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Executive Strategies

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Abstract The focus of this chapter is on how leaders and executives can improve their strategic decision making around staff resourcing to foster work opportunities for people with disabilities and also support strategic business objectives. While you as a leader can champion disability inclusion, there are many other stakeholders and factors to consider. The chapter discusses the drivers of disability inclusion for businesses, the role of leaders in this endeavour and the possible strategies that organisations can adopt to employ more people with disabilities. Why would businesses employ more people with disability? What are the motivations at the executive level? How do these drivers relate to overall business goals? The chapter discusses key concepts and theories as applied to recent research with businesses in Australia. We present a number of evidence-based strategies for disability inclusion that can be enacted in your organisation.

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Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Understand the role that executive leadership plays in staff resourcing to promote the equity, diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities.
2. Appreciate how disability inclusion aligns with organisational objectives.
3. Feel more confident about working productively with internal and external stakeholders, in order employ more people with disabilities.

Case Study: MoveSync

MoveSync is a multi-national, private sector transport company, headquartered in Europe and employing 40,000 people worldwide. Internally there is a willingness within MoveSync to support and reflect the communities they transport. Importantly, there is strong support at the senior level and MoveSync's CEO Alex Lee is known for asking difficult questions of the Directors across the business, in order to support diversity and inclusion. A few years ago, MoveSync announced its new Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy which garnered much attention in the media.

Recently, Alex commissioned a report on equity, diversity and inclusion. The results were disappointing. Alex believes that MoveSync needs to improve their workforce diversity and is particularly passionate about employing more people with disability, which the report identified as a gap. Like many other businesses, MoveSync has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff, particularly in the inner-city areas in which they operate. The first job roles to be filled are customer service roles and administrative functions for one of the cities in which they deliver services. Alex has made it clear that their existing recruitment approaches need to be reviewed and reflect industry best practices.

The Talent Resourcing team at MoveSync comprises of Talent Resourcing Director Sam Rivera and Talent Acquisition Specialist Taylor Quinn. Being a small talent team, outsourcing their talent needs has made sense for them. The team had previously sourced fixed term and permanent staff at various levels from recruitment agency Urban Glide. However, earlier this year Sam and Taylor attended a local event where they found out about the work of local employment service providers and the under-represented candidates with whom they work.

Alex has made it clear to Sam and Taylor that the focus of their workforce planning strategy should not only be on the hiring of people with disabilities but also on their retention.

Discussion Questions

After a major government project is completed, Alex has asked you to review the workforce structure and provide a recommendation, taking into account (a) forecast company revenue and (b) aspirations for increased disability inclusion.

The Board has proposed the three potential options (see Fig. 2.1) for restructuring the workforce and to provide more opportunities for people with disability, as well as to budget for inclusive recruitment and retention strategies.

1. Which option is in the best interest of MoveSync? Consider the need to budget, growth of talent pipelines and improving their Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy.
2. Which option is in the best interest of existing staff with disabilities and of potential new hires with disability, in order to maximise retention and reduce hiring costs?

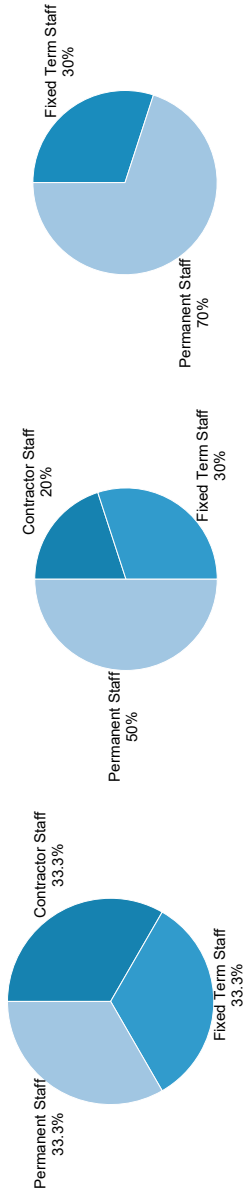


Fig. 2.1 The board's potential options in MoveSync's workforce redesign

2.1 Drivers of Disability Inclusion

For a range of reasons, businesses may wish to diversify their workforce by employing more people with disability. In shareholder-owned businesses, shareholders may drive particular practices such as diversity and inclusion. There is increasing pressure on organisations to act in more sustainable ways, in respect of economic, environmental and social impact. These are usually referred to in terms of the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and ESG—environmental, economic and social sustainability and governance. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 1987). Environmental sustainability concerns the preservation and protection of the natural environment to meet current needs without compromising the future availability of resources. For example, reducing carbon footprints and waste and promoting the circular economy. Social sustainability involves a focus on the well-being of people and communities. This involves businesses ensuring their supply chains do not involve modern slavery, supporting human rights and adopting practices that value and include people of diverse backgrounds. Economic sustainability means conducting economic activities to preserve and promote long-term economic well-being, balancing economic growth, resource efficiency, social equity and financial stability. Governance is central to achieving sustainability objectives across each pillar.

On the journey towards acting more sustainably, businesses respond to different signals and levers, including government policies, the labour market, the economic context and product markets. Governments offer a range of carrots, sticks and sermons (Bredgaard et al., 2023) to influence businesses to hire untapped talent. For example, anti-discrimination policies are sticks that set a threshold below which no organisation should fall in terms of equal treatment of candidates and employees throughout the employee life cycle. Such regulatory approaches have sanctions for non-compliance. Some governments (including the Netherlands) have introduced quotas for the number of employees with disability, with mixed results. In terms of carrots, as part of active labour market programs, governments typically offer wage subsidies to businesses if they employ individuals who face barriers or disadvantage, including people with disability. Such incentives have also had mixed results, but they are an attempt to share risk between government and business for such social inclusion initiatives (Ingold et al., 2023). With regard to sermons, governments attempt to sell the benefits of inclusion to businesses, including through benchmarking and awards for employment of groups

facing disadvantage as well as through the employer engagement actions of delivery partners such as employment service providers.

A more recent public policy initiative across a number of countries—including the UK, US and Australia—has been the innovation of social value procurement targets (Daguerre et al., 2024). Government contracts with businesses for required projects and services but there is an increasing interest in leveraging this buying power to bring about social benefits. For example, government commissions businesses for large infrastructure projects with ‘set asides’ or targets for employment of particular groups. An additional aspect of social value procurement is for government contractors to purchase their own goods and services from social impact suppliers such as disability-owned businesses. A further intended benefit of social value procurement is for closer engagement between for-profit organisations and social enterprises, with the intention being to learn from the latter regarding inclusive employment. Social purpose organisations, such as social enterprises, develop solutions to social inequity or environmental issues as a core part of their business. This can include the inclusive employment of under-represented groups, either more broadly or by focusing on a particular group, such as people with disability.

The setting of disability employment targets for organisations, either by government or by organisations themselves, can provide an initial impetus for employment of untapped talent. However, evidence shows that there needs to be a business imperative from within the organisation, in other words a strategic imperative that is considered to impact the bottom line.

Firstly, labour or skills shortage may mean that businesses have to seek out candidates outside the usual (often discriminating) recruitment channels and usual talent pools. Secondly, consumers or clients may influence businesses to better represent society or the communities they serve (as in the example of MoveSync). A business within a particular labour market or industry may want to try to obtain first mover advantage by being a leader in, for example, disability employment. Alternatively, a business may take action because they risk being uncompetitive in their industry if they do not. Thirdly, there are other business benefits such as retention, employee engagement and improved decision making within workplaces. A recent study of Sephora in the US identified increased retention, reduced sickness absence and reduced safety incidents for disabled employees compared with non-disabled (Moore et al., 2024).

In the UK, Simms (2017) identified that businesses may wish to engage in apprenticeships for two reasons that can be interpreted both as drivers for, and action to reflect, benefits gained. Firstly, human resources (HR) logics

such as the development of staff, future staffing and skills needs. Secondly, corporate social responsibility (CSR) logics. CSR logics relate to the organisation's wider role within society, being seen as a 'good citizen' and the risk of negative publicity from pursuing (or not pursuing) a course of action. Based on their research with businesses in Australia, Ingold et al (2023) found that HR and CSR logics were important to business engagement in active labour market programmes/employment services and found that there was a third dimension—financial logics. Financial logics were either direct or indirect: direct in the form of wage subsidies from government, or indirect such as the benefits of engaging with providers as an alternative to paid-for advertising or labour hire agencies, including through additional services such as post-placement support.

2.2 Organisational Strategies for Employing People with Disabilities

Although many businesses state a desire to employ more people with disability, the persistent 'disability employment gap' (the difference between the employment rates for people with and without disability) suggests that these intentions are not being translated into behaviours. The endeavour of employing more staff with disability requires a strategic approach that starts from the business objectives and needs to recognise the context in which the business operates. The 'Harvard model' (see Chapter 3 by Boselie, van Harten and van Os) prompts leaders to consider the business context including government policy; situational factors such as the labour market; management philosophy; business strategy and conditions; and a range of stakeholders such as employees, line managers, HR, top and middle managers, shareholders and government (Beer et al., 2015).

In this section, we draw on our research with businesses about their perspectives on job quality in Australia (Ingold, Knox and Lee, 2024). The research involved over 50 employers from a diverse range of industries across Australia. Leaders took part in 'masterclasses' which were a hybrid of focus groups and a community of practice. The study unpacked not only the drivers for the employment of untapped cohorts (including candidates with disabilities) but also the impact of this on their HRM policy choices to ensure that candidates are retained, which then leads to benefits for the organisation and broader society. The research identified a range of activities that are required to successfully attract, hire, retain and progress hires from untapped talent

pools. Half of the sample of businesses had recruited people with disabilities. It was evident that organisations were motivated by business needs and this was dependent on a range of internal and external situational factors (see Table 2.1).

Let us take as a starting point that organisations in general aim to acquire the most appropriate talent needed to undertake the activities required to meet the business's goals. However, acquiring the most appropriate (or, as often claimed, the 'best') talent is limited by both the supply-side and demand-side. On the supply-side, there are external factors such as the labour market context and the talent pools available. On the demand-side, the acquisition of the best talent is limited by organisations' own HR policies, practices and biases.

In terms of a strategic approach to disability inclusion, the research demonstrated that there needs to be increased alignment within organisations between HR, diversity, equity and inclusion teams and other teams, and hiring managers. Michael Porter (2008) considered strategy to be a product of analysis. Within this broader frame, Human Resource Management (HRM) was considered to be a supporting activity to assist primary business activities, such as operations. This perspective assumes that HR plays a largely administrative role. By contrast, Henry Mintzberg's (2023) perspective of 'emergent strategy'—centring the importance of learning—has argued for the need to view organisations as communities of human beings. More recently, the strategy-as-practice perspective (Whittington, 1996) has been concerned with people—how managers 'do strategy' and managerial activity. This includes the inspirational parts, the routine, the ways in which strategy actually gets formulated and implemented by the people (p. 732). Importantly, the practice of strategy is not the same for everyone. Inclusion expert Toby Milton argues that organisations need to create a strategy that everyone understands (Milton, 2020: 32).

We cannot examine management and/or strategy without also considering how HRM impacts an organisation's decision-making processes. Strategic

Table 2.1 Drivers of employing from untapped talent pools

Internal drivers	External drivers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate need for staff • Corporate social responsibility or diversity, equity and inclusion targets • Future workforce planning • Representation of customer base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour and skill shortages in the labour market • Meeting government targets (social procurement or quota requirements)

Human Resource Management (SHRM) acts as a bridge between an organisation's business strategy and its HR strategy. Central to debates about how HRM and SHRM intersect has been the extent to which organisations should focus on the link between HRM and organisational performance, productivity and efficiency, compared with other measures such as employee and societal well-being.

van Gestel and Nyberg (2007) examined the translation of public policies to reduce sickness absence within organisations. This can be achieved through the embedding of strategic issues, like financial targets, control, and performance into organisational practices. van Gestel and Nyberg highlighted that there are three important dimensions involved in translating new strategies throughout organisations. These are: individual preferences and strategic reframing of policies by HR managers and local grounding throughout the organisation. This occurs via a range of actors from the senior level to frontline managers. It is also where organisations can consider how they can best *reframe* their HR policies to ensure that people with disabilities are included. It is critical that organisations prepare to receive candidates ('organisational readiness') training for the workforce and building leadership capability (see Chapter 4 by Breit and Yde Aksnes) and is preferable to organisations over-relying on one champion who, when they leave, leads to a loss of capability.

Organisations in our research introduced, or modified, HRM policies and practices to facilitate inclusion. For example, ensuring that the organisation's recruitment and selection processes were inclusive in order to support the recruitment, selection, and retention of the target cohorts. By so doing, the organisations in the study experienced specific HR outcomes, such as improved retention and productivity, and a range of other benefits to the organisation. These included an improved workplace culture that supported the further inclusion of a diverse range of people and the community. This was achieved through for example offering sustainable career pathways within the organisation. Within recruitment and selection, a strategic approach involved empowering the HR function to challenge hiring managers' biases and try out alternative recruitment and selection methods.

Trialing a disability inclusion strategy in one area of an organisation can be an important way of assessing the organisation's readiness to employ people with disability. A number of organisations in our study did this. This approach also has the benefit of allowing organisations and their staff to upskill managers. One way of meeting quotas or targets is to ringfence particular roles for people with disability. This has the benefit of allowing one section or team to upskill, prepare and be a leader for the rest of the

organisation. However, it is important that employees with disability are not stigmatised by being restricted to particular roles.

In relation to attraction, employee value propositions and employer brand need to focus on inclusive employment. This means moving from a supply-side approach to a demand-side one. For example, moving from saying ‘we welcome applications from people with disability’ towards ‘we love to employ people with disability’ and articulating what makes your organisation attractive to people with disability. Within recruitment, this can mean having tailored job advertisements (see Chapter 7 by Bredgaard) and using different recruitment channels, including partnering with employment service providers and community organisations (see also Moore et al, 2024).

Partnering with intermediaries as labour market experts on specific cohorts (e.g. employment service providers, social enterprises and community organisations, particularly those led by people with disability) can help to inform executive strategies, educate the broader workforce and inform an organisation’s workforce planning (see Chapter 10 by Brathen). ‘Instrumental’, of ‘ad hoc’ engagement with intermediaries tends to be linked with reactive, short-term vacancy-filling approaches. By contrast, relational engagement involves partnering more proactively for workforce planning and talent acquisition for the longer-term. The latter is closer to a strategic approach and ideally should involve all of the elements discussed in this section, with strategy informing the employee lifecycle from recruitment, selection and onboarding, through learning and development, retention and progression. Bringing all of these elements together can lead to social and economic benefits for the organisation and its employees, for customers and wider society.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has focused on how leaders and executives can improve their strategic decision making around staff resourcing, in order to foster work opportunities for people with disabilities while also supporting strategic business objectives. Central to this is whether organisations should focus solely on the link between HRM and organisational performance, productivity and efficiency, or on other measures such as employee and societal well-being. Drawing on our research with organisations in Australia, we presented a case study of a multi-national private sector transport company and discussed the drivers of disability inclusion including sticks, carrots and sermons, and HR and CSR logics. The chapter presented a range of organisational strategies

to assist disability inclusion from the strategic level based on our empirical data from businesses in Australia. Such strategies included consideration of the range of stakeholders, both internal and external, and situational factors from the so-called Harvard model, including internal drivers such as future-proofing your organisation and external drivers such as the context of skills and labour shortage. These strategic-level dimensions should feed into HRM policy choices such as the alignment of HR, DEI and other teams in the organisation. Through their implementation, these policy choices can have a direct impact on HRM outcomes, such as increased retention and decreased turnover and further long-term benefits, as well as organisational outcomes including culture change and the building of internal labour market capacity and capability to better meet business objectives.

Individual Task

Consider your own organisation. How can you and other stakeholders (internal and external) ensure that the organisation is working towards the inclusion of employees with disability?

Group Task

1. Consider which MoveSync stakeholders should be involved in the recruitment of people with disability. Discuss with your group how they would each positively contribute to an inclusive recruitment process for this cohort.
2. Share your organisation's strategic approach to inclusive recruitment and onboarding practices. Highlight any particular challenges you are facing.

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Further Reading Suggestions

- Adams, L. (2021). *HR Disrupted: It’s time for something different*, Northwich: Practical Inspiration Publishing—A common-sense approach to HRM focused around the EACH model (employees as adults, consumers and human beings)
- Gold, M., & Smith, C. (2023) *Where’s the human in Human Resource Management? Managing work in the 21st century*. Bristol University Press—Centres the people element that is often absent in HRM.
- Guest, D. E. (2024). Strengthening links between HRM theories, HR practices and outcomes: A proposal to advance research on HRM and outcomes. *Human*

Resource Management Journal. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12569-agreatprimeronthekeytheoriesofHRM>

MacLeavy, J., & Pitts, F.H. (2024) *Handbook for the Future of Work*. Routledge—A reference guide to everything you need to know about future of work debates

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