Initiatives of the Working Group on Remote Work by Persons with Disabilities

October 2022

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Preface

For over 50 years since its founding in 1962, The Nippon Foundation (TNF) has implemented a variety of public benefit projects focusing on persons with disabilities, with the aim of realizing a synergetic, inclusive society in which all people, with or without disabilities, can live daily lives in their community and fulfill their full potential. The focus of TNF's overseas disability projects in Southeast Asia and other regions has been to provide educational support for persons with disabilities to become community leaders. These projects succeeded in creating many competent leaders with disabilities in various Asian countries. Yet the stark reality was that many persons with disabilities, even those academically competent enough to graduate from higher learning institutions, were either unable to find employment due to social barriers or managed to find employment but quit their jobs after a short time because they were not given an opportunity to fulfill their potential. For this reason, TNF decided to **expand the scope of its projects to include employment support and to change the perceptions of the society about disability inclusion.** To realize this aim, TNF established a groundbreaking collaboration with the business sector.

Photo - Vietnamese children with hearing disabilities studying using sign language

Global trends show the relationship between disability and business has been undergoing dynamic change. Diversity and inclusion (D&I) is attracting increasing public attention and many global businesses are implementing D&I initiatives. **Workplace diversity is now regarded as one of the factors that energizes businesses and is a critical determining factor of competitiveness.**

> Persons with disabilities include those with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

In total, approximately 1.2 billion persons live with disabilities globally,[1] and their total purchasing power along with friends and families, is said to amount to 8 trillion dollars.[2] Despite this large market, companies that provide disability-inclusive products that accommodate the requirements of persons with disabilities currently account for only 4% of all businesses globally. Recognizing both the need and opportunity, a global business collective was launched at the World Economic Forum in 2019, made up of 500 CEOs and their companies who are innovating for disability inclusion, known as 'The Valuable 500' (V500).[3] It is expected that the V500 will bring energy and dynamism to existing structures by focusing on developing jobs for persons with disabilities as well as products and services targeting consumers with disabilities. The V500 succeeded in gaining 500 members in May 2021, 53 of which are Japanese companies. In addition to providing financial support, **TNF decided to collaborate directly with the V500 to enhance global trends promoting social participation of persons with disabilities**.

With this goal in mind, during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic of 2020, in a fast-changing social and working environment, TNF established **the Working Group on Remote Work by Persons with Disabilities** as part of its Social Inclusion Team, comprising a broad range of members with various disabilities. The Working Group aimed to examine the timely topic of **whether the expansion of remote work would promote disability inclusion at work**. This report compiles the experiences of this unique Working Group and shares its lessons learned to allow a wide range of stakeholders worldwide, both persons with and without disabilities, to benefit from the valuable insights gained.

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[1] According to the State of World Population Report 2022 by the UN Population Fund, the world population of 2022 was approximately 7.95 billion. As the World Health Organization estimates that 15% of the world population has disabilities of some kind, it follows the number of persons with disabilities in 2022 was approximately 1.2 billion.
[2] Return on Disability (2020) *Annual Report – The Global Economics of Disability*
[3] www.thevaluable500.com

Part 1. Introduction

■ *Background*: COVID-19 promotes expansion of diverse and flexible work styles

Starting in April 2018, when the statutory employment quota for persons with disabilities was raised and the Japanese government positioned teleworking as a key initiative in its Work Style Reform, a rapid increase was seen in the number of businesses adopting the work-from-home arrangement.[4] Then COVID-19 hit. As the pandemic expanded, the government urged the public to stay at home and encouraged businesses to ensure that employees work from home. Under these circumstances, people within and outside Japan began to expect that teleworking would increase employment of persons with disabilities and expand job opportunities for persons with disabilities who have difficulties commuting to or from their workplaces or who live in rural areas where jobs are scarce.[5]

■ *TNF's experience of working with persons with disabilities*

As it considered the project, TNF realized that it did not have adequate experience working with persons with disabilities and had not reflected their views sufficiently in past projects. TNF decided to build its experience in working with persons with disabilities by embodying, as one team, the basic principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – **"Nothing about us without us"** – and reorganizing existing disability projects to incorporate the views of persons with disabilities themselves**.**

Driven by this goal, TNF established a working group dedicated to these principles. Taking the change in social attitudes towards teleworking as an opportunity, TNF aimed to examine and learn from direct experience, whether the expansion of remote work would promote disability inclusion at work.

Q1. What is *"Nothing about us without us"*?

This memorable slogan was born from the Independent Living Movement for Persons with Disabilities that began in the U.S. in the 1970s. The slogan is also the title of a famous book written by David Werner, an advocate for community-based rehabilitation and a person with a disability himself. The slogan stands for the idea that no decision about persons with disabilities should be made without the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities themselves and that better results will be achieved by involving them in decision making.

■ **Objectives of the Working Group**

The objectives of the Working Group were:
1. To reflect the views of persons with disabilities themselves in TNF's existing projects by striving as one team to embody the "nothing about us without us" principle.
2. To examine the benefits and challenges of remote work in promoting disability inclusion at work, in an environment characterized by an accelerated shift to remote work even after the COVID-19 crisis.
3. To extract and share lessons learned that will be useful to businesses.

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[4] Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2019) *Telewaaku de shogai no aru katao yori kigyo senryaku ni!* (Involve Persons with Disabilities More in the Strategies of Businesses through Teleworking Arrangements!)
[5] Ibid.

■ Characteristics of the Working Group

The Working Group was comprised of 15 members: eight from external organizations and seven from TNF. In total, nine members were persons with disabilities: one with physical disabilities (locomotor dysfunctions), three with hearing disabilities (deafness), two with visual disabilities (blindness), and one with a psychosocial disability.

TNF subcontracted persons with disabilities with whom there had been longstanding relationships, rather than directly hiring. While remaining focused on its objectives, the Working Group carefully monitored its processes, learning from trial and error by, for example, conducting surveys during the process.

■ Methodology

The members were divided into two groups which conducted separate assigned initiatives. Group 1 explored the future directions of TNF overseas disability programs including the planning and design of new projects. Group 2 focused on creating a Global Disability and Diversity Fact Sheet for CEOs to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, based on face-to-face interviews concerning good disability employment practices with 16 leading Japanese companies.

Tasks were performed primarily through remote work. Meetings were held over Zoom, and interviews with businesses were conducted face-to-face as much as possible. The scope of assigned tasks and participation levels varied from member to member.

Annex A provides a full description of methodology, including initiatives, activities, task assignment and deliverables.

■ Deliverables

The Working Group itself defined expected deliverables. Throughout their 21-month collaboration from June 2020 to March 2022, the Working Group produced the following deliverables:

- New TNF overseas disability project proposals
- Global Disability and Diversity Fact Sheet for CEOs (in Japanese and English)
- Zoom User Guide for Sign Language Interpreters
- Face-to-face interviews with representatives of 16 Valuable 500 (V500) companies
- The Original Accessibility Tool manual for ensuring information accessibility for persons with hearing disabilities as well as reasonable accommodation arrangements for online meeting participation.

■ Objectives of this report

Many reasonable accommodation practices have already been implemented for persons with disabilities, which may serve as exemplary initiatives for businesses wishing to promote disability inclusion in the workplace. However, few publications have detailed the failures encountered by organizations working with persons with different disabilities, or how reasonable accommodations were made for such employees. This report compiles the experiences of the Working Group on Remote Work by Persons with Disabilities. It shares the lessons learned obtained from interviews with Working Group members as well as disability-inclusive companies, and will allow a wide range of persons concerned to make use of such insights and lessons. We hope this report will be a valuable resource to many.

■ Limitations

This report is not a manual on the employment of persons with disabilities. The persons with disabilities featured in this report are from different backgrounds and have different types of impairments. Thus, the experiences of the Working Group do not represent the experiences of all persons with disabilities. Even among those with the same or similar type of impairment, the circumstances and needs vary from person to person, and the required accommodations also vary among persons with disabilities depending on their disability types and situations. The Working Group's initiatives are different from the common employment practice for persons with disabilities, in that the members participated as non-regular employees.

■ Structure of this report

Part 1 of this report explains the project's rationale and background, as well as the characteristics and achievements of the Working Group. Part 2 specifically examines the provision of reasonable accommodation – necessary and appropriate adjustments – for each Working Group member with a different type of impairment. Finally, Part 3 presents detailed case studies exploring various themes that emerged from the process and experience of selecting reasonable accommodations, and sets forth valuable lessons learned.

Part 2. Reasonable accommodations by impairment type

In the course of its work, the Working Group on Remote Work by Persons with Disabilities undertook a process of assessing the reasonable remote working accommodations required by each member with a disability. This valuable process was a real-world experience which not only facilitated the inclusion of each member but also led to informative lessons learned. This section presents different cases of reasonable accommodation provision according to various types of impairment of the Working Group members. The concept of reasonable accommodation is explained in Box 1.

Box 1: Reasonable accommodation – definition and implementation

In Japan, The Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities stipulates that when a person with a disability expresses their request to a governmental organization, business operator, or the like for any necessary accommodation, and the costs required for providing such accommodation are not too burdensome, the governmental organization, business operator or the like shall provide the necessary and reasonable accommodation so as not to harm any right or interest of the person with a disability. Provision of reasonable accommodation shall be made in the following stages:

1) Have the person with a disability express their request for necessary reasonable accommodation arrangements.
2) Consider what sort of accommodation arrangements can be provided in the department in which the person with a disability is likely to be placed, and discuss the options with the person with a disability.
3) Ensure the person with a disability and the employer discuss the types of accommodation that can be provided in specific situations, and mutually agree on the accommodation to be provided.
4) After implementing any accommodation, review the content and level of each accommodation and make necessary improvements at regular intervals.

Key concepts:

1) To ensure reasonable accommodation is provided, employers and employees must work together to establish a mutual understanding of the unique circumstances of a person with disabilities.
2) Providing reasonable accommodation is an employer's duty. However, if an employer is unable to know in any way that an employee has a disability, the employer shall not be held liable for violating the statutory duty of reasonable accommodation provision.
3) Where various reasonable accommodation arrangements could be provided, the employer may, upon consultation with the employee with disabilities, and sufficiently respecting their wishes, choose to implement the measure that is easier to take. However, in cases where the requested reasonable accommodation arrangement is considered too burdensome, the employer shall, upon consultation with the employee with disabilities, and sufficiently respecting their wishes, provide such reasonable accommodation arrangement that is not too burdensome.
4) To facilitate the provision of reasonable accommodation and based on the recognition that persons with disabilities are also labor force participants, it is important for employers and colleagues of employees with disabilities to gain accurate knowledge about and deepen their understanding of the needs of employees with disabilities.

Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan (2016) Guidelines on Reasonable Accommodation

Within the Working Group, some members had physical disabilities and others had psychosocial disabilities. The members with physical disabilities included a member with a motor function impairment, members with visual disabilities (blindness) and members with hearing disabilities (deafness). The following briefly summarizes the specific accommodations provided and difficulties encountered. Names are anonymized for privacy.

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The case of Ms. A with motor function impairment

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Ms. A has extensive working experience in the field of human resource development for persons with disabilities. She has motor function and speech impairment, with paralysis of the hands. While carrying out her tasks, she occasionally needed more time when typing in a chat, due to her impairments. Therefore, Ms. A used Universal Design Talk (UD Talk) – an application that converts conversations and speech into text in real time through speech recognition technology.[6] However, UD Talk sometimes failed to recognize Ms. A's speech correctly.

Job Situation	Needs/Lessons Learned	Provision of Reasonable Accommodation
During contract negotiation	None	None
Before / after meetings	None	None
During meetings	• UD Talk failed to recognize Ms. A's speech correctly at times. • Ms. A had difficulty writing meeting minutes or taking notes in real time.	• Whenever UD Talk failed to recognize Ms. A's speech correctly, TNF staff corrected its errors. • During meetings, other people took notes on behalf of Ms. A.
Interviewing businesses	• Ms. A requires support when using public transportation or getting on and off an elevator. • Interview venues needed to be accessible for a person using a wheelchair.	• TNF staff provided Ms. A. with the necessary support.

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[6] Universal Design (UD) Talk is an app that converts conversations and speech into text in real time by using speech recognition technology. TNF has been using this app before embarking on this Working Group's initiatives, under a corporate contract already concluded. TNF has a dedicated server for UD Talk to ensure security.

The cases of Ms. B and Mr. C with visual disabilities (total blindness)

For the last 10 years Ms. B has worked as a manager of a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting reading and improving literacy in a farming village in Thailand. Mr. C works in research and development in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) field. Both have been blind since birth.

Activity Situation	Needs/Lessons Learned	Reasonable Accommodation Practice Implemented
During contract negotiation	• A proxy had to fill in or sign a paper-based contract on both members' behalf.	• TNF introduced an electronic contract system. However, the system's text-to-speech software was unable to read some parts of the text.
Before / after meetings	• Both members wished to have the meeting materials, if any, sent to them before each meeting.	• TNF staff inserted Alternative text (Alt text)[7] into PowerPoint presentations. • All PowerPoint presentations and other meeting materials were prepared in plain text format and sent to members with visual disabilities in advance.
During meetings	• Members with visual disabilities had difficulty discerning who was commenting when participants were many. • It was also very difficult for these members to understand what presenters were referring to when making such remarks as, "as you can see on this slide…"	Some basic meeting rules were developed and agreed: • All participants should announce their names before speaking. • When giving a PowerPoint presentation, speakers should explain what the presentation is about and ensure any visual information displayed is also described verbally.
Others	• The Working Group used Slack to communicate (a business messaging app for group discussion) but members with visual impairment found it particularly difficult to learn and use. • When making a report or filling out expense claims forms in Excel, these members found it difficult to understand which information to insert in which section. • The text-to-speech software was unable to read the text in Excel format.	• The Working Group used other means of communication such as: person-to-person email, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and communication via voice recorder. • On some occasions other people input the necessary information on behalf of a blind person. However, inputting information by proxy is generally prohibited for contracts containing personal information. As a special arrangement for this Working Group only, the Accounting Department of TNF allowed its staff members to input information about blind persons on their behalf. For any document that was filled out by a proxy, the Accounting Department received an email acknowledging that the inputted information was confirmed by the blind person themselves. • TNF improved the format of the relevant Excel file.

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[7] Alternative text (Alt text) describes the appearance or function of an image on a page and is read aloud by screen readers used by those with visual disabilities.

The cases of Ms. D, Ms. E and Ms. F with hearing disabilities (deafness)

Ms. D works on a project supporting deaf people in Asia. Ms. E is engaged in a medical service for deaf people, and Ms. F works in an educational initiative for people who are deaf. The latter two have been deaf since birth, whereas Ms. D lost her hearing during her early childhood. All three members use Japanese Sign Language (JSL) for communication.

Activity Situation	Needs/Lessons Learned	Reasonable Accommodation Practice Implemented
During contract negotiation	• Members required a sign language interpreter to confirm the details of their work contracts with TNF.	• The members and a representative of TNF confirmed the details of their work contracts via Zoom with the help of a sign language interpreter.
Before / after meetings	• A preparatory meeting with the sign language interpreter prior to each Zoom conference was necessary.	• For all meetings, TNF provided the necessary materials to the sign language interpreter in advance. • Before each meeting, a 10-20 minute opportunity was provided for each participant or presenter with hearing impairment to explain and confirm with the sign language interpreter the content of the meeting to be held, technical terms to be used, and the sign language expressions of the words they frequently use.
During meetings	• When more than one person spoke at the same time, the sign language interpreter was unable to catch up with the pace of the discussion. • UD Talk was unable to recognize the speakers' comments, making it impossible for the deaf member to understand what the speakers were talking about. • At times, they could not communicate to others what they wanted to say.	• A sign language interpreter was arranged at each meeting. • Captions were provided for ongoing discussion on the screen using the UD Talk speech recognition application. • TNF staff modified the incorrect texts generated by UD Talk. • Staff directly asked those who had not made any comment if they had anything to say. • Working Group members utilized the chat function.
Others	• In some cases, members with hearing disabilities questioned why they always had to arrange sign language interpreters by themselves.	• TNF created a manual for engaging sign language interpreters and a related administration table, to allow Working Group members other than those with hearing disabilities to arrange for sign language interpreters if required.

The case of Mr. G with a psychosocial disability

Mr. G is the father of a child and works for an organization for persons with psychosocial disabilities. He has a psychosocial disability; there were times when he could not speak up or preferred not to show his face on the screen because he was feeling unwell.

Activity Situation	Needs/Lessons Learned	Reasonable Accommodation Practice Implemented
During contract negotiation	None	
Before / after meetings	None	
During meetings	● At times, Mr. G could not communicate to others what he wanted to say. ● When he was feeling unwell, Mr. G did not make any comments. By not having his face shown onscreen, Mr. G could concentrate on the meeting and felt more comfortable participating.	● The Working Group accepted Mr. G's request to not be shown onscreen when he was feeling unwell. ● Some break times were included during the meeting. ● TNF staff directly asked Mr. G if he had anything to say, when he was not commenting.
On the day of interviewing a business	● Mr. G felt uncomfortable going to the interview venue on his own.	● TNF staff arranged for Mr. G to be accompanied by another person while conducting interviews.

Part 3. Case studies — challenges, issues and lessons learned

In Part 2, we examined the provision of reasonable accommodation – necessary and appropriate adjustments – for each Working Group member with a different type of impairment. Part 3 presents case studies exploring various themes that emerged through the process and experience of selecting reasonable accommodations. Cross-cutting issues are also presented along with the organizational value and benefits generated by the Working Group's initiatives. Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of remote work are discussed. The detailed cases in this section present both the challenges encountered and the lessons learned. Table 1 presents a summary of the key messages and lessons learned that emerged from the Working Group's experience.

Table 1. Summary of key messages and lessons learned

3.1 The process of providing reasonable accommodations	
a. Difficulties encountered in discussing reasonable accommodation requirements *Persons with psychosocial disabilities, total blindness and deafness*	• To successfully discuss reasonable accommodation needs, persons with disabilities must be able to understand their needs and request accommodations in words. It is also essential that persons in charge of supporting employees with disabilities listen carefully to them and identify their specific needs. • It is not easy for persons with disabilities to express their needs for reasonable accommodation. To ensure that their evolving needs are met, it is crucial to create an environment that allows persons with disabilities to easily and openly express their requests.

b. Consensus eventually reached after some difficulties
 	
Persons with deafness
	• Building consensus on the provision of reasonable accommodations requires:
	  i. Careful consensus building through discussion;
	  ii. Understanding the needs of persons with disabilities; and
	  iii. Regular communication between persons with disabilities and the support team.

c. Failure to reach consensus on accommodations
 	
Persons with total blindness
	• Factors leading to the failure to build consensus on reasonable accommodation include a lack of understanding of the importance of providing persons with disabilities with ICT training, and an insufficient understanding of the nature of sign language, both of which result from a lack of understanding of disabilities.
	• Building consensus on the provision of reasonable accommodation requires:
	  i. Understanding the needs of persons with disabilities; and
	  ii. Regular monitoring and feedback.

d. The emergence of new issues after provision of accommodations *Persons with a mobility impairment, total blindness, and deafness*	• When facing a situation in which one issue is resolved, but another later emerges, it is important to deal with the new issue flexibly.

3.2 Cross-cutting issues

a. Lack of understanding between persons with and without disabilities	• Gaps in understanding between persons with and without disabilities may be resolved by improving how the project is managed. It is important to realize that there may be times when decisions are made based on unconscious biases.
b. Costs of accommodating the requirements of persons with disabilities	• For a business to sufficiently accommodate the requirements of its employees with disabilities, an organization-wide support structure is required. • The duties associated with accommodating the requirements of workers with disabilities should be divided among multiple employees rather than placing the responsibility entirely on one employee.

3.3 Organizational value and benefits generated

a. Providing accommodations improved organizational efficiency	• Arrangements made for providing reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities resulted in benefits to everyone.
b. Business impact of disability-inclusive project design	• Promoting the participation of individuals with disabilities and adopting a bottom-up approach facilitated the creation of new projects that better addressed the previously unmet requirements of persons with disabilities. This approach also generated fresh initiatives for the Working Group. By incorporating the perspectives of persons with disabilities, new business opportunities can be generated.

c. Improving organizational capabilities through accepting differences	• Collaborating with Working Group members with disabilities encouraged us to contemplate profound aspects of humanity, including differences in values. From this experience, we gained insights into two advantages of working with persons with disabilities:
	  i. Teamwork is strengthened, leading to improvements in organizational or corporate performance; and
	  ii. New possibilities for cultivating a fresh organizational culture are generated.

3.4 Advantages and disadvantages of remote work

Correlation between the increasing popularity of remote work and advancing disability inclusion	• While remote work by persons with disabilities may contribute to disability inclusion, it has its own unique set of challenges. It is essential to find a balance between the advantages and disadvantages of remote work, by addressing any issues that arise.

3.1 The process of providing reasonable accommodations

a. Theme: Difficulties encountered in discussing accommodation requirements

Providing reasonable accommodation can be a difficult task for employers. However, the Working Group's interview-based survey revealed important insights. In particular, the survey found that establishing consensus on reasonable accommodation arrangements that are agreeable to both persons with disabilities and the staff members responsible for supporting employees with disabilities in their jobs, requires:

> 1) the ability of the persons with disabilities to communicate their needs in words, and
> 2) the active listening skills of other members to understand and identify the needs of persons with disabilities.

Constructive dialogue and communication skills are necessary to identify and select the most effective accommodations in a collaborative manner. Trial and error may also be necessary, as some requirements may only be identified over time. Gradually both persons with disabilities and their colleagues can work together to find the most effective ways to address the issues, as illustrated in Case 1 below.

Case 1: Not all persons with disabilities can express their requirements for accommodation

Reasonable accommodations are determined based on the accommodation needs requested by the persons with disabilities. However, some cannot verbally communicate what they want. It can be challenging for both persons with disabilities and their colleagues to identify their issues and needs, articulate them, and propose solutions. We became acutely aware of this issue while undertaking the Working Group initiatives. For example, there may be cases where a person with disabilities is hesitant to express their requirements, or their expressed requirement is not understood by their colleagues. Alternatively, the expressed wish may not be easily or immediately achievable. To facilitate productive **Persons with disabilities who do not express their requirements at all may simply be unable to articulate and communicate their requirements in words.** discussions concerning the changing requirements of persons with disabilities, we realized the importance of creating an environment in which their needs and requests can be easily communicated and confirmed.

TNF conducted individual interviews with the members the Working Group in line with the Guidelines on Reasonable Accommodation in employment established by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan referring to 'the necessity of employers paying attention in ways deemed necessary.'[8]

Case 1: Difficulties articulating or communicating requirements in words

Experiences of a group member with total blindness in her previous job

In her previous job, this Working Group member with total blindness sometimes faced difficulties operating a computer, and was unsure whether the issue was due to her lack of computer knowledge, her impairment, or the environment. Unfortunately, she did not have the necessary skills to articulate her requirements and seek support. It is not uncommon for individuals with disabilities to face these experiences, as they might not always have access to the necessary information and resources to effectively advocate for their needs. For example, individuals with visual disabilities who use assistive technology to communicate, travel, and manage their daily lives might also understand the functioning of their devices in order to express their needs for reasonable accommodation. However, this can be difficult when using newly developed high-tech devices.

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[8] Guidelines on Reasonable Accommodation, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan

Cases 2 & 3: Difficulties in understanding the diverse needs of persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities are just like all people but have various physical or cognitive differences. They are a diverse group with different needs in different contexts. Thus, it is necessary to accurately understand their different situations, backgrounds and needs. Such understanding facilitates constructive discussion and helps build consensus on the best approaches. To appropriately accommodate such diverse requirements, training employers to support persons with disabilities is critical to gain appropriate knowledge and deepen their understanding of how best to provide support.[9]

Case 2: The difficulty of understanding diverse requirements

The Working Group primarily communicated through online means. Working Group member Mr. G informed us that he sometimes prefers to keep his camera off due to his fear of being stared at (scopophobia) and acute anxiety arising from his psychosocial disability. However, it is important to note that other participants may also opt not to show their faces on screen in certain circumstances, just like Mr. G. Everyone, with or without disabilities, experiences periods of feeling unwell, such as headaches or migraines. However, it's essential to acknowledge that persons with psychosocial disabilities do not merely experience occasional discomfort; each person with psychosocial disability might live with his/her condition which might change with time. Third parties cannot comprehend the extent of the needs s/he might have without having constructive dialogues.

Mr. G expressed that he finds it exhausting that those in the minority, like himself, must always explain the challenge they are experiencing in a manner that is understandable to those in the majority. Additionally, it is worth noting that there was no clear agreement or established etiquette for the virtual meeting at the outset. During our discussion about reasonable accommodations for Mr. G, he emphasized that it was not only important to consider what accommodations should be made, but also to address virtual meeting etiquette and rules. It is important to build a work environment or culture that is accessible and inclusive for everyone. This can be achieved by sharing experiences and feedback from working with persons with disabilities, and reviewing the existing rules and guidelines as needed to ensure they accommodate everyone. Doing so can help build a culture that is conducive to collaboration and productivity for all team members.

Review the rules and policies of the entire organization through the lens of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities

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[9]*Shikaku Shogaisha no Shin no Niizu wo Hikidasu Tame no Mensetsu to Asesumento Shuho* (Interview and Assessment Methods to Decipher True Needs of Persons with Visual Disabilities) https://www.jarvi.org/pub/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/JJVR20170602-01.pdf

Comments from Working Group members with psychosocial disabilities

"I feel that I could neither communicate the challenges we go through nor express our requirements sufficiently. Every time I requested a reasonable accommodation, I was not certain to what degree my request was understood by others. I sometimes wondered if I had to emphasize my point more intentionally or if I should have stressed more strongly how persons with psychosocial disabilities experience things by generalizing us as a group. I also found it a bit uncomfortable to use the term 'reasonable accommodation'."

*"I feel that I needed to experience the process of expressing my thoughts in words repeatedly, and become better at the process. I think it is critical to have an **organizational training program and appropriate environment in place to support** those with difficulty in expressing their opinions **turn their thoughts into words**. In Japan, there has been an ongoing trend for persons with psychosocial disabilities to obtain national disability certificates. This certification serves as an incentive for many persons with psychosocial disabilities to seek employment opportunities under the special employment quota for persons with disabilities.* In this transitional period, one advantage of belonging to an organization of persons with psychosocial disabilities is that the organization allows its members to share their firsthand experiences with each other, such as "when I told them my needs for accommodation, they were simply ignored" or "they understood my intentions better when I spoke to them in this way." I believe that we must not only gain information but also develop such experience-based learning in our workplaces and communities."*

Comment from a TNF staff member

"When we work with persons with disabilities not as their 'supporters' but as their 'team members', it may be more effective to separate us into two teams when addressing matters requiring special arrangements through, for example, using external public services. The first team will be responsible for facilitating the reasonable accommodation's requirements of members with disabilities, and the second one for "performing the Working Group tasks together with members with disabilities."

*Special employment quota for persons with disabilities: Unlike open employment, persons with disabilities have to show their disability identity cards to employers.

Case 3: Communication failure concerning reasonable accommodation

Mr. G, a person with psychosocial disabilities, asked whether he could have someone accompany him on a company visit to conduct interviews as he did previously. A TNF staff member answered that the budget is for only one person, and TNF could not allow anyone to accompany him. The staff member was unclear whether Mr. G made the inquiry as a way of asking for reasonable accommodation provision. His inquiry was eventually classified as a case that was not addressed by providing a reasonable accommodation. This made Mr. G think that treating all inquiries and suggestions from persons with disabilities as matters related to reasonable accommodation itself is a form of reverse discrimination.

! Constructive dialogue is needed for building mutual understanding

Case 4: Expression of requirements is facilitated when several share the same type of impairments

Among members with disabilities, there were times when they had difficulty deciding the degree of reasonable accommodation arrangements they could request, including the provision of equal information access to persons with and without disabilities. They also felt uncomfortable speaking out their Honne (real feelings)* to other members. However, as they had more meetings, each of them became increasingly able to share identified issues with other members and consider the best solution through group discussion. Having three deaf members with the same requirements within the group facilitated open communication regarding their requirements and proved to be immensely valuable in recognizing and articulating the requirements for reasonable accommodation of the deaf persons.

* Honne and Tatemae: In Japan, **honne** (*hon'ne)*, refers to a person's true feelings and desires and **tatemae** refers in contrast, to the behavior and opinions one displays in public. A person's *honne* may be contrary to what is expected by society or what is required according to one's position and circumstances, and they are often kept hidden, except with one's closest friends.

Having multiple members with the same type of impairments in a group may make it easier for them to express their requirements for reasonable accommodation

Box 2: Invisible Disabilities

The requirements of persons with psychosocial disabilities tend to be unnoticed as their disabilities are not visible. Such invisible disabilities include, for example, those related to learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, brain trauma, mental disorders, epilepsy, autism and Asperger's syndrome. Some study results revealed that persons with invisible disorders often face challenges not experienced by those without such conditions. For instance, they may have difficulty deciding whether to express their requirements for reasonable accommodation in their workplaces. Even when they do decide to make such requests, they may have difficulty determining when, to whom, and what information to disclose due to various barriers. Therefore, it is necessary for employers to gain more accurate knowledge of invisible disabilities and deepen their understanding of the struggles encountered in workplaces by persons with such disabilities.

Source: Maria Norstedt (2019) Work and Invisible Disabilities: Practices, Experiences and Understandings of (Non) Disclosure

Q2. How much should we ask persons with disabilities about their disabilities?

From the interviews held with several businesses, we heard comments such as, "*We didn't know at first how we should communicate with team members with disabilities*." "*We don't know how much we can ask employees with disabilities about their disabilities*." "*At first, we could not tell if the issues of employees with disabilities are something that had stemmed from their personalities or for which we should provide reasonable accommodations*."

Initially many individuals were unsure how to approach colleagues with disabilities or ask about their conditions. This was likely due to conflicting ideas, such as "I want to accommodate their needs but don't want to offend them," and "I should not ask things that are personal."

It is recommended that employees openly and clearly communicate their support for colleagues with disabilities with respecting confidentiality. One way to do so is by saying, "We are willing to work with you over the long term and want you to succeed in your job. Can you please let us know about any accommodations or concerns you have related to your disability?" This allows a respectful and productive dialogue and ensures necessary accommodations can be provided to support colleagues with disability thrive in their roles.

Source: Personal Challenge (2019), *Shogai Koyo wa Keiei kadai datta! Shippai jirei kara manabu shogaisha no katsuyaku seori* (Employment of Persons with Disabilities as a Management Issue: Factors that Make Employee with Disabilities Succeed in the Workplace Learned from Failure Cases).

b. Theme: Consensus eventually reached after some difficulties

Many businesses ask themselves how they can best decide on the reasonable accommodation arrangements for employees with disabilities within the limited resources and conditions of their organizations. In some cases, several reasonable accommodations were suggested by employees with disabilities, but the employee's requirements conflicted with those of the organization. In such cases, a careful consensus between the two must be built each time.

Within the Working Group, TNF and members with hearing disabilities discussed effective remote meeting participation, which took a significant amount of time until both sides reached a consensus. One of the reasons why the process took so long was the lack of understanding of the need for having both a sign language interpreter and real-time transcription that converts what is being said in a meeting into text. A misunderstanding also arose concerning the arrangements for a sign language interpreter. This misunderstanding was caused by a lack of communication between the two parties.

The final solutions were as follows:

- The Working Group used both a sign language interpreter and UD Talk to generate captions of the ongoing conversation, which were then displayed on the screen by linking the Zoom and UD Talk systems.

- As the speech recognition function of UD Talk sometimes generated incorrect captions, a staff member of TNF corrected the captions in real time at each meeting, which improved their accuracy. It was originally decided that during a meeting, correction of incorrect captions would be done by whoever is available to do the job. However, in actual meetings, many members could not do this job because of their disabilities. Therefore, the job was mostly completed by TNF staff members. They said that it was difficult at times to concentrate on correcting incorrect captions and participate in discussions simultaneously.

- TNF also purchased new cables to connect smartphones, tablets and PCs and installed them to input audio directly into UD Talk. This improved the accuracy of speech recognition, since UD Talk does not always recognize the speech coming from PC speakers and collected through the built-in microphones of smartphones and tablets.

!   **Importance of a careful consensus-building process**

Q3. Why hire a sign language interpreter?

Sign languages are a type of language that uses gestures, positions, and hand movements in addition to facial expressions and articulations of movement to express speakers' opinions and feelings visually and convey them to others. There are specific grammatical structures in sign languages that differ from their spoken counterparts.

Sign language interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating inclusivity and open, seamless communications for persons who are deaf. They enable direct interaction with those who cannot hear well and allow targeted support to be provided in cases where explanations or instructions are required.

In some industries and settings in some countries, it is a legal requirement to provide interpreters. Employees, students, consumers, clients or customers may need access to clear instructions or guidelines that contain important information. In healthcare, schools and law enforcement contexts, sign language interpreters may be legally required.

For many businesses, hiring sign language interpreters is an effective way to communicate with employees or clients, champion inclusivity and provide equal opportunities.

Some businesses which choose not to hire a sign language interpreter may do so based on the mistaken assumption that it is adequate to capture ongoing discussions in written text and display this on screen. This faulty thinking leads to a failure to adequately communicate with persons with hearing disabilities though, for the following reasons.

Disadvantages of using written text only without a sign language interpreter

1) Participants with hearing disabilities whose primary language is sign language may find it difficult to catch up with ongoing discussion by relying solely on written captions. All the Working Group members with hearing disabilities use sign language as their primary language, and written Japanese as their secondary language. Relying only upon written captions in meetings deprives them of the opportunity to capture the full meaning of communications in their 'mother tongue'.

2) Written text cannot convey speakers' feelings. A speaker naturally raises their voice when discussing a point they want to emphasize. Using written text alone cannot convey subtle feelings and nuances, whereas sign language can capture such fine distinctions.

3) Because the meeting proceeds much faster than the speed of the transcription application typing speakers' comments, it becomes impossible for persons with hearing disabilities to speak up and express themselves on an equal basis with members without hearing disabilities or to catch up with the ongoing discussion.

One Working Group member with hearing disability posed a pertinent question regarding this situation: *"Why do people hire language interpreters for foreign languages in important business meetings but not sign language interpreters? Sign language is regarded as one form of language."*

Some businesses interviewed said they were unable to hire sign language interpreters because they must protect their corporate secrets. However, sign language interpreters are strictly required to fulfill confidentiality obligations in the same way as foreign language interpreters. In current workplace meetings and training opportunities, many persons with hearing disabilities cannot fully participate because there is no sign language interpreter. To resolve the unequal situations, it is vital to create an environment where sign language can be used on an equal basis with spoken languages.

Why did it take so long to reach consensus?

Even though TNF had arranged sign language interpreters on previous occasions, it took some time to understand the requirement for both a sign language interpreter and real-time transcription for the three deaf members to participate effectively in meetings.

Lack of understanding of the requirement for both a sign language interpreter and real-time transcription

Because Japanese and Japanese Sign Language (JSL) have different grammatical structures, it is necessary to have both a sign language interpreter (for those whose primary language is JSL) and real-time transcription (for those whose primary language is Japanese) in place to fully provide equal information access to participants with and without hearing disabilities.

Transcription is a means of providing equal information access to persons who have difficulties acquiring information via sound through communicating the sound/speech being made on the site in written words. A transcription app communicates speakers' comments by typing their words, voices, and sounds spoken at high speed, turning them into written words, and displaying them on the screen in real time.

! **Understanding the unique requirements of persons with disabilities is the first step**

What were the key factors behind misunderstandings in hiring sign language interpreters?

During the Working Group's initiatives, an issue was raised concerning who should be responsible for arranging sign language interpreters for the members with hearing disabilities. Even though TNF and the members with hearing disabilities had never discussed this issue, there was an implicit understanding that "sign language interpreters should be arranged by members with hearing disabilities because they are used to doing it."

Lack of communication between the two sides

As the number of situations requiring the engagement of a sign language interpreter increased, members with hearing disabilities found it increasingly difficult to manage this task. They began to pose the question: *"do members with hearing disabilities have to always arrange sign language interpreters even though members without hearing disabilities need them as well in communicating with members with hearing disabilities?"*

After this question was raised, the Working Group decided to have members without hearing disabilities try their hand at arranging sign language interpreters, which led to a good result – the members with hearing disabilities began to understand how difficult it was to arrange sign language interpreters!

Eventually, because all members found this task was too burdensome to handle individually, the Working Group requested that TNF staff manage the arrangements for sign language interpreters. A few coordinators were dedicated to ensuring equal information access to all members with and without disabilities (with a plan to include both the persons with hearing disabilities and the persons without hearing disabilities as coordinators).

! **Understand the requirements of persons with disabilities and initiate prior consultations to prevent a lack of communication.**

Perspectives of members with hearing disabilities:

- Working Group members with hearing disabilities initially felt it unnecessary to let other members know that arranging a sign language interpreter was difficult and time-consuming. Assuming others will 'figure out the situation' causes misunderstandings.
- To avoid such misunderstandings, concerned parties should be consulted in advance.

  ⇨ It is important to identify accommodation needs in detail, express the identified needs in words, and communicate them honestly to others.

Perspectives of colleagues without disabilities:

- Colleagues without disabilities were unaware that arranging a sign language interpreter was a difficult and time-consuming task.

  ⇨ It is important to identify, understand and discuss needs of colleagues with disabilities with them.

Box 3: COVID-19 changed public awareness of persons with hearing disabilities

Public awareness of persons with hearing disabilities has changed gradually due to the outbreak of COVID-19. For example, it was not widely known among the public that that wearing a facemask can be a barrier for some persons with hearing disabilities to understand speech because it prevents lip reading. This fact was increasingly featured in the news during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to growing public awareness. Additionally, as a result of a campaign by the Japanese Federation of the Deaf to promote the use of sign language interpreters, it has now become the standard practice for governors of the 47 prefectures of Japan and mayors of Japanese cities to arrange sign language interpreters at press conferences. Sign language is becoming increasingly recognized as a crucial component of modern society. Disability inclusion could be significantly improved when it becomes standard practice for businesses to provide sign language interpreters.

Source: The Nippon Foundation (TNF) Journal, *Korona de hirogatta 34 mannin no kikoenai no koe ga shakai o kaeru* (The Voices of 340,000 Deaf People Saying, "We Can't Hear You!" Will Change Society).

Comments from deaf Working Group members

"From this experience, I learned the importance of communicating the progress of work with supervisors and colleagues. I now realize that I was partly to blame for causing this situation because I didn't provide them with enough information."

"It takes lots of time to arrange sign language interpreters. It is not too difficult to secure the same interpreters regularly for domestic meetings. However, arranging a sign language interpreter for overseas meetings is difficult due to the time difference and the lack of sign language interpreters who can do Japanese-English interpretation (between JSL and American Sign Language (ASL)). I managed to find an interpreter at the last minute so it delayed getting the internal approval well in advance for the procurement. They held me responsible without even asking why the delay was caused. I wanted other members to understand how much effort and time are necessary to arrange for sign language interpreters."

"To promote members' understanding of the need to ensure equal information access to persons with and without disabilities, as well as the difficulty of achieving such access, both sides can take turns in performing the task of arranging a sign language interpreter among all the members, with or without disabilities."

c. Theme: Failure to reach consensus on accommodations

Ms. B is a member of the Working Group who is blind. She felt that an important communication issue remained unaddressed.

Issue	The Working Group chose to use an ICT tool called Slack for daily information sharing as they considered it simpler to use than other tools. But Ms. B, being blind, found Slack difficult to use and requested that a different tool be used, if possible. But the Working Group continued to use Slack despite Ms. B's request.
Measure Taken	The members provided Ms. B with all important and urgent information through direct communication means other than Slack, such as email, telephone, and SMS.
Result	Ms. B hardly ever used Slack and was left wondering whether the difficulty she had in using the ICT tool was due to her impairment or lack of competency in using the tool.

Key factors behind the failure to reach a consensus on reasonable accommodation for her requirement

One factor contributing to the failure to accommodate Ms. B's requirement is the limited accessibility of communication applications such as Slack and Zoom to persons with visual disabilities. Additionally, there were several factors that led to a lack of consensus on the daily communication tool to be used among the group members.

① Lack of understanding of the need to provide effective ICT training to persons with visual disabilities

The group was unable to come up with a concrete resolution for the issue of Ms. B's difficulty in using Slack. In today's world, proficiency in using information processing and ICT tools is essential for anyone to perform their job. However, a report by the Japan Federation of Persons with Visual Impairments highlights that many persons with visual disabilities have yet to receive sufficient training and support in acquiring ICT skills, including PC operation skills.

The provision of ICT training for persons with visual disabilities has challenges, including the absence of a structure for equal training nationwide. Society must improve systems for ICT training to better cater to the specific requirements of persons with visual disabilities,[10] including establishing training programs for ICT skill enhancement for employed individuals and training instructors who specialize in ICT training for persons with visual disabilities.

② Lack of effective monitoring and feedback

Some Working Group members said, "*Even though I submitted a request for reasonable accommodation, I did not receive any feedback,*" and "*Feedback about the project's progress was insufficient.*" The provision of effective feedback can make recipients feel a sense of accomplishment, boost their motivation, and deepen mutual trust between the feedback provider and recipient. In industrial

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[10]Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, 2020 Project for Promoting Provision of Comprehensive Support to Persons with Disabilities: Research & Survey Project for the Implementation of ICT Training Programs that are Useful for the Visually Impaired to Find Employment http://nichimou.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/01ict_training_-researchandsurveybusiness.pdf

and organizational psychology research, feedback is considered an important means of communication. Research shows that the more frequently supervisors give feedback to employees, the better the employees' evaluations of the supervisor become in the three elements of ability, altruism, and integrity, and the stronger their trust in the supervisor grows, which results in enhanced commitment and growth satisfaction of employees.[11]

Comments from the member who is blind:

"I don't know how much of my inability to use Slack comes from my impairment. I know that persons without visual disabilities who are capable of using smartphones can use Slack easily. However, the tool is not that easy to use for persons with visual disabilities, who cannot see things and thus are not good at performing complex processes and using PCs. I might have been able to get used to Slack if I had tried really hard. But I didn't think it would be worth the effort, so I said I would rather not use it. I also expressed my request to receive Slack training at the expense of TNF, which was not realized. I didn't receive any feedback on the request, which made me think no matter what proposal I made, it would not be realized, and I became discouraged about expressing my requests."

Comment from a staff member of TNF:

"I told her that she could take a training course on Slack use if there was one. But I'm afraid that this message did not fully get through to her."

[11]Eri Shigemasu (2017), The Effects of Positive and Negative Feedback on Subordinates' Commitment and Satisfaction with Growth: The Mediating Role of Trust in Supervisors https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jaiop/30/2/30_159/_pdf/-char/ja

d. Theme: The emergence of new issues after provision of accommodations

Despite resolving certain issues of accommodation, the Working Group often encountered new ones that required attention. The following cases are examples of such situations. These situations provided valuable lessons regarding the **importance of responding to issues in a flexible and adaptable manner**.

Case 5: The importance of flexibility in accommodating diverse requirements

Ms. A, who has locomotor dysfunction, was on the same team as members with hearing disabilities. Ms. A had issues such as slow typing speed in chat input at online meetings and difficulty writing meeting minutes in real time. Therefore, it was easier for her to communicate over the phone with members without disabilities.

Providing this accommodation resulted in the emergence of a different issue: other members of the team who had hearing disabilities felt left out because they could not join the telephone conversations. In this particular situation, while addressing the requirements of one person with disabilities, the requirements of other members with disabilities were left unaddressed.

Comments from the deaf members:

"I can't talk directly to other members over the phone. A sign language interpreter cannot be arranged on the spot. It also takes time for me to communicate via email. Whenever there is an issue that I want to resolve by speaking directly to the person in charge, I cannot do it; I always feel frustrated. Then, I write down the message I want to convey in an email and send it. But, whenever I do that, a certain 'latency' occurs."

After much deliberation, the team ultimately agreed on a hybrid arrangement that allowed the sharing of information over the phone with Ms. A, while using Slack or other tools for members with hearing disabilities.

Case 6: Difficulty accommodating diverse requirements at short notice

Ms. B is a Working Group member with total blindness. During a quick meeting with Ms. B, deaf members expressed their desire to participate as well. However, due to the lack of availability of a sign language interpreter, the meeting had to be postponed. As a solution, the Working Group decided to use Slack as a common online communication tool. Unfortunately, this arrangement then made it difficult for Ms. B to participate in the discussions and restricted her access to information, as it was difficult for her to use Slack.

Comment from a staff member of TNF:

"In some cases, when we had to hold a meeting on short notice, we were unable to arrange a sign language interpreter. We encountered many situations like this where we had to choose to observe the deadline over providing reasonable accommodation. In such situations, we had a hard time explaining why we made that choice. I feel that, in situations like these, it is necessary for both sides to discuss and make necessary arrangements, such as asking the members with hearing disabilities to express well in advance their wish to participate in any pre-scheduled meeting; to accept to participate only via UD Talk in any short notice meeting where a sign language interpreter could not be arranged; and to be provided with meeting minutes to make up for missed parts."

Case 7: The importance of flexibility and creativity in providing accommodations

To manage online meetings, the Working Group established a general rule that required individuals to press the "Raised Hand" button before making a comment. But Ms. A, who has locomotor dysfunction, found it difficult to press the button. Consequently, she sometimes made comments without pressing the button. As a result, some members who always followed the rule and waited their turn before speaking began to feel frustrated and perceived that the facilitator was not respecting the rule.

Comment from a staff member of TNF:

"We tried to establish rules about how to lead a meeting but found it difficult to meet all participants' needs equally because their needs were so diverse."

!   **Flexibility is essential to adequately respond to issues.**

3.2 Cross-cutting issues

a. Issue: Lack of understanding between persons with and without disabilities

During the Working Group discussions, some of the internal barriers that divide persons with and without disabilities rose to the surface and became apparent. The Working Group found that **barriers between individuals with and without disabilities were not only related to members' disabilities but were also linked to how projects were managed and our unconscious biases.**

Factors that created divisions between persons with and without disabilities

(1) Factors arising from project management

Some of the issues that arose in the Working Group had nothing to do with members' disabilities. Their causes included:

− problems in communication between the relevant members and personnel
− lack of preparation and planning for projects
− insufficient clarification of who was responsible for which tasks, and
− lack of team building.

This suggests that solutions for bridging internal barriers may be found by improving project management. For instance, in remote work meetings which are usually highly structured, it can be challenging to initiate casual conversations. Yet chatting and small talk among colleagues are essential for building stronger relationships and can greatly impact teamwork and collaboration. The Working Group addressed this problem through intentional efforts, such as creating opportunities for casual conversations to happen more often.

❗ Some factors creating internal barriers are rooted in project management

(2) Factors arising from unconscious biases

For some team members, working with persons with disabilities was a new experience. Even team members without disabilities who considered themselves as 'liberals who are also highly aware of people's rights,' realized that they held unconscious beliefs and prejudices, or unconscious biases, about persons with disabilities. These biases caused them to perceive persons with disabilities as 'incapable of doing certain things' and led them to underestimate persons with disabilities.

Unconscious biases exist everywhere in daily life and in the minds of all people. These become problematic when we make prejudice based on such biases and impose them on other people. In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the importance of diversity and inclusion in society. As a result, some companies now require their middle managers to undergo unconscious bias training. The purpose of this training is to help participants recognize unconscious biases, evaluate whether their organization or individuals hold any biased perspectives, and promote behavioral changes.

❗ Unconscious beliefs and prejudices create internal barriers between people

Comment from a TNF staff member:

"*Some of the TNF staff members strove to collaborate with the members with disabilities on an equal footing. Despite that, I felt that the spirit of 'collaborating with each other' was not fully understood by the Working Group members. One of the members described TNF team as the project 'secretariat' rather than the collaborating partner of members with disabilities'. There was an established perception of us being the reasonable accommodation provider (the carer) versus them being the reasonable accommodation recipient (the cared for), and this gap in understanding between persons with and without disabilities was very difficult to close.*"

Comments from members with disabilities (total blindness, hearing disability):

"*It felt like they regarded persons with disabilities as weak persons who need to be protected, not as their equals, and looked down on us. Persons with disabilities tend to become workers who only receive task requests and just do what they are instructed to do. They won't do anything further than that. This attitude has limited their opportunities for career advancement. It is important for persons with disabilities to develop relationships with their colleagues that enable them both to receive instructions and to instruct others. Having such relationships will strengthen the self-confidence of each person with disabilities.*"

Comments from a member with total blindness:

"*When persons with disabilities work together with those without, the persons without disabilities become the carer and the person with disabilities the cared for. The more diverse a group becomes, the harder it becomes to remove the categorization of 'person with disabilities' and 'person without disabilities.'*"

"*I found it uncomfortable that the fact 'working together with persons with disabilities' was emphasized purposefully. I wonder if we could forget about the idea of 'working with persons with disabilities' altogether. By providing accessibility efforts and reasonable accommodations, I believe we, persons with disabilities, can overcome any issue we face.*"

b. Issue: Costs of accommodating the requirements of persons with disabilities

TNF incurred costs not only in monetary terms but also in time and effort to accommodate the requirements specific to members with disabilities. These costs included expenses for providing reasonable accommodation and managing the working hours of the staff members. Typically, TNF's HR department is responsible for managing the working hours of staff members. However, in this case, the HR department was not involved in the Working Group's initiatives. Instead, the team members in charge of project implementation handled everything, including arranging and following up on reasonable accommodation requirements, assigning duties, managing working hours, and providing consultations.

This structure places a significant burden on staff members and can lead to exhaustion. From this experience, TNF has learned **the importance of establishing an organization-wide inclusion structure to fully accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. Organizations must avoid placing the entire role to respond to the needs of one staff member and instead allocate the necessary tasks mainstreamed into the respective departments.**

While there were no specific monetary costs associated with conducting initiatives remotely, as mentioned above, TNF needed to invest time and effort to make the necessary accommodations to enable various members with different disabilities to participate remotely in meetings.

As discussed in the preface of this document, workplace diversity is now regarded as one of the factors that energizes businesses and is a critical determining factor of competitiveness. While many people regard hiring persons with disabilities important from a social welfare perspective, we believe it is also essential to view the employment of persons with disabilities from a business perspective. If we only focus on social welfare, emphasizing the *protection* of persons with disabilities, their employment will not make a positive contribution to the management of an organization, nor will it provide them opportunities to thrive in their workplaces. Furthermore, measures implemented to hire persons with disabilities without considering costs, tend to be short-lived. There are indeed many benefits to working with a diverse range of team members, including individuals with disabilities, although hiring any person, with or without a disability, will always entail costs of some kind. We believe that optimal management of direct and indirect costs will lead to the promotion of employment for persons with disabilities.

To promote inclusion, build an organization-wide support structure for accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities to mainstream inclusive response in all the internal mechanisms

Q4. What is the cost to businesses of accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities?

Many businesses may view accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities as something of a cost burden, but a survey conducted by Accenture suggests otherwise. The survey showed that inclusive businesses that employ persons with disabilities tend to achieve better business results than their non-inclusive competitors. It reported that these businesses are financially successful with sustainable profits and have the potential to generate twice the shareholder returns of their less-inclusive competitors.

In addition, businesses that promote inclusion in the workplace were shown to continuously generate higher total shareholder returns than their competitors, in some cases up to four times the returns of others in their industry. In terms of profitability and value creation, these companies recorded superior results. According to the survey, average sales, net profit and profitability over the survey period of four years were, respectively, 28%, 100%, and 30% higher than other less inclusive businesses. The businesses that were more advanced in disability inclusion also showed superior results in employee retention, with turnover rates up to 30% lower than their less inclusive counterparts.

These disability inclusion efforts also contributed to the improvement of the corporate image of these businesses. The results of a survey conducted by the National Business & Disability Council in 2017 showed that 78% of customers said they "will purchase goods and services from a business that takes steps to ensure easy access for individuals with disabilities at their physical locations."

Source: Accenture (2018) Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage

Box 4: External resources to facilitate businesses cover the costs of accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities

In Japan, various external resources exist to help businesses cover the costs of accommodating the needs of persons with disabilities, including national subsidies. Below are some examples of such external resources.

National subsidies for facilitating employment of persons with disabilities

Based on the Act to Facilitate the Employment of Persons with Disabilities, the Government of Japan provides various national subsidies to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, such as the 'Employment Development Subsidy for Specified Job Seekers (For Specified Persons with Difficulty in Employment),' the 'Employment Development Subsidy for Specified Job Seekers (For Employment Development of Persons with Developmental Disorders and Patients with Intractable Diseases)' and the 'Subsidy for Promoting Stable Employment of Persons with Disabilities (For Supporting Retention of Persons with Disabilities in their Workplaces).' Click here for more information about business subsidies available to support the employment of persons with disabilities.

Source: S*hogaisha o yatoi ireta baai nadono josei* (Subsidies to be Used by Businesses When They Employ Persons with Disabilities), Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan.

Support by a Workplace Adaptation Facilitator

Professional career counselors, also known as job coaches, provide employment-related support to persons with disabilities and, after they are employed, support them adapt to their workplaces.

Telephone Relay Service by TNF

The Telephone Relay Service was established by TNF to allow persons with hearing disabilities to communicate with the persons without hearing disabilities through telecommunicators acting as interpreters. The callers pay call charges for this service. The service is available 24 hours per day, 365 days a year, to provide speedy communication for users with hearing disabilities. With this service, users can communicate with colleagues and business partners, book appointments, consult with healthcare providers, make reservations, contact restaurants or other services, and communicate with families and friends. The use of this service and others like it, is expected to promote disability inclusion in the workplace.

TNF established the Telephone Relay Service in 2013 as a model project. After the enactment of the Act on Telephone Use Facilitation for Persons with Hearing Disabilities, etc. in June 2020, this communication service became available as public infrastructure, starting in July 2021.

3.3 Organizational value and benefits generated

a. Benefit: Providing accommodations improved organizational efficiency

The efforts made to provide reasonable accommodations have resulted in the establishment of organizational practices that have benefitted all TNF staff. Through these efforts, previously unidentified requirements within TNF have been identified and addressed. The example below presents a few of the new organizational practices at TNF in response to the accommodation requirements of persons with visual disabilities.

Case 8: Introduction of an electronic contract system

When the Working Group was established, TNF used paper-based contracts at the time. However, with paper-based contracts, the members with total blindness required to ask for support from others in checking the contract details and giving their signatures (i.e., proxy reading and signature assistance).

To better address this situation, TNF decided to introduce an electronic contract system to allow blind members to check their contract details and give their signatures by themselves, using text-to-speech. After the introduction of this system, TNF decided to move to an entirely electronic contract system. There are still some issues remaining for persons with visual disabilities to be able to read the entire contract text, however, we hope that this issue will be resolved by future improvements.

Compared with paper-based contracts, electronic contracts made TNF operations much more efficient by reducing labor and costs for clerical processes such as printing and binding contracts, affixing revenue stamps to each, addressing envelopes, and physically going to a post office to send the contracts. Using electronic contracts also shortened lead times for concluding contracts and improved efficiency in the storage and management of contracts. There are also environmental benefits as no paper is used.

Case 9: Improvement of Excel file format for invoices and work reports

The text-to-speech software used by Working Group members with visual disabilities could not read the text of invoices and application forms in Excel format. One way to resolve this issue is to have someone input the necessary information on behalf of the person with visual disabilities. TNF has prohibited such proxy input of information in its regulations but decided to make an exception for this project. For each of the forms completed through proxy input, emails were exchanged to confirm that they were filled out by someone else on behalf of a person with visual disabilities. The completed content was confirmed by the person with visual disabilities and submitted to the accounting department. TNF also made improvements to the Excel format of the files, which proved to be easier to use for everyone, with or without disabilities, helping users reduce mistakes and improve operational efficiency.

b. Benefit: Business impact of disability-inclusive project design

The outcomes of the Working Group's initiatives have had a positive impact on other TNF activities. TNF strongly believes in the importance of incorporating the perspective of disability inclusion into various fields, including education, employment, health, social security, disaster response and tourism. Our goal is to develop projects that will benefit more people and **leave no one behind**.

Disability-inclusive businesses that incorporate the perspectives of persons with disabilities will enable businesses to enter a promising market comprising persons with disabilities and their families, which accounts for as much as 73%[12] of all consumers and brings about new business opportunities.

Case 10: Disability-inclusive project planning generated new business proposals

In the past, TNF's projects on disability were developed and led by staff members without disabilities. This time, however, the process of listening to persons with disabilities and discussing project development with them provided new insights. This approach has helped us realize the importance of developing projects from the viewpoint of persons with disabilities.

For example, some Working Group members with disabilities chose to interview the people involved in our existing overseas disability projects. Through this process, we were able to identify new requirements and issues, such as gaps between occupational training and market needs, and challenges in school-to-work transitions. By incorporating the experiences of persons with disabilities and their unique perspectives, we were able to expand the range of our support, reconstruct our existing projects, and propose six new projects. Two of these proposed projects are now in the process of implementation.

Other Working Group members with disabilities proposed interviewing businesses, which led to a new activity within the Working Group. When uploading articles on the TNF website about the interviews we had with businesses, the members with disabilities suggested adding a sign language video,[13] which was a completely new initiative for TNF. These approaches created new opportunities for persons with disabilities to thrive at work.

Disability-inclusive project planning led to the development of projects that better reflected the needs of persons with disabilities and also generated new initiatives.

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[12] Return on Disability (2020) *Annual Report – The Global Economics of Disability*.
[13] A sign language video was inserted in the Japanese version of the article https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/journal/2021/53300.

Box 5: New business opportunities generated through incorporating the perspectives of persons with disabilities

Business opportunities will arise from initiatives that approach disabilities from a commercial perspective. Why?

1) The market opportunity presented by the significant population of persons with disabilities (15% of global population) is promising.

2) Accessible facilities and services promote the social participation of diverse populations and contribute to the development of an inclusive society.

3) There are many similarities between the needs of persons with disabilities and those of older persons, which might serve as a springboard for developing concepts for universal goods and services.

4) Regarding disability as a potential source of business opportunities can create new value.

To determine whether the rise in enterprises that take into account the needs of persons with disabilities aids in promoting their social participation and helps create an inclusive society, TNF conducted a business practice survey in 2018 on product development, facility improvement, and new service provision practices that incorporated the perspectives of persons with disabilities. TNF surveyed the business practices of 12 organizations (nine companies, one hotel, one restaurant, and one non-profit organization). The two examples below present the survey results and demonstrate that considering the needs of persons with disabilities in improving facilities and the provision of new services is received favorably by many clients, including older persons, and also creates social value and financial advantages.

Fukuyoken

Keio Plaza Hotel Co., Ltd.

Fukuyoken, a Chinese restaurant, began offering special meals to accommodate the different needs of persons with disabilities about 10 years ago, including dishes made with chopped-up, blended and strained ingredients. What prompted the restaurant to serve these dishes was an inquiry they received from a school for children with disabilities asking if it was possible for the restaurant to serve dishes catered to the needs of its students. So, they made and served dishes that met the different requirements of the students, which were well received. The good reputation of the dishes was spread by word-of-mouth, the Internet and newspaper articles, and the restaurant became famous as a result. They started receiving more and more customers with children with disabilities or older persons, including group customers from schools for children with disabilities or facilities for persons with disabilities, which increased the restaurant's orders for expensive dishes for evening parties and pushed up sales.

Accessibility improvements helped to increase sales. Beginning with the refurbishment of guest rooms to make them wheelchair-accessible, they improved the accessibility of the hotel's tangible and intangible elements. Their Universal Guestrooms were designed to be accessible to persons with physical, hearing, visual, and other disabilities, and included equipment such as handrails that can be adjusted or removed as necessary. These rooms are now also popular among older customers, and the occupancy rates of these rooms are on par with the hotel's regular guest rooms. Based on customer interviews, the flexible services the hotel offers are well received, and the hotel has increasingly been chosen as the venue for events of athletic organizations and ceremonies.

c. Benefit: Improving organizational capabilities through accepting differences

The Working Group's initiatives focused specifically on working with persons with disabilities. These initiatives allowed TNF to gain experience working directly with persons with disabilities and prompted us to think profoundly about elements of humanity such as differences in values. TNF found that working together with persons with disabilities strengthens teamwork, brings organizational performance improvements and generates opportunities for creating a new organizational culture. These findings can be applied commonly to all people, with or without disabilities, and can be harnessed in many different situations. We came to realize that disability is merely one element of diversity. This realization was a valuable lesson learned from this project.

Case 11: Better communication led to improved performance

TNF's perspectives changed as we recognized things previously unnoticed, and our **communication skills also improved** as we learned to respond to others in ways that respected each Working Group member's unique needs. As a result, **the quality of our performance also improved.** Efforts to build relationships among all people, beyond impairment-type differences, also served to benefit the members with disabilities. Having opportunities to work together with various persons with disabilities made us realize the importance of devising a project with a broader scope.

Case 12: A case in which the initiatives provided opportunities to understand the broader meaning of diversity and diversity management

Of the Working Group members with disabilities, some were more assertive than others. Those who had previously lived or received a college education in the U.S. were considered by some other members as being too assertive. As ways of working become increasingly diverse in the future, there will be increased collaboration with people of diverse nationalities. Using this case as an example, managing diversity may require actively addressing the tendency of Japanese to feel uncomfortable about people of other nationalities being more assertive.

This experience helped us remind that **disabilities are just one element of diversity** and that the need for diversity management spans many different aspects of society. This includes promoting employment opportunities for individuals with diverse talents, regardless of their gender, race, or disability.

Comments from TNF staff:

"By experiencing firsthand the barriers that persons with disabilities encounter daily, I was able to deepen my understanding of their barriers. This experience enabled me to understand more about projects for persons with disabilities and also positively affected my daily work."

*"As we started noticing things we weren't aware of before, members became more interested in each other and found it increasingly easier to disclose ourselves. As a result, it became easier to **build relationships**."*

"By complementing each other, we grew closer, our teamwork became stronger, and we learned to enjoy communicating with each other. In workplaces rife with bullying and condescending behaviors, members tend to focus on superficial things and forget to cherish human values. By becoming considerate of each other in daily life and in other projects, we can make new discoveries."

"Through working together with members with disabilities for a long period of time, I began to forget about who has and does not have disabilities during group discussions. I was able to experience the process in which new things are generated through the interactions of the members' unique ways of being."

Comments from Working Group members with disabilities:

"I had the opportunity to get to know the thoughts of people who are well-versed in the disability field. It gave me great opportunities to think about things I could only imagine before. These opportunities were something I would not have had if not for this Working Group" – a person with hearing disability.

"I discovered that the requirements and issues of other persons with disabilities different from ours are similar to ours, which helped deepen my understanding of other types of needs" – a person with total blindness.

"The group enabled me to get to know persons with disabilities of different generations. By watching how they worked, I was able to learn various ways of working, such as how those in the generation that led the disability rights movement and won the rights of persons- with disabilities performed their tasks. I was impressed once again by their ways of doing things and realized the importance of expressing our requirements for necessary accommodation clearly" – a person with psychosocial disabilities.

Case 13: Considering the broader meaning of equality and participation

What does "equality in working" mean? Lessons learned from the experiences of a nurse with hearing disability

One of the Working Group members is a nurse working for a senior citizen's home for persons with hearing disabilities. All her co-workers are persons without hearing disabilities, and she is the only employee with hearing disability. Nurses are responsible for wide-ranging tasks, including those related to management and intravenous drips. They receive training to perform all their required tasks independently. However, persons with hearing disabilities cannot use stethoscopes. The Working Group member with hearing disability focused on performing tasks that could be done by using her eyes and relying on inspection and palpation.

One day, a deaf patient with a delusional disorder was trying very hard to make himself understood by a nurse without hearing disabilities who could use sign language, but the nurse could not understand the patient. The member with hearing disability, whose primary language was sign language, guessed and succeeded in deciphering what the patient was trying to say. Since then, her colleagues without hearing disabilities have begun to depend on her more.

This member said, "*I would feel uncomfortable if only I depended on their support, and they did not depend on mine. But we were able to develop a kind of relationship in which they also depended on me. Being asked for help made me feel happy, and I find that this situation exemplifies how 'equality in working' should be. Although I believe it's important to train workers to be able to perform all their tasks independently, I think it is also okay for them to make up for each other.*" This kind of relationship, in which each member depends on and is also depended upon by others, strengthens the self-confidence of all team members, which will benefit individuals and, eventually, their organization.

Box 6: Effective and meaningful participation

The United Nations (UN) has been placing greater emphasis on 'effective and meaningful consultations' in recent years. "Effective and meaningful consultations of persons with disabilities" refers to the process of actively involving individuals with disabilities in decision-making and policy development that directly affects them.

The active participation of persons with disabilities, their support organizations, and related civil society members throughout the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was a crucial factor in making it a groundbreaking human rights convention. From the initial drafting stages to the final discussions, these groups played pivotal roles in shaping the Convention. This emphasis on the meaningful participation of individuals with disabilities and their representative organizations is a defining feature of the Convention and its core principle.

Case 14: New ideas generated by respecting individuals' strengths, each other's preferences and values

The Working Group was able to build a collaborative environment by complementing each other's preferences.

What made the Working Group's initiatives unique was that people with different types of impairments were brought together as a team. For example, members with hearing impairment collaborated with those with total blindness, each of whom had little opportunity to communicate and work together before. Specifically, when the blind team had to deliver a presentation, they developed the presentation script in text, and the deaf team developed the visual materials for the presentation by checking with the blind team about their preferences for design elements and layout, such as which photos to use. This collaboration resulted in the creation of new ideas and approaches. It allowed us to work towards achieving the organizational vision by successfully unleashing the potential, enthusiasm, beliefs, and values of both teams.

Comments from Working Group members – one with deafness, the other with total blindness
"Preparing presentation materials together with team members without disabilities allowed us to exercise our imagination more extensively and think more flexibly."

"By complementing each other's preferences and making use of each other's strengths, we were able to focus on what each of us could do and was good at and achieve better results. We don't feel comfortable with relationships in which persons with disabilities are always the ones to depend on others. But in this group, we were able to build a kind of relationship in which both sides depended on each other."

Box 7: Key processes that led to accepting differences and improved organizational capabilities

As we reflected on the initiatives and factors that led to such successful teamwork and organizational improvement, several critical processes emerged. The following three key processes helped us gain a deep understanding of each member's different needs and personal traits. This understanding contributed to improved teamwork, enhanced organizational performance, and the potential for building a new organizational culture, as Figure 1 shows.

① **Communicate openly within the team to identify the needs of persons with disabilities.**

Reaching consensus on reasonable accommodations that meet the needs of both persons with disabilities and supporting staff members requires effective communication. Persons with disabilities must be able to clearly express their needs in words, and employment supporters must be able to listen attentively to persons with disabilities and identify their needs.

Effective communication was essential in discussing specific details, understanding each other's values and finding reasonable accommodations in different situations. Previously, members considered such detailed discussions unnecessary, but as we went through the lengthy process of seeking the best way of doing things, the need for detailed discussions only increased. **Through repeated discussions, we gained a deeper understanding of each other's values and needs, which led to stronger relationships and enhanced teamwork.**

② Become aware of misconceptions and biases by sharing our thoughts and feelings.

As a result of our conversations with Working Group members with disabilities, we realized that we held preconceived notions and biases that we were unaware of. People commonly have unconscious misconceptions and make assumptions based on stereotypes, but it is crucial to recognize and address them. Such preconceived notions about persons with disabilities may include ideas such as 'they are incompetent at work' or 'they are difficult to work with.' **However, by taking steps to accommodate the needs specific to respective individuals, we've seen how individuals can thrive and realize their full potential.**

③ Create a collaborative environment by embracing and accommodating individual differences in needs and preferences

Creating an environment in which the needs and personal preferences of each member are recognized and embraced can lead to more open and expressive communication of requirements. Our own experiences have demonstrated that **diverse values and perspectives can stimulate a range of viewpoints and ideas, which in turn helps spark innovation.**
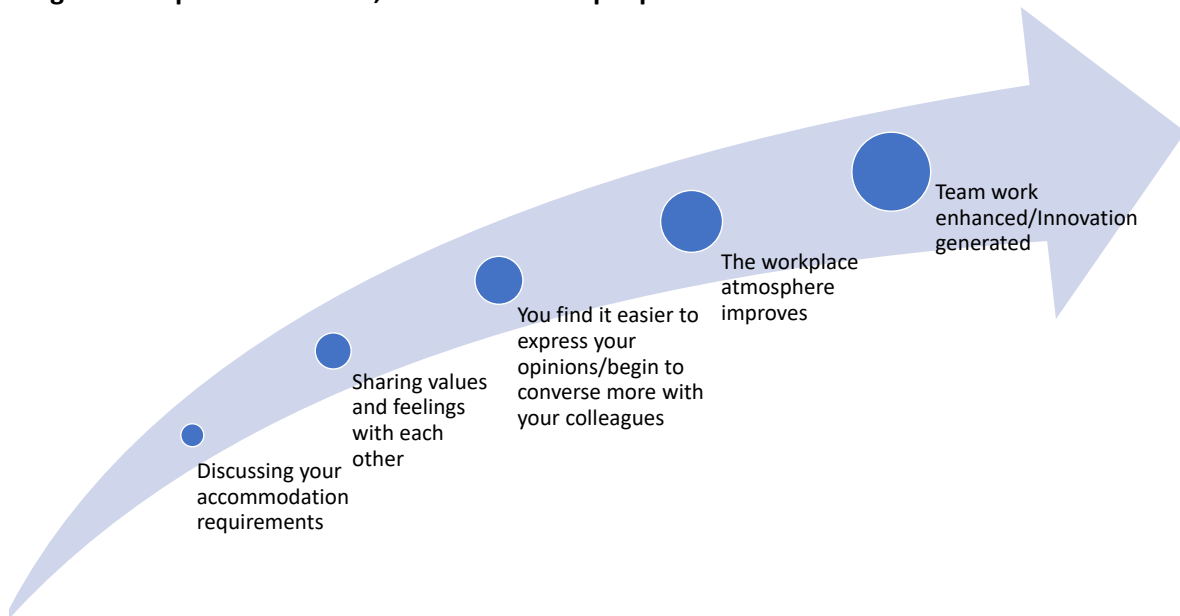
Team work enhanced/Innovation generated

The workplace atmosphere improves

You find it easier to express your opinions/begin to converse more with your colleagues

Sharing values and feelings with each other

Discussing your accommodation requirements

Figure 1. Processes that enable team members to accept each other's differences, leading to improved organizational capabilities

By implementing the three key processes above, we were able to establish a sense of psychological safety within the team, which allowed all members to feel safe enough to express their opinions to anyone in the group. This is an achievement of great value. Other factors that contributed to the sense of psychological safety included having multiple members available for consultation and having peers with similar impairments in the group. These insights are not only beneficial for persons with disabilities but also for other staff members with varying requirements, such as those caring for children, providing nursing care for older persons, or managing a health condition while working.

Comment from a TNF staff member

"I think all people, whether with or without disabilities, have their own circumstances, issues, or secrets they don't want others to know. Under normal circumstances, even when people choose not to disclose such things to others, they can still do their jobs or build relationships with others just as well. However, in the case of persons with disabilities who need accommodations in some ways, persons with disabilities must disclose to their colleagues the details of sensitive matters they would rather keep to themselves for the sake of performing their duties. They are often forced to disclose such matters to people with whom they have not established a relationship of trust. I feel that the gaps in understanding between persons with and without disabilities stem partly from their situational differences in the form of persons without disabilities being the ones who can do their jobs just as well without disclosing their own circumstances' versus 'some persons with disabilities being the ones who cannot perform their jobs well without disclosing their circumstances or being assisted by others.'

Box 8: Aiming to become an organization with enhanced psychological safety

One of the most important experiences gained through the initiatives of the Working Group is the process of improving psychological safety in a group. The term 'psychological safety' refers to an organizational or group environment in which everyone can be their natural selves. A 2015 study by Google revealed that as the sense of psychological safety grew within teams, performance improved.

According to the results of this study, the elements comprising an effective team include: (1) psychological safety; (2) dependability; (3) structure and clarity; (4) meaning of work; and (5) impact of work. Of these, psychological safety is considered the most important element. The study also revealed that teams with higher levels of psychological safety displayed several other positive characteristics as a group, including a lower employee turnover rate, more effective utilization of ideas devised by team members, higher profitability, and twice as high a chance of being evaluated as 'working effectively' in performance evaluations.

Source: Google, Study on "What Makes a Google Team Effective?"

3.4 Advantages and disadvantages of remote work

Correlation between the increasing popularity of remote work and advancing disability inclusion

Based on these experiences, we have learned that it is not only possible to work with persons with disabilities remotely, but that such remote work may help promote disability inclusion in the workplace.

However, we also found several challenges specific to remote work. They include issues related to the pressure of being constantly online, challenges related to the provision of equal information access to persons with and without disabilities, and issues concerning digital literacy. As a result, some Working Group members expressed a preference for working in a physical office.

We also learned the importance of striking a balance between remote work and office work environments, and addressing the specific challenges associated with remote work to ensure an inclusive workplace for all.

Difficulty in building trust when working remotely under a newly established structure

While some Working Group members knew each other before this project began, most of the group had not previously met. As with any newly formed group, it was a challenge to reconcile the different working styles in this newly established structure. Working remotely posed additional difficulties in building trust among the members, as there were fewer opportunities for casual interactions, such as impromptu team meetings and small talk, compared to in-person settings.

Online communication typically provides less non-verbal information, such as facial expressions and body language, than face-to-face communication. This can result in personal interactions that are more distant and superficial, which is also due to the lack of informal interactions that are typically present in face-to-face settings.

Working Group members with disabilities also revealed that online communication was more challenging for them because in some cases they found it difficult to receive non-verbal cues. TNF realized that **if the organization intends to expand its remote work initiatives, it is important to deliberately create opportunities for informal communication among group members**, for example, by intentionally providing chat time and breaks. Casual conversations sometimes enable us to share useful information and tips for activities or develop new ideas.

> **Comments from a member with total blindness**
> *"It was really difficult for me to build relationships and communicate with other members as they were from different backgrounds and their personalities were unknown to me. When working for a company, the members share the clear goals and common visions of the organization, even when their individual views are different. However, in this Working Group, I found it hard to build relationships with other members because we didn't even have a common vision to share."*

!   **Extra effort is necessary to promote informal communication when working remotely.**

Case 15: Extra arrangements were needed to promote communication between deaf members and blind members of the Working Group

In an online meeting, when a member with a hearing disability commented using sign language, blind members were not able to identify even the gender of the speaker because they could only hear the voice of an interpreter and not the speaker's actual voice. Even when a deaf member expresses their opinion enthusiastically, it may be difficult for an interpreter to convey the same enthusiasm to the blind members. As a result, the blind and deaf Working Group members had to collaborate knowing little about each other.

Our experience showed that the relationships among team members may become superficial when communicating only through a sign language interpreter.

As a solution, deaf members and blind members began communicating with each other through chat instead of via the sign language interpreter. By communicating with each other directly and using their own words, they discovered that they were about the same age and that the barriers they encountered daily were also similar. Through this more direct and informal means of communicating, they came to understand each other more deeply, building trust within the team and improving teamwork. It is worth noting that when communicating solely via text, our perception of a person can differ from their actual personality and character. Since we rely on written words to form an image of the person, our imagination can often fill in the gaps, resulting in a potentially inaccurate representation of the individual.

Q5. If remote work becomes more widespread, will it enhance disability inclusion in the workplace?

The following reflects Working Group members' responses to this question.

■ Remote work expands work opportunities for persons with disabilities who have difficulty going out

*"As remote work makes it possible even for bedridden persons to work, if organizations start offering more focused, function-based jobs to workers, remote work may lower barriers for persons with disabilities to enter the labor market. Remote work will bring about an expansion of work options rather than enhance disability inclusion. **Function-based jobs will increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. If ways of working practiced in society change, such an increase may become a reality**."*

"Although remote work may open new doors for persons with disabilities (such as increased employment opportunities), it is still unknown whether an increase in the number of persons with disabilities working remotely will promote disability inclusion in the workplace. The number of such persons cannot be an indicator of the actual status of society-wide disability inclusion."

■ Remote work enables people to work from anywhere

"Participants and sign language interpreters may attend a meeting from anywhere in Japan or other countries."

■ Changing our ways of thinking is key

"It is important to shift our thinking from 'persons with disabilities can work despite their disabilities' (assuming difference is a negative thing) to 'persons with disabilities can work by harnessing their difference as their strengths.' When hiring persons with disabilities, it will be difficult to find suitable candidates if the focus is on recruiting jack-of-all-trades types of people. The important thing is to have team members who complement each other to achieve a common goal."

■ Remote work may make people's disabilities invisible (persons with disabilities may experience less stigma in remote environments)

"When working remotely, workers' disabilities sometimes become invisible. For example, employees with visual disabilities sometimes wander around their workplaces because they are unable to see. With remote work, people will not see their colleagues with visual disabilities doing this. Remote work may enable us to become much less conscious of our colleagues' impairments. As a result, I believe more and more people will forget about impairments altogether. For persons with disabilities, remote work has the merit of increased confidentiality if they do not want to share about their impairments. Everyone has a need not to disclose some aspects of themselves, and society must accommodate such a need as well."

Table 2 presents the advantages and disadvantages of remote work as reported by members via an interview survey, categorized by disability type.

Table 2 – Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work (by disability type)

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Physical disabilities (locomotor dysfunctions)	· No need to commute · Able to participate in a meeting from anywhere	· Unable to ask others for support with computer use on the spot.
Visual disabilities (total blindness)	· Remote work makes the common traits of the blind invisible, which enables them to be regarded as being no different from persons without disabilities. For persons with visual disabilities, it is difficult to read and write business or other documents on paper-based documents. This barrier makes their daily and social lives difficult, and becomes especially prominent in the workplace. Yet, remote workers do not use as many paper-based documents as office workers, which may serve as an advantage for persons with visual disabilities.	· When working remotely, people rely more on ICT tools, which can make the participation of persons with visual impairment. · In remote work settings, individuals with visual disabilities may face participation barriers, such as being unable to inquire with colleagues about on-screen content. To address this, there are some remote assistance tools available, such as *Be My Eyes*, which can provide compensatory visual information. However, seeking external support requires coordinating with relevant parties and making necessary preparations in advance.
Hearing disabilities (deafness)	· By arranging a sign language interpreter, we can promote persons with hearing disabilities to participate in a meeting no matter where they are.	· Persons with hearing disabilities may face several issues specific to remote meetings. Examples include: (1) When many participants have an active discussion in a remote meeting, it is extremely difficult for participants with hearing impairment to know when they should cut into the conversation; (2) When some participants are speaking simultaneously, the persons with hearing impairment find it impossible to determine who said what; and (3) Unlike in physical meetings, in remote settings expressing and understanding feelings through gestures and facial expressions is more difficult for persons with hearing disabilities. To address these issues, the Working Group decided all participants must announce their names before making their comments. However, this rule was often forgotten when the conversation picked up momentum. On such occasions, it would have been useful if the person in charge of correcting machine-generated captions had included information about the speakers in the displayed captions.
Psychosocial disabilities	· When feeling unwell, persons with psychosocial disabilities sometimes cannot commute to their workplaces. However, in the case of remote meetings, they can perform their tasks from home.	· When persons with psychosocial disabilities feel unwell, in remote meetings their mental condition may not be apparent to others on screen. This situation may create a negative cycle in which it will become difficult for others to understand the needs of the persons with psychosocial disabilities.

Part 4. Conclusion

The Working Group initiatives revealed important advantages and disadvantages of remote work for persons with different impairments. Some of the challenges and insights were found to be more related to project management than disability-related issues. Notwithstanding the unique nature of the project's structure and its short duration, **TNF strongly believes that remote work can enhance disability inclusion in the workplace if implemented effectively, particularly as remote work becomes more widespread.** Furthermore, persons with disabilities can benefit from the diverse and flexible work styles offered by remote work, which can lead to improved organizational performance. This is particularly true when we have a full understanding of the characteristics and values of remote work.

Important lessons learned for future TNF recruitment of persons with disabilities

Prior to hiring:

- Improve skills of TNF staff in charge of supporting employees with disabilities at work. For example, staff should be given training on reasonable accommodations, unconscious bias and disability equality training (DET).
- Develop an organization-wide support structure for sufficiently accommodating the requirements specific to persons with disabilities.
- Set up a consultation service desk operated by a third party (external organization) or utilize external resources.

At the start of employment:

- Discuss the details of the accommodation needs of each person with disabilities, as the needs for reasonable accommodation vary even among people with the same type of impairment.

After hiring:

- Improve the communication skills of staff members.
- Improve project management skills (e.g. monitoring and providing effective feedback).
- Divide project tasks to avoid situations in which all the workload is placed on one staff member.
- Keep in mind that not everyone with disabilities can clearly express their needs for accommodation and that these requirements might change.

Annex A
Working Group methodology and initiatives

Composition of the Working Group

The Working Group comprised 15 members: eight external members and seven TNF staff members. Nine members were persons with disabilities: one with a physical disability (locomotor dysfunction), three with hearing disabilities (deafness), two with visual disabilities (blindness), and one with a psychosocial disability.

Working Group initiatives

The members were divided into two groups which conducted separate assigned initiatives. Group 1 considered future directions of TNF's overseas disability assistance and Group 2 focused on creating a Global Disability and Diversity Fact Sheet for CEOs, which was distributed online. The aims and outcomes of each group are outlined below.

Group 1: Future Directions of TNF Overseas Disability Assistance

Aims	Activities	Deliverables
• Reorganize TNF's existing overseas disability programs • Plan and design new projects	The group conducted desk studies, interviewed people involved in the TNF's overseas disability programs and developed proposals for both the restructuring of existing projects and the establishment of new disability projects.	• Plans and designs of new TNF overseas disability projects

Group 2: Global Disability and Diversity Fact Sheet for CEOs

Aims	Activities	Deliverables
Develop the Global Disability and Diversity Fact Sheet for CEOs to promote the employment of persons with disabilities	The group conducted intensive interviews with 16 companies based on members' desire to better understand corporate needs by directly interviewing company representatives. The companies involved were selected by the members with disabilities, mainly based on the list of Valuable 500 (V500) member companies. The interview articles were published on TNF's official blog "*TNF Journal: Business's New Relationship with Disabilities.*"[14]	• Fact sheet for CEOs • Interviews concerning good disability employment practices of 16 companies in Japan

Selection/assignment of tasks for members with disabilities

The participation of Working Group members with disabilities varied. TNF attempted to select and assign tasks to members with disabilities specifically based on their preferences. As a result, some members just participated in a weekly 1-hour meeting, while others belonged to both groups, performing multiple tasks such as acting as a liaison with subsidized organizations, holding interviews, writing reports, ensuring equal information access to members with and without disabilities, and writing articles and other materials.

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[14] http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/journal/issue/52181

Deliverables

The Working Group itself collaboratively identified deliverables to achieve. Throughout their 21-month collaboration from June 2020 to March 2022, the Working Group produced the following diverse and valuable deliverables related to remote work by persons with disabilities:

- New TNF overseas disability project proposals;

- The Global Disability and Diversity Fact Sheet for CEOs (in Japanese and English);

- A Zoom user guide for sign language interpreters;

- Face-to-face interviews with representatives of 16 V500 companies on their innovative disability inclusion initiatives, including: Asahi Shimbun, ANA, Benesse Holdings, Bridgestone, Denko, Dentsu, Fast Retailing, Freee, JAL, NHK, NTT, PwC Japan, Santen Pharmaceutical, Sega Sammy Group, Showa, SoftBank, and Sumitomo Life Insurance; and

- The Original Accessibility Tool manual, developed to ensure information accessibility for persons with hearing disabilities. Three members of the Working Group (all with hearing disabilities) took the initiative of creating this manual which presents the reasonable accommodation arrangements necessary for deaf persons, and useful arrangements to facilitate the participation of persons with hearing disabilities in online meetings. The manual greatly improved the Working Group's operations.

Confirming accommodation needs of Working Group members

The Working Group first consulted with each member to identify reasonable accommodation needs for performing their tasks. Even among members with the same type of impairment, accommodation needs varied, which underlines the importance of personal consultation. Table 3 presents the specific accommodations requested by group members.

Working Group support infrastructure

TNF established a Working Group help desk comprising: 1) a consultant responsible for accessibility-related matters; 2) a sign language interpreter and chat tool administrator; 3) a consultant responsible for clerical tasks; and 4) a consultant specializing in harassment-related issues. A help desk was also established for external third parties not within the TNF chain of command.

Table 3. Remote work accommodation needs according to type of impairment

Impairment Type	Examples of reasonable accommodation arrangements requested by group members
Hearing disabilities (deafness)	· When a speaker shares material on the main meeting screen, it is helpful if he or she physically points out the part being discussed. This helps because persons with hearing disabilities must watch the sign language interpreter throughout a meeting and can miss the written material being presented. · Ask each speaker to announce their name before commenting in a meeting. Without this accommodation it is difficult to know which person is speaking. · Display proper nouns on screen in real time. Sign language interpretation of proper nouns (names of places, people, organizations, new loanwords and technical terms) takes longer than other words. Thus, sign language interpreters often touch upon them only briefly to keep up with the speed of conversation. If displayed on the screen in real time, those with hearing disabilities can understand the terms accurately.
Visual disabilities (total blindness)	· Distribution of meeting materials in Word format is preferable to PDF format because Word files are easier to read with text-to-speech software. · Documents in plain text in case the documents are text-only. · Using Alt text for illustrations serves an important role in presentations. · Ask speakers to explain illustrations in ways that are understandable to people who cannot see the figure or the chart.
Psychosocial disabilities	· When feeling unwell, sometimes persons with psychosocial disabilities have difficulty understanding sound-based information. Providing any sound-based information in text form is helpful for use during and after the meeting. · Sometimes persons with psychosocial disabilities do not feel comfortable having their faces displayed continuously on screen. They would sometimes prefer to respond using icons or other symbols.
Physical disability (locomotor dysfunctions)	· Some persons with physical disabilities prefer to use voice input for writing text, as manual input is time-consuming or not possible.

Contracts and work arrangements	The members worked for the Working Group as TNF subcontractors based on individual contracts. The group worked remotely via Zoom to hold meetings, but interviews with businesses were conducted face-to-face as much as possible.
Monitoring	Indicators such as satisfaction levels and member workloads were monitored via monthly questionnaires and at regular meetings using the Self-Report Sheet and the Occupational Stress Questionnaire developed by TNF.
Methods of sharing information	The Working Group chose to use Slack, a messaging application for business purposes; Google Docs, through which documents can be created and edited; and Gmail, for the daily exchange of information. One of the group members with a visual disability had advanced IT skills and was frequently consulted for advice. Most importantly, the group regularly allocated consultation time in online meetings to inquire about members' needs.