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# A Comparison of Perceptions of Factors in the Job Accommodation Process Among Employees With Disabilities, Employers, and Service Providers

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## Abstract

Job accommodation is a multifaceted and interactive process. Stakeholder groups (i.e., employees with disabilities, employers, and in some cases service providers) make decisions about requesting or providing job accommodations based on multiple factors in this process. An understanding of stakeholder differences in their perceptions of these factors may mitigate the myths and misconceptions about accommodations, and facilitate the accommodation process. Stakeholder perspectives on the importance of factors involved in the accommodation process are compared. How these perceptions may affect the likelihood of requesting or providing accommodations is discussed, along with the implications for rehabilitation professionals.

## Keywords

job accommodation, perceptions of factors, stakeholders, employment

Twenty years after Congress passed the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), employment issues facing people with disabilities remain challenging. Recent data indicate that only 20% of people with disabilities were participating in the labor force in 2008 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Title I of the ADA not only makes employment discrimination illegal, but it also mandates the provision of reasonable accommodations (RAs) to qualified individuals with disabilities (Baldwin, 1997; Parmet, 1990; Schartz, Hendricks, & Blanck, 2006). Studies have demonstrated that these ADA accommodations improve employment and retention for people with disabilities (Fabian, Waterworth, & Ripke, 1993; Franche et al., 2005; Hendricks, Batiste, & Hirsh, 2005). Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, studies continue to report that employees tend to be reluctant to request accommodations (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Baldrige & Veiga, 2001; Balsler, 2002), and employers reluctant to provide them (Balsler, 2002; Basas, 2008; Harlan & Robert, 1998; Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005).

A recent analysis of data from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) of the U.S. Department of Justice on discrimination charges filed by employees with disabilities under the ADA showed that those involving RAs accounted for 25% of all employment-related

charges filed in 2010, making failure to provide accommodations one of the single-largest types of allegations (U.S. EEOC, 2011).

The accommodation process is an interactive one (Floreay & Harrison, 2000; Gates, 2000; Silverman, 1998; Simon & Alison, 1998). It requires communication and collaboration between two (employer and employee) and sometimes three (employer, employee, and service provider) stakeholder groups, suggesting that differences in perceptions of the process, and the factors involved in it, may affect successful outcomes in this area. Although stakeholder perceptions of the job accommodation process have been reported in the literature, few, if any, studies have compared either stakeholder perceptions or how these differences might affect outcomes. The purpose of this exploratory study is to

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compare stakeholder perspectives on the importance of the factors involved in the accommodation process, and how these perceptions may affect the likelihood of requesting or providing them.

## RAAs

Under Title I of the ADA, qualified employees with disabilities may request RAAs to perform the essential functions of the job. RAAs are defined as “any change in the work environment (or in the way things are usually done) to help a person with a disability apply for a job, perform the duties of a job, or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment” (U.S. EEOC, 1992, § 1630.2(o)). As indicated earlier, there is ample evidence of the positive contributions of RAAs on job performance (Franche et al., 2005), retention (Fabian et al., 1993), and smaller, but robust support for their effect on employee job satisfaction (Hartnett, Stuart, Thurman, Loy, & Batiste, 2011).

The responsibility for requesting accommodations falls on the employee with a disability, who must disclose the nature of the condition, indicate how it interferes with performing essential job functions, and suggest the types of accommodations that might mitigate its effect. Several studies have examined employee’s perceptions of the accommodation request process, many of them focused on people with nonapparent or “invisible” disabilities, as these can carry a higher psychological burden related to disclosure. In general, these studies have concluded that the nonapparent nature of the disability, together with the type, influence the individual’s decision to request an accommodation. The majority of the people with disabilities either do not disclose or are reluctant to disclose their impairments to an employer, even when these individuals experience job performance problems due to their disabilities. These include invisible disabilities (Allen & Carlson, 2003), young adults with learning disabilities (Madaus, Foley, McGuire, & Rubin, 2002), people with hearing impairments (Balsler & McClusky, 2005), and employees with arthritis (Allaire, Wei, & LaValley, 2003).

Another focus is on the factors influencing the accommodation process from the perspective of employers. From a theoretical perspective, for example, Cleveland, Barnes-Farrell, and Ratz (1997) hypothesized that the rationale for the accommodation and the characteristics of the employee requesting it played a role in the process. In their study of factors contributing to RA decisions among university business majors, Florey and Harrison (2000) found that perceptions about controllability of the onset of the disability and past job performance influenced their participants’ intentions to accommodate. Many employers do not consider psychological conditions to be disabilities (Chen & Popovich, 2003), implying that decisions to accommodate may be based on misperceptions regarding the nature and

type of disability. Other studies have found that business structural characteristics, such as size (Geyer & Schroedel, 1999) and workplace culture (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000), played a role in the accommodation process. In one of the few studies comparing stakeholder perspectives on factors influencing the decision to provide accommodations, Michaels and Risucci (1993) concluded that vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors focused on the extent and nature of the disability, whereas employers considered workplace equity and cost issues.

We could not locate any studies that compared the perceptions of the importance of factors affecting the RA decision-making process of the three stakeholder groups most involved: employees, employers, and service providers. Accordingly, exploration of the discrepancies among stakeholder perspectives may help in developing effective employee- and employer-focused interventions to improve the likelihood of positive outcomes, and subsequently yield fewer EEOC charges. In addition, employee resistance to requesting accommodations, and employer reluctance to provide them, may be based on inaccurate assessments of factors each party relies on in the process.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine and compare the importance of items in the Reasonable Accommodation Factor Survey (RAFS; Dong, MacDonald-Wilson, & Fabian, 2010) among three stakeholder groups (people with disabilities, employers, and service providers). This investigation was guided by three research questions:

*Research question 1:* Are there important differences in perception of the importance of considerations related to RAAs among three stakeholder groups?

*Research question 2:* How do employers who are more likely to provide accommodations differ from employers who are less likely to provide accommodations?

*Research question 3:* How do employees who are more likely to request accommodations differ from those who are less likely to request accommodations?

## Method

### RAFS

Fifty-two RAFS items were derived from a comprehensive analysis of empirical studies published between 1992 and 2008 on variables related to the request and provision of RAAs in the workplace. The survey items were refined based on guidance from a group of experts who comprised a Participatory Action Research (PAR) team. Dong et al. (2010) detailed the development of the RAFS, and the eight factors identified from the RAFS.

For the purpose of this study, we compared and contrasted the perceptions of the top 30 of the 52 survey items with higher means (exceeding 3.00 on a 5-point Likert-type scale) rated by the three stakeholder groups. The job accommodation literature reviewed earlier provided a compelling rationale for selecting the top 30 items. For example, communication between employees and employers (Gates, 2000), employer's support for requesting accommodations (Baldrige, 2005), and the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements (Harlan & Robert, 1998) have emerged as significant factors in the RA process. In addition, an earlier study identified these top-rated survey items as the most important among three stakeholder groups (Dong et al., 2010).

### Procedure

We contacted the directors of the Americans With Disabilities Act Center (Region III of the Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center [DBTAC]), the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), and state Business Leadership Networks (BLNs), and asked them to invite their constituents and other collaborators to participate in this study. We emailed the web link of the online survey to the directors of the above-mentioned agencies, and asked them to invite participants through their electronic newsletters and list-serves. In addition to the above-mentioned recruitment strategies, we also recruited participants through regional DBTAC meetings, and rehabilitation and employment-related conferences. Once they completed the survey and submitted their responses, participants were given the option to enter a drawing for a gift card, at which time contact information was requested. Because most of the survey promotion and recruitment was conducted through online notices and websites in multiple branches of these organizations, no response rate was estimated.

The sample was recruited in two rounds, with the first round using SurveyMonkey (an online survey engine). We switched to a different web-based survey program (SurveyGizmo), as it was more accessible to all users of Job Access With Speech (JAWS) screen reader programs. During this round of survey administration, we added four questions related to participants' demographic information in the questionnaire: gender, race/ethnicity, educational level, and age.

### Participants

Altogether, 531 participants completed the study. Employees with disabilities, employers, and service providers composed 31%, 33%, and 36% of the total respondent sample, respectively. The three groups were nearly equally represented in the study. Overall, 50% of individuals participating in the survey self-identified as having a disability.

In the first round of data collection, only participant role (employee, employer, or service provider) was collected on 263 respondents who did not report on demographic information. In the second round, with the change in survey software, we had an opportunity to add questions about demographic information (age, race, gender, educational level), which was then collected on 268 participants. The percentages of employees with disabilities, employers, and service providers were similar between the first and the second rounds of data collection: 31% (32%), 34% (31%), and 35% (37%), respectively. Among the 268 participants in the second round of data collection, age ranged from 18 to 65 and older; two thirds of the sample was between the ages 45 and 64. Participants were predominantly female (67.5%) and Caucasian (76%). The respondents were mostly well educated, with 82% of the sample reporting having at least a bachelor's degree.

### Scoring and Data Analysis

Participants were asked "Based upon your past experience, how important do you think these survey items were to job accommodation requests and provision?" They rated each of the 52 items on the RAFS, using a Likert-type scale with a range from 1 to 5, with 1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *extremely important*.

We conducted confidence interval (CI) analysis (95%) to identify differences in perceptions of RAFS items among employees with disabilities, employers, and service providers. We chose this analytic strategy over the ANOVA tests because the use of the latter may lead to Type I errors due to a large number of significant tests. Furthermore, an item comparison can identify the nuances of perceptions on RAFS items among the three stakeholder groups, which may otherwise be compromised by collapsing items into latent factors. These more nuanced differences may provide better assistance to stakeholders in the job accommodation request, provision, and handling process.

Independent *t* tests were used to reveal differences in perception of the importance of top-rated RAFS items between employers who were more likely to provide RA, and those who were not. Individuals who answered "yes" for the question ("If you are an employer/supervisor, have you provided the accommodation(s) requested when you received a request for job accommodation(s)?") were categorized as more likely to provide accommodations. Those who answered "no" or "sometimes yes and sometimes no" were categorized as less likely to provide RA.

Similarly, independent *t* tests were used to reveal differences in perception of the importance of top-rated RAFS items between employees who were more likely to request RAs and those who were not. Employees who answered "yes" to the question ("If you are an individual

with disabilities, have you ever requested a job accommodation?") were categorized as more likely to request accommodations. Employees who answered "no" to the question were categorized as less likely to request accommodations.

## Results

### Descriptive Analysis

Across three stakeholder groups (employees with disabilities, employers, and service providers), the top five items rated most important are the following: *supportiveness of the employee's direct supervisor*, *employer's support for requesting accommodations*, *communication between the employee and employer*, *employers' understanding of disabilities and ADA eligibility*, and *the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements*. The ratings and CIs of the top 30 items within each of the three stakeholder groups can be found in Table 1.

Except for two items, *the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements* and *overall resources of the organization*, employers' ratings of importance (mean scores) of the items are lower than those of employees with disabilities and service providers.

### Differences in Importance Ratings Among Stakeholders

By identifying the nonoverlapping of CIs on the means of RAFS items, nine differences (as evidenced by nonoverlapping CIs) in ratings of the importance of 30 survey items in the request and provision of accommodations were found among the three stakeholder groups. Among these nine differences, four differences existed between employers and employees with disabilities; one difference existed between employers and service providers; and three differences existed among employers, and employees with disabilities and service providers.

Differences in perception were found in the following categories: nature of employers and organizations, nature of the accommodation requests, and characteristics or behaviors of employees with disabilities. Among the nine differences (as evidenced by nonoverlapping CIs), two differences were related to the nature of employers and organizations: (a) direct supervisor's supportiveness for requests (with CIs ranging from 4.39 to 4.60, and from 4.05 to 4.35 for employees with disabilities, and employers, respectively); (a) perceived fairness of the accommodation by coworkers (with CIs ranging from 2.58 to 2.96, and from 3.00 to 3.36 for employers, and service providers, respectively). In the first item, employers' importance rating was lower than those of employees with disabilities (but not different from service providers), and service providers' perceptions of these items were not different from ratings of employers or ratings of

employees with disabilities as evidenced by the overlapping CI. On the second item, employers' ratings were lower than employee and service provider ratings as evidenced by the nonoverlapping CIs, and there was no difference between service providers and employees as evidence by the overlapped CI.

Three differences were related to the nature of accommodation requests: (a) *the cost of accommodations* (with CIs ranging from 2.95 to 3.31, and from 3.34 to 3.68 for employers, and service providers, respectively), (b) *urgency of the request* (with CIs ranging from 3.70 to 4.02, and from 3.30 to 3.62 for employees, and employers, respectively), and (c) *timing of the request* (with CIs ranging from 3.05 to 3.49, and from 2.65 to 3.03 for employee, and employers, respectively). In all three cases, employers' ratings on these items were lower than ratings of employees with disabilities or ratings of service providers as evidenced by the nonoverlapping CIs.

Four differences were associated with characteristics or behaviors of employees with disabilities: (a) *employee's capacity to address barriers in requesting accommodations* (with CIs ranging from 3.62 to 3.98, from 3.60 to 3.88, and from 3.21 to 3.55 for employees, service providers, and employers, respectively), (b) *creativity in identifying accommodations* (with CIs ranging from 3.52 to 3.90, and from 3.04 to 3.40 for employees, and employers, respectively), (c) *knowledge and awareness of the ADA and RAs* (with CIs ranging from 3.48 to 3.90, from 3.22 to 3.58, and from 2.55 to 2.99 for employees, service providers, and employers, respectively), and (d) *communication skills* (with confidence intervals ranging from 3.26 to 3.66, from 3.12 to 3.46, and from 2.67 to 3.05 for employees, service providers, and employers, respectively). Employers' ratings on these items were lower than those of employees with disabilities as evidenced by the nonoverlapping CI.

### Differences in Importance Ratings and Likelihood of Requesting/Providing Accommodations

Significant differences in perception of the importance of four RAFS items were found between employers who were more likely to provide RAs and employers less likely to provide RAs (see Table 3): *the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements*, *the role of the individual who is handling the request*, *employee's knowledge of RA procedures in the organization*, and *perceived fairness of the accommodation by coworkers*. Employers who were less likely to provide accommodations viewed *the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements* and *the role of the individual who is handling the request* as more important. However, they also believed that *employee's knowledge of RA procedures in the*



**Table 1.** Perceptions of Importance on RA Items Among Stakeholder Groups.

Item	Pooled groups (N = 531)	Employees (N = 164)		Employers (N = 176)		Service providers (N = 191)	
	M (SD)	M (SD)	CI (95%)	M (SD)	CI (95%)	M (SD)	CI (95%)
Supportiveness of the employee's direct supervisor <sup>a</sup>	4.36 (0.90)	4.50 (0.76)	[4.38, 4.62]	4.20 (1.02)	[4.05, 4.35]	4.37 (0.88)	[4.25, 4.49]
Employer's support for requesting accommodations	4.29 (0.97)	4.33 (0.95)	[4.18, 4.48]	4.32 (1.04)	[4.17, 4.47]	4.24 (0.91)	[4.11, 4.37]
Communication between the employee and employer	4.28 (0.92)	4.40 (0.82)	[4.27, 4.53]	4.25 (0.98)	[4.11, 4.30]	4.22 (0.95)	[4.09, 4.35]
Employer's understanding of disabilities and ADA eligibility	4.27 (0.96)	4.32 (0.92)	[4.18, 4.46]	4.24 (1.06)	[4.08, 4.40]	4.26 (0.90)	[4.13, 4.39]
The extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements	4.18 (0.90)	4.18 (0.97)	[4.03, 4.33]	4.25 (0.82)	[4.13, 4.37]	4.12 (0.91)	[3.99, 4.25]
Employer's attitudes toward employees with disabilities	4.18 (1.13)	4.33 (1.01)	[4.18, 4.48]	4.00 (1.27)	[3.81, 4.19]	4.22 (1.06)	[4.07, 4.37]
Supervisor's knowledge of accommodation procedures in the organization	4.16 (0.99)	4.29 (0.95)	[4.14, 4.44]	4.07 (1.06)	[3.91, 4.23]	4.13 (0.094)	[4.00, 4.26]
Organizational policies regarding the ADA and workplace accommodations	4.15 (1.04)	4.21 (1.00)	[4.06, 4.36]	4.16 (1.11)	[4.00, 4.32]	4.08 (1.00)	[3.94, 4.22]
Role of the individual who is handling the request (e.g., direct supervisor and HR manager)	4.04 (1.08)	4.14 (1.04)	[3.98, 4.30]	4.09 (1.09)	[3.93, 4.25]	3.90 (1.09)	[3.75, 4.05]
Extent to which the supervisor is involved in the accommodation process	4.03 (0.96)	4.12 (0.94)	[3.98, 4.26]	4.04 (0.98)	[3.90, 4.18]	3.94 (0.95)	[3.81, 4.07]
Ease of use of the accommodations	3.92 (1.00)	4.07 (1.03)	[3.91, 4.23]	3.80 (0.97)	[3.66, 3.94]	3.90 (0.98)	[3.76, 4.04]
Employee's productivity/performance	3.81 (1.23)	3.90 (1.21)	[3.71, 4.09]	3.70 (1.33)	[3.50, 3.90]	3.82 (1.14)	[3.66, 3.98]
Benefits of providing accommodations	3.77 (1.14)	3.89 (1.19)	[3.71, 4.07]	3.64 (1.19)	[3.46, 3.82]	3.80 (1.04)	[3.65, 3.95]
Urgency of the accommodation request <sup>a</sup>	3.64 (1.04)	3.86 (1.03)	[3.70, 4.02]	3.46 (1.08)	[3.30, 3.62]	3.63 (0.98)	[3.49, 3.77]
Employee's capacity to address barriers when seeking accommodations <sup>a</sup>	3.64 (1.10)	3.80 (1.16)	[3.62, 3.98]	3.38 (1.14)	[3.21, 3.55]	3.74 (0.98)	[3.60, 3.88]
Employer's knowledge of technology and other means of accommodations	3.63 (1.12)	3.69 (1.15)	[3.51, 3.87]	3.66 (1.09)	[3.50, 3.82]	3.54 (1.12)	[3.38, 3.70]
Type of accommodations requested	3.53 (1.13)	3.59 (1.21)	[3.40, 3.78]	3.42 (1.08)	[3.26, 3.58]	3.58 (1.09)	[3.43, 3.73]
Relationship between the employee making the request and the supervisor	3.53 (1.31)	3.63 (1.33)	[3.43, 3.83]	3.42 (1.38)	[3.22, 3.62]	3.54 (1.23)	[3.37, 3.71]
Severity of the employee's disability and resulting functional limitations	3.50 (1.29)	3.50 (1.25)	[3.31, 3.69]	3.41 (1.38)	[3.21, 3.61]	3.59 (1.25)	[3.41, 3.77]
Employee's knowledge of RA procedures in the organization	3.49 (1.31)	3.79 (1.27)	[3.60, 3.98]	3.23 (1.42)	[3.02, 3.44]	3.47 (1.19)	[3.30, 3.64]
Structural modifications necessary to provide accommodations	3.47 (1.06)	3.52 (1.18)	[3.34, 3.70]	3.37 (1.04)	[3.22, 3.52]	3.53 (0.96)	[3.39, 3.67]
Employee's creativity in identifying accommodations <sup>a</sup>	3.47 (1.19)	3.71 (1.22)	[3.52, 3.90]	3.22 (1.19)	[3.04, 3.40]	3.48 (1.13)	[3.32, 3.64]
Overall resources of the organization (e.g., size, profitability)	3.38 (1.16)	3.37 (1.18)	[3.19, 3.55]	3.46 (1.19)	[3.28, 3.64]	3.32 (1.11)	[3.16, 3.48]
Cost of the accommodation requested <sup>a</sup>	3.30 (1.27)	3.26 (1.31)	[3.06, 3.46]	3.13 (1.25)	[2.95, 3.31]	3.51 (1.22)	[3.34, 3.68]
Employee's knowledge and awareness of the ADA and RAs <sup>a</sup>	3.28 (1.43)	3.69 (1.40)	[3.48, 3.90]	2.77 (1.48)	[2.55, 2.99]	3.40 (1.26)	[3.22, 3.58]
Scope and intensity of the accommodation	3.26 (1.16)	3.40 (1.25)	[3.21, 3.59]	3.09 (1.17)	[2.92, 3.26]	3.29 (1.07)	[3.14, 3.44]
Employee's communication skills in requesting accommodations <sup>a</sup>	3.20 (1.28)	3.46 (1.28)	[3.26, 3.66]	2.86 (1.27)	[2.67, 3.05]	3.29 (1.22)	[3.12, 3.46]
Formality of the accommodation process/procedure in the organization	3.15 (1.17)	3.24 (1.23)	[3.05, 3.43]	3.17 (1.18)	[3.00, 3.34]	3.04 (1.11)	[2.88, 3.20]
Timing of the request to the employer <sup>a</sup>	3.08 (1.31)	3.27 (1.42)	[3.05, 3.49]	2.84 (1.28)	[2.65, 3.03]	3.14 (1.19)	[2.97, 3.31]
Perceived fairness of the accommodation by coworkers <sup>a</sup>	3.03 (1.34)	3.13 (1.42)	[2.91, 3.35]	2.77 (1.32)	[2.58, 2.96]	3.18 (1.24)	[3.00, 3.36]

Note. RA = reasonable accommodation; CI = confidence interval; ADA = Americans With Disabilities Act.

<sup>a</sup>Indicates significant differences exist between or among means of relevant survey items through identifying nonoverlapping of the CIs. The CIs italicized indicate that significant differences exist between or among the corresponding means.

organization and perceived fairness of the accommodation by coworkers were less important than employers who were more likely to provide accommodations (See Table 2).

Significant differences in perception of the importance of three RA items were found between employees who were more likely or less likely to request accommodations: *the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements*, *ease of use of the accommodation*, and *employee's communication skills in requesting accommodations*. Employees who were less likely to request accommodations regarded *the extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements* and *ease of use of the*

*accommodations* as more important than employees more likely to request accommodations. They also viewed *employee's communication skills in requesting accommodations* as less important than employees who were more likely to request accommodations (See Table 3).

## Discussion

This study investigated factors that employees, employers, and service providers consider important in the job accommodation process. Overall, the results reveal that all three stakeholder groups share common perspectives

**Table 2.** Differences on Employers Likely and Less Likely to Provide Accommodations.

RA items with significant difference	M/SD		F	p
	Likely provide RA (n = 111)	Less likely provide (n = 65)		
Extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements	4.13/0.858	4.38/0.748	2.266	.05
Role of the individual who is handling the request	3.94/1.145	4.26/0.924	2.253	.05
Employee's knowledge of RA procedures in the organization	3.46/1.361	3.03/1.318	-2.454	.05
Perceived fairness of the accommodations by coworkers	3.05/1.303	2.58/1.321	-2.707	.01

Note. RA = reasonable accommodation.

**Table 3.** Differences on Employees Likely and Less Likely to Request Accommodations.

RA items with significant difference	M/SD		F	p
	Likely request RA (n = 105)	Less likely request (n = 59)		
Extent to which the accommodations are matched to job requirements	4.14/0.968	4.33/0.750	1.919	.05
Ease use of the accommodations	3.89/1.087	4.13/0.804	2.216	.05
Employee's communication skills in requesting accommodations	3.38/1.276	3.08/1.264	-1.972	.05

Note. RA = reasonable accommodation.

on the majority of items surveyed. Interestingly, the actual ranking of the items is similar across the three groups; for example, *supportiveness of the employee's direct supervisor*, *employer support for requesting accommodations*, *communication between the employee and employer*, and *employer's understanding of disabilities and ADA eligibility* all ranked in the top five by employees, employers, and service providers. All stakeholders believe that support and communication are very important in the accommodation process. In other studies, an unsuccessful accommodation request was the result of a breakdown in communication between employees and employers (Gates, 2000; Rumrill, 2001). In addition, the stakeholders agreed that the *extent to which accommodations are matched to job requirements* is very important.

Among the top 30-rated items, a little less than one third showed differences between employers compared with either service providers or employees with disabilities (who shared similar perspectives). Of these differences, there were none between employees and service providers, two between employers and service providers, four between employers and employees, and three among employers, employees with disabilities, and service providers.

Among the nine RA items showing differences in importance ratings, employer ratings were lower (less important)

than employees or service providers. Between employers and employees, differences were noted in items related to the nature and type of organizations, the nature of accommodation requests, and characteristics or behaviors of employees with disabilities. It appears that employees placed more emphasis than employers did on organizational and employer characteristics, types of accommodations, and their skill in requesting them. While service providers appeared to overestimate the importance of accommodation cost relative to employers, it was not a highly rated item (mean of 3.5 out of 5) for any of the stakeholder groups.

Service providers rated two items higher (more important) than employers: *cost of accommodation* and *perceived fairness of the accommodation by coworkers*. One emerging pattern here is that service providers tend to base the likelihood of receiving an accommodation on the nature of the accommodation and its impacts, rather than on job performance issues. This finding is similar to that of one other study comparing perceptions of service providers and employers (Michaels & Risucci, 1993), which found that VR counselors focused on the limitations of the individual, whereas employers focused on job performance in evaluating accommodation requests. Perhaps not surprisingly, employee and service provider ratings were highly consistent for all 30 items but different from those of employers, implying that service providers may need to adopt a more "business-like" perspective on the RA process by emphasizing demand side factors (improving productivity and performance), rather than supply side issues (responding to employee needs).

Differences were observed, however, between factors related to employers' likelihood of providing accommodations and employees' likelihood of requesting them. Employers who were *less* likely to provide accommodations thought that the *extent to which accommodations are matched to job requirements* and the *role of the individual handling the request* as more important than those of employers more likely to provide them, although both groups rated these items as highly important. Similarly, employees who were *less* likely to request accommodations rated the *extent to which accommodations match job requirements* and *ease of use of accommodations* as very important. These findings emphasize the importance of framing a credible and useful accommodation request and addressing it to the right person in the organization.

### Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, the sample may not be fully representative of stakeholder groups (people with disabilities, employers, and service providers). The sample in this study is mostly female, relatively highly educated, Caucasian, and middle-aged, which may be related to the characteristics of constituencies of the

recruiting agencies (i.e., DBTAC, JAN, and BLN), but not representative of all employers, employees with disabilities, and service providers. Caution should be taken when trying to generalize findings beyond the scope of the sample for this study. A second limitation may be the length of the survey, as it consists of rating 52 items along with additional questions. For instance, individuals with cognitive disabilities may have had difficulty completing the survey or may not have volunteered to complete it, thus resulting in lower response rates in these groups. Third, the self-report nature of the survey questionnaire may lead some participants to choosing answers that may be more socially desirable and therefore skew the findings. Results of this exploratory study should be interpreted with caution.

Despite these limitations, this exploratory study on RA is the first to compare perceptions of employees, employers, and service providers on the factors that influence the RAs decision-making process. Results of this study highlight the importance among all stakeholders of the communication between employers and employees in the accommodation process, and the match between the job accommodation and job requirements, suggesting developing and researching accommodation interventions that focus on these characteristics. Developing effective interventions to facilitate the accommodation process may result in improved relationships between three stakeholders, improved employment outcomes for peoples with disabilities, and ultimately fewer EEOC discrimination charges related to accommodations.

### Implications for Rehabilitation Professionals

There are several important implications arising from this study that might be useful for rehabilitation professionals to consider. First is what Gates (2000) referred to as the "social" nature of the RA process. The results of this study clearly support the need for trust, communication, and support among employees and employers in the RA process. Rehabilitation professionals can play a potentially important role in facilitating communication by assisting employees with development of disclosure and RA request plans, based on credible documentation of performance needs consistent with job demands.

The discrepancies between employer ratings of importance of several of the items and those of employees and service providers highlight the need for service providers to adopt a business perspective regarding employer-hiring practices. For example, RA scope and duration are relatively important factors employers consider in the request process, so emphasizing the potential benefits (such as enhanced productivity, reduced turnover) resulting from the RA provision might be important job development/placement strategies. Interestingly, this group of employers did not rate the actual cost of an RA as an important consideration, but service providers should be aware (and indicated their awareness in the

current study) that other larger studies of employer-hiring practices (e.g., Domzal, Houtenville, & Sharma, 2008) have cited cost as a barrier in RA provision.

Several of the items addressed the importance of creative accommodation solutions and having knowledge of the ADA and the RA process. Rehabilitation professionals should be key resources connecting employers (and employees) to available RA technical assistance and other information through the JAN ([www.askJAN.org](http://www.askJAN.org)), and the DBTAC, a national network of ten regional ADA Centers.

There is evidence that the provision of work accommodations supports job acquisition and retention for employees with disabilities. As the request and provision of accommodations is a process, not a single event, it is important to understand how the different stakeholders involved in the RA process view it, to more adequately prepare employees for the request process, and prepare service providers to more adequately address accommodation issues. This study highlights the importance of communication among stakeholders, and effectively matching accommodations to job requirements.

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