

# The New Inclusive Economy: Literature Review

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**Note: Helpful tips for employers appear in green font, throughout. More tips for employers can be found in the Employer Practices Summary Guide found at [newinclusiveeconomy.ca](http://newinclusiveeconomy.ca).**

## Introduction

The purpose of the *New Inclusive Economy* project is to investigate inclusive employment conditions and economic models that show promise in increasing workforce participation across sectors by people with disabilities or other barriers to employment. We will then offer evidence-based recommendations that employers can learn from to address structural barriers in their own environments - contributing to collective movement towards the New Inclusive Economy.

In addition to standard employment settings, we are strategically including in our inquiry innovations and models that might be seen as ‘alternative.’ This is due to evidence that the dominant system is exclusive *by design* (as outlined in the section entitled *Disability exclusion in the workplace*).<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with employment that is *already* addressing structural barriers that lead to exclusion from the labour force, we can reveal powerful lessons so that other employers can learn from them and feel empowered to address these challenges. We are interested in nuance, complexity, and depth of learning over large numbers.

The research question guiding this process is: **What are the enabling structural conditions that create meaningful employment for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment? How can these be amplified and mobilized in other employment settings?**

Over the course of two years, the research will explore:

- **Examples** of increased labour market participation by people with disabilities and high barriers to employment;
- **Conditions** conducive to employment, including accessibility and accommodations;
- **Economic models** that demonstrate equity, sustainability, and inclusion;
- **Alternative approaches** to business that center the social benefits of inclusion and equity in the labour market while increasing economic benefits;
- **Supports and Barriers** that increase or decrease labour market participation by people with disabilities and those with barriers to employment.

The first step of the project is to review the current body of literature in order to see a) what is already known about this topic, and b) what we still want to find out through the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Grills et al, 2016

## Key terms

Some key terms to help orient us to the material include:

**Capitalism:** Capitalism is “an economic system in which most businesses and the means of production are privately owned and operated for profit.”<sup>2</sup>

**Disability:** A social model of disability says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. There is no single definition of disability – there are functional, legal, and subjective definitions.<sup>3</sup>

The Accessible Canada Act defines disability as “any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, *hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society.*”<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of this project, we will use the social model of disability: the experience that results when persons with impairment or a functional limitation encounter attitudes or environments that hinder their full participation in society on an equal basis with others.<sup>5</sup>

**Demand-side:** Demand-side factors include “socio-political and labour market context and employers’ motivations for hiring.”<sup>6</sup> In this project, the demand-side refers to employers. (To date, most inclusive employment initiatives have focussed on addressing barriers to employment on the supply side: potential employees.)

**Economy:** The word ‘economy’ comes from the Greek *oikos*, which means household, combined with *nomos*, which means rules or norms. Thus, *economy* refers to the “art of household management.”<sup>7</sup> However, the economy is now understood and examined largely in terms of financial growth, as a result of a set of international rules outlined in the United Nations System of Accounts.<sup>8</sup> This renders other important economic and socially useful activities – such as unpaid household or subsistence labour - invisible.

In this review we highlight diverse economic models as a reminder that the dominant economic structure is one possibility among many that have been used through time and in different places, and it can continue to change in response to the needs of the people.<sup>9</sup>

**Employment:** Employment is usually understood as the condition of having paid work. *Access* to fairly paid employment is considered a human right according to the UN Declaration on the

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<sup>2</sup> Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Gronvik, 2009

<sup>4</sup> Government of Canada, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Bachrach, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay et al, 2019, p. 142

<sup>7</sup> Raworth, 2017, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>9</sup> Waring, 2018

Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that monetary exchange alone does not ensure equitable employment conditions. What is valuable will vary for different people: pay, enjoyment, purpose, autonomy, choice, and other characteristics are worth considering. In this research we are looking at meaningful employment as different for everyone and defined by the individual.<sup>11</sup>

**Inclusion:** Social inclusion is multi-dimensional, and doesn't look the same for everyone. It can be defined as the interaction between two major life domains: interpersonal relationships and community participation.<sup>12</sup> Flexibility and choice are important elements of inclusion. Inclusion in meaningful employment for our purposes could be defined as having equal access to employment opportunities without additional burden of risk or disclosure.

**Inclusive Design:** The terms Universal, Equity-centered,<sup>13</sup> Inclusive,<sup>14</sup> and Accessible Design<sup>15</sup> are commonly used, with similar meanings. The movement intends to design “the world with and for people with disabilities’ different capabilities.”<sup>16</sup> Inclusive design is also based on the principle that all people are included in decision-making at all stages.

**Inclusive economy:** There are studies that define inclusive capitalism<sup>17</sup> and inclusive growth,<sup>18</sup> but a ready definition of ‘inclusive economy’ is not yet available. For our purpose we speak of inclusive economy as one in which everyone has opportunity to participate, benefit, and design, and in which profit or other motives do not take precedence over inclusive participation.

**Occupational justice:** An occupational justice perspective recognizes that everyone has the right to work, regardless of “age, ability, gender, social class, or other differences” and that this right is limited for some people due to existing “social structures.”<sup>19</sup>

**Positionality:** Positionality refers to how differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society. Our identities “are shaped by socially constructed positions and memberships to which we belong.”<sup>20</sup> Positionality is intersectional. This means “inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors”<sup>21</sup> but are “embedded in society.”<sup>22</sup>

**Social determinants of health:** Social determinants of health include such things as: income and social status, employment and working conditions, education and literacy, childhood

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<sup>10</sup> Grills et al, 2016; see also Schmid, 2018

<sup>11</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013; Gibson et al, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Simplican et al, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Education First, n.d.

<sup>14</sup> Holmes, 2018

<sup>15</sup> Treviranus, 2014

<sup>16</sup> Luck, 2018, p. 98

<sup>17</sup> Borko, 2016

<sup>18</sup> Pavlova, 2018

<sup>19</sup> Nillson & Townsend, 2014, p. 65

<sup>20</sup> Misawa, 2010, p. 26

<sup>21</sup> Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> Misawa, 2010, p. 26

experiences, physical environments, social supports and coping skills, healthy behaviours, access to health services, biology and genetic endowment, gender, culture, and race/racism.<sup>23</sup> *Access to land is also a determinant of health, which is often overlooked but increasingly highlighted by Indigenous and other scholars.*<sup>24</sup> The Government of Canada states that determinants of health are the broad range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health.”

**Structural conditions:** In relation to employment, they can be conditions in which a) the employment setting is embedded (ie. employment setting is accessible by public transit), or b) the conditions created within the employment setting (ie. emotionally safe work environment). Structural conditions are the specific ways political, cultural, social, material, and economic systems are organized. The term ‘social structure’ is sometimes used to describe the way social institutions are created and work together to create a stable society.<sup>25</sup>

**Work:** Work includes all the things people do to contribute to their families, their communities, the ecosystem, and themselves. When work is only understood as only something we do for money, it overlooks the vital uncompensated labour that holds up community economies (such as volunteer, household, and other forms of work). This tends to make the contributions of certain groups of people invisible - including people marginalized from formal workplaces on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or ability.<sup>26</sup>

## Roadmap

We begin with the *Context* in which we undertake this research, as well as suggestions for how to engage with this report.

Under the heading *Disability exclusion in the workplace*, we outline how the barriers to employment currently faced by people with disabilities (PWD), impact them on many levels. We look at new legislation and policies that are emerging in B.C. and elsewhere to support accessibility. Critical disability scholars remind us that rather than (only) seeking inclusion in existing social systems, we might also seek to alter social systems to be more equitable in themselves.<sup>27</sup>

In the next section, *Positionality – seeing outside the silos*, we learn from Tla’amin writers<sup>28</sup> and from global economic geographers.<sup>29</sup> Their writing shows us how looking closely at the activities of particular groups of people in certain places and times can highlight important elements sometimes obscured when we view employment in a silo. We then look at how

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<sup>23</sup> Government of Canada, 2020

<sup>24</sup> de Leeuw, 2015; Waring, 2018

<sup>25</sup> Britannica, 2022

<sup>26</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>27</sup> Adam, 2018; Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay, 2015

<sup>28</sup> Paul, 2014; Washington, 2004

<sup>29</sup> Gibson-Graham et al, 2013; Gibson-Graham et al, 2019

thinking about work and disability differently can expand the realm of possibility when it comes to identifying promising practices for inclusive employment.

The section entitled *Changing the Narrative* about disability and employment enables us to see the ways PWD are engaged in meaningful work *already*, and the ways PWD and others who are systematically excluded have found alternative methods of engaging in the economy that create new possibilities for everyone and for the workplace in general. Not only does this section debunk myths, but it allows us to see how conceptual and structural changes can pave the way for a new inclusive economy.

From there, we move to the very concrete ways employers are already taking it upon themselves to enact some of these changes. In the section called *Experiments in structural change within employment settings*, we highlight some promising practices that emerge from the literature. Examples include: inclusive design, centering values, internal workplace policies, inclusive participation at every level, and an organizational structure that aligns with these commitments.

In the *Conclusion*, we outline some of the gaps in the literature, and how they might guide us in our next steps. The intention of this literature review is to expand our understanding of what is possible when it comes to the New Inclusive Economy.

## Context

### Looking at the New Inclusive Economy with an un-siloed lens

Approaching conversations about inclusive employment by refocusing our understanding of what disability, employment, work, and economies *are and can be* is a helpful starting place. This invites researchers, employers, and others to recognize potential biases and allow for critical and creative thinking about inclusion. Businesses that do so - intentionally or not - also serve to create valuable disruptions in the larger context of oppressive systems in which they operate and can inspire or carve a new way forward.<sup>30</sup>

It is the responsibility of those currently benefiting to alter the imposed system that privileges them.<sup>31</sup> Meaningfully addressing workplace inclusion requires a dramatic altering of existing power dynamics. Supply-side solutions are not enough, if we are not also actively and collectively addressing the “socio-political and labour market context” in which employment takes place.<sup>32</sup> This requires the active participation of people who are currently often excluded from the conversation and is precisely why new efforts towards accessibility and inclusion – including but not limited to the Accessible British Columbia Act – are so necessary at this time.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Roth, 2019; see also Solid State Community Industries, n.d.

<sup>31</sup> Roth, 2019, p. 311

<sup>32</sup> Lindsay et al, 2019, p. 142

<sup>33</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2021

This project bridges two bodies of knowledge and practice that have previously not been in dialogue with one another: a) diverse economies and b) disability inclusion.

## Current responses to structural barriers to employment

While the pandemic reminds us all of the precariousness of life, wellbeing, and (un)employment, these experiences are felt more heavily by people who are *already* marginalized by current systems.<sup>34</sup> This is in part due to the cumulative and “psychological impacts of oppression.”<sup>35</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has mainstreamed conversations about employee rights and mental health. Many people are experiencing declining mental health due to the unstable nature of life and employment. This speaks to the fact that ableness itself comes and goes and societies/economies need to be responsive to fluid and intersectional vulnerabilities<sup>36</sup>. All workers can benefit from flexibility in the workplace.<sup>37</sup> Pointing to the structural inequities that persist, work-from-home options not previously readily available to PWD have been normalized during the pandemic. Recruitment and retention are challenges that emerged in force during the pandemic and are likely to remain with us.<sup>38</sup> The response to these challenges requires us to think about how to best support and nurture our human resources, and to (re)think the values and priorities upon which the entire economy is based.<sup>39</sup>

The world is currently in the midst of a significant experiment in relation to occupational justice, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the COVID-19 crisis itself is expected to be time-limited, it has created an opportunity to consider how collaboration can help us “in addressing other challenges of a more enduring nature,”<sup>40</sup> making us more resilient in the face of new challenges. “In the COVID-19 environment, savvy employers will utilize UD [universal, or inclusive design] to strengthen the ability of all employees to continue to carry on business as usual in anything but usual times.”<sup>41</sup> Tips on how to learn through this and create more inclusive employment environments can be found in the ‘Inclusive Design’ section, below.

System-level responses to the pandemic suggest that instead of trying to “build back better” we could “build back fairer”<sup>42</sup> by normalizing a system that addresses “ongoing and structural strains toward building ‘everyday resilience’”.<sup>43</sup> This can be pursued with a human

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<sup>34</sup> Sheppard-Jones, 2020

<sup>35</sup> Bates et al, 2017, p.160

<sup>36</sup> Kuran et al, 2020

<sup>37</sup> Child, 2021; Hick & Murphy, 2020; Larue, 2021; Stuart, Spencer, McLachlan, & Forde, 2021

<sup>38</sup> Child, 2021; Hick & Murphy, 2020; Larue, 2021; Stuart, Spencer, McLachlan, & Forde, 2021

<sup>39</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2022; Larue, 2021

<sup>40</sup> Child, 2020, p. 118

<sup>41</sup> Sheppard-Joens, 2020, p. 76

<sup>42</sup> Jesus et al, 2021, p. 12

<sup>43</sup> Jesus et al, 2021, p. 12



rights approach, grounded in a commitment to equity-centered design as well as social and occupational justice perspectives.<sup>44</sup>

## Disability exclusion in the workplace

The current, dominant economic system systematically excludes people with disabilities from equitable participation in employment.<sup>45</sup> Unemployment and lack of access to meaningful work remains a reality the world over,<sup>46</sup> despite the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* having been signed by 164 countries.<sup>47</sup> In 2017, “employment rates (including both full- and part-time employment) for approximately 6 million Canadians aged 15 and over who have one or more disabilities [was] 59% compared to an 80% employment rate for those without disabilities.”<sup>48</sup> High unemployment rates for people with disabilities are observed worldwide.<sup>49</sup>

According to one study, people for whom the disability onset was later in life, and people with physical limitations or multiple limitations, are the *least* likely to be working.<sup>50</sup> In Canada, as many as 40% of disabilities are invisible, and as our population ages, the number of workers and job seekers with invisible disabilities will continue to grow.<sup>51</sup> People with intellectual disabilities face the greatest barriers to employment.<sup>52</sup> “As of March 31, 2019, only 24.2% of individuals supported by Community Living BC (CLBC) reported some employment earnings, with 82% of these reporting earnings below \$10,000 a year,”<sup>53</sup> despite the fact that research shows workers with intellectual disabilities are typically reliable and capable.<sup>54</sup> Inclusive workplaces also demonstrate other benefits including low turn-over among staff, profitability, and productivity<sup>55</sup> as well as higher morale, positive workplace culture, and improved corporate culture overall.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jesus et al, 2021; Nilsson & Townsend, 2014; Sheppard-Jones et al, 2020

<sup>45</sup> Grills et al, 2016

<sup>46</sup> Grills et al, 2016, p. 338; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022

<sup>47</sup> Meltzer, Robinson, & Fisher, 2019; Murfitt, Crosbie, Zammit, & Williams, 2018

<sup>48</sup> Gupta, Sukhai, & Wittich, 2021, p. 2; see also Prince, 2014 and Prince, 2017

<sup>49</sup> Baker et al, 2018; Berry & Kymar, 2018; Ferrucchi, 2014; Ramachandra et al, 2017; Mactaggart et al, 2018; Meltzer et al, 2019; Park et al, 2016; Prince, 2017

<sup>50</sup> Mactaggart et al, 2018

<sup>51</sup> Prince, 2017

<sup>52</sup> Ramachandra et al, 2017

<sup>53</sup> Hole, Reid, and Mudde, 2022, p. 2

<sup>54</sup> Backrach, 2015

<sup>55</sup> Backrach, 2015

<sup>56</sup> Buettgen & Klassen 2020; inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

## Structural barriers that exist outside of employment settings

There are proven links between poverty and disability the world over.<sup>57</sup> The relationship between poverty and disability is described as cyclical: people who live in poverty often experience many forms of exclusion (from health care and education, for instance) as well as high exposure to risk factors (including trauma, poor nutrition, isolation, or mistreatment), which can increase the risk of some disabilities. Conversely, people with disabilities are more likely to be restricted from livelihood opportunities (such as education, work, and social connectedness) which can be a sentence to lifelong poverty. All of this is “shown to negatively impact on psychosocial wellbeing, identity and social inclusion.”<sup>58</sup> Specific population groups who experience the burden of systemic inequities due to gender, race, ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic status also experience some disabilities at a higher rate. These “systemic inequities (ie. lack of access to healthcare, poor nutrition, housing issues, violence, exposure to environmental hazards) intensify negative health outcomes for [people] with disabilities, and in some cases are causing secondary conditions.”<sup>59</sup> All of these contribute to the exclusion of people with disabilities from the workforce.

**To state more plainly, the major barriers to workforce participation for people with disabilities (PWD) are the compounding effects of exclusion or oppression - not their disabilities.** This requires systemic and structural responses, not just individual accommodations, and in more than just the workplace.<sup>60</sup>

“Nearly half of all discrimination complaints in Canada are about disability”<sup>61</sup> and “more than 40% of disability-related complaints were in the area of employment in most jurisdictions.”<sup>62</sup> Discrimination is identified as a major barrier in many other countries too.<sup>63</sup> People in Italy with disabilities state they experience discrimination in their job searches (40.6%) and in the workplace (38%).<sup>64</sup> An Australian study highlights barriers to *finding* work (such as narrow, dismissive, and discouraging attitudes of both employment support workers and potential employers) and barriers to *maintaining* work (including both subtle and overt discrimination).<sup>65</sup>

The impacts of this are also compounding: Many people with disabilities also experience depression or other mental health challenges. Being wrongfully dismissed, passed over for jobs or promotions, or otherwise discriminated against in the workforce leads to higher rates of depression, suicidality, and family trauma. These barriers also lead to many people simply not

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<sup>57</sup> Mactaggart et al, 2018

<sup>58</sup> Mactaggart et al, 2018, p. 2

<sup>59</sup> Sheppard-Jones, 2021, p. 72

<sup>60</sup> Meltzer et al, 2019

<sup>61</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d, p. 1

<sup>62</sup> Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d., p. 27

<sup>63</sup> Crawford, 2011

<sup>64</sup> Ferrucci, 2014

<sup>65</sup> Meltzer et al, 2019

applying to work in a system that repeatedly and actively excludes or mistreats them.<sup>66</sup> “This structural inequality, which begins in the classroom and continues in the boardroom,” has become a reality to which many people are indifferent, but to which PWDs have been forced to adapt.<sup>67</sup>

## More structural barriers: economic and cultural

It is important to make explicit the connection between strategic colonial nation-building and the deliberate marginalization of people with disabilities. In contrast with a social model, a medical model of disability “treats disabilities as defects in need of treatment.”<sup>68</sup> A medical approach has disproportionately pathologized and institutionalized Indigenous bodies and minds, and separated them from one another and from the land.<sup>69</sup> Indigenous cultures and perspectives are diverse, and around the world, they challenge “western narratives of disability.”<sup>70</sup> A strong theme involves community members looking after each other, and people being understood more in terms of their role in community than in terms of what they are able to do or not do physically or otherwise.<sup>71</sup>

The collective impacts of colonialism include “loss of land, culture, identity, knowledge base, values and language” – and these are described as far more disabling than individual physical or intellectual impairments.<sup>72</sup> Traditional teachings emphasize interconnectedness, respect for the whole person, collective wellbeing, and belonging. Things commonly diagnosed as disabilities are seen as gifts: special talents, connections with the spirit world, or power.<sup>73</sup>

In economic terms, too, many Indigenous authors point to the ways we have lost sight of important connections with the world we inhabit, and that we have fallen out of step with the values embedded in teachings that honour and include the natural world as vital participants in the economic structure.<sup>74</sup> As the demands of capitalism place great strain on natural and social systems,<sup>75</sup> we are reminded that the physical world has value and worth beyond what humans allot to it. In order to address this, “language, policies, theories, frameworks” need to be pushed back against and constantly re-imagined.<sup>76</sup>

Colonialism has dispossessed many peoples and communities from the land, which compromises (among other things) the ability to provide for oneself, one’s family, and one’s community. The current economic priorities have led to an undervaluing of the broader range of

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<sup>66</sup> Amoroso, 2020

<sup>67</sup> Amoroso, 2020, p. 4

<sup>68</sup> Guevera, 2021, p. 274

<sup>69</sup> Adam, 2018

<sup>70</sup> Adam, 2018, p. 13

<sup>71</sup> Adam, 2018

<sup>72</sup> Adam, 2018, p. 24

<sup>73</sup> See also Ludski, 2019

<sup>74</sup> Mitchell, 2018, p. 88

<sup>75</sup> Teegee, 2015, p. 121

<sup>76</sup> de Leeuw, 2015, p. 97-98

activities that keep communities well.<sup>77</sup> In order to set the balance right, we can exercise the power we have (however limited) to do things differently; and this involves economic restructuring in a way that recognizes ourselves as embedded within all natural systems, not set apart from them.<sup>78</sup>

One in-depth study traces the simultaneous containment of Indigenous people, certain immigrant groups, and people with disabilities in both prisons and asylums, specifically looking at Victoria, B.C.<sup>79</sup> The social construction of categories of ‘unfit’ - supported with the force of both the legal and medical systems – made it possible to remove people from their land.<sup>80</sup> In the midst of settler-colonialism, which is dominated by a capitalist orientation to land and labour, globalized capitalism is thus experienced as a new form of assimilation and “an expansion of the colonial model.”<sup>81</sup>

Colonial systems and practices persist to this day that perpetuate the systemic exclusion of certain groups of people from participation in mainstream economic activities - such as land ownership, education, and the workforce.<sup>82</sup> Other legitimate economic activities that are inhibited include providing food and other forms of sustenance that are based on living off the land. So, while large economic development projects that involve resource extraction, for instance, may provide Indigenous communities employment, they may simultaneously threaten Indigenous economies by destroying or devaluing the land without recognizing the vital role it plays in sustaining community economies more generally.<sup>83</sup> This is why the definition of ‘meaningful employment’ cannot be defined from outside, and why wellbeing cannot be measured in economic terms.<sup>84</sup> Even though there is enormous pressure for Indigenous communities (and others) to conform to capitalist economies, this does not mean other approaches are not viable.<sup>85</sup>

These broader economic and social conditions are often not recognized in our day-to-day lives or decision-making, but are increasingly being acknowledged for the way they *enable* participation for some groups of people, and present *barriers* for others. Making structural conditions visible by naming them can enable us to see and address the racism, sexism, and ablism built into them, as well as the intersections among these forms of oppression and exclusion.<sup>86</sup> Underlying cultural norms and values are often unacknowledged but play a significant role in who has access to what. Indeed, neoliberalism and neocolonialism are identified by many as the “two most important structural forces that shaped contemporary life.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Richmond, 2015

<sup>78</sup> Mitchell, 2018

<sup>79</sup> Roman, et al, 2009

<sup>80</sup> Roman, et al, 2009

<sup>81</sup> Hernandez, 2013, p. 10; Kuokkanen, 2011

<sup>82</sup> Roman et al, 2009, p. 20; Hernandez, 2013; Kuokkanen, 2011

<sup>83</sup> Kuokkanen, 2011; see for example Tenson, 2017

<sup>84</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>85</sup> Kuokkanen, 2011

<sup>86</sup> Roman et al, 2009

<sup>87</sup> de Finney et al, 2011, p, 362-363

For instance, **the design of a building or neighbourhood, the routing of buses, the cost of rent are structural conditions that impact employment.<sup>88</sup> So are decisions about where investments and divestments are made, legislation, policies, and political priorities.<sup>89</sup>** Partnerships<sup>90</sup> can provide access to funding or relational supports, and alter conditions that make inclusive employment possible. Whether a biological or architectural metaphor, the term ‘structure’ helps us to see social and economic features that “persist over time, are interrelated, and influence both the functioning of the entity as a whole and the activities of its individual members.”<sup>91</sup> We are beginning to recognize the need to widen the scope of dominant economic indicators and policy responses, and alternative approaches are emerging.

## Some policy responses

There is now new legislation to support equity for people with disabilities, based on pre-existing human rights frameworks (ie. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).<sup>92</sup> This shift towards a rights-based approach can be felt worldwide, and has far-reaching implications, because it requires that we restructure many aspects of our society, including and extending beyond workplaces.<sup>93</sup>

The Accessible Canada Act of 2019 sets the target of complete accessibility by 2040 for Canada.<sup>94</sup> Laws, policies, programs, services, and institutions must be redesigned and developed with the “highest level of accessibility” as a goal. This will require employers and others to quickly acknowledge the barriers that PWD face and then adjust policies and practices towards this aim. This cannot happen without the active involvement of persons with disabilities.<sup>95</sup>

In 2021, the Accessible British Columbia Act set accessibility standards to remove or prevent barriers to full and equal participation in society. It outlines barriers which can be caused by “environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications or technology” and states that they can be “affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.”<sup>96</sup> The Accessible British Columbia Act also sets out that accessibility standards and related regulations may be established in many areas of civic life – the first of the eight that are listed in the Act is “employment”. Importantly, the Act also sets out the parameters under which the standards will be developed, and this includes equitable representation on an Accessibility Committee by

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<sup>88</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

<sup>89</sup> Baker, et al., 2018; Bates et al., 2017; Beyer, 2012; Crawford, 2011; Ferrucci, 2014; Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017; Morrow et al., 2009; Park et al., 2016; Prince, 2016

<sup>90</sup> Berry & Kymar, 2012; Sulewski, Ciulla Timmons, Lyons, Lucas, Vogt, & Bachmeyer, 2017; Nicholas et al, 2019; Pavlova, 2019

<sup>91</sup> Britannica, 2022

<sup>92</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2021; Government of Canada, 2019

<sup>93</sup> Ebuenyi et al, 2018; Lang et al, 2019; Meltzer et al, 2019; Smith et al, 2018

<sup>94</sup> Government of Canada, 2019

<sup>95</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2021

<sup>96</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2021

people with disabilities, and other people as well as organizations who will be directly impacted.  
<sup>97</sup> This demonstrates a central commitment to Inclusive Design – explored later in this review.

The StrongerBC Economic Plan, released in February 2022, acknowledges that **“if an economy is not working for people, then it’s simply not working.”**<sup>98</sup> In order for the economy to do well in meeting the needs of a society, more people need opportunities to participate in it. Importantly – as is evident in the discussion above – more people also need opportunities to define it and design it. It also points out that “healthy, inclusive societies where wealth and opportunity are broadly shared are more productive, competitive, and innovative than societies where inequality is high. They are also more resilient.”<sup>99</sup> **Flexibility is key to successfully adapting** in ever-changing local and global conditions.<sup>100</sup> As identified in B.C.’s recent Economic Plan, now is the time for such adaptation.<sup>101</sup>

In this project, we look at employment as part of the broader economy and society. Localized and place-based approaches enable us to shed light on processes and practices that emerge from certain conditions.<sup>102</sup> These may not be replicable universally, or even sustainable in one place indefinitely.<sup>103</sup> For this reason, we refer to ‘promising practices’ instead of ‘best practices’ in this project.<sup>104</sup>

## Positionality - Seeing outside the silos

This report is an update of a previous literature review related to inclusive employment.<sup>105</sup> The previous review primarily focused on barriers to employment, conditions *within* a workplace that can improve accessibility, as well as benefits of employment inclusion. The current review focuses on the broader conditions *in which* the workplace operates, as well as creative *responses to* those conditions, both of which are often missing from the conversation.

## Tla’amin teachings about disability and the economy

Five members of the research team are living on the traditional and (modern-day) treaty territory of the Tla’amin people at the time of writing. When reviewing the writing of Tla’amin and other Indigenous scholars, the research question itself is immediately striking in two ways:

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<sup>97</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2021

<sup>98</sup> Province of British Columbia, 2022

<sup>99</sup> Province of British Columbia, 2022

<sup>100</sup> Child, 2021; Raworth, 2017

<sup>101</sup> Government of British Columbia, 2022

<sup>102</sup> Tenson, 2017; Waring, 2018

<sup>103</sup> Raworth, 2017

<sup>104</sup> Thoms, 2007; Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010

<sup>105</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2018

First, inclusion of diverse abilities is integral to community life.<sup>106</sup> Recognizing that each community member is more and less able to do certain things at different moments in life, so everyone in the community has a place, and everyone takes care of each other to the extent that they can – all the time.<sup>107</sup> An inclusive social environment is central to the primary teachings of how to live a good life. In the context of policy and research, this emphasis on creating inclusive social environments is now often called a social model of disability.<sup>108</sup>

Second, this inclusive worldview is supported directly by a broader understanding of economy as the running of a household or community for collective wellbeing.<sup>109</sup> The traditional Tla'amin economic system involves many ceremonial and other practices through which knowledge, food, and other assets are regularly redistributed throughout the community.<sup>110</sup> The redistribution may take place when a particular family is in a time of need (such as a funeral), or it may take place when a particular family is experiencing abundance. It also occurs in big and small ways on a daily basis, as part of living the ta'ow (teachings). According to this economic system, financial return is not the primary purpose. Work is done to care for your family's needs, to gain an education, share music and culture, entertain, build community, and offer spiritual advancement.<sup>111</sup> Another important aspect of work is recognizing our relationship with the rest of creation (ie. reciprocal relationships with everything around us, and stewardship of the land to sustain future generations). The humility this fosters ensures we do not take more than we need and encourages us to express thanks for everything that has enabled us to provide for our families through work.<sup>112</sup>

Tla'amin's traditional economic and governance structure includes *thu uh nuck* (potlaching and governance). Within this system, each family has a *heh-goos* (head) and this person manages property and worked for the prosperity of the entire family.<sup>113</sup> Hosting feasts, for instance, is a way of not only providing for people, but also establishing good relations and reputations. Interestingly, economic leadership in this system is not structured around a business, but a family (similar to the Greek definition of economy, above).<sup>114</sup> If your family is managing well, then you are capable of contributing to the greater community; if your family is struggling, there are supports around you. Those whose families are well, and who are and do contribute more broadly to their community receive recognition, honour and influence.<sup>115</sup>

Although many of these teachings and practices have been dramatically disrupted through ongoing colonial imposition,<sup>116</sup> Washington maintains that many aspects of the *ums nah*

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<sup>106</sup> Adam, 2018

<sup>107</sup> Paul, 2014

<sup>108</sup> Bachrach, 2015

<sup>109</sup> See also Raworth, 2017 and Warning, 2018

<sup>110</sup> Washington, 2004

<sup>111</sup> Paul, 2014

<sup>112</sup> Paul, 2014

<sup>113</sup> Washington, 2004, p. 588

<sup>114</sup> Raworth, 2017

<sup>115</sup> Washington, 2004

<sup>116</sup> Adam, 2018; Paul, 2014

*motl* (Tla'amin traditional laws) that “governed all forms of social, economic, and political relations” are relevant today and there is an obligation to include them in plans for the future.<sup>117</sup>

In a recent participatory action research project, parents and caregivers of Tla'amin children with disabilities center the importance of cultural safety.<sup>118</sup> This includes such things as:

- centering identity, and lifting them up to feel proud of who they are;
- integrating *ta'ow* (teachings) into daily life, which – among other things – teaches to acknowledge and embrace every child/person for their gifts; and
- fostering good and respectful relationships with the child, family, Elders, schools, and professionals.

The study also highlighted systemic barriers faced by children with disabilities and their families - including racism and bureaucratic red tape that interfere with achieving cultural safety and social inclusion. The community's recommendations for systemic change include:

- centering the child at every step;
- good support for workers and caregivers;
- revitalizing language and culture;
- building up the next generation of leaders; and
- investing in decolonizing and Indigenizing the dominant system.<sup>119</sup>

In this, we see this ancient wisdom being carried forward by current generations to re-center a Tla'amin orientation to inclusion and belonging. These recommendations can help us when considering inclusive employment.

## A diverse economies framework: shedding new light

Although the words ‘economy’ and ‘market’ are often used interchangeably, the broader definition of economy is inclusive of a much wider range of activities that keep households, communities, and countries running well.<sup>120</sup> A diverse economies framework is a way of making visible *all* of the elements of the economy so we can see those activities that are valuable but marginalized, or discounted/uncounted<sup>121</sup> - not just activities that flow through the market.<sup>122</sup> Given the systemic exclusion of PWD and others from the mainstream workforce, exploring outside the dominant capitalist system can reveal economic contributions and promising possibilities not immediately recognized when financial growth is the only measure for success.

Using a diverse economies approach that is fluid, experimental, and place-based has proven beneficial.<sup>123</sup> It shows how the local and emergent activity of a single person or business

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<sup>117</sup> Washington, 2004, p. 583

<sup>118</sup> Harrop, 2019, p. 4

<sup>119</sup> Harrop, 2019

<sup>120</sup> Gibson-Graham, et al, 2013

<sup>121</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>122</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013

<sup>123</sup> Gibson-Graham, et al, 2013



has political and powerful implications.<sup>124</sup> Paying attention to everyday economic activity (which sometimes does and sometimes doesn't involve money changing hands) has exciting transformational potential. It helps us see the ways the economic system is created by all of us - even seemingly small, local initiatives contribute to meaningful systemic action.<sup>125</sup>

A case study demonstrates the big and small ways one woman's garden offers community-building and sustenance: people contribute to the production of food; they access and further distribute the food that is grown there; they build important friendships and social networks (through which *other* important needs get met as well), and so forth. These are vital forms of economic activity that would not be recognized as such using dominant indicators for success.<sup>126</sup> The impact of her garden is described as "liberatory" by not only providing food and social connection, but empowering community members and improving social determinants of health causing a positive ripple effect throughout the community.<sup>127</sup> This demonstrates how we create the economy through our everyday activities. Incremental changes - such as valuing the activities in this garden as part of the economy - are the active stepping stones of system transformation; small efforts, when examined together, can lead to radical change over time.<sup>128</sup>

Examples from economic geographers the world over abound, including the economic role of gardening,<sup>129</sup> bicycle-sharing,<sup>130</sup> food production and distribution,<sup>131</sup> and manufacturing.<sup>132</sup> These examples include for-profit and non-profit enterprises, and they may involve monetary exchange, trade, and sometimes other forms of remuneration. They show us that local experiments in doing things differently shine new light on what is possible when it comes to a more just, inclusive, and sustainable economy and how we view employment.

Global examples of existing diverse economic activities looked at in relation to each other and the broader economic system, reveals several themes:

- **Economic practices are responsive, adaptive, and flexible and may correspond to various notions of success.**
- **They are hybrid, and responsive to changing conditions and circumstances.**
- **They are not only individual-centered, but provide for the collective care of humans and non-humans.**
- **Surplus generated is generally (re)distributed through some community-based mechanisms, which increases wellbeing, reduces vulnerability, and strengthens resilience.<sup>133</sup>**

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<sup>124</sup> Hosking & Palomino-Schalscha, 2016

<sup>125</sup> Schmid, & Smith, 2021

<sup>126</sup> Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017

<sup>127</sup> Hosking & Palomino-Schalscha, 2016, p. 1250

<sup>128</sup> Gopel, 2016

<sup>129</sup> Hosking & Palomino-Schalscha, 2016

<sup>130</sup> Zademach & Musch, 2018

<sup>131</sup> Moragues-Faus, Marsden, Adlerova, & Hausmanova, 2020; Rosol, 2019; White, 2013

<sup>132</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, Healy, & McNeill, 2019

<sup>133</sup> Gibson et al, 2018

Examining current activities with an un-siloed lens gives us the opportunity to recognize that the alternatives we seek (in this case, inclusive employment) may already be within reach or in play.

## Changing the narrative

When organizations acknowledge the systemic nature of workplace exclusion, and actively redefine *themselves* in a way that aligns with equity and inclusion, the entire corporate culture shifts so that inclusion is inherent to the organizational structure.<sup>134</sup> This takes the onus off of people who are historically marginalized from the workforce from *having to* self-disclose in order to access assistance or accommodation. Simultaneously this creates an environment that is hospitable to self-disclosure and accommodation. In other words, it relieves pressure to somehow ‘fit in’ to a system or environment that is not designed for or by them.<sup>135</sup>

A social model of disability shifts the responsibility to change from PWDs to potential employers, policy makers and the broader social world.<sup>136</sup> The social model of disability has effectively informed some policies and legislation in the direction of work inclusion around the world.<sup>137</sup> However, while it has alleviated some barriers and contributed to the development of accessibility policies and legislation,<sup>138</sup> exclusion from meaningful work for people with disabilities is still a reality.<sup>139</sup>

## Employer attitudes and perceptions

Many employers express positive attitudes about the idea of hiring people with disabilities, but demonstrate a reluctance to do so.<sup>140</sup> They often believe the myth that people with disabilities will perform poorly or cost the company.<sup>141</sup> They also voice concerns about safety and productivity, their own knowledge related to hiring and retention, and identifying workplace supports and accommodations.<sup>142</sup> This is particularly the case for small companies.<sup>143</sup> Despite evidence that these concerns are unfounded,<sup>144</sup> these stigmas contribute to the low employment rates for PWD.

Grassroots or bottom-up approaches to structural change are imperative however the disability inclusion literature also points out that **a motivated leader with an empowering**

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<sup>134</sup> Buettgen & Klassen, 2020, p. 91

<sup>135</sup> Buettgen & Klassen, 2020; Meltzer et al, 2019

<sup>136</sup> Backrach, 2015

<sup>137</sup> Ferrucci, 2014

<sup>138</sup> McColl, Gitterman, & Goldowitz, 2019

<sup>139</sup> Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017

<sup>140</sup> Fraser, Ajzen, Johnson, Herbert & Chan, 2011; Kocman, Fischer, & Weber, 2018

<sup>141</sup> Baker, et al., 2018; Bonaccio, et al, 2020

<sup>142</sup> Bonaccio, et al, 2020; Kocman et al, 2018

<sup>143</sup> Kuznetsova, 2016

<sup>144</sup> Bonaccio et al, 2020; Kaletta, et al., 2012

**attitude at the top of an organization can play a role in setting the tone and conditions for the workplace.**<sup>145</sup> Employers who have a personal relationship to disability themselves are the most likely to cultivate inclusive work environments.<sup>146</sup> When employers have received training that addresses biases and have included disability as a focus in their diversity hiring strategies, they are more likely to be inclusive.<sup>147</sup> **Education, knowledge-building and ongoing support are needed** to dispel myths, change practices, and build “disability confidence”.<sup>148</sup> Partnerships between employers and agencies that can help them raise their level of awareness, build connections, and provide employment for people with disabilities have also proven to be important. We must look at both disability and work differently, in order to bring about this change: Organizations or businesses that are recognized by people with disabilities as good places to work celebrate the value of diverse experiences, embodiments, and voices while resisting dominant notions of disability and difference as in any way problematic.<sup>149</sup>

## Non-standard employment

Even when employment is secured, it can often be precarious, unfulfilling, and even demeaning - especially for people with disabilities or other barriers to employment.<sup>150</sup> As a result, PWD often creatively address the barriers faced by bypassing a discriminatory mainstream labour market and creating “their own disability friendly business or non-profit.”<sup>151</sup> Indeed, barriers or unmet needs often lead to significant innovations that benefit the individual and the collective.<sup>152</sup> We can observe many ‘promising practices’ by looking at employment and economic innovations that have emerged in response to some of the exclusive structures and practices discussed already.

Employment described as ‘non-standard’ usually involves atypical hours or contractual relationships. It can include such things as “temporary help and subcontracted business services, independent contracting, ‘on call’ workers and day labourers, part-time work, and self-employment.”<sup>153</sup> Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a massive structural transformation was already in place in the Canadian labour market through intersecting impacts of “innovative technologies, demographic shifts, globalization, and the rise of the gig economy.”<sup>154</sup> Since then, the pandemic has pushed boundaries and further normalized what was once considered non-standard employment.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Glade, et al, 2020

<sup>146</sup> Kuznetsova, 2016; Nicholas et al, 2019

<sup>147</sup> Frazer et al, 2011

<sup>148</sup> Murfitt et al, 2018

<sup>149</sup> Buettgen & Klassen, 2020; Ferrucci, 2014

<sup>150</sup> Meltzer et al, 2019

<sup>151</sup> Amoroso, 2020, p. 2

<sup>152</sup> Holmes, 2018

<sup>153</sup> Shuey & Jovic, 2013, p. 176

<sup>154</sup> Anani, 2018, p. S167

<sup>155</sup> Glavin, Bierman, & Schieman, 2021

For many non-standard employment is not a choice, while some people choose and prefer it.<sup>156</sup> There is great debate over the implications of the growing gig economy in Canada.<sup>157</sup> Non-standard employment is often insecure, can be short term or cyclical, and lacks access to labour market protections.<sup>158</sup> “Workers with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be in nonstandard work arrangements” than those without.<sup>159</sup> A Canadian study demonstrates that employees with disabilities who work in non-standard employment settings are “more likely to have unmet accommodation needs”, despite accessibility legislation.<sup>160</sup> As outlined previously, this leads to poverty, isolation, and other compounding challenges for people without access to the workforce. That said, non-standard options may provide much-needed flexibility and autonomy that cannot be found in standard employment settings, and provide valuable alternatives to dominant structures that aren’t serving many people.<sup>161</sup> Many people actively choose non-standard options because they are optimal for a wide range of reasons.<sup>162</sup> Some research demonstrates that “we should embrace non-standard employment as an opportunity rather than as a danger” and create institutional protections and supports for non-standard forms of employment<sup>163</sup> – a recommendation that is also emerging in new research about the labour market in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>164</sup>

This does not preclude employers from the responsibility of implementing recommendations in order to foster inclusive workplaces. It does, however, indicate that by looking both within and *outside* of the mainstream labour market we will find PWD have created meaningful employment opportunities. Including - and even centering - in this research the perspectives of people who have created or found non-standard employment will shed light on possibilities that can support disability inclusion in diverse employment settings and change the dominant narrative about work.

## Redefining success

Our current economic, business, and employment models are structured by and for a very small, privileged demographic to the exclusion of others.<sup>165</sup> It is by now abundantly clear that those structures which do not currently work for PWD are also “less than optimal” for most people.<sup>166</sup> We are “in dire need of new disruptive interventions to address global risks and challenges.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ebuenyi et al, 2018

<sup>157</sup> Glavin, Bierman, & Schieman, 2021

<sup>158</sup> Shuey & Jovic, 2013

<sup>159</sup> Shuey & Jovic, 2013, p. 179

<sup>160</sup> Shuey & Jovic, 2013, p. 174

<sup>161</sup> Anani, 2018

<sup>162</sup> Hosking & Palomino-Schalscha, 2016; Solid State Community Industries, n.d.

<sup>163</sup> Schmid, 2018, p. 31

<sup>164</sup> Child, 2021; Sheppard-Jones, et al, 2020

<sup>165</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>166</sup> Treviranus, 2014, p. 99

<sup>167</sup> Treviranus, 2014, p. 99

During any transition in which new approaches are being tested, indicators for success should not be imposed from outside, but determined by those most impacted by the intervention.<sup>168</sup> There also needs to be room for the learning that comes when outcomes are different than anticipated.<sup>169</sup> When initiatives are developed by specific people, in specific places, on the basis of specific values, a strong argument is made for the definitions and indicators for success to also be “place-based and culturally relevant” - rather than applying singular standards for success, such as profit-growth.<sup>170</sup>

There are many efforts taking place in Canada and around the world towards this aim, with a focus on restructuring for the “next economy”:<sup>171</sup>

One study redefined success on the basis of the learning and community impacts - not the company’s viability. They found that **experiments in creating different futures require a certain tolerance for risk**.<sup>172</sup> Risk tolerance is important not only on the part of businesses and employees, but it also demands institutional (legal, financial, and organizational) capacities that provide “social protection for people engaging in these risky employment relationships.”<sup>173</sup>

A B.C.-based example is testing its inclusive employment model thanks to provincial funding and the support of organizational partners during its 18-month pilot phase.<sup>174</sup> The stability these supports offer enables risks to be taken, which has contributed greatly to the social enterprise’s collective learning. As with the bakery, many of the people employed at OneLight identified it as successful due to a wide range of success indicators: employee retention, employee satisfaction, collective learning, productivity, equitable pay, and improved quality of life. They indicated the value of employment on individual well-being as well as at a community level.

Developing internal measures for success expands possibilities substantially because what gets counted is what is deemed important by those most impacted. This is about making the market fit workers, instead of making workers fit the market. When working innovatively in these ways, other recommendations include: **having a “visionary leader”, securing advice, having a solid plan, and ongoing evaluation efforts**.

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<sup>168</sup> Carnegie et al, 2019; Waring, 2018

<sup>169</sup> Schmid, 2018

<sup>170</sup> Carnegie et al, 2019, p. 253

<sup>171</sup> Center for Social innovation, 2022; see also BC Center for Social Enterprise, 2021; Solid State Community Industries, n.d.

<sup>172</sup> Santana & Paolo Parigi, 2015

<sup>173</sup> Arias-Loyola, & Vergara-Perucich, 2020, p. 56

<sup>174</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

## A detour

There is an argument for employment inclusion that is based on evidence that it can increase productivity, profit margins, and shareholder returns.<sup>175</sup>

This argument aims to make the labour of people with disabilities or other barriers to employment visible within the existing profit-oriented economy, similarly to the way some economists have estimated the monetary value of “unpaid work,” “environmental services,” and “the free gifts of nature” in order to help us all recognize their value.<sup>176</sup> Evidence does show that the perspectives and experiences of people with diverse ways of engaging in the world physically, mentally, or socially have led to innovations that are not only useful – they are marketable. Inclusive design is smart business.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, research at a social enterprise reveals that it was more financially viable because social needs were being met.<sup>178</sup>

While this can be a compelling and impactful argument, it is a slippery slope when understood in dialogue with diverse economies literature. In fact, it ultimately works against pursuing the structural changes needed for genuine and meaningful employment inclusion and other forms of social and ecological justice, by centering financial gain over wellbeing as the purpose of our economic activity.<sup>179</sup>

## Experiments in structural change *within* employment settings

There are many experiments in structural change already taking place within employment settings. What promising practices does the literature point us towards?

### Inclusive design

Employment inclusion is not a burden; it is a benefit.<sup>180</sup> Despite persistent assumptions,<sup>181</sup> the truth from employers is that accommodations cost nothing or very little,<sup>182</sup> and the support needed by any new worker usually decreases over time.<sup>183</sup>

In order to foster inclusive employment opportunities, it is critical to break social norms and conditioning to disrupt stereotypes of PWDs or other barriers. When PWD are excluded

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<sup>175</sup> Sheppard-Jones, 2020, p. 76

<sup>176</sup> Waring, 2018, p. 18

<sup>177</sup> Holmes, 2018

<sup>178</sup> Bellostas, Lopez-Arceiz, & Mateos, 2016

<sup>179</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>180</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

<sup>181</sup> Bonaccio et al, 2020 - also see section entitled ‘Employer attitudes and perceptions’

<sup>182</sup> Lindsay, et al, 2019, p. 149

<sup>183</sup> Hartnett et al, 2011

from *design* conversations, this is difficult to achieve – but it is never too late to address the systemic exclusion of diverse voices.<sup>184</sup>

Tools and roadmaps now exist to guide equity-centered design processes:

- beginning with understanding the problem,
- exploring possible solutions,
- reflecting on their effects,
- implementing an option, and
- ensuring it is equitable.<sup>185</sup>

An inclusive design (ID) approach honours natural human diversity, and recognizes that human diversity means no single design is universally accessible.<sup>186</sup> When the right people are involved at each stage of the process, ID is easy to implement, it is not a burden, and it benefits everyone – the positive implications extend to all existing and potential workers.<sup>187</sup>

Actively considering how to best accommodate all workers in every stage of employment (ie. recruitment, interviews, and promotion) allows for changes to be addressed easily.<sup>188</sup> **Hiring to people’s strengths and interests, and creating a disability-inclusive recruitment and interview process are strongly recommended.**<sup>189</sup> For instance, demonstrating in job postings and interviews that flexibility and accessibility are prioritized in the workplace can encourage applicants - knowing they will not have to raise the topic and risk being seen as the complainer.<sup>190</sup> In some cases, employers can partner with other organizations in their region to support recruitment and hiring - educational institutions can connect them with students or graduates, or community service organizations can connect them with job-seekers.<sup>191</sup>

Company-specific policies and practices should attend to the environment as a whole.<sup>192</sup> **Ensuring environments – including architecture, transportation, communications, processes, and digital spaces – are accessible from the beginning will enable all employees to be productive and efficient – as does flexibility.**<sup>193</sup> Flexibility makes workplaces emotionally and physically safe and accessible for people who have fluctuating physical or mental health. It enables employees to maintain other important commitments in their families and communities, without having to fear losing their jobs.<sup>194</sup> **Ensuring clarity and a shared understanding about the business model** (relationship to profit, ownership structure, and

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<sup>184</sup> Zitcer, 2014

<sup>185</sup> Education First, n.d.

<sup>186</sup> Treviranus, 2014

<sup>187</sup> Bonaccio, 2020; Glade et al, 2020; Prince, 2017; Sheppard-Jones, 2020

<sup>188</sup> Lindsay, 2019

<sup>189</sup> Bonaccio et al, 2020

<sup>190</sup> Glade, et al, 2020; MacTaggart, et al, 2018

<sup>191</sup> Baker et al, 2018

<sup>192</sup> Baker, et al., 2018; Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

<sup>193</sup> Baker et al, 2018

<sup>194</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

decision-making mechanisms, for instance) is also important for meaningful inclusion at every level.<sup>195</sup>

Many of the strategies listed above will create a more hospitable and flexible workplace, contributing to employee recruitment, job retention, promotion, and innovation.<sup>196</sup> While “accessible design has often been motivated by charity or legal human rights obligations,” it is argued that the most powerful rationale for inclusive design is that it creates concrete quality improvements to both products and practices<sup>197</sup> and improved outcomes for society as a whole. For instance, such things as reading glasses and adjustable desks are all innovations that began by addressing exclusion, and have become ubiquitous in our daily lives and workplaces.<sup>198</sup> Inclusive Design is not only just and effective (and cost-efficient);<sup>199</sup> it has also tended to “spur innovation and cause disruptive leaps forward.”<sup>200</sup>

In a successful initiative at a large distribution center, three commitments the business made up front included:

- partnering with social service agencies on an ongoing basis,
- building a physical workplace that would be conducive to a range of abilities and needs, and
- creating a welcoming and inclusive culture from day one, with safety as an explicit top priority.<sup>201</sup>

Changes over time at this distribution center have also led to:

- increased attention to matching employees' skills and interests with the job opportunity, as well as
- more thorough training that extends beyond tasks and safety instructions – particularly for employees for whom this is their first work experience.

## Being clear about values

Whether acknowledged or even recognized, values underlie the economic and social decisions being made.<sup>202</sup> How we understand our ‘bottom line’ alters trajectories and creates or limits possibilities.<sup>203</sup>

There is a long and successful history of what is now described as the *social economy*, though many efforts have experienced serious disruption as a result of a more globalized and

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<sup>195</sup> Hinton, 2021; Zitcer, 2014

<sup>196</sup> Bonaccio et al, 2020; Brown, Kessler, & Toson, 2016; Holmes, 2018; Huang & Chen, 2015; West, Targett, Wehman, Cifu, & Davis, 2015

<sup>197</sup> Treviranus, 2014

<sup>198</sup> Sheppard-Jones, et al, 2020; Treviranus, 2014

<sup>199</sup> Jesus et al, 2021; Sheppard-Jones et al, 2020

<sup>200</sup> Treviranus, 2014, p. 95

<sup>201</sup> Kaletta et al, 2012

<sup>202</sup> Waring, 2018

<sup>203</sup> Carnegie, McKinnon, & Gibson, 2019



universalized approach to economic development.<sup>204</sup> Currently, the system is structured in a way that makes it difficult for these beneficial and inclusive initiatives to survive and be recognized. Globally there are a myriad of actions, small and large, attempting to bring a more balanced look at the economy to include ecological and human wellbeing as part of the equation.<sup>205</sup> Values that underlie economic decisions vary widely:

Ecological sustainability is a value that is now guiding many businesses. The linear economy is one in which material resources are extracted from the earth, used (one or more times), and discarded whereas the circular economy creates a closed loop with limited and/or repurposed ‘waste’.<sup>206</sup> The bioeconomy,<sup>207</sup> the green economy,<sup>208</sup> and sustainable development<sup>209</sup> are all slightly different approaches to creating economies that work within natural planetary limits.<sup>210</sup>

Social justice has emerged as another value that is central to many new initiatives, with a focus on justice for workers and ethical products. With this value in mind, many businesses are organizing themselves around equitable participation in decision-making as well as profit share.<sup>211</sup> These have taken many forms, including cooperatives,<sup>212</sup> social enterprises,<sup>213</sup> non-profit organizations,<sup>214</sup> as well as private enterprises.<sup>215</sup>

Profit is a dominant value underlying many economic decisions, as discussed previously.<sup>216</sup> Profit is argued by some economists as an end in itself, and others as a means to an end (ie. community benefit); there is no consensus about the economic or social value of profit.<sup>217</sup>

For our purposes, it is important to acknowledge that environmental sustainability, social justice, and profit can be experienced as competing interests, so it is recommended for an organization or business to **be explicit about its guiding values and priorities** to help in decision-making and organizational development.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Rihter & Zidar, 2018; Qian & Wei, 2019

<sup>205</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013; Hernandez, 2013; see also Frazo, 2010

<sup>206</sup> Bolger & Doyon, 2019; Sedikova, 2019

<sup>207</sup> Beluhova-Uzunova, Shishkova, & Ivanova, 2019

<sup>208</sup> Horbach & Rammer, 2020

<sup>209</sup> Slusariuc, & Nimara, 2020

<sup>210</sup> Okewale, Adeyemi, Soyemi, & Mieseigha, 2020

<sup>211</sup> Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017

<sup>212</sup> Klagge & Meister, 2018; Zitcer, 2014; Solid State Community Industries, n.d.

<sup>213</sup> Bouchard, Cruz Filho, & Zerdani, 2015; Smith, McVilly, McGillivray, & Chan, 2018

<sup>214</sup> Buettgen, & Klassen, 2020

<sup>215</sup> Gibson-Graham, Cameron, Healy, & McNeill, 2019

<sup>216</sup> Hinton, 2021; Waring, 2018

<sup>217</sup> See Barauna et al, 2021; del Moral-Espin & Fernandez-Garcia, 2018; Gibson-Graham et al, 2019; Hernandez, 2013; Hinton & Mclurcan, 2017; Kuokkanen, 2011; North, 2016; Rosol, 2019; White, 2013

<sup>218</sup> Arias-Loyola & Vergara-Perucich, 2020; Austin-Broos, 2009; Bolger & Doyon, 2019; Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017; Sedikova, 2019; Slusariuc, & Nimara, 2020; Zademach & Musch, 2018

Doughnut economics is a model which holds room for all three of the above values to play a role, with an underlying value of balance.<sup>219</sup> This model aims to support economic decision-making that is deliberately designed to both respect the natural limits of the planet and consider human wellbeing as a vital bottom line. In this model, profit may be generated, but not at the expense of people or the planet.

Some scholars recommend replacing *efficiency* with *sufficiency* as a fitting guiding value for businesses and organizations.<sup>220</sup> Sufficiency is a particularly valuable concept in terms of inclusive employment, because efficiency is often a value basis upon which employers justify *not* employing people with disabilities. A growth-orientation tends to favour efficiency which often interferes with equity and social justice.<sup>221</sup>

There are many inherent challenges in the experiential nature of system transformation; there is no pre-existing formula and it is recommended to take stock of the different ways power and profit are organized within the enterprise.<sup>222</sup> A commitment to inclusion can often be trumped by other competing values a company might have.<sup>223</sup> **Identifying available support and using strategic business or other partnerships can mitigate against that inevitable conflict.**<sup>224</sup> Lessons learned also suggest that **nimbleness is important when navigating the tension between ideals and practice** in order to remain consistent with organizational values over time.<sup>225</sup> Deliberate, transparent, and participatory decision-making about the structure, the values, and the economic model can increase the chances of meeting the particular, place-based aims of the enterprise, and developing indicators for success that make sense for its purpose.<sup>226</sup>

## Workplace policies

Workplace inclusion is a fundamental condition for an equitable economic landscape for us all. While some observe that focusing on one individual at a time - especially without altering the organizational culture and supportive partnerships - is inefficient,<sup>227</sup> others note that “protecting workers might make more sense than protecting jobs,” given new challenges such as COVID-19 and climate change.<sup>228</sup>

Organizations and businesses can work to become “disability confident and have inclusive policies, processes, and facilities.”<sup>229</sup> Recommendations include: **assessing the level of both cultural and physical inclusion**, proceeding to improve “disability awareness and

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<sup>219</sup> Raworth, 2017, p. 39 and 25

<sup>220</sup> Krueger, Schulz, and Gibbs, 2018; Unger, 2010

<sup>221</sup> Krueger, Schulz, and Gibbs, 2018

<sup>222</sup> del Moral-Espin and Fernandez-Garcia, 2018

<sup>223</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

<sup>224</sup> Berry & Kymar, 2012; Sulewski, Ciulla Timmons, Lyons, Lucas, Vogt, & Bachmeyer, 2017

<sup>225</sup> Oz & Aksoy, 2019

<sup>226</sup> Hinton, 2021

<sup>227</sup> Wehman, Brooke, Green, Hewett, & Tipton, 2008

<sup>228</sup> Larue, 2021, p. 272

<sup>229</sup> Murfitt et al, 2018, p. 428

diversity training,” and “developing inclusive policies and procedures, especially for recruitment, and addressing physical barriers in the workplace.”<sup>230</sup> Fear can be a barrier for change, but disability confidence and organizational growth towards equity and justice can be supported, regardless of the starting place.<sup>231</sup>

Internal workplace policies can continue addressing “the structural and cultural barriers that create/reinforce disadvantage” in the workplace.<sup>232</sup> Companies with targeted corporate policies and sustainability programs in place at a company level are more likely than others to be inclusive employers.<sup>233</sup> Having policy is imperative; however implementing the policy is equally imperative. This may require a shift in organizational culture, training for all management and staff, and direct involvement of people with disabilities in decision-making.<sup>234</sup> These might be massive foundational changes in some places, or minor adjustments in others. **Fostering any kind of organizational change is a process, not just an outcome, and this process itself should be person-centered as well.**<sup>235</sup>

## Inclusive participation at every level

Increased inequity is one of the major pitfalls of present-day capitalism.<sup>236</sup> Inclusive capitalism is described as a system that bonds people through interdependency and partnerships (rather than dependency and hierarchy).<sup>237</sup> This means active participation of every member of the system in things like decision-making, ownership, and employment. The argument is that with more equal participation at every level, benefits and harms would be more equitably distributed when the economy ebbs and flows.<sup>238</sup>

This approach points to the very important element of having PWD representation in decision-making, ownership, and other leadership positions.<sup>239</sup> As with gender and other forms of inequity, representation at all levels is vital for structural change.<sup>240</sup> Structural change that facilitates equitable representation in leadership positions will enable entirely new thoughts and perspectives to arise. Some concrete steps to better reflect a democratic inclusion are: sliding scale equity payments, anti-racism and anti-oppression training, and training for young people.<sup>241</sup> Others include: **board and leadership diversification, engaging with broader justice**

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<sup>230</sup> Murfitt et al, 2018, p. 428

<sup>231</sup> Murfitt et al, 2018; Vachon, 2018

<sup>232</sup> Kitching, 2006, p. 881; see also Bumble, Carter, McMillan, & Manikas, 2017; Lang et al, 2019

<sup>233</sup> Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017

<sup>234</sup> Bonaccio, et al, 2020; Gunty et al, 2019; Glade et al, 2020

<sup>235</sup> Grills et al, 2016; Gunty, Van Ness, & Nye-Lengerman, 2019, p. 325

<sup>236</sup> Raworth, 2017; Waring, 2018

<sup>237</sup> Borko, 2016, p. 33

<sup>238</sup> See also Government of British Columbia, 2022; Treviranus, 2014

<sup>239</sup> Caldwell, et al, 2018; Grills et al, 2016

<sup>240</sup> Meier, Celis, and Huysentruty (2016)

<sup>241</sup> Zitcer, 2014

**movements, and altering communications and signage.** These recommendations, again, do not speak only to disability inclusion, but to inclusive design more generally.<sup>242</sup>

People with disabilities are often excluded from the opportunity for career progression.<sup>243</sup> Case studies in Ontario, Alberta, and B.C. show that this can be addressed by:

- Having a range of products, services, or initiatives within a social enterprise increases the potential for job diversity and enables people to find work that suits their interests and skills.<sup>244</sup>
- Upward mobility with increased responsibility and pay was another strategy, as was moving to jobs in the mainstream workforce with support from the original social enterprise was another (with varying degrees of success).<sup>245</sup>
- And in B.C. the importance of flexibility in scheduling and tasks was identified as a central element of the inclusive employment model. **Flexibility requires attentive and skilled management, so structural support at the management level is also necessary for success.**<sup>246</sup>

A network of Canadian solidarity economy enterprises called ‘Solid State Community Industries’ (SSCI) demonstrates the wide range of possible forms an enterprise can take when inclusive participation at every level is a central commitment. “Bound together by a commitment to cooperativism and working past extractivism and exploitation,” these enterprises embody shared decision-making, shared ownership, and organizational values that center social benefit.<sup>247</sup> This approach leads to meaningful employment, innovation, long-term commitment, and concrete impacts for those employed *and* the communities in which they are embedded.

## Organizational structure: Spotlight on the social economy

People are reorganizing, and new responses are emerging – such as worker owned cooperative social enterprises. There is optimism about their ability to offer good working conditions, higher pay and benefits, job satisfaction, opportunities for skills training, and greater job security. A Spanish study found that social enterprises (that were also sheltered workshops for people with disabilities) had a track record of continuing to create jobs even during an economic crisis.<sup>248</sup> Similarly, a worker inclusive social enterprise in B.C. experienced extremely high employee retention and satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic when other employers were experiencing labour shortages.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Treviranus, 2014

<sup>243</sup> Amoroso, 2020

<sup>244</sup> Lysaght, Krupa, & Bouuchard, 2018

<sup>245</sup> Lysaght, Krupa, & Bouuchard, 2018

<sup>246</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

<sup>247</sup> Solid State Community Industries, n.d.

<sup>248</sup> Bellostas, Lopez-Arceiz, & Mateos, 2016, p. 369

<sup>249</sup> Inclusion Powell River Society, 2021

Sometimes social enterprises are “non-profit organizations that participate in commercial activities to fulfill and even broaden the social missions of their organizations.”<sup>250</sup> They can in fact take many forms.<sup>251</sup> Social enterprises can provide “higher quality work experience compared to sheltered employment, while creating a supportive atmosphere that may be lacking in competitive employment.”<sup>252</sup>

The social economy also includes other economic structures – such as cooperatives, which share power through ownership.<sup>253</sup> The social economy is a potential opportunity for disability work inclusion because the social economy encompasses both economic and social aims.<sup>254</sup> Ablism is pervasive in Canada, and can be combated by engaging the social economy in disability inclusive initiatives - but there are **important questions that organizations and businesses should ask of themselves, to ensure they do not replicate paternalistic or oppressive patterns in their workplaces.**<sup>255</sup>

Challenges for social enterprises include: finding start-up funds, generating enough revenue to pay fair wages, balancing economic and social aims,<sup>256</sup> and resisting the replication of paternalistic or oppressive patterns in workplaces.<sup>257</sup> Another challenge is the fact that given the (often) part-time nature of this work, it may not be enough to lift people out of poverty – exacerbated by the fact that employment beyond a certain level actually interferes with financial aid eligibility for workers with disabilities.<sup>258</sup> It is recommended that social enterprises and other employers that center social purpose:

- **ensure the setting integrates employees with and without disabilities,**
- **pay fair wages,**
- **offer choice to employees about their role and how to be paid, and**
- **provide regular skill assessment that leads “to the opportunity for advancement and promotion where appropriate, or, with the skills developed, movement to another job with another employer.”**<sup>259</sup>

It is also recommended that they:

- have their own management structure,
- are well-supported by their parent organization (if they have one),
- have a good business plan and competent people to implement it, and

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<sup>250</sup> Hsu, Huang, and Ososkie, 2009, p. 20

<sup>251</sup> Bouchard et al, 2015

<sup>252</sup> Tan, 2009, p. 53

<sup>253</sup> Oz, & Aksoy, 2019

<sup>254</sup> Prince, 2014

<sup>255</sup> see also Buhariwala, Wilton & Evans, 2015; Lanctot, Corbiere, & Durand, 2012; and Morrow, et al., 2009

<sup>256</sup> Cooney, 2016

<sup>257</sup> Prince, 2014

<sup>258</sup> Buhariwala, Wilton & Evans, 2015

<sup>259</sup> Katz, 2014, p. 134

- track both successes and challenges over time (related to economic and social impacts).<sup>260</sup>

For-profit businesses of various sizes are also demonstrating just and inclusive responses to many of the challenges discussed thus far. Larger organizations are more likely to have formalized disability inclusion policies and practices,<sup>261</sup> however small and medium sized businesses play an important role.

Looking at the impact of “small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in environmental action” we can see how private sector SMEs are (already) motivated by things beyond profit and growth in their decision-making, even when they are technically structured as for-profit businesses.<sup>262</sup> SME owners can also be associated with social purpose, and “can develop better stories about prosperous, sustainable and convivial local economies.”<sup>263</sup> Similarly, rural communities are demonstrating innovations in “production and experimentation of utterly different, more desirable, futures” even though they are “often left out of urban-centric processes of designing the future of industry, economy, development, and society.”<sup>264</sup>

Research on four manufactures (one shareholder corporation, one family-owned company, one cooperative, and one social enterprise) demonstrates how manufacturing can contribute to both ecological and social wellbeing.<sup>265</sup> Environmental care is enacted by: “eliminating waste”, “treating waste as a resource,” and “pushing at the limits of what materials can do.” Social care is enacted through “remuneration rates”, “career progression for employees”, “relationship with casual employees”, and openness to “those at a distance from the labour market.” How each of the featured businesses does these things varies. The most innovative strategies were taken by **leadership who had the long view in mind, rather than making short term decisions to do business as usual in response to immediate pressures or demands.** It involves taking risks, and approaching challenges creatively in order to foster “new cultures of production” and redefining standards of success or goals.<sup>266</sup> All of them are financially viable, but they are redefining viability on others terms as well.

“The scope of the social economy movement is in fact quite large.”<sup>267</sup> Through the course of this research, we hope to broaden our understanding of which, if any, of these forms shows promise in contributing to the structural conditions to inclusive employment.

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<sup>260</sup> Katz, 2014

<sup>261</sup> Lindsay, Cagliostro, Leck, Shen, & Stinson, 2019

<sup>262</sup> North, 2016, p. 437

<sup>263</sup> North, 2016, p. 451

<sup>264</sup> Spanier, 2021, 121

<sup>265</sup> Gibson, Cameron, Healy, and McNeill, 2019

<sup>266</sup> Gibson, Cameron, Healy, and McNeill, 2019, pp 11-17

<sup>267</sup> Bouchard et al, 2015, p. 56

# Conclusion

Once again, the research question guiding this process is: **What are the enabling structural conditions that create meaningful employment for people with disabilities and other barriers to employment? How can these be amplified and mobilized in other employment settings?**

This literature review set out to explore a) what is already known about this topic, and b) what we still want to find out through the research.

## What is known

- The barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities are largely structural. This includes broad economic and cultural conditions, as well as the structures of workplaces themselves.
- There is now both federal and provincial legislation that acknowledges and seeks to remedy this by foregrounding accessibility as a central commitment at every level, and in all contexts – including but not limited to employment.
- Legislation alone is not enough: employers need to first understand and then address the structural barriers that interfere with employing PWD.
- There are many known effective strategies that employers can and do take up to recruit, employ, and promote people with disabilities.
- Looking at these practices in context can create new possibilities related to a more integrated inclusive economic structure.
- Enterprises that are guided by social values show promise for creating inclusive employment settings, and centering the perspectives of PWD is important for ensuring structural barriers are addressed, and enablers are adopted.
- Many PWD are working in non-standard employment settings. We can widen our scope to include alternative ways people with disabilities are generating employment opportunities for themselves and/or others, for example as entrepreneurs.
- A social purpose can be compromised by a profit-orientation - being explicit about values is important.
- Rather than seeking a single ‘best’ practice, we are encouraged to consider the collective impact of many seemingly discrete actions over time. Recognizing the actions of small, medium-sized, and large enterprises of various forms in context can help us see the impacts they are having when it comes to both addressing structural barriers and creating structural enablers.
- This means we need not seek one decontextualized replicable model, but we can explore how system transformation occurs through the interplay of many diverse actions in a place.
- System-level transformation requires an appetite for risk, and visionary employers who take the long view are paving the way for exciting possibilities.

## What we hope to learn

- Largely missing from the literature are the perspectives of entrepreneurs with disabilities themselves, or other PWD in leadership positions.
- Most of the inclusive employment literature focuses on either social enterprise or private enterprise. The diverse economies literature points to a wider range of possibilities, but doesn't speak specifically to disability inclusion. It would be useful to learn more about inclusive employment possibilities related to different kinds of employment settings such as non-profits, governments, co-operatives, and others.
- We hope to cultivate a richer understanding of these and other promising practices that can address the demand-side barriers to meaningful employment for people with disabilities.
- To gain new insight, we must ask questions about structural barriers that exist both within and outside of the employment setting, as well as the ways people address them.
- Our primary focus is to learn more about creating conditions for inclusive employment. By learning from what is already working well, we can better understand the creative ways people are addressing existing barriers.
- Each story is unique, and spending time with each employer or entrepreneur who chooses to participate will generate rich, localized, qualitative data.

## Next steps

- Conducting an environmental scan will help us begin to identify potential research participants. Inventorying inclusive employment that is already taking place in B.C. will help us see where innovation is happening, as well as where more is needed.
- When it comes to inviting people to participate in this research, an innovative starting place will be 1) employers or entrepreneurs who live with disabilities themselves or in their families, 2) those with PWD in leadership positions, 3) as well as those who are identified *by* PWD as being accessible and inclusive employers.
- Developing the research tools such as invitations to participate, surveys, consent processes, and interview questions will require attention to Inclusive Design processes.
- When ready, we will embark on primary research through interviews, focus groups, and case studies, in order to better understand promising practices for workplace inclusion.
- The final step is to share the knowledge as widely and accessibly as possible through a multimedia microsite, and peer-to-peer/business-to-business sharing.



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