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The value that employees with Down syndrome can add to organizations

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Aware of the importance of having people with disabilities in the job market, we—with help from Instituto Alana—looked at the impact people with Down syndrome might have on the business environment.

Several countries in the world have specific legislation requiring companies to hire people with disabilities. In general, the focus is more on the challenges of inclusion than on the actual value these people can add to organizations.

The paths to inclusion depend on the need for support and on eliminating barriers related to the different types of disability and the individual characteristics of the people involved. As a rule, it is more challenging to include people who are intellectually challenged, and companies would rather hire people with physical or sensory disabilities.

However, some companies have chosen to tackle the far more complex challenge of hiring people with intellectual disabilities. Those that have done so have found that these people can add value to organizational health (an organization's ability to align, execute, and renew itself faster than competitors so that it can sustain exceptional performance over time). Employees with Down syndrome are a particularly interesting topic of research, as they have a number of characteristics that both increase the challenges associated with inclusion and bring added benefits.

There are mutual gains when people with Down syndrome are included in the workplace. People with Down syndrome involved in such initiatives have a better quality of life and opportunities for development, while the companies that employ them often report significant improvements in their organizational health.

People with Down syndrome generally have a positive impact on a number of organizational health dimensions such as leadership, external orientation (a positive impact on client satisfaction), culture and climate, motivation and coordination and control. This impact has been measured in qualitative and quantitative surveys of leading organizations that have chosen to hire people with Down syndrome.

The positive impact people with Down syndrome can have on organizational health also reflects on business performance, as it is known that there is a direct, mapped relationship between increased organizational health and business performance. As people with Down syndrome can affect more than one of the dimensions that make up organizational health, they are one of the numerous factors that can influence business performance.

Yet despite all of the potential advantages, it is important to be well aware of some of the challenges to overcome in order to effectively include people with Down syndrome on the staff. Preparing employees to receive them and creating opportunities for growth for these people are only two of many.

Before hiring people with Down syndrome it is important to make sure the corporate culture is compatible with including people with such disabilities. It is recommended that inclusion reflect an existing cultural element or be a mechanism for cultural transformation. Inclusion is not advised for organizations unwilling to go through all of the steps involved in overcoming the associated challenges.

For organizations wishing to exercise corporate responsibility, and at the same time improve their organizational health, a program to hire people with Down syndrome may be an interesting opportunity. [□](#)

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