



Advancing social sustainability in air travel: Hidden disabilities and the role of change management

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Abstract

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<p>This thesis investigates how passengers with hidden disabilities are recognized within airline services, how their experiences are supported through customer service processes, and to what extent these efforts are monitored or evaluated. The study also examines how principles of change management can be applied to improve service for this specific passenger group.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the thesis is built around the history of accessible travel, the concept of hidden disabilities, and the role of social responsibility in travelling. Additionally, it covers the fundamentals of change management and relevant change management models.</p> <p>This study focuses on the experiences and service needs of passengers with hidden disabilities within the context of customer service interactions. The research is limited to the perspectives of managers, frontline supervisors or professionals who have long-standing experience in passenger service roles. The aim is to understand how these professionals identify and respond to the needs of passengers with non-visible disabilities, and how change management strategies could support improvements in service delivery.</p> <p>The study does not examine all forms of disability or accessibility in travel sector but specifically concentrates on hidden disabilities, such as neurodivergence, mental health conditions, or chronic illnesses that are not immediately visible. The findings are intended to support the development of socially sustainable service practices but do not provide a full implementation model for organizational change.</p> <p>The chosen research method was qualitative interviewing, specifically utilizing a thematic interview approach.</p> <p>The findings of this study indicate that while the need for improved support for passengers with hidden disabilities is widely recognized among staff, the current organizational approach lacks strategic coordination and structure. Social dimension, including accessibility and inclusivity, has become a critical aspect of sustainable development but despite regulatory frameworks, there is still a gap in how service providers identify and support passengers with hidden disabilities. The responses reflect a clear pressure for change. Successful change requires a clearly communicated vision, supported by leadership and embedded in everyday routines. These elements, according to the interviews, are not yet fully in place. The responses suggest that current staff training and support systems are insufficient. This gap risks increasing employee stress and diminishing service quality. The desire to extend training across all roles, not just to frontline staff, points to a need for a more inclusive, organization wide approach.</p>
Key words Sustainable aviation, Hidden disability, Invisible disability, Social sustainability, Inclusive travel, Change management

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1 Introduction

Travelling is often associated with freedom and global connectivity (World Economic forum 2025). Greenwood (2024) highlights in a blog post for the World Travel Market (WTM) also that connectivity constitutes a fundamental aspect of travel, as it facilitates meaningful connections between individuals, their families and cultures. However, for passengers with hidden disabilities, such as autism spectrum, ADHD, mental health issues, anxiety, ageing population and many more, travelling can present significant barriers (IATA 2025). Many hesitate to disclose their conditions out of fear of discrimination (IATA 2025). While some airlines and airports have implemented supportive measures such as pretravel information and sensory rooms, there remains a global need for better awareness (IATA 2025). Besides better awareness, also improved communication about assistance requests, and consistent support throughout the travel journey, including during disruptions, is urgently needed (IATA 2025).

Unlike visible disabilities, hidden disabilities are not immediately apparent to others. This may cause misunderstandings and unmet service needs. The growing recognition of diversity among travellers has highlighted the need for more inclusive service models within the travel industry. (Sunflower 2025.)

In recent years, social responsibility has gained increasing importance in the sustainability discourse of travelling. While environmental concerns remain central, the social dimension, including accessibility and inclusivity, has become a critical aspect of sustainable development. Despite regulatory frameworks and the introduction of voluntary service initiatives, there is still a gap in how service providers identify and support passengers with hidden disabilities in practice. (Visit Finland 2025.)

This study explores how staff in the travel business, particularly those in supervisory customer service roles, perceive and recognize passengers with hidden disabilities, and how customer service processes can be developed to better meet the needs of hidden disability passengers. Furthermore, the study investigates how principles of change management can support the implementation of more inclusive practices within organizations. By combining perspectives from accessibility, customer experience, and organizational change, this research aims to contribute to a more socially sustainable future for travelling.

In 2019, the European Union adopted the Accessibility Act, which will be implemented in 28th of June 2025. This legislation requires member states to improve the accessibility of products and services for all individuals, including those with various disabilities, such as hidden disabilities. The Accessibility Act emphasizes social inclusion and equal opportunities, marking a significant step toward a more accessible Europe. (EU Accessibility Act 2019.)

This directive places increasing pressure on the travel industry to enhance its customer service to be more accessible, highlighting the timeliness and importance of this research. Identifying and addressing the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities is a crucial part of this transformation (IATA 2025). Organizations must adopt effective change management strategies and practices.

Globally, populations are aging at an unprecedented rate. According to the United Nations (2025), the number of people aged 65 and older is expected to more than double by 2050, reaching over 1.5 billion worldwide. (United Nations 2025.) Ageing can be considered also a hidden disability because aging often involves for example chronic health conditions, sensory limitations or cognitive challenges that aren't immediately visible but may affect travel experiences. (IATA 2025.) This demographic shift is especially pronounced in Europe, where many countries already have a high proportion of older adults. In Finland, the population aged 65 and above is steadily increasing, posing new challenges and opportunities for various sectors, including travel and customer service. (United Nations 2025.)

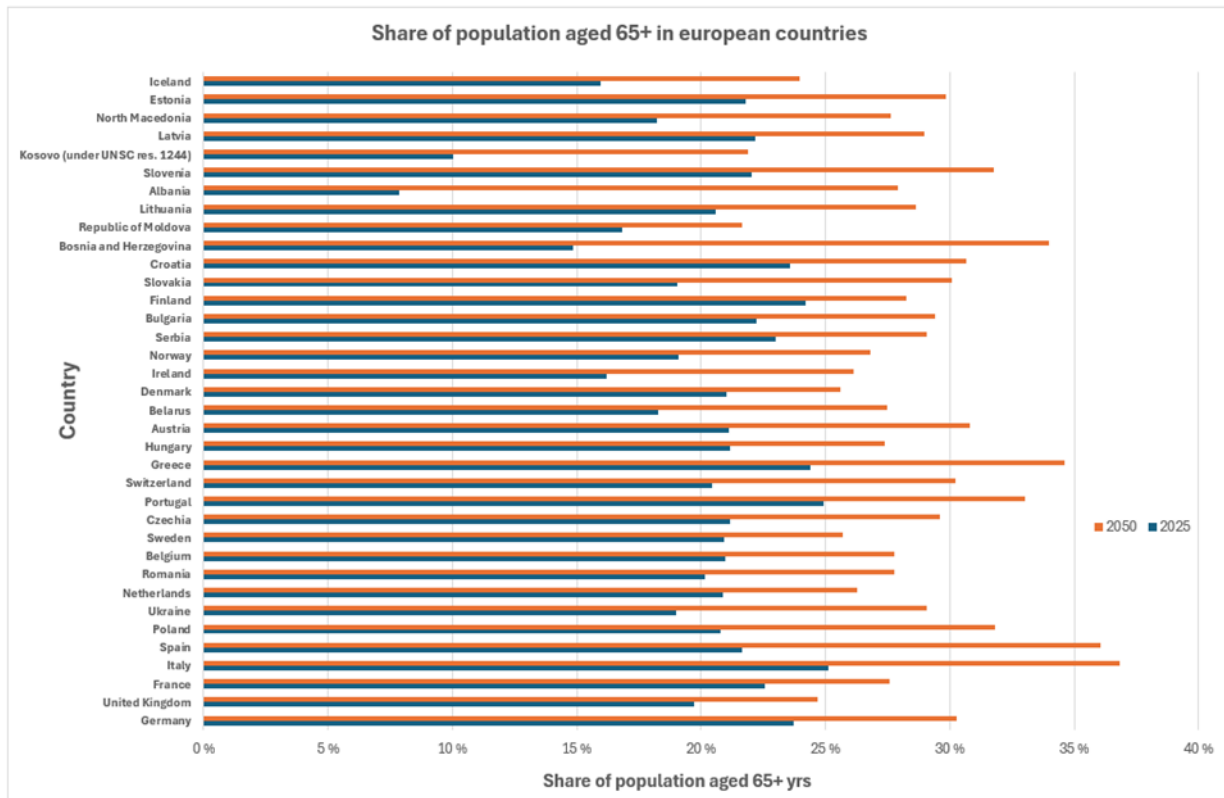


Figure 1. Share and growth rate of population over 65 in European countries (United Nations, Data Portal, Population Division 2025)

The aging population often means a rise in both visible and hidden disabilities, such as cognitive impairments or chronic health conditions that may not be immediately apparent. This demographic trend further highlights the need for accessible and inclusive services within the travel industry. Organisations must also adapt to meet these evolving customer needs. (Medical press 2025.)

This thesis is a development project aimed at identifying and improving airline processes to better support passengers with hidden disabilities. The topic was chosen in response to the observation that hidden disabilities often remain insufficiently recognized within current operations. By combining perspectives from social sustainability and change management, this thesis provides an opportunity to examine how the travel industry can develop its operational models and service practices to meet contemporary accessibility standards and promote greater inclusivity. This topic combines perspectives from social sustainability as well as change management, offering a possibility to explore how travel business may develop their operational models together with services to meet today's standards and become more inclusive.

I chose to explore the topic out of personal interest and due to its current relevance. At the time of completing this thesis in June 2025, the new European Accessibility Act is set to come into force on June 28, 2025. As the global population continues to age and life expectancy is expected to rise, combined with growth forecasts for the travel industry, the need for socially responsible services will become increasingly significant.

This table presents the key concepts that are repeatedly used throughout the text:

Table 1. Key concepts (Hidden disabilities sunflower 2025; Visit Finland 2021)

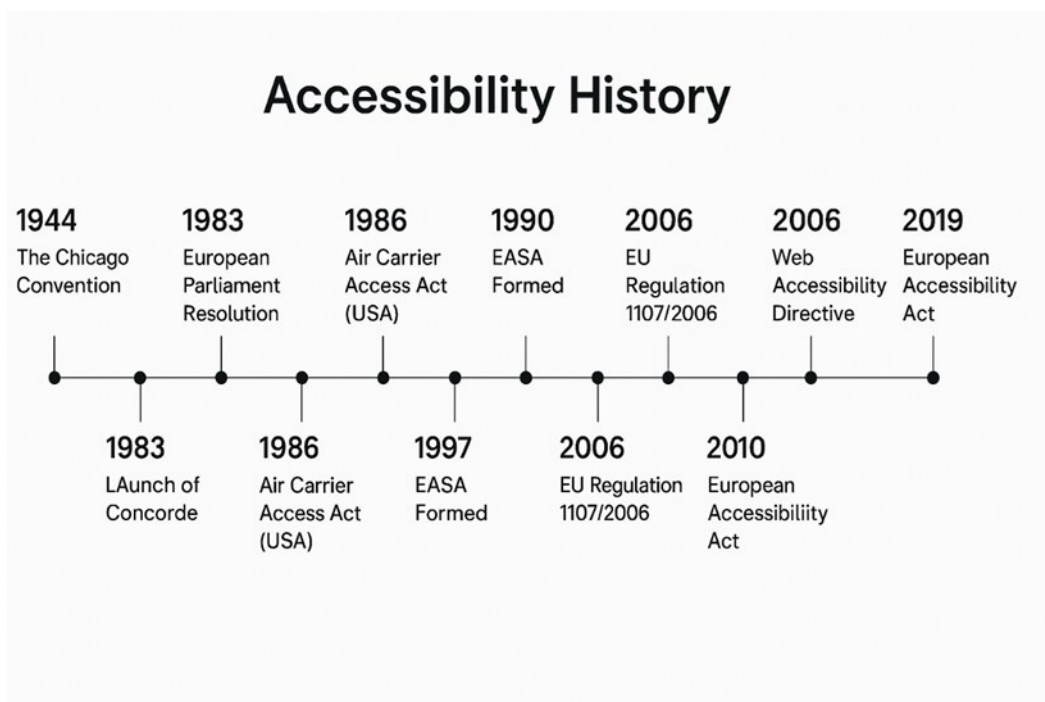
Concept	Definition
Hidden disability	Condition that is often non visible from outside. Also called as invisible disability (Hidden disabilities sunflower 2025).
Invisible disability	Condition that is often non visible from outside. Also called as hidden disability (Invisible disabilities association 2025).
EU Accessibility Act	European Union directive for accessible services for passengers with disability (Ministry of social affairs and health 2025).
Inclusive travel	Accessible travel to all people, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or individual needs (Visit Finland 2021).
EAA	European accessibility Act
DPNA	Disabled passenger with intellectual or development disability needing assistance.
CRO	Complaint resolution officer

2 Background

Accessibility in air travel has progressed since the Chicago Convention 1944. While early developments focused on passengers with visible disabilities, attention towards hidden disabilities has increased only in recent years. Finnair, among other airlines, has adopted the Hidden disabilities sunflower scheme as a part of the effort to promote inclusive air travel. In legal terms, the European Accessibility Act (EAA, adopted in 2019, represents a major step towards harmonized accessibility standards across the EU. In Finland, the national implementation of the EAA comes into force on 28th June 2025. EAA aims to reduce social exclusion and foster equal participation for all passengers.

2.1 History of accessibility in airtravel

Organisations like the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and Airports Council International (ACI) are working together to create a more inclusive air travel experience. According to IATA resolution (2019), the airline industry has been committed to enhancing that safe and reliable air travel accessibility is possible for everybody. (IATA 2019.)



Picture 2. Timeline for airtravel accessibility history (IATA 2019)

Accessibility's history started already in **1944** with the Chicago convention. ICAO which is the international Civil Aviation Organization was established in 1944 and its role was to set standards which included accessibility standard for airline travel.

1945 IATA, the International Air Transport Association, was founded to standardize air travel operations. That influenced accessibility standards across airports and airlines indirectly.

IATA resolution 700 was introduced in **1952** which was an international effort to address accessibility among airline travel worldwide.

Launch of Concorde, the supersonic aircraft in **1976** lead into discussions related to air travel accessibility. The Concorde's design was unique, and it highlighted the need for more inclusive airline travel.

1983 The European parliament highlighted the need for equal access to public transportation, including air travel for passengers with disabilities.

1986 an air carrier access act was established in the United States. Its aim was to prohibit discrimination against passengers with disabilities in travel by air. The act concerned both airports and airlines.

1990 ADA which is the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law. It included accessibility requirements for transportation services for people with disabilities.

1997 the Treaty of Amsterdam was written into EU law, and it was a base for anti-discrimination policy in transportation including the aviation business.

The European Aviation Safety (EASA) agency was formed in **2001**. Its role was to harmonize standards for accessibility across operators in aviation business.

In **2006** EU regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 came into effect, demanding that airports and airlines need to assist passengers with disabilities at no additional charge.

2010 airports started to follow EU regulation 1107/2006 where infrastructure became more disability friendly. Ramps and e.g. designated seating areas for passengers with disabilities came into use. The World Health Organization published a report also in 2010 pointing out barriers that passengers with disabilities are facing in air travel.

2016 EU adopts directive that requires that public sectors websites and mobile apps need to be accessible. This will benefit passengers who are seeking information on accessible air travel.

In **2019** the European Accessibility Act (EAA) seeks to improve access to essential services and infrastructure for elderly passengers and passengers with disability. The deadline for full compliance for this act is **28 June 2025** for newly launched products and services. For older products and services, the transitional period is 2030. (IATA 2019.)

For decades, accessibility in air travel have focused on visible disabilities such as wheelchairs or blind passengers. Passengers with hidden disabilities like autism, ADHD, mental health conditions, are recognized quite slow and late.

The airline industry was not an early adopter in recognizing this group. While efforts toward accessibility began with the Chicago Convention in 1944 and progressed through acts like the Air Carrier Access Act (1986) and ADA (1990), they primarily addressed physical or visible barriers. For a long time, invisible needs were invisible in the travel business. After EU Regulation 1107/2006, conversation began to show slowly changes and the introduction of hidden disability lanyards at some airports, increased staff training. European Accessibility Act (2019) have put real efforts in having this passenger group heard. Hidden disabilities challenge traditional definitions of who needs or is entitled to have help. Hidden disabilities are not visible, and the aviation system, which is built for efficiency and security is slow to make room for complexity or individual support.

2.2 Hidden disability

Hidden disability or often also called invisible disability is a physical, mental or neurological condition that is often not visible from the outside. It may limit or challenge a person's movements, senses, or activities. (Invisible disability association 2025.)

Living with a disability, does not mean that person is disabled. Many, living with a hidden disability are fully active in their work or hobbies but may need assistance in daily functions. People may think that disability refers to people using wheelchairs, walkers, sticks or seeing eye dogs. A person is considered also to have a disability when they have difficulties e.g. in seeing, hearing, talking, walking, lifting or carrying or taking stairs. We should keep in mind that not all disabilities are visual and that can lead to misunderstandings. There are many disorders, dysfunctions or illnesses that are considered as hidden disabilities. There is no point making a list because hidden

disabilities are unique but open every-one's eyes to the fact that a person might look ok but still suffer from a disability and need help in everyday situations. (Invisible disabilities association 2025.)

Everyone with a disability is different, with different challenges and needs. We should stop judging with our eyes and learn to listen with our ears instead. Otherwise, everyday functions can be frustrating for those who may appear unable but are fully capable and for those who are seen able but are not. (Invisible disabilities association 2025.)

2.3 Sunflower organization

Sunflower Hidden Disabilities was created in 2016 in England to encourage inclusivity, understanding and acceptance for people that live with a disability which is not visible for others and who might need support. The hidden disabilities sunflower is a tool for a person who voluntarily want to tell that he or she has a disability that may not be apparent. With this tool person may tell that they need help, understanding or more time in transportation or in public spaces for example. With this tool, which is often a lanyard with sunflower images, you communicate without words to persons who are aware of the Sunflower scheme, that you may need assistance. (Sunflower hidden disabilities 2025.)



Figure 2. Sunflower lanyard (Sunflower Hidden disabilities 2025)

Sunflower identifier may also be a credit card size card or lanyard, and card combined. Card can also state your disability in words as shown in picture Wearing this lanyard, you might find people around you to ask how they may assist you best. (Sunflower hidden disabilities 2025.)



Figure 3. Sunflower card (Sunflower hidden disabilities 2025)



Picture 5. Sunflower lanyard with a text stating the disability (Sunflower Hidden disabilities 2025)

Without a visual cue it is difficult for people working in the service branch to identify and understand people with hidden disability. Sunflower was created to discreetly tell others that a person has a non-visible disability and that they might need some extra attention or help. The idea for Sunflower originated at London Gatwick Airport to answer the need for airport staff to recognize

people who might need support and assistance. Since its launch it has spread to other public spaces, transportation companies, workplaces and shops. Nowadays Sunflower symbol is recognized and used internationally at many airports, retail stores, entertainment venues, train stations etc. (Sunflower hidden disabilities 2025.)

2.4 Accessibility at Finnair

Finnair aims to offer an accessible, smooth, and above all, comfortable flight experience. The airline encourages customers to inform them in advance if they have a disability that may require assistance during travelling. Passengers with hidden disabilities are invited to contact the special assistance check-in counter at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport. If they wish, they may notify staff at the departure gate should they prefer to board the aircraft early due to their condition. (Finnair 2024.)

Finnair participates in the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower initiative. The airline describes the Sunflower as an international symbol that allows passengers to discreetly indicate that they have a hidden disability. The aim is to signal that the passenger may need extra help navigating various travel situations. (Finnair 2024.)

Such situations may include needing additional time to process information, check in, board, or disembark the aircraft. It may also mean the passenger requires clearer verbal instructions, particularly if non-verbal communication is difficult to interpret. They may need help reading signage or departure screens or they may benefit from extra information about what to expect before, during, or after the flight. At Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, passengers can obtain a Sunflower lanyard from the Finnair check-in desk marked with an accessibility symbol. (Finnair 2024.)

2.5 EU Accessibility Act

Eu accessibility act (2019) is a directive that has a big aim to improve products and services to be more accessible for everyone. It is a significant EU directive which aim is to improve accessibility and ensure equal access for people with disabilities including hidden disabilities. EU accessibility Act aims to common accessibility rules in the whole EU region. It aims to lower the barriers for

people with disabilities when accessing transportation and services. This will also lead to job opportunities where expertise is needed. (European accessibility act 2019.)

The European accessibility act will cover services and products that have been identified to be very important and that have had a diverging barrier between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. These products and services from an aviation business point of view include ticketing and check-in machines and services related to air, bus, rail and water passenger transport. (European accessibility act 2019.)

2.5.1 Implementation of the European accessibility act in Finland

The European accessibility Act came into force at EU level in 2019 and in Finland the national law implementing the directive will come into force on June 28, 2025. From this day onwards all new products and services must comply with the accessibility requirements. For existing products and services, the transition period is until 2030. (European accessibility act 2019.)

This legislation requires airlines and airports to improve the accessibility of their services. In practice, this means that not only digital services, but also physical environments must be accessible to all passengers. Airline and airport digital services, such as booking websites and check-in kiosks, must be easy to navigate, include image descriptions or captions for videos, and be compatible with assistive technologies. Travel related information, such as flight announcements, gate announcements, or other communications, must be presented in accessible formats for people with visual or hearing impairments. (European accessibility act 2019.)

Staff must be trained to support and assist passengers with special needs, including awareness of hidden disabilities and how to appropriately respond to these passengers' requirements. The EAA sets a common standard across the EU, meaning all airports and airlines operating within the union must follow the same rules. This Act gives legal weight to equal treatment and increases the responsibility of service providers to be inclusive. This act also recognizes the needs of individuals not only with visible disability but persons with hidden disabilities. This Act sets rules that also hidden disability passengers has right to receive individual support. (European accessibility act 2019.)

In Finland, the supervisory authority for accessibility requirements is Traficom. Traficom underlines that accessibility requirements apply to both public and private operators, when services or products fall into accessibility legislation category. (Traficom 2025.)

Finland has implemented the EAA by enacting national legislation ensuring that both public and private sectors provide accessible products and services. The EAA is expected to reduce social exclusion and promote inclusion, especially for people with disabilities and for the aging population. (Ministry of social affairs and health 2021.)

3 Theory

The goal of accessible tourism is to make travel available to everyone, regardless of their special needs. Inclusive tourism, that does not discriminate, supports the goals of sustainable development and helps build a more equal society. Considering different target groups, sustainable tourism supports the achievement of sustainability goals and also impacts the competitiveness and profitability of businesses. If staff and companies lack the ability to recognize the specific needs of different groups, willingness to serve is not enough, and customer-centricity will not meet the needs of all customers. (Renfors & Kokkarinen, 2011, 3.)

Implementing inclusivity requires tourism operators not only to recognize but also to actively consider different target groups. However, recognition alone is not sufficient, active measures are also necessary. (Guide to Inclusive Tourism 2021, 7.) The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2019) also states that customer-oriented operations based on the principles of responsibility require the adoption of responsible practices and competencies. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2019.)

This means that both tourism companies and destinations must adopt responsible competencies and practices, making inclusivity a part of tourism. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2019.) A company must make a conscious decision to serve all customers equally. This value choice must be reflected in every part of the service chain and must extend to the entire staff. It is important to train all employees so that no one is treated inappropriately, including non-verbal communication. (Guide to Inclusive Tourism 2021, 36.)

Accessing information about inclusive tourism and using its services is still difficult for many. Feelings of exclusion or insecurity are present in the everyday lives of many potential travellers. (Guide to Inclusive Tourism 2021, 38.)

3.1 Inclusive travel

Tourism service providers are increasingly expected to take accessibility and inclusivity into account. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (2024), there are currently around 800,000 people with reduced mobility in Finland, and one-third of Europe's

population falls within the scope of accessible tourism. Today, accessibility considerations extend beyond physical accessibility to include, for example, people with sensory impairments. Furthermore, nearly everyone will require accessible services at some point in their life cycle. Responsible and conscious consumers value social well-being and prefer operators who incorporate social sustainability into their operations. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2024, 16-17.)

The tourism industry must change its practices in a responsible and long-term manner. The implementation of these changes requires sufficient resourcing and cooperation among different actors. Socially responsible decisions can also result in business growth, for instance through improved profitability. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2024, 24.)

In tourism product development, sustainable tourism and increasingly also regenerative tourism, guides development work. Responsible choices in tourism are supported by constantly improving service quality with the customer in mind. It is also important to consider safety, equality, and accessibility in tourism services. Accessibility of the destination and well-functioning travel chains must also be considered. Tourism helps regions grow and create jobs. To support this and increase travel to Finland, we need to carefully manage tourism's effects and use resources responsibly, in the ways that respect culture, people, the environment, and the economy. National sustainable tourism indicators help destinations and companies create and track their sustainability plans. This is also a key part of the Sustainable Travel Finland program. (Visit Finland 2025.)

Data-driven leadership is a key tool in developing expertise, product development, and business activities. For example, marketing efforts should increasingly be guided by data, and the effectiveness of marketing should be evaluated. Strengthening the knowledge base is also necessary to address labour availability and skill matching challenges. Data-driven decision-making is supported by the production of different datasets, such as regional tourism accounts. The European Union has launched a project to strengthen the data foundation of the tourism industry and support the green and digital transition. The EU Tourism Dashboard is a public digital tool that compiles quantitative data about the tourism economy across the EU. It also contributes to the development of a tourism data space, as part of the Digital Europe Programme. In Finland, data spaces for tourism and cultural heritage should be leveraged to strengthen data-driven leadership, RDI (research, development, and innovation) activities, and enhance data sharing across sectors and the development of new services and applications. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2024, 45.)

3.2 Change management

This thesis draws upon three complementary change management models.

These models were selected based on their relevance to complex organizational environments, their structured approaches to managing transformation, and their applicability to social sustainability themes.

Stenvall and Virtanen (2007) contribute a complementary, diagnostic view of organizational change by identifying four essential conditions for successful transformation. First one is pressure for change. Second is a shared vision. Thirdly there needs to be capacity to implement the change and the last one is feasible development projects. Their model highlights the risks of failure when any of these components is missing. This model is especially useful in the airline context, where large-scale change requires alignment between operational feasibility and strategic direction, and where feasibility and communication bottlenecks can severely undermine progress. (Stenvall & Virtanen 2007, 79-80.)

Kotters (1916) classical model provides a linear, leadership-driven approach that outlines key stages from creating urgency to embedding new practices into organizational culture. Its structured nature makes it particularly suitable for established, hierarchical organizations like airlines, which require clear direction, communication, and stepwise progress to implement change effectively. (Kotter 1916, 21.)

Sancak's (2023) Sustainability Transformation Model (STM) which is based on Stouten, Rousseau, and De Cremer (2018) model, expands the traditional change management perspective by embedding environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles into the process. It is especially relevant to the context of this thesis, as it provides a framework for translating abstract social sustainability goals, such as improved inclusion for hidden disabilities, into tangible organizational practices. Sancak's model also addresses the importance of governance in driving long-term cultural and procedural transformation. (Sancak 2023, 1-2.)

The following diagram (picture 6) illustrates the essential factors required for the change process and makes clear the consequences when any component of the process fails to function effectively. Successful change begins with the recognition of the need for change. Subsequently, leadership and effective management ensure the establishment of a clear and shared vision for the

change within the organization. They also guarantee that the target and direction of the change are clearly communicated and understood by all stakeholders. Additionally, the organization must possess the capacity to implement the change and identify feasible projects to support this process. The absence of any of these critical factors can render the change effort unnecessary and aimless. A lack of implementation capacity often leads to anxiety and frustration among involved parties. Furthermore, if the projects are not feasible, the change initiatives tend to become random and ineffective, failing to achieve the intended outcomes. (Stenvall & Virtanen. 2007, 79-80.)

Pressures for change	A clear and shared vision	Change capacity	Feasible projects	=	Successful change
	A clear and shared vision	Change capacity	Feasible projects	=	Contentless effort
Pressures for change		Change capacity	Feasible projects	=	Unfocused effort
Pressures for change	A clear and shared vision		Feasible projects	=	Anxiety/ frustration
Pressures for change	A clear and shared vision	Change capacity		=	Random efforts

Picture 6. Factors that influence the success of change processes (According to: de Woot 1996; Merilä 2006; Stenvall&Virtanen 2007)

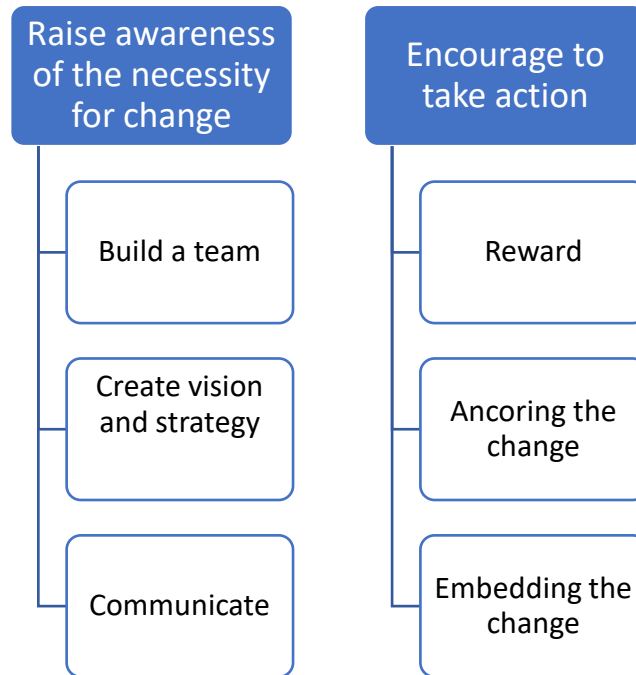


Figure 4. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model. (According to Kotter 1996, 21)

In the initial phases of organizational change, supervisors play a critical role in helping employees to understand and accept the reasons and justifications for the change (Kotter 1996, 36–42). Driving successful change within an organization requires a committed and capable team. Supervisors are advised to select both people leaders and task-oriented managers from within the workforce to form an effective team. (Kotter 1996, 57–58.) The objective and goal of the change must be clearly understood by all involved. To achieve the goal, a concrete strategy should be developed, which is both comprehensible and feasible. (Kotter 1996, 69–71.)

Communication is one of the most critical factors determining the success or failure of the change process. Facts should be communicated clearly and precisely, using multiple channels and frequent repetition, with leadership behaviour serving as a model. Communication must be two-way, flowing both top-down and bottom-up (Kotter 1996, 90–99). Employees should be encouraged to take an active role in the change by empowering them and modifying organizational structures accordingly (Kotter 1996, 21; 115).

Setting concrete and realistic interim goals and achieving them collectively is also vital. Reaching milestones demonstrates that the change process is progressing and that the outcome is attainable. (Kotter 1996, 120–123.) Supervisors play a key role in engaging employees in realizing the vision of change through training, development, and motivation (Kotter 1996, 21; 143). Changes

become permanently embedded in the organizational culture only when they replace old habits and routines. This requires ongoing dialogue and verification that the change is being implemented in practice. (Kotter 1996, 21; 157.)

Conversely, Kotter identifies common errors that lead to the failure of change initiatives, summarized in an eight-point list. These include insufficient support from strong leadership, underestimating the power and significance of the vision, ineffective communication of the vision, premature celebration of victories, and inadequate anchoring of the change in the organizational culture. (Kotter 1996, 16.)

Sancak (2025) adapts a ten-step model for managing organizational change and applies it to sustainability transformation, particularly in relation to environmental and social criteria. The model is based on the framework by Stouten, Rousseau, and De Cremer (2018). This model outlines key steps such as assessing problems, bringing together the right people, creating and communicating a vision, enabling structural support, achieving short-term wins, making sure that the positive changes made during a change process are maintained, making sure the change sticks, evaluating and improving change readiness, and engaging stakeholders. Sancak (2018) expands on this by developing a Sustainability Transformation Model (STM) that integrates ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) factors and emphasizes the importance of governance, especially in the early phases of change. (Sancak 2023, 2-4.)

Not all companies are initially aligned with social sustainability goals. Adapting to these standards requires strong leadership and collaboration with various stakeholders. Although it is clear that companies must develop sustainable strategies, the practical steps toward transformation often remain vague. (Sancak 2023, 3).

Salomaa and Juhola (2020) also highlight that sustainability transformation still needs deeper analysis, particularly concerning how it is implemented in practice, since the concept is relatively new and research has mostly focused on academic discourse rather than real-world process change (Salomaa & Juhola 2020, 2.)

Chofreh and Goni (2017) similarly argue that companies need comprehensive frameworks to successfully implement sustainability initiatives. Sancak's (2023) research addresses this gap by exploring how organizations can begin and manage effective sustainability transformations. As Stouten et al. (2018) explain, successful change requires learning, training, and development at all levels of the organization. Training is not only a way to build necessary skills but also a means to communicate the importance of sustainability values and strategies (Bertels et al., 2010). Truly sustainable companies go further by asking critical questions such as, "How do our products and

services benefit society and the environment?” and “How can we transform our operations to offer measurable solutions to pressing social and environmental challenges?” (Dyllick & Muff, 2015). In this context, change management becomes a vital approach for integrating ESG practices, overcoming resistance, managing uncertainty, and ensuring long-term commitment. According to Sancak (2023), among ESG factors, governance plays the most critical role in initiating and sustaining successful sustainability practices within organizations.

3.3 Methods

The final thesis for a master's degree at a University of Applied Sciences should contribute to the development of working life in some way. The outcome of the thesis should be replicable not only for the target industry of the research but also for other organization, even across different industries (Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, 2017).

The aim of this research was to gain insights into the main challenge of how accessibility can be improved for passengers with hidden disabilities, with a focus on enhancing airline customer service processes. The study also explores how these processes can be developed through change management and a socially responsible approach.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research approach is said to be well-suited for exploring topics that require deep understanding and contain layers of meaning and interpretation (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 75-85). Hidden disabilities in air travel may involve emotional, sensory, and interpersonal factors that are not visible or easily measurable (Hidden disabilities sunflower, 2025), which is why a quantitative approach was not suitable at this stage of the research. A thematic interview method was selected to gather in-depth insights from industry professionals with insights into passengers with hidden disabilities.

Interviews are a common method for collecting data in research. Because interviews can provide in-depth insight into the subject under study, this method was selected for data collection in the present research.

In the book called *Tutkimushaastattelu: Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö* (2008), Sirkka Hirsjärvi and Helena Hurme discuss the key characteristics of successful research interviews from the perspective of thematic interviewing. They emphasize that in thematic interviews, it is crucial that the themes are clear and coherent. The interview should remain both focused and flexible, allowing the interviewer to pose clarifying questions as needed. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 28-29.)

The roots of thematic interviewing trace back to the classic the focused interview by Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956), which remains a foundational theoretical reference for the method. In thematic interviews, the themes are predetermined, and the interview is based on the premise that all interviewees have experienced a certain event or phenomenon. The interviewer is familiar in the research area as a whole and develops an interview framework based on preliminary research. (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956. 3–4.)

For this study, a thematic interview approach which is also known as a semi-structured interview, was chosen. This method was appropriate because all interviewees had experienced a common situation, interactions with passengers who have hidden disabilities. Furthermore, all participants had observed how their organizations communicate, inform, and train staff to recognize and assist customers with hidden disabilities.

Braun & Clarke’s method can easily be applied to various types of research questions which makes it a versatile tool. Six step thematic analysis enables the researcher to summarize key themes and include all participants’ opinions, not only the most common ones. This gives the researcher a more accurate understanding of the data.

Brown & Clarke’s six steps are (Brown & Clarke. 2024, 35-36)

- **Familiarize yourself with the data**
- **Generate initial codes**
- **Search for themes**
- **Review themes**
- **Define and name themes**
- **Produce the report**

The phases of the method are documented carefully, enhancing the trustworthiness and transparency of the study. (Brown & Clarke. 2024, 35-36.)

Thematic interviews offer both flexibility and depth, enabling participants to share perspectives that might remain concealed within more structured or quantitative research approaches (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 28-29). This method is particularly well suited for the exploratory and transformative aims of the study, which seeks to contribute to process of organizational change. Understanding resistance, communication gaps, and employee experiences is key to effective change

management. These complex and context dependent phenomena are best examined through rich, qualitative data. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 29.)

The aim was not to generalize statistically, but to understand underlying processes, experiences, and barriers that influence social sustainability and inclusion within airline services.

In this study, I interviewed only professionals who have worked in the airline industry for over 20 years. The intention behind this sampling decision was to focus on participants from a shared professional category, allowing for deeper insight into institutional practices and long-term industry perspectives. At this stage of the research, the aim was not to achieve diversity in roles or viewpoints, but rather to gather focused, experience-based knowledge from individuals with extensive familiarity with airline operations and, where applicable, hidden disability passengers.

4 Research design

This chapter outlines the research design chosen to explore how airline processes can be improved to better support passengers with hidden disabilities. The approach is grounded in principles of social responsibility and change management.

4.1 Selected research method and implementation

A qualitative research method was selected for the customer survey. The target group of the study consisted of supervisors who have worked for a long time in passenger customer service.

The data collection method was interviews. A short cover letter was sent to the interviewees, explaining the study and its objectives, and informing them about the anonymity of their responses. The interview consisted of ten questions, all of which were open-ended. The questions were divided into three themes. The first three questions focused on the employees' personal experiences regarding how they perceive the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities. The second theme examined the organization's current operating models and readiness to meet passengers with hidden disabilities. The third theme primarily focused on development proposals and change management strategies.

Given the personal and potentially sensitive nature of disability related experiences, particular attention was paid to ethical considerations throughout the research process. Many of the interviewees held professional positions where being identified could have affected their role or relationships within their workplace or organization. Therefore, anonymity was particularly important to the participants. To protect their anonymity, names, specific job titles, and organizations are not mentioned in the study.

Participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the study and were provided with an information letter detailing their rights, including the voluntary nature of participation. The letter clearly stated that they could withdraw from the process at any point without providing a reason and without any negative consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and data protection procedures were followed to ensure that participants' identities and personal information remained secure throughout the research.

Data was collected with semi-structured interviews via teams, guided by a set of core questions while allowing for open ended responses. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was

recorded and transcribed with participants' consent.

Data was analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. I studied what participants said and found common themes based on their experiences. Answers were grouped into themes related to change management and social responsibility. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis was chosen because it is structured and clear process. It is easy to follow and helps to systematically review the data. It allows for exploration of meanings rather than statistical generalization, which is, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) important to qualitative surveys.

4.2 Interview

As the interviewer, I was personally familiar with the research topic through firsthand experience. I have travelled with a passenger who has hidden disabilities, and I have often needed effective tools to communicate that passenger's specific needs to various service providers. To prepare for the interviews, I deepened my understanding of the topic through relevant literature and academic articles. Additionally, I attended webinars organized by the Finnish Autism Association and listened to several podcasts and interviews related to the subject. This preparatory work significantly influenced the development of the interview themes.

Nine interviews were conducted. Saturation was reached by the seventh interview, after which two additional interviews were carried out. The interviews were conducted via Teams, recorded, and transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Three main themes were selected for the interviews. The first theme was perceptions and understanding of passengers with hidden disabilities. The focus of this theme was on personal experiences, challenges in customer interaction, and the recognition of specific needs. The questions under this theme included

1. What kinds of experiences do you have with passengers who have hidden disabilities?
2. How does your organization currently recognize and assess the needs of this passenger group?

3. In your opinion, what are the main challenges your organization faces in supporting passengers with hidden disabilities?

Theme two was concentrating on current organizational practices, training and performance monitoring. The aim of this theme was to clarify existing support systems. Find out what kind of training for staff is available and evaluate of service delivery.

Questions where.

4. Could you share examples of successful practices or service models your organization has implemented to support this passenger group?
5. Can you describe any support systems or procedures your organization has in place for assisting passengers with hidden disabilities?
6. What mandatory training programs does your organization offer to staff?
7. How does your organization measure or monitor staff performance in relation to supporting passengers with hidden disabilities?

Theme three was concentrating on development needs and change management strategies. The focus on this theme was in improvement areas in the service journey and strategies for organizational change. Questions were as follows.

8. Which parts of the customer journey require the most improvement to ensure service standards?
9. What change management strategies (methods or approaches) would you recommend improving these areas and better meet service standards?
10. What specific strategies (e.g., communication, inclusion, training, leadership, incentives, or monitoring) or improvements would you suggest to better respond to the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities?

5 Results

The interviews were based on the assumption that the interviewees had encountered situations in which they had, in some way, interacted with a customer with a hidden disability. All of the interviewees confirmed that they had personal experience with customer service situations involving individuals with some form of hidden disability.

Question 1. What kinds of experiences do you have with passengers who have hidden disabilities?

"On vuosien varrella ollut tilanteita. Ehkä yksi tai 2 mutta kyllä niitä on ollut"

"There have been situations over the years. Maybe one or two, but yes, they have occurred."

"No aika vähän itseasiassa ja se on aika uusi asia."

"Well, actually very few, and it's quite a new thing."

"Autistisia tapauksia tässä nyt on ollut ihan tasaisesti"

"There have been autistic cases here fairly regularly."

"Niitä jotka pyytävät tätä nauhaa on."

"There are people who request this ribbon."

([Note: Assuming "this ribbon" refers to something specific like a lanyard or identifier for hidden disabilities])

"Vaatii joskus semmoista pidempää asiakaspalveluosaamista tunnistaa näitä."

"It sometimes requires more in-depth customer service skills to recognize these cases."

" On ollut sellaisia tilanteita jossa ollaan ajateltu, että asiakas on humalassa mutta sitten kun rupeaa katsomaan niin sitten ollaan monesti tultu siihen johtopäätökseen että tää saattaa olla semmoinen näkymätön vika mikä ihmisellä on."

"There have been situations where we thought the customer was intoxicated, but upon closer observation, we often came to the conclusion that it might actually be an invisible condition the person has."

"Ehkä mieleenpainuvin oli matkustaja joka näytti ihan tavalliselta matkustajalta mutta hänen laukun jäätyä jälkeen pyysin häntä kirjoittamaan osoitteensa paperille ja tätä tehdessään selvisi ettei hän Parkinsonin taudin vuoksi pysty kirjoittamaan kuin erittäin hitaasti ja hän pyysi sitä anteeksi"

"Perhaps the most memorable was a passenger who looked completely ordinary, but when their bag was left behind and I asked them to write down their address on a piece of paper, it turned out they could only write very slowly due to Parkinson's disease—and they apologized for it."

Minulla on kokemusta matkustajista jotka ovat pyytäneet vihreän auringonkukilla koristellun kaulanauhan. Meillä on sellaisia lähtöselvitystiskillä, joka on avun tarpeessa olevia matkustajia varten. Lähtöportilla tätä kaulanauhaa on myös vilautettu minulle ennen boardingin alkua ja pyydetty pre-boarding palvelua.

"I have experience with passengers who have requested the green lanyard decorated with sunflowers. We have these available at the check-in desk for passengers who require assistance. At the boarding gate, some passengers have also shown me this lanyard before boarding begins and requested pre-boarding service."

The interviewees then described how their organization currently recognizes and responds to the needs of this passenger group.

Question 2. How does your organization recognize and assess the needs of this passenger group?

"Jos asiakas haluaa itse ilmoittaa, niin meillähän on se DPNA koodi matkustajille ja niitä joskus menee toi Lassila & Tikanoja jopa vastaan."

"If the customer wants to report it themselves, we do have the DPNA code for passengers, and sometimes even Lassila & Tikanoja will respond to those." (Note: Lassila & Tikanoja is a ground service provider)

"Nythän lentoyhtiöllä on se projekti elikkä se avustettava voi pyytää tiskiltä sellaisen avainnauhan kaulaan, josta hänet sitten tunnistetaan"

"Now the airline has this project where a person needing assistance can request a lanyard at the counter, which identifies them."

"En tiedä mitä organisaatiomme tekee."

"I don't know what our organization does about this."

"Varauspuolella voidaan tästä asiasta mainita."

"This can be mentioned during the booking process."

"Meillä on tiski lähtöaulassa, jossa on kuvat tällaisille autettaville matkustajille jotka haluavat indikoida että heillä on jonkunnäköinen ongelma mikä voi liittyä siihen matkustukseen kentällä ja lentokoneessa"

"We have a counter in the departure hall with images for passengers who wish to indicate that they have some kind of issue that may affect their travel at the airport or on the plane."

"Meillä pyritään siihen, että kaikki palvelut olisivat mahdollisuuksien mukaan esteettömiä. Esteettömyys tarkoittaa sitä että pyritään siihen että palveluita pystyy käyttämään kaiken tyyppiset matkustajat"

"We aim to ensure that all services are as accessible as possible. Accessibility means striving to make services usable for all types of passengers."

"Lentokentällä on huomioitu esimerkiksi henkilöt jotka eivät siedä korkeita ääniä tai kovia kuulutuksia"

"At the airport, people who are sensitive to loud noises or announcements are also taken into account."

"Viestitään poikkeustilanteissa esim. Tekstiviesteillä kun ei kaikki pysty vaikka kuuntelemaan"

"In exceptional situations, we communicate for example via text messages, since not everyone can, for instance, listen to announcements."

Emme voi tunnistaa matkustajia näkymättömällä vammalla ellei matkustaja itse jotenkin tuo tätä esille, tai siitä on kirjattu matkustajan varaus tietoihin. Jos tätä avuntarvetta ei jotenkin tuoda aktiivisesti esille se jää huomiotta.

"We cannot identify passengers with hidden disabilities unless they actively indicate it themselves or it has been noted in their booking information. If the need for assistance is not clearly communicated, it may go unnoticed."

The final question within the first thematic area invited interviewees to identify the key challenges encountered within their organization when providing support to passengers with hidden disabilities.

Question 3. In your opinion, what are the main challenges your organization faces in supporting passengers with hidden disabilities?

"On tosi haastavaa ylipäättänsä tuunnistaa nää näkymättömät vammat."

"It's really challenging to recognize these invisible disabilities in the first place."

"Miten voidaan ottaa huomioon kun se sanakin jo kertoo että on näkymätön."

"How can they be taken into account when the word itself says they are invisible?"

"Haaste on se että nää ihmiset ei ehkä edes kerro asiaa."

"The challenge is that these individuals might not even mention it."

"Mielestäni on vaikeaa toimia tai kohdella jotakuta eri tavalla, jos ei oikeasti tiedä, mikä on vialla tai miksi."

"I think it's difficult to act and treat someone differently without knowing what is really wrong or why."

"Haaste on se, että esim.autismi on niin eri tasoinen."

"The challenge is that, for example, autism varies so greatly in how it presents."

"Jos he eivät kerro vammasta niin heitä kohdellaan kuten kaikkia muitakin."

"If they don't tell us, we treat everyone the same."

"Näkövammaiset ja kuulovammaiset ovat niinku helpompi kun se on ikäänkuin yksi vamma ja näkymättömät voi olla niin moninaisia."

"Visual and hearing impairments are somewhat easier, as they are more de-fined, whereas invisible disabilities can be so diverse."

"Ulospäin on vaikea sanoa jos henkilö ei kerro asiaa"

"It's hard to tell from the outside if the person doesn't disclose it."

"Usein he eivät halua sanoa tarvitsemastaan avusta ja me emme niitä näe ellemmme jotenkin pääse kärryille että jotain voisi olla rajoittamassa."

"Often they don't want to say what kind of help they need, and we don't notice it unless we somehow pick up on the signs that something might be limiting them."

"Jos emme tiedä, että matkustajalla on jokin vamma, kuinka voimme tarjota hänelle apua."

"If we don't know passengers have a disability, how can we give them assistance."

"Haaste on just toi tunnistaminen"

"The challenge is precisely in that recognition."

"Haaste on se, että asiaksata ei sitten tosiaan lähdetä nolaamaan"

"Another challenge is making sure the customer isn't embarrassed in the process."

"Tunnistettavuus on mun mielestä se suurin haaste"

"Recognizability, in my opinion, is the biggest challenge."

”Haasteena on että emme voi tietää minkälaista apua tai tukea matkustaja toivoisi ellei sitä ole kirjattu varaukseen tai selvästi kerrottu lähtöselvitys tilanteessa. Yleensä matkustaja joka ei halua kertoa sen enempää vammastaan tai tilanteestaan voi kuitenkin toivoa pre-boarding palvelua että saa rauhallisen asettumisen koneeseen ja voi istua alas omalle paikalleen ennen yleistä ruuhkaa ja jonottamista. Tämä antaa vähän rauhallisemman alun lentomatalle ja voi auttaa matkustaa selviytymään mahdollisesti stressaavasta lentokoneesta matkustamisesta.”

”The challenge is that we cannot know what kind of help or support a passenger might need unless it is recorded in the booking or clearly communicated at check-in. Often, a passenger who does not wish to disclose details about their disability or personal situation may still request pre-boarding in order to settle into the aircraft calmly and take their seat before the general boarding rush and queues. This can provide a more peaceful start to the flight and help the passenger cope with what may be a stressful air travel experience

Following the first theme, the interviews proceeded to the second thematic area, which focused on examining the organization's current practices and its readiness to accommodate passengers with hidden disabilities.

Question 4. Could you share examples of successful practices or service models your organization has implemented to support this passenger group?

”Nyt on se CRO (=complaint resolution officer), joka on erityinen tuki vammaisille ja liikuntarajoitteisille matkustajille. Siinä asiakkaalla on oikeus keskustella erityisesti liikuntarajoitteisiin perehtyneen yhteyshenkilön kanssa.”

”Now there is the CRO (Complaint Resolution Officer), who provides dedicated support for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility. This gives the customer the right to speak with a contact person specifically trained in mobility-related issues.”

”Finnairilla esim. antaa matkustajilleen auringonkukkanauhan kysyttäessä.”

”Finnair, for example, provides sunflower lanyards to passengers upon request.”

”Esimerkiksi just se auringonkukkanauha.”

”For example, the sunflower lanyard.”

"Just yksi perhe portilla, heillä oli semmoinen nuori joka selvästi oli aurinkokukkanauhan tarpeessa niin miehistö pystyy sitten ottamaan huomioon"

"There was a family at the gate, and they had a young person who clearly needed the sunflower lanyard—so the crew was then able to take that into account."

"No esimerkiksi viestintä poikkeustilanteissa että viestitään ei vaan pelkillä kuulutuksilla vaan viesteillä ja sähköpostilla."

"For example, in exceptional situations, communication is not only through announcements, but also via text messages and emails."

Mielestäni juuri tämä aurinkokukka nauha on käytäntö joka kertoo henkilökunnalle kentällä ja cabinissä että tällä henkilöllä saattaa olla jokin erityinen tilanne tai tarve. Jos tämän matkustajan käyttäytyminen tuntuu jotenkin oudolta tai poikkeavalta siihen löytyy heti paljon enemmän ymmärrystä ja kärsivällisyyttä kohdatessa tämä matkustaja.

"In my opinion, the sunflower lanyard is a practice that signals to both ground staff and cabin crew that this person may have a special situation or need. If the passenger's behavior seems unusual or out of the ordinary, the lanyard helps staff respond with greater understanding and patience when interacting with them."

5. Can you describe any support systems or procedures your organization has in place for assisting passengers with hidden disabilities?

"Meillä ei tietääkseni ole."

"I do not think we have any."

Auringonkukka nauhan vilauttaminen portilla. Silloin ground crew pystyy kommunikoimaan cabin henkilökunnalle jo ennen koneeseen nousun alkua alkua että preboardataan tämä henkilö ja crew koneessa voi ottaa tämän matkustajan vastaan ja vaihtaa muutama sana ja kysyä toivooko hän jotain erityistä lennon aikana missä crew voisi häntä auttaa. Häntä voidaan hieman huomioida.

“When a passenger discreetly shows the sunflower lanyard at the gate, it allows the ground crew to inform the cabin crew in advance, before boarding begins, that this passenger will be pre-boarded. The crew on board can then welcome the passenger personally, exchange a few words, and ask if there is anything specific, they might need assistance with during the flight. This allows the crew to give the passenger a bit of extra attention and support.”

“Meille on kerrottu että auringonkukkanauhat voi noittaa palvelutiskiltä mutta kukaan ei ole kertonut mitä se nauha tarkoittaa.”

““We’re told that sunflower lanyards may be collected from a service desk but what does the lanyard mean?”

“Kaulanauhat vain ilmestyivät, ja meille kerrottiin, että ne on tarkoitettu henkilöille, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja – mutta tiedotus ja niiden käyttö on epäselvää.”

“The lanyards just appeared, and we were told they are meant for people with invisible disabilities — but the communication and their use are unclear.”

6. What mandatory training programs does your organization offer to staff?

”Meillä ei ole”

“We don’t have any.”

”No oikeastaan ei ole”

“Well, actually, no, we don’t.”

”Varsinaista koulutusta ei ole lainkaan”

“There is no formal training at all.”

"Käymme kahden vuoden välein pakollisen PRM (=passenger with reduced mobility) verkkokurssin josta saamme valmiuksia"

"Every two years, we complete a mandatory online PRM (Passenger with Reduced Mobility) course, which gives us some preparedness."

"Ne liittyy osana siihen, kun me koulutetaan peruskoulutuksessa ja gate koulutuksessa avustettavia matkustajia niin me käydään läpi myös nää näkymättömät"

"It's part of our basic and gate training on assisting passengers, where we also go through the topic of invisible disabilities."

"Näkymättömille ei ole omaa koulutusta"

"There is no dedicated training specifically for invisible disabilities."

"En ole muistaakseni saanut mitään erikoista koulutusta. Aiheesta saattaa olla olemassa jokin verkkokurssi mutta en ole tästä varma."

"As far as I remember, I haven't received any specific training on the topic. There might be an online course available, but I'm not sure about that."

7. How does your organization measure or monitor staff performance in relation to supporting passengers with hidden disabilities?

"On varmaan jotain mittareita olemassa."

"There are probably some indicators in place."

"Ehkä koneessa ja miehistön puolella on mittareita, meille aika uusi asia."

"Maybe there are indicators on the aircraft and crew side—it's still quite a new thing for us."

"Meidän osastolla ei ole mittareita."

"In our department, there are no indicators."

"Asiakaspalautteiden kautta mitataan."

"It's measured through customer feedback."

"Ihan samalla tavalla kuin muut tehtävät jotka työhön kuuluu. Voi olla performance review mutta tätä tilannetta varten ei ole omaa erillistä seurantaa henkilöstön suoriutumisesta."

"It's handled just like any other task that is part of the job. There may be a performance review, but there is no separate follow-up specifically for how staff perform in these situations."

"Asiakaskokemus on tärkein mittari. Tarvitsemme enemmän tietoa jotta tiedämme kuinka hyvin suoriudumme ja missä voimme parantaa."

"Customer experience is the main indicator—we need more data to see how well we're doing and where to improve."

8. Which parts of the customer journey require the most improvement to ensure service standards?

"Kyllä pitäisi enemmän promota."

"There really should be more promotion."

"Asiakkaan pitäisi itse olla aktiivinen siinä tiedottamisessa."

"The customer should take an active role in communicating their needs."

"Tunnistettavuus se on nyt se haaste ja sitä pitäisi jotenkin kehittää."

"Recognizability is the current challenge, and it's something that should be developed."

”Sitä koko polkua pitäisi kehittää siitä kun se asiakas varaa sen lentolipun.”

”The entire journey should be improved, starting from when the customer books their flight.”

”Ihan joka puolella tätä palveluketjua. Kun ihminen tulee lähtöaulaan niin siellä pitäisi olla hyvinkin merkitty paikka johon hän voi tulla sitten ilmoittautumaan.”

”At every point in the service chain. When a person arrives at the departure hall, there should be a clearly marked place where they can check in or report their needs.”

”Yhteistyö Finavian kanssa.”

”Collaboration with Finavia.”

”Yhteistyö turvatarkastuksen kanssa. Turvatarkastus voi olla usein sellainen vaikea näille henkilöille.”

”Collaboration with security control. Security checks can often be difficult for these individuals.”

”Yhteyistyö Finavian ja turvan kanssa on tärkeää. Turvatarkastus voi olla hankalaa tällaisille matkustajille.”

”Collaboration with Finavia and security is crucial because security checks can be difficult for these individuals.

”Erytishuomiota pitäisi järjestää porttialueella”

”Special attention should be arranged in the gate area.”

”Etenkin koneeseenmeno voi olla sellainen paikka missä saattaa näkyä tällaiset.”

”Boarding the aircraft is especially a point where these things can become apparent.”

”Henkilöstön tiedottaminen että ihmisellä on tällaisia erilaisia vammoja jotka ei ulospäin näy niin sen tietämyksen levittäminen on tärkeää.”

”Informing staff that people may have various invisible disabilities—spreading this awareness is important.”

"Ehkä tiedotus että meillä on olemassa tällainen lähtöselvitystiski joka on olemassa erillistä avustusta tarvitseville matkustajille."

"Perhaps some communication to raise awareness that we have a dedicated check-in desk available for passengers who require special assistance."

9. What change management strategies (methods or approaches) would you recommend improving these areas and better meet service standards?

"Kyllä mä sanoisin että tällainen koulutus pitäisi järjestää kaikille meidän työntekijöille että miten kohdellaan ja mitä vinkkejä ja työkaluja siihen miten tunnistaa."

"I would say that this kind of training should be provided to all of our employees how to treat people and what tips and tools help in recognizing these cases."

"Mä laajentaisin koulutuksen kaikille työntekijöille elikkä en vaan pelkästään suorassa asiakaspalvelukontaktissa vaan koko organisaatiolle lisäisin tällaisen"

"I would extend the training to all employees, not just those in direct customer service, but across the entire organization."

"Mitä johtajuuteen tulee niin tiedon levittämistä henkilökunnalle ja tämän asian esille nostamista eri foorumeissa.

"When it comes to leadership, it's about spreading information to staff and bringing this topic up in different forums."

"Opastusta siitä minkälaisia asioita pitää ottaa huomioon ja tiedon levittämistä siitä minkälaisia vammoja ihmisillä ylipäätään on."

"Guidance on what kinds of things need to be taken into account and spreading knowledge about the types of disabilities people may have."

"Se, että tietoisuutta lisätään ja yhteistyötä eri toimijoiden kanssa. Just luin että Finnavian infossa joku oli käynyt pyytämässä sitä nauhaa niin sitten ei saanut sitä kun siitä ei tiedetty."

"Raising awareness and improving collaboration between different actors. I just read that someone had gone to Finavia's info desk to ask for the lanyard but didn't get it because the staff didn't know about it."

”Koulutuksen lisääminen ja tietopaketin kokoaminen.”

”More training and the creation of an information package.”

”Kyllä sitä meidänkin tietämystä voisi nostaa vaikka viikkopalaverissa niin sehän lisääisi sitä tunnettuutta ja sitä miten tunnistat.”

”Even raising awareness in something like our weekly team meetings would increase recognition and understanding.”

”Ne nauhat on vaan ilmestyneet ja on kerrottu et ne on tarkoitettu näille kenellä on näkymättömiä vammoja et annetaan jos joku pyytää.”

”The lanyards just appeared, and we were told they’re meant for people with invisible disabilities—that we give them out if someone asks.”

”En osaa sanoa”

”I cannot say”

”Kyllä se pitäisi lähteä tietoisuuden lisäämisestä ja tämän asian nostamisesta esiin eri foorumeissa. Johtamisessa pitäisi ottaa tämä huomioon.”

”It’s about spreading information to staff and bringing this topic up in different forums. Leadership needs to prioritize this”

10. What specific strategies (e.g., communication, inclusion, training, leadership, incentives, or monitoring) or improvements would you suggest to better respond to the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities?

”Mittarina on asiakaskokemus niin mitataan miten me suoriudutaan ja pystytään erilaisia asiakkaita palvelemaan. Erilaisia palkitsemisjärjestelmiä ei varsinaisesti ole kuin että me tähdätään siihen asiakkaan kokemukseen.”

”The main indicator is customer experience—so we measure how well we perform and how we’re able to serve different types of customers. There aren’t really any specific reward systems, except that we aim to improve customer experience.”

"En osaa muuta sanoa kun että saataisiin henkilökunnalle mahdollisimman paljon tietoa tästäkin asiasta kommunikoimalla."

"I can't say much else except that we should provide staff with as much information as possible on this topic through communication."

"Nostaisin tätä asiaa esille vähän enemmän."

"I would highlight this issue a bit more."

"Se olisi sellaista muutosten hallintaa että tähän asiaan laitettaisiin vähän enemmän paukkuja."

"It would be a matter of change management—putting a bit more effort into this area."

"Tietoisuuden lisääminen, koulutuksen lisääminen, asian nostaminen esiin viikkopalavereissa"

"Raising awareness, increasing training, and bringing up the topic in weekly meetings."

"Kiittäminen hyvästä asiakaspalvelusta että kannustetaan sillä niitä työntekijöitä. Se pitäisi olla sellainen perus standardi ja koulutuksessa mukana."

"Thanking employees for good customer service—encouraging them that way. That should be a basic standard and included in training."

"Tietoa saatavista avustuspalveluluista voisi olla enemmän saatavilla eivätkä ne jotka niitä tarvitsevat tuntisi että vaivaavat ketään tarpeillaan."

"There should be more information about available assistance services, so that those who need them wouldn't feel like they're being a burden."

"Ehkä koulutus ja esimerkkejä minkälaisista vaivoista voi olla kyse mitkä eivät näy ulkopuolelle."

"Perhaps some training and examples of the kinds of conditions that may not be visible from the outside."

5.1 Analysing the results

The analysis was conducted using Sancak's (2018; 2025) analysis model, which enables systematic organization of the data and identification of key themes (Sancak 2025).

Staff is facing challenge in recognizing and understanding passengers with hidden disabilities. Unlike visible disabilities, these conditions are not immediately apparent, which creates a fundamental barrier to identifying who needs assistance and what kind of support to provide. The invisibility of these disabilities leads to uncertainty and discomfort among staff, who often worry about misinterpreting behaviours or offending passengers by making incorrect assumptions.

Many participants expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to identify hidden disabilities or to know how best to adapt their service to meet individual needs. Without clear prior indicators, staff are left navigating between treating all passengers equally and recognizing the need for individualized support.

Staff are expected to deliver personalized assistance, yet they often lack sufficient information to do so effectively. Visibility, whether it is done by through disclosure, communication, or visual cues such as the Sunflower lanyard, is essential for enabling staff to respond appropriately. However, there remains an ongoing debate about where the responsibility lies. Should service providers take the lead in identifying hidden disabilities, or does it fall on passengers.

Theme 1: "Hard to Help What You Cannot See" — Invisibility and Challenges of Recognition

A consistent thread across all interviews was the difficulty for staff to recognize and understand hidden disabilities. This invisibility presents a barrier to providing appropriate support. Participants expressed both uncertainty and discomfort in interpreting behaviours that may be linked to disability, often fearing they might make incorrect assumptions or offend.

One interviewee said:

"I think it's difficult to act and treat someone differently without knowing what is really wrong or why."

Person lacked confidence in identifying what is wrong or why and how to adapt their service accordingly. This lack of clarity led to hesitancy in offering help.

Another interviewee noted:

"If we don't know passengers have a disability, how can we give them assistance?"

Participants also reflected on their discomfort in approaching passengers when their disability is not disclosed. The fear of making mistakes or offending a customer leads to not giving the support needed.

Moreover, staff emphasized that without proactive disclosures such as notification at booking, passengers with hidden disabilities often remain unnoticed.

"If they don't tell us, we treat everyone the same"

Threatening everyone the same might cause problems. This tension between standardization and individualization was particularly striking. While staff valued fairness and equal treatment, they also recognized that true equity often means adjusting to specific needs. However, doing so required visibility, either through tools like the Sunflower lanyard or through personal disclosure and this was not always present. This leads to paradox. Staff are often expected to offer individualized service without sufficient information. This theme highlights the challenge of recognizing hidden disabilities in operational context. Visibility needs to be enhanced, but it is unclear whether this should be the service provider's duty or if the burden is shifted onto the customer.

Theme 2: "We're Not Trained for This" — Lack of Knowledge and Emotional Preparedness

A second key theme emerging from the interviews was the feeling among staff that they are unprepared, in terms of knowledge, to support passengers with hidden disabilities. While most participants expressed a willingness to help, they also acknowledged feeling underqualified.

A recurrent issue was the absence of in-depth training about hidden disabilities. While some participants had received brief overviews during onboarding or yearly updates, these were often described as superficial and lacking in practical guidance.

"We had a short section in our training that mentioned hidden disabilities when we talked about visible disabilities, but it was very general"

Staff described that there is a lack of structured training or clear protocols. This led to a lack of consistency in how passengers with hidden disabilities were treated, which further worsened the feeling of uncertainty.

"Sometimes you just try to be calm, but if someone is having a meltdown, it's really hard to know how to act right. Person might have a fear of flying, autism or just a bad day."

Few interviewees described moments of stress or helplessness when interacting with passengers with autism, especially if those passengers became distressed.

"When a person screamed and refused to enter the plane, I didn't know what to do. Other passengers were watching, and I felt like I do not have tools for this situation. Co-traveler's tried to verbally communicate the situation, but the person got more upset."

The emotional impact of these situations on staff is often overlooked in public discourse. As front-line representatives, they are expected to remain composed and helpful under pressure, but many feel unequipped to manage complex or emotionally charged situations related to disability.

The gap in knowledge also contributes to a broader structural issue. Staff often felt that the responsibility for understanding and accommodating passengers with hidden disabilities was placed on them personally, rather than being supported by the organization.

"I feel like we're expected to just know, or guess. But these situations are so rare."

In summary, this theme highlights the urgent need for more comprehensive, scenario-based training that equips staff not just with technical knowledge but also emotional tools for responding to sensitive and complex situations. Doing so would not only improve passenger experience but also enhance staff confidence.

Theme 3: “It Helps When We Know” — The Power of Awareness and Communication

This theme centres on how the quality of interactions between staff and passengers with hidden disabilities is significantly shaped by communication, especially when staff are made aware of a passenger’s needs in advance. Many interview participants noted that uncertainty about who has a hidden disability often prevents them from offering appropriate help.

“If I know someone has a disability, I can adjust how I approach them.”

This comment reflects a structural dilemma in supporting passengers with hidden disabilities: their invisibility. Unlike physical disabilities that may be more immediately identifiable, hidden disabilities rely on either disclosure or visible signals such as notification at booking or a lanyard or a card.

The lanyard, however, was seen as both helpful and problematic. While it provided a useful signal, staff were often unsure of its exact meaning.

“We’re told that sunflower lanyards may be collected from a service desk but what does the lanyard mean?”

These examples suggest that communication can create more positive and effective interactions. But there is a delicate balance between respecting passengers’ privacy and creating environments that invite disclosure in a safe, non-stigmatizing way.

Participants also noted that advance communication is extremely helpful, if passengers notified the airline when booking or through special assistance desk.

Ultimately, the presence or absence of communication shaped the quality of the experience, not only for the passenger but also for the staff. When they knew, they could act. When they didn't, they were often reactive and hesitant.

This theme highlights that visibility is not only about making disabilities seen, but also about enabling honest, supported communication between passengers and staff. Empowering both sides with information and safe ways to share it can bridge the current gaps in service.

Theme 5: "A Work in Progress" — Continuous Development Needed

The final theme reflects a shared recognition among interviewees that while progress has been made in supporting passengers with hidden disabilities, significant work remains to enhance service quality and organizational readiness.

Many participants acknowledged existing initiatives such as the introduction of sunflower lanyards and improved communication methods during disruptions but emphasized that these are only initial steps.

"The lanyards just appeared, and we were told they're meant for people with invisible disabilities—but the awareness and consistent use still need improvement."

There was a clear call for more comprehensive and ongoing staff training that extends beyond frontline employees to include all personnel involved in the passenger journey.

“I would extend the training to all employees—not just those in direct customer service, but across the entire organization.”

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of leadership commitment and structured change management to embed awareness and responsiveness into organizational culture.

“It’s about spreading information to staff and bringing this topic up in different forums. Leadership needs to prioritize this.”

Participants expressed the need for better collaboration among different stakeholders such as airlines, airport authorities, ground handlers, and security. A seamless support system should be created.

“Collaboration with Finavia and security is crucial because security checks can be difficult for these individuals.”

Furthermore, monitoring and evaluating support practices through customer feedback and staff performance indicators were identified as essential for continuous improvement.

“Customer experience is the main indicator. We need more data to see how well we’re doing and where to improve.”

Overall, this theme underscores that fostering accessibility and inclusion for passengers with hidden disabilities requires sustained effort, organizational learning, and adaptive change processes.

Based on the interview data, it became evident that customer service processes should be approached and developed as an integrated whole. Responses to questions within both the first and

second thematic areas emphasized the need for improved recognition of hidden disabilities, enhanced staff training, increased awareness, and clearer service processes. These elements were seen as essential for better supporting passengers with hidden disabilities.

Interviewees highlighted that the passenger journey should be designed to be as clear and accessible as possible from the very beginning, starting from the booking phase. There should be a straightforward method for passengers to indicate their special needs, and this information should be transferred seamlessly across all touchpoints of the service chain from booking and check-in to security screening, the boarding gate, and onto the aircraft itself. One concrete suggestion was the implementation of a clearly marked, recognizable meeting point in the departure hall, where passengers could proactively seek assistance for any type of special need. This needs to be highlighted and designed so that everyone could identify themselves into this group, not only wheelchair or blind passengers whose disability is often visible.

A recurring theme in the responses was the difficulty in identifying hidden disabilities. Staff members often lack the training and awareness necessary to recognize and respond appropriately to passengers with such conditions. For example, visual identifiers like the sunflower lanyard—used internationally to signal that a passenger has a hidden disability—may go unnoticed or be misunderstood by personnel who have not received adequate instruction on its purpose. Furthermore, interviewees emphasized that this knowledge should extend beyond frontline customer service roles. Individuals working in indirect or supporting positions should also be trained and informed.

The need for multichannel communication was also strongly emphasized. Especially in complex or highly stressful environments like airports, communication should not rely solely on public address systems. Complementary channels such as text message notifications and email updates were considered vital to ensuring passengers with cognitive, sensory, or psychological impairments receive information in a timely and comprehensible manner.

Finally, the need for tailored and well-defined procedures at key pressure points, such as security screening and gate areas, was underscored. These procedures should be thoughtfully designed to

reduce confusion and anxiety and ensure that staff can confidently and compassionately support passengers with hidden disabilities throughout their journey.

6 Discussion

The responses highlight the need to improve services for passengers with hidden disabilities. Introduction of the EU accessibility Act creates pressure to grow awareness. This would help also ageing population, not only passengers with hidden disabilities. According to Stenvall & Virtanen (2007) there needs to be pressure for change and these answers clearly shows that pressure exists. (Stenvall & Virtanen 2007, 21.)

Staff acknowledge the importance of accessible service, but the situation today lacks consistently communicated vision. What inclusion looks like in practice seems to be unclearly communicated and there is risk for unfocused efforts. According to Kotter (1996), a clear vision must be actively communicated across the organization. According to answers this is not fully realized here.

Interviewees repeatedly mentioned that training should be extended to whole organization, not just frontline staff. This indicates insufficient capacity. If staff don't have enough skills, knowledge, or support, change efforts can lead to frustration and anxiety, as Stenvall & Virtanen (2007) explain. Kotter (1996) also highlights the need to support people and remove barriers so they can take part in the change. (Kotter 1996; Stenvall & Virtanen 2007.)

The idea of integrating awareness topics into weekly meetings, information packages, and promoting staff recognition for inclusive behaviour are all concrete, feasible actions. However, these remain informal and uncoordinated. For change to succeed, these initiatives need to be structured as part of a larger change program, with clear roles, timelines, and leadership support.

Without anchoring the change into organizational culture, efforts may appear temporary. Kotter warns about risks when victories are celebrated too soon without long-term reinforcement. Effective change requires leadership and that inclusive practices are embedded in organizational routines.

Interviews showed that staff were unaware of the Sunflower lanyard initiative. This shows gaps in communication. Kotter's model underlines the role of repeated communication, two-way feedback and multi-channel information.

Sancak (2025) and Stouten et al. (2018) say that making operations more socially sustainable requires strong leadership and clear structure. Right now, there's no formal system to track or

measure progress. Adding accessibility to official policies and ESG practices would help keep it a priority and support long-term results.

Based on the responses, it is evident that the need for change is recognized, but a strategically guided and structural transformation is still lacking. Customer service processes should be developed holistically, with particular emphasis on awareness of hidden disabilities, staff training, communication, and clarity of processes.

From the point of booking, the customer journey should offer a clear path for indicating special needs, and this information should be accessible throughout the service chain. At the time of booking information should be easily available and booking systems should recognize hidden disability as important disability as more commonly known visual disabilities.

At departure halls, there should be a clearly marked assistance point where any passenger can communicate their special assistance needs. A central challenge appears to be the recognition of hidden disabilities; due to a lack of awareness and training, personnel often do not identify them. Visual identifiers, such as the sunflower lanyard, are not meaningful unless staff have been properly informed. Moreover, employees in indirect customer roles should also be included in awareness efforts.

Multichannel communication should be strengthened for both normal and exceptional situations, with SMS and email serving as important tools alongside announcements. Additionally, specific procedures should be developed for passengers with special needs in security control and gate areas.

To address these challenges more systematically, three key areas for development emerge. First would be strategic alignment and awareness leadership—appointing a responsible coordinator or team for accessibility and inclusion, embedding these themes in internal communications, and integrating them into customer experience strategy.

Secondly reforming training structures by providing onboarding and continuous learning opportunities for all employees, not just frontline staff, supported by practical materials and examples.

Thirdly establishing recognition and incentive mechanisms by developing performance metrics, highlighting exemplary service internally, and considering customer feedback as part of the evaluation process. Together, these actions would lay the foundation for a more inclusive and systematically managed customer service experience for passengers with hidden disabilities.

7 Conclusions

This chapter provides analysis of the research findings. I present responses to the questions outlined in the study's objective. The objective of this study is to explore, from the perspective of social sustainability, how the customer journey path should be developed to meet today's standards and needs of passengers with hidden disabilities. The second objective of this study is to address how the organizational change management should be approached in relation to this issue.

In this chapter, I examine the research findings. I present responses to the questions outlined in the study's objective: how the customer service journey should be improved from the perspective of passengers with hidden disabilities, and what staff need from leadership in order to better recognize, assist and serve this customer group effectively.

The results are examined in relation to the theoretical framework presented earlier in the study. Furthermore, an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the research methods is conducted, alongside a thorough consideration of the ethical aspects relevant to the study. By reflecting on how the empirical data aligns or diverges from existing theory, this chapter offers insightful interpretations and draws informed conclusions.

This chapter includes a personal reflection on the learning process experienced throughout the research journey. Finally, based on the findings recommendations for future research directions are proposed.

7.1 Methodology and assessment of the applied methods

I chose thematic interviews as my method in order to obtain somewhat deeper insights from the out-set, compared to using a quantitative survey. Other possible interview formats would have included group interviews and in-depth interviews. I considered organizing a group interview in which the participants could have represented hidden disability passengers as well as personnel from check-in, security control, gate services, and cabin crew. Unfortunately, this was not feasible, as

both the air-port operator and the airline required that I be employed by them in order to conduct such an interview.

While individual interviews were selected for this study, a group interview could have offered extra value. Group interview situation could stimulate discussion and bring out differing viewpoints as participants build on or challenge each other's perspectives. Additionally, a group interview could have encouraged collaborative problem solving, allowing participants from different roles or organizations to exchange ideas and best practices in real time. However, given the sensitivity of the topic, the individual interview was chosen for gathering deep, honest, and nuanced insights.

The topic of hidden disabilities is sensitive, sometimes under recognized and in a group setting, participants may feel constrained in sharing critical insights, especially if colleagues are present.

Coordinating a group interview across various companies would have presented both time and logistical challenges and could have limited participation. Organizational policies or confidentiality concerns might have restricted open discussion. The goal of the research was to gain in-depth insights into how hidden disabilities are recognized and supported within specific airline processes. This type of detailed exploration is better suited to one-on-one thematic interviews, which allow for a more focused, personalized, and flexible dialogue.

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008), the research problem determines which method is appropriate in each case (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 27). In this study, thematic interviewing suited the research problem well. In addition, interviews are a flexible method. It was easy to ask follow-up questions as needed, which led to some surprising and valuable insights. In a thematic interview, it was also easy to change the order of topics depending on what the interviewee was most interested in discussing and where the conversation naturally led within the theme.

7.3 Self-assessment of my own learning process

The initial inspiration for this thesis arises from my personal experience of traveling with a child who has both ADHD and autism. It was only through my studies in sustainable aviation that I came to understand that responsibility in aviation is not limited to topics such as sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), electric or hydrogen-powered flight. Rather, social responsibility is a highly relevant and important dimension as well. Motivated by this realization, I decided to combine these two aspects and examine responsibility specifically from the perspective of a passenger with hidden disabilities.

One of the key considerations in conducting this research was the fact that I was not affiliated with any airport operator, airline, ground handling company, or security service provider at the time. Still, I was able to secure interview participants with relative ease. Insights of the thematic interview were highly valuable. The interviews not only revealed important gaps in current service processes but also underscored the significance and timeliness of this study.

While I was unable to organize a group interview involving representatives from all relevant stakeholders, including passengers with hidden disabilities, such an approach remains a promising avenue for future research. Despite these limitations, thematic saturation was achieved within the group of interviewees, as recurring patterns and perspectives indicated that a sufficient depth of understanding had been reached. However, the representation of certain airport stakeholders was limited due to practical constraints. The findings provide valuable insights into the topic and contribute meaningfully to the field. However, they should be interpreted with caution, as not all relevant stakeholder perspectives were represented in the study.

7.4 Conclusions and recommendations for future research

A broader study such as a multi-stakeholder perspective on the service chain could examine the entire travel service journey from the time of booking to arrival through the perspective of different actors such as airlines, airport operators, security providers and ground handling companies.

Another study could concentrate on experiences of passengers with hidden disabilities. This study could be a qualitative study focusing on passengers with hidden disabilities and their travel

experiences. This study would help service providers to gain deeper understanding on hidden disability passenger's needs, challenges and preferences,

One study could be an experimental study on the impact of staff training on hidden disabilities. This could be targeted e.g. for crew to investigate how targeted training helps staff's ability to identify and support hidden disability passenger's needs.

A service design project could be done also by co-creating new service concepts and communication strategies. This could involve both passengers and service provider stakeholders.

The airline industry is traditionally characterized by long-term investments, rigid structures, and complex operational systems, often planned decades in advance. This inherent inflexibility can make the sector slow to adapt to rapid changes in societal expectations, customer needs, and accessibility requirements. For this reason, effective change management processes are essential. They enable organizations to introduce necessary transformations even within structurally rigid and investment-heavy environments. Change management provides a structured approach for guiding individuals and organizations through transitions. Effective change management makes it possible to implement new practices. In the context of improving accessibility for passengers with hidden disabilities, robust change management processes can help embed new, inclusive practices into an industry that might otherwise resist or delay such change. Future research could explore how change management strategies are utilized within the airline industry, and how they might support the implementation of socially sustainable practices across the travel sector.

This thesis focused on air travel and, in particular, on how the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities are addressed within the airline industry. Future research could usefully expand this focus to include other modes of transport, such as ferry and bus companies. This would allow for a broader understanding of how the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities are considered across the entire travel and tourism sector.

A wider perspective would enable the identification and comparison of best practices across different transport providers, potentially supporting greater social sustainability and customer-oriented service development throughout the industry. Furthermore, increased collaboration between different modes of transport could lead to more coherent policies and improve the accessibility of travel chains for passengers with hidden disabilities.

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Appendix 1. Consent to participate

SUOSTUMUS HAASTATTELUUN – MASTER-TUTKIMUS

Olen Camilla Riikkala, opiskelija Haaga-Helian ammattikorkeakoulun Sustainable aviation linjalta (YAMK) , ja teen opinnäytetyötäni aiheesta "Hidden disabilities, Toimintaprosessien kehittäminen näkymättömiä vammoja omaavien matkustamisen sujuvoittamiseksi hyödyntäen muutosjohtamista ja sosiaalisen kestävyuden periaatteita". Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kehittää ymmärrystä siitä, miten matkustajia, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja, voidaan palvella voidaan palvella voimassa olevia säädöksiä ja sosiaalisen vastuullisuuden periaatteita noudattaen.

Tätä varten haastattelen asiantuntijoita, joiden näkemykset ja kokemukset ovat tärkeitä tutkimuksen sisällölle. Haastattelu kestää noin 45 minuuttia ja se toteutetaan etänä Teamsin välityksellä ajankohtana, joka sovitaan erikseen.

Haastattelu nauhoitetaan ja litteroidaan tutkimustarkoitusta varten. Kaikki annetut tiedot käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja anonymisoidaan siten, ettei yksittäistä henkilöä tai organisaatiota voi tunnistaa. Tallenteet ja litteroinnit säilytetään tutkimuksen ajan. Aineistoa käytetään ainoastaan tässä opinnäytetyössä.

Osallistuminen on täysin vapaaehtoista, ja voit keskeyttää osallistumisesi milloin tahansa ilman perusteluja.

Jos sinulla on kysyttävää tutkimuksesta, voit ottaa yhteyttä minuun:

camilla.riikkala@gmail.com tai 040 5465016 tai ohjaavaan opettajaan ivan.berazhny@haaga-helia.fi

Suostumus

Olen saanut riittävästi tietoa tutkimuksesta ja suostun osallistumaan haastatteluun. Suostumuksen voi antaa sähköisesti vastaamalla tähän sähköpostiviestiin.

Nimi: _____

Paikka ja päivämäärä: _____

Allekirjoitus: _____

Appendix 2. Consent to participate

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW – MASTER’S THESIS

My name is Camilla Riikkala, a student in the Sustainable Aviation program (Master’s level) at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. I am conducting my thesis on the topic: "Hidden disabilities – Developing operational processes to facilitate travel for passengers with invisible disabilities by utilizing change management and principles of social sustainability."

The aim of the research is to develop understanding of how passengers with hidden disabilities can be served in compliance with current regulations and principles of social responsibility.

For this purpose, I will interview experts whose views and experiences are important for the research content. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted remotely via Teams at a mutually agreed time.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. All information provided will be handled confidentially and anonymized so that no individual or organization can be identified. Recordings and transcripts will be stored for the duration of the research. The material will be used only for this thesis.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without providing any reason.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact me at:

camilla.riikkala@gmail.com or +358 40 5465016 or the supervising teacher at ivan.be-
razhny@haaga-helia.fi

Consent

I have received sufficient information about the study and agree to participate in the interview. Consent can be given electronically by replying to this email.

Name: _____

Place and date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 2. Interview questions

1. Millaisia kokemuksia teillä on matkustajista, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
2. Miten organisaationne tällä hetkellä tunnistaa ja arvioi tämän ryhmän tarpeita?
3. Mitkä ovat mielestänne keskeisimmät haasteet, joita organisaationne kohtaa tukeessaan matkustajia, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
4. Voitteko jakaa esimerkkejä onnistuneista käytännöistä tai toimintamalleista, joita organisaationne on ottanut käyttöön tämän matkustajaryhmän tukemiseksi?
5. Voitteko kuvata tukikäytännöt tai -järjestelmät, joita organisaationne on ottanut käyttöön auttaakseen matkustajia, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
6. Millaisia pakollisia koulutusohjelmia organisaationne tarjoaa henkilöstölle varmistaakseen tehokkaan tuen matkustajille, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
7. Miten organisaationne mittaa tai seuraa henkilöstön suoriutumista liittyen matkustajien tukemiseen, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
8. Mitkä asiakaspolun osa-alueet vaativat eniten kehittämistä, jotta palvelustandardeja voitaisiin paremmin noudattaa matkustajien kohdalla, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
9. Mitä muutosjohtamisen strategioita (menetelmät ja lähestymistavat) suosittelisitte näiden asiakaspolun osa-alueiden parantamiseksi ja palvelustandardien paremmaksi saavuttamiseksi matkustajien kohdalla, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja?
10. Mitä erityisiä strategioita (esim. Viestintä, osallistaminen, koulutus, johtaminen, esimerkki, palkitseminen ja kannustimet tai seuranta) tai parannuksia suosittelisitte, jotta matkustajien tarpeisiin, joilla on näkymättömiä vammoja, voitaisiin vastata paremmin?

Appendix 3. Interview questions

1. What experiences do you have regarding passengers with hidden disabilities?
2. How does your organization currently identify and assess the needs of this group?
3. What do you see as the key challenges your organization faces when supporting passengers with hidden disabilities?
4. Can you share successful examples or practices your organization has implemented to address the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities?
5. Could you describe the support practices or systems your organization has in place to assist passengers with hidden disabilities?
6. What mandatory training programs does your organization provide for staff to ensure effective support for passengers with hidden disabilities?
7. How does your organization measure or track staff performance in relation to assisting passengers with hidden disabilities?
8. Which areas of customer journey need the most improvement to meet service standards for passengers with hidden disabilities?
9. What change management strategies would you recommend improving these aspects of the customer journey and better meet service standards for passengers with hidden disabilities?"
10. What specific strategies or improvements would you recommend to better meet the needs of passengers with hidden disabilities?