

Creating better job markets

How a pioneering digital skills training provider for people with disabilities addresses 8 frequently encountered job market failures

A case study for

A Canadian Disability Inclusion Business Council

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> Three Talents Bridge Academies gets better job outcomes for people with disabilities

BECAUSE their carefully engineered design reflects a nuanced understanding of whole systems and the typical employment barriers which every Academy needs to systematically overcome.

The strategic aim is not to set up isolated training projects - but to shape job markets which get a much better balance between employer demand for talent and the supply of suitably skilled candidates with disabilities. And to bring at least 90% of Academy graduates with disabilities into meaningful jobs and careers through a unique partnership ecosystem.

The success of every Academy depends on its ability to operate within job markets which typically fail both the employer interested in disabled talent and the disabled job seeker.

The design specification therefore requires that each Academy proactively address each of the '8 job market failures' flagged as 'obstacles', starting slide 5. Noting that these 8 barriers, symptomatic of inefficient and unfair job markets, are encountered worldwide, including in Canada, and are not in any employer's direct control.

The Academy model reflects the fact that public policy makers seeking to empower disadvantaged job seekers, must constantly adapt for the dynamics of the systems that impact an employer's ability to recruit disabled talent (talent demand) and those systems impacting the supply of talent with disabilities.

The Bridge to Opportunity Academy

A Bridge to Opportunity

“IT Bridge Academies” around the world provide accessible IT training and certification for persons with disabilities to enable employment for in-demand roles.

We generate a supply of market demanded skills, leveraging the Cisco Networking Academy curriculum, and delivered through a public/private partnership.

Core Principals

- All candidates with disabilities;
- Delivered through local Partnership Ecosystem;
- Cost free: funded by external partners;
- Best practices continually applied
- Transformative; Leads to in-demand IT jobs!

Program Locations

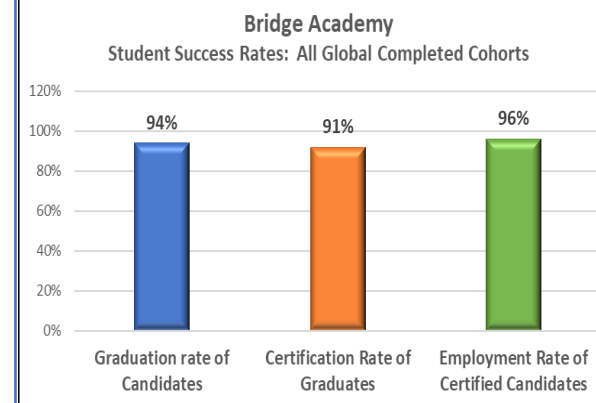


- 30+ cohorts completed
- Over 400 student graduates;
- Programs in US, Europe and Africa

Candidates and Roles

- **Qualifications:** Junior cyber-security analyst and IT Technician roles.
- **Employer benefits:** Lower turnover, lower absenteeism, lower error rates, and higher productivity than other employees.

Historical Results



bridgetoopportunity.org

> A promising 'job market' innovation: Three Talents Bridge Academies

Founded by Pat Romzek, a former senior global Cisco executive, the innovative, the expanding Bridge Academy programme has academies for people with disabilities in America, Europe and Africa, with over 30 cohorts having completed their training.

These carefully structured digital skills programmes enable people with disabilities to gain the mainstream IT skills and certifications which are highly in demand by employers worldwide. They get significantly better results than traditional specialist programmes for disabled learners, because the model explicitly sets out both to deliver skills *and* to shape more efficient and fair job markets.

94% of students with disabilities who enter graduate

91% of graduates gain formal Cisco certification

96% of those certified get paid internships and/or jobs

Bridge Academies start by looking at the balance between the 'supply and demand' for disabled talent and ask: "How can we make it easier for employers to recruit disabled people into jobs requiring in-demand digital skills?"

They invest in personalising support for individual trainees - the resulting slightly higher costs deliver value for money, as more than 90% of trainees with disabilities become economically active, compared to the often less than 40% success rates of traditional training programmes for people with disabilities.

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle ONE

Committed employers struggle to find suitably skilled and qualified candidates with disabilities who remain an untapped talent pool.

Academy Critical Success Factors

Bridge academies only offer Skills & Certifications that are in demand by local employers for specific in-demand IT jobs– starting with, but potentially not limited to, Cisco Certifications. And they include the soft skills that employers are also looking for.

Disabled students gain these same in demand skills and certifications, and achieve the same or better performance standards, as set by mainstream Cisco Academies and relevant certifying bodies.

Employers gain ongoing access to a growing pool of suitable, pre-screened and known candidates for hard to fill vacancies.

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle TWO

Disability specialist training providers, and their funders, tend to share low expectations of both employers and persons with disabilities. They measure success not by how many get jobs (often 20-30% of a disability training provider's participants get employment) – but by the numbers trained or served. The anticipation that most disabled trainees will fail to gain employment reinforces the deep-rooted assumption that this failure is unavoidable and therefore 'acceptable'.

Academy Critical Success Factors

Academies have high expectations of both job seekers with disabilities and employers. Success is measured by how many graduates move quickly into paid internships and jobs. And by employer satisfaction with the programme.

The ambitious baseline expectation that at least 90% of trainees will gain paid internships and/or jobs actively reinforces the model's focus on quality assurance, continuous improvement, and the need to consistently deliver these 8 Critical Success Factors.

Observable high expectations of employers & trainees trigger a virtuous circle, as key actors feel valued... and then engage... and then strive for the success that is so clearly anticipated.

businessdisabilityinternational.org

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle THREE

Employers asking a disability organisation to refer candidates for a vacancy often discover that their access to disabled talent is limited to people they, the disability organisation, already know - including many who are not seeking employment, not interested in the jobs the employer needs to fill, and/or are not yet job ready. Rarely, if ever, do these intermediaries offer the employer a recruitment service which advertises widely to help them access the widest possible pool of suitable disabled candidates, to fill a particular vacancy.

Academy Critical Success Factors

As Academies advertise widely and creatively for applicants on social media etc as well as with Organisations of and for Persons with Disabilities, the talent pool of people with disabilities available to local employers expands, to include many potential candidates not known to the disability sector.

More than 500 people applied for 40 training places when the Nairobi Bridge Academy opened. This level of reach into their local untapped disabled talent pool continues as the Kenyan Academy selects its third cohort of trainees in early 2023, with over 600 applicants for 50 training places.

> Job Market Obstacle & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle FOUR

Training projects for disabled people often have little contact with senior business leaders and little understanding of business reality. They do not routinely bring their learners into the Talent Recruitment Pipelines which expedite the journey to meaningful jobs and careers. They tend to regard the employer *not* as a valued service user and potential partner, but as 'the problem' in need of educating.

Academy Critical Success Factors

Employers interact directly with trainers and students throughout the training: these employers enjoy privileged access to this pool of talent, as the students graduate and as candidates who are known to these partner employers, move into their Recruitment Pipelines.

Employers are integral to the collaborative structure that establishes, funds, and manages these Academies.

Academies ensure that employers and trainees with disabilities learn directly from each other - to challenge negative assumptions regarding both people with disabilities and people working in the private sector- assumptions that hamper efforts to systematically create more efficient and therefore more equitable job markets.

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle FIVE

People with disabilities are placed into disability specific training and employment programmes and projects because they have a disability – regardless of their individual aspirations, aptitudes, interests, needs, preferences, circumstances.

Academy Critical Success Factors

Disabled people are invited to apply if they have an interest in jobs requiring digital skills; trainees are then accepted *only* after careful consideration of their career aspirations, commitment, aptitude, attitudes, preferences, potential to succeed. Having a disability does not automatically warrant participation.

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle SIX

Well intentioned employers struggle to find the basic business relevant advice re disability & accessibility best practice that would help them attract suitable candidates and to routinely employ people with disabilities on an equal basis.

Disability employment initiatives tend not to regard the employer as a valued service user or client. Employers are therefore reluctant to invest in talent that is 'not yet job ready' in the absence of credible 'business & disability' relevant guidance and support for their managers.

Academy Critical Success Factor

The Bridge Academy model requires a structured, managed, multi-stakeholder collaboration, as employers, leaders with disabilities, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, training providers, NGOs, the public sector – collaborate, learn from each other and drive continuous improvement across the job market.

This includes enabling the 'business confidence' of disability employment services, building their capacity to meet the needs and expectations of both job seekers and employers. Employers can then, over time, become confident that relevant support is available should they decide to invest in helping 'not yet job ready' disabled talent to enter the wider job market.

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle SEVEN

The mainstream digital skills training sector, including certification programmes linked to global digital companies (Cisco, Sales Force, AWS, Pearsonvue etc.) operate policies, processes and ways of working that exclude disabled people, sometimes inadvertently. People with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and often cannot afford to participate in the mainstream programmes that are most likely to lead to jobs.

Academy Critical Success Factors

The model requires every Academy to remove barriers, at every step, as disabled people: find the training; apply and qualify to enter; cover costs; learn; pass exams; qualify; move into paid internships and jobs. Academies ensure they are affordable. This learning, regarding how to adapt digital training programmes so that disabled people can participate, is then available to mainstream providers.

The success of these Academies challenges the mainstream digital training sector to discard stereotypes - to learn how to deliver at least equal opportunities to people with disabilities – to partner with business to enhance the life chances of every trainee, including those with disabilities - while enhancing the overall return on investment.

> Job Market Obstacles & Academy Critical Success Factors

Job Market Obstacle EIGHT

Digital training providers often assume that e-learning is 'the answer' - that everyone can succeed by working alone in front of a screen. Unfortunately, sole reliance on e-learning fails a wide range of individuals, not just those with disabilities, who lack the confidence and resilience to 'self-motivate' as they attempt, in isolation, to navigate these standardised e-learning processes.

Academy Critical Success Factors

Academies personalise the training. They tailor the personal supports that students require, in the knowledge that 'e-learning plus human support' gets better results, and not just for those trainees who have disabilities. This flexible level of student support helps candidates succeed who would otherwise struggle with and/or abandon self-managed training.

100 % of recent Academy graduates in Kenya –all of whom experienced personalised training- passed their final Cisco certification exams first time: 30% of their non-disabled counterparts in the more standardised Cisco mainstream academies typically pass at their first attempt.

> We need to learn from the Bridge Academy experience

TO challenge widely held low expectations of both persons with disabilities and employers, as typically held by the mainstream Learning & Skills sector and by those who fund training and employment related services for persons with disabilities.

TO evidence the 'game changing' potential impact were mainstream training providers to deliver at least equal opportunities, by making reasonable adaptations for people with disabilities, and build their capacity to serve significantly more persons with disabilities.

TO evidence the positive impact of positioning the employer from the outset as a critically important stakeholder, valued service user and potential partner of every service that enables disabled people to prepare for and find employment.

TO leverage the positive experience of individual business leaders as they interact with Bridge Academy trainees with disabilities, experience the programme's affirming ethos, and begin to focus on the potential contribution of disabled talent.

> We need to learn from the Three Talent Bridge Academies

TO then encourage engaged business leaders to support structured B2B collaborations that goes beyond partnering with a given Academy and could include National Business Disability Networks and Business Talent Compacts.

TO evidence the positive impact of linking every disability employment & economic empowerment strategy with 'employer demand': i.e., "which skills are most in demand by local employers? Which employers locally have a track record for investing in human potential?"

TO evidence the impact of bringing disabled people into 'Talent Recruitment Pipelines' which is much more successful than trying to help graduates after they finish their course to apply 'cold' to recruiters who do not know them, while competing with applicants who have more 'standard' CVs.

Only the employer has the power to say "YES I will hire you"

but the Job Market has the power to make it impossible for even the well-intentioned employer to say YES

Bridge to Opportunity Benefits All

People with disabilities

Enables opportunities for employment that change lives for generations.



Employers

Build access to job-ready talent for in-demand roles. Expands brand value through global leadership and community impact.



Delivery Partners

Expands target population for impact. Increases opportunity for new employer and community partnerships. Creates new sources of funding.



Benefits
All
Stakeholders



IT Companies

Expanded use case for technology. Creates social impact, and brand benefits.

Government Agencies

Transforms benefit recipients to taxpayers. Expands the labor pool. Drives economic impact, and community benefit.



Advocacy Organizations

Fulfills mission achievement. Creates service revenue. Increases community partnerships and impact.





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