Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources

Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources **(2021) 59, 63–83** doi:10.1111/1744-7941.12230

Re-calibrating HRM to improve the work experiences for workers with intellectual disability

Timothy Bartram *RMIT, Australia*
Jillian Cavanagh *RMIT University, Australia*
Hannah Meacham *Monash University, Australia*
Patricia Pariona-Cabrera *RMIT, Australia*

This study examines the impact of human resource management (HRM) on workers with intellectual disability (WWID) across various industries in Australia. The research aims to identify HRM strategies for WWID by drawing on Thomas and Ely's (1996) managing diversity framework. A critical methodological case study approach was triangulated through participant interviews, focus groups and observations. The research identified three main factors that organisations must practice ensuring effective management of WWID; first, promoting workers' well-being through specific HRM wellbeing practices; second, valuing difference among all employees; and third, developing purposeful intervention strategies to support the inclusion of WID. The ways in which WWID are integrated into the workplace are important in ensuring workers' well-being and maximising their individual performance. We extend Thomas and Ely's (1996) learning and effectiveness paradigm to include 'plural voices in diversity management' at each stage of the paradigm and propose a re-calibrated model of HRM for WWID.

Keywords: disability, diversity management, employee well-being, HRM

Key points

1 The research identified three main factors that organisations have to practise to ensure effective management of WWID; first, promoting workers' well-being through specific HRM wellbeing practices; second, valuing difference among all employees; and third, developing purposeful intervention strategies to support the inclusion of WWID.
2 The ways in which WWID are integrated into the workplace are important in ensuring workers' well-being and maximising their individual performance.
3 We extend Thomas and Ely's () learning and effectiveness paradigm to include 'plural voices in diversity management' at each stage of the paradigm and propose a model of HRM for WWID.

Correspondence: Professor Timothy Bartram, School of Management, College of Business, RMIT, Melbourne, Vic. 3000, Australia; e-mail: timothy.bartram@rmit.edu.au

Accepted for publication 25 April 2019.

There is limited research on human resource management (HRM) and workers with intellectual disabilities (WWID) but a growing interest in how to improve the work experiences of this cohort of workers (Holmes and Fillary 2000; Meacham et al. 2017). This comes at a time when organisations are beginning to look in alternative places for talent to join their workforces to gain a competitive advantage; for example, studies have already outlined the key talents of individuals with autism (Baron-Cohen and Lombardo 2017). Research indicates that diversity management should incorporate an approach that values an employee's individual strengths and incorporates those strengths to support their growth, inclusion, well-being and performance (Alcázar, Fernández and Sánchez Gardey 2013; Lauring 2013; Lorbiecki and Jack 2000; Tatli 2011). Most organisations develop and implement HRM systems that assume workers do not have disabilities, often creating a disconnect between their espoused HR policies and practices in action (Akkerman, Kef and Meininger 2018). 'Intellectual disability' is characterised by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills' (Schalock et al. 2007, p. 118). Conditions can include Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome and Fragile X syndrome. Employer understandings are limited as to how to best support WWID (McDermott and Edwards 2012). Past research and practice has focused on disability as a whole, rather than disability types (such as physical, intellectual and mental health) and the unique needs of those with these disabilities (Cavanagh et al. 2017). Transgender research, for example, has shown that the needs of transgender employees are vastly different from those of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers; however, these minority groups are often included under the same LGBT label (Ozturk and Tatli 2016). Therefore, we call for a greater understanding of targeted HRM approaches/strategies for smaller minority groups, such as WWID.

Traditional HRM and management fail to consider the complexity of the relationships between WWID, their managers and co-workers within organisations (Brewer and Roccas 2001; Cook and Burke-Miller 2015; Flores et al. 2011). Guest (2017) argues that stresses related to work, and anxieties associated with the external environment, often impact employees' overall well-being. He proposes an alternative approach to HRM that promotes a greater investment in employment relationships, workers' well-being and, ultimately, individual and organisational performance. For workplace experiences to improve for WWID, managers have to create a better work environment (Meacham et al. 2017).

This study is innovative because we develop a new model of HRM for WWID in open employment underpinned by a workforce diversity perspective. To do this, we use a critical methodological case study approach and triangulate participant interviews, focus groups and observations across seven organisations. The purpose of this paper is to develop a model of HRM that uses a diversity approach to support and enable WWID. We also offer important practical insights into the development of HRM practices for managers across a number of sectors. Our overarching research question is: 1 How can organisations develop inclusive HRM systems for WWID?

The paper is structured in the following way: first, we present a review of the key tenets of learning and effectiveness related to diversity; second, the methodology procedures of the study will be presented followed by the results, which will identify the main elements influencing diversity in the context of the research sites; finally, the conceptual and practical implications of this research and avenues for future research will be discussed. Following the literature review, we expand our question base.

HRM and WWID

Current HRM approaches for WWID are not working, largely due to the lack of appreciation for these workers and their potential for building a competitive advantage (Hartnett et al. 2011). This is often related to negative employer perceptions of WWID and fear of the legal ramifications associated with employing WWID (Cavanagh et al. 2017; Chi et al. 2018). This can be seen with other minority groups, such as transgender workers (Ozturk and Tatli 2016). Managerial attitudes and organisational HR approaches towards workers with disabilities are often significant barriers to employment (Akkerman, Kef and Meininger 2018; Scior 2011). Moreover, negative attitudes of colleagues often lead to unfavourable treatment of WWID in the workplace (Chi et al. 2018; Holmes and Fillary 2000).

A growing number of organisations employ WWID as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Russo and Perrini 2010) but do not necessarily promote the well-being of workers (Guest 2017). Some organisations market themselves as CSR employers to reach internal CSR targets and comprise a percentage of their employee base with workers with disabilities (Font et al. 2012; Vuontisjärvi 2006). Hart (2010) has been critical of the ethical reputations organisations proclaim and argues that CSR is often underpinned by a business case and managed through an organisation's internal regulation system. WWID often feel 'isolated and excluded from organizational social networks' (Fujimoto et al. 2014, 518). An inclusive HRM approach can be achieved by building a competitive advantage through WWID and their unique skill sets (Bohdanowicz and Zientara 2009; Garay and Font 2012; Hart 2010), and by promoting their job satisfaction and well-being (Guest 2017).

Diversity management and WWID

The literature suggests that diversity management should take a strategic approach to valuing employees' individual strengths for an organisational competitive advantage (Alcázar, Fernández and Sánchez Gardey 2013; Kochan et al. 2003; Lauring 2013). Diversity management is defined as

> the utilization of human resource (HR) management practices to (i) increase or variation in human capital on some given dimension(s), and/or (ii) ensure that variation in human capital dimension(s) does not hinder the achievement of organizational objectives, and/or (iii) ensure that variation capital on some given dimension(s) facilitates the achievement of organizational objectives (Olsen and Martins 2012, 1169).

Effectively managing workplace diversity is challenging for many organisations in that leveraging diversity whilst maintaining organisational performance is a weighted issue (Sippola and Smale 2007). The study identified a shift from a focus on diversity management to one of inclusiveness. However, many organisations focus on issues generalised to socio-cultural group identifiers such as race, gender or religion (Mueller 2014) rather than specific needs related to individuals, such as those with a disability, which transcends generalised socio-cultural groups. Therefore, a disconnect is created between espoused HR policies and practices in action (Akkerman, Kef and Meininger 2018; Hall and Kramer 2009). Hence, employer understandings are often limited as to how to best support WWID (Flores et al. 2011). Top-level management is often committed to the inclusion of WWID at a strategy level; however, the cascade of information and support systems can fade at the middle management/supervisor level (Riccò and Guerci 2014). Therefore, it is important that this disconnect is resolved to ensure that disability inclusion strategies are successful (Cavanagh et al. 2017; Meacham et al. 2017).

Diversity management should create workplace environments (e.g. job-person fit, mentor programs, workplace accommodations) in which employees from a range of social and cultural backgrounds can perform effectively and achieve their full potential (Oswick and Noon 2014; Van Knippenberg, van Ginkel and Homan 2013). In such environments, WWID can be productive and, in some cases, may even have the potential to out-perform their counterparts when they are afforded opportunities (Blick et al. 2016; Hall and Kramer 2009). Case studies, carried out at a film company and a five-star hotel in Australia, respectively, examined HRM innovation programs in the early stages of employment for 17 WWID (Meacham et al. 2017). A 'life theme' created through innovation programs was one of enhanced and creative opportunities for the social inclusion of a diverse group of employees. We argue that HR professionals need to be more proactive in finding innovative ways to engage WWID in the early stages of employment.

Learning and effectiveness paradigm

This study employs Thomas and Ely's (1996) learning and effectiveness paradigm to underpin the re-thinking of HR approaches to the employment of WWID. The paradigm outlines eight pre-conditions for an inclusive diversity strategy. First, the organisation should understand that a diverse workforce will offer different perspectives and that the organisation needs to value their opinions. Second, the organisation needs to recognise learning opportunities and challenges that arise from employing a diverse workforce. Third, the organisational culture needs to create an expectation of high performance standards. Fourth, the organisational culture should encourage personal development. Fifth, the organisational culture needs to encourage openness. Sixth, the organisation needs to make workers feel valued. Seventh, the organisation should have an easily understood mission. Eighth, the organisation needs to have a fairly non-bureaucratic structure (Thomas and Ely 1996).

Workplace approaches towards diverse employees can be better incorporated into workplace processes (Roberson 2006) through 'strategies that enhance organizational performance' (Thomas and Ely 1996). Organisations need to create a culture in which the diverse nature of individuals is recognised, allowing those individuals to 'share their unique perspectives' (Thomas and Ely 1996). This can relate to WWID, as they often display unique talents and perspectives such as mathematical, organisation and technical abilities that can contribute to organisational performance. Without an inclusive workplace culture, managers may struggle to incorporate individual and unique perspectives into job roles and are unable to utilise these insights (Hall and Kramer 2009). Under a learning and effectiveness paradigm, organisations focus on the themes of integration and inclusion (Roberson 2006), which can be essential for workers with disabilities (Cavanagh et al. 2017; Kaye, Jans and Jones 2011). Eight pre-conditions aim to support organisations to utilise identity-group differences in the service of organisational learning and growth.

An organisation should have a 'mission clearly communicated to staff', 'adopt a democratic approach to management' and a 'non-bureaucratic structure' (Thomas and Ely 1996). The conditions focus on integration to enable employees' to share their unique skills, by 'encouraging openness', 'valuing opinions' and 'promoting learning opportunities for personal development'(Thomas and Ely 1996). For WWID this is especially important due to the possible exclusion that often occurs in society because they have a disability (Overmars-Marx et al. 2014). Workplace inclusion may assist in the inclusion of WWID within their communities. It is also important for an organisation to have a 'strategy of diversity' and 'encourage high performance' of all workers. In a qualitative study of three professional services organisations, Ely and Thomas (2001) examined the effects of diversity management paradigms on work groups. The organisational approach encourages employees to openly discuss their different experiences about diversity management. It was reported that employees within an integration-and-learning based organisation felt valued by managers and colleagues, which increased employee performance. Learning and effectiveness outcomes can result from the integration of a diverse workforce into work processes (Roberson 2006). For example, a flexible approach to managing a diverse workforce can increase innovation of work processes by employees.

Methodological approach

This research is based on a case study approach across three hotels, a courier company, a film company, a management consultancy firm and a recruitment company in Australia. A case study approach is the most appropriate for this research, as it focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality to understand social phenomena in context (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Ethical clearance was secured from the university prior to the commencement of the case studies. Participant organisations were purposefully selected due to their employment of WWID. Contact was made through a gatekeeper at each organisation, who identified suitable participants to be involved in the study.

Data collection involved 78 participants in this study. A series of one-hour interviews were carried out with 45 participants, made up of 16 from management (HR managers, duty managers, management/recruitment consultants) and 29 WWID. Patton postulates that face-to-face interviews allow researcher/s to ask important questions that draw out information about a particular set of circumstances. Focus groups included 33 participants (five WWID and 28 supervisors and colleagues). Group interviews allow participants to develop a construction of meaning (Patton 2005). One organisation requested a focus group of WWID as a means of support for participant WWID. Of the 34 WWID participants, 19 are female and 15 male. WWID participants range in age from 19 to 55 years, with an average job tenure of 8.7 years. All WWID are employed in open employment. The level of disability was not asked during the data collection phase due to invasion of privacy concerns raised by each of the organisations. However, management advised most WWID had either delayed development or Down syndrome.

During the interviews and focus groups the researchers took observation notes. According to Lofland and Lofland (2006) observations add to the accuracy of the data by capturing the actions and facial expressions of participants. Upon contacting the prospective participants for the interviews and focus groups, the purpose of the research was outlined and each participant was assured that this was a confidential and voluntary exercise (Schensul 1999). Participants were assured of confidentiality and advised they could exit at any point during interviews or the focus group discussions.

Data from the interviews and focus groups was transcribed and analysed using NVivo, following the steps of thematic content analysis outlined by Weber (1990). The first step was to generate a coding framework and a detailed codebook. Themes were identified through the review of the literature and theoretical framework. Initially, an a priori coding framework was established based on themes in the literature predicated on Thomas and Ely's (1996) eight preconditions to diversity. Additional themes were added concomitantly as the analysis of the data progressed. The transcripts were coded independently by two coders until saturation. Two coders were used to ensure the reliability of the coding framework. Inter-rater reliability was consistent with the coding themes as instruction had been given as to the content of each theme. Where there was disagreement between the coders, a third rater was employed to finalise the coding.

Findings

The findings of this study are grouped into three focus areas, each containing features of the learning and effectiveness paradigm outlined by Thomas and Ely (1996). The first section, *Integration: being fair and ensuring equal opportunity,* encompasses 'the organisational culture should encourage personal development'; 'the organisational culture needs to encourage openness'; and 'the organisation needs to make workers feel valued'. The second section, *Access to work and valuing difference,* includes 'the organisation should understand that a diverse workforce will give different perspectives and the organisation

needs to value their opinion'; 'the organisation needs to recognise learning opportunities and challenges that come from employing a diverse workforce'; and 'the organisational culture needs to create an expectation of high performance standards'. The third section, *Organisational strategies to support diversity,* comprises 'the organisation should have an easily understood mission' and 'the organisation needs to have a fairly non-bureaucratic structure'.

At the outset, all of the managers made it clear they employ people with disabilities with the skills to do a specific job, which contributes to their competitive advantage and at the same time meets their CSR obligations. Hence, managers described their focus as a synthesis between competitive advantage and meeting CSR obligations.

Integration: being fair and ensuring equal opportunity

Management support was found through the integration of WWID into work at each of the research sites. When asked about HR policy regarding employing WWID, two of the managers explained:

> We have a target of having 2 per cent of our employees having a disability . . . this can vary throughout the year. (Cassandra, HR Manager, Hotel 3)

> We are an equal opportunity employer. It's a big CSR thing at the moment. . .. (Justine, HR Manager, Hotel 2)

To underpin the support for WWID, each one of the research sites and their respective managers had a clear and widely understood mission that sent a message to all employees that the organisations are working towards a common goal. As Sylvia noted,

> The organisation wanted to avoid putting the spotlight on employees with disabilities after finding that they 'just wanted to fit in'. (Sylvia, HR Manager, Courier Company)

Support for WWID and their well-being was evidenced through workplace accommodations, such as modified work spaces (e.g. quiet workspaces) for WWID and flexible hours for medical appointments, which in effect create a social climate where workers can and do perform to their potential (Hartnett et al. 2011).

> We are open to discussing how flexibility can work for every role in the firm, whether that's a junior member in the mail room to partner level. (Debra, Consultant, Consultancy Company)

> Being able to work from home makes disability more manageable. Organisations should have a results-based system, where it doesn't matter how or where the work is done. . . (Christine, Consultant, Recruitment Company)

Positive manager and supervisor attitudes are also crucial for integrating WWID, as seen in this case, where top managers promote inclusion.

> Board and top end [management] tend to be supportive but it stops at middle management level (Debbie, Consultant, Recruitment Company)

However, negative supervisor's attitudes may hinder this inclusion, as described by employees at the consultancy company, showing that negative attitudes are still present:

> Some managers . . . are quite old school in their thinking, and that's a challenge. . . So it's about having those conversations and being able to articulate where the value comes from in allowing someone to work flexibly. (Maria, Consultant, Consultancy Company)

When the researchers posed a question to WWID about management and supervisor support, participants made comments such as 'there's lots of communication' and 'we get requests from management on education'. Wayne (WWID) encapsulated the views of most of the participants when he spoke about management support and how this allowed him to feel included:

> All the supervisors are helpful, the department manager is friendly and helpful and he has really helped me recently in having time off for my operations. I feel I can go and ask any questions I have; it is an open office that you can just walk into and everyone says hi and helps me. You can tell the department manager is busy but they always ask how I'm doing. (Wayne, WWID, Hotel 1)

By understanding difference and various work approaches, managers and supervisors often have to adjust work roles to manage performance, for example by reducing the number of rooms an attendant has to clean. Their focus is on encouraging the integration of WWID into the workplace and some supervisors recognised what WWID do well and responded positively when asked about WWID performance:

> He does so well; he always gets excellent guest comments. He's always on time and reliable and will always cover a shift if we need him. (Eric, Supervisor, Hotel 1)

> What is good to see is that other colleagues notice their good work. We have a staff awards night and one WWID always gets nominated because of the hard work they do – always asking if anyone needs help. (Joyce, Supervisor, Hotel 2)

Supervisors at Hotel 2 demonstrated that WWID could be challenging, and we found there were limits to how WWID work and how they are perceived by other workers:

> The laundry attendants are quite slow. . ..The other laundry attendants get a bit annoyed as they feel they are carrying them a bit but there is nowhere else to put them (Jenny, Supervisor, Hotel 2)

> The laundry attendants can be difficult; they do their jobs when they want to but when they don't it can be a struggle. . . (David, Supervisor, Hotel 2)

However, Eric (Supervisor, Hotel 1) responded to being asked what challenges there were managing WWID, and how he has to relax expectations depending on each worker:

> Apart from being slow, the housekeepers do their jobs well and don't cause a fuss, they are never sick and turn up on time. You have to give them the benefit of the doubt sometimes, you can tell the days they are struggling and sometimes we forget they are not as able as we are. Our team is good in that way, they help them out. (Eric, Supervisor, Hotel 1)

Access to work and valuing difference

It was evident that organisational culture encourages inclusion by identifying all employees as 'employees' rather than 'a person with a disability'. It was evident that 'difference' was valued within the organisations. When asked about team/department culture, participants responded:

> We have such a diverse culture; the majority of people have experienced the feeling of being left out at some point. . .. (Helen, Supervisor, Hotel 3)

> They are very inclusive . . . there are language classes, OH&S assess your desk and working environment to name just a few. (Janice, WWID, Courier Company)

> I would like to see a general acceptance and tolerance for anyone who is awesome at their job but doesn't have to fit a particular mould. (Lainey, Consultant, Consultancy Company)

There was a level of recognition and openness towards WWID that appeared to empower them to not only identify with the organisation but fostered their well-being and performance. WWID used phrases such as 'I'm more confident. . .I work hard' (James, WWID, Courier Company), and 'They (managers) include me. . .I feel part of the team. . .' (Joey, WWID, Film Company). At Hotels 1 and 3, it was imperative that WWID feel valued and management made every effort to demonstrate their commitment. When asked about organisational commitment to diversity, we found that they provide WWID with information about their rights and they encourage the empowerment of WWID through incentives:

> A lot of them feel incentive just to do well at their job, or if they have another job in mind, such as being a buddy themselves that drives them to do well (Helen, Supervisor, Hotel 3)

> It's important to make sure they are comfortable with what they are doing. By designing their job around them we can ensure we get the best out of them (Sally, Duty Manager, Hotel 1)

However, at Hotel 2, some WWID felt they were not valued enough as part of the team.

> The supervisors only care about targets, they just tell us to get on with our work even if they see we are stuck (Damo, WWID, Hotel 2)

Barriers to accessing work were found to be an issue at the recruitment company, but also, by identifying these barriers, organisational strategies can be put in place to overcome these barriers.

> There's often a subconscious bias because someone has a disability. Keeping a job is fitting the job to the employee and allowing for flexible working. Employers need a bit of common sense. (Christine, Consultant, Recruitment Company)

> Recognising that workers with disability are part of diversity and . . . they can contribute fully to the job, if they're given the chance. (Debbie, Consultant, Recruitment Company)

Organisational strategies to support diversity

Each of the research sites demonstrated internalised organisational strategies to support the differences and the well-being of WWID. As evidenced by Hotel 2 and Hotel 3, having an open organisational structure with a democratic approach encourages a diverse range of employee abilities, opinions and experiences to influence the performance of employees:

> Teamwork is one of our strengths – it has to be in this industry – and we have to stick together. (Chris, Supervisor, Hotel 3)

> We have to support all our employees. It's how we work effectively (Justine, HR Manager, Hotel 2)

At the courier company and film company, open communication and additional informal support were seen as crucial for WWID to perform their job roles, showing that small practices can make a big difference to WWID.

> It's not that we need them to do our jobs for us, we just need a little extra help from time to time. (Ricky, WWID, Courier Company)

> There's lots of communication. We have team meetings before the shoot, at lunch and at the end of the day . . . it gives me responsibility. I like being part of a big team making something. (Daryl, WWID, Film Company)

At Hotel 3, supervisors were invited to explain their training strategies. There was evidence of strategic training programs for employees and WWID, allowing for their differences, when supervisors were asked about job training.

> It is probably quite difficult, as each person and their disability is different. Some might be mild when they can do more jobs, others may be happy to do the same job. This makes it difficult to train not only them but the employees that work with them (Craig, Supervisor, Hotel 3)

However, when asked the same question, the recruitment company and consultancy company outlined a lack of strategic management training, suggesting the need for management training as part of their support strategies for WWID to enhance their well-being.

> There's not enough mid-level management and training. Training for mid-level managers is a must to identify the key core job roles and how employers can make them flexible and fit people with disabilities. (Tanya, Manager, Recruitment Company)

Additionally, when asked about further diversity strategies, Hotels 1 and 3 employed the use of external workplace activities such as a cricket team and department social events to foster team development and inclusion. However, this tended to be limited amongst colleagues at Hotel 2.

> The banquet attendant plays cricket with us and the kitchen hand sometimes does too. (Eric, Supervisor, Hotel 1)

> We go to the cinema and I always have lunch with the housekeepers. (Barry, WWID, Hotel 2)

> We go for drinks after our shifts and spend time with each other on days off. (Jessica, WWID, Hotel 3)

The use of team activities where WWID and colleagues can integrate and socialise with each other outside of the workplace setting allows all employees to find social interests in common with each other, strengthening the inclusive nature of the hotel. As a strategy, creating opportunities for social interaction through activities can enable managers to include WWID into a workplace setting by creating a mutual sphere of acceptance through a social activity, such as cricket at Hotel 1.

Discussion

Our study suggests that workers such as WWID, supported by management and positive employment relationships, are more likely to achieve individual performance leading to organisational performance. We found that the participant organisations provide opportunities for WWID to enhance their well-being by promoting equal opportunity and taking steps to ensure WWID are engaged in legitimate work. We also found evidence of how each organisation gets in touch with the diversity of WWID to implement effective work practices and interventions that offer opportunities for these workers. Borrowing from the learning and effectiveness paradigm (Thomas and Ely 1996), we include 'plural voices in diversity management' at each stage of the paradigm and propose a model of HRM for WWID. In the context of plural voice and diversity, the term 'voice' is about 'the right of speaking and being represented' (Barton, 1994, p. 3) and, in this case, for WWID in the workplace. We contend that the plural voices in diversity management include WWID, work colleagues, supervisors and managers. Our model presents processes through which organisations can utilise the conditions of the learning and effectiveness paradigm to integrate WWID into the workplace. Workplace accommodations, such as modified work spaces and flexibility for medical appointments, may also give WWID the support they need to feel included within the workplace and the ability to perform to their potential (Blick et al. 2016; Hall and Kramer 2009; Hartnett et al. 2011).

Equal opportunity for work is about more than meeting legislative requirements; it is about embracing 'diverse perspectives and valuing the opinion'. Creating a 'non-bureaucratic structure' and adopting an 'egalitarian approach' to management will best support diversity management (Thomas and Ely 1996). Managers acknowledged that they may be challenged on lowering their standards, but espoused an 'inclusive' approach as the most effective for managing WWID. This often means adjusting their work hours and/or workloads, but the focus is on finding ways to 'always include them' and 'stick together'. This approach confirms the learning and effectiveness precondition of adopting a 'democratic approach to management' where autonomy and collaboration are critical to making decisions within the organisation. However, as indicated by the recruitment company and consultancy company, the need for focused management training to 'identify the key core job roles' and 'make them flexible

and fit people with disabilities' is essential for ensuring diversity management support. The organisations also promote 'teamwork' through regular team and department social events, which validates and also enhances the precondition in relation to the importance of having a flexible, 'non-bureaucratic structure' when it comes to enhancing the identity and social inclusion of WWID.

At each of the organisations, management plays a vital role in the learning and effectiveness paradigm of diversity management (Thomas and Ely 1996) in the ways they value diversity and helps 'employees to feel valued'. This was evidenced when supervisor Caroline (Hotel 1) explained that every worker 'adds something' and 'brings something different' to the workplace. Hogg (2001) and Abrams and Hogg (2004) suggest the way a worker is treated is linked to HR practices that increase employee belongingness and empowerment which, in turn, encourages them in their work. Nevertheless, management needs to utilise approaches to effectively harness the strengths of each WWID by valuing diversity and acknowledging the skills of WWID. (Alfes et al. 2013).

An organisation's culture should 'encourage openness' and 'stimulate personal development' (Thomas and Ely 1996). WWID were encouraged to 'give their opinions', 'step up' into higher roles and 'learn more' about the processes in the organisation and were treated like 'everyone else', which enriches the learning and effectiveness precondition related to 'encouraging openness', whereby a transparent and equitable culture exists for WWID. It was important that workers were 'comfortable with what they are doing' and there were 'incentives for good work', which further encouraged and empowered WWID and led to the endorsement of the precondition relating to 'promoting learning opportunities for personal development'. An open-minded organisational culture with a focus on performance may enable employees to ascertain effective ways of working together (Mueller 2014). Open communication within the organisations encouraged employees to explore new and improved job tasks and working relationships. Therefore, HR practices that support a culture of openness should support employee interactions and encourage knowledge sharing between employees.

An organisational culture of inclusion was found at Hotel 1. Sue (WWID/Supervisor) described her first job as 'a room attendant for 8 years' and the management support she received to be promoted to a 'supervising role'. This verifies the precondition of a 'democratic approach to management' and how it can enhance learning and personal development through promotional opportunities. As a long-term strategy, organisations need to adopt 'learning opportunities' that champion difference. This may open lines of communication along with acceptance from colleagues, allowing WWID to identify with colleagues and the workplace, which may foster empowerment and performance and lead to an improved workplace culture (Janhonen and Johanson 2011; Santuzzi and Waltz 2016).

Social activities, such as the cricket team at Hotel 1 and cinema nights at Hotel 2, have been used as strategies to encourage inclusion in the workplace at the research sites. All employment levels noted the use of social activities as a strategy to diversity inclusion, At Hotel 1, Tom (Colleague) noted 'the banquet attendant plays cricket with us' and Henry (Supervisor) at Hotel 2 stated, 'We always invite them to staff parties'. As a strategy, social

activities can enable managers to include WWID in a workplace setting by creating a mutual sphere of acceptance through a social activity. This 'encourages openness' and in doing so, organisations are creating positive perceptions of diversity and extending the learning and effectiveness precondition of having an effective 'strategy of diversity'.

Line management is particularly important to support WWID within the workplace through inclusive attitudes and strategic interactions (Thomas and Ely 1996). It is essential that managers and supervisors foster the social identity of these workers by helping them depersonalise their identity and categorise themselves according to social 'norms' (Hogg and Terry 2000). Management representatives of organisations that employ WWID need to set 'standards of performance' to be applied to 'all employees' regardless of ability and/or disability. Managers stated that there is 'not too much difference' in regard to performance levels; however, there are times where WWID 'do slightly less' or 'take slightly longer'. Whether workers are treated differently in regard to performance 'depends on the disability'; however, there is a 'balance between being fair' and 'productivity'. The fair and equitable practices used in these organisations to manage WWID endorse the learning and effectiveness precondition associated with 'encouraging high performance'. Also, the way in which these performance strategies are implemented verifies the precondition relating to 'promoting learning opportunities for the personal development' of WWID.

These findings demonstrate how managerial behaviours and HR practices, including training and development and performance management, can play an important role in supporting and empowering WWID (Hogg and Terry 2000). We now turn to extending the learning effectiveness framework and the development of a HR approach to the management of WWID.

Theoretical contributions

We extend Thomas and Ely's (1996) learning and effectiveness paradigm to recognise the unique voices of WWID, include 'plural voices in diversity management' at each stage of the paradigm and propose a model of HRM for WWID. We contend that the plural voices in diversity management include WWID, work colleagues, supervisors and managers. This plurality can assist in ensuring diversity management strategies are implemented effectively and support and include WWID. For example, managers who are proactive, and provide innovative interventions, such as the 'buddy system', clearly support the inclusion of WWID. The process by which this happens commences with managers seeking to employ WWID, connecting with them and giving them choice by being 'accommodating' and 'flexible'. In these conducive environments, WWID are encouraged to release their unique voices to express what works for them. Their passive and often missing voices need to develop into stronger voices that influence their work choices and possibly their advancement at work. WWID need to be given the opportunity to be heard and to contribute their voices relative to the work with which they are engaged. We argue that recognising the different voices of individuals within a team and combining those voices will add value to the individual and contribute to building organisational performance.

Additionally, colleague voices can sustain WWID voices, offering an informal support and voice system.

We acknowledge that conditions do not always support WWID and, in particular, negative attitudes of middle managers in this study were found to have an adverse effect on WWID. It will be the middle managers on whom CEOs and senior managers need to focus to educate them and to improve approaches towards WWID, which will hopefully lead to improved attitudes towards these workers.

We propose that HRM practitioners need to recalibrate how they think about, develop and implement HRM practices for WWID. We appeal to management to reflect upon Thomas and Ely's (1996) learning and effectiveness framework and lessons from this study and apply them in the workplace for WWID (and others). The application of Thomas and Ely's (1996) framework has been unique because we used it with a disability focus. Previously, there has been limited application of theories in action for this often marginalised cohort of workers. By using this framework, we have demonstrated valuable findings that highlight that WWID do have the capacity to learn, grow and make a contribution. Moreover, we agree with Guest (2017) that supportive management practices will enhance the workers' individual performance. Therefore, based on our findings, our paper calls for HRM approaches to managing WWID underpinned by a workforce diversity perspective (see Table 1). We argue that current HRM practices need to be re-calibrated with a more flexible approach to the practice of HRM with people with intellectual disability.

Human resource management should be underpinned by a philosophy that views diversity and the employment of WWID as a vehicle to compete in the marketplace through their unique skills, knowledge, abilities and attributes (Cavanagh et al. 2017). Valuing people with difference and building a positive culture of inclusion for all staff is central to an approach to HRM for WWID. We also suggest that strategic HR goals should be concerned with maximising the strengths and potential of WWID to achieve strategic business goals, rather than the more traditional approach of meeting obligatory CSR responsibilities instead of being responsive to the needs of these workers.

In relation to job analysis and design, we propose an approach that would incorporate working with each WWID to craft a flexible job description to the individual instead of the outdated practice of fitting the person to the job and the job description. The HR manager, working with the supervisor and WWID would design jobs to match the skills, abilities and aspirations of WWID to ensure effective utilisation. We argue that extensive teamwork and mentoring of the WWID is critical to the inclusion and growth of WWID at the workplace (Oswick and Noon 2014; Van Knippenberg, van Ginkel and Homan 2013). An approach to HRM would involve the integration of WWID into team-based work and the use of both formal and informal mentoring practices.

An approach to HRM for WWID would include training and development to build trust in employees and increase their commitment and sense of inclusion at the workplace (Bartram et al. 2014). Our HRM approach would also see managers and supervisors receive diversity training inclusive of anti-discrimination legislation, the value and potential benefits of diversity, education about working with and mentoring and supporting

Table 1 Human resource management (HRM) approaches for the management of workers with intellectual disability (WWID)

Current HR practice for WWID	Recalibrated approach to HR for WWID
HR Strategy *Management plans to achieve goals of the organisation and predominantly meet CSR responsibilities*	Strategic plans – aligning management goals to maximise the potential and strengths of WWID *Management promotes supportive and participative activities that embrace WWID* (Guest 2012)
HR Mission and Vision *Values of the organisation that support goals and resources; documents/statements that set out and promote diversity and inclusion in a workplace*	Valuing people with difference Building a positive culture of inclusion for all staff regardless of difference *Promote an organisational climate that facilitates WWID involvement in work* (Guest 2012) *Promote individual expression of voice and two-way communication between WWID and managers and/or supervisors* (Guest 2012) Utilising employees' knowledge, skills and abilities and attributes as the greatest assets of the organisation
Training and Development *Improving the performance of workers in an organisation as a technical process; on-the-job training*	Coaching and mentoring for WWID Training for Colleagues Co-workers and Managers Developing intervention programs for WWID Innovation – bringing new ideas to the organisation to support best-practice management practices to support WWID
Performance Management *Monitoring and reviewing an employee's work; future planning; responding to performance gaps; managing relationship with supervisor*	Focus on the individual's performance needs Understand and respond to the needs of WWID Develop a career path and opportunities for promotion *Provide relevant information on promotion-related options for WWID* (Guest 2012) Building relationships with supervisors and managers *Provide WWID with relevant information regarding their rights and responsibilities* (Guest 2012)
Occupational Health and Safety *Health, safety and welfare of all staff; adhering to legislation*	Assess accommodation needs, such as ergonomic furniture, at job design and recruitment stages Proactive well-being programs for WWID, managers and colleagues Building a healthy environment and safety awareness for WWID, e.g. appropriate signage Health and safety training programs that include WWID First Aid programs for WWID *Create opportunities for social interaction with management and colleagues at work* (Guest 2012)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Current HR practice for WWID	Recalibrated approach to HR for WWID
Management Development *Short/online courses about diversity, inclusion, and disability*	Leadership management (training and development) for managers/supervisors of WWID Diversity and inclusion development for Managers Team building training Developing staff from diverse backgrounds – disability, gender, race and any type of difference Knowledge of government and non-government disability support services Reward system – incentives for managers who reach organisational diversity goals relative to WWID

WWID, and support for innovation and best practice management techniques to support WWID (Chavez and Weisinger 2008). Central to employee and management training and development would be innovation and best practice intervention to support the inclusion, growth and performance of WWID.

In performance management, we advocate that immediate supervisors focus on understanding and responding to the individual's performance needs. Performance management practices should support the development of an agreed upon career path and opportunities for growth, achievement and promotion. Performance management should be underpinned by building mutually respectful and productive relationships between WWID and their supervisors. Finally, occupational health and safety (OHS) concerns can often act as a barrier to the employment of WWID (Hart 2010).

This study enables us to locate gaps in how diversity is understood by management and researched by scholars. Research focusing on WWID remains an outlier in diversity management studies (Cavanagh et al. 2017). It is important for researchers to pay attention to the lack of practical diversity management that ensures inclusion for all employees. General diversity frameworks may not suitably address small minority groups within a larger minority group, such as transgender employees or WWID (Ozturk and Tatli 2016). Diversity management research up to this point has highlighted the inadequacies of workplaces and the importance of inclusion (Lorbiecki and Jack 2000). However, the concept needs expanding to consider exclusive social groups, as seen in this paper, to ensure complex workplace environments are inclusive for all (Ozturk and Tatli 2016).

Practical implications

Our research provides practical HRM practices, integrating different HR strategies. For instance, we propose proactive well-being programs for WWID, managers and colleagues to support team and workplace inclusion, safety awareness for WWID, building a healthy environment for WWID, and OHS training programs that include WWID (Hart 2010).

Table 1 outlines the practical contributions made. Traditional practices for areas such as HR strategy and mission and vision are detailed, followed by recalibrated suggestions.

There are broad implications for organisations and HR managers in promoting the well-being of WWID and ascertaining the skills they may potentially bring to the workplace. That can be achieved by providing WWID with the information and communication necessary to capitalise on their skills when gaining employment and whilst performing their jobs. It is important to note that WWID needs should be assessed individually due to differences in abilities. An approach to HR for WWID, as detailed above, emphasises the need for individual assessment and support, rather than HR initiatives that consolidate all employees. Additional focus could be given to line managers, in the form of leadership development and incentives, to ensure that WWID diversity goals are met. Utilising a multi-level approach to diversity management organisations may support individual and organisational performance.

Researchers have the opportunity to advance the knowledge base on diversity and social inclusion of WWID and find ways to improve the work experiences based on the theoretical frameworks provided in this paper. This paper has demonstrated that existing diversity frameworks can be used and extended when focusing on WWID. This may open the gateway for further extensions to diversity frameworks to include other minority groups with individual needs, such as older workers and ex-offenders. Additional and supplementary research could be conducted in organisations on the other HRM functions, such as job analysis and design, and recruitment and selection. Research could also extend beyond the hospitality sector to investigate comparisons between industries and countries. Due to the distinct needs of WWID, research focusing on other types of disability may be required to present comprehensive recommendations for disability diversity inclusion.

Research limitations and conclusion

As this research focuses on the hospitality industry, limitations arise when generalising these findings to other industries. By focusing on WWID, this research is limited due to the complex and divergent nature of intellectual disabilities making it difficult to apply these finding to other disability types. However, due to the limited research focus on intellectual disabilities, this can also be a strength of the research as researchers and HR practitioners are now attaching more importance to the inclusion of such workers. Furthermore, this research includes the HR functions that were identified as applicable and important to the WWID participants. Other HR functions may be explored in future research projects. It is important to note that all WWID participants are employed in mainstream work rather than sheltered employment; therefore, generalisations can be made to other minority groups without disabilities.

A key message for organisations is that they need to be more aware of diversity inclusion practices and interventions and effective management support for WWID and their well-being. This study has confronted the traditional HR diversity approach to managing

WWID and employing these workers according to what they can achieve at work, even if it means reducing their work hours and/or their workloads. We challenge organisations to engage in a continuous cycle of identifying best practices such as a 'buddy system' and recognizing 'plural voices in diversity management' to improve practice and implement interventions that will ultimately lead them to derive benefits from diversity. We propose that organisations re-think their strategies, develop strategic goals and training programs for supervisors to improve their practices, and involve WWID in job-centred decision-making to ensure individual performance. It will be critical for the well-being of WWID to ensure that diversity in organisations is expressed by more than meeting legislative requirements. If organisations espouse the acceptance of diversity, they need to show their commitment and capitalise on diversity by continually pursuing ways to improve the work experience and inclusion of WWID. Diversity should reach a point where the very concept is not discussed because everyone is accepted equally in an organisation.

Timothy Bartram is Professor of Management at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. His research interests include human resource management, high performance work systems, healthcare management and workers with disability.

Jillian Cavanagh is a senior lecturer at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include human resource management, vocational education and training, Men's Sheds and workers with disability.

Hannah Meacham is a lecturer in the Department of Management at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Hannah holds a PhD in the creation of meaningful and inclusive work for people with intellectual disabilities. Prior to her appointment, Hannah worked within the HR industry both in Australia and the UK, specialising in strategic HR management and workplace relations.

Patricia Pariona-Cabrera is a doctoral candidate at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include human resource management, organisational psychology, workers with disabilities, workplace violence and healthcare management.

References

Abrams D and MA Hogg (2004) Collective identity: group membership and self-perception. In MB Brewer and M Hewstone (eds) *Self and social identity*, 147–181. Blackwell, Oxford.

Akkerman A, S Kef and HP Meininger (2018) Job satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities: the role of basic psychological need fulfilment and workplace participation. *Disability and rehabilitation* 40(10), 1192–1199.

Alcázar F, P Fernández and G Sánchez Gardey (2013) Workforce diversity in strategic human resource management models: a critical review of the literature and implications for future research. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal* 20(1), 39–49.

Alfes K, C Truss, EC Soane, C Rees and M Gatenby (2013) The relationship between line manager behavior, perceived HRM practices, and individual performance: examining the mediating role of engagement. *Human Resource Management* 52(6), 839–859.

Baron-Cohen S and MV Lombardo (2017) Autism and talent: the cognitive and neural basis of systemizing. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 19(4), 345.

Barton L (1994) Disability, difference and the politics of definition. *Australian Disability Review* 3, 8–22.

Bartram T, L Karimi, SG Leggat and P Stanton (2014) Social identification: linking high performance work systems, psychological empowerment and patient care. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 25(17), 2401–2419.

Blick RN, KS Litz, MG Thornhill and AJ Goreczny (2016) Do inclusive work environments matter? Effects of community-integrated employment on quality of life for individuals with intellectual disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 53, 358–366.

Bohdanowicz P and P Zientara (2009) Hotel companies' contribution to improving the quality of life of local communities and the well-being of their employees. *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 9(2), 147–158.

Brewer MB and S Roccas (2001) *Individual values, social identity, and optimal distinctiveness*. Psychology Press, Hove.

Cavanagh J, T Bartram, H Meacham, C Bigby, J Oakman and E Fossey (2017) Supporting workers with disabilities: a scoping review of the role of human resource management in contemporary organisations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 55(1), 6–43.

Chavez CI and JY Weisinger (2008) Beyond diversity training: a social infusion for cultural inclusion. *Human Resource Management* 47(2), 331–350.

Chi C-F, RS Dewi, Y Jang and H-L Liu (2018) Workplace accommodation for workers with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics* 68, 1–7.

Cook JA and JK Burke-Miller (2015) Reasons for job separations in a cohort of workers with psychiatric disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development* 52(4), 371–384.

Denzin NK and YS Lincoln (eds) (2000) *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*, 2nd edn. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Ely RJ and DA Thomas (2001) Cultural diversity at work: the effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46(2), 229–273.

Flores N, C Jenaro, M Begoña Orgaz and M Victoria Martín (2011) Understanding quality of working life of workers with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 24(2), 133–141.

Font X, A Walmsley, S Cogotti, L McCombes and N Häusler (2012) Corporate social responsibility: the disclosure–performance gap. *Tourism Management* 33(6), 1544–1553.

Fujimoto Y, R Rentschler, H Le, D Edwards and CEJ Härtel (2014) Lessons learned from community organizations: inclusion of people with disabilities and others. *British Journal of Management* 25(3), 518–537.

Garay L and X Font (2012) Doing good to do well? Corporate social responsibility reasons, practices and impacts in small and medium accommodation enterprises. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 31(2), 329–337.

Guest DE (2017) Human resource management and employee well-being: towards a new analytic framework. *Human Resource Management Journal* 27(1), 22–38.

Hall AC and J Kramer (2009) Social capital through workplace connections: opportunities for workers with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation* 8(3–4), 146–170.

Hart SM (2010) Self-regulation, corporate social responsibility, and the business case: do they work in achieving workplace equality and safety? *Journal of Business Ethics* 92(4), 585–600.

Hartnett HP, H Stuart, H Thurman, B Loy and LC Batiste (2011) Employers' perceptions of the benefits of workplace accommodations: reasons to hire, retain and promote people with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 34(1), 17–23.

Hogg MA (2001) A social identity theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, 184–200.

Hogg MA and DI Terry (2000) Social identity and self-categorisation processes in organisational contexts. *Academy of Management Review* 25(1), 121–140.

Holmes J and R Fillary (2000) Handling small talk at work: challenges for workers with intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education* 47(3), 273–291.

Janhonen M and J-E Johanson (2011) Role of knowledge conversion and social networks in team performance. *International Journal of Information Management* 31(3), 217–225.

Kaye H, L Jans and E Jones (2011) Why don't employers hire and retain workers with disabilities? *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 21(4), 526–536.

Kochan T, K Bezrukova, R Ely, S Jackson, A Joshi, K Jehn, J Leonard, D Levine and D Thomas (2003) The effects of diversity on business performance: report of the diversity research network. *Human Resource Management* 42(1), 3–21.

Lauring J (2013) International diversity management: Global ideals and local responses. *British Journal of Management* 24(2), 211–224.

Lofland J and LH Lofland (2006) *Analyzing social settings*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, CA.

Lorbiecki A and G Jack (2000) Critical turns in the evolution of diversity management. *British Journal of Management* 11(s1), S17–S31.

McDermott S and R Edwards (2012) Enabling self-determination for older workers with intellectual disabilities in supported employment in Australia. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 25(5), 423–432.

Meacham H, J Cavanagh, A Shaw and T Bartram (2017) HRM practices that support the employment and social inclusion of workers with an intellectual disability. *Personnel Review* 46(8), 1475–1492.

Mueller J (2014) A specific knowledge culture: cultural antecedents for knowledge sharing between project teams. *European Management Journal* 32(2), 190–202.

Olsen JE and LL Martins (2012) Understanding organizational diversity management programs: a theoretical framework and directions for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 33 (8), 1168–1187.

Oswick C and M Noon (2014) Discourses of diversity, equality and inclusion: trenchant formulations or transient fashions? *British Journal of Management* 25(1), 23–39.

Overmars-Marx T, F Thomése, M Verdonschot and H Meininger (2014) Advancing social inclusion in the neighbourhood for people with an intellectual disability: an exploration of the literature. *Disability & Society* 29(2), 255–274.

Ozturk MB and A Tatli (2016) Gender identity inclusion in the workplace: broadening diversity management research and practice through the case of transgender employees in the UK. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 27(8), 781–802.

Patton MQ (2005) Qualitative research. In BS Everitt and DC Howell (eds) *In Encyclopedia of Statistics in Behavioral Science*. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ.

Riccò R and M Guerci (2014) Diversity challenge: an integrated process to bridge the 'implementation gap'. *Business Horizons* 57(2), 235–245.

Roberson QM (2006) Disentangling the meanings of diversity and inclusion in organizations. *Group & Organization Management* 31(2), 212–236.

Russo A and F Perrini (2010) Investigating stakeholder theory and social capital: CSR in large firms and SMEs. *Journal of Business ethics* 91(2), 207–221.

Santuzzi AM and PR Waltz (2016) Disability in the workplace: a unique and variable identity. *Journal of Management* 1111–1135.

Schalock RL, RA Luckasson, KA Shogren, S Borthwick-Duffy, V Bradley, WH Buntinx, DL Coulter, EM Craig, SC Gomez, Y Lachapelle, A Reeve, ME Snell, S Spreat, MJ Tassé, JR Thompson, MA Verdugo, ML Wehmeyer and MH Yeager (2007) The renaming of mental retardation: understanding the change to the term intellectual disability. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 45(2), 116–124.

Schensul JJ (1999) *Enhanced ethnographic methods: audiovisual techniques, focused group interviews and elicitation techniques*. Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.

Scior K (2011) Public awareness, attitudes and beliefs regarding intellectual disability: a systematic review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 32(6), 2164–2182.

Sippola A and A Smale (2007) The global integration of diversity management: a longitudinal case study. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 18(11), 1895–1916.

Tatli A (2011) A multi-layered exploration of the diversity management field: diversity discourses, practices and practitioners in the UK. *British Journal of Management* 22(2), 238–253.

Thomas DA and RJ Ely (1996) Making differences matter. *Harvard Business Review* 74(5), 79–90.

Van Knippenberg D, WP van Ginkel and AC Homan (2013) Diversity mindsets and the performance of diverse teams. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 121(2), 183–193.

Vuontisjärvi T (2006) Corporate social reporting in the European context and human resource disclosures: an analysis of Finnish companies. *Journal of Business Ethics* 69(4), 331–354.

Weber RP (1990) *Basic content analysis*. Sage, London.

