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Master of Science Thesis

BI Norwegian Business School

- Exploring how Inclusive Leadership facilitate Workplace Inclusion of People with Disabilities –

A qualitative study of middle managers and people with disabilities in Norway

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Supervisor: Eric Breit
Professor at The Department of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at BI Norwegian Business School with a PhD in management and organization.

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Abstract

This study explores middle managers' role in promoting and facilitating workplace inclusion for people with disabilities through the model of inclusive leadership, in Norway. Through qualitative interviews, valuable insights into the inclusion of people with disabilities have been obtained. The findings suggest that several components in the model are emphasized by middle managers and valued by employees with disabilities. Furthermore, this study introduces additional sub-components to the model, as the participant of the study highlights the importance of flexibility and trust. Significantly, there exists considerable variation in the extent to which the company and middle managers incorporate and enable flexibility within their practices. Interestingly, a surprising finding of this study is that both middle managers and employees struggled to provide examples of challenges they face in their daily work life, indicating a potentially positive work environment. Moreover, our ambitions are for organizations and leaders to be motivated to adopt inclusive leadership practices and to exert a positive influence on the employment prospects of people with disabilities.

Introduction

The concept of "inclusion" has gained prominence alongside "diversity," leading to the combined term "diversity and inclusion" becoming more prevalent. (Adamson, et al., 2021). Diversity primarily emphasizes heterogeneity and the demographic composition of groups or organizations. Inclusion refers to employee engagement and the incorporation of diversity into organizational systems, aiming to remove obstacles that hinder full participation and the utilization of employees' skills to their maximum potential (Roberson, 2006). Within developed Western economies, the concept of "inclusion" has gained significant attention in business discourse, as evidenced by its prominence in various sources (CIPD, 2019; Riordan, 2014; Sherbin and Rashid, 2017). Organizations are actively working to foster inclusion to establish fair and equitable employment practices for marginalized groups (Ferdman, 2017; Le et al., 2021).

This present study aims to explore the factors that contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities (PWD) in organizations, as successful employment of PWDs has gained significant relevance for organizations on a global scale. Several key factors drive this increasing focus. Notably, the scarcity of skilled labor, demographic shifts resulting in a higher prevalence of disabilities among aging workforces and evolving societal attitudes and legislative measures aimed at promoting the workforce participation of PWDs (Baldridge et al., 2018; Baumgärtner et al., 2015; Kulkarni, 2016). PWDs have for many years experienced exclusion from ordinary workplaces and continue to experience lower employment rates than the general population (Gjertsen et al., 2021, p. 360).

PWDs represent one of the most stigmatized groups in the world, and discrimination limits their opportunity to find meaningful work in competitive and integrated employment settings. In Norway, the estimated number of PWD who are not actively participating in the regular workforce is 105 000. Moreover, an estimated 30% of PWDs who are currently unemployed express a keen interest in actively participating and contributing to the conventional work environment (Barne-, ungdoms- og familiedirektoratet, 2022). PWD can work without any substantial limitations, others may require workplace modifications. It is important to acknowledge that some PWDs may face exclusion from mainstream employment altogether, independent of their degree of disability.

Disabilities can manifest in various forms, including congenital disorders, acquired illnesses, or as a result of occurred injuries throughout life. Therefore, defining disabilities can be challenging, as it often fails to capture the full complexity. Many PWD faces multiple health or disability issues, with pain and mobility being the most significant barriers to workforce participation (Williams, 2006). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as "the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual and contextual factors", (World Health Organization, 2011: 4). Further, United Nations (2012) defines disabilities as "those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (UN, 2012). This comprehensive definition includes social disability. The fundamental principle of the social model of disability claims that it is society, rather than an individual's impairment, that causes disability (Oliver and Barnes, 2012).

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in research focusing on inclusive organizations. Central to this research area is the concept of inclusive leadership. Shore et al. (2011) introduced inclusive leadership as a crucial contextual factor that contributes to fostering inclusion within organizations. While leadership studies and theories have been extensively explored for many years, research on inclusive leadership has recently gained attention (Boekhorst, 2015; Booysen, 2013; Gallegos, 2014; Henderson, 2014). Shore and Chung (2021) conducted their study with the recognition that there remains a degree of uncertainty regarding the specific actions and behaviors that leaders should undertake to foster inclusivity.

This study's main objective is to furnish empirical evidence to clarify the actions and behaviors from middle-managers associated with successful inclusive leadership, because its empirically demonstrated to be highly effective in fostering an inclusive work environment that embraces employees from diverse social identities. Middle managers (mid-managers) are included as a main object because they play a crucial role in coordinating the day-to-day activities of organizational units (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, p. 154). Mid-managers are of particular interest when studying inclusive leadership because they have direct interactions with employees and can provide guidance, support, and encouragement on a day-to-day basis. To illustrate, mid-managers include a variation of roles, such as team-

leaders or line-managers. In relevance to this study, mid-managers pursue staff management and are the immediate managers of the PWDs in question. The role of mid-managers can be understood through Likert's (1961) concept of the "linking pin," where a superior in one group becomes a subordinate in the next hierarchical level, thus establishing a chain of coordination throughout the organization. Likert (1961) further argues that these "linking pins" are responsible for harmonizing the activities between top-level executives and operational-level employees. Additionally, Harding et al. (2014) describe mid-managers as individuals who occupy a central position within organizational hierarchies. This positioning implies that they have direct access to both higher-level executives and lower-level employees, allowing them to serve as critical intermediaries in the flow of information, decision-making processes, and coordination efforts within the organization.

Delmestri and Walgenbach (2005) assert that middle managers have a crucial role as expert problem solvers. They possess the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and address complex challenges that arise within the organization. Their ability to effectively analyze and resolve problems contributes to the overall operational efficiency and success of the business. Moreover, according to Huy (2001; 2002), mid-managers play a vital role in ensuring the successful implementation of radical changes within the organization. They are responsible for managing the emotional states of their employees during times of significant transformation. Considering these important characteristics and responsibilities, mid-managers are of particular interest when studying inclusive leadership.

Exploring the leadership approaches and behaviors of mid-managers in promoting inclusivity becomes a relevant and valuable research focus in understanding inclusive employment. Mid-managers tend to find themselves in a challenging position, as they must navigate the expectations of both their superiors and subordinates. Their behaviors can appear inconsistent when observed in their interactions with superiors versus subordinates. Consequently, their behaviors and performances are responsive to criticism and scrutiny from both higher-level management and those below them (Sims, 2003). Concerning workplace inclusion, mid-managers have a dual responsibility, as they must adhere to the policies and practices established by the company while also striving to create an inclusive environment for their employees.

Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022) propose the model of inclusive leadership, which provides a comprehensive framework comprising three essential components that shed light on the factors that contribute to the facilitation of inclusive leadership. Firstly, they highlight antecedent conditions as predictive factors that influence the development and utilization of inclusive behaviors by leaders. Secondly, they emphasize the specific behaviors exhibited by leaders that can foster inclusive leadership. Lastly, they identify various positive organizational outcomes that arise from the facilitation and implementation of inclusive leadership (p. 328-332).

Further, Kuknor and Bhattacharya (2022) encourage empirical researchers to explore the construct of inclusive leadership by conducting interviews with leaders and their followers across diverse organizations. They also examined how inclusion in the workplace largely depends on managerial behavior (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). In line with these calls, this study aims to address this gap through a qualitative examination of the experiences of employees with disabilities and how the behavior and actions of their immediate manager facilitate inclusive employment in various Norwegian organizations. These mid-managers are especially interesting as they´re responsible for the day-to-day supervision of employees. In relevance to this study, the mid-managers pursue staff management and are the immediate managers of PWDs. Consequently, this paper aims to address the following research question:

What are the antecedent conditions, behaviors, outcomes, and challenges associated with middle managers' facilitation of workplace inclusion for people with disabilities?

This master thesis is structured into several key chapters. Firstly, we will provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical concepts pertaining to workplace inclusion and inclusive leadership. Additionally, we will delve into the model of inclusive leadership, clarifying its components and relevance. Secondly, we will dedicate a chapter to detailing the methodology employed in our study. This section will outline the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. Thirdly, we will present the findings derived from qualitative interviews, which offer valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants, shedding light on the practical implications of

inclusive leadership in the workplace. Lastly, we will conclude our thesis with a thoughtful discussion section. In this chapter, we will analyze our findings in relation to the established theoretical framework. By establishing connections between our empirical results and the existing literature, we aim to contribute to the broader understanding of inclusive leadership and its impact on organizational dynamics.

Theory

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations surrounding workplace inclusion and inclusive leadership. Specifically, we will explore the model of inclusive leadership proposed by Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022), which serves as a valuable framework for understanding and fostering inclusive leadership practices.

Workplace Inclusion

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning emphasis on the principles of diversity and inclusion within the realm of organizations. Diversity in the workplace is increasing globally, which creates challenges and opportunities for organizations (Shore et al., 2011, p. 187). Early research on diversity emphasized bringing those who were different into the organization. These differ in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and education. However, merely hiring people from underrepresented groups is insufficient to maintain diversity. Organizations must also consider factors and processes that make people of differences become entirely accepted, equally productive, and rewarded, which leads to inclusion in the workplace (Hays-Thomas, 2016, p. 3).

The concept of inclusion has emerged as a core concept in relation to diversity. Workplace inclusion centers on eliminating barriers and cultivating an environment where everyone is accorded respect and fairness, enabling equitable opportunities for engagement and progression, ultimately contributing to organizational achievement. Nevertheless, numerous organizations tend to overlook the inclusion aspect by prioritizing workforce diversity alone, which results in disappointing organizational outcomes (Panicker et al., 2018, p. 531). The state of inclusion is crucial, as without it, newcomers, particularly those from underrepresented groups, may feel like outsiders (Collins, 1986). This sense of exclusion can lead to added stress, early resignations, limited opportunities for

advancement within the organization, or even termination (Hay-Thomas, 2017, p. 16). Consequently, organizations must recognize the critical interplay between diversity and inclusion to fully harness their synergistic potential (Panicker et al., 201, p. 531).

Moreover, inclusion involves "how well an organization and its members connect with, engage, and utilize people across all types of differences" (Ferdman & Deane, 2013, p. 4). Workplace inclusion is further defined as by Pearce & Randel (2004) "the extent to which employees feel that they belong to and are socially included in the workplace" (p. 84). Workplace inclusion is facilitated both by coworkers and leaders, by the values and norms functioning at the workplace, in addition to the individuals' own behavior and attitudes (Johnsen et al., 2022, p. 2). In essence, inclusion refers to the culture within an organization that enables individuals from all backgrounds to express their perspectives and actively participate in activities in the organization (Wasserman et al., 2008). Culture is often impacted by the leader, and at the same time, leadership behavior is shaped by the organizational culture (Johnsen et al., 2022, p. 2).

Inclusive leadership

Inclusive leadership represents a fresh outlook in the field of leadership theories. While organizational policies and human resource practices play a role in establishing an inclusive framework, it is the leaders who hold the primary responsibility for shaping the organizational culture. Consequently, organizations require leaders who can foster a sense of inclusion among their followers and effectively harness the advantages of diversity Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022, p. 324)

Furthermore, Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022), emphasize that inclusive leadership is a central element for successful diversity management (p. 324). Diversity management refers to "planned and systematic programs and procedures designed to improve interaction among diverse people and make this diversity a source of innovation and effectiveness rather than miscommunication, conflict, or obstacles to employees' performance, satisfaction, and advancement" (Hays-Thomas, 2016, p. 5). Shore and Chung (2021) conclude that leader inclusion is highly effective for facilitating an inclusive work environment that further welcomes employees from a diversity of social identities. Moreover,

inclusive leaders who can inspire inclusion in their work group are becoming critical for organizational success as diversity increases globally (p. 745).

Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022) describes inclusive leadership as the process of creating an inclusive environment where employees feel belongingness. Where inclusive leadership is present, employees feel that they belong and are valued for their unique beliefs, attitudes, values, and background. Further on, the theory focuses on the relational aspect of leadership by fostering a positive relationship with each follower (p. 325). Additionally, the capability of inclusive leadership helps organizations adapt to diverse talents (Boruke & Titus, 2020). Moreover, Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022) highlights three goals of inclusive leadership. "(1) To create a shared identity among group members such that everyone feels a sense of belonging, (2) to reduce status differences and ensure that each individual is treated with respect and concern, and (3) to facilitate the participation and involvement of all so that everyone has an equal voice and input in making important decisions" (p. 327).

The Model of Inclusive Leadership

This thesis implements the framework of Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022) which presents the model of inclusive leadership. They suggest that inclusive leadership has three key components with additional sub-components which outline factors that facilitate inclusive leadership and the resulting climate and behavior. The model highlights antecedent conditions which includes group diversity, cognitions, and organizational practices. Moreover, the model emphasizes inclusive leader behaviors and the outcomes of inclusive leadership.

Antecedent Conditions	→ Behaviors	→Outcomes
Leadership characteristics • pro-diversity beliefs • cognitive complexity • personality Group diversity cognitions • multiculturalism • climate for inclusion Organizational policies and practices	Encourages divergent viewpoints Appreciates all views and contributions Is available and accessible Invites input from others and shares decision making Ensures justice and equity Shows support Incorporates members knowledge, skills and abilities	Psychological safety Work engagement Well-being Creativity and innovation Helping behavior Learning from errors/failure Work unit performance

Model 1: Model of inclusive leadership (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022).

Antecedent Conditions

Antecedent Conditions represents the first component of the model of inclusive leadership and refers to predicting factors that affect how leaders develop and use inclusive behaviors. This component enhances leader characteristics, group cognitions, and organizational policies and practices as predicting factors (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022, p. 328).

Firstly, Randel et al. (2018) introduce pro-diversity beliefs and cognitive complexity as characteristics that enhance inclusive leaders. Stauss & Connerly (2003) found that personality factors such as openness to experience influence the diversity orientation of individuals and further on leadership performance. Openness to experience refers to the degree to which individuals are open-minded, intellectually curious, exploring, and imaginative (McCrae, 1987). Further, Goldberg (1990), emphasizes that openness refers to the tendency to be informed, creative, insightful, and curious.

Secondly, research suggests that diversity cognitions within the group can have an effect on inclusive leadership. Especially in relation to their multicultural beliefs, which can have a positive effect to make use of diversity within groups (Van Knippenberg, Homan & van Ginkel, 2013; Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022, p. 330). Additionally, research emphasizes how an inclusive culture facilitates a healthy workplace and how inclusion minimizes negative aspects at work (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022)

Lastly, organizational policies and practices may include collaborative work arrangements, fair treatment initiatives, or diversity among all stakeholder groups (Roberson, 2006). Further, to which extent diversity is considered an important resource within the organization and how the organization facilitates leaders' capacity for valuing and integrating diverse approaches (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022, p. 330).

Behaviors

The second component of the model of inclusive leadership emphasizes leadership behaviors that facilitate inclusive leadership (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022, p. 330). Thousands of studies have been conducted on leadership behavior and the behavioral approach has become a well-established leadership theory. The behavioral approach focuses on what leaders do and how they act (Northouse, 2022, p. 84). Studies from the past decades have provided evidence of how various behaviors correlate with organizational performance, employee satisfaction, employee engagement, leader effectiveness, and so on.

Research conducted by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) emphasizes that encouraging divergent viewpoints and genuinely appreciating views and contributions are behaviors that characterize inclusive leaders (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022, p. 331). Additionally, Edmonson (2004) proposes that leaders who are available and accessible, psychologically, and physically to their followers, are reviewed as inclusive leaders. She further enhances behaviors where the leader invites input from others and shares decision-making responsibilities (Edmonson, 2004). The study of Carmeli et al. (2010) define inclusive leaders as open, available, and accessible to employees coming up with new ideas creating a context where people are psychologically safe to express ideas that may often not be in sync with norms (Carmeli et al., 2010). Employees

address issues and concerns openly when leaders are accessible and available (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Additionally, the model of inclusive leadership proposes that support is a behavioral characteristic which is present in inclusive leaders. The supportive leadership approach is characterized by behaviors that bring out follower's skills. It includes listening, asking for input and giving feedback (Northouse, 2022, p. 110). Support and trust from the management are one of the key indicators to foster inclusion (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). Likewise, to fully incorporate members' knowledge, skills, and abilities into the team (Randel et al., 2018).

Outcomes

The final component of the model addresses organizational outcomes of inclusive leadership. First of all, previous research indicates that work engagement and psychological safety is often present within teams who have an inclusive leader (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022; Choi et al., 2015; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). The study of Carmeli et al. (2010) also concludes that inclusive leadership is positively related to psychological safety. Similarly, inclusive leadership is positively related to employee well-being, including positive emotional states and quality relationships with others (Choi et al., 2017). According to the World Health Organization (2021), well-being is defined as a favorable state that individuals experience. It encompasses various aspects such as quality of life and the capacity of individuals to make meaningful contributions to the world.

Shore et al. (2011) emphasize that previous studies of leader inclusion have found positive relationships with psychological safety (p. 178). Organizational research has identified psychological safety as an important factor to understand how people collaborate to achieve a shared outcome (Edmondson, 1999; 2004). Psychological safety is about "feeling safe" when sharing different opinions and views with others (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

Furthermore, research has shown that inclusive leadership influences follower creativity and innovative work behavior (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022; Choi et al., 2017; Choi et al., 2015; Javed et al., 2019; Oi et al., 2019). In addition, inclusive leadership has a positive relation to follower-helping behaviors both towards the leaders and others (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022, p. 332). When there is a present feeling of psychological safety as a result of leader

inclusiveness, this has been connected to how followers learn from their failures (Hirak et al., 2012; Ye et al., 2018). Finally, inclusive leadership has a positive impact on unit performance (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022; Hirak et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015).

These outcomes represent the result that one can achieve by implementing inclusive leadership in an organization. In summary, the model emphasizes factors which influence relevant behaviors and the outcomes of inclusive leadership (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022, p. 332). The model of inclusive leadership, presented by Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022) is based upon recent research.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

This study aims to investigate the antecedent conditions, behaviors, outcomes, and challenges associated with middle managers' facilitation of workplace inclusion for people with disabilities. Our ambition is to gain a deeper understanding of how inclusion operates within organizations in Norway. To achieve this, we have selected a qualitative research strategy as our preferred methodology. Qualitative data collection enables us to explore and assess the experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs of both employees and mid-managers, which are underlying factors shaping their behavior. By utilizing qualitative data, we can effectively measure and analyze these elements to shed light on the dynamics of inclusion in the organizational context. By gathering data from employees and their managers, the study aims to understand the behavior of managers who succeed with inclusion of PWD.

In this study, we have adopted an exploratory research design to guide our approach and execution of the research. Workplace inclusion and inclusive leadership are areas that have received limited attention in previous research endeavors. Hence, an exploratory research design is particularly appropriate in this context, as it seeks to uncover novel and intriguing aspects within a field that has been relatively unexplored (Swedberg, 2020, p. 17). Research on inclusive leadership has received increased attention the previous ten years (Boekhorst, 2015; Booysen, 2013; Gallegos, 2014; Henderson, 2014), nevertheless Kuknor and Bhattacharya (2022) still seeks empirical researchers to explore the construct of inclusive leadership. By applying an exploratory research strategy, we seek to establish new connections between inclusive leadership theory and its practical implications for promoting the inclusion of PWD. The adoption of an exploratory research design was a logical decision for our investigation because it allows us to delve into unexplored areas, such as the viewpoints from both manager and PWD, and further contribute to the model of inclusive leadership.

Data Collection

We opted for interviews as our method of data collection as suggested by Czarniawska (2014, p. 29). Interviews enable us to delve into participants´ impressions, interpretations, and viewpoints, providing rich descriptions of

leadership practices that promote the inclusion of PWDs. Building upon the arguments presented by Johannesen et al., (2011), we recognize that people´s experiences and perceptions are best captured when informants feel unrestricted in expressing themselves. Hence, our study aims to encourage participants to share their personal experiences and narratives, with a specific focus of their work life and, notably, their interactions between PWD and manager. By allowing participants the freedom to articulate their thoughts, we anticipate uncovering deeper attitudes, examining the dynamics of the manager-employee relationships, and fostering an environment of honesty.

Given that PWDs are considered a vulnerable group of people, we deemed it crucial to adopt a flexible approach to data collecting to accommodate the unique circumstances of each informant (Askheim & Grenness, 2008, p. 91). Consequently, interviews were chosen as the most suitable method, offering the opportunity to adapt and improvise as necessary during the data collection process. Our data set consisted of information gathered from a diverse sample of 20 participants, comprising ten mid-managers, ten employees with disabilities. The participants were drawn from eight distinct companies.

We sought to obtain comprehensive insight into participants´ perceptions of inclusive leadership, shedding light on their experiences and fostering a deeper understanding of the manager-employee relationship. Furthermore, our study aims to encourage open and honest responses. The significance of our research lies not only in its potential to contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also in its focus on marginalized populations who face barriers due to disability.

Semi-structured interviews

The data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was deliberately chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the participants' narratives and foster a natural conversational environment. Extensive preparation and careful discussion according to prior research preceded the interviews to ensure the collection of relevant data of interest. To capture a comprehensive understanding of the topic, distinct sets of questions were formulated, tailored to the specific roles, responsibilities, experiences, and competencies of the employees and managers. Thus, separate interview guides were developed for each participant group. Appendix 1 contains the interview guide for employees and Appendix 2 contains the interview guide for managers.

During the interviews, we leveraged the flexibility inherent in the semi-structured format to determine the sequencing of the listed questions while ensuring comprehensive coverage of all relevant topics. The interview process itself exhibited a high degree of adaptability, placing emphasis on the interviewer's framing and comprehension of issues. By granting respondents considerable freedom in their responses, the method enabled them to express their perspectives in a manner that felt most authentic to them. Furthermore, this approach facilitated the exploration of follow-up questions and encouraged respondents to elaborate on their answers, thereby enhancing the depth and richness of the data collected (Bell et al., 2019, p. 436). Given the diverse qualifications and assumptions among participants, this interview methodology proved particularly valuable as it allowed for the rephrasing of questions to elicit more valid and nuanced insights.

Further, the semi-structured interview guide encouraged active engagement from the respondents and afforded the flexibility to pose follow-up questions tailored to each individual participant. Recognizing the varying capacities of participants to provide extensive answers and reflections, we observed that some were capable of sharing detailed insights for up to ten minutes without necessitating further probing. Others responded with brief statements, prompting the need for multiple follow-up questions to elicit broad and valid responses. Moreover, the semi-structured interview guide provided the opportunity to intertwine lived experiences with the theoretical framework under investigation, ensuring a robust integration of empirical and conceptual perspectives (Galletta et al., 2013, p. 24).

To ensure clarity and effectiveness of our interview questions in accurately measuring their intended constructs, a pilot test was conducted. This pilot test involved two interviews: one with a manager and another with an employee. These individuals were selected from a company where we had established contact and received consent for their involvement in our research. The pilot test provided valuable feedback and served to validate the suitability of the established questions. By engaging with legitimate respondents, we were able to refine and enhance the quality of our data collection instruments. Through the pilot interviews, we notably acknowledged that the inclusion of multiple traits to describe the manager presented a challenge for participants. Recalling and expressing all the words accurately proved demanding and led to repetition. To

overcome this hurdle in subsequent interviews, we devised a solution by introducing cards with the traits written on them. This innovative approach aimed to streamline the process, enabling both managers and employees to reflect and carefully select the words that best characterized or did not align with the manager's traits. This method garnered positive feedback from participants throughout the interviews, affirming its effectiveness in facilitating a smoother and more comprehensive process of data collection. The material collected from the pilot interviews is not included in the study. During these two interviews, it became evident that the employees in question were on long-term sick leave for reasons unrelated to disabilities. Consequently, these participants of the pilot did not meet the selection criteria established for this study. Furthermore, this experience highlighted the need for enhanced clarity in specifying the target population for interviews, particularly when communicating with HR departments.

Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' workplaces. Primarily due to the convenience of having access to both the employee and the manager in one location. However, some participants expressed a preference for digital interviews, which we accepted. Moreover, four participants were geographically distant, necessitating the use of digital interviews. One interview was conducted in a meeting room at campus. In order to prioritize the comfort of the respondents, the choice of interview location and setting was left to their discretion. To ensure maximum participation, participants were given the flexibility to choose digital interviews when needed.

In total, eight interviews (comprising four employees and four managers) were conducted digitally. During the digital interviews, all managers had their cameras on, while only one out of four employees utilized their camera. It was observed that when communication was restricted to audio-only, it became more challenging to achieve the desired conversation flow. Generally, the digital interviews exhibited a slightly more mechanistic quality, compared to face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the absence of visual cues made it more difficult to interpret body language and facial expressions, hindering the ability to ask integrative questions effectively.

Prior to each interview, participants were explicitly informed that they had the option to decline answering any questions. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that all participants willingly answered all the questions posed to them. Additionally,

the participants were provided with a comprehensive introduction to the data collectors and received general information about the study. During this stage, they were encouraged to seek clarification on any aspects of the study they found unclear or had questions about. Given that many participants had been introduced to the project through their company´s Human Resources (HR) Department, it was crucial to ensure that they were provided with accurate information. Moreover, participants were reminded of their autonomy and given reassurance that they could withdraw from the study at any point. This emphasis aimed to uphold ethical considerations and prioritize the comfort and rights of the respondents throughout the research process.

The interview commenced by posing a series of background questions, aimed at gathering demographic information that would aid in understanding the participant's profile. Additionally, these questions provided insights into their position, workload, and the path that led them to their current role. Subsequently, the interview structure adhered to a theoretical framework, beginning with an exploration of workplace inclusion, followed by an examination of leadership behaviors and outcomes, concluding with an exploration of workplace challenges. Lastly the interview guide included a distinct segment dedicated to reflection to allow the participants to share any additional information they deemed relevant. Furthermore, participants were specifically prompted to highlight aspects they considered crucial in relation to workplace inclusion and inclusive leadership, enabling us to gain valuable insights into their perspectives and priorities.

Sample

The unit of analysis is inclusive leadership of mid-managers whose followers have a disability. Accordingly, we applied a purposeful sampling method to specify and select cases that represent successful workplace inclusion for investigation. In other words, we aimed to select more cases that show high performance (Aken & Berends, 2018, p. 159). Our main sampling method was the sequential approach, as we depended on replies from relevant firms and informants (Bell et al., 2019, p. 470). The selection criteria for sampling were focused on organizations that had employees with a disability. It was of particular significance that the mid-level manager chosen for each employee interviewee held the role of their immediate supervisor and carried personnel-related responsibilities. In order to maximize the potential pool of participants, we did not impose any other specific requirements.

Additionally, given the availability of digital interview platforms, the sampling process was not limited by geographical considerations.

The sampling process commenced with the initiation of communication with non-profit organizations that advocate for PWD across diverse domains. Subsequently, we organized two meetings, which facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. These meetings served as valuable platforms for acquiring insights into both successful examples of inclusivity and instances where PWD face exclusion from the labor market in Norway. Furthermore, these interactions furnished us with a solid foundation of knowledge regarding companies that purposefully embrace PWD.

Subsequently, we proceeded to engage with Norwegian companies that have demonstrated achievements in fostering workplace inclusion for marginalized people. Our initial approach involved reaching out to their HR Departments, where we presented an overview of our research objectives and the specific population we aimed to investigate. Further, the HR departments conducted internal inquiries within their respective organizations to identify suitable participants. Once the HR department had successfully engaged an employee and their respective manager and received confirmation of their willingness to participate in our study, they shared the contact information of these identified individuals with us.

As the next step, we proceeded to establish contact with these individuals by email to coordinate the scheduling and location for conducting the interviews. Our outreach efforts encompassed both private and public sectors and we included a mix of medium-sized enterprises, as well as large corporations with a workforce exceeding 3000 employees. These companies were all located in Norway and spanned across various industries. These actions ensured a diverse and comprehensive representation of organizations. In all the cases we examined, it was noteworthy to observe that there were either ongoing or previous collaborations with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (Nav) or other private job specialists. Interestingly, this correlation was not explicitly sought in the initial inquiry sent to potential respondents. However, it is pertinent to acknowledge this aspect. Information regarding the pertinent demographics is provided in table 1 (Overview of participants).

The sample consisted of a total of 20 participants, evenly distributed between ten employees and ten mid-level managers. These participants were

drawn from a range of organizations, comprising six private companies and two governmental entities. Notably, saturation in data collection was reached after the sixteenth interview, as subsequent cases failed to yield novel insights, aligning with the concept of saturation as described by Aken and Berends (2018, p. 160). The majority of participants identified as males, while the companies involved operated within diverse industries. The employees who took part in the study represented various minority groups, encompassing individuals with physical, psychological, and social disabilities.

Participants					
Employee			Manager	Company	
Gender	Disability	Position	Gender	Industry	Sector
Case 1	Male	Physical Disability	Retail Associate	Male	Merchandise	Private
Case 2	Male	Physical Disability	Software Developer	Male	Oil and Gas	Private
Case 3	Male	Social Disability	Janitor	Male	Facility Services	Private
Case 4	Male	Cognitive Disability	Chef	Male	Tourism	Private
Case 5	Male	Cognitive Disability	Janitor	Male	Tourism	Private
Case 6	Male	Social Disability	Scaffolder	Male	Oil and Gas	Private
Case 7	Male	Social Disability	Guard	Male	Security	Private
Case 8	Male	Physical Disability	Customer Service	Female	Logistics	Public
Case 9	Male	Physical Disability	IT Support	Male	IT	Private
Case 10	Male	Social Disability	Lawyer	Female	Health Care	Public

Table 1: Overview of participants

Data Analysis

Throughout our analysis, we adopted an abductive reasoning approach, which in our case involves observing the phenomenon of mid-managers and seeking to develop explanations for their success with inclusive leadership. By adopting an abductive reasoning, we overcome the limitations of inductive and deductive research, and it allows us to seek the best explanation from competing explanations, and further entails an iterative process of moving back and forth between theory and data (Bell et al., 2019; Mantere and Ketovi, 2013). When examining the data collected, we identified patterns, observations, and recurring themes related to the collaboration between employees and their managers. These observations and patterns served as the foundation for generating theoretical insights and propositions. We utilized these insights to develop explanations for how and why inclusive leaders are successful or may encounter obstacles in the context of mid-managers. It is important to note that our study does not aim to provide definitive conclusions but rather to contribute to the existing knowledge and understanding of inclusive leadership. The theoretical insights and propositions generated from our analysis can serve as a basis for further research, refinement, and testing in future studies.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the collected data, we employed a thematic coding approach. Both researchers involved in the study possessed prior experience with this coding method. By constructing the interview guide with predetermined theoretical categories, we laid the groundwork for the subsequent thematic coding process. Once the interview transcripts were finalized upon completion of all interviews, we commenced the coding process by identifying and labeling themes and patterns within each transcript. Categorizing and deriving theoretical significance from these themes and patterns is crucial in analyzing the collected data (Lee et al., 1999). It is important to note that this process had already commenced during the structuring of the interview guides, which were based on the predetermined theoretical categories. Subsequently, the responses were categorized into the following thematic areas: background, workplace inclusion, leadership behavior, workplace challenges, and reflection. Appendix 5 illustrates the main and sub-themes implemented.

Initially, we embarked on the coding process by identifying sub-categories that corresponded to the specific questions posed to the participants. This allowed us to organize the data in relation to the interview guide, providing an initial

overview and facilitating familiarity with the dataset. It is important to note that the semi-structured nature of the interviews occasionally resulted in deviations from the prescribed order of questions. To ensure comprehensive coverage, we sought to address all the listed questions, even if they were not consistently addressed in the same order across interviews. This approach served to ensure that we obtained responses to all the intended inquiries and maintained a comprehensive analysis of the data material. Table 2 (Overview of categories) serves as an illustration of categories applied in the initial part of the analysis.

Main category	Sub-category
Background	Career & Work situation
	Organizational Policies and Practices
Workplace Inclusion	Managers Motivation
	Implemented Measures
	Decision-Making Processes
Leadership	Description of leader
	Traits which correlate with manager
	Traits that do not correlate with manager
	Manager-Employee Relationship
	Communication & Collaboration
Challenges	Which?
	The managers facilitation of challenges
	Other resources who eliminate or reduce challenges
Reflection	Summary
	Differentiation from other companies

	Three most crucial factors for succeeding with inclusive employment
	Additional contributions

Table 2: Overview of categories

For the process of coding, we opted to utilize Microsoft Excel as it aligned with our prior experience in coding qualitative data. Both researchers felt comfortable and competent using Excel for this purpose. We believed that employing Excel would facilitate a more comprehensive insight into the data, a notion that was ultimately confirmed through our experience. Additionally, Excel provided a convenient platform for copying and pasting text from the transcribed data, as well as integrating the findings into our thesis. To ensure impartiality and minimize biases, we conducted the coding process separately. Despite conducting individual reviews of the data, we found consistent content for all the codes identified. By coding separately, we aimed to acquire a holistic understanding of the data, rather than fragmenting it across different coding approaches or interpretations.

After completing the separate coding processes, we engaged in a collaborative session where we reviewed and compared the contents of both coding sheets. This crucial step involved extensive discussions regarding the identified themes, sub-labels, and the relationships between the independently categorized content. As outlined by Goetz and LeCompte (1981), this collaborative review process served to ensure the reliability of intercoder agreement. During this joint review, we encountered minor discrepancies in the content of the coding sheets, particularly within the categories of background and reflection. However, these differences were not unexpected, as the questions within these categories were designed as "warm-up" questions in our interview guide, aimed at initiating and facilitating conversations. As such, variations in the labeling and content were anticipated. To ensure consistency, any divergences that emerged were thoroughly discussed and mutually agreed upon before proceeding with the analysis.

In the next stage of our data analysis, we opted to consolidate all transcribed materials, segregating them into two distinct categories: Selection 1 (employees) and Selection 2 (managers). This consolidation process yielded a

total of 200 pages of transcribed interviews. During this phase, we noticed a recurring occurrence of certain words and concepts throughout the interviews. By merging the transcribed materials, we aimed to facilitate a comprehensive search for these recurring words, even in cases where the content or sentence from the participant did not possess a specific code. This approach allowed us to uncover and examine patterns and themes that emerged organically from the participants' responses.

Subsequently, the process of drafting the findings chapter commenced. Furthermore, we went back and forth between the data material, theoretical framework. This iterative process allowed for the development of comprehensive explanations regarding the successful implementation of inclusive leadership by the managers, as well as addressing the challenges they encountered. In conclusion, the qualitative interviews were systematically analyzed using an abductive reasoning approach.

Data Credibility

In conducting our study, we adhered to a rigorous and systematic approach to data collection and analysis, as emphasized by Bell et al. (2019). This encompassed several key aspects, including formulating a clear research question, employing suitable data collection methods, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality for participants, and utilizing techniques such as triangulation to enhance the credibility and reliability of our findings. It is important to acknowledge that qualitative methods have inherent limitations in terms of their expressive power and generalizability.

Reliability

In the context of business and management, reliability refers to the extent to which data collection methods yield consistent results or outcomes when applied to specific concepts or phenomena. Therefore, it addresses the question of whether the measurements can be trusted to provide consistent and dependable information over time (Bell et al., 2019, p. 46). In regard to this study, we both discussed and participated in the entire research process to ensure consistency and agreement. This included conducting interviews and reviewing transcripts to arrive at common decisions in all assessments. By doing so, we were able to establish a high level of internal reliability, which is a strength of the study. Internal

reliability refers to the extent to which there is agreement among research team members regarding what they observe, or information gathered throughout the data collection. This is connected with the requirement for intersubjectivity, which means that several people can agree that the results are a reliable expression of reality (Johannessen et al., 2011, p. 44).

During two of our interviews, external individuals accompanied the participants, which could have compromised the reliability of the data. The presence of additional participants in an interview can potentially result in biased responses from the primary participant being interviewed, leading to inaccurate data. This is because the presence of others may influence the participant's responses due to social desirability (Bell et al., 2019, p. 227). However, potential limitations will also be considered and discussed later in the paper.

Moreover, the inclusion of a wide range of data sources (participants) enhances the reliability of the study's findings, contributing to a more robust and nuanced understanding of the topic. We ensured that the participants represent a diverse range of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences related to inclusivity, which strengthens the possibility for a broader applicability of the findings.

Validity

The method of data collection used in our study, namely interviews, contributes to the validity of this thesis. Interviews allow for a closer interaction between the researcher and the object of study, facilitating the resolution of validity-related issues. Validity, in this context, pertains to whether the interview effectively addresses the research questions and is contingent on how well the problem has been operationalized (Johannessen et al., 2011, p. 45).

To further ensure the validity of this study, we incorporated follow-up questions during the interviews. This deliberate decision aimed to ensure that the questions were answered comprehensively and provided sufficient information for our research purposes. By including follow-up questions, we sought to enhance the internal validity of the study, which refers to the alignment between the researcher's observations and the underlying theoretical concepts (Bell et al., 2019, p. 363). Additionally, there is a rich selection of participants which to a large extent represents diversity. Table 1 provides relevant demographic information which ensures the transferability and generalizability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Following the arguments by Diener and Crandall (1978), there are four main ethical principles: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. Ethical considerations are important when conducting qualitative research, and especially when including vulnerable groups who risk social exclusion, such as PWDs. To minimize harm we consider the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of participants throughout the study, by implementing the following measures.

Firstly, we consequently interviewed the employee first and then their manager. The reason for that was that we wanted to secure the comfortability of the employees, and we found that more important than with the manager. As we would ask them to describe the other person, we believe that it would be more uncomfortable for the employee if he knew that we had already been provided with information from the manager's perspective. This became the case for the managers and some of them found it troublesome to describe themselves as leaders when they knew that we had already gathered information about them from their followers. Nevertheless, we found this way more appropriate, taking the leader responsibility of the managers under consideration.

Secondly, details about our study and how we would manage the data collected were submitted to SIKT. Further, an informed consent form was written in line with their principles. All participants received the form before the interviews. This form emphasized relevant information about the study, and that participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Appendix 4) (Crow et al., 2006). None of our participants were in a position where they were unable to give their full consent,

Thirdly, following the arguments presented by Bell et al. (2019), issues of confidentiality and anonymity raise difficulties and involve both ethical and legal considerations. To ensure the anonymity of all participants, both name and company were excluded from the interview transcripts and further notes conducted throughout the study. The transcribing was completed by using Word, and the final file was saved in BI´s OneDrive. In addition, all of the collected forms of consent were stored as a password-protected pdf file in the same drive. These steps ensured that the participant's privacy was ensured.

Lastly, to ensure that we were in line with the principle regarding harm, we ensured all participants that the information that both leader and employee presented during the interviews would not be shared with each other. Additionally, since some of our participants were especially vulnerable, we opened up the possibility of having a legal guardian or someone they felt comfortable with to participate in the interview. Further, we conducted all interviews in a setting preferred by the participants, most interviews were conducted at the participant's workplace.

Findings

The presentation of our study's findings will follow the theoretical framework presented in the theory chapter, in the same order as the model of inclusive leadership. Moreover, we will incorporate additional findings that align with and contribute to the model. We will start with a summary of all the findings presented in table 3. In this model we have highlighted the findings from each case, which provides an overview of all findings connected to the study.

Case	Antecedent Conditions	Leadership Behavior	Outcomes	Flexibility	Challenges
1	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Arrogant Employment funded by Nav Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Included in decision making	Work engagement Employee openness	Work task Work hours	Few challenges regarding efficiency
2	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Openness Recruitment through Nav Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Availability and support Included in decision making Manager and employee emphasized the importance of trust	Work unit performance Well-being Creativity and innovation Employee openness	Home office	No challenges
3	Self-identified leadership	Availability and support	Work Engagement	Work tasks	No challenges

	characteristic: Openness Pay and recruitment provided by Nav Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Included in decision making Great degree of trust Informal and social relationships with employee			
4	Support and recruitment through the assistance of work specialists from work inclusion organizations Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Manager emphasized the importance of trust Informal and social relationships with employee	Well-being Employee openness	Work tasks Working hours	Few challenges regarding efficiency and concentration
5	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Openness Support and recruitment through the assistance of work specialists from work inclusion organizations Climate for inclusion	Motivated for workplace inclusion Informal and social relationships with employee	Well-being	Work tasks Working hours	No challenges

6	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Openness Recruited through Nav Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Availability Less included in decision making	Work engagement		No challenges
7	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Openness Recruited through Nav Climate for inclusion	Availability and support Less included in decision making Employee emphasized the importance of trust	Work unit performance Work engagement Well-being		No challenges
8	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Arrogant Support provided by Nav Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Availability and support Included in decision making Great degree of trust	Well-being	Home-office Working hours	No challenges
9	Self-identified leadership characteristic: Openness	Availability and support Less included in decision making	Work engagement Well-being	Home-office Working hours	No challenges

	Support and recruitment through the assistance of work specialists from work inclusion organizations *Restricted* climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Great degree of trust Informal and social relationships with employee			
10	Support and pay provided by both Nav and a job specialist Climate for inclusion Motivated for workplace inclusion	Availability and support Included in decision making	Work engagement	Home-office	No challenges

Table 3: Overview of findings

Antecedent Conditions

In the model of inclusive leadership, the first component is antecedent conditions which precede and influence the emergence and utilization of inclusive behaviors among leaders (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022, p. 328). Regarding leadership characteristics, a noteworthy majority of the managers exhibited openness. Their willingness to embrace diverse perspectives and ideas indicates a crucial attribute of inclusive leadership. Secondly, in regard to group diversity cognitions, our investigation revealed the presence of an inclusive climate within several of the participating companies. Lastly, our analysis of organizational policies and practices revealed the involvement of Nav and work inclusion organizations in the inclusion of people with disabilities (PWD) within the

companies under study. This demonstrates a commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce, where PWD are given equal opportunities and support.

Leadership Characteristics

Our research findings indicate a compelling presence of openness as a leadership trait or characteristic. The majority of the managers self-identified as "open" leaders, emphasizing their propensity for honesty and transparency in their interactions with others. These self-perceptions were further confirmed by the information provided by their follower, lending robustness to the collected data. Furthermore, the recurring use of the term "open" emerged consistently when describing the communication style between employee and manager. The concept of "openness" extended beyond individual leaders and encompassed colleagues, fostering a culture of transparency and creating an environment where individuals felt at ease engaging in open conversations. The prevalence of such openness within the workplace demonstrates a fundamental element of inclusive leadership, as it encourages open dialogue, enables the sharing of diverse perspectives, and establishes an atmosphere where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves. The subsequent quotations substantiate this claim.

There is an open-door policy (...) people come to me with all sorts of things, so indeed they are very open. (Manager, Case 2)

It is very often that colleagues seek me to talk, simply because they feel that they are being heard. (Manager, Case 7)

In line with this, the managers underscored that their demonstrated openness yielded positive results for the collaboration between employees and managers.

When you are open, they are also open, which creates a dialogue, and then everything goes much easier for everyone. (Manager, Case 3)

(...) if you are open with those around you, then people open up to you. I am quite aware of exactly that. (Manager, Case 2)

In contrast to the managers who identified themselves as "open," two managers in this study expressed apprehension about potentially being perceived as arrogant by their employees. These managers attributed this concern to their communication style, specifically acknowledging a more assertive tone in their voice. However, interestingly, interviews conducted with the employees revealed that they did not describe their managers as arrogant in these particular instances.

He has quite a lot of thoughts about how things should be around here. Sometimes, I cut through and I´m very much like that, and that's when I believe that he perceive me as quite arrogant. (Manager, Case 1)

He's not arrogant. (Employee, Case 1)

I can probably be perceived as arrogant at times (...) I have a very determined tone in my voice. I say things very directly. (Manager, Case 8)

She has truly great empathic abilities, although her communication style may sometimes come across as assertive, as well as she is quite impatient.
(Employee, Case 8)

Climate for Inclusion

An important factor that fosters inclusive behaviors among leaders is the presence of climate for inclusion at the company. Our research revealed that a substantial number of managers expressed the existence of such a climate within their respective organizations. Throughout the study, we specifically inquired about the culture of inclusion within the company, and a significant portion of the managers acknowledged the presence of a positive culture for inclusion.

It becomes a culture when you see that there are several other shops doing it, and you see that it has a good effect (...). But then the decision itself is made by each individual store manager, who they want to hire, how they want to solve it.
(Manager, Case 1)

So inclusive working life has been such a mantra throughout the company, but ultimately, it's about the people who are in the organization. (Manager, Case 2)

That's one of the most important measures we have in the company. Environment, sustainability, and work inclusion. Those are 3 of the most important points. (Manager, Case 4)

During the interviews, it became evident that several managers regarded workplace inclusion as a social responsibility and an unquestionable imperative for their respective companies. When asked about the measures taken by their companies to include people with disabilities, one manager explicitly stated that facilitating such inclusion was an obligation for the organization. This manager specifically referred to the company's IA agreement emphasizing the commitment to inclusion outlined in this agreement. To clarify, the IA agreement represents the "agreement for a more inclusive working life" introduced by the Norwegian government as a significant step towards fostering inclusive practices within workplaces (Regjeringen, 2022).

(...) We have a certain social responsibility and therefore we try to find personnel that have a disability and perhaps various challenges and train them to master labor activity. (Manager, Case 6)

Our company is obligated to facilitate workplace inclusion (...) so it is part of our everyday working life. (Manager, Case 8)

It is the responsibility given that we are a public organization, and we have the responsibilities we have. (Manager, Case 10)

In contrast, one of the managers held a different perspective on the company's efforts towards inclusion. This manager viewed the company's work with inclusion primarily as a marketing tool. The company had hired the employee in question through a job program it offers. However, due to internal practices within the company, it was not possible to offer the employee a permanent contract. Therefore, the manager perceived the hiring as a means for the employee to gain experience and enhance their attractiveness to other companies for recruitment purposes. It is worth noting that both the manager and the employee expressed the manager's genuine efforts to secure a permanent labor

contract for the employee, as they deemed their collaboration successful. However, due to the company's internal constraints and policies, the manager was unable to fulfill this intention. As a result, the employee was eventually let go.

(...) I might get fired now, but the company emphasize advertisement and reputation. They like to talk more positively about inclusiveness, than they actually implement it. (Manager, Case 9)

I tried to get the company to hire him. But when the company is left in the position of downsizing, and you must get rid of 200 employees, it´s difficult to get it through the system. (Manager, Case 9)

We are inclusive and we belong to an inclusive working life (...) so it is part of our work that we facilitate for our employees. Mostly short-termly, but in some cases on long-term basis, if we have the opportunity. There must be an opportunity for it, and it must not affect others. (Manager 8, Case)

Organizational Policies and Practices

In terms of organizational policies and practices, our study revealed that the collaboration with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (Nav) and work inclusion organizations enhances inclusive leadership within some of the companies examined. In short, Nav stands for "Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration" and is a government agency responsible for social security, and welfare services. They promote the transition to work and activity, and their goal is to create an inclusive society, an inclusive working life and a well-functioning labor market (Nav, 2023). Multiple companies in our study actively engaged with Nav, leveraging its expertise to facilitate employment opportunities. In some cases, these companies received financial contributions from Nav, which were allocated towards covering the employee's salary, necessary equipment, or required courses to ensure the employee's competence. On the contrary, some had no collaboration with Nav.

We still cooperate with Nav, I spoke to them this morning in relation to the further continuation of his contract. (Manager, Case 3)

I think the vast majority of stores. At least occasionally I have been in contact with Nav, and have some employees recruited by them. (Manager, Case 1)

There is no support or cooperation with Nav in this case. (Manager, Case 2)

One employee disclosed that they had been actively seeking employment for nine months without success until Nav became involved, leading to their successful placement in their current job. Several employees expressed that their decision to work at these specific companies was influenced by Nav 's involvement, highlighting the pivotal role played by Nav in creating employment opportunities for PWDs. Another employee, who had not held a full-time position for seven years, attributed their current job, which they deeply enjoyed, to their participation in a job training program facilitated by Nav. In this particular instance, the individual expressed a strong desire to engage in gainful employment yet encountered significant challenges in securing suitable employment opportunities over the course of several years.

By contrast, it is important to note that not all participants had positive experiences with Nav. Some participants expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with their interactions with Nav. One individual mentioned being involved with Nav due to their social disability but felt that there was a lack of meaningful dialogue. In another interview, an employee expressed discomfort and reluctance when communicating with Nav. Specifically, they mentioned a reluctance to engage in phone conversations with Nav due to the experience of being transferred to multiple advisers, which created a sense of unease and inefficiency.

Furthermore, our study revealed that three employees were recruited through the assistance of work specialists from work inclusion organizations. These organizations or foundations are established with the explicit aim of promoting a more inclusive labor market in Norway. Both employees and managers in these cases expressed their appreciation for the dedicated efforts, initiatives, and guidance provided by the job specialists. Not only were the employees provided with support, but the managers were also offered valuable insights on how to effectively accommodate the specific needs of each employee.

In particular, two managers emphasized the support and counselling they received from the job specialists, enabling them to effectively facilitate inclusion and create an inclusive work environment. The involvement of these job

specialists went beyond mere recruitment assistance. In contrast, the cases related to Nav received less counseling and had a more systematized approach with the provision of welfare benefits. Nav 's role primarily centered around providing support in the form of welfare goods, the work inclusion organizations and their job specialists took a more personalized and comprehensive approach, actively assisting in fostering inclusion and ensuring the smooth functioning of the workplace.

Managers motivation for Workplace Inclusion

Our study uncovered that a significant number of managers expressed motivation derived from the knowledge that their employees had a purposeful and inclusive work environment where they could make meaningful contributions. These managers expressed that working with inclusion was personally rewarding for them and that they found motivation in witnessing the growth and success of their employees. The intrinsic motivation derived from seeing their employees thrive served as a significant driving force for their commitment to inclusion. Interestingly, the managers who described or identified themselves as more arrogant leaders especially expressed motivation with workplace inclusion. We consider this motivation as a crucial factor contributing to inclusive leadership.

(…) it is very motivating that he has a place he where belongs.
(Manager, Case 1)

When we have taken on such responsibility, I want him to have a meaningful everyday life. And that gives something for me too. (Manager, Case 5)

I am proud and happy when he says that he feels comfortable, included and valued here. I am very happy when he feels at home here. (Manager, Case 4)

It is inspiring compared to everything else we do which may be characterized by routine. This makes the day a bit more of a challenge in a positive sense.
(Manager, Case 6)

The findings shed light on key elements within the antecedent conditions' component of the model of inclusive leadership. The presence of open leadership

characteristics, a climate for inclusion, and engagement with work inclusion organizations reflect a strong foundation for cultivating inclusive behaviors among leaders in these organizations.

Leadership Behavior

The second component of the model of inclusive leadership focuses on behaviors exhibited by leaders that contribute to fostering inclusive leadership (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson, 2022, p. 328). This study identifies several key behaviors, namely support, availability and accessibility, decision-making. Additionally, we add trust and motivation as important leadership behaviors. These behaviors were observed and reported by participants throughout our research.

Support, Availability, and Accessibility

In our study, we discovered a strong interdependence among the behaviors of support, availability, and accessibility. It became evident that these behaviors were closely linked, and discussions about one behavior often included references to others. Despite the limited direct and daily interactions between managers and their employees, as well as physical distance, it became apparent that a majority of managers maintained a consistent availability for their employees.

However, there were a few managers who had less frequent communication with their employees. It is important to note that this does not imply that these managers possessed closed characteristics. Interestingly, during interviews, they openly shared their thoughts and insights. Nevertheless, their employees did not perceive these characteristics due to the infrequent nature of the communication with their leader.

All of the statements related to support were validated by the employees. While it is true that some employees had limited day-to-day communication with their managers, with only essential interactions taking place, it is noteworthy that the employees still perceived their managers as highly responsive and supportive. In two specific cases, the manager and employee communicated only when necessary. However, despite this minimal interaction, the employees consistently highlighted the fact that whenever they required assistance, facilitation, or had questions, they could always rely on their managers.

Additionally, it is worth noting that one employee had a specific need for ongoing consultation with their manager regarding assigned tasks. This employee

relied on regular communication with their manager to ensure clarity and guidance throughout their work. In another case, an employee was entrusted with the responsibility of placing orders with suppliers, but their colleague was assigned the role of overseeing and controlling the process.

I know that if there is anything, I can just ask him about anything.
(Employee, Case 2)

The participants of our study consistently emphasized the significance of manager availability and support, highlighting their essential role in creating psychological safety within the workplace. The data we collected provides compelling evidence of the link between the manager's presence and the establishment of a psychologically safe environment.

(...) if there is something I wonder about, it is very easy for me to just ask him. Then I get an answer right away, or he does a little extra to sort it out. Then I feel that I have the security, and that I can call him if there is anything.
(Employee, Case 3)

(...) My employees have been clearly informed that I am available all the time.
(Manager, Case 3)

Moreover, the data collected in our study strongly emphasizes the significance of in-person presence as an important aspect of inclusive leadership. Several managers expressed the importance of meeting their employees face-to-face periodically, rather than solely relying on electronic communication such as emails or phone calls. By prioritizing in-person interactions, managers demonstrate their commitment to building strong relationships and fostering a sense of connection with their employees. This allows for nonverbal cues, active listening, and a deeper understanding of individual needs and perspectives. Such direct engagement contributes to building trust, rapport, and a greater sense of inclusion among team members.

No, I find it easy to talk to him, if there is anything. (Employee, Case 7)

Creating a sense of security, being out there (...) as operations manager, I´m the one in the office, but by being visible out there, it creates so much better one-to-one communication with the employees. (Manager, Case 7)

In contrast, some employees in our study reported that their interactions with their managers were primarily limited to working hours or specific company-organized social events. When asked about their daily communication with their manager, several employees mentioned that they would only engage in conversation when necessary. It is worth noting that certain employees did not work in the same physical office location as their managers, which may have contributed to less frequent contact. These responses indicate that while some employees had more informal and social relationships with their managers, others maintained a more task-oriented dynamic focused on work-related discussions. The extent of socialization seemed to vary based on individual circumstances and the nature of the working relationship.

Involvement in Decision Making

Throughout the study, we sought feedback from all employees regarding their level of involvement in decision-making processes at work. The majority of the employees reported being involved in relevant decision-making. Furthermore, they mentioned being invited to provide input on matters related to their disability, reflecting a commitment to individual evaluation and accommodation. Some employees highlighted their involvement in critical decisions such as securing permanent employment contracts and creating workstations tailored to their specific physical needs.

He is involved in every staff meeting and he is encouraged to speak up. After all, he has been given responsibility to organize and restock the soft drinks department. (Manager, Case 1)

He is involved all the way in relation to the path to a permanent job with us, so he takes part in the meetings we have with the supervisor. (Manager, Case 6)

*Yes, to the extent that I can be involved, I would say that I am involved.
(Employee, Case 10)*

*(...) I always get to know in advance if there are any changes to my
contract (Employee, Case 3)*

In contrast, one manager in our study expressed that he did not actively involve his employee in decisions, except in cases where there were changes in the employee's work location. Interestingly, the employee held a different perception and felt that he was included in aspects that were relevant.

*Apart from the change of location for work, there is not much he needs to be
included in. (Manager, Case 7)*

Trust

In our study, both managers and employees consistently emphasized the crucial role of trust as a fundamental component of inclusive leadership. This finding resonates with the behavior of managers and highlights the significance of trust in fostering workplace inclusion. As a result, we propose adding trust as a key component to the model of inclusive leadership.

During interviews, managers were asked about the factors they deemed important for ensuring workplace inclusion. One manager explicitly mentioned the importance of building trust, while several others added this point of view. They expressed that when employees feel trusted, their level of engagement and involvement in their work increases. Trust was seen as a fundamental element that nurtures a sense of belonging and inclusion among employees. Furthermore, our study revealed that trust is closely tied to the allocation of responsibility in the workplace. Several employees reported having a sense of responsibility, and they viewed this as a form of inclusion. Some employees were entrusted with specific tasks, while others were given broader responsibilities.

The participants, many of whom face various challenges in their daily lives, underscored the critical importance of having a trustworthy manager. One employee specifically emphasized that trust is one of the most significant factors in creating a truly inclusive work environment. For this individual, who had been excluded from the labor market for seven years, the experience of being trusted at

work held immense value. It served as a validation of his worth and abilities. The following citations represent findings where both manager and employee highlight the importance of openness as an instrument to create mutual trust.

(...) I have created some kind of trust in the way that they dare to open completely now and then. At least, I view it as a declaration of trust. (Manager, Case 2)

He is very inclusive and sees you exactly as you are. I think that's a very, very good quality (...) He's good at sharing and he is not afraid to talk about private things. (Employee, Case 2)

Manager-employee relationship

In several cases within this study, we discovered that the relationships between managers and employees extended beyond the dimensions of the workplace. Some managers described their connection with their followers as a genuine friendship that they valued. When asked about socializing outside of work, one employee confirmed that they and their manager were indeed friends. Additionally, some of the interviews unveiled instances where managers and employees shared meals or coffee together in a non-work setting. These findings shed light on the existence of social relationships that extended beyond the professional realm, which were present in case three, four and five, where the employees had cognitive disabilities and were highly dependent on their managers. In these instances, the managers not only fulfilled their professional duties but also engaged in social interactions with the employees outside of work. This further emphasizes the close bond and dependency between these individuals.

(...) It's a bit like going to a good friend's house or being invited for coffee, sort of. Yes, very nice. (Employee, Case 3)

We became friends straight away. See, that's the advantage, he's so social. He can talk to everyone, and that's great. (Manager, Case 5)

Outcomes

The final component of the model of inclusive leadership focuses on the outcomes that can arise as a result of inclusive leadership. This study discovers compelling evidence supporting several outcomes associated with inclusive leadership, namely openness, psychological safety, well-being, and work engagement.

Employees Openness

The findings of our study indicate that not only the managers who are open to experience, but the employees themselves also demonstrate openness. Throughout our interviews, some employees openly shared their personal situations with us, indicating a willingness to be transparent and vulnerable. Furthermore, these employees expressed that they were equally open with their colleagues and manager. One employee even justified their openness by stating that their life had always been characterized by such openness, as a result of his disability.

The managers in our study acknowledged and appreciated the openness displayed by their employees. They recognized and valued the willingness of their employees to openly communicate and share information. This mutual openness fostered a climate of trust and understanding between managers and employees, facilitating effective communication and collaboration.

What was so good about him was that he was so open right away, and then it was so much easier to facilitate. (Manager, Case 2)

During our study, we posed a follow-up question to one of the employees: "Do you find it difficult to be so open with your colleagues?" The employee responded with a clear affirmation, stating, "Absolutely not" (Employee, Case 2). While it is challenging to ascertain the precise reasons why this employee did not find it difficult, their response indicates a level of comfort and ease in being open with their colleagues. Upon joining the company, this employee expressed to their manager the desire to communicate with their colleagues and discuss their disability-related situation. In response, the manager promptly organized a departmental meeting within a week. The employee expressed appreciation for the manager's swift action in arranging the meeting. Certainly, the importance of openness for this employee becomes even more evident when considering their prior experience. Towards the end of this interview, we inquired about what set

apart this current employment from their previous experiences. The employees'
response provided a surprising revelation: they disclosed that their previous
employer, with whom they had worked for several years, had failed to
accommodate their disability. Unfortunately, this lack of support led to a
distressing outcome where the employee ended up in the hospital.

Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that not all employees felt
comfortable or inclined to openly share about their life during the study. It was
observed that certain individuals exhibited hesitancy or reluctance in discussing
these topics, as evidenced by their limited responses or expressions of uncertainty.
Recognizing the varying comfort levels and preferences of individuals when it
comes to disclosure its crucial when conducting research and creating inclusive
environments. It is understandable that some participants may have had personal
reasons or reservations that influenced their level of engagement in the study.

Flexibility

The finding of flexibility as an important facilitation measure in your study is
valuable and adds an additional dimension to the model of inclusive leadership.
The emergence of flexibility as a significant factor highlights the importance of
being open to unexpected findings and adapting the research process accordingly.
Flexibility, as reported by both employees and managers, suggests that the ability
to accommodate individual needs, preferences, and circumstances plays a crucial
role in promoting inclusion within the workplace.

The widespread adoption of flexibility by both managers and companies in
your study is an encouraging and positive finding. It demonstrates a strong
commitment to accommodating the individual needs and circumstances of
employees, particularly those with disabilities. The willingness of managers to
make changes in working hours, location, and tasks indicates their recognition of
the importance of adapting the work environment to enable employees to perform
at their best. This flexibility allows employees to better balance their personal and
professional lives, accommodate their specific needs, and contribute effectively to
the organization.

It's interesting to note that the term "flexibility" was repeatedly mentioned
by the managers in relation to facilitating the inclusion of employees in your
study. The managers' emphasis on flexibility indicates that it is a valued and
recognized approach in creating an inclusive work environment. The ability to

work from home, variation in work tasks, and flexible working hours are indeed common factors associated with workplace flexibility. These factors can provide employees with greater control over their work arrangements, allowing them to adapt their schedules and tasks to their individual needs and circumstances. It's important to note that the specific aspects of flexibility varied across the participating companies.

Home Office

One example of flexibility at work is the possibility of remote work, or home office solutions. Not all employees in our study had the opportunity to work from home, and this was primarily due to the nature of their positions. Out of the participants, only four of them worked on computers, which made remote work a viable option for them. However, those working in roles such as grocery store, on-site security, or kitchen, the requirement for physical presence and specific tasks made remote work impractical.

During our study, employees who had the opportunity to work from home expressed the positive changes brought about by the pandemic, as both managers and companies became more open to the idea of remote work. One employee mentioned that their company had implemented a policy which addressed remote work. According to this policy, employees were required to be in the office for two days a week while working from home for the remainder. This arrangement was greatly appreciated by the employees as it helped address various challenges, they faced in their daily work lives.

For the participants who relied on wheelchairs, the option to work from home was particularly valuable due to enhanced accessibility at home and the availability of specialized equipment at their own residences. It is worth noting that these employees communicated their preference for working from home, and the managers effectively facilitated this arrangement for them.

(...) I've looked at the weather forecast, and it's going to rain tomorrow, so I'm considering home office. (Employee, Case 2)

Working at home has the provides a variety of standing, but it is also nice to go to the office, greet colleagues and be social. So, it suits me perfectly to have three days at home and two days at the office. (Employee, Case 8)

(...) I spent a lot of time in the home office (...). (Employee, Case 9)

And it's clear that instead of going to a canteen, where he's sitting in a wheelchair to make his way through a narrow queue to get food etc. He feels better sitting at home (Manager, Case 9)

Home office can be seen as a facilitation measure that addresses physical challenges and thereby promotes workplace inclusion. The employees in our study recognized the efforts made by their managers in facilitating remote work. They viewed this as a significant contribution to their inclusion within the company.

Work Tasks

It's notable that two employees with cognitive disabilities from the same company had a greater level of flexibility in relation to work tasks, compared to other participants in the study. These individuals required additional facilitation and support from their managers to ensure that work tasks were carried out effectively. The managers in these cases recognized the unique needs of these employees and were proactive in implementing measures to facilitate their success. The availability of a diverse range of tasks within the workplace facilitated this process, as it provided opportunities for the employees to be assigned tasks that aligned with their strengths and preferences.

In case four, the employee's work schedule was adjusted to accommodate his needs and the operation. By working after the morning rush, during a quieter period, the employee experienced reduced stress levels and improved concentration. This modification helped him perform his tasks more effectively and contributed to his overall well-being.

In case five, the employee previously had tasks related to cleaning, but language barriers with his colleagues created a challenge. Recognizing the employee's ambition to work in the reception area, his manager took into consideration his language limitations and the demanding nature of software-related tasks. Instead, the manager identified a task that the employee enjoyed and excelled at, which mainly was securing the emergency exits. To ensure that the employee could regularly engage in this preferred task, the manager took steps to assign it exclusively to him during his shifts. These examples demonstrate the

proactive approach taken by the managers to understand and accommodate the specific needs and preferences of employees with disabilities.

The employees in case four and case five thrived when their assigned tasks were not time-sensitive and allowed for social interaction. These tasks provided them with an opportunity to work independently and showcase their abilities. By engaging in such tasks, the employees experienced a sense of accomplishment and belonging within the workplace.

We've tried and failed. Tried to see what fits and what does not (...) We find tasks that work better. If you review it consecutively and then you adjust. You always have to try and make some mistakes. (Manager, Case 4)

We have created a system. (...). A system with work tasks, where we add new tasks. (Manager, Case 5)

In our study, we found that the majority of the managers demonstrated a positive and accessible approach towards adjusting work tasks to accommodate the needs of their employees. They were willing to customize the tasks to ensure that the employees could benefit both personally and professionally. Some employees had more defined job roles, but they still expressed having the opportunity to influence their work content or relocate within the organization.

He is not expected to work 100% as a normal employee (...) He is allowed to carry on freely. (Manager, Case 1)

Everyone can check if there are any work tasks that they need to get done as they would like (...). (Manager, Case 9)

Additionally, the employees contribute data that suggests that their manager actively provides and facilitates flexible work tasks. This flexibility is particularly manifested through the expectations set by managers regarding the quantity or volume of tasks that employees are required to handle or complete. These findings are derived from the following citations.

He is open in the sense that I get to define a lot myself. How to do work with the customer etc. If the customer is happy, he is happy. (Employee, Case 7)

I have the same tasks as before I got sick (...) In the beginning, I took on slightly easier tasks, as I can pick cases. (Employee, Case 8)

There has been a lot of openness with how many tasks I will have. (Employee, Case 10)

Working Hours

All the managers said reducing working hours creating the best balance for their employees was something they were willing to facilitate for them. The communication between the employees and the company regarding reduced working hours was clear and effective. The employees were able to discuss their needs and limitations with their managers, and the managers supported new solutions. This flexibility in working hours was greatly appreciated by the employees, as it allowed them to effectively manage their health conditions, attend medical appointments, or receive necessary treatments. In one case, an employee required regular appointments at the hospital. Despite already working in a reduced 40% position, the employee's manager did not consider scheduling these appointments during working hours as a problem. The manager recognized the long-term nature of the employee's medical needs and was accommodating in allowing time off for these appointments.

I have set up very flexible working hours for me or my department. I have said that there is freedom, but also responsibility. (Manager, Case 2)

If he has something he has to do one day, he can work another day (...). If he arrives half an hour late, then the working day will be half an hour longer (...). (Manager, Case 4)

During our study, we explored the views of mid-managers regarding flexibility and whether there were any differences in the flexible arrangements for the employees. The results indicated that most managers expressed that there was no special treatment or preferential flexibility given to the employee. One

manager stated that some people need more flexibility than others, regardless of their disability.

It's the same for everyone in the team, so he hasn't received any special treatment. (Manager, Case 2)

Some people need a bit more flexibility than others (Manager, Case 9)

In contrast to the managers who claimed to demonstrate equal levels of flexibility towards all their employees, two managers specifically acknowledged making extra efforts to accommodate the needs of the employee by being more flexible.

It is something special for him. But of course, if people need different things, then arrangements are made as best as you can. But he probably needs it more than others. (Manager, Case 8)

We try to be a little extra flexible with him (Manager, Case 3)

In our study, we found that some managers demonstrated a higher level of flexibility when it came to finding suitable work tasks and working hours for PWDs. These managers were more lenient and open to exploring different options to accommodate the unique needs and capabilities of the employee. In case four, an illustrative example highlights how the manager has identified an optimal approach where the employee arrives at work later in the day and assists with the production tasks for the following day. This modified schedule has demonstrated improved effectiveness by eliminating the need for the employee to wake up at 5:30 in the morning. Consequently, it facilitates greater adaptability in their workday, particularly considering there was less time pressure during later hours. Furthermore, case one exemplifies how the extent of freedom is granted to an employee is a direct consequence of their limited collaborative ability.

It appears to be a slightly higher threshold for engaging in serious conversations with him, which allows him a certain degree of freedom to work relatively unhindered. (Manager, Case 1)

Challenges

This study recognizes the importance of understanding and addressing the challenges faced by both employees and mid-managers in relation to the employee's disability. By including questions about these challenges in your interview guide, we aimed to collect valuable data that could shed light on the specific obstacles and difficulties encountered in the workplace.

It is interesting to note that when we asked the participants about the challenges they faced in their everyday work life, many of them responded by saying that they did not experience any challenges and did not understand why such questions were being asked. This unexpected response may have various explanations.

Additionally, we asked several follow-up questions to collect data on this certain topic. To give an example, we asked if they had experienced any challenges earlier in their collaboration with the manager or employee. Additionally, we asked if there were any challenges at the beginning of their employment. Sometimes we even provided examples of what kind of challenges it could be. To provide an example: "Are there any issues when communicating or socializing with colleagues or clients?". The interview guide also included questions to investigate which measures were implemented to solve various challenges or obstacles. As a result of that question, the participants provided some events from their everyday work life that we would define as challenges. For example, employee's accessibility or varying work capability. However, the managers expressed that there were not any challenges that could not be solved.

Challenges from managers perspective

80% of the sampled managers indicated that they did not perceive any specific challenges related to the employee's disability or prior exclusion from the labor market. Instead, they emphasized the positive contributions and benefits that these employees brought to the organization and work environment. The managers recognized the value and unique perspectives that PWDs brought to their teams.

I don't feel there have been any challenges really. (...) I just have to say that I am incredibly proud to have him join the company. (...) I can't see that there are any challenges with him. Everything just kind of fell into place and he does a great job. (Manager, Case 3)

No, there are not any big challenges, it is really not.
(Manager, Case 5)

Regarding him, there have not been any challenges. (Manager, Case 7)

There are really none, so no challenges at all. (Manager, Case 9)

Among the sample, two out of ten managers acknowledged encountering certain challenges related to efficiency in their respective roles within the supply chain and customer service. These positions typically entail higher demands for efficiency compared to other cases. However, despite these challenges, the managers regarded them as insignificant in the overall context. Both managers demonstrated a high level of openness and willingness to facilitate the employee's needs in addressing these efficiency challenges. As for case four, where exceptional customer service was a key requirement, the manager created an environment where the employee could work independently and without undue pressure, accommodating any challenges related to concentration.

Both managers expressed several times that the employees were valuable to the work environment and were positive contributors to the social aspect at work. Additionally, both managers expressed that it gave them motivation that employees had a place where they could thrive every day, and they got inspired watching them grow and take on different tasks and do meaningful work.

(...) so he's not the world's most efficient guy. He has a slight limp, now I never remember whether it's the right or left side. (Manager, Case 1)

You must perform all the time. We must satisfy our customers.
(Manager, Case 4)

Challenges from employee's perspective

Out of the total number of employees, half of them reported no challenges associated with their disability in the workplace. These individuals did not encounter significant obstacles that hindered their ability to effectively carry out their work duties. Even among the employees who acknowledged minor challenges, they did not consider these difficulties to have a substantial impact on their overall job performance.

No, it's nothing special. (...) I get a bit tired, but then I can take a break. (Employee, Case 8)

No. I don't think so. (Employee, Case 4)

The only problem that I might have, we already have a solution for. So I hardly see it as a problem. (Employee, Case 2)

Among the remaining five employees, they reported encountering challenges in their work environment. These challenges were primarily linked to their mobility or physical condition, directly associated with their disabilities. We sought to gather further information through follow-up questions, but the data we obtained is represented through the following citations.

Well, the right side is impaired, so that's sort of my challenge. But otherwise, it's going perfectly. (Employee, Case 1)

My biggest challenge will be my physical strength, I guess that's it. (Employee, Case 2)

I write with one hand, plus I also stutter a bit, but apart from that, it works well. (Employee, Case 9)

Several employees faced challenges related to their social disabilities, particularly in areas requiring concentration. These individuals expressed feelings of insecurity and stress because of their disabilities. However, their managers

effectively facilitated support to ensure that these challenges did not hinder their work performance.

I struggle to remember a lot of things at once. And I struggle a bit with that I very quickly become uncertain about things. (Employee, Case 3)

Discussion

This study aims to investigate how mid-managers facilitate workplace inclusion and address challenges for people with disabilities (PWD) through the model of inclusive leadership. In summary, our findings underscore the limited challenges associated with the inclusion of PWD. The results highlight the significance of flexibility as a key factor that prevents both managers and employees from encountering notable challenges. Furthermore, our findings emphasize that several subcomponents within the model play an important role in inclusive leadership.

These findings are grounded in a substantial dataset that encompasses a wide range of participating companies, managers, and employees with diverse disabilities. In total, twenty participants were interviewed for an average duration of one hour each, generating over 200 pages of transcribed raw material. While certain cases may share similarities such as being employed within the same company or possessing a comparable degree of disability, it is important to note that none of the cases are identical. Based on this, we contend that our findings possess a high degree of reliability. Furthermore, we assert that our study makes contributions to the field of inclusive leadership research, offering meaningful insights and knowledge. Significantly, the extensive and diverse nature of the study's data material serves as compelling evidence that we possess a comprehensive understanding of inclusive leadership performance at the level of mid-managers.

In general, it is noteworthy that the study captured relatively few instances of critical voices among the participants. The majority of the findings tended to present a positive perspective on inclusive employment. This observation raises some level of surprise, as it is reasonable to expect that the implementation of inclusive employment practices may encounter challenges and give rise to disagreements. The limited presence of critical voices in this study warrants further discussion. It is possible that participants who have negative experiences or reservations regarding inclusive employment may have been less inclined to express their concerns openly. Each of them knew that they were asked to participate in this study, because they had succeeded with inclusive employment. This could have led to an unintentional bias towards more positive perspectives in the findings. In addition, it is important to consider that the absence of critical voices could be linked to the attitudes and values of the managers themselves. During the interviews, there was an apparent prevalent mentality among the

managers, where an optimistic outlook prevailed, believing that everything would eventually work out in the context of inclusive employment.

This study discovers that employees and managers experience few challenges with inclusive employment of PWDs. We will further argue that the absence of challenges is related to our additional findings concerning organizational policies and practices, leadership behavior and characteristics, employee characteristics, and the presence of flexibility and trust. These topics will further be discussed in relation to the model of inclusive leadership presented by Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022). Furthermore, this study introduces a revised version of the inclusive leadership model, incorporating additional components identified through our research. The additional sub-components are highlighted in italic and bold to clarify.

Antecedent Conditions	➜ Behaviors	➜Outcomes
Leadership characteristics • pro-diversity beliefs • cognitive complexity • personality	Encourages divergent viewpoints Appreciates all views and contributions Is available and accessible	Psychological safety Work engagement Well-being Creativity and innovation
Group diversity cognitions • multiculturalism • climate for inclusion	Invites input from others and shares decision making Ensures justice and equity	Helping behavior Learning from errors/failure Work unit performance
Organizational policies and practices *Flexibility*	Shows support Incorporates members knowledge, skills and abilities *Flexibility* *Trust*	*Flexibility* *Few challenges*

Model 2: Revised model of inclusive leadership

Antecedent Conditions

The initial component of the model of inclusive leadership, as proposed by Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022), encompasses antecedent conditions that serve as predicting factors influencing the development and utilization of inclusive leadership behaviors (p. 328-329). These predictors can be characterized as organizational capabilities that play a crucial role in the effectiveness and continuity of inclusive leadership. The identified antecedent conditions, or predictors, create a foundation for mid-managers to embrace and demonstrate inclusive behaviors within their roles.

The first subcomponent of antecedent conditions in the model highlights leader characteristics, including pro-diversity beliefs, cognitive complexity, and personality factors, as identified by Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022, p. 238). In this study, it is worth noting that all of the participating managers expressed a recognition of the benefits of diversity in the workplace. Additionally, it is important to highlight that all companies included in our study were already known for their successful practices in workplace inclusion. As a result, we did not specifically inquire about the organizations' pro-diversity beliefs as it was already well-established. Regarding cognitive complexity, our study findings indicate that all managers demonstrated a high level of awareness and understanding of the individual differences among their employees. This awareness enabled them to effectively tailor tasks and responsibilities to align with each employee's unique strengths and capabilities. The managers' pro-diversity beliefs, cognitive complexity, and attention to individual differences reflect their commitment to creating an inclusive work environment.

The final aspect of leader characteristics in the model pertains to personality factors. In our study, we found supporting evidence for the personality trait of openness among mid-managers. This trait aligns with contemporary theory that suggests mid-managers are often catalysts for new initiatives and are open to exploring alternative approaches (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). In other words, they are open to new ways of doing things. The findings emphasized openness as a factor which was appreciated by the employees. Half of the participating managers self-identified as being open individuals. Openness was not only attributed to the managers themselves but also extended to their colleagues and throughout the workplace culture. The participants expressed a sense of comfort in engaging in conversations with their managers or subordinates, which was

facilitated by openness. Thus, we consider openness to experience as a crucial leadership characteristic that fosters inclusive leadership behavior.

Prior research supports the notion that openness to experience can positively influence individuals' diversity orientation and their performance as leaders (Strauss & Connerley, 2003). Further, more open individuals have been found to be more able to cope with change (Judge et al., 1999). The managers were open to handling changes regarding how and when their employees performed their work tasks and further, they could adjust their working hours and location. Moreover, Carmeli et al. (2010) define inclusive leaders as open. The findings of our study support Carmeli et al.´s (2010) definition, as the majority of the managers either described themselves as open, or their followers described them as open. The managers' demonstrated openness appears to play a significant role in the absence of perceived challenges related to employees' disabilities in this study. We posit that the capacity to embrace new experiences, ideas, and perspectives reduces the inclination to perceive diverse life situations as inherently challenging. The managers' openness fosters an inclusive work environment where employees feel supported and understood. This, in turn, contributes to positive work experience for PWDs.

The second subcomponent of antecedent conditions encompasses group diversity cognitions, specifically focusing on multiculturalism and the climate for inclusion. While the primary focus of this research is to examine the inclusivity of PWD, there is limited evidence to discuss multiculturalism in this context. However, the findings indicate the presence of a favorable climate for inclusion within the diverse companies under investigation. There is one exception from this statement, which will be discussed later in the paragraph. The qualitative data obtained from our study reveals a strong consensus among the managers regarding their commitment to facilitating inclusive employment practices. Notably, a significant observation emerged from the data, as several managers expressed a profound sense of fulfillment and personal significance derived from their company's proactive efforts in fostering inclusivity. The managers highlighted the value of creating a supportive and inclusive work environment, where they feel a sense of belongingness and can actively contribute daily.

Furthermore, the employees emphasized that their disability is not a focal point in their work environment and expressed a strong sense of inclusion facilitated by their respective managers. They articulated their perception that the

company actively promotes and fosters inclusion as an integral part of its organizational culture. This sentiment indicates that the company's commitment to inclusivity extends beyond individual manager-employee relationships and is embedded in its broader organizational practices and values. The employees' experiences further highlight the effectiveness of the company's inclusive initiatives in creating an environment where PWD are treated equally and are provided with opportunities for meaningful engagement and participation.

In contrast to most managers who expressed a positive climate for inclusion and emphasized their company's significant efforts in including PWDs, one manager held a different perception (table 1; case 9). This manager perceived their company's inclusion initiatives as a mere marketing tool. He humorously expressed concern about potential job repercussions but remained committed to honesty during the interview. In essence, he shared his perception that the company's outward portrayal of inclusivity did not fully align with the actual extent of inclusion practices within the organization. Through the interview, we observed him to consistently exhibiting highly inclusive behavior and demonstrate genuine motivation in offering their employee a permanent contract. Furthermore, in this case, both the managers and the employee described their manager-employee relationship as informal and socially oriented. Since they did not work in the same physical office location, the manager made efforts to organize occasional social gatherings outside of work. In case nine, our findings indicate the presence of inclusive leadership behaviors. However, we observed a lack of a climate for inclusion within this case. Consequently, the manager's ability to pursue this option was restricted by prevailing company policies. It is noteworthy that the interviews provided evidence of the company's need for downsizing, which presented a challenge for the manager in advocating for a permanent working contract for his employee. Nevertheless, this case highlights the complexities and limitations that can arise within organizations despite a manager's genuine motivation to foster inclusivity. While the manager exhibited a significant desire to be inclusive, the internal practices of the company hindered the provision of a permanent contract for the employee, leading to an unfortunate outcome.

The majority of the companies in our study engaged in collaborative partnerships with the Nav to facilitate the employment of PWD. Alternatively, the remaining companies sought the assistance of work specialists from private

organizations that were dedicated to promoting inclusivity in the labor market. These organizations were established with the explicit aim of fostering a more inclusive workforce in Norway. The participating companies demonstrated their commitment to inclusivity by actively seeking collaboration with Nav as a strategic partner in their efforts to hire PWDs. Some companies proactively initiated contact with Nav to enhance their inclusive employment practices, while others had established longstanding partnerships with Nav or work specialists from alternative organizations. This deliberate collaboration with Nav and work specialists exemplifies the companies' dedication to creating a more inclusive work environment and promoting equal opportunities for PWDs. In other words, organizational policies and practices are present in the various companies that participated in this study. Moreover, the companies demonstrated the presence of organizational policies and practices aimed at promoting inclusivity.

The presence of Nav and work specialists from work inclusion organizations emerged as antecedent conditions in some of the cases. The findings indicate that a few employees obtained their current job because of their counseling with Nav. However, it is noteworthy that several managers and employees mentioned that their collaboration with Nav was primarily focused on funding rather than comprehensive support. Employees reported difficulties in communicating with Nav due to the constant turnover of counselors, resulting in lack of consistent support. Some managers expressed a lack of communication and collaboration with Nav, despite the ongoing provision of monthly funding. In contrast, the managers and employees who received assistance from work specialists from work inclusion organizations reported invaluable support and guidance. Additionally, regular consultations were conducted to proactively enhance employee well-being and optimize operational efficiency for the managers. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that Nav serves as a valuable resource for some organizations aiming to foster inclusivity. However, it is not a critical factor for successful inclusive employment, as counseling from Nav was less prominent. Therefore, while Nav may contribute as an antecedent condition, its absence does not hinder organizations from achieving inclusive employment outcomes.

Additional Sub-Component of Antecedent Conditions

Moving forward, one of the noteworthy findings in this study relates to the role of flexibility in promoting workplace inclusion for PWDs. We argue that these findings are closely linked to the organizational policies and practices observed in the participating companies. It was evident that flexibility served as a valuable tool for facilitating inclusion by enabling managers to adapt work tasks, working hours, and implement home office arrangements. However, it is important to acknowledge that the ability of managers to embrace and implement flexibility was contingent upon the support and endorsement from top-level management within the companies. Without such support, managers may encounter limitations in their ability to foster flexibility, particularly in organizations characterized by bureaucratic and rigid structures. One notable example was a participant who shared that their company had implemented a home office policy. The policy proved beneficial for individuals with mobility challenges, particularly those using wheelchairs, as it allowed them to work from the comfort of their own homes during inclement weather or when their physical condition necessitated the use of specific equipment available at their residence. Examples of such equipment is adapted chairs or an apartment with accessible features on a single level. This proactive approach to accommodating employees' needs exemplifies the company's commitment to fostering inclusivity through company policies for their employees.

Leadership Behavior

The model's second component focuses on specific behaviors that contribute to the practice of inclusive leadership. Within this study's scope, we examine the behaviors exhibited by mid-managers, as they play a crucial role in ensuring the successful implementation of organizational changes and are responsible for managing the emotional well-being of their employees (Huy, 2001; 2002). They have a greater influence on individuals compared to top management. In the specific context of promoting the inclusion of PWDs, the role of mid-managers becomes even more significant. While top management sets the tone by implementing organizational policies that aim to enhance inclusivity, it is the mid-managers who translate these policies into everyday practices.

Returning to the model, Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) highlight that one's ability to encourage divergent viewpoints and appreciate others' views and

contributions, characterize inclusive leaders (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022, p. 331). The findings of this study serve less evidence that leaders have a divergent viewpoint. However, the findings found support that mid-manager acknowledged their followers' desires and needs at work, which supports Nembhard and Edmondson's (2006) description. To give an illustration, a couple of the managers explicitly said that they were available to their employee at all times and that the employee at any time could ask them questions. Likewise, the managers made an effort to regularly meet their employees in person because they evaluated conversations in person to be more valuable, and if there was anything that the employee needed, it was easier to detect this need in person than through digital communication.

Further, showing support and being available and accessible to followers is a subcomponent of leadership behavior that positively contributes to inclusive leadership (Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022, p. 331). Since the findings indicate a connection between leaders' supportive behavior and availability and accessibility, we will jointly discuss these two behaviors. We found several pieces of evidence that the managers' behavior was described as supporting. The employees in our study described their manager as supportive both with what would concern their present life-situation and their ability to work. These findings contribute to Edmonson's (2004) insight that leaders who are available and accessible to their followers enhance inclusive leadership behavior. The employees that we interviewed emphasized that the support provided by their manager was important for them, and it further increased their feeling of belongingness and safety. They expressed that the constant possibility to ask questions, message or call their manager, made them feel safe and comfortable when performing their work tasks. In addition, several of the employees had worked to achieve a permanent employment contract with the explicit company, and we observed that their managers supported their effort in doing so. Even if the manager and employee did not have day-to-day communication or worked in the same geographical place, none of the employee's stated instances where they did not receive support from their manager or experienced a lack of belongingness and safety at work. This paper further argues that the manager's ability to show support and being available and accessible is a contributing factor to why there have not been any significant challenges impacting their work.

Furthermore, the model emphasizes shared decision-making as key. In light of this, we implemented questions in the interview guide to examine to which extent employees were involved in decision-making processes by their respective managers. Simultaneously, we also sought the managers' perspectives on including their employees in decision-making. A majority of the managers conveyed that they indeed included their employees whenever necessary. However, in contrast, one manager admitted to not involving the employee in decision-making. This disclosure was confirmed by all employees, as they expressed feelings of inclusion in decisions that directly impacted them. Moreover, they were invited to give input. This is in line with Edmondson`s (2004) view that shared decision-making may help to create a climate for trust and learning. According to Mor-Barak and Cherin (1998), inclusion is defined as the degree to which individuals have access to information and resources, actively participate in work groups, and can influence decision-making processes. Remarkably, this definition finds resonance among our participating employees, as they unanimously express a sense of inclusion in both decision-making and within the broader organizational context.

In regard to ensuring justice and equity, the focus of our data collection was primarily on examining the relationship between managers and employees, specifically the actions taken by managers and their impact on the individuals involved. While the research did not specifically aim to evaluate justice and equity, it is worth noting that all managers in the study demonstrated a commitment to ensuring fairness and equality in the workplace. Although our study had limited capabilities to comprehensively assess justice and equity across PWDs, we argue that the managers' efforts to prevent discrimination and create an inclusive work environment align with the principles of justice and equity. This is evident in the majority of the companies having established collaborations with Nav, indicating a willingness to promote fairness and equal treatment for employees with disabilities.

The final subcomponent of leadership behavior pertains to the incorporation of members' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Throughout our data collection process, we encountered numerous citations that provided strong evidence of the managers' adeptness in integrating their followers' expertise and capabilities. This was particularly evident in how they facilitated work tasks and accommodated varying work schedules. In several cases, employees faced

limitations in their capacity to work full-time or for extended hours. However, the managers exhibited exceptional flexibility in tailoring work arrangements to ensure that these employees could effectively utilize their knowledge, skills, and abilities. This level of adaptability aligns with the research conducted by Cox and Blake (1991), who emphasize the importance of employing flexible work schedules, such as flextime, as an organizational accommodation to promote diversity (p. 48). Building upon these insights, we now turn our attention to the proposed component that we aim to integrate into the model of inclusive leadership.

Additional Sub-Component of Behavior

As presented in our findings, we have identified that flexibility was a contributing factor to why the participants faced few challenges at work. Within the context of our study, flexibility was evident in the manager's facilitation of various aspects, including work tasks, working hours, and home office setup. This paper extends the argument by suggesting that flexibility is not only associated with antecedent conditions but also with leadership behavior, particularly in the context of mid-managers. Previous research suggests that facilitating adaptability, e.g., fostering flexible organizational arrangements, is an important strategic function of mid-managers (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). We argue that this contributes to inclusive leadership. According to Wasserman et al. (2008), inclusive leaders need to demonstrate qualities like flexibility, courage, and vulnerability. They further address flexibility in relation to an inclusive culture and argue that these leadership skills build a culture of inclusion. Additionally, leaders should encourage open dialogue and adopt flexibility in rules for acceptable behaviors (Wasserman et al., 2008).

Cox & Blake (1991) address organizational flexibility as one out of six dimensions of business performance directly impacted by diversity management. They further state that managing diversity enhances organizational flexibility (Cox & Blake, 1991, p. 51). This is related to this study's findings as there was some sort of adaptation or flexibility within work tasks, working hours, or regarding the use of the home office, in the majority of the cases. The managers argued that as they were flexible in the sense that they would adapt or make adjustments to secure a well-functioning workday, there would neither become challenges. In particular, when it comes to the utilization of home office, our

study indicates that it played a crucial role in addressing physical obstacles. We found that employees with physical disabilities highly appreciated the opportunity to work remotely from their homes. Especially, the employees who depended on a wheelchair, because they had better equipment at home. Moreover, they found it easier to manage their fatigue and physical well-being when stationed in their home offices. Taking breaks or resting during the workday was more convenient compared to being in the office, where they may have felt the pressure to appear constantly engaged and productive in front of their colleagues. The ability to easily take breaks and resume work later contributed to their overall comfort and work performance. Therefore, we view home office as an excellent tool for mid-managers to enhance workplace inclusion, which the managers facilitated.

This study asserts that the effectiveness of flexibility in accommodating employees with disabilities can be attributed to the presence of a strong sense of trust between the managers and their employees. In certain cases, it was evident that employees had the autonomy to manage their work hours based on their personal needs related to their disability. The high degree of flexibility observed in this study was made possible by the managers' unwavering trust in their employees' dedication to fulfilling their responsibilities and tasks. This aspect of trust was particularly highlighted in case two, four, and seven (table 1), where participants emphasized its significance in achieving successful inclusion. Furthermore, in case three, eight, and nine (table 1), the findings revealed a strong sense of trust within the manager-employee relationship. Trust is a fundamental aspect of any leader-follower relationship, and it is not surprising that the employees highly value this attribute. Interestingly, our findings revealed an absence of controlling behavior from the managers, which may have challenged our initial assumptions. However, we contend that this absence can be attributed to the managers' demonstrated ability to instill trust in their followers, fostering a work environment built on mutual respect and empowerment.

Outcomes

Based on the interaction between antecedent conditions and leadership behavior, the model of inclusive leadership encompasses a range of outcomes. This study seeks to examine the extent to which mid-managers can foster workplace inclusion and address challenges for PWDs by applying the model of inclusive leadership. The research design employed in this study may have limitations in

fully exploring the outcomes of inclusive leadership, as it primarily involved interviews with managers and employees. However, the valuable insights obtained from those directly involved in the inclusion process provide sufficient evidence to discuss several subcomponents within the final component of the model.

The presence of psychological safety appears to be apparent in the employee-manager relationships investigated in our study, as a substantial majority of the interviewed managers can be characterized as supportive, consistently demonstrating their availability and accessibility to the employees. Carmeli et al. (2010) concludes that inclusive leadership is positively related to psychological safety. Further, Shore et al. (2011) emphasize that studies of leadership inclusion find positive relationships with psychological safety (p. 178). The findings provide several examples of how managers are available to their followers, and further how their behaviors make it unproblematic for the employees to ask questions or share information about their personal life and privacy. We argue that these findings also illustrate how the managers demonstrated helping behaviors.

During the interviews conducted, a noteworthy observation was the remarkable level of work engagement exhibited by both the employees and managers. This high degree of work engagement can be argued to be closely connected to their overall well-being. In order to explore potential areas for improvement in terms of inclusion, all employees were asked if there were any specific actions, they wished their employers would undertake. Surprisingly, every employee expressed contentment with their current working situation and stated that they could not think of any changes necessary for further inclusion. Some employees even drew comparisons to previous workplaces, highlighting the evident disparity in inclusivity. The discussion of this study suggests a relationship between work engagement and the overall well-being of employees with disabilities. The high level of work engagement observed among the employees indicates a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction, and meaningfulness in their work. This, in turn, positively influences their well-being. The fact that all employees expressed contentment with their working situations and did not identify any specific areas for improvement in terms of inclusion is a noteworthy finding. It suggests that the current work environment, characterized by inclusive practices and supportive leadership, contributes significantly to the well-being of employees with disabilities. The absence of dissatisfaction or requests for further

inclusion measures indicates that the managers in these cases have successfully created a work environment where employees with disabilities feel valued, supported, and included.

The findings of our study provide limited evidence regarding the relationship between inclusive leadership and creativity and innovation. However, one notable case (Case 2) emerged as an exception, where creativity and innovation were evident. The manager in this case specifically praised the employee's ability to generate innovative ideas, citing successful product developments as examples. The employee attributed his autonomy in defining tasks and working independently as contributing factors to his creative output. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this case stood out due to the employee's access to unlimited resources and equipment, which further facilitated his job performance.

The subcomponent of helping behaviors is another aspect of the outcomes in the model. However, due to the limited number of findings in this study, a comprehensive discussion on the presence of helping behaviors is not possible. Future research should implement measures to investigate the existence of helping behaviors.

Moreover, learning from errors or failures is presented as an outcome of inclusive leadership. Even though the findings do not illustrate how the leaders learned from failures, the findings demonstrate their willingness to do so. Several of the managers stated that they and their employees had to "try and fail", to conclude with a solution that created value for the company. Especially since all of the employees were satisfied and genuinely happy with today's work-life situation. We interpreted this as evidence of how the managers had learned from their failures in regard to workplace inclusion.

The final subcomponent of outcomes in the model is work unit performance. Ones again, because our sample only consisted of cases who have succeeded with inclusive employment, we took it for granted that work unit performance was present. This study therefore finds less evidence of the correlation between antecedent conditions, leadership behaviors and the outcome, work unit performance. That being said, the managers in case two and seven implicitly highlighted the performance of their employees. Stating that they did a great job and that they outperformed several of their colleagues.

Additional Sub-Components to Outcomes

To this point we have discussed our empirical evidence in relation to the original outcomes of the model. Furthermore, this paper adds additional outcomes derived from the findings. Firstly, according to Cox and Blake (1991), managing diversity contributes to the enhancement of organizational flexibility (p. 51). In other words, inclusive leadership can lead to increased flexibility within an organization. In our study, we have gathered empirical evidence that supports this claim, in the context of managing PWD. When we inquired about the extent of flexibility in terms of tasks, working hours, and remote work, the managers affirmed that these benefits were extended to all employees across the company. However, they did acknowledge being more accommodating and understanding of the need for flexibility among employees with disabilities. Supporting Cox and Blake (1991), this paper argues that organizational flexibility is evaluated as an outcome of inclusive leadership.

Furthermore, as presented in our findings, we noted that when managers demonstrated openness as an antecedent condition, it enhanced the likelihood of employees reciprocating with their own openness. This was not an outcome presented in the model of inclusive leadership. However, this refers to the fact that there is a connection between the three components in the model.

Lastly, as a result of the interplay between antecedent conditions and leadership behavior, it can be observed that the individuals involved in each case encounter minimal or negligible challenges in the workplace related to the employee's disability. This unexpected response may have various explanations. One possibility is that the participants genuinely did not perceive or recognize the challenges they faced. It is possible that they have developed coping mechanisms or adapted their approach to work in a way that minimized the impact of their disability. They may have found ways to navigate their work environment effectively without perceiving significant challenges. Another explanation could be that the participants were hesitant to express their challenges or concerns due to fear of judgment, stigma, or potential negative consequences. People may be hesitant to disclose vulnerabilities or difficulties in a work setting, particularly if they have experienced discrimination or exclusion in the past. Moreover, the participants knew that they were asked to join the study because of their successful workplace inclusion. This could lead them to downplay or dismiss any

challenges they might be facing. Further, the wording or phrasing of the question itself could have influenced the participants' responses.

Limitations, Strength & Future Research

This study has certain limitations, which give scope for future research. Future research should study companies that do not have recognized success with workplace inclusion and look for challenges they meet with the employment of people with disabilities. As we aim to study how mid-managers facilitate inclusion and address challenges, we naturally have included companies that have had success with workplace inclusion, and therefore, one could argue that our findings are biased.

Additionally, the participants of this present study includes two females out of a sample consisting of twenty participants. This skewness represents a more homogenic sample, making the findings less generalizable. Future studies should strive to include participants who represent both man and woman. Furthermore, in two of the interviews, external individuals accompanied the participants. In these cases, the employer desired to include others for support and re-phrasing. This could relate to bias data material. Moreover, future research should strive to limit the use of digital interviews, as these provided less data material than the psychical interviews.

Another limitation of our thesis is the language barrier between the written text in English and the interviews conducted in Norwegian. This discrepancy raises the possibility that some of the nuances and essence of our findings may be lost in translation (Bell et al., 2019). Nevertheless, we have been mindful of this issue and made efforts to capture the essence of each quote accurately by avoiding directly translating.

In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive employment, future studies could employ targeted strategies to actively seek out and include diverse perspectives, including those that may offer critical insights and those who face barrier with inclusion. Moreover, future research could implement a longitudinal design which captures the experiences of participants over a period. This could provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and disagreements that may arise while performing inclusive leadership.

This study possesses several notable strengths. Firstly, it boasts a substantial sample size and employs robust data collection methods, thereby

providing a substantial and credible dataset. The sample encompasses a diverse range of industries and occupations, encompassing both public and private sectors. Additionally, the study includes an examination of various disabilities, including social, cognitive, and physical impairments. This broad inclusion enhances the external validity of the findings, enabling generalizability across industries, sectors, occupations, and disability types. Furthermore, the use of interviews as the primary data collection method enhances internal validity by fostering a close researcher-participant relationship.

Theoretical Contribution & Practical Implications

Limited research has been conducted on the subjects of workplace inclusion and inclusive leadership. Our study makes a valuable theoretical contribution by conducting interviews with both mid-managers and employees to gain insights into their experiences of inclusion within their respective companies. Moreover, we have investigated the actions taken by managers to foster inclusion and address any challenges they may encounter, using the framework provided by Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2022). Earlier research has emphasized that there is a need for more studies regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities (Shore & Chung, 2021, p. 723). Additionally, there has been conducted research of employers where the employee's views are not captured, therefore in our study we have included both mid-managers and employees (Kulkarni, 2016, p. 1675).

Additionally, our study provides empirical evidence highlighting the significance of flexibility as a leadership skill that enhances inclusive leadership. Wasserman et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of inclusive leaders demonstrating qualities such as flexibility. This aspect emerged in our study, despite not being initially investigated. Interestingly, while existing literature on inclusive leadership lacks emphasis on flexibility, our findings contribute to filling this gap. Furthermore, our findings offer empirical support for the theoretical framework of inclusive leadership, along with other relevant theories.

There are several practical implications that can be recognized from this study. Notably, the Norwegian government has allocated increased funding towards the inclusion of individuals from vulnerable groups (Regjeringen, 2023). However, they have not provided explicit guidance on how organizations can effectively incorporate these employees into their workforce. In this context, our study emphasizes the importance of implementing inclusive leadership practices,

as they offer organizations a promising pathway to achieve successful workplace inclusion.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the significance of an inclusive culture originating from top management, as mid-managers alone cannot single-handedly establish an inclusive environment. However, our findings reveal that mid-managers play a crucial role in fostering workplace inclusion. They serve as direct points of communication for employees and are involved in daily collaboration. Their actions and behaviors greatly influence the overall inclusiveness of the workplace.

This study underscores the significance of flexibility in work task arrangements, remote work options, and reduced working hours to promote employee inclusion. Our findings indicate that incorporating flexibility and fostering trust can alleviate challenges experienced by employees in their day-to-day work lives. Moreover, all participants in our study expressed great joy in having a physical workplace to go to each day and were enthusiastic about contributing to their organization's goals. Furthermore, our research underscores the significance of the support offered by NAV and workplace inclusion organizations as a possible contributor for succeeding with inclusivity in the organization. Notably, they were especially valuable when recruiting people with disabilities. The findings of our study highlight that people with disabilities have the ability to contribute effectively and be integrated into mainstream work environments.

Conclusion

This study aims to answer the following research question; *What are the antecedent conditions, behaviors, outcomes, and challenges associated with middle managers' facilitation of workplace inclusion for people with disabilities?* Our findings align with these key elements, validating the relevance in understanding the facilitation of workplace inclusion for PWD. Additionally, our study highlights the remarkable absence of challenges reported the employees and mid-managers, despite the presence of disabilities among the employees.

This study suggests inclusion of additional components to model of inclusive leadership, namely flexibility and trust, to enhance the comprehensiveness of the model of inclusive leadership. The significant role played by flexibility in accommodating the unique needs of employees with

disabilities, along with the crucial factor of trust between managers and employees, emerged as essential factors contributing to successful workplace inclusion. The presence of flexibility is evident in various ways across the companies included in this study, providing additional evidence that proactive measures have been implemented to mitigate challenges. Moreover, the research contends that the existing flexibility is founded upon a foundation of trust between managers and employees.

Furthermore, our study highlights the perspectives of mid-managers and employees regarding the challenges associated with workplace inclusion. It is important to note that our sample consists of companies that have demonstrated notable success in including people with disabilities. However, we contend that the scarcity of reported challenges can be attributed to the presence of support, flexibility, openness, and trust within the examined organizations. These crucial elements foster an environment where both mid-managers and employees struggle to provide specific examples of challenges they have encountered in their work. These findings align with the research conducted by Kuknor & Bhattacharya (2022), which emphasizes that management support and trust are key factors in promoting inclusion.

Our intention is for organizations and leaders to acknowledge these findings and be motivated to adopt inclusive leadership practices. Furthermore, we aim for this study to exert a positive influence on the employment prospects of PWD. By promoting inclusive leadership and fostering an inclusive work environment, we strive to improve opportunities and experiences for marginalized individuals in the workforce.

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Appendix 1 - Interview guide (Selection 1: Employee)

Background	1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself? How did you get the job and how long have you worked here? What made you want to work here? 2. Can you tell us a bit about your current work situation?
Workplace Inclusion	3. Can you provide some examples of what your workplace does to make you feel included? 4. Is there anything that you wish your company would do differently to ensure inclusion? *a. What does it take for you to feel a sense of belongingness at the workplace?* 5. What does your manager do to create an inclusive workplace? 6. How does your manager include you in decision-making processes at work?
Leadership	7. How would you describe your manager? Are there any special features that your manager has which make you feel included? 8. Which of the following words best describes your manager; engaged, humble, curious, empathetic, collaborative, authoritarian, arrogant, open, or patient Can you provide any examples of situations where these characteristics are expressed? (Possibly if none of the words describe your manager particularly well.) 9. How would you describe your relationship to your manager? 10. How would you describe the communication and cooperation between you and your manager?

Challenges	11. How would you describe the communication and cooperation between you and your manager?
	12. What challenges do you face at work?
	13. What does your manager do to facilitate these challenges?
	14. Which other people contribute positively to your everyday working life? What is their contribution?
Reflection	15. Can you summarize today's work situation for us?
	16. How is today's situation different from the working life you had before you started working here?
	17. If you were to point out three things that you think are the most important things in regard to workplace inclusion, what would they be?
	18. Is there anything you would like to add to what we have talked about?

Appendix 2 - Interview guide (Selection 2: Manager)

Background	1. Can you tell us a bit about yourself? How did you get a job here and how long have you worked here? What made you want to work here? 2. How long have you been a manager for employee X?
Workplace Inclusion	3. How does your company work with inclusion, and where does this initiative come from? 4. What do you think the business must do to create an inclusive working environment? 5. What motivates you about your company's work with inclusion? 6. How do you work to create an inclusive environment in the workplace? 7. What specific measures have you taken to include employee X? 8. How do you involve employee X in the decision-making processes?
Leadership	9. How would you describe yourself as a manager? 10. How do you think employee X would describe you as a manager? 11. Which of the following words best describes you as a manager; engaged, humble, curious, empathetic, cooperative, authoritarian, open, arrogant, patient? *a. How are these descriptions expressed?*
Challenges	12. What challenges do you and employee X face in everyday work? *a. Can you provide examples?* 13. What is the dialogue like around these challenges, and how are they handled? 14. Which other people help to handle these so that employee X masters the job?

	a. What challenges require the involvement of a third party?
Reflection	15. If you were to single out three things that you think are the most important things we've talked about, what would they be? 16. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 3 - SIKT approval for data collection

Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Dato   Vurderingstype

09.03.2023   Standard

Referansenummer

180876

Prosjekttittel

Masteroppgave

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Handelshøyskolen BI / BI Oslo / Institutt for ledelse og organisasjon

Prosjektansvarlig

Eric Breit

Prosjektperiode

02.01.2023 - 30.09.2023

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Særlige

Lovlig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Uttrykkelig samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som

oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 30.09.2023.

Kommentar

OM VURDERINGEN

Sikt har en avtale med institusjonen du forsker eller studerer ved. Denne avtalen innebærer at vi skal gi deg råd slik at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet ditt er lovlig etter personvernregelverket.

TYPE PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om helse.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

Vi har vurdert at du har lovlig grunnlag til å behandle personopplysningene, men husk at det er institusjonen du er ansatt/student ved som avgjør hvilke databehandlere du kan bruke og hvordan du må lagre og sikre data i ditt prosjekt. Husk å bruke leverandører som din institusjon har avtale med (f.eks. ved skylagring, nettspørreskjema, videosamtale el.)

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Se våre nettsider om hvilke endringer du må melde: https://sikt.no/melde-endringar-i-meldeskjema

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

Vi vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet. Lykke til med prosjektet!

Appendix 4 - Consent & Information Letter

Samtykkeskjema for forskningsprosjekt om inkluderende arbeidsliv

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i vårt forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke hvordan Norske virksomheter lykkes med inkludering av medarbeidere på arbeidsplassen. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Formålet med prosjektet er å besvare en masteroppgave tilknyttet vår studie innen ledelse og organisasjonspsykologi.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Handelshøyskolen BI Oslo er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Du får spørsmål om å delta på denne studien fordi du er ansatt i et selskap som har utmerket seg som en inkluderende organisasjon i norsk næringsliv. Vi har fått din kontaktinformasjon fra ditt selskaps HR-avdeling eller leder etter samtykke fra deg.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du stiller til et personlig intervju. Vi setter av 1,5 time til intervjuet og spørsmålene vil omhandle din opplevelse av samarbeid med din nåværende leder/medarbeider, samt hvordan du oppfatter virksomhetens arbeid med inkludering. Intervjuet vil bli registrert gjennom et lydopptak og vil i ettertid bli transkribert før opptaket slettes.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Prosjektet er anonymisert så det vil ikke påvirke ditt forhold til arbeidsplassen.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun veileder og studenter som vil ha tilgang ved behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.
- All annen innhentet dokumentasjon, herunder samtykkeskjema og transkribering, vil bli lagret i passord beskyttede filer på private datamaskiner.

Du som deltaker vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i masteroppgaven.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 03. juli 2023. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger anonymiseres og slettes etter 31. september 2023. Denne datoen er satt i hensyn til sensur for masteroppgaven.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Handelshøyskolen BI Oslo har Sikt (Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør) vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

Handelshøyskolen BI Oslo:
- Ved veileder Eric Breit; eric.breit@bi.no.

- Ved student sxxxxxx@bi.no og sxxxxxx@bi.no
- Vårt personvernombud: Vibeke Nesbakken, personvernombud@bi.no.

E-post er en usikker kommunikasjonskanal, send derfor taushetsbelagte og sensitive personopplysninger per post til Handelshøyskolen BI, Nydalsveien 37, 0484 OSLO v/Personvernombudet

- å delta i personlig intervju,
- å avholde intervjuet ved bruk av lydopptaker.

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Personverntjenester sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med: Personverntjenester på e-post (personverntjenester@sikt.no) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Eric Breit   -------- & -------
(Forsker/veileder)   (studenter)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *"Masteroppgave om inkluderende arbeidsliv"*, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål.
Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i et personlig intervju,
- å holde intervjuet ved hjelp av en lydopptaker.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)