

# Why Should Employers Hire People with Disabilities? – A Review of Benefits for the Hospitality Industry

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**Abstract** | Organizations across industries are increasingly paying attention to the role of people with disabilities (PWDs) in the workplace. This exploratory study aims to identify the benefits of employing people with disabilities in the Hospitality Industry. The influence of HRM policies and practices that enhance the participation of people with disabilities at the workplace were studied. Hiring PWDs has several benefits for an organization. Increased profits and cost-effectiveness, improved business turnover and retention, substantial improvement in guest loyalty and satisfaction are a few benefits for an organization with PWDs. A cross-section of industries was studied. Further research can be conducted on the employees of five-star hotels for a more HR specific perspective. This study suggests that benevolent HRM practices for PWDs may prove beneficial for the brand value and customer loyalty in the long run. Meanwhile, HR managers need to be more practical and creative while formulating disability-inclusive initiatives. The findings of the study may be used to make the hospitality industry aware of the best practices as far as disability-inclusive plans are made for PWDs.

**Keywords** | People with disabilities, Hospitality industry, Benefits, Human resource management.

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## 1. Introduction

Disability is considered to be a physical or mental impairment that substantially limited one or more life activities (Golden, 1991). Disability may also arise out of the interaction of a person with a health condition and particular environmental situation (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2011). Social and environmental factors are broadly responsible for the limited participation of people with disabilities in a workplace (Barnes, 1992). Not only people with disabilities are far more likely to stay out of work as compared to people without disabilities but also are more likely to be paid less and also work for low status jobs in poor working conditions (Barnes, 1992). In India, disability falls in the category of seeing, hearing, in speech, in movement, in mental retardation or mental illness (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2011). The human resources department of any organization plays a vital role in the employment and retention of employees with disabilities (Stone & Colella, 1996) and one of the best ways of rehabilitating people with disabilities is to create a socially inclusive environment (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2019; Hagner et al., 2015). The role of human resource management extends beyond hiring and retaining as it also needs to make policies that help PWDs to get socially integrated within the workforce and accepted by the co-workers (Vornholt et al., 2013). A new aspect of benevolent leadership was introduced by (Luu, 2019), which talked about the psychological and physical well-being of PWDs along with the aspect of social well-being at the workplace. Work-related well-being was defined (Grant et al., 2007) as "the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work", which is an essential part of the work-life for PWDs. Thus, some hospitality companies are finding out ways of creating and maintaining a diverse workforce (Paez & Arendt, 2014). The idea of positive workforce inclusion has been advocated (Meacham et al., 2017), whe-

reby the social exchange theory (Richard, 1971), and the social climate theory (Collins & Smith, 2006), have been incorporated as far as workers with intellectual disabilities are concerned. As customers also form a crucial part of the hospitality service equation, guests from diverse backgrounds and guests inclined towards corporate social responsibility get attracted towards hospitality organizations which employ PWDs. This attraction, in turn, also results in increased revenues for the organization (Kalargyrou, 2014)

Kulkarni et al., (2016) suggests that PWDs who get employment are hardly retained in their jobs for a long time. In the past, PWDs have not done well in the US market as only 4 out of 10 people with disabilities work full time (Kraus et al., 2018). One of the biggest challenges faced by PWDs is to search for a job and also maintain satisfactory job performance (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Bengisu & Balta, 2011). Numerous other challenges faced by PWDs are, limited interaction with various other employee groups, lack of awareness of job placement agencies, and the physical barriers created due to the design of the workplace (Gröschl, 2007b). The employer's attitude toward PWDs can be better understood by a term called "aesthetic anxiety" whereby the owner of a hotel or a restaurant is holding a perception that PWDs might create a negative perception about the business in the eyes of the customer (Jasper & Waldhart, 2013). An indication of this attitude is also reflected by the fact that some hotel organizations have no mention of diversity or diversity-related ideas of inclusion of PWDs on their corporate websites (Gröschl, 2011). Legislations should be framed and enforced in such a way that their should be zero tolerance for any discrimination against people with disability in whatever manner (Barnes, 1992).

On the contrary, there are hospitality companies like the German-based Embrace Hotel, which introduced the concept of "Integrative Hotels" where at least 60% of employees are PWDs

(Gröschl, 2013). Nonetheless, studies show that despite awareness about workforce diversity, hotels in urban areas still find it challenging to attract and employ PWDs (Gröschl, 2007a; Kalargyrou, 2014). It has been observed (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012) that if a hospitality organization decides to employ and retain PWDs, this will not only reduce costs but will also significantly improve the length of service of the employees.

With an idea to diversify the workforce, hospitality companies like Marriott, Hyatt, Starwood, McDonald, and Sodexo have employed people from diverse backgrounds to serve their guests from diverse backgrounds (Kalargyrou et al., 2018). A recent video posted (Gutowski & Dixon, 2016) showed Sam, a young Starbuck's barista, who overcame his autism and movement disorder by dancing to music while making a beverage ordered for his guests. Approximately 60 million people viewed this video. The overwhelming response of the viewership showed that people wanted to see success and recognition for PWDs (Rosenbaum et al., 2017a). As specialized training is essential for PWDs, recruiters from the healthcare, hospitality, and retail sectors have observed common patterns of PWDs being associated with an agency which specializes in such training (Hernandez et al., 2008; Dicen et al., 2019;). As was similar in the case of (McIntosh & Harris, 2018) Special Needs Hotel when all the PWDs were being trained on various hospitality tasks at the Foxes Hotel which was attached to a rehabilitation facility. Besides corporate social responsibility, addressing employability of PWDs is now another idea of social business innovation, for work integration social enterprises, in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Alegre & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016).

This paper aims at highlighting the best human resource management practices as far as employing and retaining PWDs is concerned. With an exception to corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019), all commercial organizations work for profits. We also aim to

highlight the benefits that an organization would derive from employing PWDs in its workforce.

## 2. Research Methodology

To accomplish the research objectives, a structured literature review was conducted focusing on PWDs. Initially, the authors analysed more than 115 articles on hiring PWDs published in last two decades. Then, only those papers were selected that were published in peer-reviewed journals which is one of the best approach for conducting systematic review as suggested by Leung et al., 2013; Shashi et al., 2018. After reading the abstracts of all the research papers published in peer-reviewed journals, 97 research papers were then selected which were relevant for the current study based on the proposed themes. Afterwards, Authors have carefully read 97 research papers in detail and found that 75 research papers are actually covering the proposed area of interest and have been considered as part of this study.

SCOPUS and Web of Sciences were the two main databases that were used for literature search (Teixeira, 2019; Centobelli et al., 2020). Other than these, the authors have also used ProQuest, EBSCO, K-Hub, and DELNET databases to identify the relevant research papers. The Keywords associated with disabilities such as hiring people with disabilities, advantages and benefits of employing people with disabilities, workforce diversity in hospitality industry, inclusive human resource policies, people with disabilities in hospitality industry, and disability awareness were extensively searched to identify the appropriate literature. After providing a thorough literature review covering benefits of hiring PWDs, the authors have outlined a summary table of 'Benefits of hiring PWDs'. This table would help the organizations and the future researches to identify various benefits of hiring PWDs, and also reflects the combined efforts of

all the authors who have contributed toward those benefits.

### 3. Benefits of hiring PWDs

#### 3.1 Organizational Profitability and Cost Saving

The literature indicates five studies pointed at sustained and improved profits as a result of hiring PWDs. An increase in sales was reported (Buciuniene, 2010; Pehlivano, 2019) at malls and supermarkets employing PWDs. Cost-saving was in terms of not being forced to perform, re-hiring and re-training once workplace accommodations were in place (Hartnett et al., 2011; Schartz et al., 2006). Growth in business and profits for the hospitality industry was discussed (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014) although specific measures were not listed. The inclusion of visually challenged in the workforce resulted in enhanced sales as experienced by employers of nine, not for profit organizations (Wolffe & Candela, 2002). Improved retention resulting in major tax saving, cost-cutting on recruitment and training overtime was reported by an organization (Zivolich et al., 1997). Two studies indicated that hiring people with intellectual disabilities and autism proved to be cost-effective in terms of their vocational and administrative rehabilitation (Robert et al., Burgess, 2011). The majority of the employees, more than 70%, favoured benefits over the cost of including PWDs along with a significantly positive impact on the work-related environment at the workplace (Grafam et al., 2002; Kearney et al., 2019). Inclusion of PWDs in a countries workforce would result in such workers becoming taxpayers and benefit the overall economy of that country (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997). Resources spent by the country on the social welfare and rehabilitation cost of such people were also significantly reduced (Zivolich et

al., 1997). Eggleton et al., (1999) suggested that it was economically beneficial to provide employment and help generate income rather than utilizing resources and spend money on their welfare and rehabilitation.

#### 3.2 Employee Longevity or Longer Job Tenures for PWDs

Literature suggests that hiring PWDs, positively influences the longevity, retention, and turnover of employees. For example, PWDs employed as caretakers, doorkeepers or doorman and in the hospitality housekeeping department, had a higher rate of retention as compared to employees without any disabilities (GE & TE, 1996; Sharma, 2019). Malls and supermarkets have a high rate of turnover but (Buciuniene I, 2010) that was significantly lower in the same industry as far as PWDs were concerned. A unique survey conducted (Chi & Qu, 2003) on 500 hospitality employees concluded that PWDs had a lower turnover rate. A national-level chain of restaurants was able to make significant financial savings in a short tenure after employing PWDs in their hospitality workforce (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997). It was reported that PWDs had longer employment stints in the hospitality industry as compared to the non-disabled workforce (Hernandez & McDonald, 2010). PWDs employed as front-line staff in the retail sector also showed lower turnover as compared to the non-disabled workforce (Kalargyrou, 2014; Kearney et al., 2019). Kaletta et al., (2012) concluded that as far as employing PWDs in the supply-chain management was concerned, the rate of turnover was higher with people without disabilities as compared to PWDs. Creating workplace accommodations is an integral part of making the workplace conducive for PWDs. Once the accommodations were provided, the PWDs proved to significantly reduce turnover and positively impact the long-term retention of PWDs (Hartnett

et al., 2011).

### 3.3 Fidelity or Loyalty amongst Employees with Disabilities

PWDs, who are long-serving employees, also show faith, dedication, and loyalty towards their organizations. For example, PWDs employed in malls and supermarkets were thankful to the organization for providing them with a source of income and hence were very loyal as compared to employees without any disabilities (Buciuniene I, 2010). In the food service industry (Chi & Qu, 2003) and the hospitality industry (Asghar et al., 2019) where timeliness is the essence, PWDs were more dedicated, loyal and punctual at the workplace. Nietupski et al., (1996) concluded that employee dedication was the topmost benefit, an organization could derive by employing PWDs in its workforce. Lack of work-related opportunities and not being able to live independently contributed in a significant way for enhanced loyalty of PWDs towards their organizations once they were employed (Kalargyrou, 2014).

### 3.4 Corporate Image

Hiring PWDs had a positive impact on the image of the organization in the minds of its stakeholders (Miethlich & Oldenburg, 2019). For example, hiring people with different kinds of disabilities enhanced the image of the organization (Hartnett et al., 2011). This fact was validated and was found to be true for the hospitality industry also (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017). At a hospitality and food service organization like a coffee shop, employees with hearing impairment created a sense of care for the guest and helped to enhance the image of the organization (Friedner, 2013). Similarly, hard of hearing employees too played a significant role in improving the image of a company

engaged in the business process outsourcing domain (Friedner, 2015).

### 3.5 Winning edge over the competition

Employing PWDs in the hospitality workforce may prove to become a USP and stand out from the competition. For example, hiring visually impaired individuals as the front-line staff for a restaurant will attract guests as well as ensure a repeat visit too (Rosenbaum et al., 2017b). Senior managers across organizations have mentioned that employing PWDs significantly increased the competitive edge as well as created a loyal workforce available, extraordinarily dedicated, and punctual towards the organization (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014). The guest too carried a favourable image as part of the wholesome experience while dealing with the organization (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014).

### 3.6 Diversified Customer Base

Customers from diverse backgrounds are at the centre of a service experience as far as the hospitality industry is concerned. Khan et al. (2019) and Theodoros (2019) have indicated the increase of a diverse customer base as a result of employing PWDs in the organization. In the case of malls and stores, it was observed that the footfall of customers with various disabilities increased significantly as a result of employees with disabilities interacting with such customers (Buciuniene, 2010). In a survey conducted (Schartz et al., 2006), the resultant spur in the number of customers was attributed to hiring and employing PWDs. To tap into the market segment of prospective customers who stood for an all-inclusive workforce concept (Henry et al., 2014) concluded that employing PWDs influenced customer decisions significantly.

### 3.7 Fidelity or Loyalty amongst customers

In this age and time where the customers are driving markets across industries, their loyalty and patronage have been significantly influenced by employing PWDs across industries namely hospitality (Bengisu & Balta, 2011; Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014; Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014; Rosenbaum et al., 2017b; Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997), telecommunication (Kalef et al., 2014) and allied industries (Siperstein et al., 2006). People with visual (Rosenbaum et al., 2017b), intellectual (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997) disabilities were the primary influencers for enhanced customer loyalty.

### 3.8 PWDs with innovative skills

One of the major and unique benefits cited by employers for employing PWDs was cited in three studies (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014; Friedner, 2015; Scott et al., 2017). As a result of their disabilities, employees with disabilities were able to suggest and implement innovative service methods and procedures (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014). PWDs proved to be extremely creative in the business process outsourcing industry (Friedner, 2015). Employees with autism were explained to have many abilities, including being creative (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997).

### 3.9 Output & Employee Productivity

In a study conducted (Graffam et al., 2002) majority of the employers, about 60% from across industries said that employing PWDs had a considerable positive impact on productivity. Comparing employees with and without disabilities, employers from the hospitality industry found that PWDs were as productive as employees without disabilities (Bengisu & Balta, 2011). Employers from the logistic supply chain industry also agreed

on this issue (Kaletta et al., 2012). Employers from the footwear industry found that the productivity of employees with disabilities had considerably improved (Bitencourt & De, 2012). Employees with hearing impairment were found to be very productive and followed excellent work habits (Friedner, 2015). Employing PWDs showed improvement is the overall productivity of all employees in the hospitality industry (Halim et al., 2019). Contrary to the generally perceived challenge, employers found that by providing for workplace accommodations, the productivity of employees with disabilities significantly improved (Friedner, 2015; Hartnett et al., 2011; Schartz et al., 2006).

### 3.10 Ethics at the Workplace

Employees with hearing and autism as disabilities were reported to follow a solid work ethic and disciplined approach toward the rules and regulations of their respective organizations (Zhu & Sun, 2017). Exceptional attention to detail, ability to follow all rules and regulations by an employee with autism was considered as an example for other employees (Scott et al., 2017). Employees with hearing disability were found to follow strong work ethics and were also found to undertake jobs and tasks that were beyond their job role (Friedner, 2015). PWDs were found to be very hardworking, dedicated, and efficient while performing their job role in their respective organizations (Irvine & Lupart, 2008; Nietupski et al., 1996).

### 3.11 Safety at the Workplace

In the hospitality industry, organizations created the best workplace accommodations, safety, and security procedures for employees to work side by side with PWDs (Kalargyrou, 2014). Accidents related to the workplace were reported to be lesser by 34% in the retail industry (Kaletta et al., 2012).

In the hospitality industry, employees with autism and cognitive impairment also experienced similar safety at their workplace (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997). Workplace safety and security was significantly enhanced once the special accommodations for PWDs were in place (Schartz et al., 2006).

### 3.12 Workforce Diversity (Inclusive Work Environment)

Training on disabilities, for all employees without disabilities was considered an effective tool to improve the image of the organization and was found to have a positive impact on the development of a diverse workforce for the organization (Buciuniene, 2010). Hiring PWDs could considerably assist an organization in developing a diverse employee base as well as promote inclusivity and positivity in the entire workforce (Hernandez et al., 2008). The telecom industry experienced a diverse work culture, positive environment as well as enhanced co-workers coordination and participation as a result of hiring PWDs in their workforce (Kalef et al., 2014). Improved social inclusion and an enhanced sense of well-being among employees was also noted (Owen et al., 2015). The presence of employees with autism promoted an inclusive work culture (Scott et al., 2017; Vashishth et al., 2019; Kampani & Jhamb, 2020.). Due to the availability of workplace accommodation for PWDs, the organization experienced enhanced co-worker interaction and coordination at the workplace (Schartz et al., 2006; Solovieva et al., 2009). As far as work-related motivation and employee engagement were concerned, (Friedner, 2013; To-

mez, 2017; Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014) a considerable improvement was found as a result of hiring PWDs. This also improved the morale of all employees at the workplace (Hartnett et al., 2011; Schartz et al., 2006; Scott et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2006; Solovieva et al., 2011; Solovieva et al., 2009; Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997).

### 3.13 Awareness of Capabilities and Improved Quality of Life

Public awareness about the capabilities of PWDs was significantly improved at malls and supermarkets (Buciuniene, 2010). Awareness about a rare disability like autism was increased due to hiring PWDs (Rosenbaum et al., 2017b). The inclusion of PWDs at the workplace significantly enhanced the level of recognition amongst employees (Hartnett et al., 2011) as well as community acceptance and better workforce culture of the organization (Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997). Many managers at an organization felt that after working with PWDs, they saw a significant change in their thinking about the capabilities of PWDs (Lindsay et al., 2018). As a result of employment, PWDs experienced good quality of life (Eggleton et al., 1999) as well as they could also see their self-confidence improve (Blessing & Jamieson, 1999; Buciuniene, 2010; Irvine & Lupart, 2008; Owen et al., 2015). The stable source of income (Clark et al., 1998; Kuiper et al., 2016) helped PWDs to enhance their social presence and also made them felt included in the broader community (Moura et al., 2012; Kuiper et al., 2016)

Author & Benefits	Profitability	Turnover/Retention	Reliability & Punctuality	Employee Loyalty	Company Image	Competitive Advantage	Diverse Customers	Customer Loyalty	Innovation Skills	Productivity	Safety	Inclusive Work Culture	Ability	Work Ethic
(Hartnett et al., 2011)	✓	✓			✓					✓		✓	✓	✓
(Buciuniene I, 2010)	✓	✓		✓			✓					✓		✓
(Schartz et al., 2006)	✓		✓				✓			✓	✓	✓		
(Wolffe-Candela, 2002)	✓		✓									✓		
(Zivolich & Weiner-Zivolich, 1997)	✓	✓						✓			✓	✓		✓
(Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		
(Hernandez & McDonald, 2010)		✓												
(Chi & Qu, 2003)		✓	✓	✓										
(Kalargyrou, 2014)		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓			
(GE & TE, 1996)		✓												
Kaletta et al., (2012)		✓	✓							✓	✓			
Hernandez et al., (2008)			✓									✓		
Nietupski et al., (1996)			✓	✓	✓									✓
Hindle, Gibson, & David, (2010)			✓											
Graffam et al., (2002)			✓					✓		✓				
Houtenville & Kalargyrou, (2012)				✓										
(Friedner, 2013)					✓									
(Friedner, 2015)					✓				✓	✓				✓

Table 1: | Benefits of Hiring PWD

Table 1 highlights the contribution of the previous researchers in context to the benefits of hiring PWDs. The idea behind showcasing the efforts of the researchers collectively is threefold. First, it highlights the past research on PWDs and combines different benefits in a unique table. Second, the table not only combines all the benefits of hiring PWDs together but also help in understanding the importance of each benefit by looking at how many times each benefit is quoted by the number of researchers such as inclusive work culture is supported by twelve researchers followed by ability (eleven times) and reliability and punctuality (ten times). Inclusive work culture states that hiring PWDs boost an environment of equality, respect, and positive appreciations and helps in reducing the disability barriers in context to social and institutional environment. Ability, on the other side, builds the trust of the internal stakeholders on PWDs in terms of their capabilities to complete a job task effectively. Researches also claim

that PWDs are more reliable and punctual in their work which becomes beneficial for the hospitality industry in maintaining an overall disciplined environment. Also, there are number of factors namely competitive advantage, diverse customer base, and innovation skills emerged as the least important benefits of hiring PWDs because all these factors are supported by three researchers only. Third, our efforts will help the future researchers to further empirically investigate the importance of these benefits and may come out with new insights.

#### 4. Conclusion

Creating awareness about the employability of PWDs is vital today. Highlighting the benefits associated with hiring PWDs may help employers overcome stereotypes. The barriers associated with finding worthwhile employment for PWDs are



many. If the organisations are made aware of the unique benefits of hiring PWDs, this may ease the struggle. Various issues like that of workplace accommodations being costly have been contradicted through the literature(s). Findings show that such accommodations were not costly and contributed towards creating a diverse work culture and promoted employee cooperation and interaction amongst PWDs and all other employees. The literature advocated that hiring PWDs significantly contributed to meet the primary objective of an organisation of generating profits. The literature also indicated a favourable impact on the organisation's employee retention & turnover, workforce loyalty, and improvement in the overall image of the company. The literature also drew a comparison of PWDs as being more reliable, punctual, and loyal toward the organisation than employees without disabilities. The findings showed that hiring PWDs helped the organisation in getting ahead of the competition. Aspects such as customer loyalty, diversification of the consumer base, and innovative business practices experienced an upward progression. Amongst other industries, the retail, services, and hospitality domains experienced this the most. This was consistent with the claim that customers who favoured workforce inclusion and diversification patronised organisations in a regular practice of hiring and supporting PWDs. The literature highlighted the capabilities and qualities of PWDs. Employees, especially those who were hearing impaired or had autism, were found to be extremely creative, full of ideas of innovation and someone who followed a strong work ethic with exceptional attention for detail. One of the unique finding was associated with workplace safety and security features. It was highlighted that organisations that employed PWDs had excellent safety and security records. The number of accidents was less and all employees experienced a better sense of well-being and social interaction at the workplace. Other benefits of employing PWDs were associated with non-workplace aspects. It was found that stable

employment created a positive impact on the lives of PWDs. Due to their income generation; PWDs experienced a better quality of daily life. The social connections and interaction improved and PWDs experienced better self-confidence and self-esteem. The larger society was able to accept them and this induced a sense of inclusion in PWDs.

#### 4.1 Limitations

Finding relevant research papers was limited to the keywords and terms used to extract data from scholarly journals and databases. Second, the policies applicable for PWDs across industries varied and hence may be limited to the industry-specific issues. Likewise, feedback by employers on issues related to financial incentives and the overall attitude of the co-workers also varied and hence the findings should be interpreted accordingly. Third and the final limitation come out of our choice of papers in the English language only and from peer-reviewed journals; hence some literature might have been missed by us.

#### 4.2 Future Scope

The change in the quality of life for PWDs after getting employed can be studied further. The correlation between the level of education and job-specific skill set may also be explored in future research. Certain types of jobs may be conducive for specific disabilities; thus, more emphasis may be laid in future research. There is a lack of literature that elaborates on PWDs working at higher levels in management and administration; thus, further research may focus on this aspect too.

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