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The Employment Continuum: A Framework for Hiring People with Disabilities in Dubai, UAE

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Abstract: Globally, people with disabilities (PWD) face enormous barriers to securing decent and sustainable employment in the workforce. Quota systems to counter this have been enacted in some countries and yielded some successful results. There is risk, however, of token employment within a quota program in the absence of a structured assessment/evaluation protocol. The authors of this paper propose a comprehensive inclusive employment framework, The Employment Continuum, for employment of PWD in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a measure to temper ableist practices and address the need for assessment/evaluation protocol of PWD as well as an appraisal of the employer and workplace to ensure accessible and sustainable employment.

Keywords: People with Disabilities (PWD), People of Determination (POD), Emiratisation, Inclusive Employment, Universal Design, Accessibility

1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates 15% of the world's population has a disability, making this the largest minority group in the world [1]. This is significant particularly given the evidence that people with disabilities (PWD) are also highly marginalised with overall poorer health, lower education outcomes, fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities [1]. Although disability inclusion is gaining momentum globally, unemployment rates among PWD remain staggeringly high [2, 3]. Facilitating disability inclusion on a local, national, and international level is an urgent necessity to create genuinely inclusive environments where PWD are accepted, engaged, and empowered [4].

Global employment rates for PWD vary and are not well documented. A general figure for developing countries is that 80%-90% of PWD of working age are unemployed, whereas in industrialised countries that drops to 50%-70% [5]. Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, facing enormous attitudinal, physical and informational barriers [6].

Unemployment rates among PWD in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are not documented, however, the country has struggled with high unemployment rates among its local citizens in general for decades.

Since a high of 14% in 2009 [7], the UAE government had to step up its efforts to protect the rights of all of its citizens, PWD included, by creating sustainable employment opportunities [7].

This paper looks at the government initiatives to bring about full inclusion in society in Dubai, UAE through opportunity and employment for PWD and affirmative action, known locally as Emiratisation. It follows with a proposed inclusive employment framework (i.e., The Employment Continuum) that aims to address vital components of the employment process to ensure optimal placement and sustainable employment for this select group.

2. Disability in the UAE

The UAE government defines a person with a disability as someone suffering from a temporary or permanent, full or partial deficiency or infirmity in his physical, sensory, mental, communication, educational or psychological abilities to an extent that limits his possibility of performing the ordinary requirements as non-disabled people [8].

There are no official statistics on the total number of PWD in Dubai or the UAE. As of 2016, there were 15,782 people registered on disability cards in the UAE, of whom 62% are UAE nationals, numbering 9869. The remaining 5913 are represented by various foreign expatriates [9]. This represents less than 0.25% of the country's population. These figures are significantly lower than the global estimate of 15% of the total population and are likely due to under-reporting and/or poor documentation procedures. The UAE national figure is likely much higher as the rate of congenital birth defect rates are known to be higher in Arab countries where consanguineous marriages are among the highest in the world [10, 11].

The UAE government ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) soon after it promulgated Federal Law No. 26 of 2009 Concerning the Rights of People with Special Needs. This was the first step toward ensuring their rights in all domains, including education and employment. However, without proper measures in place to enforce or follow up to ensure accessible education and that opportunities were availed to PWD with fair practices by employers, little came of this law. Dubai Government Law No. 2 of 2014 was then decreed to further bolster the rights of PWD to equal access to education and employment. Education is a vital component that contributes to securing employment. Children with disabilities, including those with mild disabilities, have mostly been denied access to mainstream or general education classrooms because *"historically the people of the region have not had a very open and accepting attitude towards those with special needs and/or disabilities"* [12]. Their learning environments have largely been restricted to special education schools.

Only in 2018 did governmental measures turn the tide with new legislation (i.e., Cabinet Resolution No. 43 of 2018), as part of its affirmative action plan, that would benefit all Emiratis including those with disabilities. This aligned the UAE legislation with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Focus Goal #8.5 aims, by 2030, to '*achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value*' [13].

3. People of Determination

Parting with the global standard of referring to people with special needs or disabilities as such, the leaders of the UAE uniquely took a bold position in April 2017 under the National Strategy for Empowering People with Disabilities to decree that the new official phrase to refer to people with special

needs and/or disabilities would henceforth be People of Determination (POD)[ii] to more aptly recognise their achievements in different fields [9].

This new official term in the UAE (i.e., People of Determination, أصحاب الهمم Owners of Inspiration in Arabic) is more than just an altruistic gesture. It embraces the belief and impresses upon the greater population that POD contribute to and will participate meaningfully in the community and have equal access to all of the same opportunities and privileges that the non-disabled populace enjoys. In this way, through their determination, they will accomplish the goals they set for themselves, free from the restrictive and discriminatory barriers too well known to many POD around the world.

In his decision, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of United Arab Emirates and Ruler of the Emirate of Dubai, has set an example by shifting the perception away from the medical model of disability that focuses on the limitations and what a disabled person cannot do toward a more social understanding that operates on empowerment by focusing on what a disabled person can do and respecting the requisite determination to accomplish his/her goals as well as the rights afforded to them. This is reflected in the new National Strategy to Empower People of Determination [9].

4. Inclusivity Is a Multi-Dimensional Construct

Chia (2013a) contends that both professionals and the general public need to be educated about disabilities for inclusivity to be fully embraced. In this way, through understanding, POD will be accorded the same rights, opportunities and acceptance as everyone else. It means that all people, whether or not they have a disability, are recognised for their unique and diverse potentials, perspectives, aspirations and needs [2].

The UAE has recently adopted and is in the process of implementing three types of inclusivity (identified by Chia, 2013a) that both reflect and align with the directives from the UN's CRPD and are inherent in the concept and practice of Universal Design [14].

They are:

1. *Pedagogenic inclusivity* – this instructs inclusive education policy and practice to provide equal and accessible education to all. This is evidenced by Dubai's recent Inclusive Education Policy Framework (2017).
2. *Sociogenic inclusivity* – this views disability as a social issue, where POD should be treated fairly and given equal opportunity, including employment. This is evidenced in the UAE's National Strategy to Empower People of Determination (2017).
3. *Ecogenic inclusivity* – this ensures a barrier-free environment (also referred to as the least restrictive environment) to allow mobility for people with physical or sensory impairment so that everyone can to move about freely. This is evidenced in Dubai's recently established Dubai Universal Design Code (2017).

Pedagogenic Inclusivity: Inclusive Education

An essential first step to societal inclusion is equal access to education. Inclusive education was formally proposed in 2017 with the first Dubai Inclusive Education Policy Framework which promotes inclusive education for all students with special needs. Finally, in 2019 under the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), inclusive education was officially mandated with the issuance of Implementing Inclusive

Education: A guide for schools, and supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE) General Rules for the Provision of Special Education Programs and Services [15]. All schools in Dubai must be fully inclusive by 2020.

The legislative measures provide the requisite scaffolding for POD to optimise their learning journey from early childhood through the transition to adulthood by having access to educational programs to develop not only academic skills but also social and communication skills and vocational skills to be fully included members of society. Many POD do not require vocational training, special accommodations or support services to access employment. For those who do, however, these policies ensure their right to training programs that align to requirements of the labour market as well as to an employment environment that is inclusive, accessible, and prepared.

Pedagogenic Inclusivity: Vocational Training and Employability

Dubai's National Strategy to Empower People of Determination (UAE PM Launches, 2017) now aligns with the ILO's Convention No. 159 (1983) and Recommendation No. 168 (1983) concerning the vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons. The newly launched Tamkeen Center (Tamkeen تمكين, which aptly means 'to empower' in Arabic) will assist Emirati POD who are keen to receive vocational training and assistance in identifying suitable employment opportunities. The center will provide 'capacity assessment', training to develop their professional skills, practical experience, facilitation to seek appropriate employment, and assistance to create a working environment for them (The Tamkeen Website, n.d.). Additionally, follow up service will be provided to ensure their productivity and ability to compete in the business world. The program is not yet fully developed and full details are not yet available.

This new department aligns the government to be compliant with the ILO Convention C159 concerning vocational rehabilitation and employment of POD, 1983 and the related Recommendation R168 requiring competent authorities to provide vocational guidance [16].

The new national strategy focuses on six pillars: 1. Healthcare and rehabilitation; 2. Education; 3. Vocational training and Employability; 4. Accessibility; 5. Social protection and Family empowerment; and 6. Public, cultural and sports life [9]. Under the third pillar of Vocational training and employability, three goals with supporting initiatives represent the responsibilities as outlined in Recommendation No. 168 (1983). They are listed in Table 1.

Sociogenic Inclusivity: Affirmative Action

In the UAE, affirmative action in the form of quotas and incentives forms an essential part of its localisation program, referred to as Emiratisation, to ensure local Emiratis are sustainably employed, particularly in the private sector, and to contribute to the development of the local economy [7].

Emiratisation is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for achieving one of the pillars of Vision 2021, namely to build a competitive knowledge economy [8].

Although POD are not specifically mentioned in the Emiratisation policies, there is a strong public awareness campaign backed by government legislation that protects the rights of POD to employment in the UAE, and therefore they are inherently included in Emiratisation if they are Emirati.

Table 1. 3. Pillar – Vocational training and Employability

3.1 Goal	3.2 Goal	3.3 Goal
Providing vocational training adapted to different disabilities and levels of severity	Providing adequate employment opportunities for various types of disabilities and levels of severity	Providing disability awareness training and support for employers to ensure workplace inclusion and accessibility
Initiatives		
Developing training programs to respond to the requirements of the labour market	Elaborating policies to employ [POD] in search of vocational training and employment, possible employers of [POD]. Adopting and implementing employment support programs in competitive work environments	Providing incentives, rewards, and exemptions to encourage the recruitment of [POD] in the private sector. Providing qualifications and vocational training programs
Launching vocational programs for people of determination in collaboration with various public and private organisations	Providing a channel of communication between the public and private sectors to support the employment of [POD]	Training work colleagues and employers to ensure optimal treatment of [POD]
	Establishing partnerships to provide micro-financing and market the products of [POD]	Adopting an assessment program to evaluate the work environment and its adequacy to [POD], and accordingly introduce the required changes

Source: Ministry of Community Development, 2017

Sociogenic Inclusivity: Rights and Privileges

Strengthening his decision to ensure the rights of POD, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of the Emirate of Dubai, issued yet another new resolution in August 2018 (Cabinet Resolution No. 43 of 2018) with the aim of supporting and protecting the rights of POD in the pursuit of employment by ensuring equal access to opportunities in the labour market (Supreme Legislation Committee, 2018). It further states that POD cannot be terminated if they are fit to work but require some accommodations, exemptions and/or privileges. Relevant government bodies (i.e., Ministry of Community Development, Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, and Federal Human Resources Authority) will now be tasked with developing regulations to determine the nature of reasonable

accommodation arrangements needed by POD in the workplace environment.

The Emiratisation strategies have continued to evolve to encourage the private sector to actively seek to employ locals to their workforce. Adding to the existing quotas and incentives, private companies are mandated specific Emiratisation targets by the government each year; the criteria is based on the revenue they generate and the size of the company (i.e., number of employees). Quotas are set and target points are awarded for placement levels of Emiratis, with higher points being given for senior management positions and fewer points for less senior jobs. To ensure that POD are given equal opportunity in the employment process, companies are awarded double the points for hiring [Emirati] POD than Emiratis without disabilities, thereby giving greater incentive to hiring an Emirati POD (Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, 2019). Conversely, financial penalties are levied against companies that do not reach their mandated target points, AED 20,000 for each point below the target amount [17, 18].

Sociogenic Inclusivity: Risks

There are well-meaning companies willing to hire POD, not because of quotas or target points, but because they fundamentally believe it is the right thing to do and it aligns with their personal or corporate vision to be inclusive. However, if not guided by proper vocational and employment protocol, there is risk of placing a POD in a role that is unsuitable, and a multitude of consequences could ensue. Simply relying on on-the-job training or placement by type of disability (as has been the case) in the absence of any kind of formal assessment for abilities and capacity, can yield unfavourable, even detrimental results [19].

When quotas (and target points as in the case of Dubai) drive localisation, there is some concern that it could prompt a backlash if some employees perceive that the POD has been appointed only because of their disability and not on the basis of their merit (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2015). If this perception persists or is widespread within an organisation, the support for Emiratisation may be undermined because managers and employees may feel that the hiring of POD was motivated by coercion, even if they personally believe in and care about inclusion. Quotas act as external motivators and research has consistently shown that [external motivators] can be associated with negative impacts on POD because they do not address underlying discrimination (Institute for Gender and the Economy, 2019). Lack of support for localisation can manifest in two key ways: ableism and tokenism.

Ableism

Ableism can be categorised in two ways: overt ableism and covert ableism. Overt ableism, as its name suggests, is the open or obvious discriminatory behaviour toward POD. This can include actions such as bullying, public shaming, face-to-face confrontation, or deliberate exclusion from educational, community, and employment activities. Covert ableism is more discreet, although can have an equally negative impact as overt ableism, and manifests in two ways: 1) microaggressions, and; 2) benevolent ableism. Microaggressions are evidenced in subtle ways. They tend to be brief, thoughtless yet common verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or slights and insults to POD [20]. Microaggressions tend to be so pervasive and automatic that they are often dismissed as being innocuous; sometimes inappropriately defended as 'innocent jokes' [21].

Benevolent ableism is a trickier affair because, unlike microaggressions, it is typically born out of good intentions but nurtured by ignorance. DiLeo (2015) describes benevolent ableism as *"when well-meaning people set up programs or services that also segregate or send messages of stigma due to using disability as the defining core of the services, rather than such things as individualism, quality of life, informed choice, and inclusion."* [21].

The intent to help inadvertently reinforces ableist values of the culture and undermines the overall goal for meaningful inclusion. *"The challenge of benevolent ableism is that those who perpetuate it are well-meaning, caring folks who feel their actions are improving the lives of [POD]. But, unfortunately, efforts to help do not automatically equal actual improvement of lives*." [21]. This can be due to taking decisions on behalf of POD, offering them little or no say; adopting a rescue mentality or role of saviour and protector, denying the empowerment of POD and undermining authentic inclusion, or; following trends that exploit workers through menial work and low pay, such as sheltered workshops or similar models that are not accountable to any governing professional body [21].

The risk of ableism in Dubai is high given that "*the majority in UAE society considers people with disabilities as needy and therefore regards the caring for them as a charitable act"* and "*stigmatisation of disability is still common among the communities of most nationalities in the UAE"* [19].

Tokenism

Similar to ableism is the practice of tokenism, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) as "*the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of [...] equality within a workforce."*

These symbolic gestures result in presence without authentic inclusion and make the POD feel like you do not appreciate them for what they can offer [22]. With tokenism there may be a lack of good intentions and simply a sentiment of compliance or establishing an outward appearance of being an equal opportunity employer. Also, it is believed that tokenism is a way of declaring a problem settled, doing the least amount required so that the actual issue does not have to be addressed with further effort or action.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation is aware of the potential for some companies to hire Emiratis and/or POD to superficially comply with their mandated quota target points but is developing measures to address this and condemns this practice [23].

So what should the process look like for POD to both protect and optimise the transition from school to work place? How should employers prepare the workplace to protect the POD and the company and ensure the placement is sustainable? In this paper, we propose an employment framework, The Employment Continuum, to address this process in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

Ecogenic Inclusivity: Dubai Universal Design Code

In 2017, the Dubai government released the newly developed Dubai Universal Design Code (DUDC) and tasked all existing buildings to retrofit in compliance with the DUDC by 2020. All new builds must also comply with the DUDC and ensure that their facilities are fully accessible. This includes government buildings, commercial and retail outlets, as well as educational institutions,

health and related services buildings, and multi-residential environments. The code also addresses accessible transportation and wayfinding.

By issuing the DUDC and imposing compliance deadlines, the government is paving the way to ensure that POD with mobility or sensory impairments can easily access and freely move about any structure in the built environment. The code also enables more independence and thus empowers POD by reducing or eliminating barriers to their environmental surroundings.

The Employment Continuum

Preparing a POD for employment requires a carefully planned process in order to ensure optimal placement and best chances for success of the applicant. While, thus far, the terms PWD and POD have referred to a group of people sharing a common broad categorisation, the individuals within the group are as heterogeneous as the non-disabled population. Each will require different levels of support (or some none at all) and offer different skills and abilities. Thus, some elements of assessment may not be required based on these differences. For example, a person who was injured in an accident and uses a wheelchair may not require assessment for cognitive capacity or vocational interest in the same way that a candidate with intellectual disability might.

The concept and practice of universal design is embedded in all stages (i.e., pre-employment, transitional employment, and sustainable employment) of the inclusive employment framework proposed in this paper, The Employment Continuum, as shown in Figure 1. Universal Design for Living (UDL_1) is the most basic component that determines the outcome in all other areas. Universal Design for Learning (UDL_2) underpins Pedagogenic Inclusivity; Universal Design for Transition (UDT) contributes to both Pedagogenic and Ecogenic Inclusivity; and Universal Design for Recruitment (UDR), Universal Design for Employment (UDE) and Universal Design for Workplace (UDW) address key factors within Ecogenic Inclusivity.

Sociogenic Inclusivity, as shown in the figure, encompasses all phases and stages because it lies at the heart of all human interaction. Every aspect of The Employment Continuum, but particularly Sociogenic Inclusivity, is governed by the UN's CRPD, which is a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension, identifying POD as "subjects" with rights and fundamental freedoms [24]. Those rights begin at birth and continue until death. They include the right to education as well as the right to fair and meaningful work with equitable pay. Thus, Sociogenic Inclusivity must be present throughout the process. The continuum illustrates the journey the POD takes from pre-employment to transitional employment and finally to sustainable employment. Each phase and stage is explained below.

Pre-employment Phase

The pre-employment phase is the time to prepare the POD for possible employment. There are three stages that must be completed before suitable employment can be considered: UDL_1 which includes vocational assessment, UDL_2 covers vocational training and vocational interest, and UDT which provides temporary placement within workplace to see how the POD will cope.

Stage 1: Vocational Assessment

Vocational assessment is the first stage of this process within the pre-employment phase. It helps the POD to make realistic job training and career choices based on (1) aptitudes, (2) interests and (3) abilities and skills, in order to identify the POD's vocational strengths, needs and career potential.

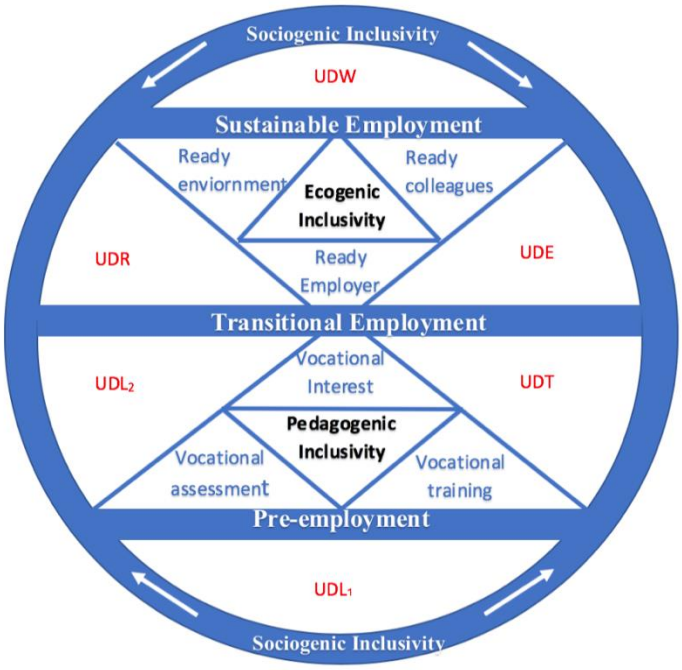

Figure 1. The Employment Continuum

This constitutes the basis of vocational assessment and will help to evaluate the degree of employability of the POD to match with the requirement of the chosen field of employment. Vocational assessment is a systematic on-going process designed to help students and their parents understand a (young) person's vocational preferences and potential. In this way, less resources, time and effort are wasted in dealing with logistics but more to provide direct assistance to POD to ensure there is a proper transition from training to working. Vocational assessment is based on the principles of UDL_1.

Universal Design for Living (UDL_1)

UDL_1 addresses both adaptive skills and functional capacity as they relate to the home environment and the work environment. At home, UDL_1 refers to Activities of Daily Living (ADL) that include basic self-care skills such as bathing or showering, personal hygiene and grooming, dressing, toileting, and functional mobility (i.e., transferring). In order for a POD to prepare for work in the morning, s/he would have to be able to perform these basic activities independently or with support [25]. If these basic activities cannot be met, it would be very difficult for a POD to be able to take on various skills in a workplace environment.

Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) represent a level of independence for a POD and include: cleaning and maintaining the home, managing money, preparing meals, using the telephone, shopping for groceries and other activities considered as basic life skills [25]. Similar to ADL, an employer or job coach must ascertain the degree to which a POD has these skills so as to ensure a work interest matches the competency of these skills.

A formal standard assessment / evaluation protocol is required to determine the occupational profile, or employability, of the POD before training should begin and placement can be considered. It *"establishes the [POD]'s readiness in terms of his/her occupational capacity or functional employability so that emplacement is both suitable and successful"* [2]. There are five levels of vocational/occupational assessment to be considered for occupational training and preparedness, emplacement suitability, and

possible employment (see Table 3), as described by Chia & Kee (2013) [2].

Level 1 addresses the essential foundation of general cognitive skills and abilities before any other levels can be investigated. If the POD has a profound cognitive impairment, it will be very difficult to place him/her in any employment situation. The need for close supervision and assistance will limit employment options to a sheltered workshop.

Level 2 investigates sensory perceptual-motor skills & abilities. By identifying the POD's sensory perceptual-motor strengths and needs, principles of Universal Design and accessibility should be applied to ensure the physical and mental effort required in a job is matched with that of the POD.

Table 3. The 5 Levels of Vocational/Occupational Assessment

Levels	Type of Assessment	Assessment Tools (examples)
1	General cognitive skills & abilities	General Ability Measure for Adults
2	Sensory perceptual-motor skills & abilities	Adolescent/ Adult Sensory Profile
3	Adaptive behavioural skills & abilities	Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales-III
4	Functional capacity for training and employment	Global Assessment of Functioning
5	Vocational/Occupational interest and preference	Reading-free Vocational Interest Inventory-II

Table 4. Assessment Domains of Adaptive Behaviour

Domains	Skills Assessed
Conceptual	Competence in language, reading, writing, and in money, time, and number concepts
Social	Interpersonal skills in social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté, obeys laws, following rules, avoid being victimised, social problem solving
Practical	Activities of daily living (personal care) in occupational skills, use of money, safety, health care, schedules, routines, use of telephone, transportation

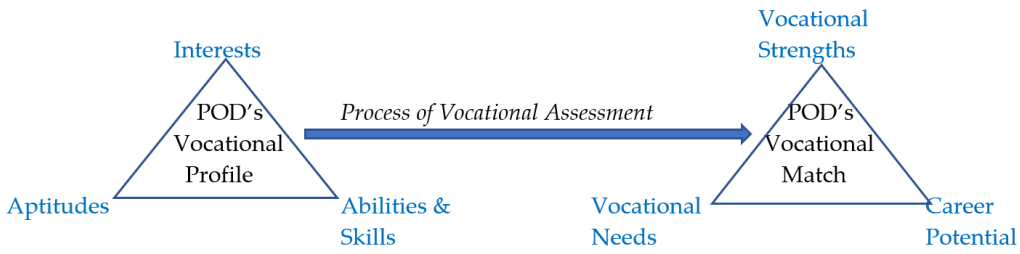

Figure 2. Process of Vocational Assessment

The next level provides an understanding of the adaptive behaviour skills & abilities in order to determine the POD's conceptual, social and practical skills and how s/he will cope or adjust to a particular workplace. Sometimes considered life skills, adaptive behaviour is predictive of the competence with which the POD can complete the everyday tasks required in the workplace. Table 4 provides examples of the skills inherent in each of the adaptive behaviour domains.

Functional capacity is the fourth level of assessment. It provides important information on the ability of the POD to function in a job. It investigates the physical strength, range of motion, reaching and flexibility, how long one can stand or walk, grasping and holding capabilities, lifting power, push and pull power, and balance and bending capabilities.

The last level considers the POD's vocational/occupational interest and preference. By determining where the applicant's interest and preference lies, specific jobs can be targeted to match that interest or preference ensuring the POD is happy to accept such a position. Figure 2 illustrates the need to determine the POD's vocational profile in order to make a sustainable vocational match.

Stage 2: Vocational Training

Once the POD has been comprehensively assessed, and his/her profile understood, vocational training can be tailored to maximize his/her potential and take into account the specific learning needs s/he may have. The principles and practice of universal design for learning must be embedded in all stages of training.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL_2)

UDL_1 is a framework that focuses on improving and optimizing teaching and learning for *all* people based on research about how people learn [26]. It addresses the design of instructional goals, assessments, methods, and materials to be used and that all can be customized to meet individual needs. Understanding that individuals have unique learning profiles, UDL_2 should guide all vocational training programs for POD to meet three criteria:

1. *Multiple means of representation* to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
2. *Multiple means of expression* to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know.
3. *Multiple means of engagement* to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn [26].

Stage 3: Vocational Interest

Each individual, whether or not s/he has a disability, holds interests that are unique to them. These interests are often the catalyst that steer us toward a particular career. As much as possible, the POD should have voice to express which type of work is of interest to him/her. Valuing their active role in securing satisfying employment will have a positive impact on the sustainability of a job.

The sensory needs or limitations of the POD, however, should be considered against a job that may or may not support those needs or limitations, making the placement unsuitable even if it matches the POD's interest. For example, a candidate with autism may lack the social communication skills necessary for a customer service position that relies on understanding the customer's point of view and empathy to resolve complaints. People with autism typically have difficulty with Theory of Mind (i.e., being able to understand the beliefs, intentions, desires, and perspectives of oneself and of others) as well

as empathy. The company and product line may be in line with the autistic's occupational interest and preferences, but the position may not be suitable given the social communication limitations he/she experiences. In such a case, working behind the scenes, away from customers may avoid this and provide a win-win placement.

Transitional Employment Phase

Within The Employment Continuum, to move from pre-employment toward transitional employment, the POD is engaged in the processes of UDL_1, UDL_2 and UDT, namely vocational assessment, vocational training, and vocational interest. UDT should include an opportunity for a POD to transition into a workplace for situational assessment, to see if the POD in an actual work situation can cope and also to assess his/her work performance.

Transitional employment is used more for POD who has more severe disabilities who benefit from the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment. This model aims to improve work outcomes for those with more severe intellectual disability or mental illness by finding work in integrated settings with nondisabled workers in the community, and provides ongoing support to help them succeed in that job or to transition to another job [27]. For some, the mainstream workforce environment may be deemed unsuitable and a sheltered or supported workshop environment will be more appropriate.

In this phase, the potential employer must prepare the workplace to ensure the opportunity being presented can become one of sustainable employment. Such preparation ensures that the employer, the colleagues, and the environment are ready. Just as with the pre-employment phase, being ready involves the principles of universal design (i.e., Universal Design for Recruitment (UDR), Universal Design for Employment (UDE), and Universal Design for Workplace (UDW) at each stage).

Transitional employment is not a time for a company to test out the POD and if s/he performs satisfactorily then the company will make the necessary preparations to incorporate principles of universal design; the preparations must already be in place to give the POD the best possible chance of succeeding. This is a legitimate trial phase specifically to determine the PODs ability to perform and cope within a real working environment. Unlike the traditional probationary period that puts the onus solely on the employee to live up to the expectations and standards of the employer, this phase takes a more supportive and humanitarian role, designed to see if the employer, place of employment and employees can support the POD and ensure the overall well-being of the POD, and to determine if the POD can cope in the environment. The next section describes the preparation measures required to meet the principles of universal design.

Universal Design for Transition (UDT)

UDT refers to an approach that bridges the gap between teaching academic and functional/transition goals [28]. UDT combines the concept of barrier-free learning from UDL_2 with the transition-based principles as explained by Bruno and Scott (2019) [29]:

1. *Multiple life domains* to prepare the POD for a variety of transition outcomes.
2. *Multiple means of assessment* to provide a variety of materials and assessments based on the POD's needs and provides a holistic snapshot of the individual.
3. *Self-determination* to take into account the POD's preferences and interests when discussion transition.

4. *Multiple resources and perspectives* to collaborate with a variety of individuals in the school, community, and home to ensure all perspectives are considered when determining the types of support the POD has for transition.

Ready Employer

Socioegenic inclusivity in the workplace centers on the fundamental belief and vision that the employer holds about POD in general. The owner, CEO, director, or manager of a company becomes the role model to all other employees by communicating his/her unwavering commitment to creating an inclusive culture within the workplace. When inclusive hiring emerges from an inclusive culture, sustainable employment is achievable. Employers are cautioned to recognise that diversity is *not* inclusion. While diversity is focused on tracking characteristics and identities such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and any other characteristics, inclusion is about embracing diversity *because of the benefits it brings*. It gives voice to marginalised groups. Diversity does not lead to inclusion unless there is a firm commitment to equal access and barriers to full and equitable participation are removed.

Universal Design for Recruitment (UDR)

Effective inclusive hiring is not only intentional, it is also accessible. Equity must form an integral part of a company's vision, mission and culture. Equity is most often understood as equal pay for equal work, as championed by the International Labour Organization (2015) in partnership with UN Women and the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in their Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) to support the attainment of the ILO's Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) to ensure that women, youth and PWDs are given equal pay for work of equal value. Equity, however, is about more than pay.

Equity is best understood in the workplace when a company has a comprehensive diversity and inclusion workplace policy. Establishing and operating by such a policy is a company's statement that their workplace is one where diversity and inclusion are valued differences that contribute to the success of the company, to the benefit of all. But it also requires more than a policy to stipulate a company's objective to be truly inclusive and it needs to be about more than complying with legislation. "For authentic, sustainable, inclusive organisations, leaders have to "*get it in their guts*" and then commit to becoming competent so their behaviour matches their intent" [30]. Accessibility is a vital component of equity because it ensures the POD can access all aspects related to the company and potential job, with the same freedom and independence as any other applicant.

With the rise of digital recruitment, company websites should adhere to the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for web accessibility, organized under the four principles of being: 1) perceivable, 2) operable, 3) understandable, and; 4) robust. The guidelines aim to make web content as accessible as possible for all people, including those with visual impairments including colour blindness, hearing impairments, seizure disorders, motor / mobility difficulties, and cognitive or intellectual disabilities [31].

Job postings should clearly state that the company is an inclusive employer, and that accommodations will be provided during the hiring process, as requested or required. Human resource (HR) managers should identify if an applicant has stated a preferred method of communication as that may be the only accessible way for the POD to

communicate. For example, a deaf applicant would not be able to answer a phone call and may indicate in the application to be notified by email or mobile messaging.

A job interview may require an employer to make accommodations as well. First and foremost, the HR manager or recruitment specialist must understand the company's vision and intention to become an inclusive employer and to keep this in mind to ensure bias-free interviewing processes. This can be facilitated by using standard interview scripts as well as consulting with the applicant on how they can best meet the applicant's needs (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2018) [32]. The interview may need to be conducted in a location that is accessible for a POD with mobility impairment so that a wheelchair can be adequately maneuvered or by telephone if that is easier for the applicant. Adequate lighting in an interview room would be necessary for a POD with hearing impairment who relies on lip reading can see the interviewer's face clearly.

Another component of equity is to provide the POD with a proper job description, just as would be done with all other employees. It should describe the specific duties and functions the employee will be expected to perform as well as the specific and mutually agreed-upon accommodations that are required by the employee to perform those duties. There should be nothing *ad hoc* about the process, expectations or accommodations for either the employer or the employee. With these specifications in writing or an accessible format, the employee knows what to expect and the employer knows what to do.

Ready Colleagues

Disability awareness training sits at the heart of sociogenic inclusivity. Effective disability awareness training for employers, Human Resources (HR) directors and employees can be the catalytic paradigm shift toward not only a successful inclusive placement for a POD but for a wholly accessible and inclusive cultural environment. Without disability awareness training, the risk of workplace ableism, in all its forms, remains high and companies will quickly learn that good intentions are not good enough.

Many studies and surveys reveal the commonly held misbeliefs that employers have and forming the basis for not hiring POD. Emirates NDB's published white paper in July 2018 (Emirates NBD Group) addressed the ten most commonly held myths in the UAE about hiring POD. They are:

1. You can tell if a person has a disability, because it is visible.
2. There is always a gap between the ideal candidate and a POD.
3. No one is hiring POD, why should we?.
4. Hiring POD is expensive and requires disruptive changes.
5. Absenteeism will increase if POD join the workforce.
6. Hiring POD will negatively affect my business.
7. We don't have or need a structured diversity policy.
8. We want to hire POD but there's no support.
9. My colleague is a POD and I have no clue how to behave with them.
10. It's the government's job to take care of POD.

These negative and incorrect beliefs can be the very barriers that prevent POD from securing sustainable employment in jobs they are well suited for or being genuinely accepted by co-workers. The most commonly cited [mis]belief among employers for not hiring POD is that there is (significant) cost to accommodating POD [33]. For many POD, little or no accommodation is necessary. For others,

many accommodations are simple fixes, of little or no cost, such as flexible work hours, working from home, communicating by email or mobile messaging, etc.

Universal Design for Employment (UDE)

To perform their job well, some POD may require accommodations not afforded other employees, and this can sometimes be viewed by employers and/or employees as unfair to them. However, accommodations may be necessary to ensure fairness and access to the same opportunities. For example, if an employee has a hearing impairment, a hearing aid or use of an induction loop does not give that employee an unfair advantage over his/her hearing colleagues; rather it allows that person to access the same audible information equitably as the others. Therefore, ensuring POD in the workplace are productive employees means ensuring they have equitable access to the resources they require. This is also supported by the recent Cabinet Resolution No. 43 of 2018 in Dubai, where it is stipulated that the private sector "should be encouraged to integrate 'people of determination' into their institutions and grant them *reasonable accommodations, exemptions and privileges*."

Just as for any person, meaningful work gives a POD a sense of purpose and self-worth. It provides a source of pride and may define who the person is, how s/he identifies themselves. It further helps a POD connect socially and to improve independence as well as individual and family finances [34]. To achieve this sense of purpose, the work must be decent and receive fair pay, both directives of the ILO's sustainable development goals. The ILO defines decent work as that which involves *"work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and equal opportunity and treatment for all"* [6].

Ready Environment

The most commonly held misunderstanding about accessibility is that it *only* pertains to wheelchair users. Of course, there are obvious accessibility requirements for wheelchair users (e.g., accessible parking bays, dropped kerbs, ramps, handrails, etc.). But there are many different disabilities with just as many accessible needs, or simply someone with accessible needs who does not have a disability (e.g., someone with a broken leg). Those who currently do not have accessible needs may acquire them in the future. For these reasons, the DUDC has been mandated for all buildings in Dubai with a municipal license.

Universal Design for Workplace (UDW)

UDW encompasses the basics of ecogenic inclusivity by adhering to principles of universal design for the built or physical environment. Given that all physical structures in Dubai with a municipal license will have to comply with the DUDC, an accessibility audit should be conducted by a certified accessibility consultant/auditor to identify any possible gaps as per the DUDC.

In general, access to the built environment begins with the exterior approach to the building. This includes sidewalks free from debris, objects or growth that may be an obstacle, tactile paving and dropped kerbs, dedicated disabled parking spaces with sufficient transfer area and free access to the dropped kerb, and wayfinding signage and tactile paving to the security office and main entrance and ease of opening entry doors.

The interior includes a reception area with lowered counters, an induction loop for hearing impaired visitors, signage and indication of disabled toilets, tactile paving, work stations, meeting rooms, and staff canteens. There may be many more aspects where accessibility should be addressed, each unique to an organization's built environment.

Emergency evacuation is an aspect often overlooked when it comes to POD. A Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) should be in place for any employees who may not be able to reach a designated place of safety unaided or in a satisfactory amount of time in the event of an emergency. This can apply to POD with mobility, vision, hearing or cognitive impairments or to an employee with a short term injury, temporary medical condition, or who is in the later stages of pregnancy. The PEEP outlines the use of equipment (e.g., an evacuation chair), the emergency escape route and who is responsible for aiding the POD if such an occasion arises.

Sustainable Employment Phase

Sustainable employment can be described as the degree to which employees are able and willing to continue working now and in the foreseeable future [35]. When pedagogenic, ecogenic, and sociogenic inclusivity are the pillars that guide inclusive employment, the sustainability factor is high as it suggests the company has a comprehensive diversity and inclusive policy in place and that all measures have been taken to provide and sustain an inclusive culture. Employees are happy, treated equitably, and inclusion becomes standard practice. The POD's affective commitment is then greatly enhanced as s/he feels valued and an emotional attachment has formed toward the organization and s/he is motivated by a high desire to belong to the organization [35]. The result is a win-win for all.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the authors have presented an inclusive employment framework, The Employment Continuum, centered on the principles of universal design as well as pedagogenic, ecogenic, and sociogenic inclusivity. This framework provides a strategic roadmap to follow to ensure the best chance for successful implementation of inclusive employment in Dubai and avoid ableism or token employment. Employers are cautioned, however, that there is no "one size fits all" approach for any employee, let alone POD. Just as no two employees are the same, neither are POD the same in their needs, skills or abilities. The framework eliminates ad-hoc practices that undermine the value of inclusive employment and provides a planned approach to employing POD by addressing the key phases and stages necessary to ensure a positive outcome for all.

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