THE STATE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

A Report by Global Disability Inclusion & Mercer

Insights based on 12M+ Global Responses

Global Disability Inclusion

MERCER

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INTRODUCTION: DISABILITY INCLUSION

The practice of diversity and inclusion has provided organizations with innovative leadership, better product development, and improved customer service. Recognizing individual differences strengthens an organization, creates cultural competency, and enables employees to engage more fully and interact more effectively.

Set in motion by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, diversity inclusion efforts have been underway in most organizations for more than four decades. Yet, despite the fact that people with disabilities represent 15% of the global population, they have been sequestered into a micro-diversity group which is often overlooked, or entirely left out of diversity discussions and initiatives.

In 2020, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and many corporations have integrated disability causes as part of their philanthropic efforts. But many have failed to view people with disabilities as part of their global talent strategies, nor as a viable consumer base. It has been reported that 90% of global corporations report being committed to diversity and inclusion efforts, but only 4% state having a disability inclusion focus.*

The employment and inclusion of people with disabilities has garnered the attention of the global stage, appearing on the agenda at the World Economic Forum (WEF) for the first time in 2019. The inclusion of disability on the global business agenda was a key milestone in helping companies understand the benefits of inclusion and the global costs for leaving people with disabilities outside of the inclusion movement.

We are at the precipice of significant change as the world begins to understand that Disability IS Diversity, and it's time to change the way companies recruit, hire, engage, and retain talent with disabilities. This study**, which currently represents **12M+ global employee responses**, is the first report of its kind and magnitude sharing the engagement and perceptions of employees with disabilities.

We believe these data will provide organizations with detailed insights and actionable information to create more inclusion efforts that focus on improving employee experiences for individuals with disabilities.

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*The Return on Disability Report

**Mercer|Sirota, in partnership with Global Disability Inclusion, has been capturing data on the employee engagement of individuals with disabilities and comparing their work experiences with their non-disabled colleagues. The study began in 2008 and continues through today.

DISABILITY DEFINED

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The ADA also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on association with a person with a disability.

World Health Organization

Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is often a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations like social events and activities.

Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD states that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Article one of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Purpose) further offers that: "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

It is the disconnect between the environment and attitudinal barriers that global organizations must begin to address in order to become more inclusive of people with disabilities and create organizations that are focused on universal inclusion. **Universal inclusion is the design of work environments, products, services and customer service programs are knowledgeable and equipped to handle the needs of all employees and users.**"

CALLS TO ACTION

Food for Thought

How can diversity and inclusion programs comprehensively investigate diversity issues when the group with the largest differences in the largest group are not part of most D&I programs?

As we analyzed the data captured from global engagement surveys we compared the workplace experiences of individuals with disabilities versus the work experiences of employees without disabilities. Our findings show on verage a -6-8 point difference in engagement from employees with disabilities demonstrating they are less engaged and satisfied with their work, their companies, and managers

It is important to note that typically **a five-point difference is a "call to action" when differences exist between groups**. For example, if female employees scored 5% less than their male colleagues, this typically results in a detailed analysis of existing program to identify the factors causing the active disengagement of female employees and launch new initiatives to counteract these forces.

Our research makes it evident that employees with disabilities score less favorably than those without disabilities. In fact, in no instance did employees with disabilities score higher on any employment element when compared to those who did not identify as having a disability, or any other diversity segment. For typical engagement questions, we see the engagement gap of employees with disabilities on average is -6 points lower than their non-disabled colleagues with some data points reaching a remarkable -12 or -13 point gap.*

*While most diversity and inclusion committees are actively working on differences by gender, age, and ethnicity, the differences in Mercer's global engagement research show very small to no differences by these diversity groups. Looking at main effect differences by engagement, gender shows no difference (80% favorable for females, 80% for males). Ethnicity finds no notable main ef ect differences in engagement by ethnic group (80% Asian, 80% Black/African American, 82% Latino, 80% Native American, 79% White, 77% more than one ethnicity). Similarly, for age, we see no notable main effect differences in engagement (under 55 at 79%, 55 and over at 81%). Even sexual orientation, which has been difficult o collect consistently due to changes in sexual orientation terminology changes show no notable main effect differences in engagement with heterosexual employees scoring 82% and homosexual employees scoring 80%.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A Global Disability Workplace Engagement Crisis

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY (-8)

Employee equity means everyone is treated fairly in the workplace. Equity sets clear expectations for all employees, and provides clear channels to opportunities, and rewards advancement, as well as consequences for employees who do not live up to the organizational mission, values, structure and performance expectations.

Employee equity showed some of the greatest gaps in all survey questions between employees with disabilities and those without disabilities, demonstrating there is a significant disconnect in equity, opportunity, and how valued individuals with disabilities feel in their organization. At the basis of this rating, individuals with disabilities do not feel they have the same work opportunities within their company that individuals without disabilities do.

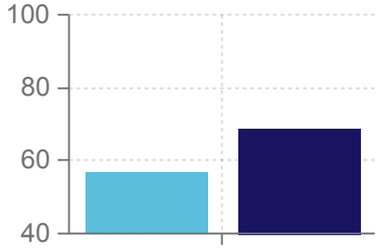
The question in particular that showed wide variability was "My company creates an environment where people of diverse backgrounds can succeed." People define for themselves what “diverse backgrounds” means for them. It is our belief that people with disabilities are interpreting “diverse backgrounds” as their identified disability.

Key Takeaway

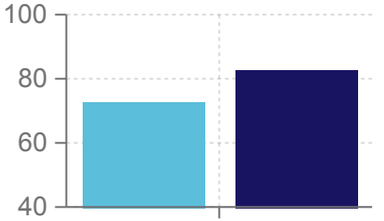
Inclusion and equity speak to how an employee perceives how the organization treats them, or cares about them as an individual and a contributor at work.

Do they feel valued in an organization?
Are they treated respectfully regardless of their diverse backgrounds?
Do they feel they can be themselves?

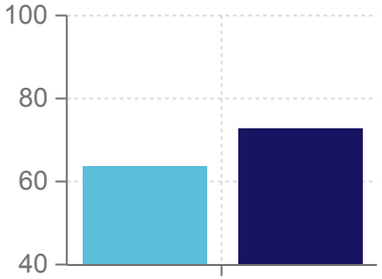
“Employees can express their ideas/views without negative consequences.” -12



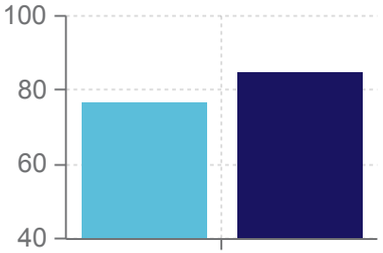
“My Company treats employees fairly regardless of their age, family/marital status, gender, disability, race/color , religion or sexual orientation.” -10



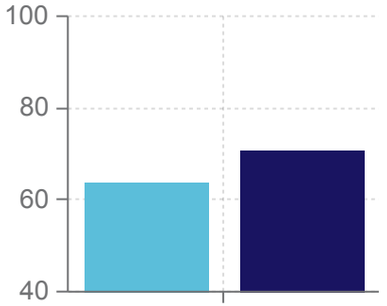
“My company takes an interest in the well-being of its employees.” -9

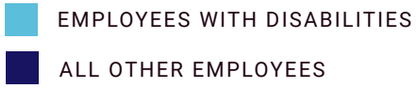


“My company creates an environment where people of diverse backgrounds can succeed.” -8



“I feel valued by my company.” - 7





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EMPLOYMENT EQUITY (-8)

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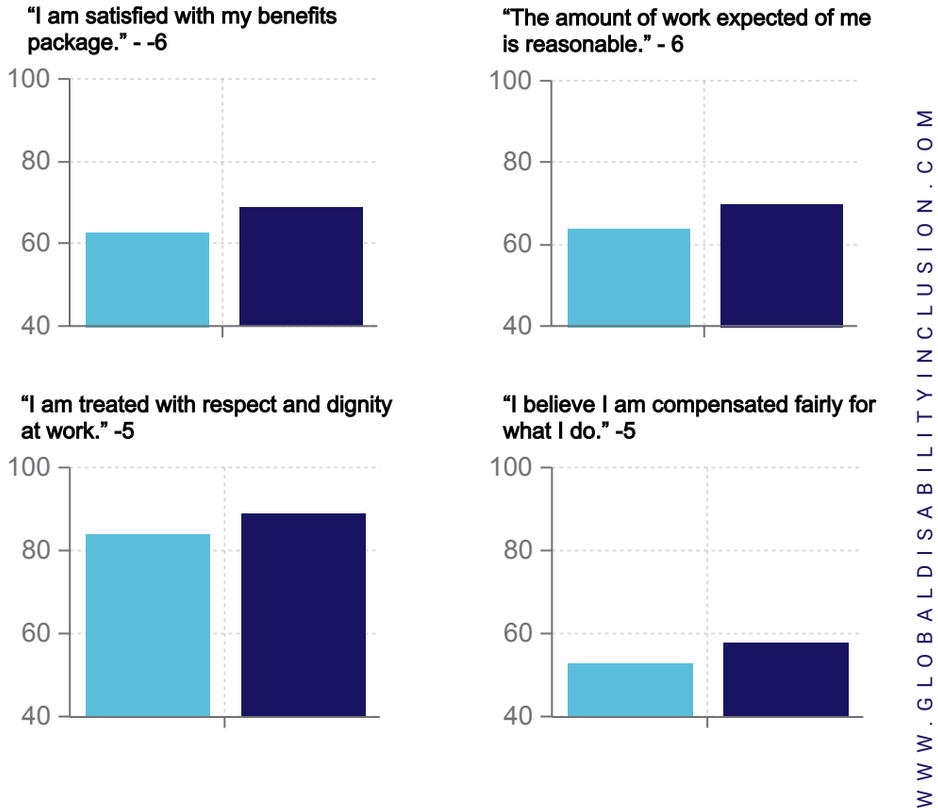
Equitable workplaces attract top talent because there is an understanding that no matter who you are, you have an opportunity for professional development, fair pay, education, ability to speak up and ultimately if you choose to, opportunity for advancement. Yet, our data show that individuals with disabilities do not feel their workplaces offer the same opportunities or equity in these areas.

It has been well documented that diverse organizations are more efficient, have better strategies and have broader perspectives to create opportunities and solve problems.

As companies strive to create diverse and equitable organization, our data points to the critical need for corporations to focus on workplace equity for those with disabilities.
Additionally, equity questions such as compensation, benefits, and being treated with dignity and respect also showed large differences between those with disabilities and those without, albeit, slightly smaller than the previously discussed items, but these numbers are still a call to action.

Key Takeaway

Feeling valued is at the crux of these equity differences. It has been well documented when employees feel valued by their company they are more engaged, work harder and maintain a stronger commitment to their organization.



WORKPLACE ACHIEVEMENT (-8)

Employees inherently want their work to add value to themselves, their team, managers and ultimately to the company. In “The Enthusiastic Employee,” David Sirota writes of three pillars to an engaged employee: Achievement, Camaraderie, and Equity. Employees want to feel they have accomplished something, need to get along with their co-workers and need to be treated fairly.

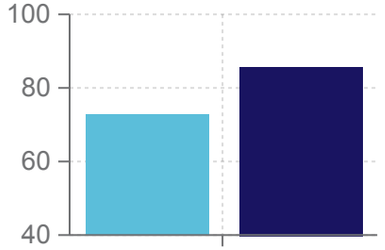
All employees desire opportunities for professional development and growth; they need to feel that they can advance successfully within the organization or if they do not wish to advance, they need to feel they can grow within their current position or role. In our survey questions, we asked employees how they felt about their ability to achieve through opportunities for professional development, growth, and advancement. The questions ranged from perceptions about their skills and abilities, recognition from management, their ability for independent decision making and the prospects for advancement.

Workplace Achievement questions demonstrated some of the largest gaps in all the survey questions with a -13, "I have the freedom to use my judgement in getting my job done." And, -12, "I receive recognition from management when I do a good job".

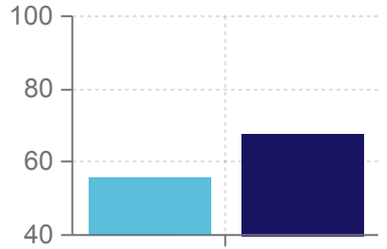
Key Takeaway

Overall, employees with disabilities are less confident their skills will be used effectively, or that they can be trusted to use their own judgement when it comes to performing their work.

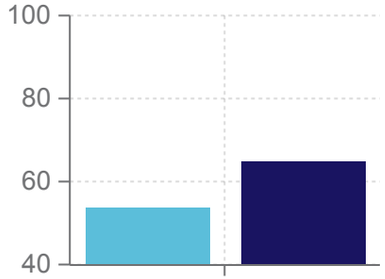
“I have the freedom to use my judgement in getting my job done.” -13



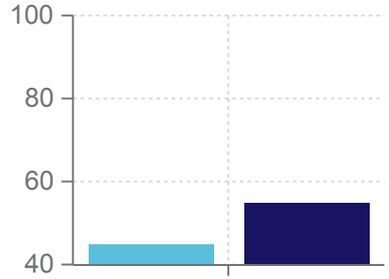
“I receive recognition from management when I do a good job.” -12



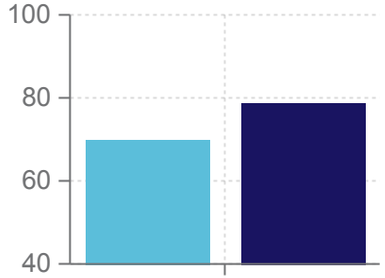
“I am appropriately involved in decisions about my work.” -11



“I have the opportunity for advancement.” -10



“My job makes good use of my skills and abilities.” -9



EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

ALL OTHER EMPLOYEES

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WORKPLACE ACHIEVEMENT (-8)

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Individuals with disabilities often feel "stuck" in their roles and within those roles, they are less likely to be chosen for important projects or have the ability to take on leadership roles within their teams. Additionally, people with disabilities don't feel they have the same autonomy for decision making and creativity about their work as their non-disabled colleagues.

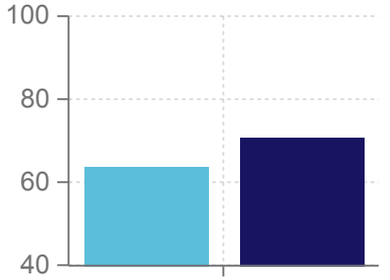
This impacts workplace morale and engagement as employees with disabilities often feel their skill sets are underutilized, undervalued, and that their managers don't provide the appropriate recognition for a job well done.

Achievement questions also had a few data points that showed smaller gaps, yet still statistically notable and a call to action.

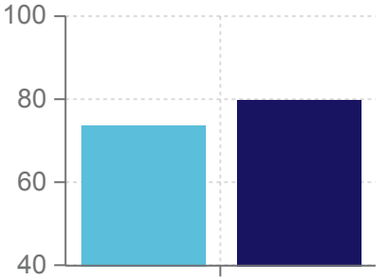
Key Takeaway

It is clear employees with disabilities believe they do not have the same opportunities for growth and/or advancement within their company as other diverse groups.

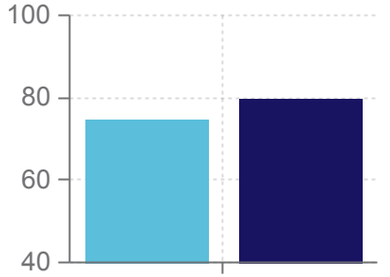
"I feel my career goals can be met at my company." -7



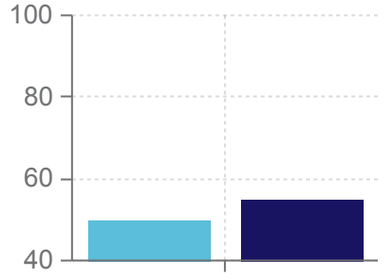
"My immediate manager recognizes me when I do a good job." - 6



"My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment." -5



"The better my performance the more I am rewarded." -5



EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

ALL OTHER EMPLOYEES

LEADERSHIP (-7)

Leadership and management entail two distinct levels in the organization: 1) immediate manager and supervisors and 2) senior leadership. Both levels are critical for creating an engaged and inclusive organization, however; they represent different experiences to the employees.

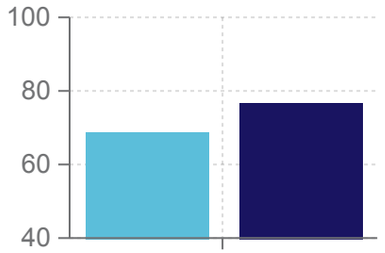
Senior Leadership - Employees with disabilities rate their faith in leadership as -7 points lower than their non-disabled counterparts (eg. “My Company has effective senior leadership”). There is greater distrust of leadership with employees with disabilities, which is evident in the -6 difference in the question, “At my company senior leadership actions are consistent with what they say.”

Employees with disabilities did not feel as comfortable as other diversity groups in reporting unethical behavior or practices because of fear of retaliation. This question had an -8 point gap between those with disabilities and those without. Employees with disabilities are underemployed or unemployed at twice the rate of someone without a disability and securing a new job on average can take 8-12 months (although this varies by industry and skill set). This plays a key role in their willingness to addressing difficult or unethical behaviors and practices.

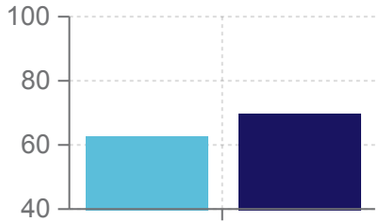
Key Takeaway

Employees with disabilities are more disconnected from senior leaders. They are more fearful to come forward to raise concerns or create a perception they are complaining about their work. Individuals with disabilities don’t want to “rock the boat."

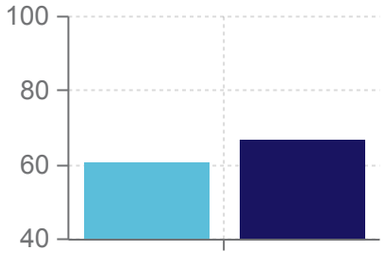
“I can report unethical behavior or practices without fear of retaliation.” -8



“My Company has effective senior leadership (i.e., senior leadership who knows what it wants to do, inspires confidence).” -7



“At my company senior leadership actions are consistent with what they say (e.g. the walk the talk).” -6



EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

ALL OTHER EMPLOYEES

IMMEDIATE MANAGER (-4)

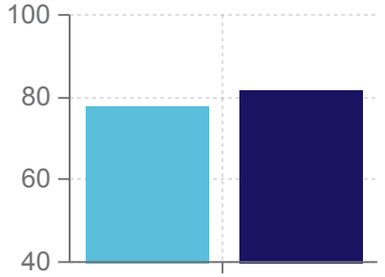
Contrary to other engagement scores, scores about immediate managers show smaller differences. Our research indicates that employees with disabilities view their managers quite similarly to their colleagues without disabilities. This is because employees work to build a strong level of trust with their managers and work to ensure this level of trust translates into being supported at work. So, the small variance in this rating could indicate there is typically a clear understanding and practice within a company as to how to engage with managers.

Another reason for this variance could be one of disability disclosure. It is known that when employees choose to disclose their disability, it is frequently to their immediate manager/supervisor before disclosure to Human Resources. For some the experience of disclosure has been negative, or a portion may not have disclosed yet due to fears of discrimination, and being perceived as unable to take on big projects or even retaliation. However, we have found people who disclose their disability are more engaged with the organization than those who have not disclosed.

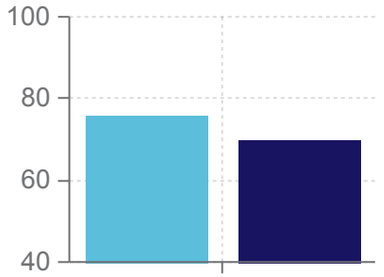
Key Takeaway

People who disclose their disability are more engaged with the organization, their managers, and their teams than those who have not disclosed.

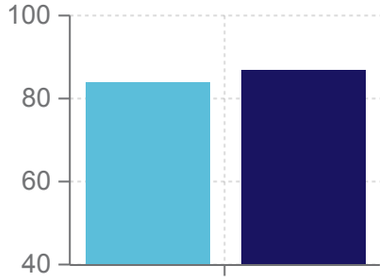
Overall, my manager is doing a good job." - -4



"My immediate manager supports my professional development." -4



"My immediate manager listens to my concerns and suggestions." -3



EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

ALL OTHER EMPLOYEES

OVERALL ENGAGEMENT (-6)

Employee engagement represents the level of commitment and connection to their company; it is how individuals feel about the company and a key outcome variable on engagement surveys. Overall engagement has a direct impact on how employees present themselves at work and influences their productivity, efficiency, safety, and the overall quality of their work. How an employee feels about their job and their company directly impacts how they perform on the job and has a direct impact on the success of the business.

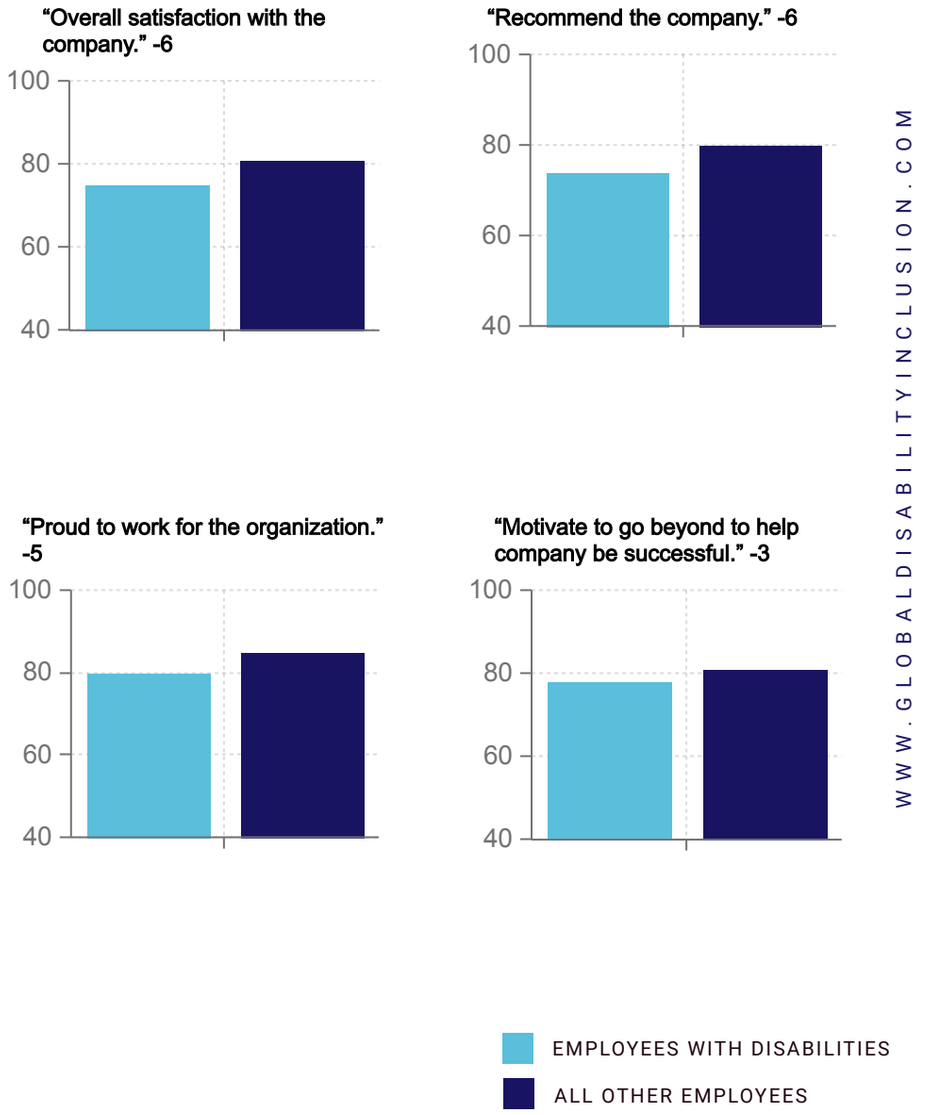
While having engaged employees is advantageous, research demonstrates employees who are actively disengaged frequently negatively impact colleagues, co-workers, and customers—and have a significantly stronger negative impact on an organization than someone who is similarly strongly engaged. Employees who are disengaged are bad for your business, your culture, and your brand.

However, a key finding on the engagement data finds the questions which describe the company's relationship to the employee are Pride, Recommend, and overall satisfaction.

The question that showed the lowest difference for employees with disabilities was the question about employees' desire to be "motivated to go beyond to help the company be successful."

Key Takeaway

Employees with disabilities still want to help the company be successful; however, the company needs to do more for employees with disabilities for them to feel a stronger connection to the company.



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CONCLUSION

Globally, people with disabilities are the largest minority group. Yet, it is estimated that **less than 5% of companies investigate the employee experience of those with disabilities.** This presents a significant gap in understanding employee experiences when most engagement surveys do not assess the disability demographic. When there is a lack of data, there is also a lack of innovation, progress, equity, and inclusion.

What percentage of your workforce has a disability? How many more employees do not feel comfortable disclosing their disability status?

People with disabilities can have a difficult time obtaining competitive employment. In the U.S., the ADA and Section 503 have helped improve opportunities for people with disabilities, yet the hiring experiences are not equal to other diversity groups.

The disparity doesn't end in obtaining employment, the disparity continues to exist once gainfully employed. As discussed, in this paper people with disabilities are considerably less engaged at work than their non-disabled colleagues. There are many items where employees with disabilities score significantly lower than their non-disabled counterparts.

The data demonstrates that the gaps are much wider than other diversity segments signaling that companies are not doing enough to understand and address the needs of employees with disabilities. It should be noted that when investigating differences for newly hired employees there are very few notable differences between employees with disabilities and those without. However, as tenure increases for both groups, the engagement of employees with disabilities drops considerably more than those without disabilities. This suggests there is an inequity in the workplace for employees with disabilities that increases over time. Do you know what is happening within your organization to disengage employees with disabilities?

Companies need to better understand the work experiences of employees with disabilities, who likely represent 20% of their workforce. To this end, Global Disability Inclusion, in partnership with Mercer, has created Amplify, a disability engagement survey that enables companies to truly understand their disability employee population, their needs, issues, concerns, and how to help the be more successful and engaged.

METHODOLOGY

The 12M employee engagement survey responses were collected and analyzed through the engagement practice of Mercer called Mercer. Mercer partnered with Global Disability Inclusion to assist in analyzing the data and the experiences of employees with disabilities. These data are employee responses to annual company employee engagement census surveys. The surveys represent 844 projects from the 2008-2018 engagement benchmark database. As part of this large database (12M), a smaller portion of projects (38) included the disability demographic identifier which yielded 1.7M employee records, enabling us to compare workplace experience between those with disabilities versus their colleagues without disabilities. These companies are both national and multi-national with headquarters all over the world; however, about half are located in North America.

The number of companies collecting disability status is relatively small compared to the total number of projects collected, only 4.5%. During this ten-year period the authors have seen small positive changes with more companies either providing disability status or electing to include it as a question on the survey. However, disability has not been treated the same as other diversity segments programmatically or in engagement surveys.

It is only in the past six years that we have seen an uptick in organizations focusing on disability inclusion. Section 503, which is a U.S., law has sparked a global movement within corporations to improve disability inclusion efforts, and global foundations, and NGOs have begun to realize social justice, poverty and civil rights issues also include people with disabilities.

Bottom-line, organizations are beginning to understand Disability should not be a separate initiative from other diversity programs. It is just a start and there is more work to be done.

For more information about the survey and its findings please contact the authors:
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Meg O'Connell

Global Disability Inclusion

CEO & FOUNDER

Meg is the CEO & Founder of Global Disability Inclusion; she is an internationally recognized disability employment and inclusion expert with over 25 years of experience in human capital management, talent acquisition, performance management, disability inclusion, employee engagement, marketing, and customer service programs. Meg and her team haves worked with some of the world's most recognized brands and provides strategic program design, development, and implementation of disability employment and inclusion programs for Global 500 companies, US Federal Contractors, colleges and universities, non-profits, and foundations

Her work has received numerous accolades including the Society of Human Resource Management's (SHRM's) Innovative Practice Award. She has been quoted in Huffin on Post, Science Magazine, Diversity Executive, DiverseAbility, and numerous trade magazines for her insights on the employment of people with disabilities. She keynotes and presents at international conferences regularly. Meg holds a certificate in A A Mediation and she is also conversationally proficient in American Sig Language.

ABOUT

Global Disability Inclusion

Global Disability Inclusion is a boutique consulting firm specializing in disability empl yment and inclusion. Our experts work with Global 500 companies, Global NGOs, U.S. Federal Contractors, Universities, Foundations, and Non-Profits o design and develop comprehensive disability employment & inclusion strategies. Global Disability Inclusion has three main focus areas: the Workforce, the Workplace, and the Marketplace. Our approach enables companies to evolve from a compliance-focused program to one focused on being disability competitive. Global Disability Inclusion is 100% women and disability owned and operated. For more information, please visit our website at Global Disability Inclusion.

WWW.GLOBALDISABILITYINCLUSION.COM

Peter J. Rutigliano, Ph.D.

Mercer -Mercer Employee Research

SENIOR PRINCIPAL

In over 25 years of external consulting, Peter has provided data analysis, interpretation, and recommendations for many organizations across a variety of industries. Peter joined Mercer in 2007; over the years since Peter has been working with client organizations to drive change through engagement surveys, onboarding surveys, exit surveys, 360 surveys, as well as other survey efforts. Peter is a trusted advisor to many Fortune 500 companies throughout North American providing insights and actionable recommendations to CEOs and other corporate executives. Additionally, Peter manages the Data Analytics Group within Mercer which, among other duties, maintains the company benchmark database.

In addition to his position at Mercer, Peter is on the Corporate Advisory Board at Hofstra University. He is the former president of the Metropolitan New York Association for Applied Psychology and continues to sit on the advisory board. Peter is also a committee member for SIOP (Society of Industrial / Organizational Psychology).

Peter maintains an active research program with over 90 publications and scholarly presentations including a consistent representation at the SIOP annual conference. Peter's major areas of focus are the effective use of identified su veys, survey psychometrics, and investigating the work experience of people with disabilities.

ABOUT

Mercer Consulting

Mercer is the world's largest human resources consulting firm. It is also the world s largest institutional investment advisor with over $10trn in assets under advice and more than $200bn in open architecture assets under delegated management. Mercer has also been ranked as the largest outsourced chief investment officer ovider. Headquartered in New York City, Mercer has more than 23,000 employees, is based in more than 43 countries, and operates internationally in more than 130 countries. Mercer is a subsidiary of global professional services firm Marsh & McLennan, an Mercer's $4.3 billion in 2016 revenue represented 33% of the parent company's consolidated revenue. For more information, visit our website at Mercer Consulting. Mercer|Sirota is the Employee Listening practice within Mercer who's data is represented in this study.

Thank You

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