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THE UTILIZATION OF CAPITAL OF EMPLOYEES LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the accumulation of capital among employees living with disabilities. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 employees across diverse workplaces, divided into three groups: 10 individuals with visual impairments, 10 with hearing and communication impairments, and 10 with mobility impairments. Data were analyzed using conclusion-building and content analysis methods. The findings reveal that employees living with disabilities accumulate and strategically utilize multiple forms of capital to enhance work performance and social interactions. These include symbolic capital (linked to disability type and job position), cultural capital (education and specialized skills), social capital (networks, friends, and family), and economic capital (income and assets). Additionally, two emerging forms of capital play significant roles. Digital capital refers to technological skills that enable adaptation to modern work environments, while body capital involves assistive devices and prosthetics that improve mobility and facilitate daily tasks. Overall, the study highlights the adaptive capabilities and resourcefulness of employees living with disabilities, demonstrating how various forms of capital are mobilized to enhance workplace efficiency and foster meaningful social engagement within professional settings.

KEYWORDS: Capital, Capital Accumulation, Employees Living with Disabilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Thailand has taken a clear stance by initiating policies to eliminate ableism, emphasizing that the public sector, private sector, and all social groups must cooperate in eradicating discriminatory practices that create inequality for persons with disabilities. These efforts encompass various forms of inequality, including those embedded in law-making and enforcement, welfare rights, and practical treatment. The policies aim to implement appropriate measures to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. For example, in terms of infrastructure and basic services, modifications have been made to physical infrastructure, transportation systems, and access to information. In the area of public services, there have been expansions of healthcare rights and welfare, legal rights protection, and practical recognition of equality through increased opportunities for learning, education, employment, and equal political participation (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2015).

However, Thai societal attitudes continue to negatively impact employees living with disabilities in several ways. For instance, employers often hold incorrect perceptions about persons with disabilities, becoming a major obstacle to their employment. Job assignments, work environments, and available tools are often unsuitable or unsupportive. Additionally, coworkers may perceive employees living with disabilities as lacking capability, leading to rejection and resistance to team integration and shared benefits (Tongkaew & Pasunon, 2018).

In response, employees living with disabilities have sought to build stability and self-worth by accumulating four types of capital: symbolic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and economic capital. These resources help strengthen their confidence in their own capabilities and potential to live fulfilling lives within society. Moreover, such capital contributes to enhancing their work performance, supporting independent living, and reducing dependency on others (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2015).

This article focuses on studying employees living with disabilities in the workplace, particularly exploring how they accumulate various forms of capital and how they utilize each type differently. The expected benefit of this study is to inform effective workforce diversity management strategies

1.2. Objective

To study the capital utilization of employees living with disabilities

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research adopts Bourdieu's theory of capital, which posits that individuals as social agents accumulate various forms of capital within themselves (Chantavanich, 2010). Bourdieu classifies capital into four types:

1. Economic Capital - refers to money or ownership of property and assets.
2. Cultural Capital - refers to personality, demeanour, general or specialized knowledge, language and communication skills, and high-level technical competencies. It also includes institutionalized forms such as education credentials from reputable schools or universities and work experience in large, recognized organizations.
3. Social Capital - refers to resources derived from relationships among individuals, groups, and social networks.
4. Symbolic Capital - refers to prestige, recognition, or status that an individual is acknowledged to possess.

Each type of capital involves a process of capital accumulation, and each form can be transformed into another (Bourdieu, 1986).

In the work of Holt et al. (2019), highlight that access to digital technologies for people with disabilities is not straightforward, often requiring substantial resources and effort. While digital environments can facilitate the accumulation of cultural capital, such opportunities remain uneven and are shaped by broader social conditions. Moreover, individuals with greater existing capital—particularly families—are better positioned to secure access to valued resources, reinforcing inequalities in who benefits from these technologies. Similarly, in the study by Mithen et al. (2015) social capital was categorized into three types:

1. Informal networks, such as connections with family and friends,
2. Formal networks, such as membership in groups or engagement with influential organizations, and
3. Social support, including financial assistance, practical help, and emotional support.

These types of social support are derived from diverse relationships in the daily lives of people with disabilities. The establishment of these social connections is crucial for advancing the overall well-being and development of people with disabilities.

3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employs an individual unit of analysis to gather data on personal characteristics, as well as the processes of capital accumulation and the various types of capital utilized by employees living with disabilities in the workplace. These include economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and other forms of capital relevant to their employment contexts.

The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with employees living with disabilities who have been employed under the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act, B.E. 2550 (2007), Sections 33 and 35, for at least one year. The participants work in various types of organizations, including government agencies, state enterprises, private sector organizations, and civil society organizations. A total of 30 participants were interviewed, categorized as follows:

1. 10 individuals with visual impairments
2. 10 individuals with hearing or communication impairments
3. 10 individuals with mobility or physical impairments.

Data were analyzed through conclusion drawing and content analysis methods. This project was approved by the Khon Kaen University Research Ethics Committee on February 14, 2025, under project number HE673260.

4. RESULT

4.1. Characteristics of Employees living with disabilities

This article studies three groups of employees living with disabilities: 10 individuals with visual impairments, 10 with hearing or communication impairments, and 10 with mobility or physical disabilities – totaling 30 participants. The majority were male (19 participants), followed by females (10 participants), and one participant identified as a gender minority. Most had completed a bachelor's degree.

Regarding occupation, the largest group (12 participants) worked in various professional fields, followed by 8 office staff, 3 service workers, 3 technicians, and 4 government officials.

All employees living with disabilities were employed under the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act, B.E. 2550 (2007): 1. Section 33, which requires public and private employers to hire one person with a disability for every 100 employees, promoting employment of persons with disabilities in accordance with job suitability. 2. Section 35,

which allows businesses to support persons with disabilities through alternative means, such as providing concession areas for selling goods or services, subcontracting work, offering internships, or other forms of assistance to support the quality of life of persons with disabilities or their caregivers.

In this study, 24 participants were employed under Section 33, and 6 participants under Section 35.

4.2 Capitals Of Employees Living With Disabilities

4.2.1. Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital refers to the value attributed to individuals by others through recognition and acceptance, such as acknowledgment of dignity or social status. This form of capital can be built upon other types of capital, such as economic and social capital. At the same time, symbolic capital can be converted into economic capital.

Persons with disabilities can gain recognition for their attributes, which helps form social relationships and networks. These networks play an important role in increasing access to benefits and opportunities. Within the field of labor for people with disabilities, symbolic capital is shaped by organizational and social structures, allowing individuals to perform roles according to their abilities. This can involve positions or disability symbols, influencing their access to resources in daily life and the workplace. As one interviewee stated:

"Actually, I take on several roles, but my main one is in development – as a programmer, a developer. Recently, I even trained website developers."

(Manat [pseudonym], visually impaired, interviewed on November 6, 2024)

Symbolic capital related to disability can develop at any stage in life, not only from birth. In this study, most disabilities among workers were acquired through illness or accidents, with congenital disabilities being less common.

Symbolic capital affects access to and utilization of resources. Possessing symbolic capital involves being socially recognized and acting in accordance with one's disability, leading to societal status and respect. Symbolic capital develops through accumulation, reproduction, and transformation, ultimately generating new forms of capital:

1. Accumulation of Symbolic Capital: Employees living with disabilities develop symbolic capital related to their impairments, whether congenital, due to illness, or resulting from accidents.
2. Reproduction of Symbolic Capital: Maintaining social status and appropriate

behavior based on the type of disability, such as using sign language or a white cane, leads to societal respect and recognition. For example:

"Mostly I write to communicate. If something isn't clear or an interpreter isn't available, I write. The grammar may be off, but people here understand how deaf individuals write."

(Adisorn [pseudonym], hearing and communication impaired, interviewed on October 31, 2024)

3. Transformation of Symbolic Capital: Gaining recognition through further education to increase trust in their abilities. This can lead to economic capital. As one said:

"I work in multiple roles—lecturing on legal rights, for example. They invite me because of my abilities. These are income sources. I prepare depending on the topic. Sometimes I speak, sometimes I listen. Building connections with these organizations is important too."

(Bodin [pseudonym], visually impaired, interviewed on August 21, 2024)

This aligns with another visually impaired worker using education to enhance career prospects:

"I finished a master's in management. While not directly applicable, it gave me ideas—like research and information gathering—that I now apply."

(Naphat [pseudonym], visually impaired, interviewed on August 20, 2024).

4.2.2. Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to qualities linked to other forms of cultural resources. This study finds that employees living with disabilities accumulate embodied cultural capital—skills and knowledge embedded in the body and mind—over time. Examples include the use of a white cane, Braille literacy, and sign language, particularly among those with visual or hearing impairments.

Additionally, cultural capital connects with institutional recognition. Studying at reputable institutions adds to one's cultural capital. As shared:

"Going to university was more resourceful than studying in Chiang Mai. I applied through the disability quota, competing with visually impaired students nationwide. Once accepted, everything changed. Coming from the North to Pathum Thani was a big adjustment, but Thammasat had everything. I didn't go out much at first—it took a year or two before I ventured into Bangkok."(Bodin [pseudonym], visually impaired, interviewed on August 21, 2024).

Cultural capital related to disability encompasses education, disability-related skills, and work

competencies. It, too, develops through accumulation, reproduction, and transformation:

1. Accumulation of Cultural Capital: Employees living with disabilities gain knowledge and skills through both general and disability-specific education.
2. Reproduction of Cultural Capital: Skills are maintained and enhanced through training and continued practice.
3. Transformation of Cultural Capital: Education and skill development are recognized through qualifications, which can increase income and convert into economic capital.

4.2.3 Social Capital

Social capital refers to the relationships and networks that support people with disabilities in securing employment. This begins in early childhood and school years, with the family playing a crucial role. In adolescence and adulthood, networks expand to include friends, the state, and work-related groups.

From Bourdieu's perspective, social capital stems from patron-client relationships, enabling support from various sources, such as family, friends, and the state. For example:

"At university, I discovered the Blind Association. Seniors invited me to activities. I wasn't a top student, but I liked volunteering. I joined clubs for students with and without disabilities to do activities together. Later, a legal committee member saw potential in me and invited me to write a project proposal to train the blind on legal matters. With help, the project received funding. That opened the door to my job here." (Bodin [pseudonym], visually impaired, interviewed on August 21, 2024)

Social capital also develops through accumulation, reproduction, and transformation:

1. Accumulation: Access to information, network-building, and opening opportunities.
2. Reproduction: Maintaining relationships with family, friends, state institutions, and participation in activities strengthens networks and leads to employment.
3. Transformation: Expanding networks improves access to work, education, and other capital forms like economic or symbolic capital.

4.2.4 Economic Capital

Economic capital refers to tangible resources, such as money or property, owned or controlled by employees living with disabilities. This includes physical assets (e.g., cash, houses, cars, savings) and

legal entitlements (e.g., state welfare benefits). The study found that employees living with disabilities earn an average income of 20,000 THB per month, some of which is used to pay for homes or vehicles – thus building further economic capital.

In the context of employees living with disabilities, economic capital also follows accumulation, reproduction, and transformation processes:

1. Accumulation: Gathering resources through income, assets, or career opportunities supported by mechanisms like disability employment quotas, skill development, and vocational training.
2. Reproduction: Sustaining economic capital through long-term strategies such as continued education, training, or promotions.
3. Transformation: Converting economic capital into other forms, such as symbolic or cultural capital. The study also noted the emergence of digital and body capital through access to work technology and adaptive tools, like assistive devices and modified vehicles, which in turn can generate further economic returns.

4.2.5. *Digital Capital*

Employees living with disabilities possess the ability to develop technological skills, particularly hard skills such as computer usage, programming, video editing, graphic design, digital marketing, and IT system administration. These skills can be cultivated and enhanced through dedication, self-directed learning, access to online resources, and training provided by both governmental and private sectors. Such continuous development enables employees living with disabilities to increase their competencies over time.

The development of digital capital is closely linked to cultural capital, as it involves the acquisition and mastery of technological skills. Employees living with disabilities who have access to knowledge sources – including the internet, online courses, and learning applications – gain more opportunities to learn, improve, and apply these skills in meaningful ways.

1. Accumulation: Employees living with disabilities accumulate digital capital through access and skill acquisition, utilizing:
 - 1.1 Hardware such as computers, smartphones, and assistive devices;
 - 1.2 Software including design programs, data analysis tools, and learning applications;
 - 1.3 The internet to access knowledge, online courses, and skill-building platforms.

This process is inherently tied to cultural capital, for example, learning programming techniques, mastering digital design, and developing expertise in digital marketing. Moreover, it relates to social capital through the creation of digital social networks by connecting with online communities of employees living with disabilities and technology experts.

2. Reproduction: Sustaining and Expanding Digital Capital. Once digital skills are accumulated, employees living with disabilities can maintain and reproduce this capital through:

- 2.1 Knowledge transfer to peers, younger generations, or community members;
- 2.2 Continuous participation in training programs provided by governmental, private, and international networks;
- 2.3 Developing digital work networks such as remote work, IT freelancing, or online commerce.

This reproduction process enables employees living with disabilities to sustain their capacities, strengthen community knowledge, and build stable income sources, thereby reducing dependency on social welfare systems.

3. Transformation: Converting Digital Capital into Social and Economic Value. Digital capital holds significant potential to transform the economic and social status of employees living with disabilities by:

- 3.1 Creating new employment opportunities – for instance, becoming freelance graphic designers or digital content creators;
- 3.2 Enhancing income and economic security through jobs that are not limited by physical constraints;
- 3.2 Reshaping social perceptions by shifting the view of employees living with disabilities from passive recipients to active contributors and knowledge producers.

This transformation also connects digital capital to symbolic capital, as the effective use of technology enables employees living with disabilities to gain recognition, status, and dignity within the labour market and broader society.

4.2.6. *Body Capital*

Body capital refers to the body and its physical limitations based on the type of disability. Employees living with disabilities utilize various assistive devices tailored to their specific needs to facilitate daily life and work. They also engage in physical self-care, rehabilitation practices, and adaptive techniques to maximize their bodily capabilities. By

doing so, they enhance their work efficiency, improve employability, and strengthen social participation.

Body capital has become a critical determinant in accessing opportunities, resources, and social recognition. The body is not merely a medium for living or working but also a site of social, cultural, and political meaning – especially when it diverges from the “normative standards” imposed by society.

1. Accumulation: Employees living with disabilities accumulate body capital through:
 - 1.1 Assistive devices such as wheelchairs, prosthetic limbs, hearing aids, and screen-reading software; Training adaptive bodily skills to compensate for physical limitations, e.g., mastering prosthetic use or adapting work methods to bodily conditions; Maintaining physical health to ensure sustainable capacity for work and daily living.
2. Reproduction: Body capital is reproduced and expanded via: Access to evolving assistive technologies such as screen readers, magnification software, and adaptive tools for employees living with disabilities; Knowledge sharing about bodily adaptation strategies within disability communities; Transferring

lived experiences to newly employees living with disabilities or those entering the labor market.

This reproduction process occurs within a sociocultural context, helping to establish new norms in labor environments that embrace bodily diversity.

3. Transformation Reframing the Meaning of the Body. Body capital enables employees living with disabilities to transform physical limitations into capabilities:
 - 3.1 Through assistive technologies and adaptive practices, employees living with disabilities can perform tasks equally or, in some cases, more effectively than non -disabilities employees; The body thus becomes a site of potential and value creation, rather than limitation;
 - 3.2 When employees living with disabilities achieve success in their careers, they acquire symbolic capital – being recognized as role models or pioneers of adaptation.

Consequently, body capital transcends its physicality and becomes a form of symbolic capital that reshapes societal perceptions of disability. Rather than being viewed as a deficit, disability is reframed as a valuable difference deserving respect.

Table 1: Capitals of Employees living with disabilities.

| Capitals | Indicators | Process of Capital Production and Accumulation | | | Transformation |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| | | Productivity | Maintain | Reproductivity | |
| Symbolic Capital | Types of Disabilities | Disabilities | Practicing in type of disability | Social acceptance | Economic Capital, Body Capital |
| Cultural Capital | Educational Qualification | Knowledge | Skill development | Income | Economic Capital, Body Capital |
| | Work Skill/ Disability Skill | Knowledge | Skill development | Income | Economic Capital |
| Social Capital | Public sector support | Access to information | Contacting | Expand the network | Economic Capital, Symbolic Capital |
| | Team Support | Networking | Contacting | Expand the network | Economic Capital |
| | Family Support | Providing opportunities | Taking care and supporting | Expand the network | Economic Capital, Symbolic Capital |
| Economic Capital | Income | Capability | Evaluation | Promotion | Economic Capital, Digital Capital, Body Capital |
| | Vehicles | Saving | Taking care and supporting | Social Mobility | Symbolic Capital |
| | Residence | Saving | Taking care and supporting | Social Mobility | Symbolic Capital |
| Digital Capital | Technology Skill | Knowledge | Skill development | Income | Economic Capital |
| Body Capital | Prosthetics in type of disability | Prosthetics | Practicing in type of disability | Social acceptance | Symbolic Capital |

Table 2: Capitals of Employees living with disabilities Classified by Type of Disability.

| Type | Symbolic Capital | Cultural Capital | Social Capital | Economic Capital | Digital Capital | Body Capital |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Visual impairments | Visual impairments | Educational Qualification | Network | Income | Screen reader technology | White Cane |
| Hearing or Communication impairments | Hearing or Communication impairments | Educational Qualification | Network | Income | Hearing aid | Sign Language |
| Mobility or Physical impairments | Mobility or Physical impairments | Educational Qualification | Network | Income | Assistive Technology | Vehicle |

The table above reflects the differences in capital accumulation among different types of employees living with disabilities. Each type of employees living with disabilities tends to accumulate similar forms of capital namely cultural capital (education level), social capital (social networks), and economic capital (income). However, they differ in the accumulation of symbolic capital, digital capital, and body capital.

These three types of capital are closely related to the nature of each individual's disability. For example, workers with visual impairments require screen-reading technology to support their daily lives and work. When traveling outside familiar places, they need a white cane for navigation. In contrast, workers with hearing and communication impairments may rely on hearing aids, or, in the case of deaf individuals, use sign language to communicate with others. These employees living with disabilities encounter different challenges in life and work, depending on the surrounding context and the extent to which they possess various forms of capital. To fully understand these differences in capital accumulation, it is necessary to include quantitative data to illustrate the levels and usage of capital among different types of employees living with disabilities – an issue that will be addressed in the following article.

5. CONCLUSION

The employment of employees living with disabilities is a significant issue that has received increasing attention in today's society, particularly in terms of work capabilities and social interactions. These factors play a crucial role in supporting and developing employees living with disabilities so that they can work effectively and reach their full potential in diverse and equal environments. Although employees living with disabilities face various obstacles in the work process, including physical and mental limitations that may affect their ability to perform tasks, they have developed strategies for working by utilizing various forms of

capital. These include symbolic capital (type of disability and job position), cultural capital (education and specialized skills), social capital (networks, friends, family), economic capital (income, assets), digital capital (technology skills), and body capital (assistive devices). These capitals are used to generate benefits in both work performance and social interactions. In order for employees living with disabilities to work effectively and with quality, they can transform the capital they have accumulated into other forms of capital.

The findings of this study align with the research of Holt et al. (2019), which found that people living with disabilities have a strong need to benefit from technology to facilitate their lives, but they also require access to economic capital to be able to use technology as an opportunity to acquire cultural capital. The study also aligns with the work of Mithen et al. (2015), who found that both informal and formal social networks, along with social support, are interconnected and help lead to the goal of improving the lives of employees living with disabilities. This includes accessing employment opportunities, exchanging information, and participating in social organizations. Based on these results, the following recommendations are made:

1. Promote the creation of networks between employees living with disabilities and employers to exchange knowledge, experiences, and job opportunities.
2. The government agencies, employers, and business establishments should establish measures to promote the employment of employees living with disabilities by focusing on their abilities and potential based on various forms of capital. These measures should enable employees living with disabilities to accumulate different types of capital, reproduce these forms of capital sustainably, and transform them into social recognition and meaningful participation in the labour market.

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