# TASKFORCE REPORT:
# Inclusive Workplace Community of Interest

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## Introduction

More than fifteen years have passed since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD defines and promotes a broad set of rights of the more than one billion persons with disabilities worldwide. It includes Article 27, the right to work on an equal basis with others. While progress has been made in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development, there are still barriers to remove to create and support increasingly more inclusive and accessible working environments that enable participation in labor markets of everyone, including persons with disabilities.

In 2021, G3ict and Steelcase partnered to develop the ***Blueprint for Inclusive Workplaces of the Future***. The document explores trends and factors shaping workplaces across the world. The Blueprint describes a comprehensive set of relationships and activities that are critical to creating and supporting inclusive workplaces. The Blueprint defines 14 specific roles as key stakeholders in improving accessibility and inclusion in the workplace.

As a follow-up to the Blueprint, G3ict and Steelcase convened an Inclusive Workplaces Taskforce (IWTF) to understand more fully how collectively, as a community, the various stakeholders could make even greater progress in supporting inclusive workplaces. The charter for this IWTF was to explore the role of communities of practice of all kinds and across different roles in creating and maintaining inclusive workplaces.

This report summarizes the work of the IWTF and presents a set of challenges and opportunities related to how global communities of practice are and can be playing a role in supporting increasingly inclusive workplaces, including for persons with disabilities around the world.

## Project Context

The Blueprint for Inclusive Workplaces of the Future makes evident that there are four key groups with significant influence over the creation of inclusive workplaces. Within each group, the report identifies multiple different roles, each contributing *to increasingly inclusive* workplaces. Those four groups and fourteen roles are:

1. **People:** These are individuals who work for an organization and interact with physical, digital, and hybrid workplace environments, including *Employees, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)*

2. **Business Functions:** This group includes those areas performing critical activities to achieve inclusion at the workplace, including *Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT), Legal, Mid-Level Management, Procurement, and Senior Leadership*

3. **External Beneficiaries:** These are individuals with and without disabilities and organizations who use or purchase the goods and services of a company, such as *Customers and Community*.

4. **External Partners:** These are those persons or organizations who contribute to how workplaces look, feel, and function, including *Designers & Architects, Facility*

*Managers, Occupational Health & Safety (OHS), Vendors*

*and Suppliers*

With this follow-up project, G3ict, Steelcase, and the IWTF set out to build on the Blueprint findings and explore more deeply how communities can support these roles. This report summarizes the project's exploration of the role of communities of practice of organizations and individuals to support greater progress towards inclusive workplaces.

## Project Methodology

Communities of Practice (CoPs) exist in a variety of fields. They most often comprise a group of people who share common concern or interest and are looking to improve their knowledge and address common challenges in a meaningful way. When successful, CoPs provide effective mechanisms for knowledge sharing that augment individual capacity as well as extend knowledge across the fields in which those individuals operate. CoPs can vary significantly in their size, membership composition, and modality of working. All these elements are dynamic and can change over time.

Organizations can take many different actions to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace. What is less clear is how individual professionals responsible for driving these efforts decide what to prioritize or how they ensure the engagement and interaction of other key stakeholders to achieve a greater progress in fostering inclusion at the workplace. Also not clear is how individual professionals can address significant challenges to workplace inclusion, e.g., breaking down "silo mentality" and even staying current with evolving good practices from organizations of different types and from different sectors and geographies.

For this project, G3ict undertook four main activities to explore and understand the current and potential role of CoPs in support of inclusive workplaces:

1.  Design, deploy, and analyze results of a global survey. G3ict deployed the survey through multiple channels and partner organization worldwide, resulting in 301 responses.

2.  Design and run three focus groups of international professionals. Focus groups included 12 different experts from different sectors.

3.  Convene and manage an Inclusive Workplaces Task Force (IWTF). By design, the IWTF members included global disability and inclusion experts as well as representatives from existing CoPs with a role to play in inclusive workplaces.

4.  Pilot activities that might be examples of community of practice supports, e.g., webinars, etc.

Following is more detail about each of the project's four main activities.

## 1. Global Survey

The G3ict global survey solicited insights from a broad range of stakeholders to understand interest in a Community of Practice in support of inclusive workplaces. 301 respondents from 26 countries across all global regions completed the survey. The data collected helped identify strategic opportunities for a CoP and informed both the focus groups and the IWTF meetings. More detail on survey results can be found on the [G3ict website](#).

Survey respondents identified as:

- Role: 55% individual contributors, 33% managers, 12% C-suite executives

- Department: 44% Architecture/Design/Engineering (largest of nine identified)

A third said they had five years or less experience with inclusion and accessibility and are relatively new to their role, while more than a quarter of respondents (28%) reported having more than 20 years of accessibility and inclusion experience.

Importantly, nearly a third of all survey respondents (31%) identified as being a person with a disability.

Respondents came from multiple different industry sectors, with the largest number representing the business services, technology, and government sectors. Respondents worked for organizations of different sizes, with a third of respondents in organizations with 50 employees or less and 5% with more than 100,000 employees.

Inclusion and Accessibility:

- Job Description: 79% reported having inclusion and accessibility as part of their job description

- Company Values: 72% say their organization has inclusion and accessibility as part of their values

- 58% say their organization has accessibility and inclusion policies and strategies

A large majority of survey respondents (70%) felt that today's employers do not have a clear and shared understanding of what is an inclusive workplace. Nearly all (96%) expressed some level of interest in being a member of a community of practice focused on sharing knowledge and good practices in support of more inclusive workplaces.

Survey respondents identified a range of benefits that could come from being part of a community of practice for inclusive workplace. The top three benefits included:

- Identifying, curating, and sharing existing knowledge and good practices related to inclusive workplaces (57%)

- Providing a forum to identify solutions to common challenges related to inclusive workplaces (57%)

- Providing opportunities to share information, stories, and personal experiences about inclusive workplaces in a way that builds understanding and insight (50%).

Respondents also recognized engaging with others as a useful opportunity of communities of practice. They expressed particular interest in networking with disability and civil society organizations (75%), vendors providing workplace inclusion solutions (60%), and other professionals but in different roles (53%).

## 2. International Focus Groups

G3ict and its partners convened 12 experts from nine different countries to participate in three separate focus groups. Countries represented in the focus groups included: Argentina, Canada, Ireland, Kuwait, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Spain, United States. Expertise represented in the focus groups included: built environment accessibility consultants, hospitality services, ICT accessibility consultants, IT and professional services. Participants in the focus groups represented the government, enterprise/private sector, and civil society sectors.

In each of the three focus groups, G3ict facilitated discussions of participants that centered on a few key questions:

- From the participant perspective and experience, to what extent are workplaces inclusive today for persons with disabilities?

- Are the participants today engaged in existing communities of practice or are they aware of such communities?

- How could a community of practice help support more inclusive workplaces? What activities might a community undertake and how might it best support their work?

## 3. Inclusive Workplace Taskforce

G3ict and Steelcase convened the taskforce to build on the insights of the Blueprint for Inclusive Workplaces of the Future by exploring and defining how a global community of practice could support key roles and activities needed for inclusive workplaces.

The stated goal of the taskforce was to:

*"Explore and define how a global community of committed organizations and individuals might, together, drive greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in places of work around the world."*

Taskforce members represented different types of organizations, missions, constituencies, and geographic regions. Each taskforce member was a recognized leader and expert in one or more of the key concepts being explored by the project, i.e., inclusion, workplace design, disability rights, etc. The Inclusive Workplace Taskforce members included:

- Gale Moutrey, Steelcase

- James Thurston, G3ict

- Brian Collins, Microsoft

- Crosby Cromwell, Valuable 500

- Bill Curtis-Davidson, PEAT

- Susan Mazrui, AT&T
- LaMondre Pough, Billion Strong
- Karen Tamley, Access Living
- Esteban Tromel, ILO

Importantly, and by design, the taskforce included leaders of several existing efforts already building and supporting communities working towards more inclusive workplaces, including:

ILO - Global Business Disability Network (Worldwide)

http://www.businessanddisability.org/

- Community of **leading multinational companies** working with the ILO, to the benefit of business, persons with disabilities and economies and communities worldwide.
- The 10 principles of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network Charter provide a framework to help enterprises achieve business success while simultaneously creating equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

Billion Strong

https://www.billion-strong.org/

- Billion Strong is an identity and empowerment organization designed to bring the billions of voices of persons with disabilities together. They are a global community of persons with lived experiences of disabilities that will also celebrate their allies and accomplices.

The Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT)

https://www.peatworks.org/ai-disability-inclusion-toolkit/

- PEAT fosters collaborations in the technology space that build inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities. It fosters digital accessibility in the workplace and a vision for "Why" and "How" to create accessible emerging technologies.

Valuable 500

https://www.thevaluable500.com/

- Supported by its strategic partners, Valuable 500 team collaborates and connects with 500 of the world's most influential global businesses for disability and inclusion. Together with their Iconic Leader companies, Valuable 500 is developing a Transformation Program which will drive system change and make business more inclusive of people with disabilities.

## 4. Pilot Virtual Community

Throughout the project, G3ict convened subject matter experts, professionals, and others already operating in roles that could be related to inclusive workplaces or that expressed interested in the topic, including through:

- An inclusive workplaces online seminar series:
  - [Roundtable on Blueprint on Inclusive Workplaces of the Future. Key Roles and Good Practices](#)
  - [Roundtable on Procurement for More Inclusive Workplaces. European Inclusive Procurement Discussion Series](#)
  - [Developments in the New International Standards for Accessibility in the Built Environment](#)
- An inclusive workplaces blog series:
  - [Creating an Inclusive Workplace: Lessons from the pandemic](#)
  - [Toward Inclusive Workplaces: Moving beyond "the way it has always been done"](#)
  - [Challenges in the Accessibility of Workspaces](#)
- Compiling a list of professionals interested in remaining engaged on the project and topic of inclusive workplaces. Individuals wanting to receive information about the project could sign up at this [IAAP web page.](#)

## Key Findings

Inclusion is built on a complex set of variables and inclusive workplaces are defined, created, and supported by a variety of roles. The inputs described above in the project methodology section led the G3ict project team and IWTF to identify a set of priority challenges related to inclusive workplaces and a set of strategic opportunities related to communities of practice in support of inclusive workplaces.

## Priority Challenges

The four activities of this project surfaced a set of challenges to greater progress in creating and maintaining inclusive workplaces and that do or could relate to the existence and functioning of communities of practice. Those key challenges include:

| CHALLENGES | |
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| **Global access to effective resources** | Professionals and advocates in different countries and regions do not have equal access to tools and supports defining and supporting inclusive workplaces. There is a need for proven resources of all types in languages other than English for use by individuals and communities in non-English speaking countries. Even leading multinational companies that have strong inclusion |

and accessibility policies and programs can struggle to extend those good practices globally to their subsidiaries and partners across all regions, countries, and markets. Today, most leading-edge resources and communities in support of inclusive workplaces remain largely in English and among English speakers.

*''We need a community that is global honestly, and it is not USA centric. There are so many little pockets, but it would be nice if we had more of a unification.''* Focus group participant from North America

*"In our country, very few people talk English properly and they'll hear you, but they can't even talk back and converse with you. And this really creates a gap, especially around inclusion and accessibility and things to get people on the same wavelength."* Focus group participant from MENA region

| **Underserved roles and sectors** | Some roles and sectors (e.g., IT, diversity and inclusion) are today relatively effectively engaged on workplace inclusion. However, there may be a lack of knowledge about inclusive workplaces among some critically important stakeholder groups (e.g., facilities management, procurement). This lack of knowledge extends even to entire industry sectors (e.g., the design industry). These groups may not benefit today in their existing communities from a clear knowledge of what inclusion means or what are the accessibility requirements for different types of disability. Individual stakeholders in these underserved groups may be acting as "silos" of inclusion without the benefit of knowledge sharing and community. |
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*"I don't believe that a lot of our corporate leaders understand that when we talk about diversity we are also talking about people with disabilities."* Focus group participant from the hospitality sector

*"The community of designers has a huge appetite and wants to do something. It has awareness but doesn't really know where to start."* IWTF Member

| **SMEs struggle to keep up** | Small and medium enterprises may face particular challenges in learning to be more inclusive. Some may have a strong interest in developing strategies but get overwhelmed by a lack of |
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understanding of key concepts and a lack of support and resources that help them define how and where to start.

*"Communities could help small companies. There are thousands of local companies, of small companies in local communities that don't have any idea how to do inclusion at the workplace. They do not how to reach that goal."* Focus group participant with expertise in built environment accessibility

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| **Professional churn and knowledge loss** | In most organizations, particularly larger ones, there is a constant flow of employees in and out. Too often, key disability inclusion knowledge may leave with an employee, regardless of their role. New employees coming into an organization may not have the context, experience, and the perspective to fully understand key inclusion systems and good practices or even to look at their role in an organization from an inclusion and accessibility perspective.

*"There are new people coming into this over and over again, and they don't have the history, the experience, nor the perspective to really understand why or how certain things are either done or even looked at."* IWTF member |
| **Lack of clarity about roles and interdependencies** | In many organizations, it is unclear which professionals and departments may play a role in specific aspects of defining an inclusive workplace. In addition, the interdependencies between different departments and roles may also be ill-defined.

*"There are bits and pieces of accessibility that people know well (web accessibility, procurement processes, etc.) but there is no place to look at the interdependencies of each of these things, to talk about the coordination and the interdependencies."* Focus group participant from multinational corporation |
| **A business and rights case for inclusive workplaces** | Organizations of all types struggle with both defining a compelling business justification for an increasing commitment to inclusion and accessibility in the workplace and aligning that business case with the human rights imperative and obligations for inclusion and accessibility.

A rights-based approach to inclusive workplaces integrates human rights and legal norms, standards and principles into plans, policies, services, and processes. It empowers persons |

| | with disabilities. It recognizes people as assets to their company or organization that help drive positive business outcomes. |
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| | However, it can be difficult to source existing reports, studies, and case studies that provide both the business rationale and messaging for committing to and working toward inclusive workplaces. Organizations and companies need resources that make clear how a commitment to inclusive workplaces is an investment not a cost and should be core to every workflow not just something nice to do. |
| | In addition, there can be some cultural aspects to defining a compelling and effective business case for inclusive workplaces. These nuances can exist across different countries, different industry sectors, and different companies, making it even more challenging to define and communicate a business case.56% of survey respondents said that it would be important to explore through a Community of Practice strategies for helping the board and senior executives recognize the business value of accessibility and inclusion. |
| **New perspectives on the workplace** | The places where work occurs is changing rapidly. The global COVID pandemic has accelerated a move to hybrid workplaces. But the impact of this "new normal" on employees with disabilities is not yet clear. In addition, the workplace isn't just where you are while you're working, whether hybrid or not. The workplace can extend to wherever and whenever teams and managers meet for discussions and team building (e.g., restaurants, cafes, golf courses, business trips, etc.). These activities and locations can have an impact on career velocity and professional development, but too often they are not accessible and inclusive for employees with disabilities. |
| | Almost half of survey respondents (45%) stated that a CoP should promote facility managers training on how to prioritize the accessibility, usability, and inclusion priorities of organizations. |
| | *"I say the words hybrid work probably 50 times a day right now. Understanding what that means is important. It's a vacuum. Nobody really knows how to think about that relative to a truly inclusive workplace."* IWTF Member |

| Community of Practice discoverability and coordination | There exist today some communities of practice with a sole focus or partial focus on inclusive workplaces for persons with disabilities. However, awareness among professionals of these communities may be limited. In addition, these existing communities may even be perceived as redundant or even competing efforts, which can be confusing and be a barrier to progress.<br><br>More than 40% of respondents said they were interested in being a member of a Community of Practice but not sure how to participate. 73% believe being part of a Community of Practice could contribute to improving inclusion at their workplace.<br><br>*"That whole competition thing that is really apparent with many of the groups and organizations that work in this space really is an antiquated way of thinking about how we approach this. And honestly, it's been one of the things that has kept us from moving the mountains."* IWTF Member |
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| **Role specific knowledge and training** | Professionals in different roles and with different levels of experience could benefit from a validated and role-specific body of knowledge and related training materials. For some professionals and in some roles, actual certifications may also provide the credibility to affect and lead real organizational change in support of more inclusive workplaces.<br><br>65% of survey respondents, across all roles, expressed a need for help in defining and addressing complex inclusion issues.<br><br>Nearly half of survey respondents (45%) stated that a CoP should promote training specifically for facility managers on how to prioritize the accessibility, usability, and inclusion priorities of organizations. |

## Moving Forward: Strategic Opportunities to Explore

The focus groups, surveys, and discussions of this project have uncovered four possible strategic areas of opportunity to explore both to strengthen the existing ecosystem of communities of practice and to seed new communities or activities where gaps exist.

## Opportunity 1: Achieve easier community discoverability and greater coordination

Today there exist communities of practice promoting workplace inclusion for persons with disabilities and striving to eliminate barriers. In the G3ict survey, more than 40% of respondents affirmed they were interested in becoming members of a community of practice that supports inclusive workplaces, but they did not know how to find one. In that survey, just 11% said they were already engaged in a community. Likewise, just one of the project focus group participants, despite a strong interest across all participants in the topic of inclusive workplaces, was active in a community of practice related to the issue. In addition, today there is a lack of significant collaboration among existing communities and sometimes even competition. A lack of organizational and community coordination extends to those organizations that may have a focus on inclusion broadly but without genuine commitment to disability as an explicit part of those efforts.

**To achieve important shared objectives and greater impact, organizations and existing communities can address how a lack of discoverability and coordination is leading to redundancy, confusion, and inefficient use of limited resources.**

## Opportunity 2: Support underserved islands of effort

The Blueprint for Inclusive Workplaces of the Future identifies 14 distinct roles with considerable influence on whether and how a workplace is inclusive, safe, and compelling. This follow-on project has revealed these roles do not yet uniformly enjoy the same level of community and resources in support of inclusive workplaces. Some roles (e.g., facilities management, procurement) do not yet focus in a significant way on disability inclusion through their existing communities. This lack of community in support of disability-inclusive workplaces extends to other relatively isolated groups that also could benefit from resources and knowledge sharing, including some industry sectors (e.g., the design industry), types of employees (e.g., those new to accessibility), and categories of employers (e.g., SMEs).

**For more systemic progress in creating and supporting inclusive workplaces, more progress will need to be made in serving these isolated groups with more resources and through stronger and more active communities.**

## Opportunity 3: Bridge geographic and language gaps

Accessibility and inclusive workplaces are not new topics. There are today efforts across governments, companies, and the civil society sector that support greater inclusion of people with disabilities at work. G3ict manages one such effort, the International Association of Accessibility Professionals (IAAP). As G3ict has expanded the IAAP globally through chapters in other countries and regions, we have learned firsthand the importance and challenges of creating a local body of knowledge and local communities of professionals. Each of this project's three focus groups included considerable discussion about the lack of useful and up to date resources in local languages and with country specific and cultural context.

**To make global progress in supporting inclusive workplaces for the more than one billion persons with disabilities worldwide, communities of practice and the resources and bodies of knowledge at their core will need to address geographic and language barriers.**

## Opportunity 4: Spotlight key topics

A goal common to all Communities of Practice is creating and sharing a body of knowledge among members. A large majority of this project's survey participants (75%) perceived knowledge exchange as an important aspect of a Community of Practice that is critical to achieving more inclusive workplaces. However, this project's activities also revealed that today there is an acute lack of knowledge and good practices on some topics in particular. The importance of these topics may be increased because of workplace shifts due to the global pandemic (e.g., hybrid workplaces) or they may be longstanding challenges that remain difficult to address (e.g., defining the business case for workplace inclusion).

**To achieve the goal of more inclusive workplaces, both existing communities of practice and new ones will benefit from developing and deploying a body of knowledge and resources specific to these important, and as yet under-explored, keys to workplace inclusion.**