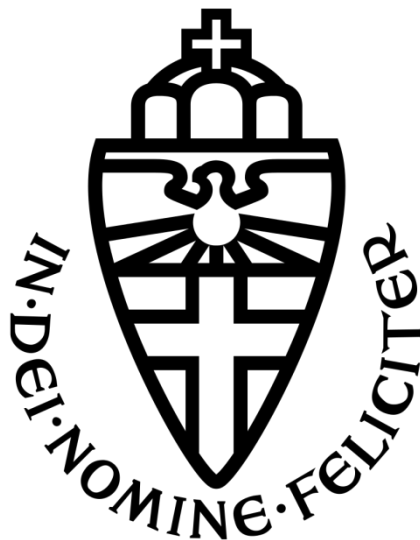


# The complicated concept of inclusion

How the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees  
is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor



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## Preface

This master thesis ‘How the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor’ is my final project which I had to write in order to fulfill the graduation requirements of the master Strategic Human Resource Management. This master is a follow-up on the bachelor Business Administration. With this master thesis I will conclude five amazing years at the Radboud University, a period which was in many ways very instructive.

In January I started with this thesis. Reading more and more about the topics and start writing the first sections was an informative and fluent process. In good spirits I started searching for a suitable organization to gather the data, but this turned out to be harder than I expected. Finally I had good contact with a logistic organization where I could start my data gathering. This part of the thesis I liked most, contact with both the organization and the employees which I interviewed. I really had the idea that I finally did my own research, something which I studied for in the past five years. Writing the analysis, discussion and conclusion was also a very interesting and instructive part. But also a part which forced me to spend long days in the library.

Several persons have contributed academically, practically and with support to this master thesis. I would therefore firstly like to thank my supervisor Channah Herschberg for her time, valuable feedback and support throughout this process of writing my thesis. Her feedback often gave me new insights on how to improve this thesis and her support helped me when I sometimes started to lose a little faith in the whole project. Furthermore I would like to thank the organization, Mr. Stammen (my contact person at the organization) and all the employees I interviewed for their participation in this research. They all gave me very valuable information, the basis of the results of this thesis. Finally I would like to thank my family and friends for being helpful, understanding and supportive during this last half year of my master.

I wish you a pleasant reading

Ilse Mosselman

Nijmegen, 3 August 2016

## Abstract

The Netherlands is a country with a high degree of ethnic diversity nowadays (Vasta, 2007). It is important that also the ethnic minority employees are included in the organizations. A high perception of inclusion leads to positive outcomes for both the employee and the organization (Jansen Otten, Van der Zee & Jans, 2014; Shen, Chanda, D'Netto & Monga, 2009; Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart & Singh, 2011). Leaders are important in the perception of inclusion of employees (Cottrill, Lopez and Hoffman, 2014). In the existing literature there is still limited known about the behavior of leaders which is linked with a greater perception of inclusion of employees (Shore et al., 2011). Furthermore, there is also limited research on 'how' leadership behavior is linked to a greater perception of inclusion (Cottrill et al., 2014). The aim of this research is to describe how the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor, in order to contribute to the debate of the perception of inclusion in organizations. The research question which will be answered in this research is: *'How are the perceptions of inclusion of ethnic minority employees influenced by the behavior of the supervisor?'*

A qualitative research method with a case study is used for this research. Twelve semi-structured interviews were done with ethnic minority employees who worked at the Dutch logistic organization. These interviews were transcribed, open codes were used and there was searched for overlapping themes in the data. These themes were then used for another round of analysis of the individual interviews for searching for similarities and differences in these themes. Based on this method, the data is analyzed.

This research found that the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees are influenced by the following behaviors of the supervisor: the supervisor should be interested in the employees, involve the employees in what happens in the organization, and have attention for the different nationalities. The relationship the employees have with their supervisor also influence their perception of inclusion but it differs between the employees how the supervisor should behave in this relationship. Some employees want their supervisor to behave like a friend, other employees want their supervisor to keep some distance and treat everybody the same. The perception of inclusion of the employees who want to grow within the organization is also influenced by the supportive behavior of the supervisor. Furthermore this research found that the concept of inclusion which is often used is not applicable to all people. There are differences in what people perceive as inclusion. These differences automatically lead to

differences in how the employees perception of inclusion is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor, which is also found in this research.

This research has a few major contributions. First of all, an answer is found on ‘how’ leadership behavior is linked to a greater perception of inclusion of employees. This was a gap in the literature but is here answered. Secondly, a direct link is found between leadership and the perception of inclusion. Earlier research on the link between leadership and inclusion mostly focused on leaders influence on the inclusive culture, not directly on the perception of inclusion (Pless and Maak, 2004; Wasserman, Gallegos, Ferdman, 2007). The third contribution of this research is that in contrast to earlier research on inclusion of ethnic minorities, language is the main cause of perception of exclusion. Earlier research stated that culture was the main cause of this. The fourth contribution of this research is that an ethnic minority group became the ethnic majority of the department. This fact influenced their perception of inclusion. Another contribution is that the existing literature on the concept of inclusion is not applicable to all employees. There are differences in the perception of inclusion between employees, something which is hardly found in the existing literature on inclusion. Finally, based on the differences of inclusion, this research shows that it that how the supervisor’s behavior influence the perception of inclusion of the employees is not always the same. It differs between groups of employees and if they want to grow in the organization. Two of the five behaviors of the supervisors found in this research are only influencing the perception of inclusion for certain groups of employees.

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## 1. Introduction

The Netherlands has moved from a high level of ethnic homogeneity before 1945, to a high degree of ethnic diversity nowadays (Vasta, 2007). From 1945 until the early 1960s there was a flow of people from the former Dutch East Indies. Later, between the 1960s and 1970s, there was an inflow of ‘guest workers’ from Southern Europe, Turkey and Morocco, and a lot of people from Surinam and the Antilles came in. Since the late 1980s refugees from former Yugoslavia and Africa came in. Furthermore, between 2004 and 2008 a lot of people from Eastern-European countries came to the Netherlands to find a job (Corpeleijn, 2009). In a short time, the Netherlands had a lot of ethnic diversity. In 2015, 21.7% of the total population of the Netherlands was immigrant, first and second generation, so they are born abroad or at least one parent is born abroad (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2015).

In a literature review on managing diversity the authors stated that diversity has become a “hot-button issue in political, legal, corporate and educational arenas” (Shen, Chanda, D’Netto and Monga, 2009, p. 236). The key challenge of diversity lies in how to create an inclusive environment within a workgroup in which people with diverse backgrounds perceive to be included (Jansen, Otten, Van der Zee & Jans, 2014).

According to Roberson (2006), research on inclusion in organizations has only recently began. Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart & Singh (2011) stated that in the past decades there has already come more and more literature about inclusion. They defined inclusion as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). The big inflow of refugees puts the current society in a condition of ‘super-diversity’, with a paradoxical process of inclusion and exclusion (Ghorashi & Ponzoni, 2014). According to Ghorashi and Ponzoni (2014), there is an increasing demand for cultural recognition and culturally sensitive measures, but in the same time there are explicit and subtle processes of exclusion within organizations. This exclusion is seen in the professional developments and career prospects of ethnic minority employees. These professional developments and career prospects remain limited while the number of minority employees increases.

When employees feel included, this will have a positive influence on their well-being (Jansen et al., 2014). Furthermore, the perception of inclusion also has a positive effect on the organization (Shen, Chanda, Netto & Monga, 2009). Due to inclusion employees have positive

experiences of co-worker support, rewards, access to adequate resources and greater autonomy, which leads to higher job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Furthermore, Shore et al. (2011) stated that when employees perceive inclusion, some examples of positive outcomes are job satisfaction, job performance, intention to stay, organizational commitment and creativity. Acquavita, Pittman, Gibbons and Castellanos-Brown (2009) also indicated that there is a relation between inclusion and job satisfaction. They stated that a high perception of inclusion in the organization will have a positive effect on the job satisfaction of the employee. More specified on ethnic minorities, Shore et al. (2011) reported that when the members of ethnic minority groups do feel included, this minimizes resistance and conflicts. It is important to make ethnic minorities feel included, but more research is needed to gain knowledge on how to create an inclusive environment (Shore et al., 2011). In a lot of studies, the same ethnicities were studied as the ethnic minority group in the literature on inclusion. These groups are Islamic migrants (Ghorashi, 2010), Asian people (Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998; Findler, Wind & Barak, 2008) and African Americans (Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998; Bell, Denton & Nkomo, 1993). Besides the work of Janssens & Zanoni (2014), European people are hardly used as an ethnic minority group in studies about inclusion. As said, a lot of different ethnicities entered the Netherlands since 1945. Most of these ethnicities are studied on in the literature on inclusion in organizations, but not the Eastern-European ethnicities which entered the Netherlands since 2004.

Cottrill, Lopez and Hoffman (2014) emphasized the importance of leadership in the perception of inclusion of employees. Others suggested to look at the role of leaders and managers in creating an inclusive environment (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011; Wasserman, Gallegos & Ferdman, 2007). Nishii and Mayer (2009) stated that leaders play an important role in creating a pattern of inclusion in their units. This pattern of inclusion is created by leaders through the relationships they develop with their followers. How higher the relationship between the leader and his/her follower, how higher the inclusion in the unit. In their research, supervisors are seen as the leaders, which will also be done in this research. Although this earlier research on leaders and their influence on inclusion, there is still limited literature about the behavior of leaders which is linked with greater employee perceptions of inclusion (Shore et al., 2011).

The aim of this research is to describe how the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor, in order to contribute to the debate of the perception of inclusion in organizations. The research question which will be studied in the present research is:

*How are the perceptions of inclusion of ethnic minority employees influenced by the behavior of the supervisor?*

The findings of this research contribute to the literature. First of all, there is still limited literature about the behavior of leaders, which is linked with greater employee perceptions of inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). This research contributes to knowledge on this link between leaders and the perception of inclusion of employees. This can be a start for more research in this area. Furthermore, how leadership may influence employees' perception of inclusion is a quite new topic. Before the research of Stamper and Masterson (2002), this influence was not studied (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). Cottrill et al. (2014) also stated that there is still limited research on 'how' leadership behavior is linked to a greater perception of inclusion of employees. This research will answer this 'how' question.

The societal relevance of this research is threefold. Firstly, as said by Ghorashi and Ponzi (2014), the big inflow of refugees puts the current society in a condition of 'super-diversity' and brings paradoxical processes of inclusion and exclusion. Now even more refugees are entering the Netherlands who may become new employees. The fact that there will be more ethnic minority employees makes research on inclusion a current issue. As stated before, it is important to make them feel included in the organizations. Due to this research, a better insight is given in how to make these employees feel more included. Secondly, as Shen et al. (2009) stated, employees who are included within a group experience co-worker support, higher rewards, access to adequate resources and greater autonomy which lead to a higher job satisfaction. Additionally, the perception of inclusion has a positive influence on the well-being of employees (Jansen et al., 2014). So to become a good supervisor with satisfied and healthy employees, it is important to increase the perception of inclusion. The results of this research will give insights in the behavior which supervisors can adopt to influence this perception of inclusion of their employees. Thirdly, like Shore et al. (2011) said, a higher perception of inclusion leads to positive outcomes for both the employees and the organization. So the third societal relevance of this research is that the results will offer supervisors guidelines how to behave in order to increase the perception of inclusion. With these guidelines the supervisors will not only get more satisfied and healthier employees, but also better outcomes for the organization as a whole.

In order to answer the research question, a case study will be conducted at a Dutch logistic organization with employees from different ethnicities. Using a case study as the research



strategy is useful because inclusion then can be studied from different perspectives in one particular case organization which is needed to examine how supervisors influence the perception of inclusion of the employees (Boeije, 2005). A qualitative research approach will be used to get more in-depth information about the thoughts of the respondents.

In the next section an outline of the theoretical framework of this research will be presented. In section 3 the methodology used in this research will be explained. Section 4 will elaborate the results. The final section, section 5, contains the discussion and conclusion.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This theoretical framework discusses the existing literature on ethnic minorities, perception of inclusion and the influence of leadership on inclusion in more detail. Furthermore, the relationships between them, which are given in the existing literature, will also be discussed.

### **2.1. Ethnic minorities**

As said, the population of the Netherlands, but also other countries like America, is becoming more diverse in ethnicity (Johnston & Packer, 1987; Vasta, 2007). There are a lot of different definitions used for ethnicity. Although limited, country of birth is often used as allocation of ethnicity (Nazroo, 1998). According to Kenny and Briner (2007) ethnicity is a key part of one's identity. Ethnicity identifies group differences based on the shared ancestry, traditions and categorizations by external groups and the people within such a group. Kenny and Briner (2007) stated that although the term is criticized, it is widely recognized and used in preference to the discredited concept 'race'. Ossenkop (2015, p. 19) combined ethnicity with diversity, and defines it as "the relative (dis)similarity between individuals within one unit due to assigned or acclaimed group membership based on assumed similarities in culture, ancestry, traditions, and categorizations". This kind of combined definitions lead to technical problems with assigning individuals to ethnic categories during a research process (Nazroo, 1998). Problems like collecting sufficiently detailed information to differentiate between groups, recording ethnic background in a consistent way and dealing with issues such as mixed parentage. Nazroo (1998) furthermore claimed that many studies use ethnic grouping with inappropriate boundaries like Black or South Asian. People within these categories are then seen as homogeneous, but within those categories there are differences such as cultures, religions and migration histories. Nazroo (1998) gave a solution for not having one clear definition of ethnicity: allowing individuals to define their ethnic group in their own terms. Advantages of this method are that it reduces made up groups without a real meaning and it avoids racist assumptions of researchers when constructing the ethnical boundaries. But, as Nazroo (1998) mentioned, in most researches which are using this method, respondents are offered only a limited number of categories from which they can chose so there is still a bias.

Although the term 'ethnic minority' is widely used, Kenny and Briner (2007) claimed that it is an imperfect one. They state that this term is mostly used to refer to 'visible' minority groups instead of ethnic minority groups as a whole, for example non-white ethnic groups. In this way they ignore the communities who also have their own cultural traditions. Kenny and

Briner (2007) stated that the term ethnic minority is used often in a too wide definition and needs more explanation. In the Netherlands they often use immigrants as a synonym for ethnic minorities (Rapportage minderheden, 1999). The meaning of the concepts immigrants and ethnic minorities varies with the different views and needs of policy institutions and researchers. The 'Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek' (Central Office of Statistics, 2016, CBS) has a narrow and a wide definition for immigrants. The narrow definition includes all residents who are born abroad or whose both parents were born abroad. The wider definition includes the same residents as the narrow definition plus the residents with one parent who was born abroad. Since 1999 the CBS mostly uses the narrow definition for immigrants (CBS, 2000). With ethnic minorities the CBS means the wide definition of immigrants. In the Netherlands these ethnic minority groups are Turks, Moroccans, Southern Europeans, Surinams, Antilleans, Moluccas invited refugees and asylum recipients from a lot of countries from the Third World and Eastern Europe. This is a very precise definition but it is not often used in an operational way because you need a lot of information about the person. The CBS now mostly uses ethnic minority as "someone who lives in the Netherlands but is born abroad and/or who has at least one parent born abroad" (CBS, 2016, p.24).

According to Roberson, Galvin and Charles (2007) ethnicity is viewed as a diffuse status characteristic. This means that stereotypes about ethnicity include beliefs about their status position but also about member competence with regard to a wide range of abilities. These assumptions about competence and social significance lead to performance expectancies. According to Roberson et al. (2007), the characteristics are often used to form expectancies about someone when they are salient in the situation, for example in a mixed group. That these characteristics lead to performance expectancies is an ethnic minority bias; only because they have another ethnic background people have certain expectancies about them. Another ethnical bias explained by Roberson et al. (2007) is the appraisal bias based on relational demography. Demographic similarities-dissimilarities of an individual relative to others in a group has an effect on appraisals. Dissimilarity of the ratee from his or her rater or work group will result in less favorable performance evaluations. For the ethnic minorities this means that their performance evaluations will be lower when they are evaluated by someone with demographic dissimilarities (Roberson et al., 2007). They are treated in a different way only because of their demographic background. Verkuyten, Hagedoorn and Masson (1996) found that people prefer their own ethnical in-group and that there is an ethnical hierarchy which is a social representation of a status hierarchy based on ethnicity. Ethnical groups often give the same ranking of the ethnic hierarchy based on ethnic groups, white people typically hold the highest

status position. So, ethnic minorities get a lower status only based on their ethnical background (Verkuyten et al., 1996). The fact that these biases exist is important to this research: if the supervisor treats the ethnic minority employees differently because of these ethnic biases, this could lead to a perception of exclusion for these employees. If they do not get the same opportunities as the ethnic majority because of these biases, this may also lead to a perception of exclusion. In this research there will be analyzed if these biases are playing a role in the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees.

So, there is not one definition of ethnicity, race and culture that is agreed on by all researchers (Okazaki & Sue, 1995). These terms are interchangeable when identifying and categorizing people by background. In this research there is chosen for the term ethnicity, which is based on country of birth. This term is mostly used in the literature on inclusion of non-Dutch people. The precise definition of ethnic minority will be the one which is mostly used by the CBS: “someone who lives in the Netherlands but is born abroad and/or who has at least one parent born abroad” (CBS, 2016, p. 24). This research is done in the specific context of the Netherlands and this definition is used and accepted in the Netherlands (CBS, 2016). Furthermore, in the case organization the ethnicity of the employees, as in country of birth, is known, not their race or culture. So this definition is usable in an operational way.

## **2.2. Perception of inclusion**

Although the concept of inclusion is often used, researchers do still not have one general agreement about how to explain this concept. Barak (1999, p.52) made a definition for inclusion, he stated that “employee perception of inclusion-exclusion is conceptualized as a continuum of the degree to which individuals feel part of critical organizational processes”. His perception of inclusion refers to the feeling of being a part of the organizational system in both the formal and the informal processes. These processes, according to Barak (1999), include access to information and resources, connectedness to supervisor and co-workers, and the ability to participate in and influence the decision making process.

In contrast to Barak (1999) who only gave belongingness as important to feeling included, Shore et al. (2011) stated that both belongingness and uniqueness are found as important to employees to feel included. They defined inclusion as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). With belongingness is meant “the need to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1264) and uniqueness is defined as “the need

to maintain a distinctive and differentiated sense of self” (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1264). Shore et al. (2011) based this definition on the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT). The ODT explains the tensions in the different needs of people (Brewer, 1991). People want to be similar to others, but in the same time they need uniqueness and individualization. According to the ODT, the right balance between these needs will lead to the perception of inclusion within a group.

Two other well-known theories about inclusion are the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Social Comparison Theory (SCT), introduced by Barak and Levin (2002). These theories focus on group inclusion. Group inclusion is the continuous process in the individual’s desire to secure positive group affiliations. How the individuals perceive reality is largely determined by the group membership of the individuals. Contradictory, Shore et al. (2011) stated that inclusion is often perceived at the individual level. It is important to look at the individual level of experience when looking at perceptions, because in this way shared perceptions of the organizational culture or the diversity climate are precluded (Ossenkop, 2015). By focusing on the individual experience of inclusion and not the shared ones, the individual perceptions can be found, apart from the perceptions which are formed by the organizational environment and present across the whole organization. In this research the definition of Shore et al. (2011) will be used, so the focus will be on the individual level of perception.

In this research the focus will also be on the individual perceptions of inclusion: how included each ethnic minority employee feels, independent from each other. The definition of Shore et al. (2011) will be used because this definition focuses on the individual level of perception of inclusion. By analyzing how the employees perceive belongingness and uniqueness in the organization, and what this means for them, their perception of inclusion will be found. This definition of inclusion of Shore et al. (2011) is the theoretical lens of this research. It will both guide the data gathering process and the analysis part of this research.

### **2.3. Ethnic minorities and perception of inclusion**

Since 1983, the Netherlands has adopted several models of inclusion for including ethnic minorities in the society (Vasta, 2007). According to Vasta there were three main approaches: (1) pillarization, (2) the ethnic minorities policy and (3) the integration policy. Pillarization was implemented in 1983 and entails that you allow groups with different religions to create their own institution. The ethnic minorities policy was implemented in the same year as the pillarization but goes a step further. In this approach the government funds new ethnic and religious minority communities for their own place of worship and media, and certain types of

educational provision. Lastly, the integration policy was integrated in 1994. This is the process leading to full and equal participation of ethnic minority individuals and groups in society. Despite these approaches which were implemented to include the different ethnic groups in the Netherlands, ethnic minorities are often still constructed as ‘absolute others’ (Ghorashi, 2010). This means that they are seen as not belonging to the nation and yet living inside it. The most important reason for this, stated Ghorashi (2010), is that integration policies are focused on developing language skills and encouraging the equal participation of migrants in the society, but not on cultural differences. A focus on cultural differences was not necessary because of the pillarization. The pillarization always allowed groups with different cultures to create their own institution instead of alignment to the dominant culture. Often the culture of the migrants is different than the culture of the Dutch, which causes ‘thick’ boundaries between the Dutch and the migrants (Ghorashi, 2010). Because it is impossible to consider the individual migrant as separate from their culture, she stated that the different cultures they have make them seen as ‘absolute others’. It is plausible that this image of migrants as ‘absolute others’ given by Ghorashi (2010) can be found in organizations as well, that will be studied in this research.

Inclusion in the society is a well-known theme in the Netherlands, but inclusion in work groups in organizations is still an underdeveloped theme in the literature (Shore et al., 2011). In the past, members of ethnic minority groups have experienced great difficulties in gaining social and instrumental support in their workplaces (Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998). So, taking this group into account when looking at organizations is important. According to Ossenkop, Vinkenburg, Jansen and Ghorashi (2015), the identities of gender and ethnic diverse employees emerge as a pivotal theme when talking about their career experiences. Ossenkop et al. (2015) referred to earlier research of Bell, Denton and Nkomo (1993), who showed the importance of ethnic identity at work. Bell et al. (1993) described the stress experienced by black women who worked as professionals in a dominant ethnic and male environment. These women were made clear that in order to become a successful manager, they should adopt a new identity and give up their commitment to their old culture. According to Janssens and Zanoni (2014) this could be seen as a key marker for ethnic inequality in organizations, not being able to bring your entire set of identity to work but assimilate to the dominant culture. This conscious awareness of their ethnic identity suggests feelings of alienation, which is the opposite of inclusion where you are unaware of your ethnic identity (Ossenkop et al., 2015). Being part of the minority group has significant effects on individual’s affective experiences in the workplace, especially the sense of isolation in work groups and exclusion from support networks (Findler, Wind & Barak, 2008).

Which groups are seen as the ethnic minorities varies between the different studies. But, in the literature on inclusion most of the times the same ethnicities are studied. The ethnicities who are selected mostly as the ethnic minorities are Asians (Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998; Findler, Wind & Barak, 2008), African Americans (Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998; Bell, Denton & Nkomo, 1993) and Islamic migrants (Ghorashi, 2010). Besides the work of Janssens & Zanoni (2014), ethnicities from European countries are hardly used as ethnic minorities in the literature on inclusion. In the Netherlands there are a lot of Islamic and Asian people, but also a lot of people from Eastern-European countries (Corpeleijn, 2009). In 2015 there were 177 thousand residents from Eastern-European countries plus another 75 thousand that came temporary to the Netherlands for work (CBS, 2015). Although this ethnic minority group contains a lot of employees for the Netherlands, no research on how to include this group of ethnic minorities in organizations is being done. In this research, the ethnic minority group contains for the major part individuals of Eastern-European countries.

So, according to the literature ethnic inequalities in organizations are still there (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014) and have an impact on the perception of inclusion of ethnic minorities (Ossenkop et al., 2015). Taking into account these ethnic inequalities is important to this research because it is possible that supervisors can influence these inequalities and thus indirectly the perception of inclusion of ethnic minorities.

#### **2.4. The role of leaders on the perception of inclusion**

According to Cottrill et al. (2014), leadership is important to the perception of inclusion of employees. Nishii and Mayer (2009) found that leaders play an important role in creating an environment of inclusion in their units, based on the leader-member exchange (LMX). According to Nishii and Mayer (2009), LMX suggests that the relationship between a leader and an employee is based on social exchange and it can be a high-quality or a low-quality relationship. A high-quality relationship is based on mutual trust, respect and obligation, a low-quality relationship is based on economic-exchange. Furthermore, the employees with a high-quality relationship with their leader feel more accepted and validated, they perceive more inclusion than employees who have a low-quality relationship with their leader. The effort of the supervisor to strengthen this relationship will be seen as a behavior in this research which can increase the perception of inclusion of the employee.

According to Wasserman et al. (2007), leaders are the shapers of the organizational culture and therefore the voice of an inclusive culture. An inclusive culture recognizes, respects, values and utilizes the different talents and contributions of all organization's employees (Wasserman

et al., 2007). All employees in an inclusive organization have the opportunity to be present, have a voice, be appreciated and engage in the core activities on behalf of the collective. Wasserman et al. (2007) stated that for achieving this inclusive culture, leaders of inclusive organizations should redefine boundaries and rules for acceptable behavior, create conditions for conversations to explore differences, model comfort with diversity, being authentic and using personal experiences strategically to encourage authenticity in others. According to Pless and Maak (2004) managers can use certain qualities and traits to create a culture of inclusion, competencies of inclusion. They translated the competencies into seven behaviors which should be integrated in the management system in order to create a culture of inclusion. These behaviors are: (1) showing respect and empathy, (2) recognizing the other as different but equal, (3) showing appreciation for different voices, (4) practicing and encouraging open and frank communication in all interactions, (5) cultivating participative decision making and problem solving processes and team capabilities, (6) showing integrity and advanced moral reasoning, especially when dealing with ethical dilemmas, (7) using a cooperative/consultative leadership style. These behaviors of the leaders to create an inclusive culture given by Wasserman et al. (2007), Parker (2006) and Pless and Maak (2004) will be taken into account in this research. There will be investigated if these behaviors also have a direct influence on the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees.

Wasserman et al. (2007), Parker (2006) and Pless and Maak (2004) stated that leaders influence the inclusive environment, not directly the perception of the employees. In contrast to this indirect linkage, Barak and Cherin (1998) found three categories through which leadership directly influences the perception of individuals feeling a part of critical organizational processes, feeling included. These three categories are access to information and resources, involvement in work groups and ability to influence the decision making process. In this research these three categories will be seen as behaviors of the leader: if he/she gives the employee access to information and resources, if he/she supports involvement in work groups and if he/she gives the ability to employees to influence the decision making process.

A lot of recommendations for leadership behavior are given in different studies which should create an inclusive environment (Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Parker, 2006; Pless & Maak, 2004; Wasserman et al., 2007) but there is little known about leadership behavior which directly influences the perception of inclusion (Barak and Cherin, 1998). It could be the case that certain inclusive behaviors are not perceived as increasing the perception of inclusion of ethnic minorities and others are. The given inclusive behavior of Nishii and Mayer (2009), Parker



(2006), Pless and Maak (2004), and Wasserman et al. (2007) are kept in mind when searching how the perception of inclusion of ethnic minorities are influenced.

### **3. Methodology**

In this section the methodology used in this research will be explained. First the epistemology and the type of research will be explained. Secondly, there will be elaborated on the research unit, the way of data collection and the data analysis. Finally, the research ethics and the validity and reliability will be discussed.

#### **3.1. Epistemology**

Epistemology is the philosophical theory of knowledge, wherein there is an interpretivist and a positivist approach (Anderson, 2013). In this research the focus was on the perception of the employees which fits the interpretivist approach better than the positivist approach. In the interpretivist approach human experience is seen as inherently influenced by the social context (Anderson, 2013). An objective understanding of the world is not possible. The focus of the interpretivist approach is on interpreting human experiences. Understanding is more important than explaining in this approach. Perception of inclusion cannot, as in the positivist approach, be seen as objective. Perceptions are influenced by the social context and it includes interpretations, reasoning and feelings of people, therefore it is subjective (Anderson, 2013). Furthermore, the data gathered in this research was affected by the meanings and experiences of different people in different situations. Anderson (2013) stated that for the interpretivist approach interviews are more valuable than quantitative data because they give information in the form of words and meanings (Anderson, 2013). By analyzing the interviews, the understanding of how the perception of employees was influenced by the supervisor's behavior was found.

#### **3.2. Type of research**

The aim of this research was to describe how the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor. To answer the main question, data was collected from interviews with different ethnic minority employees. Interviews were analyzed in order to find out how inclusion was perceived by employees and how the behavior of the supervisor influenced this perception of inclusion. The main question, "*How are the perceptions of inclusion of ethnic minority employees influenced by the behavior of the supervisor?*" is a 'how' question and for answering these kind of questions, qualitative research is more suitable (Boeije, 2005). According to Boeije (2005), qualitative research also offers the opportunity to go more in depth and to examine the behavior of the respondents in their natural

context. Furthermore she stated that data will be most valid by interviewing the involved respondents on location, their natural context. In this qualitative design a case study was performed in a single organization. Using a case study as the research strategy was useful because this enabled to study in-depth one particular case organization and the experiences of inclusion of the employees within this particular organization (Boeije, 2005).

For gaining the data from the respondents, semi-structured interviews were held. An interview guide was developed and used during the interview (see Appendix I). The definition of inclusion of Shore et al. (2011) was used during the development of this interview guide. About the two components of inclusion, belongingness and uniqueness, detailed questions were asked. The interview guide contained open questions. This method allowed room for interpretation and enabled questions to be tailored to a certain context and situation (Vennix, 2006). Furthermore, this semi-structured way of conducting interviews fitted best for qualitative research. The interview guide started with some general questions in order to make the interviewee feel comfortable, get to know something about their job and their place within the organization. After that, questions were asked about the perception of inclusion of the employee. The components belongingness and uniqueness were not used in the first questions about inclusion because this could steer the answers. Therefore questions which were related to these terms were asked first, followed by the direct questions about the terms. Although this order of questions seemed logic, this order of questions about the perception of inclusion was changed between the first day of data gathering at the organization and the second day. During the first day of data gathering, the respondents repeated the answers on the first few questions when they were asked about uniqueness or belongingness. So when the question about belongingness came they answered with 'acceptance, being an insider and feeling involved', the factors which were given in the questions before the term belongingness. To prevent this, the order of the questions was changed and the questions about the terms belongingness and uniqueness were asked first. This in order to make the respondents think about the influence on these terms themselves without given any examples beforehand. Finally, after the questions of inclusion, questions were asked concerning the influence of the supervisor. Asking questions about the role of the supervisor in the end of the interviews was important because it prevented that the employees directly linked the perception of inclusion to his or her supervisor which could influence the answers.

For this research an inductive approach was used. According to Boeije (2005) research data is more important than the existing literature in the inductive way of analyzing. In this research, the data was placed within relevant literature and not tested directly on a specific existing theory

or model, so this fitted the inductive approach. According to Anderson (2013) the inductive researcher will gather data, develop some general ideas about what is happening and then starts to 'build theory'.

### **3.3. Research unit**

The organization was chosen because it has both ethnic minority and ethnic majority employees. The chosen organization is one of the world's leading non-asset-based supply chain management companies with over 41.000 employees working in seventeen regional clusters around the globe. This research focused on the operational department of one location. The sample size consisted of twelve respondents with different ethnic backgrounds. One of them had the Dutch nationality but his parents were from abroad. Furthermore, he only lived a few years in the Netherlands and could hardly speak Dutch. No statistical numbers could be given by the organization, but according to the respondents about 80% of the employees of their operational department were Polish. So the Polish employees, an ethnical minority group, were the majority of the employees in the department. Since there worked a lot of employees that did not spoke and understood Dutch, the corporate language of the organization was English. But according to the respondents, both Polish and Dutch were also spoken during working hours. Furthermore, four of the respondents were men and eight were women. All of the respondents were operators, but there were some differences in their functions. An elaborated overview of the respondents can be found in appendix II. The twelve respondents were asked by their supervisors to participate in this research. All of them were willing to participate.

### **3.4. Data collection**

This research focused on inclusion of ethnic minorities and the influence of the supervisor on this perception of inclusion. For getting representative data, interviews were conducted with employees who worked with different supervisors. By interviewing employees who worked with different supervisors it was possible to analyze how different behaviors influenced the perception of inclusion of the employees. A total of twelve semi-structured interviews were held face to face in an office at the organization. The interviews took approximately 30 until 45 minutes. Since the corporate language at the case organization was English, most interviews were held in English. Although the corporate language was English, some of the respondents had some difficulties understanding and speaking this language. Four of the respondents preferred to be interviewed in Dutch because they understood Dutch better than English, so

with these respondents the interviews were held in Dutch. The Dutch interviews were translated into English. All quotes of this research were literally copied from the respondents. There are some grammatical mistakes in the quotes in the next section because they were literally copied from the respondents, for whom English was not their first language. After every quote some characteristics of the respondents are shown in parentheses: (Respondents letter, gender, function, nationality).

### **3.5. Data analysis**

When all the interviews were conducted, the data was prepared for the analysis (Vennix, 2006). All interviews were recorded, so before the analysis could start registration was done. In this part, all data was transcribed directly from the tape. After this step there was a dataset and the coding part could started (Vennix, 2006, p.265).

In the coding stage, codes were given to relevant parts of the data. The first step was open coding where codes were given to relevant data (Boeije, 2005). Since it was open coding, a lot of different codes were used. Some examples are: bounding, trust, skills, atmosphere, motivation, listening, support, input, language, alone, family and voice. During the second step, common themes were searched within the data. Examples of the themes are: being noticed, feeling important, colleagues, interest, personal opportunities, communication and relationship with supervisor. These themes were then again ordered in higher themes: the different behaviors of the supervisor. The analysis resulted in the identification of five different themes: interest in the employees, relationship with the employees, involve the employees, support the employees and attention for differences between nationalities. With these common themes, another round of analysis of the individual interviews was done, searching for similarities and differences in the themes. By doing this, possible tensions, inconsistencies and contradictions could be found within the interviews.

### **3.6. Research ethics**

Anderson (2013) describes three stages of the research process that have ethical implications. The first stage is the research design and planning. In this stage the employees of the organization were informed by the supervisors about the research and the research goals. Later they were asked if they wanted to be involved in the research. It was explained that if they agreed to participate, they had the right to withhold consent at any moment without any consequences for them. It was notified that the respondents stayed anonymous at all times and

that all the data gathered from the respondents would be dealt with confidentially. Because this research included employees with different ethnic backgrounds, it was important to take into account the sensitivity to different values and attitudes while making the interview guide.

The second stage was the data-gathering process. A silent and inconspicuous location was used for conducting the interviews. In this way there was a safe place to talk openly (Anderson, 2013). Before starting the interview, the respondents were asked permission to record the interview. In this research questions were asked about the supervisor of the employee. It could be expected that the respondents hesitated to provide honest answers about their supervisor. Again there was told that they would stay anonymous and that the answers they gave would not be shared with their supervisor or other persons with their names in it.

The last stage was the after data-gathering stage. First the transcripts of the interviews were sent to the respondents so they had the opportunity to indicate any misinformation. Finally it was made clear that no personal information would be shared with anybody and that the information was confidential and would only be shared with the supervisors of the University.

During the whole process reflexivity was very important because interviews were held with employees from different cultures than the culture of the researcher. To overcome the problem that information was interpreted in the wrong way, a constant iteration between the personal experience of the researcher, relevant theory, underlying assumptions, data and the respondents' feedback was done.

### **3.7. Validity and reliability**

There was standardization in this research since semi-structured interviews were used during the data gathering (Anderson, 2013). By using semi-structured interviews, the same questions were asked which increased the reliability. Furthermore, the order of the questions was only changed once, between the first and second day of data gathering, so the order stayed nearly the same which increased the reliability. Also the research process was explained, which increased the reliability. But, as the transcripts were coded by one person, the reliability decreased because the researcher can have misinterpreted the answers given by the respondents (Vennix, 2006).

The use of open questions instead of closed ones during the data gathering increased the validity (Anderson, 2013). There was space for explaining the questions, to ask for further information and for additional remarks.

## 4. Results

In this section the results will be presented according to five themes which were found in the data. Each theme contains aspects of both uniqueness and belongingness, the two components of inclusion. Furthermore, during the data gathering the terms 'belongingness' and 'involvement' were used interchangeably by the respondents. They argued that involvement is a synonym for belongingness to them. Section 4.3. contains the theme 'involve the employees', but this theme covers the issue of the need of the respondents to be actively involved in the organization by the supervisor, so not the synonym of belongingness. The five themes that will be discussed below are: (1) interest in the employees, (2) relationship with the employees, (3) involve the employees, (4) support the employees and (5) attention for differences between nationalities.

### 4.1. Interest in the employees

All respondents indicated that it is important to them to feel that they are being noticed at work in order to perceive belongingness to the organization. An explanation is given by one of the respondents: *"I don't feel like staff, but as a person yes, I'm a person, I'm individual, that's very important to me"* (Respondent J, Female, Quality control + Label printer, Polish). This respondent explains that to her it is important to feel like an individual person and not just as staff. She is a unique person and wants to be treated that way. After asking the respondent what she needs from the supervisor to make her perceive that she is an unique person, she answers: *"I think that this is uhmmm, very important, to see and notice what I'm doing, notice that uhmmm, I do the best"* (Respondent J, Female, Quality control + Label printer, Polish). To her it is important that the supervisor sees what she is doing in order to give her the feeling that somebody cares about it. The words 'notice that I do the best' indicate that she puts effort in her work. According to her, this effort should be seen and mentioned by the supervisor to make her perceive uniqueness. When the supervisor shows that he/she knows where this employee is working on, the supervisor makes her feel more valued for her individual input. A possible explanation for why this respondent want to be noticed can be found in the nature of her job. Her job is repetitive, so when nobody notices what she is doing, she may feel like nobody cares about her work. Some respondents explain that they need more for perceiving uniqueness. For the supervisor to mention that he/she knows that the employees are there is the first step, but for some of the employees this is not enough. One respondent claims that the supervisor should really focus on people, pay more attention to them, instead of only looking at the results. He

explains that the people on the floor make the results for the company and therefore deserve the attention. Another respondent agrees with this. She says that the employees work hard but sometimes the supervisor does not treat them humane. According to her this treatment is not fair. She gives an example about using the bathroom: the employees may only use it during the breaks. Every time the supervisor mentions this to the employees she gets a negative feeling. According to her, nobody wants to be longer in the bathroom, so why should the supervisor mention it in such a severe manner? She thinks it is not necessary and that mentioning it only leads to negative feelings because they are all adults who will not take advantage of using the bathroom. This example of the feeling that she is being treated not humane indicates that this respondent experiences that the supervisor does not trust her. And, as she argued, this leads to negative feelings. So to her, it is important that the supervisor trusts the employees.

The data showed that another important way in making the employees perceive uniqueness is the supervisor showing interest in them. After asking what the supervisor could do to improve the feeling of belongingness, one respondent explains what she would do as a supervisor to make people feel more involved: *“You don’t have to, you know, talk long about your private life, but just ‘how are you, are you fine’, you know, just a comment and attention for the personnel would be nice and make people feel better”* (Respondent I, Female, Quality Control, Laotian). By answering the question in this particular way, what she would do if she was the supervisor, she shows which behavior of the supervisor is important to her in order to increase her perception of involvement. Just a little bit of interest from the supervisor in her as a person and not only in her work will increase her perception of involvement. Another respondent gives an example of a moment when the supervisor showed interest in him. This respondent had some troubles with his stomach before. The moment he came back to work the supervisor asked him how he was doing and said that he could go home any moment he feels bad again. The respondent explains that this moment was very important to him because the supervisor really showed interest in him and remembered that he had problems with his stomach. Another respondent also held the opinion that the supervisor should not only be interested in work but also in the private life of the employees. He gave an example about one colleague who was building a house and the supervisor told him that he could go home to work further at home. He really appreciated this gesture because the supervisor showed interest in this person’s private life.

According to the respondents, another important aspect for the perception of uniqueness is that the employees have the feeling that they are being appreciated. The data shows that the supervisor plays an important part in this. Although some employees claim that they do not



need any compliments because they know themselves if they did a good job, all of them admit that compliments give them extra motivation and make them feel appreciated. Some of the respondents really need this extra attention to increase their perception of uniqueness. After asking one respondent what she needs to perceive uniqueness, she answered: *“And I think that, yeah, I need a good word from my supervisor. If I do really good my job, it is important to me that my supervisor, my boss says it”* (Respondent J, Female, Quality control + Label printer, Polish). So she explains that in order to make her feel unique, she really needs recognition from her supervisor. For her it is not enough that the supervisor notices what she is doing, but he must also really tell her when she is doing something well. There were also respondents that warn for too many compliments. These respondents argue that too many compliments can result in incredibility or give people too much confidence. So getting compliments works as a motivator and gives employees the feeling that they are appreciated and unique as long as they do not get too much of them.

In conclusion: to all employees it is important that they have the feeling that the supervisor is interested in them, that he sees them as individual persons and not just as staff. To make the employees perceive uniqueness it is important that the supervisor mentions that he knows what everybody is doing, that he shows interest in their private lives and appreciates the work his or her employees do.

## **4.2. Relationship with the employees**

As explained in the previous section, for increasing the perception of uniqueness of the employees it is important that the supervisor shows interest in the individual persons, also by getting involved in their personal life. Opinions on how involved the supervisor should be and what kind of relationship he/she should have with the employees differ a lot between the respondents.

Few of the respondents mention that to them it is most important to have nice colleagues around in order to feel involved with the organization. When asking further, one respondent explains why: *“I have a lot of friends here. Because of course every of my friends in Poland stayed there. So I had to make some friends here. And they have really nice people here”* (Respondent C, Female, Admin, Polish). So for her, because she left everything behind in Poland, the colleagues are important to feel involved because the colleagues are the only people she knows. Her work is the start of her new life, combining work and social life. Others, who also say that the colleagues are important to perceive involvement call the organization their ‘second home’. They explain that they spend a lot of time with their colleagues, both during

and after work hours. By doing this, the colleagues became their friends and they know each other so well that the separation between their private and working life nearly disappears. So, to these employees who are searching for friends at work, this belongingness part of inclusion is very important. This group of employees is all from Poland and is now a group of Polish friends within the organization. In order to feel involved, the relationship this group has with the supervisor is important. They explain that in their perception of involvement the supervisor should be more of a friend than a boss for the employees to make them feel involved. One explains this: *“He must be our friend, he has that function and I have other (function), but we work together. But not that he is on the top and is angry”* (Respondent B, Male, All operational tasks, Polish). He explains that because he and the supervisor work together, they should be friends. So for him, working together means that you are friends. He talks about ‘our’ friend, where he refers to his colleagues: his group of friends. So for these employees who need friends at work to make them feel involved, the supervisor should also be part of this group of friends.

The other respondents claim that they separate work from their private life. They say that they come to work for their job, not for making friends. These respondents state that they do not like this friendly relationship of the supervisor with the group of Polish friends. One employee explains how he experiences the fact that he does not have a friendly relationship with the supervisor while others have:

*Yeah, like they treat each other like family, and I’m that friend, so that different type. So I think, I think even though you’re new, I noticed that, there are a lot of new Polish employees, they are already accepted. And I’m feeling like, why is it taking so long for me?* (Respondent L, Male, Order picker, Dutch)

Besides that he does not perceive inclusion in the Polish group, the fact that the (Polish) supervisor has a friendly relationship with the Polish people and not with him makes him feel different from the rest. Although he claimed that he does not search for friends at work, he wants to be a part of this group because in the last sentence he asks himself why it takes so long for him to be accepted in the group. The fact that the Polish supervisor accepts every new Polish employee in this group but does not do this with him makes him feel excluded. Because of this, most respondents think that it is important that the supervisor treats everybody in the same way. One of these respondents explains it:

*I think supervisor should be free, that means that don't should be more personal contact with worker, I think he should not. Supervisor don't should, of course maybe he likes more that yes somebody than different person. But uhmm, don't should uhmmm, it don't should be visible for different people* (Respondent A, All operational tasks, Female, Polish)

According to her, it should not be visible that the supervisor likes some employees better than others. Personal contact with the employees may cause that the supervisor will treat people differently so this should be avoided according to her. So according to the employees who are not part of the group of Polish friends, the supervisor should treat everybody the same and keep some distance from all the employees in order to prevent that people will perceive exclusion.

Concluding, there is a group of employees that is searching for friends and sees the organization as their second home. This group of employees has a very close relationship and they prefer that the supervisor is a part of this group to make this perception of belongingness even stronger. At the same time there are employees who are not included in this group of friends and they feel excluded when the supervisor has a friendly relationship with this group of friends. These employees want their supervisor to treat everybody the same to prevent that some people perceive exclusion.

### **4.3. Involve the employees**

According to the data, to all the respondents it was important that they feel involved in the organizational processes, in what happens in the organization. One respondent was asked what is most important to her in order to perceive belongingness to the organization. She answers:

*What very important is, is the information sharing. If we as a team or me myself get all the information I feel belonged. As long as I don't know what happens around, what happens around me, I don't feel belonged"* (Respondent H, Female, Assistant-supervisor, Hungarian)

So to her it is not only important that she knows what she has to do, but also what happens in the rest of the organization. She argues that by knowing what happens around her, she knows her position or role within the organization, what her part of the organizational process is. Most of the respondents explain that this information-sharing is important to them, but some of them claim that it is very important to them. These are the respondents who have functions with more

responsibilities like the admin in picking (a function under the assistant-supervisor), assistant-supervisor and the lead operator. To these respondents the role of the supervisor in involving them in the organizational process is even more important. They say that the supervisor should know everything about the process. For one respondent it is very important that the supervisor knows everything in order to feel belonged, but he explains that this is not always the case: *“Sometimes missing communication with uhmmm, supervisor. He, some supervisor don’t know everything, send me to other person who know everything about system... this is no good, I feel angry with supervisor, he should know it”* (Respondent F, Male, Order picker, Polish). It upsets this employee that the supervisor does not know everything. He later argues that it is important to him that he himself has all the information about what happens within the organization. If he does miss a piece of information, he expects the supervisor to give him this missing piece. Besides this role of the supervisor, the respondents claim that he should also tell the employees everything about what is going on at the organization and what has to be done. One of the respondents explains that she once had a real *“super supervisor”* (Respondent H, Female, Assistant-supervisor, Hungarian) who also thought it was very important that the employees knew everything. She says that with this supervisor they had a weekly meeting in which all information about the organization was shared. With this supervisor she felt very included. So according to her, organizing meetings with employees to share information and talk about the process is very important to make her feel involved with the organization.

What makes the perception of belongingness to the organization even stronger, according to all the respondents, is that they have a voice in the organization, that they can give their opinion. In this organization the employees with a fixed contract have a performance-review three times a year with their supervisor in which they should give some input to the organization. Although the respondents claim that this is a good opportunity for giving input, most employees prefer to tell the supervisor right away if they have an idea, that they do not have to *“spare the ideas until 1 May, 1 June, 1 July, because then I should have three improvements”* (Respondent D, Female, Trouble shooter, German). One respondent explains that she always has very good ideas and once even got a bouquet of flowers for an idea that saved the organization a lot of money. She felt very special because of this big appreciation but she still thinks that the supervisor can improve the way they deal with the input: *“Sometimes I give a very good idea and then days after, or months later there is nothing done with it”* (Respondent I, Female, Quality Control, Laotian). This respondent expects the supervisor to do something with her ideas. Later she claimed that a reaction to her idea will already be enough for her, about what they will do with it. But in this example nothing is being done with her

ideas. The fact that nothing is being done makes her sad which implies she has a feeling that the supervisor does not care about her input. So according to her, the role of the supervisor is important in the voice of the employees. He/she should listen to the employees and react on their input. The respondents claimed that even when some of their ideas cannot be performed, the supervisor should share this information with the employees to ensure that they know that they are being heard.

There are some respondents that need more involvement from the supervisor in order to perceive belongingness. These respondents want him to actively involve them in problem solving and decision making. These are, again, the respondents which have more responsibilities than the others. These respondents want to feel that they are important to the organization and they need the opportunity to grow to make them feel belonged to the organization. They talk more about their work and the organization which makes them feel more involved and talk less about the importance of the people around them. Except for one, these are the respondents that are not part of the group of Polish friends. One respondent explains what she needs from the supervisor:

*If you make a decision as a supervisor you may share that with your team, you should actually ask your team 'what do you think of this, do you think this is good', that is involvement, that is what I mean (Respondent H, Female, Assistant-supervisor, Hungarian)*

Here she explains that the supervisor should not stand above the team, but really include the team. She argues that for perceiving involvement she needs a supervisor who actively includes her in the decision-making-process. This respondent later explained that she needs to feel important to feel involved in the organization. By getting involved in the decision-making-process by the supervisor, need to feel important may be satisfied because the supervisor asks her opinion on critical decisions.

In conclusion, the data shows that in order to perceive belongingness, the supervisor should involve the employees in the process. But, there are some differences in how far the respondents expect the supervisor to involve them. All of them want the supervisor to share information about what is going on at the organization, so that they know what happens around them. Also, all of the respondents mentioned that it is important that they can give their opinion, that they have a voice and that the supervisor responds to that. But some of the respondents need more.

Some of them wanted the supervisor to actively involve them in problem-solving and decision-making.

#### **4.4. Support the employees**

For the respondents who want to grow in the organization, it is important that they get support from their supervisor in what they do or what they want to do in the future, to increase their perception of uniqueness. One gives a role-description of a perfect supervisor for her:

*In my opinion, the supervisor should be a person that is, let's say, God father, yes. The supervisor should move people who working for him, he should ask sometimes what going on and what is it with you? He can't be only our boss, yeah, sitting behind his desk. He or she should be also uhmmm, should be also coacher and uhmm, should support us” (Respondent J, Female, Quality control + Label printer, Poland)*

With this description she explains that, besides having interest in the employees, the supervisor's role is to be a coach. As a coach he should support the employees in his team by motivating the people and having conversations with them. By calling him a God-father she clarifies how important his role is to her, that he is a kind of role model for everyone. This supportive role is only mentioned by the respondents to whom it is important that they get the ability to grow within the organization. Other respondents, who have more of a focus on the atmosphere, did not mention this. Most of these respondents were from the Polish group of friends. They needed the supervisor to be their friend to perceive involvement as explained earlier, not to be their coach.

According to the data, another way of supporting the employees are the evaluation interviews. These interviews are held with the employees with a fixed contract three times a year. It is explained that during these interviews the supervisor asks the employees what they want to do or what they want to learn in their job. After these interviews the supervisor is responsible for realizing that. The supervisor taking seriously these interviews and the responsibility to help them, is very important to those employees who want to grow within the organization. One explains that she is very glad when she can learn something new:

*I work here for two years now, and in the beginning it was boring, because yes, all the time the same job, every day the same. That's why I wanted to learn something new and I asked it, now it's better (Respondent K, Female, Lead Operator, Czech)*

So she needs the supervisor to help her find new opportunities to learn something to make her job more challenging. She admits that she is proactive in this. She asked the supervisor herself if she can learn something more. She argues that after asking, the supervisor should find something for her. She chose to ask for it, but there may be employees who do not dare to ask if they can learn something new. These employees need a supervisor who ensures that he keeps on challenging everybody who needs it. Again, the differences between the two groups of employees is visible, the Polish group of friends that wants to have friends at work, and these other respondents who want to learn new things to make their job less boring. There is one respondent of the Polish group of friends who says that it is also important to her to grow. But, later she admits: *“actually I can be on lower level and have around me good people, it’s better than you are on highest level”* (Respondent C, Female, Admin, Polish). So although she wants to grow within the organization, the people around her still are more important to make her feel belonged. So in contrast to the other employees who want to grow in the organization, this respondent attaches more value to the people around her than to the opportunity to grow.

Two of the respondents, who have some more responsibilities than most of the respondents, explain that it is important that the supervisor supports them in their decisions, to make them perceive belongingness. One of them gives an example of a problematic person at work who is not listening to her: *“if somebody is acting respect-less to me, I think it’s normal uhhmm, normal if I tell this to my supervisor, than I think it’s normal that he sends this person away”* (Respondent K, Female, Lead Operator, Czech). She wants her supervisor to support her in her decision to come to him/her because she does not agree on the behavior of an employee, that he trusts her opinion that this person did something wrong. By saying ‘I think it’s normal that’ she clarifies that she expects the supervisor to support her, but according to her this is not always the case. Later she argued that sometimes she has the feeling that the supervisor does not understand her. That he does not support her decisions and does not understand her makes her feel excluded.

In conclusion, according to the respondents who want to grow in the organization, the supervisor should also have a supportive role. The evaluation interviews where they can explain their needs are very important to them. After these interviews, they state, it is the role of the supervisor to act on these needs of the employees. For the two respondents with some more responsibilities in their job the support of the supervisor in their decisions is very important.

#### 4.5. Attention for differences between nationalities

Although the role of the supervisor in dealing with differences between nationalities is only specifically mentioned by three respondents, most of the respondents talk about the differences between nationalities when discussing how included they feel. Because most respondents mention the link between nationality and inclusion, it seems an important subject to them.

For one of the respondents to perceive more belongingness to the organization, it is very important that everyone works as hard as him. But, according to him, that is not always the case: *“this is sometimes not fair play, some people do it 120% some people do it, give it only 80%”* (Respondent F, Male, Order picker, Polish). He experiences that there are big differences in how hard people work and this feels unfair to him. Later on, he makes a link to the different nationalities: *“sometimes people from Dutch working too slowly, I don’t know why.”* So he implies that he is the one that works for 120% and some Dutch employees only work for 80%. At the moment, he feels less belonged because he has the feeling that he works way harder than some other people and nobody says something about that. Because he mentions that some Dutch people work too slowly, he implies that the differences in how hard people work can be found in the nationalities. He later explains that the supervisor should discipline all the employees more so they work harder, so it will be fairer to him. This difference in the way of working is also mentioned by one other respondent. She explains that sometimes she thinks it is difficult to work with her Dutch supervisor:

*Sometimes it is annoying, because uhmmm, what I see is that my Dutch colleagues, the direct colleagues, so not the manager but my Dutch supervisor is more calm, like it’s going to be fine. And me, I have a temperament, like fire, that’s a big difference... I need a boost, like if he also have more temperament than it’s exiting. And it will not be boring, and you see he also goes with the flow and find it interesting, and then you also get the feeling that you want to do it... But he is like really calm, too calm*  
(Respondent H, Female, Assistant-supervisor, Hungarian)

Here she explains that it is hard for her to have a supervisor who is very calm, like all Dutch colleagues. She says that the supervisor acts ‘like it’s going to be fine’ but this is something different to how she feels. She explains later that this calm way of working of the Dutch supervisor gives her the feeling that he does not care about the work. Furthermore, she also explains that because he is so calm and works slower, she gets extra workload in order to get everything done. She does not feel supported due to his ‘Dutch’ way of working, and she needs



this support to perceive belongingness. When analyzing her needs in the quote, it would be better for her if the supervisor adapted to her way of working and in this case gave her a boost in her work. One other respondent explains that she has the feeling that the supervisor does not really understand that the employees are from different countries: *“That he, he don’t understand the people I think, like an example that uhmmm, for someone from Poland it’s very important that he goes on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December to Poland, I think he don’t understand that”* (Respondent K, Female, Lead Operator, Czech). That she brings this up means this bothers her, it could be the case that the supervisor also does not always understands her. To her it is important that the supervisor understands the cultural differences. She gives this example and says later that the supervisor should work on his understanding of the cultural differences. This in order to make the Polish people feel more understood. So according to her, there is a role for the supervisor to understand that the employees have different nationalities and that he should take that into account. But on the other side, few of the Polish people say that they like the fact that the supervisor treats them the same, that he should not look at the nationality. One explains: *“I feel that I have the same possibilities, not because of my nationality, but because of my skills... I’m not Polish in working here, but I’m a person working here”* (Respondent J, Female, Quality control + Label printer, Polish). So to her it is important that the supervisor does not look at her nationality but at her as an individual person. She likes that she is being treated like everybody else and that her nationality does not matter. A contradiction between the needs of the employees is found here. According to some respondents the supervisor should pay attention to the cultural differences but in the same time other respondents claim that the supervisor should treat everybody the same.

Besides the different work behavior and cultural differences of the nationalities, the data showed that there is also the language which in some cases leads to feelings of exclusion for some employees. One respondent says that he does not like the breaks because he has to sit alone:

*If I will sit there with the Polish people, in order to getting involved, everybody has to speak English and that is not their first language, and I will just be a bother, so I kind of feel guilty when I sit there. I will sit alone* (Respondent L, Male, Order picker, Dutch)

So because he does not understand the Polish language he sits alone at the table. This means that he is the only one that does not understand this language and so the only one who is

excluded from this group during the breaks. He also experiences that he is a bother if he will join them, so although he might want to talk to them, he thinks that the Polish people will see it as something negative. Furthermore, he gave this example after he was asked what he does not like about work. By giving this as the answer, it is clear that this exclusion during the breaks is very important to him. The other respondents who do not speak the Polish language also give the same example regarding the break. But, when asked about the communication during work, all of them say that everything is fine, because during work they all speak English and there is no language barrier. Although they say this, the respondent who gave the clear example about the breaks explains: *“It feels like I’m the outcast, on most days. You know, every morning at kick-off they all greet each other, but they don’t greet me, or it’s in Polish which I don’t understand”* (Respondent L, Male, Order picker, Dutch). So the fact that he does not speak Polish, and that the Polish people do not speak English with him, makes him feel like the outcast, excluded from the group. So to him, in order to perceive inclusion with his colleagues, language is very important. After asking this respondent what he needs from the supervisor to increase his perception of belongingness to the organization he answers *“I think recruiting more Dutch supervisors.”* By giving this answer he makes clear that he thinks that the supervisor plays an important role. This suggests that he would feel more included when there would be a supervisor who is not from Poland, that this will make him feel less like an outcast. Another respondent who also does not speak Polish says that it is the job of the supervisor to make sure that during work everybody speaks English: *“The supervisor asked the employees to speak English, but after a while they speak their own language again, he repeated it a few times but it’s a pity they forget it then again”* (Respondent I, Female, Quality control, Laotian). She thinks it is a pity that the supervisor forgets to repeat that everybody should speak English, so it is his job to keep on repeating this until everybody does speak English. By saying that it is a pity, she admits that she prefers that everybody is speaking English. According to the non-Polish employees, around 80% of the employees in their department is from Poland. So although the Polish employees are an ethnic minority, they are the ethnic majority in this organization. For the non-Polish employees, as explained, non being part of this group make them perceive exclusion. Some of them even speak about ‘them’ when they say something about the Polish employees, and speak about ‘we’ when they say something about all the other employees. In contrast to these employees, the Polish employees claimed feel very involved at their work because there are a lot of Polish people around to talk to. They explain that the language is not a problem for them. According to them they speak English during work and they perceive to be very involved at the organization because there are a lot of Polish people around to talk to. But,

some of the Polish employees want to learn Dutch, one explains: *“Last year it was very good, [organization] made payment for the Dutch school... I want to go, I wanna go, this is better to communicate with the people yes. I feel better, it’s better to talk”* (Respondent B, Male, All operational tasks, Polish). This respondent recognizes that there is a problem with the language, because he admits that ‘it’s better to talk’ if he learns Dutch. He is talking about learning the Dutch language because it would make him able to communicate better, but he says nothing about the problem with the English language. He furthermore states that he will feel better when he can speak Dutch. By telling this, he clarifies that the language is also a barrier for him to connect with the other people. One respondent thinks that it is a good idea if the company can organize language courses for the employees who have a fixed contract: that they invest in them by doing this. This demand for learning the Dutch language can be seen as a task for the supervisor, because like they explained earlier, the supervisors role is to support them in increasing their skills.

Concluding, according to the respondents it is important that the supervisor takes into account the differences between nationalities. Those differences are found in the way the employees work and in what is important to them. But despite these differences, the supervisor should treat everybody the same. This is a remarkable: there should be attention to differences but in the same time employees want to be treated the same. Also in the language barrier the supervisor could play an important role, to make people feel less excluded he should ensure that the main language at work is English and that he helps the employees who want to learn Dutch.

## **5. Discussion & Conclusion**

This last section will elaborate those findings in the context of the research question: “*How are the perceptions of inclusion of ethnic minority employees influenced by the behavior of the supervisor?*” In the first part, the findings of this research will be discussed and the second part of contains the conclusion.

### **5.1. Discussion**

In this discussion part of this section an answer will be formulated on this research followed by a discussion about the concept of inclusion. Then, the managerial implications of this research will be discussed. Finally, the limitations and recommendations for further research will be presented.

#### **5.1.1. The role of the supervisor on the perception of inclusion**

Through a qualitative and inductive analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews, five themes are found in the data in which supervisors influence the perception of inclusion of the ethnic minority employees. The five themes are: interest in the employees, relationship with the employees, involve the employees, support the employees and attention for differences between nationalities.

For all respondents, in order to feel belonged to the organization, the supervisor should be interested in them. By showing that he sees and knows what the employees are doing and mentioning this, he increases their perception of belongingness. Some employees claim that the supervisor should focus on them, treat them humane. Focusing on the employees also means that he should be interested in them as persons, not just focusing on the work. Furthermore, to influence the perception of uniqueness of the employees, the supervisor should appreciate the employees by telling them if they did a good job. For the supervisor, showing interest in his/her employees is in line with earlier research (Pless and Maak, 2004; Wasserman et al., 2007). Pless and Maak (2004) and Wasserman et al. (2007) stated that this behavior of the supervisor provides an inclusive culture within the organization. In contrast, this research found that the supervisor showing interest in his/her employees directly influences the perception of inclusion of the ethnic minority employees. An explanation for this fact could be that in this research questions were asked about the perception of inclusion of the individual employees. Later there was asked how the supervisor influences this perception. Because the focus was on the individual perception, only direct influences of the supervisor were discussed and nothing was

mentioned about the organizational culture. Pless and Maak (2004) focused on the inclusive culture and Wasserman et al. (2007) wrote a review, it could be the case that they did not check if their findings were also perceived at the individual level or only at a higher level like the organizational culture. The fact that the behaviors found in this research not only creates an inclusive culture but also directly influences the perception of inclusion is a new finding.

The relationship the supervisor has with the employees also influences the perception of inclusion according to the respondents. All employees state that the relationship between them and the supervisor is important to them. This is also found in previous research of Nishii and Mayer (2009). They stated that a good relationship between the employees and their supervisor is important in the perception of inclusion. The relationship they explained in their research is based on mutual trust, respect and obligation. In this research, a difference is found between the respondents who want to have friends at work to increase their perception of belongingness, in this case most of the group Polish friends, and the other respondents who separate work from their private life. In order to feel belonged, the group of Polish friends needs their supervisor to behave as a friend, being very close with them. They call the organization their 'second home' because all of their friends also work there. As one respondent states, the supervisor should be their friend because they work together. The fact that they see the organization as their second home could explain that they prefer a friendly relationship with the supervisor, there should not be a clear hierarchy in a place with your friends which you call home. An informal relationship in which the supervisor has a friendly relationship with the employees was not found before. For the other group, in order not to make anyone perceive that they are excluded, the supervisor should keep some distance from the employees and treat everybody the same. This perception of exclusion based on the behavior of the supervisor is in line with the ethnic bias described by Verkuyten et al. (1996). The respondent that explains that he experiences exclusion has the Dutch nationality. He feels excluded because the Polish supervisor treats him differently than the Polish employees. This feeling is caused by what Verkuyten et al. (1996) called the ethnic bias, when people treat other people differently because they have another ethnic background. The relationship that is described by the respondents which are not a part of the Polish group of friends is more in line with the characteristics of the relationship explained by Nishii and Mayer (2009). These respondents do not see the organization as their second home but they separate their work and private life. The behavior of employees to separate their work from their private life is common in the literature. Today, the distinction of work and home is seen as normal (Clark, S.C., 2000). The research of Nishii and Mayer (2009) is based on American employees of a large supermarket chain in the United States. Because the distinction of work

and home is seen as normal, the respondents in the research of Nishii and Mayer (2009) probably did not see the supermarket chain as their second home but just as the organization where they did their job. This may explain why there is a difference between the relationship explained by Nishii and Mayer (2009) and the relationship explained by the Polish group of friends in this research. The employees of the Polish group of friends left everything behind in Poland and see their colleagues as their friends. They see the organization as their second home because all of their friends work there. Because they want to make friends at work see their colleagues as friends, they also want their supervisor to have this friendly relationship with them. Further research on the characteristics of the relationship between ethnic minority employees and their supervisors is needed in order to explore if there is a difference in the characteristics in the relationship between supervisors and ethnic minority employees, and supervisors and employees that are not ethnic minorities.

For all respondents, in order to perceive belongingness to the organization, the supervisor should involve them in what happens in the organization. For respondents who have some more responsibilities, the role of the supervisor in making them perceive more belongingness is bigger. For them, the supervisor should know everything and share all the information about what is going on in the organization. To make the perception of belongingness to the organization even stronger, besides involving the respondents in what happens in the organization, the role of the supervisor is to give employees a voice in the organization and to react on their input. For respondents with more responsibilities it is important that the supervisor involves them in problem solving and decision making. Earlier research also stated that actively involve the employees in organizational processes, problem solving and decision making by the supervisor is influencing the inclusion of employees (Barak and Cherin, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004 & Wasserman et al., 2007). But, according to Wasserman et al. (2007) and Pless and Maak (2004) this behavior of the supervisor leads to an inclusive culture and does not directly influence the perception of inclusion of the employees. This research found a direct relationship between supervisor involving the employees in what happens in the organization and the perception of inclusion, like Barak and Cherin (1998) found.

The employees who want to grow in the organization describe that the supervisor should have a supportive role to increase their perception of uniqueness. His role is to support them in what they do or what they want to do in the future and to be more of a coach. Pless and Maak (2004) described this role as a cooperative/consultative leadership style, which has an influence on the inclusive culture. But in this research, this behavior of the supervisor directly influences the perception of inclusion of most employees. Furthermore, this research found this supportive

role of the supervisor does not influence the perception of inclusion of everyone. Only the employees who want to grow within the organization claimed this role of the supervisor as important. The employees that want to grow within the organization want to develop themselves. An explanation that only this group mention this role of the supervisor can be found in the literature. The role of a coach is to facilitate employee development (Ellinger, A.D., Ellinger, A.E. & Keller, S.B., 2003). So, because these employees want to develop themselves, this coaching role is becoming more important than for the employees that do not want to grow. None of the employees of the Polish group of friends did mention the supportive role of the supervisor. For them the belongingness part of inclusion seems more important than the uniqueness part. For the respondents who have some more responsibilities this supportive role of the supervisor also includes supporting them in their decisions at work. A possible explanation for the fact that only those two employees want their supervisor to support their decisions, is that they are the only two employees that have to make decisions which may have a big impact. They have more responsibilities so also more influence on the organizational processes. The supportive role of the supervisor in their decisions is important to ensure that they make the right decisions. Furthermore, these employees are already in a position where they can develop themselves. So like the people that want to grow in the organization, the coaching role of the supervisor becomes more important. (Ellinger, A.D., Ellinger, A.E. & Keller, S.B., 2003).

According to the respondents, the supervisor should also pay attention to the differences between nationalities. Some of the respondents mention that there is a difference in the way of working between them and their Dutch colleagues, which is unfair to them or make them feel that they are not important or not understood. This feeling of these respondents is in line with the concept of the 'absolute other' of Ghorashi (2010). In this research it is not directly the culture which makes them feel different, but it is the different way of working which separates them from the Dutch employees. The thoughts of the respondents that they are different, not important and not understood makes them feel that they are the 'absolute others'. In order to make these respondents perceive more belongingness the supervisor should adjust his behavior to them, understand them and treat them the same as the Dutch employees. These behaviors are contradictory, the supervisor should adjust to the different behaviors but in the same time treat everybody the same. According to Pless and Maak (2004) the supervisor should recognize the others as different but equal in order to create an inclusive culture. This contradiction makes the concept of inclusion a difficult one. This research found that the behavior directly influences the perception of inclusion of the employees, not only the culture. Furthermore, in order not to

make non-Polish employees perceive exclusion, the non-Polish respondents explain that they need the supervisor to ensure that everybody speaks English during work and not behave as a group member of the Polish group. Language as the main cause of perception of exclusion is something which is hardly found in the existing literature on inclusion of ethnic minorities. The corporate language of the organization is English, but during breaks the employees start speaking in their own language and this causes the feeling of exclusion for the employees who do not understand this language. This finding is a contribution to the existing literature on inclusion, but it is not entirely unknown in the literature. Dorte Lønsmann (2011) wrote her PhD thesis about English as a corporate language and she found that English as the corporate language allows for inclusion of all international employees. She stated that it is important that in both formal and informal situations, so also during the break, this corporate language is spoken. If this is not the case, there still is exclusion for the employees that do not understand the national language of the country. But, Lønsmann (2011) claimed that if English is chosen as the corporate language, employees with little or no English skills are excluded. The assumption that everybody should understand and speak English is often forgotten. As Lønsmann (2011) concludes, if everyone can understand and speak English, the choice of English as the corporate language can hardly have any negative consequences. In this research, the respondents that feel excluded prefer that everybody does speak English, the corporate language, all the time. This is not always the case, sometimes Polish is spoken and this leads to a feeling of exclusion for some respondents because they do not understand that language. So, this research found a clear link between the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees and the importance of the corporate language, a link which is hardly found in the existing literature about inclusion of ethnic minorities.

In conclusion, there is not one answer on the research question that applies to all the ethnic minority employees. There are some differences in what the employees perceive as inclusion, so also how this perception is influenced differs. However, three of the five themes can be seen as overall behavior of the supervisor that influences the perception of behavior of the ethnic minority employees. These behaviors of the supervisor are: he/she should be interested in the employees, involve the employees in what happens in the organization, and have attention for different nationalities. These are the basic behaviors which influence the perceptions of inclusion of all ethnic minorities. For some employees these overall behaviors should be more specific in order to influence their perception of inclusion even more. There are also two behaviors of the supervisor where differences are found in the influence on the perception of inclusion: the supportive role of the supervisor and the attention for differences between



nationalities. Only the employees who want to grow within the organization need their supervisor to support them in order to perceive inclusion. For the employees with a function with more responsibilities this role is even more important. How the supervisor should behave in the 'relationship with the employees' differs between the group of Polish friends and the other employees. For the first group the supervisor should behave like a friend, but when he does that, the other group of employees will feel exclusion. In order to prevent this feeling of exclusion, this second group of employees claims that the supervisor should keep distance and treat everybody the same.

### **5.1.2. Concept of inclusion**

During the analysis of the data, contributions to the concept of inclusion were found. When the data was gathered, respondents discussed what they perceived as inclusion. By analyzing their perception of inclusion, contributions to the existing literature about the perception of inclusion are found.

First of all, the definition of Shore et al. (2011) is mostly used in the literature, that both uniqueness and belongingness are important to employees to feel included. This research found that this definition is not always applicable. For the group of Polish friends, the belongingness part of inclusion is more important than the uniqueness part. One respondent even says that she would rather be in a lower position and have nice people around her, than grow in her position and lose this bond with her friends at work. In contrast to the definition of Shore et al. (2011), which states that inclusion is perceived at individual level and not on group level, these respondents attach more value to belonging to the group than to perceive individual uniqueness. This can be explained by the fact that these employees see the organization as their second home. They explained that they left everything behind in Poland when they moved to the Netherlands and now their colleagues are their only friends with whom they also meet outside the organization. So for them, these people are more than colleagues, they are friends, so it is important to them that continue working with these friends, which increase their feeling of belongingness. They do not need to be unique, belonging to their group of friends is enough for them. This finding is more in line with the Social Identity Theory of Barak and Levin (2002) which is a theory about inclusion that focuses on group inclusion. Furthermore, for the ethnic minority employees in this research it is important that they are valued for the person they are and that they have the same opportunities as anyone else. This is in line with the existing theory about inclusion of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities feel included when they can bring their entire set of identity to work instead of assimilating their behavior to the dominant culture

(Janssens and Zanoni, 2014; Ossenkop et al., 2015). In this research, the employees do not have to change anything about their culture or ethnic characteristics. They are valued based on their individual talents, not on their ethnicity. All employees get the same opportunities, independent from their nationality. None of the existing concepts of inclusion covers the concept of inclusion which is described in this research. The concepts of inclusion given in the literature should be applicable to all employees, no exceptions or distinguishes are being made between different ethnic groups. The findings of this research suggest that there are differences between ethnic minority employees in what they perceive as inclusion. There is a group that perceives belongingness to the group as more important than uniqueness in order to feel included, to them having friends at work is very important. The other group perceives both belongingness and uniqueness as important, they do not have to make friends at work but need trust and a professional relationship in order to feel belonged to the organization. So, this research indicates that there is a difference between employees in what they perceive as inclusion, something which is not given in the existing literature yet. This finding might give rise for a new conceptualization of perception of inclusion for ethnic minority employees.

The existing literature about the perception of inclusion of ethnic minorities is often based on differences in culture. Ghorashi (2010), Bell, Denton and Nkomo (1993), and Ossenkop et al. (2015) all stated that culture can be seen as the main cause of the awareness of the ethnic identity of the ethnic minorities. This continuous awareness of their ethnic identity suggests feelings of alienation which is, according to Janssens and Zaononi (2014), the opposite of inclusion. This research found the language as main cause of the perception of exclusion. The only times that respondents themselves mention exclusion, is when they talk about the language that is spoken in the organization. Not their different culture or ethnic background make them feel excluded, but the fact that they do not understand the language that is spoken by the majority of their direct colleagues. One explanation could be that, as explained by the respondents, they can be their selves at the organization, they do not have to change anything about their culture or background in order to reach anything. So because they have this feeling in this organization, their different culture does not play a role in their perception of inclusion. Another explanation can be that the differences in culture between all the employees in their department is smaller than the cultural differences between the respondents of the other researchers. Almost all respondents came from Eastern-European countries and their culture may differ less from the Dutch culture than for example the Islamic culture of the respondents in the research of Ghorashi (2010) and the African American culture of the respondents of Bell, Denton and Nkomo (1993) compared to the American culture. Language as the main cause of

perception of inclusion is, besides the work of Lønsmann (2011), hardly found in the literature yet.

Finally, in this research an ethnic minority group became the ethnic majority group within the department, which influences the perception of inclusion of the other employees. A big part of all the employees, according to the respondents about 80%, in the organization have a Polish background. So even though they are ethnic minorities, they are the ethnic majority group in this department. The fact that these Polish employees are with such a big group, has influence on the perception of inclusion/exclusion of other ethnic minorities which have another ethnic background. The Polish employees speak the same language, also during working hours, they spend time together after work and one employee even describes them as a 'family'. Some employees perceive exclusion because they do not understand the Polish language, which is spoken by the majority of their colleagues. These employees speak about 'them' when they say something about the Polish employees and speak about 'we' when they say something about the employees who are not Polish. This idea about grouping people in 'them' and 'we' based on certain characteristics, in this case the nationality, is seen in the literature. Tajfel and Turner (1979) described this as the social categorization in in-groups and out-groups. People group themselves and others based on similarity. The people in these groups see themselves as an in-group and the people with other characteristics form an out-group. In this case the characteristic which forms the in-group and out-group is the nationality of the employees. So, the Polish employees are seen as a group because they have the same nationality, they are an in-group and all 'others' are the out-group for them. But, the respondents of this out-group also see themselves as a group. They are an in-group based on the fact that they have another nationality than the Polish nationality. This particular situation found in this research, that an ethnic minority group became a majority group which influences the perception of inclusion, is not found yet in the existing literature on the inclusion of ethnic minorities.

Concluding, as the title of this thesis suggest, the concept of inclusion is a very complicated one. What employees perceive as inclusion differs between different groups of employees. In this research a contradiction is found between the Polish group of friends and the other employees, and between the employees that want to grow in the organization and the other employees. Furthermore, in order to feel included, the respondents want to be treated the same but also differently. The supervisor should adjust to the cultural differences but in the same time treat everyone the same. This is another contradiction which makes this concept of inclusion a very complicated concept.

### **5.1.3. Managerial recommendations**

The results of this research provide insights in how the perception of inclusion of the ethnic minority employees is influenced by the supervisors. Based on these findings some practical recommendations can be given in order to increase this perception of inclusion.

First of all, the supervisor should pay attention to all of the given themes. So, the supervisor should be interested in the employees, involve the employees in what happens in the organization, support the employees and have attention for the different nationalities. How the supervisor should behave in the 'relationship with the employees' differs between the group of Polish friends and the other employees. For the first group the supervisor should behave like a friend, which causes perceptions of exclusion for employees that are not included in that group. The second group of employees claims that the supervisor should keep distance and treat everybody the same. Because those two desired behaviors are contrary, one of the behaviors should be chosen by the supervisor. This is a dilemma at which the organization should take a clear look before they decide which behavior all supervisors should adopt.

The organization should also take a look at the theme 'attention for differences between nationalities', for the same reason as the previous mentioned theme. The Polish employees perceive extra included because they can speak their own language, but at the same time the other employees perceive exclusion because they do not understand this language. During working hours, the supervisor should ensure that everyone speaks the corporate language, English, in order to lower the perception of exclusion of those employees that do not speak Polish. As found in the work of Lønsmann (2011), if everybody can speak and understand English, the choice of English as the corporate language can hardly have any negative consequences.

Because most supervisors have a different nationality than the employees, this sometimes leads to differences in workstyles and cultural values. These differences cause that the ethnic minority employees do not feel understood by their supervisor. In order to prevent this feeling, the recommendation for the supervisors is to delve into these differences and try to adapt to what these employees consider as important. When the ethnic minority employees see that the supervisors put effort in this, this may ensure that the feeling that they are not understood decreases.

Another recommendation for the supervisor is to have evaluation interviews with all of the employees, not only with the ones with a fixed contract. The employees with a fixed contract argue that these conversations with the supervisor about what they want to do or what they want to learn increase their perception of inclusion. If the supervisor also does these evaluation

interviews with the employees with a flexible contract, this may also increase their perception of inclusion.

The last recommendation considers the behavior of the supervisors when input is given by the employees. All of the employees explain that they feel belonged to the organization because they have a voice in the organization, that they can give their opinion. But, when the employees do not get a reaction on their input, they have the feeling that the supervisor does not care about their ideas. So in order to prevent this feeling the supervisors should give a reaction on all of their input.

#### **5.1.4. Limitations and recommendations for further research**

There are some limitations of the present research, which need to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

First of all, the extent of the external validity of this research is limited since this case study is conducted in one single organization. It is not possible to generalize the results to ethnic minority employees in general, the findings of this research are only true for the respondents in this organization (Boeije, 2005). It would be interesting to continue this research within other organizations. By repeating this research and comparing the findings, influences of the organizational context on the perception of inclusion can be eliminated. By doing this, there will be less factors left that could have influenced the perception of inclusion besides the behavior of the supervisor. So by eliminating these influences the results of the influence of the supervisor will be more clear. Furthermore, the results can then be generalized over different organizations.

Another limitation is that nine of the twelve respondents came from Eastern European countries. It could be possible that employees from Eastern European countries have other needs to feel included than employees from other countries, so the results of this research only apply to the group of Eastern European employees. Research on other ethnic minorities is needed in order to generalize the results to other ethnic minority groups.

All respondents, except for one, were only living five years or shorter in the Netherlands, which may also be a limitation. Because they live this short time in the Netherlands, they are less established in the Netherlands than people who live in the Netherlands for a longer time. This could influence what they need in order to feel included within an organization and therefore also the role of the supervisor in making them perceive included. For example, as found in this research, the language is a problem for the employees. Those employees need the supervisor to ensure that the corporate language is spoken in order to not feel excluded. When

the employees are longer in the Netherlands and learn the language, the Dutch language does not longer influence their perception of inclusion and the role of the supervisor in the language will disappear.

The possible presence of socially desirable answers is another limitation of this research. Talking about their supervisor or about things they do not like about their job may be hard for the respondents. Although it is made clear to the respondents that they remain anonymous, both in the analysis and in the communication with the organization, they may still have the tendency to give socially desirable answers on questions about their work and supervisor (Anderson, 2013).

Another limitation of this research is the language barrier. The interviews were conducted in English or Dutch, the respondent could choose which language they preferred. For all of the respondents none of these two languages is their native language and this sometimes led to difficulties in expressing their feelings and thoughts about inclusion. By asking for examples, summarizing their answers and asking if this summary was what they meant, there is tried to reduce this barrier. Although these measures have been taken, it is still possible that there are some differences in what they felt or thought, and what they actually answered and explained.

Looking into the role of the researcher, the ethnical background of the researcher could also have played a role during the collection of data. According to Anderson (2013) it is important that the researcher reflects on his/her role as researcher and shows that he/she is aware that his/her characteristics may influence respondents. In this research, this means that the Dutch background of the researcher, which does not correspond with the employees but does correspond with most of the supervisors being discussed, could have influenced respondents' behavior and answers during the interviews. For example, during the data gathering of this research, one of the respondents apologized when he claimed that Dutch people work slowly, because he did not want to offend the researcher. It could be the case that there were more 'characteristics' of Dutch people which causes frustrations for the respondents, but that they did not tell this because they did not want to offend the Dutch researcher who may have this Dutch 'characteristics' as well.

Since there is only one researcher, no researcher triangulation in the analysis could be present (Anderson, 2013). All the data is analyzed by only one person which could lead to a bias, the feelings and views of the researcher cannot be assumed to have been completely absent during the analysis. To prevent this bias in the future, another researcher could check the coding and analysis part of the research.

## **5.2. Conclusion**

As Cottrill et al (2014) and Shore et al. (2011) stated, there is still limited research on ‘how’ leadership behavior is linked to a greater perception of inclusion of employees. This is a gap in the literature. By using an inductive research method, this research found an answer on how the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor. The fact that an answer is found on this ‘how’ question is the first major contribution of this research because it answers the gap in the literature. This research can serve as a base for further research on this topic.

Earlier research which was found on the link between leadership and inclusion mostly focused on leaders influencing the inclusive culture, not directly influencing the perception of inclusion of employees (Pless & Maak, 2004; Wasserman et al., 2007). Most of what they found in their research is also found in this research, but this research found the direct linkage between the behavior of the supervisor and the perception of inclusion of the employees. This is the second major contribution of this research. The supervisor does not only influences the inclusive culture like studied before, but also directly influences the perception of inclusion of the employees.

Another major contribution is that in contrast to earlier research on the concept of inclusion which stated that culture is the main cause of exclusion of ethnic minorities, this research found that the language is the main cause of the perception of exclusion. Further research on the concept of inclusion of ethnic minorities is needed in order find why a difference is found.

The fourth major contribution of this research is that in this research an ethnic minority group became the ethnic majority group within the department. This situation is not found in the literature yet. That this ethnic minority group became a majority group has influenced their perception of inclusion and the perception of inclusion of the other ethnic minority employees. They have a different perception of inclusion than the other ethnic minorities, which could be caused by the fact that they became a majority. Further research on this kind of situations, that an ethnic minority group becomes a majority, is needed in order to conclude that it affects their perception of inclusion.

One other major contribution of this research is that it shows that the existing literature on the perception of inclusion is not applicable to all employees. This research identifies differences in the perception of inclusion between different employees. The respondents of the Polish group of friends have different needs than the other respondents in order to perceive inclusion. Another contradiction is found between the employees who want to grow in the organization and the employees who did not mentioned this. These contradictions in the

perception of inclusion is hardly found in the existing literature on inclusion. Further research regarding the perception of inclusion of different (ethnic minority) employees is recommended in order to strengthen the concept of inclusion. The findings of this research offers a start for further research this concept.

The last contribution of this research is that, in contrast to the given literature, how the perception of inclusion is influenced by the behavior of the supervisor, differs between different employees. Only three of the five overall behaviors which are found in this research are influencing the perception of behavior of all employees. One behavior, support the employees, only influence the perception of inclusion of the employees that want to grow within the organization. How the supervisor should behave in the relationship with the employees, the other behavior, differs between the Polish group of friends and the other employees. These differences are related to the different perceptions of inclusion of the employees. So this research found that the perceptions of inclusion of ethnic minority employees are not all influenced in the same way by the behaviors of the supervisor. Before searching how the perception of inclusion of ethnic minority employees is influenced, it should be clear what the different employees perceive as inclusion.

So despite the limitations, this research contains some major contributions to the existing literature and it gives rise to further research on these topics.



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## Appendices

### I. Interview guide

First of all thank you for participating in my research. At this moment I write my thesis for the master Strategic Human Recourse Management at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. My research focuses on international employees working in Dutch organizations. I am very interested in your experience of working here at this organization. Most important is that it is all about your experience and not about facts. The interviews will last between 30 and 40 minutes and you will remain completely anonymous, both in my research as in my communication to your supervisor. The interview will be recorded, only with your permission. The transcription of the interviews can be send to you to check if you agree with it before I will use it for my analysis.

You may always interrupt me for any questions. Have you got any questions beforehand?

Main questions	Sub-questions
<b><i>General questions</i></b>	
Could you introduce yourself?	What is your name? Where are you from?
Could you tell me something about the organization you work for?	For how long are you working at [organization]? What is your job description within the organization? (Tasks & Responsibilities) What do you like about working here? What do you like less about working here?
<b><i>Questions about inclusion, belongingness</i></b>	
How do you experience working in a Dutch organization?	What are the good things about it? What are the adverse things about it?
How do you experience working with your colleagues?	How accepted do you feel? Which factors are important? How does this make you feel? Do you feel that you are an insider? How?

	<p>Do you feel involved with your colleagues?  Can you explain this? How does this make you feel?  Have you got this with all the colleagues?</p>
<p>If you think in general, so also outside [organization], what is important to you to make you feel belonged to an organization?</p> <p><i>With belonged I mean that you can form and maintain interpersonal relationships which makes you feel involved in the organization.</i></p>	<p>Can you explain what you mean with this?  How ... do you feel in this organization? (use the answers given in the previous question)  In what way has the supervisor influence on this? (use the answers given in the first sub-question)  What could the supervisor do to improve this feeling of belongingness? (use the answers given in the first sub-question)  You earlier told me about ..., do these things make you feel more belonged to [organization] as well? What is here the role of the supervisor?</p>
<p><b><i>Questions about inclusion, uniqueness</i></b></p>	
	<p>To what extent do you feel different than your colleagues?  How are your talents valued? Which factors make you feel that your talents are valued?  In what way is there room for input from you within the organization?  How important are these things for you?</p>
<p>If you think in general, so also outside [organization], what is important to you to make you feel unique in an organization?</p> <p><i>With unique I mean that you can be yourself and that you are valued for the individual person who you are</i></p>	<p>Can you explain what you mean with this?  How ... do you feel in this organization? (use the answers given in the previous question)  In what way has the supervisor influence on this? (use the answers given in the first sub-question)</p>

	<p>What could the supervisor do to improve this feeling? (use the answers given in the first sub-question)</p> <p>You earlier told me about ..., do these things make you feel more belonged to [organization] as well? What is here the role of the supervisor?</p>
<p><b><i>Questions about leadership</i></b></p>	
<p>How do you experience working with your supervisor?</p>	<p>How connected do you feel to your supervisor?</p> <p>Can you explain your relationship with your supervisor? (mutual trust, respect and obligations)</p> <p>What is the effect of this relationship on how you feel in this organization?</p>
<p>How do you experience the treatment of the supervisor between the different employees?</p>	<p>How do you feel about this?</p>
<p>How does your supervisor influence your work behavior at the workplace?</p>	<p>How do you feel about this?</p> <p>How could this be improved for you?</p>

These were my question. I would like to thank you for your time, you have helped me a lot with my research. I will send you the transcript of this interview by email, if you would like to? If yes, would you write down your email? Have you got any questions left?

## II. Overview of respondents

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Contract duration</b>	<b>Nationality</b>
<b>A</b>	Female	All operational tasks	4 years	Polish
<b>B</b>	Male	All operational tasks	3.5 years	Polish
<b>C</b>	Female	Admin (a function under the assistant-supervisor)	3 years	Polish
<b>D</b>	Female	Trouble shooter	4 years	German
<b>E</b>	Female	Picker	10 months	Polish
<b>F</b>	Male	Order picker	11 months	Polish
<b>G</b>	Male	Packing boxes	1.5 month	Polish
<b>H</b>	Female	Assistant-supervisor	2 years	Hungarian
<b>I</b>	Female	Quality control	17 years	Laotian
<b>J</b>	Female	Quality control + Label printer	2 years	Polish
<b>K</b>	Female	Lead operator	3 years	Czech
<b>L</b>	Male	Order picker	3 months	Dutch