

# Perfect Strangers: Benefits and Barriers in the Collaboration of Health Science and Organizational Behaviour researchers in studies of people with disabilities



Arif Jetha<sup>1,2</sup>, Silvia Bonaccio<sup>3</sup>, Catherine E. Connelly<sup>4</sup>, Sandra Fisher<sup>5</sup>, Susan Forwell<sup>6</sup>, Monique AM Gignac<sup>1,2</sup>, Sean Tucker<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Work & Health, Toronto, ON; <sup>2</sup>Dalla Lana School of Public Health University of Toronto, Toronto, ON; <sup>3</sup>Telfer School of Management, University of Ottawa, Ottawa ON; <sup>4</sup>DeGroot School of Business, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON; <sup>5</sup>David D. Reh School of Business, Clarkson University, Potsdam, NY; <sup>6</sup>Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC; <sup>7</sup>Hill School of Business, University of Regina, Regina, SK.

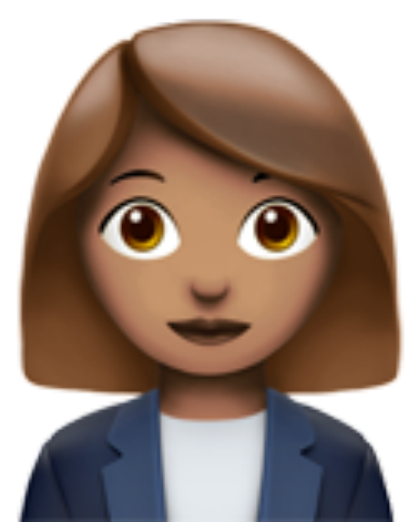
ajetha@iwh.on.ca @arifjetha

## Background

- Canadians living with disabilities are less likely to participate in paid employment (49%) when compared to those without a disability (79%) and are more likely to report productivity loss<sup>1</sup>
- Diverse biological (e.g., disability type and severity), psychological (e.g., self-efficacy), social (e.g., attitudes held by others) and contextual factors (e.g., physical accessibility) represent barriers or facilitators to employment participation
- The work context plays a particularly important role in determining the employment of people with disabilities

## Transdisciplinary approach to research

- Studies which draw on the expertise of researchers from different disciplines have the potential to advance research and practice on the employment of people with disabilities
- Yet, research on the employment participation of people with disabilities is siloed across disciplines
- Health sciences (HS) (e.g., medicine, rehabilitation sciences, public health) and organizational behaviour (OB) represent two disciplines that offer important insights and require greater collaboration



OB



HS

## Objectives

- To examine the scholarly benefits of research including team members from HS and OB;
- To examine disciplinary similarities and differences that may foster or create barriers to productive collaborations between HS and OB researchers.

## Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP)

- CDPP<sup>2</sup> is an alliance of university, public, private and government sector partners working together to enhance community participation among Canadians with physical disabilities.
- The study brought together a team of HS and OB researchers to design, test, and implement evidence-based practices that will increase both the number of people with disabilities who participate in the labour market, as well as the quality of participation.

## Methods

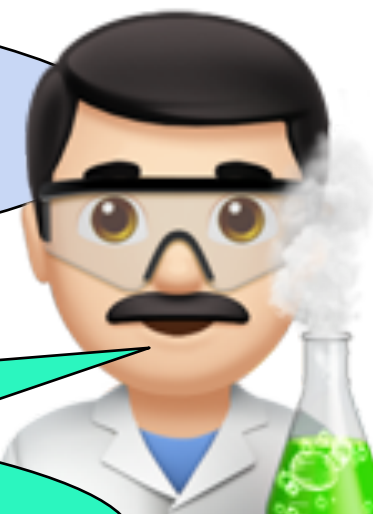
- Seven CDPP team members representing HS and OB documented their collaborative experiences within the CDPP including benefits and barriers to transdisciplinary research
- Similarities and differences that existed between HS and OB team members were documented including theories, research methods and knowledge transfer and exchange practices (KTE)
- Finally, CDPP team members were asked to provide a roadmap for collaboration

## Results

### 1. HS and OB each provide a unique perspective to research on the employment of people with disabilities



"We have deep knowledge of theories explaining workplace processes ranging from a focus on the individual to the organization. We also have developed skills that facilitate talks with business owners and managers."

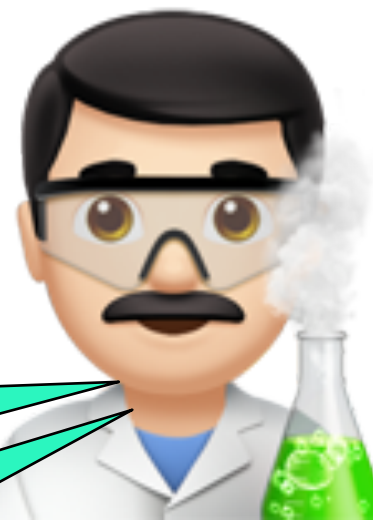


"Theories on participation and the meaning of living with a disability largely come from the health sciences along with a number of existing measures used to assess disability and health outcomes that can be drawn upon in the research."

### 2. Collaboration between HS and OB researchers brings together two unique research disciplines to advance research



"We bring together complementary knowledge. By joining forces, we can ensure that we avoid errors of omission. We know different literatures, have skill sets that only partially overlap, and we can ensure greater reach in terms of knowledge transfer."



"Often times, the health sciences downplay the role of the workplace, instead focusing on clinical or psychosocial determinants to employment. Organizational behaviour scientists provide specific insights into the factors within the workplace that shape policies and practices."

"Collaboration between HS and OB are critical to conducting high quality research on the employment of people with disabilities. The outcome can be findings that are relevant to end users ranging from employers to health care professionals."

### 3. Differences in theory, publication process and KTE can create hurdles in the collaboration between OB and HS researchers



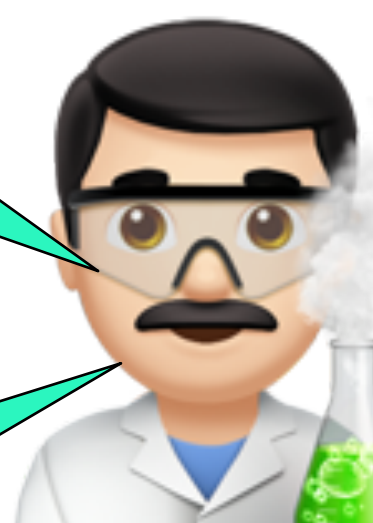
"The time from study planning to publication seems to be much longer in OB than in HS. The articles tend to be longer, the review process takes more time, reviewers expect lengthy answers (sometimes longer than the original submission)"

"KTE is an inherent feature of HS research including the integration of stakeholder engagement at all phases of the research process. KTE is emerging within OB."

"OB researchers seem to have different institutional environments: we teach more, and the expectations for teaching are very high."

"OB papers seem to require a more detailed theoretical foundation. For us, it is not enough to identify a gap in the literature, or to apply a theory. We are always trying to theory-build as well as develop practical implications."

"HS researchers sometimes look atheoretical to those in OB because we start with a problem facing a person aiming to participate in employment with a disability, and not on a theoretical perspective about working. Both groups value theory, but at different points in the research process."



## Roadmap for successful collaboration

The following tips were offered by members of CDPP to begin a transdisciplinary program of research

- Take time to familiarize yourself with colleagues in different disciplines. Highlight commonalities and differences in research methods, theory and KTE. Take steps to bridge the gaps at all phases of the research process
- Consider starting a collaboration with small working groups. Challenges can occur when you're managing both transdisciplinary differences and large-group issues
- Sustain engagement with your colleagues even when you don't know exactly where it is going to go. Discovery takes time, willingness and patience
- Embrace the diversity in research traditions, languages and approaches. Don't assume the other discipline has ignored issues of theory, measures, design or research process. They often just unfold somewhat differently or have different audiences in mind