

# SUBMISSION On the National Disability Employment Strategy

## Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA) – Bill Gye (CEO)



While the focus of this submission is upon people living with Psychosocial Disabilities, the views expressed made are extendable to all people living with disability. These views are shaped by the authors 30-year history of working in employment services, including as CEO of what was at the time the largest mental health specialist Disability Employment Service in Australia.

### Prologue – The Future of Work

Many influential commentators<sup>1</sup> are arguing that the “the purpose of work” is evolving from enabling survival to meaningful<sup>2</sup> activity and living a contributing life<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the evidence is that when the provision of basic survival needs is guaranteed, people still choose to work<sup>4</sup>.

Employment programs should be re-designed in light of this shift. Compulsion through threats to basic income are broadly ineffective and out of step with history<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, money is not the major motivator for those who are working<sup>6</sup>. It is well argued that lack of appreciation of the above trends is a major contributor to poor mental health and high suicide rates, particularly for males<sup>7</sup>.

We should apply a growth mind set<sup>8</sup> to the future of work and aspire for all jobs to be fulfilling<sup>9</sup>. A civil society should first offer and apply this principle to those most disadvantaged<sup>10</sup>.

### The Current Poor Success Rate

*Connecting People with Jobs: Key Issues for Raising Labour Market Participation in Australia* - OECD Publication 2017

- Approximately 67% of people between the age of 16 and 65 are employed
- Only 50% of people with a mid-to-moderate mental illness in this age group are employed
- Only 23% of people with a severe mental illness in this age group are employed

**NDIS** Quarterly Report April-June 2019: “Employment rates for participants have only increased modestly from 23 per cent to 24 per cent”

**DES** (Disability Employment Services) Employment outcome rates for 6 months is around 30% and is **lower for people with psychosocial disabilities**. The rates for long-term unemployed and those with significant disadvantages are lower again and have not changed much in 20 years.

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results” - Albert Einstein

What we should aim to achieve- is that the significant majority (e.g. 66% +) obtain sustainable positive employment. To achieve this, we should consider the following **12 PRINCIPLES**.

<sup>1</sup> *Why the Future is Workless* – Tim Dunlop; *Changing Jobs* – Jim Chalmers

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Meaning and Purpose - [http://www.michaelfsteger.com/?page\\_id=105](http://www.michaelfsteger.com/?page_id=105)

<sup>3</sup> *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities* - National Mental Health Commission

<sup>4</sup> *Utopia for Realists* – Rutger Bregman

<sup>5</sup> *Sapiens* – Yuval Noah Harari

<sup>6</sup> *Why we Work* – Barry Schwartz

<sup>7</sup> *The Boy Crisis* – Warren Farrell

<sup>8</sup> *Mindset* – Carol Dweck

<sup>9</sup> *Flow* - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi “Fulfilment may arise from frequent experiences of FLOW which occurs when challenges are just a little above your current skills and abilities. Too high causes stress, too low causes boredom.”

<sup>10</sup> *The Better Angels of our Nature* – Steven Pinker

## 12 PRINCIPLES

### **Principle 1. Take the Long View**

Many people with psychosocial disability have and experience functional challenges and many instances of failure (learned helplessness<sup>11</sup>), often in dysfunctional environments. Most have then had to prove this is the case to obtain entry.

To achieve high rates of success, significant investment in capacity building both pre and post placement are required to build confidence, resilience, optimism, etc. Service models (e.g. IPS) that claim significant rapid place and train success almost always self-select their participants based upon their “willingness to work” (or some equivalent) and their reported higher initial improved outcome rates disappear when retention is evaluated<sup>12</sup>.

Expenditure in the factors necessary to ensure that the majority of all people with disabilities can obtain and retain suitable employment should be based upon long term (actuarial) estimations. That is, **it can make investments based upon life-long returns on investment (ROI)**.<sup>13</sup> This is unusually not the case in Government funded programs where most expenditure decisions are made at best within election cycle ROIs.

To significantly improve the employment the outcome rates that have varied little over the past 30 years we must develop models of practice that innovate beyond standard employment service practices that then set the benchmark standard for future employment services.

### **Principle 2. Be Honest about the Risks and Benefits of Employment**

The **benefits of obtaining and retaining employment** particularly for people with Psychosocial Disabilities have been well researched. See for example the recent: *“The mental health benefits of employment: Results of a systematic meta-review”*<sup>14</sup>.

But there are also several **risks and possible downsides associated with employment**, particularly for people living with mental illness. **These risks have to be managed** and be seen to be understood and managed by all stakeholders. As the above cited article concludes *“Future research should aim to further investigate what constitutes a **'good' workplace** or a **'good' job** in terms of mental health outcomes”*

#### *Boredom, Tedium and Disengagement*

The world of work is not all beer and skittles. In 2012, the International Gallup Organisation conducted a meta-analysis of 263 studies across 34 countries, 49 industries, 192 organizations, 49,928 work units, and 1,400,000 employees. Gallup researchers focused on the relationship between employee engagement and performance outcomes.

Performance, as many studies have found, is highly correlated with employee engagement. But, in terms of engagement these were the main disturbing findings:

---

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learned\\_helplessness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learned_helplessness)

<sup>12</sup> Cochrane Review (Kinoshita et al 2013) showed no benefit of supported employment even in high fidelity IPS of tenure (i.e. sustainability of employment) relative to no support.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Fels (2015, *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities*) and Patrick McClure (2015 Welfare Reform) proposed actuarial perspectives. Both have publicly acknowledged that a significant barrier to the implementation of their recommendations is that most expenditure decisions are made with their ROIs judged on much shorter time frames

<sup>14</sup> Australasian Psychiatry, 2016, Modini, M. et al. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26773063>

1. **Only 13% of workers are engaged in their jobs**<sup>15</sup>
2. 63% not engaged
3. 24% actively disengaged<sup>16</sup>
4. Actively disengaged workers do worse than the unemployed across five key positive experience measures that Gallup surveys as part of the [Gallup Well-Being Index](#).

### Negative Effects on Mental Health

- A. *The psychosocial quality of work determines whether employment has benefits for mental health: results from a longitudinal national survey.* P Butterworth, L S Leach, et al. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 2011...

#### Findings:

1. The health benefits of employment are **dependent on the quality of the job**
  2. Moving from unemployment into a high-quality job improved mental health
  3. **Moving from unemployment to a poor-quality job harmed mental health**
  4. Those in the poorest quality jobs showed greater decline in mental health than those who were unemployed
- B. *What's Best for Mental Health: No Job or Any Job at All?* - (2,600 participants) - *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 2103. S. McManus, P. Butterworth, et al. "Jobs of poor psychosocial quality may be no better for mental health than being unemployed"
- C. *Re-employment, job quality, health and allostatic load biomarkers: prospective evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study.* *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 2017; T. Chandola, N. Zhang. "Re-employment into poor quality jobs was associated with higher levels of chronic stress related biomarkers compared to remaining unemployed."
- D. *Precarious employment: understanding an emerging social determinant of health.* *Annual Review of Public Health*. 2014, Benach J, et al. Finding: "Precarious employment (insecure, casual employment) can be very stressful and negatively affect health and mental health"

### **Principle 3. Get the Four Contexts Right**

- A. Employment is **just one form of Meaningful and Contributing Activity (MCA)**, or more broadly CHIME<sup>17</sup> (Connection, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment). There are many legitimate ways of achieving MCAs other than standard employment. Employment Services could benefit from being renamed and reframed as MCA Services.
- B. Services **must exist in a Culture of Trust**<sup>18</sup>. Employment Services currently exist in an environment of compliance breeding two-way mistrust. Mistrust by the person that the

<sup>15</sup> Many people sense this which is why the 1941 book *How to Avoid Work* by Willian Reilly has become a classic

<sup>16</sup> Gallup Publication ""these workers actively undermine what their active engaged workers accomplish, they dislike their like and work and are actively engaged in seeking to damage the company they work for"

<sup>17</sup> CHIME – [Systematic Review and Synthesis](#)

<sup>18</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust\\_\(social\\_science\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_(social_science))

system only wishes to push them into any job to reduce welfare entitlement and mistrust by the system that the person's real reason for being unemployed is a laziness.

- C. Employment should be embedded in a context where **Choice and Control are primary**. This is the domain of **self-direction, self-efficacy and autonomy**. Such a capacity is not easily exercised, particularly on a basis of significant "learned helplessness" but must be a clear and present aspiration to redress the stigma and self-stigma of "dis-ability".
- D. Employment should be contextualised in a **Human Rights Framework** in which "good employment" is guaranteed for all citizens. Australia has no "Bill of Rights" there are many voices calling for such a framework from the bottom up.

#### **Principle 4. Be Creative about Types of Employment**

The opportunity presented by the changing nature of the world of work and also our current high levels of employment is that we can and should invest in strategies that can lead to high and sustainable long-term returns by broadening our definition of what counts for legitimate paid employment. For example, **in addition to standard open employment**, other common options include **social enterprises** and **self-employment**.

Entrepreneurs apply imagination to create new businesses. So, apply imagination to **expanding the range of employment types**... e.g. group explorations of collective income generating opportunities, job crafting (creating new jobs in existing businesses), job splitting, etc.

#### **Principle 5. Have "Employment Specialists" with the Right Skills and Qualities**

A recent study by Geoff Waghorn and Joanna King "*How High Performing Employment Specialists Engage and Support Job-seekers with Psychiatric Disabilities*<sup>19</sup>" identified the key to high outcomes as staff having the right skills and personal qualities, such as being able to:

- i. Form stronger working alliances with job seekers
- ii. Acknowledge and address job seeker fears
- iii. Provide effective social skills training
- iv. Apply the principles of several psychological interventions to a wide range of problems
- v. Directly support employers and advocate for job seekers in the workplace
- vi. Provide information to employers to reduce stigma and to counter any employer fears

This list is not exhaustive and each can be broken down into substantial sub-competencies.

The point is, regardless of service model, obtaining high outcomes requires staff with high levels of "behaviour change" competency, with social and practical intelligence. The under-estimation of the skills required is arguably the major factor contributing to low outcome rates in all current government funded employment services. Employment service's average level of remuneration generally does not allow for, attract or keep many people with such high-level skill levels.

---

<sup>19</sup> See <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:572d14f>

## **Principle 6. Take Small Steps and Reward Small Outcomes**

The discipline of Occupational Therapy has developed several frameworks for the individualised measurement and sequences of activity and functional development<sup>20</sup>. Similarly, modern behaviour change techniques<sup>21</sup> stress the value of small step gains, positive mini-habit development through recognised stages of change within a coaching framework<sup>22</sup>.

In this way, more accurately individually calibrated steps can be set out and their ongoing achievement monitored allowing for continuous improvement. Only measuring and rewarding giant step achievements (e.g. 4, 13, 26- and 52-week outcomes in a job as is the case in DES) can lead many to stall and abandon the required step by step process with a sense of failure.

It is, of course, possible to define a broad framework within which multiple and individualised mini steps can occur, such as the following four major phases:

1. Activity (physical and cognitive)
2. Proactivity (self-efficacy and initiative)
3. Interactivity (effective social cognition and activity)
4. Coordinated Productivity (collaborative activity with results)

## **Achieving High Rates of Sustainable Positive Employment Outcomes (Principles 7 to 12)**

The following six principles are set out as components of a model. Assisting the majority of people with significant psychosocial disabilities (and PWD in general) to obtain and retain employment that is beneficial to their wellbeing is a complex process. Successfully implementing such a process requires modelling its component parts and steps, together with having the necessary workforce, time and resources to carry those out.

It is proposed here that several well-known models of employment placement and support for people living with significant mental illness are sub-sets of the model set-out below. These well-known models include: Individual Placement and Support (IPS), Customised Employment and Transitional Employment (Clubhouse model). These models are rich in operational detail, but conceptually their components are incomplete sub-sets of what is set out below. A mapping exercise to demonstrate this relationship is a subject for later explication.

---

<sup>20</sup> Evaluating outcomes of therapies offered by occupational therapists in adult mental health, Journal of Mental Health. 2012; Samsonraj RS et al, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22250992>

<sup>21</sup> <https://esherhouse.org/>

<sup>22</sup> For example see the Science of Behaviour Change (SOBC) Program: <https://commonfund.nih.gov/behaviorchange>



<sup>(1)</sup> Based upon the person's real needs, likes, aspirations and interests, freely exercising choice and control over their own lives without compulsion

<sup>(2)</sup> Including the person's requirements for a job (e.g. location, accessibility, hours, time-flexibility, social and sensory environment, on-the-job support needs, etc.)

<sup>(3)</sup> As person's capacities, or a position's requirement change & develop over time, they must be kept aligned for ongoing engagement, satisfaction and sustainability

<sup>(4)</sup> Including the conditions of the job (e.g. location, accessibility, hours, time-flexibility, social and sensory environment, on-the-job supports available, etc.)

<sup>(5)</sup> This includes the good-will of the employer, possibly their own lived experience and the in-kind and/or financial support made available to them

<sup>(6)</sup> This is, or should be supported by an economy (underlined by all-of-government policy) putting human wellbeing as a primary performance measure

<sup>(7)</sup> People need to be offered a choice amongst a selection of "matched" positions. Employers need to be offered a choice amongst a selection of "matched" candidates

## Principle 7. Engage “Higher Levels” of Motivation

This component is not well incorporated into standard employment services. While some staff and organisations work with the grain of a person’s motivation, the legislative context is compliance<sup>23</sup>. This context threatens income support reduction or suspension for non-compliance with rules, breeding anxiety and mistrust.

It may be argued that within the limits of resources this compliance regime is the most expedient. But is also true that humans are very skilled at passive resistance and simulating compliance<sup>24</sup>. From this vantage the relatively low rate of sustainable outcomes amongst the most alienated is a testament to the power of covert resistance<sup>25</sup>.

A program founded on the principles of choice and control, makes possible new ways of achieving economic participation. **The primary goal is for a person to be in self-directed in pursuit of a fulfilling and contributing life that meets their needs and aspirations<sup>26</sup>.**

Obtaining and retaining open employment in this context is a **secondary goal**, just one way that the above primary goal can be reached. This is not just a moral ideal, but a pragmatic necessity to achieve high rates of sustainable employment for the most disadvantaged.

While motivation is clearly complex and individualised<sup>27</sup>, the traditional Maslovian Hierarchy provides a simple way of making the key points.



### Factors effecting Motivation

Each of these deserves detailed examination, but in summary:

- i. **Barriers:** Addressing the psychological barriers to employment is important (e.g. fear and lack of confidence). These are more easily overcome if there is positive motivation.
- ii. **Practical Needs:** Assessing and meeting a person’s practical needs for a job is essential (e.g. location, accessibility, hours, time-flexibility, social and sensory environment, etc.)

<sup>23</sup> <https://jobsearch.gov.au/compliance>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.amazon.com.au/Everybody-Lies>

<sup>25</sup> For an extra twist see Addendum 1 “Outsiders and the issue of perceived status”

<sup>26</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ikigai>

<sup>27</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motivation>

<sup>28</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-actualization>

<sup>29</sup> *Self-Esteem and Socioeconomic Status: A Meta-Analytic Review*, Jean M. Twenge, et al ... “Socioeconomic status has a significant relationship with self-esteem in a meta-analysis of 312,940 people. Higher status individuals report higher self-esteem. The effect size increases substantially during young adulthood, continues higher until middle age. Asians and Asian Americans show a higher effect size, and occupation and education produce higher correlations with self-esteem than income does.”

- iii. **Strengths** Building on strengths is an effective evidence-based approach. What a person is good at helps build esteem (Maslow level 4).
- iv. **Interests:** Finding out what a person likes doing is a key. A way of growing motivation is expanding a person's range of interests. People usually like to do what they are good at; thus a means of expanding interests is to develop skills and capabilities (Maslow level 5).
- v. **Dreams:** While not everyone may have them, a person's dreams are deeply personal and a powerful motivator. In that regard aligning practical steps towards a dream is an art.
- vi. **Career:** Similarly, a job can and should be contextualised as a step in a career (which is also an art and science to design). When done so, flexibility and resilience can be developed with entry level jobs being given meaning as a step in a longer more optimistic story.

### **Principle 8. Assess (and Develop) Personals Skills and Capacities**

Skills and capacities are complex and individualised, intermesh with personality and character. They range from the broad and generic (e.g. cognitive skills<sup>30</sup>) to the specific and technical (e.g. making a good coffee)<sup>31</sup>. There are many frameworks mapping skills and capacities<sup>32</sup>. The Australian Competency Framework is currently under review<sup>33</sup>.

The world of education and training is a big domain, equally as complex as the matters covered here, requiring its own review with many of the 12 principles set out here applicable. One relevant current trend is the incorporation in education of the building of capacities such as resilience, cognitive skills, interpersonal training, mindfulness, etc. These are no longer restricted just to the clinical health domain (e.g. the Recovery College model<sup>34</sup>).

#### Three Considerations

- Skills and capacity assessment (e.g. through examining documentation or questioning), outside of the context of actually performing, generally has low reliability and validity. This is why “active assessment” through “work experience” or *the Clubhouse Model*<sup>35</sup> are usually a better assessment model to better calibrate the next stage of “Matching”.
- Skills and capacity building also includes all the fine tuning for appearance, interview skills, and presenting oneself in a good light. But this should not be at the expense of authenticity and the need for employers to be inclusive of diversity (including neurodiversity<sup>36</sup>).
- Once employed skills and capacities continually develop through formal and informal learning, ongoing assessment of developing skills and capacity is needed to ensure that a person is not stuck in a job below their potential. This is a key problem of the traditional business enterprise model (unfortunately still often called “sheltered workshops”).

---

<sup>30</sup> *Web-Based Cognitive Remediation Improves Supported Employment Outcomes in Severe Mental Illness: Randomized Controlled Trial* – Anthony Harris, Tanya Koscic, Jean Xu, Chris Walker, Bill Gye, Antoinette Redoblado Hodge, 2018; JMIR Journal of Mental Health - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5628284/>

<sup>31</sup> To further complicate things skills and abilities can to a greater or lesser extent be context specific.

<sup>32</sup> One example amongst many <https://abilitymap.com/competency-framework/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-qualifications-framework-review-0>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/recoverycolleges>

<sup>35</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clubhouse\\_model\\_of\\_psychosocial\\_rehabilitation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clubhouse_model_of_psychosocial_rehabilitation)

<sup>36</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurodiversity>

## **Principle 9. Assess Job Requirements and Conditions (FRAMED)**

This step presumes that resources have been devoted to seeking out “suitable” positions. While there are some government initiatives<sup>37</sup> and most agencies have some resources devoted to this function, this key component of an effective system is very under-resourced resulting in having a **poverty of suitable job options** (see Addendum 2).

The assessment of a job’s requirements and conditions is the mirror image of the assessment that applies to the person. The more detailed the assessment the better the matching. While this is not always easy, ideally it consists of the following:

- **F**eatures of the Job (Location, Hours, Time Flexibility, Training Provided, Pay, etc)
- **R**ole and Tasks (Skills and Learning Capacity Required)
- **A**ims (Purpose of this Job, its relations to other roles and the organisation’s aims)
- **M**easures (Performance Expectations)
- **E**nvironment (Sensory Environment<sup>38</sup> and Workplace Culture - see Principle 12)
- **D**evelopmental Opportunities (future opportunities in that role or organisation)

One option for conducting a fully **FRAMED** assessment is by having an employment support officer (whatever the title) spending time learning the job to experience the role & workplace. Such staff placements are used in the Clubhouse Transitional Employment Model<sup>39</sup>.

Some employment opportunities are very flexible (so called “golden ticket” opportunities) where an employer is completely willing to adapt or create a position around the abilities and interests of the person. Such opportunities obviously broaden the opportunity for matching.

## **Principle 10. The Matching Process**

Like relationship matching the process is part art and science. Reliance on chance and luck is inadequate and risks bad mistakes. The significant early failure rate of placements in employment services and the need for probationary employment periods are proof of and insurance against the inaccuracies of matching/recruitment.

The “art part” consists of the “gut feel” of an experienced employment specialist, but only those who know both sides of the street well – the reality of the employer’s needs and capabilities (and the culture of the workplace) and those of the particular person. This double expertise in the one employment specialist is rare in the world of employment services.

This rarity is why the “science part” is needed. This part consists of a comparison between the mapped skills, competency and personality traits<sup>40</sup> of the person with the mapped tasks and responsibilities of the job and the assessment of the culture of the workplace. While online services have taken on the matching process, their fairness and efficiency are questionable.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/service-providers/national-disability-recruitment-coordinator>

<sup>38</sup> This is an important component for people with for example a diagnosis of schizophrenia, whose ability to filter out sensory information is not functioning well and for whom an intense sensory environment can be overwhelming

<sup>39</sup> [http://clubhouse-intl.org/documents/bilby\\_eng.pdf](http://clubhouse-intl.org/documents/bilby_eng.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> *Five-Factor Model of Personality in Predicting Job Performance: Integrating Three Organizing Frameworks With Two Theoretical Perspectives*, Judge, T.A., et al. Journal of Applied Psych (2013).

<sup>41</sup> <https://equitablegrowth.org/how-job-matching-technologies-can-build-a-fairer-and-more-efficient-u-s-labor-market/>

The finishing stage of a matching process is often a “two-way sales process”. It can require a broker to sell the qualities and opportunities of the job to the person and the qualities and potential of the person to the employer. This is also why the following Principle is important.

### **Principle 11. Engage and Motivate Employers**

The more employers that can be engaged and motivated to support people living with psychosocial challenges the more employment options can be made available and the greater the possibility of finding matches (see Addendum 2). While there are some initiatives in this area, it is insufficiently resourced and commonly not done well or enough.

It is a cliché to say that “employers are people also” (until AI HR systems take over<sup>42</sup>). Being people, they also are motivated by the need to connect and contribute to others and this altruistic quality can be stimulated by a knowledge of a person’s story (i.e. prospective employee’s). We emotionally connect to stories better than statistics.

It is a common occurrence that employers with a lived experience of mental ill-health, either as a carer, family member or personal experience are the most supportive and successful employers of people who have or have had significant mental health challenges. This is a broader phenomenon that applies to seeking employment for all diversity groups.

While it is not and should not be the main motivator for an employer to employ someone, monetary incentives clearly help. There is an ethical argument that a wage subsidy equal to the whole salary being paid to an employer is unacceptable. The contrary argument would be that depending upon circumstances that if this was the only means by which in this case employment could happen then so be it, at least for a period of time.

The offer of ongoing support, assistance with induction, availability for troubleshooting, etc. are also positives. A special case of such support is the Clubhouse Transitional Employment Support model, where the employment specialist first learns the job, trains and supports the new employee and makes themselves available to perform the work should the new employee for whatever reasons be absent.

The positive effect on other employees of having a more diverse workplace by employing somebody with disclosed psychosocial disability is very affirmative. The disclosure decision is made on a case by case matter. As a principle, the more people who disclose the more familiar people become with mental illness and the less stigmatized it may become.

---

<sup>42</sup> [https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-the-new-age-artificial-intelligence-for-human-resource-opportunities-and-functions/\\$FILE/EY-the-new-age-artificial-intelligence-for-human-resource-opportunities-and-functions.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-the-new-age-artificial-intelligence-for-human-resource-opportunities-and-functions/$FILE/EY-the-new-age-artificial-intelligence-for-human-resource-opportunities-and-functions.pdf)

## Principle 12. Make all Workplaces Mentally Healthy and Diversity Friendly

The assessment of the factors effecting the mental health of a potential workplace is a key. Placing a person with significant psychosocial disability into a mentally unhealthy workplace is likely to lead to increase episodic illness, poor productivity and mental health. Given the stress-vulnerability connection<sup>43</sup> such individuals are the “canaries in the mine”.

Conversely working in a mentally healthy workplace is a significant contributor to sustainable recovery and productivity. Fortunately, there are **many drivers** pushing the workplace in a mentally healthy direction supported by excellent initiatives such as *HeadsUp*<sup>44</sup>.

### **Some of these drivers include:**

- *Productivity Improvement*: Engaged employees are more productive<sup>45</sup>. Given the findings of the Gallup Poll that among 1,400,000 workers only 13% were engaged in their work - the opportunity for productivity gains here are enormous.
- *Reduced Work Health and Safety Risk* (and Insurance costs): There is a positive feedback cycle between mental wellbeing at work and employee engagement. Both of these in turn reduce risk for employee absenteeism and mental health injury<sup>46</sup>.
- *Attracting quality employees*: People choose to work at workplaces (“employers of choice”) that value wellbeing when compared to the same role in other companies where wellbeing is less of a priority even when salaries are lower<sup>47</sup>.

In a few local, state and national governments (e.g. New Zealand<sup>48</sup>) human wellbeing is being pushed up the policy priority pole. Hopefully this will establish examples that will may eventually raise human wellbeing measures to at least the same level as GDP.

The world of work is being affected by many trends: remote working (particularly accelerated by COVID), globalisation, mobilisation, automation, casualisation, gigification, etc. Over the past 40 years the global distribution of higher levels of wealth and health has increased remarkably<sup>49</sup>, though in many developed economics this has resulted in wage-deflation and the loss of whole industries to lower labour cost countries<sup>50</sup>.

The good news is that as the above identified drivers and trends are pushing in the direction of improved workplace wellbeing. Here we must go full circle back to where we started promoting optimism about the future of work. The extent to which this occurs the greater will be the future options for the inclusive employment of even the most disadvantaged.

---

<sup>43</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diathesis%E2%80%93stress\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diathesis%E2%80%93stress_model)

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.headsup.org.au/>

<sup>45</sup> [Improving employee productivity through work engagement](#)

<sup>46</sup> <https://hbr.org/2017/04/employee-burnout-is-a-problem-with-the-company-not-the-person>

<sup>47</sup> [Employers of choice must pay attention to workplace wellbeing](#)

<sup>48</sup> <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-05/b19-wellbeing-budget.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> *Factfulness* – Hans Rosling – 4 minute Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8t4k0Q8e8Y>

<sup>50</sup> This has driven a growing opposition to globalisation from the far right (xenophobic nationalism) and far left (concerned with the social and environmental damage caused by global free-range neoliberalism)

### **Addendum 1: A note on “Outsiders” and the Issue of Perceived Status**

Many individual “outsiders<sup>51</sup>” or group “sub-cultures”<sup>52</sup> define their identity and sense of worth by their difference from the dominant sub-culture. Within those sub-cultures they have belonging and esteem (self-worth and status).

Often outsiders counter their perceived lower status in the dominant culture by perceiving their outside status as being a mark of their individual or tribal superiority, using it to critique the dominant culture (e.g. “the system”) as morally suspect<sup>53</sup>.

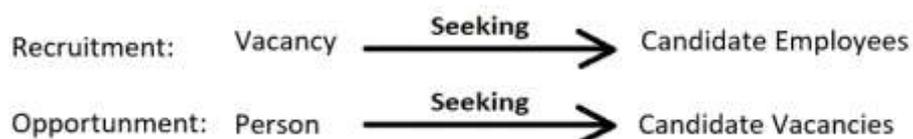
Such critiquing is not whole unjustified or delusional. In this context providing a bridge to employment has additional complexity. By entering into employment and in a sense becoming part of the “dominant culture”, outsiders may be lowering their self-perceived sense of worth.

This may be aggravated by the fact that often the starting point is into entry level jobs. A common psychological avoidance strategy here is for people to be only willing to accept high status jobs. One antidote here is to clarify the potential career pathway from the entry level.

This matter would benefit from extensive analysis, but for simplicity we may say that the bridge must often be through connection through outreach, gradual trust building, leading to eventual belonging within in a welcoming workplace setting.

### **Addendum 2: Seeking Suitable Positions - “Opportunement”**

In recruitment a vacancy exists, and a range of suitable candidates is sought to choose from. In employment placement and support (EPS) services, we start from a person and ideally seek a range of suitable vacancies to choose from. A new term for this activity could be “Opportunement”, defined as seeking employment opportunities that are in harmony with a person’s needs, goals and capabilities.



An ideal for recruitment is to be able to create a “short list” of say 4 or 5 candidates who at least demonstrate on paper their suitability for the position. An ideal for quality Opportunement would be to provide a person with a “short list” of say 4 or 5 suitable jobs to choose from.

Such a situation would require a much greater investment of resources than is currently made in the industry. If an appropriate financial model could be developed the creation of a disability Opportunement Industry would be a great compliment to the extensive Recruitment Industry.

---

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-long-reach-childhood/201211/being-the-outsider>

<sup>52</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subculture>

<sup>53</sup> “Being an outsider makes life difficult, but it also makes you aware of the invisible strings of culture that manipulates insiders like puppets” - Eckhart Tolle