achieve employment support via adaptive technology. Potential employers may not have been aware that needed devices could be provided at no cost through vocational state agencies. Assistive technology (AT) has been used as a broad term referring to systems or devices that allow IWDs to maintain or increase workplace competencies (Morash-Macneil et al., 2018).

Many IWDs have found that AT supports greater independence at work, and the everyday use of smartphones and smartwatches was widespread through both the nondisabled and the disabled populations. Therefore the use of AT would not pose a distraction as it has not been uncommon to see people utilizing such technology.

Many organizations have tapped into the financial incentive programs offered by the government, so not only would they not incur additional costs for hiring IWDs, they might have seen a bottom-line benefit. For example, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has long provided tax credits for businesses that employ IWDs for a certain length of time (Baker et al., 2018). As a result, benefits for companies were increased as sustained employment of IWDs increased at that workplace, suggesting that it would be in an organization's best interest to retain IWDs for as long as possible.

Organizational Learning

To help businesses to understand the benefits of hiring IWDs, it was vital to first explore the nuances of organizational learning. An organization's culture has traditionally indicated the leaders' values and mindsets, and this culture also demonstrated the willingness (or lack of willingness) to adapt and be receptive to new concepts (Oh & Han, 2018). When leadership embraced learning as the key to innovation and growth, it has been much more likely to succeed (Soomro et al., 2021). Encouragement of engaging in proactive strategies has allowed organizations to address potential issues before they became detrimental. Promoting an active learning dynamic within business management was also noted as more likely to see sustained market viability (Soomro et al., 2021). To help facilitate that willingness to learn, leadership has needed to first establish trust with

employees as a supportive relationship would allow workers to be more receptive to learning and feedback (Louis & Murphy, 2017).

An organizational environment that embraced a learning-oriented culture appears to be more likely to retain market relevancy (Soomro et al., 2021). This has come in part from asking HR to develop employee retention programs. In addition, embedded employees, i.e., those who showed strong commitment and engagement, have been invaluable as they not only had detailed organizational knowledge, but they supported their co-workers by allowing for more equitable distribution of work tasks (Ma et al., 2018). This has been vital to organizational health, as constant employee turnover has often resulted in the remaining employees having to take on the former employees' work tasks, leading to frustration and the possibility for additional employee turnover.

Organizations have enjoyed higher retention when they hired employees who fit well with their corporate culture by forming friendships within that organization. Because such workers found it more beneficial to stay than to leave, they were more likely to remain at that company regardless of challenges (Ma et al., 2018). For those concerned about helping employees build relationships during the time of Covid, Tijunaitis et al. (2019) found that globally dispersed working teams had success building relationships through virtual team building, the use of blogs, and social media. Embracing modern technology to engage in team-building has been one example of how organizational learning and adaptability has helped businesses maintain their objectives, build cohesive teams, and sustain worker engagement.

Lin and Sanders (2017) emphasized the importance of HR understanding that each department has usually had its specific cognitive mindset to learn differently for

some employees and departments. This has been a natural extension of the particular skill sets needed to complete job-related tasks. Determining the specific recruitment and task needs for each department could be considered helpful as HR develop programs that hire and support those departments accordingly, which, in turn, would then assist in providing engaged employees. Because, as Lin and Sanders (2017) explained, innovation and problem-solving, including retaining dedicated employees, has often taken place at multiple levels, HR has needed to actively seek out input from each department to understand better job roles, that department's individualistic culture, and most-desired/least-desired job tasks that might have encouraged/disrupted employee commitment.

Showing respect for and promoting a learning culture has proved to be highly beneficial. Organizations that have fostered informational exchange with employees and other stakeholders (clients, suppliers, etc.) have seen growth in employee skills and more significant application of the information gained (Potnuru et al., 2021). While the encouragement of innovative programs has been beneficial, HR and leadership needed to establish a corporate climate that would allow employees to discuss concerns and mistakes to allow the organization to learn and adapt. Continuous learning has supported employees seeking knowledge and professional growth, thereby opening the organizations to finding innovative solutions for problems such as employee retention.

One way that a learning-oriented organization might have approached the retention issue is by exploring its diversity practices, an approach that would be beneficial now as well. While many may have conceptualized some sort of seminar or written policies, diversity in hiring has often involved exploring what makes a successful

employee. At times recruiters and supervisors have demonstrated linear thinking, looking for candidates who mirrored similar qualities to their own (van den Brink, 2020). This has led to a less diverse workforce. It would have been more beneficial to have recruiters and managers reevaluate the characteristics deemed essential to increase diversity. Management might have found that they had a more extensive variety of candidates if they looked for multiple ways desirable characteristics could be defined and presented and surrender previously held stereotypes (van den Brink, 2020).

This organizational learning concerning diversifying employee recruitment has seemed to be a charge that should have been led by HR. HR has served as a bridge between the organization's core values and the employee recruitment standards and therefor has been placed to help establish procedures that fit well with the organizational culture (van den Brink, 2020). Rather than having a one-time training, HR might instead have assisted managers in examining their needs and ideas from different angles. Exercising critical thinking and cognitive flexibility with the hiring needs and application procedures could have allowed for a broader candidate pool.

Having flexibility when selecting job candidates might have increased diversity and addressed problems not fully defined in an organization. That same cognitive flexibility that has been applied to selecting applicants could have also be applied to defining job roles. It has not been necessary for an organization to wait for a problem before looking for solutions; often, an opportunity has arisen that provided an answer to a future issue not yet fully developed (von Hippel & von Krogh, 2016). Workers who have performed higher-level tasks may have had less stress and less turnover if focused solely on the complex tasks utilizing their skill sets (Gordon et al., 2018; Vermooten et al.,

2019). It would have been beneficial for organizations to have assessed how much current employees have been bothered by completing mundane daily tasks such as copying, filing, and stapling.

Some IWDs have demonstrated a fondness for tasks many might consider monotonous and they have been grateful for the opportunity to work (Werner &Hochman, 2019). This has been the key area where cognitive flexibility could have been at play: by reimagining job role requirements, it would be possible to diversify the workforce without incurring significantly higher costs. For example, if a sales marketing team has spent one-fifth of its time filing, stapling, and stuffing envelopes, that has resulted in one-fifth of its time not making sales. Instead, IWDs could have performed these essential tasks while the marketing team expanded their sales, thereby increasing potential profits, diversifying the workforce, and engaging in corporate social responsibility.

Inclusivity Training

The key to establishing and maintaining a diversified workforce has appeared to be an emphasis on inclusion, which would have helped those workers become part of the woven workforce fabric (Brewis, 2019). Hiring employees with different abilities and backgrounds has been shown to improve an organization's innovation potential (Hoisl et al., 2017). The impetus for the successful inclusion of diverse populations has been the recognition that it would be possible to respect and accommodate others' values without compromising one's own (Brewis, 2019). HR would be able to facilitate this by encouraging workers to examine their core beliefs and engage in active listening, as often

the opportunity to speak and be heard in a constructive manner has assisted in the inclusion process.

Walsh and Magley (2020) found that training focused on inclusiveness and civility towards diverse coworkers was more effective when the training was consistent with policies and strategies within a department. In departments where a civil climate was previously integrated, there was less pushback against educational programs that addressed the acceptance of others. This suggested that leadership could set the tone by modeling tolerance and openness to diversity (Hofthuis et al., 2015). It has appeared that the environment management created allowed for the acceptance of those who might be seen as different. This positive attitude towards inclusion would then allow those in HR to preemptively address potential worker shortages by exploring the possibility of hiring IWDS.

Even if the organizational climate have seemed receptive to employee diversity on the surface level, it has remained imperative that HR consistently provides diversity training. Diversity programs have helped workers gain a more inclusive perspective, which in turn allowed for a more harmonious work setting and thus lessened employee turnover (Zhang & McGuire, 2021). Training has usually been a combination of awareness training, wherein one examined one's emotions and cognitive biases, and behavioral training, which has taught employees how to self-monitor and correct potentially inappropriate actions. This increased awareness has positively impacted employees such that it has rippled throughout an employee's career, benefiting both the employee and the organization alike. Employees who have shown a growth mindset and appeared receptive to diversity training have been more likely to be supportive of HR's

diversity policies, less inclined towards stereotyping, and less often engaged in inter-departmental conflict (Zhang & McGuire, 2021). The core of effective diversity training has included the ability to safely contribute one's views and for management to show the value of those ideas (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017).

Regardless of HR policies and training, the organization's leadership has usually promoted or undermined successful worker inclusion (Jin et al., 2017). Leaders have needed to model acceptance of diverse workers by showing them respect and recognizing that each worker has their own specific concerns and needs. While there have been a variety of laws and legal precedents that enforced a certain level of diversity in hiring, it has been the attitudes of management that help actions that supported the inclusion and embeddedness of such workers once they were hired. Once leadership has projected the image of worker diversity as an innovative move aimed at helping the company perform at optimal levels, it has been suggested that more workers would support inclusiveness initiatives (Jin et al., 2017).

Hiring IWDs

Even when diverse firing was both encouraged and expected, many may have been unaware that HR often unintentionally created barriers to employment for IWDs by how the employment was advertised and how the hiring process was conducted (McKinney & Swartz, 2019). This has had a detrimental impact on both IWDs and employers alike. IWDs may inadvertently have been prevented from obtaining employment which snowballed into their inability to gain financial independence and related autonomy. But businesses also suffered as it was difficult for them to diversify their workforce as only specific candidates may have responded to job advertisements.

Therefore, HR needed to ensure that interview questions were geared towards the job requirements and not delve into personal information. It has been understood that it wass difficult for HR to not ask specific disability-related questions as this information (a) would help determine if diversity targets were being met and (b) helped determine if accommodations were needed, but HR also needed to allow the potential hires to decide what they did and did not wish to disclose (McKinney & Swartz, 2019).

Many modern organizations have utilized web-based recruitment services to attract potential employees, yet many major companies have also had websites that either referred loosely to diversity policies or did not address such policies at all (Couture & Johnson, 2017). This may have been problematic as often job-seekers desired to join those companies that reflected their values. Couture & Johnson (2017) noted that while most companies have produced broad statements regarding diversity as part of their general statements about company values, many stayed at that rudimentary level and did not discuss such policies in detail. As a result, when potential employees with disabilities looked at the websites, they may have ended up with more questions than answers.

This barrier also occurred within the job applications themselves. Many applications were not accessible to all populations (Couture & Johnson, 2017). For example, someone with a visual or hearing impairment would not have been able to access written or video information because the format prevented them from acquiring the needed information. In addition, many adaptive devices could not process the application program. If the application and employment information was only available in a single format, then an entire group of IWDs was essentially (if unintentionally) denied access.

Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al. (2020) determined that barriers to employment for many IWDs included lack of flexibility by the potential employer. Rather than focusing on what skills exist, potential employers instead focused on the potential risks and needs of hiring an IWD. Individuals with developmental disabilities felt that they were assumed to be incompetent and thus denied the opportunity to present themselves in their best light, which might have allowed them to show how they could benefit the company.

Some hiring managers may have been unaware of how many IWDs they have either interviewed or worked with as some disabilities were less visible, and federal law prevented potential employers from directly asking questions about whether or not one has a disability (Bonaccio et al., 2019). IWDs have often been advised against disclosing their disabilities unless specific work accommodations were required. Others with disabilities may never even have gotten the chance to apply. Like Couture & Johnson (2017), Bonaccio et al. (2019) found that many job postings were inaccessible. This showed that even if managerial attitudes were favorable towards those with IWDs, it was possible to prevent them from having access to employment.

Organizations have needed to learn to recognize the work value of IWDs. IWDs face unemployment and poverty at an extremely high rate at a time when many workers have been aging out of the workplace (Vornholt et al., 2018). While many potential employers accepted the recruitment of IWDs, they often desired those who have prior work experience, the crux of the matter. It has been improbable for an IWD to obtain competitive employment if employers wanted someone with previous experience, as it has been difficult for IWDs to get hired at all. This has been an unfairness of monumental proportions and one that must be addressed.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

The injustice of a world that has traditionally defined people by their work and yet also denied people the opportunity to gain employment has been the calling that prompted the proposed research project. Jeremiah 22:3-5 (*New International Version, NIV,* 2011) described God's directive that His believers must address injustice and oppression through peaceful, non-violent means. That was why this research project was so important; it provided an opportunity to obey God and peacefully work to create change for those who have been suffering unjustly.

Proverbs 14:23 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011) told the faithful that they would find great benefit in working, but none in simply talking about work, and this desire to receive the benefits of working is something that many IWDs strived to achieve. Yet, despite dreams and plans, opportunities to work have often been denied to IWDs. Many IWDs have faced a lifetime of hopelessness due to not finding employment in a world where one's value was often assessed by looking at their societal contribution via meaningful work (Brown et al., 2016). It became a Biblical imperative that a solution could be found to serve His purpose.

Understandably, many companies have wanted to find highly skilled employees. Yet, there have been essential support roles that must also be filled, and they would be ideal for those who cherish routine tasks. There have been places in the Bible where God has called the least likely heroes to do great things. Psalm 118:22 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011) served as a reminder that those rejected often had a purpose in the foundation of work. IWDs have often faced bias and rejection because they were seen as "less," and many have assumed they were less competent and less capable than others

(Rohmer & Louvet, 2018). But having a disability has not detracted from being one of God's children, and it has never meant that one was unworthy of kindness and respect.

In Exodus 4:10 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011), Moses worried and explained to God that his speech was slow and that he had difficulty with speech. That was a clear example of a disability, yet Moses was entrusted with God's mission to save His people from slavery in Egypt. Jesus told believers that God makes things such as this possible (*Matthew 9:26, New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011)).

The Bible also has also shown us that humans could not presume to know who was worthy and who was not. In Acts 9:13-15, Ananias was sent to find Saul of Tarsus. Ananias objected because of Saul's reputation, but God reminded Ananias that Saul had been chosen to spread the word of God. When one considered that idea when viewing those with disabilities, it showed that it would be easy to judge someone and suggest that they were not worthy, yet God had His plans and a grand design that must be left to faith. To reject anyone based on reputation or disability directly would have contradicted God's laws as laid out in ancient text. This understanding showed why it would be crucial to find a means of helping those with disabilities to find respect and find their place in the world.

Summary

The employment rate for IWDs pre-pandemic was 17.2%, a horrifically low number, especially compared to the employment rate for non-disabled peers, which was 65% pre-pandemic (Baker et al., 2018). When one has considered the societal identification and autonomy that employment has traditionally provided, it appeared urgent that this issue of unemployment be addressed. There have been laws that

prevented discrimination against those with disabilities, which helped set the stage for

equitable employment opportunities. Yet despite such measures, bias against IWDs has

continued to interfere with the location of employment opportunities for IWDs. To

ascertain whether or not the premise of employment has been low due to employers'

misconceptions regarding IWDs in the workplace, it became vital that research involving

subjects who could hire commence as soon as possible; the proposed research was

designed to focus on attitudes held by those in a position to hire IWDs.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

Ellenkamp et al. (2016) and Geiger et al. (2017) have noted that the dearth of literature regarding the successful employment of IWDs may have contributed to the lack of knowledge in the business world, thus limiting understanding of the multifactorial aspects of hiring someone with a disability. The purpose of this research was to examine whether introducing the positive aspects of employment of IWDs to those in human resources (HR) increased HR staff's estimation of IWDs as viable candidates for employee recruitment. Many in HR may have been unaware of the potential benefits since often corporations cited concerns regarding costs as part of their reluctance to hire IWDs (Bastas & Altinay, 2019). It was hypothesized that understanding both the tangible and intangible remuneration associated with hiring IWDs might increase HR staff's consideration of those with disabilities as a potential employee pool. This chapter was focused on discussing the proposed research design, pre- and post-survey development, the need for specific data calculations, and specific research design elements, including consent and ethical considerations.

This research was designed to be all-virtual, as many subjects might have held concerns regarding potential COVID-19 exposure. Yue and Yang (2021) noted that individuals who were more compassionate were more likely to have sympathy and show interest in helping others, so some subjects might have been willing to meet for an in-person seminar due to the altruistic purpose of this research. Still, the need for complying with multiple social distancing guidelines suggested that conducting this research virtually would be prudent at this time. Because Google Survey allowed for the insertion of videos it was selected for administration of both pre- and post-educational video

surveys for this study. Google Survey also allowed subjects to respond anonymously, which was a significant factor in protecting the confidentiality of the subjects.

Fulton (2018) cautioned that responses to organizational surveys used for research have been declining, and it was hoped that the familiarity with Google and the promise of confidentiality would encourage participation. It was suggested that appealing to organizational management to promote survey completion in a company could be beneficial as staff often faced an onslaught of research surveys (Fulton, 2018), so leaders of companies identified through the Chamber of Commerce would be the first point of recruitment and all who wished to leave their name and email at the end of the survey were entered into a drawing for one of four fifty-dollar Amazon e-gift cards (Appendix F).

This study was a quantitative design that incorporated pre-test and post-test comparisons of survey results to examine the impact of a brief educational video that presented the benefits of hiring IWDs. Surveys have been demonstrated to be beneficial when attempting to apply a hypothesis to examine whether a relationship exists between certain factors (Kelley-Quon, 2018). Kelley-Quon (2018) suggested that questions should be relatively easy at the beginning and more complex later to keep the subject engaged as they had less invested in completion than the researchers. In a quantitative investigation, it has been shown to be impossible to craft a truly neutral survey as concepts defined and evaluated via research were intrinsically value-laden based on the investigator's

background and the societal constructs of the time period, so ethical reporting of methods and results was paramount to the authenticity of the study (Zyphur & Pierides, 2019).

The surveys were designed to address commonly noted concerns regarding the hiring of IWDs and then determine whether or not education might have alleviated such considerations. Surveys were based on the works of Bonaccio et al. (2020), Rashid et al. (2017), and Werner and Hochman (2019). Both the surveys and the scenarios were pilot-tested before their use. It was anticipated that combining pre- and post-education surveys would be possible to demonstrate the effectiveness of information dispersal and how it would impact whether or not IWDs were seen as viable employment candidates once the numerous advantages of such employees had been presented.

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Research Questions and Hypotheses

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Research Questions

> RQ1: Did the employability ratings of scenarios depicting IWDs increase after education regarding the benefits?
>
> RQ 2: Were IWDs deemed as more or less employable based on the portrayal of specific disability types?
>
> RQ 3: Would employers be interested in learning about local job training programs and vocational placement programs after learning about the benefits of hiring IWDs?

Hypotheses

> Hypothesis 1: Employability ratings of IWDs would increase if employers were provided with education regarding the benefits of hiring employees with disabilities.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals with observable disability-related behaviors would be

deemed less employable than those with disabilities that were not easily observed.

Hypothesis 3: After receiving information regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs

employers would express interest in receiving information regarding local job

training and vocational programs.

Research Design

Because this research included embedded educational technology, i.e., an

educational presentation video, and included a pattern of problem identification-proposed

solution-results evaluation, it followed what has been known as process-based research

(Cronje, 2020). The research was quantitative as it was founded to confirm via deductive

reasoning that the hypotheses were or were not supported (Faems, 2020). It had three

stages: the pre-educational survey, an educational video intervention, and a post-

educational survey, including one additional question (asking if subjects would like a list

of local vocational training programs that could be contacted). To circumnavigate the

non-completion of the three parts, all three were conducted online, and participants were

asked to complete the three portions in one session. A pre-test/post-test method was

deemed appropriate as the results would demonstrate whether or not an intervention (i.e.,

the video) had potential benefit (Marsden & Torgerson, 2012). Those individuals who

consented to participate would be given a link to Google Survey, which was utilized to

allow for the inclusion of a video presentation, which was used for the educational

component.

The first step was a pre-survey to assess subjects' familiarity with IWDs and

ascertain what they believed would make a good employee (see Appendix A). This step

also included vignettes depicting individuals with various disabilities, and subjects were

be asked to rank their employability level based on three components. The survey was

developed specifically for this research and was based on work by Bonaccio et al. (2020)

and Rashid et al. (2017). Similarly, the vignettes were crafted specifically for this

research and were based on Rashid et al. (2017) and Werner and Hochman (2019). The

second step was the educational portion which included a brief presentation regarding the

potential benefits of hiring IWDs. Inclusion of a video to impart the information

regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs seemed consistent with the modern education

protocols; use of a visual learning aid has become standard practice, and visual literacy

has been on the rise due to the abundance of images and videos used in modern society

(Matusiak,2020). The third step was the post-educational survey aimed at determining

whether or not the responses had changed.

Participants and Setting

The participants for this research were the Chamber of Commerce members who

employed 100 or more employees and whose businesses were located within 50 miles of

Raleigh. This was a convenience sample, but according to Ball (2019), it was also

considered a systematic sample as a specific population, i.e., local businesses, were

targeted. Convenience sampling somewhat limited the application of the research so that

only companies with a similar composition to the subjects used might find the research

relevant to their organizations (Scholtz, 2021). Recruitment was conducted via the

Chamber of Commerce; two board members expressed interest in this research and

offered to help make contacts at local businesses. An initial connection was made with an

additional board member who stated that their directory was available for legitimate

purposes including research and no special permission form was needed. Participants were contacted via an email to request their participation (Appendix D).

The goal was to recruit 100 subjects who worked in HR or a similar recruitment/onboarding capacity, who had been employed at the organization for at least one year, and who assisted with hiring and onboarding. It was important to get as large a sample size as possible as the sample size impacts the effect size (Gruijters & Peters, 2020). Businesses within a 200-mile radius of Raleigh, North Carolina, were approached. The area was being limited to allow for in-person surveys and presentations if those were requested.

One consideration for any hypothesis test is the determination of the sample size necessary to detect a particular effect size, given a certain power and significance level. Cohen (1988) suggested a minimum acceptable power of 0.80. Since four scenarios were being examined using an ANOVA test, in order to detect a medium effect size (d = 0.5), using a power of 0.80, and a significance level of 0.05, there should have been a minimum of N = 45 individuals examining the scenarios (Cohen, 1992). A targeted sample size of N = 100 was selected so that if a few individuals do not respond the integrity of the study was not compromised. Also, a larger sample size would have implied that a smaller effect size might be detected with a higher power, and a lower significance level (Gruijters & Peters, 2020).

The pre- and post-educational surveys, along with the educational video, were administered via Google Survey. The link for this research was sent via email. It was important to note that only companies with offices in North Carolina and who were members of the Raleigh, North Carolina Chamber of Commerce were recruited for this

particular research project. However, subjects could complete the surveys from any convenient location as all phases were online.

In order to comply with COVID-19 restrictions regarding gatherings and to prevent potential harm via exposure in a group setting, the educational intervention via a video was recorded and placed in the survey. Mikkonen et al. (2017) explained that organizational training was ongoing and could take numerous formats including videos, direct instruction, and mentoring, so use of a video for imparting information was determined to be consistent with modern organizational practices.

Study Procedures

Once approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained, this research was conducted in three parts, all of which occurred over the same (slightly less than) half-hour time span. As per IRB requirements a recruitment email explaining the study was sent first (Appendix D). Those who clicked on the link were taken to Google Survey. Subjects first encountered the consent form, which explained that by clicking to start the surveying they were consenting to participate and understood that they could leave the study at any time (Appendix E).

While using the link subjects were asked to complete the initial survey that investigated the level of familiarity in working with IWDs as well as familiarity with job crafting (Appendix A). Subjects were also be asked to assign employability ratings that they might give for individuals portraying specific disability-related characteristics (Appendix B). Once rating of scenarios were completed subjects clicked to the next screen, in which was embedded a brief (approximately 10 minutes long) educational video that described some of the benefits of hiring IWDs. After the video was completed,

subjects were asked to rate employability for four more scenarios. Additional questions were asked to determine if the information presented was new to the viewer and subjects were offered a list of some of the area vocational training programs (Appendix C). Lastly, participants were provided with researcher, supervisor, and IRB contact information in case they had any questions regarding the research. Subjects were offered the opportunity to go to another screen to enter a drawing for one of four e-gift cards. The separate screen was necessary as information gathered for the prize drawing purposes was separated from survey/scenario responses in order to ensure that anonymity regarding response remained in act. It was anticipated that the educational intervention would address concerns held by those in a position to recruit/hire/train personnel.

All participants were advised via recruitment email and follow-up emails that responses were needed within a four-week period. Only those surveys where both pre- and post-surveys were completed were considered for data analysis as the key purpose of this research was to assess the impact of education on interpretation of the hirable nature of IWDs.

Instrumentation and Measurement

Abildgaard et al.(2016) suggested that it was possible to measure the impact of organizational intervention via comparing the results of initial questions to responses given post-intervention, suggesting that administering a survey both before and after the educational video would offer some insight into the interventions effectiveness. The questions crafted for the survey were based on Bonaccio et al. (2020) and Rashid et al. (2017) and addressed level of familiarity with varying disabilities, concerns regarding having IWDs in the workplace, and job crafting. The scenarios being used were crafted

based on Rashid et al. (2017) and Werner and Hochman (2019) and portrayed individuals with different types of disabilities, asking subjects to determine what level of employability each one represented. Survey items were assessed for clarity using the Question Understanding Aid (QUAID) online tool (University of Memphis, 2021). QUAID noted that the term "disability" was vague despite the inclusion of the phrase "physical/mental/intellectual" being added, so an additional note was added with the instructions giving examples to help clarify the meaning of the term "disability".

Likert Scale

A Likert scale was used for the first part of the survey (Appendix A) which assessed subjects' familiarity with job crafting and IWDs. Use of a Likert scale seemed prudent as simply asking whether participants agree or disagree with a topic, e.g., that an IWD can perform work tasks, might produce an undue cognitive burden (Oberski, 2016). A discrete Likert rating scale was used as discrete Likert scales were noted as usually less confusing for subjects, resulting in higher rates of completion (Chyung et al., 2018).

Cyr (2019) suggested that a Likert scale could be an effective means for measuring the strength of responses examining the likelihood of an occurrence. This Likert seven-point scale was anchored with one and closed at seven. Chyung et al. (2018) stated that Likert scales with more than four options often showed greater distribution normality. For this first part (Appendix A), in the seven-point Likert scale one was "strongly disagree", two was "disagree", three was "slightly disagree", four was "neither agree nor disagree", five was "slightly agree", six was "agree", and seven was "strongly agree". A Likert scale was also be utilized to assess the employability level for each individual portrayed in the scenarios however, this scale was reversed with the second set

of scenarios. When the first set of scenarios (Appendix B) were presented immediately after the disability awareness questionnaire (Appendix A) respondents were provided with a scale of one to seven, with one being "completely unemployable", two being "unemployable", three being "somewhat unemployable", four being "unable to determine", five being "possibly employable", six being "employable" and seven being "highly employable", subjects were asked to remark where each individual portrayed would fit. The employability scenarios were given prior to the educational information and after the educational information to investigate whether or not the educational information altered subjects' consideration of the IWDs presented. In an effort to prevent respondents giving the same employability rankings based on their memory of the first set of scenarios, names for the scenarios were changed based on focus group recommendation, the scenarios were presented in a different order, and the Likert scale wording was changed with one being "highly unemployable", two being "employable", three being "somewhat possibly employable", four being "unable to determine", five being "somewhat unemployable", six being "unemployable" and seven being "completely employable" (Appendix C).

While having a midpoint that allowed an ambiguous answer (i.e., four, which for the purposes of this research was "neither agree nor disagree" for Appendix A and "unable to determine" for Appendices B and C) was not ideal, per Schaeffer and Dykema (2020) elimination of an ambiguous midpoint on ratings scales would not increase reliability. Often subjects may have used the scale's midpoint when unsure or concerned

by social desirability (Chyung et al., 2017). Despite this potential issue, a Likert scale seemed the appropriate measure for this research project.

Survey Development

The questions (see Appendix A) focused on experience with IWDs, perceptions of the cost related to hiring IWDs, schedule flexibility, job crafting, and other potential concerns. Similar to Rohmer and Louvet (2018), a Likert scale was utilized for the employability ratings, with 7 representing an individual who was highly employable (i.e., an ideal candidate). The survey, the scenarios, and a brief educational presentation explaining the benefits of hiring IWDs were all presented in one session to prevent non-completion of the three steps. All subjects were provided with a downloadable list of public vocational training firms at the end of the post-educational survey in case they wished to reach out and discuss potential employment opportunities at a future date.

Research by Bonaccio et al. (2020), Werner and Hochman (2019), and Rashid et al. (2017) formed the foundation for item development. Bonaccio et al. (2020) examined 11 concerns expressed by employers regarding everything from issues hiring IWDs to ending employment. These concerns were utilized as a foundation for developing Appendix A, the survey crafted for this research that assesses familiarity in working with IWDs and potential issues that working with someone with disabilities might bring to mind. For example, Bonaccio et al. (2020) noted that apprehension was voiced regarding whether or not the cost of hiring IWDs was commensurate with the productivity value of IWDs. In Appendix A, one would have noted item 14, which explicitly asked if HR staff felt that the cost to hire someone with a disability would be higher than the cost to hire someone without a disability. Rashid et al. (2017) examined the impact of IWDs who

maintained work roles with supported employment. It emerged that many supervisors had not considered the ability to hire IWDs when using job crafting job roles successfully, and the effectiveness of those with disabilities was evident. Therefore, Appendix A items 8, 9, and 10 examined job crafting and mundane tasks that might have been shunned by more skilled employees.

Similarly, Werner and Hochman (2019) examined the impact on the workplace when IWDs were hired and found that it was overwhelmingly positive despite initial apprehension. To mimic similar emotional reactions to hiring IWDs, the early items in Appendix A asked about positive and negative experiences in the workplace with IWDs as this would potentially demonstrate a significant acceptance or resistance to hiring those with a disability. The survey, administered both pre- and post-educational video, utilized a Likert scale; by contrast, the pilot group was instead be invited to give "free" qualitative commentary, as their interpretation of and reaction to certain items might have suggested a need for rewriting.

Once the final format of the pre-and post-surveys was complete, participants from companies who were associated with the local Chamber of Commerce were asked to access the Google survey via an emailed link. The consent form for the study was completed prior to beginning the actual research. It advised subjects of their ability to withdraw at any time and potential risks as was required by the American Psychological Association Code of Ethics and in compliance with Liberty University's IRB. Survey responses were anonymous in order to protect the participants' identities. Although it was not required that participants complete the pre- and post-surveys and the educational video in one sitting, it was preferred to avoid potential confounders (as discussed later).

Scenario Development

Four scenarios were developed to showcase different manifestations of social and work characteristics of IWDs; these were loosely based on the work of Rashid et al. (2017) and Werner and Hochman (2019). Rashid et al. (2017) discussed the tendency to be seen as a better job candidate if the characteristics of one's disability seemed less obvious. Those with visible disabilities have often been seen as less desirable because they might create a negative image with consumers. Dhariyal et al. (2019) described the stereotypic behaviors of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) including repetitive motor movements such as flapping, impaired communication, and compromised social skills, all of which would be difficult to disguise in a work setting. For that reason, the four scenarios utilized incorporated low, no, or moderate social skills, stereotypic motor movement (hand flapping), and low, no, or moderate communication skills. Werner and Hochman (2019) also noted that employers had concerns regarding the need to constantly supervise adults with intellectual disabilities, but in many cases adults with intellectual disabilities were able to perform rote tasks and follow work routines independently. To reflect these concerns two of the scenarios showcased individuals who were able to work independently. To protect the integrity of the responses to subjects' interpretation of employability and ensure that respondents did not automatically provide a repeat of previous ratings of the individuals depicted in the scenarios, scenario order, names, and descriptions were worded differently for Appendix B and Appendix C. Because the core characteristics of the individuals portrayed were maintained in the two versions this ensured the internal validity of scenario portrayals (Oberski, 2016).

A pilot group was established to assess the accuracy and consistency of the scenarios written for the research study (Appendix B and Appendix C). This group was comprised of two disability case managers for local agencies serving those with disabilities, two college-to-work training specialists who work specifically with those with disabilities, one adult with physical and mental disabilities, one community trainer for adults with Autism, two lawyers specializing in special needs law, one retired special education teacher who conducted on-the-job training for her students with intellectual disabilities, and two psychology professors who teach developmental psychology. All had been asked to review the survey and scenarios and advise both understanding and accuracy of the portrayals. Virtual meetings were held with them individually to allow everyone the opportunity to speak freely regarding any concerns or suggested changes. Meeting separately was deemed prudent both because many of them have worked together in the community, and it was preferred to have individual critique rather than risk groupthink. Additionally, the individuals in the pilot group had significantly different schedule demands, so finding a central meeting time was extremely difficult. No compensation was provided for participation.

Pilot testing of the survey and scenarios via the use of a focus group assisted in ensuring the validity of the instruments and video provided. Once consent was given as prescribed by the IRB procedures, testers were provided with a copy of both surveys, including the scenarios portraying individuals with disabilities, as well as the educational video one week prior to the meeting. The pilot testers were asked to mark on their copies and also verbally review items with the investigator to determine what changes were required. Cyr (2019) emphasized the importance of the focus group as a method of

assuring that the work being assessed met current social constructs, allowing the researcher to improve surveys in order to assess correctly the research questions being considered, so this step was crucial to ascertaining the validity of the surveys being used.

Operationalization of Variables

Variable One – Variable One was an ordinal variable derived from the ratings of interpersonal skills during the employability ratings of each scenario presented.

Variable Two – Variable Two was an ordinal variable derived from the ratings of ability to perform job-related tasks during the employability ratings of each scenario presented.

Variable Three – Variable Three was an ordinal variable derived from the ratings of ability to receive instructions during the employability ratings of each scenario presented.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using an ANOVA in SPSS. This allowed for comparison of pre- and post-survey results while also examining how different portrayals of disabilities might have impacted perceptions of employability interpreted as a level of interpersonal skills, ability to perform job-related tasks, and ability to receive instructions. Alessandri et al. (2017) noted that the ANOVA was beneficial for evaluating pre- and post-intervention characteristics and suggested a disadvantage in that an ANOVA assumed a level of homogeneity in the subjects' responses. According to Lakens (2013), because there was reason to believe that the educational intervention would affect the mean and the standard deviation of the responses, a Glass's Delta was used to measure the effect size.

The ANOVA was developed by R. A. Fisher in 1919, based on his work with biological researchers, and was published in his book *Statistical Methods for Research*

Workers in 1925 (Bodmer et al., 2021). Fisher's work stemmed from Pearson's earlier work developing the chi-square statistic and Student's development of the t-distribution (Parolini, 2015). The ANOVA technique had been shown to be beneficial for research where there were several variables because it offered the advantage of being able to examine multiple influences rather than looking solely at linear relationships.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

Potential challenges and ethical concerns to the proposed research included finding suitable participants, social desirability, and the potential that IWDs might be unintentionally marginalized through research questions and scenarios. Lysaght et al. (2016) noted that participants in research about the employment of IWDs have often been with companies where IWDs were already part of the employee pool; this would not help clarify why some organizations have not utilized vocational programs and benefits and why they have not openly recruited IWDs.

Social Concerns

Another factor of concern was social desirability and worries regarding potential legal issues resulting from answering interview questions (Lysaght et al., 2016); it was anticipated that subjects might feel less inclined towards brutal honesty and instead elect to provide answers considered socially acceptable. There was also the concern regarding whether the questions and scenarios used might somehow increase the stigma of IWDs. McDonald (2012) found that research studies have often included portrayals of IWDs that were belittling and reinforced negative stereotypes. Additionally, those who responded one way in the pre-test might have needed a break or might have been exhausted by the

time they completed the post-intervention survey, and mental exhaustion with long

surveys might have impacted the responses (Kilic & Sohnesen, 2019).

Confidentiality

Another major ethical concern was confidentiality, which was also most likely a

concern for subjects. Subjects might have been reluctant to respond truthfully if there was

a risk that their responses might somehow be used against them should hiring disputes

ever arise. Alter and Gonzalez (2018) suggested that researchers needed to consider the

risk of identifying subjects based on how data was presented. Measures needed to be

taken to prevent the risk of harm as certain types of information could have long-term

repercussions should the respondents be identified.

No directly identifiable information was included in the data analysis. Broad

information such as the state where the subjects were located (for this research, North

Carolina) and average company size (100 or more employees) was included only.

Because Google Survey had a means of making a survey anonymous so that no Google

sign-in was required, this option was utilized to protect the privacy of subjects. Subjects

were sent a survey link to access all three steps. Survey results showed if both pre- and

post- test surveys were completed and had there been any surveys that did not utilize all

three steps they would have been discarded.

It was impossible to know who had responded, but the protection of privacy and

the reduction of social and financial harm for subjects was, as it should have been, a

central consideration of any research using human subjects (Alter & Gonzalez, 2018).

The initial recruitment email included the survey link, and the survey had Informed

Consent as the first panel so that subjects were aware of their rights to privacy and to

leave the study at any time. When considering the privacy issue, it seemed unwise to ask

subjects to enter their email if they would like additional information, as that would risk

disclosing their response set. Instead, my contact information and a separate PDF with

information on local job training programs was available for anyone who wanted that

information. No tracking was conducted to determine who opened and/or downloaded the

PDF to maintain an additional level of privacy. As the third research question asked if

HR staff would be interested in learning more about such programs, this could be

answered by them clicking "yes" or "no" at the end of the post-educational survey and a

prompt advising them that there was a PDF of local programs available on the last screen.

Absence of a Control Group

One additional factor that was of concern was the inability to have a control group

to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. As Trinidad (2018) suggested, having

everyone as part of the treatment group could serve as a practical means of measuring the

intervention's impact, yet it also meant that potential confounding variables might have

influenced the post-intervention results. Fulton (2018) explained that response rates for

organizational surveys has been declining, so the inclusion of a control group was set

aside for this study due to the need for as high a response rate as possible.

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Summary

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As discussed in Geiger et al. (2017) the lack of successful employment for IWDs

has produced a deficiency in research that exemplified the positive aspects of hiring

IWDs; Ellenkamp et al. (2016) also found that the literature regarding how IWDs gain

and maintain work has been relatively nonexistent. The mutual mindset of both articles

suggested that increased employment of IWDs needed to occur for employment-

supportive literature to grow. It was this gap in the research that the proposed study hoped to indirectly address. By demonstrating to businesses that IWDs could be suitable employees it seemed as if it might be possible to increase their willingness to employ IWDs. It may be that the lack of current research has been contributing to the hesitancy of businesses to reach out to local community vocational programs, and it was anticipated that along with encouraging businesses to work with vocational training programs this research might also enhance the literature regarding employment for IWDs. In Chapter 4 the results for this research and the relevant implications were discussed.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this quantitative survey study was to examine how education regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs impacted employers' estimations of employability when considering job candidates with a disability. This study utilized a quantitative design that incorporated pre-test and post-test comparisons of survey results to examine the impact of a brief educational video that presented the benefits of hiring IWDs. Google Survey was the survey engine used as it allowed for anonymous responses as well as "forced choice", meaning that participants were required to respond to immediate question in order to advance to the next question.

Demographic questions that gauged the subjects' level of familiarity with IWDs both in the community and in the workplace, the practice of job crafting, and concerns regarding the costs related with hiring someone with a disability. For this first part of the pre-educational survey (Appendix A), in the seven-point Likert scale one was "strongly disagree", two was "disagree", three was "slightly disagree", four was "neither agree nor disagree", five was "slightly agree", six was "agree", and seven was "strongly agree".

The second part of the pre-educational survey asked subjects to rank the potential employability of the IWDs portrayed. Employability was broken down into three categories: interpersonal skills, ability to complete tasks, and ability to receive instructions. Some of the IWDs portrayed in these scenarios had observable disabilities, and some did not. The accuracy of these portrayals was confirmed by a pilot group that included several experts who work with IWDs. Respondents were provided with a scale of one to seven, with one being "completely unemployable", two being "unemployable",

three being "somewhat unemployable", four being "unable to determine", five being "possibly employable", six being "employable" and seven being "highly employable". Subjects were asked to indicate where they believed each individual portrayed would rank.

The survey items were concisely worded as Brosnan et al. (2021) cautioned that cognitive overload could be prevented by keeping wording simple and limiting the number of questions. Schaeffer and Dykema (2020) discussed the benefits of utilizing the Question Understanding Aid (QUAID) tool to determine if survey questions were clearly written so that subjects would understand them, so all items were analyzed through the QUAID tool to ascertain their level of clarity (University of Memphis, 2021).

After the first set of scenarios a brief 10-minute educational video was shown. This video discussed the potential benefits for organizations that hired disabilities and bolstered the presentation by including current supportive research. After the presentation was viewed subjects were then directed to the post-educational survey. This second survey had two portions. The first post-educational portion sought to determine if subjects thought that their organizations might be open to job crafting or be interested in the benefits listed in the video (free job coaching, tax benefits, and community benefits). Subjects were also asked whether or not they learned something new via the educational presentation. These questions asked respondents to indicate "yes", "not sure", or "no." The second part of the post-educational survey asked subjects to rank employability for a second set of IWDs portrayed in scenarios wherein each IWD has either easily observable or non-easily observable disabilities. These scenarios used the same Likert

scale as the pre-educational scenarios. This survey was answered by 14 respondents and the value for Cronbach's Alpha for the survey was $\alpha = .85$.

For the first and second research questions an ANOVA was applied to determine whether or not the video educational intervention regarding the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities (IWDs) increased the perception of the employability with regards to interpersonal skills, ability to perform job-related tasks, and ability to receive instructions. The third research question utilized a one-sample proportion test. Electronic surveys with an embedded educational presentation were sent to individuals in human resources (HR) departments who were involved in recruitment of new employees.

This study attempted to answer three questions. Did the employability ratings of scenarios depicting IWDs increase after education regarding the benefits? Were IWDs deemed as more or less employable based on the portrayal of specific disability types? Lastly, were employers interested in learning about local job training programs and vocational placement programs after learning about the benefits of hiring IWDs?

Descriptive Results

Survey respondents (N=14) were individuals with hiring positions in Human Resources (HR) at their organizations. All of the participants' organizations were located within a 200-mile radius of Raleigh, North Carolina. This was a convenience sample as all subjects were listed with the local Raleigh Chamber of Commerce or were members of the local HR association. Participants were recruited via an email with the survey link. After consenting to the survey participants were asked a series of demographic questions that sought to understand past community and workplace experiences with IWDs,

familiarity with job crafting, and whether or not employees at the subjects' organizations often complained of having to perform mundane work tasks (e.g. stapling papers.)

Demographic information indicated that all respondents had prior experiences working with IWDs, and the majority of those experiences were positive. While all subjects had some level of familiarity with job crafting half of those subjects were uncertain as to whether or not their organizations would be supportive of that practice. All subjects had encountered complaints by workers regarding having to complete mundane tasks. It should be noted that there was no missing data. Since in the employability scale lower scores always meant lower employability levels and higher scores always meant higher employability scores there was no need to clean the data.

Study Findings

Pre-test and post-test ANOVA analyses were run to examine the impact of educational intervention; essentially the goal of this research was to determine whether or not those in HR might consider IWDs more employable after they watch a brief video regarding the benefits of hiring IWDs. The use of ANOVA analyses assumed that the distribution of data was normal, that the groups being compared had equal variances, and that the data were independent (Alessandri et al., 2017). The assumption of normality for the two hypotheses tested using ANOVA was met as there were 168 measures in each group being compared. For the first hypothesis test, Leverne's test indicated that the hypothesis of unequal variances could not be rejected $(F(1,334)=1.96, p=.163)$. For the second hypothesis test, Leverne's test indicated that the hypothesis of unequal variances could not be rejected $(F(1,334)=0.55, p=.457)$. Since the responses returned were not from a random sample, the assumption that the observations were independent may not

have been satisfied. However, because surveys were sent to only one person per

company, the independence of data assumption was assumed to have been met.

RQ1: Did the employability ratings of scenarios depicting IWDs increase after

education regarding the benefits?

Hypothesis 1 was supported. A repeated measures ANOVA indicated a statistically

significant result (F=7.143, p=0.008) with a medium effect size (η^2=0.041), Glass's delta

(Δ=0.18), indicating that the employability ratings of IWDs increased after the

intervention.

Table 1

Pre/Post Intervention Comparison of Employability Rankings

Measure	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention		F(1,167)	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD		
Employability	4.85	1.80	5.18	1.64	7.14[**]	.04

[**]p<.01.

Figure 1

Comparison of Employability Ratings Pre/Post Intervention
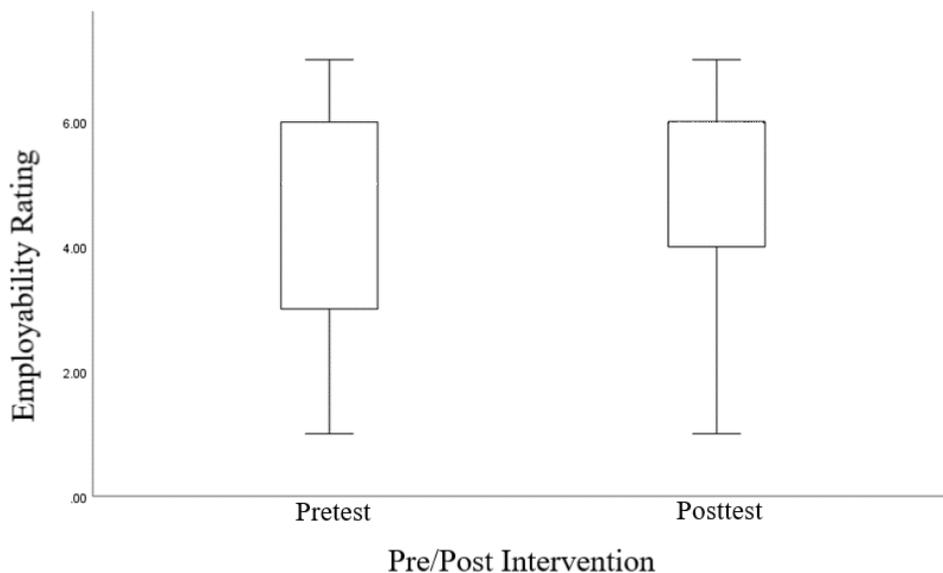
RQ 2: Were IWDs deemed as more or less employable based on the portrayal of specific disability types?

Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The repeated measure ANOVA showed no statistically significant difference in employability ratings between scenarios demonstrating observable disability versus those scenarios wherein the disability was not easily observed. Those with observable disabilities scored slightly higher than those without easily observed disabilities (F=1.769, p=0.185).
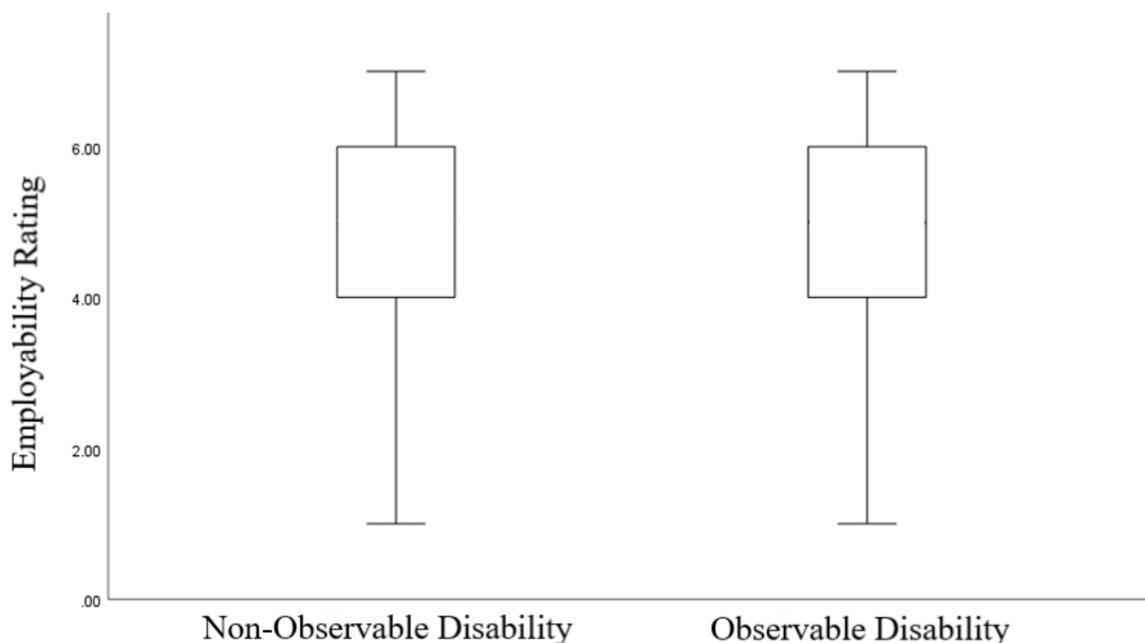
Table 2

Employability rating based on whether or not the disability was observable

Measure	Non-Observable		Observable		F(1,167)	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD		
Employability	4.94	1.76	5.09	1.69	1.77	.01

Figure 2

Employability rating for observable versus non-observable disability

RQ 3: Would employers be interested in learning about local job training programs and vocational placement programs after learning about the benefits of hiring IWDs?

Hypothesis 3 was supported. Post-intervention, 57.14% of the respondents expressed interest in receiving a handout that lists several vocational rehabilitation programs in the community. A one-sample proportions test showed that the percentage of respondents wanting information on job training and vocational rehabilitation programs was significantly more than what one would expect from a purely random selection (z=1.89, p=.038).

Figure 3

The proportion of subjects requesting the list of local vocational rehabilitation programs was p=0.571.

Pie chart showing InterestedInVocRehabProgramList: Yes 57.14%, Not sure 7.14%, No 35.71%.
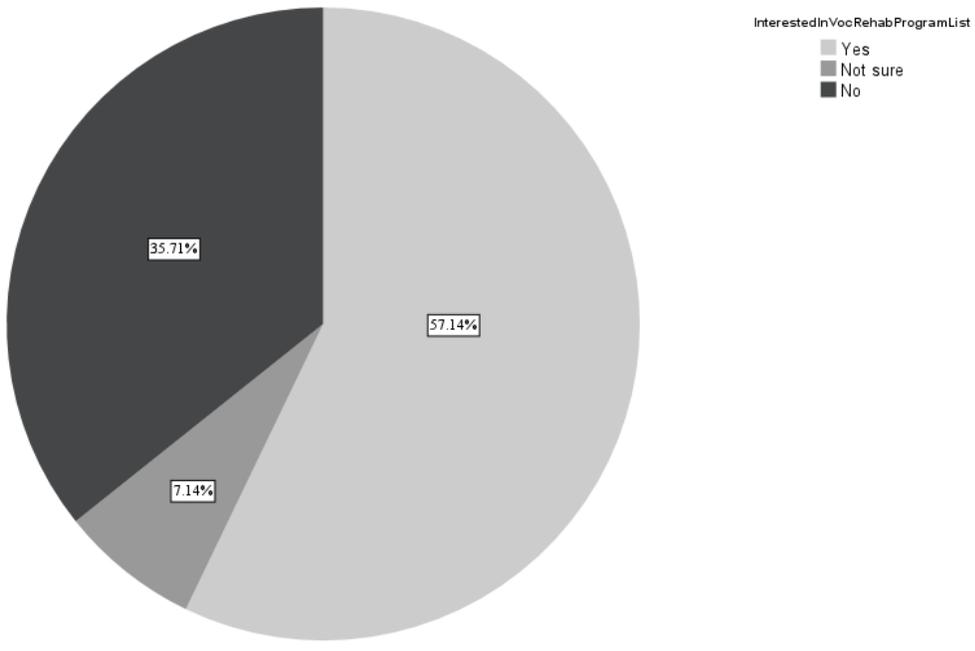
Summary

The repeated measures ANOVA indicated that rankings of employability potential for the IWDs portrayed in the scenarios increased after the educational intervention. Based on responses, whether or not the disability was observable had relatively low impact with regards to employability. Most subjects expressed interest in receiving the proffered list of local vocational rehabilitation training programs.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of educational intervention on the perceptions of those in HR to determine whether an understanding of the benefits of hiring IWDs might increase their inclination to view IWDs as more employable with regards to interpersonal skills, task completion, and ability to receive instructions. The results indicated that there was a moderate increase regarding how IWDs with observable disabilities might be viewed as viable candidates for employment

Summary of Findings

The results showed that educational intervention had a statistically significant impact in how IWDs were viewed in terms of employability. Although there was a statistically significant result, the practical significance of a small increase in employability ratings was debatable. The type of disability (observable versus non-observable) did not appear to be significant, although those scenarios depicting observable disabilities did have a slight increase in employability rating post-intervention. The majority of the respondents expressed interest in downloading the list of local vocational rehabilitation programs and also reported that they were not familiar with some of the benefits listed in the educational intervention.

Discussion of Findings

The first question this research sought to answer was whether perceptions of IWDs' employability would increase when an educational intervention was introduced (Hypothesis 1). As proposed, the educational intervention was associated with a significant increase in the perception of employability based on a pre- and post-

intervention comparison. The inclusion of an educational intervention in the research design was based on Abdigard et al. (2016), who found that pre/post-intervention comparisons were the best way to determine whether an intervention had an impact. The educational intervention was designed to address many of the concerns noted by organizations when considering whether to hire someone with a disability. While at first glance the practical significance seemed negligible, one must bear in mind that most of the respondents had reported prior positive experiences with IWDs at work and/or in the community. This would most likely have reduced the potential increase in estimation of employability.

The second question sought to determine if the ratings of employability were higher or lower based on whether or not the disability was easily observed (Hypothesis 2). This hypothesis was not supported. Those with visible disabilities were ranked much higher in terms of employability post-intervention, but those without visible disabilities did not see significant improvement regarding employability ranking. Because those scenarios depicting individuals without observable disabilities were already ranked high in terms of employability pre-intervention, there was little room for improvement post-intervention. In contrast, those with observable disabilities saw significant improvement with regards to employability ratings, suggesting that the intervention was beneficial for them with regards to being viewed as viable job candidates. Friedman and VanPuymbrouck (2021) suggested that those with disabilities encountered prejudice and barriers to employment in the workplace due to bias against those with disabilities. Rohmer and Louvet (2018) also found that often the focus for employees with disabilities was on the negative aspects rather than the positive aspects. Many in HR were suggested

to determine whether IWDs were able to handle certain tasks and more complex job roles based on disability type (Gouvier et al., 2003). Thus, the improvement in employability ranking for those with more obvious disabilities seemed to support the need for educational intervention that espouses the potential benefits of hiring IWDs.

The last question (Hypothesis 3) focused on whether subjects would express an interest in learning more about local vocational programs post-intervention. This hypothesis was supported as 57.1% indicated interest in downloading the list of vocational programs. While this interest in receiving a list of training programs was associated with the use of an educational intervention one cannot assume that the use of the intervention itself caused the subjects to download the list of programs. Saski and Ted (2020) suggested that when one's preconceived notions were challenged that person was more likely to acquire new schemas; 78.6% of the respondents said that they were unaware of some of the benefits presented in the educational intervention. From this one might infer that the intervention may have created the cognitive dissonance needed for revising cognitive schemas, i.e., viewing IWDs as potential job candidates.

The findings of this pilot study align with current research, which suggested that most employers were favorable towards hiring IWDs but were concerned with the potential costs and personnel-related issues including how to train such individuals and their potential impact on the workplace. Despite the fact that most survey respondents reported positive experiences with IWDs both in the community and the workplace, the IWDs in the pre-intervention scenarios were viewed as being less employable. This was also consistent with current literature as there have been research studies that demonstrated bias against IWDs in the workplace as many deem their hiring to incur

additional costs and require complex accommodation practices (Baker et al., 2018).

Koval et al. (2012) suggested that this is to be expected as IWDs were part of the social

out-group, and Rohmer and Louvet (2018) found that IWDs were often viewed as having

lesser capabilities. Indeed, Kuiper et al. (2016) found that when IWDs were integrated

into the workforce those workers with disabilities had a positive impact on organizational

morale.

Malachi 3:5 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011) reminded us that God will

not tolerate those that turn away from others in need and those who were oppressed, an

interpretation supported by Boloje and Groenwald (2014). The results of this study were

encouraging in that they indicated that the educational intervention appeared to be

related to an increase in viewing IWDs, i.e., those who have been historically oppressed

and often have often faced isolation and social rejection based on their disabilities

(Brown et al., 2016), as employable. Walker and Rogen (2007) noted that employment

was vital to facilitate social inclusion of IWDs.

This pilot study sought to honor Malachi 3:5 and help those who were in need as

well as honoring the directive given in Proverbs 1:5 (*New International Bible, NIV,*

1978/2011) wherein believers were advised to seek knowledge. Those subjects whose

answers and rankings of the scenarios changed demonstrated that they, too, were open to

learning and increasing their understanding, something that provided positive

implications for future studies.

Implications

Because this pilot study of the educational intervention was related to a more

positive viewing of IWDs as candidates for employment, this application of intervention

warrants further study and incorporation. More than 61 million individuals in the United States have some form of disability (Zhao et al., 2019). Due to biases against those with disabilities, even when an IWD gains employment they may be reluctant to request accommodations or reveal their disability in the workplace (Shpigelman & HaGani, 2019). It was anticipated that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) would facilitate employment of IWDs (Murphy, 2021; Koen et al., 2017; Victor et al., 2017), yet the number of IWDs who have been employed remains at less than one-third of the rate of their neurotypical peers. Because this early research indicated that educational intervention regarding the benefits of employing IWDs led those in HR to view such individuals as being more employable, this suggests that additional research and an expanded version of the educational intervention would be beneficial. The educational intervention utilized for this pilot study directly addressed some of the concerns expressed in others' research, including concerns regarding the potential increased cost of hiring IWDs (Bastas & Altinay, 2019; Fraser et al., 2010; Lindsay et al., 2018). While addressing potential issues such as costs and training the intervention also emphasized the positive aspects of employing IWDs including their high level of engagement and commitment (Pérez et al., 2018). Highlighting such positive aspects of workers with disabilities appears to be beneficial, although one must also consider potential limitations of this pilot study.

A Christian worldview for this pilot study would first and foremost recognize that researching how to ease the suffering of those who have been oppressed was vital to uphold in God's Biblical mandate in Malachi 3:5 to help those unable to help themselves (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011). When interpreting the findings, the first

question that must be asked is whether this work follows God's will for us. Based on the idea of helping the oppressed, it does. This study aimed to suggest that advocates could help those who were compromised with disabilities by helping those in positions of power to see the great worth of every person regardless of their neurodiversity.

Research had previously demonstrated that individuals were likely to change when facing new ideas (Saski & Ted, 2020), so it was through introduction of a new schema (i.e., the concept of IWDs as being beneficial to organizations) that creating an understanding regarding IWDs as potential employees could occur. This was also one of the great challenges of this pilot study; its overarching aim was to help follow God's directive to help others, but it also required submitting to Proverbs 1:5 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011) wherein the faithful were advised to seek new knowledge. Thus, it is intriguing that, though the sample size was low, the results were enough to demonstrate that humans naturally acquiesce to God's plan that mankind be willing to adjust and grow in their understanding. Ramchandra et al. (2017), Vornholt et al. (2018), and Rohmer and Louvet (2018) all suggested that the low rates of employment of IWDs was due to the attitudes and misunderstandings aimed at those with disabilities, yet the results of this pilot study showed a willingness to learn and change attitudes. This indicated that following God's directive and sharing knowledge could possibly help others to expand their knowledge and expectations from those often overlooked. For this reason, it was decided that this study should be expanded upon in the future in order to follow God's directives to help those in need by seeking the knowledge required to support them in their efforts to be considered contributing members of society.

Limitations

Despite the encouraging results of this pilot study, several limitations must be noted. As one might expect, the is a risk of the Hawthorne Effect when soliciting responses that might violate socially acceptable norms (Lysaght et al., 2016). Although subjects were advised that their responses would be anonymous their concern over being observed might have dampened potentially negative reactions, so self-reporting may have limited authenticity of responses. The pre- and post-intervention surveys required subjects to rank employability for IWDs with less/more obvious symptoms, yet many organizations have high levels of inclusivity as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Alborno & Gaad, 2012). If a subject's organization promotes inclusion as part of its CSR that might influence responses.

The cross-sectional nature of this study might also be considered a limitation as online administration of both pre- and post-intervention surveys was conducted within the same half-hour time span. Phillips et al. (2018) suggested that cross-sectional online research could be problematic when determining if variables, such as the educational intervention used for this study, were associated with the expected results. Based on van den Brink's (2020) study additional repetitions of educational interventions might have increased long-term learning retention, but time constrictions for the purpose of this study prevented repeated sessions and testing.

An unanticipated limitation of this pilot study was the low response rate, which limits generalizability of results. Only 14 responses were recorded despite distribution of the surveys to roughly 400 individuals in HR, so this falls somewhat short of the 45 responses required for optimal power. When calling to follow up on the survey request it was discovered that the survey request had gone to the person's spam email folder and

had thus been ignored. Additionally, the proposed time requirement of 30 minutes for pre-/post-survey and video intervention may have been discouraging for potential respondents. Use of email for this pilot study and the time involved were necessary to address Covid concerns, but alternatives may be needed for future studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

The low response rate suggests that changes would be needed for future research. It would be beneficial to either (a) revert to the pre-Covid plan of holding in-person training seminars (a sort of lunch-and-learn program for those in HR) or (b) arranging with one or more organizations to conduct the study so that their HR staff would anticipate the email and participate accordingly. There was also a fear that the scenarios might marginalize those with disabilities, something that is an unfortunate consequence of many studies concerning IWDs (McDonald, 2012). It would be advisable to include additional scenarios depicting extremes including those who might be characterized as neurotypical and those who might be severely compromised or psychotic (i.e. those who might serve as unofficial controls, those who would be ranked high for employability and those who would be ranked low for employability). It would also be advisable to learn more about the CSR initiatives for respondents' organizations as this might provide context for interpretation of responses. This pilot study was kept broad due to the need to keep survey completion time under thirty minutes, but more extensive questions and scenarios might provide greater depth to help bolster the theory that educational intervention might be the key to extracting biases and increasing views of IWDs as viable candidates for organizational staff roles.

Summary

Despite the low response rates for this pilot study there appears to be a demonstration of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory in that introduction of new schemas has prompted learning by challenging potential concerns (Saski & Ted, 2020). Subjects increased their ranking of employability for the IWDs portrayed in the scenarios after viewing the educational intervention video. More intriguingly, many respondents stated that they were unaware of some of the benefits of hiring IWDs that were presented, which leads one to think that this pilot study is indeed following the needed path to providing an avenue that helps organizations fulfill staffing needs while also helping IWDs to obtain gainful employment. Gottfredson's Theory of Circumscription and Compromise (1981) states that people often choose what is accessible rather than what is preferred because it is achievable, and many IWDs accept compromise because it is extremely difficult to locate any type of paid work. Even with a multitude of vocational training programs for IWDs jobs that then utilize such training have been difficult to find (Stafford et al., 2017). Yet research shows that many organizations have expressed a positive attitude towards hiring those with disabilities (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Hemphill et al., 2016). It may be that introduction of educational interventions and facilitating introductions between vocational rehabilitation programs and organizations seeking staff might address concerns for both parties. Thus, the goal of future research must be to build upon the initial findings, increase response rates, and continue to adhere to God's directive in Malachi 3:5 (*New International Bible, NIV,* 1978/2011) by actively seeking to assist those who have been shown to be in need in our society.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

(based on Bonaccio et al., 2020 and Rashid et al., 2017)

In our society individuals with disabilities are often defined as having a physical, mental, or intellectual disability. Disability can range from have a motor impairment such as walking difficulty to having a social impairment such as Autism. This first part of the survey will help me better understand your familiarity with individuals with disabilities. As a reminder, all responses are anonymous and cannot be connected with you personally.

Using the Likert scale indicated, where one is "strongly disagree", two is "disagree", three is "slightly disagree", four is "neither agree nor disagree", five is "slightly agree", six is "agree", and seven is "strongly agree", please mark the number appropriate for each of the following prompts:

1. I feel familiar with adults who have a physical/mental/intellectual disability.

2. I have positive experiences in the general community (home, stores, parks, other public places) with individuals who have a physical/mental/intellectual disability.

3. I have negative experiences in the general community (home, stores, parks, other public places) with individuals who have a physical/mental/intellectual disability.

4. I have positive experiences in the workplace with individuals who have a physical/mental/intellectual disability.

5. I have negative experiences in the workplace with individuals who have a physical/mental/intellectual disability.

6. The process for training new employees is flexible enough to be modified to meet each new hire's individual training needs.

7. An individual with a disability could successfully complete our company's onboarding process.

8. I feel that I am familiar with job crafting (i.e. modifying job roles and tasks to suit individual worker needs).

9. Employees have been known to complain about the need to complete mundane tasks such as filing, decorating, cleaning, or stapling.

10. It would be beneficial to our business to have individuals whose jobs were dedicated to routine tasks such as stapling, cleaning, and filing so employees with specialized skills could focus their skills on higher-level projects.

11. I am familiar with community programs that train individuals with disabilities for work.

12. I am aware that businesses get tax incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities.

13. I am aware that there are job trainers who can train an individual with a disability to work in a specific role at a specific business at no cost to that business.

14. I feel that the cost to employ an individual with a disability would be higher than the cost to employ an individual without a disability.

15. Workers at our business would respond favorably to having an individual with a disability in the workplace.

APPENDIX B: SCENARIOS SET 1

Would you consider the individuals portrayed in the following scenarios to be employable and why or why not? (Scenarios based on research by Rashid et al., 2017 and Werner & Hochman, 2019)

Using a scale of one to seven, with one being "completely unemployable", two being "unemployable", three being "somewhat unemployable", four being "unable to determine", five being "possibly employable", six being "employable" and seven being "highly employable"

Scenario 1:

JJ has Autism and an intellectual disability. He sometimes flaps his hands, but he really loves to staple papers, file papers, and clean up. His job coach gives him a broom as a reward, and JJ happily spends his time sweeping up every bit of floor he can find. He loves to talk to anyone nearby about his favorite topic, college football.

Scenario 2:

EK has Autism and is a strong reader. She enjoys using Excel and data entry but does not like to socialize. She only works well if she is in her own area in a quiet setting where there is complete silence. She likes to type names and numbers and can copy and type in whatever her job coach gives her. She would like a job where she could do this for at least four hours per day.

Scenario 3:

RM has Down Syndrome and intellectual disability. He likes to move things and will spend hours moving boxes from one side of his parents' garage to the other. His mother sells crafts and he loves to help her by delivering the boxes on his bike. He gets upset if

anyone talks to him while he does this, but when he is left on his own he can load and unload boxes and deliver them. He then checks a box on his checklist to prompt him to go to his next task.

Scenario 4:

AE loves to clean. She walks around her house, her church, and her town and picks up trash whenever she sees it. She will stand next to people eating or drinking from disposable plates and cups and ask for their trash when they are done. At home and at church she carries a bucket with cleaning supplies as she loves to clean chairs and tables. Her vocabulary is limited and she gets agitated when certain phrases are used, so she wears noise-canceling headphones whenever she is in a community setting.

Thank you for completing the first part of the survey! When you click to the next screen you will see a brief (10 minute) video discussing some of the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. Please watch through the video before going to the new scenarios. The post-video scenario portion is brief (only four scenarios) and will take only a few minutes.

Appendix C: Scenarios Set 2

This ratings scale will be slightly different. Thinking back on what you learned in the educational video, please assess the following individuals using the Likert scale as follows: Using a scale of one to seven, with one being "highly unemployable", two being "unemployable", three being "somewhat unemployable", four being "unable to determine", five being "possibly employable", six being "employable" and seven being "completely employable". Your answers are confidential so please assess the individual as you might assess any potential new hire.

Scenario 1:

JT, a young man with Down Syndrome and intellectual disability, delivers items his mother has sold using his bike to get to each destination. JT's favorite activity is to move heavy boxes and he gets upset if any talks to him or interrupts him while he is moving items. While he does not like to be talked to or interrupted, he loves to use his daily checklist, which prompts him to move from one activity until the next, and he will not stop until every item on his checklist is completed.

Scenario 2:

SH is an enthusiastic cleaner, so much so that she happily watches and waits for people to finish eating or using items so she can take their trash. Cleaning is her favorite task in the world. She does not like noisy items like vacuums, but she loves her bucket of cleaning sprays and cloths and will wipe down counters, doors, tables, and desks all day every day if given the opportunity. SH does not have a big vocabulary, and she gets very, very upset if someone uses certain phrases around her. She also does not always wait to see if anyone reuses their plate or cup, and often swoops in to take it as soon as it is empty

rather than checking to see if the person wants to use it again or get a drink refill. Often she wears noise-cancelling headphones to avoid the phrases and noises that upset her.

Scenario 3:

AS is a very social individual who will discuss football with everyone (whether they want him to or not.) He sometimes has motor behaviors such as arm swinging and hand flapping due to his Autism and an intellectual disability. His favorite reward is to sweep floors, although he really loves stapling and filing papers.

Scenario 4:

MM hates being social and can only work in a quiet, isolated area as she does not like any noise to disrupt her while she is working due to her Autism. She is skilled at using Excel and is near perfect with data entry; she loves spending hours entering names and numbers. She is excellent at typing information in so long as she is only copying what is presented to her. She would like a job where she can work for no more than four or five hours a day.

Thinking back on the educational video presented earlier, please respond to the following:

1. My company would likely be open to job crafting, i.e., modifying job roles/expectations to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

   Yes   Not sure   No

2. If job coaches for individuals with disabilities are provided at no cost to your organization I believe my organization would be more likely to consider hiring individuals with disabilities.

   Yes   Not sure   No

3. The potential tax breaks for hiring individuals with disabilities would be beneficial for your business.

   Yes   Not sure   No

4. The potential community benefit for hiring individuals with disabilities would play an influential part in your decision to actively recruit individuals with disabilities.

   Yes   Not sure   No

5. You sometimes hear skilled workers complain about having to complete non-skilled tasks such as filing, cleaning, and/or basic communal tasks.

   Yes   Not sure   No

6. I was unaware of some of the potential benefits listed in the presentation.

   Yes   Not sure   No

Thank you for participating! On the next page there is an area to give your name and email address if you would like to enter the drawing for one of four $50 (fifty dollar) Amazon electronic gift cards! Please rest assured that this information will be separated from your responses, so there is no way to link your name/email to your surveys.

As a reminder, if you have any questions about my research or this survey please contact me as follows:

Claire McElvaney XXXXX

My doctoral supervisor Dr. Margaret Gopaul XXXXX

Or Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) XXXXX

If you would like to enter the drawing for one of four $50 (fifty dollar) Amazon electronic gift cards, please give your name and email address below. Only one entry per name and/or email address will be accepted. All names/email addresses will be separated from your survey responses, so your survey responses will remain anonymous. I will draw names/emails on Monday, April 4, 2022, and will email you and let you know if you won after the drawing. As always, please email me at XXXXX if you have any questions. Thank you again for your time and participation!

Name:_____

Email:_____

Appendix D: Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Psychology at Liberty University I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. **The purpose of my research is to investigate how information regarding the benefits of hiring adults with disabilities might increase one's interest in recruiting such individuals for the workplace. and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.**

I recognize that you and others with your company probably receive numerous requests to participate in survey research and that your time is extremely valuable. My research has a distinct advantage for your company and your Human Resources staff: I am actively searching for a solution to your need for staff and a community's need for a better quality of life for adults with disabilities such as Autism, Down Syndrome, and Intellectual Disability. This is why I need your help, because as a leader at your organization you have the power to model corporate social responsibility for your employees by completing this survey and sharing it with your staff and encouraging them to participate.

Participants must be 18 years or older and work at a company that employs 100 or more staff, either full-time or part-time. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a pre-video survey, watch a brief (less than one hour) educational video, and complete a post-video survey. It is anticipated that this will take less than two hours total. Both surveys and the educational video will be presented in the Google survey platform online and may be completed any day/time within the four-week span that it will be available. Participation will be completely anonymous as no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here: (survey link to be inserted). This survey will be available March 1 through March 31, 2022.

A consent document will be available on the first screen prior to starting the pre-educational survey. Because participation is anonymous, proceeding to the survey will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey. Participants who wish to submit their name/email at the end of the survey will be entered into a drawing to win one of four $50 (fifty-dollar) Amazon electronic gift cards, but these names/email will be on a separate page and will not be connected to your survey responses. This drawing will take place on Monday, April 4, 2022 and winners will be notified by the email provided.

Thank you in advance for considering my request. Building a better community, better businesses, and better lives for our citizens is something I am sure we all want, and while participating in this research is only a "drop in the bucket", it will hopefully help our community identify a way to make lives better for everyone.

Sincerely,
Claire McElvaney
I/O Psychology Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E: **Consent**

Title of the Project: Disability and employability: Challenging stereotypes
through information and education
Principal Investigator: Claire McElvaney, MS, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years or older and work at a company that employs 100 or more staff, either full-time or part-time. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate how information regarding the benefits of hiring adults with disabilities might increase one's interest in recruiting such individuals for the workplace.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a pre-video survey, this will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes;
2. Watch an embedded educational video which last approximately 45 minutes;
3. Complete a post-video survey, this will tale approximately 15 to 20 minutes.
4.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants who choose to provide their name/email information will be entered into a drawing to win one of four fifty-dollar Amazon e-giftcards. This drawing will take place on Monday, April 4 and winners will be notified via the email address they provide.

Benefits to society include increased awareness of the ability of adults with disabilities to benefit community employers.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Participant responses will be anonymous.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study but are eligible to enter a prize drawing for one of four fifty-dollar Amazon e-giftcards. Email addresses will be requested for those who wish to participate in the e-giftcard drawing; however, they will be pulled and separated from your responses to maintain your anonymity.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Claire McElvaney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at: XXXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Margaret Gopaul, at XXXXX.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at XXXXX

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher, Claire McElvaney, using the email provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. By clicking to the next screen and starting the survey I consent to participate in the study.

Appendix F: Raffle Results Email

Email for those who win the prize drawing:

Good morning!

    Thank you for participating in my research survey. I am grateful for the time you took to help with my research and, more importantly, to help build a better community by providing insight into employers' views regarding the potential benefits of hiring individuals with a disability.

      Congratulations on winning an Amazon gift card! Your $50 Amazon electronic gift card will be sent to this email address and will come directly from Amazon, so please be on the lookout (and possibly check your spam folder if you do not see the email by tomorrow). I am grateful for the time you took to participate in my survey and hope that this helps brighten your day, just as you brightened mine by completing the survey!

Kind regards,

Claire McElvaney

XXXXX

For those who do not win the prize drawing:

Good morning!

    Thank you for participating in my research survey. I am grateful for the time you took to help with my research and, more importantly, help build a better community by providing insight into employers' views regarding the potential benefits of hiring individuals with a disability. I am sorry you did not win the gift card drawing but please know that your time and assistance with this project was invaluable. I hope that soon this research and other projects like it will help improve the lives of those often overlooked in

our community. That positive change will be in part because of someone like you who

takes the time to help further our understanding of what businesses need. THANK YOU!

Kind regards,

Claire McElvaney

XXXXX