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**Proposal to IFDM 2010 Call for Papers**

**Title:** Major Factors Contributing to Successful Cases of Work Retention after Disability

**Descriptive Abstract:** Key factors identified in longitudinal case studies of employees and their supervisors that contribute to successful work retention after disability are reported and discussed.

**Topic Track:** General: Success Stories, Case Studies, and Solutions for Stakeholders

**Proposal Summary:**

MAJOR FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESSFUL CASES OF WORK RETENTION AFTER DISABILITY

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A series of 20 longitudinal case studies were conducted over 24 months at four diverse U.S. employers as one project of the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Work Supports and Job Retention, sponsored by the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), U.S. Department of Education.

At each organization, interviews were conducted with top management and with managers of internal programs related to health and disability management. Disability managers at each firm identified five specific employees with disabilities or health conditions who had successfully retained employment for at least 12 months since onset. Each identified employee and each of their supervisors and the DM mediator were interviewed 3 times: at start-up; at 12 months follow-up and at 24 months follow-up.

Employees, supervisors and DM mediators were each asked to identify the key factors contributing to successful work retention in the case, as well as barriers encountered. The key factors identified as facilitating retention will be presented and discussed, focusing on their relevance; (1) for employer policies and practices, (2) for DM interventions and services, and (3) for possible implications for public policy.

Those facilitating factors most frequently identified as valuable in the interviews will be reported including: the worker traits and motivation of the specific employees; the opportunities within the firm for education and advancement contributing to personal and career development; the willingness of the supervisor to provide support, flexibility, and accommodations to enable the employee to continue working; the availability, assistance and support provided by the DM mediator to the supervisor when needed in order to address new or changing needs and issues and sustain worker performance and productivity; the relative attractiveness and security of employment with this firm as a preferred employer in the local labor market considering wages, benefits and retirement, as well as respect for the values and mission of the organization.

Frequently identified barriers to retention will also be reported including: delays in effectively managed intervention at time of onset; employee performance issues and behavioral disabilities not sufficiently addressed in the DM and accommodation process; and inability to access appropriate modified work opportunities due to attitudinal and structural barriers.

There are implications to be considered from these findings at several levels: by top managers in regard to the culture, work climate and people-oriented policies of the organization that appear to facilitate retention; by program managers in regard to the way services and interventions are organized and delivered, and the skills needed by those who provide them; by those who determine the content and type of training, support and performance management for supervisors; by organizations representing people with disabilities and preparing them for successful work retention; and by advocates and policy makers who wish to increase the involvement of employers in DM and expand the employment of people with disabilities. One of the study employers will provide reactions to the findings and explain how they carry out their particular policies and practices that contribute to successful work return and retention.