# Episode 3: Adjustments

Hello, and welcome to episode three of this Australian Disability Network miniseries podcast where we're talking about how to make Australian boardrooms more accessible, and inclusive.

My name is Andy McLean, and in this episode, we're going to look at adjustments that you can make to the way that your board runs in order to make it more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.

So, let's jump in and get started. Episode three Adjustments.

Put simply, an adjustment is a change that helps somebody with a disability to participate equitably as a board member. Such adjustments can be made without compromising the board's operations or efficiency, and they often require no financial outlay. A simple example would be when a director is using crutches, you might hold a board meeting close to the exit point of the building.

Typically, we think about adjustments in three ways, physical spaces, communication channels, and technology. So, in this podcast episode, we're going to provide eight practical tips for adjustments that can help your board make the most of all your directors’ talent. Now, those eight tips include a golden rule.

They include a discussion about meeting invites, we talk about physical access, we talk about online board meetings, hybrid meetings, and building breaks into meetings. We also talk about what accessible documents involve and also feedback mechanisms.

So, let's jump in and talk about all of them. So, first up the golden rule. Everyone experiences disability differently. So, it's important not to make assumptions about adjustments that may or may not be required to find out how to adjust your board's processes, practices, procedures, or environment, to make it accessible for a particular director. Simply ask that person, they're the experts after all.

Our second tip is about meeting invites. So, in board meeting invitations that you send out, include a simple standard sentence asking invitees to mention any accessibility requirements before the meeting, and always offer them two modes of contact. So, for example, in that email invitation, you might include the words, if you require any adjustments to participate in this meeting, please contact me via email or phone. Once asked, people are much more likely to feel comfortable requesting the adjustments that they need.

Our third tip is about physical access. And that's all about considering the accessibility of the building, and the meeting room where a board meeting is planned to be held. Ask yourself will directors be able to get to into and around each room?

Our fourth tip is about online and video meetings. So the basic protocols you can introduce for online video board meetings include ensuring that one person speaks at a time using the standard functionality of video meeting platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Google workplace to display captions in real time to soundcheck your technology before the meeting, and at the start of saying something each speaker should say their name out loud first, for example, Andy speaking. And while we are on that topic, let's hear from Lyn Birnie, Board Member for East Coast Apprenticeships, West Moreton Hospital and Health Service, Ipswich Zonta and Ipswich Legacy.

**Lyn Birnie** 03:37

Often in a board meeting, you're sat at a long table. That's it, particularly if you're joined by technology. It's hard to hear things, I have hearing aids. So, I struggle to hear, and I know that something funny has been said because everybody, everybody laughs And I think, okay, I missed that, etc.

Somebody mentioned about asking people with disability, what adjustments they needed. Now, I would never have thought to do that. But they talked about, for instance, putting captions on. So, I actually now have that on my Zoom in Teams meetings, because I now know that that thing exists. And that helps me to hear what's being said.

So, if a board is aware that people have needs, then that helps to include people more in the body of the meeting where people aren't left out because they can't participate in part of it, and you don't lose the exposure to their skills.

**Andy McLean** 04:31

That was Lyn Birnie. Tip number five is about hybrid meetings. So, a board meeting where some attendees are together in the room, while others are joining online is often required because of people's competing schedules. These can also be especially helpful for directors who may be immunocompromised or those who don't live near accessible public transport. So, for such meetings, consider the table setup in the room where people are gathered. A U-shaped table can ensure that everyone online can see the people who are speaking in the room, and the all the faces can be seen.

Our sixth tip is all around building breaks into meetings. Everyone benefits when you build a break into a meeting, just five minutes per hour allows everyone to reset and recharge. It also allows time for anyone who needs it to take medication, change a colostomy bag, have a snack if they're diabetic or stretch if they have back pain, and it allows anyone who is using captioning services to switch off their device to avoid digital fatigue.

Tip number seven is about accessible documents. So before finalising and sending out board documents, there's a simple step that you can take to ensure they're accessible. If you go into apps such as PowerPoint or Word, Microsoft has a built-in accessibility checker that suggests small changes that you can make so that it's easier for everyone to read and analyze the documents. This can be particularly valuable for readers who are epileptic or colorblind for example, or for those who use assistive technology such as screen reading software. We explore accessible communication in more detail in the next podcast episode.

And our eighth and final tip is about feedback mechanisms. And that's all about establishing open channels for feedback and regularly seeking input on the effectiveness of adjustments, commit to making continuous improvements in creating an inclusive environment.

Now we're going to have a quick chat about reasonable adjustments. So, the Australian Disability Discrimination Act states an adjustment is considered reasonable unless it causes quote, unjustifiable hardship to the employer or organisation. Unjustifiable hardship could be in the form of financial cost, a change to the physical building, that's not possible due to counsel or other restrictions, or an adjustment that would disadvantage other employees or board members.

Here's what to consider when deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable. How effective the adjustment is in helping the board member with disability to contribute, if or how others may benefit from the adjustment, the practicality of the adjustment. The disruption caused to business operations, the financial or other costs of the adjustment in the context of your financial and other resources, the nature of business activities and organisation’s size, and the availability of financial or other assistance to help make the adjustment.

And finally, just to wrap up this episode on adjustments, let's give the final word to Dr. Alan Hough, who is the Director of Purpose At Work.

**Dr Alan Hough** 07:43

The simple rules are ask what adjustments a person requires if any, do as they ask, check that their needs are being met and do that, after their appointment and across time. Do treat directors with disability as having valuable lived experience as well as their technical skills. But just remember that no director acts as a representative of all people of a particular class and do recognise that the director brings a range of knowledge, skills and abilities.

**Andy McLean** 08:16

That was Dr. Alan Hough, and that brings us to the end of this episode. Thank you for listening to this Australian Disability Network miniseries podcast. Do stay tuned because in episode four, we're going to look in depth at culture and communication and a whole stack of proven ways that can help make boards more accessible and inclusive for people with disability. Every episode in our podcast series features input from directors who have lived experience of disability, providing practical suggestions and recommendations that boards of directors can put into action today.

All of our episodes are now available on our website, AustralianDisabilityNetwork.org.au. That's Australian Disability Network, all one word .org.au And that's where you'll also find our comprehensive directors guide on improving access and inclusion in the boardroom.

And so, until our next episode, this is me Andy McLean saying, thanks so much for listening, and goodbye for now.