

Leaving Talent on the Table

Examining Successful and Sustainable Disability
Employment Programs

Ebru Sumaktas



Centre for Social
Justice and Inclusion

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UTS Shopfront: Working with the Community

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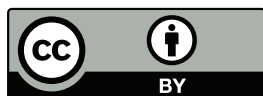
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Foreword

In our society, there is a fascination and fixation with the world of work. To be able to have a decent quality of life, people need to have an income—in most circumstances, this is derived from having a job with a decent salary. Often when people meet for the first time, one of the first questions they ask each other is: What do you do for a living? or What is your job? And as they grow up, children are often asked: What do you want to be when you become an adult? Our media is full of stories of people and their careers. However, there is one part of the community who are largely excluded from talk about jobs and career aspirations. These are people with disability. Extensive research undertaken both in Australia and overseas shows discrimination against people with disability when it comes to finding and keeping jobs is rife and systemic.

Despite a number of national inquiries into the barriers to employment for people with disability, including two inquiries conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission over the last 12 years, the rate of employment of people with disability continues to remain the same. People with disability are twice as likely as those without to be unemployed. The Willing to Work report (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016) is based on the findings from the National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability. It found that too many people are excluded from employment because of assumptions and stereotypes associated with their disability. These beliefs lead to discriminatory behaviours across all parts of the employment experience, including recruitment and commencement. The report also found that the impact of these practices on individuals and the economy is high, and made many recommendations for addressing this systemic discrimination.

Ebru Sumaktas' monograph, based on a Churchill Fellowship report, is a timely and important contribution to this topic. Australia is missing out on a huge talent pool by not including people with disability in the workplace. As Ebru outlines, there are positive benefits of access to open and inclusive employment. By having a job, people with disability feel they are part of society. And it is not only positive individual fulfilment that is gained here. The economy and society at large also benefit. In other words, everyone wins. I congratulate Ebru on developing this report and highly commend it to you. It is of great merit and will provide a much-needed intervention for the employment of people with disability in Australia.

Born with retinitis pigmentosa, Ebru began losing her sight from the age of 13. Ebru's disability has given her a heightened awareness of how society's perceptions and attitudes shape the social, emotional and physical environment, especially in the workplace. Her lived experience, her leadership and professional experience made her eminently qualified to author this publication.

Ebru Sumaktas has worked in the disability sector for approximately 20 years and has been a strong leader and advocate for people with disability. She has held numerous leadership roles, including as Vice Chairperson of the Australian Centre of Disability Law, a Board Member for People With Disability Australia and as an Associate of the Australian Network on Disability.

Ebru has also worked as a Senior Policy Officer in the team leading the NSW public sector Jobs for People with Disability initiative, which aims to double the current representation of people with disability employed in the NSW public sector from around 2.8 per cent to 5.6 per cent by 2027.

Alastair McEwin

Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner, 2016–2019

Royal Commissioner, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability, 2019

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I found it inspiring to meet so many people with whom I share an interest and passion for the inclusive employment of people with disability. In particular, I would like to thank Susanne Bruyere, Gregor Demblin, Bettina Hillebrand, Dr Frank Hoffman, Randy Lewis, Kate Nash, Erin Reihle, Susan Scott-Parker and Judith Smith who kindly agreed to be interviewed for this project

I also want to acknowledge UTS Shopfront at the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion for invaluable advice and support, taking me on as a Community Fellow and recognising the importance of this project.

Thank you to Sophie Hopkins whose literature review stands alongside this publication. I am grateful for you providing access to information and resources in an accessible format, for working with me to extrapolate and analyse primary data from the interviews, and for saving me from the task of referencing.

Thank you to my friends and family for their unconditional support and encouragement. My gratitude and appreciation to my loving mother, Saniye Sumaktas. Without your unwavering confidence in my capabilities I would not have achieved what I have to date. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for not settling for the soft bigotry of the low expectations that some of my teachers and medical practitioners predicted for my future.

My gratitude and love to my husband, Pedro Gonzalez, my biggest cheerleader! I am incredibly grateful for your patience, support and ongoing encouragement.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the invaluable personal and professional development gained from my experience of the fellowship. A major personal outcome was overcoming my own presumptions of what I am capable of accomplishing as a person living with disability. It was an honour to represent Australia as an Australian Churchill diplomat on a topic that I am so passionate about. My thanks to the Winston Churchill Trust of Australia for this incredible opportunity.

Introduction

Diversity is the world's greatest asset, and inclusion is our biggest challenge.

Kate Nash interview

Inclusion is everybody's business. It is acknowledged that it is one of the real triggers of national economic growth (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011; Australian Human Rights Commission 2016). Exclusion limits opportunities. Australians with disability have the lowest relative income and one of the lowest levels of labour force participation of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD 2010).

Earning an income meets basic needs. Earning an adequate income provides a safety net and a sense of personal security, and contributes to community economies. But, on top of this, the desire for 'meaningful work' is not unique to 'professional' workers—physicians, lawyers, engineers and professors. It is fundamental, a human need.

This report was undertaken by a person with disability and pulls together information on the ethos and ideologies driving successful and sustainable disability employment programs in open labour markets in the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Austria and the United States (US). It describes replicable and marketable employment characteristics that can be adapted and adopted into the Australian context and contribute to meaningful employment for people with disability. By examining the deficiencies of the Australian disability employment system through the lens of alternative models, this work aims to challenge existing practice and policy in Australia.

Australia is at a crossroads in improving outcomes for people with disability, as the landscape is changing with the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Introduced in 2013, the NDIS is designed to improve independence for people with disability. However, its success can only be measured by the extent to which people are able to realise their goals, including those around employment. The Disability Care and Support report (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2011), which underpinned the case for the NDIS, emphasised the substantial boost to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that would occur if people with disability were better included in the workforce. The Willing to Work report (AHRC 2016) that came out of the National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability led by the Australian Human Rights Commission, did the same.

While Australia has been signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability since 2008, it is also in the bottom rank among OECD countries for both relative income and labour force participation for people with disability. Moreover, with people with disability making up around 20 per cent of the population (ABS 2016), employment is a key factor in overcoming the disproportionate levels of poverty, social isolation and discrimination in comparison to people living without disability (AHRC 2016).

Despite discrimination being legislated against and the millions in Commonwealth and state funds spent each year to address the issues of unemployment and underemployment for people with disability, the numbers and the barriers in Australia remain the same. It seems that, as much as we as a society want to do the right thing, for all the investment and effort, our current disability employment framework is not having the intended impact. In the last decade, despite ongoing changes to the payments and employment services systems, Disability Employment Services (DES) performance has plateaued with only one in three participants achieving employment (Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business 2018).

Providers, peak organisations and people with disability participated in consultations around the 2015 National Disability Employment Framework. The key findings included that incentives that arise from the DES outcomes framework and the associated star rating performance system are perverse. the perverse incentives that arise from the DES outcomes framework and the associated star rating performance system (Australian Government Department of Social Services 2015). Much of the criticism levelled at DES, including poor employment outcomes, was attributed to the design and complexity of the program. Key criticisms included short-term job placements that do not drive long-term outcomes and poor job matching that places people into any job rather than one that is consistent with participants' skills, capabilities and experience. People with disability are often placed into jobs that do not sufficiently match their skills and capabilities (Judith Smith interview).

The rate of participation in the labour force for people with disability in Australia is almost a third lower compared to people without disability at 53.4 and 83.2 per cent respectively (Hopkins 2019, citing ABS 2016). Moreover, the OECD places Australia at 21 out of the 29 countries ranked for workforce participation for people with disability (OECD 2010). However, there is a lack of consistency between countries in how they define both 'disability' and 'employment'. Of the 29 OECD countries, each country has its own definition of disability. Thus, an accurate measure of comparable workforce participation is difficult to determine. Here, the following definition is used:

Disability is the term used to describe impairments which affect an individual's functioning. It is generally understood as a social construct which arises from the interaction between an individual with an impairment and their personal and environmental factors. Disability is a multifaceted concept.

Hopkins 2019, citing Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen and Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al 2018

Leading disability employment programs

As part of the research undertaken for this report, relevant public policymakers and other subject matter experts were identified. These included service providers in the rehabilitation job placement sector, businesses that are leading in accessible and inclusive employment practices and pathways for people with disability, and disability employee networks.

Names of leading practice programs and other advice was provided by the Zero Project Network, which comprises some 3,000 experts from around the globe, with and without disability, who contribute to developing and communicating leading practices and policies, technologies, regulations, services and business strategies that have proven to advance the lives of people with disability. Susan Scott-Parker from Business Disability International was also a key source of information.

This section provides an overview of each of the nine leading programs visited during the Churchill Fellowship study tour. Key people were interviewed about:

- the organisation's purpose and structure (including cost structure and revenue streams)
- why the program was founded
- program design and methods for implementation
- the reasons for their success
- start-up and ongoing challenges
- implementation and adjustments made in response to evaluation.

To ensure consistency of information gathered, each interviewee was asked the same set of questions (See Appendix 1). The interviewees were also asked to reflect on the impact their programs have had on the employment of people with disability in their locality and country.

Business Disability International, London, UK

We can no longer afford the waste of human potential that results when we make assumptions about each other on the basis of labels, particularly medical labels.

Susan Scott-Parker interview

This not-for-profit organisation was founded and is led by Susan Scott-Parker. Business Disability International (BDI) works with businesses and individuals to develop solutions that generate gainful and meaningful employment for people with disability through inclusion. BDI makes connections within its extensive global networks in the private and public sector to co-create appropriate 'best practice' interventions—which it describes as 'Disability Confidence'—to transform the disability performance of global business and the life chances of many people. A number of the organisation's interventions include working with organisations on accessible and inclusive recruitment processes, workplace adjustment practices, and disability awareness and confidence training.

Purple Space, London, UK

Purple Space is a not-for-profit, fee-for-service professional development hub for employee network leaders and champions that deliver disability employment networks within the public and private sector. The role of a champion is to celebrate the contributions of employees with disability, and to promote disability inclusion and access at all levels within the business. Purple Space's

mission is to connect people with disability with each other within an organisation, and support them to help their employer to make the workplace more disability confident and competent. An example of the organisation's initiatives is the use of storytelling sessions, usually with an audience of senior leaders, where employees with disability share their experiences of being an employee with disability.

Purple Space was founded by Kate Nash. For her, it is critical that people with disability have their voices heard in conversations around improving employment policy, practice and procedure. Nash described the work of Purple Space as a 'two-way street'. Once the employee has been assisted, the next step is to connect the employee disability networks, locally and globally. Purple Space's purpose is 'to build a community and develop a sense of community amongst amazing people with disability of different talents, different skills, different grades, different levels of seniority', whilst, most importantly, respecting their impairment, type of impairment and its severity. Purple Space is a membership organisation of 300 individuals and 85 organisations, including 35 international organisations.

Discovering Hands, Dusseldorf, Germany

[Discovering Hands] is not only giving blind people the chance to make a capability of their disability; it is creating a life-saving capability.

Dr Frank Hoffman interview

Discovering Hands trains blind and vision-impaired women to become Medical Tactile Examiner (MTE) technicians through a nine-month training program. The tactile examination scans, known as 'tactilography', performed by these technicians are used as part of early breast cancer detection. The program was founded in 2010 and is managed by Dr Frank Hoffman.

Tactilography has scientifically proven success. MTEs detect about 30 per cent more tissue changes than medical doctors (Discovering Hands 2019). Some blind and vision-impaired women have a unique skill that makes them excellent MTE technicians—their superior sense of touch. Once qualified through the training program, MTEs use their skills and are able to discover even very small changes in the breast tissue at an early stage. MTEs can detect a lump between six and eight millimetres in size, while a doctor will usually only be able to find tumours measuring between one and two centimetres. In addition, MTEs are trained in psychology and the whole process of cancer treatment. They accompany patients through the entire process. Discovering Hands has grown in scale, with 40 MTEs across Germany. Discovering Hands' model is being piloted in India, Mexico, Austria and Columbia (Discovering Hands 2019).

myAbility, Vienna, Austria

myAbility is an innovative, fee-for-service social management consultancy that helps companies harness the potential of people with disability as both customers and employees. myAbility was founded by Gregor Demblin in 2014, with a primary focus on changing both the narrative and businesses' views of disability—to shift away from 'social mercy' to an economic point of view. A key learning from the program has been that every company is different. Gregor Demblin says: 'Some companies are more advanced than others and every company has a different company culture.' Accordingly, myAbility tailors the service they provide to companies.

myAbility advises companies on building successful disability management, with the aim of including people with disability as employees and customers. The organisation makes the case

that all products and services should be accessible to people with disability and that excluding them risks losing ‘a big customer fee’—‘15 per cent of the population makes a big difference if someone can buy your product or not.’ myAbility also offers expert advice on training, access and inclusion in the workplace.

Specialisterne, Vienna, Austria

Specialisterne is one of the first companies in the world to highlight the benefits of a ‘neurodiverse workforce’ through its work in assisting organisations in recruiting and supporting people who are neurodiverse. Specialisterne’s franchise in Austria is a fee-for-service and non-for-profit organisation, reinvesting profits back into its programs. The company’s manager is Bettina Hillebrand.

Specialisterne recognises that people who are neurodiverse have a range of skills that benefit a workplace, but traditional recruitment processes can disadvantage people who are neurodiverse. The company was founded by the father of a child with autism. He realised that the skills of many people who are neurodiverse aligned with those required by unfilled jobs in the telecommunications industry. Specialisterne works with companies to diversify their workforce and to help recruit talented people who are neurodiverse looking for a career in that sector. The process the organisation has developed to assess potential employees aims to remove barriers experienced by people who are neurodiverse in traditional recruitment processes. Specialisterne also works to support employees in their transition to the workplace and to build the capacity of the employers to support their staff members.

Project Search, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Centre, Cincinnati, US

Project Search has developed effective ‘internship-style’ methods for young people with disability seeking employment in hospital settings, banks, pharmaceutical companies, hotels, military bases and museums. Co-founded by Erin Reihle and Susie Rutkowski in 1996, the program is currently operating in 268 sites in the US with a further 440 sites internationally. Erin Reihle was interviewed about the establishment and ongoing growing success of Project Search. Between 2016 and 2017, over 3,000 young people with intellectual and developmental impairments were provided with on-the-job training. Of these, 93.6 per cent completed the program and 80 per cent gained competitive employment. Individualised job development and placement is based on matching the student’s experiences, strengths and skills. A series of job rotations lasting up to 10 weeks allow students to find positions and focus on developing skills that best suit their work preferences. They receive support with accommodation, adaptations and training throughout the nine-month internship.

Walgreens, Chicago, US

Walgreens, America’s largest drug-store chain, is ranked 35 in Fortune Magazine’s list of largest companies, with more than \$76 billion in sales and 213,000 employees. Randy Lewis, former senior-vice president of Walgreens and founder of the NOGWOG Disability Initiative led logistics at the company during the period it grew from 1,600 to 8,000 outlets and employed thousands of people with disability. Currently, an average 35 per cent of the workforce in Walgreens’ distribution centres is a person with disability. The company has set targets for one in 10 in-store hires to be a person with disability. When a new distribution centre was constructed in 2007—larger and more automated than any the company had owned before—it enabled the company to hire greater

numbers of people with disability. It is now Walgreens' most efficient site and 40 per cent of its workforce are people with disability.

Poses Family Foundation, New York City, US

The Poses Family Foundation (PFF) is a New York City based not-for-profit established by Nancy and Fred Poses. Judith Smith, Director of Workplace Initiative, was interviewed for this project. PFF is dedicated to bringing about significant positive impact in five focus areas. The largest is intellectual and developmental impairment, which PFF engages with through a combination of business disciplines and non-profit expertise funding. As a fee-for-service foundation, PFF supports non-profit organisations financially. They provide capacity-building advice in areas such as strategic and operational planning, innovative design, talent development, and management and marketing to facilitate the employment of people with disability.

Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability, Cornell University, New York, US

Yang-Tan is an institute within the School of Industrial and Labour Relations at Cornell University. Its mission—as described by its Clinical Research Coordinator and Director Susanne Bruyere—is to improve ‘inclusion opportunities for people with disability in all facets of society, but with a focus on employment.’ The Institute promotes knowledge, policies and practice to enhance equal opportunities for all people with disability in partnership with federal and state government and philanthropic organisations. According to Susanne Bruyere, Yang-Tan's work breakdown is 30 per cent research, 40 per cent direct information dissemination and 20 per cent online tools.

The Yang-Tan Institute focuses on enhancing and developing aspects of sustainability, accessibility and inclusion pertaining to workplaces, education, work, income, healthy living, community membership and engaged learning.

Defining meaningful employment and the challenge of measuring success

Employment only counts as a 'job' if it is an integrated environment, 16-hours-a-week or more, if it's non-seasonal—unless everybody else in the community is working seasonally—and if it pays the prevailing wage for a given job.

Erin Riehle interview

'Gainful' and 'meaningful' employment are not synonymous, but achieving both requires consideration of:

- the employment process—being hired for a suitable position appropriate to a person's skills and abilities
- the work place environment—what happens once the job starts.

What pathways exist for people with disability transitioning into industries that are growing rapidly and with longer-term employment? What happens to people with disability once they are employed? Do they move within the organisation? Do they have equitable opportunities for advancement?

Responses from interviewees on how successful employment is measured, if at all, varied. Some don't measure. For others, the key measures are job placement and job maintenance. But there is a strong awareness that simply measuring numbers of job placements is inadequate for understanding the life cycle, success and sustainability of programs and 'meaningful employment' outcomes for people with disability.

Kate Nash from Purple Space felt that adequate measuring does not exist for this sector. Susanne Bruyere, Director of the Yang-Tan Institute, observed that the approach of many supported employment programs—which is to find 'whatever job we can to get people into integrated employment' regardless of whether it is part-time or entry level—may have been acceptable practice in the 1980s but is now outdated. For her, expectations in the US have evolved since the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) in 2009. And 'in the last five years,' Bruyere notes, 'we've consistently been looking at how can we move people into industries that are growing and have higher paying jobs and longer-term potential'.

Kate Nash and Susanne Bruyere provided significant insight into the failings of the measures applied by the employment sector to evaluate successful and sustainable employment for people with disability. Nash simply stated that adequate measuring does not occur or exist in the sector. Susanne Bruyere argued that for many the difficulties of measuring are linked to the inability to follow up: 'Most of the time, because of the funding model, we don't have the luxury of following up for the longer term.'

Erin Riehle, from Project Search, highlighted the risk of programs not being held accountable: they 'can exist for years wasting money and the time and talents of people with disability and yet not get outcomes.' Programs and organisations may be perceived as being successful in inclusive employment—take Walgreens where 35 per cent of one workplace identify as persons with disability. But the question remains: does employment translate as 'meaningful' employment with opportunity? Are the roles aggregated in one business unit within the organisation? Are they only entry-level or semi-skilled roles?

Project Search has developed specific criteria for measuring competitive employment. Specifically, employment must be at least 16 hours a week, integrated, non-seasonal and with a prevailing

wage. This is reinforced by Judith Smith's comment that 'the most important metric is how many people have secured employment' with a 'competitive salary and a fully integrated environment.'

For internal workplace programs, information is easier to obtain. But how success is measured varies. Discovering Hands, which provides an innovative solution to decrease the amount of time taken for comprehensive breast examinations, measures productivity in terms of the number of examinations, time taken and the detection of breast lumps. Walgreens also has measures based around productivity: performance, quality, retention, absenteeism, safety and cost. According to Randy Lewis, in the Walgreen's program people with disability perform at the same level as the rest of the workforce, but accuracy and retention are improved, safety costs and absenteeism are decreased. However, he said: 'to be sustainable in my mind it had to outlive me and it has. I've been gone six years, my successor was there six years, and the program has continued to grow.'

However, in both instances, the number of employment hours, remuneration and career progression—indicators of meaningful employment—are not measured. Susanne Bruyere has observed that:

What's wrong is to presume that it's just enough to get people into a job—even a really good job in a high-profile company. People want to be able to move and progress and to be included.

Erin Riehle explained that as part of Project Search, franchise programs must comply with the success measures. Erin Riehle describes it thus:

There should be a standard measure of success or you should not be allowed to continue doing work ... If we get a program that has less than 70 per cent employment in any given year, we audit that program ... we have a process and then we require that they follow that up by responding to what they're going to do for continuous improvement. And if they don't do better, we'll kick them out because that's a waste of money ...

Leading practice

A common theme emerging from the interviews is that, as a result of fragmented local and global systems of disability employment programs and public policies, there are multiple silos—both public and private—working independently to address employment for people with disability. This lack of cohesiveness is evident in the gaps between the non-profit disability employment service providers and employers when it comes to measuring success. Erin Riehle, from Project Search, described the current dilemma this way:

They all do it differently. They have different measures and different definitions of what success even looks like. Very, very different. And essentially all they're really doing is pushing failure forward. So it's a really linear system, very failure oriented.

The organisations featured in this report demonstrated leading practice in one or more of five key areas that build disability confidence in the workplace and were recognised in the Zero Project Report as modelling leading practice. The five key areas are:

- attraction, retention and career progression
- job preparation, internships and on-the-job training
- innovation: creating new industries
- workplace adjustments
- disability employment networks working to change the narrative.

Attraction, retention and career progression

A common characteristic of the programs is the method of flexible recruitment, focused on employing the appropriate person for the appropriate job. As Bettina Hillebrand from Specialisterne explained, it is not enough to 'just have an interview—you have to make them try things out.' For example, recruitment exercises that simulate on-the-job tasks provide a more accurate indication of an applicant's suitability for a particular role. The rationale behind this is that, by allowing people to demonstrate their skills and capability, they are not precluded, as they are likely to be in more traditional recruitment and interview processes. Performing well in an interview does not necessarily mean that you are the person with the appropriate skills and talent for the job. This, of course, is applicable universally to all job applicants—irrespective of disability.

Specialisterne assesses potential employees through processes and practices that remove the barriers of traditional recruitment screening facing many people who are neurodiverse. There are a number of assessment modules they use. The longest takes up to six months. Candidates complete a three-day assessment with a psychologist or a neurodiversity specialist examining individual and team work capabilities. The assessments can include individual logic tests—such as organisational skills—or group work where applicants are expected to share information—such as building Lego robots and describing their program design. The assessments are used to determine each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. Once candidates have been through this program, they are either placed in employment through one of their partner employers or placed on the 'leasing books', awaiting a suitable position whether contract or permanent. In 2018, Specialisterne placed 45 candidates into employment. Thirty-five of the placements have become lasting employment.

Specialisterne works closely with partner employers, both large and small, to identify workforce characteristics, including workforce trends such as vacancies. From the vacancy list, Specialisterne then looks at position descriptions to identify whether or not a job has repetitive tasks and/or needs attention to detail, and the level of engagement with colleagues and the public required. Based on this analysis, they can identify which jobs can be filled with Specialisterne's candidates. Ongoing support is provided in the workplace for the candidate, and to assist managers to understand the unique strengths of their neurodiverse employee and to implement strategies to help them thrive in the workplace. Employers can also contract employees for short or long-term contracts. Specialisterne have set a goal to generate one million jobs globally for people on the spectrum, and those with similar challenges, by 2030.

Bettina Hillebrand described how, when a prospective employer approaches Specialisterne with job advertisements, they advise the employer that there is more to placing an employee who is neurodiverse into a job than a generic job description. A deeper understanding of the position, the inherent duties required and how the job can be adapted and customised is what is necessary to successfully match candidates. She gave the example of a candidate who is an expert in logistics but could not converse over the phone. With Specialisterne's support, the job was adapted to accommodate the candidate—phone conversations were allocated to a colleague who disliked data analysis and preferred to deal with the phone calls, and that worker's data analysis duties were delegated to the new employee. This process of sourcing talent is now used in many countries, and with large companies such as IBM and Microsoft. Examples in Australia are Westpac and the Australian Taxation Office.

For Walgreens, the main obstacle in recruiting people with disability is 'getting in'. Once employed in the company, they will progress. Because there were two main entry level roles for new applicants, Walgreens created an 'intern-to-hire' program where candidates undertook a 9 to 12-week internship covering both roles. From this, the company determined which was the best fit for them. Then, as Randy Lewis explained:

That's where they started. But the way that we work, once you're in that job, you can go into any job based on your time in the organisation ... We promoted people who started in those jobs [who] are now managers. That's why we say we are okay with the entry level, because guess what? They are going to grow and they are going to be here.

However, for other programs, the practice of recruiting people with disability only for entry level positions—with the hope that their careers will progress with time—is concerning. Erin Riehle, from Project Search, argues: 'it's not an accident that businesses only ever offer the same types of positions.' For Erin, greater focus on personal choice is needed and on 'finding a job that the person actually wants'.

Judith Smith from the Poses Foundation commented that:

Distribution and logistics have been the vanguard space for disability inclusion. That's a little troubling because, of course, those are entry-level jobs.

In the work of the Poses Foundation, she finds that companies often want to start with recruiting people with disability in distribution centre roles:

So we meet them where they are and then work on engaging other business units and other departments to open up other jobs.

Judith Smith argues that ‘we need to be investing in more than entry-level work’ so that people are able to progress their careers into meaningful and sustainable employment.

Susanne Bruyere, from the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability, explains that what we often get wrong is presuming that for people with disability gaining employment—even if it is a high-profile, well-paid job in a prestigious organisation—is more than sufficient. People with disability may or may not have career aspirations. But opportunities for career progression should be afforded to them irrespective.

Job preparation, internships and on-the-job training

Erin Riehle, founder of Project Search, noted that the right to work is one thing, but gaining preparation for getting work is equally important. All interviewees pointed to the deeply entrenched attitudes that are stubborn obstacles to successful employment programs. This is supported by the findings of the Willing to Work report (AHRC 2016). It identified discrimination and prejudice among employers as the greatest barrier to employment. Employers themselves acknowledged that attitudes and stereotypes limited opportunities for people with disability within their own organisations.

Additional obstacles for people with disability reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) included job readiness in the form of both on-the-job training and workforce pre-training (17.8%). Access to workplace adjustments, including equipment (6.3%), was also important.

Provision of internships, on-the-job training and job preparation activities were common practice in the programs studied, but the use of traineeships, cadetships and internships is not common practice in the sector. Erin Riehle explained that two questions motivated the establishment of Project Search:

- Where are the employment pathways that provide people with disability with opportunities for work experience and exposure to a range of roles with the aim of finding the best fit and not presupposing what a person with disability is capable of?
- Where are the on-the-job opportunities within businesses that allow people with disability to develop skills and capabilities, including interpersonal skills that cannot be replicated in a workshop setting?

Susanne Bruyere from the Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability also stressed the absence of opportunity for both work experience and pre-employment training in schools. Emersion in the workplace gives the employee experience and confidence that naturally comes with being employed.

When Erin Riehle asked her workplace partner, the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, about their workplace training programs, she found over 60 training programs. But none of the programs intentionally included people with disability. Nor had a program for people with disability specifically been developed. For Erin, as all hospitals have run training programs for doctors and nurses, the issue is:

we’re not asking them to do anything different. We shouldn’t have to apologise or beg for them to educate people with disability, it’s just another training program.

In following up on the lack of job preparation in the form of on-the-job training opportunities, Erin approached three local government disability employment service providers. She asked:

instead of ... waiting for the other to fail, and instead of spending more money ... What would happen if we took all of your knowledge, your funding and your resources, and we braided them together for one year ... and instead of training these young people in the school, where we just keep teaching Math and English over and over again ... let's move them into a business for their final year of school and teach them [workplace] skills.

For her, this means individualised job development and placement based on the student's experiences, strengths and skills. A nine-month internship was developed at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Incorporating a series of 10-week job rotations, it allows students to find positions that best suit their preferences. They also receive support with accommodations, adaptations and on-the-job training throughout the internship.

Erin Riehle prefaces one of the issues of the current Australian Disability Employment Services framework by describing her own experience. Simply placing a person with disability in a role, regardless of whether the role suits their skills and capabilities or interests, is ineffective:

I hired a couple of people and they didn't work out. Primarily because, even though I had open positions that were high turnover entry-level positions, they still required some basic skills and the people coming from the agencies are coming off the street with disability and didn't have even a basic level skill development.

The Cincinnati Children's Hospital program provides a pathway for the recruitment and retention of skilled staff for low-skilled, repetitive but necessary roles. In addition, there is a connection with the community and a contribution to helping people with disability fulfil their goals. The program enables young people with disability to gain skills and capabilities across several employment areas. Interns are evaluated by the job coach, the instructor and the department supervisor. They are then matched to the most appropriate job site based on individual interests and skills. Each intern interviews for a job rotation placement and a job coach works with the employee until the assigned tasks can be performed independently.

While touring the hospital, the tangible and intangible benefits of the program for both the interns and the business were obvious. In meeting with a number of interns and their managers, even the most introverted intern took great pride in explaining the role and responsibilities of his job:

My job is to go around the entire hospital and collect all the toys. Gosh, there are so many toys, you know? I then clean all of them with anti-bacterial solution and take them back to the play rooms.

The interns start their morning with a one-hour class in the host business, including the hospital and external placements. They are trained on workplace expectations, such as working with others, punctuality, completing tasks and social skills. It is a full immersion into the business. By undertaking assessments, the social educators determine the skill level and the intern interest following the first rotation. Subsequently, an appropriate department is identified for the next 10-week rotation. Between the three rotations, the interns write a resume, cover letter, letter of application and practice their interview skills. As part of the program, interns are expected to have an interview with a manager and write a follow up thank you letter.

Carolyn Rogers, Instructor of the Fifth Third Bank Project Search initiative, further explained:

Project Search has replicated the whole cycle of what a job would look like. As part of the Project Search curriculum the interns have to rotate jobs three times. If you think about that, that's like getting three different jobs within one year. What an experience! Knowing that they can actually do that, knowing that things are going to change, but that they are going to be okay because they have support. The whole experience of being in a business, the whole experience of interacting with people who are working, I think that holistic picture is what makes Project Search successful.

Unless disability employment service providers are working with and in a business, there is no way to be familiar with what the jobs or the titles are. For Erin Riehle, the reason disability employment service providers put so many people to cleaning tables and bagging groceries is because they don't work closely enough with businesses to understand available positions. As she explained:

It's not a coincidence that businesses predominately only ever offer the same types of positions. It's because educators and agencies have no clue what [job] titles mean. So, there's not a school in Cincinnati or an agency that would think that a person with disability could work as a Grossing Room Technician, not because they can't, but because they don't know what that means.

What is a 'Grossing Room Technician'? A very enthusiastic ex-intern explained that, following surgery, organs, tissues and blood have to be cut into small pieces and mixed with a solidifying agent and made ready for incineration. A person with cerebral palsy who lives with a frequent seizure disorder loves the television show CSI and now works in the hospital morgue as a Grossing Room Technician.

Erin Riehle explains the reason for Project Search's success, sustainability and transferability across the US and indeed the world. It comes from working closely with and within the host businesses. She said:

Unless you are in that business every day, and you are helping that business to understand that people with disability are capable, it is very difficult to achieve meaningful and gainful employment for people with disability. As a consequence of working within the business, Cincinnati Children's Hospital has taught people with disability to be Endoscopic Technicians, Grossing Room Technicians and Clinical Sterilisation Assistants.

Susanne Bruyere, a leading researcher in disability employment, says 'internships are remarkably effective ... If we can work with schools to prepare young people to do well in internships, to create as a part of the school structure work opportunities, we would do a whole lot better.' Job preparation in the form of internships is also used at Walgreens, with their intern-to-hire program (as described above).

A common practice that emerged is that the organisations are all providing on-the-job coaching and on-the-job training to the employer to ensure the employment process is successful for all involved. Bettina Hillebrand explained that candidates who are suitable for the jobs Specialisterne has available will proceed to job preparation. Here they are assisted in preparing a CV, have one-on-one talks and job training involving tasks they will be required to do on the job.

If disability employment service providers work within individual businesses to understand the nature of the opportunities available, it provides persons with disability effective pathways into employment—harnessing their various skills, capabilities and attributes and enabling them to apply for and keep jobs that also pay the prevailing wage. Immersing disability employment service providers within the business also indirectly challenges conscious and unconscious biases

because managers, colleagues and customers are witness to the abilities of interns and workers. This leads to a diverse workplace that is accessible and inclusive.

Innovation: creating new industries

Innovation and being able to encourage people to try new things, in the knowledge that if it doesn't work, nobody is going to be fired. We will regroup, it is not that you did the wrong thing, it is just that it didn't work.

Kate Nash interview

Despite each sector having its own discrete drivers, constraints and opportunities to enhance the employment pathways for people with disability, innovation in practice is critical to achieving better employment outcomes. This is based on the principle of creating demand by opening doors for supply. Erin Riehle explained in her interview that sometimes 'it is just a matter of moving existing funds and spending them "at a different time and in a different place".' Gregor Demblin, from myAbility, described the need to tap into an 'untapped talent pool'.

Kate Nash sees an employment service culture that is afraid of failure and acknowledging failure, and that is prepared to stick with the status quo rather than take a chance or try new ideas. For her, the question is: 'what can we do differently?':

I think that's what the private sector often comes to market quite quickly with. A bit of a product, or an idea ... they will bash it around if it doesn't work; they will get back out to market. Whereas often in the public sector, because of evidence-based policy making, sometimes it can be a slower machine.

Dr Frank Hoffman developed Discovering Hands as an innovative solution to an examination problem for breast cancer. Early detection of tumours is critical. But regular examinations usually take anywhere between two to five minutes and small lumps are likely to go undetected. By the time a patient returns for their annual check-up, the small lump may have grown to a tumour or spread elsewhere in the body. Having blind or vision impaired women, with their superior sense of touch, examine women's breast tissue for lumps was a potential solution. The success of the trials of the Medical Tactile Examiner (MTE) in his practice has led to a new practice. Dr Hoffman says: 'We can't afford to set aside people who are different, where we need different ideas and capabilities to help us innovate.'

Discovering Hands has developed a nine-month training program that allows blind women and women who have low vision to learn everything about breast health, breast cancer and disease, as well as the physical examination. Students are expected to pass a final examination that is undertaken by a medical board comprised of doctors. The students then qualify as MTEs and can work as medical assistants in hospitals, doctors surgeries or Discovering Hands centres. MTEs undertake sophisticated and detailed examinations and report the result to the doctor. MTEs are sharpening the early detection on the breast tissue as a first step in breast examination.

The cost of an examination in Germany is €46.50 (around \$AUD75). From the €46.50, €10 Euros is paid to Discovering Hands to fund the cost of tactile strips that are used by MTEs during examination to guide them in conducting a thorough and meticulous examination. The doctor retains €36.50 which is partially used to fund the MTEs' salaries. On any given day, an MTE can examine between seven and 10 patients.

Dr Hoffman described the benefits in this way:

It is a pathway to employment for people who are blind and [promotes] early detection of breast cancer—a win-win for the medical team. It is changing the mindset of the public to act more proactively, to go to get tested, and saving money for the public purse. There is also an economical [sic] benefit for Discovering Hands, as the key is to bring as many people as possible [in]to the labour market to make the company itself also economically viable.

Other benefits are that the patient is not exposed to radiation and that some women, who have had mastectomy and may feel particularly vulnerable or unattractive, feel far more comfortable being examined by a blind or visually impaired woman who has a superior sense of touch. In addition, according to Dr Hoffman, with a forecasted workforce shortage for doctors in Germany in the next decade:

MTEs can potentially meet the needs of the system. The MTEs can do other types of medical diagnostics, such as prostate examinations. Mobile teams of MTEs could go to the patients, particularly in rural areas where the numbers of medical professionals and doctors are under-resourced. Think of mobile ultrasound devices, which can be run by assistants, because the ultrasound system is giving ... the picture [and] ... the 3D volume to any smart phone. We can connect our smart phones to a doctor sitting somewhere in the world [and be] able to check the results of the ultrasounds as though they were there.

There is a possibility 12 MTEs could work a part of a mobile service to examine women in remote rural locations. The service would send patient reports to a doctor at a hospital, with the quality of the medical diagnostics equal to clinicians carrying out examinations themselves. MTEs could also give woman-to-woman advice to patients regarding health issues, such as vaginal infections and women's diseases.

Susanne Bruyere also described an example from the Israeli Government's Department of Defence, which used the abilities of people who are neurodiverse to notice differences between maps of towns and cities drawn up at different times—a capability that others may not have.

Workplace Adjustments

The more committed a company is to improve its workplace adjustments process and its recruitment processes, [the more committed] it is to improving what I call the fact funnel, the pipeline. We all win balloons, and that means an employer is more likely to have more suitable hires over time, you are more likely to have to think reactively about how you hang on to that, in case your competitors steal them.

Kate Nash interview

Workplace adjustments are accommodations that enable the employee to independently and efficiently undertake the inherent requirements of their job. These accommodations are no different from any other employee being supported with the right equipment, tools or resources needed to undertake their duties and responsibilities. For instance, if a freelance travel journalist didn't have a laptop it would limit their independence and ability to do their job. Similarly, if a person with disability waits lengthy periods for their workplace adjustments to be implemented, it limits their ability to complete their work and fulfil their responsibilities.

As detailed in Sophie Hopkins' literature review (Hopkins 2019) and the Willing to Work report (AHRC 2016), all too often employees with disability are forced to resort to 'work-arounds' when workplace adjustments are not implemented adequately or at all. Without adjustments employees are unable to develop their skills, capabilities, knowledge and aspirations. This results in a 'concrete ceiling' preventing career advancement and engagement. In this situation the employee's work is at risk of becoming meaningless.

For Kate Nash, 'much of the narrative about disability gets caught up with the debate on cost'. Sophie Hopkins (2019) found that workplace adjustments for people with disability often have a small financial impact on the employer and are neither as problematic nor financially significant as employers' perceive them to be. Workplace adjustments are fundamental to many employees' ability to meet the responsibilities and requirements of their role and cost should be seen as an investment for the longer term. Further, an employee is more likely to be fully engaged when adequately supported.

Erin Riehle emphasised that how workplace accommodations are proposed is important, advising accommodations should centre on the capabilities of the individual, not on what the individual is unable to do. Riehle used an example of a legally blind intern:

We could have gone into that department and ... said: 'Hey, got a great candidate here for you, we think she'd do a super job. By the way she's legally blind.' And then that department head ... they can't help it ... they often respond inappropriately and they go to their fear place.

However, Project Search's preferred approach is to work with businesses to create combinations of adaptations for a candidate and show them how to implement these. In this example, where the role was working in a supply room, the labelling needed to be changed to large print. The outcome benefitted all employees in that department because the large print labels made it easier for everyone to read. In this instance, the workplace adjustment was easy to implement and had no cost associated with it, benefiting everyone.

Randy Lewis emphasised that accessible and inclusive workplaces benefit all employees, irrespective of disability: 'anything we did for people with disability,' he said, 'made it better for everybody'. He explained Walgreens' approach: 'If a procedure gets in the way, or policy gets in the way of achieving that, we will think about adjusting the policy'. In developing their design for the new distribution centre, Walgreens consciously made an effort to consider ergonomic design so that equipment can be easily manipulated by employees with different heights and arm reach. The centre also includes technology so that can text can be magnified, and uses voice recognition and symbols throughout. This meant that it is not reliant on the conventional methods of giving and receiving information. A lesson Walgreens learnt was that people with disability figure out, early on, how to adjust to everyday living. For this reason, it is Walgreens practice to always 'Ask The Person' (ATP) with disability before making any assumptions as they are the expert of their own experience.

The benefits of workplace adjustments are also explained by an emergency nurse from Cincinnati Children's Hospital who shared his experience of working with two Project Search interns. One, whose role is to manage the supply room in the department by ensuring it is stocked and organised, had been on vacation for a week. The emergency department and staff couldn't wait for their return. The emergency nurse emphasised how crucial the intern's role is in keeping the department running efficiently, particularly in a ward that is pressed for time. He explained that the

Department's intern enables the medical team to focus on providing adequate and efficient care to patients.

Disability employee networks working to change the narrative

When asked what is needed to improve employment pathways for people with disability, Kate Nash replied: 'We need to change the narrative ... the public narrative about disability offers little that is relevant to the majority of employees with disability'.

Building a more positive narrative for people with disability is a common driver for each of the programs visited. If the lived experiences of people with disability seeking employment or in employment is undervalued, the narrative is often a bleak one. All too often, it is about deficit: the disproportionate unemployment rates for people with disability, the lack of workplace adjustment procedures and practices. All of these are genuine lived experiences for people with disability. However, equally real are the skills, capabilities and perspectives that people with disability contribute to their workplaces.

Disability employee networks are comprised of people, with or without disability, within a workplace or industry who champion policies and procedures to enhance access and inclusion within the working environment.

Building and supporting individual employers, and then employer-to-employer connections, is one of the key objectives of Purple Space. Kate Nash explained:

Much of the narrative about disability gets caught up with the debate on cost ... If it's not a story about cost, it's very often a story about the sporting achievements of Paralympian athletes or of disability brought on in dramatic circumstances, such as the case of injured war veterans. Granted, these are important stories that offer insights about resilience and human venture ... [But] we don't get to hear about the debate on talent and the lived experience of employees with disability who work day-in, day-out, in every organisation in the UK.

Nash further explained how an employee network can truly be successful by challenging members to hold the mirror up to themselves as individuals. She described it as:

Talking a lot about the self-bigotry, of low expectations. Many people with disability, as we know, will face day-in and day-out subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, moments and clues from individuals who may not deliberately share a sense of pity or disappointment, or sadness for that individual. There is nothing deliberate, it is simply a human thing to do. And the down side I think to our life story is often that we are exposed far too much to other people's sadness, and feelings of fear — feeling that they don't want to do or say the wrong thing in front of us. But also having not a clue how to help. If they don't see easily how they can help, it is then quite hard to envisage how it's possible to unlock the potential of this individual.

Nash also described the positive examples of successful employment trajectories she has witnessed when helping network leaders to build and sustain authentic storytelling campaigns. By delivering know-how and skills to create systemic change, Purple Space is about feeding and seeding thought leaders with ideas about how they can transform their business. 'The role and value,' she says,

... of people with disability encouraging each other to be open, honest and to share information about their disability—and particularly for those individuals who may have impairments but it is not visible. It is not about ‘outing’ people, and not about encouraging people to share their story when they are not in a place where they feel able, or confident, or skillful enough to do that.

She prefaced her argument by stating that:

[It] has been all fair in love and war in terms of the gender talent debate, female talent, LGBTIQ and Black talent. We see generosity; we see a number of organisations actively reaching out to each other to say: what did you learn about this? How did you kick start this process? Or we want to deliver a work place adjustment to our people with disability across the world. How would you do it? What worked? What didn't? What would you do differently?'

Cultural awareness in the workplace has subsequently made it a more inclusive environment; it has improved the ability of individuals of culturally diverse backgrounds to be their authentic selves at work. However, people with disability are still contending with challenges of accessible and inclusive work environments that can directly and indirectly preclude them. It could be argued that this is the reason why many people with disability are in a perpetual cycle of navigating and advocating within workplace systems, processes and policies. This is the difference between disability and other diversity groups.

Lessons should be learnt from other diversity groups. What were their successes? What were their failures? And what is transferrable into the disability context? Tom Shakespeare, in his book *Disability: The Basics*, explains the barriers experienced by people with disability in comparison to other diversity groups:

disability is more than just oppression. For this reason, disability differs from ... other identity politics issues ... Thinking of people who are from a minority ethnic community, if you remove racism and discrimination from the equation, there is no reason why they cannot flourish and compete equally with the majority ethnic community.

He further argues that:

For women, unless they are made solely responsible for homemaking and child-rearing, there is no intrinsic reason why they cannot do as well as men in almost every occupational setting and sector of society. Similarly[,] for gay people. Yet for people with disability, even after discrimination and prejudice is removed, inequalities are likely to remain ... We cannot reduce the complexity of disability to either a biological problem, a psychological problem, or a social problem. We need to take account of all the factors and intervene at all the different levels to benefit and include people with disability. This means medical and rehabilitation interventions; assistive devices; psychological support; barrier removal; supportive welfare benefits; legal protections; cultural change. Different interventions will be appropriate for different people in different settings.

Where an employer's motivation is driven by public perception and less about sourcing appropriate talents, initiatives are likely to be less successful. The 'right' motivation is when employers are open to innovation, failure, contribution of ideas and solutions. It is evident from the employment agencies visited that success comes from a primary focus on sourcing the appropriate talent and matching it to an appropriate job.

The ‘people network’ model is used at the Poses Family Foundation to influence and change the narrative—the team describes it as ‘field building’. This involves bringing together nine large employers that co-fund projects and test, trial, evaluate and share learnings, modelling and how they have overcome challenges. Judith Smith contends that ‘places where job seekers can connect’ are important so the employment sector can be coordinated in a way that works with employees and job seekers with disability.

Kate Nash feels there is a danger in overstating what employers need to do. This can create the impression that everything is the employers’ responsibility. She sees three simultaneous phases needed to improve the existing landscape for people with disability:

- legislation
- the employer’s journey
- the ongoing initiatives and effort by employees with disability.

But for her:

It’s not like one phase is done and then starts the second. It’s like spinning plates; you have to get them all spinning for there to be music; you have to get the legislation in place—have to get that right. And then you have to get the employer’s plate spinning. And then the third plate is let’s get people with disability thinking positively about their careers and their life chances. Get all three plates spinning and I think that is where we can get some traction.

Recommendations

The interviews undertaken for this report indicate that leading disability employment programs have much in common when it comes to approaches to successfully and meaningfully employing people with disability in the open labour market. Moreover, motivators for success were person centred rather than systemic, and focused on:

- attraction, retention and career progression
- job preparation, internships and on-the-job training
- innovation—creating new industries
- workplace adjustments
- changing the narrative through disability employee networks.

The below recommendations are drawn from the disability employment programs visited. Based on the success and sustainability of these programs, implementation of the recommendations would see meaningful and sustainable employment of people with disability in Australia. Improved socioeconomic outcomes for people with disability would in turn increase Australian labour force participation and income, and boost the country's GDP.

No recommendation will be effective on its own—all five must be implemented together as part of a holistic strategy. Internships and on-the-job training will not lead to successful employment outcomes if people coming into a position are set up to fail because workplaces cannot tailor their approach to meet specific role and employee requirements.

How can we address the lost talent that is being left behind when it comes to employment, underemployment and unemployment of people with disability? What can we do differently? We need to look to evidence-based good practice on a global scale and see how we can adapt successful programs to the Australian context.

Adopt a holistic approach to the life cycle of employment

A consistent recommendation from the nine disability employment programs visited is that the sourcing and recruitment processes indirectly discriminate against people with disability. A better understanding of the job, and its roles and daily tasks is needed. Job advertisements and titles don't always represent the job's duties and tasks at hand. This was evident with Project Search's 'Grossing Room' example (see, 5.1 Attraction, retention and career progression). The need for employers to improve existing recruitment practices is demonstrated in the disability employment programs visited.

The definition of what constitutes success needs to be clearly articulated and subsequent evaluation using this definition needs to occur. In addition, Australia needs to shift from using quantitative data as its primary source to determine whether the employment of a person with disability is successful. Meaningful and successful employment has less to do with an individual being placed in a job, and has more to do with matching skills, capabilities and interests with a role. In order to enhance and expand employment pathways for people with disability it is integral to understand where the quantitative data comes from. Specifically, when evaluating disability employment programs, we need to investigate the reasons behind the quantitative data by not neglecting to explore the qualitative data, such as case studies. For example, when examining the percentage of people with disability leaving the workforce, the data needs to be assessed

with reference to qualitative data, that is, the reasons why: was it to pursue further training and/or education, to take up a promotion, or because the position wasn't an appropriate fit? Perhaps the workplace was not disability confident/competent, or appropriate workplace adjustments were not implemented. Applying quantitative and qualitative data as measurables of successful employment is no different to when assessing the success of any other individual's career and employment history. These evaluation measurables gives us a more holistic view of the failings and the successes of employment for people with disability.

Evaluation of success needs to factor in a range of measurables over the life-cycle of the employment placement. It needs to look to the employment opportunities afforded to the employee with disability, as well as retention and career progression.

Australia, and the rest of the world, need to adopt an ideology that does not focus on simply placing an individual into a role. Too often employees with disability remain stagnant in their role and their respective pay grades with little to no training and development (Hopkins 2019). At each of the disability employment programs visited, ongoing development and training to enhance employee skills and capabilities is at the forefront. This investment in the career progression of employees with disability has translated into meaningful and gainful employment at each of the leading disability employment programs explored in this report.

Develop employment pathways for people with disability

Australia needs to further investigate leading evidence-based disability employment programs and provide opportunities for work experience and exposure to a range of roles for people with disability. There are many leading disability employment programs, far too many to conduct a Churchill Fellowship report on, and more than enough to learn from, explore, and possibly implement in Australia.

A problem shared across the countries visited during the fellowship is that educational and training opportunities that lead to employment are rarely available for people with disability. Susanne Bruyère explains that this is:

... partly because we don't get [people with disability] into mainstream classes where they get the talents and partly because we don't give [people with disability] work experience and partly because we don't coach [people with disability] toward confidence that they can do these things.

To address this, a two-pronged approach is needed.

1. We need to create employment pathways for people with disability that provide them with exposure to the workplace, identifying what their strengths and weaknesses are through job preparation, internships and on-the-job training.
2. Exploring existing leading disability employment programs and how they can be adapted and adopted into the Australian context with the aim of providing Australians with disability an opportunity to gain on-the-job skills and experiences.

Without these two interventions people with disability will continue to be unable to fulfil their personal and employment goals.

Australian governments, policymakers and business needs to explore leading disability employment programs abroad. There are programs for people with disability that have successfully moved beyond their country of origin, such as Project Search and Discovering Hands. 23

These programs have proven they can be transferred and implemented in other countries, and that unique environmental challenges can be overcome through commitment in implementation.

Explore opportunities for innovation

All too often public policymakers rebrand what has been done previously as something new, even if it has failed in the past. Australia needs to look at what has been done well and scale it up. Likewise, we must be honest about what strategies and programs have failed and reject them. For years, public policymakers have debated employment of people with disability, its effect on the labour market and GDP, including the burden on Australia's welfare system.

Australia needs to have the courage and genuine commitment to want to change the status quo. Despite numerous inquiries into disability employment over the last two decades, problems persist. Given the state of employment for people with disabilities in Australia, it appears that recommendations from inquiries and their implementation do not address the inhibitors and enablers in order to adequately inform innovative solutions to the persistent problems.

A better and more holistic understanding of problems, including of those factors that inhibit and enable successful employment outcomes for people with disability, will support more creative and effective approaches to implementing change. As Albert Einstein famously said of his ideal problem-solving process, 'If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.'

This creative approach to innovation is exemplified by Discovering Hands, a program that addresses both a women's health issue and unemployment of women who are blind by developing an entirely new industry to solve a multi-faceted problem. By considering the issue from both the employer and employee perspectives, Discovering Hands has provided an improved method of breast cancer detection that increases the probability of successful treatment. In addition, the program has enabled recognition of the skills and capabilities of a cohort previously ignored, contributed to the GDP of the operating country, and improved socioeconomic outcomes by providing early detection.

Thinking outside the box is integral to addressing persistent employment barriers for people with disability. Specialisterne identified traditional recruitment practices as a barrier for employment of people who are neurodiverse. The innovative solution created by Specialisterne looks beyond traditional interviews gives candidates the opportunity to demonstrate and highlight their skills and capabilities through assessments that focus on tasks typical to the job they are applying for. Challenging workplace practices and looking beyond the status quo, as demonstrated by Specialisterne, leads to innovative solutions.

Remove barriers through workplace adjustments

Workplace adjustments need to be implemented efficiently and effectively. Employees with disability can inadvertently be set up to fail because job preparation programs, internships and on-the-job training aren't effective on their own. These initiatives also need to be supported with the 'right' equipment, tools and resources tailored to meet the specific needs of business, the role and the employee once employment begins. If they are not, the employee with disability is prevented from undertaking their role's responsibilities safely, confidently, and with autonomy and dignity. Tailored approaches are also important for the attraction, retention and career progression

of people with disability. Erin Riehle, during her interview, aptly described the implementation of workplace adjustments as ‘error proofing’.

People with disability are experts of their own experience and are able to identify the accommodations they require. This must be at the forefront for employers when implementing workplace adjustments. A lesson learnt at Walgreens, which could be a standard within any workplace, is to Ask The Person (ATP), or the employee, with disability what adjustments they need in order to undertake their duties and responsibilities in employment. This is established in Sophie Hopkins’ literature review (Hopkins 2019) and is a simple action that is well established and justified; as such, employers should adopt the practice immediately.

Contextual factors of each employee and workplace must be considered in developing and implementing customisable and person-centered adjustments (Hopkins 2019). For example, Randy Lewis described that at Walgreens a safety procedure required employees to use both hands to lift a case, assuming that an employee who ‘had one hand or one arm’ would not be able to comply with the procedure. Following the practice of ATP, Walgreens recognised people with disability have multiple ways in which they can safely pick up the case and move a case without having to use both hands.

Evidently, policies and practices need to be flexible and open to adaptation to cater to an employee’s access requirements, on a case-by-case basis. A prominent barrier for many people with disability in workplaces is the incompatibility of assistive technologies with information and communication technology (ICT) used within their workplace. Developers of ICT must consider inclusive design to allow people with disability to use them with assistive technology. Further, employers should support employees with disability by ensuring the ICT used in the workplace are able to be used with assistive technologies, so as to not preclude employees from access.

Change the narrative through the power of disability employee and people networks

A definition of what constitutes employment is needed to effectively measure outcomes. The standard used at Project Search adopts a 16-hour working week as a minimum at the prevailing wage. Having a definition in Australia that is consistent with other OECD countries would enable more accurate measurement of our performance compared to other nations.

Too often, the definition of employment for people with disability differs from the definition applied to people without disability (Hopkins 2019). For people with disability the common approach is to place an individual into a job, irrespective of whether or not it is a volunteer position without a paid employment outcome, meets the minimum wage, or fits the skills and capabilities of the individual. It is recommended that Australia challenges the existing status quo to adopt a more person-centred approach that matches an individual’s skills, capabilities and career aspirations to a particular job.

Australia’s disability employment service providers and employers alike primarily rely on quantitative data to measure the success of employment for people with disability. This needs to be broadened to encapsulate the qualitative data and a narrative that looks into the employment life cycle as a whole.

‘We don’t get to hear about the debate on talent and the lived experience of disabled employees who work day-in, day-out, in every organisation’ (Nash 2014). Businesses need to recognise and celebrate the contributions of their diverse workforce; this not only includes LGBTIQ+ and gender equity but also disability.

Without disability employment services working together and exchanging knowledge about their programs it is virtually impossible to compare learnings, track how each is performing, and collectively work towards a common goal of meaningful and successful employment for people with disability. We need to make existing knowledge more accessible and inclusive for people with disability and businesses alike. For example, information about disability employment as well as people networks and what programs other workplaces have implemented should be readily available. Ways to connect and share information—networks—need to be supported. The Willing to Work report (AHRC 2016) indicated that people with disability can sense when an employer is motivated by numbers, quotas and targets as opposed to genuinely wanting to enhance access, inclusion and improve workplace culture.

To change the narrative, employers need to start by asking themselves questions, before they ask candidates or employees to identify disability:

- Why do we want to know?
- How would it benefit the workplace by knowing?
- What are incentives for the employee to identify?

Honestly explaining the reasons why questions are being asked of a potential employee and what employers intend to do with the information is important. Is it because the available role is part of a targeted graduate program or internship or because the employer wants to be able to provide workplace accommodations? Does the recruitment panel wish to accommodate to access requirements or is it all of the above?

Reasons given for collecting data must be more than a generic statement about wishing to have a workforce that is diverse and representative of the broader community. Clear actions and benefits need to be articulated.

People are more likely to disclose information about their disability and state accommodations they may require when they feel safe, are in a workplace that is disability confident and competent, and are able to recognise positive consequences of doing so. Employers must recognise and appreciate that it is not just about crunching numbers but that there is a person-centred element. This approach will result in a win-win for employers and employees with disability.

Conclusion

While employers often profess to wanting to employ people with disability they are not always ready and, in some instances, willing to adopt affirmative action procedure such as graduate programs, internships and other employment pathways. Bruyere observed:

We're trying to take our mission and make it everybody's mission because we think it has significant generalisability to everybody, right? We know that one in four households in America has a person with disability in it. So if you aren't a person with disability, your family member [could be a] a person with disability— [they] could be your spouse, your child, your mom, your dad. And that's a really powerful tool for change if you leverage that population, and that means a quarter of the American workforce has some kind of personal motivation to try to make the world a better place for people with disability. So it's leveraging that.

We talk about targets but we need to be properly prepared to meet them. Employers need to look in the mirror and ask themselves: what is the motivation behind your program? Is it to look good to the public and shareholders? Are you dealing in motherhood statements? Are you prepared to implement affirmative action procedures, such as targeted graduate programs, internships and cadetships for people with disability?

There is a real opportunity to influence the design of Australia's public policy in the area of access and inclusion in employment for people with disability. Research completed by Deloitte Access Economics for the Australian Network on Disability estimated that if the participation rate of working age Australians with disability increased by 10 per cent, it would result in a cumulative \$40 billion increase in GDP over 10 years.

But it is not just about the money. Equally important is the personal fulfilment of meaningful employment and its positive impact on each individual, whatever their ability.

Appendix: Interview Questions

List of interview questions asked of disability employment providers visited.

1. Can you give me an overview of your organisation and its purpose and structure, including the ethos and ideology behind your organisation?
2. What led to the establishment of your organisation?
3. What was the design and methods for implementation of the business model? How did you put this into practice? Were different processes for different business entities required? For example, by sector—small companies, medium companies, non-for-profit, government?
4. What were the initial challenges and how did the organisation overcome these?
5. What was the costing structure?
6. How does your organisation measure the success of employment pathways for people with disability in the open labour market?
7. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the success of the organisation?
8. What continue to be ongoing challenges for full impact?
9. Refining the model, what worked well? What didn't? Why? What would you change?
10. In response to evaluation or failure, what adjustments have been made? What has the organisation learnt from these failures?
11. What do you see as being wrong with the existing employment pathways in your country? What do you think is needed? What are the best intervention points? What's next for your organisation?
12. In your opinion, what learnings and knowledge may be transferable?
13. Is there an intangible value to the work of your organisation?
14. What unexpected collaborations or results have come out of your organisation's work? Please provide some case studies.

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