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The Peoplelink Online Newsletter

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Make Your Next INNOVATION JAM Work

by Alessandro Di Fiore (Harvard Business Review)

Jamming has become a popular way to unearth innovations — bringing together people of many different backgrounds to creatively brainstorm around a company's competitive challenges, expressed as "problem statements." Yet although the process is widely hyped, many companies struggle to make it work.

They work in self-defined, small sub-teams

In a classic experiment, researchers ran a lottery. Half the participants were randomly assigned a number. The others were asked to write down a number. Just before drawing a winning number, the researchers offered to buy back the tickets. Intriguingly they found that they had to pay five times more to people who had chosen their own numbers. It's dramatic proof that when we choose for ourselves, we are far more committed to the outcome.

How does this apply to jamming?

Well, it turns out that in many companies jamming participants are simply assigned a challenge or a problem to work on. If that's what

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From the President's Desk »

Jay Wilkinson, President and CEO

Five Personalities
Your Business Needs to Thrive in 2013

Society tends to idolize the individual, from the star quarterback to the charismatic leaders of the modern business arena. But humanity's greatest achievements—the Egyptian pyramids and Great Wall of China, the invention of modern medicine, the exploration of the outer reaches of the universe—are the result of collective effort.

In business, high-performing teams can achieve better results than individuals. Yet, even teams composed of talented individuals rarely perform to their maximum potential. So, what's the difference between a successful team and one that falls flat? Top-performing teams carefully balance individual personalities and skills. Here are five personalities every team needs:

Results

Every business needs someone to manage the team, and individuals who gravitate toward the results role are comfortable taking charge. Typically ambitious, socially self-confident, competitive and energetic, these individuals organize work, clarify roles, distribute tasks and evaluate outcomes. However, having too many results-oriented team members can create competition between peers and infighting over leadership roles.

Relationships

Individuals in the relationships role create harmony and cooperation within the team. Frequently champions for the customer and stakeholders, these individuals are empathetic and acutely aware of how those outside the team will perceive its actions. Often upbeat, gregarious and outgoing, relationships role holders are seen as warm, friendly and approachable. Although important for building team cohesion, they can be overly focused on getting along rather than performance.

Process

Individuals who naturally focus on process are concerned with implementation, the details of execution and the use of systems to complete tasks. They are reliable, organized and conscientious about following rules and protocol. Procedurally driven and attentive to details, they hold high standards for both their own and others' performance. However, others may see them as rigid and inflexible. Oftentimes, they tend to miss the big picture.

Innovation

Individuals who gravitate toward the innovation role anticipate problems and recognize when the team needs to adapt.

Often creative, curious and open-minded, innovation role holders spot trends and patterns quickly, enjoy solving problems and generate creative solutions. However, they may have difficulty with practicality, and prefer ideas over implementation.

Pragmatism

Individuals drawn to the pragmatism role are practical, somewhat hard-headed challengers of ideas and theories. They promote realistic approaches and are not easily swayed by the need to preserve harmony or innovation for its own sake.

Practical and level-headed, they are cautious in accepting new ideas and are not easily swayed by emotions. Others may view them as naysayers.

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you're doing now, then stop. Let participants choose what they want to work on instead. You'll see much more creative energy.

And keep the jamming teams small. A big mistake is to think that you need to let everyone get involved, but academic research consistently shows that people tend to prefer working in small teams. In any team, members need to get to know each other and define their norms of working together. If time is tight — as it is with jamming — you want to accelerate this part of the teaming process and you can't do that with a big team. In general we find that teams of four offer enough diversity and engage quickly with the challenges they select.

They define the problem statement clearly

In many cases, the reason for failure in jamming lay in a weak definition of the problem or challenge a team was addressing. Often, in a desire to get the ball rolling or maybe because of the leadership's own imperfect understanding of their company's problems, jamming teams are often given broad, ill-defined problem statements. These are usually jargon-heavy and can be interpreted in different ways, which is sometimes thought useful because it initially helps achieve buy-in.

But for jamming to pay dividends, problems need sharp definition, even if this requires more effort up-front. The business, technological, and other challenges that are encapsulated in a jamming team's problem statement all need to be clearly understood in the same way by everyone otherwise each team member will end up trying to solve a different problem. Pretty quickly the whole jamming process will break down.

They train, train, train

Just like competitive swimmers train both in the pool (to be good at the actual swimming) and in the gym (to improve stamina and muscle tone), jammers need to practice not only problem definition and brainstorming but also spend time engaging with creative thinking tools that they can apply in their ideation processes.

For example, SIGG, a Swiss producer of aluminum bottles, used a "random words" exercise in a jamming session. This involves selecting two or three words or pictures out of a hat and then looking for analogies, associations, and other links to the problem statement. At first, jammers are usually skeptical. How does the word "flower" or its image relate to the brand positioning of an aluminum bottle. But then an association to colors and colorful life come out, which led to the idea of a new product line of colored bottles.

In addition to the pure creativity tools, we also found that the training in the use of strategic innovation frameworks — Blue Ocean Strategy, for example — dramatically improves the business relevance of team outputs.

They are ready to play

Many scholars have argued persuasively that more fun makes a better, more creative workplace. Fun and creativity go together. If your office is not a fun place, therefore, you need to think about protecting your jamming from the company's culture. Take it off-site to someplace that feels different enough for participants to be ready to risk a bit of playfulness. And when you're there, factor in some time for pure play (play needs practice too): bring in a conjuror or a clown to make people laugh and break down their reserve.

A global German chemicals company, for example, once brought a divisional team off-site for a Jamming session. Problem statements were focused on the theme of sustainability, so they picked a hotel with one of the best carbon footprints in the country. The meeting room was decorated with colorful drawings and objects. At one point the facilitator made the group take a 15-minute break to practice juggling with three balls. The mood carried over into the rest of the sessions as participants "juggled" their business ideas.

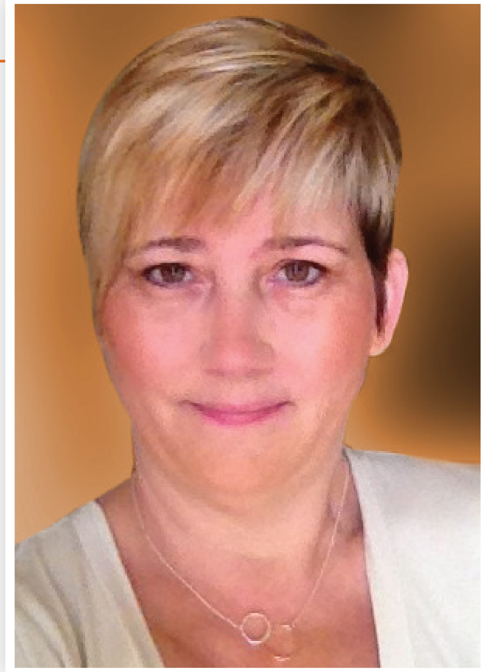
Note the role of the facilitator here as a master of ceremonies. He or she needs to be smart about how to play that role. One that pokes fun rather at others makes people afraid to play. And of course, you can have too much of a good thing; at the end of the day the team is there to work. A wise facilitator knows when to move from play back to the business in hand.

Companies that struggle with jamming tend to give up on it after just one or two attempts. That's a pity, because when you get the process right jamming can be a great source of new ideas and its effectiveness grows exponentially the more you use it. So before you give it up, try it one more time — but try it the right way instead.

Meet **SHERI MARR »**

Regional Director, SE US

Southeastern United States



» How long have you been in the staffing business? It will be 16 years in August.

» What was your first job? What do you remember most about it? Salad Girl for Adam's Rib. That it was such a messy job.

» Who was the worst boss you ever had and why? I worked for someone that had an addiction problem. You never knew from one day to the next what type of mood they were going to be in. It was like walking on egg shells all the time but I managed to stick with it for 10 years.

» What motivates you each day to sell and service your clients? I love to sell because I see it as a challenge, competing against other vendors and coming up with better solutions to win the business. I enjoy meeting people and building those relationships. You work hard for a company and build that trust they will follow you anywhere!

» What are some of your long-term goals? To build the number one region within Peoplelink and to grow into other markets that we are currently not in. To have a Zing Recruiting office in Atlanta, GA.

» What makes Peoplelink unique, from your perspective? The commitment level for our clients and the integrity of the people that manage our business.

» What makes you successful as a Regional Director? Since this is a new role for me, my plans for success start with; leading by example, holding others accountable and developing my people with a defined career path in mind and taking my region to the top!

» What is the best advice you could give to other Peoplelink staff members? Always do what you say you are going to do, treat people the way you want to be treated and always look for ways to improve.

» What is your favorite movie? *The Shawshank Redemption.*
Book? *The Five People You Meet in Heaven.*
Drink? A glass of good Pinot Nior.

» If you could have any car, you want, what would it be? Lexus LS 460

» What is the greatest feature about Zionsville, IN? The people.

» How do you unwind when you're not at the office? Listen to good music and enjoy a glass of wine.

» What do people like most (least) about you? *Most:* I deliver what I promise. *Least:* That I am very direct and don't like to take no for an answer. Tendency towards perfectionism.

From the President's Desk »

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Five Personalities

Finding the Right Fit

Maintaining a balance of roles not only makes the team more productive, it also creates a more satisfied workforce. It is impossible for any one person to fill all the roles that a great team needs. When a team has complementary fit, it means that it has enough diversity among its members to cover every psychological role.

Without complementary fit, teams develop gaps that can hurt performance. A team that has multiple results-oriented individuals but lacks individuals in the relationships role, for instance, would likely suffer from excess internal competition.

Or, a team member or group of team members might push for results, to the detriment of customer satisfaction. Similarity fit, on the other hand, concerns having enough individuals to provide critical mass in each psychological role.

Part of the concept of a balanced team is that it may not be enough to have a single individual carrying the burden of a particular psychological role. For example, the more individuals a team has in the process role, the better it tends to perform.

Of course, role imbalances in an existing team are not cause for despair. It would never make sense to just fire everyone and start over.

By knowing their balance of individual roles, teams and their managers can identify and correct for performance gaps. Self-awareness is a powerful tool, both for teams and individuals.

Bright Ideas

New Rules for New Communications

Stephen Paskoff (Workforce.com)

Who doesn't want to increase productivity, cut waste, reduce spending, improve teamwork and inclusion and decrease risk? Here are eight suggestions regarding electronic communication, which don't cost a dime. Spread them throughout your organization for huge payoffs.I've omitted the most obvious principle: do not transmit or relay inappropriate jokes, remarks, and/or pictures. The following are the frequent behaviors about which I've heard complaints over the past year.

1 In business meetings, turn off cell phones and beeping devices and don't look at them. If you have to break this rule, let others know you have a personal or business emergency and that's why they're on. Electronic interruptions drive live attendees nuts and suggest that spam and random calls have greater priority to the responder than the "real" person right in front of them.

2 Don't read information to others that they can read and re-read themselves—it's a waste of time and annoys the listeners. Email communications are far more effective in this case.

3 Don't ascribe negative motives or intent to others in your emails—your speculation, random thoughts, and impulsive conclusions can become damaging evidence and can reach others long after you've changed your mind.

4 Use "Reply All" as the exception rather than the rule to email responses. Does everyone really need to hear from you? And do you really mean to fill your email system with messages that others don't need to get and don't have time to read?

5 Emails don't solve serious disputes. They tend to expand and distort them. If an issue where there is disagreement is important and an email must be sent, send it and review the response you receive in return. If it's still unresolved, call the person to discuss or walk down the hall for a face-to-face chat.

6 We interpret communication by what's said and how it's said, particularly tone of voice and "body language." Increasingly, we work closely with employees in remote locations. This removes the contextual elements of communication that most use to understand complex messages. If you must discuss sensitive business issues from a distance, consider using Skype or FaceTime or a similar system. Both you and the other person will have a better sense of the meaning and tone of what's said by being able to "look the person in the eye" online.

7 If you send out an email where you need some action, let the recipient know what's being requested and indicate when you need a response. Ask if your deadline is agreeable. If you don't hear back, it's possible that the recipient innocently overlooked your communication. Call the recipient or send a reminder to make sure the recipient has seen your message.

8 Everything written about email applies to texts and social media communications as well.

Experience the Peoplelink difference.

Drive productivity. Reduce staffing costs. Run more profitably. Those are just a few of the ways in which People*link* can help you achieve success.

To ensure we deliver the best return on your staffing investment, we first take the time to understand your organization, your expectations, and your objectives. By combining old-fashioned fundamentals, like hard work, integrity, and service, with a strategic approach to staffing, People*link* can not only fulfill your hiring needs, but can make a significant positive impact on your profitability.

Our "people first" approach to staffing will help you meet and exceed your business goals.

For more information, call Jeannine Victor at
574.232.5400 x 261.

Spotlight on Benefits Used to Recruit, Retain Employees

Source: SHRM

In January 2013 the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) released a series of "State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace" reports, based on surveys fielded among SHRM members in 2012. Key findings highlighted the benefits most often used to help recruit and retain employees, and organizations' efforts to communicate the value of employer-sponsored benefits.

Recruitment

According to the findings reported in State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Leveraging Benefits to Recruit Employees, organizations reported health care (80 percent of respondents) and retirement savings and planning (63 percent) were the benefits most frequently leveraged (that is, used strategically) to recruit employees, and that these benefits will increase in importance for recruiting employees in the years ahead, as indicated below.

Benefits and Recruitment

"Within the next three to five years, what benefits offerings will increase in importance in your organization's efforts to recruit all levels of employees?"

Health care	79%
Retirement savings and planning	76%
Flexible work benefits	71%
Preventive health and wellness	69%
Professional and career development benefits	61%
Family-friendly benefits	51%
Leave benefits	44%
Housing and relocation benefits	13%
Source: SHRM, State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Leveraging Benefits to Recruit Employees.	

The benefits that organizations most often leveraged to recruit "highly skilled employees" were health care (75 percent) and retirement savings and planning (58 percent).

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Spotlight on Benefits Used to Recruit, Retain Employees

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Retention

One in five (20 percent) organizations reported leveraging their benefits program to retain employees, according to State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Leveraging Benefits to Retain Employees. Similar to the recruitment findings, HR professionals reported that health care (72 percent) and retirement savings and planning (58 percent) were the benefits most frequently leveraged to retain employees, and that these benefits would become more important for retention in coming years, as indicated below.

Benefits and Retention

"Within the next three to five years, what benefits offerings will increase in importance in your organization's efforts to retain all levels of employees?"

Retirement savings and planning	70%
Health Care	70%
Preventive health and wellness	65%
Professional and career development benefits	64%
Flexible work benefits	63%
Leave benefits	51%
Family-friendly benefits	50%
Housing and relocation benefits	24%
Source: SHRM, State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Leveraging Benefits to Retain Employees.	

HR professionals also reported that the most frequently leveraged benefits to retain "high-performing employees" were health care (58 percent), professional and career development benefits (55 percent) and flexible working benefits (48 percent).

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"Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person – not just an employee – are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability."

Anne M. Mulcahy
former chairperson and CEO
of Xerox Corporation.

Spotlight on Benefits Used to Recruit, Retain Employees

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Communications

While roughly three-fourths of respondents thought their benefits communications efforts were effective, only about one-quarter had an employee benefits communications budget in 2011, according to State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Communicating Benefits.

Very few organizations (4 percent) were using social media in their communications efforts, as indicated below, although 8 percent indicated they planned to start using social media within the next 12 months.

Benefits and Communications

"How does your organization determine the knowledge level of employees about the employer-sponsored benefits available to them?"

Employee Surveys	24%
Interactions with HR	17%
Employee Focus Groups	14%
Intranet Use	12%
Employee Meetings	4%
Source: SHRM, State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Communicating Benefits.	

"Which of the following employee benefits communications methods does your organization use?"

Enrollment Materials (online or on paper)	84%
Group Employee Benefits Communications with an Organizational Representative	65%
One-on-one Employee Benefits Counseling with an Organizational Representative	51%
Intranet	48%
Direct Mail to Home/Residence	41%
Newsletters (online or on paper)	39%
Benefit Fairs	26%
Virtual Education	13%
Social Media	4%
Group Employee Benefits Communications with Your Vendor	3%
Source: SHRM, State of Employee Benefits in the Workplace—Communicating Benefits.	

HR News

Both Employers and Employees Worry About Obamacare's Thresholds for Coverage

By Allen Smith (SHRM)

The battle cry among opponents of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) up to this point has been to repeal the law. But as the 2014 implementation date of the employer mandate approaches, time to repeal the legislation with the re-election of President Obama is either running out or effectively has run out.

Do the law's opponents have any plan B? Could there, for example, still be time to amend it, even in the increasingly all-or-nothing politics of the nation's capital? Not likely. Amending core provisions of the centerpiece of the president's first term would require not only enough votes for passage in the Senate and House—a stretch in the Democrat-controlled Senate—but enough votes to override the all-but-inevitable veto.

Still, few provisions of the law cry out for amendment like its definition of "large employers."

How Low Can You Go?

"Large employers," as defined by the law, are subject to penalties if they do not offer full-time employees and their dependents the opportunity to enroll in minimum essential coverage, and additional penalties if their coverage is unaffordable or does not provide minimum value.

But, at just 50 or more full-time or full-time equivalent employees, the law's threshold for large employers is far below what most businesspeople would consider acceptable.

As Rep. Tom Reed, D-N.Y., remarked on the House floor on March 26, 2012: "In the last month and a half I went to a business just north of Cornell, New York, a small electronics company that's been struggling day after day, just trying to make ends meet. It has about 48 employees. [The owner] stated to me that because of this law, the Affordable Care Act, and its 50-employee threshold for the additional bureaucracy and requirements and taxes and penalties that Washington, D.C., is putting on that business if he goes over that 50-employee threshold … he will keep his employee rolls at 48 and not venture down the path of hiring two more individuals."

What's more, few employees would consider the law's definition of full time—a mere 30 hours per week—to really be full time, either. And many employees are scared that their hours will be cut because of the PPACA.

Just six days after the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) posted its notice of proposed rulemaking, on Jan. 2, 2013, Kelly Holland O'Leary of the Kalamazoo Valley Community College Federation of Teachers in Kalamazoo, Mich., wrote, "As the president of a newly formed union of part-time community college faculty, I am deeply concerned that the government's attempt to provide health coverage to full-time workers of 30 hours per week will result in colleges and universities, nationwide, increasing the number of part-time faculty so as to decrease our hours to avoid paying health coverage for the majority of their teaching staffs."

Every day, employers are getting calls from employees who read about the PPACA and are worried about their hours being cut below the 30-hour threshold, Adam Solander, an attorney at Epstein Becker Green in Washington, D.C., reported during the firm's Jan. 9 webcast on the law's shared responsibility rules. Some employees are even asking their employers to keep their hours the same, promising the employers that if they offer them health insurance, they'll decline it.

But Solander noted that nothing in the law would prevent those employees from turning around and getting a federal health care subsidy, which could result in employer penalties even though the employer offered health insurance.

Anti-Abuse Rule

Not only is the employer-mandate threshold low, but the IRS stated in its proposed rule that the final rule would include an "anti-abuse rule" aimed at penalizing employers that try to structure worker employment in such a way as to avoid PPACA coverage.

"The Treasury Department and the IRS are aware of various structures being considered under which employers might use temporary staffing agencies (or other staffing agencies) purporting to be the common law employer to evade application of Section 4980H," the shared responsibility penalties of the PPACA, the IRS said.

For example, "In one structure, the employer (referred to in this section as the "client") would purport to employ its employees for only part of a week, such as 20 hours, and then to hire those same individuals through a temporary staffing agency (or other staffing agency) for the remaining hours of the week, thereby resulting in neither the 'client' employer nor the temporary staffing agency or other staffing agency appearing to employ the individual as a full-time employee," the agency stated.

"It is anticipated that the final regulations will contain an anti-abuse rule to address the situations described in this section of the preamble," the IRS stated. "Under that anticipated rule, if an individual performs services as an employee of an employer, and also performs the same or similar services for that employer in the individual's purported employment at a temporary staffing agency or other staffing agency of which the employer is a client, then all the hours of service are attributed to the employer for purposes of applying Section 4980H."

OSHA Releases Annual Inspection Plan

By Bill Leonard (SHRM)

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) announced Jan. 8, 2013, that at least 1,260 randomly selected workplaces will be inspected as part of the agency's 2012 site-specific targeting (SST) program. The inspections will be conducted throughout 2013 and will focus on workplaces that have more than 20 workers and higher-than-average injury and illness rates.

OSHA officials say that the primary goal of the inspection program is to focus the agency's enforcement resources on

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HR News

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businesses with the most incidences of workplace injuries and illnesses. The SST program and annual inspection plan is based on data collected from a survey of 80,000 companies in "high-hazard' industries—industries that typically have the highest rates of workplace injuries.

"Through the SST program, we can prevent injuries and illnesses and save lives by focusing our inspection resources on employers in high-hazard worksites where workers are at greater risk," said David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health, in a written news statement.

As part of the inspection program, OSHA also announced a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the program based on 1,260 randomly selected establishments. The OSHA study should provide agency officials statistics on how many businesses have repeat workplace injuries and give insight into the effectiveness of the inspection program, according to Ed Foulke, a partner with Fisher & Phillips in Atlanta and a former assistant secretary for OSHA.

"The study could provide a pretty clear picture of recidivism and who the repeat offenders are or are likely to be," Foulke said.

Under President Barack Obama, OSHA has focused more of its efforts on enforcement and inspection of workplaces, Foulke said. When Foulke served as head of the agency during the second term of President George W. Bush, the agency directed more attention to education and compliance issues.

"The OSHA study could provide a good comparison about which approach is more effective in reducing the number of workplace injuries," Foulke said. "It will be interesting to see the data when the study is concluded."

Disability Benchmarking Tool Coming in 2013

By Pamela Babcock (SHRM)

Employers who want to know how their company's disability inclusion and accessibility policies and practices stack up against those of other U.S. businesses will have a new tool to use for benchmarking in 2013.

The U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) announced plans on Dec. 19, 2012, to establish the "Disability Equality Index," a national disability benchmarking tool.

Although the tool is still being developed and an exact 2013 release date has not yet been set, the USBLN and the AAPD said the forthcoming index will provide employers with a transparent, objective roadmap for improving opportunities for people with disabilities.

"Employers are seeking ways to enhance their disability inclusion efforts and we believe the index will help them do this," wrote Jill Houghton, USBLN executive director, in an email to SHRM Online. Initial feedback "has been very positive," she added. "Employers are stepping forward and asking us how they can become involved in the project."

The index is expected to provide a way for companies to benchmark progress and identify avenues for improvement. It will help keep practitioners informed of best and emerging disability employment practices and point them toward business peers that are already high performers, Houghton noted.

That's particularly important, because according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, Americans with disabilities experience higher unemployment and underemployment than any group in the U.S., she added.

Modeled After HRC Corporate Equality Index

The new Disability Equality Index will use the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation model as "a launching point for development," explained Mark Perriello, president and CEO of AAPD, in an email to SHRM Online. The HRC produces the Corporate Equality Index (CEI), a tool used to measure employers on a scale of 1 to 100 in terms of their efforts to create a workplace inclusive for LGBT workers.

"It will be similar in nature to the HRC model in that it will be an objective national benchmarking tool for employers," Perriello wrote. "The index will be designed to highlight best and promising practices and provide employers with resources to improve their disability employment [and] inclusion efforts."

He added that it will measure organizations across a range of criteria, including recruiting and retention programs, professional development, and accessible information and communications technology.