

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Characteristics of workplaces and employers that embrace cognitive diversity on the work floor --Manuscript Draft--

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Abstract:	People with intellectual disability (ID) are only marginally represented in the competitive labor market. This article aims to explore what Norwegian employers describe as important features of their workplace that enable labor market participation for employees with ID. The article was based on a mixed method approach that combined qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey with employers who have hired people with ID. Findings suggest that building inclusive environments and individualized supports can be effective for supporting employees with ID. More research is needed to further understand how employers can provide sufficient support to their workers, and successfully hire and retain workers with ID.

Characteristics of workplaces and employers that embrace cognitive diversity on the work floor

Abstract

People with intellectual disability (ID) are only marginally represented in the competitive labor market. This article aims to explore what Norwegian employers describe as important features of their workplace that enable labor market participation for employees with ID. The article was based on a mixed method approach that combined qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey with employers who have hired people with ID. Findings suggest that building inclusive environments and individualized supports can be effective for supporting employees with ID. More research is needed to further understand how employers can provide sufficient support to their workers, and successfully hire and retain workers with ID.

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Introduction

Article 27 of the United Nation's (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right of people with disabilities to engage in freely chosen work, on an equal basis with others, in an environment that is open, inclusive and accessible. This article recognizes that people with intellectual disability (ID) can make active and valuable contributions to the labor market, and, with the right support, a multitude of work tasks in various workplaces may be available to them (Garrels et al., 2022). Yet, people with ID are only marginally represented in the labor market; merely a small fraction of them are in competitive integrated employment (CIE), and international employment rates for this population are low, with an estimated range from 9 to 40 % (Ellenkamp et al., 2016).

With such low employment rates, people with ID are likely to miss out on the multiple benefits that employment offers, such as greater financial independence (Grant, 2008), a feeling of being a valued member of society (Voermans et al., 2020), and a sense of relatedness to others (Garrels & Sigstad, 2019). Moreover, a systematic review by Robertson et al. (2019) supports the well-established association between employment and mental and physical health for people with ID. Thus, low participation in the labor market for people with ID may be problematic for various reasons.

In research, successful employment for people with disabilities is measured by a variety of outcomes, the most common being job acquisition, job retention and improved performance, but other outcomes, such as work productivity, reduced functional limitations, and the number of hours worked are also frequent parameters of successful employment (Wong et al., 2021). In a study by Meltzer et al. (2020), people with ID predominantly identify challenges with gaining and maintaining employment, i.e., job acquisition and job retention. Participants in this study mention dismissive and discouraging attitudes towards their work in open employment, experiences of stigma, and discrimination at the workplace as barriers to their employment participation. Yet, a systematic review by Taubner et al. (2022) concludes that social factors that affect job acquisition and retention are less studied, and relatively few research studies have investigated employer perspectives on this topic. Therefore, this article aims to explore what employers describe as important features of their workplace that enable successful labor market participation for employees with ID. In this context, successful employment is understood as the employers' positive experience of hiring employees with ID, so that they are likely to hire new employees with ID in the future. This way, our study addresses social or contextual factors that are directly and indirectly related to job acquisition and job retention.

In Norway, the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (Nav) is committed to support people who experience difficulties in entering the labor market and help them find employment (Tøssebro & Olsen, 2020). Nav is responsible for social security allowances, labor market measures, and follow-up of people with ID in CIE. These measures compensate for lower productivity and involve support for both the employee and the employer, and they usually include financial compensation, facilitation, or both. Nav has schemes that combine salary and social security, wage subsidies, support for transport, mentors, facilitation, necessary aids, etc. People with ID are eligible for a disability benefit from age 18, and this benefit is usually a prerequisite for receiving support in ordinary employment. People with ID who are employed in CIE receive the disability benefit as a basic income, and optionally the employer may pay them an additional bonus. In Norway, job coaches often make a significant effort to assist employees with ID in their work performance in CIE. Job coaches' work are often affiliated with Nav or other employment services. In CIE companies, the job coaches' primary function is essentially to support the employees with ID and their employers.

Environmental dimensions of participation

World Health Organization (2001) defines participation as "involvement in a life situation", and employment is considered one such major life situation. Thus, employment counts as a key area of the broader participation construct. However, within a disability context, participation may be understood and analyzed in different ways by different researchers. In a scoping review, Dean and colleagues (2016) concluded that the construct participation is rarely defined in research on ID, but access and opportunity, inclusion, meaningful engagement, choice and control, and responsibility were identified as factors that affect participation. In a conceptual analysis of the participation construct, Imms and colleagues (2017) highlighted, amongst others, attendance and involvement as crucial

components of participation. Relatedly, Maxwell and colleagues' (2018) conceptual model of participation describes five environmental factors that influence frequency of attending and intensity of involvement, namely availability, accessibility, accommodability, acceptability, and affordability. These different ways of understanding participation illustrate the urge for researchers to be clear and transparent in how they use complex constructs. We consider Maxwell and colleagues' (2018) conceptual model of participation as particularly relevant for our study that explores contextual factors affecting employment participation. The model provides a highly relevant understanding of the participation construct and it forms a viable framework for discussing the findings of this study. The five environmental factors related to participation are described below, with a focus on the employer's role in making labor market participation possible for employees with ID.

Availability refers to the objective possibility to engage in a situation, i.e., whether opportunities for participation are actually existent. In an employment context, availability refers to the number of jobs a person could apply for and thus, whether employers are willing to consider hiring an employee with ID. In a study by Meltzer et al. (2016), people with ID reported that they had little choice about where they wanted to work, in part because few jobs were available to them. Recent research on employer willingness to hire people with ID found that employer perceptions of work performance, corporate social responsibility, and prior experiences hiring employees with ID were key to employers' openness to employ people with ID, (Dean et al., 2022). According to Kocman et al. (2018), employers also identified a lack of adequate jobs due to an ever-increasing automation of manual and repetitive tasks, the growing demands for higher education, and the tendency to outsource labor, , and the reduction in available jobs deemed suitable for individuals with ID limited employment opportunities for people with ID. However, a study by Garrels et al. (2022) indicated that a wide variety of work tasks with different degrees of complexity is available

to people with ID, across work sectors and workplaces. Thus, in contrast to previous research, this study paints a more positive image of the availability of work tasks for job seekers with ID.

Accessibility refers not only to the degree to which a situation can be objectively accessed by a person, but also to how a person subjectively perceives this accessibility (Maxwell et al., 2018). Whether CIE is accessible to employees with ID, will in part depend on whether employers manage to make the workplace accessible both physically and socially. According to the United Nation's (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessibility depends, amongst others, on the universal design of buildings, transportation, information, communication, and services. Structural and societal factors may limit labor market accessibility for people with ID. A well-designed work environment and employer support may, on the other hand, increase the experienced accessibility of the workplace for employees with ID (Nevala et al., 2019).

Accommodability refers to the degree to which a situation can be adapted to a person's level of functioning, i.e., the adaptability of the environment (Maxwell et al., 2018). In the context of the present study, accommodability may refer to the efforts that employers make in order to facilitate the labor market participation of employees with ID. For instance, employers may adjust the work pace and working time to create a better match between the employee's capacity and the daily workload (Boman et al., 2020). On-the-job supports, instructional approaches, checklists and action plans may also be appropriate accommodations that employers can provide to allow employees with ID to perform their work effectively. In Norway, job coaches often provide individual support to employees and employer. Supported Employment, with individually tailored job support for people with extensive support needs, is another accommodation that is commonly used to help people

with ID find and keep a job (Gjertsen, 2021). Hence, employers may use various strategies to enhance the accommodability of their workplace.

Acceptability refers to people's acceptance of a person's presence in a particular situation (Maxwell et al., 2018). At the workplace, this may refer to the subjective feeling of being valued, e.g., whether people with ID feel that they are welcome. Employers' or colleagues' negative attitudes and subtle workplace discrimination may prevent people with ID from thriving at work, as they may not feel accepted as part of the work force (Cavanagh et al., 2021). Research suggests that people with ID may experience stigma and negative perceptions from co-workers, particularly related to their capabilities and behavior (Gormley, 2015). Thus, employers may create more inclusive workplaces in which employees with ID may thrive, by establishing a welcoming work climate that embraces diversity.

Finally, *affordability* refers to whether the financial cost and the amount of effort in both time and energy expenditure make it worthwhile to engage in a particular situation (Maxwell et al., 2018). In the context of employment participation for people with ID, affordability is about whether CIE is worth the cost, literally and figuratively. From the employer perspective, affordability may be a question of how to make employment worthwhile for employees with ID in terms of economy and experience, while at the same time running a company effectively. Hence, affordability raises the question whether possible benefits of employment weigh up for possible disadvantages, for both employer and employee. A study by Meltzer et al. (2016) found that employees with ID highlight social relationships and skills development as benefits of being employed, suggesting primarily positive employment outcomes. Other research suggests positive effects of being employed, such as improved health (Robertson et al., 2019) and higher self-esteem (Jahoda et al., 2008). Yet, the review by Jahoda et al. (2008) also indicated that employment may be associated with stress and fear of failure for people with ID. Thus, the affordability of labor market participation depends in part on finding a

good match between the individual's capabilities and on-the-job demands. For employers, the affordability of hiring employees with ID may also be influenced by the availability of supports, such as financial or job coach support.

Despite several barriers that challenge CIE for people with ID, some workplaces do succeed. However, little research examines the characteristics of companies that are successful in hiring and retaining workers with ID. A systematic review on competitive employment settings over the past 20 years found few studies that focused on work environment-related factors that may enhance CIE for people with ID (Ellenkamp et al., 2016). Hence, more research is needed to fully understand work environment-related factors that promote the employment of people with ID. There is a need for more in-depth knowledge, especially in terms of success factors of workplaces that have employed people with ID.

Aim of the article

In this article, we explore characteristics of workplaces that employers identify as central to the successful employment of people with ID in their companies. Within this study, we focus on both environmental aspects within the workplace and individual characteristics of the employers. The following research question guided this article:

What characterizes workplaces and employers that succeed in employing employees with ID?

Success in this study was defined as hiring and retaining workers with ID and expressing a willingness to hire employees with ID in the future.

Findings from this study may prove valuable to employers who are considering hiring employees with ID, but who are uncertain of what this may require of their company. Furthermore, findings may inspire innovative research interventions to improve the labor market participation of people with ID.

Methods

This study is part of the project "Effective school-work transitions for students with mild intellectual disability", funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The article is based on a mixed method approach that combines qualitative interviews with employers in competitive companies that have experience with hiring people with ID, and a quantitative survey carried out among employers who have hired employees with ID in their companies. In this article, the qualitative data analysis directed the presentation of the results from the quantitative survey, so that the quantitative data are embedded in the qualitative data. Finally, the combined results are discussed in relation to the research question. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved this study (approval number xxxxxx).

The qualitative interview study

Design

This qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews with nine employers that had hired young people with ID. With nine participants, data saturation was achieved.

Participants

Our sample consisted of five female and four male employers in competitive workplaces across different sectors, such as hotel management, childcare, laundry industry, renovation, nursing homes, retail industry, etc. In order to get in touch with these employers, we contacted different stakeholders in organizations and employment projects in south-eastern Norway that facilitate the employment of people with ID.

Data collection

All interviews were performed at the participants' workplaces, with two researchers present. We used a semi-structured interview guide with predefined ideas, and more detailed

follow-up questions were continuously developed, based on participants' responses. The interviews were centered around aspects that participants identified as important for hiring employees with ID in their companies. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim after completion.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted through an inductive data-driven process. A thematic, structural analysis was used to identify themes in the collected data (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). By using condensed descriptions from the interview transcripts, the essential meaning of text fragments was captured. Meaning units were further condensed into subthemes, which were then assembled into themes (see Table 1). Two researchers collaborated during the entire analytical process to strengthen the reliability of the data analysis. In this analysis, the researchers fully agreed on all subthemes and then agreed on combining the different subthemes into final themes.

Table 1 about here.

The survey

Participants

An online questionnaire was emailed to a sample of employers identified as likely to have experience with hiring people with ID. To ensure an adequate sample size, we targeted recruitment of employers who have hired workers with ID through three subsamples: 1) All childcare centers, nursing homes for elderly and cafeteria businesses in a random sample of municipalities representing 15% of the inhabitants in Norway (1353 employers invited/302 participated); 2) Companies recruited from an initiative that aims to recruit people with ID into regular jobs combining salary and welfare benefits by matching willing employers with employees with ID (58 employers invited/22 participated); 3) All companies included in a

project established by The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) to promote activity from employers to increase the employment of people with impaired functioning (1119 employers invited/154 participated). An automated email reminder was sent to non-respondents within a few weeks after the initial invitation. A total of 2,530 employers were invited to participate in the survey and 478 responded, giving a response rate of 19 %. In this study, we map the experiences of employers who have employed persons with ID and in our sample, 127 employers of the 478 respondents had prior experience with hiring employees with ID. Hence, our analysis is based on data from 127 employers.

Data analysis

The STATA software package version 14.2 Special Edition (StataCorp, 2015) was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive bivariate analysis was conducted, using T-test, Cohens d, Chi-square and Cramer's V as a gauge of difference between groups.

Measures

Successful employment. Employers answered the following yes/no question: "Has your company employed people with ID, either now or in the past?". As a follow up question, employers with prior experience of hiring employees with ID were asked if they would consider hiring a person with ID in the future. If the employers answered "yes" on the follow-up question, the employment was defined as successful employment. According to this definition, about 70 % of the employers (n =88) characterized the employment as successful, while 30 % would not consider hiring a person with ID in the future (n=38).

Employer Willingness to Hire. The Willingness to Hire scale consisted of the following six items rated on a five-point Likert scale: (i) People with ID can contribute in a positive way to our business, (ii) I see that there are work tasks a person with ID can do in our business, (iii) The work we do here is not suitable for people with ID (reverse scored),

(iv) If the necessary financial support is included, our company will consider hiring people with ID in the near future, (v) If the necessary guidance is included, our company will consider hiring people with ID in the near future, (vi) Our company is willing to facilitate work assignments and job descriptions to create job opportunities for people with ID. The “Employer Willingness to Hire” scale has been described and validated in an earlier study using the same data material (Authors, 2022).

Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporate Social Responsibility was measured using one item (“*Hiring people with ID is a social responsibility that the company should take on.*”), which was rated on a five-point Likert scale. We used this statement as a gauge of the employers’ corporate social responsibility.

Accommodability and Acceptability. In the survey, employers were asked nine questions about what the company can offer in terms of workplace adaptations. Seven questions concerned adaptations in work pace, workload and work tasks, physical arrangements, time for follow-up, and other resources. These seven questions were collapsed into one variable measuring *accommodability* as an additive index. The remaining two questions assessed inclusive attitudes among colleagues and knowledge of the employee’s needs for facilitation. These two questions were combined as a gauge of *acceptability*.

In addition, the analysis used survey data concerning the need for extra follow-up of the employee with ID, how the employee was recruited, the degree of cooperation between different supporting actors, and if the employer had a family member, friend or acquaintance with ID.

Results

In this article, the themes from the qualitative data analysis direct the presentation of the results from the quantitative survey. The following five themes were identified during the

qualitative analysis: i) Environmental characteristics, ii) Employer characteristics, iii) Collaboration with upper secondary school, iv) Collaboration with others outside the workplace, and v) Financial support (see table 2). For each theme, results from the qualitative analysis are presented before connecting them to the study's quantitative findings. Table 2 shows the qualitative analysis with themes and subthemes.

Table 2 about here.

Environmental characteristics

Within environmental characteristics, three subthemes were identified: Inclusive culture, characterized by openness to diversity and colleague support; fundamental values - corporate social responsibility; and on-the-job support.

An inclusive culture at the workplace, characterized by openness to diversity and a supportive climate amongst colleagues, was mentioned as essential for success. Most employers praised their work environment; one employer in a kindergarten described his workplace as such: "The culture is open and inclusive. The team around the employee [with ID] provides security and a sense of safety. It is about relationships, attachment, and security; the employee has a supportive network around him."

Environmental success factors also included fundamental values in the company, and the employers clearly emphasized the corporate social responsibility of the company: «We are such a large company, we have a social responsibility: People with intellectual disability can be a resource».

On-the-job support was an essential environmental characteristic in workplaces that succeed in hiring employees with ID. Such support was characterized by clear routines and frameworks, clear expectations to the employee, worklists for which tasks to do, support systems in the company with feedback to the employee, and strategies for inclusion.

Expectations towards employees were also pivotal: "We have always been clear about expectations. There were different things that we saw right from the start: 'This needs to be worked on', and so we did. Of course, being a little strict in some areas helps a lot."

Some employers identified written worklists as a valuable support for employees with ID. For instance, the daily follow-up for a hotel clerk with ID was based on work lists: "To gain insight in what he has on his work list, I usually ask him, 'How are you today? Do you have any questions? What work tasks are you currently doing?'" This way, the employee received support to carry out his work tasks. At the same time, the employer received information about the need for follow-up.

To succeed in the inclusion of employees in the workplace, conscious strategies were needed, such as giving the employee fixed work tasks and taking time for follow-up. Colleague support was also mentioned as a successful approach. However, this required colleagues to have allocated time for guiding the employee with ID. One employer described what she did to provide an experience of being included: "Ever since I walked through these doors, I have treated him like a colleague, and challenged him to build further on the skills that he already possesses. I find that it pays off very well".

In the survey study, environmental characteristics at the workplace were measured through the variables Accommodability, Acceptability and Corporate social responsibility (CSR). Accommodability refers to the adaptation and facilitation that the workplace can offer. Acceptability refers to inclusive attitudes and knowledge of how the employee may be supported at work.

Table 3 about here.

Table 3 shows that employers who experience successful employment of a person with ID describe the workplace as more accommodable and acceptable. These employers also

rated corporate social responsibility as higher than employers who do not characterize the employment as successful. The effect sizes (Cohen's d) are moderate to large, substantiating the qualitative study's findings about important environmental factors for successful employment. However, employers that characterized the employment as unsuccessful rated higher than their "successful" counterparts that the employee with ID required extra follow-up compared with employees without ID (table 4: t -value 2,94; Cohen's $d=0,57$). This could be interpreted as an indication that employees' characteristics also influence whether the employment is deemed successful. However, the situation might be more intricate. The need for "extra follow-up" could be influenced by a combination of factors, such as the employee's traits, their fit into the job, the internal and external support systems, and possibly even the employer's attitudes towards persons with disability. These elements collectively may affect the employer's inclination to reconsider hiring someone with ID.

Employer characteristics

Employer characteristics included the following subthemes in the qualitative study: personal relationships with people with ID/ personal experiences with learning difficulties, attitudes towards inclusive employment, and having an eye for employees' needs and experiences.

The role of the employer seemed essential for successful inclusion of employees with ID. Personal relationships with people with ID or personal experiences with learning difficulties were important for employers' willingness to hire people with ID. For example, one of the participants ran a small business, and his attitude towards his employees was firmly anchored in his own school experiences. His personal experience with learning difficulties played a role in his willingness to hire people who challenged the typical employee profile:

"Unless you're a people's person with a heart for others, you cannot take care of them. They give what they've got. There are many who are branded as idiots because they never got the opportunity to learn anything."

Attitudes towards inclusive employment were significant. The ability to see all employees as valuable resources, to have the desire and willingness to create an inclusive workspace, and to take time to succeed all seemed important conditions for success.

Having an eye for employees' needs and experiences was another quintessential trait of the employers in our study. Several of the participants highlighted how they monitored the employees' well-being at the workplace to make sure that they experienced a sense of belonging and felt collegiality at the workplace. Employers were also concerned about their employees with ID experiencing self-efficacy, and they emphasized the employee's sense of mastery as a prerequisite for successful participation in the workplace.

About 20 % of the respondents in the survey was related or in near family with a person with ID, and approximately 37 % knew someone with ID in their friends/extended network. The remainder of the respondents did not know anyone with ID. Personal relationships did not seem to influence employers' rating of successful employment (Chi squared: 0.33; p -value=0.847). However, table 4 shows that employers who experienced successful employment, expressed more positive attitudes towards hiring people with ID according to the willingness to hire scale, with a Cohen's d value of .87 (i.e., large effect size).

Table 4 about here.

Collaboration with upper secondary school

Two subthemes were found in the qualitative study related to collaboration with upper secondary school: internships/training candidates in the company, and training of relevant workplace skills at school.

For several workplaces, arranging internships or trainee positions for students during upper secondary school was beneficial to their recruitment to a permanent job after finishing school. One employer explained:

“He started here as a trainee while he was attending upper secondary school. It was his first contact with the company, and that opened the door for more.”

The collaboration between workplace and school was about practicing relevant work skills at school. The manager of a nursing home was asked by an upper secondary school if he could provide an internship for one of their students twice a week. In collaboration with the school, they agreed on relevant work tasks: «We talked about current tasks that she was able to perform. Then the school would facilitate the training of the necessary work skills at school, e.g., making up beds».

Table 5 shows results from the survey study, where employers who recruited the employee with ID through collaboration with upper secondary school, were more likely to experience successful employment (Table 4; Chi = 3.84 p -value = 0.05; Cramer's V = 0.17). Survey data revealed no significant differences regarding other recruitment methods. Further, employers who experienced successful employment collaborated more with upper secondary schools than other employers (table 6: t-test, t-value 1.98; Cohens d=0.37).

Table 5 about here.

Collaboration with others outside the workplace

In the qualitative study, two subthemes related to collaboration with others outside the workplace were identified: Close cooperation between all parties (e.g., social services, supported employment companies), and the role of job coaches.

Several employers emphasized close collaboration between all parties for inclusion of employees with ID to be successful:

“The most important thing is the employee himself, his wishes and his desire to work. However, success depends on close collaboration. Our key for success is that we seek possibilities together.”

In many cases, job coaches provided invaluable support in the workplace. They were primarily assigned to provide guidance directly to the employee in the workplace, but could also function as an important team member for the employer.

Findings from the survey data nuance the impact of collaboration with other service providers for the successful employment of people with ID. While the qualitative data highlight the importance of other collaborative partners, there is no clear indication in the survey that such cooperation, besides with upper secondary schools, has a significant impact on successful employment (Table 6).

Table 6 about here.

Financial support

Within financial support, the following subthemes seemed essential in the qualitative study: compensation for expenses, employees with ID function as extra resources, and disability benefit as a condition for employment.

Compensation for expenses was a prerequisite for our participants to hire employees with ID. The employers received wage subsidies from Nav as a compensation and could

choose if they would give part of the amount as a bonus salary to the employee or if the total amount should accrue to the company. One employer described his dialogue with Nav:

“When the company receives 6,000 NOK from the social services, I cannot pay him the full amount, because I also need to pay the employer's tax and insurance. Therefore, in the end, of those 6,000, there will not be more than 2,500 left for the employee.”

All our participants had employed people with ID as an extra resource, in addition to their basic staff. Nonetheless, employees with ID performed necessary work tasks and were counted on as important resources, so other employees had more time available for other tasks. For instance, one employer explained how the employee with ID contributed with kitchen assistance in a nursing home, leaving his colleagues with more time to take care of residents. The presence of the employee with ID improved the working situation for all other employees by reducing their workload. Yet, the employers in our study did emphasize that the employees with ID did not manage the same work pace as employees without ID.

Finally, several employers stated that the employee's disability benefit was a condition for their employment. Since the employees with ID did not have the same working capacity as those without ID, employers claimed they could not pay them ordinary wages. Hence, financial support in terms of a disability benefit was a precondition for employing people with ID, and it gave employees with ID the possibility to try out relevant tasks in the company over a certain time without posing a financial burden on the company. After this initial trial period, employers could then decide to offer the employees with ID a permanent contract, in which case they paid them a 20 % salary, which came in addition to the disability benefit from the social services.

In the survey study, table 7 shows that half of the employers who rated the employment as successful, received assistance or wage subsidies from social services,

compared to around one third of the employers who rated the employment as unsuccessful, although the difference is not significant. There is no clear indication in the survey that support – financial or other – influenced successful employment (table 7).

Table 7 about here.

Discussion

This study investigated the characteristics of workplaces that have hired people with ID in Norway. Employers represent an important environmental factor for people with ID's participation in the workforce. We will now discuss our findings in light of Maxwell et al.'s (2018) dimensions of participation, i.e., availability, accessibility, accommodability, acceptability, and affordability.

Availability refers to the objective possibility to engage in a situation, i.e., whether opportunities for participation are actually existent (Maxwell et al., 2018). Findings suggest that employers in this study displayed inclusive attitudes and openness to diversity, and the workplaces were characterized by a fundamental value of corporate social responsibility. Employers considered the employees with ID to be important resources and treated them as colleagues in line with other employees. The role of the employer seemed essential for successful inclusion of employees with ID. Personal experiences with ID or learning difficulties, and positive attitudes towards inclusive employment were related to employers' willingness to hire people with ID, although prior personal relationships with persons with ID did not significantly influence successful employment in the survey study. Results from previous research studies on employer willingness to hire people with ID pointed out that employer perceptions of work performance, corporate social responsibility, and prior experiences with hiring employees with ID affected employers' openness to employ people with ID, thereby influencing the availability of jobs for this group (Dean et al., 2022). For the sample of employers in this study, it seems that their personal characteristics of open-

mindedness, positivity, and orientation towards finding solutions contributed to making the workplace available to employees with ID. These findings highlight a need to increase opportunities for employers to gain experience with workers with ID. While models for partnering with employers to provide opportunities for employment exist, such as Project Search (Wehman et al., 2012), investigating additional methods for creating work-based experiences supported by employment specialists can enhance opportunities for employers to gain experience and assistance hiring and supporting people with ID (Joshi et al., 2012; Test, 2009).

Accessibility in the sense of universal design was not particularly emphasized in the qualitative study. Yet, accessibility was addressed regarding structural and societal factors that affected the objective and subjective ease of access of the workplace. As Nevala et al. (2019) suggest, a well-designed work environment and employer support enhance the experienced accessibility of the workplace for employees with ID. In our study, employers took specific measures to make the workplace more accessible, e.g., by establishing a system of colleague support, identifying work tasks that provide a sense of mastery, and allocating time for regular follow-up. Thus, the employees who were successful at hiring people with ID worked systematically to provide an accessible workplace. While many employers can provide support for people with ID without assistance, this finding also highlights a critical role for job coaches to work together with employers to provide efficient support. For example, previous research has identified open communication, mentoring and advocacy, diversity training, and addressing stigma and discrimination as supports developed to promote inclusive workspaces, which benefit all workers (Lindsay et al., 2019).

While our survey did not include items that asked about support from job coaches in particular, respondents highlighted first and foremost the meaning of financial support and collaboration with upper secondary school, rather than support from job coaches as crucial

for successful employment. These findings align with findings from other research indicating that job coaches are often not sought out by employers (see e.g., Ellenkamp et al., 2016). This suggests that a stronger focus on informing employers about the benefits and availability of job coaches could enhance the accessibility of workplaces for workers with ID.

In the qualitative study, *accommodability* was about delivering sufficient support for the performance of relevant work tasks, with the intention of giving employees an experience of mastery. On-the-job support seemed essential in workplaces that succeed in hiring employees with ID. According to Maxwell et al. (2018), *accommodability* refers to the degree to which a situation can be adapted to a person's level of functioning, i.e., the adaptability of the environment. In this case, such support was characterized by clear routines and frameworks, clear expectations to the employee, structured worklists, support systems in the company, and strategies for inclusion.

Those employers in the survey who experienced successful employment of people with ID, described the workplace as more adaptable. With moderate to large effect sizes, the quantitative results substantiate the qualitative study's findings about important environmental factors for successful employment. Furthermore, survey results indicated that employers who had previously hired employees with substantial support needs, were statistically significantly less likely to hire persons with ID in the future. Employees with substantial support needs may be influenced by a combination of factors, including the employee's characteristics, their compatibility with the job, the support systems within and outside the organization, and attitudes. The need for substantial support may reflect the environment's *accommodability* as well as a trait associated with the employees.

Acceptability refers to people's acceptance of a person's presence in a particular situation (Maxwell et al., 2018). At the workplace, this is about the subjective feeling of

being valued and accepted in the work environment. In the qualitative study, the workplaces seemed characterized by an inclusive culture where colleagues supported each other. The work environment provided a sense of safety through a supporting network for the employees involved. Having an eye for employees' needs and experiences was an essential trait of the employers. Participants highlighted how they monitored the employees' well-being at the workplace to make sure that they experienced a sense of belonging and felt collegiality at the workplace.

In the survey, acceptability involved inclusive attitudes among colleagues and knowledge of the employee's needs for facilitation. Employers who experienced successful employment described the workplace as more accommodating and acceptable, supporting the qualitative findings.

According to Maxwell et al.'s (2018) conceptualization of participation, *affordability* refers to whether the financial cost and the amount of effort in both time and energy expenditure make it worthwhile to engage in a particular situation. In the context of employment participation for people with ID, affordability is about whether CIE is worth the cost for both employer and employee. The qualitative results showed that for employers, financial support played a significant role, and compensation for expenses was a prerequisite for hiring people with ID. An inclusive culture at the workplace, positive attitudes among the colleagues, guidance from external job coaches, and close collaboration with upper secondary school and others outside the workplace, played a significant role in terms of the desire to hire workers with ID.

By combining two different methodological approaches, we tried to identify characteristics of workplaces and employers that include employees with ID in their companies. The quantitative data in this study correspond well with three of the five themes

that appeared in the qualitative study in this project (i.e., environmental characteristics, employer attitudes toward hiring, collaboration with upper secondary school). First, we found in the survey study that environmental characteristics in the workplace, such as accommodability, acceptability and CSR, are essential for successful employment. At the same time, the results revealed that the interplay between individual characteristics of the employee and workplace characteristics might also play a role in successful employment, indicating the importance of finding a good match between employee and workplace. Second, employers' attitudes toward hiring people with ID and collaboration with upper secondary school are common findings in the quantitative and the qualitative data regarding success factors for successful employment.

While employers in qualitative interviews mentioned the importance of collaborating with others outside the workplace and highlighted the role of job coaches for the successful employment of people with ID, the survey results indicated no significant differences in successful employment between workplaces that collaborated with outside organizations and those that did not. Yet, these qualitative and quantitative data are not necessarily contradictory, as they respectively assess the quality and quantity of the collaborations. However, when interpreting the quantitative and qualitative findings together, this could indicate that there is room for more systematic collaboration between the workplace and other organizations, given the attributed importance to this during the qualitative interviews. Similarly, the quantitative data showed no significant correlation between employers who received financial support and their experience of successful employment of people with ID. Yet, during the qualitative interviews, employers emphasized financial support as a prerequisite for employing people with ID. These findings could indicate that, while financial support is important for businesses, other factors, such as an inclusive organizational culture, may play a greater role in ensuring successful employment for people with ID.

Limitations

This study has certain methodological and contextual limitations that the reader needs to take into consideration. Concerning our methodology, the use of a mixed methods approach with qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey may present challenges regarding the validity of our findings. As we experienced, the results from the quantitative survey were not always corroborated by the qualitative data, and they sometimes appeared contradictory, as was the case for the perceived impact of financial support for employers. This could stem from variations in the composition of employers between those selected for interviews and those participating in the survey. However, we tried to present the data from both sources so that we could exploit the benefits of the mixed methods approach, and we strived to integrate the quantitative and qualitative data to maximize the strength of each of the data sets. The discussion of the results in light of a common theoretical understanding also helps to strengthen the validity of the study.

If the survey had included question about job coach, responses might differ, as awareness could influence answers. Further, our study intentionally focused on specific business subsets with higher chances of hiring individuals with ID, not aiming for a broader representation of Norwegian companies. Thus, our study's sample lacks representativeness for the general Norwegian business landscape. The relatively low survey response rate amplifies potential bias.

Another limitation concerns the socioeconomic context for this study. In Norway, where this study was conducted, people with ID who are employed in CIE receive the disability benefit as a basic income. Thus, the financial cost of hiring employees with ID is low for the company that hires. This is a contextual factor that needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results from this study, as other countries may have

different financial arrangements that can affect the affordability of competitive integrated employment for both employers and employees. We urge the reader to bear in mind cross-cultural differences when generalizing results from this study to other contexts.

Finally, this study highlights the perspective of employers who hire people with ID, which is a critical factor in successful employment for people with ID. However, by solely focusing on employment from the employer perspective, our study does not take into account the perspective of the employee with ID. The dimensions of participation explored in this study (availability, accessibility, accommodability, acceptability, and affordability) will likely be viewed differently from the perspective of the employee. More work is needed to explore participation from both the perspective of the employer and the employee.

Conclusion

In this article, we used a mixed methods approach to explore the characteristics of workplaces that employers identified as central to the successful employment of people with ID. Using qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey with employers who have hired people with ID, we identified strategies that companies in Norway have used to successfully hire and retain workers with ID. Findings suggest that building inclusive environments and individualized supports can be effective for supporting workers with ID. Prospective research studying employer supports for workers with ID is needed to further understand how employers can successfully hire and retain workers with ID.

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COGNITIVE DIVERSITY IN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

1

Table 1: Examples of thematic structural analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Meaning unit	Condensation	Subtheme	Theme
There is a basic attitude in this workplace, that we provide opportunities. It is about seeing the opportunities when we meet people with different challenges.	Basic attitudes towards employees with challenges	Inclusive culture, characterized by openness to diversity and colleague support	Environmental characteristics
There were not many at school who thought I could start my own business. I was no good at reading or writing. Still, I have always managed. I have been running a business for myself ever since I was a little boy.	Own experience of learning difficulties at school.	Personal relationships with people with ID/ personal experiences with learning difficulties	Employer characteristics

Table 2: Themes and subthemes in the qualitative data.

THEMES					
	Environmental characteristics	Employer characteristics	Collaboration with upper secondary school	Collaboration with others outside the workplace	Financial support
S U B T H E M E S	Inclusive culture, characterized by openness to diversity and colleague support	Personal relationships with people with ID/ personal experiences with learning difficulties	Internships/training candidates in the company	Close cooperation between all parties (e.g., social services, supported employment companies)	Compensation for expenses
	Fundamental values - Corporate social responsibility	Attitudes towards inclusive employment	Training of relevant workplace skills at school	The role of job coaches	Employees with ID functions as extra resources
	On-the-job support	Having an eye for employees' needs and experiences			Disability pension as a condition for employment

1

Table 3: Accommodability (Facilitation), acceptability (inclusive attitudes) and corporate social responsibility by successful and unsuccessful employment. (t-test N, Mean, Standard deviation (SD), t-value, Cohen's d (absolute value))

	Successful employment			Unsuccessful employment			t-value	Cohen's d
	n	mean	sd	n	mean	sd		
Accommodability: The company can offer adaption and facilitation [†]	84	4,01	1,05	36	3,17	0,92	4,17***	0,83
Acceptability: The company can offer inclusive attitudes and knowledge about support needs [†]	87	4.89	0.85	38	4.45	0,81	2.69*	0.52
Corporate social responsibility ^{††}	87	4,43	0,79	38	3,92	0,88	3,18**	0,62

[†]Scale 1- not at all – 6 – to a very large degree. ^{††}Scale 1-Completely disagree – 5 – Completely agree

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001 (chi)

Table 4: The need for extra follow-up and attitudes towards hiring people with ID by successful and unsuccessful employment. (t-test N, Mean, Standard deviation (SD), t-value, Cohen's d (absolute value))

	Successful employment			Unsuccessful employment			t-value	Cohen's d
	n	mean	sd	n	mean	sd		
To what degree does the employee with ID require extra follow-up compared with employees without ID, arranged by successful and unsuccessful employment [†]	88	3,81	1.23	38	4.50	1.16	2.94*	0.57
Willingness to hire ^{††}	85	4,21	0.59	36	3.69	0,62	4,39***	0,87

[†]Scale 1- not at all – 6 – to a very large degree. ^{††}Scale 1-Completely disagree – 5 – Completely agree

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001 (chi)

Table 5: Recruitment of employees with ID by successful (n=88) and unsuccessful employment (n=38). (numbers in %)

	Successful employment	Unsuccessful employment
1 Through open announcement in competition with other jobseekers without disabilities	19.3	10.5
2 Through open advertising in competition with other jobseekers with developmental disabilities	10.2	2.6
3 Through the social network of someone in the business	21.6	7.9
4 Through social services	52.3	55.3
5 Through a work inclusion company	47.7	34.2
6 Through collaboration with upper secondary school	26.1*	10.5

*Chi= 3.84, p-value < 0.05; Cramer's V = 0.17

*Table 6: Degree of cooperation between different actors in the employment of the employee with ID by successful (n=88) and unsuccessful (n=38) employment. (t-test N, Mean, Standard deviation (SD), t-value, Cohen's d (absolute value))

	Successful employment		Unsuccessful employment		t-value	Cohen's d
	mean	sd	mean	sd		
Upper Secondary School	2.26	1.68	1.65	1.25	1.98*	0.37
Social services	3.36	1.69	3.32	1.58	0.15	0.03
Work inclusion / labor market company	3.63	1.88	3.13	1.94	1.33	0.25
Pedagogical-psychological service	1.26	0.70	1.60	1.37	1.86	0.36
Parents	1.99	1.39	2.05	1.61	0.22	0.04

Scale 1- not at all – 6 – to a very large degree; *p-value < 0.05

Table 7 Support received for the employee with ID by successful (n=88) and unsuccessful employment (n=38). (numbers in %)

	Successful employment	Unsuccessful employment
Assistance from social services or other work inclusion activities	50.0	36.8
Wage subsidies	50.0	31.6
Facilitation grants (for aids or adaptations of the workplace)	13.6	15.8
Support for mentoring scheme	11.4	7.9
Function assistance	4.6	5.3
Sick leave benefit	8.0	5.3
Inclusion allowance (e.g., for necessary equipment)	6.8	5.3
No support	27.3	26.3

No significant differences between successful and unsuccessful employment