

Building Inclusive Workplace: Evaluating Disability Inclusion and Accessibility Initiatives at Westpac

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Abstract: The concept of inclusive management has recently gained much attention in organizations and companies. This study employs a case study methodology to evaluate Westpac Banking Corporation's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives, including workplace adjustments, recruitment improvement, group support, and training and talent programs, through the lenses of Psychological Safety, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, and the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory. This study found that its initiatives improve the personal well-being and performance of employees with disabilities. However, the study identifies several limitations, such as the lack of emphasis on skills training, challenges in disability disclosure, the lack of systematic inclusive leadership training, and the lack of transparency on implementation. Based on these limitations, the study recommends enhancing inclusive leadership training, supporting disability disclosure, providing personalized training, and improving transparency in reporting its inclusion initiatives. These findings can provide other companies with experience and reflection and provide a foundation for future research in disability inclusion and accessibility.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive and globalised business environment and increasing workforce diversity, inclusive management has emerged as a crucial strategy for organisations and companies. Recently, organisations have increasingly prioritised fostering inclusivity to support diversity (Roberson, 2019). Inclusive management ensures equal opportunities for diverse employees in areas such as organisational culture, recruitment, promotion, compensation, and decision-making while fostering a workplace that respects, accepts, and supports differences (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018). Research also indicates that inclusive management enhances employees' sense of belonging and job satisfaction and strengthens corporate innovation and market competitiveness (Roberson, 2019).

In recent years, the importance of disability inclusion and accessibility within organisations has gained significant attention. According to the World Health Organization (2023), about 16% of the world's population suffers from severe disability. In Australia, approximately one in five people report having a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). With support and accommodation, people with disabilities

can achieve similar job performance to people without disabilities when supported and accommodated (Hartnett, Stuart, Thurman, Loy, & Batiste, 2011). Moreover, evidence indicates that hiring people with disabilities can improve brand image and profitability (Lindsay, Cagliostro, Albarico, Mortaji, & Karon, 2018). Therefore, inclusion and accessibility for employees with disabilities are important for organisations.

Westpac Banking Corporation, commonly known as Westpac, is an Australian multinational bank and financial services provider. As one of Australia's "Big Four" banks, Westpac is Australia's oldest and longest-standing banking institution. In 2024, Westpac served approximately 13 million customers worldwide, employed around 35,000 people, and was ranked 53rd in the Top 1000 World Banks ranking. Westpac has put much effort into organisational inclusion and has achieved some success. Disability inclusion and accessibility are important aspects of Westpac's inclusive Initiatives.

Based on Westpac's public information and reports, including its website, Access and Inclusion Plans and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy, this study employs a case study methodology to analyse its core disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives,

drawing on three key theoretical frameworks: Psychological Safety, the Job Demands-Resources Model, and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory. This study evaluates the best practices and limitations of Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives. It aims to share Westpac's experience in these areas and provide recommendations for reflection and improvement.

2 DISABILITY INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE

Disability inclusion and accessibility are key aspects of Westpac's inclusive initiatives. According to King, the CEO of Westpac Group, about 20 years ago, Westpac committed to improving inclusion and accessibility (Westpac Group, n.d-a). Since 2001, Westpac has regularly published Accessibility Action Plans to disclose its objectives and achievements. This section will introduce Westpac's latest main disability and accessibility initiatives for its employees, including recruitment, training, workplace adjustments, and networking support. As a founding member of the Australian Disability Network, Westpac was ranked first in banks in Australia for its disability and accessibility initiatives in 2017. In 2020, Westpac joined The Valuable 500 to enhance disability inclusion (Westpac Group, n.d-a, n.d-b).

2.1 Workplace Adjustment

According to Westpac's latest access and inclusion plan, Westpac has made some efforts to help employees with special needs or disabilities. Similar to another Australian company, Australia Post, Westpac records the workplace adjustments and needs of employees with disabilities as part of its personalisation category in its HR and profile management platforms. These adjustments and needs will be shared with management teams, which can provide employees with disabilities with continuous, seamless workplace adjustments throughout the employment process (Westpac Group, n.d-a).

Moreover, Westpac also incorporates the accessibility of HR systems into workplace adjustments for employees with disabilities, including creating a roadmap for people with accessible needs and making accessibility a requirement for designing HR systems.

Furthermore, Westpac also values mental health in the workplace and provides relevant training for employees and management teams to foster a positive work environment.

In addition, Westpac considers accessibility in the design of its buildings and offices, including floor layouts and accessible facilities. Westpac also partners with Lendlease and the Australian Network on Disability to obtain guidance on building accessibility (Westpac Group, n.d-b).

2.2 Recruitment Improvement

Westpac takes action in the recruitment process to ensure disability inclusion and accessibility. Its accessibility and inclusion initiatives mainly focus on two aspects: improving hiring opportunities for people with disabilities and building an accessible recruitment environment.

Specifically, its actions and plans involve improving the recruitment and interview process through end-to-end employee experience audits, candidates' feedback, education and cooperation with professional groups. These efforts aim to increase the confidence of candidates with disabilities and ensure they receive fair recruitment experience and opportunities (Westpac Group, n.d-a).

2.3 Group Support

Since 2019, Westpac has established the Access and Inclusion Team to integrate accessibility into Westpac's organisational practices and provide support for employees with disabilities (Westpac Group, n.d-a, n.d-b).

Moreover, Westpac's Employee Advocacy Groups (EAGs) also empower employees by giving them more opportunities to participate in organisational management to enhance inclusivity. These EAGs are supported by members of the executive team and are voluntarily operated by employees, maintaining a degree of autonomy. ABLE (Assisting Better Lives for Everyone) is one of Westpac's EAGs, which provides disability and accessibility support to both employees and clients.

2.4 Training and Talent Programs

According to Westpac's publicly available information and plans (n.d-a, n.d-b), the organisation implements a range of training initiatives, talent development programs, and resources for its employees, management, and recruitment teams.

Specifically, Westpac builds an inclusive workplace and environment for employees with disabilities by training all employees to reduce misunderstandings and increase confidence. In addition, its talent programs can reduce employment

barriers for individuals with disabilities. For instance, Disability Confidence Training is a program provided by Westpac to reduce misconceptions about people with disabilities, enabling them to support both their colleagues with disabilities and customers better. Moreover, Westpac also participates in the Australian Network on Disability's Stepping Into internship program to provide more employment and career guidance opportunities for university students and graduates with disabilities.

3 INITIATIVES EVALUATION

Overall, Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives include multiple dimensions and have achieved notable outcomes.

This section critically examines the effectiveness and limitations of these initiatives from an inclusivity perspective, drawing on concepts and theories such as psychological safety, Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, and the Job Demands-Resources model to identify key insights, best practices, and limitations.

3.1 Effectiveness

3.1.1 Psychological Safety

From a psychological safety perspective, Westpac's initiatives of group support and training, such as Disability Confidence Training and ABLE, have strengthened the social connections between leaders and employees with disabilities, which provides room for employees with disabilities to communicate with their managers and express their opinions. In other words, these initiatives and commitments can allow employees with disabilities to share their views and opinions freely without fear of consequences, which can lead to psychological safety and increase job satisfaction and performance levels of employees with disabilities (Edmondson, 1999). Moreover, evidence also shows that psychological safety can increase the innovation capabilities of employees and organisations (A.C. Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

3.1.2 Job Demands-Resources Model

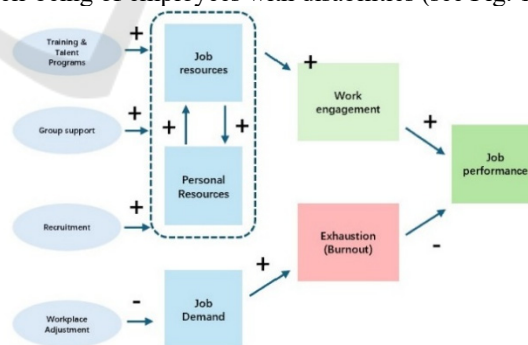
According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, job demands and resources jointly influence individual performance and burnout (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

In the case of Westpac, the recruitment accessibility initiatives, group support, and training programs can be regarded as a job resource and

personal resource and will contribute to work engagement because these initiatives provide employees with disabilities with organisational support, skills, autonomy, opportunities to participate in organisational management and room for free expression (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). One example is Westpac's EAG of ABLE. This EAG supports employees with disabilities and empowers them to participate in organisational management.

In Addition, Westpac's workplace adjustments can also reduce the job demand of employees with disabilities because they reduce the extra effort that disabled employees have to put in at work, thereby reducing the risk of job burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). For instance, Westpac records the needs and requirements of employees with disabilities on its HR systems and shares them with the leaders. It can simplify the communication process of work adjustments and avoid repeated disclosure by employees with disabilities to reduce their extra efforts and mental stress.

Furthermore, Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives, including workplace adjustments, recruitment, group support and training, create a disability-inclusive environment and can make employees with disabilities feel valued and respected, improving their self-efficacy and leading to work engagement (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). Overall, from the perspective of the JD-R model, these initiatives reduce the risk of burnout and increase work engagement, thereby benefiting the performance improvement and well-being of employees with disabilities (see Fig. 1).



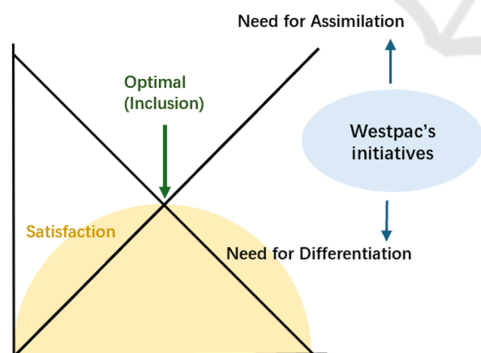
Alt Text for the figure: A Diagram showing how job resources and personal resources increase work engagement and job performance, while job demands lead to exhaustion and lower performance. Initiatives include training, group support, and recruitment to increase personal and job resources. Workplace adjustments reduce job demand.

Figure 1. JD-R model: Westpac's Initiative Evaluation (Bakker et al., 2014).

3.1.3 Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

According to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, individuals have two distinct needs: the need for differentiation and the need for assimilation (Brewer, 1991). This theory also points out that individuals will strive to balance these two needs within social content to achieve an optimal balance, which will positively impact personal mental health and well-being (Brewer, 1991; Zhao & Glynn, 2022). Moreover, an inclusive environment requires both meeting the need for belonging and recognising and leveraging individual uniqueness (Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart, & Singh, 2010).

From this perspective, Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives meet the need for uniqueness and foster a sense of belonging for employees with disabilities. An example is Westpac's workplace adjustment initiatives and training programs, including recording the specific needs of employees with disabilities, which create an inclusive and accessible workplace that meets their unique needs and makes them feel included. Moreover, its group supports employees with disabilities, respects their differences and meets their unique needs to a certain extent. In general, Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives cover these two different needs and can help employees achieve their balance. As a result, these initiatives can positively impact their mental health, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviour. See Figure 2.



Alt Text for the figure: A diagram shows how individuals balance the need for assimilation and differentiation to achieve the optimal point, leading to satisfaction. Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives support these two needs.

Figure 2. Optimal Distinctiveness Theory: Westpac's Initiative Evaluation (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010)

3.2 Limitations

Although Westpac has taken many initiatives and made many efforts regarding disability inclusion and accessibility, there are still some limitations and gaps.

According to Santuzzi, Martinez, and Keating (2021), some employees still face difficulties disclosing their disabilities or needs. This is not only related to psychological safety and fear of negative consequences but also due to their self-perception and self-respect. Although Westpac strives to build an inclusive workplace and culture, and its initiatives—including training, group support, and documentation of workplace adjustments—can encourage employees with disabilities to disclose, Westpac's public materials lack emphasis on psychological factors that impact the disclosure. To address this challenge may require further improvement, including measurement and intervention.

Moreover, although its inclusion policy mentions inclusive leadership training for employees, its latest plan does not focus on it (Westpac Group, n.d.c). Inclusive leadership is a field that has only recently gained attention (Boekhorst, 2015). Research suggests that leaders significantly influence organisations and can impact organisational performance to a certain extent (Shore & Chung, 2021). Therefore, Westpac has a strong rationale for providing leaders with inclusive leadership training and support. Besides that, Westpac has a range of inclusion training initiatives, but most focus on building confidence or creating an inclusive environment. However, its recent reports and plans lack skills training for employees with disabilities.

Additionally, based on the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, the two needs of uniqueness and belonging are in dynamic balance and may change for various reasons (Leonardelli et al., 2010). However, Westpac's Initiatives lack personalised and flexible support for employees with disabilities, which limits its ability to adapt to their changing needs and may prevent individuals from achieving optimal distinctiveness.

Besides, although Westpac provides relatively comprehensive disclosures and information regarding its disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives in its reports, plans, and publicly available information, some of this information lacks specificity. Moreover, the information provided by Westpac relatively lacks detailed implementations and evaluations of its plans and initiatives.

4 RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above evaluation of Westpac's disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives, this section proposes several recommendations for further reflection.

4.1 Enhance Inclusive Leadership Training

Westpac can develop an inclusive leadership framework or platform, provide basic training for recruitment teams and managers, and design a tiered, continuous leadership development pathway.

In addition, Westpac can introduce situational leadership training. Through case studies, situational simulations and experiential learning, managers and leaders can be encouraged to be more sensitive and supportive of employees with disabilities.

Moreover, the assessment of inclusive leadership could also be incorporated into regular performance evaluations.

4.2 Provide More Support for Employees with Disabilities to Disclose

Westpac can enhance employee privacy protection, introduce anonymous or private channels for disability disclosure, and ensure data security and privacy protection so employees feel that information disclosure will not negatively impact and protect their self-esteem.

Moreover, psychological support should be strengthened by developing a system for early detection and proactive intervention while assisting potential employees in need, including psychological counselling and guidance.

Furthermore, Westpac can improve the disability disclosing process by changing the measuring methods and expressions. When collecting and disclosing information, avoid using terms such as "disability," which may negatively impact self-esteem. Instead, adopt more inclusive and acceptable language, such as "special needs" or "required accommodations."

4.3 Provide Personalised Support and Training

Westpac can provide personalised and flexible support and training to employees with disabilities based on their preferences and cultural backgrounds

while adjusting existing initiatives in response to their feedback and external environments to adapt to individual differences and changing environments.

In addition, skills training for employees with disabilities should also be prioritised and strengthened. Westpac can provide different skills training for employees with disabilities based on their differences and characteristics to help them adapt to work.

4.4 Improve Information Transparency

Westpac can disclose more information in reports and the website on the implementation of its inclusion initiatives and plans, including their evaluations and results, to enhance transparency and be open to public scrutiny.

5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study evaluates the key disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives implemented by Westpac Banking Corporation using psychological safety, the Job Demands-Resources Model, and the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory as a case study to evaluate their strengths and limitations and provide insights and reflection on disability inclusion and accessibility in the banking industry.

Westpac's initiatives of workplace adjustment, recruitment process improvement, group and network support, and training and talent programs can generally improve psychological safety. Moreover, from the perspective of the JD-R model, these initiatives also reduce the job demand and increase job and personal resources, which can help prevent burnout and promote work engagement and performance. In addition, based on the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, Westpac's initiatives of workplace adjustment, training, and group support meet the needs for uniqueness and belonging for employees with disabilities, contributing to personal well-being.

However, its disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives still have several limitations. For example, its latest plans lack skills training programs for employees with disabilities, insufficient support for disability disclosure, and systematic training on inclusive leadership. In addition, there is limited transparency regarding the implementation of these initiatives. Therefore, based on these limitations, this study provides several recommendations, including enhancing training on inclusive leadership, encouraging disability disclosure among employees,

providing personalised training and increasing information transparency.

This study primarily relies on Westpac's reports and publicly available materials. Therefore, it has limitations due to the lack of information on the actual implementation of initiatives. Moreover, the lack of primary data and research may limit the ability to fully capture the experiences of employees with disabilities. Therefore, future studies can focus on collecting primary data, including interviews and surveys with Westpac employees with disabilities, which can provide insights into the implementation and effectiveness of its inclusion initiatives in the workplace.

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