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EMPLOYEE ACCOMMODATIONS IN SMALL BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Because of limited financial and human resources, small entrepreneurial organizations often struggle to meet work accommodation needs of their employees. Further complicating this challenge is an absence of professional human resource expertise and procedures to guide accommodation decision making. As a result, accommodations frequently carry with them more unintended negative consequences for co-workers than would otherwise be necessary or desirable. While many of these small organizations are not legally mandated to provide accommodations, their employees still have occasions where accommodations are needed and considered to be appropriate. Entrepreneurial organizations need creative and practical strategies to meet such needs. To address these concerns, many factors should be considered and incorporated into organizational responses to such requests. A model discussing these factors is proposed and suggestions for implementing accommodations in a manner which minimizes negative impacts are described.

INTRODUCTION

All organizations, at one time or another, find they must make accommodations for employees who need to attend to their own or a family member's health-related issues or to accommodate military service. Accommodations may be in the form of time off for medical appointments, recovery time, or may involve work changes, such as when employees become disabled and are no longer able to work as they have in the past. Small organizations, however, are particularly challenged by these changes in work status because they have fewer financial or human resources available to cover the time employees are away from their jobs or to make necessary work changes. Vacation and sick time are difficult to deal with but, as these time spans are rel-atively short and, at least for vacation, are of a finite and predictable duration, most small organizations find a way to "make do." When employees or their family members have more serious and longer lasting health concerns, simple adjustments to make do will not suffice. As more employees request leave for military duty, childbirth/adoption, or to care for aging parents, ensuring that accommodations are successful is becoming a growing need for competitive businesses.

Existing research on accommodations or leaves focuses primarily on the employees requesting accommodations. Research issues have included: what legal rights are provided to employees (Samuels, Coffinberger & Fouts, 1988; Ennis, 1990; Crampton & Mishra, 1995); who is actually eligible for accommodations (Hoekstra, 1997); when do

employees choose to utilize these rights (Grosswald & Scharlach, 1999; Dorman, 1995; McGovern, Dowd, Gjerdingen, Moscovice, Kochevar, & Murphy, 2000); and what types of accommodations are to be provided (Cash & Gray, 2000). All of these questions are important but the narrow focus on the requesting employee fails to address the influence that the larger context has in the accommodation process. These contextual factors, such as organizational size and resources, co-workers, managers, job attributes, and the law, play crucial roles in defining ultimate success of the accommodation. The model proposed here explores how these issues may affect the design process and implementation of an accommodation. It is stressed that the roles of management and co-workers are critical in this process.

Employees requesting accommodations typically need periods of time away from work, adjustments to work schedules, and/or changes to the work tasks they regularly perform. In practice, all organizations have a combination of formal and informal systems for allowing employees time away from work for these types of life events. Small organizations, like their larger counterparts, typically have time off programs for vacations, illness, and personal time. Legal requirements, such as Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), apply to all employers but small organizations may be exempted from legal mandates under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and workers' compensation programs. Even without these legal obligations, many small organizations will attempt voluntarily to accommodate employee needs.[4] Such voluntary accommodations may be stimulated by a moral sense of responsibility to employees, empathy, sympathy to the plight of the employees, or more instrumental goals of influencing perceptions of the organization and retaining valued employees.

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[4]Many states have parallel statutes, often with lower size thresholds for coverage. Nevertheless, a substantial percentage of small companies fall beneath the radar screen of the laws regulating medical and/or disability accommodations.

Offering successful accommodations will be difficult for small, entrepreneurial organizations from both financial and human resource perspectives. Financially, many small organizations, particularly startups and those fighting for initial market viability, have few resources to spend on accommodations. In these situations, accommodations need to be based on relatively inexpensive solutions, which frequently mean shifting work to co-workers of the requesting employee. The only assured method for avoiding significant impacts on the immediate co-workers is to hire a new employee to fill in for the requesting employee. Unfortunately, hiring, even on a temporary basis, often is neither financially feasible nor practical for the small organization.

Successful design and implementation of an accommodation requires the recognition and consideration of multiple perspectives. Accommodations directly affect three stakeholders: the requesting beneficiary, co-workers, and their organization. Each of these groups defines success differently. Requesting beneficiaries may see a successful accommodation as one that meets all of their needs and preferences for work alteration. Co-workers may define an accommodation as successful if it requires few or no changes to their workloads or if the changes needed are accompanied by appropriate recognition for their efforts. Organizations may define an accommodation as successful if the business needs are accomplished and legal requirements are fulfilled. Measuring the success of an accommodation must incorporate these multiple perspectives. Therefore, accommodation success is not dichotomous but rather three continuous measures of success-to-failure that perhaps could be additive if necessary for an overall measure of accommodation success.

While protecting and satisfying the employees requesting the accommodation, their co-workers, and the organization's interests during the accommodation process, managers must design accommodations that are cognizant of financial and human resource constraints. To do this, a thorough

consideration of all the relevant beneficiary, job, and organizational factors should be undertaken before implementing any accommodations. Beneficiary factors include aspects of accommodations that are derived from the requesting employees. First, the extent and nature of the accommodation necessary must be determined. The initial information needed to guide this assessment should be readily available from the requesting employees and managers can expect that employees will identify the types of changes that are desired. However, it is important to note that employees should not be given carte blanche to dictate the exact format or details of any requested accommodation. In practice, there often are multiple options available to employers for meeting employees' accommodation needs. Second, an analysis should be done to understand the job tasks and behavioral expectations of the requesting employees' jobs. These may not be completely and accurately depicted in existing job descriptions. In the case of small organizations, these job descriptions may not even exist. Third, how the requesting employees are regarded by co-workers, while largely uncontrollable by the organization, must be taken into consideration in shaping any accommodation. Fourth, organizational factors related to how the organization is positioned to respond to such requests must be examined. These organizational factors are controllable by the organization and, therefore, give managers the best opportunities to design successful accommodations that meet the needs of most requesting employees and their co-workers while protecting the interests of the employer. Finally, depending on the size of the organization and state law, there may be legal regulations in effect. These five factors are universal to all organizations. They will affect how all organizations design accommodations that lead to success. Small organizations have additional concerns, which may moderate how some of the foregoing factors contribute to successful accommodations.

The goal of most organizations will be to design and implement accommodations which are considered successful by all of the key constituencies: the beneficiary, co-workers, and the organization. The model presented discusses five universal factors influencing this multifaceted standard of success and incorporates organizational size as a moderating influence. It must be understood that the impact of these factors is not directly on the success of the accommodation itself but, rather, on the decision-making process, the final accommodation decision, and the implementation of that decision. How an organization handles these three steps is the critical determinant of the degree of success experienced.

First, we will address the special circumstances of small organizations. Second, we will discuss how each of the universal factors affects accommodations incorporating the organizational size issues into the discussion where applicable. These factors are modeled in Figure 1.

ACCOMMODATION CHALLENGES OF SMALL ORGANIZATIONS

Small, entrepreneurial organizations have some challenges to making accommodations that will probably not be as relevant in large organizations. Small organizations may have a higher percentage of single incumbent jobs. They tend not to have formal human resource departments or written human resource policies and procedures. Their managers may have limited HR experience and, without the aid of a professional in the HR field, managers may have a greater tendency to make ad hoc decisions regarding accommodations. Larger organizations may face some of these issues but, realistically, they are more likely to have access to larger employee talent pools and professional HR expertise.

Small organizations almost always embrace a lean staffing strategy which implies that there is little redundancy in the skills possessed by employees. In many situations, there will not be other employees in an organization who possess the same knowledge, skills, abilities or work expertise/experience as the employee needing an accommodation. In this context,
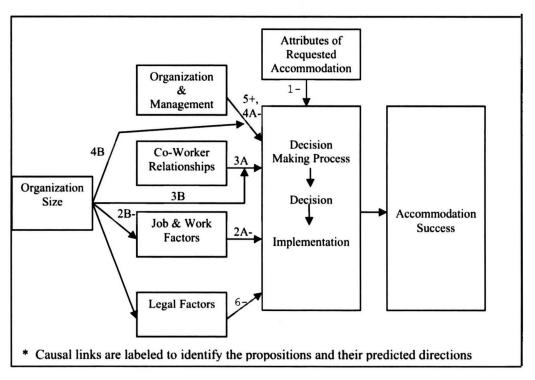
Figure 1 – Factors Influencing Work Accommodations*

* Causal links are labeled to identify the propositions and their predicted directions

when an employee requests an accommodation, the problem may not be that co-workers are unwilling to fill in for their colleague or that there is insufficient time but, rather, that they are incapable of such an effort. This situation usually requires that managers find external sources of labor to complete work or devise some other accommodation to reduce reliance on the requesting employee's work. Such accommodations will be necessary for the short-term and, possibly, for the long-term as well.

Another challenge faced by most small organizations is a low level of human resource expertise. Owners and managers may be lacking in knowledge of human resource issues that may be pertinent to the requested accommodation. Further, such organizations typically do not have formal human resource departments or even a human resource professional on staff until they have a critical mass of employees, which is generally thought to be 100 employees or more. Without professional human resource expertise, these organi- zations may be less likely to have formal

policies or procedures that can provide guidance about how requests for accommodation are to be handled and, consequently, to develop appropriate accommodations. Similarly, small organi- zations are less likely to have written job descriptions. Operating in such a human resource vacuum may result in *ad hoc* decisions being made about each request. The resulting accommodations may be arbitrary and inconsistent over time, which may give employees the negative impression that favoritism is involved in the determination of accommodations. These human and financial resource constraints may limit the types of accommodations small organizations are able and willing to make.

ATTRIBUTES OF REQUESTED ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations may be requested for any number of reasons. Typically, requests will be made because employees have experienced a challenging, and sometimes life-altering, event or developed a chronic condition which causes them to need

changes in their work environment. While we typically focus on events which happen directly to the employee in question, accommodations resulting from family and relationship issues also are likely to occur (Starrels, Ingersoll-Dayton, Dowler, & Neal, 1997). These events may diminish people's physical capabilities or mental state (Hantula & Reilly, 1996). Such changes may be permanent or temporary. Chronic conditions, such as learning disabilities, while not discussed as often as physical disabilities, may be more difficult for employers to identify, but still will require accommodation (Price & Gerber, 2001). Chronic conditions will typically require permanent accommodations.

While each of these causes is legitimate and compelling, from an organizational perspective the cause of the request is not the primary issue confronting the organization. The cause is important because it triggers any legal requirements and defines the range of what work changes will be needed. These work changes, while infinite in possibilities, typically have three basic attributes: duration, timing, and the physical or environmental form of accommodations.

The duration, timing, and form of the accommodation go to the heart of the beneficiary's need. These items provide an analytical framework to be used in defining and selecting accommodations that are necessary and desirable. Duration refers to the length of time the accommodation will be needed. Accommodations that are of an undefined duration, extend over a long time frame, or repeat frequently will impose more of a "cost" than will short and infrequent amounts of time-off. Timing refers to the predictability of when the accommodation will be needed. Is the requested time-off unpredictable or sporadic or is it known well in advance? In the former case, co-workers may pay a higher price as they may be forced, with little advance warning, to cancel activities outside of work, to stay late, or delay projects to adjust for the accommodation. The form of the accommodation refers to the need for time off or adjustments to the work of the beneficiary. Changes in work tasks may be required not

only of co-workers to cover tasks previously completed by the beneficiary but also by managers in their duties of supervising the accommodated employees. The latter may be more pertinent in cases of employees with chronic mental impairments, who will require perhaps a different management style (MacDonald-Wilson, Rogers, & Massaro, 2003). The *costs* to co-workers and the organization may be substantial with either of these forms (e.g., time off or work changes) and will increase as the extensiveness of the accommodation increases.

Proposition 1: The extensiveness of the accommodation needed will be negatively related to the success of the accommodation.

Job and Work Factors

As was previously noted, small organizations are likely to have a lean staffing model which will increase the concerns about the interdependence and centrality of the beneficiary's work in virtually all situations. Each employee in a small work organization typically holds a unique position that cannot be easily duplicated. Relative to larger organizations, the workforces of small organizations are more likely to have broad jobs (i.e., scope of activities and responsibilities) that are not confined to a narrow skill set. Jobs tend to be situationally defined and tailored to the unique knowledge, skills, and abilities of the employees and there frequently may be only one or very few employees who have a specific set of competencies. Because the skills required for each job are more likely to cover a broader range of knowledge areas than similar jobs in a larger organization, the result is that jobs in smaller organizations may have a tendency to be more interdependent as employees work in more areas of the organization. Further, knowledge, skills, and abilities are, to varying degrees, critical to organizational success. The more central a job is to the completion of organizational tasks, the more important it will be for the organization to design and implement an effective accommodation. Transferring tasks to another employee often will require

substantial amounts of training. Even where abilities are sufficient, there rarely is "slack" available to accommodate the reassigned tasks. In addition, there is no guarantee co-workers will be psychologically open to this reassignment of tasks. Any significant accommodation-driven changes to the co-workers' jobs can decrease the co-workers' own work effectiveness and/or job satisfaction. Employers must not lose sight of the fact that the efforts and cooperation of co-workers are just as crucial to the work process as those of the employee requesting the accommodation. Until sufficient growth occurs, which will permit more employee "depth", small organizations must deal with their realities of shallow talent pools when responding to requests for accommodations.

Proposition 2A: Higher centrality and/or interdependencies of the beneficiary's job with other jobs will be negatively related to accommodation success.

Proposition 2B: Organization size will be negatively related to a job's centrality and interdependence with other jobs.

Co-Worker Relationships

The beneficiary's relationships with co-workers are especially important in smaller organizations as they probably will need to rely more directly upon co-workers to accomplish accommodations than larger organizations. The relationships these beneficiaries have developed with their co-workers, prior to requesting accom-modations, will have a substantial impact on co-workers' willingness to put in extra time and/or effort to support their accom-modations. For example, the beneficiary's work history or job performance may play a role in co-workers' perceptions of the legitimacy of the accommodation or, at least, the degree to which changes in work or workload should be borne by them. Co-workers may be more sympathetic in cases where the beneficiary has been a good performer than they would be in cases where past job performance was marginal, suggesting that the request for accom-modation is just one more method of avoiding work regardless of the actual need

for accommodation. As the reasons for many of these accommodations are not evident and will be difficult for co-workers to verify, perceptions of "shirking" are not uncommon (Staten, 1982).

Related to this notion of shirking is the perceived legitimacy of the need for accommodation. For example, co-workers may not agree with the need for accommodation if the condition necessitating it is seen as having been self-inflicted rather than beyond the control of the accom-modated person. An accommodation which is a result of self-inflicted needs that are perceived by co-workers to be caused by unsafe behaviors or bad judgment may not be construed as justifiable by co-workers to the extent that a serious illness of a family member might. Also, if the severity of the need can be subjectively interpreted by co-workers as not extreme enough to merit the proposed accommodation, then co-workers may be less likely to adapt their work efforts in support of the accommodation.

Finally, the personal relationships developed by these beneficiaries with their co-workers are likely to affect co-workers' reactions to these accommodations. Co-workers, who have strong, positive personal ties with the employee requesting accommodation, are more likely to be sympathetic and feel better about the effects that an accommodation has on them. Co-workers will be more accepting of work impacts when they result from assisting someone they consider a friend and a good colleague rather than someone they do not know or dislike.

In smaller organizations, these relationships may prove to be even more critical than in larger organizations. Smaller organizations generally have fewer financial resources to make accommodations by utilizing external sources of labor or technology. As a result, accommodations will rely more heavily on the efforts of co-workers. Small organi-zations' lean staffing issues complicate this because employees may need to exert additional effort to learn new skills. This effort may be easier to elicit from employees who have a positive working relationship with the beneficiary.

Proposition 3A: The relationships between beneficiaries and co-workers will be positively related to accommodation success

Proposition 3B: Organization size will moderate the relationship between co-worker relations and accommodation success.

In practical terms, the attributes of the accommodations and these co-worker factors are largely beyond the control of management. Organizations can not easily alter the accommodations needed or the perceptions, values, or relationships with which co-workers make assessments about their willingness and enthusiasm to support accommodations. However, managers must recognize that designing an accommodation does not in itself assure that the needed work will be done well or that there won't be unintentional secondary impacts.

Organizational and Management Factors

Organization and management factors are more directly under the control of owners and managers than is the case with Co-worker Relationships and Job and Work factors. These factors deal with how the organization is positioned to address the accommodation from the perspectives of business cycles, organizational culture, and the policies and practices used to guide the development of the accommodation. The factors are not specific to the individual requesting accommodation but, rather, reflect management's approach to the external environments in which the organization operate and the roles of employees in accomplishing organizational goals.

Organizations may be less able or willing to accommodate employees who make requests during the peak work periods because the business needs will take precedence over the needs of an individual employee, except where legally mandated. Co-workers, already stretched thin, will be less able to take on additional and unfamiliar tasks. While management cannot determine the timing of a need for accommodation, it can and should be sensitive to the implications this has on the demands on co-workers as it responds to

such requests. The lean staffing dilemma of small organizations will exacerbate this problem. In larger organizations the business cycle still will be a contributing factor to accommodation success but their access to a larger number of employees will perhaps decrease the impact this business cycle will have on the accommodation.

Proposition 4A: An organization's business cycle will be negatively related to accommodation success.

Proposition 4B: Organization size will moderate the relationship between business cycle and accommodation success.

Organizational culture and management actions will affect how employees perceive requests for accommodation. Management's attitudes, behaviors, and demonstrated commitment can go a long way in setting the tone for implementing accommodations. Cultures that are accepting of accommodations send signals to employees that finding ways to work with accommodations is encouraged and expected. Further, co-workers are more likely to be accepting of accommodations if it is apparent that managers are sensitive toward and are making reasonable efforts to limit the negative impacts on others. One management action that can greatly assist in developing an accepting culture is procedural consistency of responses to requests for accommodations. While small organizations are unlikely to have many formal policies or procedures, the use of *ad hoc* approaches to decision making when designing accommodations may lead to perceptions of special treatment or favoritism. Even very basic policy statements about organizational commitments toward accommodations and the basic principles that will guide how requests for accommodations will be addressed can increase co-workers' acceptance of the decisions that result.

Proposition 5: A supportive organizational culture will be positively related to accommodation success.

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Legal Factors

Federal and state laws related to making these accommodations provide general guidance about what is considered a reasonable accommodation. Basically, these laws define employee rights, impose requirements on employers, and allow organizations to consider each request individually when determining whether or not to make any accommodations and the form and substance of such accommodations. The concepts of business necessity and undue burden play key roles in shaping these decisions. When federal regulations do not apply to smaller organizations, there may be state laws that will require these organizations to make accommodations because of the lower size thresholds for coverage in these laws. Even though these laws may have a positive influence on the actions of organizations, any laws that apply to organizations will, in some way, inhibit the organizations' ability to respond freely to an employee's request for accommodation. Still these laws provide a minimum standard for organizational responses to requests. Many managers recognize the minimal nature of these laws and are willing to go beyond these legal requirements when circumstances warrant it (Unger, 1999). These managers understand that the spirit of these laws is to ensure the fair and ethical treatment of employees in need and that rigid adherence to the letter of these laws does not, in and of itself, assure its provision. Thus, managers have, in many instances, risen above the legal requirements to meet their employees' needs and fulfill their perceived ethical obligations to their employees. Accommodations built solely on legal obligation must still meet the burdens of effectiveness and support by co-workers if they are to succeed.

Proposition 6: The extent to which legal considerations drive the accommodation design process will be negatively related to accommodation success.

IMPLICATIONS

The model in Figure 1 is proposed as a framework for future research and for the consideration of practitioners in the midst of making accommodations. More research is needed to understand if the causal links proposed reflect the realities of organizations. Should the proposed relationships be confirmed by additional research, there are implications for practitioners in organizations of all sizes; however, the design of accommodations and their success may vary by organizational size.

During the process of designing and implementing responses to requests for accommodation, management should consider all of the foregoing factors, which include the financial and human resource costs. This approach should increase the probability of creating a successful accommodation for the beneficiary, co-workers, and the organization.

An accommodation is considered unsuccessful if it fails to meet the needs of at least one of the stakeholders: beneficiaries, co-workers, or organizations. The costs associated with an unsuccessful accommodation may be high. Beneficiaries who think their organizations did not do all they could or should may engage in undesirable activities ranging from lower job performance to a law suit. Co-workers who are unhappy with work changes resulting from an accommodation also may engage in undesirable behaviors in the form of negative attitudes, lower performance, lower morale, and poor organizational citizenship behaviors. These behaviors may be difficult to identify as each co-worker interprets an accommodation based on their personal understanding of the situation and their relationship with the accommodated employee. Further, co-workers may mask their negative feelings because they fear a negative reaction or because of a sense a social desirability, making it all the more difficult to gauge co-workers' reactions. For organizations, an unsuccessful accommodation may mean missed opportunities and missed profits.

Management can minimize these problems by implementing policies and practices, which are fair and are perceived as being fair to all involved parties. Table 1 provides a

sample of issues confronting organizations and potential options that may be available to fairly and effectively deal with employee needs while at the same time minimizing the secondary effects on co-workers and maintaining the financial health of the organization. These options focus on the Organization and Management factors and Job and Work factors as these are more

controllable by organizations. Co-worker and Legal factors need to be taken into account when making these decisions but these are unlikely to be changed as a result of an accommodation decision. These suggestions for accommodation designs should work for organizations both large and small, but they are presented with small organizations in mind.

Table 1 – Suggestions for Minimizing Negative Impacts to Co-Workers While Making Accommodations

Factors	Suggestions for Minimizing Negative Impact
• Interdependence of work group • Criticality/Centrality of accommodated employee's work	• Job sharing • Part-time work • Teleworking • Outsourcing
• Organizational Culture	• Management and HR Policy changes aimed at increasing acceptance of accommodations • Focus on work challenge rather than on accommodation
• Management efforts	• Share information with co-workers • Consult co-workers in determining the specifics and impacts of accommodations • Give positive feedback to co-workers, who help with accommodation
• Consistency of treatment	• Well-defined, procedurally fair, documented policy • Applications of consistent decision making approaches to accommodation requests
• Seasonal Effects	• Hire temps • Postpone non-essential activities

Job and Work Factors

The interdependencies and centrality of work may seem difficult to change, especially in small organizations where every employee is uniquely critical to work processes. Still there are usually more options available than may be initially recognized. Reallocating tasks among other workers (Greenlaw & Kohl, 1992), job sharing with a co-worker, or greater use of part-time and temporary employees can reduce each employee's centrality and reduce the severity of gaps created by one employee's absence or reduced capacity to perform. Job and task

design to reduce the centrality of any one employee's role could be explicitly built into the organization management model. Where there is advance notice, it may be possible to work ahead or develop a stockpile of the critical products or work contributions made by the accommodated employee. Cross-training may be another option for the small organizations, though the opportunities for employees to learn and/or perform other employees' tasks may be limited by existing work loads and the extent to which required knowledge domains and/or skill sets are distinct. In small organizations, as processes are likely to be already efficiently engineered

and staffing slack minimal, these approaches may not seem to be viable. Alternatives that focus on deepening the pool of talent available to organizations may be best.

Job sharing and part-time work used together can be a powerful strategy for small organizations. Job sharing implies that two people each work part-time to complete one whole job. These employees are each competent to perform the duties of the other employee but their employers are not paying for two full-time employees. Organizations will have the benefit of deeper talent pools without the cost implications of a higher full-time employee headcount. If one of these employees needs an accommodation of time off from work, then the job sharing co-worker is prepared to take over the tasks of this incapacitated employee.

Taking advantage of the technology available for teleworking is another approach to solving the lean staffing dilemma. This may be an option for employees who cannot work on-site every day because of their accommodations but would be willing and able to do work from home. Teleworking may be especially feasible for service organizations where "products" can be emailed between employees or projects can be completed independently. While this option holds promise in many situations, care must be taken to view telework as a facilitative factor and not as a substitute for a needed accommodation.

Organization and Management Factors

Management efforts focused on improving the environment for accommodations, may not change the actual work that will need to be done by co-workers but they, hopefully, will ensure that co-workers are more positively motivated to accept the resulting changes and complete any extra tasks that may be required of them and that employees needing accommodations will not be fearful of asking for them (Baldridge & Veiga, 2001). If the organization's culture does not value and encourage these types of accommodations, owners and managers will need to take a long-term perspective on creating a supportive organizational culture.

Management of smaller organizations have an apparent advantage in that they may be able to affect more quickly the culture of an organization than would be possible in larger, more bureaucratic organizations. Still, managers must make a concerted effort to develop a culture that both is compassionate to the needs and wants of the workforce and is outcome-oriented. The desired culture should support employee cooperation as well as a shared sense of responsibility and accountability for achieving profitable business outcomes. If all employees share a common goal and there is a spirit of openness, cooperation, consultation, and participation, then most employees will not be unreasonable when asked or are expected to facilitate an accommodation.

There are a number of things that management can do to encourage an organizational culture that increases the probability that co-workers will be open to these accommodations and that they will be helpful in making the accommodations successful. It is essential that co-workers see management taking whatever actions are possible to minimize what may be perceived as unreasonable impacts on them. Even though the work systems in small organizations may be fairly transparent and managers could independently design appropriate and feasible work accommodations, co-workers should still be solicited for input about the specific design of accommodations. Further, offering explanations to co-workers about the nature of accommodations and, to the extent legally feasible, the general reasons for accommodations may increase co-workers' understanding and acceptance of accommodations. Without such explanations, these changes might seem mystifying and be perceived as unfair, inappropriate, or unnecessary.

Once the accommodations are in place, management should strive to maintain a sense of community within the workforce by recognizing the extra efforts made by co-workers. Formal mechanisms for recognition may exist but managers should not forget that opportunities for informal approaches to recognition also will be available. Verbal

recognition either public or private that acknowledges co-workers' extra efforts should add to a helping culture. Many creative and inexpensive ways to recognize co-workers' efforts can be used without fear of setting a precedent (Nelson, 1994). Managers should deliver this recognition in a format which will be welcomed by co-workers and does not come at the expense of the accommodated employee.

Another method of adding to the "helping culture" is by putting in place policies that address employees' concerns with procedural fairness. Small organizations have a reputation for avoiding written policies because of the perception that this allows them greater flexibility in responding to situations. Unfortunately, flexibility may ultimately lead to perceptions of favoritism or *ad hoc* decision making that does not consider the needs of all employees. Even in small organizations, employees will want to have confidence that management is considering everyone's interests before designing accommodations. Inconsistencies in the decision-making process will undermine the value of these programs and can have negative impacts on how employees regard even the most deserving of accommodated employees. A written policy that outlines the underlying principles of accommodation, the sequence of steps, the actors, expectations for communication with co-workers, and any other steps in the decision process will assure co-workers that their interests specifically are considered in the accommodation decision-making process (Mondak, 2000). This policy should retain a large amount of flexibility in the design of accommodations but provide a decision-making framework that includes all affected parties to increase the understanding and acceptability of accommodations.

The timing or season of accommodation requests may have an impact on how managers respond. Since small organizations have very few employees who can share the burden of accommodations, requests that come during peak seasons or near significant work deadlines will be more difficult to work around than those that come during slower times. Management is encouraged to be realistic about co-workers' stress and work loads. The use of part-time, job-sharing workers that was suggested earlier may only work during slower times. During peak times, it is likely that employees who are normally part-time workers may be working close to full-time schedules to meet higher product demands. Therefore, the use of temporary workers may be more necessary during peak seasons or some work will need to be postponed until later when product demand decreases. The financial realities of the organization will probably dictate whether or not the use of temporary workers is feasible. If temporary workers are not a viable solution, decisions will need to be made about whether some work tasks can be postponed or outsourced. Establishing clear work priorities and communicating these to everyone will help employees lower their stress as they will have a good understanding of what must be done first and not waste time debating the relative importance of tasks. When management is prioritizing which work must be done when and making other operational decisions, they must encourage and reinforce the existence of an open and supportive organizational culture. Including input from co-workers, as they are closest to the work and may best understand how the work is organized. may help achieve this open culture.

Finally, beneficiaries making these requests should understand that organizations do not have unlimited power to demand that co-workers adjust their work schedules or to take on additional tasks to cover beneficiaries' needs. It will not always be feasible for small organizations to make the needed accommodations. Requesting employees should be aware that in some circumstances the organization may not be legally required to provide an accommodation that would be expected from larger organizations. All businesses, including small organizations, have a right to be in business and operate profitably. To the extent that a requested accommodation threatens these ends, management may make the decision to deny some accommodation requests, even where they recognize the legitimacy of the request and are sympathetic to the employee's plight. Requesting

employees in these situations should be made aware of the risks that these requests may carry to their continued employment.

Once accommodations have been implemented it is important for organizations to measure the successfulness of their efforts. The definition of success should include not only the effectiveness with which the needs of the accommodated employee are met but, also, the successful completion of organizational work and the minimization of undesired or unreasonable impact on co-workers. Only by measuring these three outcomes can organizations be confident that the accommodations they are making and the process of designing these accommodations are truly effective.

This model describes a perspective on the process of accommodation that will hopefully be beneficial for not only the requesting employee but, also, for co-workers and the organization itself. Future research efforts should seek to verify the assumptions that underlie the proposed model and begin the process of empirical verification. It is important that the implications for accommodation success and minimizing the negative impacts of accommodation be confirmed if they are to serve as practical guidelines to managers of small organizations. This confirmatory process will be challenging, as the measurement of many of the independent variables will require subjective assessments – through self-report or participant observation – and include reflective descriptions of values and beliefs that affected both individual reactions and behaviors. For example, the level of beneficiary success could vary substantially from one requestor to another even with identical accommodations. In addition, these data may be distorted by the respondents' sensitivity to political correctness and the perceived social desirability of honest responses. Further complicating these issues may be managers' concerns that the actual decision making process could reflect poorly on their methods, behaviors, and decisions within their managerial/professional competence.

It may prove to be the case that this type of research is more easily accomplished in the format of case studies, where much can be gleaned by in-depth explorations of managerial and co-worker involvement in accommodation decision making. Nevertheless, longitudinal, empirical tests of the model are appropriate and desirable.

When making work accommodations for employees, organizations must consider all the factors that affect the design and implementation of the work changes. Small organizations have both disadvantages and advantages in comparison with larger organizations when making these accommodations for the life needs of their employees. Small organizations have fewer human and financial resources to implement these accommodations but, at the same time, they are more likely to have a culture that is supportive of accommodating employees. The design and implementation of these accommodations typically will rely more heavily on co-worker support than is the case in larger organizations. For this reason, the culture of the organization is vitally important. Even where there is a supportive culture, however, owners should be careful not to ignore the needs of the other workers or assume that their support is universal or boundless. The "hidden costs" of unhappy or uncooperative co-workers could cripple small organizations that rely proportionately more on each of its employees than larger organizations. Appropriate staffing and policies that include inputs from all affected parties should help to minimize these hidden costs. The real issue here is not to assure equal treatment but, rather, to assure equitable treatment of all parties affected by the decision.

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