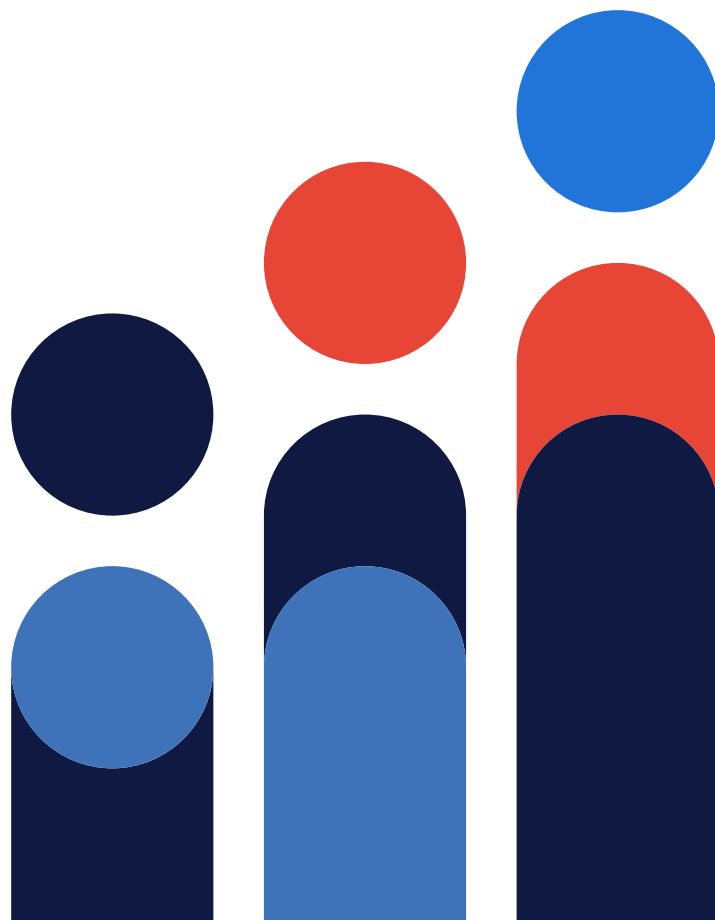


# senior leaders drive the culture of inclusion when they lead by example



# Leading by example is one way in which senior management can improve inclusion strategies for people with disabilities across Indian workspaces. What are some of the effective strategies leaders follow to drive inclusion?

A Bersin by Deloitte study revealed that companies that were inclusive achieved a cash flow 2.3x higher than their competitors. Clearly, organizational leadership is crucial in cultivating a company culture that reaps better profits.

India has 1.3 crore people with disabilities who are qualified and employable. If leaders successfully include them in the workforce, we will witness a dual advantage of dignified employment for people with disabilities and a boost to our economy.

To gather insights into how senior leadership amplifies disability-oriented inclusion, Randstad India, in association with Vocallea Networks, conducted a study, 'Embracing All Abilities: Including People With Disabilities At Work.' As a part of the study, 206 business leaders participated in quantitative research, and 50 people with disabilities including 10 HR leaders participated in qualitative research to discuss leadership-initiated inclusion practices. 47% of the business leaders in Randstad's study stated that

their company consciously hires people with disabilities.

At the crux of leading by example is the importance of hands-on action-oriented leaders, something that the study proved too. Respondents felt they performed better under the guidance of leaders who empathized with their disabilities, listened to their suggestions, and implemented the necessary resources that could make their professional lives easier. As per the respondents, senior management that follows an empathetic leadership path does not wait for employees to produce proof of their challenges. Such sensitivity specifically helps people with invisible disabilities who cannot 'prove their disability.' Similarly, inclusive leaders took into account the mobility issues of those with visible disabilities and worked toward aligning workplace policies to their advantage. One of the participants in the study, a teacher with visual impairment, shared how her management installed braille sign boards around the college to help her navigate the space comfortably.

A leader's ability to translate well-intended policies into action is determined by the allocation of budgets and resources toward inclusion strategies. There are various ways in which senior leaders have used financial resources to create employment for people with disabilities. Some of the notable examples that the study revealed are:

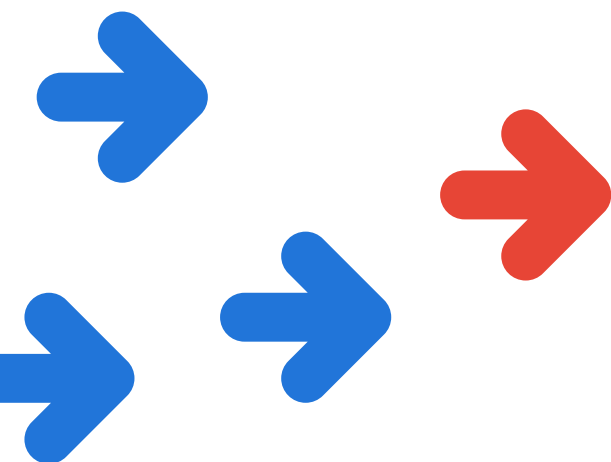
- Provision of in-house training to help people with disabilities feel comfortable in client-facing roles
- CSR activities to increase the employability of people with disabilities and equip them to take on job responsibilities
- Sensitization training to help employees across the organization become familiar with various disabilities as a concept and condition
- Investments in assistive technology to help people with various disabilities contribute their best at work

- Setting up accessible physical spaces for people across the disability spectrum
- Provision of benefits like medical insurance for employees from which people with invisible disabilities can also benefit

Leaders who give attention to the immense needs of employees with disabilities make them feel valued. It helps them recognize themselves as part of the organization. However, the mere allocation of the budget is not enough. How the leader perceives and interacts with people with disabilities is also significant.

The study also revealed that employees with disabilities feel included when leaders from the top-most rung in the hierarchy provided regular support and recognition to them. It is the employee's skills that gain attention and not their disability. This helps place people with disabilities on the same level as their able-bodied co-workers. Moreover, it also encourages other employees to interact freely with people with disabilities. It eliminates the bias to a large extent.

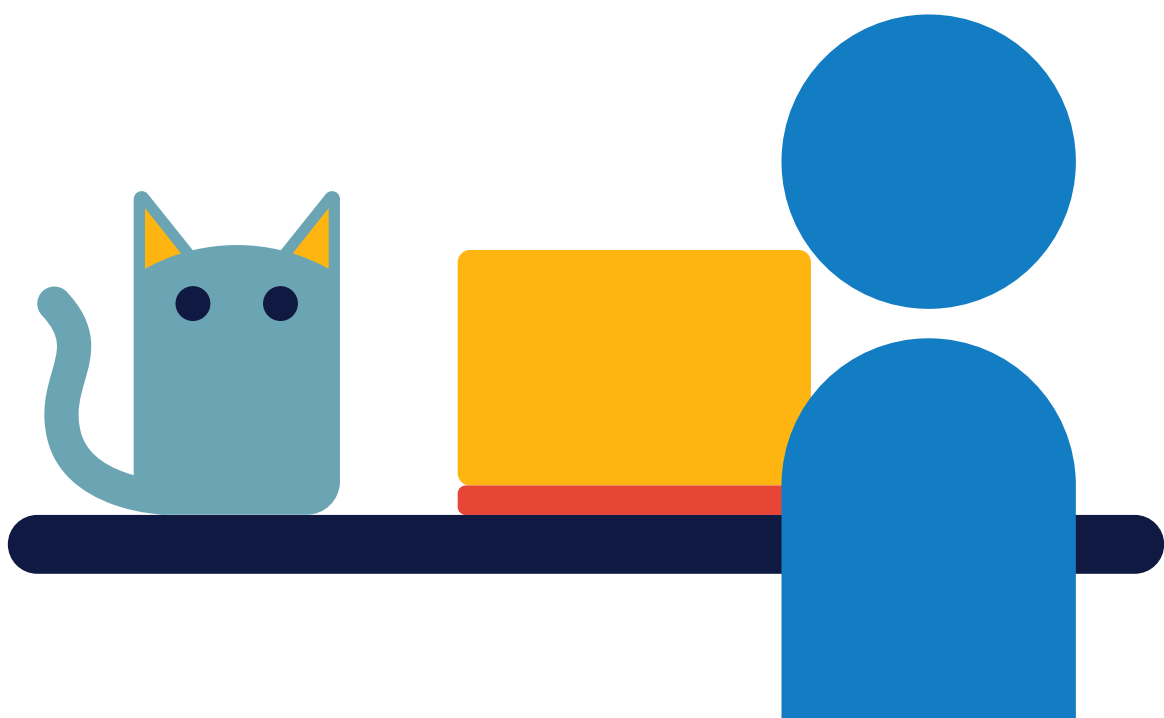
When people with disabilities chair managerial and senior positions they create an impact at several organizational levels. First, they act as role models. They set an example of how an employee's talent exceeds their disability. Such representation is also necessary to silence the bias and stereotypes against people with



disabilities. Second, they hold the power to drive mandatory inclusion policies into the organization. Doing so can also help abled managers and employees become more aware of visible and hidden impairments, allowing people across the disability spectrum to enjoy equitable access to opportunities and benefits that they couldn't access because of their disability. Lastly, using their lived experiences, leaders can suggest amendments to make the workplace

more inclusive, through assistive technology and disabled-friendly infrastructure.

Empathetic leaders set the example of how inclusive workplaces can benefit employees as well as the organization. It is the product of systemic relearning, active listening, and equitable allocation of resources that helps them lead by example.



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