The Future of Work: Integrating People with Disabilities into the workforce

Literature Review/Report - Harry Spurrier

Purpose

Explore the nexus between technology, employment, and people with disabilities (PwD).

Objective

Unveil risks and opportunities for inclusive employment practices.

Importance of Inclusion

PwD bring diverse perspectives, strong problem solving skills, higher retention, and loyalty to the workforce.

1 in 5

Australians are PwD

30%

Lower employment rate

Societal stigmas and structural barriers limit PwD's employment access.

01

ATTITUDINAL

Societal stigmas and misconceptions about the abilities of PwD
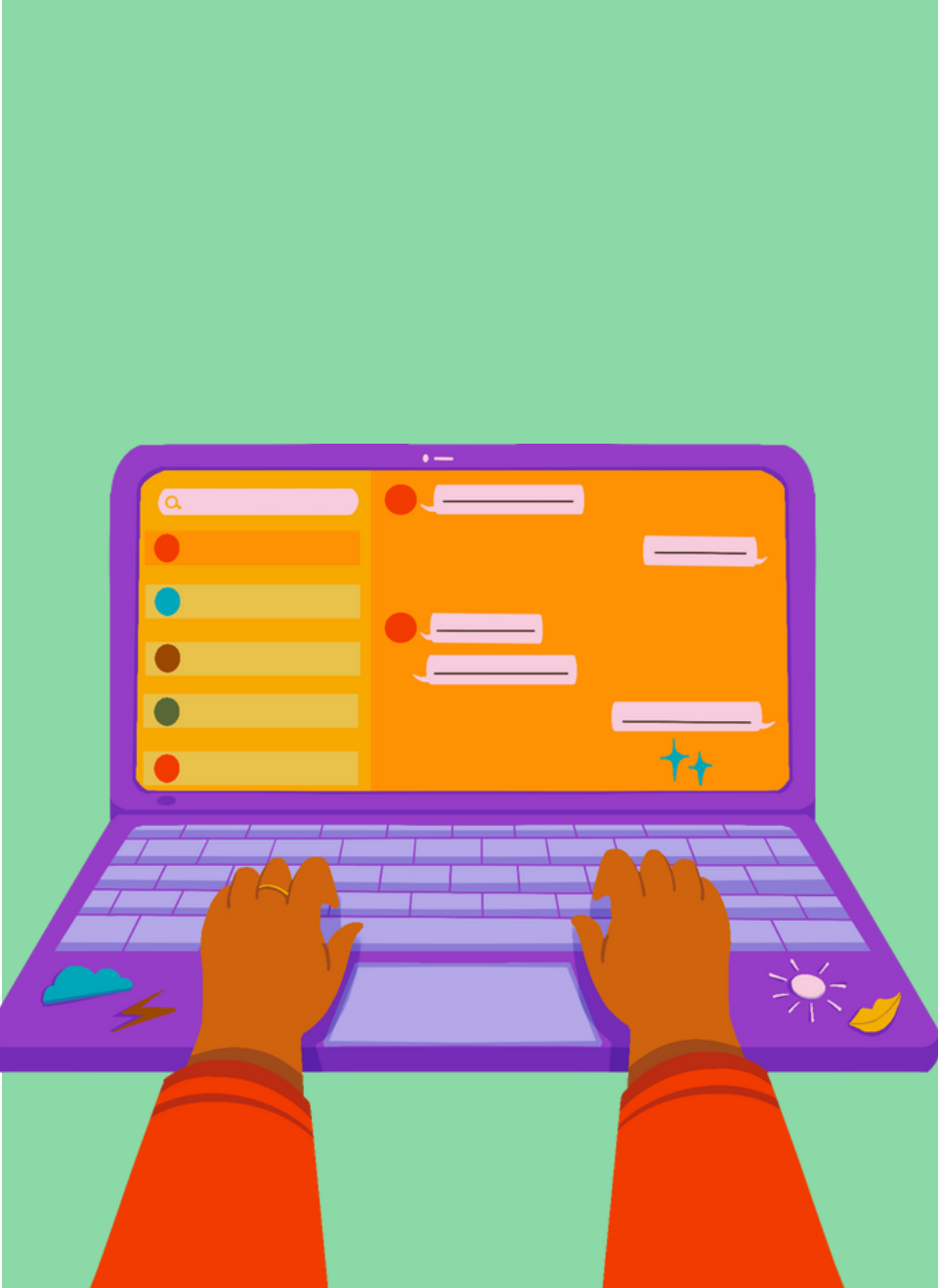
02

ENVIRONMENTAL

Physical infrastructural challenges hindering PwD at workplaces.

03

ORGANISATIONAL

Employer-related issues in hiring, retaining, and promoting PwD.

04

STRUCTURAL

Systemic obstacles, including issues within Disability Employment Services due to consultants' lack of specialised knowledge.

CHALLENGES OF BIAS:

02.

It's crucial to ensure new technologies do not reinforce existing societal and systemic biases against PwD.

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES:

04.

Employers must use technology to develop recruitment and selection processes that are truly inclusive, mitigating biases and facilitating a wider acceptance of PwD.

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN RECRUITMENT:

01.

Assistive technologies and AI can facilitate employment of PwD and address systemic challenges.

BREAK the BIAS
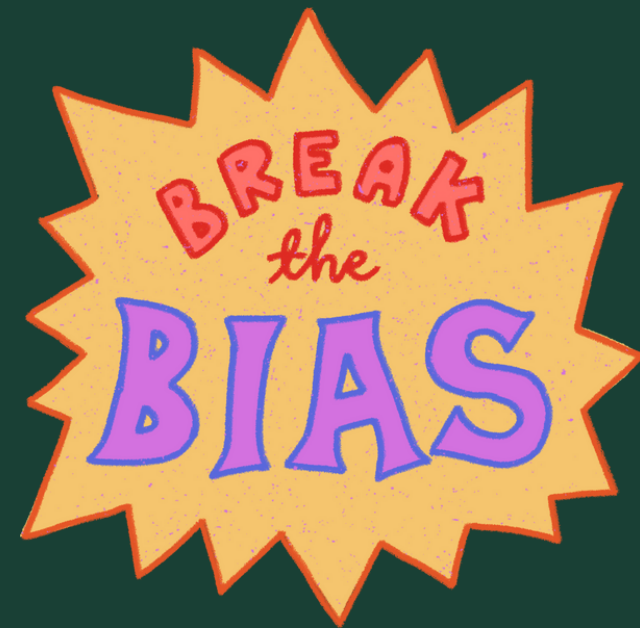
IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL:

03.

Technology should address the gap in social capital for PwD, enabling better access to networks and job opportunities.

Gig Economy and Virtual Work Opportunities

Gig work entails short-term, task-based employment, while virtual work involves remote tasks facilitated by digital technologies, with freelance online work representing a segment of this where individuals offer services per project via digital platforms.

OPPORTUNITIES

Flexibility in gig work and virtual employment can accommodate PwD's needs.

RISKS

This work can lead to inconsistent income and fewer benefits for PwD.

Support in Virtual Work Environments

The shift towards virtual work, propelled by technological advancements and the COVID-19 pandemic, offers flexibility and reduces barriers for people with disabilities, yet requires careful integration of assistive technologies and inclusive strategies to address challenges like social isolation and ensure accessibility.
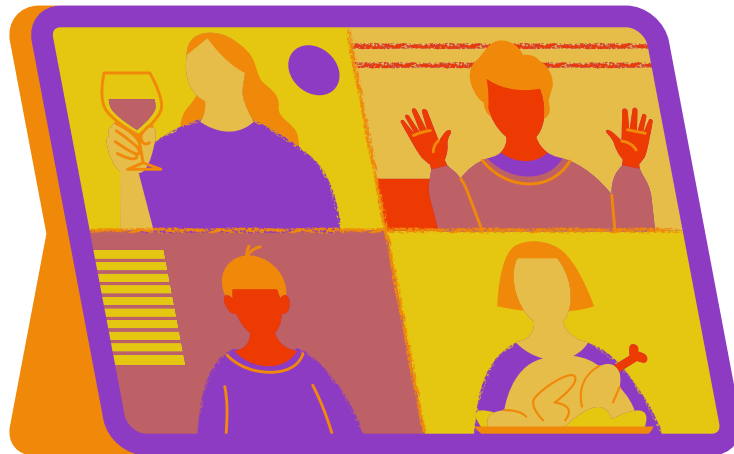

SOCIAL CLIMATE

Importance of creating an inclusive culture in virtualworkplaces.

LEADERSHIP

The role of leadership in ensuring integration and support for PwD in virtual teams.

Overcoming Social Isolation

Why it Matters

Social integration is crucial for the well-being and productivity of PwD working remotely. It not only mitigates feelings of isolation but also fosters a collaborative culture, enhancing team cohesion and enabling PwD to fully contribute their skills and perspectives to the organisation.

How to fix it

Strategies such as organising virtual team-building activities, creating online networking events, and establishing virtual coffee breaks can foster a sense of belonging and combat isolation for PwD in the digital workplace. Implementing regular check-ins and peer mentoring programs can further enhance this, providing both social and professional support.

Empowering Self Management

What it means

The role of self-management is paramount in virtual settings. It empowers people to effectively navigate their workloads, set realistic deadlines, and maintain work-life balance.

Support

Tools like project management software, time tracking apps, and customisable alerts can assist in structuring their day and ensuring tasks are manageable and prioritised.

Leveraging technology to facilitate self-management is key. Features such as voice-activated software, customisable interfaces, and accessible task management systems can provide crucial support for PwD, enabling them to perform their roles with greater autonomy and efficiency.

01 Universal design principles in workplace technology for PwD.

Adopting universal design principles in workplace technology ensures that digital tools are accessible to all employees, including PwD.

This means creating platforms and software that are adaptable to various needs, from screen readers for the visually impaired to speech recognition for those with physical disabilities.

02 Involving PwD in the development process for better technology outcomes.

Actively involving PwD in the technology development process is essential for creating tools that truly meet their needs.

This includes not just testing and feedback phases but also conceptualisation and design, ensuring that the end products facilitate an inclusive and productive work environment for everyone.

AI and Emerging Technologies

Impact: AI's automation potential can make work more accessible for PwD.

Example: AI personalises learning/work for individual needs.

Risks:
Speculative job displacement risks for PwD due to automation. Bias in the construction of AI models perpetuating bias in future products (i.e., recruitment algorithms).

Inclusive Design Essential:
Involve PwD in AI development; ensure diverse training data. (i.e., develop voice recognition software with input from individuals with speech impairments).

Recommendations for Employers

Strategies:

Foster inclusive recruitment, retention, and professional development.

- Ensure job descriptions and advertisements are inclusive and encourage applications from PwD.
- Utilise accessible interview formats and processes that accommodate the unique needs of applicants with disabilities.
- Implement mentorship programs pairing PwD with experienced employees.
- Develop policies ensuring workplace adjustments and accommodations are easily accessible.
- Promote success/challenges from experiences within the organisation to educate future inclusion efforts.

Training:

Emphasise training in accessible technology and procurement

- Offer ongoing technology training for PwD to ensure they can fully utilise workplace technologies.
- Establish a feedback loop with PwD employees to continually assess and improve technology accessibility.
- Engage with vendors to prioritise accessibility in the procurement process, ensuring that all new technologies meet accessibility standards before purchase.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing sessions where PwD employees can share insights and tips on using accessible technologies effectively.

Summary:

- While technology provides new avenues for employment, attention to accessibility and inclusivity is crucial.
- Efforts to integrate technology in the workplace must be accompanied by strategies to counteract existing societal biases and structural barriers.

Barrier Remain

- The digital divide exacerbates access issues, particularly for PwD living in areas with poor internet connectivity or limited access to technology.
- Continuous rapid technological changes can outpace the adoption of accessible features, making it harder for PwD to keep up.

Opportunity Through Inclusion

- Proactively seeking feedback from PwD on technology implementation can lead to innovations that benefit the entire workforce.
- Prioritising the recruitment and retention of PwD not only enriches the workplace but also broadens the organisation's perspective and approach to problem-solving.

Future Research Directions

As technology has become necessary in everyday work more research is needed to explore how technology shapes work for PwD.

01

VIRTUAL WORK

Lack of comprehensive studies on psychological and societal implications of virtual work.

02

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Physical infrastructural challenges hindering PwD at workplaces.

03

WORKFORCE CHANGES

Longitudinal research on changes to the workforce as technology advances.