Constructing an inclusive environment: the working experience of disabled employees in the context of an institute of higher education in the Netherlands

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1. Introduction

"It was no dream" (Kafka, 2012, p.5)

Gregor Samsa wakes up one day to realize that he has transformed into a giant bug. It turns out he is not dreaming and it does not take long before his family and a procurator of his work want to know what is going on with him. When they beheld him in his condition their behavior toward him changes. Because of how others perceive him, he also adjusts his own self-image, preferring to cover himself completely and not to show himself. He loses his job and his family locks him in his room and takes care of him at the minimum. His family no longer considers him a person, they can only see him for the creature he has turned into (Kafka, 2012).

This is the story of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis', a story in which themes of alienation and othering can be recognized (Minar & Sutandio, 2017; Powell, 2008). Through this, Kafka´s work can be seen as a reflection on issues that are still present in society today. Zooming in on the workplace, diversity has been a theme since the 1980's (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop & Nkomo, 2010) and a lot of research has been conducted into diversity practices at work (Jammaers, 2023). Diversity management has become increasingly interesting for organizations, with the economic benefit of a diverse workforce as the main focus (Köllen, 2021). While these developments have resulted in more representation of minority groups in the organization, certain groups still experience a state of alienation from the organization. There are six dimensions of diversity that can be considered the main sources of discrimination and disadvantage within the organization following Kirton & Greene (2022). One of these dimensions is disability, the focus of this research. Disabled people often still end up in low-skilled, low-status jobs (Kirton & Greene, 2022). This topic has not received as much attention in research and organizational processes as gender, class and race (Acker, 2006).

In recent studies, ableism has been explored as a lens to look at how disabled people are marginalized in the workplace (Corlett & Williams, 2011; Williams and Mavin, 2012). Ableism refers to the "ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume able-bodiedness' (Williams and Mavin, 2012: p. 171) or to non-disability as a normative organizing principle against which all are assessed (Campbell, 2009; Wendell, 1996), generating a collective understanding of disability as a diminished state of being human (Campbell, 2008). Ableism thus affirms the belief that any form of impairment is negative and, whenever possible, must be resolved, either by being cured or excluded" (Campbell, 2008).

An ableist point of view can result in the exclusion of disabled employees. Within diversity management employees are often compared to the image of the 'ideal worker',

positioning the white, heterosexual, middle or upper class, western, able-bodied man as the norm to which all are compared (Zanoni et al., 2010). By setting one group as the norm, anyone who does not meet the standards of this norm is automatically positioned as the 'other', doing this is called 'othering' (Zanoni et al., 2010; Mik-Meyer, 2016).

Disabled employees are often discursively constructed for things they are unable to do. This characterizes the social identity assigned to them (Davis, 2003; Shakespeare, 2006). In contrast, regarding their jobs they are hired for what they are able to do, making their discursive position in the workplace contradictory (Jammaers et al., 2016). Therefore it is important to gain insight into how the construction of this social identity and the expectations from their workplace influences the work experience of disabled employees (Jammaers et al., 2016). This research is scientifically relevant since it will expand the literature on the work experience of disabled employees on an individual level. Not a lot of research has been conducted on how the individual, disabled employee positions themselves within these disabling workplace discourses (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021). This research will add to the literature by filling this gap.

The aim of this research is to understand the working experiences of disabled employees and how they construct disability. The corresponding research question is: how do disabled employees experience in/exclusion at their job and how do they construct disability?

This research will explore how disabled employees experience working in an organization given their discursive position in the workplace and how they construct disability in this context. This research of disability in organizations will be conducted in the context of higher education in the Netherlands. A single case study will be conducted at an institute of higher education, interviewing disabled employees from several departments within the organization. Using a single case study will provide in-depth information on the personal experience of disabled employees.

This research is relevant for society since it will create awareness in organizations with regards to the prevailing discourses on disability and the experience of disabled employees. This can aid organizations in adjusting their disability/diversity policies to stimulate inclusion within the organization. An inclusive environment can result in more disabled people feeling welcome in organizations, which can increase diversity.

1.1 Reading guide

This research is structured as follows. In chapter two the theoretical background to the subject will be outlined. This chapter will elaborate on inequalities in organizations and the critical perspective on disability, disability in organizations and ableism in organizations. The next chapter contains the methods used in this research, with information about the research context and strategy, as well as a case description and data collection section. A data analysis, ethics and reflexivity section will also be addressed. The following chapter contains the results. The discussion and conclusion will then start with the analysis and discussion, followed by the practical implications, suggestions for future research, limitations and the conclusion. At the end the reference list and appendices can be found.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter will provide a review of the relevant literature with regards to the topic of disability. The first paragraph will introduce the subject of inequalities in organizations and the critical perspective, followed by a paragraph on disability in organizations. In the final paragraph, ableism will be discussed.

2.1 Inequalities in organizations and the critical perspective

The way in which someone experiences working in an organization and the distribution of the labor market is influenced by a number of dimensions. Gender and race are generally considered as the largest of these dimensions in the literature, other dimensions are age, religion, sexual orientation and disability (Kirton & Greene, 2022). Although improvements have been made over the past few years, some groups within these dimensions are still disadvantaged. For instance, women still encounter ending up in certain 'sex-typed' professions and the glass ceiling still restrains them from reaching top positions within organizations (Kirton & Greene, 2022). Black and minority-ethnic workers are more likely to end up in lower-grade and lower-skilled jobs. When someone reaches an age above 50, the likelihood of being out of work for an extended period of time increases and the willingness of employers to invest in a worker's training decreases (Kirton & Greene, 2022). Religious minorities and workers that do not identify as heterosexual are more likely to experience discrimination and harassment on the work floor. Disabled employees are more likely to end up in low-skilled and low-status jobs (Kirton & Greene, 2022).

It seems contradictory that these inequalities still exist within organizations, while diversity has been a significant theme since the mid-1980s. Starting then, differences in organizations were stated as strategic assets for the first time, able to create a competitive advantage for an organization (Zanoni et al., 2010). This perspective on diversity resulted in the inclusion of a variety of identities in the organization, with the goal to increase the profitability of the organization, also described as the business rationale (Zanoni et al., 2010). The business rationale had a prominent position in the literature on diversity and diversity management, focusing on the processes and outcomes of a group consisting of a variety of identities (Zanoni et al., 2010).

In critical diversity management studies, a few points of critique can be made. The first critique lies in the positivistic ontology used to describe identity in diversity management. Identity is considered a fixed and measurable category, reducing individuals to an aspect of their identity, placing them in a group on that basis (Zanoni et al., 2010). This aligns with the functionalist perspective on identity, where identity is linked to management outcomes (Alvesson et al., 2008). There are more ways to consider identities, such as in an interpretative manner, in which identity is constructed by oneself and the environment and identity is something one does (Alvesson et al., 2008). Another way to look at identity is from a critical perspective, in which power is central and there is resistance against identity control, power and regulation (Alvesson et al., 2008). On top of sticking to the functionalist perspective when looking at identity, within diversity management comparisons are made not between groups, but "white, heterosexual, western, middle/upper class, abled men" (Zanoni et al., 2010, p. 13) are taken as the point of reference, comparing other groups to this norm, inherently positioning these groups as the 'other' (Zanoni et al., 2010).

Another point of critique relates to the devaluation considering the organizational and societal contexts that play a role in what diversity means. There is too much focus on the individual and psychology, but not enough focus on the context and structure (Zanoni et al., 2010). On top of that, critical diversity management criticizes the way in which power is theorized in diversity management (Zanoni et al., 2010).

2.2 Disability in organizations

Within organizations, there is a general idea of what an 'ideal worker' would be for a particular job. A job is a description of a specific set of tasks, responsibilities and skills that are necessary to perform these tasks (Acker, 1990). A job remains abstract until a worker fills the position.

In organizational logic an abstract job is performed by a disembodied worker who lives only for the job. Outside of work, this hypothetical worker cannot have any other obligations interfering with performing the job (Acker, 1990). The more a worker has to do besides work, the less suitable they become for this job. The closest example of a real life embodiment of the disembodied worker for the abstract job would be a male worker who organizes his life around his full-time and life-long job, who has a wife that can take care of their children and his personal needs. This has long been the image of the 'ideal worker' in social and economic theory (Acker, 1990).

The impact of such theories can still be found in the modern workplace. For all parts of the organization's operation rationality and objectivity are used as measures of performance. The processes of administration and management led to the goal to find an 'ideal' bureaucratic organization and ideal candidates to fill the specific roles that were created to reach this goal (Jammaers, Zanoni & Hardonk, 2016). Standard jobs are essentially made for the 'ideal worker', which ultimately results in a mismatch between the employee an organization is looking for and disabled people. The hegemonic organizational ideas, how an 'ideal worker' should be, therefore effectively rule out disabled workers (Foster & Wass, 2012). Ability, flexibility and efficiency are concepts associated with the 'ideal worker'. If one's impairments limit the ability to act according to these concepts, the difference between the ´ideal´ person for the job and a disabled person will be perceived as an actual gap, 'legitimizing' discrimination of disabled people in the workplace (Foster & Wass, 2012).

Measuring organizational performance by looking at abstract concepts such as productivity and efficiency, thereby using the idea of the ´ideal worker´, thus excluding disabled people, might not even be the best way to perform a job (Foster & Wass, 2012). But this idea is not often challenged. While someone's class, race, gender or sexuality rarely influences the way in which someone is able to physically perform a job, this can be different for disabled people. It is possible however, to look at a certain job and to acknowledge that there are certain ideological images connected to it (Foster & Wass, 2012). Ableist perspectives and disabling practices are implanted in society and organizational culture (Foster & Wass, 2012), thus organizational culture can play a role in maintaining discrimination and inequality for disabled employees in organizations (Fujimoto, Rentschler, Edwards & Hartel, 2014). Therefore, more should be done to accommodate disabled employees than trying to fit them into a job designed for someone else (Foster & Wass, 2012).

2.3 Ableism in organizations

In literature, several models can be recognized for different ways of perceiving disability. Historically there was the medical perspective, which considered the employment gap to be a consequence of someone's physical impairments or medical conditions reducing their physical and/or psychological capacities (Oliver, 1986). In this model, disability is seen as the result of someone's physical impairments (Barnes, 2000). Opposite to this is the social model on disability, considering disability as society's impact on impairments (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). It considers the ways in which disabled people are institutionally discriminated against in their possibilities for employment and the workplace, by considering constructs as social environments, materialism and capitalism (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). In the social model institutional discrimination is seen as the explanation for the inequality gap and how disabled people are underrepresented in the workforce. Inequality, between able-bodied people and disabled people, arises due to physical and social limitations in the environment, the way in which institutions are arranged, the way in which policies are restrictive, certain organizational practices and social value systems (Barnes, 1992; Foster, 2007).

Although the social model has been criticized for lacking the perspective of the individual, a lot of research has focused on the social side of the experience of disabled employees (Mik-Meyer, 2016). The discourse of ableism often plays a role in organizational culture in turning people's impairments into disabilities (Mik-Meyer, 2016). Therefore, people have impairments, but are disabled by their environment. Ableism refers to the "ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume able-bodiedness' (Williams and Mavin, 2012: p. 171) or non-disability as a normative organizing principle, against which all are assessed (Campbell, 2009; Wendell, 1996), generating a collective understanding of disability as a diminished state of being human (Campbell, 2008). From an ableist perspective, disabled employees are of less value than able-bodied employees. This hierarchical division reinforces understanding of the 'ideal worker' in organizations (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021) and emphasizes how 'othering' processes constitute what is normal (Campbell, 2009).

On top of the discourse of ableism, there is another prevailing discourse of inclusiveness and tolerance, automatically making speaking about difference problematic. These discourses contradict each other and this results in the othering of disabled employees (Mik-Meyer, 2016). Dick (2013) recognizes the existence of two conflicting realities and refers to this as ´politics of experience´. Being disabled can be considered both objective and factual, and subjective, constructed by the environment. From the discourse of inclusiveness and

tolerance people want to refrain from the idea that they label someone 'disabled' and are afraid of speaking about someone's disability (Mik-Meyer, 2016). They feel as though they would inherently exclude someone if they acknowledge their disability. Therefore, they turn to comparing disabled employees to people in other marginalized groups, for example comparing giving support to someone with a physical disability to helping an old lady (Mik-Meyer, 2016). With this it does become clear that one considers the disabled employee as different, since they are ultimately still labeling someone as the 'other' and reinforcing ableist views (Mik-Meyer, 2016).

3. Methods

In this chapter the methods will be discussed. It starts with a paragraph on research context, followed by paragraphs on research strategy, including the paradigm employed in this study, case description and data collection. Subsequently, ethics and reflexivity will be addressed.

3.1 Research context

To conduct this research, empirical data was obtained through interviews with disabled employees working at an institute of higher education in the Netherlands. The higher education in the Netherlands is used as the context in this study. The terms disability and disabled employees were deliberately chosen to address this topic, as these terms are commonly used in critical disability studies. This denomination is in line with the social model of disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001), stressing that people are disabled by society, not by their individual biological impairments (Mik-Meyer, 2016; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021).

In the Netherlands, there is a job agreement for disabled people. The government has made this job agreement in cooperation with organizations for employers and employees, because they want disabled people to be able to work at a 'regular' employer more often (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), 2021). By early 2026, the goal is a total of 125,000 additional jobs for disabled people, of which 25,000 within the government. As of January 1, 2020, this quota regulation is mandatory by law for the government (Ministry of SZW, 2021). The target group for these additional jobs includes people that are covered by the Participation Act[1], who cannot earn the legal minimum wage independently and people that receive Wajong benefits with an ability to work (Ministry of SZW, 2021). People for whom

[1] The Participation Act replaces the Work and Social Assistance Act, the Sheltered Employment Act (WSW) and part of the Disablement Assistance Act for Handicapped Jung Persons (Wajong). (Ministry of General Affairs, 2022)

these jobs are intended, are in the ‘target group register’, which is managed by the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV). Whenever an employer hires someone from this register, this job counts for the job agreement (Ministry of SZW, 2021).

The Participation Act should ensure that more people can find a job and is intended for people who can work, but not without support. Disabled people, who are not capable of earning minimum wage on their own, can be supported by the Participation Act (Ministry of SZW, 2023). The act has to be implemented by municipalities. Municipalities have the task to stimulate hiring disabled employees, for instance by reimbursing workplace modifications or wage subsidy (Ministry of SZW, 2023). Regional ‘work companies’, together with the UWV, employers, unions and schools from the regional labor market facilitate disabled people in getting a job (Ministry of SZW, 2021).

3.2 Research strategy

Paradigms display the basic beliefs on the structure of the world and how one is positioned in this world and which connections can be made (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This research will be considered from a social constructivist paradigm. Within social constructivism, a relativist perspective is taken: reality is shaped locally and situation-dependent. The researcher and their subject are considered to be interactively linked, which means that the findings are constructed during the investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research methods used are hermeneutical and dialectical (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This research will be conducted from the perspective that reality is constructed by people and research cannot be objective. The research is qualitative and dialogue is used to obtain information.

To examine how disabled employees experience work and how they construct disability, a qualitative research design is used. A single case study is conducted of the experiences of disabled employees working at a Dutch institute of higher education. A single case study is an appropriate research design for this research question, since by using a case study it is possible to build theory based on rich empirical data (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In-depth insight will be provided, giving voice to a selective group that has not been studied in scientific research often. The research is abductive, going back and forth between the data and the literature (Kennedy, 2018).

3.3 Case description and data collection

The data for this study was collected at a Dutch institute of higher education and consists of ten in-depth interviews with disabled employees in different departments of the organization.

A disability is seen as having a visual impairment, being blind or deaf, having mental health issues or physical or intellectual impairments, as defined by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, 2022). Employees throughout the organization were selected to review the working experience of disabled employees. These are employees hired by the institute of higher education and employees seconded to work through the work company.

To recruit respondents for the study, different networks have been used. The invitation for participation in this research was distributed through employees of the institute of higher education, who knew suitable respondents. Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (AVG), it was difficult to make direct contact with respondents. Eventually, most of the respondents were collected through the network of one of the employees of the institute of higher education.

I conducted the interviews myself and the interviews took place at a location agreed upon with the respondents. In seven of the cases, this was a location on the campus. Two interviews were conducted at the respondent´s house, and one of the interviews took place online via Microsoft Teams. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, and lasted between 35 and 65 minutes. All the interviews were recorded with consent. To ensure anonymity, the respondents' names have been omitted and information about the department where they work is omitted as well as very specific details about their disabilities by which other people could determine who the respondents are. In this respect, a deliberate choice was made to use non-binary pronouns to refer to the respondents, reducing the respondents' traceability. Moreover, gender is not a distinctive aspect that is included in this analysis.

The interviews were conducted with the use of a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix I). The interview guide consisted of questions considering the respondent's career, their work experience, the nature of their disability, how this influences their daily and work life, the interaction with colleagues and supervisors and their experience with the policy of the institute of higher education. All respondents received a consent and information form with detailed information on their rights concerning their participation in the research. After each interview, I reflected on the conduct of the interview and made improvements for the next interview.

3.4 Data analysis

First of all, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data analysis process was an iterative process, going back and forth between the literature and the empirical material. Since this research entails a single case study, the 'Gioia method' can be used as a template to structure the data and as an aid to offer distinctive insights (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Coding the data using the 'Gioia method' helps develop the story that is contained in the data (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013).

At first I went through the transcripts on paper and marked important passages. The transcripts were then loaded into the qualitative research tool Atlas-ti and open coding was used to create an initial list of first order concepts that arose from the data, staying close to the data (Gioia et al., 2013). After the creation of the first order codes, a search for similarities and differences within these categories was performed. This led to a list of axial codes, making the data more manageable. Then, a final step was made in creating a clear overview with aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). With the first order codes, axial codes and aggregate dimensions, a data structure was created (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Then I went back to the literature from the theoretical framework to code the data by theory, enriching the data structure by asking the data certain questions: how is this exclusive towards disabled employees? How can ableism be recognized here? How are disabled employees made different here and in which ways does this happen?

During the data analysis, it appeared that disabled employees had different attitudes towards work. To try and better understand these attitudes, I went back to the literature. According to Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016), there are three types of discursive practices by which disabled employees construct positive identities within the ableist discourse of lower productivity. Employees contest the discourse of lower productivity by viewing it as 'commonly defined', by redefining productivity, or by affirming lower productivity but denying responsibility for it. These three discursive practices were used as theoretical codes to revisit the data with, to see if these could be recognized. The same was done with 'othering' (Mik-Meyer, 2016), coding instances in the data where disabled employees were positioned as the other.

A codebook with an overview of the first order codes, axial codes and aggregate dimensions can be found in Appendix 2.

3.5 Ethics

Within research, it is important to consider research ethics. The first way this is taken into consideration is within the information given to the respondents. It is important that clear and honest information about the research project is given to them and to stick to it, so that everyone involved knows what they are getting into (Myers, 2019). Furthermore, before starting an interview, it is made clear to the respondent that everything will remain anonymous as a general principle. If it is agreed upon that the interview is recorded, no one but myself will access these recordings. Furthermore, the recordings are deleted after the study is completed. Respondents are assured anonymity, meaning that quotes mentioned in this research cannot be traced back to a person. For this reason, personal information, such as names and detailed descriptions of the department where respondents work, as well as details on their disability, are not included. It is important for respondents to feel comfortable speaking about the subject without repercussions. The privacy of respondents is respected, they can revoke their participation and consent at any moment in time up until six weeks after the data collection. They are allowed full access to the research and the transcripts, which enhances the credibility of the study.

3.6 Reflexivity

It is important to reflect on your position as a researcher within the study. Especially since this subject can be considered sensitive, there is value in realizing your own positions and beliefs. Therefore, reflexivity is an important part of this methods section as well. From a perspective of social constructivism, I am aware that reality is constructed and that reality will be constructed during the research, as a result of the interaction between the respondents and myself.

While I am very interested in the topic and I care about it, I am aware that I am also privileged in the sense that I myself do not have to deal with disability discrimination and living in an ableist society that disables me because of my disability. This also means that in conducting this research in some ways stereotypes and hierarchy are kept in place by researching disability. I am aware of this, however I feel as though expanding the research on this topic is very important, since I believe that there is still much to gain. I'm trying to pay attention to this by making a division between impairments, the physical or mental barriers that can limit someone in their job, and disability, which is when someone with impairments is disadvantaged in a way. Therefore, I made a deliberate choice to use the term 'disabled

employee', in this study, building on critical disability studies, where the emphasis is on someone being 'disabled' by societal factors.

At all costs, I try to avoid making the respondents feel as though I am identifying them based on one aspect of their identity. While everyone is influenced by their environments and I grew up in an ableist capitalist society, I actively prevent myself from being influenced by these contextual factors. I went into the interviews with an open mind and during the interviews I actively paid attention not to say something that might come across as suggestive or that could indicate a personal point of view or that made it seem as if a certain answer was desired. I also indicated that I thought a lot about the terminology and I felt it was very complicated and we reflected together on what wording they felt was most comfortable. To put respondents at ease, I indicated that there was always room to take time to think. After the interviews, I asked the respondent's opinion on how they thought the interview went and there was room to comment on how I approached the interview. If a respondent had practical tips for me I took these to the next interview and implemented them there. I noticed that I was quite nervous before I had the first interview, but it actually went rather naturally and I only needed the interview guide as a handle when a new direction was desired during the conversation or to check if everything had been discussed. After the first interviews were conducted, my confidence for the following interviews was higher and I also noticed that I was less nervous for the rest of the interviews.

4. Results

This chapter presents the results that arose from the data. While coding the data, it emerged that the results can be reduced to three different aggregate dimensions: institutional influence, peer influence and self concept. The different ways in which in/exclusion can be experienced within the organization and how disability is constructed by respondents can be reasoned back to these dimensions. The first two dimensions cover the respondent's relationship with the specific social context within the organization, and the third dimension relates to how a respondent constructs disability. This chapter will be organized using these dimensions. Subsequently, the next chapter, the discussion and conclusion, will reflect on the theoretical implications of these findings.

4.1 Institutional influence

During the interviews respondents frequently mentioned the design and practice of the institute of higher education where they worked. This includes respondents' experiences with

supervisors. These instances together can be linked to the experience of in/exclusion in their work within the organization. In this section this will be elaborated on.

4.1.1 Accessibility

The first area disabled employees indicate that they experience exclusion within the organization is the accessibility of their workplace. Respondents, in whom their disability was physical in nature, shared experiences about this in particular. One of the respondents, respondent 4, who is in a wheelchair, is someone who encountered a number of difficulties considering their physical working environment. This respondent indicated that the design of the building where they work, currently keeps them from working on location:

> "We have been working at home with corona for a very long time and [...] we have been here in the [designation building] for a few months now and, since that time everyone from my department has been required to attend on Thursdays. Yes, but not me, because I can't go to the bathroom. Or I have to go downstairs to the basement. But yeah, then I have to go through long corridors and yeah, [...] if I really have to go to the toilet, then I have to go. And then I shouldn't have to go through a couple of long hallways, because then I'll pee my pants before [I get there]." (R4)

In this case, the way in which the building where respondent 4 has their workplace is designed, causes them to be physically excluded from presence at their job. Notions of ableism can be recognized here, since it seems as though not all buildings from the organization are designed for people who are not able-bodied. Moreover, respondent 4 has had this experience with multiple buildings, since they had to move buildings regularly during their career at the institute of higher education, indicating that this is not coincidental:

> "The university states on paper that it must be accessible to everything and everyone and that everything must be possible. And every department I go to, there have to be adaptations. [For example] things still need to be put on the doors, or an accessible toilet [still needs to be installed]." (R4)

Another instance in which the design of the physical space at the institute of higher education can be linked to the physical exclusion of disabled employees is the rise in popularity of flexible

workspaces. During the interviews, respondents 3 and 5 indicated that it is not possible for them to use these workspaces, due to the fact that the adaptations that they need are not installed at these flexible workspaces. According to respondent 3 the institute “missed the mark” regarding this topic and respondent 5 indicates that flexible workspaces have caused them to be less likely to work at one of the buildings where they have a workspace:

> "Yeah [...], and I also had custom lighting, because I'm not supposed to have fluorescent light above me, because of my eyes which do not have tear fluid, so I have indirect lighting. So I have these [...] lights facing upwards, so the light doesn't shine in your eyes. But now for example at [building X] they have all [...] those flexible workspaces. Yeah, I don't have [that custom lighting] there. And yes, I sit there very little, so [...] that is a bit inconvenient [...]." (R5)

In this example, ableism seems to play a role as well, since people with different needs than an able-bodied person have not been taken into account when increasing the number of flexible workspaces.

Not only the physical accessibility of the institute appears to play a role in the feeling of in/exclusion with disabled employees; the organization can also be (in)accessible for these employees at a more abstract level. For example, the range of positions that are suitable for disabled employees influences the extent to which disabled people are involved in the organization and can therefore play a part in the in/exclusion of these employees. Respondent 1 indicates that “there are not many positions where someone [with a disability] can just flow in”. This may indicate an ableist arrangement of positions within the organization. It appears that it is not expected that someone with characteristics other than an able-bodied person will apply for the job. This can contribute to a sense of dissatisfaction and exclusion among disabled employees:

> “And then I do think, but then that's my own experience, my own frustration with that, [...] that for years we've actually been saying to the university, to the faculty there, to central [...] 'Hello, here I am. I'm able to fill a job at the university, within certain constraints and I'm part of the quota in that. And there are all kinds of arrangements within, but also outside of the university by which that is advantageous to do so.'" (R1)

On the other hand, it appears that when positions are created for disabled employees and customization is provided, this can actually bring about a sense of inclusion. Respondent 6 explains how things are arranged at their department:

> "And if my consultant at the WSW has a candidate who she thinks, well, maybe they will fit into [department name], she will talk to [...] my supervisor and then they will see if that works. [...] So, [for example] people with severe dyslexia are not assigned to [task that requires good language skills]. But some people can interpret images very well, for example, and they can then [perform another task where they can use that quality]. Then something suitable is sought." (R6)

When discussing this way of including people in the team, respondent 6 indicates that they "feel like it's pretty unique" at their department to offer people jobs in this way, expressing their contentment with their department.

In summary, the way in which the buildings of the institute of higher education are designed are perceived as exclusive to employees with physical disabilities. The rise of popularity of flexible workspaces contributes to this sentiment. In addition, the manner in which disabled employees are or are not considered when job positions are offered within the organization, may also contribute to feelings of in/exclusion with disabled employees.

4.1.2 Institutional support

Another topic that came up during the interviews were the facilities and support offered by the organization. The organization of the institute and the supervisors of disabled employees can influence the number of facilities and the quality of support offered. Respondents shared different experiences with this.

Respondent 5 was ill for a while during their career and indicated that during their illness the institute did not offer facilities to them:

> "Yeah, they really never asked during my time of being ill, do you want a coach or anything? No, really nothing at all." (R5)

In this situation, the institute did not take an active stance by asking the respondent about their needs. When asking respondent 5 what they would expect from the institute in terms of

providing facilities, they indicated that they would at least like to have an overview of the possible facilities and support, so that it is clear what is available and where you have to turn to to arrange it.

That employees have to arrange the facilities and support they need themselves is experienced by several respondents. However, how they feel about this differs among the respondents. Respondent 1 indicated that there is an atmosphere within the organization in which you are “allowed to do it all yourself”, but also mentioned the drawback of this, namely that you also “have to do it all yourself”. They experience it as “incredibly difficult” having to ask for everything, as if they have to keep on saying “But hey, hello, don’t forget about me. Hello, I needed more guidance.” They indicated that they would benefit from a policy that is “actively propagated”.

The first time respondent 4 had to move with their team, they and their supervisor were approached by someone from the institute:

> "Months ago [...], before the first time we moved, they came to me and to my supervisor to ask, 'would you guys like to come to the building sometime for a tour so that we can take a look at what needs to be changed?' We thought that was very positive, my supervisor and I. So, we went there. We made a whole tour and looked at all the things that needed to be changed. But to this day, nothing has happened." (R4)

It seems as though the intention from the institute to take into account the needs of respondent 4 were good, however it lagged in implementation. From this situation it appears that it can take a long time before adjustments are actually realized. Respondent 3 also indicates that “you have to go through a hundred departments to achieve something”. These experiences imply that the structure of the institute tends to have bureaucratic characteristics. This complicates the possibility to quickly and efficiently arrange facilities and support for disabled employees.

Respondent 4 mentioned that their supervisor helped them a lot when they had to move buildings during their career. When they moved to a building where the facilities were not yet up to par for them as a wheelchair user, they stated that their “boss would go after it and she would call in [other] people or their [own] supervisor, and she would ask [them] something like: 'can't this be done differently or can't that be done differently?’"

Respondent 4 is not the only one where their appreciation for their supervisor comes up during the interview. Respondent 5 also indicated that they experienced a lot of support from

their supervisor at times. Years back, when they were diagnosed with their disability, their then supervisor invited them for a walk, where they offered them advice. Their supervisor at the time had a physical disability themselves. Respondent 5 speaks of this supervisor as follows:

> "And she was, of course, a super great supervisor at that time, because she simply had a lot of experience herself. And even though she had [a different physical disability], she knew what processes you go through." (R5)

That this supervisor had their own experience with dealing with a physical disability made her more capable of empathizing with what respondent 5 was going through.

That a supervisor can also have a negative impact on a disabled employee's work experience is evident from the experience shared by respondent 2. Without explanation, their job duties were changed by their supervisor:

> "By last fall, it was suddenly like: [...] 'you can't do certain tasks because you're not doing them well.' Why I wasn't doing them well I actually still haven't heard. "And it is noticeable that you suddenly do have autistic traits." So it [...] all depends on what kind of supervisor you are dealing with and to what extent they are receptive to you or not." (R2)

In this excerpt, it seems as if the supervisor is using the respondent's disability as an excuse to exclude them from their tasks, which can lead to a feeling of exclusion on the part of the employee.

In another case, the opposite happens. Respondent 10 works in a team with multiple disabled employees. They experience that their supervisor does not take into account that not everyone understands everything the first time it is explained:

> "Everyone is basically ought to be able to do everything. But there are also people who just don't have the capabilities. But also people who are very reluctant, [...]. People often think that we have the same level as my boss and those just below him. My boss has [a] university [degree] and the others at least [higher education] and maybe university. [...] It is expected that if we are explained something once, we will understand it. But that's not how it works." (R10)

To sum up, within the organization, there are practices from both the institute and supervisors that can lead to varying degrees of feelings of in/exclusion of disabled employees at work. Examples include to what extent both the institute and the supervisor (actively) offer facilities and how supervisors engage with disabled employees.

4.2 Peer influence

Most respondents interact with colleagues and/or work in a team. Colleagues are frequently mentioned during the interviews and the interaction with them seems to be of influence with regards to the sense of in/exclusion experienced by respondents.

The first way interaction with colleagues may affect the work experience of disabled employees, is the extent to which they feel the space to talk about their disability with their colleagues. Most respondents mentioned that they had been transparent about the nature of their disability, but that the topic was not discussed much in everyday life. Respondent 1, with a mental disability, indicated they felt that colleagues sometimes have "a certain fear maybe of actually asking things directly or asking more deeply". Within the team where respondent 1 works, there is no experience working with disabled employees. This is different within the team of respondent 8. Their team employs several disabled employees. They feel that this influences the extent to which they feel included in the group:

> "And I do feel that I am a full member of the group, so in that respect I do not feel that I am excluded because of my handicap. But that's also because almost everyone who works there has a (mental) disability in one way or another." (R8)

Respondent 4 stated that "there's not a lot of talk about specifically the disability or [...] the wheelchair anymore" and that their disability does not usually come up in "normal conversation". Respondent 9 also indicated that their disability "is never talked about" with colleagues.

Another aspect of the interaction with colleagues relates to the support they can offer to disabled employees. Respondent 5 experienced a lot of support from their colleagues and even asked one of their colleagues to be their 'buddy'. They share their thoughts with this colleague about work issues in relation to their disability and consider this to be very helpful.

Respondent 5 also indicated that, in order to receive the right support from their colleagues, they felt that transparency towards them was very important:

> "So [...] especially continuing the conversation and staying open, that was always the recipe for me. And well, my colleagues said: 'we don't notice much about you and you don't talk about it very often', but if something was really wrong I would say it. And then they would take it into account so I was lucky with that. People sometimes said '[...] you don't mention it enough, we forget about it.'" (R5)

For colleagues to be able to take the situation of a disabled employee into account, it is important that disabled employees are sufficiently transparent about their disability. According to respondent 7 “you do make it more difficult for yourself” if one does not tell their colleagues about their impairment. That well-informed colleagues can take into account the situation of a disabled employee is also indicated by respondent 10:

> "So there really is a lot on my plate. And people know that, and colleagues take that into account as far as they can. That's why I can keep working, otherwise I would have been on health insurance." (R10)

This excerpt shows that respondent 10 feels as though having colleagues that take into account their disability allows them to continue doing their job. Thus, a team that takes into account the disabled employee’s personal situation can have a positive impact on the work experience and inclusion of disabled employees.

However, the opposite can also occur. Respondent 2 feels that their colleagues use the knowledge about their disability against them:

> "Well yes, but it's, I also have a bit of a feeling that, [...] those colleagues, a bit bluntly put, abuse the situation [...] that they say 'yes, no, you can't do that because of your work disability'. When in fact, while they're not the labor expert, [...] not a psychologist either, so [...], how do they come up with that? No, yes, I wouldn't know what it should be based on." (R2)

This experience shows that their colleagues apply able-bodied norms, therefore ableism can be recognized here. Here, the respondent's colleagues actively exclude their coworker from certain tasks, placing them in the position of the 'other'.

In summary, it appears that the interactions that disabled employees have with colleagues may affect the degree of in/exclusion they experience at work. The extent to which disabled employees experience space to talk about their disability contributes to the extent to which colleagues can offer them support, which in turn can play a part in a sense of inclusion. Knowledge of one's disability can also be used against someone, so it can be situation-dependent and also lead to a sense of exclusion.

4.3 Self concept

Respondents discussed what it is like to work with a disability. It appeared that the way in which they internalize their context and interactions, influences how they construct disability. This self-concept differs among respondents and seems to be very person-dependent.

It was examined whether the three discursive practices through which positive workplace identities can be constructed, according to Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016), could be recognized in the data. Productive is understood here as when respondents feel they can work as effectively and efficiently as colleagues. One of these discursive practices could be recognized in respondents' statements, namely the one that contests the discourse of lower productivity by redefining productivity.

Redefining productivity can be done in various ways, respondent 2 assigned specific other qualities to a person that they possess due to their disability:

> "There are also people with disabilities, who often have, as a counterpart, an exaggerated other quality. For example blind people can be incredibly good listeners. And it's often with, and this may be stereotyping, autistic people, and in my case it's not the case, but they are often tremendously good at analyzing." (R2)

Although respondent 2 does not necessarily recognize this quality themselves, it does indicate a way in which they approach disability and can craft a positive identity.

Since the other two discursive practices are not recognized, the work experience must be explained by something else. Repeatedly, respondents acknowledge that their disability affects their work to some extent. Respondent 8, who has a visual disability, mentions that their

“pace of work is clearly slower than that of someone who can see well”. Respondent 10 indicates they sometimes need to do “some easier tasks” to clear their mind. As long as they give themselves the space for that and receive this space from others too, this does not seem to negatively affect the way they view themselves. Work seems to be very important to respondent 10 and they also see some necessity in having a job:

> "I'm like, sitting at home, I don't feel like that either, because then I start worrying and that's not helpful either. They would prefer me to deliver quality, [...] than to sit at home. Yes, nobody benefits from me sitting at home, not them and not myself." (R10)

This sentiment is shared by respondent 6, who mentions that work makes them feel ´normal´:

> "And I also just come [to work] for the human contacts. I find it, I don't want to sit at home all day and I also want to contribute something to society, or well, the structure or the feeling that you [...] are still a bit normal. That's also very much part of it." (R6)

Also important for how respondents construct disability appears to be a desire to fit in. Some respondents feel very strongly the need to belong to the group and others are a bit more on their own.

Respondent 5 mentioned that early in their career they had difficulty to "take up space" during meetings. Their disability required them to stand up occasionally due to pain. In their opinion, it was "like with adolescents, you don't want to stand out." They also indicated that they preferred to be "one of the crowd" and not an "exception". Respondent 7 likes to work autonomously and claims “as for me, just leave me alone, let me be in my bubble and I'll be fine”.

Several respondents struggle with how much space they want to take up in the organization. Respondent 9 spoke about how, because he has difficulty climbing stairs, he is taken into consideration by building staff during a fire drill. He shared the following about this:

> "Well, I don't know if I would [make use of help] if there's a real fire, because then I think, then everybody just needs to get outside as quickly as possible. But in a fire drill (I have a problem with climbing stairs), then it's good to have someone with me to make sure I don't get knocked over." (R9)

Other respondents also indicated they find it difficult to claim necessary facilities. Respondent 7 mentioned they "always have a hard time asking for things" and respondent 5 feels “awkward” asking for the adaptations they need for a building since they do not have to work there often.

Another experience respondent 5 had at work had to do with how they reflected on themselves what others thought of them:

> "Once a human resources counselor said to me, 'You are a successful, chronically ill person'. Yeah, that's weird, isn't it? And [...] so I really wanted that stamp, because I know it gives benefits. [...] Then you have a 'plus'. So if you're ill for a while then, maybe it's not perceived as so bad. Because yeah, the fear is, am I doing enough? Those are unconsciously those voices: am I doing enough, do I belong?" (R5)

Some respondents indicated they feel that they have to prove themselves, but that they also need to accept not being able to do everything:

> “Yes. If I can be completely honest Simone, it requires a lot of energy, and it also requires a lot of energy to prove that you are able to do things. But it also demands a lot of energy to accept that you can't do things, because that is sometimes very difficult to let go of.” (R3)

This seems to be a dichotomy. According to respondent 5, it is important "to be honest with yourself and say, 'yes, I have a work disability or, I have a work impairment.' Because then you start dealing with it."

To sum up, the construction of disability seems to relate to the way in which disabled employees internalize their context and interactions. Whether this is positive or negative, seems to be very person-dependent. Respondent’s disabilities seem to affect their work, but the value of work seems to outweigh difficulties. Other aspects, such as whether respondents want to be part of a group and if this is possible seem to play a part.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The goal of this research was to understand the working experiences of disabled employees and how they construct disability. The following research question was established: how do disabled employees experience in/exclusion at their job and how do they construct disability? The way in which the individual, disabled employee positions themselves within disabling workplace discourses thus far remained an understudied terrain. The research was conducted in the context of a Dutch institute of higher education. Ten disabled employees who work in various departments within the institute were interviewed. Analyzing their personal work experiences creates insight into the individual perspective of disabled employees in relation to which elements influence their sense of in/exclusion and their construction of disability. The three dimensions that emerged are institutional influence, peer influence and self concept. Below, the theoretical as well as practical implications of this research will be discussed, as well as future research suggestions. Limitations of the study will also be reflected on. The chapter will end with a conclusion.

5.1 Analysis and discussion

The first theme that emerged in the data, institutional influence, indicated that the design and doings of the institute and supervisors may influence how disabled employees experience in/exclusion. Notions of ableism can be recognized in the physical accessibility of the organization. That wheelchair users or other people who are not able-bodied are not always taken into account in the design of buildings, indicates that a presumption of able-bodiedness still prevails in the organization (Williams & Mavin, 2012). This causes the physical exclusion of disabled employees, which can result in a sense of exclusion.

On a more abstract level, ableism can be recognized within the organization. A sense of exclusion can be experienced when it comes to suitable job positions. The supply of positions sometimes seems to use able-bodiedness as a normative organizing principle against which everyone is measured (Campbell, 2009; Wendell, 1996). Jobs, in other words, are created for the "ideal worker," leaving a disabled employee out of the search picture (Foster & Wass, 2012). When disabled employees feel there is no room for them within the organization because of this, it can lead to feelings of exclusion.

The opposite also emerged from the findings. When disabled employees do feel there is room for them within their team and appropriate work is being sought for disabled employees, this leads to feelings of inclusion. This suggests that when the presumption of able-

bodiedness is not experienced and able-bodiedness does not seem to be used as a benchmark, thus when ableism is not reflected within the team, feelings of inclusion can be experienced.

The way facilities and support are provided by the institute and managers seem to play a role in disabled employees' feelings of inclusion/exclusion. The feeling that the organization does not actively implement policy and the idea that disabled employees have to arrange facilities and support themselves, can strengthen feelings of exclusion. To get facilities, respondents must identify with being disabled, placing themselves in the position of the other, in ableist hegemony. In addition, the bureaucratic nature of the organization is mentioned as a barrier in arranging facilities and support.

The way a disabled employee's supervisor handles their situation can influence feelings of inclusion/exclusion. An assertive attitude and experience with the subject, for example because a supervisor has a disability themselves, are perceived as actors in feelings of inclusion. A supervisor's attitude can also cause feelings of exclusion. Sometimes ableist practices or 'othering' and the image of the 'ideal worker' can be recognized in supervisor's attitudes (Zanoni et al., 2010). We see this with respondent 2, whose supervisor excludes them from certain tasks based on their disability, assuming that they cannot do certain tasks because of their disability. Respondent 10's supervisor, on the other hand, expects everyone on his team capable of performing all tasks, while some employees are unable to do so, because of their disability. This indicates a presumption of able-bodiedness (Williams & Mavin, 2012).

The second theme emerging from the data is the influence of colleagues. Whether employees felt that they could communicate with colleagues about their disability and whether they received support from them contributed to the extent to which they felt included within the organization. A certain degree of transparency appears to be necessary to receive support from coworkers, but a safe space is needed for this transparency to occur. Experience with working with disabled employees seems to contribute to feelings of inclusion.

Some colleagues appeared to find it difficult to communicate with disabled coworkers about their disability. Colleagues of respondent 1 did not dare to ask further about their mental disability. The discourse of inclusiveness and tolerance could be a reason for this. Colleagues might have difficulty talking about disability, fearing they come across 'non inclusive' (Mik-Meyer, 2016). When colleagues are aware of a disabled coworker's needs, they can offer them support. Having colleagues who offer support contributes to feelings of inclusion. It remains a consideration for disabled employees to what extent they can be transparent with colleagues, because in some cases that knowledge is used against them. The experience of respondent 2

indicates that their colleagues have ableist views and place them in the position of the ‘other’, excluding them reasoning they cannot perform certain tasks because they are not able-bodied.

The third theme emerging from the data is self-concept and considers disabled employees construction of disability. It varies greatly within respondents how they construct disability, but a number of things appear to be important.

It was examined whether the discursive practices through which positive workplace identities can be constructed, according to Jammaers, Zanoni and Hardonk (2016), could be recognized in the data. Only one of the three discursive practices emerged in the data, so the construction of disability mostly has different causes. Respondent’s mentioned that their disabilities affected their work, but their valuation of work mostly outweighs these difficulties. A desire to fit in also emerges, but is person-dependent, and the construction of disability mainly has to do with to what extent this wish is fulfilled.

Ableism also seems to play a role in the construction of disability by disabled employees. Ableist hegemony in society seems internalized, also by disabled employees, that they sometimes unconsciously go along with the idea that they are worth less than able-bodied employees (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021). For example, Respondent 9, with a physical disability, does not know if they would utilize the necessary help if there were a fire. This, even though help is arranged by the institute and they have no less right to get out of the building than anyone else. This view may be an exception, but does stand out as it may indicate that disabled employees can internalize ableist views.

That internalizing the behavior or opinions of others can influence how disabled employees view disability is also evident in the excerpt in which respondent 5 indicated that they appreciated the mark of being a "successful, chronically ill person", given to them by a human resource counselor. This confirms that ableist views are still prevalent in some way within the organization. This statement of this human resource counselor implies that they have the idea that chronically ill people are not normally successful and that respondent 5 is an exception to this. This places those with chronic illness in a position that differs from the able-bodied norm, essentially ‘othering’ them (Zanoni et al., 2010). In this case, it is important to see that respondent 5 goes along with the ableist thinking of someone else, thereby internalizing certain conceptions of disability.

Disabled employees seem to feel as though they have to prove their value in the organization, that they are capable of executing their jobs as well as able-bodied people. Here the ableist image of the ‘ideal worker’ is recognized. As mentioned in the literature, the closest

example of a real life embodiment of the 'ideal worker' would be a male worker, with his life centered around his full-time, life-long job, who has the ability to fully focus on work and has a wife that takes care of the household and his personal needs (Acker, 1990). Most of the time, it is not possible for disabled employees to meet this image, but this does not mean that they are not capable of doing their jobs. Such an image can have an impact on disabled employees, they have to actively oppose ableist beliefs to prove their ability.

5.2 Practical implications

A number of practical implications emerge from the findings of this study. To improve inclusion of disabled employees, an organization should become aware that even choices about the structure and design of an organization can affect the extent to which disabled employees feel included. Ableism still seems to play a role in the design of buildings, and this can lead to exclusion of disabled employees. So it is recommended that an organization considers the existing infrastructure and optimizes accessibility. To eliminate ableism from the organization may require system modification, which will take time. Also, to promote inclusiveness, it is important that an organization provides suitable job positions for disabled employees. This may involve examining whether existing positions need to be modified or new jobs have to be created. A clear overview of possible facilities and support could be made and should be available to all employees. In addition, a more active role in providing these facilities would possibly improve the work experience of disabled employees. Since the relationship between disabled employees and their peers and supervisors also seems to influence their work experience and sense of inclusion/exclusion, and again an ableist way of thinking or ignorance can be noticed, an organization could offer awareness and sensitivity training to their staff. A special focus here should be on mental health issues, as this is a topic that is regularly met with misunderstanding and it is valuable to eliminate the taboo. Finally, an organization could regularly ask for feedback on their experience from disabled employees, so that they can suggest possible improvements. This would ensure continuous refinement of policies and practices.

5.3 Future research

There are a number of suggestions that can be made for future research. For this research on the work experience of disabled employees, interviews were conducted with a number of respondents. However, the resulting picture is a snapshot in time. To find out how disabled

employees' work experience, their sense of in/exclusion and the way they construct disability develops over time, longitudinal studies could be conducted. Also, follow-up research could consider the intersectionality of disability with other identity markers, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background. This could present an even richer layered picture of the experiences of in/exclusion. Finally, this study examined the perspective of the disabled employee and it would be interesting to include the perspective of the organization in future research. For example, by interviewing policy makers and how they view in/exclusion within the organization, specific policies could be reviewed to assess their effectiveness. Interviews with colleagues and supervisors of disabled employees could also add an additional layer to the research, examining how they construct disability and how this matches or differs from the construction of disability by disabled employees.

5.4 Limitations

A possible limitation of this research could be representation. It is not possible to receive a list of names of all the disabled employees that work at the organization, due to the General Data Protection Regulation (AVG). Furthermore, it is not obligatory for employees to indicate whether or not they have impairments to the organization. Therefore, it remains a guess as to whether the current sample size adequately captures the diverse range of experiences among disabled employees at the institute.

Other limitations to this research were time sensitivity and time constraint. It could be the case that the experiences of disabled employees evolve over time because of changing policies, practices, or external influences. A more comprehensive picture of disabled employees' experiences of in/exclusion at work could be generated by speaking with respondents repeatedly and seeing if their experiences have changed over time.

5.5 Conclusion

This study investigated the working experiences of disabled employees and how they construct disability. The related research question was: how do disabled employees experience in/exclusion at their job and how do they construct disability? This research was conducted in the context of higher education in the Netherlands. A single case study has been conducted and the following conclusions can be drawn. It appears that very practical matters such as the way an institute designs its buildings, hires people, and how facilities and support can be arranged can influence the way disabled employees experience inclusion or exclusion in the

organization. An assertive attitude and experience with the subject are qualities in a supervisor that can increase the disabled employee´s feeling of inclusion. Also, the way colleagues deal with the disabled employee, namely to what extent they experience space to discuss their disability with colleagues and the extent to which they feel supported by colleagues, influence the feeling of in/exclusion they experience within the organization. Within all levels of the organization ableist views can still be identified, reinforcing feelings of exclusion. A number of things seem to influence how disabled employees construct disability, such as to what extent they feel space to discuss their disability with colleagues and the desire (or lack thereof) to be part of the group. However, the most important finding in this respect is that the construction of disability is very person-dependent and is very much related to interaction with others within the organization. The way in which respondents internalize different their context and interactions within the organization appear to influence how they position themselves within the organization and how they construct disability. As Kafka already noticed, one's environment plays a big role in people's self-concept (Kafka, 2012).

6. References

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7. Appendix I Interview guide

Translated interview guide:

[Introduction]

I will start by briefly introducing myself and explaining a bit about the research that I am doing. I am Simone Mankor, 23 years old, and I am following a Master's program of Business Administration at the Radboud University and I have chosen the specialism Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Management. I am currently working on my Master Thesis and for this I am doing research on the experiences of employees with impairments at the Radboud University. In the literature on diversity, a lot can be found on topics such as gender, cultural diversity, sexual identity and orientation, but very little is known about disability. By investigating this topic, I want to contribute to the knowledge about experiences of employees with impairments at an organization and possibly make recommendations for the university's diversity policy.

Before we start the interview, there are a few things that I want to mention. I expect that the interview will last about an hour, if you want to pause during the interview or stop earlier, please let me know. There are no right or wrong answers, I am just curious about your personal experiences and perspectives. I will make sure that any information that I include in my thesis cannot be traced back to you. Should any questions or uncertainties arise during the interview, please feel free to ask.

If so, I would like to ask you if I can record this interview. The recording will only be used for this research and will be deleted after the transcription. Do you have any objections to this? Before we begin, do you have any questions or things that I should take note of?

…

Then I will now start the recording.

* start recording*

[Introductory questions]

First of all, can you tell me a little about yourself?

Can you tell me about your position and tasks during your current job?

How long have you been working at this university?

What does an average workday look like for you?

1. If already discussed

You just mentioned that you have a work impairment, can you tell me more about that?

2. If not discussed

My research is about employees with work impairments, can you tell me something about that?
Would you describe yourself as someone with a work impairment?

[Questions about experience with working with impairments]

- What do you notice about your impairments in everyday life?
- How do people react to your impairment?
- What is the interaction with your colleagues like?
- What is the interaction with your supervisor(s) like?
- How were things when you just came to work at the university?
- Have you always been open about your impairment?
- Are adjustments needed for you to do your job?
- How does the university handle this?

[Policy]

- Do you know if the university has any policies for employees with impairments or work limitations?
- Or possibly the faculty?
- If not, do you think that this is necessary?
- Are there any facilities for employees with work impairments?
- Do you use any of these facilities?
- Do you notice anything about this?

We were just talking about the university's policy. The university does have a diversity policy in which it states that the Radboud University wants to be an inclusive employer.

- To what extent do you notice this?
- How would you describe/define inclusion? What does inclusion mean to you?
- Do you have any suggestions for the university?

[if not already addressed]

I also notice that the term ‘work impairments’ can be a tricky, sometimes loaded term. How do you see that?

[Final Questions]

- I think for now we have covered everything I wanted to discuss. Among other things, we have talked about how you experience working at the university, your personal experiences and also about the university’s policies. Are there any things you would like to add? Or is there maybe something I have missed?

[Closure]

I would like to thank you very much for participating in this interview. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me anytime. I will now end the recording. Thank you again very much for your time!

* stop recording*

- How did you feel that the interview went?
- Do you know any other people that I could possibly interview?

Here I will possibly explain a bit more about how the research will proceed from now on: conduct other interviews, transcribe the interviews, analyze the interviews and write the final thesis.

- Would you like to receive a copy of my thesis?
- Do you still have any questions?
- (If the respondent asks for the transcript, you can also send it to them, but do explain exactly what a transcript entails and what they can expect. (No running text, no proper sentences, with uh’s and eh’s, typed out verbatim).
- [If not yet discussed during the after talk] I also notice that the term ‘work impairment’ can be a tricky, sometimes loaded term. How do you see that?

8. Appendix II Codebook

Codebook			
Aggregate dimensions	**Axial codes**	**First order codes**	**Examples of quotes from transcripts**
Institutional influence	Accessibility	Building design	"We have been working at home with corona for a very long time and [...] we have been here in the [designation building] for a few months now and, since that time everyone from my department has been required to attend on Thursdays. Yes, but not me, because I can't go to the bathroom. Or I have to go downstairs to the basement. But yeah, then I have to go through long corridors and yeah, [...] if I really have to go to the toilet, then I have to go. And then I shouldn't have to go through a couple of long hallways, because then I'll pee my pants before [I get there]." (R4)
			"The university states on paper that it must be accessible to everything and everyone and that everything must be possible. And every department I go to, there have to be adaptations. [For example] things still need to be put on the doors, or an accessible toilet [still needs to be installed]." (R4)
		Adaptations workplace	"Yeah, I got a custom office chair right away that first year and later I got the same one at home, [which] was really nice, because sometimes I worked from home when I wasn't doing so well. And [...] that chair, I still have it in both places and it's already twenty years old." (R5)

		Flexible workspaces	"[Flexible workspaces are] the trend. Then I think to myself, yes, that's where you [...] missed the mark. Well, yes, I can't sit everywhere. I really need my adapted workspace and I don't plan to move [all my stuff] every time and sit somewhere else. I really don't plan to." (R3)
			"Yeah [...], and I also had custom lighting, because I'm not supposed to have fluorescent light above me, because of my eyes which do not have tear fluid, so I have indirect lighting. So I have these [...] lights facing upwards, so the light doesn't shine in your eyes. But now for example at [building X] they have all [...] those flexible workspaces. Yeah, I don't have [that custom lighting] there. And yes, I sit there very little, so [...] that is a bit inconvenient [...]." (R5)
		Accessibility of suitable positions within higher education	"But there are not many positions where someone [with a disability] can just flow in. You will often have to create something. You will often have to adapt something. You will, somewhere someone has to step in to do that. And then I do think, but then that's my own experience, my own frustration with that, [...] that for years we've actually been saying to the university, to the faculty there, to central [...] 'Hello, here I am. I'm able to fill a job at the university, within certain constraints and I'm part of the quota in that. And there are all kinds of arrangements within, but also outside of the university by which that is advantageous to do so.'" (R1)
			"Because now it is only some sort of bonus that you get as a department [...], when you give preference to applicants with a job indication, but that means that you still have to compete against people without, [...], a job indication who can flow in easily and there will probably be room for that and some supervisors will take the step easier than others." (R1)

			"And if my consultant at the WSW has a candidate who she thinks, well, maybe they will fit into [department name], she will talk to [...] my supervisor and then they will see if that works. [...] So, [for example] people with severe dyslexia are not assigned to [task that requires good language skills]. But some people can interpret images very well, for example, and they can then [perform another task where they can use that quality]. Then something suitable is sought." (R6)
			"I have always worked at the university. You can say, the university has given me opportunities to work here." (R5)
		Asking disabled employees for input	"It can be done easier [and better], but you just have to know how [...]. Yes, [...] I say very often that when people do something like: let someone, a disabled person, an actual disabled person try it too if you make adjustments." (R4)
			"Yeah, they really never asked during my time of being ill, do you want a coach or anything? No, really nothing at all." (R5)
			"Look, you're already limited and then it's like, '****, I'm sick and then I drop out again and how am I supposed to solve that?' And then it's very nice that there are agencies that know how to [...] guide you. I do think that [name of the institution of higher education] should pay more attention to this as well." (R3)

	Institutional support	Facilities and support	
			"At the very least, I think I should receive an email about what they offer [in terms of facilities]. And then I can decide for myself if I want some of that. So just one page online somewhere, or that you get an invitation. Yeah, it's just good to know what's out there, what's possible, where I can possibly get help or get information. [...] Yes, and I also think it's an obligation of an employer. Because you want to be inclusive, all great talk, but also show it then." (R5)
			"Months ago [...], before the first time we moved, they came to me and to my supervisor to ask, 'would you guys like to come to the building sometime for a tour so that we can take a look at what needs to be changed?' We thought that was very positive, my supervisor and I. So, we went there. We made a whole tour and looked at all the things that needed to be changed. But to this day, nothing has happened." (R4)
			"It's very different at [name institute of higher education] [than in the profit sector]. Here you have to go through a hundred departments to achieve something. I don't know if you've heard that before, but it all takes a very long time." (R3)
			"I think it will take a very long time [until the institution is inclusive]. And I think [...] it's only truly inclusive when it's accessible to everyone, so also to people with disabilities. [...] And that we're not [...] an appendix attached to it." (R3)
			"Every time we moved, it turned out that when you got to the place, there were things that weren't right. And then my boss would go after it and she would call in [other] people or her [own] supervisor, and she would ask [them] something like: 'can't this be done differently or can't that be done differently?'" (R4)

			"And she was, of course, a super great supervisor at that time, because she simply had a lot of experience herself. And even though she had [a different physical disability], she knew what processes you go through." (R5)
			"So there's nothing there, you are allowed to do it all yourself, but you also have to do it all yourself. And I think that is quite an attitude at the university, which is very difficult in such cases. Because it's incredibly difficult when you're struggling to then also have to keep asking and pulling at it yourself like ´But hey, hello, don't forget about me. Hello, I needed more guidance." (R1)
			"Well then for me I think it would be mainly that that policy is actively propagated and actively implemented. And that it's not like, we have a budget for that and if you want to claim it you can. That's all passive." (R1)
			"Everyone is basically ought to be able to do everything. But there are also people who just don't have the capabilities. But also people who are very reluctant, [...]. People often think that we have the same level as my boss and those just below him. My boss has [a] university [degree] and the others at least [higher education] and maybe university. [...] It is expected that if we are explained something once, we will understand it. But that's not how it works." (R10)
			"Because I really need [a coach], because I really go beyond my limits. I'm too enthusiastic, I'm doing too much. [...] And that's why it's so important to have a coach. [For me] at least it is. Because a coach can slow me down a little bit." (R3)
			"And a good supervisor does really [...] make a lot of difference. I've had quite a number of them and I wasn't equally enthusiastic about all of them. But I was happy with most of them. I was very lucky with that." (R5)
			"And I needed someone to consult. Someone who is neutral in it and not [...] someone from the [institute of higher education], but just someone who is objective and thinks along like 'okay, this is how it's going, maybe you need to do this, maybe you need to talk to that person.' And there was no such thing." (R3)

		Role occupational physician	"And in bad times [...], it's not that I was absent very often, but every now and then I did have really bad times, then I would consult my supervisor and the occupational physician. And I always had good occupational physicians whom I just went to preventively and then I would approach them somewhat as a coach, like: 'would you think with me, what's smart [to do]?'" (R5)
			"I'm very glad that the Occupational Health physician is there, who can monitor, for example, how you're doing and give advice, and that the [name of institute of higher education] has to comply with that." (R3)
			"And I've had very good [occupational health physicians] and now I have someone who's also very pleasant and very good and understands what it's about, but you're always afraid that you'll get someone with whom you have to defend yourself all the time. Yes, and [...], I'm just afraid that someone will say, "Nonsense, you just have to go to work."
		Agreements about tasks	"I initially was given, what my supervisor said, an extension of my duties and then after I went on vacation it was suddenly half-heartedly reversed without really consulting it with me. I wasn't actually told what things I did wrong, I can't actually point out what things went wrong either." (R2)
			"By last fall, it was suddenly like: [...] 'you can't do certain tasks because you're not doing them well.' Why I wasn't doing them well I actually still haven't heard. And it is noticeable that you suddenly do have autistic traits. So it [...] all depends on what kind of supervisor you are dealing with and to what extent they are receptive to you or not." (R2)

Peer influence	Support of colleagues	Being there for disabled colleague	"And I did have a kind of senior colleague back then, who also helped me a lot in the first few years. That was also a kind of coach. [Who] did not really have that task formally on paper, but still." (R5)
		Transparancy about one's disability	"So [...] especially continuing the conversation and staying open, that was always the recipe for me. And well my colleagues said: 'we don't notice much about you and you don't talk about it very often', but if something was really wrong I would say it. And then they would take it into account so I was lucky with that. People sometimes said '[...] you don't mention it enough, we forget about it.'" (R5)
			And yes, I am very open. I mean, when you don't tell it [about your impairment], you make it difficult for yourself. (R7)
		Taking someone's disability into account	"So there really is a lot on my plate. And people know that, and colleagues take that into account as far as they can. That's why I can keep working, otherwise I would have been on health insurance." (R10)
	Attitude towards disabled colleague	Not knowing if it is okay to ask about disability	"I think maybe they don't have the skills for that themselves as well, that they still had a certain fear maybe of actually asking things directly or asking more deeply. Then if they ask me: 'are you okay?', and I say: 'yes I'm okay', then it's over with too." (R1)
		Being part of the group	"So I was actually a full member I think with my peers and a lot of times people would say 'yeah, you don't see anything about you.'" (R5)
			"And I do feel that I am a full member of the group, so in that respect I do not feel that I am excluded because of my handicap. But that's also because almost everyone who works there has a (mental) disability in one way or another." (R8)

		Excluding their colleague from certain tasks based on prejudice their disability	"Well yes, but it's, I also have a bit of a feeling that, [...] those colleagues, a bit bluntly put, abuse the situation [...] that they say 'yes, no, you can't do that because of your work disability'. When in fact, while they're not the labor expert, [...] not a psychologist either, so [...], how do they come up with that? No, yes, I wouldn't know what it should be based on." (R2)
		Colleagues treating you the same as everyone else in the organization	"And [...] there's not a lot of talk about specifically the disability or [...] the wheelchair anymore. It [...] is also with colleagues who [...] say 'will you walk with me?' I don't feel attacked or anything, I mean I [...] will ride along. Because the other day I had also said to someone [...] of, 'just ride with me [...].' Yeah, I mean, [...] I don't have a whole lot of [...] trouble with that as far as what terms they use. [...] And it's actually not used that much in [...] normal conversation either." (R4)
		The feeling of being treated unfairly	"And I also sometimes find it inconsistent of: [the interesting tasks] actually always are assigned to colleagues, but the very moment they can't do them or aren't present, I suddenly am assigned to do them, or I have to do them, so that is just contradictory. There's also a number of things that I used to be allowed to do, [...] that now no longer end up with me, [...]." (R2)
Self-concept	The desire to fit in	Wanting to be considered an equal	[About colleagues forgetting that the respondent is disabled] "But I would like to be considered an equal as well, so that's kind of twofold, because I shouldn't sell myself short. So that's kind of a split sometimes." (R5)

		Blending into the crowd	"So, because I enjoyed just being one of the crowd again, and not an exception. And in my case that's possible, because I'm not in a wheelchair." (R5)
			"And then during long meetings, I actually had to stand up every now and then, [...] because it all started to hurt. I found that quite difficult in the beginning, because then you take up space and you are different. So I really had to learn to do that. So basically I just had to be different once in a while, [...] because it was better [for myself]. But yeah, I didn't dare to do that in the beginning. It's like with adolescents, you don't want to stand out. So [...] I had to learn all that and those are all voices in your head as well." (R5)
			"As for me, just leave me alone, let me be in my bubble and I'll be fine. No fuss and bother. Because I just have a lot of trouble with that when people are nagging and watching me, then I think, pay attention to yourself, leave me alone."(R7)
		The desire to be considered successful within the framework disability	"Once a human resources counselor said to me, 'You are a successful, chronically ill person'. Yeah, that's weird, isn't it? And [...] so I really wanted that stamp, because I know it gives benefits. [...} Then you have a 'plus'. So if you're ill for a while then, maybe it's not perceived as so bad. Because yeah, the fear is, am I doing enough? Those are unconsciously those voices, am I doing enough, do I belong?" (R5)
		Feeling burdened to speak up	"Well, I don't know if I would [make use of help] if there's a real fire, because then I think, then everybody just needs to get outside as quickly as possible. But in a fire drill (I have a problem with climbing stairs), then it's good to have someone with me to make sure I don't get knocked over." (R9)
			"Yeah, because I always have a hard time asking for things, though." (R7)
			"And I do work at [location Y], where I have my own room and I do have the custom lighting there and that is where I work most. But if that were to change, then I would think, 'well, of course I don't work that many hours'. So I notice that I find it difficult to say, [...] suppose I would work five hours at [building X], are you going to ask for an adapted workplace there? I actually find that awkward." (R5)
			"And I was fortunate that I could work with my head, so I didn't have physical work, I could just use my intellect." (R5)

	Being able to execute your job the way you want to	To what extent your disability impedes you in your work	
			"Well, sometimes I need to do some easier tasks, [...] because then I can clear my head for a while [...]. So that works. But well, that also has to do with how I handle that myself and that I get that space too." (R10)
			"[...] the limited possibilities that I do have with my worsened disability, because, for example, my pace of work is clearly slower than that of someone who can see well." (R8)
		Being challenged in your job	"No, I execute my job, but I feel that, it is currently [...] very monotonous. Whereas before I had much more variety, which also made the job more fun, I notice that now I actually do a lot of [work] outside and a lot of monotonous work." (R2)
		Degree of job security	"Because I know that [cutbacks] are a topic again, and the supervisor last week said: 'yes, we're really thinking about it.' And I think that there's a strong possibility that that will be the case, that they will cut back on [part of my job]. Yeah, do I want to do other work then? Because I don't have to leave, I understood. But yes, what then? [...] And where can I work then? That's stressful to me." (R5)
		Having to accept your disability	“Yes. If I can be completely honest Simone, it requires a lot of energy, and it also requires a lot of energy to prove that you are able to do things. But it also demands a lot of energy to accept that you can't do things, because that is sometimes very difficult to let go of.” (R3)

			"And it actually is kind of good to be honest with yourself and say: 'yes, I have a work disability or, I have a work impairment.' Because then you start dealing with it." (R5)
		Contesting the discourse of lower productivity by redefining productivity (Jammaers et al., 2016)	"There are also people with disabilities, who often have, as a counterpart, an exaggerated other quality. For example blind people can be incredibly good listeners. And it's often with, and this may be stereotyping, autistic people, and in my case it's not the case, but they are often tremendously good at analyzing." (R2)
		Not wanting to sit at home	"And I also just come [to work] for the human contacts. I find it, I don't want to sit at home all day and I also want to contribute something to society, or well, the structure or the feeling that you [...] are still a bit normal. That's also very much part of it." (R6)
			"I'm like, sitting at home, I don't feel like that either, because then I start worrying and that's not helpful either. They would prefer me to deliver quality, [...] than to sit at home. Yes, nobody benefits from me sitting at home, not them and not myself." (R10)