

# The Challenges and Benefits of Employing Persons with Disabilities: The Japanese Multinational Corporations' Perspective

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**Abstract**—This paper explores the challenges and benefits relating to the employment of persons with disabilities (PWDs) from the perspective of managers in Japanese companies. Data were obtained via face-to-face interviews with 20 hiring managers. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed a set of similar perceived challenges and benefits of hiring disabled workers. The main concern shared by the majority of the respondents was the belief that disabled workers were not able to perform at work. Another top concern was related to the type of work which is suitable for PWDs. Majority of the respondents agreed that there would be benefits to the workplace from employing disabled workers; among them are enhanced CSR performance and increased employee morale. Future research should continue to focus on employer demand side concerns with regard to disabled workers so that these issues can be better understood and adequately addressed.

**Index Terms**—Hiring, Japanese MNCs, PWDs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Like many persons with disabilities (PWDs) in other parts of the world, Malaysians with disabilities have significantly higher unemployment rates when compared to their non-disabled peers. The most common concern among employers is that the belief that PWDs cannot do the job [1] and are thus perceived as “risky hires.” This is most unfortunate given that many men and women with disabilities can and want to work [2], [3], yet they remain an untapped pool of resources. On the Malaysian front, employers are more likely to hire migrant workers than hiring PWDs to address the skills shortages issues in the manufacturing, services, construction and plantation sectors. Recent statistics show that migrant workers now constitute about 15 per cent of the Malaysian workforce [4], while a staggering 95% of Malaysian with disabilities is still unemployed [3]. The absence of effective legislative measures and policies which protect the employment rights of PWDs could be another factor contributing to their relatively low employment rates. There is also a dearth of knowledge about best practices on the employment of this marginalized population [5], exacerbating the myth that hiring and employing disabled workers is fraught with challenges and risks.

Against this backdrop, this study explored employer

perspectives of the challenges and benefits of hiring and employing PWDs in Japanese companies located in Japan and Malaysia. This is in response to research calls (e.g., [6], [7]) to shift the focus to the “demand side” of employment research whereby the needs of the employer and environment are examined. The demand side research is significantly limited [5]. Vocational rehabilitation research has tended to adopt the “supply side approach” (i.e., diverse preparatory activity related to improving job access for workers with disabilities) [6]. Greater focus on the demand side can enhance understanding of the real concerns of employers in the hiring of disabled workers so that these needs and concerns can be addressed accordingly [7]. In this light, the study findings can help companies and government agencies develop policies and strategies to enhance the employment opportunities of Malaysian with disabilities. Similarly, vocational rehabilitation entities can be better informed in their efforts to increase successful placement outcomes [7]. The study also assumes significance in view of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Incheon Strategy to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all including PWDs. This effort is more important than ever as the number of PWDs is expected to rise through population growth and ageing process [8].

The paper is structured as follows: first, we discuss employment and disability in the context of Malaysia’s disability act i.e., Persons with Disabilities Act (2008). Second, we review past literature concerning the challenges and benefits of employing PWDs. We then describe the study methodology, followed by a description of the analysis and results. Finally, we discuss the implications and provide some concluding remarks.

## II. EMPLOYMENT AND DISABILITY

The issue of high unemployment rates among PWDs is a global phenomenon, with no simple solution in sight [9]. Yet, the festering problem of unemployment among PWDs warrants to be addressed as ensuring capable and willing PWDs be hired and stayed hired carries weighty benefits in many ways. First, employment provides the primary means of livelihood generation for PWDs. It also gives PWDs the purpose and meaning of playing a productive role in society. Moreover, the exclusion of PWDs in the mainstream society has economic ramifications [10]. Based on a World Bank report, the failure to integrate PWDs in the workforce resulted in a GNP loss of between USD1.68 to USD2.38 for middle-income countries [10] like Malaysia.

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Given the aforementioned, equal access to employment is vital and barriers to work faced by PWDs must be removed [11]. To this end, a comprehensive rights-based law for Malaysians with disabilities i.e., Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in 2008. Its enactment was to strengthen the government's commitment in ensuring that the disabled population in Malaysia can finally have some protection over their basic rights in all areas of life including employment. Under this act, it is unlawful for any employers to discriminate PWDs by refusing and failing to accept their admission as employees. However, even after nine years of its implementation, the act has lamentably proved to be ineffectual in many instances. Many of the job opportunities for the disabled population in Malaysia are still found mainly in non-governmental organizations [12]. Ironically too, private companies employ relatively more PWDs when compared to public companies [12].

Some quarters have called for an overhaul of PWDA (2008) on the claim that while the legislation may contain an anti-discrimination component, beyond rhetoric, it is flawed in many ways. Most notably, it lacks the provision of sanctions, rendering it a "toothless tiger" [13]. To elaborate, Malaysian companies that do not hire disabled workers are not subjected to any serious repercussions, unlike those in Thailand and Japan. Employers in Thailand must hire at least one disabled employee for every 100 employees. Failing to do so, sanctions will be imposed on the non-compliant companies which can include asset seizures. Similarly, companies in Japan which are found not to be in compliance are required to pay a certain amount of levies and summons. It is thus plausible to surmise that due to the non-punitive nature of the Malaysian disability law (unlike those in Thailand and Japan), many companies are not actively hiring the disabled population. A study on 201 employers in East Malaysia reported that a mere 13% of the 201 companies sampled had at least one disabled worker [14]. Only 32.6% of the managers in these companies were aware of and/or had some knowledge about the act [14].

Knowledge about this act was found to be positively correlated with intention to hire PWDs [14]. Several authors (e.g., [7], [15]) similarly reported significant relationships between attitudes towards PWDs, knowledge of disability act and employers' willingness to comply with the act. Based on the above findings and other literatures (e.g., [12], [16], [17]), legislation can be an important determinant of inclusion of PWDs in organizations. Legislation prohibits unfair discrimination against PWDs and requires employers to consider disabled job applicants. Clearly, revising the Malaysian disability act to incorporate sanctions for failure to hire disabled workers is warranted to improve the effectiveness of the act. With a more effective legislative environment and with the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for SDGs and the Incheon Strategy with its set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals [11], the employment agenda for PWDs can be further enhanced.

### III. CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF HIRING PWDs

This section presents the challenges and benefits associated

with hiring PWDs. A number of studies (e.g., [18]-[21]) reported that both challenges and benefits of hiring PWDs are contingent on company size. In other words, large and small companies are likely to cite different reasons for hiring and not hiring disabled workers. Given that the present study's sample constituted managers representing Japanese multinational corporations (MNCs) of which are large companies, it is of interest that within this study these issues will not be analyzed by company size.

#### A. Challenges

A review of the existing literature on perceived challenges of hiring PWDs revealed that there are primarily three areas of concerns. They are negative attitudes, transportation and accommodation facilities, and litigation concerns.

**Negative attitudes** and stereotypes are probably one of the major challenges when it comes to hiring and employing PWDs. A number of authors (e.g., [22], [23]) opine that stereotypes and attitudinal bias about PWDs are likely to stem from lack of understanding and knowledge about disability. In the same manner, attitudinal bias of employers about PWDs' ability to work can perpetuate their reluctance to hire PWDs. Although discrimination on the grounds of disability is thought to be rarely malicious [24], employers' negative attitudes towards PWDs are consequential to a large extent.

First, many employers are likely to believe that PWDs lack adequate knowledge and experience to meet performance standards ([1], [25]) and are thus reluctant to hire them. In reality, a vast number of PWDs may lack the qualification and experience to land a job due to their exclusion from education, training and other social opportunities [26] when compared to their non-disabled counterparts. That being said, many qualified and willing disabled applicants still face a number of barriers to get employed [19]. These barriers can be both attitudinal and structural in nature. Hunt [27] opines that the problems faced by PWDs have little to do with their physical attributes; rather they are a consequence of forms of social organization which discriminate them. Second, non-disabled people tend to focus on the disabilities rather than the abilities. Also, many misperceive PWDs as a homogenous group and as many hold stereotyping view of the type of work PWDs can or cannot do ([1], [19]). Disabled workers are in fact individuals with different abilities and requirements [28].

Another main reason given by employers for not hiring PWDs is that they do not have **transportation and accommodation facilities** for disabled workers [29]. There is also a misconception among employers that investments in disabled-friendly facilities will incur additional and high costs. This concern is typically shared by smaller companies which understandably do not have as much resource allocation when compared to larger companies [20]. Problems associated with inaccessibility to the built environment are in fact long-standing issues for Malaysians with disabilities. Although there are provisions in the Uniform Building By-Laws that stipulate all public buildings should provide accessible facilities for PWDs, the enforcement of this law is not as clear-cut [12]. The result is that many public buildings continue to be inaccessible to people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users [12].

Transportation is another prominent issue for working

PWDs. The current transportation system in Malaysia remains inaccessible to many PWDs who need to commute to work [12]. Only 10.8% of the 358 disabled workers reported that their employers provided them with transportation [12]. Finally, there are concerns about work-related safety and health standards being met by individuals with disabilities [1], [7]. Unless PWDs' safety and health issues are accommodated and their needs are built into inclusive health and safety planning, PWDs cannot work safely and effectively [28]. PWD's safety and health issues can give rise to fears of **litigation infringements** and legal suits ([1], [5], [8]). These concerns can be further compounded by a dearth of examples of best practices on the employment of PWDs [1].

### *B. Benefits*

The benefits of hiring and employing PWDs must also be acknowledged as they may actually outweigh the costs [20]. Among the key benefits documented in the literature (e.g., [10], [14], [20], [30]) are an improved workforce through the inclusion of PWDs which can in turn boost company's triple bottom line and corporate image.

Literature consistently suggests that disabled workers can contribute to an **improved workforce** given that they have better attendance records [31], lower turnover rates [32] when compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Besides being loyal and committed [5], PWDs have been shown to be a source of productive labor as reported by big corporations like Walgreens and Verizon Wireless (cited in [20]). Many past studies have provided similar findings. For instance, DuPont's study in 1990 found 90% of employees with disabilities were rated average or better in job performance compared to 95% for employees without disabilities. A 2002 National Research Study of employer's experiences revealed that disabled workers are as capable and productive [33]. The employment of PWDs has also been reported to have positive impact on staff and morale [19].

Given the above, it can be surmised that employing disabled workers does not only help enhance organizational performance and profitability. It also enables companies to transcend their traditional measures of profits, return on investment and shareholder value, by encompassing the environmental and social dimensions. Simply put, the inclusion of PWDs will have a direct impact on companies' **triple bottom line** (TBL). On the premises of TBL, companies which proactively hire PWDs will have a competitive advantage [34], [35] over those which do not.

There are also other benefits of employing PWDs derived from diversity and corporate social responsibility (CSR) [20]. Having disabled employees does not only provide a link to profitability, but it can also enhance **corporate image** through CSR performance.

## IV. METHOD

### *A. Sample and Procedure*

The target population of the study was employers in Japanese companies. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents based on two criteria: the respondents must (1) represent companies which have 56 or

more full-time employees; and (2) be involved in making hiring decisions. The two criteria are applied because: the employment quota system in Japan necessitates companies that have 56 and above full-time employees to hire a certain percentage of PWDs to meet the legal requirement; and hiring managers are in a better position to provide data on recruitment and other HR issues. An online search on corporate websites resulted in a list of 30 Japanese companies and their subsidiaries in Malaysia. A letter was first sent out to these companies, introducing the study and inviting participation in the study. A total of 20 managers agreed to be interviewed for this study. They represented electronics, electrical, retailing, sales and marketing companies. Of the 20 companies, 14 did not hire a single disabled worker at the time of the study. Majority of the respondents are male (14 or 70%). Five of them (25%) are Japanese whereas the remaining Malaysians are of Chinese (8 or 40%), Malay (5 or 25%) and Indian descents (2 or 10%). Their ages ranged from 33 to 61 years ( $M=46.65$ ,  $SD=8.18$ ).

The twenty employers were interviewed face-to-face. On average, an interview session took 80 minutes. The interview method was preferred over self-administered questionnaires for two reasons. First, perceptions of the challenges and benefits of hiring PWDs can be explored in depth since interviews are not restricted to specific questions only. This thus allows the researcher a degree of flexibility in the conduct of the study. Due to time and financial constraints, only 4 interviews were conducted in Japan with the help of a Japanese interpreter. The remaining 16 interviews were done in Malaysia.

### *B. Instrument*

A set of semi-structured questions was used to facilitate a range of discourses on employers' perceived challenges and benefits of hiring PWDs. These questions also helped to probe further the issues at hand. Some example questions include: (1) Have you heard of Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities Act (2008)/Japan's Disabled Persons Fundamental Law (1970)?; (2) What are the challenges of hiring and employing PWDs?; and (3) What about the benefits? The respondents were also asked to provide information about themselves which includes gender, age, nationality, work position and industry type. This instrument was tested for clarity before the actual data collection. No major changes were made to the items as a result. It should be noted that approval from the Ethics Committee was not required given that the questions asked in this study were generally not sensitive in nature.

## V. FINDINGS

### *A. Challenges/Concerns of Hiring PWDs*

The thematic analysis of the interview data collected revealed a set of similar perceived challenges and benefits of hiring disabled workers. The following sections will in turn discuss these challenges and benefits.

#### *1) Attitudes of employers/coworkers*

The top concern of hiring PWDs as shared by the majority (18 out of 20 respondents) is overcoming the negative

perceptions about hiring disabled workers. Eight respondents expressed that while they themselves have no qualms about hiring disabled workers, they felt that it is harder to get other managers and co-workers to buy into the idea of hiring PWDs. As pointed out by two respondents:

*“Getting other employees to understand and accept why we hire disabled workers still presents some challenges to me. I guess it’s difficult to change negative attitudes and mindset of non-disabled people about disabled people.”*

Respondent #17 (Japanese, male, 45, Assistant General Manager, Recruitment)

*“I’m all for hiring disabled people if they’ve the right qualifications and are able to do the job. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues do not feel the same way ....”*

Respondent #4 (Malaysian, male, 52, Senior Manager)

Interestingly, the interview data revealed that the concerns of hiring PWDs appeared to have demystified when the respondents have experienced hiring and working with disabled workers. Four of the respondents claimed that once they have one disabled employee on board, their colleagues do not need that much convincing about this type of hiring. Excerpts of two interviews illustrate this finding:

*“I’ve hired disabled staff in the past, so I’m fine with hiring more. My colleagues who were naysayers before are supportive of the cause now... perhaps they can see the benefits to the workplace from hiring disabled people.”*

Respondent #12 (Malaysian, female, 33, Administration Manager)

*“As for me and my coworkers, we’ve no issue about hiring PWDs...I guess we (the non-disabled) have to experience working with the disabled in order to better understand them and accept them in the workplace.”*

Respondent #19 (Japanese, male, 43, Manager, Recruitment)

## 2)Type of work

The data also indicated that the availability of suitable jobs for PWDs is another salient theme. PWDs’ actual lack of education and qualifications (as a result of unequal access to education and training) can in fact limit their job opportunities. One respondent raised this point by stating that:

*“We had three disabled job applicants before. As much as we wanted to give them an opportunity to work with us, we couldn’t employ them because they didn’t have the right qualifications and skills for the job.”*

Respondent #8 (Malaysian, female, 42, Administration Manager)

Also, more than three quarters of the respondents surveyed believed that the types of work available are not suitable for PWDs. They also appeared to have a stereotypical view of the kind of jobs which are suitable for PWDs such as those that require minimum walking, communication skills, strength and intellect. This could be attributable to the tendency of non-disabled employers to perceive disabled employees as a homogenous group rather than different individuals with

different abilities and needs. As disclosed by three respondents:

*“Our department deals with customers all the time. Disabled workers may not be able to meet the expectations of this kind of job.”*

Respondent #2 (Malaysian, male, 41, Senior Manager, Sales)

*“The nature of our work is not suitable for disabled people. There is a lot of walking from one place to another...male employees are expected to move heavy objects and machineries around. So you can see that such work demands may be difficult if not impossible for a physically or visually challenged employee...”*

Respondent #1 (Malaysian, female, 46, Senior Engineer)

*“I think disabled workers will thrive in jobs which are repetitive in nature such as in the manufacturing line. Or jobs which do not require them to move around or deal with customers.”*

Respondent #9 (Malaysian, female, 33, Shop Manager)

## 3)Best practices

All 20 respondents acknowledged that the availability of information about best practices on the hiring and employing PWDs will help to boost the hiring outcomes of the disabled population. Lamentably, as pointed out by some of the respondents, such information is almost non-existent in the company and the industry.

*“Unfortunately, there isn’t a set of best practices on hiring and employing PWDs in Malaysia. Maybe that’s why many companies are not effectively recruiting and retaining disabled workers.”*

Respondent #4 (Malaysian, male, 52, Senior Manager, HR)

*“I see that we lack information on best practices on employment support for disabled employees. How we can effectively integrate disabled staff, the type of training programs they need, and so forth--these are some of the many issues we are confronted with when it comes to hiring disabled workers.”*

Respondent #7 (Malaysian, male, 61, Department Manager, HR)

More than half of the respondents also lamented about lack or absence of other resources such as links with disability groups, job coaches, and effective recruitment process for PWDs.

*“We generally do not know the do’s and don’ts in the hiring process as they apply to PWDs. We really need answers to questions like how do we hire disabled people and where can we find job coaches?”*

Respondent #5 (Malaysian, female, 44, Area Manager)

*“It’d be good if we can consult relevant disability organizations to get information on how to hire PWDs and where we should start looking...”*

Respondent #6 (Malaysian, male, 53, General Manager)

*“Our job adverts are for all, regardless of disability status. But more often than not, we do not get a single application from a disabled person. Those who applied, however, were found to lack the qualifications and skills. So we really need to establish relationships with community service providers that can lead us to a pool of qualified disabled people.”*

Respondent #8 (Malaysian, female, 42, Administration Manager)

On the contrary, the Japanese counterparts provided rather positive views on the same issues, particularly with regard to the availability of resources and effective contact with disability interest groups.

*“We work closely with community service providers from the point of recruitment to the point of assimilation for the disabled workers. The support of job coaches has been equally instrumental in ensuring that the disabled workers learn, accommodate and perform their duties well.”*

Respondent #18 (Japanese, male, 39, Department Head)

*“I must say that it is very important to establish and sustain effective contacts with special schools or vocational rehabilitation. They’ve helped us to successfully hire and employ disabled workers.”*

Respondent #20 (Japanese, male, 53, Managing Director)

*“It is only recently that we started hiring disabled workers. We’re really grateful for the assistance given by several community service providers to first address the lack of receptivity about hiring PWDs...then to advise and support us in terms of identifying workplace supports, accommodations...”*

Respondent #16 (Japanese, male, 51, Administrator)

#### 4) Workplace accommodations

Apart from overcoming the psychological barriers to employing PWDs, employers said that they have to also deal with the physical and environmental barriers. Twelve respondents opined that their existing workplace premises are inaccessible to PWDs. Excerpts of the interviews are as follows:

*“Because of the nature of our industry, our work environment is just not suitable for disabled people. We use the stairs to get to our shop floor... there’s no elevator. It will be problematic for a physically challenged worker to get around.”*

Respondent #1 (Malaysian, female, 46, Senior Engineer)

*“I don’t think we’re in a position to hire PWDs at the moment. Our company’s facilities are not built for PWDs; there are no ramps for wheelchair users... Neither do we have toilets for the disabled.”*

Respondent #3 (Malaysian, male, 57, Assistant Manager, HR)

One of the respondents even lamented that these limitations might put the safety and well-being of the disabled workers at risk:

*“The built environment in my company is far from disability-friendly. I’m afraid this can hinder the movement of workers with disabilities. Or worse still, it can be unsafe for them”*

Respondent #14 (Malaysian, male, 48, Assistant General Manager)

Yet all respondents concurred that appropriate measures should be taken to provide reasonable accommodations for disabled employees. Similarly, all (except one respondent) believed that accommodation costs are just a one-time expenses for the company:

*“Workplace accommodations for PWDs can be costly. With how things are going now, I’ve my doubts about the management’s willingness to provide the accommodations for PWDs.”*

Respondent #10 (Malaysian, female, 34, Assistant Manager, HR)

#### B. Benefits of Hiring PWDs

In relation to the benefits of hiring PWDs, three salient themes emerged from the data analysis. They are (1) enhanced corporate social responsibility; (2) loyal and committed disabled workforce; and (3) employee morale.

##### 1) Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

On an overview, the respondents perceived hiring PWDs as a means of enhancing their CSR activities. Fifteen of them stated that if they were to hire PWDs, it will not be out of litigation fears but more so as a way of giving back to society.

*“Some people may think that Malaysia needs the legislation to regulate business practices. But I personally prefer to have a free hand in making hiring decisions for PWDs...As a socially responsible organization, we take in PWDs not because it is mandated by the law but from a genuine intention to help them ...”*

Respondent #6 (Malaysian, male, 53, General Manager)

*“My company sees hiring of PWDs more like a CSR initiative ...not because the law requires us to do so. We’ve never really thought about the disability law. So, in this sense, the existing law seems to have little impact on our hiring practices and policies for disabled workers.”*

Respondent #12 (Malaysian, female, 33, Administration Manager)

*“Hiring disabled workers represents a significant part of organization’s CSR programs.”*

Respondent #13 (Malaysian, male, 52, Senior Manager, Purchasing)

##### 2) Loyalty and commitment

Eighteen of the respondents perceived that hiring PWDs adds highly motivated people to the workplace which can lead to increased work commitment and productivity. The disabled employees were believed to remain loyal to the companies which employed them as indicated in the following interview excerpts:

*“Two of our disabled workers have been with our company*

for more than seven years. All's well so far. We're happy with their work performance and commitment...I believe they are also happy to be working here."

Respondent #7 (Malaysian, male, 61, Department Manager, HR)

*"There used to be nine disabled workers on our payroll. Three of them have left for different reasons. The remaining six have been with us for close to 15 years. This in itself speaks well of their loyalty and commitment to this company."*

Respondent #19 (Japanese, male, 43, Manager, Recruitment)

### 3)Employee morale

About two-thirds of the respondents indicated another benefit of hiring PWDs which is enhanced employee morale. As disclosed by two respondents:

*"We embrace and celebrate diversity through the inclusion of disabled employees in our workforce. This is bound to have a positive spillover effects upon employee morale. Our company's image and reputation will also be enhanced."*

Respondent #11 (Japanese, male, 48, Manager, Recruitment)

*"My staff told me that they feel proud to be working in my section as we're the only section in the entire organization that hires disabled workers."*

Respondent #15 (Malaysian, male, 58, Assistant General Manager)

The positive impact on the workforce is brought about in two ways: hiring PWDs promotes an inclusive culture that appeals to the existing non-disabled employees as well as the talent organizations wish to attract [36], and it promotes morale all around which can translate to a better corporate image in the community.

## VI. DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the challenges and benefits of hiring and employing PWDs from the perspective of hiring managers in Japanese companies. To some degree, the current findings paralleled previous findings. A salient concern about hiring PWDs shared by majority of the respondents is the belief that they are incapable of work. This general mindset of employers could have birthed from lack of understanding about disability and PWDs. Hence, effective training and education programs for employers are vital to correct these misperceptions about disabled people and their abilities to work. Interestingly, the data also showed that employers' attitudes towards hiring PWDs improved when they have some experience in hiring or working with disabled people. This finding confirms a previous study by Institute for Corporate Productivity which found that many employers were initially leery of hiring PWDs but their concerns dissolved after the disabled employees were on board [36].

The data also support past studies (e.g., [6], [7], [37]) which reported that although some respondents disclosed positive behavioral beliefs about hiring workers with

disabilities, they often indicated reluctance to recommend hiring activities when pressed about actual hiring. They cited reasons such as lack of suitable jobs and unconducive work environment for disabled workers. It is of interest that more Malaysian respondents raised these concerns than did their Japanese counterparts.

Consistent with previous findings ([5], [12], [18]), most of the Malaysian respondents tended to see hiring PWDs as the company's CSR agenda rather than as the fulfillment of legal obligations. While this demonstrates altruism, unfortunately, it could send out the message that a disabled employee gets the job not on merits but because of the company's CSR agenda. Of most concern is that what will happen when a company's CSR focus shifts from the employment of PWDs to other concerns like animal welfare or environmental conservation?" The employment of PWDs will then be "off the radar" [25]. That being said, hiring and employing PWDs should transcend CSR initiatives; it should be a deliberate and continuous effort on the part of organizations which are serious about advancing the employment agenda for the disability population. Ideally, embracing diversity which covers the inclusion of PWDs in the workforce should be embedded in the corporate culture and business strategies.

Further, more effective legislation such as the employment quota system which is presently employed by Japan may have to be put in place as a push factor for hiring PWDs in Malaysia. The employment quota system is already bearing fruit in Japan [16] with companies taking a more significant role in the industry and within their communities to influence attitudes and opinions about the rights and capacity of PWDs. As disclosed by the Japanese respondents, the disability inclusion agenda has received increasing attention from the industry, signaling employers' interest in promoting more inclusive workplaces in the country. The current study also found that by and large the Malaysian respondents provided positive feedback about the quota system and the feasibility of adopting it in Malaysia. The respondents also felt that the government needs to revamp the existing disability law to make it more punitive in nature; for instance, by incorporating hiring quotas for PWDs. Non-compliant companies will then need to pay levies or have their assets seized.

Dramatic lack of best practices in the employment of PWDs in Malaysia is another prominent challenge. In this light, the Japanese experience and best practices starting from the hiring process to employment support for PWDs is indeed valuable for the Malaysian context. Hence, Japanese MNCs could play an instrumental role in the following ways; first, by altering negative attitudes of non-disabled managers towards hiring PWDs through activities designed to build understanding on disability equality and law, including the employment quota system; second, by equipping managers with the appropriate knowledge, skills and tools of PWDs' employment, right from the recruitment process to retaining disabled workers, including workers who become disabled while employed; and finally, by disseminating the know-how to their Malaysian managers concerning disability friendly strategies and practices that promote inclusive approaches in the workplace. The exchanges between the Japanese MNCs and the host country can bear untold positive effects on

promoting equal rights and equal opportunities for disabled workers.

In addition, persuasive information relative to the benefits of hiring disabled workers (e.g., attendance, increased productivity, and loyalty) should be communicated by Japanese MNCs that currently employ PWDs to those that are not overly enthusiastic about this type of hiring. This is crucial so as to raise awareness among employers and coworkers about the capacity and rights of PWDs to employment and how hiring them can help boost company's TBL. Equally important is the need to establish effective contacts and partnerships with community service providers, disability interest groups and special education schools to assist companies in the successful integration of PWDs in the workforce.

The current study has focused only on large companies. On the basis that both challenges and benefits of hiring PWDs can vary as a function of business size ([18]-[21]), this study should be replicated with small, mid-size and large companies for meaningful comparisons. While it is acknowledged that future research should continue to focus on employer demand side concerns with regard to disabled workers, non-disabled coworkers' normative concerns and benefits of working with PWDs are equally worthy of future research. It would be also interesting to examine how proactive hiring of PWDs can contribute to increased psychological safety and trust in the company which can in turn result in employee engagement and loyalty among non-disabled employees [20].

## VII. CONCLUSION

The solutions to the complex issue of unemployment among PWDs go beyond simplistic approaches [9]. Employer education and training is perhaps a good starting point to demystify the challenges of hiring and employing PWDs. But top management can only do this much. Thus, there is a need for partnerships with a number of organizations like community service providers, disability interest groups and special education schools to assist companies in the successful integration of PWDs in the workforce. Such collaborative efforts can ensure that disabled workers remain employed and marketable. More importantly, organizations need to be given persuasive information such that hiring PWDs is not only good business practice but it can also benefit the company's triple bottom line.

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