

Closing the Gap Employer Research

Key Findings

Employer research is a key element of the Closing the Gap Project. A total of 53 employers participated in the research. All were private sector, for-profit businesses. The sample reflected the diversity of the Toronto region, and included a range of firm sizes (small, medium and large) as well as a range of industries.

Employer profile

Human resource practices

Size emerges as a key factor in how ***human resource decisions*** are made.

- . In smaller businesses, the owner or general manager usually makes these decisions.
- . Many mid-size and most large employers have specialist staff responsible for human resources. Some large employers have diversity or employment equity staff.
- . Line managers also play a critical role in human resource decisions, including those involving the employment of persons with disabilities.

Most employers in the sample use a variety of approaches for ***recruitment*** of new employees.

- . Typical practices include advertising, use of agencies and word-of-mouth. For certain jobs, employers use the employment placement services of colleges and universities. Co-op programs are also used in certain jobs, such as engineering.
- . The internet has transformed how recruitment is taking place. Many employers now turn to services such as Workopolis or Monster. Some large employers are now accepting resumés only through the internet.

Experience with persons with disabilities

Employers participating in this study have mixed ***levels of experience*** with persons with disabilities. Employer size is an important factor.

- . Small employers have the lowest level of experience, while most large employers have either some experience or significant experience.
- . The most common type of experience across all firm size is with employees who become disabled on the job. Larger employers are more likely to have experience in recruiting persons with disabilities into their workforces.

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Employers in the sample have a range of experience with different types of *accommodation*.

- . Most have flexible working arrangements.
- . Many have experience with job modification for employees who become disabled.
- . Most say that their workplaces are accessible. For employers in older buildings, accessibility is an issue.
- . A number of employers have experience in acquiring technical aids for employees with disabilities.
- . Few employers provide training for managers of persons with disabilities. A limited number of large employers are beginning to introduce this training.

Employer relationships

Employers in the sample have different types of *relationships with agencies* providing services to persons with disabilities.

- . Large employers are more likely than either mid-size or small employers to have relationships. Many small and mid-sized employers say they have never been approached by any service agency.
- . Employers with relationships usually focus on two key activities – recruitment and accommodation.

Most employers in this sample have little familiarity with *government initiatives*.

- . A few employers have used government websites to source job candidates, but most were unaware of government programs or unwilling to seek them out because of the time and effort involved.
- . The majority of employers in this sample were not familiar with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Key issues

Challenges for employers

Employers were asked to assess the challenges associated with the employment of persons with disabilities.

- . There is a range of views about the difficulty of *finding persons with disabilities* to recruit into their workforces. Large employers are more likely to know where to recruit persons with disabilities than either small or mid-sized businesses.

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- Employers generally **disagree that it is costly** to employ persons with disabilities. The majority of this sample does not see either flexible working arrangements or the extra effort to recruit persons with disabilities as costly.
- Employers **do not find it too complicated** to employ persons with disabilities. Neither paperwork nor union constraints emerged as a significant constraint. Public transit is an issue only outside the City of Toronto.
- The majority of employers in the sample **disagree that it is hard to accommodate** persons with disabilities.
- Employers **strongly disagree that other employees are uncomfortable** working with persons with disabilities or that they resent special arrangements or accommodations. Employers, however, are split on the question of whether or not their managers have the skills and experience to manage persons with disabilities.
- Employers have **mixed views on the capabilities of agencies** serving persons with disabilities. Many large employers feel that agencies do not understand the business world and agree with the statement that there are too many agencies and not enough coordination among them. At the same time, many employers say that agencies provide them with helpful services.

Business case arguments

Employers in the sample find many relevant business case arguments for employing persons with disabilities.

- The majority of employers find arguments associated with **strengthening corporate resources and capabilities** as relevant. In particular, they see the positive impact on trust and morale that comes with re-integrating employees who become disabled. Large and medium-sized employers point to the contributions that persons with disabilities can make to the richness of ideas and innovation.
- A number of employers find arguments associated with **market factors** as providing a relevant business case. In particular, making the workplace accessible provides benefits for everyone, including customers and other employees. For large employers – particularly in consumer-oriented businesses – the ability to reach and service new customers is a relevant business case.
- Many employers find **social justice** to be a relevant business case argument. However, they point out that moral reasons alone do not provide the strongest business case. Employees with disabilities are capable of contributing to the strength and competitiveness of their businesses – in the same way as any other employee. They do not need moral grounds to justify their employment.

New ideas and approaches

Employers in the sample are receptive to a wide range of new ideas and approaches.

- . They are very receptive to measures that would **increase their awareness and understanding** of persons with disabilities. They would particularly value information on accommodation.
- . They are also very receptive to measures that would **build their own capabilities**. Resource materials that would help them to adopt effective practices would be valued. Most large employers would value measure that developed the skills of the managers of persons with disabilities.
- . Employers are generally receptive to measures that would better **connect them with persons with disabilities**. Most would be receptive to the development of co-op and work experience initiatives. The majority would value strengthening the capabilities of service agencies and educational placement offices. Employers express a stronger preference for internet-based networking opportunities than for personal ones. Time considerations, and ease and flexibility of internet access influence this preference.
- . There is a wide range of views about the value of measures to **reduce their costs**. They show strong consensus on having free expert advice on accommodation, but there is much less agreement on funding for accommodation. Financial incentives to lower the wage costs of persons with disabilities have very mixed reviews. A number of employers find wage subsidies problematic because they devalue the person doing the job.
- . Many employers feel that measures to **build partnerships** aimed at increasing the representation of persons with disabilities would be valued. Employers are more likely to see value in partnerships involving service agencies and educational institutions than those involving either other employers or governments.

Advice to stakeholders

Employers in the sample were asked to provide advice to other stakeholders. A number of themes emerge.

- . Their **advice to other employers** was to: focus on ability; be respectful of persons with disabilities; be open-minded; make it a business issue; get educated about disability and accommodation; prepare managers and peers; remove and prevent barriers and disincentives; be proactive and persistent.
- . Their **advice to persons with disabilities** was to: focus on ability; understand employers; look for a good match; get education and skills; present yourself well; be open about your accommodation needs; help employers understand your accommodation needs; be proactive; be positive and persistent.

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- . Their ***advice to service agencies*** was to: understand the business environment; understand the employer's needs; match the candidate to the job; help candidates present themselves well; market persons with disabilities effectively; be respectful of business; provide and promote relevant services; reach out to business; establish partnerships.
- . Their ***advice to government*** was to: provide leadership; provide information; fund the agencies; fund education and training; provide financial incentives; legislate wisely and resolve persistent issues; be responsive to the business community.