

ARE BANKS EMPLOYING MORE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?



Disability is a cross-cutting development issue, according to the World Bank. The organisation aims to make all its financed projects/programmes in education disability inclusive by 2025. Similarly, South Africa too has committed itself to not only overcome the legacy of racial and gender discrimination, but also disability discrimination, in the workplace.

The Employment Equity Act (EEA) states that at least 3% of the workforce should be employees with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have an opportunity to participate fully in the labour market without being unfairly discriminated against.

Ironically, while legislation is well-defined with specific percentages and incentives regarding employment, training and support of people with disabilities in both the private and government sectors, including corporate leaders within the banking sector, have been hesitant to comply.

In terms of the EEA, the focus is on the effect of a disability on the individual in relation to the working environment. The diagnosis or the impairment is relevant. Individuals are people with disabilities, when they satisfy the following criteria:

- They have a physical or mental impairment which is long-term or recurring.
- The impairment substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in employment.

There are a several reasons why the employment rate for people with disabilities within the banking sector are below the national average. Reasons may include: high entry requirements for occupations within the sector insufficient support and encouragement for people with disabilities and employers are often required to work offsite, which may serve as a barrier.

Despite challenges, there are very convincing reasons for employing people with disabilities.

These include:

- Problem-solving skills, as candidates are often incentivised to find creative ways to perform tasks others may take for granted.
- Dependable, dedicated, hardworking and productive employees, who are often more determined since

they have had to overcome more difficulties.

- Increased morale and productivity within the organisation.
- A more inclusive corporate environment.
- Employees with disabilities can help the banking organisation create effective marketing strategies to reach this sector of the market in a meaningful way.
- By complying with the provisions of the EEA, the banking sector can avoid potential claims of unlawful disability discrimination.
- Retaining employees who have become ill, incapacitated or impaired is often less expensive than recruiting and training new staff.

The banking sector has transformed substantially in terms of applying employment equity with regards to black empowerment of the previously disadvantaged and increasing the employment of females at all work levels. However, on the issue of employing people with disabilities there is an unintentional deafening silence or, progress has been made but is under-recorded and publicised.

For meaningful transformation, the use of technology, training, education and awareness on the issue should be seriously considered.

In 2017 the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) suggested in their Disability Toolkit Report that people with disabilities need proper access to technology to enable them to do their jobs, stay connected and informed and to advance their careers. The use of technology also put employees of different physical and mental abilities on a more level playing field.

The education and training sector, which includes further education and higher education, is in the most powerful position to effect speedy meaningful change in the banking sector. The creation of qualifications and programmes to specifically educate and train people with disabilities will erase doubts about hiring people with disabilities.

Lastly, relevant stakeholders are obligated to publicise and promote access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

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