Concept Paper

Employer Disability Confidence: Moving Towards a Theory-Based Change Logic

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Abstract: Employer disability confidence is a concept being used increasingly in employment interventions and policies targeting the demand side of the labour market to support the employment of people with disability. However, the concept is not well-defined and lacks a theoretical basis, inhibiting its application to best effect. This study aims to develop a conceptual model of employer disability confidence to fill in the definitional and theoretical gap in the current practice and literature. The paper presents a synthesis of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and explores the literature that reports on use of TPB in disability employment contexts. We have applied the TPB to explain the concept of employer disability confidence. In the proposed framework, disability confidence is theorised to be the sum of the attitudes towards hiring people with disability, the perceived social expectations, and the perception of the employer and workplace of control over factors enabling and hindering employment of people with disability. Development of a theory-based and action-oriented framework for employer disability confidence could contribute to designing initiatives and interventions aimed at employers and workplaces to remove barriers to employment for people with disability, as well as understanding and assessing the effectiveness of implementation of such interventions.

Keywords: employer disability confidence; Theory of Planned Behaviour; disability employment; people with disability

1. Introduction

Disability confidence is a concept being used increasingly in employment interventions and policies targeting the demand, or employer, side of the labour market to support the employment of people with disability. Broadly, in this context, it focuses attention on the 'confidence' of employers to employ workers with disability and/or create an inclusive workplace or business. Emerging over the last decade in both Australian and international contexts, the concept of disability confidence has appeared in government policy and programs. The Australian Disability Strategy 2021–2031 [1] is accompanied by an Employment Targeted Action Plan where four of the eight Australian State/Territory jurisdictions identify disability confidence as a core focus [2], and the notion of 'disability confident employers' is embedded in an accompanying Disability Employment Strategy [3]. Similarly, the United Kingdom (UK) Department for Work and Pensions has used the concept at least since 2013, and still offers a Disability Confident Employer Scheme [4].

Despite the popular uptake of disability confidence among employment interventions and programs, there has yet to be a consistent approach to the concept, with different definitions and interpretations of 'confidence' applied by practitioners and policy makers. Furthermore, it lacks a theory-based framework to explain what employer disability confidence entails, how building disability confidence can lead to improvement in hiring

practice for people with disability, and how to measure progress in the development of employer disability confidence. Lack of an in-depth conceptual understanding of this term inhibits its application to best effect. Employment programs and interventions aimed to improve employers' confidence to hire and work with people with disability can benefit from a better understanding of what is affecting their confidence and what actions to take to boost confidence and eventually employment outcomes.

In this context, the purpose of this paper is two-fold: (1) to explore the relevant literature to identify a theoretical model suitable for explaining employer disability confidence and its relationship to the hiring behaviour of employers; and (2) to develop a conceptual framework of employer disability confidence based on the theoretical model, to explain, analyse, and offer guidance for measurement of disability confidence building. This paper commences with a review of the concept of disability confidence as used in employment contexts in the grey and scholarly literatures, followed by an introduction to the theoretical model being considered. Next, the paper reviews empirical studies applying the selected theoretical model in disability employment behaviour research, synthesising relevant concepts and key findings. A new conceptual framework for employer disability confidence is proposed and discussed. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research and implications of adopting the model to inform designs and evaluations of policies and programs targeting employer disability confidence.

Most importantly, this study aims to fill the definitional and theoretical gap identified in the current practice and literature. Under the proposed new framework, the concept of employer disability confidence can be theorised to be the sum of employers' attitudes towards hiring people with disability, the perceived social expectations of employers, and the perception of their ability to employ people with disability encompassing factors enabling and hindering their employment. Note, throughout this paper we use the term 'people with disability' as the term preferred in the Australian context, recognizing that other terms are chosen in different contexts and locations.

2. Review of Employer Disability Confidence in Practice and Literature

2.1. Employer Disability Confidence

The notion of employer disability confidence appears to be a later iteration of wider interest in the broader concept of 'disability confidence'. In the scholarly literature, studies examining disability and confidence predominantly centre around either the confidence of people with disability [5] or the confidence of personnel such as teachers, volunteers, supervisors/peers, and health profession students working with children or people with disability [6–10]. In these contexts, confidence is frequently linked to or conflated with attitudes about, awareness of and comfort in relation to disability [7]. While there is substantial literature about these separate concepts, there is not a research base for the notion of disability confidence. Lindsay and Cancelliere [7] offer a definition in the absence of formal measurement or explanation, suggesting that disability confidence is 'the knowledge and understanding of how to work effectively with, and include people with disabilities' (p. 2122). As argued by Lindsay et al. [11], 'although the term disability confidence is becoming more frequent in use, it lacks empirical evidence and is based mainly on anecdotes and non-peer reviewed literature' (p. 41).

As discussed above, the focus on employer disability confidence has emerged largely from practice and policy and there is no consensus in how employer disability confidence is defined and operationalised. Explanations of employer disability confidence commonly focus heavily on knowledge, awareness, and attitudes of employers as core elements. A review of the grey literature on this term suggests that definitions and descriptions used by practitioners or disability employment programs broadly cluster into three approaches: (1) broad descriptions of necessary understandings about disability; (2) prescriptions about requisite knowledge and actions to be demonstrated by organisations to create a workplace or culture of inclusion for employees, job seekers, customers, and other stakeholders

with disability [12,13]; and (3) articulation of the developmental stages or continuum of confidence attainment [4].

An example of broad descriptions can be seen in this explanation of disability confident employers: 'Disability confident employers think differently about disability, and have the skills, techniques, and confidence they need to recruit and retain people with disability' [14]. An example of the prescriptive approach is the Australian Network on Disability that has highlighted three criteria for an organisation to be disability confident: (1) knowing how to make workplace adjustments to retain employees with disability; (2) knowing how to make changes to recruitment processes to engage skilled and talented job seekers with disability; and (3) delivering accessible customer services for those who may have a disability ([13], p. 8). An example of the developmental approach is the UK Government's Disability Confident scheme where employers sign up progressively to three levels of disability confidence: The first level is 'disability confident committed' where an organisation commits to becoming disability confident and doing one thing to improve inclusion of people with disability in their organisation, such as including welcoming wording on job advertisements that encourages people with disability to apply. To gain level 2 accreditation an organisation needs to do a self-assessment of their policies, practices, and facilities to identify barriers or areas for improvement for employing or retaining people with disability. An organisation gains level 3 'leader' status when the organisation has addressed those barriers or areas for improvement and been externally validated [4]. A similar developmental approach is facilitated in Australia through the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator (NDRC), and the Diversity Field Officer Service [15], both of which work directly with employers to build inclusive policies, practices, and disability confidence.

In contrast to its wide usage in practice and the grey literature, the concept of employer disability confidence has yet to receive much attention in the research field. A literature search in peer-reviewed English publications revealed the scarcity of research on this topic. While Lindsay and Cancelliere [7] offer a definition 'from an employment perspective' as discussed earlier, the concept was not progressed until Lindsay and other colleagues' [11] study into 'employer's disability confidence', the only scholarly article identified for this study on this topic. Consistent with this dearth of studies, Lindsay and colleagues [11] also make a call for more in-depth peer-reviewed research on the concept due to the uncertain quality and rigor, as well as potential conflicts of interests, of grey literature (p. 41).

Lindsay and colleagues [11] utilised data from 18 employers and 35 employees with disability in Canada. Taking a similar developmental approach as discussed above, they proposed a framework depicting four developmental stages of disability confidence building in relation to employers [11]. First, they identify that disability discomfort arises from a lack of experience and/or knowledge in working with people with disability, resulting in stigma and discrimination. Second, disability confidence development involves 'reaching beyond comfort zone' ([11], p. 45), by providing disability awareness and/or diversity training, shared lived experiences, and the business case for hiring people with disability. Third, broader perspectives come from challenging stigma and stereotypes, minimizing bias and focusing on abilities and talents. Finally, attainment of disability confidence is based on a supportive and inclusive work culture, and a role in modelling social change. It is worth noting that Lindsay and colleagues' model concluded with 'attainment of disability confidence' instead of linking it to achievement of disability employment outcomes.

2.2. Challenges in Research and Practice of Disability Confidence Building

As the concept emerged and developed in practice, employer disability confidence has been perceived as a mechanism to leverage better hiring practice and ultimately improve employment outcomes for people with disability (e.g., Australian Disability Strategy 2021–2031 and the Disability Confident Employer Scheme in the UK). However, these assumptions require a better understanding of the pathway from building employer disability confidence to improved hiring behaviour of employers and to improved employment outcomes of people with disability, which will in turn inform better designs of interventions

targeting disability confidence building. As discussed above, existing definitions and frameworks for employer disability confidence do not have the explanatory power to conceptualise how change in disability confidence can lead to change in employers' actual hiring practice. Nor is there research that links the two.

Additionally, most of the definitions of disability confidence discussed above have yet to include measurement of employer disability confidence with the exception of the Australian Network on Disability's (AND) 'Access and Inclusion Index', an employer self-report assessment. This tool aims to help organisations understand, assess, benchmark and improve their disability confidence across ten key areas, including: organisational commitment; premises; workplace adjustments; communication and marketing; products and services; information communication technology; recruitment and selection; career development; suppliers and partners; and innovation to support inclusion [16]. However, although these measures assist employers to develop inclusive practices in their businesses, there is no direct or explicit pathway linking these measures with actual employment of people with disability, and therefore the optimal level and elements of 'confidence' to precipitate employment outcomes.

In Australia, the evaluation of the Diversity Field Officer Service pilot in 2015–2016, which included 50 small- to medium-sized enterprises, did measure changes in employer confidence, and beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of employing people with disability from pre- to post-service using empirically validated measures. For example, disability confidence was measured with one single question: 'Do you feel confident about employing people with disability in your organisation' (on a 7-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). While the evaluation reported actual increases in both confidence and employment of people with disability during the Diversity Field Officer Service [17], there was no direct causal link between increases in positive beliefs and confidence, or the relative contribution of other variables such as previous experience with people with disability, on the increase in employment of people with disability following participation in the service.

In summary, there is a gap in current understanding and knowledge of employer disability confidence. There is a need to further define, analyse, and measure the concept, mapping and connecting factors affecting and/or contributing to employers' hiring practice regarding employment of people with disability. This study aims to address this gap by developing a framework for employer disability confidence to offer a deeper understanding of the concept, which could inform the design and implementation of disability confidence building practice, and provide guidance on how to track and measure progress in employer disability confidence building to the point of actual hiring practice. By doing this, this study contributes to both research and practice of employer disability confidence.

2.3. Understanding Disability Employment Through an Employment Ecosystem Lens

Beyond a focus on disability confidence, a broad array of research identifies factors that influence employment outcomes for people with disability. From an ecological perspective [18], employment of people with disability is influenced by factors internal and external to the potential employee, the employer's organisational context, and the broader environment. More recently this multi-dimensional perspective has been termed the 'employment ecosystem' [19,20], where personal factors related to the individual with disability, their family context, the employment services available to them, workplace and employer factors, and broader environmental factors such as legislation and policy supporting employment of people with disability, all interact to help or hinder the employment of people with disability. Table 1 presents these factors as barriers/enablers to employment at micro, meso and macro levels of the employment ecosystem.

An employment ecosystem lens suggests that potential models examining employer disability confidence need to have the capacity to reflect or acknowledge individual, institutional, and environmental influences on confidence and employment outcomes.

Table 1. Barriers/enablers to employment in the employment ecosystem (adapted from Wilson et al. [21]).

Individual or Micro Level of Ecosystem	
Personal factors	e.g., age, gender, biopsychosocial health factors (including diagnosis, psychological dispositions such as motivation, recovery expectations, coping ability, beliefs about own ability to work, adjustment to injury), family and carer responsibilities, literacy and numeracy levels, socio-economic status, cultural factors, educational attainment
Social factors	e.g., personal/family support, social networks
Meso Level of Ecosystem	
Service factors	e.g., timely access to quality health services, access to services and supports, timely and quality communication about services and entitlements, continuity of supports, design and culture of services/systems, administrative requirements, the work capacity certificate, engagement and coordination between stakeholders
Vocational factors	e.g., appropriate skills, access to training, level of prior work experience, job search skills, pre-injury employment status
Job-related factors	e.g., type of occupation, availability of work customisation including modifications to tasks/duties, hours, duties and conditions, flexible working arrangements, range of suitable duties available
Workplace/employer factors	e.g., employer size/industry, attitudes or employer (e.g., unconscious bias, perception of incapacity/disability), employer track record, attitudes of colleagues, relationship with colleagues, skills/knowledge/resources of employer to support employment, inclusivity of workplace, availability of graduated return to work (RTW), availability of resources to support development of inclusive practice, relationship between worker and employer, organisational policies and procedures
Macro Level of Ecosystem	
Environmental factors	e.g., accessible infrastructure (transport) and communication, accessibility of the workplace
Societal factors	e.g., norms and attitudes, stigma, discrimination, cultural factors
Economic factors	e.g., market supply, financial incentives, labour market demand, income support policy and access
Policy/legislative factors	e.g., disability discrimination and employment legislation, wages policy and legislation, active labour market policies and programs

To develop a change logic for the employer disability confidence concept, and its causal relationship to the employment of people with disability requires a clearer conceptual model with a theoretical capacity to reflect the dynamic operating environment impacting employment outcomes, including factors internal and external to employers. Below, we turn to a well-established theoretical model as a possible candidate for this task and explore how it has been applied to the disability employment context.

3. Introducing the Theory of Planned Behaviour

A widely supported theoretical model on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviour (action) is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [22–24]. The TPB (Figure 1) posits that behaviour is a function of intentions, which are in turn a function of a person's attitude (that is, positive or negative evaluation of a behaviour), subjective norm (that is, the relative weight given to the views of important others regarding a behaviour), and perceived behavioural control (that is, beliefs about what may help or hinder the person performing the behaviour). As explained by Ajzen, more favourable attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control, are associated with a stronger intention of a person to perform the examined behaviour [24]. Finally, with sufficient actual control over the behaviour, people are expected to act on such intention when the opportunity arises ([24], p. 1).

While attitudes and subjective norms contribute directly to the prediction of intention, their effects on intention are moderated by perceptions of behavioural control (see Figure 1). When perceived behavioural control is 'veridical' ([24], p. 1), that is, based on accurate assessment of the elements affecting control, it can serve as a proxy for actual control and, together with intention, contributes to the prediction of the behaviour. The TPB model

thus has the capacity to accommodate a range of internal and external factors influencing behaviours. Interestingly, perceived behavioural control was introduced to the TPB model to deal with situations when the behaviour is not under complete control, as the concept denotes subjective degrees of control over performance of a behaviour [25]. Self-efficacy is used interchangeably in the model with perceived behavioural control on a condition that both terms focus on perceived ability to perform a behaviour [25], foreshadowing our interest in this model in relation to employer disability confidence.
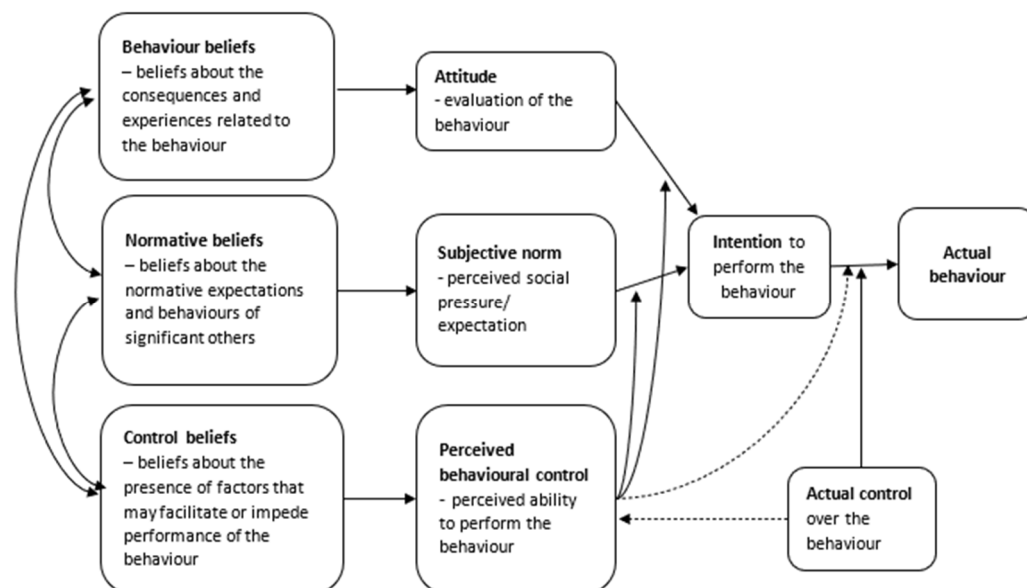

Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour framework (authors' creation based on Ajzen's work [24,25]).

The TPB is one of the most widely researched predictive models of behaviour [26], with growing evidence of the efficacy of the TPB across a range of fields [26–29]. The TPB has also been used in the study of employment intentions and behaviours related to people with disability. In an early study, one author of this paper tested and affirmed the utility of the TPB in research into attitude change in employment of people with disability in the context of a workplace mentoring program [30]. This is consistent with a body of work that has emerged since that uses the TPB to explore the intention to employ people with disability, to which we now turn.

4. Application of TPB to Employment Behaviour in Disability Employment Research
4.1. Scope of the Review

A growing body of studies has applied the TPB in the disability employment context with a focus on demand-side factors, including intentions, perceptions, or practices of employers, hiring agents, and job placement professionals. In this section, we undertook a comprehensive literature search and review of studies applying the TPB model to examine hiring intention/behaviour of employers or hiring professionals, with the view that the findings would contribute to formulating the conceptual framework of employer disability confidence.

A literature search was conducted of peer-reviewed publications (written in English) up to November 2021 using three scholarly databases, i.e., Web of Science, EbscoHost, and Scopus. Table 2 lists the search strings used. After screening abstracts and full text for relevance, a total of 12 empirical studies (Table 3) were identified that utilised the TPB framework with a focus on demand-side (employer) factors.

Table 2. Databases searched and the corresponding search string used.

Database or Journal	Search String
Web of Science, EbscoHost, and Scopus	1. "disability confidence" OR "disability awareness" AND "Theory of Planned Behaviour" 2. disabilit* AND employ* AND "Theory of Planned Behaviour"

Note: Truncation symbols '*' used to include grammatical and spelling variants of the search terms.

Table 3. Empirical studies applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model to disability employment research regarding employers' hiring intention and/or behaviour regarding employment.

Author(s) and Year of Publication	Country of Study	Disability Group	Application of TPB	Research Method	Intention and/or Actual Behaviour Analysed in a TPB Model
McDonnall and Lund, 2020 [31]	USA	Blind job applicants	Examined the goodness of fit of the TPB model to explain employer hiring intentions for blind applicants	An online survey of 388 participants involved in hiring decision making at their company	Intention
Wright et al., 2020 [32]	USA	People with disability	Used the TPB framework to identify themes that emerged in qualitative data	In-depth interviews with 63 key informants from a large healthcare organisation	
Mai, 2019 [33]	USA	Autistic job applicants	Used the TPB model to determine what hiring agents' beliefs influenced their selection of qualified autistic candidates	A survey of 130 hiring agents which mainly served medium-sized organisations (50–249 employees)	Intention
Araten-Bergman, 2016 [34]	Israel	People with disability	Used TPB to explore recruiting managers' intentions to hire people with disability and test whether these intentions were translated into actual hiring	A longitudinal study with two waves of data collection points: 250 managers completed the first round and 146 the second round	Intention Actual hiring behaviour
Ang, Ramayah and Amin, 2015 [35]	Malaysia	People with disability	Aimed to test the robustness of TPB in the domain of hiring intention for people with disability	An online survey of 200 respondents who were responsible for hiring employees at their company	Intention
Knaeps et al., 2015 [36]	Belgium	People with severe mental illness	Used TPB to examine how vocational rehabilitation (VR) counsellors differed in their beliefs about competitive employment	An online survey of 286 VR counsellors including gatekeepers, case managers, and VR specialists	
Jasper and Waldhart, 2013 [37]	USA	People with disability	Used TPB in analysis to examine beliefs about people with disability in the leisure and hospitality industry	A 2008 survey of Employer Perspectives on the Employment of People with Disabilities; 320 employers from the leisure and hospitality industry included in the sample	
Rimmerman et al., 2013 [38]	Israel and USA	People with disability	TPB was used as the conceptual framework to examine employers' practices and hiring intentions towards people with disability	Focus groups with Israeli and US non-profit and for-profit employers	Intention
Hernandez et al., 2012 [39]	USA	People with disability	TPB was used as the conceptual framework to design the research and to understand the findings	Two focus groups with hiring decision makers from non-profit and for-profit organisations	
Fraser et al., 2011 [40]	USA	People with disability	The survey was developed based on the TPB model to demonstrate that employer attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control variables predict hiring intention towards qualified workers with disabilities within six months	A survey of 89 urban employers	Intention
Fraser et al., 2010 [41]	USA	People with disability	Used TPB components to identify themes in qualitative data to complete the development of a survey instrument	Three focus groups with key hiring decision makers of small, medium, and large companies in Seattle area	
Hergenrather et al., 2003 [42]	USA	People with disability	Applying TPB to identify behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs that may affect the intention of placing consumers with disability into jobs	A survey of 155 public rehabilitation placement professionals in five southern states, with three-itemed open-ended questions	

Application of the TPB across these 12 studies can be grouped according to three main research aims:

(1) To test the utility of the TPB in explaining/predicting hiring intentions and/or behaviour. Most studies with this aim examined intentions [31,40], and a study by

Araten-Bergman in 2016 [34] is the only one that analysed both intention and actual hiring behaviour.

(2) To examine/explain specific elements of the TPB (e.g., beliefs) and the extent to which the identified factors influenced hiring intentions or perceptions [33,37].

(3) To identify themes in qualitative data or to identify/group research participants with similar characteristics [32,36].

Studies in this relatively small sample were primarily undertaken in the American context, with only three studies conducted outside of the United States—Malaysia [35], Israel [34], and Belgium [36]—as well as a comparison study on Israeli and US employers [38]. Survey and focus group discussions were the main data collection methods and, as a result, there is a mix of quantitative (*n* = 7) and qualitative (*n* = 5) studies. In terms of the participants, there is a good coverage of both internal (e.g., hiring managers/hiring decision makers of organisations, staff at different levels of the company) and external personnel (e.g., hiring agents, vocational rehabilitation counsellors, job placement professionals). The 12 studies also covered an array of industries and sectors, many involving multiple industries with a few studies specifically targeting healthcare, leisure and hospitality, and not-for-profit sectors. Most of the studies examined hiring intentions or perceptions towards people with disability in general, except for three papers that targeted specific disability groups: McDonnall and Lund [31] studied hiring intentions towards blind candidates, Mai's 2019 research involved applicants with autism [33], while Knaeps and colleagues [36] examined beliefs of vocational rehabilitation (VR) counsellors who worked with people with severe mental illness.

4.2. The Efficacy of the TPB in Explaining Hiring Intentions and Behaviours Towards People with Disability

The search found substantial evidence to support the TPB's ability to predict intentions to hire people with disability or specific disability groups, while there are variations in how each TPB component influenced the intentions across studies. For example, Fraser and colleagues [40], in a study of 89 American employers, found subjective norms played the greatest role in predicting hiring intentions towards qualified workers with disabilities, with attitude and perceived behaviour control also making significant contributions. Subjective norms were also identified as the most important contributor in predicting companies' hiring intentions according to Ang and colleagues' study of 200 Malaysian employers [35]. By contrast, in a recent study of 388 participants from the United States, McDonnall and Lund [31] reported attitudes concerning the productivity of blind employees had the strongest influence on hiring intentions, although attitudes about perceived challenges to employing blind applicants were found not significant. On the other hand, Mai [33] found a balanced influence of (perceived) control, subjective norms, and attitudes on hiring agents' intended selection of qualified candidates with autism. Interestingly, McDonnall and Lund [31] noted that despite being identified as the most significant predictor of intent in a meta-analysis of the efficacy of TPB across a range of topics [26], perceived behavioural control was found to be the least important predictor among several studies on intent to employ people with disability.

Multiple studies in our sample explored different factors that might have an influence on the TPB results. One possible factor to explain the variance across studies in how the TPB components influence hiring intentions could be the disability groups involved in the studies. McDonnall and Lund [31] suggested that employers' perceived barriers or beliefs may vary across applicants with specific disabilities, and such differences could be overlooked by pan-disability studies. This hypothesis is aligned with other research which has also provided evidence that attitudes and treatments towards people with disability vary by type of disability [43–46].

Company size and other organisational characteristics have also been explored. Effects of company size and history of hiring workers with disability were evident in Fraser and colleagues' study [40], but only in relation to perceived behavioural control where

employees in small companies were found to hold more negative control beliefs than their counterparts in large companies. Similarly, Jasper and Waldhart's [37] analysis of data from the leisure and hospitality industry reported differing control, attitude, and subjective norms by employer size. Fraser and colleagues [40] also reported significant effects of companies' current employment of workers with disability on perceived behavioural control, such as: people from companies that did not employ workers with disability were more likely to believe that senior management is not committed to hiring such workers; they were less likely to believe training in accommodation of workers with disability is available for human resources (HR) personnel; and were less likely to have contact information of vocational rehabilitation resources.

Additionally, sectoral differences have been observed by several qualitative studies on hiring intentions of not-for-profit and for-profit organisations [38,39]. In a recent study, Wright and colleagues [32] identified fundamental differences in attitudinal orientation, that is, taking a charity-oriented perspective or a human resource-oriented perspective regarding employment practices for people with disability, and concluded that employers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perception of difficulty (perceived behavioural control) differed considerably by such attitudinal orientation. It is worth noting, however, that when some of these factors were introduced as additional independent variables to the analytical models in Araten-Bergman's study [34], organisation size and sectoral difference were found to have no statistically significant role in predicting intent or actual hiring behaviour.

As the only study using longitudinal data to examine both intentions and actual hiring behaviour, findings from research with Israeli employers by Araten-Bergman [34] showed that while the TPB components successfully predicted intentions to hire people with disability, the model failed to significantly predict actual hiring behaviour measured six months later. It was further concluded that indicators of "diversity climate" (i.e., having disability hiring policy in place and providing disability training), as variables separate to the TPB model, were significant predictors of actual hiring behaviour. However, this result may be related to the measures and scope of TPB constructs, as we discuss below.

4.3. What Do the Components of TPB Encompass in a Disablity Employment Context?

A complicating factor is variance across studies in regard to how each TPB component is conceptualised or measured. The subjective norm component is perhaps the most consistently treated, underpinned by a common adherence to Ajzen's explanation of subjective norms as views of important others [24]. While some studies focus only on workplace referents (such as supervisor or co-workers), others adopt a wider approach including referents beyond the workplace [36]. Some studies also include measures to assess the motivation to comply with the views of referents [42].

Similarly, there is relative consistency in regard to the attitude component focused on consequences or experiences related to the behaviour. However, while this is the common frame, the aspects of attitudes are diverse across studies (e.g., from attitudes about contacting a vocational rehabilitation service to productivity and quality of work of people with disability).

By contrast, the component of perceived behavioural control (PBC) encompasses a range of different elements across studies. These elements broadly relate to the different factors that may facilitate or constrain the behaviour (situational barriers and/or enablers), both within and beyond the workplace, along with the internal capabilities of the individual to utilise or control them. As discussed earlier, the PBC component indicates the perceived ability to perform the target behaviour. 'Ability', framed or measured by concepts of capacity and autonomy, can be influenced by the difficulty and/or complexity of the behaviour as perceived by the individual. Of interest to the present research is that some studies have itemised a measure of confidence as part of or associated to PBC, in the form of either being confident in having the skills required to perform the behaviour [34], having the knowledge required [31], or having the confidence to overcome identified barriers (self-efficacy) [36]. In Knaeps et al.'s study [36], the two variables of perceived

behavioural control and self-efficacy are treated as distinct, though linked, components. Both components are measured by reference to eight barriers to competitive employment, based on a previous study. PBC is assessed on two indices: 'control belief strength'—the likelihood that each barrier would occur; and 'control belief power'—the difficulty these barriers pose. The measure of self-efficacy focuses on respondents' confidence to overcome each barrier [36]. Interestingly, these barriers span the levels of the employment ecosystem discussed earlier, being informed by earlier studies taking this approach [36].

Across the studies, there is variation in the way situational barriers (and enablers) are defined in the context of the employment of people with disability, with some of the studies aligning these with PBC elements [33]. As stated earlier, the employment ecosystem framework stresses that factors enabling or hindering economic participation of people with disability are manifested at the individual, meso, and macro levels [20]. Table 4 presents perceived behavioural control elements identified by studies from our sample and maps these elements against the employment ecosystem. Despite a focus at the meso level (organisational/workplace and community level), factors perceived by employers or hiring agents to affect the employment of people with disability span across personal, organisational, and societal contexts. These factors function as either barriers or enablers depending on their presence or absence in each context.

Table 4. Ecological mapping of enablers/barriers in TPB studies.

Individual Factors/Personal Characteristics	Workplace/Organisational and Community Factors	Societal Factors
Presence of job seeking skills [42]	Level of employer knowledge of abilities of people with disability [37,42]	Consumer's access to transportation [36,42]
Presence of family support [42]	Level of knowledge or information about people with disability [37]	Potential withdrawal of public benefits (e.g., income support) [42]
Presence of motivation to work [36,42]	Employer's knowledge of VR personnel to contact [40,41]	Presence of external mediation services to help resolve disability and accommodation issues (without lawsuits) [33]
Extent of work history [42]	Level of provision of applicant lists to employer by VR agencies [40]	Legislative mandate and enforcement requiring employment of people with disability [33] or incompatible legislation [36]
Medical in/stability of consumer's disability [36,42]	Level of follow up/insufficient contact from VR personnel with employer [36,41]	Presence of socio-economic problems (housing, debts) [36]
	Availability of third-party recruitment [38]	Economic conditions [38]
	Presence of supportive communication from senior management or human resources (HR) about programs to support employment of people with disability [40]	Level of legislative incentives e.g., financial incentives [40], wages [38]
	Level of commitment of senior management to hiring workers with disability [40]	
	Availability of training for HR and hiring managers in accommodation of workers with disability [33,37]	
	Concern/comfort about cost of workers compensation premiums [37]	
	Concern/comfort about cost of health care coverage [37]	
	Cost of accommodations for workers with disability [37]	
	Level of knowledge about cost of accommodations [37]	
	Written company policy addressing recruitment of minorities including people with disability [33]	
	Availability of diversity specialist who deals with people with disability [33]	
	Presence of an organisational diversity plan [33]	
	Availability of dedicated diversity training [33]	
	Level of organisational budget to support hiring [33]	
	Organisational un/willingness to redesign work [33]; resources to address barriers [41]	
	Level of demonstrated commitment of staff to equitable rights [33]	
	Negative/positive internal to workplace context: e.g., downsizing, lack of support [36]	
	Insufficient collaboration between support services [36]	

However, not all studies align barriers/enablers to PBC (as did those studies reported in Table 4), instead aligning them with other components of the TPB. For example, Fraser and colleagues' study in 2011 treated the likelihood of availability of training in accommodation of workers with disability for HR personnel as a measure of PBC [40], where in another study offering disability awareness training was understood as a practice associated with subjective norms [37]. Likewise, financial support/resources for hiring were identified as related to attitudes by Fraser and colleagues [41] and as an element of PBC by Mai [33]. Mai's research measured PBC by a range of enablers including having written company policy addressing minority recruitment, a diversity specialist, and an external mediation service helping to resolve issues [33]. Conversely, one qualitative study suggested that similar environmental factors, such as impacts of legislation and economy, are related to subjective norm [39].

Overall, while there is little consistency in the definition of constituent parts of each TPB component across studies, it is not yet clear if this is a limitation or a strength in that diverse conceptualisations enable customisation of concepts to context. Such variance in measures and scope of TPB constructs—particularly PBC—suggests the need to further explore and understand the components underpinning each TPB construct when applied to the employment of people with disability, in various disability, industry, and country contexts.

5. A New Model: A TPB Model of Employer Disability Confidence

5.1. Design and Context of the Proposed Model

There are clear resonances with parts of the TPB, when applied to the employment of people with disability, and understandings of employer disability confidence. In particular, the literature on disability confidence has a strong focus on attitudes which are addressed via awareness training, engagement with lived experience, and recognising stigma and discrimination [11]. A common approach to increasing disability confidence in workplaces has been via awareness training with research findings showing improvement in knowledge of the benefits of employing people with disability and more positive attitudes towards people with disability in the workplace [47–49]. Nonetheless, other research has highlighted a lack of empirically validated disability diversity training programs [50]. Such attitude and culture change of employers/workplaces, along with changes to recruitment policy and practice, are elements associated with subjective norm or PBC by some. However, there has not been sufficient attention paid to 'perceived' or 'actual' control in the programs or frameworks of disability confidence, nor have most of the concepts named actual employment of people with disability as the summative behavioural outcome of improved employer confidence.

Bringing TPB to the concept (and practice) of employer disability confidence provides an analytical lens that highlights the change logic that needs to be in place to achieve the hiring of people with disability around which activities and supports can be aligned. Crucially, the TPB also stresses a distinction between intention and behaviour/action, where the perceived and actual control of the hirer is critical to achieving the behavioural result. Applying the TPB model to the concept of employer disability confidence stresses the need to understand and address the full set of factors influencing the behaviour including attitudes (with multiple aspects), subjective norms (within and beyond the workplace), and behavioural control (perceived and actual) encompassing micro, meso, and macro factors. Existing disability confidence definitions and concepts have not focused on the full range of barriers/enablers relative to the outcome of employment, nor the full range of capabilities (and available strategies) of the employer to address them. Adding an ecosystem view, combined with the TPB literature, focuses attention on factors across the ecosystem, not just within the workplace.

5.2. A New Theory-Based Framework for Employer Disability Confidence

The proposed new model for employer disability confidence (Figure 2) offers a theory-based change logic to connect a range of factors influencing employment of people with disability, incorporating an ecological understanding of enablers and barriers to employment. This model broadens the concept of 'confidence' and associates 'confidence building' beyond 'self-efficacy' to extend to all TPB components. Under the new model, employer disability confidence is the sum of attitudes of the employer and workplace towards hiring and working with people with disability, the perceived social expectations (views towards employment of people with disability held by referents within and beyond a workplace), and the perception of the ability of the employer and workplace to employ people with disability (barriers and/or enablers identified).
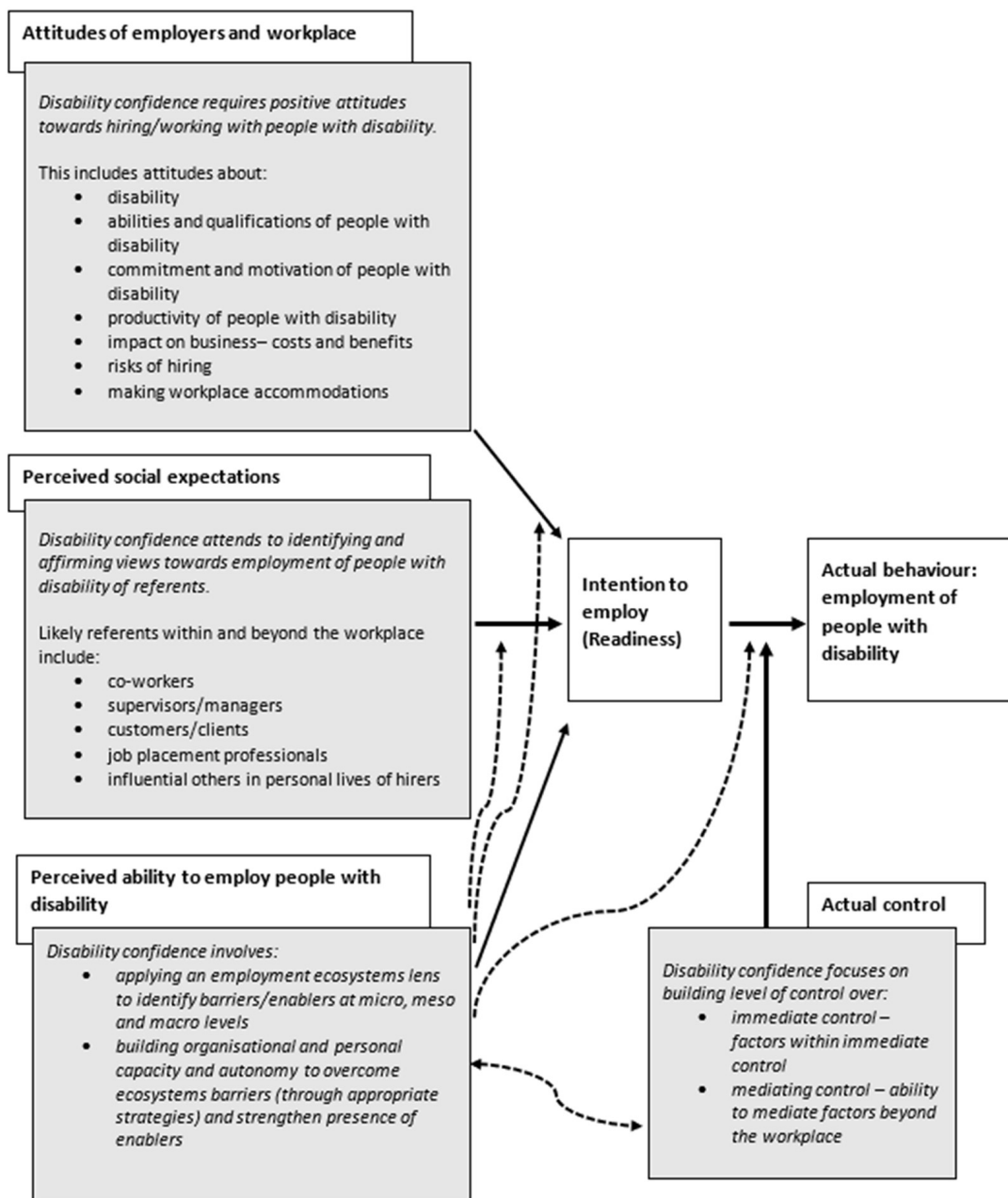

Figure 2. A TPB model of employer disability confidence. **Legend:** Unbroken lines show direct relationship between elements, where one element gives rise to or produces the other. Broken lines show moderating influences on these.

Ultimately, improved disability confidence creates a pathway to actual employment for people with disability. This new model of employer disability confidence has theorised disability confidence using the five TPB constructs: attitude, subjective norm, perceived control/ability, intention, and actual behaviour.

Under this model, building disability confidence entails building positive *attitudes* towards hiring and working with people with disability. The TPB and disability employment behaviour literature reviewed in this study suggests that aspects of attitudes of employer and workplace may include attitudes about: (1) disability; (2) personal attributes of people with disability such as abilities, commitment, and productivity; and (3) impacts of hiring workers with disabilities on business and organisation such as costs, benefits, and risks, among others.

Building disability confidence also relies on attending to perceptions of *social expectations* (subjective norms), both within and external to the workplace. A range of workplace norms are referenced in the literature reviewed in the early section, including those promulgated by senior management via clear organisational commitment to employment of people with disability [40]. Furthermore, studies also found 'significant others' whose views shaped social norms from external backgrounds such as customers, clients, job placement professionals, and even those from a hirer's personal life.

In terms of the *perceived ability* to and *actual control* over employing people with disability (to make perceived control a proxy for actual control), we propose that activities of disability confidence building focus on identifying the personal, institutional, and environmental barriers to employment relevant to the context, building the hirers' and organisational capacity to address these, and expanding the level of control over immediate factors and mediating factors beyond the workplace.

The use of the TPB as the causal frame for an employer disability confidence model is enhanced by the employment ecosystem lens. The focus to date in employer disability confidence activity has been on workplace/organisational barriers and enablers; however, a wide range of factors are at play to influence the disability confidence and employment outcomes. As discussed in the earlier section, an employment ecosystem lens highlights the dynamic operating environment with factors internal and external to employers, and factors at individual, institutional, and environmental levels. Here, we hypothesise that lack of in-depth understanding of all potential barriers and challenges enlarges the gap between 'perceived' and 'actual' control, which in turn affects the leap from 'intention' to 'actual' employment of people with disability. In the original TPB model, PBC was introduced to deal with situations when the behaviour is not under complete control and actual control plays a decisive role in 'intention' turning to actual behaviour. Considering the full range of ecosystem factors at micro, meso, and macro levels assists to make PBC 'realistic' by including elements beyond the meso (organisational), making visible personal barriers facing the jobseeker with disability, such as lack of family support, as well as macro factors such as lack of accessible transport and impact of loss of income support [42]. Taking the employment ecosystem lens, disability confidence attends to closing the perception gap between 'perceived' and 'actual' behaviour control and, ultimately, taking the leap from 'being ready' to actually 'hiring' people with disability.

Attention to building employers' 'confidence' across all the components of the model culminates in the desired *behaviour* of employment of people with disability.

6. Discussion

This paper presents a theory-based definition for employer disability confidence. Built into a TPB model, employer disability confidence is conceptualised to be the sum of employers' attitudes towards hiring people with disability, the perceived social expectations within and beyond workplace, and the perception of employers' control over factors enabling and hindering employment of people with disability. Particularly, the model stresses the need to develop individual and organisational capacities to overcome barriers to disability employment in the ecosystem. While some of the barriers sit outside of, or fall

only peripherally within, the control of the employer (as argued by Araten-Bergman [34]), once identified it is possible to craft strategies to respond to them. For example, while accessible public transport is not a factor within the control of hirers, once aware of it as a barrier employers might adjust start and finish times of the workday to maximise access to available suitable transport. The new framework highlights the importance of enhancing the capabilities required by, or the strategies available to, employers in regard to mediating, at least partially, the micro and macro level factors beyond the workplace. The extent to which this capability and strategy development can be performed is critical in impacting whether and how disability employment readiness (intention) can be transformed to actual employment outcomes of people with disability.

The Australian Disability Strategy [1], based on the social model of disability, focuses on removing barriers in attitudes, practices, and structures for people with disability to fully participate in socioeconomic activities. Most recently, the Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities [51] identifies delivering sustained and inclusive full employment and overcoming barriers to employment as part of the key objectives for Government. To address structural and systemic barriers to employment, interventions call for engagement and collaboration with all levels of government, industry, and communities [21,52]. Studies point out that structural and systemic barriers to work impact jobseekers with disability [20,52]. The employer disability confidence model demonstrates that employers' identification of and perception of control over systemic and other barriers is a key element in increasing the employment of people with disability.

The employer disability confidence model also offers a way to operationalise the disability confidence focus in disability employment interventions, particularly in relation to more logic-driven design of policies and programs involving disability confidence as a key element. For example, interventions aiming to make attitudinal changes at work could benefit by understanding aspects of attitudes affecting disability confidence, including: abilities, qualifications, commitment, and productivity of workers with disability, as well as attitudes towards costs, benefits, and risks associated with hiring people with disability and making workplace accommodations. Furthermore, as stated in the earlier section of this paper, there is no explicit measure of employer disability confidence linking with actual employment of people with disability in most current applications of employer disability confidence concept. Our framework could guide development of measurement tools to track changes in elements of 'disability confidence' and 'disability employment' over time in policies and interventions.

7. Conclusions

The development of this model has drawn on the combination of two literature sets: the largely 'grey' literature of disability confidence in the context of employment, and the small set of peer reviewed studies using the TPB to explore and explain the employment practices towards people with disability. We have highlighted other relevant literature, such as that related to 'the employment ecosystem' [19]. Without further research to test our model, our proposed TPB model of employer disability confidence can only be considered emergent. Further development of the factors associated with each component of the model is needed, particularly in light of the inconsistent elucidation of these within the TPB literature on disability employment. Further attention is also required to test whether the model adequately describes and captures experience across diverse disability cohorts.

As discussed at the commencement of this paper, the increasing popularity of and reference to the concept of employer confidence in disability employment has extended to the policy realm. This calls for development of a theory-based and action-oriented framework for employer disability confidence. Such work could contribute to designing initiatives and interventions aimed at employers and workplaces to remove barriers to employment for people with disability, as well as understanding and assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of such interventions. The current framing of employer confidence in disability employment is missing a foundation to present and develop a

theory of change, let alone the capacity to measure and track changes from attitudes, perceptions, to hiring intentions. To successfully build employer confidence and capacity to hire and support a workforce with disability, employers, employment service providers, and policymakers need a better understanding of what disability employment confidence entails and the factors that contribute to shaping and affecting it. This insight is required to develop and provide policy, interventions at the organisational level, and resources to support employers.

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