FORRESTER®

Successful HR Leaders Must Join The Accessibility Conversation

Business Outcomes Are Predicted To Decline
If Companies Don't Invest In Accessibility

Get started →

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Accessibility Must Be Imbedded In Your DEI Goals

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has taken center stage as employees and clients demand that businesses provide equitable hiring and promotion practices and create more welcoming work environments. Firms long-committed to DEI initiatives are regrouping to ensure they stay ahead of the curve, and firms new to the commitment are scrambling to put strategies in place. DEI represents multiple demographics of people including race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability level, age, and the intersection of these identities.

Inclusively commissioned Forrester to explore the benefits of DEI with a focus on disability. We found that firms have committed to DEI and accessibility initiatives, but most have not embedded these initiatives into their daily processes. As a result, employees are neither incentivized nor equipped to reach their firm's DEI and accessibility goals.

Key Findings

DEI is no longer a compliance initiative. Seventy percent of respondents said DEI initiatives are driven by employees, leadership, or both.

Firms have basic DEI practices, but few have embedded DEI into their ecosystems. When it comes to disability, firms don't have the processes or incentives in place to hire and retain talent.

Respondents said a lack of inclusive hiring practices causes their firms to miss out on the best talent and limits their market exposures.

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DEI Has Transformed Into A Business Necessity

DEI spans beyond compliance departments, and it is necessary for business success. For most companies, this reality is new. In fact, close to half of respondents said their firms' DEI practices three years ago were driven by compliance. But only 30% of respondents said the same about their firm's practices today, and most (70%) said DEI initiatives are driven by employees, leadership, or both.

Leadership teams understand that DEI is important, but they are still scrambling to expand it beyond compliance or employee experience (EX). Most respondents said their firm has basic DEI practices like employee resource groups (ERGs), but few have actually embedded DEI into their ecosystems by creating KPIs or processes that enable DEI initiatives.

"Which of the following best describes your organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion practices?"

● Three years ago
● Today

Our DEI practices are mainly compliance-driven.

49%   29%

Our DEI practices are mainly employee-driven.

11%   12%

Our DEI practices are mainly driven by leadership.

24%   22%

Our DEI practices are mainly driven by both leadership and our employees.

15%   37%

Base: 156 North American managers+ in HR with responsibilities for diversity and inclusion or accessibility
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Inclusively, December 2021

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Hiring Practices Don't Support DEI Disability Goals

Hiring is a pivotal component of DEI initiatives, and firms understand and value this. Seventy-one percent of respondents said their firm aims to hire a diverse workforce. However, their organizations' current business practices aren't set up to reach that goal.

Only one-third of respondents said their firm's recruiters are incentivized to hire diverse teams via KPIs or monetary incentives, and less than one-quarter said recruiters are incentivized to hire people with disabilities. But it's not just incentives that are lacking; companies are not doing enough to make the candidate experience (including screening, interviewing, and onboarding) more accessible or to offer accommodations. In fact, less than half of respondents said they believe their firm's practices are welcoming to people with disabilities. For example, only 40% said their firm's existing accommodation process is easy to understand and only 30% reported having inclusive interview practices that are clear and easy to understand.

"Which of the following practices does your organization currently have in place?"

40%
We have an accommodation process in place that is clear and easy to understand.

33%
Our hiring managers and recruiters are incentivized to hire diverse teams.

30%
We have inclusive interview practices in place that are clear and easy to understand.

24%
Our hiring managers and recruiters are incentivized to hire people with disabilities.

Only 49% of respondents said their firm's hiring practices are welcoming to people with disabilities.
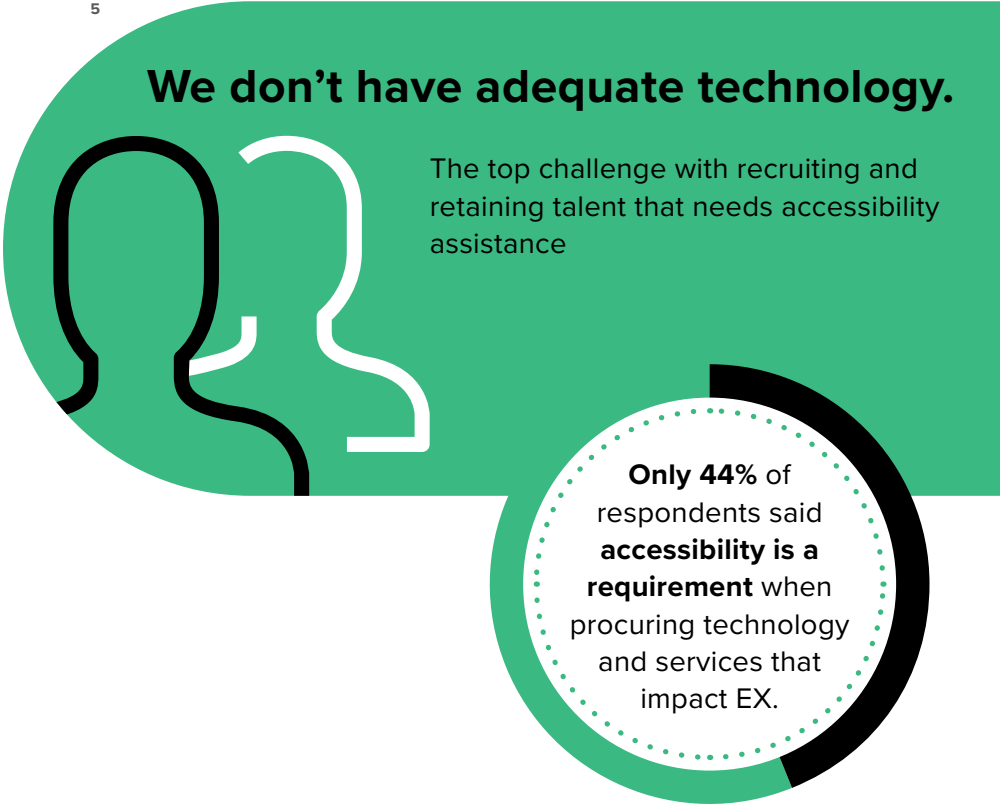
Technology Is Pivotal To Achieving DEI Disability Goals

Having a diverse workforce is not enough. Diverse talent needs to feel welcome and supported or they will leave. Similar to with hiring practices, most respondents' firms have taken the first step, but they still need to embed inclusion into their business practices.

Respondents said the top challenge with recruiting and retaining people with disabilities is inadequate technology. And only 44% said accessibility is a requirement when procuring technology and services that impact EX. Firms that don't make accessibility a priority when purchasing and implementing technology don't just exclude applicants and employees who need accessible experiences, they also missing out on the curb-cut effect.[ii] Addressing the challenge of inadequate technology will lead to easier-to-use systems and better EX for all employees.

We don't have adequate technology.

The top challenge with recruiting and retaining talent that needs accessibility assistance

Only 44% of respondents said **accessibility is a requirement** when procuring technology and services that impact EX.

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The Consequences Of Lukewarm Accessibility Practices

The consequences of not embedding DEI into business strategies are stark. Respondents indicated that a lack of inclusive hiring practices for talent with disabilities has caused their firms to miss out on the best talent and limited their market exposure. Respondents said that if accessibility practices don't improve by 2025, they expect massive declines in employee satisfaction, employee retention, brand value, customer satisfaction, and revenue.

"If your organization does not invest in or aim to improve its accessibility practices and policies, how do you expect the following to change by 2025?"

5.6%	3.2%	2.8%	1.7%	1.4%
Employee satisfaction	Employee retention	Brand value	Customer satisfaction	Revenue

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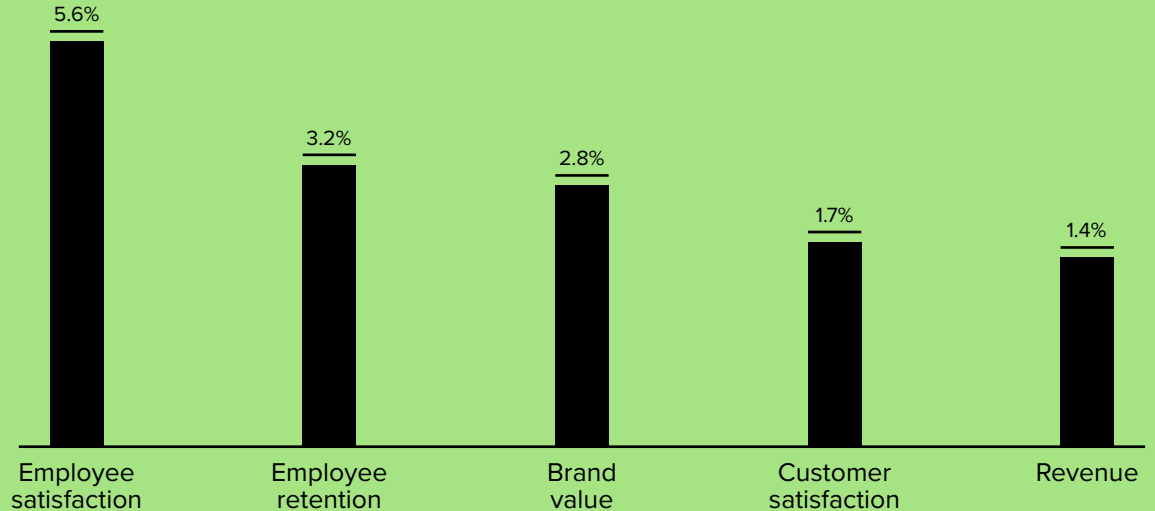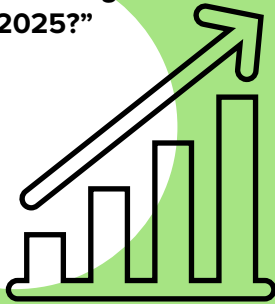
Change Is Coming

Respondents understand that change is needed. They said that during the next 12 months, their firms are committed to improving their DEI and accessibility practices. Specifically, 80% of respondents said their firm is focused on providing a culture of acceptance for those with a disability, 69% said their firm is creating KPIs attached to DEI, 66% said their firm is creating KPIs attached to accessibility practices, and 66% said their firm is obtaining accessible technology for its employees and clients. To meet these goals, respondents' firms are looking for increased access to talent, resources, and budgets.

"How is your company prioritizing the following initiatives in the next 12 months?"

Providing a culture of acceptance and understanding for those with a disability

80%

Creating KPIs attached to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

69%

Creating KPIs attached to accessibility practices

66%

Obtaining accessible technology for employees and clients (transcription, etc.)

66%

Obtaining the skills or knowledge needed to recruit and retain employees with disabilities

54%

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Executives understand disability hiring and inclusion is important, and they are establishing goals and commitments around it. It's imperative that firms translate these commitments into action.
To do this, they must:

- **Establish incentives and processes for hiring candidates with disabilities, not just KPIs.** Motivate hiring managers with incentives to build diverse teams. Enable them with training on how to ensure an accessible candidate experience and an easy-to-understand process for providing accommodations.

- **Focus on the entire applicant-to-employee journey.** Expanding where you look for candidates is not enough; it's critical to view screening, interviewing, and onboarding new hires through an accessibility lens.

- **Prioritize accessibility when procuring technology.** Make accessibility a requirement when evaluating systems that support EX. Ask more questions of potential partners to understand the current states of their accessibility and their plans to integrate it into future product updates.

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Methodology

This Opportunity Snapshot was commissioned by Inclusively. To create this profile, Forrester Consulting supplemented this research with custom survey questions asked of 156 HR leaders in the United States. The custom survey began in November 2021 and was completed in December 2021.

ENDNOTES

i "The Business of Belonging," Forrester Research, Inc., September 16, 2020.

ii "The Inclusive Design Imperative: Win And Retain More Customers," Forrester Research, Inc., April 23, 2019.

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Demographics

REGION	
US	**100%**

TOP INDUSTRIES	
Retail	**10%**
Manufacturing and materials	**9%**
Financial services and/or insurance	**9%**
Technology and/or tech services	**8%**

COMPANY SIZE (BY EMPLOYEE)	
1,000 to 4,999	**64%**
5,000 to 29,999	**29%**
30,000 or more	**6%**