

Master thesis Strategic Human Resources Leadership

Solidarity in Disability: A qualitative study on the experiences of inclusion among disabled employees and practices that produce or counter ableism in a Work Integration Social Enterprise in the Netherlands.

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Abstract

In line with the societal and political expectations regarding the employment opportunities of disabled employees, this study researches the context of a Work Integration Social Enterprise (WISE). WISE organizational structures are also expected to meet these societal and political expectations. Moreover, disabled employees remain an underrepresented diversity group in academic literature. Therefore, this research was conducted. This study explored the experiences of inclusion among disabled employees and practices that produce or counter ableism in WISE. Insights into the experiences of disabled employees were gathered via semi-structured interviews. These interviews primarily revealed positive experiences regarding the work atmosphere. The leadership style of the current store manager positively influenced these perceptions. Additionally, participatory observations were conducted to gain insights in practices constitutive of ableism. Some areas still require some attention to eliminate ableism, such as the sick leave management tool. These findings underscore the positive impact of leadership style at WISE on the experience of inclusion among disabled employees. Lastly, eliminating some ableist practices is necessary to create a fully inclusive workplace for all employees.

Acknowledgements

Use of Artificial Intelligence

For some parts of this research, artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used. It was merely used as improvement of language. None of the results were generated by the AI tool. All results were gathered by me. The prompts that were used were generally as follows: “Translate to academic English, improve grammar, give three forms”. From these three forms, phrase structures and synonyms were used to improve my English writing. All answer by ChatGPT were checked for mistakes and not literally copy-pasted. I did not use the tool for anything other than vocabulary and grammatical questions.

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1. Introduction

An evident group of people who are underrepresented on the work floor are individuals with disabilities (Klinksiek et al., 2023; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). A commonly held assumption explaining the underrepresentation of disabled¹ employees is their perceived lower levels of productivity (Kruse et al., 2017). Additionally, discrimination by employers against disabled individuals may further diminish their employability. Moreover, there is a noticeable gap between people without disabilities and people with disabilities mainly in job and pay satisfaction (Shantz et al., 2017). Furthermore, disabled employees more often experience denial of reasonable accommodations at work (Baldrige & Swift, 2015), while their able-bodied counterparts do not encounter such denials. A cause of these contrasting experiences of disabled employees might be the existence of ableism in the workplace

According to Campbell (2001, p. 44), ableism can be referred to as an interconnected set of beliefs and practices that implies a “specific type of individual” and physical attributes that make up as the “ideal, species-typical and therefore fully human”. Moreover, ableism implies the ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume able-bodiedness which marginalizes those who are not ‘able-bodied’ (Williams & Mavin, 2012). Ableism shapes a perspective that perceives disability as a condition that devalues a person's humanity (Campbell, 2008, p. 153). It degrades a person solely to their disability and categorizes individuals without conditions as the status-quo of being “normal” or even ideal (Ho, 2008, p. 198), rather than recognizing their worth as individuals. Negative associations related to disability threaten the careers of disabled people alongside having detrimental effects to organizational policies and practices (Jammaers et al., 2021). Even when organizations attempt to include disabled employees through practices like socialization, it reinforces the notion that individuals with disabilities need to be adjusted to fit in (Kwon & Archer, 2022). True inclusion can only occur when ableist foundations in organizations are absent.

Following up on this, organizations remain a profound influence in identity shaping of disabled employees (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021), which can be problematic when an organization uses ableist ways of organizing (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021, p. 430). This in turn confirms the influence of organizational culture and practices on the inclusion of disabled employees discussed by Schur et al. (2005). Ambiguities arise when an organization claims commitment to hiring disabled individuals, yet on the workplace floor they face rejection. Organizations should align these commitments by fully transforming their workplace to an inclusive environment (Kwon & Archer, 2022), that supports disabled people challenging their oppressed identity and thereby defying ableism (Kwon, 2021).

Adding on to this, an inclusive work environment plays a big part in influencing the interactions of disabled employees in seeking help from their able-bodied counterparts (Kulkarni, 2011).

¹ The term “disabled” is used in the academic literature. For this reason, I also use this term for individuals who are perceived by society as disabled. In line with the arguments of Jammaers et al. (2021), it is primarily society that disables these individuals, not themselves. Therefore, I use the term “disabled” solely to remain consistent with the academic literature (e.g., Williams & Mavin, 2012).

This shows the importance of a supportive work environment for disabled employees. Furthermore, research by Rennstam and Sullivan (2018, p. 177) highlight the influence of subtle exclusion caused by certain behavior like joking, related to “othering”. Mik-Meyer (2016) also identifies instances where disabled employees experience “othering”, where they are perceived or treated differently due to differing from what is considered “normal” within their ingroup. Previous studies have predominantly been conducted in commercial or assumed ableist organizations. Consequently, it is interesting to examine how disabled employees experience inclusion within an organization that considers the abilities, capabilities and conditions of employees; social enterprises.

Social enterprises are organizations that combine social goals with the organizing factors of a for-profit organization (Gupta et al., 2020). The main purpose of this organization form is acting from their societal goal, has a business model and sees profit as a mean not as a goal (Social Enterprise NL, 2024). A term used alongside social enterprises is sheltered workshops². These workshops provide a place for disabled individuals to work with the support of social professionals (Blonk et al., 2020, pp. 975-976). A noteworthy difference between these organizations form is that sheltered workshops are generally non-profit and community based (Whitehead, 1986; Karré, 2021). Social enterprises on the other hand, also provide a workplace to people with a distance to the labor market such as disabled individuals. Spear and Bidet (2005, p. 196) define these social enterprises as: “Work Integration Social Enterprise” (WISE). Their main purpose is to assist disadvantaged and disabled groups of individuals who are vulnerable to exclusion from the labor market.

Recent studies on ableism in the workplace focus on commercial organizations (e.g. Kwon, 2021; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021). These organizations have profit as their main goal. Little research is done for organizations that have profit as a mean not goal, like a social enterprise. To fill this gap, this research will investigate the experiences of disabled employees and explore the social interactions between disabled and able-bodied employees in a WISE. Shore et al. (2018) argue that global trends indicate an increasing diversity in the workforce, emphasizing the need for improved inclusion of all employees. Additionally, there has been a rise in social and political expectations to improve the employment opportunities for disabled individuals (Gould et al., 2019). Not only conventional organizations must meet these societal expectations, but also organizations like WISE that already provide these opportunities. In this study I critically examine WISE because they present themselves as a safe and supportive workplace for vulnerable or disabled employees.

² Sheltered workshops have gathered significant criticism due to their nature of exclusionary environments where disabled employees are segregated from mainstream society rather than integrated (Gill, 2005). Cimera (2011) and Cimera et al. (2012) support this perspective by showcasing similar vocational outcomes of disabled employees in sheltered and those in regular employment. Contrary to this, social enterprises actively engage in the mainstream labor market (Karré, 2021) and are expected to incorporate disabled employees into society.

The goal of this study is to investigate the experience of inclusion of disabled employees and practices that produce or counter ableism within WISE (pseudonym for the organization in this study) in the Netherlands. Ableism serves as the tool of analysis, providing insights into exclusion. The presence of ableism is regarded as a form of exclusion, while its absence indicates inclusivity for disabled employees. In doing so, insights will be presented regarding the nature of ableist practices. This will contribute to organizational efforts of prevention and mitigation of these practices. Given the organization's (WISE) extensive experience with people with disabilities and its forms of organizing tailored to disabled employees, it is intriguing to critically examine whether disabled employees experience ableism in this work environment. Furthermore, it examined the interpersonal dynamics among individuals, focusing not only on the discourse of ableism but also on the broader practices surrounding ableist behavior. Given that ableism can be embedded within organizational structures beyond language alone, it was appropriate to explore the holistic experiences of employees with disabilities in relation to ableism.

Interviews are a valuable method for gaining insights into individuals' experiences and subjective perspectives (Bleijenbergh, 2016). However, they may fall short in providing insights into interpersonal interactions between employees. To address this limitation, participatory observations were conducted to gain insight into the dynamics between disabled and able-bodied employees. Finally, an analysis was done to study the plans and strategies implemented by the organization itself for the inclusion of disabled employees. This analysis focused on the linkage between theoretical strategies and their practical implementation to obtain a holistic understanding of the inclusion of disabled employees within WISE.

Disability Studies has historically emphasized the power of language in shaping meaning within the context of ableism (e.g. Jammaers et al., 2016), yet the examination of practices constitutive of ableism has received limited attention (Jammaers et al., 2021). More research regarding the social practices constituting to the experience of inclusion by disabled employees through the lens of ableism is necessary to fill this gap. This study aims to address this gap by using participant observation to examine interpersonal dynamics and provide insights into the presence of ableism. Furthermore, disabled individuals are often marginalized as a relatively insignificant minority group within workforce diversity, receiving only 15 articles across 30 years of Human Resource Development research dedicated to disabilities (Kwon & Archer, 2022, p. 326). This elucidates the scarce academic attention disabled employees receive. Adding on to this, Lindsay et al. (2022) call for a more in-depth documentation of workplace ableism and the variation between disability type. There is an evident lack of more in-depth research regarding disabled employees experiencing ableism in the workplace. Therefore, this study will aim to provide more in-depth research regarding the experience of ableism by disabled employees. The following research question will guide this research:

How do disabled employees experience workplace inclusion and practices that produce or counter ableism in a WISE?

Disabled individuals benefit significantly from employment engagement. It improves their quality of life and also self-esteem (Dutta et al., 2008, p. 326). Therefore, it is essential to include disabled employees in regular work. Moreover, disabled employees often face rejection when applying for a regular job even when no difference in productivity are present (Ameri et al., 2018). This indicates ableist organization practices that exclude disabled individuals from regular jobs. Adding on to this, adjustments in hiring practices may be implemented to reduce barriers, thereby allowing a more inclusive recruitment and selection process. This highlights the importance of organizational leaders and Human Resource functions, like recruitment and selection, within the organizations (Kwon & Archer, 2022). Lastly, approximately two million individuals have impairments in the Netherlands who also deserve the right to participate in society (Rijksoverheid, 2023). To ensure that this minority group encounters minimal barriers, it is important to eliminate ableist organizational practices until no ableism is present anymore. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to a more inclusive work environment by presenting practical implications that may reduce ableist practices.

In this study, a theoretical framework is presented. In this framework, critical disability studies, the concept of disability and ableism are defined and their interpretation for this study. In addition, the concept of inclusivity is defined as it is integrated in WISEs and in challenging ableism. Lastly, social enterprises are explained in the same chapter. Subsequently, in the methodology section, the epistemology of this research is elaborated while also presenting the case and research design of this study. Moreover, the data analysis is clarified and a reflection on the positions of the researcher as well as ethics are given. the results section interprets the findings, linking them back to the theoretical framework whilst also providing new relevant sources. Lastly, the discussion summarizes the findings and gives insight in the theoretical and methodological contribution. It also illustrates the limitations and suggestions for future research. In addition, the practical implications are highlighted and finally a conclusion summarizes the study.

2. Theoretical framework

For the theoretical framework an overview is provided of relevant literature regarding critical disability studies, disability, ableism, inclusivity and social enterprises.

2.1 Critical disability studies

Disability studies is one of the newer academic disciplines. Critical disability studies (CDS) has built on the field of disability studies and expanded on it with further nuances and refinements (Goodley et al., 2019, p. 974). Thereby, it has made significant advancements and produced a more complex understanding of disability. As a result, CDS has evolved into an environment where ideas are shared which can have effects on the everyday lives of individuals with disabilities (Shildrick, 2013). Disability is merely the starting point of CDS. It encompasses a wide range of political, theoretical, and practical issues that may also apply to other individuals (Goodley, 2013, p. 632). CDS plays a crucial role in developing theory by critically analyzing disability issues. This has a central focus on the societal constructs of normal and abnormal, thereby displaying the distinction (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

2.2 Disability

In disability studies, the framework developed by Nagi (1964) is a prominent study in defining the concept of disability (Federici et al., 2016). The extensively cited research by Nagi (1964, p. 1569) discusses disability being described as “impairment”, “disability” and “handicap” as it creates meaning-related complexities. It establishes a notion of evaluating an individual based on their ability and inability, consequently stating a person’s inability to participate in activities in related to their medical determinable impairment (Nagi, 1964, p. 1570). Nagi's framework (1964) faced criticism for medicalizing disability, being viewed as a variation of the deficit model that suggests corrections should be made to make disabled individuals "normal" (Pfeiffer, 2003, p. 2). The primary focus of the medical model revolves around preventing impairments and facilitating their rehabilitation through medical and psychological interventions (Thanem, 2008, p. 584). Although criticized, Nagi's (1964) framework was used for the “*International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps*” (World Health Organization, 1980). This classification failed to integrate the social model of disability, excluding context-dependent impacts of disability (Federici et al., 2016). An update of this categorization was presented in the form of the “*International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*” (ICF) (World Health Organization, 2001) where a “biopsychological approach” is used steering away from solely using the viewpoint of health professionals (Federici et al., 2016).

Despite the ICF utilizing a biopsychological approach, Heerkens et al. (2017) argue that there is a lack of this manner as it gives the impression that medical perspective is still dominant. Namely, the medical perspective lacks the societal influence on disability. A perspective that captures the societal state of disabled individuals is the social model of disability . The social model of disability separates

between disability (social exclusion) and impairments (physical limitations) (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 215). This social model implies that individuals are disabled by society first instead of their individual biological impairments (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021, p. 448). Society being a factor in the disabled position of individuals with impairments is confirmed by the definition of disability by Federici et al. (2016), as it envelops environmental context (such as society) in its definition:

“More specifically, disability can be described as arising out of limitations on activity and restrictions on participation that are determined by the interaction between bodily functioning, structural impairments, and an unhelpful context.” (p. 2347).

According to this definition, disability is seen as product of societal factors rather than solely individual physical or cognitive restrictions. This contradicts the medical model of disability, which revolves around the individual's physical or cognitive limitations leaving out societal factors. The social model introduces the societal factors by highlighting the disabling effect of an environment arranged for able-bodied individuals (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). However, there is also criticism on this model. It fails capture subjective experiences of disabilities and their relation to the social context (Albrecht, 2002, as cited in Mik-Meyer, 2016). Regardless of this criterium, the social models offer a focus on the social situation of disabled individuals (Mik-Meyer, 2016). Therefore, it remains relevant and continues to be used when assessing ableism (e.g. Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021).

2.3 Ableism

Ableism finds its origin in Disability Studies, an academic discipline which researches disability as a social, cultural or political phenomenon (Bogart & Dunn, 2019). Within Disability Studies, the term "disablism" is also a widely used term (Jun, 2018). Disablism can be defined as a set of assumptions that promote a different or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities (Campbell, 2008, p. 152). According to this definition, disablism is mainly concerned with the unequal treatment of individuals based on their disabilities. The definition of ableism illustrated by Campbell (2001, p. 44) presents a perspective of disability where: “disability is cast as a diminished state of being human”. Ableism revolves around the negative perception of impairment and the idea that an impairment should be rectified to conform to societal norms of ability (Jun, 2018). The main difference between the two terms, is disablism laying focus on the disability itself and ableism laying focus on perceived lack of ability. Ableism prefers individuals that are able-bodied and disablism discriminates against disabled individuals. For this research light is shed on the notion of ableism as it extends beyond the discourse solely around the abilities of the body and abilities of disabled individuals (Wolbring, 2012, p. 78), making up for a more societal influenced term. Perceptions of how people interpret disability are more relevant in this research which is why ableism is the preferred term.

Jammaers et al. (2021) discuss the advancement of ableism towards a binary definition where one can be seen as 'able-bodied' or disabled. By categorizing a person as able-bodied or disabled, it labels them as lesser human being. This perspective refers back to Campbell (2001), where disabled individuals are seen inferior human beings through the lens of ableism. Related to this, are 'varieties of ableism' discussed by Jammaers and Zanoni (2021, p. 445). Variations of ableism are grounded in the able-bodied or disabled dichotomy which promotes certain work identities that are ideal for organizational goals. Through this dichotomy the notion of "othering" can be introduced. Othering, as discussed by Mik-Meyer (2016), refers to the level attention an individual receives that differs substantially from people who are able-bodied. It establishes an perception of 'different' people due to their impairments, whereas able-bodied colleagues may not be implicitly labeled as 'different' (Mik-Meyer, 2016, p. 1357).

2.4 Inclusivity

In the context of ableism, the concept of inclusive workplace and inclusion is illustrated due to its relevance within the academic field of Disability Studies. Furthermore, inclusion can be perceived as a neutralizing force against ableism. A thorough definition of inclusive workplace is introduced by Ferdman and Deane (2013). First off, they define exclusive workplaces as places where people need to conform to a preestablished idea of doing things (Ferdman & Deane, 2013, p. 298). This perspective aligns with ableist organizations where employees are expected to meet with status-quo, like mentioned by Ho (2008) where 'normality' is idealized.

In contrast to exclusive workplaces, Ferdman and Deane (2013, pp. 298-299) mention inclusive workplaces as a place that utilizes differences, contributes to community and meets the needs of disadvantaged groups. A critical reflection on the definition of inclusion is presented by Dobusch (2014, pp. 220-221), where she stated that there are two definitions of inclusive organizations. On the one hand, inclusion must be achieved by steering away from exclusion. While on the other hand, every inclusion comes with exclusion and vice versa. Dobusch (2014) shows with her study that there is not just one definition for an inclusive organization, but that are more nuanced concepts to it. In a later study conducted by Dobusch (2020), she stated that for every act of inclusion, there can exist exclusion and vice versa. This is because accommodations to include on disability-type, can simultaneously exclude another disability-type. This highlights the complexity of an inclusive atmosphere for disabled individuals.

2.5 Social enterprise

As mentioned earlier, sheltered workshops may function as places of exclusion (Gilll, 2005). An appealing alternative for sheltered employment may be social enterprises (Blonk et al., 2020), as they operate in the market economy, allowing for more accessible and mainstream employment for disadvantaged groups. Social enterprises combine commercial organizing goals with social responsibilities (Miller et al., 2012). Profit can be strived for, but everything must be reinvested in the organization (Karré, 2021). Therefore, profit is not a goal but a mean of organizing. A distinction of social enterprises is Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs). These organizations' main goal is to reintegrate long unemployed people with suitable work (Pache & Santos, 2013).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study is based on a case study of a WISE in the east of the Netherlands. As a method of conducting this research, an ethnographic approach will be used. Ethnographic research takes place in social situations that are shaped by individuals' behavior while also including people's understanding of this situation incorporating their experiences (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009). The added value of an ethnographic approach lies in fully participating in daily tasks and engaging in 'ethnographic small talk' (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Moreover, small talk provides access to information that would otherwise be difficult to obtain but is valuable for understanding culture (Driessen & Jansen, 2013, p. 260). This appears like a suitable research method as this study is focused on the of practices constitutive or countering ableism. To organize this, Blommaert and Jie (2010) recommend rigorous preparation to know what is interesting to look for. This was done by reading Disability Studies researches regarding disability and ableism and the literature provided in the theoretical framework of this research.

3.1.1 Case description

This study was conducted in a WISE in the Netherlands (hereafter referred to as WISE). The organization is part of a larger chain in the retail sector of secondhand goods with 1,825 employees throughout the Netherlands. WISE states that they provide suitable work for people who need additional support in obtaining paid employment. The store in this study employs approximately 50 employees. It consists of three main locations: the workshop and the warehouse which both are inaccessible to customers. Lastly, the store itself which is accessible for customers. Access to the organization has been granted as the branch manager and store manager both have agreed to participate in this research. Moreover, to answer this study's research question: "*How do disabled employees experience workplace inclusion and practices that produce or counter ableism in a WISE?*" a qualitative research design was used. Consistent with qualitative research, this study will employ linguistic data (interviews) to draw conclusions about social phenomena (Bleijenbergh, 2016). In contrast to quantitative research, where the focus lies on objectivity and generalizability (Lund, 2012), this study will focus on exploring the subjective reality of participants.

3.1.2 Epistemology

This study is rooted in a constructivist perception of qualitative research. A constructivist perception emphasizes that multiple realities are understood and shaped by social interaction and personal experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is in line with this study's goal, which is to gain insights in personal experiences of inclusion and social interactions that produce or counter ableism. Findings emerge as a result of ongoing interactions between the investigator and the investigated object (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In line with this epistemology, interviewees construct their own reality and my role as a

researcher is to interpret this reality through the theoretical lens I utilized. Consequently, this research is inherently inductive like most ethnographic studies (Wilson & Chaddha, 2009). The philosophical paradigm of this research will be in line of the more subjectivist orientation of social sciences: nominalism (Willmot, 1993).

3.2 Data collection

An important way of collecting data in this research is through participant observations. According to Czarniawska (2007), participant observations in organizational research entail the researcher taking on the position of a member within the organization. The researcher actively participates as an employee. I did this by taking on regular work tasks and engaging small talk with employees (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). Atkinson and Hammersley (1998, p. 249) argue that a researcher is ‘being-in-the-world’ when performing a participant observation as it allows for deeper understanding of lived experiences of participants. This method of observation provides the optimal approach to gain insights into the practices that produce or counter ableism. Moreover, to achieve rigid results, observations must be conducted at various levels, contrasting times and places (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). Making connections between those levels is essential. To fully immerse myself in the environment, I put on the work clothes mandatory at WISE. Moreover, the research was conducted in the workshop, the warehouse, and the store itself, covering all the various levels of the organization.

Table 1

Participant Observations at WISE

#	Day of observation	Time of day	Particularities
1.	Thursday 02-05-‘24	12:00-15:30	First day, lunch break and coffee break
2.	Friday 03-05-‘24	8:45-12:00	Day start, coffee break
3.	Monday 06-05-‘24	09:30-12:00	Coffee break
4.	Friday 10-05-‘24	11:30-13:00	Only electrical department. Two interviews conducted
5.	Monday 13-05-‘24	9:30-11:30	Two interviews conducted

Adding on to this, Table 1 shows when the five participant observations were conducted. The morning coffee break starts at 10:30 and the second shift has a break at 10:45. For the lunch break, employees sit together at 12:30 and 13:00. For the participant observations field notes were made to capture rich points of information that ‘bumped into the boundary what is readily understandable for you’ (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, pp. 40-41). A noteworthy point is that no audio recordings were made

during the observations as this might bring intrusiveness and counteracts with natural situations (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). Alternatively, fieldnotes allow for detailed ways of describing the observed situations as full emotion and interpretations were voice recorded. This was done by observing for half an hour and then retreating to a undisturbed office space. In this office, I used my phone as audio recorder to record my observations from the past half hour.

In addition to observing practices, interviews offer insights into the personal experiences of individuals therefore complementing the research's richness. This was done to complement the ethnographic-style observations with interviews, therefore combining what people say with what they do (Yanow, 2006). Moreover, a semi-structured interview guide supported the interviews to improve the dependability of the research (see Appendix A for the interview guide). The guide's primary role was to provide support in order to maintain a certain structure during the interviews. The main topics were: a. Work atmosphere: "*What do you think of the atmosphere?*" b. Othering: "*How do you interact with each other?*" c. Organization: "*To what extent can you perform your work activities?*" Additionally, the aim was to encourage open dialogue to ensure a rich understanding of the experiences of disabled employees. The questions are based on the theoretical framework of this research. Interviews are non-ethnographic but remain an important aspect of ethnographic research. Following the structure provided by Blommaert and Jie (2010, p. 42) the interviews will set-up as regular conversation to gain rapport with the interviewee. By allowing the interviewee to talk naturally, it grants for more lively interviews delving deeper in the experience of the interviewees.

During the interviews, careful consideration was given to the disability of the employees. Because of this, conducting in-depth interviews was not possible in this research. However, this was not a significant issue, as even the shorter interviews provided rich insights. After seven interviews, a substantial portion of disabled employees was conversed with. Moreover, about five participant observations were conducted ensuring various worktimes. Lastly, organizational documents (e.g. multi-year plan and third-party for sick leave) were analyzed to get insights in the organizational practices regarding disabled employees. This triangulation of methods enhanced the credibility of this research.

3.2.1 *Participant description*

Interviewees were selected on the following criteria. In line with Federici et al. (2016), where an employee is classified as disabled if they experience limitation in their daily activities because of how their body works. Any structural physical or mental challenge that is experienced by an individual in their daily life was included. This is why all sorts of conditions, physical or cognitive, were used in this research. To respect the participants' privacy and to protect their anonymity, their actual conditions are not specified. Instead, the disability type they have is indicated. Ultimately, one participant with a physical condition, three participants with cognitive conditions and three participants with mixed conditions partook in the interviews.

3.3 Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed ad verbatim to preserve valuable information, including silences and stutters. To transcribe the interviews and fieldnotes recordings, Microsoft Word's transcribing tool was used. All names of employees and prior workplaces were anonymized. For the analysis of the transcripts, fieldnotes and organizational documents, ATLAS.ti 24 coding software was used. Moreover, Gioia et al.'s (2013) method, emphasizing data richness and uncovering hidden themes, was adopted for the data analysis. This approach uses a systematic analysis, preserving data richness through careful coding. The coding proceeded in two stages: firstly, identifying 1st-order concepts iteratively to maintain closeness to the data. To ensure the richest coding and reduces the risk of missing important data, all data related to the research goal, interview guide and theoretical framework was included. Approximately 350 1st-order concepts emerged initially, which were then refined by removing redundant and merging overlapping codes. This resulted in roughly 200 codes. Subsequently, fieldnotes and organizational documents were analyzed, yielding a total of approximately 320 codes. Further merging reduced the total number to 133 1st-order codes. These were then aggregated into 26 2nd-order themes, which were subsequently combined into 9 aggregate dimensions. The resulting data structure is depicted in Appendix B. Additionally, supporting quotes for the 2nd-order themes are provided in Appendix C for transparency in the analysis process. This methodology ensured a thorough and structured analysis of the data, adhering closely to Gioia et al.'s (2013) approach while revealing key insights from the interviews.

3.4 Reflection on research position

For the reflection on the research position, it is important to note that I have been employed at this organization. This brings its benefits and its drawbacks. On the one hand, it is beneficial that I have good contacts with the store manager which meant that full cooperation was acquired. On the other hand, familiarity is not a benefit as stated by Blommaert and Jie (2010), because I inevitably disturbed their routines even though I was familiar with their working methods. Although this may be perceived as a disadvantage, the advantage of being known by some former coworkers and my history with the organization proved advantageous in establishing trust. Furthermore, I assured all participants that I will manage the obtained information confidentially. Also, I explicitly communicated my dedication to maintaining their anonymity. Moreover, since this is a vulnerable group to research, I was mindful when conducting the interviews and participant observations. For example, when a interviewee did not feel comfortable talking about a certain subject, I did not push them further.

Adding on to this, especially when interviews were conducted, I did not mention the term 'ableism' to the respondents. Blommaert and Jie (2010) argue that this does not violate any ethical rule and has the following benefit. Since I have formulated a theoretical framework for ableism, participants may have different interpretations of the concept of ableism. Utilizing the term 'ableism' during interviews or participant observations, would assume that the participant possesses precise knowledge

of the meaning of the term. This might lead to misinterpretations surrounding the concept. For this reason, I refrained from using the term ableism during interviews and participant observations to enhance the dependability of this research.

Moreover, Blommaert and Jie (2010, p. 66) mention reflexivity in ethnographic research: “that what becomes ‘objective’ as a scientific result is subjective as a scientific process”. So, for a researcher to be objective it needs to be subjective. The data collected might be subjective, but it is based on objective contexts. Subjective findings must be acknowledged which was done by writing reflective notes. Writing reflective memos improved the credibility of this research as it improved the trackability (Bleijenbergh, 2016).

3.5. Reflexivity

In conducting this qualitative study, I recognize that my presence has potentially impacted the findings. To cope with this, I will critically reflect on my role. Throughout the observations, I made efforts to actively participate in work activities to better integrate with the employees being studied. It is also relevant to mention again, that I have been previously employed at this organization. This may have resulted in unconscious biases regarding certain aspects. I tried to reduce this bias during the recording of fieldnotes, by clearly stating when something was my own feeling or emotion. Furthermore, I allowed interviewees to share their stories about colleagues I also know personally. I did not interrupt them or initiate discussions if I disagreed with their perspectives. I strived to remain as neutral as possible. Additionally, I assured each interviewee that I would manage their data confidentially. All conversations remained strictly between the interviewee and me and are not shared with anyone.

Moreover, it is relevant to address a probable bias. Given my preconceived ideas of the research objective, there is a possibility of observer bias. Because I knew what I was looking for, this could have influenced the research. To mitigate this bias, I attempted to include reflective notes in my fieldnotes, clearly indicating when I was aware of my own emotions and potentially bias. This enhanced the transparency of the research as my thoughts during the observations can be traced.

3.5.1 Research ethics

The following ethical issues were considered. It was crucial that all participants took part voluntarily and did not feel pressured to engage in this research. When an employee declined to partake in the research, I did not continue asking them. Furthermore, after receiving approval from the store manager, I spoke with the branch manager to obtain full consent to conduct this research. Moreover, I recognized the vulnerability of the participants. Therefore, I ensured their anonymity and respected their condition. An example of taking their condition into consideration was avoiding in-depth reviews. These can be too intense for employees with cognitive or mixed disabilities. All data collected will only be stored on my personal laptop and will not be shared with third parties. Three

months after the study is completed, all audio-recordings, transcripts and Excel-sheets with participant information will be destroyed.

4. Results

This chapter will present the results of the interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, describing the findings and providing their interpretation.

4.1 Employee wellbeing

Asking how disabled employees experienced their work provided insights into their work enjoyment and feelings of being at ease. This provided insights into their experiences working in an organization designed for individuals with distance to the labor market.

4.1.1 *Work enjoyment*

When asking interviewees about how they experience their work, I received almost exclusively positive responses. They indicated that they woke up with pleasure wanting to go to work. Additionally, one interviewee was happy about being able to work here. For her, it is a joy to work here compared to her previous job. This is mainly due to the acknowledgement of her condition at this workplace, shaping a supportive environment. This was not the case at her previous job. Furthermore, it was indicated that one interviewee finds the work to be a pleasant distraction. Even when he is no longer able to continue due to his condition, it is not a problem for him to go home. He expressed high appreciation for these arrangements.

4.1.2 *Feeling at ease*

Practically all interviewed employees indicated that they feel comfortable at the workplace. They feel a sense of belonging and did not mention any moment where they did not feel this way. There was one individual who mentioned occasionally feeling uncomfortable, but for him this was the case regardless of the workplace. The workplace at WISE is not the direct cause of this discomfort. Most importantly, two colleagues were mentioned by an interviewee who felt at their place for the first time in their life:

I: RE19 and RE20, they have a condition. And RE20, he was always bullied and [private information]. So, both of them said, this is the first workplace where they said: "I'm not bullied here". I said, "Why bullied?". RE19, she said, "I was always bullied because I have big glasses. But also because I don't understand everything right away. And here, they're willing to explain it to you again until you understand(...) so you're accepted." RE20 (...) he said, this is the first job where he has not been bullied. (Regular employee, cognitive disability)

This fragment shows two colleagues who feel comfortable in the organization. After consistently being bullied, they feel accepted for who they are. They are no longer bullied because of how they look or how they act. This insinuates a feeling of being able to be oneself, regardless of condition or 'being different.' Another example of an interviewee who felt like they belong at WISE is the following. We were discussing how she struggled at her previous job due to an undiagnosed condition. She then talked about her experiences with the former manager. Because a change in manager, I wanted to know if she feels like she belongs at WISE. This is shown in the following fragment from the interview:

I: (...) To what extent do you feel like you belong?

R: Yes, where at my previous job I felt terribly for many years that I didn't belong, that was one of the biggest reasons why I wanted to leave. I felt so lonely, but here I feel completely like I belong. Yes, so I am very happy.

I: That's nice. How does that express itself?

R: Yes, everyone comes up to me, everyone always greets me, I get hugs and I also really get verbal appreciation from everyone. That was what I was looking for and I just get it 100%, yes." (Regular employee, cognitive disability).

During the start of our conversation, she immediately mentioned her experiences at her previous employer. There, her condition was not considered. Despite her efforts, she was neither heard nor seen. At WISE, she feels accepted and valued. Her abilities and limitations are taken into account, allowing her to move freely within her work activities. Above all, she feels free from the challenges associated with her condition.

4.2 Personal experiences of disability

A variety of disability types were interviewed. One employee with a physical disability, three employees with cognitive disabilities and three employees with a mix of physical and cognitive disabilities. Furthermore, an interviewee mentioned the resilience of his body. He talked about how he has to indicate when someone should stop talking whenever he reaches his limit. He raised his hand during the interview and made a stop gesture, thereby recognizing his own physical/cognitive boundaries. He further elaborated on his need for occasional silence, as he is sensitive to too many stimuli. He acknowledges his own condition and actively tries to cope with it. Colleagues understand this when the interviewee indicates his limits, but they do not always recognize these limits on their own. Because his condition developed later on in his life, he can actively compare how it was in the past and how it is now. He emphasized that he does not want different treatment due to his condition and wants to be included with able-bodied colleagues. Therefore, a desire to be included with able-bodied colleagues indicates his wish for equal treatment.

4.3 Empowered living with a disability

The desire to be treated equally extends further when I asked an employee with a mixed disability if he wanted different treatment. He stated that he did not want this and preferred to remain among people as before. Because of this, he constructs his condition as something that does not render him disabled. He aims to continue enjoying the activities he could do previously, like socializing with people. The only thing he mentioned in the interview is that he appreciates it when people respect his condition. Colleagues demonstrate respect for his condition when the interviewee indicates that it becomes overstimulating for him and triggering them moving on.

4.3.1 *Unhindered by condition*

When asked how disabled employees want to be treated, they mentioned that they want to be treated equally. It appears that they do not want special treatment, but only respect for their condition like stated earlier. In this fragment, we were talking about how the colleagues of this interviewee considered his condition. The interviewee has a condition that evolved later on his life. Because of this, he has experienced a detrimental change in his body functioning. During the interview, I asked him if he would like it if colleagues would take him to a quiet room in advance to talk to prevent overstimulation:

I: No, not really. I'm just trying to keep socializing with people like I used to do back in the day. And I want to keep that going for as long as possible.

R: Yeah, so just being treated like...

I: Like a normal person.

R: Yeah, exactly. So you don't feel like you're being treated differently?

I: No. I wouldn't like that either. I just want to blend in nicely and keep going for as long as I can.

R: And if someone crosses your boundaries, you can speak up like hey...

I: Yeah.

R: That sounds like the perfect balance, from what I'm hearing.

I: Yeah, you could put it that way. (regular employee, mixed disability)

The interviewee used the word 'normal' himself, implying some sense of normalcy. It can be implied that the interviewee does not want to be defined by his disability. He wants to perceive himself as 'normal' and therefore equal to his able-bodied colleagues. However, he mentions his boundaries as necessary to balance being treated normally and being respected because of his condition. Another interviewee mentioned not wanting her physical condition to restrict her day at work. In her case, the focus was primarily on ensuring that her physical condition does not hinder her daily tasks. While she

acknowledged experiencing some difficulties, such as physical pain, she does not want these challenges to interfere with her day. This indicates her reluctance to be defined by her disability and her commitment to active participation in her work.

4.4 Work atmosphere

The most recurring opinion regarding the atmosphere was that it is good. It ranged from interviewees finding the atmosphere reasonably good to excellent. No negative reactions occurred to questions regarding atmosphere. Only one interviewee mentioned that he felt that there was something happening on the background:

I: 'I think the atmosphere is quite good. But I just noticed that something is going on in the background. I cannot put my finger on it. But I noticed that there are some tensions here and there.' (Regular employee, mixed disability)

In this quote, the interviewee highlights the presence of certain tensions among individuals. It can be argued that interactions between people have a degree of influence on the atmosphere. Nonetheless, he still enjoys the atmosphere at WISE.

4.4.1 Atmosphere in canteen area

"In the canteen area, there was a lot of noise. And then an employee said, 'Yeah, whenever she's in the canteen, there's always a lot of noise.' It is clear that some employees bring a bit more energy and noise with them. But overall, the atmosphere was very pleasant. It was actually quite cozy ('gezellig' in Dutch) and very relaxed. (...) I noticed that everyone sat together. You saw a lot of people just laughing, and there was an employee who was a bit quieter. But you could tell he enjoyed being there. He was just eating his apple in peace." [Observation day 1]

The canteen area was a busy, pleasant and lively place to sit for a break. People talked to each other and made many jokes. People sat close to each other and shared stories unrelated to work. Sometimes it can be busy and noisy, as stated in the observation fieldnotes. People with disabilities were also included in the conversations as everyone was included in the conversations. Moreover, everyone was included in the conversation, except for those who wanted to read their newspaper or check their mobile phone. This was possible by the distance between the two groups of tables, allowing employees to decide where they would sit. Another table was available for those who did not want to join the mass of people conversing with each other. Therefore, the possibility to sit at a calmer place was present.

4.5 Adversarial leadership

Employees who have worked at WISE for a longer period of time, were able to share insights about their previous manager. Although their opinions on their former manager were not explicitly asked, the employee brought it up on their own. Moreover, my observations regarding employees who assume managerial roles have been noted. They show a dissimilar leadership style compared to the current store manager.

4.5.1 Critics former manager

A frequently occurring comment was regarding the previous manager. This particularly emerged when questions about the workplace atmosphere were asked. Interviewees indicated that the atmosphere has improved partly due to a change in management. The leave of the former manager would have brought a lot of clarity. The heavy loaded complaints and gossiping disappeared, which were replaced by the understanding current manager. From this, it became clear that the manager at the organization has a significant impact on the work environment. For this reason, it was interesting to take note of the positive change in management for the employees with a condition. Disabled employees experienced the previous manager as someone who treated them differently. This is illustrated in the following quote by an employee with a cognitive disability.

R: But how did she show that? What did she do what made you think: “This is not pleasant”?

I: Yes. **silence** Yeah, you just feel that. That she spoke in a different tone to me. (regular employee, cognitive disability)

This shows how the previous manager could make disabled employees feel different by speaking in a different tone. The disabled employee interprets the tone of the manager as different, which indicates that she is aware of how she is perceived based on her disability. This emphasizes the social context in which her disability is experienced with regards to the former manager.

4.5.2 Regular employees taking on managerial roles

During my observations, I noticed two employees assuming leadership roles. It later came to my attention that neither of them holds a formal leadership position. This observation was further highlighted in the canteen area. During my observation in the canteen area, an employee entered whilst we were having a break. He communicated in an agitated manner that a fellow colleague needed to return from his break. This colleague has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and was immediately overwhelmed. Although the agitated colleague later calmed down, the employee with ASD remained overstimulated for the rest of the day.

“A colleague came in and addressed him because he apparently took too long of a break. The way they communicated was quite irritated and agitated, as if that colleague did it often. Now, I know that colleague has a condition, autism specifically. And this was not done empathetically. It was really grumpy, as if it happened very often. Now, it might be the case, but the way of communicating was not like you would think they would take his condition into account. (...) Because later when I asked that colleague, who I was supposed to have an interview with today, he was completely overwhelmed and said it would not work out for him anymore (...) So, I was supposed to have an interview with someone, but he was addressed in a way that completely overwhelmed him and made him overstimulated. He already mentioned in the morning to me that he was already completely overstimulated.” [Observation day 3]

The colleague of the employee with ASD expected him to know the duration of the break but he forgot or got distracted. It appears like the employee with ASD forgot it frequently. This could be related to his ASD as Keehn et al. (2016) argue that individuals with ASD are more easily distracted than able-bodied individuals. They may not pick up social cues such as indicating when it is time to return to work after a break. Despite this, the colleague became angry with the employee with ASD. He did not consider his cognitive disability, thereby overlooking his condition and expecting him to adhere to able-bodied norms (Williams & Mavin, 2012). Additionally, it can be observed that the employee with ASD experienced it as negatively, because he was even more overstimulated after the encounter. Therefore, it can be said that the interaction held elements of ableism.

4.6 Inclusive behavior (collegiality)

From the observations, I gained a proper impression of how people interacted with each other. I particularly noticed that many jokes were made. What is noteworthy is that everyone was included in this. I noticed no deliberate exclusion of certain colleagues from the jokes. Most interviewees indicated that they like the interaction between colleagues. However, some distinctions were made between colleagues. Disabled employees prefer to interact with individuals with whom they feel communication is easier. These are commonly people who have a similar condition. Although, the communication style of individuals remains the decisive factor.

4.6.1 Consideration of conditions

Employees interact with one another in a manner that showcases respect for each other's conditions. One interviewee mentioned that due to his condition, he sometimes is unable to come to work. When he calls in and tells he is unfit to work, he is met with understanding. This contrasts with what another colleague described, which is further explained under '*fear of calling in sick.*' Furthermore, when someone is unable to perform a task due to their condition, it is responded to with empathy. An example is provided in the following quote:

R: (...) Do people understand it if there's something you are unable to do?

I: Yeah. (silence)

R: From all your colleagues?

I: If I confront them about it, they understand. Thankfully, yes.

R: Have you never had a reaction that made you think, well...

I: No. No.

(Regular employee, mixed disability)

Disabled employees are not expected to perform every task. When they are unable to perform something, they are not required to do so. Consequently, there is not an expectation for them to work at full productivity levels as an able-bodied worker might (Jammaers et al., 2016). This is consistent with a non-ableist work environment, as disabled employees are not further accommodated to achieve the production levels of able-bodied colleagues.

4.6.2 *Leadership style attribute current store manager*

Many people spoke highly of the current store manager. They believe she possesses leadership qualities such as admitting her own mistakes. She is polite, calm and takes conditions into consideration which fosters a sense of security among disabled employees. She appreciates people who put in their best efforts. I also noticed this during my observations when she complimented an employee after she had cleaned the store. A customer complimented the employee on this. After telling this experience to the store manager, she gave her a high five. This also demonstrates in practice that she appreciates employees for their work. Furthermore, according to interviewees she plays an active role in engaging people. Moreover, the interviews revealed that people brought up the current manager when I asked about the atmosphere at the workplace. She has a positive influence and interviewees are fond of her. This demonstrates that she is a significant factor in creating a sense of belonging for disabled employees.

4.6.3 *Care about colleagues*

The interviews revealed that many disabled employees emphasize their colleagues who also have a condition. One interviewee indicated that she sent a colleague with ASD away when she noticed it was becoming too overwhelming for him. She noticed how her colleague with ASD was startled and unable to move, because of overstimulation. Figuring that he needed some rest, she insisted that he take a break. In this situation, she was aware of her colleague's disability and wanted to help him. Furthermore, she expressed her willingness to change her behavior for the sake of other individuals with conditions. She is aware that she can be 'a handful' and therefore she is willing to adjust herself to relieve others. Additionally, another interviewee mentioned that he can learn a considerable amount from people with conditions. He perceives these individuals as 'happy people' and believes that 'those people' enjoy themselves.

4.7 Assuming able-bodiedness

During an observation (day 2), I spoke with an employee who was frustrated by an incident involving a former colleague. He described this colleague as an "ableist" and expressed relief that he no longer works here. After conversing for a while, it surfaced that the former colleague had turned him down because he was unable to lift something. Following this incident, the former colleague refused to work with him on the box truck. This led to tensions between the two. Coincidentally, the colleague who was labeled as ableist is no longer employed at WISE. Additionally, an interviewee mentioned feeling that employees in the electrical department receive preferential treatment. He showed frustration that these employees are excused from certain tasks that he is required to perform. This closely aligns with Baldridge and Swift's (2015) study, where employees with conditions who receive accommodations can be perceived as receiving preferential treatment. However, these accommodations are essential for them to be able to function. Therefore, it can be considered ableist when these accommodations are resented by some employees.

Moreover, another interview revealed that a previous supervisor stated that an applicant's appearance was not an issue, stating that "there are already many crazies working here." Using terms like 'crazies' can reinforce negative stereotypes surrounding employees with cognitive or other mental conditions. Thereby, it can further stigmatize employees with mental conditions and cause feelings of exclusion for these employees. Additionally, such language can have detrimental effects on the work atmosphere, as revealed by the interviews highlighting the significant role of the store manager in shaping it.

4.8 Sick leave management

During the interviews, a story emerged of a sick colleague. This colleague felt sick and too weak to work but did not want to go home. She gave up the argument that she was afraid of losing her job if she went home sick. When the interviewee elaborated further, I received numerous examples of colleagues whose contracts had not been renewed because they were sick too often. Apparently, no feedback is given on this when someone is sick too often for a contract extension. Given that the interviewee mentioned several colleagues expressing similar concerns, there may be an underlying fear embedded within the organizational culture. To further research this fear, I wanted to gain insight into the strategy regarding sick leave management. Therefore, I contacted the branch manager.

Through a phone call with the branch manager, I came across the program used for absenteeism. After examining the website, it was clear that there is a high priority on saving costs on sick pay. A statement like: "By influencing the reintegration of (former) employees, you as an employer can save a lot of money", along with offering training for managers to reduce sick leave, gave me this impression. With a business plan focused on reducing sick leave costs, there is a possibility that individuals with disabilities may feel increased pressure to (not) report illness. This could adversely affect their sense of job security. Job insecurity can detrimentally impact both psychological and physical health, thereby potentially increasing the likelihood of actual illness (Bozionelos & Sun, 2013). Therefore, the current sick leave management appears to contradict the social-oriented character of WISE. This could disproportionately harm the already vulnerable employees with distance to the labor market.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to contribute to delving into the experiences of inclusion and practices that produce or counter ableism among disabled employees in a WISE. Given the increasing societal expectations for the inclusion of disabled employees (Gould et al., 2019), it is crucial that WISE's environment also meet these assumptions. This research discovered that disabled employees generally perceive a positive work atmosphere within WISE. Their comfort implies the presence of a safe environment. Interviews revealed that disabled employees feel accepted, which indicates a sense of inclusion. According to Kwon (2021), such acceptance is crucial for the inclusive integration of disabled employees. Therefore, the feelings at ease and acceptance reported by employees can be interpreted as an indicator of inclusion.

Another finding emerged from this study is the profound influence of leadership on the inclusion of disabled employees. Interviewees separately highlighted the role of the store manager when discussing feeling at ease and the atmosphere at the workplace. Particularly, they contrasted the current store manager's caring leadership style with the previous manager's shortcoming in these specific soft skills. Interviews revealed negative references to the previous manager's understanding of managing people with disabilities. Signs like speaking in a different tone to a disabled employee could suggest othering (Mik-Meyer, 2016), therefore making them feel excluded. However, this was only the case for employees who have worked with the previous store manager.

The current store manager was unanimously praised for her empathic and considerate approach. Therefore, it can be concluded that an empathic and understanding manager significantly enhances the experiences of feeling at ease for disabled employees. This finding aligns with previous research that has shown the link between benevolent leadership and job satisfaction of disabled employees (Luu, 2019). Benevolent leadership is characterized by leaders who take on a genuine and wholehearted role in aiding their colleagues (Karakas & Sarigollu, 2011). This corresponds with the current store manager's empathic leadership style.

Despite these positive remarks with regards to the current manager, the participant observations revealed that some ableist practices are present at WISE. The unsympathetic manner of communication from an able-bodied employee towards an employee with a cognitive disability indicates a lack of understanding of his disability. It appeared to occur frequently, suggesting a persistent pattern in the interaction with this disabled employee. The able-bodied colleague assumes that the disabled employee should adhere to the norms of able-bodied individuals (Williams & Mavin, 2012). Some conditions may require greater understanding such as ASD. Individuals with ASD are more easily distracted (Keehn et al., 2016), which asks for a more understanding approach by all able-bodied colleagues.

Moreover, the tailored accommodations for individuals with conditions working in the electrical department were not fully respected by every interviewee. An interviewee remarked that it was unfair that they receive different treatment for their conditions, even though their condition is not visible. This is in line with the discriminating effect on people with invisible conditions (Kattari et al., 2018). While

only minor, It would be desirable to foster better understanding for individuals with conditions within the electrical department. Additionally, it is important to respect the power dynamics highlighted by Dobusch (2020) to prevent unfair accommodations between different disability types.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

This research has contributed by presenting insights into inclusion and ableism in a different context. The change of context provides new insights in how inclusion is experienced, by examining how ableism manifests in social practices in an organization that provides employment for vulnerable individuals. Recent studies have often been conducted in strictly commercial organizations (e.g., Kwon, 2021; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021). In previously mentioned researches, ableism was assumed. Contrastingly, this study was conducted in an environment tailored for vulnerable employees like disabled employees. This distinction offers insights into the unique organizational structure of a WISE.

Numerous positive aspects regarding the inclusion of disabled employees were found. Given their generally positive perceptions of the atmosphere, it appears improbable that a hostile environment is present where disabled employees are marginalized. Schur et al. (2009) argue the important role between disabled employees and interactions between able-bodied colleagues. Moreover, disabled employees mostly felt comfortable in the workplace insinuating a sense of inclusion. Such inclusion may be experienced when disabled employees feel accepted and part of the regular workforce (Kwon, 2021). Therefore, the employees' ease and enjoying the atmosphere suggest a feeling of being accepted for who they are. Hereby, this study has contributed to gaining insights into the experiences of inclusion among disabled employees.

5.2 Methodological contribution

Moreover, this study has contributed to academic literature by adopting a different methodology. In contrast to previous researches that focus on the power of language in context of ableism (Jammaers et al., 2016), this study addressed the gap on the social practices constitutive of ableism (Jammaers et al., 2021, p. 2520). To delve deeper into these social practices I conducted ethnographic style participant observations. By doing so, I generated insights into the interpersonal dynamics between disabled and abled bodied employees. With this additional insight, I discovered that there are still some social practices that tend towards ableism. This highlights the added value of this study by conducting participant observations.

5.3 Limitations

First off, a limitation in conducting participant observation. Because I served as the measuring instrument (Bleijenbergh, 2016), it is possible that I missed relevant information in my fieldnotes. Consequently, some conversations or other peculiarities may not have been documented. Furthermore, relevant ethnographic small talk may not have been included in the fieldnotes. Moreover, I focused

solely on the canteen layout and seating arrangements during my observations. I did not specify the store layout or other workspaces. During my ethnographic style observations, the aim was to emphasize this aspect more than I have done.

5.3.1 Recommendations for future research

For future research, exploring how spaces influence the inclusion of disabled employees could yield relevant results. Van Laer et al. (2020) called for more ethnographic research in this area, and I agree with this request. Ethnographic research with focus on spaces could provide insights into how the physical environment impacts the inclusion of disabled employees. This is relevant because physical spaces can shape social interactions, accessibility, and perceptions of belonging. All essential factors in fostering inclusive environments for disabled individuals (Van Laer et al., 2020). Lastly, because of the variety of ethnic backgrounds represented within WISE, it would be interesting to consider intersectionality in future research. Exploring how ethnicity intersects with factors such as disability could present deeper insights into the experiences of disabled employees (Lindsay et al., 2022).

5.4 Practical implications: Sickness reporting concerns

Furthermore, an issue occurred that is possibly lacking attention within WISE. An interviewee indicated that some colleagues are afraid to call in sick. This fear stems from the potential negative effects for contracts renewal. Upon analyzing the organization documents, I noticed that the website for sick leave management provided pragmatic ways to reduce costs. Numerous quotes passed that suggested importance of saving costs on sick leave. Although the third-party tool supposedly focuses on human concerns, this claim is dubious when considering the prevalent fear of calling in sick among employees. Increased pressure for (not) calling in sick may have detrimental effects for all employees (Bozionelos & Sun, 2013), especially vulnerable employees. Therefore, it is advisable for WISE to critically reevaluate this program and whether it fits with their strategy focused on the human aspect of organizing. Additionally, feedback regarding frequent sick leave should be timely communicated to the employee. Moreover, managers can gain insights from this study that an empathetic and understanding leadership style positively influences the sense of ease among disabled employees. Putting in effort in adopting a compassionate leadership style can provide positive outcomes for the inclusion of disabled employees.

6. Conclusion

This study's goal was to gain insights into the experiences of inclusion among disabled employees and examining how practices produce or counter ableism in WISE. The interviews conducted in this research revealed a sense of feeling at ease at WISE, showing their experience of inclusion. They felt comfortable and experienced consideration of their conditions. Moreover, frequent negative references to their previous workplaces underscored their comfort at WISE. Furthermore, the leadership style of the current store manager is a significant factor in the experiences of inclusion. However, some interactions still inherit ableist tendencies. For instance, there was an interaction where no consideration was given to an employee with a cognitive condition. Specifically, he was expected to behave like an able-bodied individual. Besides, WISE should critically reevaluate their tool for sick leave whether it is in line with a safe work environment for vulnerable employees. By maintaining its inclusive atmosphere and eliminating observed ableist practices, WISE is presumed to provide a safe and inclusive workplace for individuals with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Introductie

Introductie van mezelf. (Studie, doel onderzoek, omgang gegevens)

Zou je jezelf kort kunnen introduceren (naam, functie, hoe lang werkzaam).

Hoe ben je bij Het Goed terecht gekomen? Ben je via een organisatie hier terecht gekomen? (Formuleer als, is er iets wat je werk beïnvloedt, denk aan fysiek iets niet kunnen of mentale belastbaarheid).

Werksfeer

Hoe ervaar je je werk? (Voorbeelden?)

(voorbeelden)

Hoe is de sfeer? (ook negatieve dingen?)

In hoeverre voel je je hier op je gemak/plaats? Wat draagt daar aan bij?

(aan het einde van deze vragen) Heb je het gevoel dat dit altijd zo is geweest?

Ableism/othering

Hoe gaan jullie met elkaar om?

In hoeverre ervaar je dat mensen erbij horen?

^^ Kun je moment beschrijven wanneer je het gevoel hebt dat je er niet bij hoort?

Kun je me vertellen over hoe mensen in je omgeving reageren op bepaalde situaties?

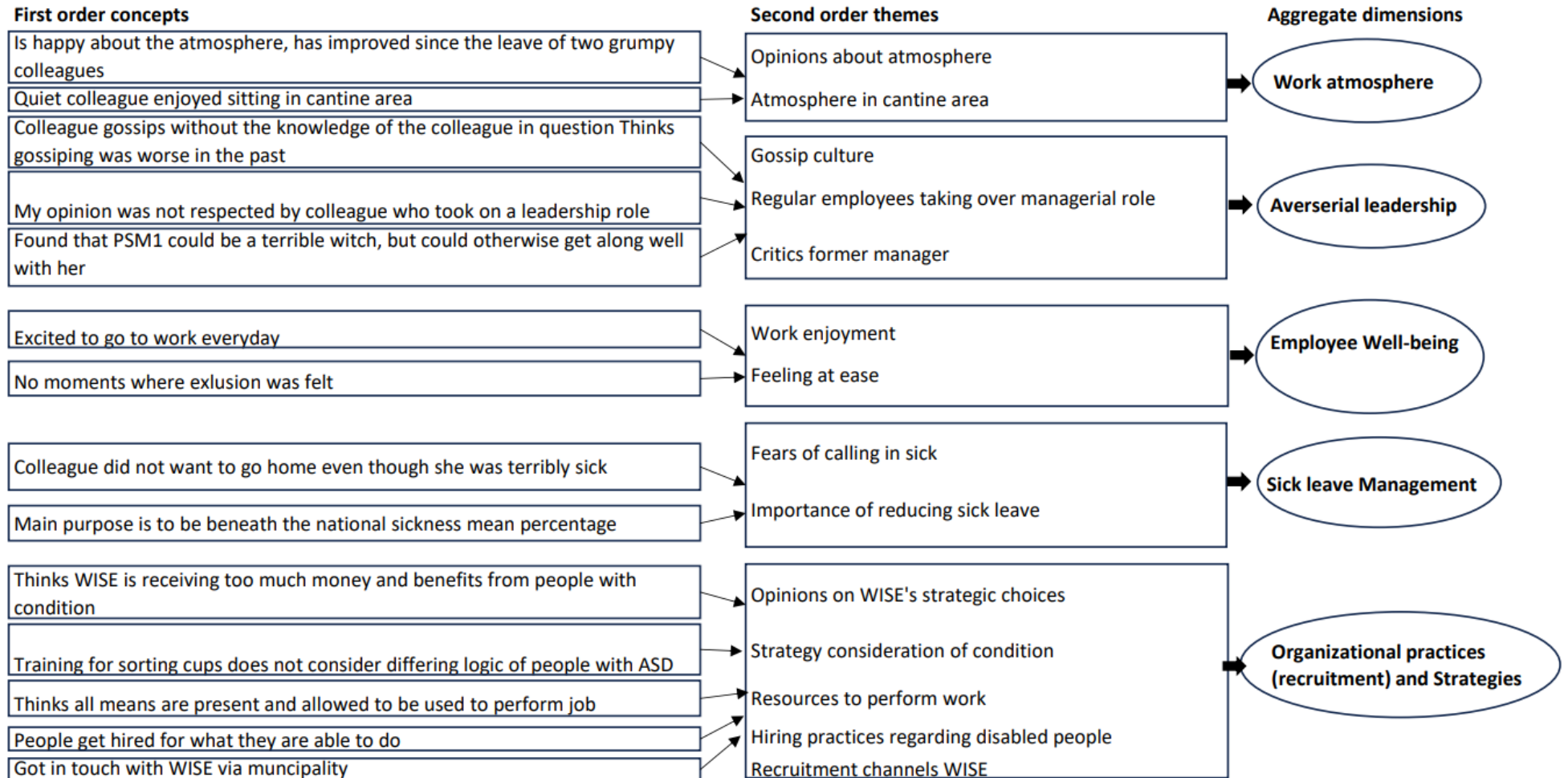
Organisatie

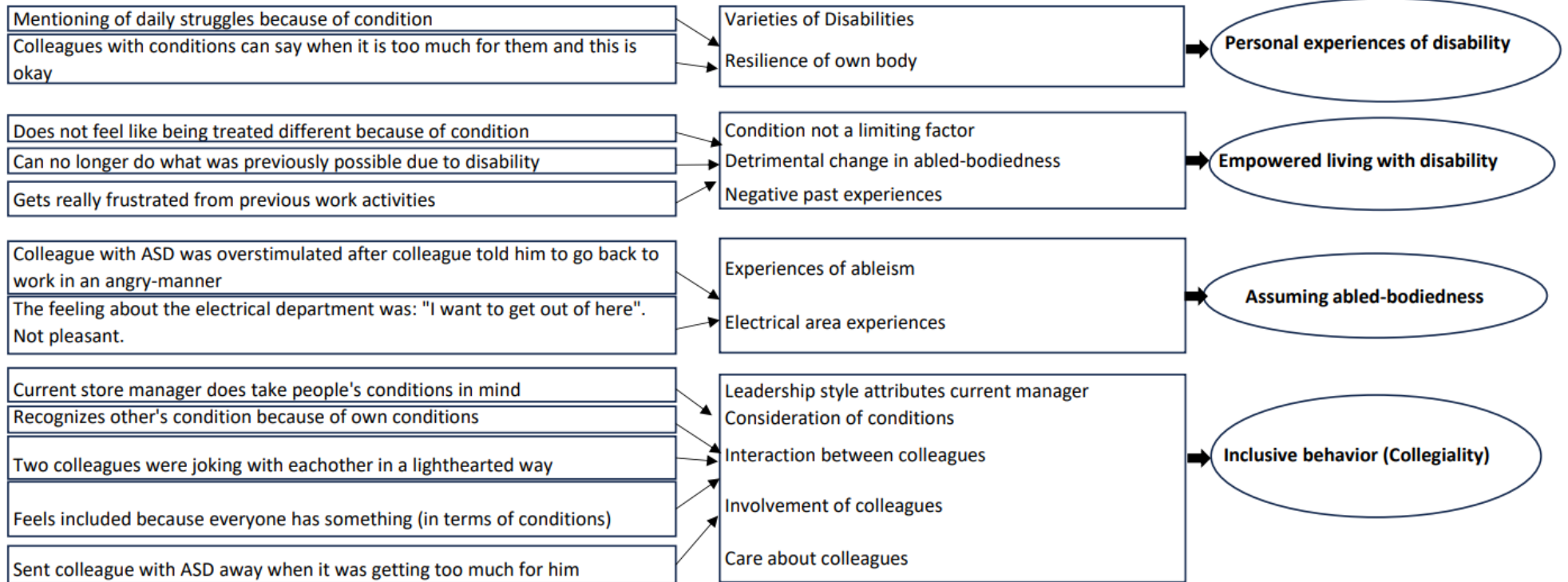
Hoe ervaar je de organisatie?

In hoeverre heb je wat je nodig hebt om je werk uit te voeren?

Ervaar je limitaties in wat er voor je geregeld kan worden?

Appendix B: Data structure





Appendix C: Supporting quotes

Employee wellbeing	<p>M: En, hoe bevalt het?</p> <p>R: Goed, ja, ik heb het heel erg naar mijn zin 's ochtends Als ik wakker word is niet van hé ik moet werken maar meer, hèy! Ik moet Werken dus Het is, Ik heb ja, ik zeg altijd, Ik heb een routine nu. Ik heb een maand bij huis gezeten en toen had ik van Ja, ik word wakker, ik doe wat Ik ga maar naar bed ja leuk, Maar ik wil ook wel wat doen.</p> <p>M: Oké en voor je of in hoeverre voel jij hier nog steeds op je gemak?</p> <p>R: Ik voel me goed op mijn gemak. Ja hoor.</p> <p>M: ook gewoon bij klanten collega's?</p> <p>R: Geen probleem over het algemeen. Nee.</p> <p>M: En voel je, in hoeverre voel je hier ook op je gemak?</p> <p>R: Nu wel ja ja, absoluut, Maar dat komt ook. Maar ik voel me eigenlijk overal op mijn gemak.</p> <p>M: En in hoeverre voel je dan ook nu echt Op je gemak?</p> <p>R: ja heel 100% Ja ja echt.</p>
Empowered living with a disability	<p>M: Ja er is er nog eentje bij, dat is echt (disability struggles)</p> <p>R: Ja, ja, ja dat heb ik ook wel vaak. Ik heb zeg Maar tussen het botje van mijn heup en mijn, Er is een heel klein botje en dat gaat ook altijd uit de kom en dan loop ik ook echt als een ballerina. Maar als dat gebeurt, dan word ik inderdaad wel beperkt. Maar ik laat me niet beperken.</p> <p>M: Nee, nee precies, maar dat beperken, dat is gewoon hoe je het phrased, als het ware.</p> <p>R: Ja.</p> <p>M: Mag ik ook vragen, wil je dat dan daar zelf in staat? Dan wil je ook echt snel beter worden of herstellen of hoe?</p> <p>R: Zoals het er nu in staat, denk ik dat het dat het deels haalbaar is. Ik zou wel heel graag ook vast werk willen krijgen, Maar ik denk dat dat Misschien lastig om te voorspellen, Maar ik denk dat ik 24 uur en dan heb ik het wel gehad, denk ik. En, dat betekent wel dat ik deels zal worden afgekeurd en dan kan ik me nu na 4 jaar ondertussen wel binnen neerleggen. Maar dat was in het begin wel heel lastig.</p> <p>R: En oh RE7 kan nog wel ook nog even de de oefenruimte programmering erbij doen. Natuurlijk! En we kregen nog een band, een een ATAK deden, gingen we erbij doen. We konden nog gewoon nog een pand erbij. Tuurlijk. Dus ik kreeg twee keer zoveel telefoontjes. *frustratie schreeuw*</p> <p>M: *lacht*</p> <p>R: Dus ja. *puf puf*</p> <p>M: Ja nee dat ik snap...</p> <p>R: Ik wou dat ik sigaretten bij me had. *lacht*</p> <p>M: Ik denk niet dat SM1 Heel blij wordt Als je hier een sigaret opsteekt</p> <p>R: Ik heb kauwgom, kauwgom. Nicotine kauwgom. *pakt kauwgom*</p>
Work atmosphere	<p>Nu er nog een andere collega erbij is, dan is het nog veel meer geluid, dus dat was wel. (...) Duidelijk te merken dat er dus bepaalde collegas wat wat meer energie. Geluid met zich meebrengen. Maar verder was dus de sfeer heel was wel gezellig te noemen. Eigenlijk was een gezellige sfeer en gewoon heel gemoedelijk. [Observation]</p> <p>M: Kan ik me voorstellen. Hoe even ervaar je de sfeer hier? Over het algemeen.</p> <p>R: Gemiddeld is de sfeer wel goed</p> <p>M: En, in hoeverre voel je je op Je gemak hier?</p> <p>R: Nou ik voel me best wel op me gemak hier. Hier kan je eigenlijk best wel veel doen. En Als ik iets nou, Laten we even zeggen, iets fout doe, dan word je er ook op aangesproken, maar wel op een professionele en nette manier dus niet "wat jij doet kan eigenlijk echt niet en Je bent bijvoorbeeld heel dom", Dat is ook al een keer op mijn werk bij mij. gezegd.</p>

**Averserial
leadership**

Met deze huidige leidinggevende moet ik daarbij wel zeggen.

M: Hoezo hoezo dan deze huidige wel?

R: De vorige leidinggevende vond ik vreselijk hier.

R: Ook maar PSM1. Er was heel veel onderling, gek genoeg. Ik wist PSM1. She blew up every time you heard something, and In dat stukje wist ik een een
fingerspitzen, een onderbuikgevoel. Wanneer zo een RE15 of een PRE1 die is eerder weggegaan om. RE18 die nou terug is die is ook weggegaan om, haar.
Zoveel Mensen op een gegeven moment die vielen. Allemaal weg. *doet PSM1 na*

Dat doen, Dat is niet goed. Dat is wel goed. En als iemand een vraag had, dan is het meteen van nee, dat moet weg. Ik heb dat gezegd, dus. Terwijl ik zover ik
weet, is deze medewerker geen leidinggevende, dus dat zal ik straks nog even navragen. Maar zijn manier van leidinggeven, want dat deed hij in principe, dat is
vrij commanderend. Persoonlijk vond ik, mijn gevoel. Daarbij was wel echt. Dat ik dacht van nou, het mag wel wat minder zeg Het is dat ik hier zeg maar
onderzoek doe anders had ik gezegd, van ja,praat even normaal tegen mij anders loop ik weg, of anders doe ik gewoon niet wat je vraagt , hè. [Observation]
