Getting Workplace Adjustments out of the "too hard basket"

Research into workplace adjustments with perspectives from employers and people with disability.

> I worry about being put in the 'too hard' basket if I did raise workplace adjustments… I would prefer to get through without [adjustments due to fear of being disadvantaged and regarded as] a 'problem' from the start".

Survey respondent, person with disability

Contents

Tables

Figures

About the research

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

About the research

The Australian Disability Network helps organisations to: 1) employ people with disability and 2) design their products and services for people with disability. We work closely with 450 member organisations and government on projects that shape the future of access and inclusion in Australia.

Australian Disability Network.
Level 3, 80 Clarence Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

Phone: (02) 8270 9200

Email: info@AusDN.org.au

Website: www.AustralianDisabilityNetwork.org.au

Correspondence on research:
research@AusDN.org.au

Using our research
Materials contained in this document are © Copyright of Australian Disability Network 2024

Suggested citation: Australian Disability Network. (2024). *Getting workplace adjustments out of the "too hard basket."* Australian Disability Network.

Acknowledgements
Acknowledgement of country: Australian Disability Network acknowledges the traditional custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present.

The research team would like to thank the following for their valuable contributions to this project:

- Survey respondents who took the time to fill in the relevant survey.

- Interviewees who participated in an online interview or focus group.

- Australian Disability Network's Disability Employee Network who co-designed and reviewed the surveys.

- Social Deck who generously donated their time to review early drafts of the surveys.

- RMIT who supported the research by enabling full access for Australian Disability Network's Research Lead to their online databases.

- Bowness Family Foundation for funding the inclusion of people with communication access needs in the research.

- Australian Disability Network's members and other stakeholders who publicised the surveys with their networks.

Disclaimer
Any errors and omissions are those of the author. Considerable effort was made to accurately capture, record and appropriately analyse information contained in this report; however, the conclusions are subject to the limitations of the data and methodologies used and described.

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Executive summary

Issues we are addressing

The aim of this research is to understand how people with disability and organisations experience workplace adjustments, by way of surveys, interviews and focus groups.

This research provides an evidence base for organisations seeking to:

• Develop, improve, and sustain workplace adjustments practices through policy and processes.

• Proactively provide multiple accessible opportunities for employees and jobseekers to engage with organisations' workplace adjustments information and processes.

• Influence attitudinal changes at organisational level and beyond.

Process we undertook

400 survey respondents and interviewees who identified as having disability described their experiences of barriers to accessing and understanding workplace adjustments and recommended how organisations could address these barriers.

200 survey respondents and interviewees from organisations also identified barriers and shared their experience of developing and implementing workplace adjustments policies, processes, and systems to remove barriers.

Key findings

The research demonstrated that workplace adjustments have a far-reaching impact on the lives of people with disability.

1. The qualitative data was thematically analysed and yielded three overarching themes:

   • **Process**
   This theme relates to workplace behaviours based on organisations' workplace adjustments policies and practices.

   • **Proactivity**
   This theme relates to specific organisational attributes of welcoming, valuing, and including people with disability. Organisations demonstrate these attributes by taking on the responsibilities of ensuring fair and equitable workplaces and experiences for all jobseekers and employees with disability.

   • **Attitudes**
   This theme relates to conscious and unconscious perspectives, beliefs, values and feelings about disability.

2. Nearly half **(46 per cent)** of people with disability said they have experienced increased job satisfaction as a result of receiving workplace adjustments, and **40 per cent** said they experienced decreased job satisfaction as a result of not receiving workplace adjustments.

3. People with disability feel **"daunted"** by the process of having to 'disclose' personal details in order to request adjustments that would enable them to do the essential requirements of their job.

4. People with disability feel discriminated against by employers' attitudes and organisational culture, and some resort to **"masking"** disability rather than request adjustments and risk facing stigma and rejection.

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Executive summary

5. **84 per cent** of organisations consider that increased access to a broader talent pool is one of the great benefits of workplace adjustments.

When employers proactively provide accessible information about workplace adjustments, and opportunities to safely share information about adjustment needs, employees and jobseekers benefit in multiple ways: improved physical, mental and emotional health, and increased job satisfaction, career progression, productivity and contribution at work.

Recommendations: Critical Factors for Success

The following critical factors for success of workplace adjustments are summarised from what people with disability and organisations told us in surveys, interviews and focus groups. We encourage any organisation seeking to learn from the findings to consider the following:

1. **Consistency:** organisations to adopt a consistent approach to workplace adjustments policy and processes; and investigate systems that support those processes.

2. **Track and measure:** track and measure effectiveness of workplace adjustments and employees' levels of satisfaction with workplace adjustments they have received.

3. **Educate managers:** build the confidence and capability of line managers and hiring managers – through training and/or mentoring – about disability awareness, including non-visible disability, differences in communication styles and behaviours, attitudes and unconscious bias.

4. **Support employees:** ask and listen to people with disability about workplace adjustments. Provide opportunities for confidential sharing of information; believe what you hear and commit to taking action; and provide advocacy support where necessary.

5. **Support jobseekers:** proactively demonstrate organisational values of inclusion by commitment to setting jobseekers up for success. Offer adjustments to all applicants, include people with disability on interview panels and engage a disability confident person to support applicants through the recruitment process.

6. **Communication and messaging that influence attitudes towards disability by addressing ableism in the workplace in the following ways:**

   - Dispel myths about disability as individual deficit by educating all employees about human rights and the social model of disability.

   - Change attitudes about workplace adjustments from it being **"a favour"** for employees with disability, to workplace adjustments being a means of enabling the contribution of all employees.

   - Reduce employees' and jobseekers' fear of being judged, not accepted or rejected by making adjustments available to everyone without requiring information about disability to be shared.

Executive summary

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

- Enable insights into ableist assumptions about disability by engaging and listening deeply to stories of lived experiences. However, do not assume that employees with disability have to take on the work of educating managers or coworkers. That is an organisation's responsibility.

- Recognise the power of personal stories told by managers and employees with disability to shift mindsets of employees without disability.

- Use consistent and accessible messaging about adjustments that have been successfully implemented to encourage all employees to ask.

7. **Organisational, social and political change:** consider ways to promote the human rights of people with disability for economic inclusion at both organisational and government levels:

- Provide support for mechanisms, such as Disability Employee Networks (DEN), that enable employees with disability to engage as a collective that has potential to inform, educate and advocate for sustained organisational, social, and political change in employment and disability.

- Exert influence at government level by lobbying for policy and legislation to support workplace adjustments as a way of enabling the human rights of people with disability to work. This includes providing feedback to services that support workplace participation of people with disability to ensure they are responsive and accessible.

Conclusion: Call to Action

We hope that this research informs and supports employers to implement workplace adjustments so that jobseekers and employees with disability have a more equitable experience.

We acknowledge that while some of our findings are positive and illustrate that progress is being made by employers, there are still structural and cultural issues that must be addressed at a societal and political level so that the human rights of people with disability to work are upheld.

Ultimately, we hope that our research draws the public's attention to the campaign for an increase in the workforce participation rate of people with disability.

1 | Introduction

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Australian Disability Network thought-leadership

As part of Australian Disability Network's thought-leadership commitment to our 450 members, and the disability employment sector, we recognised a need for organisations to better understand workplace adjustments in Australia.

Therefore, in 2022 we conducted a short exploratory survey with members about workplace adjustments to gauge their appetite for further research.

Through that survey and with direct member engagements, organisations explicitly expressed a need to know more about workplace adjustments.

A workplace adjustment is a change to a work process, practice, procedure or environment that enables a jobseeker or employee with disability to perform the essential requirements of their role.

Human Rights Standpoint

The large topic of workplace adjustments is situated within global and local legislation, research and practice. In this research, we are concerned with workplace adjustments as an enabler of the human rights of people with disability to work.

We are concerned about the low participation in the labour force by people with disability. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), labour force participation, which is defined as either working or looking for work, by people with disability aged 15-64 years has stagnated since 2015 at 53.4 per cent, in contrast to an increase in the participation rate for people without disability (84.1 per cent).[1]

At Australian Disability Network, we believe that workplace adjustments are a human right that is pivotal to economic inclusion. We recognise that historically, the biomedical and welfare models of disability have fostered negative societal assumptions that people with disability have limited potential to learn or contribute.[2] These beliefs and practices construct people with disability as economically unproductive. In contrast, a human rights approach is based on opportunities for inclusion together with the provision of accessible social, digital and physical environments.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) Article 27: Work and Employment, states that people with disability have:

> *the right to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.[3]*

---

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers- external site opens in new window accessed 30 November 2023.

[2] National People with Disabilities and Carer Council. (2009). SHUT OUT: the Experiences of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.

[3] United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2006).

1 | **Introduction**

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

In many western countries, the UNCRPD is backed by anti-discrimination laws, such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth) in Australia, and the Equality Act 2010 in the United Kingdom. Such laws promote more equitable access to employment, but do not address the systemic discrimination entrenched in workplace policies and practices that unfairly disadvantage people with disability.[4]

This research therefore explores direct and indirect organisational and interpersonal discrimination that is a barrier to fair and equitable careers for people with disability.

Complementary national and international research projects in 2023

During the months of conducting our research in 2023, the Business Disability Forum released its "Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey" in the United Kingdom. We acknowledge the breadth of that survey.[5] Our study has a unique contribution to make that builds on their research, which is: 1) we conducted qualitative interviews as well as surveys, and 2) the in depth highlighting of the experiences of jobseekers with disability. JobAccess, the Australian Government's service that supports workplace adjustments assessments and funding, also published research findings in December 2023,[6] about understanding workplace attitudes towards disability. We acknowledge their research and the way that it endorses the need for our own research, especially their finding that 60 per cent of Australians are unaware about workplace adjustments. Other research by JobAccess in 2023 found that workplace adjustments have long-term benefits for people with disability, in terms of maintaining employment and productivity.[7]

---

[4] Scott, P. S. (2016). Addressing Ableism in Workplace Policies and Practices: the case for disability standards in employment. Flinders Law Journal, 18.
[5] Business Disability Forum. (2023). The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023.
[6] JobAccess. (2023a). Understanding workplace attitudes toward people with disability. Australian Government.
[7] JobAccess. (2023b). Survey Report: The impact of workplace adjustments, two years on. Australian Government.
    JobAccess website, Survey Report

1 | Introduction

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Findings

Our research helped us to understand the experiences of people with disability and organisations, and to synthesise their combined knowledge into recommendations about how employers can address the issues that prevent their jobseekers and employees from participating equitably in the Australian workforce.

The quantitative data points collected in the organisational survey provide further guidance for organisations to see where they can improve their processes and learn from the experiences of other organisations.

This report is the result of careful, considered, iterative, thematic analysis that weaves the rich qualitative data into a compelling story about interconnected experiences of workplaces and employees, along with the recommendations they made based on their own experiences.

2 | **Research design and methodology**

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

The following questions guided this research:

1. What are the processes, experiences and impacts of workplace adjustments in the recruitment stage and in workplaces?

2. How can organisations remove barriers for jobseekers and employees with disability to requesting and receiving workplace adjustments?

3. What is best practice when implementing workplace adjustments?

Summary

- This study examined experiences of workplace adjustments for jobseekers, employees and organisations.

- We conducted two surveys that were co-designed, trialled and reviewed by members of Australian Disability Network's Disability Employee Network.

- We received:

  - 388 responses to the survey for employees and jobseekers who identify as people with disability, mental health condition or long-term health condition.

  - 180 responses to the survey for employers from a range of organisations, mainly Australian Disability Network members.

- We conducted interviews with people with disability and/or communication access needs, and representatives from organisations. We spoke with a total of 34 people:

  - 16 organisational representatives.

  - 10 people with disability, including five who have communication access needs.

  - Eight people in two focus groups (four participants per group): one group of line managers from various organisations, and one group of Australian Disability Network subject matter experts who liaise daily with jobseekers, employees with disability and organisations.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Outline

The aim of this research is to advance understanding the experiences of workplace adjustments by organisations and people with disability.

The findings are divided into three parts, organised according to three overarching themes:

1. **Process** relates to workplace behaviours based on organisations' workplace adjustments policies and practices.

2. **Proactivity** refers to specific organisational attributes of welcoming, valuing, and including people with disability. Organisations who demonstrate these attributes take on the responsibilities of ensuring fair and equitable experiences and workplaces for all jobseekers and employees with disability.

3. **Attitudes** are conscious and unconscious perspectives, beliefs, values and feelings about disability.

These themes tell the interconnected story of the impacts of workplace adjustments from the perspectives of people with disability and employers. Their recommendations, based on lived experiences, provide an evidence base for organisational improvements in:

- Workplace adjustments processes and approaches.

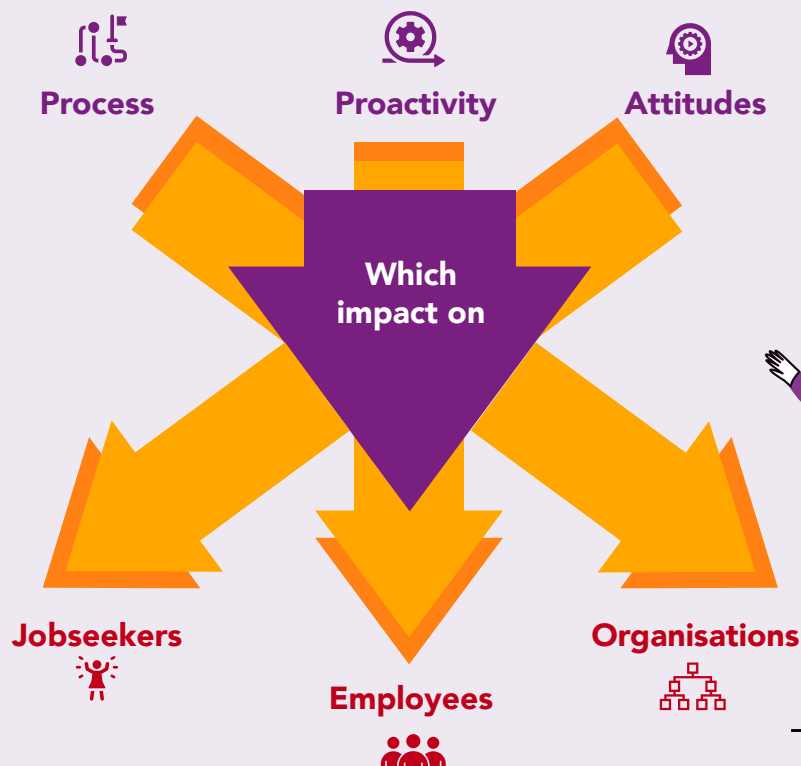- Attitudes towards disability and inclusion.

Figure 1: Themes from the research

Process   Proactivity   Attitudes

Which impact on

Jobseekers   **Employees**   **Organisations**

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Theme 1: Process

Outline

The findings presented in **Theme 1: Process** are grouped into three sub-themes. Each sub-theme has between two to five topics that outline aspects of process requirements that are integral to successful and effective workplace adjustments.

The table below summarises the sub-themes and topics:

Theme 1: Process	
1.1 Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes	**Topics** 1. A consistent workplace adjustments policy and process. 2. Workplace adjustment support systems: example – passports. 3. Role of line managers in identifying, offering and implementing workplace adjustments. 4. Measuring effectiveness of workplace adjustments. 5. Measuring employees' satisfaction with workplace adjustments.
1.2 "Humanising" the adjustments process	**Topics** 1. Why employees with disability do not request the adjustments they need. 2. Support from managers and colleagues. 3. Developing a process for managers to have conversations with employees. 4. Flexible work practices.
1.3 Inclusive and confidential recruitment adjustments processes	**Topics** 1. Fear of discrimination during recruitment. 2. Benefits of recruitment adjustments.

Table 1: Summary of sub-themes and topics relating to Theme 1 Process

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

1.1 Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes

1.1.1: A consistent workplace adjustments policy and process

"I need more support. My workload is so heavy and the adjustments process is so complex that I feel daunted by the process… I would almost rather quit than have the awkward conversations I need to have with [my manager]."
(Survey response, person with disability)

A small number of organisational interviewees explained how they categorise workplace adjustments into three complexity levels which each require a slightly different process:

1. Non-complex, such as internal coaching, guidance, flexible work arrangements. These adjustments are treated as a BAU (business as usual) implementation.

2. Mid-tier, requiring some level of coordination of support, such as Auslan interpreter, or getting information/helping employee to get information ready for JobAccess.

3. Complex, requiring infrastructure changes, such as installing a lift.

In contrast to the 3-level process described above, many responses to the organisational survey said they treat adjustment requests on a case-by-case basis, which tends to lack consistency, oversight, tracking and accountability. To address that kind of ad hoc response, many organisations said a centralised process, with a designated single point of contact and central funding to ease pressure on individual departments, is most effective at ensuring equity for all employees.

Taking equity a step further, one organisation said that every adjustment, after initial discussions between manager and employee, is submitted to a central advisory point in order to ensure **"a national**

consistency, and that no personal bias comes into play" (Interviewee 22, organisation).

The survey found that a centralised process was also the choice of people with disability, because they prefer the increased level of confidentiality provided by a central point of contact. Many employees (56 per cent) said a common deterrent to requesting adjustments was having to speak directly with their manager and risk being stigmatised.

Other organisations pointed out the challenges of having a central point of contact, especially in large organisations with multiple heterogenous departments or units. They said a line manager is better equipped to advise because they not only understand the operational demands of a particular site, but also are in a better position to build trust with employees over time (Interviewee 13, organisation). However, there was almost unanimous agreement by organisations that line managers are **"time poor"**. In addition, the survey found that only one in three managers had received training about workplace adjustments.

> **What organisations can do:** adopt a consistent approach to workplace adjustments processes, evaluating the pros and cons of a centralised approach for their business.

1.1.2: Systems that support workplace adjustments policy and process: workplace adjustments passports

21 per cent of organisations who responded to the survey said they have a workplace adjustments passports process in place to document individuals' adjustments requirements. A passport helps to enable consistency for employees.

People with disability cited confidentiality as a major benefit of passports in that there is some control over who sees their specific information, and their

3

Workplace adjustment research findings

Process – Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

manager may only need to know they have an adjustment in place rather than detailed personal information.

Several interviewees from organisations highlighted the benefits of security and continuity for employees who have a passport, especially employees who have had negative experiences in the past, or **"who have not had an easy run at gaining access or have lost access to some of their workplace adjustments. So a passport actually gives them some continuity and some reassurance that there's going to be no issues down the track"** (Interviewee 24, organisation).

A workplace adjustment passport particularly helps with continuity when there is a change of manager – **"because managers come and go"** (Interviewee 21, organisation). Also, in the event of a restructure, when **"all of a sudden, an adjustment does not stand"** due to a different workplace/team culture in the new department (Interviewee 20, organisation), having a passport system in place can support employees to get adjustments reinstated without having to go through a new process.

Passports are not a one-size fits all solution. They may inadvertently create further barriers for employees because not every request or adjustment **"fits into a box"** but are highly individual, and therefore passports should be optional rather than become a **"rigid process"** (Interviewee 23, organisation).

Research from Business Disability Forum in the United Kingdom, where workplace passports are more common, found that passports tend to catalogue all that is 'wrong', rather than what an employee with disability can do. Nevertheless, that research highlighted that having a passport represents an opportunity for employees to exert 'agency' by speaking for themselves on their own terms.[8]

> **What organisations can do:** investigate implement and evaluate systems that support workplace adjustments processes.

1.1.3: Role of line managers in identifying and implementing workplace adjustments

In terms of process, two issues about the role of line managers stood out in the data:

1. The need to get workplace adjustments right, from the beginning.

2. Building the confidence and capability of line managers – through training or coaching and mentoring by their managers.

"If it's not done properly then it just cascades. So, we need to get it right. We need the manager to know what they need to know. To get it right in the first place, because if we don't, then we know that experience is going to be significantly challenging." (Interviewee 24, organisation)

Survey data indicated that 45 per cent of organisations said Human Resources can approve or decline a workplace adjustments request, compared to 19 per cent who said managers can.

One in three said managers have to escalate all requests elsewhere.

And in some organisations neither have complete authority: (multiple answers could be selected)

*   17 per cent said Human Resources have to escalate a decline elsewhere.

*   30 per cent said managers have to escalate a decline elsewhere.

39 per cent of employers said managers have training in how to identify an employee's need for a workplace adjustment; one in three managers (32 per cent) has no training at all about workplace adjustments, and less than one in three (30 per cent) has training in implementing workplace adjustments.

These statistics highlight that managers are under-prepared to provide support for workplace adjustments, an issue that must be addressed as it can result in negative impacts on people with disability and breaches the Disability Discrimination

8 Business Disability Forum. (2023). The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023.

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Act. Managers, who said they want to help employees, become stressed because they do not know how to, which further reinforces the need to build managers' confidence and capability in identifying the need for, and implementing, workplace adjustments (Interviewee 34, organisation).

> **What organisations can do:** build the confidence and capability of line managers – through training or coaching and mentoring by their managers.

1.1.4: Measuring effectiveness of workplace adjustments

Why measure?
According to the findings, measuring is important in order to track how effective adjustments are for the individual, the team and the business. Secondly, workplace adjustments impact on employee satisfaction and engagement in general. Thirdly, how measurements are used helps to distinguish the purpose of policies and processes; are they merely to demonstrate compliance – **"tick box"** – or are they seeking to effect genuine positive change? (Interviewee 26, organisation).
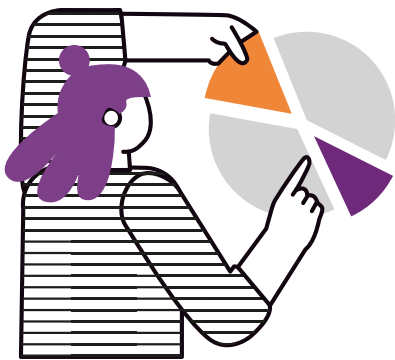
How to measure?
Many organisations said that tracking employee satisfaction and counting the number of workplace adjustments per year are ways to measure effectiveness. However, one in three organisations (32 per cent) who responded to the survey said they don't know or are unsure if they are monitoring data.

The survey data indicated two types of monitoring that organisations undertake:

- monitoring the workplace adjustment process; and

- using their measurements as feedback that propels action.

Measuring is not the only way to capture employee satisfaction and people with disability said that sharing success stories are a compelling way to capture the general effectiveness of workplace adjustments and can have a dual purpose of raising awareness of all employees about disability and equity (Survey responses, people with disability).

What to measure?
In addition to measuring employee satisfaction, collecting data points provides a road map for organisations to know which areas they need to improve. This is what organisations told us about monitoring process driven data: (multiple answers could be selected)

- 40 per cent of employers retain data on the types of workplace adjustment requested.

- 35 per cent of employers monitor and review the process following implementation of workplace adjustments.

- 24 per cent of employers retain data on the cost of implementing workplace adjustments.

- 12 per cent of employers measure timeframes for implementing workplace adjustments.

3 Workplace adjustment research findings

Process – Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Acting on feedback data

- 27 per cent of employers have a mechanism for employees to provide feedback on the effectiveness of their workplace adjustments.

- 16 per cent of employers evaluate the benefits of workplace adjustments for individuals and organisation after implementation.

- 34 per cent of employers said they continuously improve/update their workplace adjustment processes based on feedback or evaluation results.

> **What organisations can do:** measure effectiveness of workplace adjustments according to number of requests, timeframe for approval and implementation, level of employees' satisfaction, and take action as a result of feedback data from employees.

1.1.5: Measuring employees' satisfaction with workplace adjustments

The survey statistics revealed that:

- 72 per cent of employees with disability said they have requested workplace adjustments in the past two years.

- 21 per cent have not.

- 1 per cent prefer not to say.

- 6 per cent gave "other" responses.

Amongst employees who have requested a workplace adjustment:

- 34 per cent said their adjustments are in place and working well.

- 34 per cent said only some of the adjustments have been implemented.

- 15 per cent said none of their adjustments are in place.

- 10 per cent said their adjustments need to be reviewed.

- 7 per cent gave "other" responses.

One in three employees with disability who have requested a workplace adjustment is not satisfied, while the remainder are very satisfied (21 per cent) or satisfied (46 per cent).

Three factors that employees said influenced their satisfaction with workplace adjustments are:

1. Receiving or not receiving adjustments

46 per cent of people with disability experienced increased job satisfaction due to having workplace adjustments in place. However, amongst employees whose adjustments were not in place, the impacts were negative: 40 per cent said they experienced decreased job satisfaction as a result of not receiving workplace adjustments.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – Consistent and trackable workplace adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

2. Length of time taken to implement the adjustment

16 per cent of employees said it took more than 12 months. At the other end of the scale, 31 per cent said their adjustment was in place within less than two weeks.

Survey data from organisations indicated that the majority of adjustments have been implemented within four weeks.

However, every day without an adjustment may be very difficult for employees, and it's easy for organisations to forget **"there's a human being on the other side going through that"** (Interviewee 13, organisation). In addition, according to survey respondents (people with disability), the process can be prolonged if medical evidence is required, which itself is inequitable to some who lack hard evidence. Getting a diagnosis of adult attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in Australia, for example, is a long and expensive process.[9]

3. Regular reviews of workplace adjustments

Only 14 per cent of employees said their workplace adjustments are reviewed regularly. Almost half (49 per cent) said their adjustments are not reviewed regularly.

What organisations can do: measure employees' levels of satisfaction with workplace adjustments according to the three criteria above. Consider ways to gather qualitative accounts of satisfaction in addition to measurements.

[9] May, T. (2022). I think I have ADHD. How do I get a diagnosis? What might it mean for me? Monash Health. Monash Health website

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – "Humanising" the adjustments process

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

1.2 "Humanising" the adjustments process

1.2.1: Why employees with disability do not request the adjustments they need

As the findings have already demonstrated, workplace adjustment processes significantly impact employees' experiences and behaviours. While often regarded by organisations as a process, workplace adjustments affect the whole workplace experience for employees with disability. By developing an organisation-wide workplace adjustments process and implementing adjustments with a minimum of fuss means **"you get the best employee out of me"** (Survey response). In contrast, a prolonged process leads to employees feeling stigmatised, **"daunted"**, **"despairing"** and **"isolated"**.

In general, people with disability felt that **"there is a lack of understanding [by organisations] of the need for adjustments, and if the request doesn't fit into a simple box, then it is not actioned unless escalated and pushed"** (Survey response). Many felt that without a process to guide adjustments, and a designated person or team to monitor the implementation, the **"onus"** falls on people with disability to pursue their request and **"jump through hoops"** to get an adjustment or attempt to manage without it – which in some cases led to exhaustion, worsening health and even deciding to resign (Survey responses, people with disability).

21 per cent of people with disability said they have not requested workplace adjustments as an employee. A small number received adjustments informally, and a very small number without having to ask. Listed below are four main factors that people with disability said deterred them from requesting workplace adjustments: (multiple responses could be selected)

1. Fear of stigma

- 56 per cent said fear of being treated differently afterwards by their managers or colleagues.

- 45 per cent are worried about their co-workers' attitudes towards them if they get workplace adjustments.

2. Lack of awareness by employees with disability about policy and process

Survey responses and interviewees (people with disability) said there was a lack of information about eligibility and sources of funding, and lack of education for all employees about disability awareness and workplace adjustments:

- 29 per cent said they do not know whether they are eligible.

- 23 per cent said they do not know the organisation's workplace adjustment policy or where to find information.

3. Lack of awareness by managers and Human Resources about policy and process

- 19 per cent said their manager does not know about the organisation's workplace adjustment policy.

- 16 per cent said the Human Resources department do not know about the organisation's workplace adjustments policy.

4. Rejection

- 18 per cent said their request for adjustments was refused or not processed.

- 8 per cent said they were told that there is no money available to pay for the adjustments they need.

What organisations can do: develop an organisation-wide workplace adjustments process and implement adjustments without requiring unnecessary documentation and delays.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – "Humanising" the adjustments process

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

1.2.2: Support from managers and colleagues

There were several examples in the data about managers providing good support as a result of observing and listening, then taking action. For example: Interviewee 1 (person with disability) said she became overwhelmed and had **"a meltdown at work which, for my colleagues, I guess was very scary and they didn't know what to do".**

Her manager noticed, and initiated **"a group discussion on different things that affect the team members …. It wasn't like this is how you should talk to [name]… it was an opportunity for me to explain my boundaries and what I needed, which was nice. I put a lot of the pressure on myself to get to manage it all, whereas I don't think I can manage that without support"** (Interviewee 1, person with disability).

Her colleagues, as well as her manager, now understand what kinds of support they can offer to Interviewee 1, because the manager proactively provided opportunity for her to speak about her boundaries if she wanted to, without singling her out specifically.

In this particular story, the manager had lived experience of disability in their family and Interviewee 1 said that accounted for them being more confident than most managers at stepping in with appropriate support.

Many people with disability expressed the need for managers to be trained to have conversations about workplace adjustments, and disability awareness, including non-visible disability, differences in communication styles and behaviours, attitudes and unconscious bias (based on survey responses). Lack of understanding results in people with disability feeling daunted, rejected and not believed. For example:

"I wish managers received training. When I explained the adjustments that would benefit me and how, I was met with microaggressions and I left the meeting wanting to resign." (Survey respondent, person with disability)

Other survey respondents highlighted the value of support from colleagues. For example, one said they were more successful at getting information from colleagues than from managers or Human Resources:

"Human Resources and management should know about the existence of adjustments. [However] I found out about my current flexible hours work adjustment because I have made friends in other areas of the workplace with people with more years working at my current institution. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have known I was eligible for flexible working adjustments." (Survey response, person with disability)

What organisations can do: provide training for managers about disability awareness, including non-visible disability, differences in communication styles and behaviours, attitudes towards disability and unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias definition[10]

Unconscious or hidden bias refers to ingrained attitudes and perceptions we all hold subconsciously. In a similar way to stereotyping, these automatic associations can lead to assumptions that can sway our thoughts and actions. This has unfair and negative consequences for people who are affected by judgements and decisions, including recruitment, promotion, development and access to other opportunities.

[10] Unconscious Bias. (n.d.). Monash University. Retrieved 9 February 2024, from https://www.monash.edu/about/who/equity-diversity-inclusion/staff/equitable-decision-making/unconscious-bias

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – "Humanising" the adjustments process

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

1.2.3: Developing a process for managers to have conversations with employees

Interviewee 3 (person with disability) talked about the workplace adjustments process based on her lived experience of disability. From her previous role as line manager of a team comprising of people who identified as neurodivergent and with mental health conditions, Interviewee 3 recommended that good support for employees involves making the process more human, by building a relationship with the employee and following through on conversations and agreements:

- **"Do not treat the process as 'ticking the box'."**

- **"Ask your team member what supports they need to do their job."**

- **"Ensure your communication is non-judgemental."**

- **"Be informed about a range of available adjustments."**

- **"Consider the effect of different environments on individuals, for example, lighting, noise, proximity to toilets."**

- **"Provide support through the process, for example, keep them in the loop, check in regularly."**

- **"Have a health and well-being section within regular supervision sessions."**

- **"Be prepared to advocate for your employee to get what they need."**

- **"Keep the dialogue going."**

(Interviewee 3, person with disability)

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – "Humanising" the adjustments process

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Interviewee 3 (person with disability) pointed out that while some workplace adjustments are relatively easy to implement, like flexible work arrangements, others, even seemingly small adjustments, like removing a fluorescent light globe, require a lengthy process for the line manager to follow, and their importance may not be taken into account or even recognised by the rest of the organisation:

"it's always a battle getting things like lighting adjusted in an office. You have to put in the request to justify it, go through approvals, send to building maintenance, then there's the continual chasing up to get it done. At one place where I worked, management decided to move the desks around, so we [at line manager level] had to start the whole process again."
(Interviewee 3, person with disability)

The adjustments in this scenario demonstrate why some employees with disability prefer not to "hot desk", which is because they have adjustments in place that apply to a particular desk or area, like lighting or noise. But the decision by management to move the desks around – again a seemingly small move – meant that the adjustments process had to go back to the beginning. This story uncovers that when business decisions are made, there needs to be a process to first check in with a line manager if there are any adjustments in place in that area – and without breaching employees' confidentiality.

> **What organisations can do:** provide support and training to managers on how to build trust and have conversations with employees about workplace adjustments.

1.2.4: Flexible work practices

The aim of workplace adjustments is to create equity, remove barriers and increase participation for people with disability. Adjustments may be in the form of resources, time, or flexibility in working that enables employees with disability to fulfill the essential requirements of their role.

According to the survey, the top three adjustments that employees with disability said they requested or would like to request are (multiple answers could be selected):
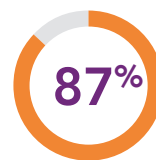
87% — 87 per cent of employees said being able to work from home.
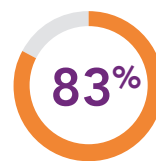
83% — 83 per cent of employees said flexible working hours, like starting and finishing at different times, or working longer days to enable time off on other days.

78% — 78 per cent of employees say taking time off for appointments, or taking breaks, to help manage a condition.

Many people with disability, long-term health condition or mental health condition said they need to spend time managing their health and well-being. This may range from attending doctors' appointments, exercise, or physiotherapy programs to assistance with personal care, all of which are essential to maintain health (Interviewee 9, person with communication access needs).

3 | Workplace adjustment research findings
Process – "Humanising" the adjustments process

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

The top three adjustments that organisations said employees requested are the same: (multiple answers could be selected)

95% — **95 per cent** of organisations said employees request being able to work from home.

92% — **92 per cent** of organisations said employees request flexible working hours, like starting and finishing at different times, or working longer days to enable time off on other days.

95% — **95 per cent** of organisations said employees request time off for appointments, or taking breaks, to help manage a condition.

Many employees with disability and communication access needs spoke about the benefits of working from home to reduce fatigue. In addition, 62 per cent of employees said it is important to them to have a permanent workspace instead of having to share or **"hot desk"**, so they can store their equipment rather than having to carry it back and forth. Another benefit of working from home is reducing anxiety about "hot-desking".

However, while Interviewee 3 (person with disability) said working from home is a **"godsend"** due to difficulties in getting adjustments to lighting and noise levels in an open-plan office, working from home did not suit everyone. For example, Interviewee 1 (person with disability) was told by her manager to work from home two days per week to reduce the fatigue of a long commute. However, the mixed pattern of hybrid working disrupted her routine. She had to approach her manager to reverse the adjustment so that she could re-establish a regular morning routine and come to the office every day. This is an example that **"one size does not fit all"** (Interviewee 13, organisation) and highlights the benefits of managers proactively and regularly reviewing workplace adjustments.

> **What organisations can do:** have regular check-in conversations with employees about what adjustments they might benefit from and personalise the workplace for the employee accordingly.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – Inclusive and confidential recruitment adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

1.3 Inclusive and confidential recruitment adjustments processes

1.3.1: Fear of discrimination during recruitment

"Discrimination [by employers in the recruitment process] is a big fear." (Survey response)

A large number of jobseekers (and employees) do not realise that they have the right to ask for adjustments (Interviewee 20, organisation). First time and early career jobseekers in particular may not know what to ask for, and this possibility must be factored into the process (Interviewee 22, organisation).

54 per cent of survey respondents (people with disability) said they have not asked for adjustments they need during recruitment. One of the reasons for their reluctance was a prevalent theme in the findings: not feeling **"safe"** in making a request for adjustments. They said they feared being discriminated against, for example by the Talent Acquisition team or the interview panel. The other main reason is that they could not find or access information about the request process, even when they contacted the organisation to ask for it. Only 14 per cent said job advertisements mentioned the possibility of recruitment adjustments, although, organisational data showed that 50 per cent of organisations said information about adjustments is in their job advertisement.

Most responses from people with disability mentioned the widespread organisational expectation that job candidates will initiate **"disclosure"*** of information about disability, mental health condition or long-term health condition in order to request and receive adjustments. According to survey respondents, sharing disability status feels like a stigmatising **"burden on individuals"** which originates from **"years of trauma…and fear"** about being rejected, treated differently, and misunderstood.

*"disclosure" – is a direct quote, used by many survey respondents and interviewees. Australian Disability Network encourages the use of the term "sharing disability information" as disclosure suggests something to hide in relation to disability.

Survey respondents who described themselves as having an **"invisible disability"** (sic) said they tend to put off requesting adjustments until they secure the job, and **"feel comfortable enough to discuss with [their] manager"**. Others, sensing a gap between what they need and what an organisation considers reasonable, downplayed their requirements at the beginning out of fear that they are **"asking too much off the bat"**.

But unless they share information about their specific workplace needs, job applicants with disability do not receive the adjustments they need to **"put their best self forward"** at a job interview (Interviewee 23, organisation).

Some people with disabilities that are not obvious prefer the phrase "non-visible" or "non-apparent". This is because the word "invisible" can erase the legitimacy of the disability or imply the disability does not exist.

And yet a general feeling was that **"it would be great to feel able to discuss from the beginning"**. Many research participants – people with disability and organisations – pointed out the problem with not asking for adjustments at the very beginning is not only that they do not receive adjustments at the recruitment stage. There is also an increased risk of not being believed, and even being regarded as someone who is seeking an unfair advantage in the workplace.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Process – Inclusive and confidential recruitment adjustments processes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

What organisations can do: do not expect jobseekers to share information about disability in order to get adjustments during the recruitment process. Proactively offer adjustments at every stage.

1.3.2: Benefits of recruitment adjustments

Although many organisations said they still have a very traditional recruitment process, some have seen the **"huge difference"** they can make by suggesting adjustments to jobseekers (Interviewee 16, organisation). The aim for many organisations is to reach a stage where they implement adjustments with minimal fuss and no questions asked, wherever possible. However, with each new occurrence there is another **"learning curve"** (Interviewee 12, organisation) because workplace adjustments are not **"one size fits all"** (Interviewee 13, organisation).

What organisations can do: listen and **"explicitly and honestly"** follow the advice of people with lived experience of disability.

"There is still a fear about disclosing a diagnosis, and the needs that are attached to it. This comes from years of trauma, and even if the new workplace is inclusive, I still fear the following:

1. What if that [diagnosis] is unacceptable?
2. What if they treat me differently?
3. What if they don't understand?
4. What if they choose someone with less baggage?

I think the following would help. Workplaces need to explicitly and honestly:

1. Share their attitude towards diversity.
2. Share previous times they chose a person based on competence.
3. Provide information about accommodations that are available.
4. Upskill staff on how to be inclusive.
5. Focus on strengths rather than deficits."

Survey respondent, person with disability

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Proactivity

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Theme 2: Proactivity

Outline

The findings presented in **Theme 2: Proactivity** are grouped into two sub-themes. Each sub-theme is presented into topic areas outlining proactive actions that are integral to successful and effective workplace adjustments.

The table below summarises the sub-themes and topics related to this theme:

Theme 2: Proactivity	
2.1 Consultation and listening to lived experiences	**Topics** 1. Initiating consultation with employees about policies and processes: listening to the voices of lived experience. 2. Proactively applying organisational values in practice.
2.2 Communicating information and educating managers	**Topics** 1. Proactively providing information about workplace adjustments. 2. Communicating information about types of adjustments. 3. Proactively addressing employees' reluctance to request adjustments by communicating policy, process and adjustment information.

Table 2: Summary of sub-themes and topics relating to Theme 2 Proactivity

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Proactivity – Consultation and listening to lived experiences

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

2.1 Consultation and listening to lived experiences

2.1.1: Initiating consultation with employees about policies and processes: listening to the voices of lived experience

Consultation with employees was seen by some employers as an opportunity to engage further with employees, especially when organisational leadership teams modelled a proactive approach by asking questions like: **"how do we set you up for success?"** (Interviewee 11, organisation).

However, only a minority of employers talked specifically about fostering 'agency' or self-determination of people with disability in connection with requesting workplace adjustments and follow up. Three such examples are:

- Interviewee 22 (organisation) said empowering employees with disability about their workplace adjustments was important to their organisation and they had successfully engaged in **"open dialogue"** listening sessions with employees with disability. They said the organisation **"took a lot of feedback from that to help design where we are now"**.

- An organisation said they provided an automated system for employees to ask for adjustments in order to **"put the team member themselves in the driver's seat"** (Interviewee 15, organisation).

- A senior level manager believed that changing the language to **"recruitment adjustments"** rather than workplace adjustments helped job applicants to feel they were not being defined forever as requiring adjustments but had some control over what they asked for, and when it was required (Interviewee 23, organisation).

When organisations are proactive like this, they are in effect advocating for the rights of employees with disability. When they are not, as a survey respondent said, **"it's humiliating to constantly advocate for yourself, especially when your disability is used against you"**.

A few people with disability said that they had learnt by experience that they had to self-advocate, for example:

> **"It's not easy, but it has to be done and I guess at some point you recognise that if you don't do it for yourself, you're just going to end up hiding from the world. You've got to be bold and be out there because you only get one life."** (Interviewee 4, person with disability)

But there is a fine balance to be struck between an organisation taking the initiative and taking over. When managers **"make suggestions"**, saying **"'what if we did it this way?' [even though there are] so many alternatives we can try"** (Interviewee 9, person with communication access needs), they may be shutting down the voices of lived experiences.

A survey respondent (organisation) suggested a remedy for this is for managers to **"get better at identifying what might help"** in their team. The respondent suggested the best way to do this is by getting more information themselves about workplace adjustments processes, usually from organisational systems like Human Resources and melding it with their own knowledge about members of their team with whom they have built trust. This can be more effective than Diversity and Inclusion specialists stepping in, because, especially in larger organisations, specialist teams don't have the same level of understanding of that team's operational workings as a line manager does (Interviewee 23, organisation). This finding reinforces the need to skill up managers and build their confidence in proactively initiating conversations and following up about workplace adjustments.

> **What organisations can do:** ask and listen to people with disability about workplace adjustments. Act on what you hear and provide advocacy support where necessary.

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Proactivity – Consultation and listening to lived experiences

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

2.1.2: Proactively applying organisational values in practice

We interviewed several senior organisational leaders, who recognised that organisations must take on the responsibility of removing barriers that jobseekers face. A senior manager emphasised the importance of the organisation being proactive **"at the very beginning of that relationship, and asking [job applicants] what do you need to be successful, how do we set you up for success?"** (Interviewee 11, organisation).

Survey respondents (people with disability) highlighted that too often questions about adjustments at recruitment are asked in **"a token sentence in an email"**, which is not reassuring to potential employees who fear that their application will be **"jeopardised"** if they require adjustments. People with disability said organisations should state at the beginning that they welcome and value employees with disability, make a point of referring to neurodivergence, and make it clear that they **"do not see [disability or neurodivergence] as an impediment to being successful in getting and doing the job"**. Many survey respondents (people with disability) said that clearly expressing a commitment to supporting adjustments throughout the recruitment process, especially in a variety of formats that job applicants prefer, demonstrates that an organisation **"actually means what they say"** when they claim to be inclusive.

> **What organisations can do:** proactively demonstrate organisational values of inclusion by a commitment to setting jobseekers up for success. Ask and listen.

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**

Proactivity – Communicating information and educating managers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

2.2 Communicating information and educating managers

2.2.1: Proactively providing information about workplace adjustments

The research findings highlighted the need to proactively provide information about workplace adjustments:

- at the recruitment stage; and

- to employees, managers and people leaders.

People with disability expressed concern about the lack of information about workplace adjustments during recruitment, especially the difficulties in finding information about the process of making a request. Although half (50 per cent) of organisations said information about adjustments is in the job advertisement, the data from people with disability tells a different story: only 14 per cent found information about adjustments in the job advertisement. Moreover, 76 per cent of employers said job applicants with disability have to request information themselves, while 9 per cent of people with disability said they got no response to their enquiries.

Responses to the survey for people with disability (multiple answers could be selected) indicated that during the recruitment stage, 42 per cent asked about adjustments at the interview – too late to request and receive adjustments to the interview itself. Yet the top three recruitment adjustments according to organisations are: (multiple answers could be selected)

54% 54 per cent of organisations said flexible interview channels.
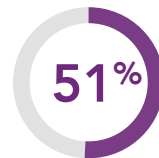
51% 51 per cent of organisations said flexible interview times.

These statistics indicate that job applicants require this information before the interview, and since it is not the custom to provide interview times and questions in the job advertisement, accessible avenues for people with disability to make requests must be offered multiple times throughout the process in order to provide equitable participation in the recruitment process.

Although 93 per cent of organisations who responded to the survey agreed equitable participation – referred to several times as a "level playing field" - is the greatest benefit of workplace adjustments for jobseekers, the forgoing data demonstrates that recruitment communications have room for improvement. Survey respondents recommended that organisations should express support for workplace adjustments in all communications, ensuring all messaging is inclusive by demonstrating respect for diversity rather than "single out" people with disability and apply to all job applicants. In addition, they said all communications should address the fear of discrimination that people with disability may have by "reassure[ing] job applicants that they will not be negatively impacted by requesting an adjustment".

55% 55 per cent of organisations said information and questions in advance.

What organisations can do: offer adjustments to all applicants at every stage of recruitment, starting with the job advertisement through to onboarding process.

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Proactivity – Communicating information and educating managers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

2.2.2: Communicating information about types of adjustments

Survey respondents highlighted the benefits of communicating and promoting workplace adjustments in a variety of accessible formats, providing examples and success stories about workplace adjustments.

Interviewee 15 (organisation) said **"workplace posters are our most effective tool"**, which demonstrates the value of providing low-tech visual prompts, rather than having all information online which many people with disability and line managers said they do not have the tools or time to access.

In terms of providing workplace adjustment examples, survey responses, organisations and people with disability strongly supported the **"consistent messaging"** of **"examples of common adjustments and the process to implement them"**. The emphasis by survey respondents also on **"demonstrating different methods for delivering results"** echoes the many responses that said workplace adjustments are not **"one size fits all"** and should be customised to the individual's needs and contexts.

In addition, **"more awareness around what adjustments have [been] provided in the past encourages other employees to know what they can request"**.

It's not merely a question of the organisation supplying a standard list of adjustments, but promoting examples that have worked for other employees, thereby encouraging employees to request what they need to do their job. Sharing success stories from all parts of the organisation was highly valued by organisations and employees with disability, as in the following story which Interviewee 22 (organisation) shared about adjustments to technology and equipment:

"What's really interesting is when we do have requests for adjustments, we actually learn a little bit more about our own technology and equipment and look at how we can enhance it more globally as well, rather than just on these individual cases.

A team member requested a workplace adjustment around the size of the text on [a piece of] equipment …which is like a little phone. We magnified…that text for that team member with low vision, and as a result we actually were able to turn that on globally and had quite a big impact for other team members with low vision who can now adjust the text size on this device.

[We also have] a device that our team members can [use to] communicate with each other. A few years ago, we had a request for a team member who was hard of hearing. That device can now Bluetooth into hearing aids so they can use their hearing aid. It had a really nice flow on effect to other team members.

Now we can actively go out and talk about some of those workplace adjustments that have worked in other areas."

(Interviewee 22, organisation)

What organisations can do: proactively use consistent and accessible messaging about adjustments that have been successfully implemented.

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Proactivity – Communicating information and educating managers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

2.2.3: Proactively addressing employees' reluctance to request adjustments by communicating policy, process and adjustment information

Survey statistics show that 37 per cent of employers said they have processes in place to address the issue of reluctance by people with disability to share information about disability: (multiple answers could be selected), yet the qualitative research findings highlighted that reluctance to share information about disability is a major concern for people with disability due to fear of discrimination and reinforces the need to **"humanise the process"** (Survey response, person with disability).

The survey specifically asked open questions about organisations' strategies to encourage sharing of information about disability, and their responses emphasised the importance of being proactive about using strategies to encourage information sharing and adjustment requests.

Survey responses and interviewees (organisations and people with disability) suggested many ways to encourage employees and jobseekers to request workplace adjustments, for example by ensuring that policy and systems are updated to say no-one has to share information about their disability.

Instead of having to share, survey respondents and interviewees suggested the following strategies:

- **"Ask about adjustments not disability."**

- **"We only ask for information that will help us provide the most suitable/appropriate adjustment for them."**

- **"No details about diagnosis or condition."**

Providing multiple ways to engage with employees was another proactive strategy that organisations found valuable, for example, providing opportunities for employees to have one on one conversations with their manager or another trusted person, rather than tick boxes about disability in surveys or forms (Interviewee 26, organisation).

Initiating routine monthly reviews of workstations by an ergonomics specialist for all employees was also used as a way of not **"singling out"** people with disability but reviewing all workstations as standard practice.

Finally, employing a designated workplace adjustments officer (Interviewee 16, organisation) meant that employees and jobseekers had one constant point of contact.

> **What employers can do:** avoid "singling out" people with disability, rather provide multiple opportunities for confidential sharing of information, and ask about adjustments not disability.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Theme 3: Attitudes

Outline

The findings presented in **Theme 3: Attitudes** are grouped into three sub-themes. Each sub-theme is presented into topic areas outlining ways to dismantle attitudinal barriers towards disability and enable organisations to embed successful and effective workplace adjustments.

The table below summarises the sub-themes and topics:

Theme 3: Attitudes	
3.1 Commitment from the very beginning	**Topics** 1. Building trust and instilling confidence. 2. Ensuring fairness, equity and empowerment.
3.2 Tackling attitudinal barriers	**Topics** 1. Addressing ableist assumptions and unconscious bias. 2. Reducing attitudinal barriers. 3. Listening respectfully to lived experience. 4. Capacity building for managers.
3.3 Culture change	**Topics** 1. Reduction/elimination of stigma towards difference. 2. Providing psychological safety. 3. Recognising and challenging power imbalances. 4. Collective push for social change.

Table 3: Summary of sub-themes and topics relating to Theme 3 Attitudes

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Commitment from the very beginning

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

3.1 Commitment from the very beginning

3.1.1: Building trust and instilling confidence

Many respondents with disability said in the surveys and interviews they have experienced workplace discrimination.

The survey results showed that 54 per cent of people with disability have not asked for the adjustments they need during recruitment. Some survey respondents said they would prefer to **"get through without [adjustments] if they can, due to fear of being disadvantaged and regarded as a 'problem' from the start"**.

Many respondents feared that seeking adjustments would unfairly disadvantage them, and worried that information they share would not be treated confidentially, based on past experiences of discrimination. Lack of confidentiality has a devastating impact on jobseekers, as a survey respondent described: **"my [request for] adjustments was ignored, but during the interview with a panel, this was mentioned to everyone. This was not a nice way to know that everyone 'knew'"**.

Only a small number of respondents and interviewees with disability said they had been assertively persistent when requesting adjustments at the recruitment stage, and those who did said they were bolstered by the knowledge that organisations are legally obliged not to discriminate on the grounds of requests for **"reasonable"** adjustments.

What organisations can do: offer recruitment adjustments to all job applicants, ensure confidentiality and secure storage of personal details, and ensure no-one is disadvantaged by sharing information about adjustments, requirements or disability.

3.1.2: Ensuring fairness, equity and empowerment

Many people with disability said they experienced the workplace adjustments process as **"de-humanising"** and psychologically unsafe, especially during recruitment.

"I worry about being put in the 'too hard' basket if I did raise workplace adjustments".
(Survey response, person with disability)

The purpose of providing workplace adjustments is to **"level the playing field"** so that people with disability have a fair chance to apply for work and be successful in their roles. Survey responses from organisations and people with disability are in agreement about the top three recruitment adjustments that people with disability need or would like to request.
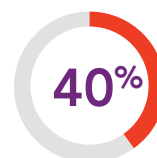
People with disability said they need or would like to request the following top three adjustments during recruitment: (multiple answers could be selected)
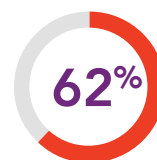
62% **62 per cent** said information about the recruitment process and questions in advance of the interview.
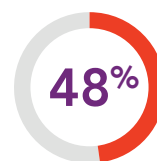
48% **48 per cent** said flexible interview channels, for example face to face, online, by phone.

40% **40 per cent** said flexible interview times.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Commitment from the very beginning

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

The top three adjustments that organisations said jobseekers request are the same: (multiple answers could be selected)

55% — **55 per cent** said information and questions in advance of the interview.

54% — **54 per cent** said flexible interview channels, for example face to face, online, by phone.

51% — **51 per cent** said flexible interview times.

Given that organisations and people with disability agree on the top three adjustments, organisations should make every interview fully accessible from the start, so no-one needs to ask for adjustments. Information about the recruitment process, interview questions, flexible interview channels and flexible interview times should be provided for everyone. By doing that, according to survey responses from people with disability, organisations can stop **"singling out persons with disabilities by making them ask for adjustments"**.

Singling people out as having a disability was a recurrent topic in the research and contributed to disempowerment and not belonging in the workplace. People with disability also spoke about the disempowerment they experienced during recruitment when there was not a designated workplace adjustments officer to assist with requests for adjustments, or a disability confident person to support applicants through the recruitment process, and when there was not a person with disability on the interview panel.

What organisations can do: make every interview more accessible from the start, so no-one needs to ask for adjustments. This means providing information and interview questions in advance, flexible interview channels and times for everyone.

Even better:
- include a person with disability on interview panels.
- appoint a designated workplace adjustments officer to assist with requests for adjustments, or a disability confident person to support applicants through the recruitment process.

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Tackling attitudinal barriers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

3.2 Tackling attitudinal barriers

3.2.1: Addressing ableist assumptions and unconscious bias

Most organisations said they were aware of the attitudinal barriers that employees with disability face, and what their organisation was doing, or wanted to do, to **"shift the mindset"** of employees without disability. Encouragingly, the survey for organisations indicated that almost half (47 per cent) of managers have training in how to recognise their own unconscious bias, which suggests that there is a growing awareness amongst managers about the attitudinal barriers that some employees and jobseekers face. However, one in three (32 per cent) of organisations said managers still have no training at all about workplace adjustments.

Organisational survey respondents said unconscious bias about disability manifests as inflexible thinking and attitudes across the organisation. Ableist assumptions are sometimes made by organisations about capability, when they perceive a mismatch **"[between the] nature of the work and capacity of people with disabilities to do the job"**.

Negative attitudes also show up in a lack of motivation or interest from different departments in the workplace adjustments process, thinking it's **"too hard"** to do, and concern that implementing one person's adjustments may negatively impact another employee's ability to do their job (Survey responses, organisations).

Unhelpful assumptions like these make workplaces feel psychologically unsafe for employees with disability to share information about their workplace adjustment needs. Combined with other process related barriers that have already been discussed in relation to the other themes, it is not surprising that the survey for people with disability showed that many are **"daunted"** about requesting workplace adjustments.

> **What organisations can do:** become aware of ableism in the workplace. Dispel myths that workplace adjustments are a favour or "extra" benefit to people with disability by educating all employees about human rights and the social model of disability.

> **Ableism** is a type of discrimination where everyday beliefs, processes and practices prioritise and value the needs of people without disability. They are regarded as competent, able-bodied, rational, autonomous and economically viable, and therefore "fully human"[11]. This construction of difference as negative leads to rules and structures that reflect majority norms and unconscious bias, rather than promoting inclusion and equity[12].

> **The social model of disability** understands disability as the interaction between people living with impairment and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. From this perspective, disability is not inherent or individualised, but is produced by a world where systems, processes and structures do not accommodate the wide variety of skills, needs and capabilities that make up humanity[13].

[11] Campbell, F. A. K. (2001). Inciting Legal Fictions: "Disability's" Date with Ontology and the Ableist Body of Law. Griffith Law Review.
[12] Gooding, P., & Kayess, R. (2022). Human Rights and Disability: an Australian Experience. In Critical Perspectives on Human Rights Law in Australia Volume 2. Thomson Reuters.
[13] Oliver, M. (2013). The Social Model of Disability: thirty years on. Disability and Society, 28(7).

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Tackling attitudinal barriers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

3.2.2: Reducing attitudinal barriers

Survey respondents (organisations and people with disability) described inclusive language as being a powerful way to frame views and values, and training in using inclusive language is important for managers.

For example, referring to **"adjustments"** rather than "workplace adjustments" helps organisations to be more inclusive of people with various conditions – who may not identify themselves as having a disability. Adjustments would ideally not rely on sharing information about disability but be made available **"regardless of whether or not someone actually identifies as having a disability"** (Interviewee 16, organisation). In this approach, **"disclosure"** is not necessary, and fear about being **"judged...not accepted for who they are ...of requesting an adjustment and being turned down"** is reduced, contributing to a more psychologically safe process (Interviewee 26, organisation).

The medical model of disability that constructs disability as individual deficit is so embedded in society that employers struggle to shift their mindset (Interviewee 22, organisation). In contrast, the social model of disability recognises that a person is disabled by the environment and culture. This means organisations must ensure environments are made to be accessible and inclusive rather than placing the onus on the individual with disability to adapt to the inaccessible environment.

> "I think it's actually being able to focus on not trying to protect someone because they might not be able to do something, but actually finding out what will enable them to...fulfill their role. I think that's the mindset shift."(Interviewee 22, organisation)

In addition, the perceptions of employees without disability feeling they are missing out or the adjustments that employees with disability are getting as **"extra"** (Interviewee 31, organisation) can be changed by messaging across the organisation that workplace adjustments are an approach that fosters equity:

"We are not doing something special for [employees with disability]. We're just doing what needs to be done…. people may require different levels of adjustment in the workplace in order to have exactly the same capacity to deliver and grow and achieve their potential as another person." (Interviewee 12, organisation)

> **What organisations can do:** reduce fear of being judged, not accepted or rejected by making adjustments available to everyone without requiring information about disability to be shared.
>
> Additionally, provide messaging across the organisation that workplace adjustments provide equity and enablement so that every employee can fulfil their role.

3.2.3: Listening respectfully to lived experience

"Please just listen." (Survey response, person with disability)

People with disability emphasised the importance of organisations asking and listening to their responses. In addition, many recommended that employers be open and approachable, non-judgemental and trust their employees. When employers make suggestions rather than listen, it **"will not be useful because employers do not understand lived experience, and there are likely many other things going on for them that employers are not aware of that is influencing their request. Please just listen"**. (Survey response, person with disability)

3

Workplace adjustment research findings
Attitudes – Tackling attitudinal barriers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Although the majority of employees wanted to be listened to, they also objected to the expectation that it is their responsibility to raise awareness about disability in the organisation, because **"I would like them to become aware of these at their own expense and I do not feel it is my accountability to provide this expertise, as my experience may not be applicable to all people"**. (Survey response, person with disability)

Not being believed, even when **"they are bending over backwards and maybe even damaging their own wellbeing trying to fit themselves to your fixed ways of working"**, being questioned and having to justify makes employees feel judged and that they are **"being difficult, instead of adjustments being common practice to make an employee feel valued"**. (Survey response, person with disability)

> **What organisations can do:** enable insights into ableist assumptions about disability by engaging and listening deeply to people with lived experiences. Do not assume that employees with disability have to take on the work of educating managers or coworkers.

3.2.4: Capacity building for managers

If managers don't understand the purpose of workplace adjustments, their assumptions and unconscious biases tend to dominate their **"mindset"**, usually to the detriment of employees with disability in their team who may feel judged, try to mask their struggles, become overwhelmed and fearful about having further conversations with their manager.

In addition to training in how to identify the need for workplace adjustments, and how to implement them; managers need to engage with and listen deeply to lived experiences. This provides insights about themselves, their assumptions and ableism – all of which are not easily learned in regular training. The following story illustrates how a manager shifted his mindset by experiencing a **"light bulb moment"**.

"The education piece – you don't know what you don't know." (Interviewee 13, organisation)

> Interviewee 13 said managers lack knowledge about workplace adjustments, such as what questions to ask employees, or where to find information. When a member of his team kept stepping away from her computer, saying that she had eye strain, he did not realise she needed a workplace adjustment. In a presentation to the rest of the team about her experiences, she explained that she experienced difficulty in viewing the screen. She also described feeling discrimination in the form of her manager's assumptions that she was wasting time by taking breaks from the screen.
>
> Since then, the organisation has installed software on her computer, and her performance at work **"sky-rocketed"** (Interviewee 13, organisation).

3 **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Tackling attitudinal barriers

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Interviewee 13 reflected that he **"didn't have a lot of education or skills to help this individual….And if I [made assumptions about her] as a leader, I'm pretty confident that other leaders are probably doing the same thing"**.

Interviewee 13 believes that while the **"[workplace adjustments] process is going to get better over time"** once policies and processes are embedded in an organisation, shifting negative attitudes about disability is more difficult to achieve. He is keen to enable all managers to have **"those light bulb moments"** like he did by learning through people's stories on how to help with **"empathy and compassion"** rather than discrimination.

What organisations can do: recognise the power of personal stories – from managers and employees with disability – in shifting managers' mindsets and negative attitudes about disabilities.

3

Workplace adjustment research findings

Attitudes – Culture change

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

3.3 Culture change

3.3.1: Reduction/elimination of stigma towards difference

Stigma is experienced by some people with disability as the number one barrier to explaining the need for a workplace adjustment. In the words of an interviewee, stigma is: **"like being treated and looked at differently, or that there's something wrong with you and [so you are] pitied when you disclose"** (Interviewee 3, person with disability).

Interviewees with non-visible disability in particular, felt judged by people without disability, who **"don't see what you struggle with"** (Survey response, person with disability), and frequently believe that **"it will pass"** (Interviewee 3, person with disability), and **"it's all in your head and you need to just work harder and just think happy thoughts and you'll be fine"** (Interviewee 2, person with disability). A dilemma thus arises for the employee: whether to share further information about their specific disability in the hope they will be believed and supported, not pitied (Interviewee 3, person with disability), or **"mask"** their struggles at work so they can avoid stigma, as Interviewee 2 felt they had to do when colleagues objected to them getting support when they did not, saying all staff were also **"under the pump"** with their workload.

Many research participants (people with disability) talked about feeling **"vulnerable and unsupported"** and **"not safe"** to share information in order to request workplace adjustments. This was sometimes due to being new, and not having access to information about workplace adjustments processes. In cases where requests for workplace adjustments were rejected, dismissed without much explanation, or ignored, employees felt devalued, dehumanised, belittled, depressed and isolated (Survey responses, people with disability).

What organisations can do: believe and trust employees when they ask for an adjustment, without interrogation or shaming.

If an adjustment has to be rejected, ensure that reasons are provided to the employee concerned, and access to counselling support is provided.

Also to consider:

As Interviewee 22 (organisation) earlier said, in their organisation every adjustment, after initial discussions between manager and employee, is submitted to a central advisory point in order to ensure **"a national consistency, and that no personal bias comes into play"**.

3.3.2: Providing psychological safety

Employees with disability said their previous experiences of bullying in the workplace made them reluctant to come forward and request adjustments. Further deterrents are the risk to an employee of not being believed, regarded as incapable of doing the job and a request being held against them. In one instance, a manager who was supportive at the beginning, became **"frustrated with me"** for not performing as they expected once an adjustment was in place. This led to the employee **"not feeling safe talking with [manager] any more and…leaving that job because I didn't feel supported. It was as if I'd asked for too much"** (Interviewee 2, person with disability).

Interviewee 6 (person with communication access needs) felt she was constantly being watched by her manager after requesting a workplace adjustment. After making the request, she was told that the company **"don't actually give out adjustments to just any employees…. I was told that I would be on check and I'll be monitored if I am actually taking the job seriously, or if I'm not then they would take back their adjustment and I won't be given any kind of special treatment"**.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Culture change

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

For this employee, it was **"like they're waiting for me to do something wrong"** (Interviewee 6, person with communication access needs), resulting in her feeling **"on edge"**, and not reporting any further issues or complaints that she might want to make, because she is not **"totally accepted"**. She has confidence in her own ability to do the work, but, like many other people with disability and communication access needs in this research, feels she has to contribute above the demands of the job because of the way she has been treated after requesting an adjustment. When we asked what would make her feel psychologically safe, she said that the organisation's attitude would have to change from **"it seems like they're doing the person a favour"** to fully accepting her as a valued employee who is helping to grow the company.

> **What organisations can do:** change attitudes about workplace adjustments from being **"a favour"** to employees with disability, to being a means of enabling the contribution of all employees.

3.3.3: Recognising and challenging power imbalances

While some level of power imbalance is almost inevitable between any employer and employee, discrimination and bullying of people with disability occurs more frequently than people without disability.[14] As our research findings have already demonstrated, listening to people with lived experience should be a fundamental commitment for organisations.

Having their workplace adjustment request rejected resulted in some employees leaving their job **"due to anxiety and stress"** (Survey response, person with disability). This is not only a loss to the organisation who have the expense of re-hiring and

training – which would very likely be more costly than adjustments – but also when people leave, the issues they have raised remain unresolved, and the opportunity for addressing systemic problems in the organisation and beyond is lost.[15]

Survey responses said that avoiding people leaving would require some effort by employers to **"flip the dialogue"**; meaning that employers take on greater responsibility by **"justifying why they can't provide adjustments, rather than individuals justifying why they should get them"** - more of an **"'if not, why not' attitude"** (Survey responses, organisations).

Flipping the dialogue also involves changing language to become more inclusive. It also ensures that the discourse (the language and practice) about difference/sameness does not become muddled. A common thread in the data was the idea of **"everyone being 'treated' the same regardless of needs"** (Survey response, person with disability). When employees with disability are told they **"are no different to anyone else and denied a reasonable request for adjustment"**, they lose trust in those in power, and **"would never seek support from them [again]"** (Survey response, person with disability).

Everyone being treated the same way can be negative when individual needs are not recognised, as the survey response above suggests, or when people with disability are expected to fit in and conform to ableist expectations. However, everyone being treated the same way can be positive when workplace adjustments are made available to everyone and become part of the workplace culture that recognises and supports difference.

> **What organisations can do:** recognise "difference" as a positive attribute that enables diverse contributions in the workplace and provide adequate and appropriate adjustments to enable this to happen.

[14] People with disability in Australia, Disability discrimination - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au) last updated July 2022, accessed 30 November 2023.

[15] Rodgers, J., Thorneycroft, R., Cook, P. S., Humphreys, E., Asquith, N. L., Yaghi, S. A., & Foulstone, A. (2023). Ableism in higher education: the negation of crip temporalities within the neoliberal academy. Higher Education Research and De, 42(6). Law in Australia Volume 2. Thomson Reuters.

3 | **Workplace adjustment research findings**
Attitudes – Culture change

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

3.3.4: Collective push for social change

When the **"burden"** of advocating for workplace adjustments falls entirely on employees with disability, many feel exhausted and **"daunted"** by obstructive processes and the stigma and trauma associated with making requests (Survey responses, person with disability).

Some organisational responses suggested strengthening support for employees to build up their self-determination in the context of workplace adjustments, rather than employers regarding adjustments as a way of providing **"protection"** for employees with disability (Interviewee 22, organisation).

A small number of survey respondents looked beyond the individualised experience of workplace adjustments, and pointed out that many adjustments are **"band aid fixes, and don't fix the structural discrimination against disability"** (Survey response, person with disability).

These respondents said they are keen **"to be part of initiatives that bring social change and equity"**, and **"we need to change the way the world thinks about individuals [with disability]"** (Interviewee 4, person with disability).

This kind of movement would require understanding by organisations that **"inclusive and accessible workplaces benefit not only current employees with disability, but all the other people who will acquire disability or experience medical conditions in the future"** (Survey response, person with disability).

It would also require the whole organisation to understand and ensure that the human rights of employees with disability guide their policies and practice, and that the social model of disability approach is adopted in Australia, in which barriers are environmental and attitudinal, not individual.

Additionally, it requires employees with disability to have a forum that enables them to collectively meet, discuss and organise sustainable action that has a wide impact at the societal, organisational and individual level. Interviewee 5 (person with disability) spoke about the potential of Disability Employee Networks (DEN) to influence at a social policy level but said the power of their DEN was being eroded by the expectation that employees with disability will attend DEN meetings in their own time, and by being used as a consultation mechanism by the organisation rather than a conduit for change.

> **What organisations can do:** consider ways to provide support for mechanisms, such as a DEN, that enable employees with disability to engage as a collective that has the potential to inform, educate and advocate for sustained social change in the area of employment and disability.
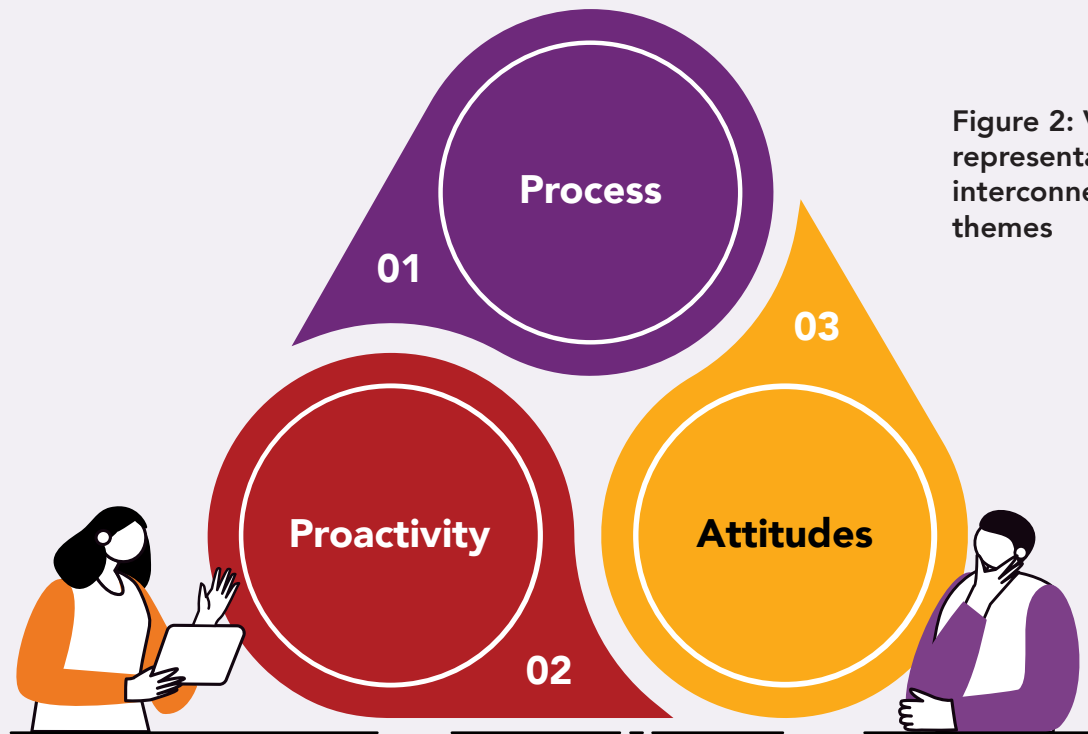
Figure 2: Visual representation of the interconnected research themes

Significance of findings

Our research findings locate disablement in the workplace as environmental rather than individual, which disrupts the dominant medical model focus on disability as an individualised personal deficit. Rather, a workplace ecosystem has significant impacts on jobseekers and employees with disability. That can be at the micro-level of immediate relationships, places, or tasks; or the meso- and exo-levels of workplace culture, systems and policies; or the macro-level of legislation and regulations related to workplace adjustments, human rights, and accessibility standards.[16]

The fact that workplaces have to be adjusted to 'accommodate' disability implies that people with disability were not consulted when job descriptions or processes were designed, and their needs were therefore unrecognised from the outset – to the extent that they are implicitly not expected to apply for jobs. The findings repeatedly demonstrate that the experience of making a request for adjustments is difficult, **"daunting"**, demoralising, and disempowering. Unless negative attitudes towards disability change and continue to evolve, processes will not be effective, and may become **"tick box"** exercises in compliance (Survey response, organisation). In turn, unless organisations are proactive in communicating and implementing the process, employees with disability will not know their rights in relation to workplace adjustments.

Changes to the processes at all levels of a workplace ecosystem have significant impacts that flow to jobseekers and employees with disability. These positive and negative impacts, analysed from our research study, are as follows:

[16] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. Harvard University Press

Impacts of good support to receive adequate and appropriate workplace adjustments that are regularly reviewed:

- improved physical, mental and emotional health;

- makes it possible to be authentic self at work; and

- increased loyalty, productivity, and contribution at work, leading to greater job satisfaction and promotion opportunities. (This is also a positive impact for organisations).

Impacts of poor/no support to receive workplace adjustments:

- feeling **"daunted"**, isolated and rejected;

- experiencing the workplace is a psychologically unsafe place to share information about disability;

- feeling disempowered and having no ways to challenge unfair decisions; and

- feeling despair and resignation – **"masking"** in order to cope, or leaving their job.

Implications of findings

Features of good support

1. Empowering by listening

The research findings demonstrate that people with disability are the 'experts' about their lived experiences of disability, the barriers they face in the workplace, and how they navigate their days. It is not always possible, however, for employees to know what adjustments they need at a new workplace or in a new role, or what is available that they may request. It is also **"daunting"** to share information.

A way for organisations to remove the onus from employees to 'disclose' is by ensuring that employees with disability feel safe to have conversations with managers, and that managers have the knowledge and confidence to listen deeply and take action. Receptive, attentive and responsive listening is key to empowering people with disability to have a voice and keeping open the possibilities of shared action for change.[17] Rather than **"singling out"** people with disability by expecting them to share information about disability, listening empowers undervalued voices, including those who do not use traditional forms of communication.

This kind of listening is accompanied by assurance of confidentiality and future action, instigated by the manager, and, significantly, backed up by organisational processes and systems. In addition, those who listen, respect, and collect data about the implementation and impacts of workplace adjustments are building an inclusive workplace which benefits current and future employees and the reputation of the organisation.

2. Respect for individuals' timing and schedules

The research findings show that employees with disability frequently request flexibility in work location and time. Workplace norms of practice usually dictate that work must be done at specific times, on specific days, at a constant speed and to deadlines.[18] However, many employees with disability require time to manage their health, energy and fatigue levels, and to attend appointments for treatments.[19] In addition, accessing external support, for example, accessible public or private transport, or assistance with personal care, depends on availability and schedule of providers and this must be factored in to a workplace schedule.[20] Attitudes that depict people with disability as seeking to get extra benefits in the workplace or at recruitment by requesting

[17] Thill, C. (2015). Listening for policy change: how the voices of disabled people shaped Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme. Disability & Society, 30(1).

[18] Rodgers, J., Thorneycroft, R., Cook, P. S., Humphreys, E., Asquith, N. L., Yaghi, S. A., & Foulstone, A. (2023). Ableism in higher education: the negation of crip temporalities within the neoliberal academy. Higher Education Research and De, 42(6).

[19] Bonaccio, S., Connelly, C. E., Gellatly, I. R., Jetha, A., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2020). The Participation of People with Disabilities in the Workplace Across the Employment Cycle: Employer Concerns and Research Evidence. Journal of Business and Psychology, 35.

[20] Edwards, J. (2021). Advocate for Change. Interview with Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner. Journal of the NSW Bar Association, Autumn.

4 | Discussion and Recommendations

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

flexible times and work locations must be challenged and dispelled. This is more likely to happen when workplace adjustments are proactively offered to all employees and jobseekers as a business as usual process.

3. Disability confident employers

Fear of doing or saying the wrong thing prevents managers from knowing how to discuss disability with their employees. A national survey about community attitudes towards people with disability found that 78 per cent of Australians agree that people are not sure of how to interact with people with disability.[21] This flows on to managers, colleagues, and Human Resources and Talent Acquisition teams, with 60 per cent of managers not feeling confident about managing people with disability.[22] These statistics help to illuminate the attitudinal barriers that are experienced by people with disability in this research: attitudes that are based on assumptions of deficit, and which limit and stigmatise people with disability, de-humanising their experiences and leading to unfair treatment and discrimination.

If, as the above study claims, close to 80 per cent of people feel awkward when interacting with people with disability, it is not surprising that the adjustment procedure fails when one of the most important stages in the procedure is to have a conversation with a line manager – who feels anything but confident.

Critical factors for success

This research provides an evidence base for organisations seeking to:

- Develop, improve, and sustain workplace adjustments practices through policy and processes.

- Proactively provide multiple accessible opportunities for employees and jobseekers to engage with the organisations' workplace adjustments information and processes.

- Influence attitudinal changes at organisational level and beyond.

[21] Bollier, A.-M., Sutherland, G., Krnjacki, L., Kasidis, V., Katsikis, G., Ozge, J., & et al. (2021). Attitudes Matter: Findings from a national survey of community attitudes toward people with disability in Australia. University of Melbourne. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26188/15176013.v10

[22] Business Council of Australia. (2023). BCA report on improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

4 Discussion and Recommendations

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

The following critical factors for success of workplace adjustments are summarised from what people with disability and organisations told us in surveys, interviews and focus groups. Any organisation seeking to learn from the findings will consider the following:

1. Consistency

- Adopt a consistent approach to workplace adjustments policy and processes, whether that is a centralised process or business unit based.

- Investigate systems that support workplace adjustments processes.

2. Track and measure

- Track and measure effectiveness of workplace adjustments according to number of requests, timeframe for approval and implementation, level of employees' satisfaction, and acting on feedback data from employees.

- Track and measure employees' levels of satisfaction with workplace adjustments they have received.

3. Educate managers

- Provide training for managers about disability awareness, including non-visible disability, differences in communication styles and behaviours, attitudes, and unconscious bias.

- Build the confidence and capability of line managers – through training or coaching and mentoring by their managers.

4. Support employees

- Avoid "singling out" people with disability, rather provide opportunities for confidential sharing of information and ensure it is stored securely.

- Believe and trust employees when they ask for an adjustment, without interrogation or shaming.

- Provide support to employees by having conversations built on trust and active listening about workplace adjustments.

- Ask and listen to people with disability about workplace adjustments.

- Have regular check-in conversations about how adjustments are going for individuals.

- Act on what you hear and provide advocacy support where necessary.

- If an adjustment needs to be rejected, ensure that reasons are provided to the employee concerned, and access to counselling support is provided.

5. Support jobseekers

- Proactively demonstrate organisational values of inclusion by commitment to setting jobseekers up for success.

- Offer adjustments at every stage of recruitment, starting with the job advertisement.

- Do not expect jobseekers to share information about disability in order to get adjustments during the recruitment process – instead, offer adjustments to *all* applicants.

- Make *every* interview accessible from the start, so no-one needs to ask for adjustments, and provide flexible times for interviews for everyone.

- Include a person with disability on interview panels.

- Appoint a designated workplace adjustments officer to assist with requests for adjustments, or a disability confident person to support applicants through the recruitment process.

4 | **Discussion and Recommendations**

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

6. Communication and messaging that influence attitudes towards disability

- Provide messaging across the organisation that workplace adjustments provide equity and enablement so that every employee can fulfil their role.

- Recognise "difference" as a positive attribute that enables diverse contributions in the workplace and provide adequate and appropriate adjustments to enable this to happen.

- Address ableism in the workplace.

- Dispel myths that workplace adjustments are a favour or "extra" benefit to people with disability by educating all employees about human rights and the social model of disability.

- Change attitudes about workplace adjustments from being "a favour" to employees with disability, to being a means of enabling the contribution of all employees.

- Reduce fear of being judged, not accepted or rejected, by making adjustments available to everyone without requiring information about disability to be shared.

- Enable insights into ableist assumptions about disability by engaging and listening deeply to stories of lived experiences. However, do not assume that employees with disability must take on the work of educating managers or coworkers. That is an organisation's responsibility.

- Recognise the power of personal stories – from managers and employees with disability – in shifting mindsets of employees without disability.

- Use consistent and accessible messaging about adjustments that have been successfully implemented.

7. Organisational, social and political change

Consider these ways to influence at organisational and government levels:

- Provide support for mechanisms, such as DEN, that enable employees with disability to engage as a collective that has potential to inform, educate and advocate for sustained organisational, social, and political change in the area of employment and disability.

- Exert influence at government level by lobbying for policy and legislation to support workplace adjustments as a way of enabling the human rights of people with disability to work. This includes feedback to services that support workplace participation of people with disability to ensure they are responsive and accessible.

4 | **Discussion and Recommendations**

Getting Workplace
Adjustments out of the
"too hard basket"

Conclusion: Call to Action

While some of the research findings about workplace adjustments are positive and illustrate that progress is being made by employers, there are societal and political issues that must be addressed so that the human rights of people with disability to economic inclusion are upheld. Ultimately, we hope that our research champions the campaign for an increase in the workforce participation rate of people with disability into the public eye and removes barriers to employment for people with disability, mental health condition or long-term health condition.

AUSTRALIAN
DISABILITY
NETWORK