



Building What's Next

Key Insights & Opportunities from the
2026 Disability:IN Global Conference



From Insight to Action

The Disability:IN Global Conference explored some of the most important questions facing organizations today: How do we build trust in an age of AI? How do we compete in an era of constant innovation? What does it mean to design for a broader range of human experiences? And where will the next opportunities for growth come from?

This guide captures key insights, examples, and resources from the conference to help you continue the conversation and identify ideas that can be applied within your organization.

Use This Guide To:

-  **Translate conference insights into practical next steps for your team, function, or business unit**
-  **Explore tools, frameworks, and implementation ideas that can be adapted to your organization's needs**
-  **Spark internal conversations with leadership, colleagues, and cross-functional partners**
-  **Identify proven approaches being used by leading companies**

Tip: Don't feel pressure to tackle everything at once. Focus first on the sections most relevant to your current priorities. Start building progress through focused, repeatable action and then expand over time.

The Next Growth Platform: AI, Innovation, and the Future of Market Leadership

Core Idea: The opening plenary challenged attendees to think about the next frontier of disability inclusion in business. Across discussions on AI, customer growth, and innovation, speakers emphasized that disability is a source of insight, innovation and market opportunity. Organizations that intentionally include disabled people in how they design products, experiences, technologies, and workplaces will be better positioned to lead in the future.

What Leaders Shared:

-  **"The question is: can we afford to overlook this segment?"**
The most consistent message throughout the plenary was that disability is increasingly being viewed through a growth lens. Using findings from [Disability:IN's recent study](#), speakers challenged organizations to recognize the size, influence, and purchasing power of the disability market and think about what their organizations are doing to win this business.
-  **"Trust is what is intrinsic to us making sure that we have a societal license to build AI."**
Leaders discussed the importance of ensuring disabled people help influence how AI systems are built, tested, and improved. Speakers highlighted examples where community feedback directly shaped AI outputs and emphasized that accessibility principles are helping guide responsible AI development across the industry.
-  **"When you design for humans that tend to have the most friction, you actually make it better for everyone."**
Panelists from repeatedly returned to a principle familiar to many Disability:IN partners: when organizations design for people experiencing the most friction, the resulting products, services, and experiences often improve outcomes for a much broader audience. Examples ranged from public transit and customer experiences to design and emerging technologies.
-  **"You can't create for, you have to create with."**
Speakers emphasized the importance of involving disabled consumers, employees, and partners throughout the design process. Across AI, customer experience, innovation, and growth, speakers repeatedly challenged attendees to move toward co-creation, ensuring disabled people help shape the products, services, technologies, and experiences that define the future.

Continue the Conversation

Throughout the plenary, speakers challenged attendees to think differently about growth, innovation, AI, and disability inclusion. The following resources offer practical starting points for teams looking to learn more, build internal momentum, or continue exploring the ideas discussed on stage.



The Next Growth Market- Inside the \$675B Consumer Opportunity

Speakers emphasized that disability represents a significant market opportunity. Explore new research on the disability consumer market to learn more about emerging consumer trends, business implications, and opportunities to tap into this segment



Microsoft Accessibility & AI Learning Resources

As discussions turned to responsible AI and future workforce skills, Microsoft leaders highlighted the importance of accessible technology, AI literacy, and continuous learning. These resources offer opportunities to deepen your understanding and prepare for the future of work.



Applied Creativity Research

Accenture Song highlighted its new research, which examines how organizations use creativity to drive innovation and growth. The findings challenge leaders to think not only about generating ideas, but also about creating the conditions that allow those ideas to become products, services, and experiences. For attendees, the research offers a useful lens for understanding how disability-informed design can become a driver of business innovation



Disability:IN's Insight Lab

Panelists repeatedly emphasized that organizations should move beyond designing for disabled consumers and begin creating with them. Disability:IN's Insight Lab connects organizations with disability-connected consumers to gather insights, validate ideas, and inform product, service, marketing, and customer experience decisions. It's a practical way to bring lived experience into the innovation process.

One Question to Take Back to Your Team:

Where are we creating friction for customers or employees, and what opportunity might we be missing because of it?

The Next Era of Disability Inclusion

The Disability Index® is the global benchmarking tool that helps companies assess disability inclusion across their organization. Driven by feedback from hundreds of companies and individuals, 2026 marks a significant evolution of the Index, introducing:

- ★ **Global benchmarking**
Measured against industry peers across global markets.
- ★ **Flexible approach**
Companies can assess at the enterprise or country level.
- ★ **Multiple reporting options**
For more robust insights and recommendations.
- ★ **Progress-focused scoring**
To identify areas of traction and drive continuous progress.
- ★ **Modernized question set**
Aligned with global sustainability and reporting frameworks.
- ★ **Free registration**
For qualifying* companies worldwide.

By the Numbers

627

Submissions

421

Organizations

45

Countries



**DISABILITY
INDEX**

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Report

* All non-government businesses or organizations with independent governance and more than 500 employees are eligible.

Redesigning Performance for the Modern Workforce

Core Idea: For years, organizations have focused on helping employees adapt to workplace systems. This plenary challenged leaders to ask a different question: *What if the systems are the problem?* Across conversations on accessibility, neuroinclusion, AI, and workforce design, speakers emphasized the growing importance of creating flexible systems that accommodate different ways of thinking, processing information, communicating, and contributing.

What Leaders Shared:

-  **"It's about actually thinking ahead so more people can participate from the beginning."**
Leaders emphasized that accessibility should not be an after-the-fact accommodation. The most effective organizations design environments, processes, learning experiences, and technology with a wider range of needs in mind from the start. Identifying where friction might occur and proactively removing barriers enables more people to participate, contribute, and succeed.
-  **"We need to stop focusing on fixing employees and focus much more on improving systems."**
One of the clearest messages throughout the discussion was that many workplace challenges are not performance problems, they are design problems. Information overload, back-to-back meetings, constant context switching, unclear expectations, and rigid ways of working create barriers for many employees, not just neurodivergent ones. Organizations seeing success are redesigning systems to improve work for everyone.
-  **"AI right now represents the single greatest opportunity we've seen for leveling playing fields for people with disabilities."**
Multiple speakers challenged the assumption that everyone should work the same way. AI was highlighted as a powerful enabler of this shift, helping employees organize information, prioritize tasks, improve communication, and navigate the cognitive demands of modern work. When designed with accessibility and disability inclusion in mind, AI can be a powerful unlock for empowering people with disabilities to thrive.
-  **"The single most important accommodation is a manager that leads with empathy."**
Throughout the discussion, speakers connected the critical importance of belonging to driving employee engagement, retention, collaboration, and innovation. When employees no longer need to spend energy navigating barriers or masking parts of themselves, they are better positioned to contribute their strengths, build relationships, and perform at their highest level.

Continue the Conversation

Throughout the luncheon plenary, speakers emphasized that performance challenges are often design challenges. The resources below can help organizations reduce friction, build more flexible systems, and create workplaces where more employees can thrive.

Neurodiversity @ Work Employer Roundtable

The session opened with an update on Disability:IN's Neurodiversity at Work Roundtable, a longstanding community of employers working to advance neuroinclusive hiring, workplace practices, and employee experiences. Disability:IN announced plans to more closely integrate the group into its broader partner offerings.

Neuroinclusive Human Capital Management Framework.

As the session concluded, attendees were encouraged to explore this study from Disability:IN which provides practical guidance for creating workplaces that support different ways of thinking, communicating, learning, and contributing.

Everway for Work

Speakers noted how AI can help reduce workplace friction by adapting to different working styles, communication preferences, and information-processing needs. Examples included tools, like Everway for Work, that help people organize thoughts, generate content, prioritize tasks, and consume information in different formats.

Salesforce NeuroForce & Neurodiversity Learning Resources

Throughout the discussion, speakers emphasized that neuro-inclusion must be embedded into how organizations operate, not treated as a standalone initiative. Salesforce shared how it combined employee-input with scalable learning and leadership development. Together, these resources demonstrate how organizations can move build systems, skills, and cultures that enable more employees to thrive.

One Question to Take Back to Your Team:

Where are employees spending energy navigating our systems instead of doing their best work?

A New Partner Experience is Coming

The Disability:IN Partner Portal Coming Fall 2026

Designed to make it easier to discover resources, research, events, benchmarking insights, and implementation tools, the new Partner Portal brings the full power of the Disability:IN ecosystem into one personalized experience.



Resources

Find the tools to move
from idea to
implementation.



Insights

Explore research and
benchmark progress
through the Disability
Index.



Networks

Learn from peers and
connect with the
Disability:IN network.



Learning

Build skills through events,
training, and on-demand
content.



Meet Mira

Powered by Microsoft Copilot, Mira helps partners quickly discover resources, explore insights, and get personalized support when they need it most.

From Usable to Exceptional: AI, Accessibility, and Product Development

Core Idea: Artificial intelligence is transforming every aspect of how people access information, navigate systems, and perform work. But throughout the session, speakers emphasized that realizing that potential requires intentionally building human-centered design into how AI is developed, governed, and deployed. A central message rang clear: AI can accelerate progress for people with disabilities, but only if accessibility remains embedded in the foundation.

What Leaders Shared:

- ★ **"We're going to change the entire game around accessibility and how it's done."**
Accessibility has historically been treated as a compliance requirement, relying on audits, remediation, and reviews after products have already been built. New AI-powered development tools are beginning to flip that model by detecting and fixing accessibility issues automatically during the development process. The implication is significant: accessibility can become the default at scale.
- ★ **"I truly believe that we're at the beginning of a renaissance of achievement for people with disabilities."**
Speakers highlighted examples of AI enabling activities that were previously difficult or impossible including using AI and open source tools to build a video editing workflow that enables blind creators to independently produce social media content. The broader message is that AI is not simply making existing tasks faster, it's creating new possibilities for participation, creativity, and independence.
- ★ **"This isn't something you bring in a consultancy for and go okay, great, we're done. No, it's ongoing."**
The panel discussion emphasized shifted away from adoption of AI and toward governance. Speakers shared the importance of ensuring accessibility and disability inclusion are embedded in AI governance structures, fairness reviews, risk assessments, and executive decision-making processes. The challenge presented to attendees was clear: organizations must think beyond what AI can do and consider who it benefits, who it excludes, and how its impact is measured over time.
- ★ **"Accessibility data is becoming a strategic business asset."**
Several speakers described accessibility as a source of product, customer, and operational insight, influencing everything from healthcare navigation and customer experiences to pricing models, manufacturing environments, and digital product development.

Continue the Conversation

Throughout the plenary, speakers explored how AI is reshaping accessibility, product development, and customer experience. The resources and examples below offer opportunities to learn more about the ideas discussed on stage and explore how organizations are putting them into practice.

Disability Inclusive AI: Considerations for Business Leaders

A collection of resources designed to help organizations build more accessible, inclusive, and responsible approaches to AI. These resources explore governance, implementation, and practical considerations for embedding disability inclusion into AI strategies and decision-making.

Evinced's Autopilot, Harness, and Resolve

The session opened with a look at how AI is changing software development. Evinced announced cutting edge tools that can help teams move toward more proactive accessibility practices- a leap forward for technical leaders and teams.

GitHub Copilot

Accessible AI tools can empower people with disabilities to create, build, and problem-solve in new ways. GitHub Copilot's accessibility features, including screen reader support, keyboard navigation, can work together with AI to unlock new forms of independence and innovation.

Fidelity's Accessibility Help Desk and Accessibility Marketplace

Fidelity's Accessibility Help Desk helps customers navigate financial services using the technologies and supports that work best for them, while the Accessibility Marketplace enables employees to access assistive technologies and accessibility resources without formal accommodation processes.

One Question to Take Back to Your Team:

Do our AI governance processes explicitly consider disability and accessibility, or are we assuming they'll be addressed after the fact?

Help Shape the Future of Disability Inclusion in Business

Throughout the conference, speakers challenged organizations to move beyond designing *for* people with disabilities and begin creating *with* them.

To support that work, Disability:IN is building a database of disability-connected individuals interested in participating in research opportunities, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, product testing, etc.

We're looking for:

- People with disabilities
- Business Owners
- Employees
- Investors
- Students
- Veterans
- Caregivers
- ...and more!



Add Your Perspective and join the database now.

Leading Through Trust

Core Idea: The conference ended with a topic that was omni-present throughout the week: Trust. Speakers emphasized that trust is built when organizations listen, act consistently, and create environments where people can contribute fully. As technology, workforce expectations, and business priorities continue to evolve, disability inclusion offers a powerful model for building products, workplaces, and cultures people trust.

What Leaders Shared:



"When an organization has trust, it gives people the confidence to move, to make decisions, and keep things moving."

Disability inclusion may be one of the most practical trust strategies available to business leaders. Speakers positioned disability inclusion as a business capability that strengthens culture, decision-making, innovation, and execution. Trust was repeatedly described as the ingredient that allows teams to navigate change with greater speed and cohesion.



"Living with disability makes people particularly adept at being creative negotiators of space... which can also translate into a business landscape."

Navigating environments that were not designed for them often requires people with disabilities to develop adaptive strategies, negotiate barriers, and solve problems creatively. Those capabilities are increasingly valuable as organizations respond to AI, automation, and changing business models. The opportunity is not simply to include disabled talent, but to recognize and tap into the expertise that lived experience creates.



"Trust is not something you announce. Trust is not a product. It's not a PR statement."

Speakers emphasized that trust is created through repeatable systems: clear ownership, accessible product-development processes, ongoing employee listening, feedback mechanisms, and visible action. When employees or customers provide input but cannot see what changed, organizations can weaken the very trust they are trying to build.



"Accessibility data is becoming a strategic business asset."

Several speakers described accessibility as a source of product, customer, and operational insight, influencing everything from healthcare navigation and customer experiences to pricing models, manufacturing environments, and digital product development.

Continue the Conversation

Speakers emphasized that trust is built through attention and collection of ongoing feedback. The resources, communities, and examples below can help organizations drive disability inclusion trust, innovation, and long-term business performance.

Love & ADHD D.A.T.E. Report

Hinge shared findings from research conducted with nearly 9,000 people with ADHD to better understand how neurodivergent consumers experience online dating. The insights directly influenced product design decisions, demonstrating how listening to all customer populations can lead to better products and broader customer adoption.

Employee/Business Resource Group Toolkit

Several panelists discussed the growing role of employee resource groups in shaping workplace design, technology decisions, and customer experiences. ERGs are increasingly positioned as strategic partners that help organizations identify barriers, provide feedback, and build trust.

Accessibility by Design Learning Resources

One of the strongest themes was that trust is built when organizations anticipate needs rather than waiting for barriers to emerge. Disability:IN's [digital learning modules](#) and [live training experiences](#) help leaders and teams understand how accessibility can be integrated into the earliest phases of product development, customer experience, communications, and technology decisions.

One Question to Take Back to Your Team:

What do we know today because we asked, listened, and acted on feedback and what don't we know because we haven't?



Maintain Your Momentum

The most impactful work doesn't happen at a conference. It happens afterward, as organizations apply new ideas, test new approaches, and bring others along on the journey. Disability:IN can help you identify the right next step.

Start the Conversation

About Disability:IN®

Disability:IN® partners with leading companies to build disability-inclusive and accessible workplaces, products, and practices. Through data, research, advisory services, and global networks, we help organizations move from intention to measurable impact.