VCU-RRTC on Employment of People with Physical Disabilities

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Research Study #4 -- Research Brief #2

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Multi-Component Demand-Side Intervention Toolkit for VR Professionals to Improve Employment Outcomes of People with Physical Disabilities: A Randomized Controlled Trial Study

Diversity Training in the Workplace: Including Disability

What is diversity training?

Diversity training is an intervention intended to improve intergroup relations and to reduce prejudice. It is typically designed to enhance the skills, knowledge, and motivation of people to interact effectively with diverse others. Within the work environment, diversity training is used to help build a more successful organization with better-performing employees. To accomplish this objective, diversity training usually aims to change employee behavior towards socially disadvantaged group members. Research suggests that as many as 67% of U.S. organizations report some use of diversity training (Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

Is disability included in diversity training?

Despite a great deal of attention to gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation issues in the workplace, focus on people with disabilities has been more limited in diversity training. The neglect of disability issues in diversity training may reflect a fundamental difference in employer perceptions of disability versus other forms of diversity. Employers sometimes view disability as a "problem to be accommodated rather than a difference to be celebrated (Stensrud, 2007, p. 234)." Research indicates that using diversity training to address employers misconceptions and concerns may serve to improve hiring and retention of employees with disabilities (Brostrand, 2006; Fabian, Luecking, & Tils, 1995; Roessler, Neath, McMahon & Rumrill, 2007). Efforts to develop disability-focused diversity training programs, therefore, are greatly needed.

What do we know about disability diversity training?

A systematic review of literature on disability-focused diversity trainings in the workplace was conducted to determine the use and effectiveness of disability diversity training aimed at improving employment outcomes for employees with disabilities (Phillips, Deiches, Morrison, Chan, & Bezyak, 2015). Out of 1,322 articles searched, only three studies included an empirical investigation of a work-based, disability-focused, diversity training program.

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One study (Rudstam, Hittleman, & Gower, 2013) assessed change in employers' general disability knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, while the other two studies (Shaw, Robertson, McLellan, Verma, & Pransky, 2006; McLellan, Prasky, & Shaw, 2001) focused on promoting supervisor behavior that was supportive of employees with work-related musculoskeletal pain or disability. For the first study, significant gains were found in attitudes, knowledge, and behavioral intentions of employers after the diversity training. In the other two studies, significant decreases in lost work time and declines in injury claim rates resulted after the training, respectively. Although these three studies provide preliminary support for the effectiveness of disability diversity trainings, more rigorous research is needed to determine its influence on work-based outcomes and to establish effective practices.

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Effective Practices in Diversity Training?

Three categories of considerations for best practices were derived from general diversity training literature: design, content, and participant factors.

DESIGN
- **Duration**: 4.5 to 6 hrs appears to be optimal
- **Distribution**: Multiple sessions tends to be more effective than single session
- **Method of Delivery**: In-person training tends to be more effective than online training

CONTENT
- **Topics Included:** Focus on single aspect of diversity (e.g., disability, race, gender) tend to be more effective than multiple aspects or a general focus
- **Participant Interaction:** Active learning methods (e.g., role-playing, games) tend to be more effective than passive, lecture-based methods and videos
- **Goal-Setting** and **Mentoring** may improve effectiveness

PARTICIPANT
- **Upper Level Management:** Senior management involvement is important and influences the effectiveness of training
- **Composition of Group:** In general diversity research, training has proven more effective when groups are more than 60% women and less than 40% Caucasian

Existing Disability Diversity Training Programs?

There are a number of promising disability diversity training programs in addition to the three cited in the systematic review. Information about a few of the currently available programs are listed here:

Program	Live Trainer	Length (hours)	Active Learning	Work Setting	Cost
Workforce Discovery http://www.transcen.org/DandD/introlhtml	Y	4-8	Y	Y	N
Tilting at Windmills http://www.miltwright.com/topics/Windmills-TT.htm	Y	>4	Y	Y	Y
Work Support http://www.worksupport.com/da/intro.cfm	N (online)	<4	N	Y	N