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An Exploration into Employers' Experiences and Perspectives on Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities and Complex needs.

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CARL Research Project
in collaboration with
COPE Foundation

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Table of Contents

CARL i
Disclaimer iii
Declaration of Originality iv
Acknowledgements v
Abstract vi
Definition of Abbreviations vii

Chapter 1 Introduction 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Background 1
1.3 Introduction to COPE Foundation 2
1.4 Rationale 2
1.5 Aim of study 3
1.6 Research Objectives 3
1.7 Research Questions 3
1.8 Chapter Outline 3

Chapter 2 Literature Review 5
2.1 Introduction 5
2.2 Experiences of People with Disabilities 5
2.2.1 Benefits of Employment 6
2.2.2 Challenges of Employment 6
2.3 Impact on the Workplace 8
2.4 Employers' Perceived Barriers 9
2.5 Strategies for Workplace Integration 11
2.5.1 Accommodations in the Workplace 11
2.5.2. Supported Employment 12
2.6 Social Inclusion 13
2.7 Conclusion 14

Chapter 3 Research Design 15
3.1 Introduction 15
3.2 Epistemology 15
3.3 Theoretical Perspective 15
3.4 Research Methodology 16
3.5 Research Methods 16
3.5.1 Sampling 17
3.5.2 Data Collection 17
3.5.3 Data Analysis 17
3.6 Ethical Consideration 18
3.7 Reflexive Position as the Researcher 18
3.8 Challenges & Limitations 19
3.9 Conclusion 20

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion 21
4.1 Introduction 21
Table 1: Overview of Themes and Sub-Themes. *21*
4.2 Theme 1 Benefits of Employing People with Intellectual Disabilities 22
4.2.1 Benefits for the Employee 22
4.2.2 Benefits for the Employer 22
4.3 Theme 2 Barriers & Challenges 23
4.3.1 Understanding of Employee Capabilities 23
4.3.2 Communication 25
4.3.3 Workplace Attitudes 25
4.3.4 Challenges in Recruitment 26
4.4 Theme 3 Supports 26
4.4.1 Support Service: COPE Foundation 27
4.4.2 Job Shadowing 28
4.4.3 Adjustments in the Workplace 28
4.5 Theme 4 Promoting Inclusion 30
4.5.1 Building Awareness 30
4.5.2 Diversity in the Workplace 31
4.6 Discussion 31
4.7 Conclusion 34

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations 35
5.1 Introduction 35
5.2 Conclusion 35
5.3 Recommendations 36
5.4 Value to Social Work Practice 37
5.5 Research Reflection 38

Bibliography 41

Appendices 47
Appendix 1: Ethical Approval 47
Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet 49
Appendix 3 Participant Consent Form 51
Appendix 4 Focus Group Schedule 52
Appendix 5 Interview Guide 55

CARL

What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the UCC website?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

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Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many student projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

Declaration of Originality

I hereby state that this research project titled *'**An Exploration into Employers' Experiences and Perspectives on Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities and Complex needs'*** submitted to the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master in Social Work is my own work.

Any work that is not my own has been acknowledged and referenced accordingly. This dissertation has been submitted through TurnItIn Feedback prior to submission. The originality report has been reviewed and any issues pertaining to citation has been addressed.

Name : _____

Date: _____

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Abstract

People with Intellectual Disabilities *(ID)* are largely underrepresented in the labour force according to Ireland's 2016 census figures. Yet studies have proven there is a strong desire to work among people with ID. Dedicated supported employment services such as COPE Foundation's Ability@Work programme work with young adults with ID to integrate them into the labour market, however, they face a variety of barriers. This dissertation strives to explore the holistic needs of employers who have experience employing people with ID and examine the barriers and supports to maintaining continuous employment within their companies. As part of this qualitative study, a focus group and semi-structured interviews were undertaken with five managers/supervisors who employ people with ID through the Ability@Work programme. The research found that people with ID make a substantially positive contribution to the workplace as they have a great work ethic and help boost morale. The main barrier perceived by participants was a lack of understanding and knowledge of disability which influenced their ambiguous assumptions to employing people with ID. The three main supports revealed in the findings were the essential role of job coaches provided by COPE Foundation, engaging in initiatives such as Job Shadowing and adjusting workplace practices. Promoting an inclusive work environment was seen as essential to all participants. This research is underpinned by an anti-discriminatory perspective which acknowledges a person with ID's right to seek meaningful employment on an equal basis to others. The research concludes with the recommendations to increase awareness of disability though employer education, staff training and building public awareness of inclusive workplaces.

Definition of Abbreviations

CARL = Community Research Academic Link

ID = Intellectual Disability

ASD = Autism Spectrum Disorder

CSO = Central Statistics Office

UNCRPD = United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

EEA = Employment Equality Act

DES = Disability Employment Service

CES = Comprehensive Employment Strategy

SE = Supported Employment

IASE = Irish Association of Supported Employment

JSI = Job Shadow Initiative

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the research topic. It will provide a background to the subject matter and will give the researcher's rationale for choosing to undertake research in this particular area. A brief introduction of the voluntary organisation COPE Foundation and its Ability@Work programme, on which this research is conducted, will be provided. Details pertaining to the study's overall aim, followed by the research objectives and research questions will be outlined. The chapter concludes with an overview of the content of each chapter in this study.

1.2 Background

This research will build on a previous report carried out by UCC Occupational Therapy students who analysed the views and experiences of people supported by COPE Foundation with a dual diagnosis of ID and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and/or mental illness (MI) on perceived barriers/facilitators to engage in employment. The findings of this study concluded that there was a strong motivation among COPE Foundation service users who expressed their desire of participating in the workforce. The service users' identified barriers which included needing help with job applications, wanting to work part-, full-time instead of a short working week with little hours and a desire for more challenging tasks at work (Foley & O'Mahony, 2019). The Central Statistics Office (CSO) results from the 2016 census reported that of those aged 15 and over with a disability, just 22.3% were at work compared to 53.4% of the overall population of the same age group (www.cso.ie). As last year's report indicated an intrinsic motivation to work, under the CARL initiative, COPE Foundation decided to put another project forward to examine the supports and barriers from an employer's perspective. Therefore, my research is the next phase which will give an insight into the experiences of the employer and together with the experiences of the service users, it will help to develop a comprehensive understanding of what supports are needed by both parties to help foster and promote an inclusive workplace.

1.3 Introduction to COPE Foundation

Cope Foundation is a non-profit organisation that supports over 2,300 people with ID and/or ASD. Their vision is *'Working for a society where people of every ability can live life to the full'.* Their mission is to enhance the lives of people with an ID and/or ASD, work in partnership with them, their families, and local communities, and to provide a range of person-centred services and supports. This research is in liaison with COPE Foundations Ability@Work programme. Ability@Work is a dedicated supported employment service available to young people aged 18-29 years. Its purpose is to bring young people with ID and/or ASD closer to the labour market. Ability@Work provides a job coach to those seeking a job who assists them at major transition points between education, training and employment. This programme benefits both employers and jobseekers. For jobseekers, it assists in preparing the person for work and connects them with local employers and job opportunities. For employers, it enables companies to promote inclusive workplaces while gaining a greater understanding around disability and the Ability team is on-hand to provide on-going support.

1.4 Rationale

I have a keen interest in disability relating back to my youth which ultimately prompted me to pursue a career in social work. I have worked and volunteered in the disability sector for a number of years and completed by first year placement in the adult services with COPE Foundation. I worked alongside adults attending training centres who spoke enthusiastically about their desire to be independent and have a paid job. Those who were employed expressed feelings of confidence and satisfaction regarding their workplace and job. Therefore, I was extremely interested by the prospect of completing a CARL project with my former placement organisation. I was impressed by the previous research which took account of the service users' perspectives. As a social work student, I thought it was important to take account of the employers' point of view to build a holistic profile of the needs and challenges that people with disabilities encounter when seeking employment. It is the goal of the overall research to reduce barriers and stigma associated with disability, promote inclusion, challenge particular mindsets, educate and raise awareness of disability.

1.5 Aim of study

The aim of this research is to examine what employers perceive as the barriers experienced and supports needed to employ and maintain employment of a person with an intellectual disability (ID) and complex needs (CN).

1.6 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to identify what are the perceived barriers or challenges to employing and working with a person with an ID and CN. Studies have shown that participation in the workforce is pivotal to people with ID and CN. It enables them to engage and be included in a community. The workplace promotes confidence and independence. It helps develop personal and professional skills and thus, improves quality and satisfaction of life. Therefore, this research will explore the supports that currently exist and what supports are needed, from an employers' perspective to promote and nurture the processes of hiring people with ID and maintaining that employment in the long term. The research also seeks to understand how people with ID are perceived by varying levels within companies such as managerial, HR and peer co-workers.

1.7 Research Questions

The following research questions were deemed to guide my research objectives and answer the overall aim of the research.

1. What do employers perceive as the barriers/challenges when employing a person with an ID and CN?
2. What supports already exist during the recruiting and employment processes for people with ID and CN?
3. What supports are needed to promote and enable people with ID and CN to remain in employment?

1.8 Chapter Outline

This chapter has outlined the research topic, how the interest in the topic arose and details the aims, objectives, and research questions of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature gathered on the topic to give a full insight into the employers' perspective of

employing people with disabilities and the importance of social inclusion and support. In chapter 3, the research methods and methodologies are applied to the research process and challenges and limitations are discussed. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and discusses the central themes. Chapter 5 concludes the research paper which includes recommendations and the value of this research to social work.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A review of the existing literature will give the reader context to the topic of people with ID in the workforce. Other studies similar and related to my topic are examined to provide a framework of the importance of this study. This study aims to add to the existing body of literature available in the area of 'disability in the workplace'. The literature review also gives the researcher the opportunity to explore and examine wider research pertaining to their chosen topic which will develop their insight and shape their study (Creswell, 2014).

In this chapter I will discuss the importance of work to those with a disability drawing on international research as well as COPE Foundations report into *'The Experiences of Young Adults with a Dual Diagnosis of Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or Mental Illness'* (2019). It will review the impact people with disabilities have in the workplace. The chapter will examine the perceived barriers by employers followed by an examination of the support strategies to include people with disability in the workplace, from the employers' perspective. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on social inclusion from an anti-discriminatory perspective.

2.2 Experiences of People with Disabilities

Employment represents something different to every individual but as a collective it represents a purposeful and meaningful activity which brings with it the opportunity for financial autonomy (Jahoda, Kemp, Riddell, & Banks, 2007). Employment plays an essential role in adult life and it is an aspiration for those with and without a disability alike. Nota, Santilli, Ginevra & Soresi (2013, p.511) state that:

> *"work is a crucial issue in the lives of people with disability to the construction of personal identity, life needs satisfaction and finding meaning in one's life, and it also provides important opportunities for applying knowledge acquired and personal talents"*

2.2.1 Benefits of Employment

People with disabilities have reported a number of benefits to being in paid employment. Many studies examined the quality of life associated with employment in the disability population. Each study concluded similar narratives from people with disabilities stating a greater sense of autonomy and financial independence (Trembath, Balandin, Stancliffe, & Togher, 2010) and feelings of empowerment (Kober & Eggleton, 2005) which in turn leads to better outcomes in emotional well-being and increases self-esteem (Meltzer, Robinson &Fisher, 2020).

With an increased awareness of self and a sense of purpose, studies revealed that this aided in the development of a range of new work and life skills including independent living skills, literacy, and communication skills (Stephens, Collins, & Dodder, 2005). Having work experience exposes individuals with disabilities to things they may never have had the opportunity to experience otherwise, and this enriches their quality of life (Irvine & Lupart, 2008). As a result of increased autonomy and self-confidence, a greater sense of belonging and community of inclusion was experienced by people with disabilities both within and outside the workplace. (Trembath et al., 2010).

Foley & O'Mahony (2019) conducted the research on behalf of COPE Foundation last year with service users and their results coincided with the wider literature. The participants of the study reported a high desire to work as an aspiration for the future stating:

> *"I just want to be out working. I'm sick of like go home and do nothing" (p. 16)*

The study also reported the enjoyment of work experienced by participants who described working with people and feeling included as the best parts of the job. The findings of this research bring the wider literature into an Irish context and reinforces the need and importance for people with disabilities to have the same inclusive experiences as those without disabilities.

2.2.2 Challenges of Employment

While there are a number of benefits, employment comes with a unique set of challenges to those with disabilities. Challenges can be internal and external (Trembath et al., 2010). It can be a lack of motivation or confidence in some individuals which may be associated with a lack of work experience, low levels of literacy and difficulties in understanding the unwritten rules of the workplace. The unwritten rules can be a huge issue as some struggle to pick up on these

social cues and this can lead to conflict or frustration for either the employee or employer/ co-worker. Managing these internal struggles was self-identified by people with disabilities. Foley & O'Mahony (2019) recognized a lack of social skills which caused participants to be nervous about the workplace. Another internal issue identified by Jahoda et al. (2007) was that, similar to all employees, a personal history is brought to the workplace and therefore, people with disabilities might be more sensitive to failure, and to being set apart or treated differently by their fellow workers.

External barriers include a lack of job opportunities, lack of appropriate support, discrimination, and stigmatization in the workplace (Trembath et al., 2010). The literature noted different barriers when finding and securing employment and when maintaining employment. In finding a job, people with disabilities explained how they experienced discrimination from employers and were fearful of labelling (Shier, Graham & Jones, 2009). They felt if they disclosed a particular condition, there would be stereotyping and stigma, giving the example that employers may think they are not capable of a certain job. Similarly, Meltzer et al. (2020, p.94) commented on the discouraging attitudes of employers as the study found:

> *"They* [potential employees with disabilities] *felt many employers assumed that they would not be able to effectively complete a role, without talking to them about it or listening to their own perspective about their capacity to undertake the work"*

Meltzer et al. also remarked on the need for assistance beyond the initial job advertisement. Foley & O'Mahony (2019) noted the same among COPE Foundation service users who indicated job attainment skills as a barrier to employment. More support was required to build skills in knowing how to apply for a job and develop professionalism/ interview skills to help them be successful in securing a job.

In maintaining a position of employment, people with disabilities felt undervalued by fellow colleagues who didn't respect them which lead to conflict. They also felt the tasks assigned to them did not extend their skills or challenge them in any way (Meltzer et al., 2020). Similarly, Foley & O'Mahony (2019, p.17) reported participant while engaged in work, expressed a desire for more challenging tasks:

" I'd like something easy at the start and then maybe build up that progress to something more challenging"

Other barriers related to the health condition associated with disabilities, some people reported difficulties in managing workloads or work tempo, job roles not suitable to their current health condition, barriers in the physical environment, and low motivation (Hanga, DiNitto, & Wilken, 2015).

Disclosure is another barrier. Disclosures or acknowledgment of a disability is a deeply complex and personal decision (Jans, Kaye & Jones, 2012). There are many factors which determine if a person will disclose a disability and if so, how, and when is the correct time for that individual. Under the Employment Equality Act (EEA) 1998 discrimination against disability is banned. The EEA ensures that suitable facilities for people with disabilities are available regarding access to employment, training and progressing in employment. It is the persons own choice to disclose or not. Many are unprepared to disclose because they fear, despite the EEA, some employers still discriminate. People with disabilities want to showcase their abilities and not be judged on their inabilities, therefore it has to be a conscious decision in relation to disclosing.

2.3 Impact on the Workplace

As well as work being a crucial and beneficial role in the lives of those with disabilities, I want to highlight in this literature review the impact that people with disabilities have on the workplace and the qualities they bring with them. The literature supports the view that having an employee with a disability has an overwhelmingly positive effect in the workplace. From the employers' viewpoint, in regard to work performance Scott et al. (2017) shows that employees with disabilities pay better attention to detail, have a great work ethic, are creative and there is little difference in their ability to follow instructions, be productive and produce quality work. While the study noted that they were significantly less flexible when completing work tasks, most challenges were based more on external factors such as a lack of knowledge and training of staff which resulted in miscommunication or conflict. Overall, the benefits largely outweighed the drawbacks. The main benefit being an increased awareness of disability in the workplace which promotes a culture of inclusion.

Studies suggested that employees with disabilities were incredibly loyal, very dedicated, hardworking, very respectful, have great attendance and a low turnover rate (Houtenville, & Kalargyrou, 2012, 2015, Irvine & Lupart, 2008). They make significant contributions to the workplace from increased efficiency to increased morale and create a crucial opportunity to educate and bring awareness of disability and inclusion to the work setting. They serve as positive role models and advocates to the community of disability in promoting the needs and demonstrating the capabilities of those with disabilities.

2.4 Employers' Perceived Barriers

People with disabilities are regarded as an untapped pool of skilled workers (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012, Lindsay et al., 2019). Yet they are largely underrepresented in the labour force. This section will examine the literature surrounding the employers' perspective of the barriers, challenges and attitudes which hinder an inclusive workplace. The challenges faced by employers vary. They vary by type of employer industry, by nature of the roles within the workplace, on a micro level such as flexibility and direct communication to the macro level of societal attitudes and accessibility.

One study in Austria by Kocman, Fischer and Weber (2018) highlighted a number of concerns and barriers experienced by employers. They cover practical obstacles such as cost and time, as well as stigma/attitudes, safety, skill levels, lack of knowledge about disability and potential legal issues. The most prevalent barrier for employers was a lack necessary skills required for particular jobs. Therefore, employers were unable to find suitable and appropriate positions for people with disabilities. There were perceptions in the study that suggested employers believed people with disabilities were unable to complete basic tasks for the job they applied for. Some employers also thought that hiring people with disabilities would cause problems in the workplace, this tells us of the effect of societal attitudes and stereotyping on a person's chances of employment. Another concern was the fear of the unknown, many employers' lack experience and knowledge in employing employees with disabilities and therefore do not understand their capabilities, needs and what to expect from them. Stepping into this unknown territory can be fearful and it can hold employers back from participation in inclusive practices. Kocman et al. (2018, p.130):

> *"These expectations and reservations are often based on misinformation or a lack of information and awareness. Yet, many employers acknowledge being insufficiently*

informed and believe that information campaigns and an increased visibility of employment for people with intellectual disability would promote inclusive employment for people with intellectual disability"

Barriers pertaining to difficulties in accessibility of a workplace, the need for certain workplace modification or accommodations and disclosures appeared frequently in the literature (Berry & Kymar, 2013, Lindsay, et al., 2019, Jans, Kaye & Jones, 2012). Disclosures were mentioned earlier as a challenge for people with disabilities, but it can also be a challenge to employers. While employers may aim to be equal opportunity or disability-friendly, there are still reservations about disclosing. Employers that have experience and knowledge take a positive attitude and willingness to grant accommodations in the workplace. However, many employers lack knowledge about how and what accommodation to provide (Lindsay et al., 2019). Employers from Lindsay et al., emphasised the importance of building trust and comfort with potential employees. It was also noted that employers were more likely to hire those with physical disabilities due to the negative stigma attached to intellectual and mental disabilities. Employers stated being known as a 'disability-friendly' company attracted more open employees with disabilities. Although legislation is in place, attitudes have a major impact of the numbers of people with disability within the workplace. The stigma is caused by a lack of knowledge, information, and education of disability on the part of employers, staff, and society in general.

A study by Riesen and Morgan (2018) in the United States identified training and communication as perceived barriers to employment. Training an employee with a disability meant a lot of prompting or time to learn the task which the employer did not view favourably. They felt certain roles could not be completed by people with disabilities. Communication was constantly mentioned as a barrier. A breakdown in communication and understanding would cause problems in the workplace. Suggestions were made that a liaison person between the employee with a disability and employer would lessen this barrier.

Studies found a range of individual, organisational and societal barriers which stopped employers' openly accepting people with disabilities. In a Canadian hotel, employers were concerned that the image consciousness of the hotel would limit employment opportunities for people with disabilities if they didn't 'fit' the aesthetic of the hotel (Houtenville, & Kalargyrou, 2015). Others were concerned about the capability and work performance of the employees with a disabilities (Scott et al., 2017, Nota et al., 2014, Houtenville, & Kalargyrou, 2012), the

change element of the work roles and structure (Irvine & Lupart, 2008), transportation and stigma (Rashid, Hodgetts & Nicholas, 2017). Costs of accommodations, attitudes of customers, lack of experience and skills, fear of litigation, and discomfort were noted by employers as barriers of employment (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012).

Interestingly, Kocman et al. (2018) stated that a low number of applications was a barrier they experienced. As revealed earlier, people with ID are worried about discrimination which prevents them from applying. I believe it is the responsibility of employers to promote an inclusive work environment. I think it's important to find ways to show people with ID that they will not be judged unfairly because they have a disability .

2.5 Strategies for Workplace Integration

Beliefs held by the employer about disability is the basis from which a supportive work environment stems (Shier et al., 2009). Strategies to promote integration in the workplace include awareness training which addresses stigma and discrimination, practicing open communication, advocacy, providing accommodations, peer mentors or job coaches.

2.5.1 Accommodations in the Workplace

Lindsay et al. (2019, p.142) Describes workplace accommodations as:

> *"workplace accommodations are adjustments made to the physical, environmental, structural, social and cognitive aspects of the workplace that can include modified work schedules, adaptive technology, modified workspaces, modified job roles or tasks, and telecommuting"*

Accommodations can be made on a formal or informal basis depending on the employer, employee, and context. Formal accommodations includes the alteration of desks, accessible technology or automatic door, training staff or structure of job role. There is a common misconception that accommodations are expensive, but they don't have to be. Informal accommodations such as a flexible schedule, shorter shifts, providing breaks and adjusting the environment can make the difference to an employee with a disability.

2.5.2. Supported Employment

Supported employment (SE) is defined as a scheme that supports people with disabilities (or other marginalised groups) in obtaining and maintaining paid employment in the open labour market (European Commission, 2011). SE is a means to access paid employment for those who can't succeed in gaining or retaining employment independently. It is a global initiative which studies show positively impacts on people with disabilities as it promotes self-esteem and social inclusion. SE is also beneficial for the employer who gets a good employee and receives specialised support for job attainment and retention (Wehman, 2012). The SE recruitment service enables employers to best match jobs with the appropriate potential employees' interests, preferences, and support needs. It provides a continuous support of a qualified Employment Support worker/ job coaches who would provide all the necessary advice. It also allows companies to promote themselves as equal opportunity employers (European Union Supported Employment, 2015).

SE differs around the globe. In Australia SE is refer to as open employment and it is a specialist service used to support people with ID to obtain a job in the mainstream workplace with equal wages and working conditions as any other employee (Meltzer et al., 2020). It supports individuals on a needs basis whether that is initial or ongoing support. The Disability Employment Service (DES) assists with recruitment, job placement, accommodations, and ongoing support. Collaboration between employers and DES providers was identified as a key component promoting positive employment outcomes for employees with a disability (Scott et al., 2017). SE asserts confidence in the process of finding and maintaining work for individuals with disabilities (Jahoda et al., 2007). SE conveys a positive message about its potential to offer greater opportunities for integration in the workplace and create a greater sense of community belonging. Participation and understanding from all staff is needed to create a supportive work environment.

There is limited research regarding the employers' perspective on SE programmes and whether they have been sustainable. While several studies show the positive impact of SE for people with ID in gaining employment, there are limitations as to the supports when retaining employment. Banks, Jahoda, Dagnan, Kemp, and Williams (2009) reported that the majority of employees with ID whose jobs had broken down were happy with the supports they received in the beginning, but the level of input thereafter differed to what employees' perceived as their level of need.

The Irish Association of Supported Employment (IASE) recognises SE to assist employees before, during and after obtaining a job as well as supporting the employer. The job coach plays a key supporting role particularly focusing on on-the-job training while using a person-centred approach. Job coaches assist in assessing the skills of the individual, matching, and seeking suitable jobs. Nic Suibhne & Finnerty (2014) reported the SE is growing strength by strength in Ireland, with initiatives such as the job shadow initiative (JSI) creating opportunities for people with disabilities. SE is a concept and a model that is underpinned by equality and 'being the same' as other people with the same opportunities.

2.6 Social Inclusion

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), article 27 states persons with disabilities have the right to:

> *"work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities."*

Irvine and Lupart (2008) states that an employer must also actively identify and eliminate employment barriers and institute policies that allow reasonable accommodation for persons with special needs. Social inclusion/community integration is at the core of anti-discriminatory practice. Kober & Eggleton, (2005, p.759) highlights its importance:

> *"people with ID placed in open employment are integrating more with their community and have a greater feeling of social belonging"*

The ability and accessibility of work for those with ID is regarded as a vital goal by policymakers in the pursuit of social inclusion (Jahoda et al., 2007). The 2016 census figure in Ireland shows people with ID are largely absent and underrepresented in the Irish Labour force as only 22.3% are employed. In 2015 a Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) was launched by the Department of Justice outlining a ten-year plan to increase the employment of people with disabilities. The Strategy is aimed at engaging people across the spectrum of disability and ensuring that everyone receives the supports they need to work. The strategy declares it is underpinned by values that focus on capacity, potential and contributions that people with disabilities can make to society (May-Simera, 2018).

2.7 Conclusion

The aim of this section was to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The experiences of people with disabilities was outlined at the beginning because this study stems from another Irish, CARL study exploring service user's perspective. This review shows there are numerous benefits both to the employee and employer, of promoting an inclusive workplace. However, it is clear there are many barriers that people with disabilities face when accessing employment. It appears attitudes towards disability are an influential factor in obstructing employment as employers are uncertain about individuals' capabilities and how they could support them. A lack of knowledge and information on the topic hindered the employment process. It was acknowledged that training and education in regard to this would help to alleviate this issue.

SE was seen as beneficial to both employers and employees. While some studies showed SE working well, others discussed its limitations in providing support after the job is obtained. Job coaches were shown to play a significant supporting role. All the literature supported creating an inclusive workplace. Where barriers were identified, many employers had resourceful suggestions in ways to support people with ID in both recruitment and on-the-job. This leads me to question why these proposed supports and strategies are not being implemented to the processes.

The next chapter will outline the research design of this study, drawing on the theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and data analysis applied. It considers the ethical issues of this study and discusses the challenges and limitation which arose during the research process.

Chapter 3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical foundations which underpin this study and discusses the research methodologies and methods which were applied during the research process. The chapter begins by introducing the reader to the epistemology and theoretical perspective which informed the research. The research methodology and methods of data collection and data analysis will then be discussed. Following from this, the ethical considerations and the reflexive position of the researcher will be outlined. The chapter will conclude will an analysis of the challenges and limitations which arose over the course of the study.

3.2 Epistemology

Individuals hold particular assumptions about their knowledge of the social world. Epistemology is a *"way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know"* (Crotty, 2009, p.3). This study takes an epistemological stance in social constructionism. Social constructionism works on the principle there are multiple representations shared by people in specific contexts (Ormston et al., 2014). It explains that the knowledge of the social world is shaped through how individuals give meaning to their experiences. Social constructionism is appropriate for this study as it allows employers to give their subjective reality of working with an employee with ID, and thus helps to generate an understanding of both individual company needs as well as the greater needs of this cohort.

3.3 Theoretical Perspective

There are certain cultural assumptions which shape how disability is seen. To examine these assumptions under a constructionist approach, this study will use the theoretical framework of interpretivism. Carey (2013, p. 60) states interpretive theory attempts to uncover the meaning to peoples' experiences in the social world as *"the researcher endeavours to understand the opinions, emotional responses and attitudes articulated by participants and then link these to people's behaviors and actions and, finally contextualize the views and conduct of participants"*. Interpretivism focuses on culture and meaning, where culture is continuously recreated through social interactions (Geertz, 1994). This theoretical framework supports the

aim of this study as it seeks to understand and make meaning of how disability is viewed within the workplace culture.

As a CARL project. there was also a participatory framework applied to this study. Participatory action research promotes inclusion, values voices in a community and is compatible with the social work value of empowerment (McKinnon, 2009). In order to make the workplace more inclusion of those with disabilities, it is important to hear from employers. In adapting a social constructionist approach, using interpretivism, a better understanding of attitudes, challenges and supports can be obtained.

3.4 Research Methodology

Methodology refers to *"the set of ideas, theory or philosophy that surrounds, encompasses and, literally 'holds together' a research project"* (Carey, 2012, p. 83). The methodology indicates to the reader, the researcher's values and how their study is moulded (Payne & Payne, 2004). Qualitative primary research was selected for the purpose of gathering information regarding employers' experience of disability in the workplace. Qualitative research emphasises words and attempts to interpret their meaning (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, the methodology aligns with the social constructionism framework of this study.

3.5 Research Methods

A research method is a set of techniques used to explore your research questions (Carey, 2013). It is often referred to as a tool to collect and analysis data. It was decided in consultation with this study's community liaison partner, to conduct two focus groups with employers who were known to employ people who attended COPE's Ability@Work programme. It was the intention of the study to carry out these focus groups each consisting of 4 members of staff who had experience hiring and working alongside people with ID i.e. managers and peer co-workers. This method was selected as a feasible action piece of research to generate a discussion within the company. The aim was to explore and understand the different perspectives and how they operate in the same setting (Morgan, 1997). One such focus group was completed. However, due to the unforeseen circumstances surrounding the global pandemic of COVID-19, the second face-to-face focus group was not an option. Restrictions of the pandemic meant limiting social interaction. It was attempted to bring the second group online, however there were challenges in access and availability. Upon discussion with my

tutor and my community liaison, I decided to conduct individual online or phone interviews. In the end, I managed to secure one phone interview with an employer, a semi-structured interview was conducted with this participant.

3.5.1 Sampling

The participants of the study were selected in conjunction with COPE Foundation through the CARL initiative. The Co-ordinator of the Ability@Work programme acted as the gatekeeper, the person who provided access to the participants (Creswell, 2014). While the plan for the focus group was to have managers and peer co-workers, the company was unable to facilitate this. Yet, each member had experience in both hiring and working directly alongside Ability@Work employees in their roles as service managers, support manager and catering manager. The phone interview was held with an operations manager with the same above experience.

3.5.2 Data Collection

The participants received an information sheet about the study. If they agreed to participate they were asked to sign a consent form. The focus group was an hour in duration and was audio recorded. It consisted of open questions with the aim to generate a discussion within the group. The semi-structured interview was completed over the phone and was also audio recorded. The interview questions had open questions with the same premise but were worded differently to suit a more individual response.

3.5.3 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to move raw data into categorised findings. Carey (2013) describes this approach to identify specific themes within the data and findings. This analysis looks for social trends or patterns regarding the individual or group attitudes, behaviours and values which can be used to draw conclusions from. This study involved looking for patterns across employers' experiences and interpreting the participants' responses. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and a system of coding was used to compile sections of related data. These sections were further analysed to create the main themes of this study which provided a comprehensive image of the participants' experience of disability in the workplace.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

An application to the MSW Research Ethics Committee was made in October 2019 but was deferred to further reflect on the potential vulnerability of the participants. Upon discussion with my tutor, a revised application was submitted, and ethical approval was granted in December 2019. The original idea of the focus group was to have participants of varied levels within the company i.e. managers and peer co-workers. Therefore, ethical issues surfaced in relation to boundaries of relationships and disclosures. As the researcher, a concern was the participants' willingness to speak openly and honestly in the group, particularly co-workers who would be speaking in front of their employers. Issues of disclosures and their appropriateness were also contemplated, recognising that the participants would continue to have a working relationship after the focus group. I consulted with my tutor, my community liaison, and the literature. In anticipation of the above concerns, it was agreed to seek a bigger representation of co-worker participants in the group and to call attention to issues at the start of the discussion through 'ground rules' to ensure privacy is respected during the process (Morgan, 1998). A job coach from Ability@Work would also attend the focus group to assist the researcher.

Ethical concerns of consent, confidentiality and data protection were also addressed. An information sheet outlining the aims and expectations of the research was circulated to all participants prior to their engagement. Informed written consent was required to participate in the study. Participants agreed they understood the nature of the study and their participation was voluntarily. They gave permission to be audio recorded and for anonymous extracts to be published. Prior to commencing the focus group/interview, consent and confidentiality were discussed again, with an opportunity for participants to ask clarifying questions. If a problem arose during the process, participants were advised to contact their GP or other support services which were listed in the information sheet.

3.7 Reflexive Position as the Researcher

As a researcher, I recognise and acknowledge the probability of bias that this study carries from myself, COPE Foundation and the research participants. Richie et al (2003) recognises that while researchers strive for neutrality and objectivity, we can never attain this aspiration fully, nor do we believe is it possible. The researcher positions themselves in the research with a unique background and set of values. Their experiences can shape their interpretation of the

data collected (Creswell, 2014). I have worked in the area of disability; therefore, I hold values of equality and unconditionality which will influence my approach to this study. I am fully aware of biases I carry and to address these, I engaged in reflecting journaling during the research process.

3.8 Challenges & Limitations

My study attempted to include the views of co-workers, those on the same level as employees with ID. However, due to staff availability and time constraints, my focus group consisted of 4 managers within a company. While not on the same level as employees, there were 2 managers who had direct and daily communication with employees with ID. On balance, the focus group was chosen as it was the most feasible method which could generate rich data through discussion, however, there were limitations to this method including dominant speakers. In an effort to avoid social desirability or groupthink, I referred to the ground rules and used eye contact and body language to encourage others to speak.

A major challenge and limitation of my study was the impact of the global pandemic COVID-19. In light of the restrictions placed on the country, I was compelled to change my research methods. A second focus group was scheduled as the country went into social isolation which required data to be collected virtually. Every effort was made on my part and the part of COPE Foundation to organise an online focus group. However, this proved difficult as we were not able to reach the participants. Numerous emails and phone calls were made with no response. Thankfully, we were able to reach out to another employer who agreed to participate. This came late into the research process and with discussion with my tutor, I conducted an individual phone interview. While remote methods are seen as inferior (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), face-to-face was not an option. The limitation here is a potential loss of richness in the data due to missed nonverbal cues and a constraint on interaction (Opdenakker, 2006, Johnson, Scheitle, & Ecklund, 2019). COVID-19 affected my research timeline; therefore, it was a challenge to conduct, transcribe and analysis the second interview for the write up of the dissertation in a reduced time scale.

Time restraints, word count and a sample size were also limitations to the study. A small sample size of two companies was used to fit into the word count. It would have been beneficial to have a larger number of participants to give more depth to the topic in an Irish context. Unfortunately, the views of co-workers were unattainable in this study due to staffing

availability. Interviews may have been a better option to facilitate more floor staff perspective as the focus group required taking more staff away from their duties.

A further limitation was the employers' selected for the study were all linked to COPE Foundations and had hired from the Ability@Work programme. This is one SE service in Ireland. The data collected consisted of the employers' experience working with COPE Foundation employees. Data may have differed had the employers been linked to alternative support services or no support services.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided the reader with an in-depth discussion of the research design. It began by outlining the theoretical framework of social constructionism and interpretivism which informed this research. A mix of qualitative methods, a focus group, and an interview were used during the process which unfolded as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The data analysis methods were discussed, from which the study's findings and conclusions have been drawn and will be presented in the next two chapters. The ethical considerations and reflexive position as the researcher were identified and reviewed. Finally, the chapter ended with a thorough discussion of the challenges and limitation of the research process.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and discuss the findings gathered from the data collected using the methods outlined in chapter 3. Through thematic analysis four main themes were identified, they are represented in the table below. The findings are supported by direct quotations from the study's participants. The findings are linked to the main findings of the literature in chapter 2 and will be explored in the discussion section of this chapter.

Table 1: Overview of Themes and Sub-Themes.

Themes	Sub-themes
Benefits of Employing People with Intellectual Disabilities	• Benefits for the Employee • Benefits for the Employer
Barriers & Challenges	• Understanding of Employee Capabilities • Workplace Attitudes • Communication • Applications & Disclosures

Supports	• Support Services: COPE Foundation
	  ○ Role of Job Coaches
	• Job Shadowing
	• Adjustments in the Workplace
	  ○ Job Role
	  ○ Interview Techniques
	  ○ Employment Reviews

Promoting Inclusion	• Building Awareness • Diversity in the workplace

4.2 Theme 1 Benefits of Employing People with Intellectual Disabilities

Participants of the study spoke to strengths of their employees with ID, noting a range of qualities and personality traits that they brought into the workplace. The participants commented on the personal development of the employee as well as the development of staff and the company.

4.2.1 Benefits for the Employee

The focus group (company 1) discussed the changes and growth in their employees with ID in terms of developing social skills and their understanding of social cues.

> *"You could see the changes in him. He stopped and he waited, he waited until he was brought into the conversation. Whereas before, he would have jumped in, he, he's learning himself"*

Participants commented on how employment facilitates maturity, builds confidence and alongside personal growth, there are opportunities for job progression.

> *"I never asked him to do that. You know what I mean, that was his own initiative"*

> *"she's actually just been made permanent quite recently"*

Finally, employers talked about employment creating a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose and meaningful engagement in a community.

> *"the expectation is that they'd have a meaningful output for them and obviously a help for us at the end of the day, you know"*

4.2.2 Benefits for the Employer

Participants spoke generously about the positives and benefits of having employees with ID. They described employees with ID as having desirable qualities beneficial to the workplace.

> *"they are always on time, they're very loyal, dedicated. It's great."*

> *"he's meticulous and he's brilliant. He's there and you can rely on him"*

Another participant remarked on the consistency and reliability of their employee:

> *"she has her certain set jobs that she does every week and it's great… They're done every week."*

A participant described how employees with ID were an additional pair of hands when the office was busy, and they were happy to complete tasks for other employees when they were too busy.

> *"those kind of jobs that need to be done that people are always putting on the long finger because they're too busy to do so,* [employee] *would be happy and take ownership of those kind of, few jobs that just needed doing"*

Participants noted the impact of employees with ID on the atmosphere in work. They were friendly and cheerful which promoted a happier working environment.

> *"they're generally very happy people you know, and eh.. just really chatty"*

> *"if you watch* [employee] *and he interacts with people, everyone that he interacts with walks off with a smile, and I think that's, it's making the workplace happier"*

Participants agreed that they brought something different to the workplace and they fit in very well with the team.

> *"He's part of the family really,"*

> *"Everybody knows him* [employee], *he is just, he's actually a breath of fresh air"*

4.3 Theme 2 Barriers & Challenges

The study attempts to understand what barriers and challenges are faced by the employers. A number of issues arose which have been categorised and summarized below.

4.3.1 Understanding of Employee Capabilities

There was an underlying concern from the participants that an employees with ID would not be suited or capable of doing the job offered to them. One participant described their fear as:

"there was fear, you know, fear of the persons capabilities, could they do what we needed them to do…….would that suit an individual that did have intellectual disabilities…. It's a big commitment to take someone on."

Fears related to the individual and how they would manage themselves in the workplace were also identified:

"bit of fear around the whole lot, like, will they be okay, is everything going to be alright, or are they going to hurt themselves or…. do something they shouldn't do,"

This fear developed further as to whether the employee would understand the rules of the workplace. Thus, a concern for their safety was raised.

"Once they can follow the rules and keep themselves safe. That's the main thing, I think safety in the workplace"

"*one of my fears was would he understand the complications?"*

However, it is noteworthy to mention that overall, participants felt some concerns were similar to any new staff in their company.

"fear of him at the till, I have that with every new member of my team, doesn't matter who it is. Will they be okay, or am I asking so much of them?"

Another challenge for participants related to their awareness of potential issues and an employee's ability to seek support if needed.

"If there would be any difficulties, eh.. or, you know, or that we would even be aware of it, you know, that he be able to talk to us if there were any issues as well, I think"

On the contrast, another participant noted the different personalities of different employees with different needs. While some were more independent, there was a concern that others were more reliant on the employer.

"I was his person because he'd meet me at the door, you know, so, [Laughs] *every time I went to the bathroom and he was saying to the girls 'where's* [employer] *gone'"*

It appears the participants were unfamiliar with knowledge about disability and different types of [dis]ability prior to their current experience. Therefore, their assumptions acted as a barrier as it created a fear of whether or not a person with ID was suitable for their work setting.

4.3.2 Communication

Communication is significantly important to understand what is being said to us. Effective communication is essential in the workplace to ensure a job is done safely and properly. Participants reported a challenge in communicating with their employees with ID and noted simple language and repetition was needed to adapt how they communicate. In giving instructions participants said:

> *"As you go through bit by bit, you don't get him to sign off until you know, cause you get him to talk to you, 'Explain in your own words how to do this'"*

Another participant explains their frustration and how they would need to adapt their response compared to working with an employee without a disability:

> *"You know, in a normal situation, you might kind of, start to get a bit cross with the person… I feel that you can't really have that tone so, you've to keep showing and showing and showing until they get it"*

Participants also reported a challenge in being more conscious of word choice as they did not wish to say anything offensive or threatening to upset or make employees with ID nervous.

4.3.3 Workplace Attitudes

When discussing the issues related to employment, participants expressed a sense of internal conflict between wanting to treat an employee with ID the same as other staff and having to treat them differently based on their individual needs.

> *"learning how to, eh.. how to treat them equally but it's, it's not that equal in some senses because it's kind of, different though.."*

One participant conveyed difficulty in knowing how to discipline their employee:

"I was kind of torn on how to deal with somebody because I wasn't sure, ehm.. how far I could go with it you know.."

The issue of co-worker attitudes was raised. The participants felt staff may treat employees with ID differently.

"there was always the niggling in the back of my head, like, do you let people know and let him, give him a little bit of a leeway."

The responses indicated that participants were aware of different attitudes in the workplace and mentioned a need to adjust mindsets.

4.3.4 Challenges in Recruitment

While the participants agreed that people with ID have the desire to work, a barrier they experienced was a lack of applications received and issues surrounding whether or not to disclose a disability. Participants stated full-time positions don't come up often but when they do, there is a lack of interest from people with ID:

" I dunno, do we scare people off, that we don't get people with intellectual disabilities going for the permanent jobs,"

Although employees are not obliged to disclose a disability, participants felt it would benefit potential employees as they would tailor the interview to ensure employees could showcase their best self. Participants were aware that people with ID had concerns of being discriminated against if they disclosed.

4.4 Theme 3 Supports

To facilitate people with ID in employment, supports are required. The nature of the disability determines the level of support needed for that individual. The participants identified a number of support mechanisms in place which made employing and maintaining employment of people with ID easier and obtainable.

4.4.1 Support Service: COPE Foundation

COPE Foundation and the service they provide was mentioned frequently as a support to the companies amidst the challenges the participants encountered. Company 1 were new to employing people with ID and worked closely with COPE Foundation. Participants praised the Ability@Work programme as collaborating with them broke down barriers and created opportunities for supported employment.

> *"we can have the opportunities and we can, we can open up the doors and break down barriers as such as well. That's what the whole Ability to Work programme is about."*

Company 2 has had a COPE employee with them for a number of years and they credited the programme for matching the person's abilities to the job, always being on the other end of the phone to provide advice and visiting when needed. COPE Foundation play a huge role as they support both employer and employee as one participant recognized:

> *"they're another support for the employee and for the employer"*

<u>Role of Job Coaches</u>

Job coaches were highlighted as a major support role in ensuring the employees transition into employment with as few issues as possible. The job coaches prepare the individual prior to beginning the job, shadow them once started the job, establishing a route and routine within the work environment and provide on-going support as needed. If there are issues, the employer, job coach and employee would discuss together:

> *"*[job coach] *came in, we sat down, we discussed it, we supported whatever decision he wanted to make"*

Participants shared the support offered by job coaches. The job coach gives the employer guidance for what works best for the individual, they show other staff how to communicate with the individual such as what questions, using plain English and clear instructions one at a time. Participants expressed their involvement to be hugely beneficial:

> *"we do that bit extra up front with the job coaches coming in and we do. And you know what, it's done us the world of good."*

"the job coaches were there through the Cope programme and that made it a hell of a lot easier"

This support was regarded as vital to getting people with ID into the workplace and supporting them to maintain employment.

4.4.2 Job Shadowing

The Job Shadowing Initiative (JSI) is a day whereby people with ID have the opportunity to gain work experience. It is held once a year by the IASE. Company 2 is involved in this initiative and subsequently with the support of COPE Foundation, hired a person with ID.

"She done eh.. the job shadow day with us and loved it. She fit in really well when she was there."

This experience gave the employer a realistic insight and knowledge of working alongside people with ID. With this insight, the participant stated they were more open to the idea of hiring people with ID.

"I was very open to it, I feel. You know a lot of people come through over the years through the job shadow, so.."

4.4.3 Adjustments in the Workplace

Internal supports reported by participants were in making changes to their work practices and making adjustment to fit the individual needs of their employees with ID.

<u>Job Role</u>

The Ability@Work programme matches people with ID with a suitable job role. However, sometimes a suitable role is not available at certain companies. One participant commented:

"We created the role. It wasn't that the role was there already, we created the role around the person, I suppose"

Another adjustments made to job roles included a reduced working week or part-time work.

"She worked 2 kind of, afternoons a week, ehm.. with us in the office."

The study's participants had no need to make physical adjustments to the work environment or provide specialised equipment or technology.

Interview techniques

Participants discussed how to manage an interview with people with ID. If the company are aware of a disability, the participants advised they would make the necessary adjustments to the process. They referred to tailoring the interview to the needs of the individual by changing the type and language of the questions.

> *"we knew when they were coming in for the interview they had a disability okay so, we tailored our approach for them"*

> *"instead of asking them this line of question, we'll go down this line, and bring it* [employee's strengths] *out more"*

Another participant said there was less of a formal job interview as the employee had done the job shadow day before. They described it as a trial period which later lead to a permanent job.

> *"It was very much a trial period at the beginning to make sure she was happy with us and we were happy with her. Ehm.. so, it was more like on-the-job interview really than a formal, normal interview"*

Employment review

One participant told their reservations in completing an annual review for an employee with ID as they were unsure how to go about it. With the support of COPE Foundation, they tailored the review by combining the company's performance review document with COPE Foundation's evaluation document. The tailored review gives examples of work completed.

> *"You're not giving perhaps a score out of 10, you're saying, you know, eh.. you know, fair, poor, good, very good or can work on… and then giving practical examples about what you mean because communication is really important to making sure that it's clear what you're trying to say"*

4.5 Theme 4 Promoting Inclusion

Creating an inclusive workplace was important to all participants. From their experience, they agreed that while there are challenges to hiring people with ID, the benefits are, promoting an inclusive workplace and supporting the equal rights of people with ID to gain meaningful employment.

4.5.1 Building Awareness

The first step is building awareness of disability and capabilities. Having the experience of working with employees with ID, participants noted it has opened their eyes and developed them as people and as a company.

> *"It's really opened our eyes and opened the doors"*

Inhouse training has been made available to some participants to build awareness when interviewing potential employees.

> *"*[Employer] *are running courses of that for all their people managers who would be employing or hiring people and we have started training last year."*

Participants reported there is a need for more awareness and training about what having a disability means and how the disability impacts their ability.

> *"I think definitely a little bit more knowledge around the type of disability that somebody has and then the parameters because of that disability."*

In terms of reducing prejudice, knowledge appears repeatedly as a means of support and building awareness.

> *"Definitely knowledge, knowledge, knowledge! Knowledge is key!"*

> *"I think maybe it is changing and there's a little bit of education, I think on both parts, both sides that needs to still go on with that"*

Company 1 discussed how they plan to change the job descriptions they advertise to ensure candidates know they are an equal opportunity employer.

"We do advertise, and we do, we do follow that, but it's just to make it easier for people to understand or to, to read"

4.5.2 Diversity in the Workplace

Diversity in a team promotes inclusion as it accepts every individual and recognises their strengths. Participants commented to this effect.

"I thought they'd definitely bring something different to the team"

"It definitely adds to the diversity of your team"

Participants placed importance on having a team that is open and willing to work alongside people of all abilities and in treating all employees fairly.

"*He gets treated just like everyone else, he has to follow the rules just like anyone else."*

Finally, when speaking about diversity and the positive impact their employee with ID has on their team, one participant had an inclusive point of view of:

"I wouldn't see disability as a barrier, it's just a different way of working"

4.6 Discussion

The analysis sought to enhance the understanding of employers' experiences and perspectives of working with people with ID. The study aimed to develop an insight into what barriers and supports helped or hindered people with ID finding employment. These subsequently arose as themes in the findings along with the themes of benefits of employing people with ID and promoting inclusion. The study's finding are consistent with the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

The findings revealed that the participants have had a positive experience of working with people with ID as they spoke highly about their strengths and impact on the workplace. The participants commented on the improvements they noticed in their employee, which co-aligned with the literature, stating a development in social skills, increased confidence (Irvine & Lupart, 2008) and a sense of community integration (Kober & Eggleton, 2005). The findings

also demonstrate a range of advantages to the employer and the workplace. Similar to Houtenville & Kalargyrou (2015) study, people with ID were described as loyal and dedicated employees. They were seen as individuals that were trustworthy and dependent which the participants rated highly. A notable advantage was their ability to increase workplace morale as participants agreed their enthusiasm and personalities created a happier work atmosphere. As found in the findings and literature, people with ID add to the efficiency of the workplace (Irvine & Lupart, 2008) as they also assisted other employees with their workload. From new and creative skills to compelling qualities, employees with ID evidently contribute positively to their workplace culture (Scott et al., 2017) and participants viewed them as part of the work *'family'.*

The barriers and challenges that arose in the study include a lack of understanding about disability and capabilities, issues in communication, problematic workplace attitudes and low numbers of people with ID applying for positions. A common fear was fear of the unknown, employers without experience did not understand disability and took the assumption that they would be unable to complete basic tasks (Kocman et al., 2018). The findings found the same lack of understanding was perceived by the participants prior to their current experience. Participants noted they were unsure if the individual with ID could do the job, if they would be okay, if they would be safe and if they would understand workplace culture and its unwritten rules. Communication arose as a challenge for participants for a breakdown in communication could potentially cause problems in the workplace (Riesen & Morgan, 2018). Participants reported a challenge in having to adapt their style of communication for employees with ID, such as using uncomplicated English and repeating instructions. Such challenges can be overcome using clear and effective communication (Scott et al., 2017).

According to the literature (Rashid et al., 2017, Lindsay et al., 2019, Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012), attitudes and stigma are the biggest barrier to employment for people with ID. The participants reported concerns regarding how co-workers would react and interact with employees with ID fearing it might cause impatience and misunderstandings. Participants themselves were challenged as to how they would manage an employee with ID as they were not sure how to evaluate or discipline them. Houtenville & Kalargyrou, (2012) study points to the same concerns. A lack of applications and issues surrounding disclosures, sit as a societal barrier associated with stigma and negative attitudes. This barrier appears to exist as Shier et al. (2009) explains people with ID are concerned about employer discrimination and labelling.

The participants acknowledged this concern, as they do in the literature (Kocman et al., 2018) and self-identified a need for more staff knowledge of disability as well as a need for public awareness to promote inclusive employment for everyone.

The study examined the significance of support mechanisms. Consistent with the literature, the main supports identified were external supported employment services such as COPE Foundation, job coaches, JSI and internal supports in the form of adjusting work practices, adapting roles and flexibility (Irvine & Lupart, 2008). There was an overwhelming response from participants illustrating support from COPE Foundation. The literature (Scott et al., 2017) supports the view that collaboration between participants and support services is a key component to encouraging positive employment outcomes for employees with ID. Participants noted their workplace was more inclusive because of SE. COPE Foundation's support in employing and maintaining employment of people with ID was seen as invaluable. The role of the job coach was mentioned favourably by the participants who regarded their support at each stage of employment as vital. Their critical role serves to support employers and build their capacity to nurture meaningful work opportunities for people with ID (Rashid et al., 2017).

JSI provides an opportunity to both employers and people with ID. Firstly, people with ID get a chance to experience the workplace and have their questions answered. This experience thus improves their employment prospects (Trembath et al., 2010). Secondly, it gives employers an awareness of SE, practical experience to alleviate some of their fears around working with people with ID and gives an insight to the positive contribution that people with ID can make to the workplace (Nic Suibhne, & Finnerty, 2014). Participants noted that after engaging in the JSI, they were more open to employing people with ID and have successively hired from this initiative. According to participants, adjustments were made depending on the needs of the individual. They included creating or altering roles, flexible work schedules (part-time work, shorter shifts), changing the structure of formal interviewing processes and employee evaluations to suit the requirements of the individual as well as adjusting their methods of communication. Lindsay et al. (2019) reported making similar accommodation for employees with ID in Canada. Providing these adjustments to work practices can help people with ID prosper in a work setting (Jahoda et al., 2007).

The participants recognized a need to promote social inclusion in the workforce. Literature highlights (Kober & Eggleton, 2005) people with ID in SE are integrated more with their community and have a greater sense of belonging. The study's participants revealed this to be

true. However, there is still a need for increased awareness of disability among employers, staff, and the general public. Many studies place emphasis on employer education (Shier et al., 2009, Rashid et al.,2017, Irvine & Lupart, 2008) and this study is no different. Participants self-identified a need for more education and knowledge about disability and what that means in terms of capabilities. While some participants stated training was offered to managers in disability awareness, there is a need to extend this to all staff to address misconceptions and reduce prejudice. Creating a disability-friendly workplace culture is favourable and is paramount in overcoming biases and stereotypes (Houtenville, & Kalargyrou, 2012). Participants reported their efforts is trying to publicise the fact they are equal opportunity employers by changing their advertisement processes to ensure this message is spread. Finally, diversity in a team not only needs to be accepted but appreciated and this is done through raising awareness.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the study's findings gathered from one focus group and one interview of employers who have employed people with ID. The findings were categorised in four themes and sub-themes. The discussion highlighted how the main themes were reflective of that found in the literature review but also gave an Irish context to the results. The study finds that people with ID bring a range of skills, qualities, and diversity to a workplace. While employers face challenges in understanding capabilities and communication the support of organisations like COPE Foundation and job coaches are invaluable. They create a supportive environment where inclusion can flourish. However, attitudes still remain an issue, therefore, increased awareness is needed to counteract this. The conclusions and recommendations of these findings will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides the reader with an overall conclusion drawn from the research findings in the previous chapter. Following this, it sets out the recommendations that are representative of the view of the research participants and the researcher. A description of the value of this research to social work practice will be included. The chapter will conclude with a reflective piece on the process of engaging in research through the CARL initiative with COPE Foundation.

5.2 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine what employers perceived as the barriers experienced and supports needed to employ and maintain employment of a person with ID and complex needs. The study set out three main research questions and invited employers with experience in employing people with ID to participate in focus groups. Due to COVID-19, phone interviews were also used to collect data. After analysis, the following conclusions were drawn.

To answer the first research question, the responses to what perceived barriers could cause uncertainty for employers were a lack of understanding regarding what people with ID are capable of managing and workplace attitudes. Participants reported concerns about whether or not people with ID could do the job assigned to them. Other concerns related to how they would manage an employee with ID compared to staff without ID and negative attitudes of co-workers. The challenges faced by participants can be summarised as needing to adapt their style of communication to ensure employees with ID understand them such as using plain English and repetition. The final barrier experienced by participants was a lack of job applications from people with ID which highlighted the issue of disclosing a disability and prejudice.

The participants had mainly recruited people with ID through support services such as COPE Foundation which matches individuals to jobs. Therefore, the supports they emphasized as this stage was the support from job coaches who prepared the individual prior to commencing the job and supported the transition into the workplace. Participants felt this was a less formal approach which best suited the needs of employees with ID. Where interviews took place and

the disability was known to participants, a tailored line of questions, direct communication and specifically designed easy-to-read documents were used. In helping to maintain employment, job coaches and COPE Foundation were again emphasised as the main support as they provided on-going individualised support as needed. Other supports including adjusting or creating a job role, providing a flexible work schedule, and adapting work practices such as communication and employment evaluations.

Benefits of employing people with ID and promoting inclusion arose as separate themes as they were mentioned favourable in this study. To answer the last research question of what supports are required to promote and enable employment for people with ID, the recommendations were drawn with supported from the above findings.

5.3 Recommendations

There are many benefits of employing people with ID as suggested in the findings, including their work ethic, ability to increase workplace morale and positively contribute to the workplace. However, as identified through the study, barriers of negative attitudes and a lack of knowledge and understanding of disability still remain an issue. The following recommendations address these barriers and make suggestions for further areas of research.

<u>Increase Awareness</u>

- In line with suggestions from the participants themselves, there is a need for increased employer education around disability and ability. Training specifically for employers is essential to help them understand the needs and abilities of individual employees with ID. This training should address and correct misconceptions such as those with ID lack competency to be effective in their roles and provide answers to questions and reservations employers may have. This training would enhance employers' confidence in employing them and reduce concerns regarding how to manage them efficiently. Training should also be provided on communication skills, accommodations, discipline, and performance review issues.

- Disability awareness training should be offered to all staff with companies to reduce stigma and negative attitudes.

- While the participants noted their companies are becoming more diverse and inclusive, it is important to make the public aware of their 'Equal Opportunity Employer' or 'Disability-Friendly' status as this will encourage more people with ID to apply for positions. Information campaigns and getting involved in initiatives like the Job Shadow Day will help raise awareness and knowledge of disability as well as reduce the fear of employer discrimination that may hold people with ID back from applying.

Further Research

- The advice from the participants to other employers is to link in with support services such as COPE Foundation's Ability@Work programme. The support from job coaches was reiterated throughout the study. The researcher recognises their pivotal role and recommends further research into their experience as the middleman. The job coaches appear to alleviate pressure for employers as they are a source of on-going support, therefore supporting job coaches is essential to ensure they can continue to facilitate their service.

- The limitations noted this study only captures the perspectives of employers' who have experience employing people with ID and are affiliated with COPE Foundation. Further research into the views of employers without experience and employers attached to other support services or no support service from across Ireland would be of benefit to the area of disability and employment in Ireland.

- Finally, missing from this study is the perspective of peer co-workers. Therefore, it is recommended a study exploring this viewpoint is essential as I believe this cohort holds valuable data which would assist in supporting the holistic needs of people with ID in the workplace.

5.4 Value to Social Work Practice

This research contributes to the field of disability and employment in social work practice. Disability in social work is a growing area and we are constantly acquiring new knowledge that informs our practice. Central to social work is the value of social justice and working towards fairness for everybody. People with disability have a fundamental right to work and be included in society. This research as previously mentioned builds on research from the

service users' perspective and combined, provides a comprehensive view of the necessary supports required to enable people with ID to enter the workforce. It is the hope that the research findings have contributed to the holistic understanding of employers' needs when employing people with ID and they help support services such as COPE Foundation in their collaboration with employers.

5.5 Research Reflection

My research journey started almost a year ago. I had finished my first placement in COPE Foundation, entering semester 3 when MSW2 students came in to talk about their experience with CARL. I was immediately drawn to the initiative as it had been my hope to complete primary research for my dissertation. However, I was conflicted as I was unsure if I could manage working on a project alongside placement 2. I found it difficult to manage the workload of placement 1 and I knew placement 2 would be equally as tough. My thoughts were interrupted when I looked at the list of available CARL projects, none of which sparked an interest for me. I was disappointed and began to think about how I could organise primary research myself. I was keen on undertaking research in the area of disability. I first volunteered in a day centre for people with ID when I was 15 and this eventually led me to pursue social work. I completed my first research proposal which sought to explore societal attitudes of people with disabilities. I found this proposal challenging. While it helped to generate creativity and concepts for my dissertation, my ideas were all over the place and I was not sure what I wanted to focus on.

At the conference, there was only one project on disability. I was disheartened to hear this as I was hoping to get some suggestions for my own project. It was an insightful presentation and I was pleased to learn the student had approached the organisation and asked if they wished to partake in CARL. I spoke with the CARL co-ordinator and decided to reach out to an organisation I have been volunteering with for years which supports children with serious or chronic illnesses. The prospect of this collaboration looked positive. I was really excited about this project, as the organisation is close to my heart. Unfortunately, I was in the process of completing my literature scope when I received the call that after a committee meeting the CEO decided not to proceed with the project. This was very upsetting; I was hugely passionate about the project and was looking forward to doing the research. This was the end of July and I now had to start again from scratch which was overwhelming.

I was still eager to do primary research, so I looked at the list of CARL projects again and to my delight, it had been updated with a project from COPE Foundation which lead to my finished piece of research. It fitted perfectly with my interests and experience from placement. I instantly contacted Anna to set up a meeting and get the ball rolling. I had to turn over the literature scope fast as my project had changed, this was an anxious time as I required an extension and was also starting my placement 2.

I had to complete an ethics review, and preparation for primary research during my placement 2. At times this was frustrating, trying to juggle the workload but looking back, that work was incredibly important for the research to progress and it taught me to organise and prioritise my workload. Starting semester 2 this year, I knew I was facing many busy months ahead. I feared I would be overwhelmed so a set a goal was to keep on top and linked in with COPE Foundation and my research. Sometimes, I wished I could just focus on the assignment like my peers. I felt I was falling behind and was not managing my time efficiently as it seemed that my peers were miles ahead of me. But I thank them, for their constant reassurance as they often commended me on my research progress and ability to manage such a workload. This along with the encouragement from my tutor instilled my self-confidence in me and I reminded myself of this when I was having doubts.

I met with Ger, my liaison and the gatekeeper to organise my participants, this was a lengthy process but thanks to my earlier work, they were agreed and finalised by January. Setting the times and dates for the focus groups was tricky as it required pulling 4-5 staff from their roles. Dates were agreed upon and the first focus group went ahead. Again, there were challenges here as some participants were late and some had to leave early. I was prepared and confident in leading the group and I felt supported as Ger and the gatekeeper were present to assist if needed. Giving the time restraints, I wanted to collect as much data as possible while remembering to address ethical concerns. I had to adapt my script to accommodate everyone. I was anxious about the change, but I ensured the ground rules, confidentiality and consent were understood before progressing. I was pleased with how the focus group went.

The second group had to be postponed due to staff availability. This caused me a lot of frustration as I sent numerous emails to re-schedule. I eventually got a new date for the 16th March. This was all set to go ahead until Thursday 12th March 2020 when the Irish government announced restrictions of social distancing due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. This disruption caused a ripple effect on my project. As a face-to-face focus group was no longer an

option, I resorted to virtual means of data collection. After emails from myself and the gatekeeper there was no response from the participants. I was extremely distraught because I didn't know what this meant for my project. Could I proceed with one focus group? Would I have to change to secondary? I requested the gatekeeper to seek other employers, but I wasn't hopefully given the current circumstance and its ambiguity. This was the most challenging part of the research process for me, not knowing what's next. Thankfully, another employer agreed to participate. Focus groups were not feasible, so I organized an individual interview over the phone. I was nervous about how this would affect the research using two different collection methods, but I was happy to have another set of data to enhance and enrich my findings.

In the midst of the pandemic and completing my dissertation, I had to move to a new house in Cork. I was isolating with 2 housemates who were also working from home, to make matters more complicated our house was unable to get Wi-Fi for about 3 weeks due to the restrictions. I was experiencing an untold amount of pressure and I often felt overwhelmed and underproductive. However, my housemates have been amazing during my research process. To cope with the stress, we created a routine. Every morning includes a walk, yoga and a good breakfast before sitting down in our make-shift workspace with timed breaks and fun activities planned in the evenings. This structure has helped me immensely in regulating my anxiety. However, it wasn't always so productive and on certain days I had to accept it wasn't a day for study and I would try again the next day. I battled many feelings of resentment towards myself for procrastinating but with support from my housemates, family, and peers, I recognised we are all in a very unusual situation and we are doing the best we can. During this pandemic, the dissertation has not been my biggest stress, I am lucky to be where I am and have coping skills inside my little isolation bubble. My biggest worries are for my very vulnerable grandmother, my at-risk mother and my dad and brothers who are tirelessly working on the frontline. It's hard to be away from family at this time but it is the safest option.

Overall, through the good and bad days, I have found the write up of my research interesting and enjoyable. It's great to see my work come to fruition and I am really proud of the research I've presented. If I was to change the research design, I would suggest starting with interviews as there would have been a better chance of collecting data from varied perspectives. It has been a very unique experience with many challenges, but I feel I have immensely developed my research skills as well as personal skills through this process.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval

MSW Research Ethics Committee
School of Applied Social Studies

Applicant: Emma Callaghan, MSW2, 2019/2020
Committee Date: 11th December 2019
Tutor(s): [redacted]
Reference: 2019-15

MSW Research Ethics Resubmission

Dear Emma

Thank you for your resubmitted application to the MSW research ethics committee.

The committee has reviewed your application. The decision of the committee is to grant ethical approval for your study. The committee advises that you continue to work with your tutor on refining the study. Some additional comments:

1) Your documentation needs to note that the final report will be published on the CARL website (this needs to be addressed in the consent form).

2) p. 12 Change SREC to MSW Research Ethics Committee

3) Change publications, to presentations and publications on the consent form.

4) The MSW REC chair provided feedback on the issue of vulnerability of some members of the FG to your tutor. Please discuss with Fiona.

Please note that receiving ethical approval for your study does not absent you from also seeking ethical approval from external agencies if this is required. Also, appropriate agency level / gatekeeper permissions are also required in addition to this approval.

On the day of the submission of your MSW dissertation, you must provide UCC with a copy of the raw data (audio files, transcripts, completed surveys, etc.) and your data analysis files. All research data should be deleted from your PC and UCC cloud storage, and all paper documentation (consent forms, printed transcripts, etc.) given to UCC for confidential shredding. UCC will securely store electronic copies of all of the study data and consent forms for you for 10 years. This stipulation does not prohibit you from publishing your findings and presenting the data outside of UCC, once your informed consent process provides such permission.

We wish you the best of luck with your study. If you have questions, please contact your MSW tutor.

Best wishes,

Dr Kenneth Burns

On behalf of the MSW Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

INFORMATION SHEET

An Exploration into Employer's Experiences and Perspectives on Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities and Complex Needs.

Purpose of the Study.

As part of the requirements for Master of Social Work at UCC, I must carry out a research study. The study is concerned with examining the perceived barriers and supports required to employing and maintaining employment of people with an intellectual disability and complex needs. This study will focus on the experiences and perspectives of employers' and co-workers'.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve one focus group discussion with the time commitment of 1 hour. There would ideally be an employer, a HR representative and 2 co-workers' in the group to explore varied perspective within the company. Participation in this focus group is voluntary.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been invited to participant in the research because your company has experience in employing people with intellectual disabilities and complex needs. Your insights and feedback on your experience will help inform what supports are needed in order to improve our practice methods.

Do you have to take part?

No. Participation in the research project is voluntary. You are invited to sign a consent if you wish to participate in the study with outlines you have no obligations and can withdraw from the study at any time. Please see consent form overleaf.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. I will ensure no identifying factors appear in the dissertation. Any extracts quoted in the dissertation will remain entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information which you give?

The focus group discussion will be audio-recorded. The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. It will be securely stored in a UCC locker. In compliance with UCC Research policy it will be retained for 10 years and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be presented in the dissertation. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The dissertation may be read by future students on the course. The findings will be presented back to the companies involved and the leadership team in COPE Foundation. This project is a UCC Community-Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative and the final report will be published on the CARL website.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. However, it is possible that talking about your experience in this way may cause distress.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of the focus group, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, you should contact your Employee Assisting Programme if available, The Samaritans on freephone 116 123 or your local GP. To withdraw consent during the during the two week period, please email Emma Callaghan, UCC Master student on [redacted]

Who has reviewed this study?

The study has been seen and reviewed by the MSW Research Ethics Committee of UCC. The study was given approval by the committee.

Any further queries? Please email me at [redacted]

Appendix 3 Participant Consent Form

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

CONSENT FORM

An Exploration into Employers' Experiences and Perspective on Working with People with an Intellectual Disability and Complex Needs.

I… ……agree to participate in the above research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my focus group/interview discussion to be audio-recorded and for the data to be stored in accordance to UCC guidelines.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation and any subsequent presentations if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/presentation of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/presentation of extracts from my interview ☐

I understand this project is a CARL initiative and I give permission for the final report to be published on the CARL website.

Signed: …….. Date: ……

PRINT NAME: ……..

Appendix 4 Focus Group Schedule

Welcome and Introduction

As people arrive try to offer them some refreshment.

Welcome! My name is Emma Callaghan.

Thank you for volunteering to take part in the focus group today. I realise you are busy, and I appreciate your time. We'll be here for about an hour.

Introduction:

This focus group discussion is designed to gather your opinions and attitudes about issues related to employing and maintaining the employment of people with intellectual disabilities and complex needs. The purpose of the focus group is to establish what are the perceived barriers and supports required to employing people with intellectual disabilities and complex needs.

I will be guiding our discussion today. I will ask you some questions, feel free to comment as you wish. Are you comfortable with me taping the discussion? (if yes, switch on the recorder)

Anonymity:

Despite being taped, I assure you that the discussion will be anonymous. The tapes will be kept safely in a locked facility until they are transcribed, then they will be destroyed. The identities of all participants will remain confidential in the transcribed notes and will contain no identifying information. Please answer as accurately as possible.

I and the other focus group participants would appreciate it if you would refrain from discussing the comments of other group members outside the focus group. If there are any questions or discussions that you do not wish to answer or participate in, you do not have to do so; however please try to answer and be as involved as possible.

Prior to this meeting, consents forms were sent via email. Does everyone understand what they are consenting to? Are there any questions about this?

Ground rules

To allow our conversation to flow more freely, I'd like to go over some ground rules.

1. Can we speak one person at a time. It is important not to interrupt and especially for the audio recording, so voices don't overlap.
2. There's no right or wrong answers, just different opinions. So, please say what is relevant for you, what you really think and how you really feel. Each of you will have a different experiences and perspectives and I want captures everyone's viewpoint.
3. You don't have to speak in a particular order, and you don't have to answer every single question, but I would like to hear from each on you during the discussion.
4. You don't have to agree with the views of other people in the group, but you must respect them.
5. I stress confidentiality because we want an open discussion. I want you to feel comfortable commenting on each other's remarks without fear that your comments will be repeated later or possibly taken out of context. What's discussed in this room must remain in this room.
6. Let me know if you need a break. The bathroom are [location]. Refreshment as set up so please help yourself to a drink and snack.

Any questions?

Introductions

Let's start with your name and your role in the company.

Discussion Guide

Introductory question:

I am just going to give you a couple of minutes to think about your experience of employing or working with people with intellectual disabilities and complex needs. Is anyone happy to share his or her experience?

Guiding questions

- What strengths do adults with ID bring to the workplace?
- What barriers have you experienced working with adults with intellectual disabilities?
    - Prior to employment
    - During employment
- What do you think is the general perception of employees with ID in your workplace?
- What works well in your workplace?
- What supports do you offer during recruitment to adults with ID?
    - Do you feel there is enough support?

    - Could you suggest improvements?
- What on-the-job supports do you offer to employees with ID?
- What support do you think are needed in your workplace?
    - What works well/ what doesn't work well?
    - Do you get feedback from staff?
- Working alongside employees with ID, what is your experience?
    - How do you feel?
    - What do you think would be helpful to ensure employment is maintained?

Concluding question

- Does anyone have any final thoughts they'd like to share?

<u>Ending the session</u>

Summarize the main points expressed during the focus group.

Thank you for giving the time to participate. This has been a very productive discussion. I hope you have found the discussion interesting. Your thoughts and opinions are extremely valuable to my study.

Your comments will be treated with respect and anonymised in my final report. If there's anything you're unhappy with, you can speak to me now or email me.

Can I get your signed consent forms before you leave, please?

I will be presenting the final report to COPE foundation and all those involved in May, [time and venue TBC]. We will receive an e-invite, I hope you can attend. Thank you again.

Appendix 5 Interview Guide

Interview Questions:

1. Can you give a background to where you work and briefly give your experience employing/working with people with intellectual disabilities (PWID)?
2. Prior to employing PWID, what were initial thoughts about hiring someone with special or complex needs?
    a. Fears/concerns/expectations
3. Can you explain your hiring process for a PWID?
    a. How do applicants come to you?
    b. Is the disability known?
    c. What do you see as challenging during this process?
    d. What supports do you offer?
4. What strengths do PWID bring to the workplace?
5. Have you come across challenges with employees with ID in the workplace?
6. What on-the-jobs supports do you offer?
    a. Do they work well?
    b. Do you think more is needed? If so, what would be helpful?
7. Do you and your staff need to make accommodations for PWID?
    a. If yes – can you give some examples of the types of accommodations/adaptions?
8. To summarise, what advice/key points would you give employers with no experience, thinking about employing PWID?