

accessible infrastructure
is the stepping stone to
an inclusive and
accessible workplace



Organizations must invest in resources and upgrades that enable people with disabilities to perform better and independently.

What infrastructural and reasonable accommodations - physical and technological - are required to help people with disabilities efficiently perform their job with minimum to no dependency?

Think of a corporate or government building you recently visited. Did it have a well-aligned ramp? An elevator big enough to accommodate a wheelchair? Were there enough braille signboards? Was the door too heavy to push? What about an accessible canteen or water cooler? While these are the primary necessities for an individual with a motor disability or visual impairment to use different areas in a building, many organizations in India are yet to make the workplace accessible.

The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India, aimed to make 25-50 of the most important government buildings in 50 major cities fully accessible by June 2022. In practice, however, a lot remains to be done.

As one of the participants in a study conducted by Randstad India in association with Vocallee Networks, 'Embracing All Abilities: Including People with Disabilities at Work' was a visually impaired government teacher



shares, the road leading to the school itself was inaccessible. Similar stories ring true for employees with disabilities in corporate jobs as well.

There are many reasons for this lapse in planning and designing workspaces. While the lack of a legal mandate remains a primary cause, the lack of knowledge and representation of the needs of people with disabilities makes 'fully accessible offices' a rare phenomenon. There is also poor awareness of the range of assistive technology available today, whether it is physical products like wheelchairs and hearing aids or digital products such as software and devices.

As part of the study cited above, 206 business leaders across sectors

participated in a quantitative survey, and 50 individuals, including 30 people with disabilities, participated in qualitative interviews to share their opinions on workplace inclusion through accessibility.

The conversations with our participants revealed that the scenario is transitioning towards better facilities and infrastructure. 17% of the respondents in our study stated that their organizations already provide assistive technology as a form of reasonable accommodation. What's more, 23% of the respondents state that they have barrier-free access to the entire workplace. This is a positive development that bodes well for the future.



making infrastructure accessible

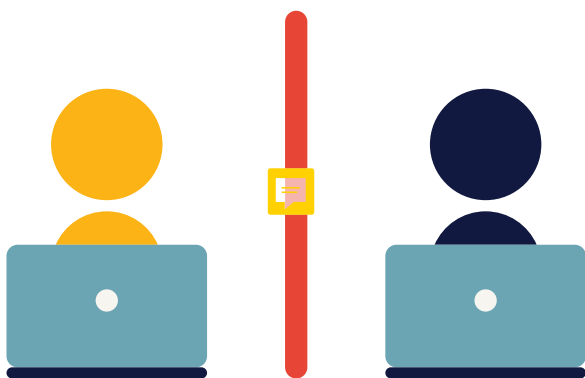
As technology has evolved, it has given designers the freedom to create accessible structures. Here are some of the ways in which technological evolution has made workspaces accessible:

- Additional ramps near fire exits, parking spaces, and main entrances
- Specialist lighting, braille signage, and tactile strips in offices and factories to help employees with low vision and blindness
- Height adjustable work stations, and basins and automatic faucets
- Work-from-home options for people with disabilities who find it taxing to commute to or work in populated offices because of their physical, cognitive, or social challenges.

The willingness of employers to incorporate infrastructural changes and offer options like work-from-home and flexible work timings reduce the challenges for people with disabilities.

Inclusion experts, accessibility auditors, and employees with disabilities can help suggest the various ways in which the workplace can be made accessible. For instance, Arvind Yadav, (a participant in our study), a wheelchair user and an accessibility auditor, pointed out that even though his corporate building has a ramp, it is not aligned to accommodate a wheelchair to carry a person with a heavy body weight. The presence of infrastructural facilities does not help if they act as additional physical barriers.

The ground realities of people with disabilities in India are full of challenges. Inaccessible workplaces add to that. However, these challenges can be managed if employers emphasize building and designing inclusive offices. Workplace policies, which do not require commuting but provide an accessible home office also help. The next time you step into your office, look out for solutions that can take your workplace a step closer to accessibility!



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