

## **Digital Transformation and Disability Employment: A Socio-Technical Analysis of Workplace Inclusion**

### **Abstract**

Prior reviews of digitalisation's impact on disabled workers have focused narrowly on assistive technologies, neglecting the interplay between technical systems, social structures, and organisational environments. This study asks: How do technical systems, social structures, and organisational environments interact to shape employment outcomes for disabled people in the digital era? Using PRISMA methodology, we conducted a systematic review analysing 34 studies on digital technologies and disability employment, selected from 317 initial records. The analysis examined outcomes for working-age adults with disabilities/neurodiversity and employed socio-technical systems theory with inductive thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that successful disability employment initiatives require alignment across all three components, particularly through participatory approaches involving disabled employees in design and implementation processes. These findings have important implications for organisations seeking to leverage digital technologies while ensuring equitable employment opportunities.

**Keywords:** Disability Employment; Digital Transformation; Workplace Inclusion; Socio-Technical Systems; Organisational Culture

**Word count:** 6027

## Introduction

The stark employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people remains a pressing concern. In the United Kingdom (UK), only 52.7% of disabled individuals are in employment compared to 81% of their non-disabled counterparts, largely due to workplace inflexibility (Taylor et al., 2022). Our research adopts the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of disability, recognising it as arising from the interaction between health conditions and various environmental and personal factors, including discriminatory attitudes, inaccessible infrastructure, and insufficient social support systems (World Health Organization, n.d.). This definition aligns with the Social Model of Disability, which posits that people are disabled by societal barriers rather than their impairments or differences (Oliver, 1983). Under this model, disability is understood as a form of social oppression that can be addressed through systemic changes rather than individual medical interventions. This framework encompasses various forms of disability, including physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments and neurodiversity – recognising the natural variations in human neurocognitive functioning, such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia (Chapman, 2021). Following this definition and in line with the Social Model of Disability (Barnes, 2019), our paper uses the term "disabled people" to emphasise how societal barriers create disability, rather than using "people with disabilities," which might suggest disability is an individual characteristic (Disability Rights UK, n.d.).

Within this context of disability inclusion, the work landscape has transformed substantially through digital technologies, fundamentally changing how organisations operate across different sectors and regions (World Bank, 2024; Yee et al., 2024). This digital shift intensified significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated by an increase in large-scale digital investment from 20% to 60% of companies worldwide between 2020 and 2022 (World Bank, 2024) and a significant shift from 6% to 31% of UK employees working entirely from home (Small Business Charter, 2022). The scope of this change encompasses various technological advances, including the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing, all of which can contribute to enhanced operational efficiency, improved decision-making processes, and better stakeholder engagement (Lang, 2021; Reis et al., 2020). However, the shift toward digital technologies presents a complex duality of effects for disabled individuals, simultaneously creating new opportunities for workplace participation while potentially reinforcing existing barriers or creating new ones (Qu, 2022). For example, digital marketplaces and platform-based work, while offering potential flexibility and accessibility, were found to perpetuate discriminatory practices against disabled users through unequal access to opportunities (Ameri et al., 2020; Dunn, 2020).

Digital transformation is deeply embedded within existing social structures and organisational environments, requiring organisations to carefully consider how technical systems interact with workplace social structures and organisational environments to meaningfully promote disability inclusion (Doherty & King, 2005). The social structure provides the basis for how digital technologies interact with persistent employer misconceptions (Ameri & Kurtzberg, 2024). For example, research shows that even when assistive technologies like exosuits can enhance workplace capabilities, employers express significant concerns about potential liability, workplace disruption, and operational risks, with 83% of hiring managers reporting concerns about integrating such devices into the workplace (Ameri & Kurtzberg, 2024). These challenges reflect broader patterns of workplace exclusion driven by negative stereotypes and unfounded beliefs about the capabilities of disabled people, including concerns about productivity, safety risks, and accommodation costs, which can lead to discriminatory behaviours (Bonaccio et al., 2020).

Research has consistently refuted these concerns, demonstrating that disabled employees show comparable job performance and do not pose increased organisational risks (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008; Stone & Colella, 1996). Yet, the misconceptions persist, impacting workplace relationships, hierarchies and power structures (Dwertmann et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the broader organisational environment impacts the effectiveness of digital technologies in terms of disability inclusion. Disabled people have historically faced systemic obstacles to employment, including discriminatory productivity standards, inaccessible workplaces, wage disparities, and counterproductive welfare systems (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Vornholt et al., 2018). While legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, which mandates workplace accommodations and prohibits discrimination against disabled people in recruitment and employment, has made it more difficult to discriminate, subtle forms of exclusion and institutional barriers persist (Hussain et al., 2022). Even in organisations actively pursuing inclusion initiatives, transitioning from traditional models of disability employment, characterised by segregated workspaces and sheltered employment, to more inclusive digital approaches requires fundamental changes in organisational identity, practices, and culture (Hein & Ansari, 2022). For digital technologies to effectively progress disability inclusion initiatives, a supportive organisational culture and policy framework is crucial.

Our research addresses a significant gap as previous literature reviews on digitalisation and disability employment focused on assistive technologies (Boot et al., 2018; Morash-Macneil et al., 2018; Nevala et al., 2015). Furthermore, disability remains understudied in the management literature compared to other aspects of diversity, such as age, race, and gender (Annett, 2022; Beatty et al., 2019; Dwertmann, 2016; Williams & Mavin, 2012; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Traditional research often treats disability as an individual medical issue rather than considering its social context (Dwertmann, 2016; Williams & Mavin, 2012). This limited perspective has led to a narrow understanding of how organisational structures and practices might enable or constrain the full participation of disabled employees in the workplace.

Drawing from the socio-technical systems and diversity management theories, this paper conducts a systematic review to synthesise the current management and organisation literature on disability employment in the digital era into three interconnected components: technical systems, social structures, and organisational environments. This framework enables an examination of how technical systems interact with social structures and organisational environments to shape employment outcomes for disabled people. We pay particular attention to participatory design, which was embraced in developing information systems, recognising that technological solutions must be developed in concert with the social systems they serve (Mumford, 2006). This principle, rooted in socio-technical systems theory, emphasises the importance of involving diverse stakeholders in the design and implementation process to ensure technologies meet varied user needs and capabilities (Doherty & King, 2005). Together, the three components form an integrated framework that organisations can use to create more inclusive workplaces in the digital economy, recognising that successful disability employment outcomes require careful alignment of technological solutions with social systems and a supportive organisational environment.

## **Theoretical Background**

The socio-technical systems theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interactions between technological and social elements within

organisations. This theoretical approach emerged from the influential Tavistock Institute studies of British coal mining operations, which demonstrated how technological change can disrupt established social systems at work and how organisational design needs to consider both technical and social factors (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). The foundational premise of the socio-technical systems theory is that organisations are complex systems where technological and social elements are deeply intertwined and mutually influential (Emery & Trist, 1965). This perspective challenges the traditional technological determinism that dominated early organisational design, emphasising that optimal organisational performance can only be achieved through joint optimisation of social and technical subsystems (Cherns, 1976; Mumford, 2006). Furthermore, the theory posits that any significant change in one subsystem inevitably affects the other, making it crucial to consider both dimensions when implementing organisational changes or technological innovations.

The socio-technical systems approach has significantly evolved since its inception to address the complexities of information systems and digital transformation. It was initially integrated into information systems' development through the Effective Technical & Human Implementation of Computer-based Systems (ETHICS) methodology, which emphasised participatory design and joint optimisation of social and technical elements (Mumford, 2006). Participatory design is an approach that actively involves users in designing and implementing technological systems, emphasising that those affected by new technologies should have a direct role in shaping how these technologies are developed and deployed in their work environment (Mumford, 2006). The socio-technical system's principles have proved especially valuable in highlighting how technical systems must be designed to accommodate diverse user needs and capabilities rather than expecting users to adapt to rigid technical constraints (Doherty & King, 2005). The participatory approach laid crucial groundwork for inclusive design practices, particularly in addressing the needs of disabled workers and other underrepresented groups in technological implementations (Barricelli & Di Loreto, 2017). Since its introduction to information systems, the theory has adapted to accommodate increasingly sophisticated technological environments. Contemporary applications have evolved to encompass cloud computing, virtual teams, artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and cybersecurity considerations while maintaining the core principle that technical and social systems must be designed in concert (Sarker et al., 2019; Winter et al., 2014). This evolution reflects the theory's enduring relevance in addressing the complex interplay between technological advancement and organisational social structures, particularly as organisations navigate the challenges of digital transformation (Pasmore et al., 2019). The approach provides valuable frameworks for understanding and managing the intricate relationships between people, technology, and work processes in increasingly digitalised environments while emphasising the importance of designing systems that accommodate diverse user needs and capabilities.

When considering disability employment outcomes, diversity management theories complement the socio-technical systems framework by emphasising the importance of inclusive organisational practices and structures (Shore et al., 2018). Integrating assistive technologies, universal design principles, and workplace accommodations must be approached through technical and social lenses to create truly inclusive environments (Marinaci et al., 2023). The diversity management paradigm suggests that organisations benefit most when they view diversity not merely as compliance but as a source of learning and innovation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). This perspective aligns with socio-technical systems theory's emphasis on joint optimisation, where technological solutions for disability inclusion must be developed and implemented in concert with social systems that promote acceptance, understanding, and equal participation. This integrated approach recognises that successful

disability inclusion requires appropriate technical design, as well as a careful implementation of the technical solutions in a social environment that values and actively promotes diversity and inclusion.

Moreover, the intersection of socio-technical systems and diversity management theories highlights the critical role of organisational culture in supporting disability employment outcomes (Spataro, 2005). Successful disability inclusion requires a systematic approach that addresses both technological barriers and social attitudes (Nishii & Rich, 2013). Organisations must develop "inclusion capability" – the capacity to create environments where diverse individuals can fully participate and contribute (Ferdman, 2014). This capability emerges from the careful alignment of technological infrastructure (e.g., accessible workstations, adaptive software), social systems (e.g., mentoring programs, inclusive leadership practices), and environmental factors (e.g., physical workspace design and organisational policies) in ways that support and empower disabled employees. Developing inclusion capability requires sustained commitment from leadership, ongoing education and training for all employees, and the creation of systems and processes that actively support and promote inclusion rather than merely accommodating differences (Ferdman, 2014).

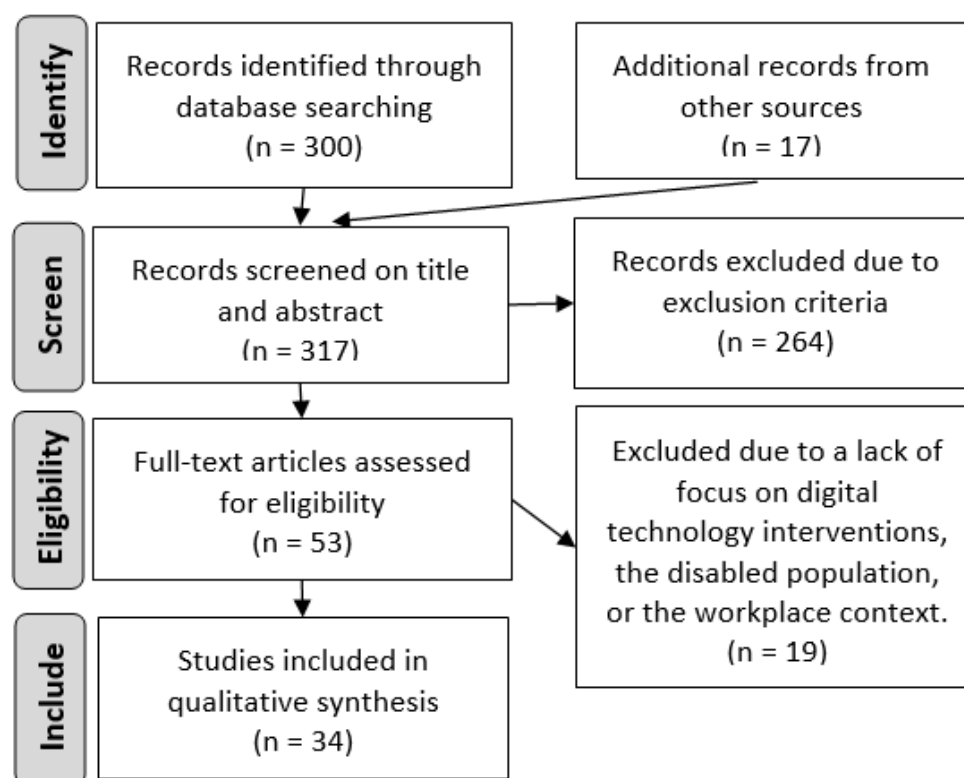
Building on these theoretical perspectives, our research addresses a crucial gap in the literature. While diversity management research has extensively examined dimensions such as age, race, and gender, disability remains comparatively understudied in organisational contexts (Williams & Mavin, 2012; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Most existing research approaches disability through a medical lens, focusing on individual impairments rather than examining how organisational structures and practices enable or constrain workplace participation. Additionally, while previous literature reviews have primarily focused on either the effectiveness of assistive technologies or the enabling support systems (Boot et al., 2018; Jansen et al., 2021; Morash-Macneil et al., 2018; Nevala et al., 2015), there is limited understanding of how technical systems interact with social structures and organisational environments in the digital era. This study, therefore, asks: How do technical systems, social structures, and organisational environments interact to shape employment outcomes for disabled people in the digital era? By addressing this question through the lens of socio-technical systems and diversity management theories, we aim to develop a more comprehensive understanding of disability employment that acknowledges both the technological and social dimensions of workplace inclusion.

## Material and Methods

We conducted a systematic review adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology, the standard for depicting literature review selection processes (Page et al., 2021). Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flowchart of the systematic article selection process. The process began with identifying 300 records through database searching, outlined below, supplemented by 17 additional records from cross-referencing, yielding 317 records for initial screening. During the screening phase based on titles and abstracts, 264 records were excluded according to predetermined criteria, which we explain below. Of the remaining 53 full-text articles assessed for eligibility, 19 were excluded specifically due to insufficient focus on digital technology interventions, the disabled population, or workplace context. The final synthesis included 34 studies for qualitative analysis. A meta-analysis was not conducted due to the diversity of the studied interventions and outcomes.

Our database search involved ABI/Informs and Business Source Complete to identify the relevant literature. These databases were selected after consultation with a subject librarian and multiple rounds of preliminary searches to ensure comprehensive coverage of business and management literature. Our search strategy focused on three key conceptual areas: disability (using terms such as *disab\**, *impair\**, *neurodiverse\**), digitalisation (using terms such as *digit\**, *artificial*, *automat\**, *algorithm\**, *analytic\**, *electronic*), and employment (using terms such as *e-HRM*, *recruit\**, *HRM*, *human resource\**, *personnel*, *employee*, *worker*). We applied these search terms to titles and abstracts to identify relevant articles.

**Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for selection of the included studies**



Our inclusion criteria focused specifically on studies examining the integration of digital technologies in workplace settings, including both traditional organisational environments and digital platforms. We included studies investigating any organisational function or process where digital technologies intersect with disability employment, from human resource management to manufacturing and remote work arrangements. We incorporated evidence from all study designs, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, to capture the full range of insights into this complex phenomenon. The review focused on working-age adults with any form of disability or neurodiversity, excluding studies focused on individuals under 18 years or older populations. We specifically sought studies examining outcomes related to disabled workers' outcomes, such as employability, job performance, retention, independence, skills development, self-confidence, well-being, experiences of discrimination, and workplace autonomy.

Several categories of studies were explicitly excluded from our review. These included studies examining the use of digital technologies in non-workplace settings (such as home or educational environments), insurance companies' technological applications for

disability claims, and medical applications of technology for treatment or therapy. Additionally, we excluded studies focusing on the general population's experience of digitalisation without specific attention to disability and those primarily concerned with employer attitudes or organisational policies without substantial consideration of employee outcomes.

The data extraction was conducted using a structured Excel spreadsheet to capture key elements. The second author extracted the data, which the first author reviewed. Furthermore, the third author reviewed a sample of papers to ensure the reliability of the extracted data. The disagreements were resolved through discussions during our project meetings. We extracted information about the study population, methods, findings, and outcomes. Then, we took an inductive thematic analysis approach to allow the themes to emerge from the studies' findings. Considering the socio-technical systems framework, we categorised the themes into three broad categories: technical systems, social structure, and organisational environment. This systematic approach to data extraction enabled us to maintain consistency in our analysis while capturing the complex interplay between technological, social, and environmental factors affecting disability employment in digitalised workplaces.

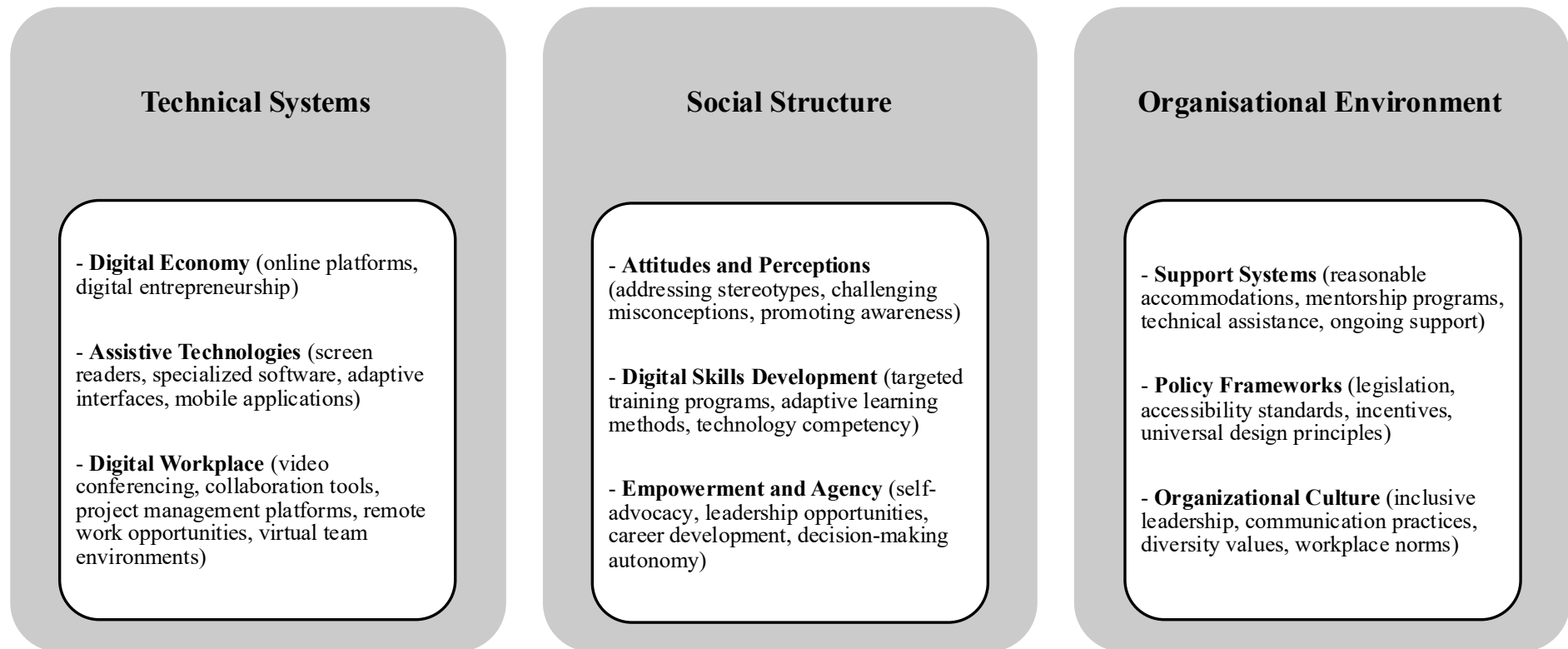
## Findings

Drawing from the socio-technical systems and diversity management theories, we propose an integrated model for disability employment in the digital era, illustrated in Figure 2, with further details in Table 1 on how each paper contributed to the development of our model. The model synthesises the reviewed studies through three interconnected components: technical systems, social structures, and organisational environments. The technology component explains how organisations can facilitate inclusion and expand opportunities for disabled employees through digital platforms, assistive technologies, and accessible online workplaces that enable remote work and virtual collaboration if designed for accessibility. The social component addresses the human factors essential for successful inclusion, focusing on changing workplace attitudes, developing digital skills, and empowering disabled individuals to achieve their career potential. The organisational environment component encompasses the broader organisational and policy ecosystems needed to support disability employment, including comprehensive support systems, enabling legislation, and inclusive organisational cultures that value diversity and promote meaningful workplace participation. The sections below explain each component in detail, with an additional section on the emerging themes regarding the interconnections between the three components.

### Technical System

The technical systems component encompasses the digital technologies and platforms that shape modern workplace environments for disabled employees. Three technological elements influencing disability employment outcomes emerged from the reviewed articles: the digital economy, assistive technologies, and online workplaces. While these elements create new employment opportunities, their successful implementation requires careful consideration of accessibility standards and user needs.

**Figure 2. An integrated model for disability employment in the digital era, derived from the reviewed literature**



**Table 1. Studies' contributions to understanding disability employment in the digital era**

| <b>Study</b>          | <b>Primary Focus</b>      | <b>Key Contribution</b>                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Almeida et al. (2020) | Technical                 | Developed and evaluated accessible online educational resources on occupational safety, demonstrating implementation strategies for W3C guidelines through design-based research             |
| Babucea (2023)        | Technical/ Social         | Theoretically analysed how digital labour markets create opportunities while identifying barriers to digital skills and technology access                                                    |
| Bloom et al. (2024)   | Technical                 | Quantitatively analysed the relationship between work-from-home arrangements and disability employment, demonstrating a 22% increase in disability employment associated with work-from-home |
| Boellstorff (2019)    | Technical/ Social         | Ethnographically examined alternative forms of entrepreneurship and value creation in virtual worlds                                                                                         |
| Bosua & Gloet (2021)  | Social/ organisational    | Qualitatively identified management attitudes and infrastructure as key barriers to flexible work arrangements                                                                               |
| Bruyère et al. (2006) | Technical/ organisational | Quantitatively assessed HR professionals' awareness of online accessibility needs through survey research                                                                                    |
| Burke et al. (2013)   | Technical                 | Empirically tested tablet-based video modelling effectiveness for workplace task completion                                                                                                  |
| Cao (2024)            | Technical/ organisational | Qualitatively examined information systems for accommodations through interviews, identifying efficiency and personalisation factors                                                         |
| Cullen et al. (2017)  | Technical                 | Empirically tested self-directed video prompting impact on workplace independence                                                                                                            |
| de Lima (2016)        | Technical                 | Systematically evaluated accessibility issues in disability-specific recruitment websites                                                                                                    |
| Estival et al. (2024) | Technical/ Social         | Developed and evaluated tablet-based interventions for social skills training through user-centred design                                                                                    |

| Study                          | Primary Focus             | Key Contribution                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ferronato & Ukovic (2014)      | Technical/ organisational | Developed case studies on workplace assessment and modifications                                      |
| Fisher et al. (2024)           | Technical/ Social         | Theoretically analysed impacts of automated recruitment tools on disability disclosure                |
| Frączek (2024)                 | Technical/ Social         | Quantitatively analysed digital skills as a predictor of employment rates through regression analysis |
| Fuhrmann et al. (2018)         | Technical                 | Developed methodology for matching users to assistive technologies through user-centred design        |
| Gentry et al. (2012)           | Technical                 | Empirically tested mobile devices' effectiveness for vocational support through case studies          |
| Ghafoor et al. (2024)          | Technical                 | Developed and tested AI-powered assistive technology for social interaction support                   |
| Hickox & Liao (2020)           | Organisational            | Systematically analysed legal cases regarding remote work accommodations                              |
| Hill et al. (2013)             | Technical                 | Empirically evaluated iPad effectiveness as an employment support tool through case studies           |
| Iftimoaei & Achiței (2023)     | Social/ organisational    | Mixed-methods analysis of barriers to technology adoption and accommodation implementation            |
| Kreuder-Schock & Lorenz (2024) | Technical/ Social         | Qualitatively identified digital workplace barriers through semi-structured interviews                |
| Krutzinna & Floridi (2018)     | Organisational            | Analysed policy frameworks for disability rights protection in digital platform work                  |
| Li et al. (2021)               | Organisational            | Comparative policy analysis of national approaches to digital disability employment                   |
| Lin et al. (2019)              | Technical/ Social         | Ethnographically examined digital platforms' impact on self-enterprise opportunities                  |

| <b>Study</b>           | <b>Primary Focus</b>     | <b>Key Contribution</b>                                                                              |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lindberg et al. (2024) | Social/organisational    | Qualitatively identified employers' challenges in digital environments through focus groups          |
| Mark et al. (2019)     | Technical/organisational | Developed conceptual framework for Industry 4.0 technologies in workplace inclusion                  |
| Oh & Chen (2015)       | Social/organisational    | Quantitatively examined factors influencing workplace advocacy through structural equation modelling |
| Qiu et al. (2020)      | Technical                | Developed and empirically tested wearable technology for social interactions                         |
| Qu (2022)              | Technical/ Social        | Qualitatively identified digital work opportunities through long-term observation and interviews     |
| Ross & Taylor (2017)   | Technical/ Social        | Developed theoretical critique of digital technologies' impact on inclusion                          |
| Tilmes (2022)          | Technical/organisational | Philosophical analysis of AI hiring tools and disability discrimination                              |
| Walkowiak (2024)       | Technical/organisational | Qualitatively examined digital technologies in neurodiversity initiatives through interviews         |
| Weller (2019)          | Technical                | Quantitatively analysed impact of digitalisation on job tasks through longitudinal data              |
| Williams et al. (2006) | Technical/organisational | Quantitatively identified accommodation patterns through survey research                             |

**Digital Economy:** The reviewed literature suggests that the digital economy can facilitate more inclusive employment practices by enabling flexibility and providing a wider range of opportunities (Li et al., 2021). This inclusivity arises from the potential of the digital economy to overcome traditional barriers that have historically hindered the employment of disabled people. For example, online platforms offer a way for disabled people to engage in entrepreneurship by starting their businesses and working independently (Boellstorff, 2019; Lin et al., 2019; Qu, 2022). However, accessibility remains a crucial concern. To ensure the digital economy is truly inclusive, websites and online platforms must be designed with accessibility, complying with standards such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (Almeida et al., 2020; de Lima, 2016). The reviewed literature also emphasises the need to address digital accessibility and skill gaps to enable meaningful participation in the digital economy (Qu, 2022). Without access and the necessary digital skills, disabled individuals risk being further marginalised despite the potential opportunities available. Concerted efforts are needed to provide targeted training and education that equips disabled individuals with the skills needed to thrive in the digital workplace. Furthermore, safeguards must be in place to prevent the exploitation of disabled workers in the digital economy, ensuring fair wages, reasonable working conditions, and protection from discriminatory practices (Krutzinna & Floridi, 2018; Lin et al., 2019; Ross & Taylor, 2017). The digital economy, therefore, requires a careful and inclusive design to truly benefit disabled people.

**Assistive Technologies:** The reviewed literature consistently highlights the critical role of assistive technologies in bridging the gap between the capabilities of disabled employees and the demands of the digital workplace. These technologies are crucial for empowering individuals to participate fully and independently in various work-related tasks. For instance, screen readers provide a vital tool for individuals with visual impairments, enabling them to access and navigate online content. Specialised software can be tailored to individual needs, offering customisable interfaces, alternative input methods, and cognitive support (Fuhrmann et al., 2018). The reviewed literature cites examples such as text-to-speech conversion apps, touch-based navigation for smartphones, and applications designed for individuals with limited dexterity or vision (Burke et al., 2013; Cullen et al., 2017; Gentry et al., 2012; Ghafoor et al., 2024; Qiu et al., 2020). Advancements in technology have also significantly reduced the cost of assistive technologies, making them more accessible and affordable (Mark et al., 2019).

**Online Workplace:** The increasing prevalence of remote work and virtual teams has opened new possibilities for inclusion in the workplace. The shift to online work environments can be particularly beneficial for disabled individuals who often face challenges in traditional work settings due to physical barriers or social stigma (Hickox & Liao, 2020). In the United States, disability employment increased by 22% between 2019 and 2024, which could be explained by the rise of work-from-home post-COVID-19 pandemic (Bloom et al., 2024). However, employees' requests for remote work as an accommodation are often denied in courts because of a systematic failure to consider technological advances that enable remote work (Hickox & Liao, 2020). The online workplace, facilitated by digital technologies, can offer a more accessible and accommodating environment. For example, video conferencing and online collaboration tools, such as shared document platforms, project management software, and instant messaging applications, can further enhance teamwork and communication, bridging geographical barriers and allowing for flexible work arrangements. However, it's crucial to ensure that online workplaces are designed with accessibility in mind (Bruyère et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2024). This includes exerting pressure on firms to engage in web accessibility (Oh & Chen, 2015), providing necessary training and support for disabled employees, and promoting an inclusive virtual culture that

values diverse perspectives and communication styles (Kreuder-Schock & Lorenz, 2024). A thoughtfully designed online workplace can create equitable employment opportunities for disabled people.

### **Social Structure**

The social structure component addresses the human factors that influence the success of digital workplace inclusion. Three critical elements emerged from the reviewed articles related to social structure, including attitudes and perceptions toward disabled employees, digital skills development, and individual empowerment and agency. These elements highlight that technological solutions alone are insufficient without corresponding changes in workplace social dynamics and individual capabilities.

**Attitudes and Perceptions:** Despite advancements in technology and growing awareness, discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions about disabled people continue to be significant barriers to inclusion in the workplace. The reviewed literature emphasises the need to change attitudes and foster inclusive perceptions to create equitable employment opportunities (Bosua & Gloet, 2021). This involves challenging deeply ingrained stereotypes and promoting a better understanding of the diverse capabilities and contributions of disabled individuals. Diversity training programs and awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in educating employees and managers, promoting sensitivity, and creating a more welcoming and inclusive work environment (Walkowiak, 2024).

**Digital Skills Development:** The reviewed literature highlights the critical need to equip disabled individuals with the necessary digital skills to enable their full participation in the digital workforce (Babucea, 2023; Frączek, 2024; Iftimoaei & Achitei, 2023). Despite expectations, analysis of job tasks over time shows that digitalisation has not enabled disabled employees to take on more complex tasks, suggesting the need for targeted training programs and educational initiatives designed to empower disabled individuals to develop the digital skills they need to succeed (Weller, 2019). The education programs should consider diverse learning styles and accessibility needs, using assistive technologies and adaptive methods to ensure inclusivity (Almeida et al., 2020). Individuals must also have the skills to utilise these technologies effectively. Investment in digital skills development for disabled people is a crucial step in maximising the potential of the digital age to create a more inclusive and equitable society (Babucea, 2023; Frączek, 2024; Iftimoaei & Achitei, 2023).

**Empowerment and Agency:** The reviewed literature further underscores the importance of moving beyond skills development to empower disabled individuals to take ownership of their careers and advocate for their needs. This empowerment involves fostering self-efficacy, encouraging self-advocacy, and creating opportunities for leadership and decision-making (Boellstorff, 2019; Lin et al., 2019). Support systems should also be in place to help individuals develop confidence in their abilities and pursue their professional goals (Lindberg et al., 2024). Encouraging self-advocacy equips disabled individuals to articulate their needs, request accommodations, and challenge discriminatory practices (Ferronato & Ukovic, 2014). Furthermore, personalised training in social skills using digital technologies can empower individuals with autism spectrum disorder to navigate difficult social situations at work (Estival et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2013).

### **Organisational Environment**

The organisational environment component addresses the systems, policies, and cultural elements that enable successful digital workplace inclusion. Three critical organisational elements emerged from the reviewed articles: support systems that facilitate

accommodation implementation, policy frameworks that govern workplace practices, and organisational cultures that foster inclusion. These elements form the foundation for effective implementation of technical solutions and social initiatives.

**Support Systems:** Robust support systems are essential for creating and sustaining inclusive workplaces that value the contributions of disabled employees. The reviewed literature emphasises the need for a multi-faceted approach that includes providing reasonable accommodations, establishing mentorship programs, ensuring access to assistive technologies, and offering ongoing support for both employees and employers (Lindberg et al., 2024; Williams M et al., 2006). Reasonable accommodations are legally mandated adjustments to the work environment or job tasks that enable disabled individuals to perform their jobs effectively, such as modified work schedules, accessible workstations, assistive technologies, and job restructuring (Hickox & Liao, 2020). Although information systems could streamline the process of requesting, evaluating, and implementing accommodations, high levels of information system use can be too standardised and disregard human elements (Cao, 2024). The design of accommodation information systems should account for individual differences, involve multiple stakeholders, and address social issues in the accommodation process (Cao, 2024). Digital-based mentorship and job coaching programs can provide valuable guidance and support for disabled employees (Burke et al., 2013; Gentry et al., 2012; Hill et al., 2013). Access to assistive technologies is crucial, and support systems should ensure that employees have the necessary technologies and training to utilise them effectively. Furthermore, Iftimoei & Achitei (2023) stress the importance of financial support and reimbursement systems in addressing the costs associated with assistive technologies and specialised training, ensuring that these resources are readily available to disabled individuals.

**Policy Frameworks:** Government policies and legislation play a critical role in setting standards for accessibility and inclusion, shaping the broader environment in which disability employment initiatives operate. The reviewed literature advocates for policies that actively promote digital inclusion, mandate reasonable accommodations and incentivise businesses to hire and retain disabled individuals (Li et al., 2021). For example, tax incentives, grants, and subsidies can encourage businesses to invest in accessible technologies, provide training, and create more inclusive hiring practices (Iftimoaei & Achitei, 2023). While comprehensive legislation exists in many jurisdictions, the emerging digital economy poses new challenges for policy frameworks, particularly regarding protecting disabled workers in atypical employment settings. Current regulatory frameworks often fail to adequately protect disabled digital economy workers, such as app developers, due to limited data collection on disability status and a lack of accountability measures (Krutzinna & Floridi, 2018). Furthermore, adopting universal design principles in policy frameworks can ensure that the design of products and services is accessible to a broader range of users from the outset (Mark et al., 2019). Finally, policy frameworks are required to ensure fairness in recent AI recruitment algorithms, which could be vulnerable to algorithmic bias and the risk of exacerbating disability employment (Fisher et al., 2024; Tilmes, 2022; Walkowiak, 2024).

**Organisational Culture:** The reviewed literature suggests that a supportive and inclusive organisational culture is essential for the successful integration of disability employment initiatives and the creation of workplaces where all employees, regardless of ability, feel valued and respected (Cullen et al., 2017). This culture should be characterised by a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion, where differences are tolerated and celebrated as valuable assets (Frączek, 2024; Walkowiak, 2024). Leadership is crucial in

setting the tone and establishing an inclusive environment. Lindberg (2024) found that employer representatives often felt unprepared despite their willingness to cooperate with employees with cognitive impairments and lacked sufficient knowledge and support to provide effective accommodations. Addressing this knowledge gap through training, education, and developing clear policies and procedures can empower employers to create a more accommodating and supportive work environment (Lindberg et al., 2024).

### **Interconnections Between Components**

The reviewed literature highlights significant interconnections between technical systems, social structures, and organisational environments in enabling successful disability employment in the digital era. The effectiveness of technical solutions, such as assistive technologies and digital platforms, heavily depends on supportive social structures and organisational environments. For instance, while digital technologies can facilitate remote work opportunities for disabled employees (Bloom et al., 2024), their successful implementation requires both social acceptance from managers and coworkers (Bosua & Gloet, 2021) and appropriate organisational policies and support systems (Cao, 2024). The relationship between digital skills development and organisational support systems further illustrates these interconnections. While digital skills are crucial for employment opportunities (Frączek, 2024), their development requires an organisational commitment to training programs and supportive environments that accommodate different learning needs (Almeida et al., 2020; Babucea, 2023). Similarly, the effectiveness of assistive technologies depends not only on their technical capabilities but also on the social acceptance within workplaces and the existence of appropriate organisational policies for their implementation (Fuhrmann et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2006).

The success of digital recruitment platforms exemplifies another critical intersection of these components. While technical accessibility of these platforms is essential (de Lima, 2016), their effectiveness is contingent upon organisational practices that value diversity (Walkowiak, 2024) and social structures that combat discriminatory attitudes (Fisher et al., 2024). This interconnection is particularly evident in implementing AI-based recruitment tools, where technical design must align with organisational commitment to fairness and social understanding of disability diversity (Tilmes, 2022). Furthermore, the literature suggests that sustainable improvements in disability employment require simultaneous attention to all three components. For example, while China's explicit digital strategy for disability employment (Li et al., 2021) represents a strong organisational environment, its success depends on both technical accessibility and social acceptance of disabled workers. Similarly, the effectiveness of workplace accommodations relies on integrating technical solutions, social support, and organisational policies (Lindberg et al., 2024; Cao, 2024). This integrated approach acknowledges that barriers to disability employment cannot be addressed through isolated interventions but require coordinated efforts across technical, social, and organisational domains.

Furthermore, the importance of participatory design emerges as a central theme that spans all three components, highlighting the interconnected nature of successful digital workplace initiatives. Studies demonstrate that when disabled individuals are actively involved in designing and implementing technical solutions, these solutions are more likely to meet user needs and gain social acceptance (Almeida et al., 2020; Fuhrmann et al., 2018). This participatory approach extends beyond technical design to influence organisational policies and social structures, as evidenced by the success of initiatives that incorporate disabled employees' perspectives in developing workplace accommodations (Cao, 2024) and digital skills training programmes (Estival et al., 2024). Such involvement helps ensure that

technical solutions align with actual user needs, organisational policies reflect lived experiences, and social structures promote genuine inclusion rather than tokenistic participation

## Discussion

Digital technologies offer significant opportunities for workplace inclusion, yet our review demonstrates that the success of disability employment initiatives in the digital economy depends on carefully aligning these technological advancements with a supportive social structure and organisational environment. This integration of technical and social elements, underpinned by proper accessibility standards and skills development programs, is crucial for creating sustainable and equitable employment opportunities for disabled individuals in an increasingly digitalised workplace. The rapidly evolving digital economy serves as the broader context within which these components interact, offering new opportunities through online platforms, remote work arrangements, and digital entrepreneurship. The digital economy's potential to overcome traditional employment barriers can only be fully realised when organisations adopt an integrated approach that considers both the technological infrastructure and the social dynamics of inclusion.

This review contributes to understanding how organisations can create more inclusive digital workplaces while addressing institutional and structural barriers to equity and equality across social groups. First, it systematically analyses how digital transformation affects disability employment outcomes across multiple dimensions, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding these complex interactions. Second, it extends beyond the narrow focus on assistive technologies that characterised previous literature reviews, examining how digitalisation fundamentally reshapes work processes and structures that affect disabled workers. Finally, it synthesises diverse organisational strategies and approaches for fostering the acceptance and inclusion of disabled individuals in increasingly digitalised organisations. These contributions are particularly timely as organisations worldwide accelerate their digital transformation initiatives, making it crucial to ensure that these changes promote rather than hinder workplace inclusion. Our findings underscore the importance of participatory design approaches, where disabled employees are actively involved in developing and implementing digital workplace solutions. This participatory approach helps ensure that technological innovations address real needs while fostering genuine inclusion and avoiding the pitfalls of solutions designed without input from disabled workers themselves.

The reviewed literature leaves several areas underexplored. First, many existing studies rely on limited sample sizes, making it challenging to draw broader conclusions about effectiveness. Second, there is a particular shortage of research examining multiple disabilities or demographic factors, and we found few studies comparing outcomes across different countries. Moreover, current literature pays insufficient attention to important aspects such as data protection in digital accommodations and technology customisation for various disabilities. The recent rise in remote and hybrid working (Bloom et al., 2024; Bosua & Gloet, 2021; Hickox & Liao, 2020) has created new research needs, particularly regarding inclusive virtual team management and remote workplace adjustments. Additionally, while participatory design approaches show promise in developing effective digital solutions (Almeida et al., 2020; Fuhrmann et al., 2018), there is limited research examining how to systematically implement these approaches across different organisational contexts and disability types. This gap is particularly significant given that participatory design could help

address the historical marginalisation of disabled voices in workplace technology development. The ongoing challenge lies in ensuring that digital solutions enhance rather than hinder inclusion, particularly as organisations continue to digitalise their operations at an unprecedented pace. These research gaps suggest several important areas for future study, including developing frameworks to assess digital workplace inclusion over time, considering both technological and social aspects, and establishing best practices for the meaningful participation of disabled employees in digital workplace design.

Additional research is needed on combining human and technological support effectively (Burke et al., 2013; Estival et al., 2024; Fuhrmann et al., 2018) whilst ensuring privacy and addressing potential bias in Human Resources (HR) systems (Fisher et al., 2024; Walkowiak, 2024). Future studies should also examine organisational factors affecting digital workplace interventions, including virtual management and mentoring approaches (Lindberg et al., 2024; Oh & Chen, 2015). The field would benefit from more research on digital entrepreneurship and platform work protections for disabled workers (Boellstorff, 2019; Lin et al., 2019; Qu, 2022). Furthermore, a significant gap in the literature concerns self-advocacy and leadership development through digital technologies, which is crucial for empowering disabled individuals to achieve their potential. Self-determination and self-advocacy are essential components of effective leadership, with leadership involving collective action towards common goals, while self-determination typically focuses on individual action (Johnson, 1999). Digital storytelling can illustrate how people with intellectual disabilities become self-advocates and strengthen advocacy efforts (Ellem et al., 2022). Exploring the impact of similar interventions in the workplace can illuminate the interaction of digital technologies and leadership programs for disabled employees.

We acknowledge several limitations in our study that warrant careful consideration. Our research only captures perspectives from individuals who have disclosed their disabilities, potentially missing valuable insights from others. While our findings discuss disability employment broadly, this approach may overlook important nuances in how different types of disabilities interact with digital technologies, even when participatory design approaches are used. The fast-paced evolution of digital technology suggests that some findings may need updating as new tools emerge. Furthermore, the study's reliance on English-language publications and management and organisation databases may have excluded valuable insights from other disciplines or cultural and linguistic contexts. Examining the findings in other contexts would enrich our understanding of digital technologies' impact on disabled workers' employment experiences. The rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies also means that some findings may require regular reassessment as new tools and platforms emerge, particularly in the context of remote work arrangements and virtual team management.

## Conclusion

This study examined the intersection of workplace digitalisation and disability employment through a socio-technical systems lens, demonstrating the transformative potential and persistent challenges in creating inclusive digital workplaces. Our analysis demonstrates that successful disability employment outcomes in the digital age require careful attention to the complex interplay between technological solutions, social systems, and organisational environments. While digital technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for workplace flexibility and accessibility, their effectiveness depends on two critical factors: thoughtful design incorporating disabled users' perspectives from the outset

and strategic implementation within supportive organisational cultures and enabling policy frameworks. This distinction between design and implementation is crucial - even well-designed technologies can fail to achieve their inclusive potential if organisations lack the necessary social structures and support systems for effective deployment. Organisations must address attitudinal barriers, develop comprehensive digital skills training programs, and create inclusive organisational cultures that value diversity. Future research should focus on examining the long-term effectiveness of digital workplace accommodations, developing evidence-based training frameworks, and understanding how policy frameworks can better support technological accessibility and social inclusion. By adopting an integrated approach that considers technical systems, social structure, and organisational environment, organisations can work toward creating more equitable and inclusive digital workplaces that enable all employees, regardless of ability, to contribute their full potential.

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