

DCIF – Corporate Strategy Tool 1: Building Your Understanding of Disability Confidence

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Tags

Who is this tool for?

High priority:

- HR professionals
- Executives and senior management

Practical Information:

- Cross-departmental managers

Useful to know:

- Frontline staff

What guidance does this tool provide?

- Understanding the best corporate practice of **disability confidence**

Take home points

- A disability confident employer recognizes the talents that people with disabilities bring to the workplace. They feel confident in their ability to hire, support, and retain workers with disabilities, and work to drive lasting change in attitudes, behaviours, and cultures within their own businesses to become fully inclusive of people with disabilities.
- The **medical model of disability** has underpinned peoples' perceptions and understanding of disability for a long time. It suggests that disability exists because of a person's impairments and must be 'fixed' or treated by medicine or healthcare professionals.
- The **social model of disability** examines disability from a broader perspective. It suggests that disability exists because of the way that society is organized, rather than a medical condition an individual may have. Based on this model, if society was set up in a way that was accessible, persons with disabilities would not be prevented from fully participating.
- Understanding your company's core strategy and culture can help you evolve. Think about different business contexts – depending on who you partner with, the adversities you face, the markets you are targeting, and many other important factors.

Understanding Disability

The World Health Organization understands disability as “a part of being human.”¹

*One in five (22%) of the Canadian population aged 15 years and over – or about 6.2 million individuals have one or more disabilities.*²

Across a lifetime, nearly everyone will either temporarily, or permanently, experience disability at some point. It is the single minority group that any one of us can become a part of, at any given time. The medical and social models of disability are two approaches to understanding disability:³

The Medical Model

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The Social Model

The social model of disability examines disability from a broader perspective. It suggests that disability exists because of the way that society is organized, rather than a medical condition an individual may have. Based on this model, if society was set up in a way that was accessible, persons with disabilities would not be prevented from fully participating.

In this toolkit, we ground our understanding of disability in the social model of disability. For example, in the context of a workplace, there are a myriad of factors that impact whether a person experiences disability:

- Are people with disabilities discriminated against in the workplace?
- Do people have negative attitudes about, or stigmatize disability?
- Can the individual access necessary treatments and health services?
- Do workers with disabilities have equitable access to benefit packages?
- Does a workplace provide reasonable accommodations?
- Is the built environment accessible?
- Have people with disabilities been involved in health and safety committees?
- Have employment policies been designed to be inclusive of workers with disabilities?

A person only experiences disability when aspects of their surroundings prevent them from doing what they want to or can do. The responsibility for accessibility and inclusion is shared by all of us.

With this understanding, can begin, and continue to counter commonly held misconceptions and negative attitudes about disability. You can challenge your organization to innovate, and restructure its practices, policies, and with that, society at large, to be more inclusive. You can show your workers, colleagues, and collaborators that you respect, celebrate, and welcome people with disabilities into the organization.

Understanding Disability Confidence

For far too long, many corporations' spotlights on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace have left people with disabilities out of the picture – standing to lose out to the competition by:⁴

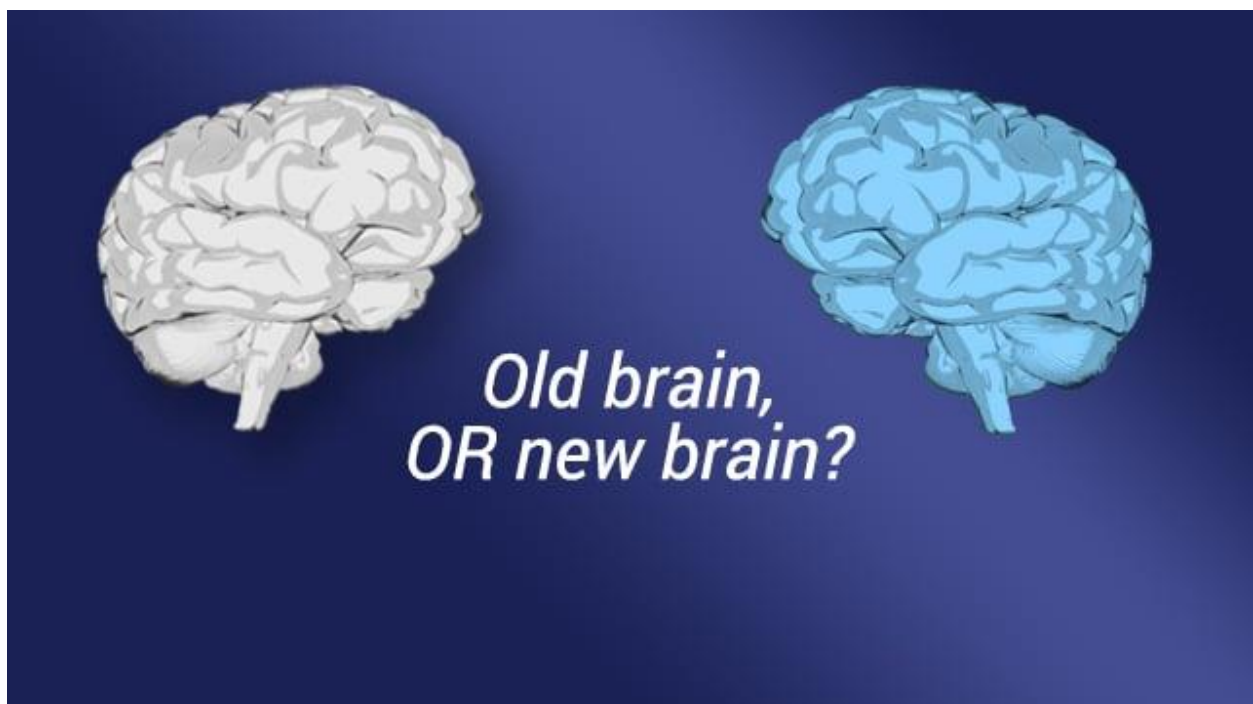
- Restricting access to an enormous population group that is talented, innovative, and ready to work
- Needlessly discounting skilled individuals who would be an asset to their businesses
- Overlooking the extraordinary spending power of people with disabilities and their allies
- Failing to account for a customer base whose size and accessibility needs will continue to expand

For the past 30 years, labour unions have built Disability Confidence amongst their membership and in partnership with employers. Unions have seen firsthand the value of embracing inclusion in their movement and have strategically been on the forefront of equity activism.

Leading businesses around the globe have committed to ending the exclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. They have recognized and adopted the best corporate practice known as disability confidence. With this toolkit of business-focused resources, we aim to support Canadian employers' understanding of the importance of the disability agenda and empower them to advance it as best as they can so that they, too, can become disability confident workplaces.

The Origins of Disability Confidence

The term "disability confidence" was coined by the CEO of business disability international, Susan Scott Parker, who is a long-standing and renowned expert in the arena of business and disability. With over 30 years of experience, business disability international has a comprehensive understanding of addressing disability as it affects business and commercial performance, uniquely positioning them to kick-start unexpected and mind-opening conversations:⁵



<https://www.businessdisabilityinternational.org/old-way-or-new-way/>

“Being disability confident is about being able and willing to effectively manage a spectrum of human needs. When organisations get this right, it can bring enormous business and personal benefit.” - business disability international

A disability confident employer recognizes the talents that people with disabilities bring to the workplace. They feel confident in their ability to hire, support, and retain workers with disabilities, and work to drive lasting change in attitudes, behaviours, and cultures within their own businesses to become fully inclusive of people with disabilities.

According to business disability international, a company that is disability confident:⁵

1. Understands how disability, and its corporate disability performance, reaches every aspect of business
2. Learns directly from people with disabilities as colleagues, potential colleagues, and community stakeholders, and transforms what is learned into action
3. Identifies, addresses, and removes barriers for all people with disabilities
4. Provides workplace adjustments to enable colleagues to contribute to the success of the business
5. Does not make assumptions about what people can do on the basis of any label

Disability Confidence in Canada

Disability confidence has entered the playing field in Canada, with the Disability and Work in Canada Steering Committee recognizing disability confidence in its core objectives within the most recent Pan Canadian Strategy for Disability and Work. This committee has the following vision:⁶

Employment throughout Canada is inclusive. Persons with and without disabilities have equality of opportunity and choice in careers, jobs, and work.

The Disability and Work in Canada Steering Committee strives to achieve:⁶

- **Disability confidence and inclusive workplaces:** Employers will understand the value of, and be committed to, hiring, managing, accommodating, supporting, and retaining persons with disabilities. And they will be confident in their ability to successfully do so.
- **Comprehensive supports for persons with disabilities:** Persons with disabilities will be supported in their pursuit of meaningful employment, while assured of income and benefits that provide a life with dignity above the poverty line.

Without the support of our Disability Confidence Toolkit partners, the guidance you read today would not exist. Learn more what they have to say about to Disability Confidence:

Disability Confidence is not just about hiring more people with disabilities, it is about making the work environment truly accessible. It goes beyond providing work accommodations to people with disabilities

to comply with disability legislations, it involves providing people with disabilities the opportunities and resources to excel and strive in the workforce. Disability Confidence is not a skill, it is a commitment to advocate for people with disabilities as well as foster equity and inclusion. It requires courage to challenge the norm and status quo. It demands conscious efforts to change perception. - **W. Francis Fung, Independent, National Manager, Rehabilitation and Clinical Services (RVP, RRP, CVRP(D), CCVE(D), ICVE, RTWDM)**

Disability Confidence will help 'End the Wait' for persons with disabilities - the wait for recognition, for employment and for inclusion. The recognition of the needs of persons with disabilities by the financial institutions of Canada will help give a voice to the broader disability community as they seek better supports and services. Every Canadian Counts is facilitating that recognition through the creation of its "Interactive Compendium of Services and Supports" project to help both employers and employees find the services they need and End the Wait for basic needs. - **Dr. William Cowie, Every Canadian Counts, Executive Director**

Being a person with a disability, I am truly honored to provide leadership in an organization that supports people with disabilities living life on their terms. MDC has taken a number of steps to advance disability inclusion including: promoting our commitment to employment equity in all of our job postings, with a special statement about disability; all new team members (employees and volunteers) participate in detailed onboarding sessions on Appreciating Diversity, Disability Sensitivity and Neuromuscular Disorders; and members of our Programs and Services team receive additional training in disability sensitivity. MDC has a number of related policies including Accommodation; Inclusion, Equity, Safer Spaces and Diversity; Accessibility and Accessible Customer Service. We have received significant positive feedback related to our Onboarding Program and are very proud of it. This program sets up our team members to work with co-workers, volunteers, clients, partners and members of the general public regardless of their level of ability.

As a leader in the Canadian Disability Community, MDC recognizes the benefits that come from being Disability Confident including out of the box thinking, understanding of customer needs and access to a larger pool of talent. As a person with lived experience, I see the recognition of the importance of inclusion throughout our team, which is demonstrated through their daily activities. It is amazing to work for an organization that is able to see your impact and value, beyond disability, and understands that even though we have individual challenges or limitations that by focusing on equity and person-centred flexibility that the organization is much stronger. - **Jeff Sparks, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, Director, Volunteer Engagement and Human Resources (BBA, MIR, CPHR, Person with Lived Disabilities)**

How Can You Journey Towards Disability Confidence?

The conversation around disability is changing. Forward-thinking employers are paving the way towards a more inclusive future – one that invests in the skills and capabilities of employees with disabilities and unlocks their potential to transform a business for the better.

Within the Canadian Financial Sector alone, we are seeing immense growth and capacity building to support employees and customers with disabilities.

- Manulife has developed a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan from 2021 – 2026, outlining the company's strategy to prevent and remove barriers from its workplace and to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities.⁷

- TD Bank has been recognized with the top score of 100 percent for the seventh consecutive year on the 2021 Disability Equality Index® (DEI), a national benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices related to disability inclusion and workplace equality.⁸

It starts with a commitment, and then follows with a plan.

Where are you coming from?

Understanding your company’s core strategy and culture can help you evolve. Think about different business contexts – depending on who you partner with, the adversities you face, the markets you are targeting, and many other important factors. Your company strategy can be expressed in innovative ways to develop new business models, products and services, and ways of thinking.

Take the concept of diversity, equity, and inclusion for example:

- All too often, leadership inadvertently neglects disability when building and retaining a diverse workforce
- Few leaders have come to understand the commercial benefits of being disability confident, let alone how to achieve it
- Only top performing companies have learned to express inclusion in a way that produces added value and sustainable business advantages – disability confidence.

Because your company’s strategy and culture are unique, when embarking on a journey towards **disability confidence**, each organization will start in a different place. While one company may begin by emphasizing education for all staff members about the benefits of disability confidence, another may funnel their attention into auditing its employment practices to enhance accessibility. A third company may hone their focus onto expanding their client base to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities.

The CEOs of intelligent and agile businesses of all sizes **have committed to disability confidence**. It is no longer about ‘can we do it?’ – rather, the reality has become ‘we have to do it to remain competitive’.

And by staying true to your business’s strategy and culture, the route you take to achieve disability confidence will be unique to you.

[Pop Up: Top Canadian companies, like TD and CIBC, are committing to inclusion that encompasses people with disabilities. Take a look at the global campaigns that are driving the disability movement forward. All employers play a role in creating a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable society. Will you join?]

The Valuable 500

The Valuable 500’s mission is to use the power of business to drive lasting change for the 1.3 billion people around the world, living with a disability.⁹ It is a global business collective made up of 500 CEOs and their companies, innovating together for disability inclusion.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Global Business Disability Network

The ILO Global Business and Disability Network aims to create a global workforce culture that is respectful and welcoming of people with disabilities.¹⁰ Their goal is to make sure that employment policies and practices in companies of all types are inclusive of people with disabilities around the world.

PurpleSpace

PurpleSpace is the world's only networking and professional development hub for disabled employees, network and resource group leaders and allies from all sectors and trades.¹¹ They have launched #PurpleLightUp, a global movement that celebrates and draws attention to the economic contribution of the 386 million disabled employees around the world.]

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