




Employment and
Social Development Canada

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Journey Mapping Project: Onboarding Employees with Disabilities

Presented to: Interdepartmental Onboarding Community of Practice

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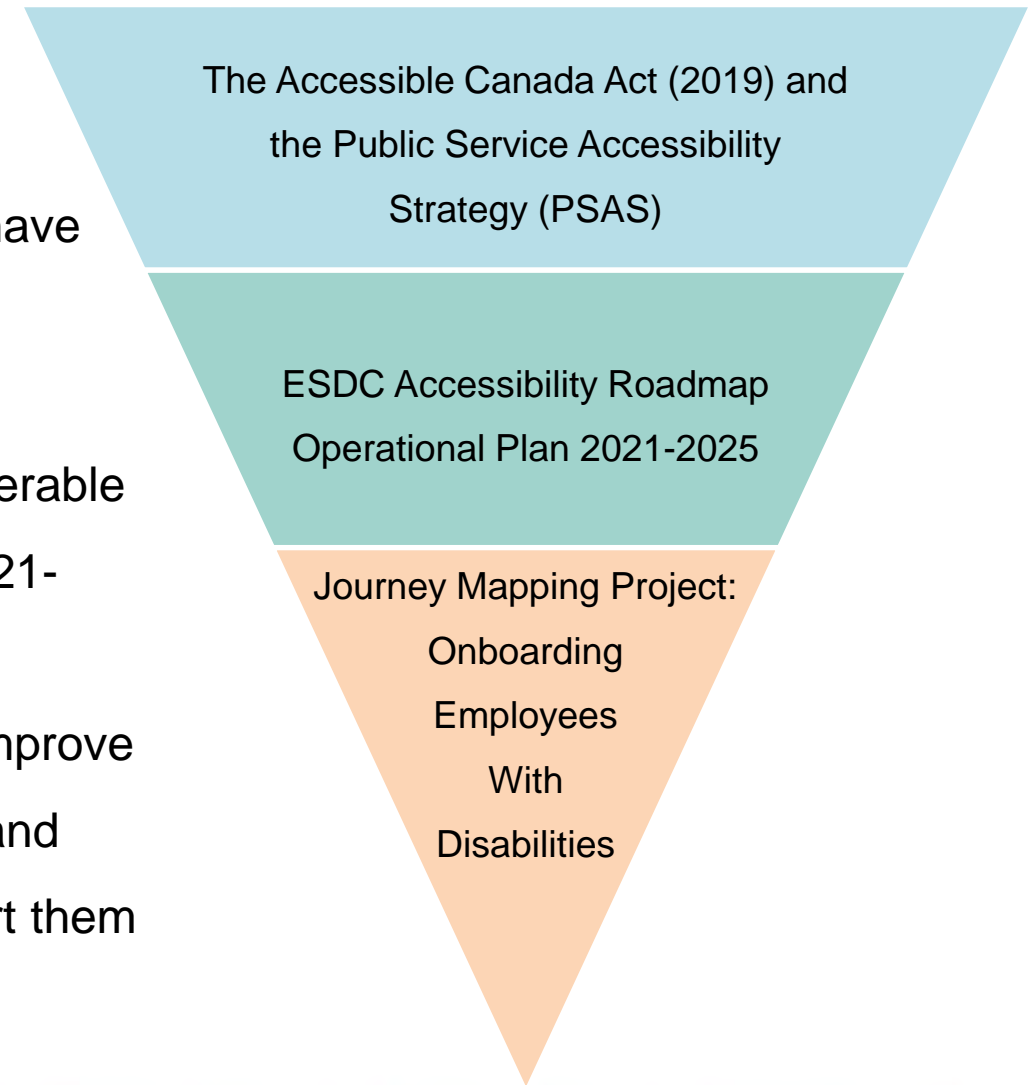
Objectives

- Present findings of the onboarding ESDC of employees with disabilities journey mapping project.
- Share recommendations for improving the onboarding experience of employees with disabilities.



Background

- Under the Accessible Canada Act, ESDC is committed to creating a barrier-free workplace for public servants who have disabilities and to increasing the hiring of persons with disabilities.
- This journey mapping project was identified as a key deliverable of ESDC's Accessibility Roadmap Operational Plan for 2021-2025.
- Project findings highlight proposed recommendations to improve the onboarding process, including recruitment, retention, and promotion of persons with disabilities in ESDC and support them in fulfilling their potential in the workplace.



Project highlights



Defined the project objectives.



Conducted an environmental scan and literature review.



Interviewed 49 ESDC employees with disabilities and 6 hiring managers*.



Consulted 12 process enablers and key contributors. (See Appendix 6)



Created seven personas.



Developed employee and hiring manager journey maps.



Held two sessions to validate journey mapping findings.



Analyzed findings to develop proposed recommendations.

*Interviews were conducted by Ference & Company Consulting in April-May 2021 and by Janet Leblanc and Associates in February 2022.



Employees: What they told us

“Stop gathering data. Start listening. Make sure people at the core of accommodations actually have disabilities and can relate.”

“Please remember we need extra time. A quick 3 to 4-minute stretch outside of the 15-minute break. I am not squirming, rather usually in pain.”

“We need to be able to share our experiences and contribute to the solutions. Bring us into the entire process, not just the initial feedback.”

“Don’t tell us something is accessible after we just told you it is not accessible. If I’ve requested accommodation, please listen.”

“The markers during training are the same for everyone. Instead, they should be more gradual and flexible.”

“Organizers should think in advance whether the training or a group activity is accessible. Maybe you shouldn’t do things if everyone cannot participate.”

“I am strong and I have endured a lot. What happened to me is not my fault and yet I’m doing the best I can living with this and healing from it. I can contribute to society as an independent person. I need to feel safe when I am disclosing [my condition] and asking for accommodation.”

“The onboarding process is intense. A lot of new information comes at you quickly.”



Managers: What they told us

"I don't always feel positioned to support an employee with a disability."

"I don't know if I am empowered to modify performance objectives for highly operational roles. It's unclear to me."

"We had to repeat the story about accommodations to justify. It shouldn't be this hard."

"Who decides [whether the software program] is close enough? Good enough?"

"This is unrealistic as disabilities are variable and highly complex."

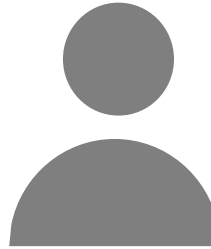
"I'm not a specialist. How do I know what's needed. I am trusting the employee to tell me what they need."

"My employee didn't disclose their disability until four months into the role. What should I have done differently?"

"My employee has an expectation that I should know everything about their disability."

"We set an expectation that the employee will be accommodated, but do not always have the capabilities to (at least in a timely manner)."

"It can be challenging or impossible for an employee with a disability to learn a new accommodation software they are not used to."



Key observations

- Working from home is a common accommodation sought by employees with disabilities. Before COVID-19, many employees with disabilities encountered resistance when requesting to work from home. The transition to remote work has been overall positive but has also created challenges related to available support and home office set-up.
- The successful onboarding of employees with disabilities is primarily influenced by the availability of approved ESDC accommodations as well as the experience, knowledge and attitude of the hiring manager in onboarding an employee with a disability.
- The variety of disabilities makes each onboarding experience unique (e.g., one employee's accommodation need for a visual impairment may be different from that of another visually-impaired employee).
- Job posters do not generally specify details about tasks and the operational environment. This makes it difficult for employees to assess the job or to know what supports they will need before starting, often causing delays in receiving the right equipment.



Common barriers identified across the onboarding process

Analysis of feedback from interviews with employees with disabilities and hiring managers, as well as input from stakeholders enabling the process, allowed for the identification of **three categories of barriers**:



1. Information &
Awareness



2. Accommodations
Process



3. Performance &
Workplace Supports



Common barrier: Information & awareness



- Managers expressed not feeling equipped with the “soft” skills (e.g., empathy, interpersonal, communication) needed to initiate the conversation about accommodation. Confusion also existed around when and how to ask an employee about accommodation needs.
- Managers raised the ‘grey zones’ and nuances around the duty to accommodate (DTA), duty to inquire and responsibility to disclose, leading to inconsistent employee onboarding experiences.
- Managers expressed not feeling comfortable or confident enough to hire and subsequently support an employee with disability due to a lack of information, knowledge and support. Those with less experience onboarding employees with disabilities were unclear about accommodations budgets, the DTA process and support options*.
- Employees who chose not to disclose their disability explained it was due to their fear of not being hired, being stigmatized and having limited opportunities for career advancement.
- Several employees indicated not pursuing any accommodations because they were not aware of the availability of workplace supports or the process to receive assistance.
- Employees indicated that not all job training programs were accessible to them.



*Examples of support options: ergonomic assessment and office equipment, adaptive technology, working from home arrangement and alternate work schedule₉

Common barrier: Accommodations process



- Employees mentioned that the Department does not proactively inform all employees about their right to obtain accommodations and the process to receive them.
- Accommodations requirements (e.g., ergonomic assessment) typically rely on a medical opinion; therefore, disabilities that were more difficult to diagnose resulted in longer and more problematic onboarding processes.
- In cases where managers involved Labour Relations for support, i.e., negotiating a DTA, it often created a negative perception for employees with disabilities.
- A few employees indicated having their requests for adaptive technology denied due to IT security requirements or cost. While alternative technology was offered, it did not provide the full support for them to accomplish their job tasks.
- Most employees indicated that it took a long time to complete the process and receive the equipment.



Common barrier: Performance & workplace supports



- Employees with disabilities expressed having insufficient time to complete the application forms, conduct job assessments, participate in training, and sometimes fulfill job requirements.
 - Managers also indicated a lack of clarity around whether ‘time’ or ‘how much time’ can be considered part of the duty to accommodate, mainly for jobs that operate under service standards.
- In some cases, neither the employee nor the hiring manager knew which accommodations would address functional limitations until the employee started using the job supports.
- Employees with invisible disabilities were less likely to be accommodated and to successfully negotiate a DTA.
- A few employees indicated having faced some challenges in conveying the effect of disability on their performance.
- Some managers were unsure and unable to accurately assess if components of an employee's performance were related to the need for accommodation or to performance issues.



Defining moments of the onboarding journey

Disclosing a disability

Often employees with disabilities, particularly those with invisible disabilities, choose not to disclose due to:

- fear of stigma;
- fear of not being hired or being negatively perceived; and
- uncertainty or lack of awareness about the types of accommodations.

Determining the right accommodation

Identifying workplace supports in a timely manner is critical for creating a level playing field for employees with disabilities and depends on:

- the manager's attitude and knowledge regarding DTA, and available job supports; and
- the employee's functional limitations and assigned job activities.

Obtaining equipment and technology

Obtaining specialized office equipment and adaptive technology promptly depends on whether:

- the initial conversation occurred before the employee start date; and
- the needed accommodation supports are on the approved list (e.g., speech-to-text software or phones that work with captioning software, noise cancelling headphones, ergonomic chairs and sit-stand desks).



Proposed recommendations for change



Information & awareness

- Update all onboarding training programs and administrative forms to meet today's accessibility standards.
- Expand and publish the approved list of accommodation supports.
- Include a definition of disability as per the Federal Disability Reference Guide in job postings and indicate that individuals have the right to needed accommodation, so employees with disabilities can better self-identify.
- Develop ESDC awareness campaign to increase understanding that **everyone** has a role to play in making the Department a leader in an accessible, people-centred, flexible workplace.
- Include empathy as one of the key leadership competencies.
- Offer training to:
 - all employees to raise awareness and shift attitudes towards understanding and inclusion, empathy and respect for employees with different abilities and ways of working; and
 - hiring managers to increase understanding about functional limitations and related core support options (e.g., adaptive technology, flexible work arrangements) and to develop their empathetic conversation skills.



Proposed recommendations for change



Accommodation process

- Improve communication among all enablers involved in the hiring/onboarding process to avoid delays and lengthy resolutions.
- Involve employees with disabilities in developing, designing and testing accommodation solutions.
- Ensure the accessibility lens is applied by corporate functions (HR, IT, communications, real property, etc.).
- Reduce the administrative burden in the onboarding process by making it human-centred, not system-centred.
- Offer centralized support, outside of Labour Relations, to provide onboarding advice and guidance to hiring managers and employees with a disability*.
- Align accommodation processes across the Government of Canada to ensure a seamless transition when employees change departments, e.g., have the accessible equipment follow the employee.
- Establish corporate reporting of the accommodation processes and activities (i.e., requests for adaptive technology, requests completed, average time, outstanding issues) to support senior leaders in tracking progress towards becoming an inclusive and accessible workplace.



* HRSB is launching a Centre of Expertise – Optimizing Employee Potential (CoE-OEP) in October 2022.

Proposed recommendations and change



Performance & workplace supports

- Encourage managers to have regular follow-ups and check-ins with employees with disabilities to ensure the job supports provided help them meet their performance requirements.
- Ensure all equipment requests include an option for assistance with delivery and/or physical set-up.
- Conduct ongoing research to expand the list of approved adaptive tools and technologies.
 - Collaborate with partners and non-government organizations to stay informed of current technologies.



Broader applicability

- Improving the onboarding experience for employees with disabilities will positively impact their day-to-day work environment, retention and career development. This will also attract and build a more inclusive and diverse workforce within ESDC.
- Learnings from this project highlight opportunities to further improve the workplace and strengthen ESDC's culture of inclusivity and diversity by:
 - Embracing an approach to accessibility across the Department, making it top of mind every day in everything we do (e.g., documents, meetings, work assignments);
 - Eliminating stigmatizing language (e.g., “Duty to Accommodate”) and systemic barriers that prevent recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities;
 - Updating systems used by employees to meet today's accessibility standards; and
 - Making client-facing systems and services accessible to better serve clients with disabilities.
- Sharing findings and recommendations with other federal departments may support them in creating positive onboarding experiences for the 5,000 employees with disabilities that will be hired across the public service by 2025.
- Reviewing the onboarding journey of other employment equity groups and sub-groups, and identifying and addressing barriers they may be facing that hinder their recruitment and retention.



Questions and Comments



QUESTIONS

COMMENTS

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Annex



Annex 1: Summary table of the five employee with disabilities personas

	 Claudette lives with chronic back pain.	 Ahmed has a hearing and visual impairment.	 Megan has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and depression.	 Lisa developed an environmental sensitivity that can trigger difficulty breathing.	 Stéphane has several mental health and chronic physical health issues.
Visible/ Invisible*	 Visible and invisible	 Visible and invisible	 Invisible	 Invisible	 Invisible
Disclosure*	 Disclosed during application	 Disclosed during application	 Disclosed after being hired	 Disclosed when developed	 Did not disclose
Manager Support*	 Medium-high	 Medium-high	 Medium	 Medium-low	 Not applicable
Outcome	 Support received	 Support partially received	 Support delayed	 Support delayed	 Not applicable
Satisfaction	 Medium-high	 Medium-low	 Medium-low	 Medium-low	 Not applicable
Feelings	 Respected, supported	 Tired, frustrated	 Discouraged, powerless	 Upset, angry	 Uncertain, apprehensive

*Factors influencing the employee's onboarding experience.

Annex 2: Persona samples developed for the employees with disabilities onboarding project


Seven personas were developed for the project: five employees with a disability and two managers.

Here are two samples:

Employee

Claudette

"To start, the process was simple: my manager got me the forms, my doctor filled them out. The equipment was sent to my home but there was no one available to help me with set up."



Details:
Claudette suffered a physical injury as a result of a car accident and lives with chronic back pain. She generally feels that she can be very open about her disability and that she is treated with respect. Her request for workplace supports are understood and met by her managers.

Disability:
Physical injury & chronic back pain; and Visible & invisible.

Support Required:
Ergonomic furniture (adjustable desk and custom chair); Accessible building entrances; and Accessible parking.

Age: 28
Position: Policy Analyst
Location: NCR

Onboarding Experience:
Manager Support:
Ease of process:
Speed of process:
Overall satisfaction:

Pain Points:
Received the equipment at home but was unable to perform the set-up herself; and It took over six months to receive the correct equipment.

Barriers:
Inadequate snow removal from entryways and sidewalks; and Few designated spots for accessible parking means there is a waiting period to secure one.

Feelings:
Respected ☒ Supported ☒
Satisfied ☒ Frustrated ☐


Process Outcome:
☒ Workplace support received; and
☐ Duty to Accommodate not negotiated.

Opportunities:
Give employees clear explanation of the process to obtain workplace support; Create a tracking system to keep an employee informed of the order fulfillment; Work with the building management on parking and accessibility solutions; and Consider alternative solutions such as other work locations, flexible work arrangements that would allow employees to pay for part-time parking.

Manager

Erik

"I didn't realize it would be such a challenging experience. I worry about doing or saying something wrong, and an employee filing a grievance. I wish I felt more confident about the accommodation process and what's available."



Details:
Erik has never onboarded an employee with a disability. He is now in the process of bringing onboard an employee with invisible disability, who disclosed his disability to him. He is mostly relying on other managers to navigate through the process.

Position: Manager
Location: W-T Region

Attributes:
Motivation:
Comfort with discussing disability:
Knowledge of disability:
Knowledge on workplace support:

Experience Onboarding Employees:
Low High

Feelings:
Discouraged ☐ Frustrated ☐ Confused ☐

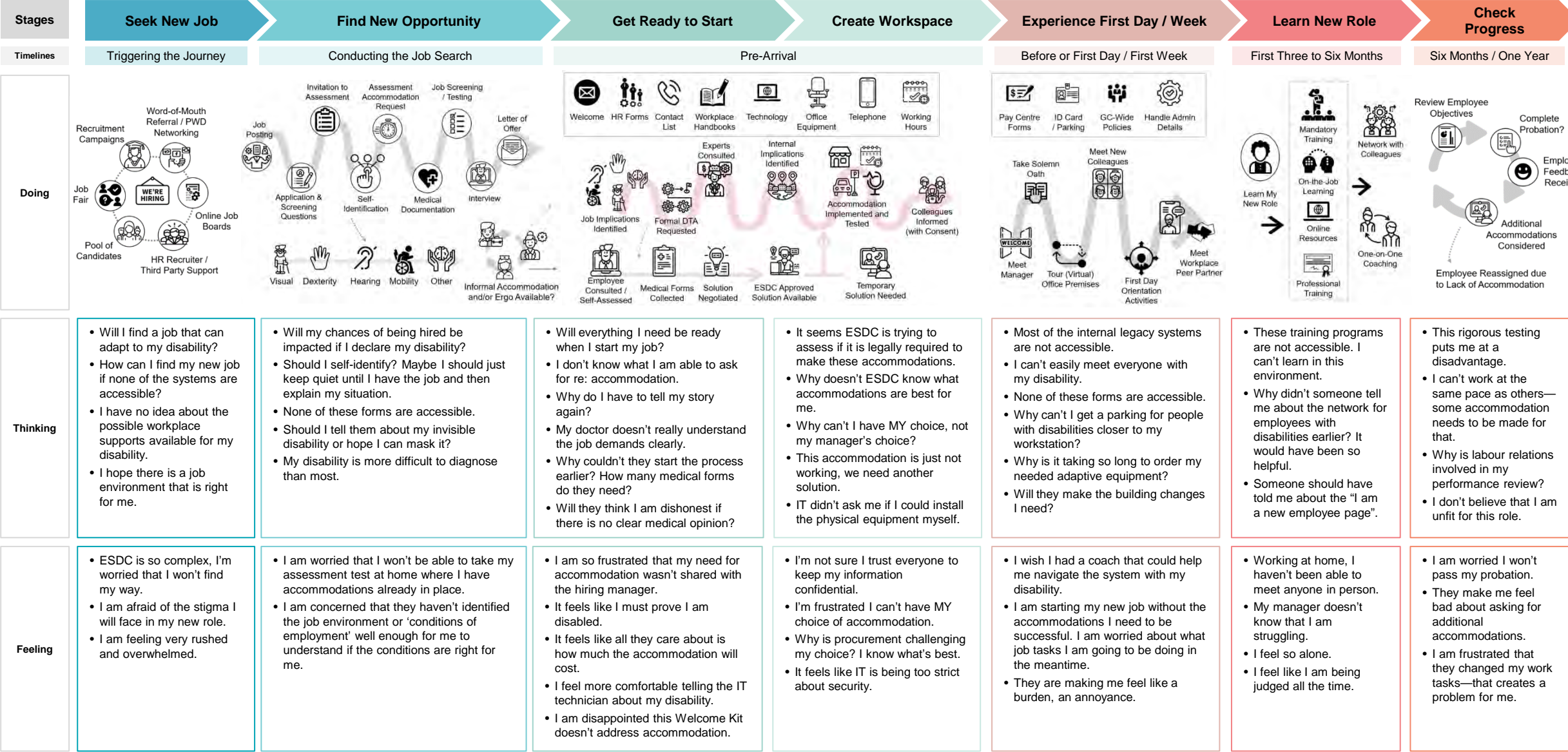
Pain Points:
Resistant towards starting the support conversation, especially with employees with invisible disabilities, due to personal discomfort; Feels that employees with disabilities may exaggerate their disabilities in order to receive special treatment; Fear over making a mistake and getting into trouble; and Fear of extended grievance process.

Barriers:
Lack of awareness of what supports are available in the department for specific disabilities and how to obtain workplace supports; Lack of understanding as to why support conversations are important; and Not sure how to broach the subject with the EWD regarding supports.

Opportunities:
Attitude may be changed with evidence that the support process works, i.e. success stories about how supports enabled EWD to achieve high work performance; More education on how to recruit and retain people with disabilities and on disability and workplace support; and Training on how to initiate the support conversation.



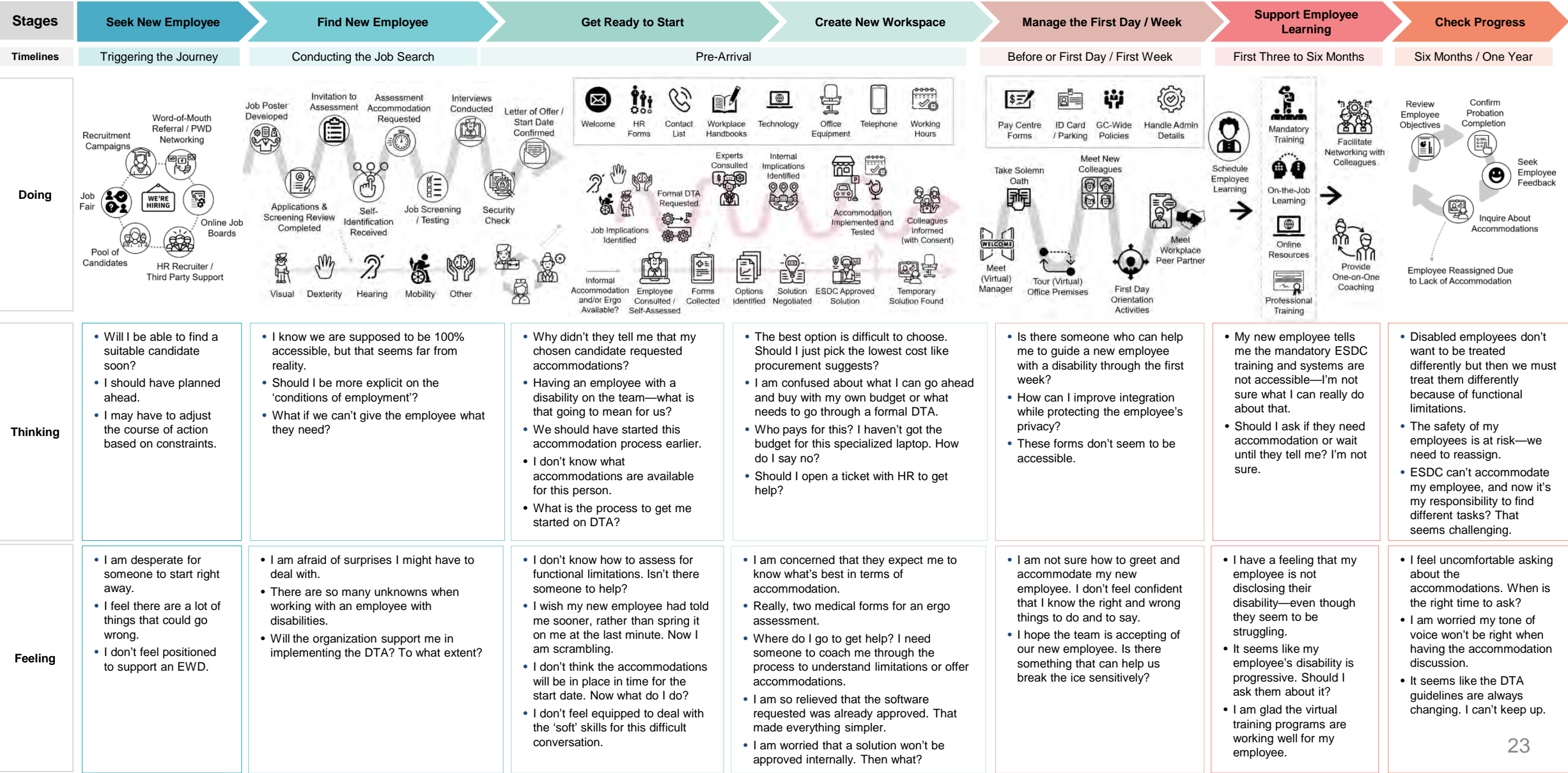
Annex 3: ESDC employees with disabilities' onboarding journey map



Annex 3: ESDC employees with disabilities' onboarding journey map

Stages	Seek New Job	Find New Opportunity	Get Ready to Start	Create Workspace	Experience First Day / Week	Learn New Role	Check Progress
Timelines	Triggering the Journey	Conducting the Job Search	Pre-Arrival		Before or First Day / First Week	First Three to Six Months	Six Months / One Year
Barriers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some employees with disabilities are not comfortable disclosing due to perceived stigma or other reasons. Disability can impact the perceived equity of hiring and onboarding processes. Uncertainty about the accommodations process may prevent employees from requesting accommodations and/or disclosing their disability. A few employees reported encountering challenges during the application and assessment process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disabilities that are more difficult to diagnose can result in longer and more problematic onboarding processes. Employees with invisible disabilities appear to be less likely to be accommodated and successfully negotiate a DTA. Employees with these disabilities are less likely to be accommodated and more likely to encounter resistance from management. Some employees face challenges in conveying the impact of disability on performance. Most of the employees interviewed indicated that they, rather than a manager, first raised the issue of accommodations. Several employees indicated that they had not pursued any accommodations because they were not sure what is available or how to receive the support they need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most common concern with the accommodation process expressed by interviewees was that it took too long to complete the process and receive the equipment. The success of onboarding of employees with disabilities is influenced by the availability of pre-approved ESDC accommodations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The transition to remote work because of the global pandemic has been a positive experience for employees with disabilities but has also created challenges related to the available support and equipment permissible in a home environment. One individual cautioned of the risk that if workplaces themselves are not accommodating then working from home may become a default option for a person with a disability that would otherwise prefer working from the office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all training is accessible for all employees with disabilities. While some employees praised the learning environment, others felt challenged by, for example, a classroom setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees expressed that they chose not to disclose due to fear of stigma and fear of limiting opportunities for advancement. Confusion exists around the manager's duty to inquire such as when and how to ask an employee if they need accommodation. In some instances described by managers they were unsure and unable to accurately assess which components of an employee's performance were related to the need for accommodation and which related to other issues of performance.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve networking as a channel for seeking new employees with disabilities. Develop ESDC as an employer of choice for people with disabilities. Recruitment campaigns, such as universities, should have more frequent mentions of accommodations for people with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify what managers should ask for to make accommodation easier to implement. Give candidates the interview questions before the interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a dedicated intermediary to suggest accommodations for functional limitations. Expand the W-T Employee Wellness Passport pilot to streamline an accessible tool to enable employees to request a variety of supports. The single most common recommendation made by the employee interviewees was that the department should inform all employees about the right to needed accommodations and the process to receive them. Develop a training toolkit for hiring managers to increase awareness about core supports, processes and available accommodations. Include soft skill training about how to have empathetic conversations. Employees recommend that the department is more proactive when discussing potential accommodations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and post the 'pre-approved' list of accommodation supports and ensure all equipment includes an accommodation request for assistance with physical set-up. Investigate the opportunity to have an open vendor contract for ESDC to improve the procurement of adaptive technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and post the 'pre-approved' list of accommodation supports and ensure all equipment includes an accommodation request for assistance with physical set-up. Investigate the opportunity to have an open vendor contract for ESDC to improve the procurement of adaptive technology. Ask in advance if support is needed to set up equipment. Ensure all equipment includes an accommodation request for assistance with physical set-up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give employees some choice in how they learn material that is needed for performing their job. Provide dedicated time for employees to complete the necessary training; provide extra time for employees with disabilities, if needed. Job training programs need to be validated to today's accessibility standards. Develop a process to share functional limitations with the trainers to ensure training programs are accessible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement regular follow ups and check-ins for employees with disabilities after the first week and perhaps every month. Train managers about how and when to ask about the need for accommodations.

Annex 4: Onboarding employees with disabilities hiring managers' journey map



Annex 5: Demographics



Research was conducted with **49 employees with disabilities** and **6 managers**:

- 40 employees with disabilities were interviewed, 9 provided written responses; and
- There was regional representation across the country.

Of the 49 employees:

- 9 have a visible disability;
- 27 have an invisible disability;
- 3 have both visible and invisible disabilities; and
- 10 did not disclose their type of disability.



Annex 6: Key process contributors

Stakeholders consulted:

- Employees with Disabilities Network
- ESDC Accessibility Office, HRSB

Interviews with process enablers:

- Accessibility Centre of Excellence, IT Accessibility Office, IITB
- Business Management Services, CSB
- Diversity outreach, Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (DoRRA), Workforce Management Directorate, HRSB
- Duty to Accommodate*, HRSB
- HRSB Survey team
- National Human Resources Service Centre, HRSB
- Real Property, CFOB
- Regional Recruitment Centre, Strategic Services Directorate, Quebec Regional Office

*A Centre of Expertise is planned to launch summer 2022.