



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

The Big Picture of Empowering Disability at Work

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Why this guy? (About your presenter)



I have a physical disability. I identify as neurodiverse and care for a parent with disability.

I have acted as both a manager and individual contributor at the University of Melbourne and in the disability sector.

I am completing a part-time MBA at Melbourne Business School. Last year, I represented the University at the Clinton Global initiative in New York City, where I spoke about disability employment.

Disability employment is a complex topic and I believe I can make a difference by sharing my experience.

I hope everybody attending this session can learn at least one thing that they can use to make their team more inclusive.



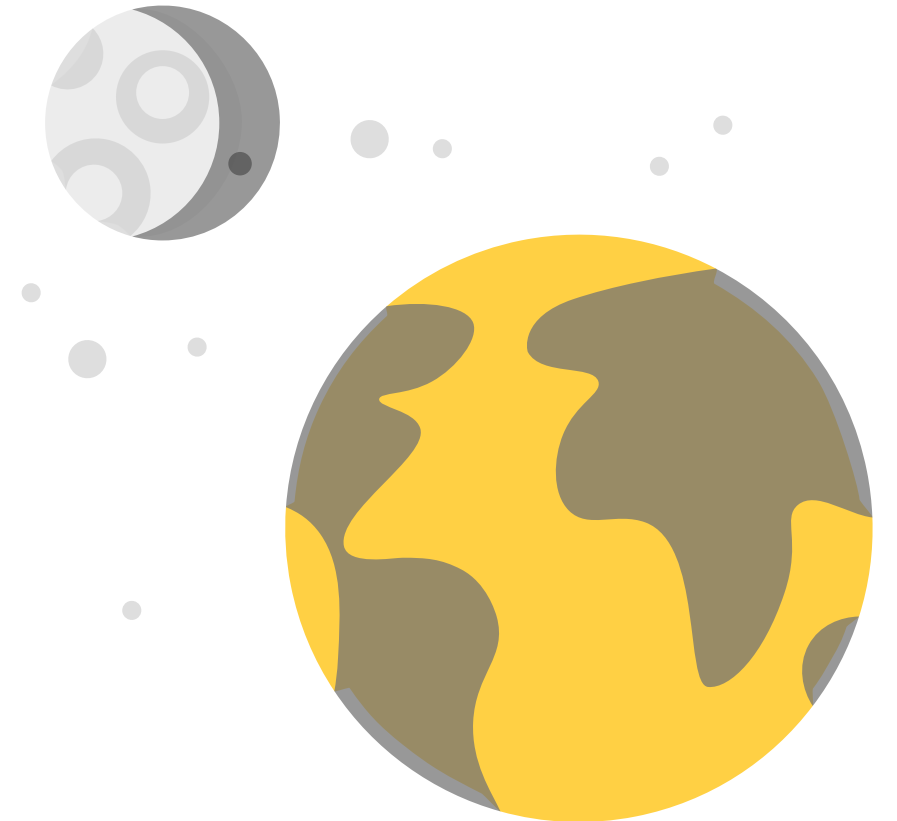
The Big Picture of Disability Employment

There are 1 billion people with disability in the world.

In Australia, there are 4.3 million people with disability, nearly 20% of the population.

- 56% of working-age Australians with a disability have a tertiary education.
- Meaningful employment can help people with disability live a fulfilling and independent life, but many barriers exist.
- Despite nationwide labour shortages, the disability employment gap is real.
- Australians with disability face double the unemployment and triple the underemployment rate of the general population.

We can all be part of a change to create better and more inclusive workplaces.



Diversity and Disability

Australia's disability community is diverse in skills and ability.

- We include people with physical, neurological and psychosocial disability.
- We are diverse in our identities, cultural backgrounds, interests and life experience.

Lived experience of disability is highly individualised.

- Disability is intersectional.
- Even with a similar impairment, impact can vary significantly between different people.

90% of disabilities are invisible or non-apparent.

- Not everybody with a disability wants to publicly identify.
- You probably work alongside somebody with disability and don't know it.





The Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability positions disability as a social construct, rather than through a medical or charity lens.

Physical environments, attitudes and social barriers can and should be accommodated to be more inclusive. This is something we can all do in our workplace.

Many people with disability have friends, families, jobs, goals and interests, just like anybody else. In other words, most of us just want to get on with life!

Myth Busting: Disability at Work



Are workers with disability are less productive?

- People with disability perform just as well and are on average more reliable than other employees.
- Diverse workplaces generate higher returns in Australia.

Will I need to budget for costly workplace adjustments?

- 88% of workers with disability don't require workplace adjustments.
- Accommodations for workers are typically low-cost or cost-neutral for employers in Australia, including flexible work arrangements.
- Specialised equipment purchases for employees with disability are typically paid for by the Australian Government's Employee Assistance Fund.

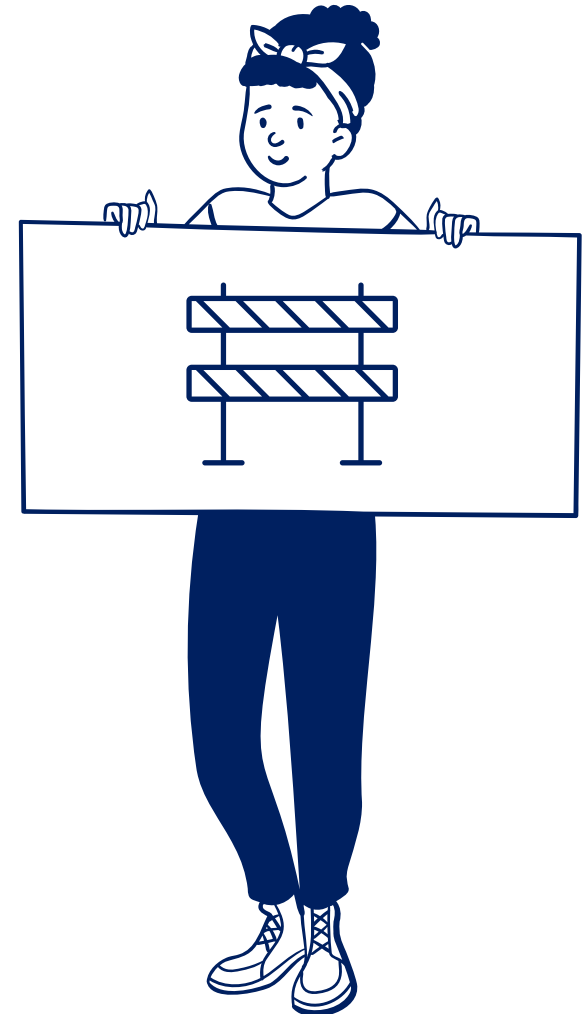
Social Barriers to Disability Employment

While many people think of physical barriers, social barriers play a major role in preventing people with disability from fully participating in the workplace:

- Social barriers include discrimination, stereotyping and unconscious bias.
- It can also include team behaviour and norms that aren't inclusive to people with disability.

We have the power to increase our awareness and take actions that remove social barriers to disability employment:

- Promoting flexibility and trust.
- Using inclusive language.
- Dismantling bias.
- Making activities accessible.
- Removing the administrative burden of disability.





Flexibility and Trust

While most workers with disability don't require physical accommodations, some of us need to work differently.

Flexibility is a great place to start:

- Some people need to work at a different pace on various tasks. It doesn't mean they are less productive as a member of your team.
- Life happens. Your team members may need to juggle outside commitments, regardless of their disability status.
- Allow flexible scheduling and respect how people choose to work, which can include scheduling of tasks and camera use during online meetings.

Create an environment of trust:

- Trust your team member to get the job done and manage their own time.
- Create psychological safety - be considerate and remember that trust needs to go both ways.
- This empowers everybody to perform and saves time for managers.



Inclusive Language



Many people aren't sure about correct language use when talking to or about people with disability.

Some general rules:

- Always be respectful and avoid offensive language.
- Use person-first language to talk about somebody as a human being rather than defining them by their disability (e.g. person with a disability, wheelchair user).
- Some people prefer identity-first language (e.g. I am disabled).
- If in doubt, person-first language is widely accepted, or you can listen to how a person identifies themselves.

When speaking, presenting and writing documents, it's a good idea to use Plain English (express your idea simply and avoid jargon).

Making Activities Accessible

A work event can include meetings, lunches, planning days and conferences.

- You won't always know the accessibility requirements for all attendees. Listen to your staff and attendees. If in doubt, ask about accessibility needs before scheduling the event and be prepared to pivot.

Think about venue accessibility:

- Consider physical accessibility of the venue, including travel distance, bathrooms and elevator access.
- Avoid noisy and overstimulating venues.

Think about your scheduling:

- Avoid long meetings and back-to-back timeslots.
- Allow break times in longer meetings – it keeps everybody fresh.
- Avoid words like 'mandatory' and understand if somebody can't make it.

Accessibility makes your event more productive and inclusive for everybody!



Dismantling Bias

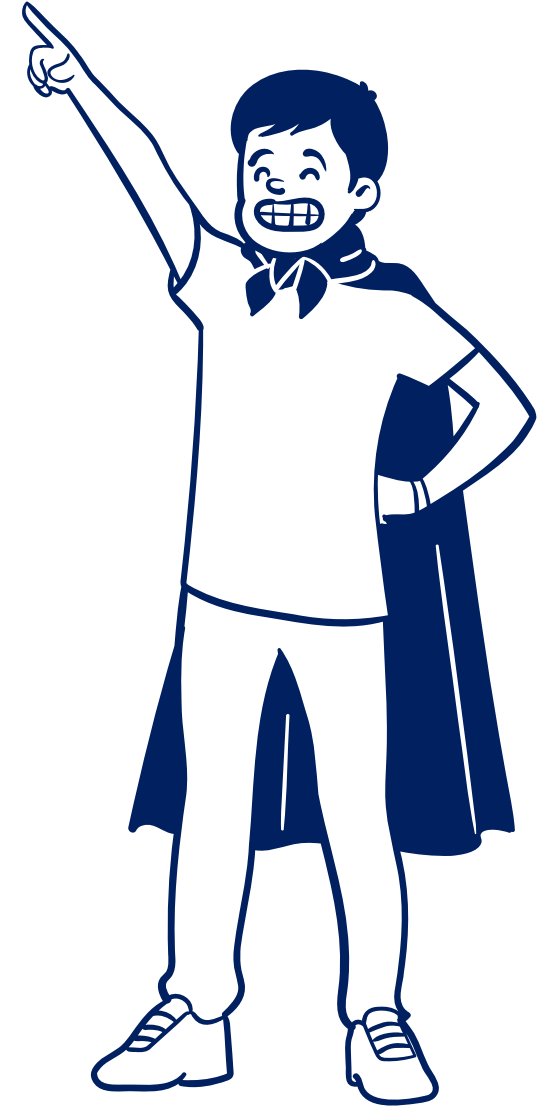
Bias can be conscious and unconscious, meaning we may not always be aware of our own biases:

- Bias can mean poor access to opportunity and distrust in a person's ability because of their disability, including how they look or communicate.
- For people with an invisible disability, it often means not being believed.

As a team member or a manager, you can dismantle bias:

- Think about barriers in your hiring process, which can include language use, non-essential tasks in the job description and interview accessibility.
- Stop making assumptions about what people can and can't do, both in your existing team and in the hiring process.
- Don't judge based on how somebody looks, talks or manages their time.
- Don't equate presenteeism with performance.

As a rule, try not to generalise, treat every person as an individual and give them a fair go!



Reducing Administrative Burden



People with disability do a shocking amount of administration:

- Journey planning how I can get to work.
- Booking appointments and rescheduling them around work commitments and my physical capability on any given day.
- Medical certificates.
- Administrative appeals.
- Proving my disability on a weekly basis.
- Many people with disability don't have a stable care team and it can be hard to arrange documentation on demand.

As a manager or team member, you can:

- Be understanding of administrative difficulties.
- Create an environment of trust.
- Minimise the administrative overhead while still acting within policy.

What can you do better?

Spend a minute to think about how you will make your workplace:

- More flexible
- More inclusive
- More accessible

Share your thoughts with the people around you.



Final takeaways

Be mindful and proactive with disability inclusion in your team.

- Don't make assumptions about people's ability.
- Remember there are invisible disabilities which you may not know about in your team.
- Always use respectful language when referring to disability.
- Aim to make your meetings, events and documents more accessible.
- Build a culture of trust and flexibility.
- Be actively considerate and listen to the people you work with.

Recommended resources:

- Complete the Introduction to Disability Awareness module via TrainME.
- Access information sheets at www.jobaccess.gov.au
- If in doubt, just Google it!

