

Misconceptions that Limit Disability Inclusion at Work

THE IMPACT OF DISABILITY INCLUSION IN BUSINESS

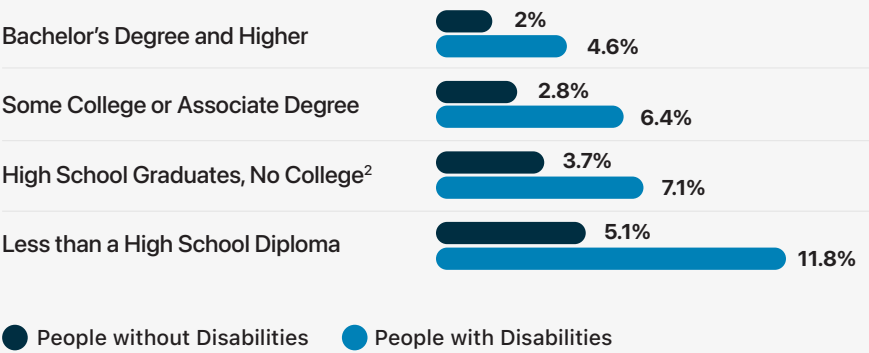


Employment Disparity Overview

The employment-to-population ratio for people with disabilities reached a record high of nearly 23% in 2023. Despite this progress, this ratio remains about two-thirds lower than that for individuals without disabilities.¹ Moreover, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities stands at 7.2%, significantly higher than the 3.5% rate for those without disabilities.

As Figure 1 shows, this disparity is consistent across all education levels, with unemployment rates for individuals with disabilities remaining roughly twice as high. It's important to note that while the employment-to-population ratio measures overall employment, the unemployment rate reflects only those actively seeking work.

Figure 1: 2023 Unemployment Rates by Education Level



This disparity highlights a critical opportunity for organizations, as people with disabilities represent a largely untapped talent pool. Yet, many companies continue to encounter systemic barriers in hiring individuals with disabilities, often fueled by persistent myths and misconceptions. These challenges not only cause valuable talent to be overlooked but

also perpetuate obstacles for people with disabilities.

By confronting and dispelling these misconceptions, we will reveal that **embracing disability inclusion is more than just a corporate responsibility—it is a strategic investment that can drive financial gains and enhance overall employee satisfaction.**

¹⁻² Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, August 29). *Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics—2022*. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

Misconception 1: People with disabilities have lower levels of productivity.

Reality:

Just like any other employee, the productivity of individuals with disabilities hinges on proper training, a suitable job match, and a supportive work environment.³

Figure 2 presents findings from a nationwide survey of 920 employers that shows employees with disabilities are highly regarded for their performance, work ethic, and productivity.⁴

Figure 2: Performance Ratings of Employees with Disabilities Compared to Their Peers⁵

Performance rated as good or excellent



Willingness to work hard (equal or greater)



Productivity (equal or greater)



By creating environments that cater to all types of workers, individuals with disabilities are more likely to not only stay at the same place of employment, but excel there. Moreover, the very environment that fosters diversity also enhances overall company productivity. According to a Gartner study, organizations with higher diversity experience a 12% increase in employee performance compared to those with lower diversity.⁶

Finding a suitable job match is crucial, as it allows individuals with disabilities to leverage their unique talents and perspectives, which can significantly boost productivity. Many people with

disabilities possess unique talents that stem directly from their disability, while others develop strengths through their experience of living with a disability. For example, neurodivergent workers often excel in innovation and creativity, and individuals who are deaf may demonstrate exceptional skills in interpreting body language.

Recognizing and harnessing these distinctive talents can greatly enhance overall workplace performance.

³ Kalargyrou, Valentini. (2014). Gaining a Competitive Advantage with Disability Inclusion Initiatives. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*. 13. 120-145. 10.1080/15332845.2014.847300.

⁴⁻⁵ Harris (Louis) and Associates, Inc., International Center for the Disabled, National Council on the Handicapped, & President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. (1987). *The ICD Survey II: Employing disabled Americans: A nationwide survey of 920 employers* (Study No. 864009). Employment and Training Administration (DOL), Office of Human Development Services (DHHS), and Social Security Administration (DHES). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED282084.pdf>

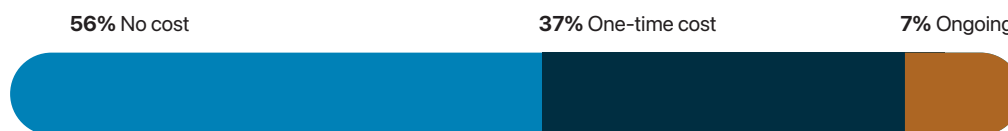
⁶ Gartner. (2023, July 11). Diversity and Inclusion: Build High-Performance Teams. Gartner. <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/diversity-and-inclusion-build-high-performance-teams>

Misconception 2: Inclusive accommodation practices are cost prohibitive.

Reality:

Accommodations in the workplace are often both inexpensive and monumentally impactful for employees. Figure 3 illustrates results from a survey of nearly 5,000 employers, which found that many accommodations are free to implement. For accommodations that involve a financial cost, the median one-time expense is only \$300.⁷ Common accommodations include meeting agendas and recaps, adaptable workstations, and flexible scheduling.

Figure 3: Cost of Implementing Accommodations⁸



These accommodations can significantly enhance satisfaction and engagement across the entire workforce, benefiting both employees with and without disabilities, and ultimately boosting productivity. In the same survey, 53% of employers reported that accommodations led to increased productivity for the individual employee, while 20% also observed a boost in overall company productivity.⁹

Accommodations also prove financially beneficial, with 89% of employers reporting that they contribute to employee retention.⁷ The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

notes that replacing an employee can cost three to four times their annual salary, with expenses divided into hard costs (40%) and soft costs (60%), including departmental time for hiring. For example, retaining an employee with a \$60,000 salary through minimal-cost accommodations can save a company between \$180,000 and \$240,000.¹⁰

The benefits here are multifaceted: affordable workplace accommodations affirm an organization's commitment to equity while providing significant savings through reduced turnover and enhancing employee satisfaction and overall productivity.

⁷⁻⁹ Job Accommodation Network. (n.d.). Costs of Accommodations. <https://askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm>

¹⁰ Pichler, S. (2024, January 23). The Real Costs of Recruitment. Society for Human Resource Management. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/real-costs-recruitment>

Misconception 3: It's challenging to create an inclusive working environment.

Reality:

Genuine commitment is essential for successfully implementing an inclusive work environment, but the process is more straightforward than it might initially seem.

A prime example of a no-cost factor with a significant impact is the role of senior leadership in shaping workplace climate and culture. The 2023 National Organization on Disability (NOD) Disabilities Insight Report shows that companies with executives who openly share their disabilities have a 34% higher rate of employees self-identifying as having disabilities.¹¹

Higher self-ID rates suggest that employees have psychological safety and are more comfortable being their authentic selves at work. McKinsey reports that psychological safety is consistently one of the strongest predictors of team performance, productivity, quality, safety, creativity, and innovation.¹²

With authentic leadership and a supportive culture, companies can effectively foster inclusivity and achieve substantial benefits, demonstrating that the process, while requiring commitment, is indeed manageable and impactful.

"I wish for a world that views disability, mental or physical, not as a hindrance but as unique attributes that can be seen as powerful assets if given the right opportunities."
– Neurologist and author,
Oliver Sacks



¹¹ National Organization on Disability. (2023). Disability in the Workplace: 2023 Insights Report. National Organization on Disability. <https://nod.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Disability-in-the-Workplace-2023-Insights-Report.pdf>

¹² McKinsey & Company. (2023, October 3). What is Psychological Safety? McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-psychological-safety?talent-acquisition/real-costs-recruitment>



Partnering for Your Success

Partnering with experts in the field makes the journey to disability inclusion significantly easier. NOD's experience helps organizations apply proven strategies, bypass common pitfalls, and avoid reinventing the wheel, which makes the process of creating an inclusive workplace significantly more efficient and effective.

As a member of NOD's **Leadership Council**, you will gain access to data-rich resources and custom support to help foster inclusion within your organization. Your dedicated Relationship Manager will provide personalized support and introduce you to a network of forward-thinking corporate trailblazers dedicated to realizing the value that equal employment opportunity can have for the organization's strategic goals.

Schedule a complimentary consultation today.

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NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON
DISABILITY