



# '[We] have to do differently and better, [we] have to change'

A Literature Review on Facilitators of Meaningful and Sustainable Employment for People with Disabilities

**Sophie Hopkins**



Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion

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A Literature Review on Facilitators of  
Meaningful and Sustainable Employment  
for People with Disabilities

Sophie Hopkins

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I would also like to acknowledge that people with disabilities are the experts of their own experience, and to recognise the diversity of people with disabilities and each individual's capabilities, skills and knowledge. There is a need for all people with disabilities to be valued, included and heard. I have sought to be sensitive and appropriate in this research but apologise if any of the content has caused offence or distress.

To employers reading this, thank you for recognising your capacity to initiate social change and better the lives of people with disabilities. I hope this review contributes to growth in meaningful and sustainable employment initiatives.

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## Foreword by Ebru Sumaktas

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Australians, as employers and/or colleagues, need to learn how to successfully employ people with disability in the open labour market. The country is at a crossroads when it comes to improving outcomes for people with disabilities. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is designed to improve independence for people with disability, but its success will also be measured by the extent to which people are able to realise their goals, including employment.

For too long, people with disabilities have been overlooked by employers and excluded from employment. It is not acceptable that people with disabilities are almost a almost twice as likely to be unemployed when compared to people without disabilities. Australia has a stagnant employment rate for people with disabilities and there is a need to adopt employment programs for people with disabilities in Australia. This literature review complements my own research and provides guidance to employers on how to facilitate meaningful and sustainable employment of people with disabilities in their workplaces.

Successful adoption of good practice and employment of people with disabilities, will increase Australia's gross domestic product (GDP) and improve our currently poor Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranking for relative incomes and labour force participation rates for people with disability. Locally, it will lead to diversity in the workplace.

## Introduction

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This paper reviews the academic literature to identify how disability is conceptualised, and the barriers to and facilitators of meaningful employment for people with disabilities. The literature review aims to answer the research question: what are the characteristics of current good practice in employment programs for people with disabilities? To do this, characteristics of current good practice that enable people with disabilities to gain employment in the open market are explored. Due to changing ideas about what constitutes good practice, this paper reviews literature from the past five years only.

For the purpose of the review, disability is understood as a multifaceted term that describes the interaction between an individual with an impairment and personal and environmental factors.

Being employed does not inherently equate with good employment outcomes. This review considers that employment should be meaningful and sustainable. For employment to be meaningful and sustainable, people with disabilities must be employed in roles where they are socially included and have equal career and employment opportunities to people without disabilities. Integral to this is job satisfaction, opportunities to utilise skills and competencies, and being valued in the workplace. Meaningful and sustainable employment should be the goal of employers and workplaces when designing and implementing programs for employment of people with disabilities. People with disabilities are the experts of their own experience and are ideally placed to determine if their employment is meaningful and sustainable, and, ultimately, if employment programs are successful according to these criteria.

The review explores, in detail, current good practice that facilitates meaningful employment of people with disabilities. The review further identifies eight good practice characteristics derived from the literature:

1. consultation with people with disabilities
2. focus on capabilities
3. senior management support
4. inclusive recruitment and hiring practices
5. workplace adjustments/customised supports
6. mentoring/natural support
7. reducing bias
8. increasing knowledge.

The good practice characteristics are listed in no particular order. Taken together they can provide a pathway, not just to employment, but to meaningful and sustainable employment.



## Methodology

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The literature search was conducted during August and September 2018. Following preliminary searches, three databases were identified and used (Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest). These databases were chosen because they consistently returned relevant articles and their filter settings enabled exclusion criteria to be applied.

Search terms were derived from the research question: what are the characteristics of current good practice in employment programs for people with disabilities? Combinations and synonyms of search terms were used to search databases across all fields. The terms developed further in light of the relevance of articles returned from the database searches.

The most successful search terms overall were:

- best practice
- disability
- disabilities
- disabled
- employment
- good practice
- work
- practice

To ensure objectivity, the review was limited to peer-reviewed, scholarly literature. Literature was also limited to work published in English within the last five years in order to assess current practices. Literature on return-to-work programs was excluded in order to focus on transition into employment for people with disabilities.

Searches of reference lists and bibliographies were used to identify articles missed in database searches. The criteria was expanded (beyond peer-reviewed scholarly literature) to include two highly cited reports from reputable organisations—specifically, the International Labour Organisation (International Labour Office, Conditions of Work and Equality Department & Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO) 2014) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (van Kooy, Bowman and Bodsworth 2014). These reports were found as a result of searching the reference lists of articles for relevant studies.

The initial focus was on literature from Commonwealth countries, as it was felt that the programs reported on may be easily replicable in Australia. However, a substantial amount of relevant literature appeared from Europe and the United States. As such, the scope of the review was expanded to include literature from developed countries that are similar to the Australian context and thus also likely to be relevant for Australian policymakers.

Following this process, 20 pieces of literature were included in the review. As depicted in Appendix A, Table 1, the literature consists of 16 peer-reviewed journal articles, two book chapters, and two reports published by reputable organisations. The origins of the researchers are detailed in Appendix A, Table 1. Of the articles from Europe, two were from Nordic researchers (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Nevala et al. 2015), and one included a Nordic researcher as a joint-author (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). All six pieces of literature from the United States

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were conducted by researchers from the country's Eastern states. Three articles were from Australia (Hedley et al. 2017; Meacham et al. 2017; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014). Three articles were from Canada, two from the province of Ontario (Jetha et al. 2018; Padkapayeva et al. 2017) and one from Alberta (Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017). One article was from the United Kingdom. In addition, the journal article Vornholt et al. (2018) included four researchers from Europe (Germany and Netherlands), two from Canada and one from the United States.

A small number of texts were included to improve the author's understanding of the sociological framework and 'Social Model of Disability'—which is frequently adopted by the literature included in this review as opposed to the 'Medical Model'. These were: Barnes (2013), Davis (2016), Oliver (2013), Roulstone (2013) and Shakespeare (2014; 2018). A total of 26 texts were reviewed.

## Overview

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Human beings are not all the same, and do not all have the same capabilities and limitations. Need is variable, and disabled people are among those who need more from others and from their society.  
(Shakespeare 2014, p. 90)

### Defining disability

Disability is the term used to describe impairments that affect an individual's functioning. It is generally understood as a social construct that arises from the interaction between an individual with an impairment and their personal and environmental factors. Disability is a multifaceted concept (Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). This definition will be used in this literature review.

This literature review seeks to understand the meaning of disability specifically in an open employment context. Roulstone (2013, p. 222) argues meanings of disability, work and employment 'require very complex interpretations to avoid misplaced inferences in explaining [people with disabilities'] unemployment and underemployment.'

### The medical model

Earlier understandings of disability were that 'disability is a negative and limiting condition of the individual' that requires medical and professional intervention to make the individual more 'normal' (Roulstone 2013, p. 217). Disability was, and arguably often continues to be, constructed in comparison to the 'normal' (Vornholt et al. 2018). The 'normal' according to the medical model is the standard by which bodies are measured and understood, and is generally viewed as the trait that appears most commonly within the population (Davis 2016; Vornholt et al. 2018). Thus, individuals whose physical, sensory or psychological functioning is different from what is accepted as normal or common in the general population are considered to be deviations from the normal and are categorised as having disabilities (Roulstone 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018).

### Emergence of the social model

The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of the notion that disability is the result of society failing to consider differences (Roulstone 2013)—that people are not disabled by impairments but rather are disabled by the barriers imposed by society (Oliver 2013).

Understanding disability as the interaction of an individual's impairment with their environment suggests an individual may have a disability in one environment, but not another (Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). The social model relocates responsibility to society and away from people with impairments (Shakespeare 2014); this consequently makes accessibility and inclusion the responsibility of employers, governments and society's institutions. Michael Oliver deliberately constructed the social model as a tool for professionals without disabilities—specifically, social workers—to identify barriers for people with disabilities in order to facilitate policies and practices that could remove said barriers (Barnes 2013; Oliver 2013). Further, it intended to highlight problems with medical and professional interventions that sought to make an individual with disability more 'normal' (Barnes 2013). Oliver (2013) notes the model's limitations and states the intention of the model was not to provide a solution but rather to demonstrate a means by which to identify what needs to change.

Disability is understood by the social model as the result of a mismatch between an individual with an impairment and an environment, which does not fit the unique capabilities of the individual

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(Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). It can be argued that any trait mapped on a bell curve 'will always have at its extremities those characteristics that deviate from the norm' (Davis 2016, p. 3), thus deviation is to be expected (Roulstone 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). With this came the conclusion that disability is the result of the interaction between a person with an impairment and the 'normal' within society (Barnes 2013).

Most critics of the social model concede it has been significant in its ability to separate barriers from impairments (Barnes 2013). Shakespeare (2014; 2018), a former supporter of the social model turned critic, highlights the primary criticism of the social model is that it can be interpreted as arguing that if all barriers are removed, an individual will no longer have disabilities. This fails to recognise that for many people with disabilities removal of barriers and implementation of accommodations will not remove their impairment (Shakespeare 2014; 2018). Shakespeare (2018) concedes that whilst the removal of barriers will be sufficient for some, others may require additional support and accommodations to 'lead lives of an equal quality to other disabled and non-disabled people' (Shakespeare 2018, p. 20). Importantly, it should also be noted that in addition to individual needs being variable, removal of barriers for one individual may create barriers for another (Shakespeare 2018).

Recognition that disability is a product of social arrangements can produce better outcomes by acknowledging that people with impairments cannot be expected to adapt to disabling environments, but that reasonable adjustments must be made to reduce barriers and ensure inclusion (French 2017).

### **Categorisation of impairments**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses the following categories of disabilities:

- sensory
- intellectual
- physical
- psychosocial
- head injury
- stroke or acquired brain injury
- other.

These categories are defined by whether an impairment relates to 'functioning of the mind or the senses, or to anatomy or physiology' (ABS 2016a). The ABS acknowledges that these groups are broad and there may be a single impairment or a number of 'broadly similar' impairments within each category. Further, persons may identify with more than one category (ABS 2016a).

An individual's experience and understanding of their own identity should not be limited or restricted to these categorisations and definitions. Impairments, as with people, are not homogenous. Not every individual who identifies with one, or more, of these categories will fit the definition provided.

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The categories used by the ABS are adopted in the present review to ensure consistency in interpreting and understanding the findings reported by the literature. Specifically, these definitions seek to inform the reader where conclusions or findings of the literature are specific to people with a particular impairment or category of disability.

*Sensory:* include the loss of sight which is unable to be corrected by glasses or contact lenses; loss of hearing to an extent that communication is restricted or an aid, or substitute for hearing, is used; and speech difficulties (ABS 2016a).

*Intellectual:* include people who have difficulties learning, problem solving, reasoning, or understanding (ABS 2016a).

*Physical:* are characterised by a range of physical functioning and differences often relating to mobility and effecting everyday activities. Physical impairments can include loss of, difficulty or inability to use one or more legs, arms, fingers or toes; chronic or recurrent pain or discomfort that restricts everyday activities; difficulty breathing that restricts everyday activities; and seizures or blackouts (ABS 2016a).

*Psychosocial:* relate to mental, emotional and social functions. Such impairments restrict everyday activities and may include mental illness, difficulty with memory, confusion, nervous or emotional conditions, or social and behavioural difficulties (ABS 2016a). Vornholt et al. (2018) state the distinction between common mental disorders and psychosocial impairments is that the latter are characterised as severe and associated with long-term impairment.

*Head injury, stroke or acquired brain injury:* defined by the ABS as injury 'with long-term effects that restrict everyday activities'.

*Other:* defined as 'receiving treatment or medication for any other long-term conditions or ailments and still restricted in everyday activities' and 'any other long-term conditions resulting in a restriction in everyday activities' (ABS 2016a).

## **Disability is not homogenous**

Heterogeneity of disability results in some individuals being relatively unaffected by their impairment besides the limiting attitudes and beliefs of society (Shakespeare 2014). Shakespeare (2018) asserts disability is best understood as existing on a continuum, or spectrum, as everyone has an impairment; however, not everyone with an impairment considers themselves, or is considered by others, to have a disability.

An individual's impairment will affect personal characteristics and capabilities, and how these relate with the physical and social environment (Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Roulstone 2013; Shakespeare 2018; Vornholt et al. 2018). Different categories of impairments affect individuals differently and thus will exist at different points on the spectrum; in addition, diversity exists within impairments and each category of impairment is best understood on its own spectrum (Shakespeare 2018).

Scholars, and employers, may draw conclusions and make findings which apply to individuals with an impairment on part of the disability continuum (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Shakespeare 2018). However, this knowledge is likely to only apply to a section of the continuum—or a section of the continuum of a particular type of disability. Shakespeare (2018, p. 6) explains, '[i]f disability is on a continuum, and if people are generalising about disability on the basis of one end or the other end of the continuum, then they are likely to disagree with each other because they are talking about different phenomena.' For example, in some cases, an impairment will substantially

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impact an individual; however, in other cases people with disabilities face minimal barriers (Shakespeare 2018). If two people are discussing the effect of disability on employment but one is referring to an individual who is substantially affected and the other is referring to an individual minimally affected, they will find it difficult to resolve their conflicting opinions as they are using the same term to talk about two different experiences (Shakespeare 2018).

### **Note on terminology**

Terminology is affected by the diverse and complex nature of disability (Shakespeare 2018). For this reason, the literature reports a range of terms and wordings used when referring to people with impairments. Shakespeare (2018, p. 3) makes the important argument, which this review promotes, that ‘it is good principle to call people by the names they themselves prefer’ as ‘different people prefer different words’.

At the time of this review, there is a focus on putting people first, as opposed to an individual’s medical condition/s. Nineteen of the total 26 pieces of literature used person first terminology. Six pieces of literature used the term ‘disabled people’ (Barnes 2013; French 2017; Jammers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Roulstone 2013; Shakespeare 2014; 2018). With the exception of Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016), authors who used ‘disabled people’ were from the United Kingdom. Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016) and Shakespeare (2018) state the term ‘people with disabilities’ is used generally outside of the UK, whilst ‘disabled people’ is used in the UK—where the social model originated—to highlight that it is society which causes disability and marginalises people with impairments (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016).

The term ‘people with disabilities’ was adopted in the present review as it is the terminology used by the majority of the total literature used. ‘People with disabilities’ puts people with impairments first, and the plural ‘disabilities’ highlights the diverse and multifaceted nature of impairments, as well as the fact that an individual may have more than one impairment. In addition, ‘people with’ is favoured when referring to people with particular impairments. ‘Impairment’ is used to refer to individual issues, whilst ‘disability’ refers to the social issue.

### **Relationships between disability and employment**

Roulstone (2013) argues the relationship between impairments and employment is complicated. He explains that an individual with ‘minor impairments’ may find it difficult to obtain paid work, for instance due to minimal social capital—that is, networks of relationships across and amongst society—or significant economic and transportation barriers. At the same time, an individual with more ‘significant impairments’ may not face any limitations in a context where they have strong social capital and access to a wide range of resources, and therefore can easily obtain paid work (Roulstone 2013). Experience in seeking and obtaining employment will be different for each individual—due to the nature of their impairment, as well as physical, social and environmental factors.

### **Labour force participation**

Most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data estimates Australians with disabilities are almost a third less likely to be participating in the labour force than people without disabilities (53.4 and 83.2 per cent respectively). In addition, people with disabilities are almost twice as likely

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to be unemployed compared to people without disabilities, with the unemployment rate for people with disabilities at 10.0 per cent, compared to 5.3 per cent for people without disabilities (ABS 2016c, Table 5.3).

Almost half Australians with disabilities at working age (15–64 years of age) are not in the labour force, that is, not employed and not looking for work (ABS 2015, Table 2). Reasons for not being in the labour force differ between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. ‘Permanently unable to work’, ‘long-term illness’ or ‘disability’ are the most reported reasons for people with disabilities who are not looking for work or do not intend to look for work (ABS 2015, Table 22).

### **Type of disability and employment outcomes**

The most frequent barrier to finding a job reported by people across all disability groups not in the labour force is ‘own ill health or disability’ (ABS 2015, Table 23). Type and severity of disability has the strongest impact on employment outcomes of people with disabilities (Henry et al. 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). People with psychological or intellectual disabilities are most likely to be unemployed (20.4 per cent and 20.0 per cent respectively) (ABS 2015, Table 9). People with sensory or physical disabilities have the lowest rates of unemployment (7.7 per cent and 8.2 per cent respectively) (ABS 2015, Table 9); however, unemployment statistics remain higher than comparable statistics for people without disabilities (ABS 2015, Tables 2 & 9). These findings are supported by the literature.

### **Type of disability and attitudes of employers**

Stigma includes stereotypes and prejudice and is often the result of lack of knowledge; this is damaging when it becomes discrimination—behaviour which results from stereotypes and prejudice (Vornholt et al. 2018). Vornholt et al. (2018, p. 47) claim ‘[t]he higher the level of stigmatisation of the disease, the more likely it is that the affected person will experience discrimination’.

Employers favour hiring people with physical disabilities over people with other categories of impairments (Henry et al. 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Shakespeare 2014). People with intellectual disabilities and people with psychosocial disabilities experience greater discrimination from and in the workplace (Henry et al. 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Roulstone 2013; Shakespeare 2014; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). In fact, people with severe mental disorders, or psychosocial disabilities, are one of the most stigmatised groups (Vornholt et al. 2018) and are more likely to be isolated from the paid labour market (Roulstone 2013).

Employers have reported greater challenges employing people with psychosocial disabilities when compared to intellectual and physical disabilities (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Vornholt et al. 2018). Challenges identified by employers appear to be directly related to accommodations needed to enable work, including ‘high job requirements’, ‘dismissal protection’, ‘too much time and effort’ and ‘lack of [job] applications’ (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018, p. 126).

Employers express concerns regarding hiring of people with psychosocial disabilities due to the often invisible nature of the impairments (Henry et al. 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Vornholt et al. 2018). Barriers for people with physical disabilities are believed to be more easily recognisable and adjustments or accommodations more concrete in that they centre around changes to the physical environment (Jetha et al. 2018). The study by Kocman, Fischer and Weber

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(2018) investigated employment preferences of managers responsible for recruitment and hiring in Austria. Just over half of the respondents preferred to employ individuals with any other disability than psychosocial disabilities (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018). This preference became more distinct when participants were asked to choose between people with psychosocial disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities, with psychosocial disabilities being the lowest preference among the majority of recruitment manager respondents (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018).



## Barriers to employment for people with disabilities

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Barriers to employment for people with disabilities must be recognised in order to understand what is required to ensure employment programs for people with disabilities adopt good practice. Barriers can be understood as either: physical, or social and attitudinal (Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Shakespeare 2018).

Physical barriers are the tangible aspects of the physical environment that prevent access. This includes the built environment, technology, means of communication, and service provision. Shakespeare (2018) identifies that barriers in the physical environment are the result of discrimination stemming from negative perceptions and attitudes. Failure to understand and/or consider the accessibility requirements of people with disabilities results in the formation of physical barriers (Shakespeare 2018).

Social and attitudinal barriers are the misperceptions, low expectations, stereotypes and lack of knowledge held by individuals in society that reduce and prevent people with disabilities from gaining equal access. For example, there is an assumption amongst employers that 'distance from the labour market is evidence of lack of interest in paid work and ingrained economic inactivity' (Roulstone 2013, p. 213).

Social and attitudinal barriers are repeatedly presented in the literature as the primary barriers to inclusion and acceptance of people with disabilities in employment. Lack of knowledge about disabilities and people with disabilities is the foundation of these barriers. It is lack of knowledge which leads to the creation of misunderstandings, stereotypes, and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities (Vornholt et al. 2018). Consequently, the capabilities of people with disabilities are underestimated and frequently overlooked by employers (Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013).

Barriers to employment, both physical and social and attitudinal, for people with disabilities are identified in Appendix B. Barriers are diverse. Potential barriers raised by the literature relate to five key areas:

- misperception, misunderstanding and stereotyping
- lack of knowledge
- personal factors
- societal and organisational factors
- workplace environment.

Appendix B identifies specific barriers within these five key areas. The presence and impact of barriers is related to type of impairment as well as an individual's personal and environmental factors.

### What is meaningful and sustainable employment?

The term 'meaningful employment' is frequently used in the literature included in this review (Baker et al. 2018; Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Hedley et al. 2017; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013)—but a definition of the term is absent. Hedley et al. (2017), Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2018) and Vornholt et al. (2018) stress that employment per se is not inherently meaningful for people with disabilities.

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Whilst a concrete definition or framework for meaningful employment is absent from the literature, overall the literature suggests meaningful employment encompasses social inclusion and equal career and employment opportunities. Hedley et al. (2014) add that employment in low paying jobs for a few hours per week is rarely meaningful, and such jobs are often below the person with disabilities' skills and capabilities. Absence of a definition could be attributed to the heterogeneity of impairments and disabilities, access requirements and workplaces which makes the concept difficult to define. As stated above 'need is variable' (Shakespeare 2014, p. 90) and, similarly, what is meaningful for one may not be meaningful for another.

Kocman, Fischer and Weber (2018) note employment improves autonomy, quality of life, and wellbeing for people with disabilities. However, Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2018) argue that these benefits do not transpire without social inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, as well as recognition of the value and capabilities of these employees. Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2018) cite Hall (2009) and identify factors crucial to feeling socially included; of note are acceptance and recognition beyond being a person with disabilities, being employed, and receiving appropriate and sufficient supports. Further, Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) report workplaces which provide supports for access and inclusion have greater capacity to provide meaningful employment for people with disabilities. There is an inextricable relationship between social inclusion and meaningful and sustainable employment (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018). The relationship between these aspects is further supported by Vornholt, Uitdewilligen and Nijhuis (2013) who note that social inclusion is a key indicator of sustainable employment for people with disabilities.

In addition to social inclusion, meaningful employment is contingent on the individual working in a role which aligns with their preferences, where they have opportunities to demonstrate competency and skills completing assigned tasks (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2018) reported some participants found it difficult 'coming to terms with the fact that the job one is employed to perform is so far removed from the job one would like to do'

(p. 30). Those who were employed in a role which aligned with their preferences were more likely to report their jobs were 'meaningful and enjoyable' (p. 32).

Being employed is not sufficient for many people with disabilities—rather they desire a job which 'offer[s] challenges and opportunities for development' (Gustafsson, Peralata & Danermark 2018, p. 30). Opportunities for skills development and career progression aid employees with disabilities in achieving meaningful and sustainable employment (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Nevala et al. 2015).

Earning a salary is integral to independence and social interactions. People with disabilities should be paid, acknowledging and recognising their value in the workplace (Hedley et al. 2014; Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas 2017). Arguably, paid work is a crucial aspect of meaningful and, particularly, sustainable employment for people with disabilities. Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) discuss voluntary work as a barrier to meaningful employment. The authors suggest unpaid employment in Canada is a result of the assumption by employers that people with disabilities do not need to be paid as they are eligible for government funding.

Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2018) report that people with disabilities employed in roles with lower salaries than those of their co-workers are dissatisfied with their job. However, it is

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the perceived difficulty in finding a new job that is a key reason for staying in a dissatisfying role (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018). Participants in the same study reported employment led to feelings of value and belonging, while earning a salary fostered autonomy and independence.

## **Current evidence-based good practice**

Different interventions will be appropriate for different people in different settings  
(Shakespeare 2018, p. 21)

Roulstone (2013 p. 213; citing Marin et al. 2004) states many employment programs for people with disabilities in more developed countries ‘do not work in making major in-roads into the world of paid work’. The barriers to employment for people with disabilities inhibit programs from effectively engaging people in work. Programs which recognise the value of and cater to the capabilities of people with disabilities prove effective in achieving meaningful employment (ILO 2014). Employers must look at practices that have demonstrated capacity to facilitate meaningful and sustainable employment for people with disabilities. The current evidence-based facilitators of meaningful and sustainable employment presented in the scholarly literature are not applicable to all people with disabilities, rather they are a guide.

Supportive workplaces encourage sustainable employment by managing and accommodating the needs and abilities of employees with disabilities (Nevala et al. 2015). Van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth (2014) found the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workplace—including improved employee loyalty, reputation and economic revenue—were so substantial that they outweighed additional cost to the employer. One benefit of note is increased productivity resulting from a more positive work environment, on the job training and support as needed, and workplace role models (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Padkapayeva et al. 2017).

The heterogeneity of people and disabilities is a primary barrier in determining good practice for employment programs for people with disabilities. The literature suggests that good practice cannot be developed and applied as a one-size-fits-all approach (Baker et al. 2018; French 2017; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013; Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare 2018). Each individual has different needs and capabilities and thus there will never be a single set of good practice facilitators that will equally benefit all people with impairments (French 2017; Hedley et al. 2017; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Shakespeare 2014). Accordingly, there is a need for development of good practice for particular types of disabilities. The barriers and facilitators identified in this review will not be applicable to each individual with impairment; this is a reality of the heterogeneity of and within disabilities.

Further, Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) note much of the literature on people with disabilities and employment focuses on advocacy and employment support providers—not employers, HR staff or policymakers. Further, Baker et al. (2018) highlight a primary barrier to successful and meaningful employment for people with disabilities—that is, that scholarly literature and industry publications do not cite each other. Consequently, there is a gap between scholarly, or academic, knowledge and its application in workplaces. As part of the work of Ebru Sumaktas, this review seeks to bridge this knowledge gap.

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## Consultation with people with disabilities

'Nothing about us without us' has been the guiding principle and slogan for the disability rights movement (Shakespeare 2018, p. 14; Initial use of the slogan for disability rights is attributed to James Charlton's book *Nothing About Us Without Us: disability oppression and empowerment* 1998 and 2000). A widely held view expressed in the literature is that people with disabilities must be consulted with and involved in the development of programs which seek to benefit them (French 2017; ILO 2014; Rudstam et al. 2013; Shakespeare 2018). Inclusion and consultation with people with disabilities in the development and implementation of employment programs is a key determinant of program success (French 2017; ILO 2014; Rudstam et al. 2013).

Expertise through experience is a recurring theme in the literature. Lived experience makes people with disabilities the experts of their own circumstances and best placed to determine what is best for them (Shakespeare 2018). The knowledge of professionals should be recognised and consulted as required; however, the power needs to reside with people with disabilities (Shakespeare 2018).

Employers should start by recognising that an individual with an impairment is the expert of their impairment and access requirements. Programs developed and led by human resources (HR) staff, without consultation with people with disabilities, tend to fall short of instigating social inclusion and meaningful employment for employees with disabilities (Meacham et al. 2017). Programs should be developed with participants not at or for them (Rudstam et al. 2013).

Consultation with people with disabilities must be front of mind in application of any good practices as it forms the foundation of all other good practices relating to employment for people with disabilities. Not consulting with people with disabilities risks creating or furthering social exclusion and vulnerability. Without using expertise of people with disabilities in developing employment programs, employers are likely to make generalisations and assumptions that may result in production of false knowledge and insensitivity, and promotion of stereotypes—all of which are contrary to inclusion (Shakespeare 2018).

## Focus on capabilities

Heterogeneity of people with and without disabilities results in a spectrum of capabilities and impairments (Baker et al. 2018; Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Shakespeare 2014). Dominant discourse devalues people with disabilities and, when compared to a person without disabilities, situates them as 'less able' (Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Shakespeare 2014; Shakespeare 2018). The research suggests a more accurate representation is that people with disabilities have different capabilities, not diminished competency. Some people with disabilities have reported that, in comparison to people without their impairment, they have stronger skills in aspects such as tolerance of repetitive tasks, retention of information, and verbal language skills, among others (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). Employers who recognise and value unique individual skills and capabilities stand to benefit from employing people with disabilities (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). Further, whilst there is reported concern amongst employers that people with disabilities are less productive; the literature asserts that, with the right accommodations, people with disabilities actually contribute positively to a more productive workplace (Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; ILO 2014; Jetha et al. 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Meacham et al. 2017).

Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016) explores how people with disabilities challenge the discourse of 'lower productivity' in their workplace. The research participants created a positive

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identity for themselves in regard to their productivity in their workplaces by: (1) challenging negative discourse; (2) redefining the understanding of 'productivity'; and (3) promoting collective, rather than individual, responsibility for productivity (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). French 2017 explains that whilst not every person with an impairment requires more time to complete tasks, for many people with impairments the reality is that tasks simply take longer. Employers must accommodate this by recognising extra time may be necessary for employees with disabilities to fulfil roles and responsibilities (French 2017). French (2017, p. 171) notes people with visual impairments 'take longer to accomplish tasks and consequently work longer hours' in order to ensure job requirements are met. As a result, many people with visual impairments seek employment in roles, or workplaces, where they can use their own time to 'catch up' (French 2017).

Kalargyrou (2014) notes that holding all employees—with and without disabilities—to the same standards is good practice for employment of people with disabilities. However, Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016) have suggested using colleagues without disabilities as the standard for assessing productivity can be damaging as it promotes negative discourse around reduced productivity of people with disabilities. Consequently, using employees without disabilities as the standard reinforces the construct of people with disabilities as 'less able' than people without disabilities—rather than acknowledging that the capabilities of each individual differs.

## **Senior management support**

Management must be active in building positive disability discourse and attitudes as visible support from top or senior management is critical to developing an inclusive workplace (Erickson et al. 2014; Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013). The management team must promote an 'equal treatment', not 'different treatment', approach to accommodations for employees with disabilities (Kalargyrou 2014; Meacham et al. 2017). An equal treatment approach recognises barriers to employment for people with disabilities and provides reasonable and necessary workplace accommodations in consultation with people with disabilities to ensure equal access for employees with and without disabilities.

Inclusion of disability in an organisation's diversity policy is a sign of public commitment to employment of people with disabilities by management. However, this does not always result in commitment in practice (Erickson et al. 2013; Meacham et al. 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014). The values of a workplace are set and exemplified by the leadership team (ILO 2014; Kalargyrou 2014). Inclusion is more likely to occur where programs seeking to successfully employ people with disabilities are the responsibility of the operating managers of the business and not the exclusive responsibility of HR or corporate social responsibility departments (ILO 2014). Senior management should demonstrate positive perceptions, inclusion and respect of employees with disabilities in order to set an example for the workplace (Baker et al. 2018).

## **Inclusive recruitment and hiring practices**

Recruitment strategies and practices must be inclusive of people with disabilities (Meacham et al. 2017). Word-of-mouth and personal recommendations exclude potential employees who do not have strong bridging social capital, that is, connecting networks or relations (van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014). Van Kooy, Bowman and Bodsworth (2014) note the increasing use of low cost and online methods of recruitment tend to exclude people with disabilities.

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Many participants in the study by Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) identified recruitment and hiring practices that exclude people with disabilities. In particular, people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can find the traditional social interview process a barrier, despite often having the knowledge and skills required for the role (Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017). Employers should take into consideration the accessibility requirements of the interview process, not just the job itself (Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017). Instead of relying on candidates to identify their impairment, workplaces should demonstrate in their job postings and workplace practices inclusivity of people with disabilities and awareness of accommodations candidates may require. Solutions may include practical interviews and non-traditional resumes that will allow people with disabilities—such as ASD—to more effectively demonstrate their skills and knowledge (Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017).

Staff involved in the interview process should be made aware of any identified impairments and required accommodations. Padkapayeva et al. (2017) suggest education and/or training of HR staff as well as workplace supervisors in appropriate practices for interviewing people with impairments. Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) extend this recommendation to include senior management and employees in entry-level positions.

## **Workplace adjustments/customised supports**

Workplace adjustments and customised supports for people with disabilities are characteristics of workplaces that seek to reduce or remove barriers (Jetha et al. 2018). Programs and supports that are customisable are more likely to be successful as they can be adjusted to suit contextual factors (Rudstam et al. 2013). Type and severity of impairment, the workplace, requirements of the job, and skills and capabilities should all be considered when developing individualised supports (Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018).

Workplace adjustments must be customisable, flexible and made in consultation with the person receiving the accommodations (French 2017; ILO 2014; Meacham et al. 2017; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Roulstone 2013; Rudstam et al. 2013). Many people with disabilities do not require workplace adjustments at all, and the adjustments that are needed may cost less and be far less complex than employers anticipate (Baker et al. 2018; Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Vornholt et al. 2018). It is unlikely that the needs of everyone can be accommodated—there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Workplaces should ensure access for a broad and diverse population. Although unique and customised accommodations will be required for some individuals, implementation of general, or mainstream, accommodations minimises the need to self-identify impairment.

Three frequently discussed good practices for workplace adjustments/customised supports are:

### **Modifying job requirements under job descriptions and job matching**

Hedley et al. (2014) and Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016) report job descriptions that include requirements to encourage an ‘ideal’ candidate, but which are not essential to the job or workplace, are an unnecessary employment barrier to people with disabilities as they position people with disabilities as unsatisfactory (Hedley et al. 2014; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Vornholt et al. 2018). Skills which are often included in job descriptions as a matter of course but may not be requisite to the role, including social skills, teamwork and multi-tasking, can exclude people with disabilities (Hedley et al. 2014; Vornholt et al. 2018).

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Job restructuring, altering the required skills and experience to be inclusive of people with disabilities, is encouraged as good practice. In employment, this practice involves modifying requirements to promote capabilities, and includes providing reasonable and necessary accommodations to meet the needs of the employee (Padkapayeva et al. 2017). This practice has its origins in supported employment programs. However, job restructuring differs to supported employment in that positions are not specifically designed and written for candidates with disabilities. Job restructuring adopts a ‘place-then-train’ approach. That is, once a candidate is selected for employment, the job is adjusted for that specific employee in order to improve access and equal treatment (Padkapayeva et al. 2017).

Modification of job requirements diminishes work disabilities; that is, disabilities which arise within workplaces when job requirements are a barrier to a person with an impairment. Vornholt et al. (2018) provide the example of people with a social phobia and/or anxiety impairment. Individuals with such impairment may thrive in a work environment that does not require them to initiate conversation and contact with others; however, they may be unable to work in a role which requires initiation of conversation and contact with clients.

The literature promotes a two-way-approach to ‘job fit’. A two-way job fit model requires employers to provide reasonable and necessary accommodations and, in some instances, to change the roles and responsibilities of the job in order to make it a ‘good fit’ for employees with impairments (Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Rudstam et al. 2013; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017). That is, it is the employers’ responsibility to remove barriers that cause impairments to become disabilities. For example, employers may need to alter workplace or team methods of communication for an employee with a hearing impairment by conducting meetings and other communications via email. The second aspect of the model focuses on how people with impairments are able to ‘fit’ the role. That is, on employing candidates who suit the position, and have the skills and capabilities necessary to fulfil job requirements, whether they have an impairment or not. A focus remains on promoting skills and capabilities and matching an individual’s skills and interests to a job (Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017). Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) provide an example where focus was drawn to capabilities, not what the individual would not be able to do. The workplace required everyone to be able to handle and deal with cash. It was proposed the workplace offer a position for the individual to unload the delivery truck—where handling cash would not be required.

The two-way job fit model is mirrored in targeted and identified roles. Targeted and identified roles are those advertised by employers wishing to employ a person with a particular characteristic, for example a person who is neurodiverse. Such opportunities are developed to match an individual’s strengths and accessibility requirements to a role so that the specific candidate’s exposure to avoidable challenges is limited (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018). This approach removes the expectation that people with impairments must adapt to an environment which is disabling (French 2017). Significantly, responsibility is removed from people with disabilities and placed with employers.

The literature articulates a common belief amongst many employers that people with disabilities are unable to fulfil many roles as the nature of the work is such that it could not be performed by people with disabilities (Erickson et al. 2014). A two-way job fit emphasises the individual’s capabilities and acknowledges accommodations required to assist the individual to meet the requirements of the role (Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Rudstam et al. 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018).

Further, according to Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2018), placing an individual with an impairment in a role where the individual’s capabilities do not match the job’s requirements

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amplifies that individual's impairment. Job matching according to an individual's interests and skills is a key factor for the success of sustainable employment for people with disabilities. As per the social model, discussed previously, such an approach understands disability to be the result of the interaction between a person with an impairment and societal barriers.

## **Flexibility**

Half of the 20 studies included in this review note inflexible workplaces and work arrangements as a barrier to successful employment of people with disabilities (Baker et al. 2018; French 2017; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Jetha et al. 2018; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Roulstone 2013; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013). Equally, flexible workplaces and work arrangements as a workplace accommodation were reported to be beneficial. Many impairments are of a fluctuating, degenerative and episodic nature (Shakespeare 2014). Individuals with impairments that are not categorised as episodic may still have episodes of increased severity (Shakespeare 2014). Flexible work arrangements are required to cater to this.

In particular, flexibility—which may include shorter days, part-time work, more breaks or rest periods during work days, and acknowledgment of regular leave requirements—is recommended in relation to work hours or schedules, and the workplace environment (Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013).

## **Provision of Assistive Technology (AT) and human assistance**

Assistive Technology (AT) is defined 'as equipment or technology that persons with disabilities can use to overcome or minimise barriers at the workplace' (Padkapayeva et al. 2017, p. 2137). Such technologies do not have to be designed specifically for people with impairments in mind. Often it is mainstream technology that provides solutions to access requirements. AT includes Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which allow for digital communication. Examples of AT include mobile phones, tablets, email and the internet, but also simple, low-tech and low-cost devices, such as hooks, thick pens, gloves, and ramps (Padkapayeva et al. 2017).

AT has proven useful in reducing workplace barriers and providing customised support to people with disabilities in the workplace—voice to text software and screen readers have proven beneficial to many people with visual impairments (French 2017), while ergonomic desks and keyboards may help many people with physical impairments (Nevala et al. 2015). However, there are limitations to AT and the potential for it to create further barriers. There can be a need for human assistance for AT to be effective.

Jetha et al.'s (2018) study of young Canadian adults (aged 18 to 35) with disabilities found AT to be the third most necessary hard accommodation required for employment. Data from Australia found 38.6 per cent of Australians with disabilities required special equipment in order to work (ABS 2015, Table 17). Use of AT has been demonstrated to reduce hours required to train employees, increase independence, confidence and rates of achieving competitive employment, improve time management, and benefit productivity (Hedley et al. 2017). Benefits of AT were also reported for people with visual impairments (French 2017), physical disabilities (Padkapayeva et al. 2017), and people with disabilities generally (Nevala et al. 2015).

Challenges of AT include inappropriate choice of technology, inadequate training on use, lack of knowledge about potential accommodations, cost, and failure to include human assistance



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the technology and those providing assistance, frequent evaluation of accommodation needs, and ongoing human support (Padkapayeva et al. 2017).

However, French (2017) stresses the capacity for technology to ‘reduce and obscure the needs for meaningful social change and the adoption of alternative solutions such as human help’ (pp. 167–168). AT should not be assumed to replace human assistance in the workplace as many people with disabilities report finding human assistance more helpful (French 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017). Nevala et al. (2015) noted the assistance of others at work was a key facilitator of equal career and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Additionally, Padkapayeva et al. (2017) found employees with disabilities who engaged with human personal assistants at work were able to increase their work capacity from ‘substantially limited to not limited at all’ (p. 2,140). Personal assistants in this context provided support with daily activities and tasks—including notetaking, interpreting, driving and reading—to employees with impairments.

Telework is reported by Baker et al. (2018) and Padkapayeva et al. (2017) as a useful practice for engaging people with disabilities in employment. Telework is the practice of working from home using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Benefits include minimising physical environment and transportation barriers (Baker et al. 2018). However, ICT telework has complex limitations and can be a barrier to employment in itself (Baker et al. 2018; Padkapayeva et al. 2017). Of note, working from home reduces social contact, which may cause isolation (Padkapayeva et al. 2017). Although telework challenges the findings of the importance of human assistance, it can be beneficial to those who do not require human assistance. Need is variable and assistive technology, human assistance, and/or opportunities for telework must be provided in consultation with the employee.

### **Mentoring/natural support**

Integration of people with disabilities into the workplace is strongly assisted by collaboration between colleagues. This is referred to in the literature as ‘mentoring’ (Padkapayeva et al. 2017; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014) or ‘natural support’ (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018). Experienced employees may be formally appointed to mentor a new employee with disabilities and provide on-the-job training. Alternatively, collaboration and inclusion amongst teams may be promoted by the workplace. Almost half of Australians with disabilities require ‘a special support person to assist or train on the job’ or ‘help from someone at work’ as a workplace accommodation in order to work (ABS 2015, Table 17). Human support and assistance is particularly important for people with disabilities who are profoundly limited in core activities, and those with intellectual disabilities (ABS 2015, Table 17).

As will be discussed in the next section, experience working with people with disabilities reduces bias and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. Mentoring/natural support can facilitate interactions between employees with and without disabilities, allowing colleagues to get to know each other, reducing social distance (the perception of substantial difference between oneself and another (Vornholt et al. 2018)) and removing bias. ‘Mentoring’ and ‘natural support’ is a skill itself that will benefit employees as well as improve workplace culture by promoting social inclusion and acceptance (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014).

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## **Reducing bias in the workplace**

Knowledge, understanding and attitudes of employers and colleagues can either be a barrier or facilitator of meaningful and sustainable employment for people with disabilities (Nevala et al. 2015; Vornholt et al. 2018). In order to be a facilitator, employers and colleagues must be informed with accurate knowledge and have experience with people with disabilities (Nevala et al. 2015).

Social distance is the perception of substantial difference between oneself and another (Vornholt et al. 2018). Vornholt, Uitdewilligen and Nijhuis (2013) and Vornholt et al (2018) report a majority of the general population feels social distance towards people with disabilities (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). This distance results in isolation from and negative perceptions of the 'Other' and of the capabilities of employees with disabilities (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). Workplaces where employers and colleagues feel little social distance between themselves and people with disabilities—that is, they view people with disabilities as similar to themselves—are more accepting and see fewer barriers for employment (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013). This acceptance and understanding can translate into effective implementation of accommodations.

Experience with people with disabilities reduces social distance (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018). People with first-hand experience of disabilities have more positive attitudes than those who have no experience with people with disabilities (French 2017; Hedley et al. 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). However, while experience with people with disabilities can promote positive perceptions amongst employers, problematic experiences with a previous employee or colleague with disabilities can result in negative perceptions (French 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018). To combat bias, employers and management must foster an open and diverse environment.

A workplace seeking to reduce bias and focus on the capabilities of people with disabilities will foster an open and accepting workplace. An open workplace is key for employees to feel they are able to identify their own impairments. Requests for workplace accommodations is the principal reason for an employee making an impairment known to their employer (Vornholt et al. 2018). Self-identification of one's own impairment is central to being able to receive necessary support, as employers require knowledge in order to be able to implement accommodations (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Jetha et al. 2018; Vornholt et al. 2018).

## **Increasing knowledge of disabilities amongst staff**

Research shows that the negative perceptions of people with disabilities in the workplace—including perception of lower productivity, dependency and even incompetence—are the result of the dissemination of stereotypes (Henry et al. 2017; Meacham et al. 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018).

An employer directly influences how a person with disabilities is accepted and included in the workplace (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). Employers can adopt practices that challenge negative discourse by educating and raising awareness of disabilities, and the value of diversity, in their workplace (Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018).

Lack of knowledge and negative perceptions among colleagues can result in resistance to working with colleagues with disabilities (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018). In particular, lack of knowledge can sustain notions of 'lower productivity', 'dependency' and 'incompetence', which influences how employees with disabilities are accepted and engaged with

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(Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016). These prejudices foster discrimination and place additional expectations and conditions on employees with disabilities in a workplace (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016).

HR units should develop education and awareness programs with information about disabilities, deconstructing stereotypes and focusing on capabilities, and good practice for working with people with disabilities (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Padkapayeva et al. 2017). Training programs can be strengthened by including targeted strategies, which, if adopted by individuals, will reduce negative perceptions of people with disabilities (Baker et al. 2018). The literature reviewed did not specify that HR professionals must have appropriate knowledge and sensitivity training themselves before conducting education and awareness programs. As discussed above, all programs that seek to assist people with disabilities must be developed, and preferably led, by people with disabilities (French 2017; ILO 2014; Rudstam et al. 2013; Shakespeare 2018). Rashid, Hodgetts and Nicholas (2017) argue disability awareness and inclusion training needs to target people at all levels of the workplace and that this education should begin at entry-level positions Padkapayeva et al. (2017, p. 2141) suggests including positive stories of employees with disabilities in ‘both formal and informal discussions and communication packages’.

Dissemination of positive stories can deconstruct stigma in the workplace (Baker et al. 2018; Henry et al. 2014; Padkapayeva et al. 2017). These narratives can go beyond the specific workplace to include the general contributions of people with disabilities within the workplace sector—for example, stories that discuss the economic contributions of people with disabilities (Baker et al. 2018), or stories publicly recognising workplaces that have demonstrated success in hiring of people with disabilities (Henry et al. 2014). Examples of these stories are included in the ILO report (2014).

Narratives that promote good practices within workplaces and success stories from elsewhere can encourage and guide others to develop their own programs for engaging people with disabilities in employment (Henry et al. 2014) and reduce stigma (Vornholt et al. 2018). It must be noted, however, that these stories may not be recognisable to all people with disabilities (Shakespeare 2014). The diversity of impairments and disabilities, impact of impairment on employment, and what ‘success’ looks like will vary significantly among people with disabilities.

## How is successful employment measured?

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Facilitators of employment, as outlined in this review, have the capacity to enable inclusion of people with disabilities within the workplace. The number of employees with disabilities in a workplace is not synonymous with successful employment of people with disabilities in that workplace. A workplace may have a number of employees with disabilities; however, employees may not feel included, satisfied or valued—this is not an indication of successful employment.

Eight of the 20 studies reviewed note particular aspects and characteristics of successful employment for people with disabilities (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; ILO 2014; Jammaers, Zanoni, & Hardonk 2016; Kocman, Fischer, & Weber 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013). Specifically, successful employment is characterised by:

1. *social inclusion,*
2. *job satisfaction, and*
3. *opportunities to utilise competencies and be valued.*

There are significant similarities between successful and meaningful employment. The three characteristics of successful employment for people with disabilities, outlined in the literature, mirror the characteristics of meaningful employment.

These three aspects should be considered in measuring outcomes and can only be measured by the individual employees with disabilities. People with disabilities are the experts of their own experience and are well placed to measure the success of employment programs they are engaged in. Again, consulting people with disabilities in measuring success should be a central consideration.

Rates of successful employment increase in workplaces where people with disabilities feel valued and accepted (Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018). Success should measure the equal opportunity for advancement and progression. Key to this is an open and accessible work environment. Support systems and accommodations for employees with disabilities are a key indicator of a workplace seeking to foster successful employment for people with disabilities (Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark 2018; Kocman, Fischer and Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017).

## Conclusion

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This review sought to answer the question—'What are the characteristics of current good practice in employment programs for people with disabilities?'—by reviewing the peer-reviewed literature published in English within the last five years.

For employment to be successful for people with disabilities it should be meaningful and sustainable. This will vary between individuals. People with disabilities are the experts of their own experience and, as such, are best positioned to determine if their employment is meaningful and sustainable. Employment is more likely to achieve this when the individual feels socially included and their career and employment opportunities are equal to those of people without disabilities. Do they feel included and valued, have job satisfaction and opportunities to utilise skills and competences in the workplace? Pay, or salary, further enables autonomy and independence and represents a tangible indication to employees with disabilities that they are valued in the workplace.

Characteristics of current good practice identified in this review are interconnected and do not exist in isolation from each other. Eight characteristics are repeatedly presented by the literature as central to current good practice in employment programs for people with disabilities.

### **Principles of current good practice:**

- consultation with people with disabilities
- focus on capabilities
- senior management support
- inclusive recruitment and hiring practices
- workplace adjustments/customised supports
- mentoring/natural support
- reducing bias in the workplace
- increasing knowledge of disabilities amongst staff

Understanding the diversity of disabilities is a primary enabler of the effective implementation of good practice. Workplaces should seek to provide access to and inclusion of a diverse population, whilst also recognising unique and customised accommodations will be required for some individuals.

It is unlikely the barriers to and facilitators of meaningful employment identified in this review are universally applicable across all people with disabilities. This review considers 'disability' generally, and further research into specific impairments is required to refine and add to its findings. The facilitators outlined in this review serve as a guide to current good practice for employment programs, as well as a tool to benchmark existing programs and processes.

People with disabilities are an underserved and undervalued group. At first instance, people with disabilities should not be constructed as less able or less than people without disabilities. Individuals must be recognised as unique and people should not be constructed in comparison to the 'normal'. People with disabilities, just like people without disabilities, are capable and have unique skills and knowledge. Workplaces must promote inclusion and acceptance by, first, employing people with disabilities and, secondly, providing workplace adjustments and customised supports to ensure people with disabilities have equal access and are treated fairly. At each step,

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there is need for consultation, a focus on capabilities, support from senior management, and a reduction of bias towards and an increase in knowledge of disabilities.

Success is difficult to measure, and this could be a fruitful area for future research. It can, however, be argued that the number of employees in a workplace who report that their work is both meaningful and sustainable is an appropriate measure of success of employment programs for people with disabilities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: List of Reviewed Literature

**Table 1: List of Reviewed Literature**

<b>Literature</b>	<b>Country/ies</b>	<b>Reference type</b>	<b>Primary or Secondary research</b>
Baker et al. 2018	United States	Peer-reviewed journal article	Secondary
Erickson et al. 2014	United States	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
French 2017	England	Book, section	Secondary
Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014	United States	Book, section	Secondary
Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018	Sweden	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Hedley et al. 2017	Australia	Peer-reviewed journal article	Secondary
Henry et al. 2014	United States	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
International Labour Office, Conditions of Work and Equality Department, & Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO) 2014	Switzerland	Report	Secondary
Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016	Belgium and Iceland	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Jetha et al. 2018	Canada	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Kalargyrou 2014	United States	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018	Austria	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Meacham et al. 2017	Australia	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Nevala et al. 2015	Finland	Peer-reviewed journal article	Secondary
Padkapayeva et al. 2017	Canada	Peer-reviewed journal article	Secondary
Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017	Canada	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
Rudstam et al. 2013	United States	Peer-reviewed journal article	Primary
van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014	Australia	Report	Secondary
Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013	Netherlands	Peer-reviewed journal article	Secondary
Vornholt et al. 2018	Netherlands (4); Canada (2); Germany (2); United States (1)	Peer-reviewed journal article	Secondary

## Appendix B: Barriers to employment for people with disabilities

**Table 2.1: Misperception, misunderstanding, and stereotyping**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>References</b>
Gap between presumed and actual capabilities of people with disabilities	Baker et al. 2018; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013; Stafford et al. 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Homogenisation and stereotypes of people with disabilities	Baker et al. 2018; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk, 2016; Kalargyrou 2014; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Stafford et al. 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Perceived lack of skills and low expectation of capabilities of performance of people with disabilities	Baker et al. 2018; Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Henry et al. 2014; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Jetha et al. 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013; Stafford et al. 2017; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Employer, and co-worker, negative beliefs and attitudes	Baker et al. 2018; Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Kalargyrou 2014; Jetha et al. 2018; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Stafford et al. 2017; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis, 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Misperceived time, cost and effort to make accommodations	Baker et al. 2018; Erickson et al. 2014; Henry et al. 2014; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Jetha et al. 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Rudstam et al. 2013; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Assumption that technology is a solution that does not require training or human assistance	Erickson et al. 2014; French 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017.
'One-size-fits-all' approach	Baker et al. 2018; French 2017; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013.

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**Table 2.2: Lack of knowledge**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>References</b>
Lack of knowledge and support for employers to implement inclusion and support programs for people with disabilities	Gower, Rudstam & Young 2014; Jetha et al. 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013; Stafford et al. 2017; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Lack of or no experience with people with disabilities	French 2017; Jammaers, Zaroni & Hardonk 2016; Jetha et al. 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Nevala et al. 2015; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Lack of or no experience employing people with disabilities	Hedley et al. 2017; Jammaers, Zaroni & Hardonk 2016; Jetha et al. 2018; Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Nevala et al. 2015; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.

**Table 2.3: Personal factors**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>References</b>
Nature of impairment	Henry et al. 2014; Jetha et al. 2018; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis, 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Self-identification of impairment	Gower, Rudstam, & Young 2014; Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Jetha et al. 2018; Nevala et al. 2015; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.

**Table 2.4: Societal and organisational factors**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>References</b>
Insufficient training of people with disabilities, resulting in lack of required workplace skills	Erickson et al. 2014; Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark 2018; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Nevala et al. 2015; Stafford et al. 2017.
Mismatch between skills of potential employees and available jobs	Henry et al. 2014; Hedley et al. 2017; Jammaers, Zaroni & Hardonk 2016; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014; Vornholt et al. 2018.
Social distance	Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013; Vornholt et al. 2018.

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**Table 2.5: Workplace environment**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>References</b>
Inflexible workplaces and work arrangements	Baker et al. 2018; French 2017; Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Jetha et al. 2018; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013.
Exclusion of people with disabilities from planning, developing and implementing workplace accommodations	French 2017; ILO 2014; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rudstam et al. 2013.
Unsupportive work environment	Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk 2016; Kalargyrou 2014; Kocman, Fischer & Weber 2018; Meacham et al. 2017; Nevala et al. 2015; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013.
Inaccessible recruitment and hiring practices	Meacham et al. 2017; Padkapayeva et al. 2017; Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas 2017; van Kooy, Bowman & Bodsworth 2014.





