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Assistive Technology Decision Tree

The Assistive Technology Decision Tree is a descriptor of the essentials of providing a technically oriented accommodation to an injured or disabled employee. The suggested accommodations are representative and illustrative. The individual situation will determine the appropriate technology for each occurrence.

Steps to Evaluate Assistive Technology Solutions

Any solution to the problems created by a physical impairment must be birthed in a proper understanding of the problem.

The essential first step is to define the problem. It is important to emphasize that the problem is not the impairment. The problem is the dis-ability the conflict between what historical way of doing the work requires and what the impairment limits. With Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, for example, the problem is not the pain in the wrists and hands, it is the inability to do prolonged manual tasks. Defining the problem in terms of factors of the job has the potential to more correctly identify the artificial barriers rooted in the circumstance or environment rather than in the person. Can the tasks be done other than manually?

Second, because the problem is defined in terms of the work, we are positioned to ask the question, can the work be modified? Assistive Technology is not the first resort. If a simple change in the work can suffice, that is preferred. If the typing is done all at once, that is a problem. Perhaps by spacing the manual components of the job out more evenly during the day, the demands on the hands do not exceed the hands tolerance to deliver.

Third, is it possible to modify the environment in which the job is done? Perhaps there is a component of stress that aggravates the injury with typing. If soundproofing could be offered, would that lower the noise, the stress, the injury?

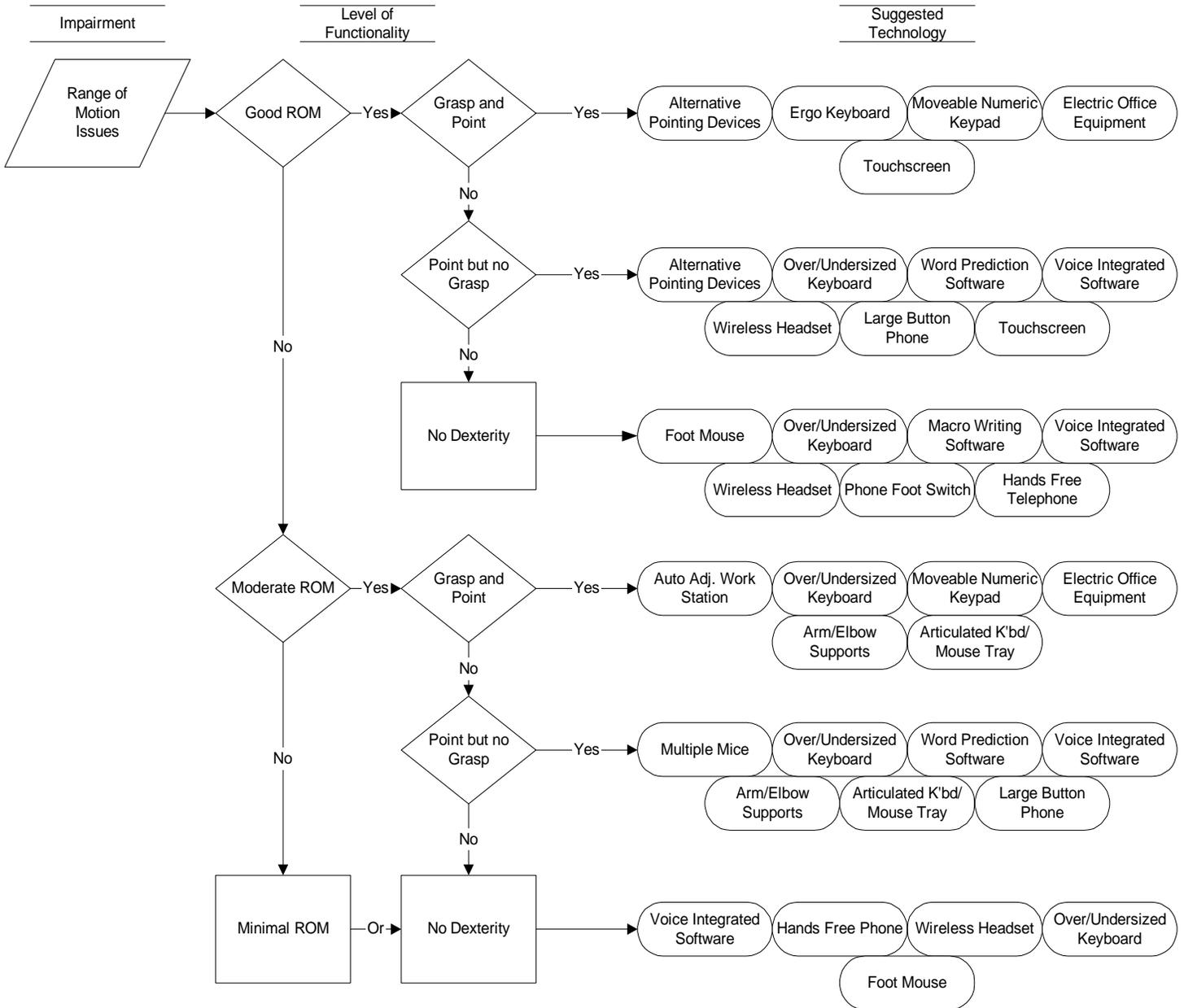
Fourth, is there some piece of hardware, software, or equipment that is currently being used in the organization that could be applied to this situation? Once it has been determined that some type of technical assistance is needed, the first place to look is within the organization. Are there existing “solutions” that are hiding around the office? For example, if handling and reading mail aggravate the pain, can the mail be scanned in to a computer to avoid manual shuffling of documents?

Fifth, is there something commercially available that will solve the problem? While an “in-house” solution will work best, if there is nothing that can be creatively used within the organization, is there a solution being offered commercially that would work?

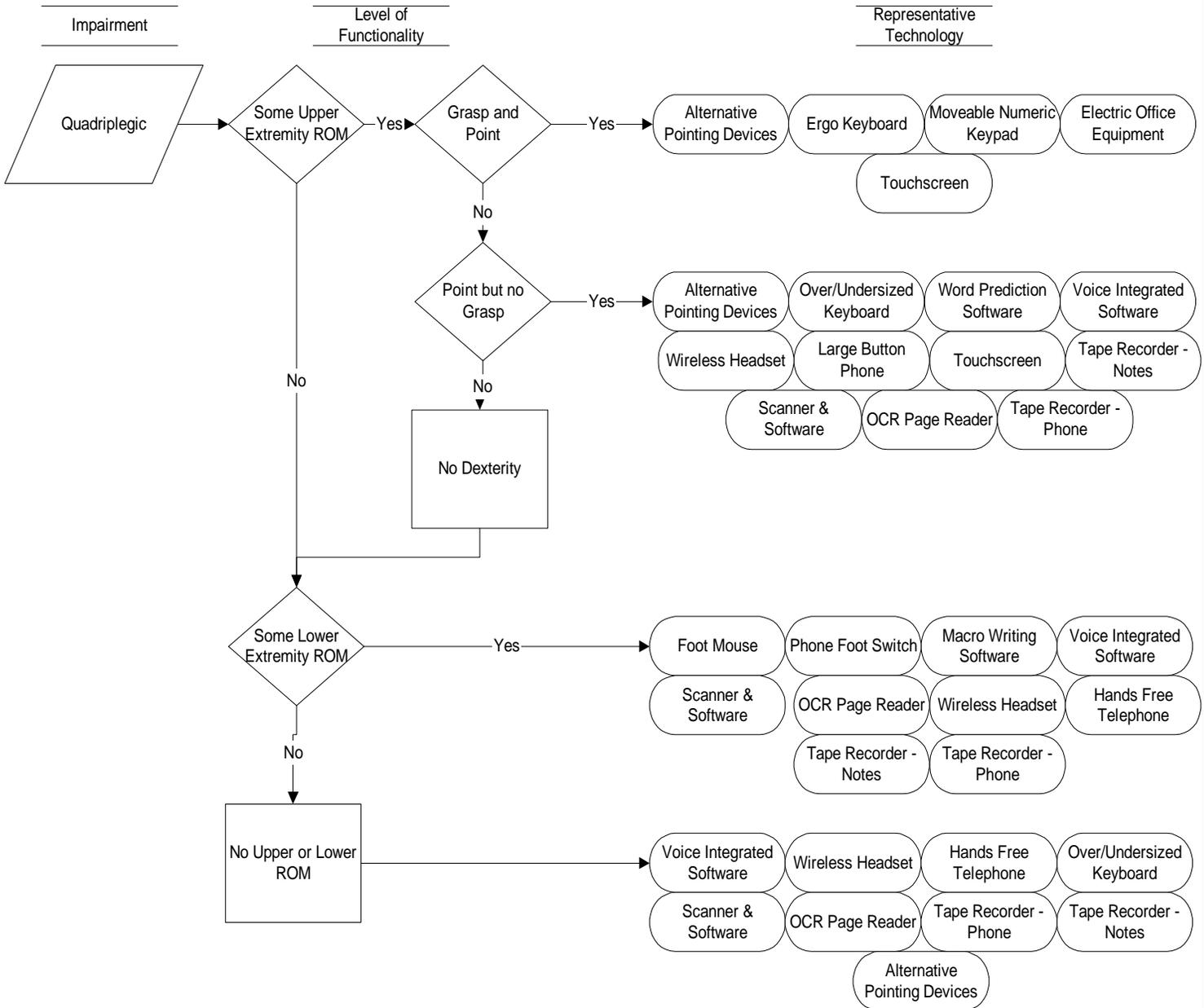
Sixth, if there is nothing in-house and nothing commercially available, can something be created or modified to solve the problem? Frequently, local and even national vendors are looking for ideas for new products and services. Often they are willing to partner with an organization to help solve their accommodation needs if the potential is their to develop a product that may have wider application.

Once all of these alternatives are exhausted, it is time to consider placing the employee in another position.

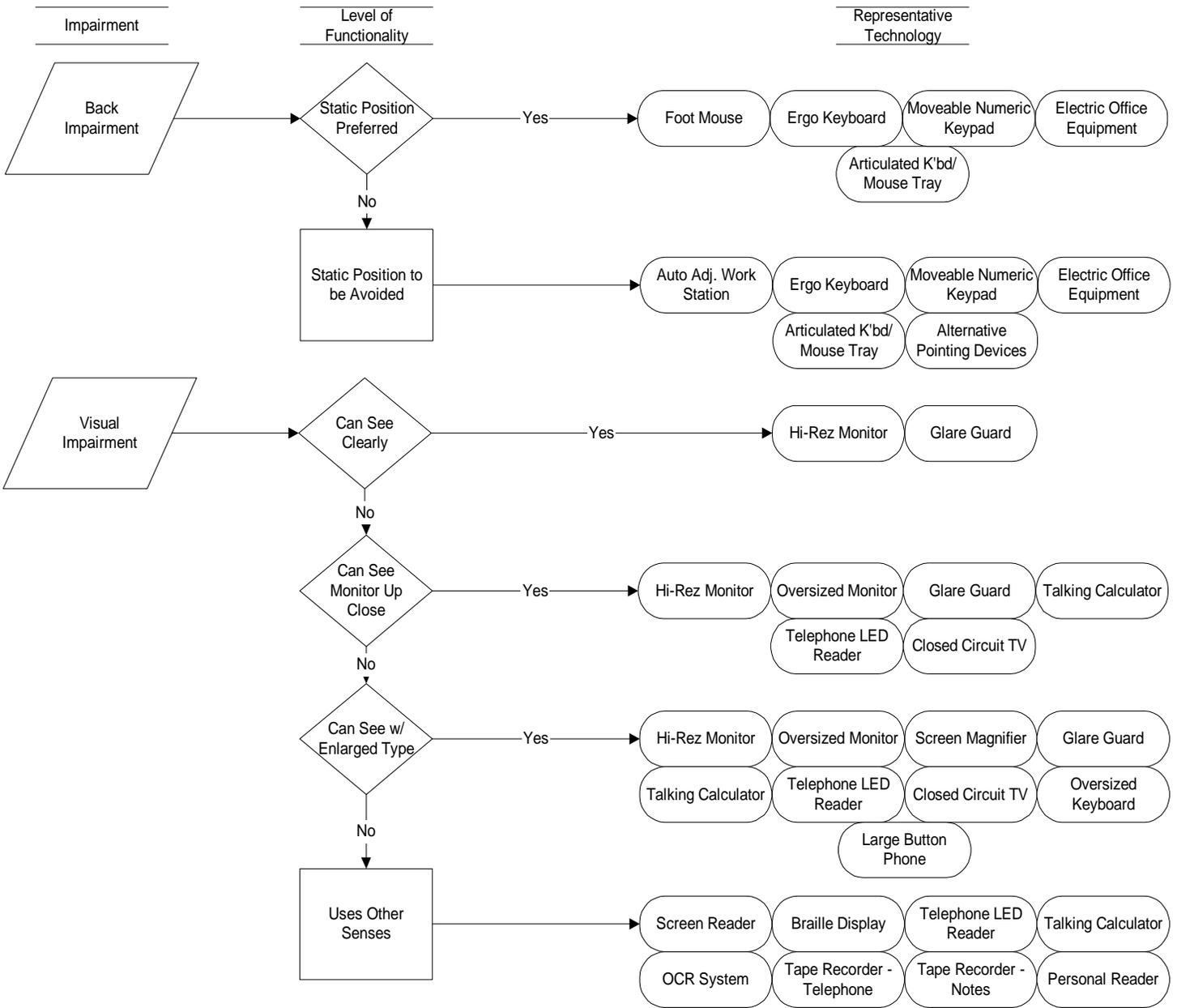
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