

Beyond Gender: To Have Work-Life Balance, First, You Need a Job!

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Introduction

Work-life balance is a real problem for many of those in the workforce. It is also a concern for people considering joining, re-joining, or staying in the workforce, such as mothers and mature workers. Whilst not discounting the importance of work-life balance, it only becomes a problem when you have work. This paper looks at the experience of people with disability who, first, are much less likely to be employed and, second, if employed, may have different and specific needs regarding work-life balance.

According to the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#), about half of the people of working age who have a disability are employed compared to around 80% of people the same age without a disability, and this number has not changed significantly in the last forty years. Even when employees are struggling to get enough staff, they are reluctant to look at the untapped resources represented by people with disability. Even though many employers have policies in place to cater to the needs of people with disability, [unconscious](#) bias and a [lack of trust](#) means that they are not recruited.

Work-Life Balance as a Strategy for Increasing Participation

People with disability face the same challenges as everyone else in balancing work and personal responsibilities. In addition, they may have [additional challenges](#), such as accessing care when they need it to enable them to work, getting to and from a workplace and accessing support systems (such as healthcare) outside of work hours. Many services that people with disability need to access are [very restrictive in their availability](#) and assume that they are not employed and are available at any time. It is assumed that services can be provided at a time of the provider's choosing. For these reasons, access to employment practices that provide work-life balance is particularly relevant to people with disability and, while not addressing the barriers created by employers that currently limit their participation, would encourage people with disability to seek work by decreasing the barriers they face.

Examples of Good Practice

There are some examples of good practices where employers are not only proactively recruiting people with disability but also offering work-life balance initiatives to facilitate that employment. [Wesfarmers](#) have a well-developed diversity and inclusion policy that includes offering work-life balance initiatives to people with disability that will help facilitate their employment, such as flexible hours and working from home. They are also educating all staff about the particular needs of employees with disability. [Vodafone](#) has used technology to make more job roles available to people with disability. They have also improved their processes to approve workplace adjustments (such as those that create work-life balance). They are collecting data that can be analysed to identify the

barriers to the employment of more people with disability. They are also taking action to encourage their suppliers to do the same. [The Australian Public Service](#) has historically had processes in place to encourage the employment of people with disability. It is now taking more actions to help them meet their target of having 7% of their staff identify as people with disability. These include their [Recruitability](#) program that engages with the disability community to attract applicants with a disability, advances the progress of people with disability in the selection process, guarantees that suitable applicants get an interview, and includes conversations at the recruitment stage about how jobs can be adapted to provide work-life balance. They have also appointed designated Disability Liaison Officers to support staff with disability negotiate changes to their work arrangements as their disability-related needs change. Finally, [IBM Canada](#) has introduced a global, online disability accommodation process, including accommodations to ensure work-life balance.

Conclusion

A range of initiatives are being used by the organisations mentioned above that can be used to ensure that employees with disability have a work-life balance and consider their particular needs.

- Visible senior executive support for employing people with disability in general, preferably with targets and accountability with senior management for meeting those targets
- Actively seeking out applicants with disability and making them aware that work-life accommodations are easily accessible
- Accommodation and work-life balance policies and processes that make it easy for people with disability to have their needs met
- Education for managers and other staff on the value of having as diverse a workplace as possible.



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Carlene worked at Australian Universities for more than 40 years and as a consultant to many not-for-profit organisations in the Health Industry and Commercial Businesses. She is especially interested in how managers can use theory to inform their day-to-day management practice. She is not a stereotypical academic, instead, she is interested in management practice and how good management improves the lives of everyone.

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