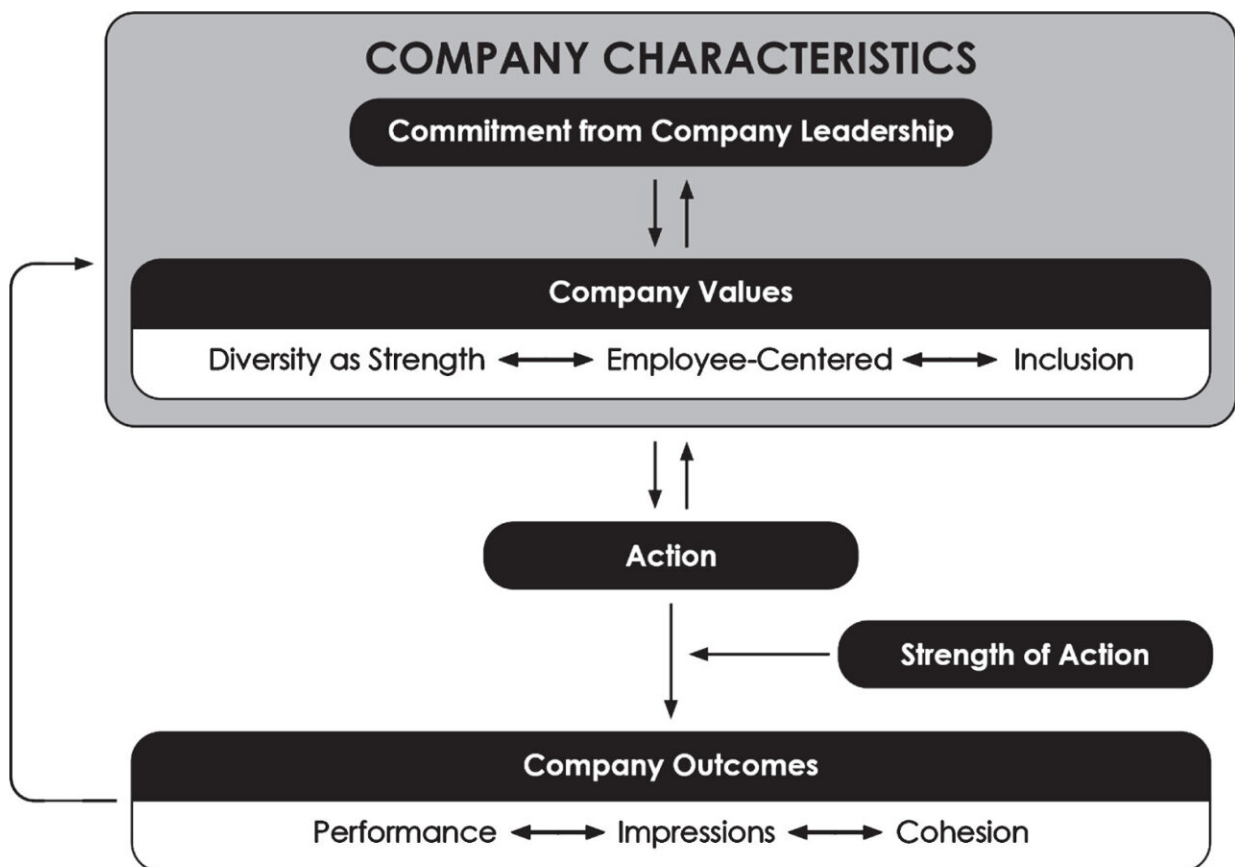


# Successful employer-driven disability initiatives benefit individuals and companies, finds study

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A model of company-driven disability diversity. Credit: *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* (2023). DOI: 10.3233/JVR-230061

Successful employer-driven disability initiatives share certain characteristics, even when the companies and programs differ in other ways.

According to [new research](#) published in the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, companies whose leadership teams are committed to inclusion for people with disabilities and are guided by complementary values deeply embedded in their organizations experienced improved performance, positive employee perceptions, and a cohesive, unified culture. The fidelity and prominence of the disability-inclusive actions and practices moderated their relative outcomes.

Disability is commonplace in society but not in the US labor market. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the US Department of Labor, the participation rate of people with disabilities in the workplace in 2023 is nearly half that experienced by people without disabilities.

"Employer-driven disability initiatives can indeed have a positive impact on both company performance and organizational climate. Our study identified the motivations and best practices that led to successful outcomes: Improved business and [financial results](#), better morale, and unity within the company," explained lead investigator Brian N. Phillips, Ph.D., CRC, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling, Utah State University.

"These [best practices](#) should serve as a beacon to other organizations to actively recognize disability as a valued part of company diversity."

The findings suggest that employers can gain a great deal from seeing the disabled as a valuable and largely untapped part of the workforce. The study combined findings from [case studies](#) conducted across seven companies of varying sizes and industries.

Recognizing the limited amount of research on the topic, the investigators sought an increased understanding of employer-driven disability initiatives, what motivated them, and what impact they had on the company's productivity and overall success. The greatest success seemed to come to companies that took the most decisive action in implementing their initiatives.

"It is powerful to appreciate how much inclusion in the workplace can be a competitive advantage. At the same time, it's important to point out that companies adopting a disability initiative on more of a trial basis or with more skepticism generated less favorable results," noted co-investigator Timothy N. Tansey, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Madison. "Many employers prioritize diversity but underinvest in providing support for people with disabilities."

Co-investigator Paul Wehman, Ph.D., Virginia Commonwealth University and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, noted, "The literature suggested we would find a relationship between employer disability initiatives and company performance, and that commitment from leadership would be influential."

"However, we were surprised to learn that the disability initiatives had such a positive impact on non-disabled co-workers. Many employees with whom we spoke reported feeling a new sense of pride in the company and a greater closeness to their co-workers."

Dr. Phillips commented that companies in the study all shared a value of being employee-centered, acknowledging that employees didn't exist solely to help the company but that the company also existed to help and support employees through flexibility, training, upward mobility, and compensation.

**More information:** Brian N. Phillips et al, Effect of company-driven disability diversity initiatives: A multi-case study across industries, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* (2023). [DOI: 10.3233/JVR-230061](https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-230061)

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