

Claiming or behaving: A closer look at if and how  
Groupe Convex applies, monitors and disseminates  
Social Role Valorization

Caroline Arcand, MACD candidate

School of Public Administration

University of Victoria

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**Project Client:**

Mr. Normand Charette, Board Director

Groupe Convex Prescott-Russell Inc.

Supervisor:

Thea Vakil, Associate Professor and Associate Director

School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

Located in rural Eastern Ontario, Groupe Convex is a non-profit organization comprised of various social enterprises employing individuals who live with an intellectual disability. Its mission is to provide valorizing employment opportunities for those marginalized people whom Groupe Convex believe would otherwise be excluded from the main stream job market. The organization deliberately uses the word valorizing within its mission statement. This word finds its roots in social role valorization theory (SRV). This theory is about the enhancement of perceived roles held by those people of a community who are already devalued or who are at risk of being devalued. The theory was developed by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger in 1983.

SRV theory holds that a person who complies with the valued predominant cultural norms and whose social image is positive will be more likely to be granted with opportunities which in turn will improve his or her enabling competencies to fully integrate in society. Role-valorizing actions, in the image-enhancement and competency-enhancement domains, requires a valued environment, valued activities and significant relationships of marginalized people with valued people. When applied within the realm of human services, SRV seeks to identify the extent to which a social service is comparable with a culturally valued analogue.

PASSING, which stands for Program Analysis of Service Systems' Implementation of Normalization Goals is a tool for analyzing social services' quality according to SRV criteria. However, no instrument exists to specifically analyse SRV in the context of a business. Therefore, Groupe Convex is concerned whether it can genuinely claim its employees are valorized as a result that the organization truly reaches its mission as it is currently formulated.

### **Research Question**

The research question is directly related to the client organization's challenge as it seeks to reflect on its practices and functioning in light of SRV.

*To what extent does Groupe Convex Prescott-Russell Inc. apply and monitor the application and dissemination of SRV?*

## **Literature Review**

The literature shows that intellectually disabled people's vulnerabilities contribute to their discrimination resulting in their reduced employability skills and ongoing social devaluation.

For people in general and not excluding those with an intellectual impairment, health, autonomy, control and interactions are the major benefits of employment. Work related pressure and unfair employers are the predominant drawbacks of employment. Specifically for people with an intellectual disability, skills development, increased health, security and dignity are the major gains resulting from employment while income support reduction and lack of social activities are the most important shortcomings of employment. The review reveals as well that the practices and dogmas of the labour market result in the exclusion of most intellectually disabled people.

The literature highlights the advantages and disadvantages of various employment measures available to people with an intellectual disability. Being supported in employment in regular businesses favours relationships building. However, it has proved to be unsuccessful for many who cannot meet employer expectations. Self-employment favours autonomy and sense of responsibility, yet business regulations and practices impede on the possibility for them to make choices according to their needs. Institutional services provide security and routine but are offered in segregated settings. Social enterprises provide a secure, income generating and flexible working environment but it is rare for someone to move upward in a career somewhere else. In all cases, the simple fact of holding a job is valued in society.

## **Methodology**

Given the core question of this paper required the understanding of social phenomena, in this case social role valorization, the methodology was qualitative. The project design entailed enquiry-based research which collected first-hand information and impressions on the subject of social enterprises, community economic development and social role valorization. Two research instruments were used to gather the data: interviews, comprised of structured and semi-structured questions and corporate documentation which was examined to provide additional information.

Key informants employed by Group Convex, namely the directors of the board and the managers of social enterprises, as well as individuals knowledgeable about social economy and SRV were targeted. Using a deductive approach, the commonalities and differences emerging from the transcripts from each group were identified and later categorized under key ideas. Insights retrieved from corporate files were collated and formed part of the analysis.

## **Findings**

Research findings from this project showed ambivalence between the good and the bad around a well-intentioned organization or Groupe Convex, which aims at valorizing people with an intellectual disability by providing them with employment opportunities within their various social enterprises. Inconsistencies between the goodwill and the end results emerged from this research project.

Interviewees stated that holding a job is a valued role. They also reported that the organization has a good reputation, is well organized, is an economic engine for its community and is creative in designing business projects that provide jobs which are suitable for people of various abilities. The client's constituents are clear and unanimous about the strengths and challenges of their social businesses that involves employing people with an intellectual disability. The client's social businesses are flexible, accommodating and respectful of their target employees and experts in social economy

pay tribute to Groupe Convex. The organization is a unique model of small social businesses employing small groups of workers which facilitates the development of relationships and community belonging.

When asked questions about the outcomes of the organization, interviewees reported that current functioning takes into account the numerous SRV criteria. The organization favours good relationships between employers and target employees. The latter develop new skills and are considered by other citizens as contributing members of their community. Parallel to these insights, which enlighten the contribution of the client's social businesses to the overall improvement of people and community, a darker side of social enterprises was discovered. The matters of segregation and working conditions were raised by experts in SRV as major limitations to reach the ultimate purpose of SRV and as diminishing the odds of holding a valued role of a worker. Experts in SRV reported that fact that people are employed by social businesses serves as an indicator that these target employees are perceived negatively by themselves and by the outside world.

## **Discussion**

Groupe Convex and its constituents as well as the other key informants, explored the possibilities and challenges in crafting valued roles for marginalized employees. Themes driving these possibilities and challenges were divided into three topics: employment, social enterprise and community economic development and were all addressed in light of SRV.

Providing learning opportunities, facilitating relationships, empowering people, developing their skills, contributing to local community and economic development emanates from values that transcends SRV. Unfortunately, this is not enough to encompass SRV to the extent the organization could claim that this is what it accomplishes. Employment opportunities in its social enterprises provided to the target workforce tends to reinforce the risks of devaluation because being employed by a special business that hires devalued people decreases the odds of role valorization, despite all invested efforts.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings emerging from the investigations on the ideas about employment, social enterprise and community economic development as well as around the theory of social role valorization, seven core recommendations were identified and presented under major topic headings. For the client to become confident reaching its mission, which is to valorize the vulnerable people it employs, change is necessary across those three areas.

### **Modification of current working environment within Groupe Convex' social businesses**

#### *(Short-term implementation)*

1. Increase the ratio of the workforce comprised of people without disabilities
  - a. Develop an informative PowerPoint based session which will be utilized for the orientation of new employees to increase their awareness about intellectual disability.
  - b. Fill any new positions with people who are not targeted by the mission.
  - c. Prior to hiring, partner with the local Employment services Center to access wage subsidies for non-disabled workers seeking employment.

#### *(Long-term implementation)*

2. Improve employment conditions by increasing salary grids and benefits and enhancing human resource practices for target workers.
  - a. Hire a project coordinator. Expenses could be avoided by:  
Applying for a 2 year grant (\$100 000) at Ontario Trillium Foundation and partnering with Sprott School of Business.
  - b. Survey the market and research data to compare the gap between salaries offered by Groupe Convex's social enterprises and similar businesses in the same market.
  - c. Implement a competencies development plan for all targeted workers and develop a remuneration scale based on competency acquisition. The established margin of profits needs to take this increase into consideration when fixing sales' price of goods and services.

3. Foster a culture of image-enhancement
  - a. Create an in-house business embellishment committee comprised of the client's upper management and middle-management staff. This committee has the mandate to examine social businesses physical features and recommend aesthetical upgrades.
  - b. Implement these recommendations when feasible. Apply for business improvement grant at <http://www.mentorworks.ca/what-we-offer/government-funding/business-expansion/eodf/>

### **Ongoing assessment**

*(Short-term implementation)*

4. Investigate PASSING components and experiment an in-house adaptation based on the current PASSING measures. This in-house instrument takes into account SRV measures in the broad cultural perspective of the business community and community economic development. Using this in-house instrument serves more as a learning and discussion foundation for the upper management of the organization. Managers and board members are encouraged to be exposed comprehensively to the features of SRV to better understand the scope, subtleties and complexities of SRV.

### **Career development**

*(Short-term implementation)*

5. Partner with the local adult education center to conceive in-house training plans for target employees. Based on European model called Different et Competent ([http://www.differentetcompetent.org/le\\_dispositif](http://www.differentetcompetent.org/le_dispositif)), this program aims at developing and acknowledging their competencies, talents and strengths, which they will be able to market at local employers.

*(Long-term implementation)*

6. Perform a review of social costs every three years, using the Business Cost Recovery tool to allow social businesses to determine the extra expenses incurred as a result of employing less productive employees. This analysis will provide the organization with an accurate estimation and will be useful in justifying the need to obtain funding to cover the costs for supporting their target workers transitioning within the mainstream job market.
7. Establish a placement agency as an organizational priority.
8. Based on Groupe Convex's social enterprises models (ExpressNet and Harvesters) target workers to be deployed in small groups into regular businesses such as manufacturing industries and retail outlets to perform tasks as required by these corporate customers. This would require the following steps:
  - i. Hire a business developer to develop this market niche;
  - ii. Design information sessions which are delivered to business groups and Chambers of Commerce;
  - iii. Meet with local business people;
  - iv. Provide coaching to workers;

## **Conclusion**

This research provides Groupe Convex with qualitative information about how its social enterprises apply and disseminate social role valorization and the many limitations the organization faces in claiming it truly valorizes all its target employees. It also considers the many dimensions of employment and employment measures, presenting their strengths and weaknesses, whether they are minimally conducive to SRV inspired practices or are key ingredients to SRV implementation. The information collected from the client's constituents, from experts in social economy as well as from experts in SRV, creates the context for deepening the understanding of role valorization in order to lead the organization toward a more comprehensive approach to valorize its target employees.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

Social enterprises (SE) have emerged across the world, as a means to offer job opportunities to people facing chronic unemployment (Quarter, Armstrong & Mook, 2009, p. 224). These enterprises are different than ordinary businesses in the sense that their ultimate goal is to improve social conditions by combining goodwill and business activities (Dees, Emerson & Economy, 2002, p. 14). Located in Prescott-Russell, Eastern Ontario, Groupe Convex is a network of SE that collectively employs about 100 individuals, most of whom live with an intellectual disability. Its mission is to create valorizing jobs for the marginalized people of its community.

The word valorizing emerged from social role valorization theory. This theory is about the enhancement of perceived valued roles for people who are devalued or who are at risk of being devalued (Wolfensberger, 2004, p. 13). The theory holds that a person whose social image is positive and who complies with the prevailing cultural norms is more apt to be provided with experiences which are in turn, more likely to increase his or her competencies and vice versa. Role-valorizing actions, in the image-enhancement or competency-enhancement domains, require a valued environment, valued activities, and significant relationships of marginalized people with valued people. When applied within the realm of human services, social role valorization seeks to identify the extent to which such a service or program is comparable with a culturally valued analogue.

The concept of normalization preceded social role valorization theory. Normalization is the utilization of means that are as culturally normative as possible in order to establish and or maintain personal behaviours and characteristics that are as culturally normative as possible (Wolfensberger & Nirje, 1972, p. 48). This initial formulation was expanded by Wolfensberger and Tullman (1982) who advanced the principle of normalization to another level of understanding, which became the theory of social role valorization. Based on their research, they concluded that social participation of marginalized people was enriched by not only normalizing the approaches employed in serving those

vulnerable persons, but also by using culturally valued means in order to enable, establish, and maintain valued social roles for them (p. 131).

### **The Problem**

The Board of Directors of Groupe Convex wishes to know to what extent the behaviours and practices within its organization are aligned with social role valorization (SRV). This information has become important since Groupe Convex will soon enter its 10<sup>th</sup> year incorporation anniversary and this occasion is an appropriate time to look at the current organizational model and assess how the structure provides a means by which its core value, social role valorization is addressed. The Board also wishes to determine whether it will be necessary to revise its mission and vision statements as well as its long term objectives. The results of the project will assist the Board to take decisions in regards of the broader orientation of the organization for the next decade. The Board of Directors needs to become confident in eventually proclaiming itself as a social role valorization conscious network of social enterprises.

### **Research Question**

This project aims to provide an answer to the following research question:

*To what extent does Groupe Convex Prescott-Russell Inc. apply and monitor the application and dissemination of SRV?*

The research strategies to address the research question are:

- Reviewing the origins and background of the organization and the current organizational structure, by collecting information from Groupe Convex Board of Directors and from its SE`s managers;
- Interviewing experts in socioeconomic and knowledgeable people in the field of community economic development;
- Interviewing leaders in social role valorization;

- Recommending actions to enhance the organization capacity to apply and monitor the application as well as the dissemination of SRV;

### **Overview of Report**

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides the background of the client, a brief discussion of social role valorization theory and a brief review of the employment situation in Ontario and locally, for people who live with an intellectual disability. Chapter 3 provides a literature review on the employment situation of people with an intellectual disability. It provides the reader with information about social role valorization theory, specifically in terms of the prerogatives of the role of a worker, in society, the place of social enterprises in local community development and as a means to employ marginalized people. It describes the advantages and issues in regard to the employment of this target population.

Chapter 4 defines the methodology employed in conducting the project. This section describes the tools and actions utilized for interviewing three distinct groups: client representatives, experts in social role valorization and the knowledgeable people in community economic development and social economy. This section explains how the participants were selected and enumerates the internal documents which were reviewed as part of the study. Limitations of the study are also addressed. Chapter 5 reports the findings of the research. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in light of the literature review. It goes over the monitoring, application, measurement and dissemination of social role valorization at the client. Chapter 7 presents the researcher's recommendations for the client, including what needs to be maintained, what needs to change and what should be improved in order for the client to eventually proclaim itself as an SRV conscious network of social enterprises. Chapter 8 concludes the report.

## **Chapter 2 Background**

This chapter provides contextual information about the client as well as a brief historical overview of the theory of social role valorization. It will review the employment situation in Ontario and locally, for people who live with an intellectual disability.

### **Client**

Groupe Convex is a not-for-profit network of social businesses (Groupe Convex, 2014.) employing particularly, but not exclusively, people with an intellectual disability. Groupe Convex' mission is to generate meaningful jobs for local people who face employment challenges due to their handicap, through business projects and enterprises established in the rural eastern Ontario region of Prescott-Russell. The organization believes in community empowerment.

Groupe Convex owns and manages nine micro social enterprises with an annual operating budget of \$4M, of which about 65% are revenues generated from sales. Through its micro social enterprises, Groupe Convex employs about 170 people, 64% of whom live with considerable employment barriers due to their intellectual disability, and who in many cases, also have physical limitations. The employees work at one of the following businesses located in eastern Ontario: three small restaurants, an antique refurbishing shop, a woodshop, a recycling centre a packaging and assembly facility, a service business offering indoor-outdoor maintenance, moving and painting services, and lastly, a farm labour pool, which also operates vegetable stands in various villages during summer. Appendix A provides a map locating the Groupe Convex social businesses.

Groupe Convex is a dynamic, self-organizing organization and its social businesses produce significant social returns on investment. Known as the acronym SROI, social return on investment is a framework based on accounting principles which helps organizations to forecast and monetize the social outcomes they create through their

programs or activities. SROI enables organizations to communicate the social value they generate, in a consistent and credible way (New Economics Foundation, n.d.).

The organization relies on the collaboration and support of many partners, including private sector businesses. It is widely known that interactions between business and the not-for-profit sector tend to be challenging (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009, p. 279).

However, Groupe Convex has managed to foster long term engagement with many local businesses as well as community organizations. Since the organization owns and manages a variety of social enterprises that are competing with those in the private market, selling its goods and services at a fair price is a necessity in order to maintain harmonious relationships with the private sector. It is a continually changing organization since it has to adapt to a changing environment. Under its umbrella, businesses are launched, are evolving or are being terminated and other businesses are created or transformed in response to external factors such as business trends, availability of funding and business opportunities.

Probably as a result of more handicapped youth who attended ordinary school given Ontario's focus on education inclusiveness in the past decade (Normand Charette, personal communication, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015), there was an increased inflow of intellectually vulnerable people entering the system in 2001. This created a high demand for vocational support and sparked community leaders and parents to unite and explore views on how to solve chronic unemployment among this group. These discussions created a momentum on the importance of challenging traditional practices of employment services for people with disabilities. After exploring several social enterprise models in Western Canada, in France and in Switzerland, it was felt that a similar concept could create a solution to help counter the problem. Some of the community leaders became the first founders of Groupe Convex, which was incorporated in 2004. Groupe Convex was created as a result of the Prescott-Russell community's willingness to improve the employment situation of local residents with an intellectual disability.

Each social enterprise that is part of Groupe Convex network must be provincially registered to obtain its business operating licence. Groupe Convex is the parent organization and the owner of the social enterprises. Being federally incorporated as an umbrella structure, Groupe Convex provides the right for its social enterprises to carry on business everywhere in Canada (Industry Canada, n.d.). The proximity to Quebec has significantly contributed to the adoption of such a legal structure, since many customers are located in that province.

Managers of the social enterprises report to the Groupe Convex executive director, who reports to a Board of Directors. The board consists of eight Directors. Groupe Convex fiscal year ends March 31<sup>st</sup>. Each business has its own financial statement while a consolidated corporate financial statement is issued annually by an accounting firm, to comply with Canada Revenue Agency requirements. Since Groupe Convex is a not-for-profit organization, all profits are reinvested within the parent organization to improve its current businesses. It also allows the organization to build its capacity in launching new business ventures aimed at creating more employment opportunities for people with an intellectual disability and for other local people who are unemployed. The corporation strives to valorize its employees with an intellectual disability and believes that social role valorization is the best approach to reach this aim.

### **Social role valorization (SRV)**

Social role valorization is a perspective based on the principle of normalization. Social participation is an objective for and a way to normalize socially excluded individuals (Wolfensberger & Nirje, 1972). Normalization is defined as the utilization of means that are as culturally normative as possible in order to establish and maintain personal behaviours and characteristics that are as culturally normative as possible. This initial formulation of normalization was later expanded by Wolfensberger and Tullman (1982) who advanced the principle of normalization to the level of social role valorization. Social role valorization suggests that social participation is enriched by not only

normalizing the approaches employed in serving vulnerable people, but also by using culturally valued means to enable, establish, and maintain valued social roles for people who are at risk or who are marginalized (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982).

Social role valorization is a complete human service management model and a theory about the enhancement of perceived valued roles for people who are devalued or who are at risk of being devalued (Wolfensberger, 2012, p. 15). Social role valorization holds that a person whose social image is positive and who complies with the prevailing culturally valued norms is more apt to be provided with experiences which are in turn, more likely to increase his or her competencies and vice versa. Role-valorizing actions, in the image-enhancement or competency-enhancement domains, require a valued environment, valued activities and significant relationships with valued people.

### **Employment of people with an intellectual disability**

The label of intellectual disability in the realm of employment is a social construct ascribed by non-disabled people (Holquist, 2009, p. 871). The Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services' (Drummond Report, 2012) recommendations resulted in an integrated government wide employment services restructuring called Employment Ontario. The Commission recommended that employment services become more focused on job seekers in need of complex interventions such as people living with an intellectual disability. Building on this recommendation, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities focused on applying a consistent approach to assessing clients' needs and improving coordination to provide clients with connections to other community supports.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services focused on improving employment outcomes of people with an intellectual disability and recognized the Ontario Disability Support Program needed to be more proactive to encourage work and be more effective by simplifying access to benefits and employment incentives (Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, 2014). The Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure acknowledges that many of its clients want

to work but are facing barriers in getting employment, since they are not job-ready and require intensive support. The Ministry services 10 000 program beneficiaries per month in Ontario and notes that all people with disabilities, 20% are people with an intellectual disability. Beneficiaries are served by one of the 300 community based service providers (Lysaght, Cobigo & Hamilton, 2012, p. 2). Despite these efforts, employment outcomes are limited: on average each month, 0.6% of the beneficiaries exit the support program as a result of obtaining employment (Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, 2014).

The overall prevalence of intellectual disability in the world is between 1% and 3% (Juhel, 2000, p.61). In Prescott-Russell however, the proportion is higher, to nearly 14% (Lalande & Gougeon, 2007, p.40), largely as a result of the closures of institutions such as Rideau Regional in Smith Falls and others throughout Ontario (Ministry of Community and Social Services, n.d). People with an intellectual disability are more severely affected by economic issues (Lefebvre, 2004, p.5). McKnight (1995) suggests that vulnerable individuals receiving social services are likely to be held in the perverse cycle of marginalization. People with an intellectual disability are amongst the most at-risk population segment, in terms of exclusion and chronic unemployment (Rose, Saunders, Hensel & Kroese, 2005, p. 9). They experience more stigmatization and less acceptance when compared to individuals with other disabilities (Goreczny, Bender, Caruso & Feinstein, 2011, p. 1597)

There is reluctance on the part of employers to hire someone with a disability as well as a lack of support for those who are willing to employ this target group (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 6). The lack of self-determination of people with an intellectual disability (Martorell, Gutierrez-Recacha, Pereda & Ayuso-Mateos, 2008, p. 1097) is associated with regular mood swings, (Hurley, 2006, p. 467) which are also obstacles to their employment. The severity of their impairment affects their capacity to gain and maintain employment (Rose, Saunders, Hensel & Kroese, 2005, p. 10). As well, people with intellectual disabilities have difficulty with literacy and numeracy. They are confused about carrying out simple tasks and cannot understand instructions properly (Crawford, 2011, p. 6).

Adding to these issues, the difficulties they have to interact and communicate with others (Crawford, 2011, p. 6) make it challenging for them to obtain and maintain employment. The majority of the people with an intellectual disability who are working require long-term training or permanent assistance (Broad & Saunders, 2008, p. 12).

For the people who are considered employable as defined by Mcquaid & Lindsay (2005, p.199) yet with limited skills sets, there is also a lack of resources to market those skills to facilitate the employment process (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 5). Limited access to employment support services and lack of coordination in employment services delivery are also impediments to their job search (Lefebvre, p. 5). In Prescott-Russell, there are approximately 500 people (Lalande & Gougeon, 2007, p.40) who live a disability.

Sixty percent of this target population is part of the active labour force, meaning they are either employed or looking for work and are between 16 and 64 years of age. Among this segment, 28% are employed (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 4). Of those who are employed, 66% have jobs in sheltered workshops (National Report Card, 2009). Among the remaining 34% of people who are working, they are employed in the retail and restaurant sectors, in not-for-profit organizations and in manufacturing industries, most often, in underpaid jobs (Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Buzinski, 2006, p. 7). They fail in maintaining their positions as workers and even as volunteers, because they are perceived as unreliable, incompetent and unable to adapt to diverse situations (Hall & Wilton, 2011, p. 9). Employees with intellectual disabilities earn less than other employees with other disabilities (Canadian Association for Community Living, 2010). They are also less likely to maintain employment for more than one year (Burchardt, 2000, p. 54).

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review**

This Chapter will first provide a description of what an intellectual disability is. It will review its definition and prevalence as well as its causes and will also describe the effects of socioeconomic factors on the alleviation or aggravation of an intellectual disability. It will also discuss the limitations of people with an intellectual disability in terms of their integration within the workforce. Second, the review will examine the action of doing work by investigating the meaning of work; its benefits and drawbacks for individuals and will discuss why working is particularly significant for a person with an intellectual disability. Third, the review will consider the advantages and disadvantages of work for people with an intellectual disability, the need to be supported within the mainstream job market, to be self-employed, to be a working member within a cooperative, to be served by institutional services or to be employed by a social enterprise. Finally, the review will examine work in light of the social role valorization by addressing social devaluation and conversely, by discussing how crafting valued social roles is possible in the perspective of employment.

### **Intellectual disability**

#### **Definition and prevalence**

An intellectual disability is a state usually present from birth. It is sometimes called mental disability or developmental disability. An intellectual disability is usually diagnosed when the intelligence quotient (IQ) is below 70 (Juhel, 2000). However, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* stipulates that a lack of mental abilities and significant limitations in communication and interpersonal skills serve in confirming an intellectual disability, even when the IQ is higher than 70.

Assessing the intelligence quotient allows neuro-scientists to establish categories of intellectual impairment, whether it is classified as mild, medium or profound impairment. A mild intellectual disability is ranked between an IQ of 35 and 70, a moderate intellectual disability is defined by an IQ of 20 to 35, and a profound intellectual disability is defined when an IQ is below 20 (Juhel, 2000, p. 61). There are concerns in

the field of sociology about intelligence testing and its use of an IQ measure related to the attribution of an intellectual disability diagnosis and the assignment of mental age in intellectual disability, since life experiences have some effects on intellectual capacities and adaptive behaviors (Jacobson, Mulick & Rojahn (2007, p. 133).

People with an intellectual disability often suffer from symptoms which are common in mental illness, such as severe mood disorders (Hurley, 2006). They display more maladaptive behaviors such as aggression, when compared with people without such a disability (Hurley, 2006, p. 465). Deviant behaviours do not necessarily result from psychotic disorders but could be a consequence of other factors such as solitude, isolation and improper ways to communicate needs, faced by people living with an intellectual disability (Tsiouris, Mann, Patti & Sturmey, 2003, p. 6).

People with an intellectual disability are able to learn several skills, including using information and equipment as well as interaction with people without a disability. Most young people with an intellectual disability now receive their elementary education in regular classes with other students of their age (Turnbull, 1995). To varying degrees, people with intellectual disabilities have difficulty learning and conceptualizing. They may have difficulty reading, writing, using mathematical calculations and accurately understanding, transmitted information (Juhel, 2000, p. 216). They often learn things differently or take longer to learn how to do things.

The prevalence of intellectual disability is usually between 2% and 3% of the total population in the world (Crawford, 2011, p. 2). According to research provided by the Canadian Association for Community Living (2010), 2.6% of the population live with mild intellectual impairment, 0.21% live with a moderate limitation and 0.15% live with a disability characterized as severe or profound.

### **Causes**

Studies in medicine, biology, psychology and sociology have identified possible causes of intellectual disability. It might be caused by genetic factors, as is the case with the

chromosomal mutation causing Down syndrome (Jacobson, Mulick & Rojahn (2007, p. 10). It may be caused by hereditary factors such as neural tube defects related to folate deficiency or may be the result of biological aberrations occurring during intrauterine life (Juhel, 2000, p. 64). Jacobson, Mulick & Rojahn (2007) explain that antimicrobial drugs and other physician prescribed substances such as warfarin consumed by the pregnant mother can cause intellectual disability. In addition, streptococcus, chlamydia or herpes contamination of the mother can result in an intellectual disability in her unborn child (Jacobson, Mulick & Rojahn, 2007, p. 10).

There are other perinatal causes of intellectual disability. If a pregnant woman is exposed to, or ingests lead or mercury during the last months of pregnancy, this will diminish the intellectual functioning of her baby (Mulick & Rojahn, 2007, p. 27). Brain injuries and viral infections such as rubella in the new born child are postnatal causes of intellectual disability (Jacobson, Mulick & Rojahn, 2007, p. 10).

#### **Effects of psycho-socioeconomic factors**

Social context is a factor that increases or decreases the severity of the disability (Juhel, 2000, p.72). Socio-economic factors have been identified as causing biological damage, affecting psychomotor and intellectual development (Juhel, 2000, p. 72). Emerson & Hatton (2007) explain that a family's living conditions such as low income, chronic unemployment, poor nutrition and low education increase the severity of the intellectual disability in adolescents. As well, Olsson and Hwang (2008) report that the greater the economic hardship on the parents or guardians, the greater the risks are for people with an intellectual disability, to face depression adding to their intellectual vulnerability (Olsson and Hwang, 2008, p. 1107). Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs (2009) suggest that the absence of mobility and lack of transportation have a negative impact thereby restraining their possibilities of fruitful life experiences (p. 55). In addition, antagonistic attitudes of people in the community have negative influence on the community participation of people with an intellectual disability (Verdonschot et al., 2009, p. 56).

Some theoretical models of human development identify the environment as an important determining factor of disability (Buntinx & Curfs, 2009, p. 55). An in-depth research project looking at environmental factors and their impacts on community participation showed that interviewees with an intellectual disability consistently showed that supported environments allow them to better function in a social context. Such a context enhances their interdependence and engagement (Hammel, Lai & Heller, 2002, cited in Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs, 2009, p. 58). The greater family involvement and the availability of vocational supports, the better are the opportunities to gain confidence, to increase self-efficacy and to develop new competencies (Hammel, Lai & Heller, 2002, cited in Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs, 2009, p.58).

### **Employment for people: Meaning, Benefits and Drawbacks**

The notions of work date back to the beginning of humanity when men were hunting, fishing, making tools, and building shelters. The terminology of the word *employment* is an invention of modernity. Work is thought as one element among other spheres of social life and is related to the concept of monetary compensation. Men built their livelihoods as a result of holding a paid job (Henderson, 1989, p. 80). This narrow conception of work has the advantage of drawing attention to the process of differentiation between personal activities and working activities.

#### **Meaning**

A first meaning of employment relates to identity. Most people in adulthood are socially active through a worker's role as defined by the prerogatives of north western societies (Hall & Wilton, 2011, p. 868). It is a way of life for the majority of the population (Wehman, 2011, p. 147). Dumaine (1994) suggests that people are working to meet profoundly egocentric, emotional and psychological needs such as gratification, being part of a group of people to relate with, developing relationships and reaching personal and technical excellence. Dumaine (1994) also argues that employees want to be valued for a job well done and seek recognition by those they hold in high esteem. He goes on to

say that people want to impact decisions and to complete tasks that are recognized as important achievements for their employer. Working is an opportunity for personal growth and learning experiences (Nelson, 1999, p. 783).

A second meaning is one of economic purposes as well as vital necessity by the majority of people (Lopes, 2011, p. 61; Weinberg, 2012, p. 35). People work long hours to fulfill their personal obligations (Harth, 2004, p. 158; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006).

Technologies brought down the time spent at work but basically, people spend time working to gain access to resources so they can look after themselves and their families (Lopes, 2011, p. 61).

A third meaning of employment is the endorsement of a social norm and identity. This dimension of work begins in early childhood when children express their intentions to become a police officer, a teacher or a doctor (Dortier, 2001, p. 32). A particular job provides recognition and reveals one's place and status in society (Treiman & Hartmann, 1981, p. 26). Occupying a place in society is a central motivation for human beings and the action of doing work as well as the interactions with others at work, are social aspirations. People see the workplace as a community where it is possible to build relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Employment addresses the need humans have to belong to a group (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 200). Unemployed people suffer from loss of identity, which is as much important in terms of impacts, as the loss of income (Linhart, 2011, p. 27).

A fourth meaning of employment is happiness. De Botton (2010) suggests that even in some jobs that might seem very boring or unrewarding, workers can find joy in accomplishing their tasks (p. 107). Jouanneaux (2011) suggests that joy occurring while someone is involved in the action of doing work whether alone or with others brings a fundamental element to the meaning of work. Hughes (2007) reports that learning new skills and gaining knowledge at work provides a pleasure which acts as the antidote to pessimism in the life of workers (p. 373). Holbeche & Spingett (2004) evoke the meaning of work as a spiritual contract a worker has with his employer (p. 16). Meaning of work

is also comprised of the notions of emotional engagement and excitement in the workplace (Ross, Swarth & Sirkiss, 1999, p. 68). Sinek (2009) suggests that people who are leaders in their workplace are working because they are personifying a cause and they are value driven (p. 143). He goes on to state that believing in a purpose explains why people engage deeply into their job (Sinek, 2009, p. 155). A job becomes a chosen path to bring to life the workers' deepest beliefs (Sinek, 2009, p. 149).

### **Benefits**

Health, autonomy and control, security, possibility to develop relationships are well documented benefits. As well, new experiences, opportunities for career advancement, security and learning opportunities are among the most documented benefits for one to hold a job. A first benefit is that full time workers are reported to be healthier people (Virtanen, Vahtera, Kivimäki, Pentti & Ferrie, 2002, p. 573). Being employed decreases hardship, which in turn improves health (Ross & Mirowski, 1995, p. 231). Being unemployed generates psychological distress which increases the susceptibility to illness (Ross & Mirowski, 1995, p. 232). Ross & Mirowski (1995) go on to say that unemployed people are at greater risk of physical difficulties such as body pain and are also at risk of facing poverty, both of which lead to an incapacity to meet basic needs, thus impeding one's health (p. 232). Employment is a precursor of a healthier life as one gets older (Ross & Mirowski, 1995, p. 235).

A second benefit relates to confidence. Schieman & Plickert (2008) explain how being employed provides a higher sense of financial security (p. 155). People occupying professional positions are most likely to have greater control over their working schedule, they have more authority and are stimulated by decision-making process in regards with the challenges they need to overcome within their workplace (Schieman & Plickert, 2008, p. 155). Employment also enhances personal autonomy as well as self-efficacy and provides one with a sense of mastery and control over his or her life (Ross, 2000, p. 410; Nota, Ginevra & Carrieri, 2010, p. 256).

A third benefit is relationships' development. Peer attachment in the workplace contributes to emotional support and can be more important than other relational experiences one maintains with other people (Connie, Gersick, Bartunek & Dutton, 2000, p. 1027-1028). Being employed in a caring work environment increases the odds for employees to nurture relationships among each other, which will expand beyond the work setting (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 15). Riordan & Griffeth (1995) report that friendship within the workplace has positive impacts on job commitment and increases people's job satisfaction.

A fourth benefit is the opportunity for new experiences. Being active within the workforce creates possibilities that are unlikely to occur without being employed. As an example, having an opportunity to travel as part of the job is a benefit in itself for many workers who would not otherwise have a chance to visit such places as foreign countries, remote regions and exotic destinations ( Hasting, Kiely & Watkins, 1988, p. 45). As well, employment provides workers with the opportunities to experience diversity, to be exposed to new world views and to learn about other cultures in terms of employment standards, rules and working habits (Hostager & De Meuse, 2008). Another example of new experiences emerging from a working environment is what Pierce, Byrnes and Aguinis (1996) call workplace romances (p. 10). These romances can evolve into serious relationships and even love, between two persons who were previously interacting only as professional coworkers.

A fifth benefit is commonly known as fringe benefits. Workers view fringe benefits as additional incentives to their remuneration and even as substitutes of their wages. This wage substitution results in a decrease of the worker's marginal income tax rate (Artz, 2010, p. 627) and lessens the tax burden of the employee. Social security, retirement plans, health and life insurances, tuition remission, discount purchases, free access to facilities such as gym and weight loss programs are amongst the financial perks some workers can benefit from certain employers (Hayes & Gaskell, 1992). The authors go on to say that other hidden advantages, including free parking, subscription to professional

journals and other types of exclusive rebates are helping employers to provide a work environment which elevate the employees peace of mind (Hayes & Gaskell, 1992, p.35).

### **Drawbacks**

Apart from the already well known challenges resulting from employment such as having limited time, being constrained and overly scheduled, notwithstanding sexism, racism and double standards in human resources management (Codrington, 2015), there are other downsides to employment. Abhorrence and despair are two conspicuous drawbacks. The first shortcoming is that antipathies and hatred are possible in a workplace. In many organizations, people or clans of people oppose each other through hierarchical levels resulting in low trust amongst co-workers or between a worker and his supervisor (Oade, 2010, p. 41). Oade (2010) also demonstrates evidence of how ruthless a colleague or a boss could be. As well, McDonald (2014) denounced unethical human resources practices resulting in a stressful working environment for many workers. The pressures from abusive supervisors result in employees being at risk of maltreatment. This type of abuse inhibits the possibilities of career development (Bassman & London, 1993, p. 18) and distresses employees because they are perturbed about the manipulation they are experiencing (p. 19). Managerial abuse occurs in many forms and is often manifested by managers who are perceived as indispensable in some businesses (Bassman & London, 1993, p. 20). Being highly skilled and demonstrating high confidence in themselves, such hierarchical supervisors may operate by means of oppression, coercion and derision and set up their employees to fail (Bassman & London, 1993, p. 19). Bassman & London's (1993) research reveals that an important number of employees feel their managers are offensive, malicious, aggressive and impolite, resulting in psychological damage (p. 19).

The second drawback is despair. Gallagher, Mazur & Ashkanasy (2015) argue that as a result of staff reductions in many organizations or businesses, employees are obligated to assume additional responsibilities and complete more work to compensate for the lack of human resources. The authors describe these employees as survivors, because they are required to do more with less, often working longer hours and are under increased

pressure to reach the employer's expectations (Gallagher, Mazur & Ashkanasy, 2015, p. 12). The demands of many positions have increased and now require so many skills and efforts of some employees to the extent it results into emotional and psychological difficulties (Demerouti and Bakker, 2011, p. 2).

## **Employment for people with an intellectual disability: Meaning, Benefits and Drawbacks**

### **Meaning**

Jahoda, Kemp, Riddell & Banks (2008) examined the implications of employment, specifically for people with an intellectual disability. The authors concluded that beyond the financial incentive, the emancipation of the person, along with his or her additional life experiences, new motivating goals, being busy and affiliated with others in the workplace constitute the true meaning of work (p. 15). They go on to say that long-term employment in the same position expresses the personal identity of the individual (p. 15). Employment also means pride, satisfaction and learning opportunities for people with an intellectual disability (Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz & Morrison, 2009, p. 420). People with an intellectual disability report that the feeling of being useful and keeping busy were vital features of work for them. Accomplishing important tasks, having a permanent schedule and structure, assuming responsibility, respecting work deadlines, investing effort to successfully complete their job as well as working at a steady pace bring meaning to their job (Freedman & Fesko, 1996, p. 49). Wehman (2011) advances that regardless of the severity of their limitation, most people with an intellectual disability want to gain employment (p. 147).

### **Benefits**

There are specific benefits from employment for people with an intellectual disability. Acquisition of social skills enabling the development of relationships, alleviation of mental and physical health issues, increased security and dignity as well as daily structure are reported to be the major positive outcomes of being employed for this population (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 202).

Interpersonal skill development is the first benefit for workers with an intellectual disability. For them, skill development revolves specifically around interacting and communicating with others and most importantly, communicating with people who are not disabled (Wehman, 2011, p. 147). Wehman (2011) also reports that such interactions increase the odds that one person will develop meaningful relationships, hence friendship, with other people from the community who are not disabled. As well, an employer can become the most significant person capable of helping a distressed disabled person, to solve her or his vocational issues (Gervey & Bedell, 1994, p. 149). People with an intellectual disability who have experienced employment and earned wages have higher social skills (Francis, 2004, p. 299). Consequently, through the enhancement of their social skills, they also increase the level of their self-esteem (Freedman & Fesko, 1996, p. 49).

The second benefit is the lessening of health related issues. People with intellectual disability present higher rates of prevalence for certain mental disorders such as depression and other neurological problems such as epilepsy (Jansen, Krol, Groothoff & Post, 2004, p. 95). Because of this, individuals particularly consider employment as a measure through which they can improve their intellectual and physical capacities as well as alleviate some of their mental issues (Wehman, 2011, p. 147). For a person with an intellectual disability, being employed allows her or him to gain financial assets and this is crucial to access the basic resources to access a healthy life (p. 147).

The third benefit is increased dignity. Increased self-image has a large impact on the dignity of a person with an intellectual disability given that many are aware how they are different from their non-disabled counterparts in the workplace (Wehman, 2011, p. 146). Francis (2004) reports that being employed compensates for the eternally childhood imagery intellectually disabled people are associated with and claims that they can learn to become more autonomous, less dependent and invest themselves with pride in a job (p. 299).

The fourth benefit of employment for people with an intellectual disability is that it provides a daily structure. A working routine enhances the quality of life not only for a person with an intellectual disability, but for their caretakers as well. A daily routine provides respite for caretakers, including family members, while their vulnerable one is at work (Lucas-Carrasco & Salvador-Carulla, 2012, p. 1108).

### **Drawbacks**

Providing identical challenges as for other people in general, being employed presents two specific drawbacks for people with an intellectual disability presents two specific drawbacks. The first is the impact of their earned income on their eligibility to governmental financial assistance. The second is the impediment that employment has on their personal activities such as outings and leisure time with family and friends.

People with an intellectual disability are scared to undertake a job search or to accept employment as they fear they would disqualify for their income support from the Ontario Disability Support Program (Broad & Saunders, 2008, p. 8) This provincial program (ODSP, n.d.) is a social and financial assistance program delivered by the Ontario Ministry of community and social services. When earning income from employment, an ODSP recipient is at risk of not only seeing his or her security income reduced, but it could be suppressed when earning too much money (Ministry of Community and Social Services, n.d.). As governmental financial support's recipients, they are at risk of losing access to other benefits such as health care insurance, including reimbursement for medication and glasses (Shartal, Cowan, Khandor & German, 2006). If a person with an intellectual disability does not receive a pension because he or she can earn a decent income as a result of employment, this person is not entitled to other subsidized advantages such as social housing. This can significantly reduce the economic benefits offered by employment (Broad & Saunders, 2008, p. 20). As well, Kantowicz (2007) indicates that when people with intellectual disability merit to earn a greater salary or are required to work more hours, that their income support program's regulations act as disincentives to the extent that some employees will prefer abandoning their jobs rather than to lose the eligibility to their welfare income security (p. 11).

People with an intellectual disability perceive employment obligations as being restrictive in regards of the time they have left for other personal activities, such as outings with friends (Honey, 2004, p. 388). Duvdevany (2002) suggests that leisure time contributes to a healthier lifestyle for people with an intellectual disability. Therefore, being employed, especially in a full time position, seems to constrain their welfare (p. 420).

### **Opportunities for work for people with an intellectual disability: Advantages and disadvantages**

People with an intellectual disability have the right to be granted special efforts from society to favour their employment (Kavka, 1992, p. 264, para 5). Over the years, many measures have been implemented to support their employment. This section discusses the advantages and disadvantages of four employment measures targeting this population. The text will discuss a first measure called supported employment within the mainstream job market. The second measure is the support one receives in the realm of self-employment, including the necessary support for becoming a cooperative's shareholder. The third measure which is discussed is the vocational assistance one receives through institutional services. The fourth measure is social enterprises employing marginalized groups. The discussion about these measures is addressed in the perspective of how these are beneficial, or conversely, how they are unbeneficial for workers with an intellectual disability, whether personally or collectively. For each measure, their particular pluses and shortfalls are presented.

#### **Supported employment within the main stream job market**

There are numerous examples confirming that people with an intellectual disability do hold meaningful jobs in the mainstream job market (Wehman, 2007). Many stories of employers from the private sector show that employing people with an intellectual disability offers them and their businesses various advantages (Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2004). Supported employment within the main stream job market usually involves wage subsidies to offset their competencies and production limitations (Stryjan, 2004, p. 7, para 2). With appropriate training and proper adaptation measures, people

with an intellectual disability can learn to work in various positions even if they continue to need the help from colleagues, supervisors or others to accomplish what is required (Juhel, 2000, p. 217). This type of support includes social skills development, problem solving, communication skills and assistance from co-workers (Storey, 2003, p. 80). Being employed within the mainstream job market provides three main advantages which are stability, social inclusion and independence. Conversely, two disadvantages for people with intellectual disability to work within the main stream job market are that they face judgement from others and have difficulty reaching employers' standards.

#### *Advantages of working within the main stream job market*

The Ontario Association for Community Living's (n.d.) survey reports that this target group constitutes hardworking people who have a positive attitude, are willing to work part-time and are working safely. Other findings also show that employees with an intellectual disability are more likely to stay in their position for a longer period of time and are dedicated to their employers (Ontario Association for Community Living, n.d.). Kregel (no page numbers, 1999) advances that individuals with such a disability are reliable and dependable. These attributes are advantageous for employers yet, they also present a competitive advantage for a person with an intellectual disability.

Being employed within the mainstream job market provides opportunities for people with an intellectual disability to interact with people who are not handicapped. This is particularly important given that this target population often only develops relationships with other disabled individuals, with paid staff or with long-term state institutions' employees (Malcomson, 2008, p. 51). Spaces which are open to the public allow people with intellectual disability to increase their chances to encounter people with whom they can eventually develop convivial relationships thus alleviating the sources of dissimilarities between people with and without disability (Wiesel & Bigby, 2013, p. 46).

When people's barriers are removed and their skills are recognized, Forbes (1980) suggests that regular employment within businesses favours the person's independence (p. 58). By elaborating human resources' policies and practices which are favourable to the effective management of a diversified workforce, corporate businesses, with the help

of employment counsellors, can contribute to intellectually disabled people's autonomy, including their capacity to make choices outside the realm of their job (Konrad, Prasad & Pringle, 2006; Björnsdóttir, Stefánsdóttir & Stefánsdóttir, 2015, p. 7). This independence also intensifies their willingness and capacity in taking part in self-advocacy and in increasing their ability to speak on their own behalf, within their own workplace, instead of relying on their social workers (Björnsdóttir, Stefánsdóttir & Stefánsdóttir, 2015, p. 8).

### *Disadvantages of working within the main stream job market*

The mainstream job market presents three particular disadvantages for workers with an intellectual disability, namely competitiveness, marginalization and isolation. Hall and Wilton (2011) explain that capitalism has dictated a non-disabled style of human resources management which is not necessarily resulting in increased well-being or increased opportunities for social inclusion of a marginalized person (p. 872, para 3). Berthoud (2006) indicates that the type and severity of the disability, along with the expectations of any given position in a workplace, influence the possibility for a person with an intellectual disability, to obtain and maintain employment in the mainstream job market. Employers with favourable attitudes in regards of employing disabled people are more likely to hire people with visual impairments, rather than people with and intellectual disability (Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2004; Hall and Wilton, 2011, p. 872).

The economic context and systems have established inclusion criteria which may be unattainable or unable to be met by people with an intellectual disability (Hall, 2004, p. 299). As well, the mainstream job market can be oppressive for people with an intellectual disability (Hall, 2010, p. 55). Employment policy favours the shortest route to employment, hence, only the less vulnerable people are in a position to withstand the burden of the system, in order to find and maintain jobs in the private sector (Broad and Saunders, 2007, p. 21). Despite legislative efforts, employers are requiring a certain level of qualifications and competencies among their employees. They seek a better prepared workforce that is adaptable, responsible and capable of helping the business meet the competitive realities of a global economy (Local Labor Market Report, 2014). People

with an intellectual disability are not likely to meet these requirements (Yates & Leach, 2006, p. 356).

Many examples illustrate how one can feel isolated while working in an ordinary business (Yates & Leach, 2006, p. 358). The mainstream job market can be oppressive and discriminatory against already vulnerable people and this is one explanation of why the rate of employment among people with intellectual disability remains very low (Hall, 2010, p. 55). In an ordinary business, people with intellectual disability may feel different and distant from their counterparts working colleagues who are not disabled (Readhead, 2013, p. ii).

### **Self-employment**

There is a lack of consensus on the definition of self-employment (Muehlberger, 2007, p. 38; Parker, 2006, p. 437). This dilemma seems to amplify when the self-employed are people with an intellectual disability given the extent of the role they occupy. From this perspective, self-employment evolves within a blurry zone between one being self-employed and being a paid employee (Parker, 2006, p. 437). Self-employment is discussed below in two distinct contexts. In the first context, self-employment is addressed as the employment someone holds provided the person is her or his own boss and is the owner of a legitimately registered privately owned business, which sells goods or services in the open market. The second context looks at the employment one holds as a member of a cooperative. A cooperative is an association owned by its members' users. The purpose of a cooperative is to promote members' economic interests by having them run a commercial activity in which they also participate as workers and as decision makers, where the principle of one vote per person applies (Stryjan & Laurelii, 2002, p. 15). Quality of life is the one particular advantage for a person with an intellectual disability, to be self-employed whereas the lack of resources is the major disadvantage faced by this population.

### *Advantages of being self-employed*

Benz & Frey (2008) research suggests that in many countries, including in Canada, people who own their business are happier and manifest greater job satisfaction than those who work for an employer (p. 445). In regards to people with an intellectual disability, Kobe's (2010) research reveals that the quality of life's indicators of newly self-employed people were remarkably higher compared than when they were not self-employed. These indicators include the absence of hierarchy, the independence one has as being one's own boss, greater control over the working schedule, the investment of time and, the efforts to accomplish tasks. Performing new roles associated with the responsibilities business owners have, being connected to a larger natural support and having new friends are specific indicators which increase the sense of happiness of people with an intellectual disability (Springer, 2010, p. 420). From this perspective, the notion of increased happiness is tied to community participation and greater opportunities to build relationships.

Working as shareholders within a cooperative environment forces people to collaborate and interact with each other. This form of self-employment allows people with an intellectual disability to take decision by consensus (Vidal, 2007, p. 808). While some individuals may not hold formal positions within the decision-making process, their sense of belonging within the cooperative sparks the emergence of their leadership. Therefore they demonstrate greater influence and assume more responsibilities (Vidal, 2007; Chatman & Flynn, 2001).

### *Disadvantage of being self-employed*

Boylan & Butchard (2002) report that the disadvantages of being self-employed are similar, whether one is disabled or not. However, one specific disadvantage affecting people with an intellectual disability is that entrepreneurship specialists providing generic services for business owners tends to present narrow knowledge about the specific needs of people with an intellectual disability (p. 91). They and their family members who accompany them in their business project experience a lower quality assistance on the part of business counsellors and other experts within entrepreneurship centers because the stereotypical views these experts have about people with an intellectual disability prevent

them to benefit from typical services such as planning and loan programs (Boylan & Butchard, 2002, p. 92). Additionally, the training offered to new business owners, including finance and human resources management, is often not delivered in an appropriate way to individuals with a disability, leaving the person less informed, thereby increasing the risks of business failures (Boylan & Butchard 2002, p.93).

Cooperative membership entitles members to various rights and obligations including the right to vote. The loss of this right is at risk since the law allows voting delegates (BoCracogna, Fici & Henry, 2013). These delegates are not prevented to prioritize the interests of the business over those of the vulnerable people it employs. Martorell, Gutierrez-Recacha, Pereda & Ayuso-Mateos (2008), Rose, Saunders, Hensel & Kroese (2005) and Crawford (2011) suggests the lack of decision-making capacity among people with an intellectual disability makes them more vulnerable and can lessen their power in executing their roles as decision-makers. As well, the law allows non-members to exercise control over the election of the board of directors, which could decrease the odds that a person with an intellectual disability could hold a formal decision-making position in terms of governing the cooperative (BoCracogna, Fici & Henry, 2013). This inequity is legally possible given shareholders, unlike members, are granted one vote per share in the election of directors.

### **Institutional services**

Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshops Managers (n.d.) describes institutional job placement services as a rehabilitation facility employing marginalized people who are producing goods and services that are sold at bargain price. The limited revenues of these facilities are disbursed against the daily functions of supporting vulnerable people. Sheltered workshops are offering unconventional types of remuneration and are delivering support services within a controlled type of working environment. These nonprofits offer permanent or temporary job placements for individuals with an intellectual disability.

### *Advantages of institutional services*

Leyshon, Lee & Williams (2003) suggest that institutional services can allow individuals who are not performing to the extent a non-disabled person would, to perform some types of work but at a different rhythm or level, whereas this would not be normally allowed at a traditional employer (p. 13). People with an intellectual disability tend to be excluded from the job market more than other disabled people since they face additional negative judgement from employers and because they are competing against mentally competent laborers for the same jobs (Ontario Disability Support Program Action Coalition, n.d.). Because they are the most excluded and marginalized groups in the perspective of employment (Barnes & Mercer, 2005), institutional services allow them to hold a job despite their incapacity to obtain or maintain ordinary employment.

Hall & Wilton (2011) share stories of people with intellectual disability whose self-esteem evolved throughout their employment experience within what they qualify as an alternative milieu. This increased self-esteem enabled them to develop a positive image of themselves which in turn, facilitates their social skills, thus the capacity to develop relationships. The support one can receive from a segregated vocational service can surpass the empathy one can ever receive from other employers (Hall & Wilton, 2011, p. 873).

Chan, Merriman, Parmenter & Stancliffe (2012) research reveals that institutional services at large, provide respite to family members. This in turn, affects the well-being of people with intellectual disability as the family members, as caregivers, are more likely to continue to provide care to their vulnerable kin (p. 120). Peace of mind exists for both the person with an intellectual disability and his or her family given that once the individual is accepted into institutional services she or he is likely to maintain this job placement for long-term period. In addition, these facilities are open year round and are not affected by labour fluctuations since they are government funded. When there is no work order, people are kept occupied in non-paid activities such as training and outings (Migliore, Mank & Grossi, 2007, p. 7).

### *Disadvantages of institutional services*

Within institutional services, exclusion implies that people with an intellectual disability are set apart from the non-disabled because they are classified as unproductive and in need of support (Barnes & Mercer, 2005, p. 539). Walker & Walkers (1997) define social exclusion as the non-realization of civil, political and social rights of citizenship.

According to Grint & Woolgar (1997, p. 28), citizenship relates first and foremost to a person being an active economic agent. In this perspective, social inclusion has a central focus on paid work. Barnes & Mercer (2005 p. 531) explain that the nonconforming work environment that institutional services provide is insufficient to achieve social inclusion. Despite the extent of assistance a disabled person would receive within the realm of institutional services, social exclusion continues to exist.

Additionally, working in a sheltered environment specifically adapted to the limitations of people with an intellectual disability is a symbol of degradation. This representation of negative differences specific to people with an intellectual disability wounds one's dignity (Wolfensburger, 2000, p. 106). Some jobs which are mostly occupied by people with an intellectual disability in institutional settings are socially considered as being repugnant and of lower importance (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999, 415). Institutional services reflect very low expectancies in regards of their working clientele thus sanctioning the prediction of failure of the intellectually disabled people, within an ordinary work setting (Pelletier, 1998, p. 12). Another disadvantage is that when people with an intellectual disability are participants in a sheltered program and are not employed as ordinary employees, the risks surrounding the encounters with non-disabled parties is that they are likely to be greeted and viewed by strangers as people who are weak and frail (Goffman, 1961, p. 31). Goffman further explains how strangers can act as a result of charity rather than conviviality toward people who are intellectually disabled, especially within milieus providing social assistance and social services.

### **Social Enterprises**

The legal structure of a social enterprise can range from profit to non-profit, private, public or blended ventures and its definitions could be unclear (Dees & Anderson, 2003). There are numerous models and types of social enterprises, namely for-profit social

businesses, socially responsible businesses and non-profits selling goods or services (Frutcherman, 2011). However, whatever the form or structure, Frutcherman (2011) raises the importance for a social enterprise to be clear about the fundamentals of its social mission as well as on what would consist a successful socially oriented venture (p. 47). Determining if a business is a social is based on the fact that social change is the primary goal of this business, where this social change outweighs the financial return. This aim characterizes the reflections a social entrepreneur must have prior to the organizational design of his or her enterprise (Frutcherman, 2011, p. 4). Social return on investment is the tool to measure the social changes of a social enterprise (Quarter, Mook & Ryan, 2012, p. 43).

#### *Advantages of working in a social enterprise*

The possibilities to interact with other people and exclusiveness of social enterprises allow people with an intellectual disability to establish relationships with people they easily relate to. As well, it provides them a space where they feel valued and important which increases their self-esteem. Working in a social enterprise supports the notions of security and the sense of caring, both of which are major advantages to fulfill the needs of this vulnerable workforce. Finally, social enterprises are structured and have fundamental values that allow them to be more flexible in accommodating this target population. Readhead (2013) shows that a social enterprise provides opportunities for people with intellectual disability. Working in a social enterprise is a solution to social and economic exclusion (Mcquaid & Lindsay, 2005, p. 204). A social enterprise is sometimes the only one route to employment (Hall & Wilton, 2011) for some intellectually disabled people.

People with an intellectual disability perceive their employment in a social enterprise as a secure place which facilitates the establishment of relationships, both of which are features of social inclusion (Readhead, 2013, p. 74). Working in a social enterprise allows a person with an intellectual disability to interact with other people who are having similar life experience and this brings a sense of connectedness and friendship in the workplace (Readhead, 2013, p. 48). Readhead (2013) research also shows that people with an intellectual disability who are working in a social enterprise define their

employment as genuine work where they are valued as employees and as active citizens; where they learn new skills as well as work ethic (p. 76). Quarter, Mook & Armstrong (2009) suggest that a social enterprise differs from an ordinary business in the sense that the quest for profits is not prioritized over the social mandate, in the organization's decision-making. The sense of caring for a target group for whom a social enterprise exists outside the financial matters (Quarter, Mook & Armstrong, 2009, p.44).

Kantowicz (2007) states that people with difficulties who are working in a social enterprise feel they can rely on their mission oriented employer to accommodate their needs and to understand their difficulties at work (p. 5). In their research, Broad & Saunders (2008) show that social enterprises will adapt the working hours and remuneration plans to protect their target employees against the shortfalls of the system. Social enterprise is a milieu in which one with a disability has greater odds of keeping a job, given such an alternative setting can adapt its approaches to favour vulnerable populations (Amin, Cameron, and Hudson 2002, p. 7). There is an evident capacity on the part of social enterprises to respond to people's needs and to provide employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability (Saunders and Broad, 2007, p. 13, para 5.).

#### *Disadvantages of working in a social enterprise*

Kantowicz, C. (2007) explains that the positions offered to people with an intellectual disability working in a social enterprise are generally part time and very labour intensive in business sectors operating outside the retail or customer service realm, making the odds for the people to interact with other people from the community, very limited.

The positions are also often considered as segregated and this is an impediment on one's social inclusion and equality (Hyde, 1998, p. 201). As well, the low remuneration they provide is not contributing to improving the financial situation of vulnerable people (Hall and Wilton, 2011, p. 874). Adding to this disadvantage, once one works for a social enterprise, the person will seldom have a career outside the realm of an alternative setting (Fioritti, D'Alema, Barone & Bruschetta, 2014; Hall & Wilton, 2011, p. 877). Although repetitive tasks are most likely to better suit the abilities of a person living with an

intellectual disability, social enterprises rarely succeed in having their target employees moving upward within the hierarchy to occupy position requiring a sound judgment and decision making skills (Kantowicz, 2007, p. 11).

### **Summary**

The literature review describes intellectual disability and explores how this impairment challenges the possibilities to obtain and maintain work. It shows that lack of resources, behavioural problems, lack of social skills and insufficient competencies contribute to stigmatization of people with an intellectual disability and reduce their employability. They are impacted by socioeconomic factors that either alleviate or increase the severity of their disability and thus the way they are perceived and treated in a work environment.

The literature also suggests that the meaning, benefits and drawbacks of employment are well recognized for all people in western society and that it has particular significance, advantages, and downsides for persons with an intellectual disability. Self-development and relationships with others are major benefits while the lack of availability for leisure is the major downside for this group of people to be employed.

The literature review reveals that the workplace is not as an inclusive space as one may expect. Ingrained capitalist cultural practices and beliefs of what workers body constitute result in a very low participation of intellectually disabled people in the job market. In addition, employment can have implications which go beyond the working setting since it is closely related to the quality of life.

For people in general, health, autonomy, control and opportunities to develop relationships are the major benefits of employment. However, being overstressed and despairing as well as being unfairly treated by an employer are the predominant drawbacks of employment. The literature suggests that people with an intellectual disability are no exception to the rules when looking at the numerous benefits and shortfalls resulting from employment for people in general. However, employment provides specific impacts for this target population. Acquisition of skills, alleviation of

health issues, increased security and dignity are the major gains resulting from employment whereas financial disincentives and a decrease in social activities are the most important shortcomings for people with an intellectual disability.

The literature also demonstrates that measures aimed at assisting this population in getting and maintain employment offer various advantages but also disadvantages. The first measure, supported employment within the main stream job market, is the standardized setting for every person to work and increase the odds that a person with an intellectual disability will develop significant relationships with non-handicapped people. Supported employment has proved to be unsuccessful for many who live with an intellectual disability because of their difficulties in meeting employers' expectations. Yes, employers from all sectors demonstrate their openness and willingness to hire people with intellectual disability.

Self-employment is the second measure. It is a venue for employment which favours the autonomy and the sense of responsibility, whether the person is a business owner or a working member within a workers' cooperative. However, laws and business practices appear to be a burden which obstructs the possibility individuals with an intellectual disability to bring change with regards to the upper management and governance of their organization.

The third measure is employment through institutional services. These are managed with a mindset which goes against the notion of equality, by discriminating recruitment of individuals on the sole basis of having an intellectual disability. Such services are designed to set apart a category of people who are not holding a real job or a valued role as an employee but rather, they are being occupied within a segregated work setting. On the other hand such services are appreciated given it provides security and stability not only to people with an intellectual disability but also to their caregivers.

The forth measure explored in this literature review is employment through social enterprises. These enterprises have a mission to create employment opportunities for

people facing employment barriers. However, despite their intentions to enhance the welfare of intellectually disabled people, social enterprises are viewed as being segregated, by supporters of social inclusion. The literature demonstrates that like institutional services, working in a social enterprise, rarely allows a person with an intellectual disability to move on to develop a career somewhere else nor can this person improve his or her financial situation. Nonetheless, literature shows that vulnerable people take a lot of pride through their job, working in a social enterprise where they can develop relationships within a securing environment.

Development of social bonds and relationships is reported as one major benefit, independent of the types of employment measures. The literature suggests as well that, for people with an intellectual disability, holding a job provides a means by which they can be valued in society. Conversely, literature indicates that regardless of the measures aimed at assisting people with an intellectual disability in finding and keeping a job, that less available time is a critical downside.

## **Chapter 4 Methodology**

The research methodology selected for this study was qualitative in nature and used key informant interviews to gather data and documentation. The decision to use a qualitative research method was based on the nature of the research and the specific characteristics of the subject matter under study. Qualitative methods are typically used to address research questions requiring explanation or understanding of social phenomena such as cultural change (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). They are particularly useful for describing and displaying phenomena as experienced by this population within their own specific context or setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). For these reasons, the researcher decided that a qualitative research design would offer the most valuable approach to investigating the social role valorization approach to employing individuals with an intellectual disability.

Key informants employed by the client (Group Convex) and other individuals knowledgeable about social economy and social role valorization were targeted to provide information and insight to address the research question. Informants were expected to have different views and were targeted to provide contrast in the findings. A review of the client's documentation provided insight on the functioning on the client organization, with regard to the application and dissemination of social role valorization.

### **Sample**

Four participant groups were identified. The first group was comprised of the managers of the client's social businesses. The second group was comprised of the directors of the board of the client organization. The third group was comprised of expert in social economy and the fourth group was comprised of experts in social role valorization.

Participants had at least 5 years' experience in their professional positions. A total of 18 individuals were interviewed. Nine individuals were invited from group one; six agreed to an interview. Of the eight invited individuals in group two, five were interviewed. The three invited individuals in group three were all interviewed. Four individuals were invited from group four and all were interviewed.

### **Group 1**

This group is comprised of managers of social enterprises under the umbrella of Groupe Convex. These managers were selected because they are directly involved in managing social enterprises and in particular, employing people living with an intellectual disability.

### **Group 2**

This group consists of Groupe Convex's Directors of the Board. These directors were selected because they have extensive knowledge about the values and orientations of Groupe Convex. Three new Board members felt were not knowledgeable enough given their limited experience with the organization.

### **Group 3**

This group consists of experts in social role valorization. They were selected because of their knowledge in the pedagogy and evaluation of social role valorization. These interviewees were identified through an experienced social role valorization trainer and evaluator from Syracuse University.

### **Group 4**

This group comprised experts in social economy. They were selected because they bring an all-encompassing view on social enterprise as well as knowledge of non-profit entrepreneurial approaches to reach social aims. These interviewees were identified through and are employed by national associations in the field of social economy or by postsecondary institutions delivering training in economic development and community development.

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment occurred in four steps. First, the President of the client's Board of Directors sent the E-invitations to the groups 1 and 2. This invitation required that the target participants from the client's organization would inform the president about their willingness or refusal, to participate in the research. Secondly, the researcher sent the E-

Invitation to both groups 3 and 4 participants. Thirdly, the president informed the researcher about interested parties from groups 1 and 2. Finally, the Researcher contacted consenting people from all groups to determine the most appropriate time and location for interviews.

### **Instruments**

Interviews utilizing questionnaires with various people as well as documents' review were chosen as the prime two research instruments. In order to favour informants in providing insights into the examination of a project's core problem, it is imperative for the researcher to have a flexibility in determining the content of the questions' sets, based on the topic in need to be developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 135; Esterberg, 2002).

The sets of questions which were asked to groups 1 and 2 differed from the interview questions for the other two groups of informants. There were more questions in the questionnaire destined for groups 1 and 2 in comparison with the external interviewees from groups 3 and 4. The questions for the internal informants were detailed to gain an in-depth understanding of the prevailing perceptions and interpretations around Groupe Convex's practices, choices and organizational decisions whereas the questions for the external interviewees were destined to tap into their unique expertise in SRV and in community economic development. .

The interviews were based on semi-structured and open-ended questions. Where appropriate the researcher used probing questions. Some interviewees were asked the totality of the initially formulated questions while others expanded their responses sufficiently enough that not all questions needed to be individually asked. (Interview questionnaires can be found in Appendices B and C).

The documentation review and interviews were conducted from January 12<sup>th</sup> to February 6<sup>th</sup> 2015. When possible, the individual interviews took place in person at a location, date and time which were most suitable for the interviewees. Six of the 14 interviews were done over the phone given interviewees lived as far as Winnipeg, Syracuse, United-

States, Toronto and Ottawa. The researcher logged notes in a notebook or on a laptop. Consent forms were signed prior to each interview. For the interviewees who were interviewed over the phone, the consent forms were sent in digital format. Signed forms were scanned back to the researcher.

Interviewees were assigned an identification code based on their groups. The client's representatives were identified as GCVX plus a number relating to their rank into the interview process. For instance, GCVX1 is the first person from the client's representatives, to be interviewed. The experts in social role valorization were coded as SRV preceding a number. Experts in social economy were coded as SE, preceding a number.

Interviewees were invited to review the transcript of their own interview. No interviewee has requested to revise it.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis requires the identification and expansion of similarities and differences between the interviewees' responses to allow an in depth understanding of the different views with regard to the question a project seeks to address (Charmaz, 2014, p. 181). For purposes of this project Data analysis was completed using a deductive approach (Creswell, 2012). The first step was to identify the commonalities and differences emerging from the transcripts from each group. The second step was to categorize key ideas from all group interviews. Recurring messages emerging from the client's official documentation, including information retrieved from its website and internal corporate documents were collated.

After extracting the recurrent ideas from the transcripts of the interviews and after extracting the topics from the corporate records, the final step was to assemble these ideas into distinct themes. Here, 'theme' means a major dimension or descriptor around the notions of a Social Role Valorization (SRV) conscious social business. This approach

is a useful tactic to analyse the data when the researcher is already aware of the problem the research seeks to investigate (Creswell, 2012, p. 44).

### Limitations

The first limitation is due to potential power-over the researcher has with some interviewees. In such case, Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach (2009) advance that the researcher can bring a unique contribution to a project provided the researcher and subordinates interact as partners who are highly involved within an inspirational study (p. 279). As well, Rey, Tremblay & Brousselle (2013) express that an intimate collaboration between the researcher and the stakeholders is fundamental for a dialogue-driven research process (p. 50), which is the case here. Also the practice of qualitative research can be perceived as an equal exchange of viewpoints, despite the researcher's hierarchical position (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 76). Cooperatively disclosing personal opinions on a topic is possible when the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees is based on trust and transparency (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 311).

The second limitation is the lack of input from the people with an intellectual disability working in the client's social enterprises. However, the aim of this project was not to tap into the disabled workers' expertise in the roles they assume by being employed in a social business, but rather to deepen the understanding of corporate behaviors against the application of the SRV theory into an organization. Although their points of views would have been interesting, Stalker (1998) raises that ethics of representation challenges can occur when analysing data obtained from people with intellectual disability, using interview and narrative techniques (p. 12). Alternatively to directly interviewing this target population, involving the community of interest, thus their employers, into a research provides the opportunity to still determine insights, identify problems and to raise related issues which are important for them (Coons & Watson, 2013, p. 15).

## **Chapter 5 Findings**

This Chapter is presented in four sections. The first three sections report the results of the interviews and the fourth reflects the results of the documentation review. The first section presents the views of the Managers and Board Directors of Groupe Convex. It is organized by the following topics: functioning of the organization, operational and subsidy structure, philosophical considerations, workforce characteristics, social impacts and work outcomes.

The second and third sections report on interview results from the Social Role Valorization (SRV) and Social Economy experts. While common topics were covered by each group they have been presented in two sections. Topics covered by their responses are: definition of a conscious social enterprise, views on Groupe Convex, segregation of social enterprises, considerations for optimal outcomes, monitoring indicators, gains and losses employment in a social enterprise, strengths and weaknesses of employing vulnerable populations and expert support for social enterprises.

The fourth section reports on the monitoring of Groupe Convex' performance, monitoring of the target employees' perception about their job, measurement of value and social return, social costs, participation in research and the dissemination of lessons learned.

### **Managers and Board of Directors (11 interviewees)**

#### **Functioning of the organization**

Nine interviewees stated that the fact Groupe Convex utilizes an entrepreneurial approach that distinguishes the organization from other organizations in the region. Ten respondents said that the organization's social businesses are competing with other businesses in the market, as fair competitors by not selling products or services below the market rate. Eight interviewees felt that the business strategy is based on quality products and services rather than exclusively on low prices. Ten participations presented the view that partnering with all sectors, including businesses and community agencies, is key to

Groupe Convex's functioning. They also said that Groupe Convex supports its community by contributing to local fundraisers and that the organization has a procurement policy favouring local suppliers. These respondents also expressed the view that having sound business practices is imperative for Groupe Convex's business development. Seven interviewees stated that even though the organization has a strong business orientation, the cohesion, friendliness and family like culture strengthens the dedication of its employees.

### **Operational and subsidy structures**

All interviewees noted that Groupe Convex is incorporated as a not-for-profit whereas its social enterprises are provincially registered as businesses and are owned by the non-profit. Nine said that the social enterprises' structure and its requirement to operate as a business are equivalent to those of an ordinary business. Ten respondents stated that the organization was tracking its efforts to market the businesses and was invested in nurturing relationships with its stakeholders.

Eleven interviewees suggested that the contributions of a local community Foundation named Valoris are critical to the survival of the organization. They further shared that the client was not relying on recurrent governmental grants. They also mentioned that although the organization generated most of its revenues from sales, Groupe Convex was continuously seeking for funding to help grow the social businesses.

### **Philosophical considerations**

Nine respondents said that the ultimate goal of the organization was to increase the self-esteem of people with an intellectual disability by means of employment opportunities. Two interviewees stated that social integration was the underlying framework of Groupe Convex and that for adults with an intellectual disability, being part of the workforce was a normal activity, which explains the reason behind Groupe Convex' mission. Four interviewees also stated that intellectually handicapped people who are working are less likely to have behavioural problems. Ten interviewees shared that combining social objectives and business goals was a challenging vision for the Groupe Convex' social enterprises.

### **Workforce characteristics**

Eight interviewees provided similar comments to describe the characteristics of the organization's target employees. They articulated in their own terms, the issues around managing a workforce with an intellectual disability. They mentioned specifically that it required a lot of patience to supervise human resources with an intellectual disability because these employees require continuous coaching. They also said that the productivity and array of skills of this labour force are lower than those of the non-target employees and that employing a workforce with an intellectual disability resulted in additional costs, such as training, adapting the environment and supervising. Three participants shared anecdotes to demonstrate that the lack of sound decision-making is a characteristic of the target workforce. Six people specified that most of the target employees are deeply involved in their work, are assiduous and are appreciative of the work opportunities the organization provides them.

### **Social impacts**

All interviewees mentioned that creating "meaning to workers life" was a social impact resulting from the organization's endeavor. Six indicated that Groupe Convex's social enterprises allowed vulnerable people to increase their social skills and thereby their ability to secure meaningful relationships with other non-vulnerable citizens in the community, outside of work. Five respondents stated that the organization facilitates interactions between the target employees and non-employees.

### **Work outcomes**

Nine interviewees stated that the organization's social businesses provide decent remuneration, allowing target employees to create financial capacity, to own personal belongings and to consume goods as local customers. Three respondents shared stories of target employees obtaining jobs elsewhere with better working conditions. One interviewee stressed that the organization failed in sufficiently developing the competencies of its target employees, preventing them for occupying higher level positions in the organization.

## **Social Role Valorization Experts (4 interviewees)**

### **Definition of a conscious social enterprise**

All interviewees felt that a conscious social enterprise requires a strategy that is aligned with the social aim of the business project. They further said that consciousness is about being aware and informed about the why and about the pros and cons of a social enterprise with a mandate to hire and employ vulnerable people. Three interviewees stated that a conscious enterprise knows how to cope with trade-offs, notwithstanding the fact that its mission has more weight than the financial bottom line.

All interviewees agreed that a conscious social enterprise investment is reflected by the beauty of its building and surrounding area as well as by providing target employees with the best working conditions for the purpose of image and competency enhancement. One interviewee added that consciousness refers to the awareness the organization has about the needs of customers, notwithstanding the needs and capacities of the vulnerable employees and that for this reason, business niches should be developed accordingly. One interviewee commented that a social business must understand that earning money and living experiences are the ultimate goals of employment.

One interviewee expressed the view that consciousness relates to the creativity of a social enterprise to develop working milieus that are small and employing a mix of employees, not only vulnerable people. This interviewee also mentioned that on the other hand, small sheltered places are better than bigger working environments, to valorize marginalized people because small working environments favour both productivity and interaction with other colleagues. This same interviewee stated that a conscious social business puts the emphasis on the performer rather than on the performance of this worker.

Three interviewees suggested that a conscious social enterprise organizes the work in a way that maximizes productivity and also ensures that the employees participate efficiently to the production of goods or services. Those interviewees said that a conscious social enterprise hires managers who are skilled and capable to share their knowledge.

One interviewee commented that a social enterprise that does not pay its target employees at least the minimum wage lacks consciousness, and reinforces the stereotype that a handicapped worker is worth less than their counterparts without a disability. Another interviewee stated that a social enterprise demonstrates consciousness only when the business niche and the positions held by vulnerable people are valued in society and that some jobs are image enhancing while others are degrading.

### **Views on Groupe Convex**

Interviews indicated they were aware of Groupe Convex. One interviewee said that of Groupe Convex' social enterprises, Casselman Woodshop was a creative one by installing adapted devices on woodworking equipment to ensure vulnerable employees could perform to the best of their capacities and fabricate a high quality product. Three interviewees mentioned that the organization has a questioning mindset and looks at different ways in which vulnerable employees could be productive. These interviewees also said that vulnerable people hired in one or the other of the organization's social enterprises, occupy real valued jobs which allow them to contribute to the world.

One interviewee said that the organization succeeded in hiring managers whose reputation and identity are inclined to favour a positive image of their employees. The interviewee stated that this was particularly favourable to increase the positive image of the target employees. This interviewee also mentioned that the organization was involved in economic development and community development initiatives such as being part of the *Reseau des Manufacturiers de Boiserie de l'Est de l'Ontario*. The respondent felt that this participation is contributing to the positive perception of the social enterprise, thus a positive perception of the employees who are working there.

### **Segregation of social enterprises**

All interviewees stated that in some cases, social enterprises are segregated. They also mentioned that on the other hand, some social enterprises differentiate their organization by applying real business practices. Interviewees suggested that real business practices

can truly damper the negative image of segregation, even when the majority of workers are marginalized.

### **Considerations for optimal outcomes**

All interviewees felt that the social enterprise setting, the extent of the managers' competencies, the efforts toward enhancing and developing the skills of the target employees as well as the opportunities for the target workers to develop relationships with other ordinary people are the key considerations, for a social enterprise aiming at valorizing its target employees.

### **Monitoring indicators**

All interviewees agreed that there were two major areas a social business employing marginalized people should focus on, in terms of indicators. The first relates to the ability of the social business to enhance the image of its target workers in the eyes of any viewer. The second relates to the capacity the social business has to enhance the skills of their target employees. Each interviewee reported that social integration should be the ultimate goal of a social enterprise and this can only be achieved by improving the imagery and developing the competencies of the target workers.

### **Gains and losses of employment in a social enterprise**

All interviewees felt that for vulnerable individuals to perceive themselves as valued workers is the greatest gain. All interviewees also noted that this gain becomes an outcome of being employed by a social enterprise only in situations where the vulnerable people could not be employed within the mainstream job market. Two respondents indicated that the access to greater opportunities as well as receiving appropriate assistance to learn how to successfully accomplish and fulfil their jobs, are other important gains. They further indicated that other gains are to have a regular schedule and to have occasions to be seen by the rest of the population, while working.

All interviewees mentioned that the most important loss of being employed by a social enterprise is that it echoes the message that disabled people belong in groupings outside

the realm of the ordinary job market. The four interviewees said this reality contributes to social devaluation.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of employing vulnerable populations**

The four interviewees mentioned that a major shortfall of social enterprises is the challenge around profitability. They mentioned the constant need for a social enterprise to be subsidized to compensate for the lack of profitability. They said that this necessity to rely on other sources of income is in itself, a differentiation which contributes to a negative perception about the employees, thus reinforcing an image of pity rather than an image of productivity. They agreed that commitment to hire vulnerable people who could not be employed somewhere else at this point in their career, is the greatest strength of a social enterprise. The four interviewees suggested that blending the target workforce with ordinary workers reinforces high expectations toward workers who have fewer abilities. All respondents said that automatically, people with less competencies will respond favorably to high hopes by attempting to reach normative expectations an employer has toward high performing workers.

### **Expert support for social enterprises**

The respondents concurred that the hard-core social role valorization trainers would not be supportive of a social enterprise, as the nature of a social enterprise ultimately conveys images of segregation. They further indicated that they would not personally be supportive of large social enterprises grouping many vulnerable people under the same roof, but that they appreciate the career opportunities smaller milieus, even small social enterprises, offer to vulnerable people.

## **Social Economy Experts (4 interviewees)**

### **Definition of a conscious social enterprise**

Interviewees agreed that a conscious social enterprise is defined as a business with clear social aims, with clear anticipated impacts and which is also clear on how to reach its goal. Three interviewees mentioned that consciousness relates to the efforts a social enterprise invests in, to monitor and report the outcomes of its activities. One respondent

stated that by definition, being a social enterprise entails consciousness. Another interviewee suggested that consciousness is to aim for social justice. A third interviewee stipulated that consciousness has to do with the knowledge the social business has in relation with its stakeholders. This interviewee specified that consciousness relates to the awareness the business has about who the stakeholders are and about what they bring to the business. This same interviewee stated that consciousness refers to the awareness the social business has in relation to its own involvement into the community ecosystems, whether it is partnerships, procurement and political influence. Of the four interviewees, one indicated that consciousness is demonstrated when a social enterprise is increasing its awareness about what it does well and not well.

### **Views on Groupe Convex**

Of the four interviewees, all were aware about the organization Groupe Convex. One interviewee stated that this organization's model is applicable to other populations. One other interviewee expressed knowing quite well the organization given he did a comparative analysis about social businesses in which the organization was included. This interviewee mentioned Groupe Convex was an exemplary model in the sector and unique in its model located in a rural area. Another interviewee found the array of social enterprises under the umbrella organization to be impressive and unusual in the sector, in that sense it offered employment to a continuum of importantly disabled people. One interviewee stated the organization was involved in many research projects and was therefore demonstrating openness.

### **Segregation of social enterprises**

All interviewees agreed that in some ways, segregation can fit the definition of a social enterprise. One interviewee stated that this reality was not necessarily a bad thing because the mainstream job market looks to hire the best possible candidates to fulfil their positions whereas there is a need to rely on social enterprises to employ marginalized populations. This interviewee stated that social enterprise does business the opposite way than an ordinary one, by hiring people who are excluded from the labour force. This

interviewee reported that this has the effect of congregating the same types of people together, thus to segregate them.

### **Considerations for optimal outcomes**

One interviewee indicated that social goals are as important as financial goals whereas three indicated that social goals should have more weight than the financial ones. All 4 interviewees stipulated that considerations should involve the hiring of local people as well as the partnerships with other community sectors, including local businesses. Of the 4 interviewees, one specified that the formulation of a clear mission, the application of democratic rules and the legal aspects of an organization are key. This interviewee went on to say that sub-considerations should include but not be limited to the measurement of sources of funding, the skills of the target employees, the financial results and the impact of the social business within its community. According to this interviewee, it is easy not to do what is not measured. This interviewee suggested that competent decision makers in an organization will act rationally to determine what should be measured to demonstrate the value of the social business.

One of the four interviewees enumerated the followings as key considerations:

Relationships the social enterprise has with its stakeholders, work satisfaction of the target employees, the degree of integration of the target employees into the business and into the community, the psychological wellness of the target employees and the level of needs of the target employees, which should decrease over time. Another interviewee mentioned that target employees should have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

### **Monitoring indicators**

Three respondents raised the importance of developing a mechanism to reach and survey the stakeholders as well as to communicate with partners. One of these interviewees mentioned the involvement of the target employees within the business's decision-making, should be monitored. All interviewees said that the social mission of a social enterprise should be monitored. Suggested indicators are: the number of jobs created, the

number of training opportunities, the level of employability of the target employees, the career development opportunities for the target employees, the impacts the social enterprise has on citizens, both individually and collectively, the awareness of the community surrounding the employment of people with intellectual an disability, the participation of the social business in local economic and community development and finally, the social return on investment.

### **Gains and losses of employment in a social enterprise**

All interviewees agreed that the major gain is that social enterprises offer more flexibility in adapting the working environment and in adapting the expectations to the needs of the target employees. One interviewee called this adaptation a “built-in support”. Two interviewees reported that another important gain is skills development opportunities for vulnerable people. Another interviewee stated that being employed in a social enterprise provides a sense of usefulness to society. A third interviewee mentioned that social enterprise is an alternative to the mainstream job market in so that those who are excluded from the market can still act as contributing citizens.

The respondents felt that one loss is that people employed by social enterprises are often researched and one respondent compared social enterprises to fish bowls. Interviewees also agreed that social enterprises are still viewed as separated from the mainstream job market and this translates into an assault on the dignity of vulnerable people. One interviewee said that seldom are workers in a social enterprise earning meaningful wages.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of employing vulnerable populations**

One interview stated that social enterprises are an alternative to current economy and presented it as a strength. Collectively, the interviewees felt that social enterprises were useful to society as they help people contributing to their local economy. One interviewee raised the question about what would be an ideal baseline ratio between targeted and not targeted employees and suggested that one strength is that a social enterprise allows social integration, by employing non target workers. One interviewee expressed the view that one major strength is that social enterprises utilize an entrepreneurial approach to solve social issues.

### **Expert support for social enterprises**

All interviewees confirmed they were very supportive of social businesses. One interviewee said that research has previously shown that the regular capitalist job market is not working for a number of regular individuals. This person raised the question about how it can work for very vulnerable people. This interviewee felt that social enterprises are committed to building a society where everyone is included. Another interviewee said that social enterprise is a buzz word today and that the concept is on the rise for good or not so good reasons. This respondents also suggested that experts should be supportive of social enterprises only when they are built on cooperation, on community development and on job creation. One interviewee said that focusing on assets and opportunities rather than on weaknesses of a community, is a strength of a social enterprise and for this reason, this interviewee paid tribute to the model of Groupe Convex. Two interviewees said that social enterprises are a powerful mechanism for social inclusion.

### **Corporate documentation and website**

#### **Monitoring Groupe Convex performance**

Groupe Convex measures the performance of its social businesses by utilizing an in-house developed tool which consists of putting a score on four different pillars. The tool was developed based on Studder (2003). The four pillars consist of finance, relationships, partnerships, marketing and mission. On a yearly basis, the Board and upper management evaluate each of its social enterprises, based on these pillars. Created in Excel, this tool requires that all evaluators reach consensus on the score each pillar deserves, whether this pillar is not reached at all, somewhat reached, adequately reached or reached beyond expectation. The first three pillars have a maximum potential of 12 points whereas the mission's pillar has a potential of 18 points and data is expressed in percentage. This practice allows the Groupe Convex to generate graphs to observe the company's overall performance, year after year. The results demonstrate that in general, over the years, the client's social enterprises performance is approximately 61%.

### **Monitoring target employees perception about their job**

Groupe Convex documentation revealed that through a participatory approach, it led its target employees to identify job appreciation indicators. These indicators identify whether or not, the employees feel they are working in a stimulating work environment, are important for the company, have rights and obligations which are fair, are paid adequately, are part of a team, and finally, are increasing their competencies.

Every two years, Groupe Convex sends a questionnaire to its target employees, as well as a copy to their tutor or family. These significant others are welcomed by Groupe Convex, to assist the target employee in completing the questionnaire. When completed, the questionnaires need to be mailed to a third party, using prepaid postage. This third party compiles the results and shares them with Groupe Convex. Combined since the beginning of this monitoring system, the results show that the target employees' level of appreciation for their job reaches 86%. On average, the rate of responses is around 60%. This bi-annual activity exemplifies the efforts invested by the organization, to measure its aim in valorizing its target workforce.

### **Measuring value and social return**

Since 2012, Groupe Convex has partnered with the Rotman School of Management at Toronto University. This partnership, developed through the Association of Nonprofit social enterprise Research, allowed them to be part of an academic project aiming at measuring the value of its social businesses.

This extensive and continuous project, in which it shows that for each dollar the Government has invested into one of Groupe Convex's social enterprises, there is a social return of \$4.00. The research and results were published in Sengupta, Arcand & Armstrong in Quarter, Ryan and Mook (2014).

### **Determining the social costs**

Social costs are defined by Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF, n.d) as the extra costs incremental to the lack of productivity and special needs of the target employees employed in a social business. Corporate files reveal that, using a balance sheet called

Business Cost Recovery, developed by TEF, Groupe Convex determined its social costs for the first time back in 2008. A second recent analysis demonstrates a significant increase in these costs.

Groupe Convex documentation shows that such an analysis is critical to negotiate grants with potential funders, as funders do not cover business or operational costs. Groupe Convex documentation shows that social costs are more likely to be absorbed, in all or partially, by a local foundation aiming at supporting vulnerable people into the community. Documentation shows that on average, the social costs to employ a worker with an intellectual disability, is about \$14 000 per year.

### **Participation in research**

The client's website presents numerous papers in which the organization was involved (<http://www.groupeconvexpr.ca/en/about/publications>). The research projects relate among other topics, to social return on investment, social role valorization, community economic development, partnerships, marketing, employment of marginalized population and best practices.

### **Dissemination of lessons learned**

The client's website leads to the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) space where a multitude of presentations and informational links address and share the learning curve of Groupe Convex and its development and learning throughout its evolution (<https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/search/node/groupe%20convex>). Through its own website and via the CCEDNet's website, Groupe Convex supplies the general public with its lessons' learned in developing a network of social businesses employing intellectually disabled people as well as the particularities of such aim in a rural setting. Lessons learned by the organizations include treating intellectually disabled workers as other employees and developing market niches which provide adapted working opportunities for marginalized people.

## **Summary**

Findings from the interviews of all groups and the review of corporate information shows that holding a job is a major and beneficial role for the well-being of people with an intellectual disability. Interviewees who were familiar with Groupe Convex reported favourably about the organization's aim and approaches.

The Groupe Convex representatives interviews reveal that the organization's social enterprises attempt to replicate the model of a common business and make efforts in developing and maintaining complementary relationships with stakeholders from various sectors in the community. The organization also attempts measuring its impacts. Findings show that the organization struggles to maintain a balance between financial and social goals and that the organization's social enterprises have not yet been very successful in enhancing the majority of its target employees' competencies, to the extent they could move on with their career outside the realm of social enterprises.

The findings from social role valorization experts show that a social enterprise is a place which segregates vulnerable people and deprives them of normal working experiences. Yet, social enterprises are necessary, since without them, many vulnerable people would be excluded from holding the role of a worker. A small milieu is keener in providing opportunities to develop meaningful relationships, and this applies to social enterprises as well. The experts also raise the requirement for a social business to valorize its employees which are the aesthetics of the global environment and the capacity to develop relevant competencies.

The social economy experts feel that social enterprises are innovative, entail collaboration and partnerships and are imperative to build a strong local economy to create a humanized market. The findings also indicate that social businesses are the solution to chronic unemployment faced by vulnerable people. Finally, the corporation documentation shows that the organization is involved in research, shares its best practices, is recognized as a leading organization in its region and deploys resources to understand and measure its impacts.

## **Chapter 6 Discussion**

Groupe Convex's mission is to generate employment opportunities for people living with an intellectual disability. Through the array of small social enterprises under its umbrella, this non-profit has a vision of combining viable commercial activities and social good. Pursuing its 10<sup>th</sup> year of incorporation, the organization intends to investigate the extent to which its entire system, including the social businesses under its umbrella, results in the valorization of its target employees. The results of this exploration as seen from the perspective of the organization's representatives, social role valorization experts and social economy experts has been presented in Chapter 5 Findings. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these findings in light of the literature. Three major themes emerged from the comparison of findings and the literature review. These themes are expressed in terms of Social Role Valorization (SRV) as follows: Employment in light of Social Role Valorization, Social Enterprise in light of SRV, and Community Economic Development in light of SRV.

### **Employment in light of SRV**

There was alignment between the client's representatives and other groups of respondents pertaining to the significance of employment for the self-esteem of people with disabilities. In all cases, employment was considered as a means to value people into a dignified role, however it was acknowledged that the majority of employees employed in Groupe Convex's social businesses are people living with an intellectual disability, thus although employed, they are segregated. This is seen as an organizational shortfall specifically by the expert proponents of SRV. This concern raised by this group particularly as well as by some of client's representatives is consistent with Hall & Wilton (2011) who explain how discrimination mainly occurs when vulnerable people are not interacting with people who are already valued into typical streams of the community (p. 876).

In this research, the notion of discrimination alleviation also appears to be dependent on whether or not a person with an intellectual disability blends well with the other members

of the workforce, in terms of image and competencies. It was brought up by interviewees from all groups that becoming a valued employee in a workplace does not occur spontaneously. Groupe Convex representatives made clear that valorization was the underlying framework of Groupe Convex and that because of this, strategies were implemented to improve the image and competencies of vulnerable employees. On the other hand, experts in SRV made clear that grouping disabled people together increases the negative stigma and therefore intensifies the risks of devaluation as well as the overt vulnerability of the people. Common responses were that efforts to counter discrimination are critical to value the role one holds in a workplace. Part of those efforts, as discovered in this research, includes the hiring of non-disabled people at Groupe Convex's social businesses.

This strategy enables people with a disability to interact with fellow colleagues who are not at risk of devaluation, although non-disabled individuals constitute the minority of the employees. Another strategy is that the organization intentionally treats its employees with an intellectual disability as members of a social hierarchy within the social business resulting in the expectation that they comply with the prerogatives linked to the roles they assume. When vulnerable people are provided with interaction opportunities that counter labeling and strengthen a positive identity, namely by exercising different valued roles and interacting with groups of people without vulnerabilities, this will alleviate negative perceptions that have come to rest upon stereotyped roles for people living with an intellectual disability (Hall, 2010, p. 50).

Consistent with Yates & Leach, (2006) who suggest that people with an intellectual disability are not likely to meet basic employment requirements, the research reflects that it is critical for Groupe Convex to enhance the social and technical skills of its target workforce, in order for them to occupy a valued role of a worker. SRV theory suggests that when a deviancy is observed by outsiders, it will reinforce the negative judgment of the observers, therefore the devaluation of the person. It is imperative for any employment services to take specific actions to help vulnerable people developing their skills (Hall & Wilton, 2011, p. 868). Through the lens of SRV, these actions are first

reducing and better yet, eliminate the evidence of an intellectual disability, by for instance, improving the appearance of the person by providing working uniforms. Second, alleviating negative stigma by allowing the person to demonstrate competencies. For instance, common responses noted that some of Groupe Convex's workers are now capable of working on equipment which requires a certain level of expertise. Hall & Wilton (2011) however, warn that putting someone without the required abilities into a social context goes against SRV principles, because without appropriate skills, it is impossible for someone to comply with the cultural prerogatives of a given valued role (p. 203). This appears to be challenging given the majority of target workers present significant barriers to skill's development.

The SRV framework suggests that an employer of a worker with an intellectual disability must utilize typical business practices to craft a valued role for this person. A common response by participants was that Groupe Convex operates with a business mid-set and is aware of the positive effects such business-oriented functioning has on the target employees. Although the business planning is not always predictable given the social needs of the employees, the organization is creative and flexible in that sense that the day to day activities of its social businesses will lead to a desired result which is employment for vulnerable people.

SRV experts felt that failing to construct a valued role, even when one has employment, has to do with the type and intensity of the job this person holds. In general, insights are that one strength of Groupe Convex social businesses is to provide stimulating jobs within work environments which expect a lot from its employees. This is consistent with Berthoud (2006) suggestion on the influence that high expectations have on the possibility for intellectually disabled workers to increase their competencies enough so they can hold on to their jobs. The research in this report also acknowledges that people with intellectual disabilities are challenged in reaching other employers expectations as far as entrepreneurs consider as essential competencies. This is consistent with Stryjan (2004) who suggests that incentives for employers are required to counterweight the costs the businesses encounter due to performance limitations and lack of productivity of this

workforce. The findings show that working within a social enterprise which deliberately provides support to its workers favours the development of competencies. This is in line with Hammel, Lai & Heller (2002), cited in Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs (2009) who mention that apart from technical abilities developed with the assistance of employment measures, workers with an intellectual disability also develop additional soft skills. This is also consistent with Francis (2004) suggestion about social skills being greater among people with disabilities who have previously experienced work, compared with those who have not worked.

Interview responses regarding the shortfalls of the organization suggest that some of the social businesses fail to pay target employees decent wages and offer types of jobs which are not image enhancing. These elements echo the devaluation of roles in which people with intellectual disability are casted. Broad & Saunders (2008) as well as Kantowicz (2007) however argue that decent wages may eventually impede on the financial situation of vulnerable people because earning much money may cause loosing provincial income support. Despite the extent of wages, SRV entails that roles are very powerful in the construction of an observer's impression about a person with an intellectual disability. Roles can be rooted in one's identity to the extent they largely define who this person is and how this person behaves. This is consistent with Tsiouris, Mann, Patti & Sturmey (2003) who suggest that deviant behaviours could result from improper ways to express needs due to lack of communication skills (p. 6).

SRV experts observed that frameworks relate to the power of imagery to counter the obviousness of negative differences, not only physical but behavioral. This is consistent with Ross, 2000, p. 410; Nota, Ginevra & Carrieri, 2010, p. 256 who suggest that employment is central to fostering adult identity. Group Convex representatives observed that because Groupe Convex promotes itself as a businesses' network rather than a program for vulnerable people, they consider themselves as employees, instead of recipients of social or employment services. This is consistent with Hall & Wilton (2011) who report that through the lens of SRV, an adult with an intellectual disability should be

actively involved in the workforce since such roles are expected for adults in our modern society (p. 868).

### **Social enterprise in light of SRV**

Common responses on success criteria for social enterprises employing people with an intellectual disability, the roles target employees occupy in these businesses, the relationships people develop with their colleagues and employer and the possibility for them to make choices about their own career. This is consistent with Baumeister & Leary (1995) and with Dortier (2001) who found that working allows individuals to build their own identity and create connections with others. Respondents also felt that Groupe Convex's social enterprises are designed in such way it favours such connectedness and identity building due to positive interactions.

Another criterion provided by interviewees was the size of a social business. Since small milieus are richer in opportunities for interpersonal interactions, this results in greater chances to know each other on a more personal basis and thus generating positive attitudes and acceptance toward people with an intellectual disability. Buntinx and Curfs (2009) raised this point while discussing the environmental factors which are positively affecting this target population. Less structured and smaller working environments allow way for interactions build on intuition and spontaneity. This was commonly highlighted by respondents who knew about the organization's structure as one of the strengths at Groupe Convex, in light of SRV.

As well, client's respondents felt that the organization favours emancipation of its target employees. This is consistent with Kantowicz (2007) view who suggested that social enterprises are designed to accommodate disadvantaged workers in many ways including favouring their autonomy (p. 5). While Groupe Convex encourages relationship building, findings does not show that the organization provides significant opportunities for its target employees to make choices about their own career, nor for them to be involved in business related decision making. It is somewhat contradictory that on the one hand, the organization is perceived by its representatives as contributing to the personal growth of

their target employees while the findings do not show that the organization makes efforts for assisting their employees in planning their career.

Responses from the client's representatives acknowledge the many challenges faced by their employees in terms of such stereotypes as being less productive, less competent and less skilled. These stereotypes tend to be generally true within this organization according to these interviewees' perspective. SRV implies that it is critical for an organization to implement practices to counter the risks of social devaluation of vulnerable people, due to such evidences. Without this consciousness, social enterprises' model seems to go against the goals of SRV as it brings to light the stigma around the vulnerability of people instead of presenting the image about competent workers working together. Common responses from all interviewees are that Groupe Convex applies such strategies as adapting tools and equipment which results in concealing vulnerabilities of target workforce. These findings are consistent with the literature that grouping of vulnerable people in a social business minimizes the odds that these people would be perceived as equivalent to non-disabled workers mainly because the congregation of people reinforces negative perceptions around the unique characteristics these people present. Crawford (2011), Hurley (2006), Martorell, Gutierrez-Recacha, Pereda & Ayuso-Mateos (2008) and Rose, Saunders, Hensel & Kroese (2005) emphasize the challenges this population faces, namely how their deviancies shape some preconceived ideas around intellectual disability.

SRV experts said that SRV also implies that utilizing typical HR practices, proposing stimulating positions and giving people opportunities to co-work with non-devalued people would increase the odds that the job will become a channel for positive opinion about people living with an intellectual disability. These findings are consistent with Readhead (2008), research indicates employment conditions in a social enterprise take into account the needs and interests of vulnerable employees. Lopes (2011) found that social enterprises were typically not able to overcome challenges faced by people with an intellectual disability in terms of their professional advancement.

For the role to be valued in the broad sense of SRV theory, an employee with an intellectual disability needs to contribute to the effectiveness of the business. The findings do not indicate that vulnerable employees are contributing to the success of social businesses. Rather, interviewee comments focused on the lack of productivity and limited skills of the target workforce. This is consistent with Juhel (2000) who shows how people with an intellectual disability present issues in dealing with numbers, literacy, mathematics, problem solving, as a few examples (p. 216).

Findings indicate that target employees are involved, assiduous and appreciative of being employed by a social enterprise, there is no evidence that people impact the effectiveness in a positive way or that target employees are instrumental in a significant way. This is consistent with Barnes & Mercer (2005) who argue that this target population is the most excluded from the mainstream job market as a result of competency shortfall (p. 535).

Findings indicate that Groupe Convex is helpful in increasing the abilities of many people but also note that the organization is not successful in developing the competencies such that they are beneficial to the effectiveness of operations. This is consistent with Amin, Cameron, and Hudson (2002, p. 7) and Kantowicz (2007, p. 11) who suggest social businesses are supportive of vulnerable people who could not meet employment expectations somewhere else. Respondents revealed target employees represented high costs for their social businesses due to their lack of competencies. This productivity issue is echoed by Hall & Wilton (2011) who state the difficulties this cohort of people has in complying with minimal prerequisites in the workplace (p. 9).

The findings suggest that Groupe Convex is creative in seeking alternative ways to support the long-term employment of its target workforce notwithstanding its limitations. Amin, Cameron & Hudson (2002) report that social enterprises offer long lasting working environments in which people with a disability are more likely to keep their job given human resources' approaches are relevant to their needs (p. 7). Respondents suggested that long-term employment in the same position helps a person in crafting her or his identity around the role she or he occupies in the workplace similar to (Jahoda,

Kemp, Riddell & Banks, 2008, p. 15) results. Respondents in this study suggested that a social business should enable people with an intellectual disability to become sufficiently competent so they are able to gain work somewhere else, using the social business is a stepping stone toward better employment opportunities. This view is consistent with Fruchterman (2011) and Dees & Anderson (2003) who describe the many shapes and forms a social business can adopt.

Documentation review indicates that the organization is committed in measuring the impacts employment has on its target workforce. The review found that the organization wishes to know if the target employees feel appreciated by their employer and colleagues, feel part of a team and feel they are learning new abilities. The desire to understand the impacts it generates for its target employees shows that the organization is fulfilling a monitoring role and is concerned about the change it create. This is consistent with Freedman & Fesko (1996) who present these features as the true meaning of work (p. 49).

The documentation review reveals information about Groupe Convex which is SRV related. First that the organization's marketing strategy emphasizes quality rather than price. Second, that the organization nurtures partnerships with the private sector's business. Although this is consistent with Dees, Emerson & Economy (2010) who argue that social enterprises must adopt a business mind-set around, this research makes it noticeable that these practices are implemented not only for this matter. The organization deliberately adopted a marketing strategy based on quality because good products and services impact positively the opinion about the employees who supply those goods and services. The organization also maintains business agreements with privately owned businesses to reflect its participation within the business sector. Such relationships with business owners also have positive impacts on the employees' image given it reinforces the organization's features are closely identical to those of an ordinary business. SRV proponents suggested this business model functioning at Groupe Convex contributes to the enhancement and valuation of the target employees.

The findings show that Groupe Convex is genuinely invested in improving its employees' competencies but that it faces challenges in concretely developing the skills of some of their employees with an intellectual disability. This view is consistent with Readhead (2008) and with Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz & Buzinski (2006) who are asserting that it is practically impossible to imagine a labour market where all people in need would be employed by the private sector. These authors find that people with an intellectual disability are the most at risk of being excluded from the mainstream job market and that for this reason, social businesses become a solution to counter their chronic unemployment (p. 7). This idea is corroborated by Hall (2005) and by Hall & Wilton (2011) who advance that social businesses are better equipped to address the continuous employability needs of people with disabilities (p. 869).

Findings indicate that holding a job systematically evokes a valued role of a worker. This is consistent with McQuaid & Lindsay (2005) who discuss the enablement of task participation and relationship participation, as a result of being employed (p. 215). Being employed by social enterprises reinforces the stereotypes about the target employees because the concept of social enterprise is in itself marginalizing. As well, respondents point out that only rarely do these individuals pursue a career within the mainstream job market. SRV entails that regrouping people based on their specific disability increases the risks of social devaluation. Therefore, because the vast majority of employees are intellectually disabled people, the organization's model unconsciously puts at risk the valued roles it created for its target employees, simply because the role of worker in segregated space might not be transferable within an ordinary business. The roles people hold might become obsolete outside the spectrum of a social business.

### **Community Economic Development in light of SRV**

The findings indicate that Groupe Convex has the attributes of a Community Economic Development (CED) organization as it runs businesses that provide meaningful jobs to marginalized people, facilitates community cohesion, invest in regional development and infrastructure renewal. Respondents saw the organization as community focused, led by community actors which proposes socially oriented business projects in an attempt to

solve socioeconomic issues. While CED does not draw upon SRV theory, the research findings suggests that CED topics are relevant to some SRV features and are suggestive of possible SRV implementation strategies. Those related topics are vulnerability alleviation, relationships with stakeholders, creativity, contributing roles, autonomy, resilience, experimentation and connectedness. These features are consistent with Frutcherman (2011) who discusses the evidences around social enterprise contributing to broad social change (p. 47).

The research highlights that at least two social businesses introduced new and successful regional approaches to community and economic development. The review of the client's information reveals circumstances where target employees were helping their community and responding to local market needs. Such personal contributions value the role of a citizen (Grint & Woolgar, 1997, p. 28). The appreciation of the social business's social returns on investment and its input into local economy (Quarter, Mook & Ryan, 2012, p. 43), has increased the likelihood that target employees are perceived as important members of their community.

## **Summary**

The information shared by stakeholders from Groupe Convex and other informants and the literature reflect numerous successful approaches to monitor and disseminate social role valorization. The observations from experts in SRV identified a number of critical challenges the organization faces in its ability to apply SRV across its operating systems.

Best practices have emerged from the findings of all groups, namely the level of consciousness of Groupe Convex of the power of imagery and competency development, when crafting valued roles to counter social devaluation. The Groupe Convex organization demonstrates an ability to reflect an image of its organization and of its constituents, which is positive and therefore beneficial for the construction of valued roles for the target employees employed within its social businesses. On the other hand, the organization's HR management practices as well as the organizational structure do

not achieve the ultimate goal of valorizing the target population. Being a network of social businesses is in itself against the philosophical framework of valued roles because it is perceived as being in the margin of the universal perception of the business world; those businesses that do not prioritize the employment of people who present serious employment barriers. Since Groupe Convex congregates people who are already at risk of devaluation given their intellectual disability, the organization unwillingly maintains their vulnerabilities and consequently devalue their roles.

## **Chapter 7 Recommendations**

Based on the findings emerging from the investigations on the ideas about employment, social enterprise and community economic development as well as around the theory of social role valorization, seven core recommendations were identified and presented under major topic headings. For the client to become confident reaching its mission, which is to valorize the vulnerable people it employs, change is necessary across those three areas.

### **Modification of current working environment within Groupe Convex' social businesses**

#### *(Short-term implementation)*

1. Increase the ratio of the workforce comprised of people without disabilities
  - a. Develop an informative PowerPoint based session which will be utilized for the orientation of new employees to increase their awareness about intellectual disability.
  - b. Fill any new positions with people who are not targeted by the mission.
  - c. Prior to hiring, partner with the local Employment services Center to access wage subsidies for non-disabled workers seeking employment.

#### *(Long-term implementation)*

2. Improve employment conditions by increasing salary grids and benefits and enhancing human resource practices for target workers.
  - a. Hire a project coordinator. Expenses could be avoided by: Applying for a 2 year grant (\$100 000) at Ontario Trillium Foundation and partnering with Sprott School of Business.
  - b. Survey the market and research data to compare the gap between salaries offered by Groupe Convex's social enterprises and similar businesses in the same market.
  - c. Implement a competencies development plan for all targeted workers and develop a remuneration scale based on competency acquisition.

The established margin of profits needs to take this increase into consideration when fixing sales' price of goods and services.

3. Foster a culture of image-enhancement
  - a. Create an in-house business embellishment committee comprised of the client's upper management and middle-management staff. This committee has the mandate to examine social businesses physical features and recommend aesthetical upgrades.
  - b. Implement these recommendations when feasible. Apply for business improvement grant at <http://www.mentorworks.ca/what-we-offer/government-funding/business-expansion/eodf/>

### **Ongoing assessment**

*(Short-term implementation)*

4. Investigate PASSING components and experiment an in-house adaptation based on the current PASSING measures. This in-house instrument takes into account SRV measures in the broad cultural perspective of the business community and community economic development. Using this in-house instrument serves more as a learning and discussion foundation for the upper management of the organization. Managers and board members are encouraged to be exposed comprehensively to the features of SRV to better understand the scope, subtleties and complexities of SRV.

### **Career development**

*(Short-term implementation)*

5. Partner with the local adult education center to conceive in-house training plans for target employees. Based on European model called Different et Competent ([http://www.differentetcompetent.org/le\\_dispositif](http://www.differentetcompetent.org/le_dispositif)), this program aims at developing and acknowledging their competencies, talents and strengths, which they will be able to market at local employers.

*(Long-term implementation)*

6. Perform a review of social costs every three years, using the Business Cost Recovery tool to allow social businesses to determine the extra expenses incurred as a result of employing less productive employees. This analysis will provide the organization with an accurate estimation and will be useful in justifying the need to obtain funding to cover the costs for supporting their target workers transitioning within the mainstream job market.
7. Establish a placement agency as an organizational priority.
8. Based on Groupe Convex's social enterprises models (ExpressNet and Harvesters) target workers to be deployed in small groups into regular businesses such as manufacturing industries and retail outlets to perform tasks as required by these corporate customers. This would require the following steps:
  - i. Hire a business developer to develop this market niche;
  - ii. Design information sessions which are delivered to business groups and Chambers of Commerce;
  - iii. Meet with local business people;
  - iv. Provide coaching to workers;

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

The worldwide market relies on productivity and performance. It is pertinent to question whether Groupe Convex's social enterprise' model undermines the merit system that is at the heart of the capitalist economy. This reality obscures the possibility that an intellectually disabled person would be perceived more valuable for a social business, for no other reason than for this social enterprise to attain its humanitarian goal. In that sense, the question is whether Groupe Convex truly valorize its target employees, providing it presents an image of care-giving. This image reinforces the stigma of the negative roles in which people with an intellectual disability are cast in.

Understanding Social Role Valorization (SRV) needs to start with a deep understanding of where society is at this point in time: its prevailing structures, standards and rules, interpretation of symbols and appreciation or reluctance of what might be different to the cultural and more precisely, local valued norms. In order to tie SRV concepts to the broad orientations of Groupe Convex as presented in its mission statement, the organization would benefit from transforming its ideals and aims into behaviors and practices. Implementation modalities presented in the recommendations are not complicated yet the social businesses need to stay out the social system, invest themselves even more into the realm of economic development since they could easily fall deeper into the already SRV threatening traps of traditional sheltered and disempowering social assistance environments.

The organizational best practices require the upper management's nurturance and continued support so that these practices become the fundamentals to implement the suggested SRV entailed above recommendations.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Map of Groupe Convex social businesses



## Appendix B: Questionnaire Groups 1 and 2

### Interview with Group 1 and 2 - Groupe Convex's Representatives- Master Project Data Collection

<p><b>Key Topics to Explore with Group 1 and Group 2</b></p> <p><b>Directors and Managers of Social Enterprises</b></p> <p>[Information gathering through document review, onsite observation, interviews]</p>	<p><b>Key Interview Questions</b></p> <p>[Information to be obtained through individual interviews]</p>
<p>I. <u>Description of the Not-For-Profit and its social businesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of the organization</li> <li>• Description and Nature of product or service of the social businesses</li> <li>• Size and reach of the social businesses in terms of number of employees (FT/PT/occasional)</li> <li>• Annual revenues</li> <li>• Markets – who is the customer?</li> <li>• Local competitors, if any</li> <li>• Formal or informal partnerships with other organizations, companies and suppliers</li> <li>• Mission, Vision and values</li> </ul> <p>II. <u>Operational Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative structure of the corporation and its social businesses</li> <li>• Decision making structure, hierarchy</li> <li>• Roles of target group in businesses</li> <li>• Roles of other non targeted employees,</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Questions for Managers/Administrators</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe the model of your organization?</li> <li>- What formal and informal partnerships does the business have and what is the nature of these partnerships?</li> <li>- What makes your social enterprises different than your competition?</li>   <li>- What are your specific functions in administering/managing the corporation or the social businesses?</li> <li>- Can you describe the agreements components you have with partners?</li> <li>- Who in the organization and in the social businesses, have a role in ensuring accountability?</li> <li>- What are roles occupied by target workforce?</li> <li>- Is imagery related to the occupied role important and why?</li> </ul>

<p>within the organizational chart</p> <p>III. <u>Subsidy Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- External financial supports that contribute to sustainability (e.g. government grants, space, in-kind staff, funding for job coaches, charitable donations, etc.)</li> <li>- Structural relationship with external funders;</li> <li>- The portion of the annual budget that is supported by sales</li> <li>- The form external support takes;</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p>IV. <u>Philosophical Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary goals of the organization and its social businesses</li> <li>• Philosophy in terms of SRV</li> <li>• Relationship of Groupe Convex with Valoris</li> <li>• Views on social integration and Social Role Valorization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who makes primary business decisions in terms day to day operations and business growth?</li> <li>- What indicators are you considering when measuring the performance of your organization/social businesses?</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p>How does financial support received from funders affect organizational goal achievement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How is this financial support determined?</li> <li>- What risks or benefits would be associated with loss of this support?</li> <li>- Are their funding sources Groupe Convex would not reached out for? Why?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What conceptual models or philosophies led the development of Groupe Convex and its model?</li> <li>- Which of your mission goals take precedence?</li> <li>- How do you balance business and social goals?</li> <li>- Are there difficulties or trade-offs in trying to meet such competing goals?</li> <li>- Is the business seen primarily as rehabilitation (i.e. preparation for outside work) or as a means of employment? What is the basic philosophy underlying this view?</li> <li>- How does your business model compare with other models of employment for people with</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functioning practices entailing Social Role Valorization</li> </ul>	<p>disability, such as supported employment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the philosophy with respect to social inclusion in the broader community? Is this a goal?</li> <li>- In what ways do target workers interact with persons outside the business, and people in the general population? Is this something important at Groupe Convex and why so?</li> </ul> <p>Some people have argued that social businesses are segregated from the community workforce and don't promote or enable integration? Some say that SB for people with disability are basically sheltered workshops. Thinking of your own social businesses, how would you respond to these claims?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did this corporation get started? Did any model businesses or other examples guide the initiation or early development of the organization?</li> <li>- Describe the core mission of Groupe Convex? Why it is?</li> <li>- What factors have dictated changes and new directions in terms of your business activities? How?</li> <li>- What allows/does not allow the business to respond to changes in the environment?</li> <li>- What factors put the business at risk?</li> <li>- Thinking about Social Role Valorization, how does this core value determine your business decisions?</li> <li>- What are key considerations in business decisions related to SRV?</li> <li>- What factors contribute / detract from optimally reaching SRV principles?</li> <li>- How does your enterprise or corporation evaluate and disseminate SRV?</li> </ul>
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<p style="text-align: center;">V. <u>Historical Development of Groupe Convex</u></p> <p>Early development – how the business was initiated, and for what purposes</p> <p>How SRV is influencing organizational decisions and evolution</p> <p>Models used in creating and development of the business while taking into account the SRV concept;</p> <p>Changes over time – how the business has changed in regards with SRV;</p> <p>Factors related to SRV, that have contributed to any changes</p> <p>How decisions around SRV are made</p> <p>Future directions anticipated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the range of needs seen in the target population employed through your social business? Do all employees have a disability? Can you describe the disability?</li> <li>- Why are workers without disability included/or not included as workers in the business?</li> <li>- If there is a mix of backgrounds and needs, how does that work? Is it an advantage? A challenge?</li> <li>- What workforce factors contribute to/detract from optimally meeting business goals?</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p>Do you track any indicators on your target employees either formally or informally?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are these indicators related to SRV?</li> <li>- Is imagery related to the social businesses important and why? How do you take this into account?</li> <li>- Is your target workforce’s competency development important, and why? How do you take this into account, in your day to day business?</li> <li>- How do your social business contributes to competency development and image enhancement?</li> <li>- Can you track competency development and image enhancement? How?</li> <li>- Have any formal outcomes been measured?</li> <li>- Anecdotally, what kinds of outcomes have you observed?</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">VI. <u>Workforce Characteristics &amp; Issues</u></p> <p>Description of workforce (both supervisory, if any, and target population) in terms of disability, age, range of backgrounds and skills, unique challenges</p> <p>Cultural differences in workforce (type of disability, age difference, etc.)</p>	<p>How many hours/week does the average worker work? What is the range? Does it fluctuate over time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the range of job tenure in the business? What are the roles of the employees in your business?</li> </ul>

<p>Response of business to shifts in population available and seeking work in the business</p> <p>VII. <u>Social Outcomes</u></p> <p>Social goals of the business</p> <p>Any formal or informal measures of success</p> <p>Social Role Valorization</p> <p>VIII. <u>Work Outcomes</u></p> <p>Profile of how much workers in the target group are working and if the business is able to provide consistent and valued work opportunities, for the workers.</p> <p>Length of involvement of most workers in the business, and where would they go if they leave</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who is your longest remaining employee? What seems to be the reasons for such length?</li> <li>- Is there any opportunity for advancement re: position, pay rate, etc.?</li> <li>- How are employees paid?</li> <li>- In your opinion, apart from income, what are the gains for the target workforce, to work in a social business?</li> <li>- In your opinion, could they work somewhere else? Explain?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is the business sustainable with the current financial supports that are in place?</li> <li>- What are indicators of sustainability? Why?</li> </ul>
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<p>X. Description of the Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of SRV</li> <li>• Of CED</li> <li>• For Background Information</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Questions for Managers/Administrators</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In your field of expertise, how would you define a conscious SE?</li> <li>2. Have you heard about Groupe Convex? Explain.</li> <li>3. What are your views on this organization?</li> </ol>
<p>XI. <u>Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophy in terms of SRV</li> <li>• Philosophy in terms of CED</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There are assumptions that some SE employing intellectually disabled people are simply sheltered workshops with an appealing name? What's your point of view in this matter?</li> <li>2. What should be the key considerations for a social business, in order to reach the requirements in your field?</li> <li>3. What indicators should be monitored? Why?</li> <li>4. In your opinion, apart from income, what are the gains and what are the losses for a target workforce, to be employed in a social business?</li> <li>5. As an expert in your field, according to you, what are the strengths and the shortfalls of SE employing vulnerable populations?</li> <li>6. Are people in your field generally supportive of SE as a means to provide employment opportunities for people who are at risk of exclusion? Why?</li> </ol>