Inclusion & Participation in the Workplace: Implications for Workplace Accommodations

Webinar - November 2021

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Workplace Accommodations

- "Any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities" (Source: EEOC)

ADA and Workplace Accommodations

Employers are required to make reasonable accommodations to help the employee perform essential functions of their job.

Typically, the focus is on the employee's workstation and primary work tasks.

Employers may be required to <u>also</u> provide accommodations for:

- The hiring process
- Use of other work spaces (e.g., copy room)
- Accessing training
- Accessing benefits (inc. breakrooms, social activities)

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Today's Webinar

- Focusing on the employee's workstation and primary work tasks isn't sufficient.

- Research from our Center has shown that the ability of employees to use common spaces and to communicate effectively with their coworkers have a significant impact on the employees' sense of participation in the workplace and being "part of the team."

- Share research findings and how we are incorporating those ideas into our Work ACCESS decision-making tool.

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Learning Objectives

1. Participants will be able to discuss the relationships between accommodation use, equitable design, and workplace participation.

2. Participants will be able to list three challenges that employees with disabilities might encounter when using common spaces in the workplace and describe technology or strategies that might be used.

3. Participants will be able to list three communication challenges that employees with disabilities might encounter in the workplace and describe technology or strategies that might be used.

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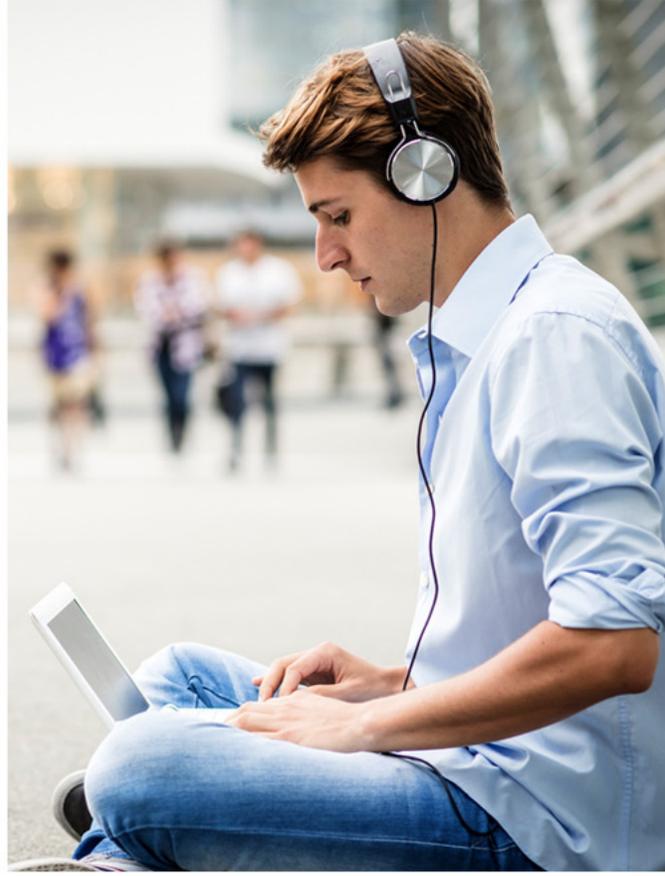
Impact of UD and Accommodations on Workplace Participation

Study: UD Practices to Enhance Work Outcomes

Investigate the impact of universal design (UD) principles on the performance and participation of employees with disabilities in the workplace.

Investigators: Jon Sanford, Karen Milchus, Frances Harris, Maureen Linden, Harshal Mahajan, Nathan Moon

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Role of Universal Design

Many employees with disabilities are able to do their jobs not only because they use accommodations, but because of supporting environmental designs and social practices that are already in the workplace.

- Universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

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Defining Participation in the Workplace

The Social Nature of Work

- Focus is on social interactions among employees, coworkers, and employers/supervisors in a dynamic environment.

- Not only work tasks, but *formal* interaction processes such as meetings, and i*nformal* interactions such as chatting in hallways.

Participation is expressed in the workplace as:

- Role fulfillment

- Sense of inclusion or belonging

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Subjects: Currently-employed people with disabilities (N=88)
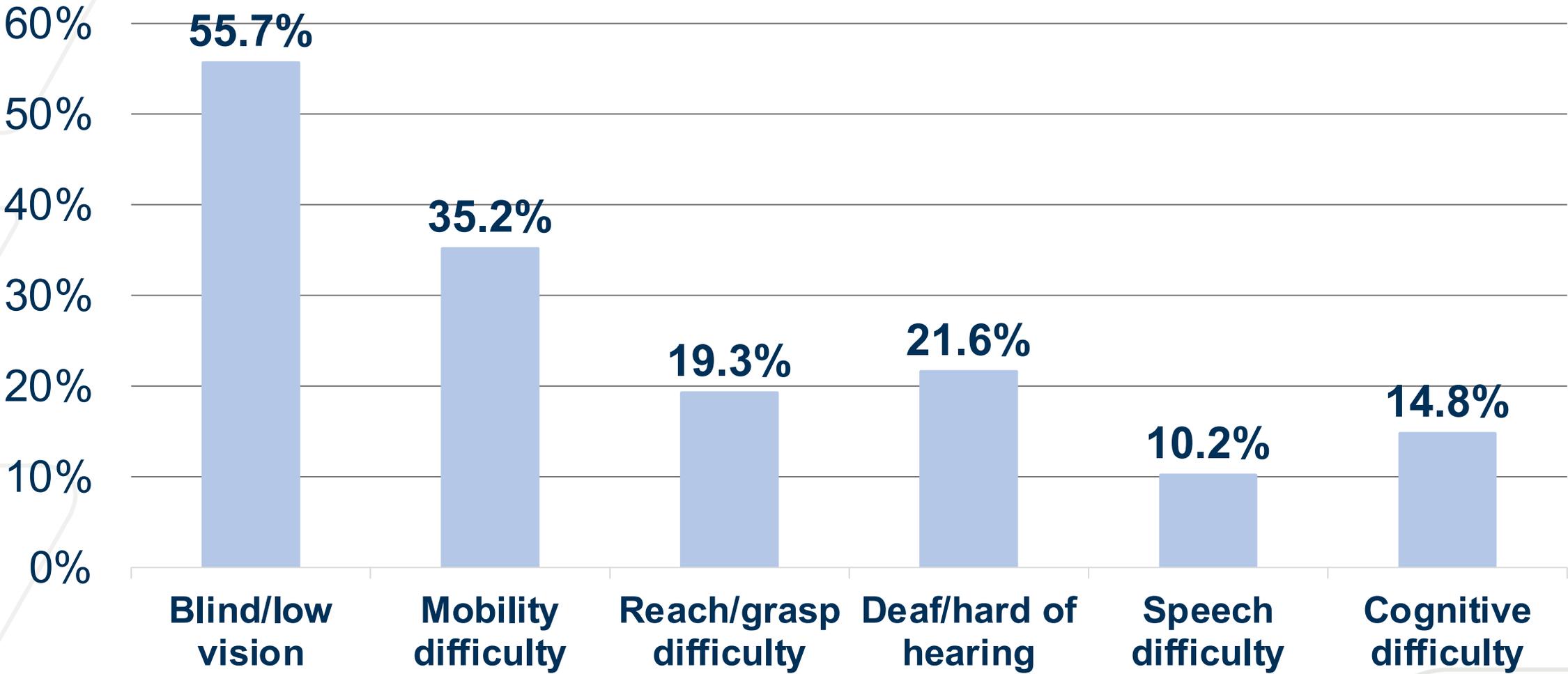
Survey and Study Measures <superscript>(1)</superscript>

- **Activity performance**

  - Whether or not an employee had difficulty performing 15 workplace activities: getting to and using different workplace spaces (e.g., meeting areas), and communicating with coworkers face-to-face or remotely.

  - Scores for individual activities; composite score of number of activities posing difficulties

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Findings: Percent Respondents Reporting a Difficulty with Workplace Activities

	All Limitations	Upper Extremity (N=16)	Mobility (N=29)	Vision (N=49)	Hearing (N=19)	Speech (N=9)	Cognitive (12)
Entering/Get to & Use Workstation	15.1%	25.0%	31.0%	16.3%	15.8%	11.1%	16.7%
Communicating	19.8%	18.8%	13.7%	12.2%	**63.1%**	**66.7%**	16.7%
Going to Other Areas	27.9%	**43.7%**	**44.8%**	22.4%	26.3%	44.4%	16.7%
Using Other Areas	**53.5%**	**68.7%**	**72.4%**	**49.0%**	**57.9%**	**66.7%**	**50.0%**
Participating Offsite	**48.9%**	**50.0%**	**51.7%**	**49.0%**	**68.4%**	**66.7%**	16.7%

Survey and Study Measures (2)

- **Universal design features (Equitable Use)**
  - Encompassed design features of parking areas, entrances, circulation routes, work stations, meeting spaces, and social gathering areas such as break rooms
  - Percentage of possible points depending on types of UD features present.

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Findings: UD Equitable Use Score

- Overall, UD Equitable Use scores ranged from 0.52 to 1.00 (range 0 to 1), with a mean of 0.86 +/- 0.09

- Some areas scored lower -- employees needed to perform activities in a different way from their coworkers.
  - Entrance, travel between floors, using meeting spaces & cafeteria

- Examples:
  - 11% worked in a different location than their work group
  - 84% had a meeting room where they could sit anywhere;
  - 23% had at least one meeting area where they could only sit in a specific area, sometimes separate from the group.

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Sense of Inclusion

- Reported whether their manner of travel to and use of different spaces (e.g., meeting areas) impacted their sense of inclusion positively or negatively, and why.

Findings:

- CIDI research has found that whether employees with disabilities could use work spaces and move around the workplace the <u>same way</u> as their coworkers impacted the employees' sense of inclusion.

- Activities with highest negative impact on sense of inclusion: using meeting spaces, and participating in offsite meetings and social events

Additional Study Measures

- Job Performance (self-reports)

- Job Satisfaction (JSS by Paul Spector)

- Workplace Participation Survey (10 4-item Likert questions)

     Constructs include:

          Autonomy over one's work   Sense of fulfillment in work roles

          Being part of a team   Recognition and value of one's work

          Opportunity for professional development

     Example: I feel that I have the same opportunity to be part of informal social gatherings in the workplace as compared to other employees.

Findings: Overall UD Correlation

Main Hypothesis!

Higher levels of UD accommodation practices are associated with higher levels of work outcomes

For Equitable Use, Overall UD level in workplace was significantly correlated with:

- Activity Performance, Workplace Participation, Job Satisfaction (to 0.01 level)
- Job performance compared to coworkers (to a 0.05 level)

(Accommodation effectiveness was also significantly correlated with the study's work outcomes)

Findings: UD and Specific Activities

UD Score for Features Related to:	Significant Correlations with Work Outcomes
Moving around workplace	Performance of that activity (0.01 level)
Moving between building levels (up/down a step; between floors)	Participation (0.01 level) and Job satisfaction (0.05 level)
Using meeting spaces	Performance of that activity, Productivity compared to coworkers, and Job satisfaction (all to a 0.05 level)
Using break room	Participation (0.01 level), and Job satisfaction and Productivity compared to coworkers (each to a 0.05 level)
Using a company cafeteria	Participation and Productivity compared to coworkers (each to 0.05 level)

Findings: Workplace Participation

Workplace Participation was correlated with:

- Employees' ease with getting to / using workplace spaces
- Employees' ease with communicating with coworkers
- Whether the workspace had features that promoted the universal design idea of equitable use (the UD score)

Conclusions

- First study to demonstrate the positive impact of UD on work outcomes.

- Workplace accommodations typically focus on essential job tasks performed at the employee's workstation.
  - Most employees do not report difficulties with entering the workplace or getting to/using their workstations.

- Communication and accessibility of common areas such as meeting spaces and break rooms are often overlooked, but are important for full participation in the workplace.
  - Many employees reported difficulties; many report needing to perform activities in a way different from their coworkers (which impacts sense of inclusion and participation).
  - Designing for equitable use had a high impact on performance, participation, and job satisfaction outcomes.

Questions? (1)
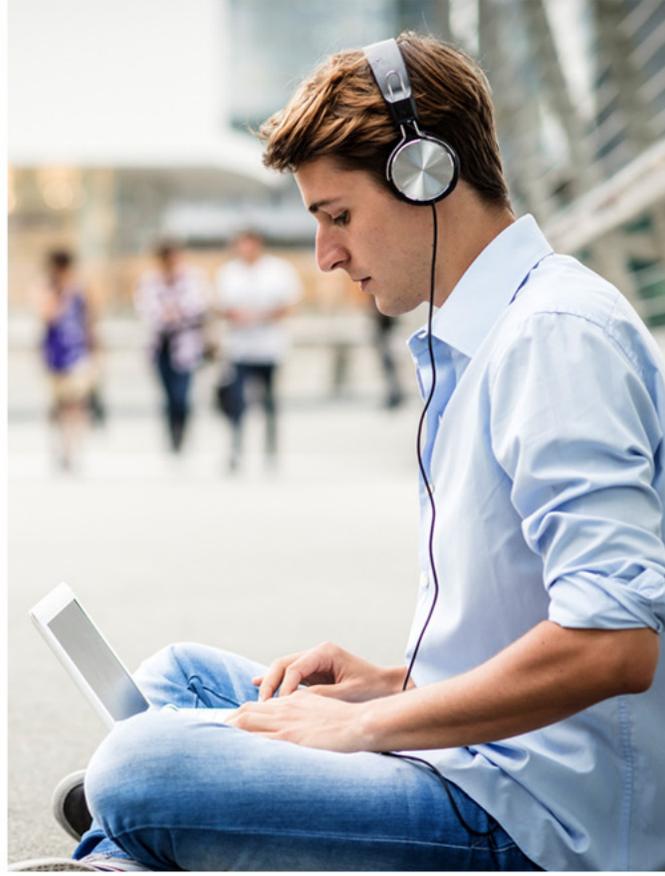
Introduction to Work ACCESS

Work ACCESS
(Workplace ACCommodation Expert Support System)

An online workplace accommodation assessment tool for employers and employees to use together. It presents questions about the problem, and based on the answers, makes recommendations.

- (Run Video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cI6faSxDkzk)

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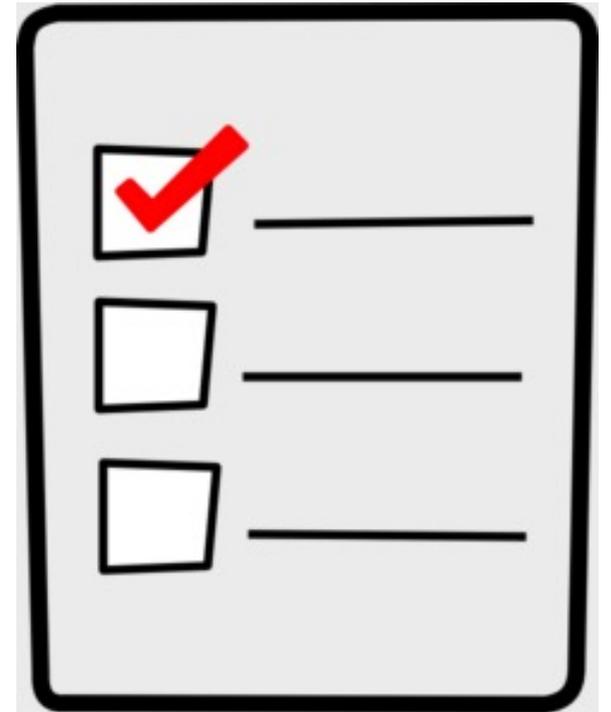
Included Work Tasks (so far)

Using Facilities
- Moving through the workplace / between floors / using doors
- Using the restroom / washing hands
- Using meeting spaces / breakrooms (coming soon)

Communication
- In-person communication (1-2 indiv.)
- Remote communication (phone/text)
- Participating in meetings (in-person or remote)
- Reading and writing documents
- Composing text

Using Workstation
- Sitting / standing at a workstation

Using Equipment
- Using computer
- Using phone

Organization
- Planning the work day
- Learning / remembering tasks
- Staying on task

Maintaining Well-Being
- Managing stress / anxiety

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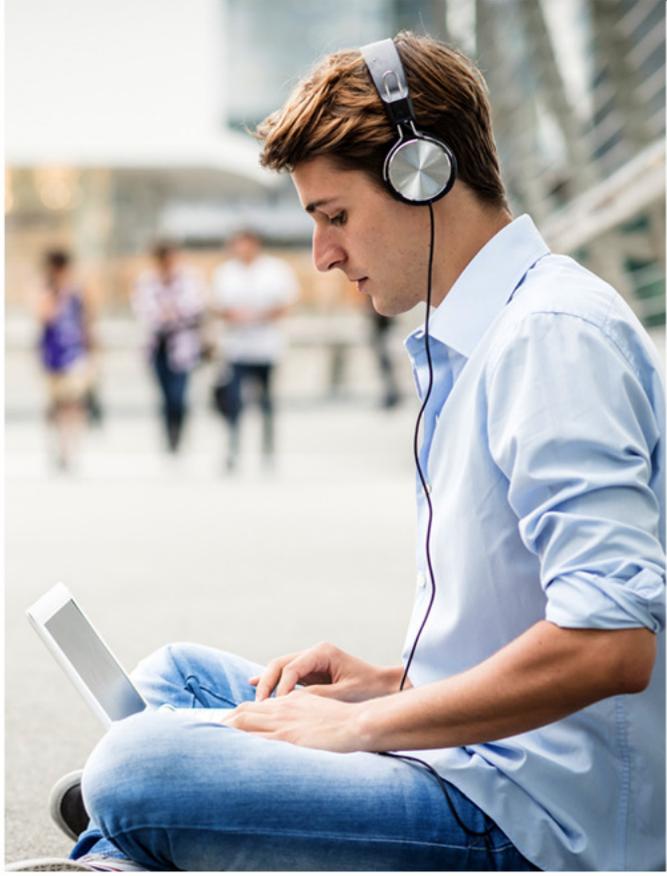
A Closer Look at Accessing the Workplace

Entry

- The entrance should be the one used by the majority of people
  - Approach path should measure a minimum of 36 inches wide
  - There should be sections that allow two people to walk or pass side-by-side (60 inches wide)
  - Promote inclusion
- Avoid segregated entrances
  - Segregate: set apart from the rest or from each other; isolate or divide.

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Entry Door

- The entrance should be accessible
  - If there are level changes, a method should be provided (ramp, lift) to allow a person who cannot use stairs to maneuver between levels
  - Entry doors should have a minimum clear width of 32 inches
  - Door hardware should be of a style that can be opened without requiring tight pinch or grasp
  - Closers should be adjusted to require minimal force to open
  - Consider an automatic door opener – not required but helpful

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Common Areas - Lobby

- If there is a reception station, the person/people occupying the station should be visible to employees and visitors
  - It is discourteous not to see or be seen

- Furniture in common areas should not block people trying to maneuver – by foot or using walking aid or wheels – in the area

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Barriers at Work

- Employees should not experience barriers that prevent them from getting to their work areas and collaborating with their colleagues
  - Isolating
  - Not feeling respected or valued

- Moving an employee to an accessible area but away from the rest of their work group (may also apply to employees that telework) may produce negative results
  - Decreased productivity
  - Limited peer interaction
  - Decreased spontaneity and creativity

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Meeting Spaces - Layout

- Meeting room layout
  - Is layout flexible? Can it be manipulated? Consider tables and chairs with wheels

- Evaluate off-site meeting space carefully – also give consideration to how employees will get there

- Avoid situations that could be seen as promoting segregation, even inadvertently
  - Wheelchair seating locations available but all located in the back row

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Meeting Spaces – Mobility Considerations

- Furniture style, size and location should allow for maneuvering space without disruption to other participants – 36 inches clear, even with other participants in situ (people with mobility issues)

- Potentially unsafe or just plain awkward:

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Meeting Spaces – Hearing Considerations

- Amplifying systems or sign language interpreters may be needed – it is often harder to hear and understand in larger, noisy meetings than one-on-one (people with hearing impairment)

Meeting Spaces – Vision Considerations

- Meeting materials may need to be presented in alternate formats (e-text, large print, Braille) or verbally described (PowerPoint presentations, video) (people with visual impairments or blind)

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Travel Between Floors

- Stairs
  - Not considered part of an accessible route
  - Employees may not be able to use
- Stair lift
  - Style: chair
    - May require duplicate equipment (i.e. wheelchair) at each stop
  - Style: platform
    - Price should not dictate choice – less expensive platform lifts are often less robust
    - Lift should be capable of lifting both a wheelchair user and their wheelchair combined – power wheelchairs are heavy

- Ramps
  - May add travel distances disproportional to benefits
- Elevators
  - Standard commercial
  - LULA
  - Freight
    - Often this style of elevator is not usable by people with mobility impairments due to door style and lack of automation
- Avoid solutions that require an employee to exit the building and use exterior walkways and ramps to change to other interior levels

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Break Room

- Careful selection of appliances, equipment and furniture is needed to insure accessibility
  - Sink – is knee space needed beneath?
  - If a refrigerator is provided, one with side-by-side doors offers a variety of storage heights for items that require refrigeration
  - Microwave
    - Simple controls, tactile queues, talking
    - Location makes a big difference – countertop more accessible than under a cabinet
  - Other appliances and equipment
    - Dishwasher should not be located at an angle
    - Stoves generally not allowed by the Fire Marshal
    - Vending machines should provide accessible features
  - Table(s) and chairs should not overwhelm the space

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Restrooms

- Communal restrooms should offer an accessible layout and features

- Installing an accessible toilet room may be a better solution to remodeling larger communal bathrooms that are not accessible – may better accommodate a wider variety of restroom needs

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Communication

- Offer a variety of communication methods for employees with disabilities
  - Locked entrance: telephone, doorbell, intercom, door attendant
  - E-mail (employees with hearing impairment)
  - Task descriptions through pictures, icons, written instruction, checklists
  - Employee identification by photos
  - Signage is often underutilized

General Considerations

- Provide an inclusive environment
- Remove barriers that prevent participation by or segregate people with disabilities
- Work directly with employees to develop solutions that maximize access to work-related tasks, peers, environment, amenities, and experiences
- Promote independence
- Show all employees that they are valued for their knowledge, experience, and skills

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Questions? (2)

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1. All areas and features of a physical workplace must always comply with ADA Standards.
A. True
B. **False**
- Answer: False
-
1. A company is looking at moving to a new office space located on the second floor of a walk-up style building. Is this a good idea?
A. No, this location might exclude both customers and employees with physical disabilities.
B. No problem, everyone in the company can climb stairs.
C. No problem, a lift can be installed if one is ever needed.
D. No problem, though the space needs to be painted.
- Answer: A

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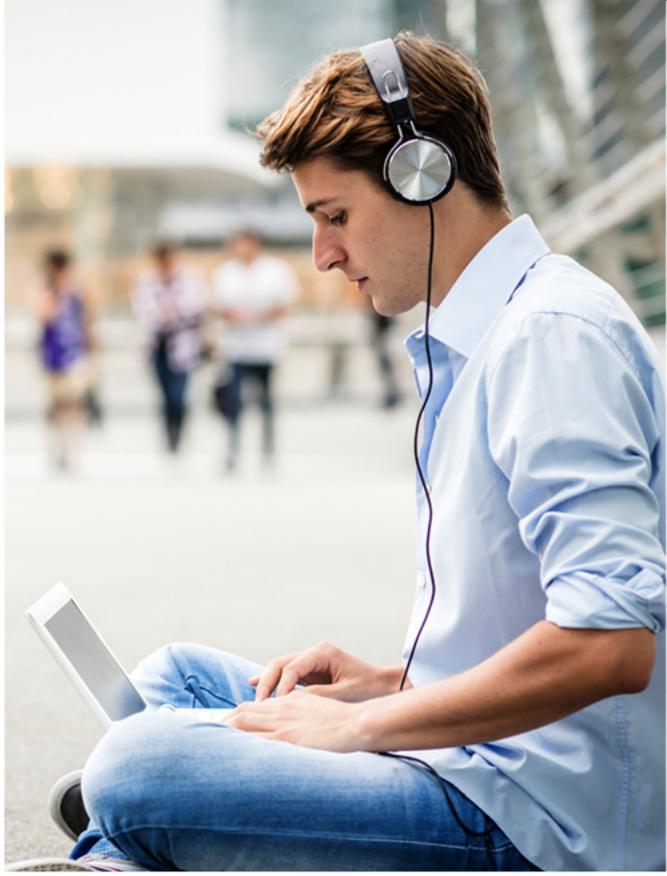
A Closer Look at Communication

Communication Tasks

This is how we have conceptualized communication tasks in the workplace:

1. Listening

2. **Social Communication** (agreeing, small talk, showing respect, cooperating, offering help)

3. **Sharing Information** (sharing information, asking questions, briefing others explaining, revealing information, answering questions, discussing, giving feedback, seeking feedback)

4. **Producing Speech** (articulation, voice, fluency, augmentative communication)

5. Hearing (face to face communication, hearing impairments)

6. **Telework** – (remote work, virtual environments)

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Tasks, Barriers & Challenges [1]

1. Listening
2. **Social Communication**
3. Sharing Information
4. Producing Speech
5. Hearing
6. Telework

Barrier/Challenge: Employee often misunderstands comments made by others

Approach: Make the words used understandable

- Use concrete, simple language
- Avoid using figurative language (i.e., idioms, etc.)

Approach: Provide time to process information

- Provide information ahead of time
- Provide the employee with information on the topics of discussion in accessible format.

Approach: Encourage questions

- Encourage questions and clarification
- Develop a regular habit to ask employees, "Do you have a question?" or "Do you understand?"

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Barrier/Challenge: Employee has difficulty demonstrating cooperation

Approach: Plan the communication

- Develop an "If-then" strategy
- Create "Power Cards"
- Use understated response
- Develop a set of "signal" cue cards
- Employ a "free pass" strategy

Approach: Practice communication skills

- Model good communication
- Work with individual to develop skills

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Barrier/Challenge: Employee is isolated from the team

Approach: Create opportunities for team communication

- Create opportunities for the whole team to virtually get together. This might include fun activities and challenges to maintain morale.

- Use chat messages to check in with people regularly.

Approach: Communicate frequently

- Have a mentor or supportive coworker check in periodically to ask how things are going (both for accountability and for support)

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Tasks, Barriers & Challenges (2)

1. Listening
2. Social Communication
3. **Sharing Information**
4. Producing Speech
5. Hearing
6. Telework

Barrier/Challenge: Employee has difficulty engaging in a reciprocal discussion

Approach: Plan the communication

- Engage employee by providing pause or asking "what do you think?"
- Create an agreed upon signal if employee interrupts
- Provide opportunity for employee to engage in the conversation appropriately

Approach: Provide support for communication

- Employer or co-worker will review topic with employee
- Make sure the employee has info on topics

Approach: Practice communication skills

- Model / discuss / practice how to have a good conversation

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Barrier/Challenge: Employee has difficulty giving information in an organized manner

Approach: Provide support for communication

- Create an outline of items to be discussed
- Give employee information on topic in accessible format
- Employee can generate their list of ideas for discussion
- Job coach or Champion will review topic with employee
- Provide employee with word processor or mind mapping app to organize information
- Create a visual display of key points
- Create cue cards with key points to discuss
- Use a sequencing app to organize details

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Tasks, Barriers & Challenges (3)

1. Listening
2. Social Communication
3. Sharing Information
4. **Producing Speech**
5. Hearing
6. Telework

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Approach: Reduce competing noise

- *Determine environments/setting where employee is comfortable speaking*
- *Reduce the number of people speaking to in a group*

Approach: Plan the communication

- Work with employee on appropriate/desired way to let them know they were not understood
- Determine environments/setting where employee is comfortable speaking
- Provide extra time for employee to speak

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Approach: Use text or pictures to communicate

- Use writing as a supplement to speech

Approach: Use sign language to communicate

- If employee uses sign language as means of communication, interpreter may be needed for meetings (remote or in person)

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Tasks, Barriers & Challenges (4)

1. Listening
2. Social Communication
3. Sharing Information
4. Producing Speech
5. Hearing
6. **Telework**

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Barrier/Challenge: Remote employee productivity requires explicit directions and feedback [1]

Approach: Provide a checklist of tasks or task steps

- Use an app to list out the steps needed to complete the work for the day and have the employee check items off as they are completed.
  - Use a format that the employee understands (e.g., text, images, color coding).
  - Seeing the whole work task list at once can be overwhelming. Consider showing only one task at a time as they are checked off.
  - Mobile devices such as phones can create distractions and may not be allowed at work.
  - Both people with and without disabilities use this type of memory aid, so its use does not mark the employee as "different".

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Barrier/Challenge: Remote employee productivity requires explicit directions and feedback (2)

Approach: Set work/home boundary expectations

- Let employees know what is expected in terms of off-hour communications, etc.

Approach: Follow a set work schedule

- Follow a set work schedule / routine. Keep separate work and non-work hours.

- Set aside specific times for responding to emails or other messages; avoid these outside of those set times. Sign out of emails if done for the day.

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Barrier/Challenge: Remote employee productivity requires explicit directions and feedback (3)

Approach: Avoid sensory distractions

- Find a dedicated, isolated area for work
- Use headphones to block out noise distractions.
  - Make sure that these solutions are compatible with the tasks the worker is doing (e.g., safety issues aren't created by blocking out warning noises).
- Use music or white noise to block out distracting noises.
  - Music with a beat may encourage the worker to keep moving.
  - Avoid music that is itself distracting (e.g., with lyrics). Try classical music, instrumental meditation music, or soundtracks.
  - Make sure compatible with the tasks …

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Barrier/Challenge: Remote employee productivity requires explicit directions and feedback

Approach: Avoid sensory distractions (continued)

Position the employee's workstation or put up dividers to reduce visual distractions from other parts of the workplace (or home).

- Make sure that these solutions are compatible with the tasks the worker is doing (e.g., safety issues aren't created by blocking out visual warnings).

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DELETE THIS ONCE SURE MATERIAL COVERED

1. When an employee is difficult to understand, what is the <u>best</u> approach to help them be better understood?
A. Stop inviting them to team meetings.
B. <mark>Plan the communication opportunities to maximize their effectiveness.</mark>
C. Limit the employee's communication opportunities.
D. Allow the employee speak, then move on to the next agenda item without discussion or clarification.
- Answer: B
-

1. During virtual team meetings, which of these is the <u>best</u> approach to use when an employee is having difficulty managing the platform features?

A. Provide a cheat sheet on using common features on platform.

B. Provide a checklist that prompts employee how to unmute before speaking and mute after speaking

C. Establish a placement for the employee's chair and work with employee to identify a proper posture and orientation to the screen.

D. <mark>Employ a combination of these strategies to help the employee be successful.</mark>
- Answer: D

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Questions? (3)

Thank you!

- If you have any questions or comments, please contact:

    Karen Milchus   - karen.milchus@design.gatech.edu

- Acknowledgements:

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EXTRA SLIDES

Study Subjects: Occupation
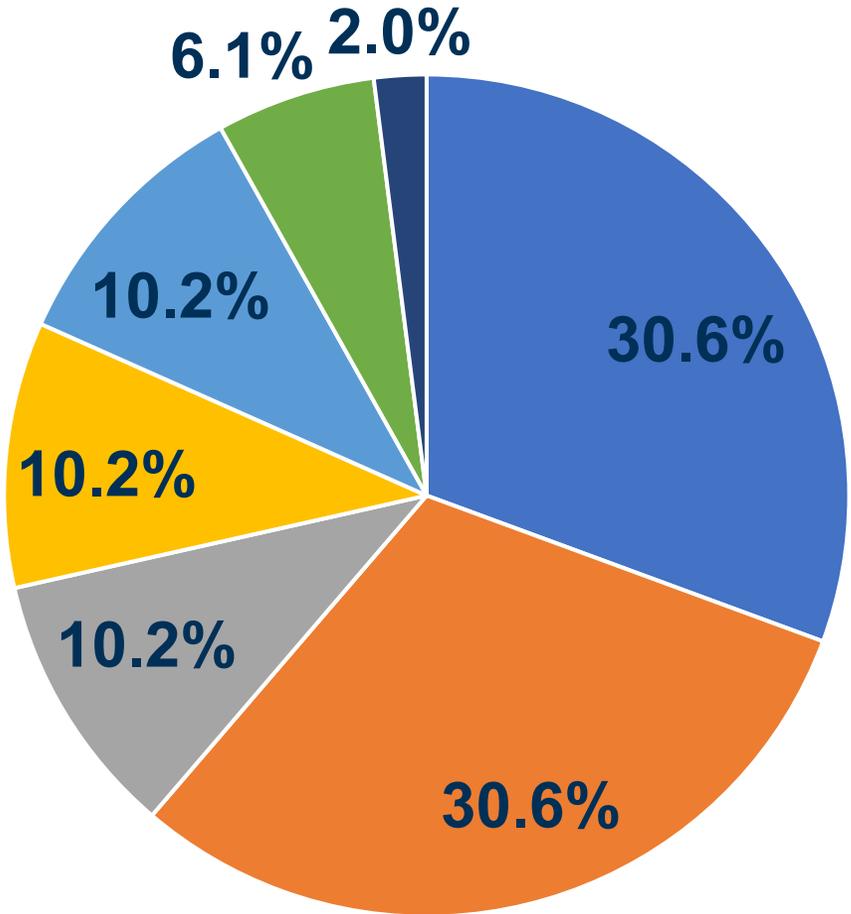
- Professionals
- Production Operators
- Clerical & Administrative
- Officials & Managers
- Technicians
- Sales Workers
- Service Workers

Subjects: Accommodation Use

Employees used both workplace accommodations and UD features

- High use accommodations:
  - Using their workstation (55.3%)
  - Communicating remotely (52.4%)
- Low use:
  - Moving around workplace (12-21%)

- Did not use accommodations (21.7%)

  (does not eliminate their use of UD features)

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Findings: Communication

- They use my preferred method(s) of communication (e.g., provide large print, describe visual information during a presentation, text rather than phone, or work with interpreters)
    - Yes, without being asked   37%
    - Yes, after being asked   30%
    - No, even when asked   9%
    - Help not needed   24%

- Face-to-Face Communication

    Find it difficult: 12.6%   Use accommodations: 28%

- Remote Communication

    Find it difficult: 13.4%   Use accommodations: 53%

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