RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enablers of successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities

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Abstract

Successful employment outcomes are often beyond the reach of people with disabilities, but relatively little is known about the factors that best enable the achievement of this goal. Using survey data from 803 people with and without disabilities, we examine the association of eight factors with successful employment outcomes. Using regression tree analysis, five factors emerged as statistically significant predictors of successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities: corporate culture and climate, job characteristics, government support, employer attitudes, and societal attitudes. Key interrelationships between factors include: (1) government support linking with corporate culture and climate; and (2) job characteristics linking with corporate culture and climate. Findings are relevant to organisations and governments to inform policy and practice to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Keywords: disability; employment outcomes; classification and regression tree analysis

Introduction

Improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities is a key focus of government reform globally. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities recognises the social and economic imperative of ensuring better employment outcomes for people with disabilities (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). Goal 8 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (decent work and economic growth) also emphasises the need for countries to promote policies that ensure full and productive employment for people with disabilities, as well as protection from discrimination and prejudice in mainstream workplaces (United Nations, 2018). The heightened urgency for, and international attention on, the participation of people with disabilities in the labour force has been further fuelled by the global decline in the working-age population (Vornholt et al., 2018). This has catalysed efforts to engage traditionally marginalised groups in employment in order to mitigate the economic effects of labour shortages and subsequent adverse impact on the world economy. Despite good strides by organisations towards embracing the talent advantages presented by diversity generally, efforts towards disability employment have lagged behind (Gould, Mullin, Parker Harris, & Jones, 2022).

Achieving the employment of people living with disabilities involves employers, however the impetus for research into the employment of people with disabilities has predominantly come from the disability sector (the demand-side of the equation) and has had limited engagement with

organisations, to enhance their practice, and with government, to inform policy. Employers require clear frameworks to help them create inclusive workplaces that effectively integrate people with disabilities into their organisation (Van Berkel, 2021). The purpose of the present study is to address this issue by identifying clear and pragmatic actions that employers can take to effectively, and sustainably, embed people with disabilities within their organisations in a mutually beneficial and rewarding way.

People with disabilities can perform most jobs well under the right work conditions (World Health Organisation, 2011), however they experience significantly lower employment rates than people without disabilities (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2022). It is estimated that people with disabilities account for 15.6% of the global workforce, which equates to around 785 million people (Cavanagh et al., 2017). Yet, 'the employment-to-population ratio of persons with disabilities aged 15 and older is almost half that of persons without disabilities' (United Nations, 2018, p. 10). Poor work outcomes for people with disabilities are considered to result from widespread systemic employment discrimination stemming from prejudice within broader society (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016; Royal Commission into Violence Abuse Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 2021).

Improving work outcomes for people with disabilities requires greater understanding of the factors that enable and drive success in mainstream employment settings. Factors identified as being associated with employment success for people with disabilities include the individual being educated above high school level (Alverson & Yamamoto, 2018; O'Neill et al., 2015), organisational values and norms (Beatty, Baldridge, Boehm, Kulkarni, & Colella, 2019; Stone & Colella, 1996), and workplace culture (McDonough et al., 2021; Schur, Kruse, Blasi, & Blanck, 2009). Matching people with jobs that are within their functional capacity is also linked with better employment outcomes for both the individual and their organisation because the individual is more likely to perform the job well (Choe & Baldwin, 2017; Wen, Van Rensburg, O'Neill, & Attwood, 2023). At a broader level, people with disabilities are more likely to succeed at work when they are accepted as full members of society with protected rights (Bogenschutz, Im, & Liang, 2016; Lindsay, McDougall, Menna-Dack, Sanford, & Adams, 2015) and have access to government-funded assistance that facilitates their sustained success, such as on-the-job support or assistive technology (Readhead & Owen, 2020).

The socio-economic rationale for hiring people with disabilities is clear and the factors enhancing employability for people with disabilities are becoming apparent. However, there is a gap between the aspirations of the human resource profession and organisational practice (Schloemer-Jarvis, Bader, & Bohm, 2022). Employing someone with a disability is espoused as generating competitive advantage in a tight labour market, or as a social good associated with sustainable human resource management (Richards, 2022). Yet, employers still grapple with hiring people with disabilities, and managing existing employees who acquire an injury or illness (Andrew, Phillipson, & Sheridan, 2018; Bartram, Cavanagh, Meacham, & Pariona-Cabrera, 2021). Disability raises human resource issues and, consequently, organisations require support to identify and resolve these challenges (Van Berkel, 2021).

A contributing factor to this situation is the fact that disability management within organisations has remained the remit of the work health and safety (allied health) professionals responsible for reasonable adjustments in the workplace (Sheridan, 2023), rather than being a primary concern of the human resource profession. Employer perspectives of disability are thus derived from a deficit mindset, where standard job roles require 'accommodations' to overcome the individual's medical problem. This results in human resource professionals feeling ill-equipped to manage, or even understand, the nature of the injury or illness and how it can be 'overcome' in a workplace setting. Some may argue that it is stigma and negative employer attitudes that explain the deficit legacy of employer perspectives on disability (Khayatzadeh-Mahani, Wittevrongel, Nicholas, & Zwicker, 2019). However, in some scenarios, there may be a willingness of employers to support people with disabilities into work, but the complexity stems from the deficit legacy which focuses human resource managers minds on sensitive health-based enquiries as being taboo and potentially a legal risk (Ikutegbe, Randle, Sheridan, Gordon, & Dolnicar, 2023b). This study seeks to overcome this by informing human resources practice on disability and work by presenting a data-informed approach (as per Beatty et al., 2019).

First, this study is contextualised within its theoretical lens, the social model of disability. This model is useful to human resource scholars and practitioners as it is a relatively new perspective on disability and it is important to understand that many, less useful, alternate views continue to be pervasive in broader society and limit the employment of people with disabilities. Second, the survey method and data analysis via classification and regression tree analysis are introduced. This approach can lead to meaningful insights into inter-related factors that contribute to successful employment outcomes and the benefit of adopting a comparison of people with and without disability to identify factors that are specific to people with disabilities. The results are then presented before interpreting these for business and government stakeholders to identify specific actions they can take to enhance employment of people with disabilities.

Theoretical background

The present study is underpinned by the social model of disability (Oliver, 1996; UPIAS, 1976). The social model understands disability as a failure of society to recognise and accommodate the needs and rights of people with disabilities (Riddle, 2020). This understanding of disability is in contrast with other models of disabilities that have traditionally shaped public policy and how society interacts with people with disabilities, such as medical, functional, and environmental models. For example, the medical model of disability considers disability as a health condition that makes the individual different to 'normal' people and that needs to be fixed. Consequently, taking a medical view of disability can dehumanise people with disabilities and expose them to heightened levels of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion from society, including in employment (Smart & Smart, 2006).

Alternatively, the social model of disability distinguishes between the health condition of an individual and their experience of being 'disabled' within society (World Health Organization, 2022). It offers an understanding of disability that is more inclusive as it seeks to identify and remove all social structures that may hinder people with disabilities from fully participating in society (Jones, Mavromaras, Sloane, & Wei, 2014; Scholz & Ingold, 2020). The capacity of the social model of disability to promote inclusion exceeds that of other models because it consistently demands societal changes that reduce stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities (Levitt, 2017; Smart, 2009).

Ikutegbe et al. (2023b) used the social model of disability to holistically consider the individual, structural, and societal factors associated with successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. They identified factors on three levels: supply-side factors (those related to the person with a disability), demand-side factors (those related to the workplace), and environmental factors (those related to the external environment). Qualitative research has identified eight factors in particular that are most important for successful employment outcomes: nature of the disability, disability disclosure, personal motivation, employer attitudes, job characteristics, corporate culture and climate, government support, and societal attitudes (Ikutegbe, Randle, Sheridan, Gordon, & Dolnicar, 2023a). The present study adds to the extant literature by further examining these eight factors to determine their statistical significance in predicting employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Method

Research context

This research was conducted in Australia, where one in six people have a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). In recent decades, the workforce participation rate for people with disabilities has remained at just over 50%, compared to 84% for people without disabilities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). It is a priority of the Australian government to increase employment of people with disabilities in mainstream workplaces (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). This approach is consistent with many countries which are shifting away from segregated or sheltered employment systems that do not support inclusive mainstream workplaces (Hemphill & Kulik, 2017).

Increasing employment of people with disabilities is also a key aim of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which was introduced in Australia in 2017. The NDIS was intended to revolutionise the way Australian people with a disability are supported by government to live an ordinary life, which involves building 'skills and capability so they can participate in the community and employment' (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2017). Key to the economic success of the NDIS was the expectation that many people with a disability and their carers would be able to enter the workforce and contribute to the economy. However, this success is jeopardised by the persistently low workforce participation rates of people with disabilities.

Data collection

This study is part of a larger program of work being conducted on employment outcomes for people with disabilities. For the present study, we use data collected through an online survey of 803 people with and without disabilities who were employed in mainstream work settings in Australia. Data was collected in November–December 2021 using a national online panel. We used an online panel company because it they enable recruitment of large samples easily and quickly (Evans & Mathur, 2005) and greater access to marginalised populations in the workforce that can be difficult to reach, such as people with disabilities (Thompson, Bergman, Culbertson, & Huffman, 2013). Screening questions were used to exclude participants who were younger than 18 years old, unemployed, self-employed, employed for less than 90 days, or employed in sheltered or supported employment settings. The university's Human Research Ethics Committee approved this research prior to data collection commencing (approval number 2018/332).

Measures

Survey measures were informed and developed using qualitative data collected through interviews with people with disabilities, employers, and disability employment service providers. Items were developed using the C-OAR-SE procedure for scale development (Rossiter, 2011), which specifies that constructs are defined in terms of the object, attribute, and rater entity. Items were formulated according to whether each construct was defined as being singular or having multiple components. Unlike psychometric theory, C-OAR-SE theory emphasises content validity as the only essential requirement of a measure. Rossiter (2011) advises against the use of coefficient alpha because it assumes that the measure of a construct can be validated by examining the scores obtained from that measure. Instead, C-OAR-SE theory assesses the validity of a measure based on the relationship between the conceptual definition of the construct and the measure that is developed. For the measures in the present study, content validity was established by conducting open-ended, semi-structured interviews with people with disabilities as part of the questionnaire pre-testing phase, and before any data was collected.

Mainstream employment success (MES) was operationalised by considering two elements. First, all participants included in the analysis had already experienced some degree of employment success in the traditional sense because they had been employed in paid work for 90 days or more and had regular work hours. Second, we measured participants' own subjective assessments of their present employment by asking them to indicate their level of agreement with three statements: 'I like my job,' 'I am able to progress in my job,' and 'I am able to achieve my full potential in my job.' Participants responded by sliding a marker on a 100-point answer scale labelled 'Strongly agree' on the far-right end (100), 'Neither agree nor disagree' in the middle (50), and 'Strongly disagree' on the far-left end (0). The three scores were averaged to produce an overall score.

Supply-side measures

Participants with disabilities were asked to indicate the *nature of their disability* and could select one or more of the following: autism, intellectual, neurological, acquired brain injury, sensory, psychosocial, physical, or other. They were also asked to indicate the severity of their disability and whether, in

their experience, it is obvious to other people that they had a disability. The other supply-side factors hypothesised to predict successful employment outcomes – disability disclosure and personal motivation – were measured by asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements. Again, participants responded by sliding a marker on a 100-point bipolar answer scale labelled 'Strongly agree' on the far-right end (100), 'Neither agree nor disagree' in the middle (50), and 'Strongly disagree' on the far-left end (0). Where multiple items were used to measure a construct scores were then averaged to produce an overall score.

Disability disclosure was measured by asking participants with disabilities to indicate their agreement with the statement: 'I am comfortable with telling an employer about my disability.' *Personal motivation* was measured for all participants using five statements for which participants indicated their level of agreement: 'Having a job enables me to be financially independent'; 'Having a job enables me to contribute to my community'; 'Having a job gives me a purpose in life'; 'Having a job enables me to socialise with people I work with'; and 'Having a job enables me to always keep busy.'

Demand-side measures

The demand-side factors hypothesised to predict successful employment outcomes – job characteristics, corporate culture and climate, and employer attitudes – were measured by asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements. Again, participants responded by sliding a marker on a 100-point bipolar answer scale labelled 'Strongly agree' on the far-right end (100), 'Neither agree nor disagree' in the middle (50), and 'Strongly disagree' on the far-left end (0). Where multiple items were used to measure a construct scores were then averaged to produce an overall score.

Job characteristics was measured using three items: 'My knowledge, skills and abilities enable me to be good at my job'; 'I am happy to stay in my job for the foreseeable future'; and 'I am suited well for my job.' *Corporate culture and climate* was measured using five items: 'I am allowed to make decisions at work'; 'Managers at my workplace support me when needed'; 'My workplace recognises and values my contribution'; 'I feel like my workplace is where I belong'; and 'The staff at my workplace care for one another.' *Employer attitudes* were measured using four items: 'My employer employs me because I am productive at work'; 'My employer employs me because I am a loyal employee'; 'My employer employs me because I am reliable'; and 'My employer employs me because they value having a diverse range of employees.'

Environmental measures

The environmental factors hypothesised to predict successful employment outcomes – societal attitudes and government support – were measured by asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements and answering on the same 100-point bipolar answer scale as for the supply-side and demand-side factors. *Societal attitudes* were measured using four items: 'Most people in society believe people with disabilities can live independently'; 'Most people in society treat people with disabilities fairly'; 'Most people in society believe people with disabilities are just as capable as anyone else'; and 'Most people in society believe people with disabilities have a bright future.' *Government support* was measured using three items: 'If needed, I know where to find information about government support for people with disabilities'; 'It is easy for people with disabilities to access disability support from the government'; and 'The government support provided to people with disabilities is adequate.'

Finally, all participants provided information regarding their age, sex, area of residence, level of education, and work classification.

Analysis

Data was cleaned using the IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 software. Postcodes were used to determine participants' geographic remoteness according to the Modified Monash Model (Australian

Government, 2021). Initially, descriptive statistics were used to examine the data. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients indicated the direction and strength of associations between constructs, using guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988).

Classification and regression tree analysis was used to analyse the data as it is statistically robust, non-parametric, and non-linear (Breiman, Friedman, Olshen, & Stone, 1984; Poulsen, Johnson, & Ziviani, 2011). It is a recursive partitioning method that uses a decision tree with binary splits to examine each predictor variable and to identify those that are strongly associated with the outcome variable (Breiman et al., 1984; Fonarow et al., 2005). Classification and regression tree analysis was particularly appropriate for the present study because it handles highly skewed numerical data, uncovers meaningful complex relationships, and is relatively easy to interpret (Greene et al., 2019; Lewis, 2000; Zhang & Singer, 1999). R statistical software was used for the regression tree analysis (R Core Team, 2022). MES was included in the model as the dependent variable. The supply-side, demand-side, and environmental factors were included in the model as independent variables.

Results

The sample of 803 people included 392 (48.82%) people with disabilities and 411 (51.18%) people without disabilities. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 83 years (average 46, standard deviation 13). In relation to gender, 55.04% of participants were female and 44.96% were male. In terms of age, 78.46% of participants were 35 or older. In relation to education level, 83.56% of participants had some form of post-secondary school education, while 28.39% held professional roles, and 23.04% held managerial roles. In terms of place of residence, 76.84% of participants lived in metropolitan areas while 96.50% of participants spoke English as their main language. A detailed breakdown of participant characteristics can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

In relation to disability type, 33.16% of participants had multiple disabilities. Most commonly, participants reported having a physical (37.50%) or psychosocial (36.99%) disability. Participants were most likely to describe their disability as either severe (43.88%) or moderate (33.67%), and 63.10% of participants reported their disability as not obvious to other people.

Predictors of employment success for people with disabilities

Five of the eight factors emerged as important predictors of successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Figure 1 shows the regression tree which indicates the factors in order of importance. Corporate culture and climate emerged as most important, followed by government support, job characteristics, employer attitudes, and societal attitudes. The absence of nature of the disability, disability disclosure, and personal motivation from the tree indicates that these factors were not important predictors of successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

The root node of the regression tree shows that people with disabilities had a mean score of 71 out of 100 for MES. After the root node, the regression tree is interpreted from top to bottom, with the right-side nodes (after each binary split) depicting the highest mean score of MES at each level. The highest mean score of 91 out of 100 appears in Node 7. The left-side nodes (after each binary split) depict the lowest mean score of MES at each level, with the lowest overall score of 21 out of 100 appearing Node 4.

The terminal nodes are segments of people constructed to be maximally different in their employment success value. Three terminal nodes predict lower levels of success (mean score 21–66) and five terminal nodes predict higher levels of success (mean score 67–91). The individual terminal nodes enabled us to identify the specific subgroups of people with disabilities reporting higher or lower levels of employment success.

Nodes 2 and 3 included people with mean scores for corporate culture and climate of <67 and ≥67 respectively. Node 2 was then split by corporate culture and climate into Node 4 (mean score < 40) and Node 5 (≥40). Node 4 could not be split further into two significantly discrete groups for any

Table 1. Sample characteristics

	People with disabilities	People without disabilities	Total (%)
	n = 392	*n* = 411	*n* = 803
	n (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Age			
18–24	20 (5.10)	18 (4.38)	38 (4.73)
25–34	83 (21.17)	52 (12.65)	135 (16.81)
35–44	113 (28.83)	101 (24.57)	214 (26.65)
45–54	86 (21.94)	88 (21.41)	174 (21.67)
55–64	74 (18.88)	106 (25.79)	180 (22.42)
65+	16 (4.08)	46 (11.19)	62 (7.72)
Gender			
Male	155 (39.54)	206 (50.12)	361 (44.96)
Female	237 (60.46)	205 (49.88)	442 (55.04)
Location			
Metropolitan	284 (72.45)	333 (81.02)	617 (76.84)
Regional or rural	108 (27.55)	78 (18.98)	186 (23.16)
Highest level of education			
Primary school	4 (1.02)	1 (0.24)	5 (0.62)
High school	54 (13.78)	73 (17.76)	127 (15.82)
TAFE/Technical training	144 (36.73)	126 (30.66)	270 (33.62)
University undergraduate	112 (28.57)	138 (33.58)	250 (31.13)
University postgraduate	74 (18.88)	69 (16.79)	143 (17.81)
Other education (post-high school)	4 (1.03)	4 (0.97)	8 (1.00)
Work classification			
Manager	79 (20.15)	106 (25.79)	185 (23.04)
Professional	105 (26.19)	123 (29.93)	228 (28.39)
Technician and trades worker	18 (4.19)	25 (6.08)	43 (5.35)
Community and personal service worker	27 (6.19)	20 (4.87)	47 (5.85%)
Clerical and administrative worker	83 (21.17)	67 (16.30)	150 (18.68)
Sales worker	41 (10.16)	24 (5.84%)	65 (8.09)
Machinery operators and driver	8 (2.14)	13 (3.16)	21 (2.62)
Labourer	31 (7.11)	33 (8.03)	64 (7.97)

variable, which made it a terminal node. Node 5 was split by job characteristics into Nodes 8 (<79) and 9 (≥79). Node 9 was a terminal node. Node 8 was split by societal attitudes into Nodes 12 (<70) and 13 (≥70). Nodes 12 and 13 could not be split further, which made both of them terminal nodes. Node 3 was split by corporate culture and climate into Nodes 6 (<88) and 7 (≥88). Node 7 could not be split further into two significantly discrete groups for any variable, making it a terminal node. Node 6 was split by government support into Nodes 10 (<79) and 11 (≥79). Node 11 could not be

Table 2. Characteristics of participants with disabilities

Type of disability*	n (%)
Autism	48 (12.24)
Intellectual	35 (8.93)
Neurological	48 (12.24)
Acquired brain injury (ABI)	24 (6.12)
Sensory	37 (9.44)
Psychosocial	145 (36.99)
Physical	147 (37.50)
Other types of disability	79 (20.15)
Multiple disabilities	130 (33.16)
Severity of disability	
Mild	30 (7.65)
Moderate	132 (33.67)
Severe	172 (43.88)
Profound	58 (14.80)
Visibility of disability	
Visible	145 (36.99)
Not visible	247 (63.10)

*Participants could select more than one type of disability, so percentages do not add to 100.
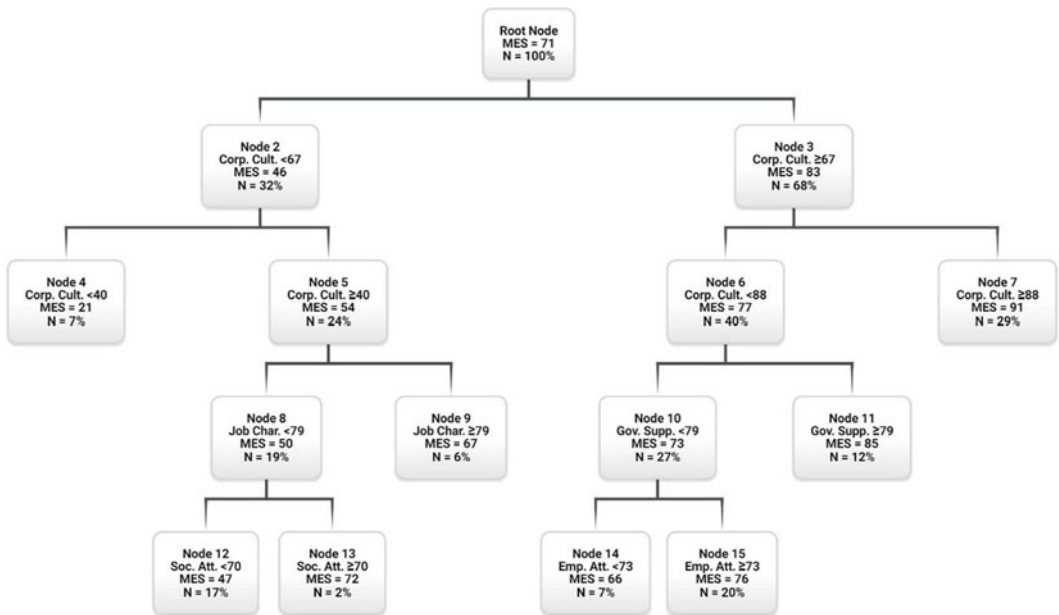

Figure 1. Regression tree for people with disabilities.

split further, but Node 10 was split by employer attitudes into Nodes 14 (<73) and 15 (≥73). Nodes 14 and 15 could not be split further.

Of the five factors that were statistically significant predictors of MES for people with disabilities, corporate culture and climate (Node 7) was the most important predictor of employment success for

Table 3. Regression tree results for people with disabilities

Node	Defining characteristics	Mean employment success value	% of cohort
7	Corporate culture and climate ($\geq$88 mean score)	91	29
11	Corporate culture and climate (67–88 mean score); combined with government support ($\geq$79 mean score)	85	12
15	Corporate culture and climate (67–88 mean score); combined with government support (<79 mean score); and employer attitudes ($\geq$73 mean score)	76	20
14	Corporate culture and climate (67–88 mean score); combined with government support (<79 mean score); and employer attitudes (<73 mean score)	66	7
9	Corporate culture and climate (40–67 mean score); combined with job characteristics ($\geq$79 mean score)	67	6
13	Corporate culture and climate (40–67 mean score); combined with job characteristics (<79 mean score); and societal attitudes ($\geq$70 mean score)	72	2
12	Corporate culture and climate (40–67 mean score); combined with job characteristics (<79 mean score); and societal attitudes (<70 mean score)	47	17
4	Corporate culture and climate (<40 mean score)	21	7

people with disabilities. Around 29% reported the highest level of MES when mean scores for corporate culture and climate was at its highest ($\geq$88), regardless of other predictor variables. Table 3 summarises the results of the regression tree analysis for people with disabilities, including the characteristics of significantly discrete subgroups for any predictor variable associated with employment success. Nodes are in descending order according to success value.

Predictors of employment success for people without disabilities

The regression tree analysis for people who do not have disabilities necessarily excluded some factors that are not direct relevant to their own employment experiences. These were the nature of a disability, disability disclosure, societal attitudes towards people with disabilities, and government support for people with disabilities. The other four factors – personal motivation, job characteristics, employer attitudes, and corporate culture and climate – were entered as independent variables in the regression tree. All four factors were significant predictors of employment success for people without disabilities (see Fig. 2). Corporate culture and climate was most important, followed by job characteristics, personal motivation, and employer attitudes.

The root node of the regression tree indicates that the overall employment success score for people without disabilities was 72 out of 100. The highest mean score for employment success can be seen in Node 13 and the lowest in Node 4. Five terminal nodes predict lower levels of success (25–70 mean score) and five terminal nodes predict higher levels of success (71–95 mean score). Nodes 2 and 3 include people with mean scores for corporate culture and climate of <66 and $\geq$66 respectively. Node 2 was split by corporate culture and climate into Nodes 4 (<36) and 5 ($\geq$36). Node 4 could not be split further, but Node 5 was split by job characteristics into Nodes 8 (<87) and 9 ($\geq$87). Node 8 was split by corporate culture and climate into Nodes 14 (<58 score) and 15 ($\geq$58). Node 15 was split by employer attitudes into Nodes 18 (<75) and 19 ($\geq$75). Nodes 18 and 19 could not be split further.

Node 3 was split by corporate culture and climate into Nodes 6 (<91) and 7 ($\geq$91). Node 6 was split by personal motivation into Nodes 10 (<76) and 11 ($\geq$76). Node 10 and Node 11 could not be split further into two significantly discrete groups for any variable. Node 7 was split by employer attitudes into Nodes 12 (<97) and 13 ($\geq$97). Node 13 could not be split further, but Node 12 could
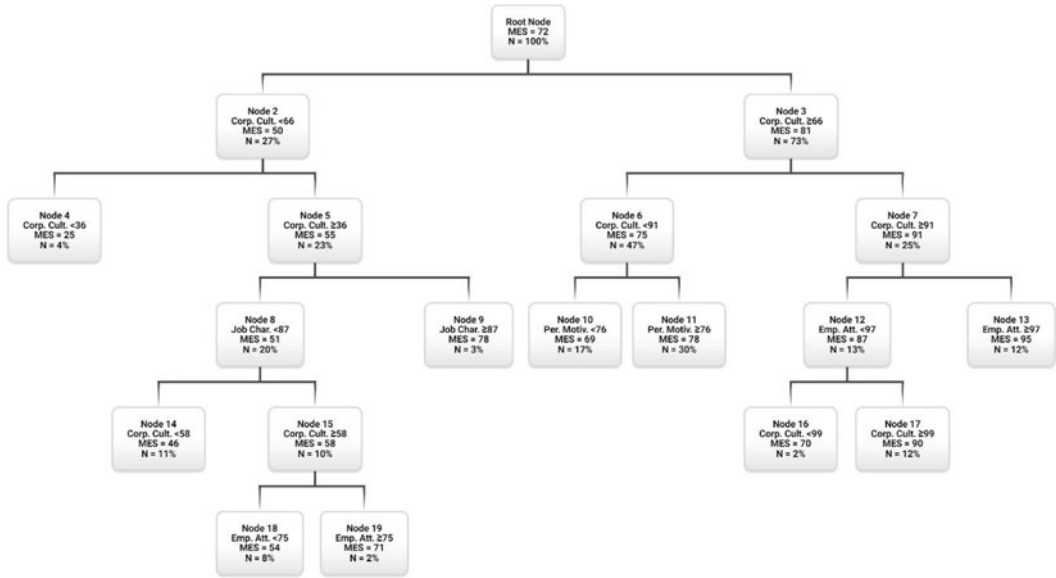
Figure 2. Regression tree for people without disabilities.

be split by corporate culture and climate into Nodes 16 (<99) and 17 (≥99). Nodes 16 and 17 could not be split further into two significantly discrete groups for any variable.

Similar to the regression tree for people with disabilities, the regression tree for people without disabilities identified corporate culture and climate as the most important factor associated with employment success. Twelve percent of people without disabilities reported the highest employment success (Node 13) when mean scores for both corporate culture and climate (≥91) and employer attitudes (≥97) were at their highest, regardless of other predictor variables. Table 4 summarises the results of the regression tree analysis for people without disabilities. Nodes are in descending order according to employment success value.

Discussion

The primary aim of the present study was to identify factors that predict successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Overall, corporate culture and climate was the strongest predictor of employment success, both for people with and without disabilities. Job characteristics and employer attitudes were also predictors of employment success for participants in both cohorts. Government support and societal attitudes were predictors of employment success for people with disabilities, and personal motivation was a predictor only for people without disabilities. These findings raise three points for discussion.

First, corporate culture and climate is the single most significant predictor of successful employment outcomes, both for people with and without disabilities. Prior studies acknowledge corporate culture and climate as a key factor affecting the likelihood that people with disabilities will be successful in the workplace (Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003; McDonough et al., 2021). It is especially important for people with disabilities seeking new job opportunities, career advancement, or simply job retention (Schur et al., 2009). This is because people with disabilities generally thrive in organisations that have an inclusive and supportive corporate culture and climate (Baldridge & Swift, 2016; Meacham, Cavanagh, Bartram, & Laing, 2019). Conversely, a poor corporate culture and climate 'can create attitudinal, behavioural, and physical barriers for workers and job applicants with disabilities' (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005, p. 5).

Table 4. Regression tree results for people without disabilities

Node	Defining characteristics	Mean employment success value	% of cohort
13	Corporate culture and climate ($\geq$91 mean score); combined with employer attitudes ($\geq$97 mean score)	95	12
17	Employer attitudes ($<$97 mean score); combined with corporate culture and climate ($\geq$99 mean score)	90	12
11	Corporate culture and climate (66–90 mean score); combined with personal motivation ($\geq$76 mean score)	78	30
9	Corporate culture and climate (36–65 mean score); combined with job characteristics ($\geq$87 mean score)	78	3
19	Corporate culture and climate (58–65 mean score); combined with job characteristics ($<$87 mean score); and employer attitudes ($\geq$75 mean score)	71	2
16	Corporate culture and climate (91–99 mean score); combined with employer attitudes ($<$97 mean score)	70	2
10	Corporate culture and climate (66–90 mean score); combined with personal motivation ($<$76 mean score)	69	17
18	Corporate culture and climate (58–65 mean score); combined with job characteristics ($<$87 mean score); and employer attitudes ($<$75)	54	8
14	Corporate culture and climate (36–57 mean score); combined with job characteristics ($<$87 mean score)	46	11%
4	Corporate culture and climate ($<$36 mean score)	25	4%

Corporate climate and culture emerging as so critical to the successful employment of people with disabilities means that if we want people with disabilities to enter mainstream employment, we must generate environments that enhance their positive self-image while at work. Otherwise they will find self-employment to be the only potentially positive option (Martin & Honig, 2020). Situating disability within the broader diversity portfolio is an important first step to be followed up by a disability inclusion strategy. This strategy should be sustained using key performance indicators that link with the business's fundamental goals and maintained through engagement with key organisational stakeholders (Gould et al., 2022). Particularly useful is Kwan's corporate culture mezzo-level intervention study which informs organisations on how to improve their corporate culture to ensure it is 'disability-friendly' (Kwan, 2021). In addition, the International Labor Organization's *Businesses leading the way on disability inclusion* is a useful guide on existing good practice within organisations (International Labour Organization, 2023). When people with disabilities find themselves only 'partially included' at work, human resources practitioners and researchers need to collaborate to strive to understand the precursors and causes through research into the nuanced aspects of organisational culture (Beatty et al., 2019). Disability can no longer lag behind other diversity initiatives (Gould et al., 2022) because of stigma (Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019) and the impact it has on corporate climate and culture.

Second, the provision of government support to people with disabilities in workplaces with a suboptimal corporate culture and climate can mitigate potential barriers to successful employment outcomes. Prior studies have shown that government funded financial support is effective in incentivising employers to ensure positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Greenan, Wu, & Black, 2002; Waghorn, Parletta, & Dias, 2019). This can facilitate initiatives such as on-the-job training, rehabilitation technology services, and vocational rehabilitation counselling services, which are all associated with favourable employment outcomes (Pack & Szirony, 2009). In particular, small and medium-sized organisations, which typically have limited resources, often respond positively to financial incentives such as tax credits and wage subsidies (Fraser, Ajzen, Johnson, Hebert,

& Chan, 2011). To shift perceptions of the capability of people with disabilities in our workplaces, organisations must experience their presence and the full – including financial – benefits they bring. When governments do not support efforts to overcome any financial barriers to employment of people with disabilities, they enable the 'productivist ideology', the idea that people with disabilities are not as productive as other workers, to dominate (Ge, Chen, Tang, & Cong, 2021).

Third, effective job-matching does not necessarily ensure employment success for people with disabilities if corporate culture and climate is suboptimal. The effect of this interrelationship was particularly prominent in the regression tree for people with disabilities. This supports prior studies which find that effective job-matching enhances employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including higher earnings and increased work hours (Choe & Baldwin, 2017; Dreaver et al., 2020). Findings from this research build on this to emphasise that in addition to effective job matching, a good corporate culture and climate is, however, necessary for this to occur.

Notably, none of the supply-side factors considered in the present study (nature of the disability, disability disclosure, and personal motivation) were statistically significant predictors of successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Prior studies have suggested that supply-side factors are typically more important during the pre-employment period, where people with disabilities receive necessary skills training and support to enter the workforce successfully (Chan et al., 2010). It is possible that the lack of supply-side factors in the regression tree for people with disabilities is a result of all participants having already obtained mainstream employment.

This study builds on existing models of successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities (Ikutegbe et al., 2023b) by statistically testing the relative predictive strength of individual, organisational, and social factors on employment outcomes. Prior studies typically consider a limited range of factors, such as individual or organisational, and do not provide statistical evidence of their relative weight, thereby responding to Beatty et al.'s (2019) call for a holistic, data-informed, approach.

The present study shows that organisational factors, such as corporate culture and climate, employer attitudes and job characteristics are important predictors of success, regardless of disability. But it also highlights differences between people with and without disabilities. The provision of government support and societal attitudes are significant predictors when employees have disabilities, and personal motivation is a significant predictor for people without disabilities.

This study offers several practical implications to employers seeking to improve mainstream employment outcomes for people with disabilities. First, findings highlight several organisational factors which predict employment outcomes and can be influenced by managers and human resources professionals. This includes building an inclusive and equitable corporate culture and climate by promoting fair policies and practices at work, which ensures that everyone feels psychologically safe to voice their opinions and request job accommodations when required. Job characteristics is also a significant predictor and illustrates the importance of effective job matching for all employees. Organisations which do not have formal job-matching programs could formalise these to ensure managers consider this when appointing employees, and employees know they can raise this issue with their manager without fear of negative consequences. Employer attitudes are also important predictors and highlight the importance of educating managers on disability, the benefits of including people with disabilities in the workplace, and the types of supports people with disabilities may require.

We propose that the field of human resources shift the domain of disability from a workplace health and safety perspective towards a talent management perspective. In so doing, human resources practitioners could focus on the skill set of the individual rather than the modification of an existing job role that has been planned according to organisational needs, and that needs to be 'modified' or 'adjusted' in accordance with workplace health and safety legislation. The job crafting emerging from the field of talent management could then inform job crafting for people with disability, because human resources would be focused on the talents of all staff rather than the medical challenges of some.

Talent management lends itself to this perspective, as talent is 'a socially constructed phenomenon that takes on different meanings in different contexts' (Downs & Swailes, 2013, 268). Downs & Swailes argue that the focus in the field of human resources on talent management being restricted to a small, elite, percentage of the workforce is erroneous and under values the potential contribution of all employees. Their views align with Iles, Peerce, and Chauai who endorse talent management as process that facilitates the 'strategic management of the flow of talent through an organisation' (Iles, Preece, & Chuai, 2011, p. 127).

The focus on capability presented by Downs and Swailes (2013), easily aligns with focusing on 'ability' rather than 'disability' and helps to overcome the deficit mindset currently holding back the human resources practices behind employment of people with disabilities. This is endorsed by Sheehan and Anderson who advocate for 'a belief that all employees are talented and whose talent can be developed further to enhance value to the organisation' (2015, p. 351). Aside from enabling organisations to acquire talent, an inclusive approach to talent management may avoid the job stagnation and lack of career progression facing anyone in the organisation currently labelled as a 'non-high-potential employee' (Kwon & Jang, 2021, p. 95). A shift towards talent management for all employees including people with disabilities may also overcome the current phenomenon raised by Park and Park (2019) whereby people with disabilities struggle to get recruited but, even once successfully recruited, quit soon after due to a lack of potential for career progression.

Other important predictors for successful employment outcome for people with disabilities are the environmental factors of government support and societal attitudes. These factors are largely outside the control of individuals or organisations but are factors that can be influenced by governments. Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al. (2019) found that, in fact, a whole of government and society approach was fundamental if redressing the lowest labour participation, that of people with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, our findings highlight the importance of governments investing in financial supports to help employers cover any costs associated with hiring people with disabilities, and also providing employment services which specifically focus on matching people with disabilities with suitable employers and roles. Publicly funded social marketing campaigns have proven successful in improving societal attitudes towards people with disabilities (Randle & Reis, 2016). Findings from this study demonstrate that improved attitudes among the general population increase inclusion for people with disabilities across society as a whole, they also have positive implications specifically in employment. Governments should prioritise investing in social marketing campaigns as a way of indirectly improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

This study was conducted in Australia; therefore, findings may not be generalizable to other countries with different employment conditions and policies to support people with disabilities. Future research should investigate how the factors identified in the present study are associated with successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities in other countries. This would advance global understanding of disability in mainstream employment settings and identify similarities and differences in different cultural settings. It should be noted that the present study excluded people who were unemployed, self-employed, or had mainstream employment for less than 90 days. Studies which include people with disabilities who are not employed would provide useful insights into the barriers to gaining employment and inform organisational or government policies to overcome these barriers. In addition, this study did not include employers in the sample. Future studies which report the perspective of employers would generate further insights into successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

Adopting the social model of disability, this study identified five factors that predict successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities: corporate culture and climate, job characteristics, government support, employer attitudes, and societal attitudes. It also identified key interrelationships between government support and corporate culture and climate, and job characteristics and

corporate culture and climate. This study recognises the potential for drawing on existing, more advanced, equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives to stop disability employment from lagging behind. A talent management approach is encouraged to overcome perspectives derived from the medical model of disability, that may encourage 'productivist ideologies' to linger. Most interaction between human resources and disability has been mediated through a workplace health and safety lens and 'reasonable adjustments' which can infer, to some, deficiencies rather than strengths. Employers can use our findings to focus on the aspects of their organisation that are likely to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, such as building an inclusive corporate culture and formalising job matching practices. The present study is limited to the Australian context and did not include unemployed people or employers. Future studies which broaden the scope of this work to other countries and stakeholder groups would add further insights into successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

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