

## Disabled people volunteering - analysis

The analysis of the literature review is based on the 3 'talent' components as follows:

### **Commitment**

1. Commitment can be undermined by a range of practical considerations. There are a range of solutions available, but identifying and implementing these requires a determined approach, knowledge of disability-related solutions and good communication between the various stakeholders
2. The barriers associated with engaging with disabled volunteers has created an environment where disabled people can be concerned their needs will be misunderstood and their potential contribution not recognised, resulting in frustrating placements or meaningless activity. However several solutions in place for developing more worthwhile engagement are cited

Case study examples of these would be helpful, particularly around how organisations encourage prospective volunteers that volunteering with them would be both safe and beneficial, and how organisations develop meaningful placements that offer the opportunity for on-going personal development.

3. Some disabled people particularly value the social benefits of a volunteering placement, and real-life examples of how this is embraced within organisational activity would be helpful.

### **Competence**

1. There are a number of strategies in place for developing organisational knowledge and positive attitudes to engaging with disabled volunteers. These include equality and diversity training, and the range of good practice guides on engaging with disabled volunteers that are available.

However it is less clear what training strategies are most effective in developing skills and that help staff to engage with disabled volunteers in practice.

It would be helpful to explore potential training initiatives in more depth, for example:

- Shadowing other departments/organisations
- Mentoring for staff supervising disabled volunteers
- Action learning activities incorporated within management meetings

NB There may be a role for disabled volunteers in enhancing the organisation's capacity and skills, and there may also be a role for non-disabled staff in delivering (or supporting the delivery of) disability training sessions (NB this would break down the myth that it is only possible for disabled people to understand disability in the context of volunteering).

2. There is a lack of organisational awareness of the business case for engaging with disabled volunteers.
3. Some challenges are caused by disabled people either over or under-estimating their abilities.

There may be a role for intermediaries and support-workers to manage these situations.

4. There is a need for person-focused and flexible approaches when engaging with disabled volunteers, and real-life examples of this being achieved in practice would be helpful.

## Contribution

1. Both disabled volunteers and staff responsible for supporting them can be 'victims' of a situation.

There are several ways of addressing this in respect of disabled volunteers, but these tend to rely on a holistic organisational approach to engaging with disabled volunteers.

Whilst some initiatives are in place to support staff in disabled volunteering initiatives, there is more evidence needed that staff can benefit from the involvement of disabled volunteers. These benefits need to be communicated within the organisation. NB point 1 in the 'commitment' section above also applies here.

2. A number of initiatives are cited to encourage the move from 'bystanders' to 'beneficiaries', however real-life examples showing this in practice would be helpful, particularly around how disabled volunteers can assist with these initiatives, and how to avoid disability initiatives being perceived as tokenistic.

In addition, as disabled volunteering initiatives encourage good practice volunteer management cultures (based on a person-centred and flexible approach) there can be beneficial outcomes for other volunteers. Therefore the impact of a disabled volunteering initiative on the wider volunteering programme needs to be evidenced.

3. There are a significant amount of 'blockers' based on the following categories:
  - Resources concerns (finance and management skills and support requirements)
  - Organisational performance (perceptions that disabled volunteers can unreliable and lack the pre-requisite abilities)

There are plenty of solutions cited for managing these 'blocker' issues, but these would need a structured and committed approach by senior management.

4. There is a range of strategies available to promote sponsorship of disabled volunteering initiatives, and these have a particular focus on involving disabled people in a management steering group or similar.

However, there are no 'sponsors' specifically identified (outside of disabled volunteer-involving organisations), which undermines the implementation of strategies to address the 'blocker' issues.

5. There are plenty of opportunities to engage 'positive influencers', but currently these appear relative unexplored in practice. In addition there is a range of potential strategies for addressing the issues around 'negative influencers', but these all require a co-ordinated and strategic approach.

Cross-cutting themes that are evident in encouraging 'influencers' to become 'sponsors' are:

- Benchmarking with how employers engage with disabled staff. NB the findings that the vast majority of managers find this easy warrants further exploration (as is the issue that organisations providing services to the public should already have accessible premises)
- The difficulty in encouraging disabled people to volunteer with non-disability related organisations
- The need to evaluate disability volunteering initiatives

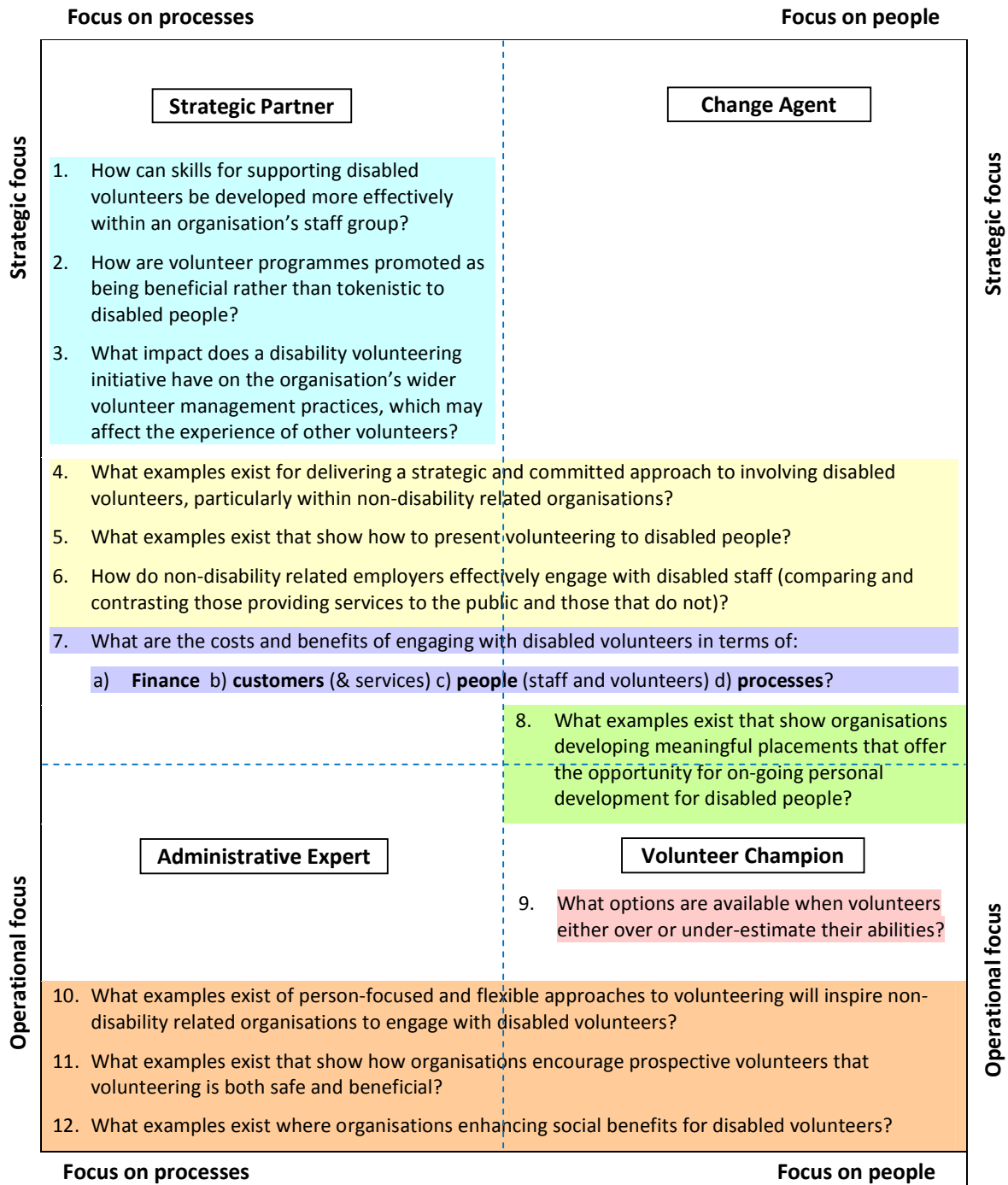
These themes underline the importance of developing clear messages to encourage leaders and senior managers within volunteering organisations to consider the business case of engaging with disabled volunteers. This conclusion would concur with the research findings that state organisations need to have a clear rationale for doing so, which aligns with their organisational values and strategy.

**Note:** The lack of overt sponsors (particularly within non-disability related organisations), together with the range of blockers, means that it is of critical importance to develop a 'business case' for engaging with disabled volunteers. The need for this is even more apparent when considering the various 'influencers' (both positive and negative). All can be influenced by a suitable business case (**see question 7 below**).

## Disabled people volunteering – further research questions

The above analysis has highlighted a number of gaps in research, strategies and initiatives to encourage volunteering for disabled people.

These gaps have been framed as further areas of research to be explored with relevant volunteer-involving organisations and practitioners. A model of human resource management (Ulrich 1998) has been adapted to show trends of current gaps in volunteering research, strategies and initiatives for disabled people.



Observation:

- Question 7, the costs and benefits of engaging with disabled volunteers is a key issue, and this is explored using the 'Balanced Scorecard' approach in a separate 'business case' mind-map on the research page.