

THE INCLUSIVE VOYAGE: EMPOWERING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO THRIVE IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY WORKFORCE

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People with disabilities (PWD) account for 1.3 billion individuals, representing 1 in 6 of the global population. With such a significant number worldwide, PWD tend to experience higher levels of unemployment compared to people without disabilities. As such, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals #8.5 promotes full labour participation of PWD on an equal basis with others, highlighting their rights for the opportunities to achieve decent work. Following this, the T&H sector has faced long-standing challenges, including high employee turnover rates, intense customer demands juxtaposed with labour shortages. These challenges have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternatively, PWD offer a valuable human resource pool which the T&H sector has immense potential to benefit from. The inclusion of PWD in the T&H workforce not only promotes sustainable tourism, which is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, but also creates more accessible and inclusive organisations that attract diverse customer groups. In response to the identified research gaps, the PhD thesis underpinned by the social model of disability focuses on unearthing the invaluable traits which allow PWD to contribute to the workforce if social barriers are minimised. Thriving at work is a psychological state that can lead to work-related well-being and positive job performance. While studies have investigated the dimensions and determinants of thriving at work for employees in the T&H sector, how PWD thrive at work remains conceptually underdeveloped and in need of theoretical refinement. Subsequently, informed by the emancipatory research paradigm, this research draws on self-determination theory to critically explore the conditions which empower PWD to thrive in the T&H workforce.

This research will contribute to theory through the development of a conceptual model that emphasises the optimal conditions which enable PWD to thrive in the workforce. By adopting participatory action research, this research will inform policy and practice of the strengths and capabilities of PWD and effectively address the persistent labour shortage issue in the T&H workforce.

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