

Opportunities and Challenges in Integrating Disabled Employees in UiTM Pahang

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Abstract: Integrating the disabled in an organization is not an easy task. It demands a lot of changes in order to suit the disabled's needs – without which, a successful integration in the workplace can be compromised. Within 30 years of its establishment, UiTM Pahang has taken a bold action in fulfilling the corporate social responsibility in hiring people with disabilities. Job opportunities are widely opened for the disabled as qualification is the main factor in determining their employability in the campus. A semi structured interview with the Rector of UiTM Pahang was used to get a clear view on its implementation. It is found that there is an indication of facing challenges in hiring the disabled but opportunities do exist while integrating them in the UiTM Pahang workplace.

Keywords: Challenges, Disabled Employees, Opportunities, People with Disabilities

1. Introduction

Disabled and non-disabled people are perceived as having an equal chance to work with the government or private sector in Malaysia. However, this does not seem to be effectively taking place despite the recent statistics recording an incremental number of disabled people holding important positions as professionals, teachers and technicians. Hiring disabled staff is part of the national agenda for Malaysian citizen's development and UiTM Pahang is no exception. The integration of the disabled in UiTM Pahang workplace is however, not without challenges. People with disabilities require different treatments in terms of facilities, nature of work, work load and others. On the positive side, despite it facing challenges in integrating the disabled in its workplace, career opportunities are widely opened for this group of employees. This paper thus aims to discuss these opportunities and challenges seen in UiTM Pahang.

2. Literature Review

Since the launching of the Vision 2020 by the fourth premier, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's journey in becoming a developed nation in 2020 has never been halted, despite the myriad challenges surrounding this Southeast Asian nation. Nine strategic challenges have been laid down, two of which mention a kind of a society Malaysia is projected to be – “a fully caring society and a caring culture, a social system in which the society will come before self and the welfare of the people will revolve not around the state or the individual but around a strong and resilient family system” and “an economically just society, a society in which there is a fair and equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation” (Challenges 7 and 8 respectively, as cited in Rafikul, 2010, p. 200). While the former can be safely said as taking place and inclusive of all (the increasing number of the elderly, children, women and disabled centres provided are one of the evidence) the latter however seems to be limited to the ethnical grid of this multicultural country. Whether we realize it or not, the economically just society that Malaysia needs to be, oftentimes narrowed down to the discussion of a fair distribution of wealth among the different races, with little mention of the disabled citizens as another rightful but

disadvantaged minority shareholders of the economic cake (M. Rezaul, 2015; Sarimah, Norshahril and Rohana, 2012; Norani, Khalid and Nor Aishah, 2001). This is reiterated in a report that says ‘persons with disabilities are at a disadvantage compared to the general population across several dimensions of social and economic well-being (WHO and World Bank, 2011 as cited in United Nations, 2013, p. 85).

The exclusion or the minimal inclusion of the disabled in the workforce is global, with some countries doing better or less than some others. A 2007 Spanish study on supported employment rendered to the country’s disabled discusses the supports that this group needs namely family, training, monitoring and work setting as to achieve successful integration in their workforce (Vilà, Pallisera & Fullana, 2007). The research finds that family’s lack of knowledge about the disabled’s work opportunities and work integration in the industry hinders the latter’s potential, which finally results in the disabled being excluded from the social and economic mainstream. Training is another support that is really needed by the people with disabilities, with social skills being an added value for them to be successfully integrated. Besides, the work setting provided by the companies also determines the disabled’s employment opportunity and effective integration. The necessity of these three supports agree with the findings by Sarimah et al.(2012) who report family, lacking of and/or mismatched training as well as unfriendly work setting as hindrances in Malaysian disabled’s attempts to seek employment.

M. Rezaul (2015) in his comparison of multiple literatures argues that people with disabilities undergo a social exclusion in Malaysia as they are deprived of their rights in different levels which are family, community/social and institutional/state levels. Family members’ ignorance of the disabilities themselves, rejection and even parental overprotection deny the disabled proper care, wider opportunities and greater potentials which worsened by so many other barriers in the community and institutional levels. Despite all the existing “disability act, social exclusion act, and welfare policies”, the author contends that “the disabled people in Malaysia are excluded from the main stream development and their socio-economic [a] conditions are poor” (p. 176).

A discussion by Ang (2012) looks at some other different aspects of people with disabilities as far as employment is concerned. The study investigates the use of rational tactics among Malaysian disabled workers and the potential influences these tactics might have on their salary increment and promotion. It was found that workers with disabilities did use rational tactics while working, although somewhat lesser than their non-disabled counterparts. Their use of the tactics such as “exchange of benefits, personalized help, rational persuasion, and showing expertise” (p. 181) had no influence on their salary progression, in contrast to their promotability. This “interesting, yet perturbing fact” derived from these contrasting results, suggests that the disabled’s salary progression might not be free from disability-bias, as promotability of those workers could not be necessarily translated into a salary increment, unlike the conventional practice whereby a granted promotion usually means salary progression.

The disabled should be seen as having potential in contributing their skills. As many literatures lament the lack of workforce integration, supports and possible biasness the disabled need to face while securing employment, this paper intends to look at the matter within the context of challenges faced and opportunities gained in integrating people with disabilities in UiTM Pahang workplace.

3. Methodology

The report on the findings is based on the interview with the top level management of UiTM Pahang. A semi structured interview with the rector, Prof. Dr. Jamaludin Kasim was planned to discuss the issues of integrating disabled employees as to provide further insights on the intentions, challenges and opportunities of the integration. As mentioned earlier, hiring disabled employees in government agencies has become an issue as it is not being practiced as expected from the revision of Disability Act, 2008. Hence, this issue is seen as relevant as to

gauge the current practice of this institution in hiring people with disabilities after 30 years of its establishment. The research aims to: (a) gain a clearer view of the opportunities and challenges in integrating disabled employees in the workplace, and (b) identify potential ways of dealing with the challenges encountered in ensuring the disabled's embeddedness.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results of the interview are discussed below to shed some light on the opportunities and challenges in integrating persons with disabilities in the UiTM Pahang workplace and to highlight potential ways in ensuring the disabled's job embeddedness in this institution.

Question 1: Challenges in integrating disabled employees in UiTM Pahang.

The interview shows general awareness and acceptance in hiring disabled employees as there are two disabled employees working here. The real challenge is to provide a really disabled-conducive working environment as the campus still lacks disabled-friendly infrastructure.

“The environment of the university here is not really disabled-friendly. It is not the same as the other countries especially the western countries. We have not yet reached that level.”

This comment made on the disabled-unfriendly buildings and infrastructure agrees with other researches that have found the same problem facing the disabled employees, thus hinders their integration in the workplace (Dag & Kullberg, 2010; Newton, Omerod & Thomas, 2007). However, improvement can be seen in the campus, as the new buildings are mostly equipped with special toilets for the disabled employees and students. The interview also found a promising future for the disabled's workplace integration, as the management always considers the needs of the disabled in their future construction projects. Therefore, it can be said that the campus is ready to integrate person with disability as part of their workforce.

Question 2: Opportunities in integrating disabled employees in UiTM Pahang.

Based on the comment below, it indicates that the integration of the disabled is possible in UiTM Pahang.

“Employment opportunities are given to everybody regardless of their disabilities. The essentials in their employability are their academic qualification, skills and abilities deemed suitable for the position applied. It is just that, we have not got a lot of application from them.

UiTM Pahang always welcomes people with disabilities to contribute and show their potential. Any requests from the head of department / faculty coordinator regarding the special needs of their disabled staff will be given a priority. We always accommodate them. For example, the ground floor classroom or office is reserved for the disabled, toilet and parking lots are provided as to ease the disabled employees in doing their job. We do have problems with the toilets in the old building as they are not disabled-friendly, but we will try to provide the disabled with what they need. They can always request for it.

Employee with disabilities is always accepted and supported by their colleagues. They know that people with disabilities must be respected as

other normal employees. They should be respected. They can perform their job just like their non-disabled counterparts and sometimes they even perform better than the non-disabled ones.”

Question 3: Potential ways of dealing with the challenges encountered.

Naturally, people will react differently towards integrating people with disabilities as part of their colleagues. However, an impression towards certain potential ways of dealing with the challenges was shown by the management of UiTM Pahang.

“People with disabilities are independent. They should be given more opportunities to develop themselves. UiTM Pahang can take this opportunity to perhaps, doing a corporate social responsibility programme (CSR) with them. We have always been focusing on the orphans, schools etc. We should move to the disabled centre, perhaps.

New buildings and infrastructure will be constructed accordingly as to suit the needs of the disabled.

Many types of jobs can be taken by the disabled for example clerk, operator or even at the professional level such as lecturer, depending on their qualification.

These comments indicate the seriousness of the UiTM Pahang management to fulfil their responsibility to promote diversity in their workforce involving all people, regardless of their physical.

Although there are challenges, it is apparent from the discussion that integration of the disabled employees in UiTM Pahang is possible. In line with the existing literature on the challenges of integrating the disabled at workplace (Buciuniene & Kazlauskaite, 2010; Furuoka, Lim, Pazim & Mahmud, 2011; Lee, Abdullah & Mey, 2011; Ta & Leng, 2013), such challenges will normally discourage the disabled to seek employment or even remain in one. This proves that there are lots of improvement to be made by the institution as far as employing the disabled is concerned. Despite UiTM Pahang being welcoming towards the persons with disabilities, lots more efforts should be shown by the institution as to ensure successful integration of these employees. A greater awareness on the disabled’s needs is needed among the people in the institution.

5. Conclusion

The Management of UiTM Pahang has shown a positive feedback towards hiring disabled employees. It provides the same opportunities to the disabled staff to develop and enhance their career. It never stops the disabled from applying for the position in UiTM Pahang as qualification is seen as the most important element in their employability. It is important to help the disabled to have a fixed income, able to be independent and at the same time contribute to the community just like any other citizens. The interview also shows that the employees’ disabilities do not matter as their commitment and discipline in performing their job is more important. The disabled staff in UiTM Pahang have so far performed well and this shows that they are capable to perform just like any other employees.

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