Managers' and employees' perception of diversity and inclusion in the high-tech sector: A qualitative investigation

by

Sophie Jansen

3075540

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

A master's thesis submitted for the degree of

Master of Business Administration

2025

1st supervisor: Lara Carminati

2nd supervisor: Hatice Kizgin

Abstract

This thesis explores how Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) practices are perceived to influence job flourishing among employees and managers in a Dutch high-tech manufacturing organization. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework, this qualitative study investigates how identity-based characteristics influence individual-level perceptions and experiences of inclusion. The findings reveal that perceptions of inclusion differ substantially between dominant group members, in this context, the Dutch male participants, and those identifying with minority groups. While dominant group members perceive the organizational culture as inclusive, individuals who do not identify with the dominant group perceive barriers to recognition, opportunities, and belonging. In contrast to assumptions in existing literature, hierarchical status did not appear to influence D&I perceptions as strongly as identity-based factors, particularly gender. The findings indicate that D&I outcomes are primarily shaped by informal processes and interpersonal interactions, rather than formal policies. The data structure, developed using the Gioia methodology, highlights how limited organizational support, symbolic initiatives, and a general resistance to D&I, particularly among the Management Team, limit inclusion and restrict job flourishing for the minority groups. These insights emphasize the need for high-tech organizations to move beyond surface-level representation and install meaningful inclusion practices aimed at creating equal opportunities for individuals to flourish.

Keywords: diversity and inclusion, job flourishing, high-tech manufacturing, perception, Input–Process–Output framework

Table of Contents

Abstract 2
1. Introduction 5
2. Theoretical Framework 8
2.1 Diversity & Inclusion in Organizations 8
2.2 Multi-level Approach 10
2.3 Input-Output Model 10
2.4 Social Identity Theory 12
2.5 Job Flourishing 13
2.6 High-tech Manufacturing Sector 14
3. Methodology 16
3.1 Research Design 16
3.2 Data Collection and Sampling 16
3.3 Research instruments 18
3.4 Data analysis 20
4. Results 21
4.1 Perceptions on (lack of) D&I Practices 21
4.1.1 Non-inclusive Work Practices 22
4.1.2 Resistance to D&I 23
4.1.3 Dismissive Attitude towards D&I 26
4.1.4 Perceived Absence of Organizational Support 27
4.2 Identity and Inclusion at Work 29
4.2.1 Unequal Opportunities 30
4.2.2 Experience of Inclusion and Exclusion 33
4.3 Perceived Job Flourishing 36
4.3.1 Negative Experiences 37
4.3.2 Positive Experiences 38
4.4 Collective Recognition of the Need for D&I 39
5. Discussion 42
5.1 Theoretical Implications 43
5.1.1 Inductive Insight: The Role of Gender in Perceptions of Inclusion 43
5.1.2 D&I and Job Flourishing: Insights from the IPO Framework 45
5.1.3 D&I in Dutch High-Tech Manufacturing 46
5.2 Practical implications 47
5.3 Limitations and Future Research 48
6. Conclusion 49

Reference list 50
Appendix 1 54
1A: Interview mail to participants – Dutch 54
1B: Interview mail to participants – English 55
Appendix 2 56
2A: Interview Protocol - Dutch 56
2B: Interview Protocol – English 57
Appendix 3: Complete Data Structure 58
Appendix 4: Exemplary quotes of first-order codes 59

1. Introduction

Inclusion efforts nowadays still face an important challenge: people sometimes act on bias and prejudice, even when doing so harms organizational performance. This paradox, first formalized by economist Gary Becker in his book *The Economics of Discrimination*, remains relevant today (Becker, 1957). Taste biases continue to shape labour market attitudes and inclusion-related preferences, aligning with Becker's theoretical framework (Banerjee & Datta Gupta, 2015). Ever since, research has been done on the topic of diversity, showing its importance in terms of how the underrepresentation of certain minorities can harm the organization's overall success (Heydari et al., 2024); how gender diversity at both the management and staff levels can have positive effects on firm profitability (Ferrary & Déo, 2022); and how organizations that prioritize diversity practices experience advantages such as higher creativity, better decision-making, and more employee engagement and retention (Leuhery et al., 2024). However, Richard et al. (2013) noted that the studies on diversity and its impact on performance have shown mixed and inconclusive results. To find a possible explanation for this incongruency, they argued that diversity alone is insufficient to (positively) influence organizational performance and emphasized the importance of inclusion as a critical complement of diversity. Hence, to fully realize the potential benefits of a diverse workforce, often referred to as the "diversity advantage", organizations need to foster and exploit an inclusive culture that enables individuals from varied backgrounds to contribute meaningfully and feel valued (Pless & Maak, 2004; Richard et al., 2013). Despite recognition of its importance, organizations often struggle to effectively implement diversity and inclusion (D&I), since managing a heterogeneous workforce can bring additional challenges as opposed to a homogeneous workforce (Jehn & Greer, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Furthermore, while D&I practices are widely recognized as critical to organizational success, their impact spans across multiple levels, i.e., organizational, team, and individual, which is important to consider for comprehensively managing diversity within organizations and understanding their consequences (Roberson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2025). At the organizational level, diversity has been linked to improved firm performance, due to enhanced organizational capabilities. At the team level, it can enhance creativity and improve decision-making processes. Finally, at the individual level, diversity shapes interpersonal interactions through personal biases and attachments, affecting trust, collaboration, and individual well-being (Roberson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2025). Among these levels, the individual level has received the least attention. Extensive research has explored the impact of diversity at organizational and team levels, overlooking how these practices affect individual employees on a deeper, personal level, such as sense of

belonging, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction (Roberson, 2019). Moreover, there remains a general lack of understanding of *how* D&I practices create value across all levels. This is mainly due to limited research on the mechanisms through which these outcomes come to exist. Most studies apply an input-output logic, examining which D&I practices (input) are linked to specific organizational outcomes (output), without considering and exploring the intervening mechanisms that explain how or why these outcomes or effects occur (Gerpott & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Randel, 2023; Roberson, 2019). Roberson (2019) underscores this gap by arguing that diversity literature has focused too narrowly on individual-level outcomes in terms of behaviours, calling for more research into psychological and emotional outcomes, such as self-esteem, identity expression, and well-being. As such, investigating the concept of job flourishing offers a timely and meaningful response to this research gap by capturing how employees experience inclusion in the workplace. Job flourishing refers to an individual's positive state of mental health at work, including emotional, psychological, and social well-being (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023). Unlike traditional measures of job satisfaction or employee engagement, job flourishing integrates both hedonic dimensions (feeling good) and eudemonic dimensions (functioning effectively), thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of individual psychological states of mind. Job flourishing can be applied as a good indicator of motivation at work, organizational effectiveness, and job performance (A'Yuninnisa et al., 2024).

Furthermore, studies show that even though many industries have begun to benefit from D&I practices, high-tech, manufacturing, construction, and engineering-intensive fields continue to lag in D&I (Heydari et al., 2024; Tans, 2023). For example, Heydari et al. (2024) performed a systematic literature review on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) sector and emphasized a need for more sector-specific research, as DEI efforts in these technical fields remain fragmented and underdeveloped. Similarly, Tans (2023) underlined that many Dutch companies in the high-tech, digital sector have made limited progress on D&I, lagging behind other European countries (Tans, 2023). For instance, within the technical sector in the Netherlands, only 15.4% of the companies have integrated D&I practices effectively into their business strategy. While 85% of companies send out an Employee Engagement Survey, 72% of those companies leave out questions on Inclusion (Tans, 2023). Hence, more research is needed to understand how D&I practices can be implemented in and influence the high-tech manufacturing sector.

Therefore, in light of the above, the goal of this study is to explore how employees and managers perceive D&I practices and their impact on job flourishing in the high-tech manufacturing sector. This thesis approaches perceptions as subjective interpretations shaped by individual

experiences, expectations, and daily interactions at work. Hence, the research question of this thesis is as follows:

“How do employees and managers in high-tech manufacturing perceive the role of D&I practices in stimulating job flourishing?”

By answering this research question, this thesis contributes to the literature of D&I practices in two ways. Firstly, we extend current knowledge on how D&I practices can influence individual-level outcomes by providing further insights into the unknown mechanisms through which D&I practices create value for individuals. More specifically, this study focuses on job flourishing as one of the key D&I outcomes given its direct relationship with performance. Secondly, this thesis sheds light on D&I practices in an understudied context, namely the Dutch high-tech manufacturing sector, as it performs significantly worse in effectively implementing D&I practices compared to other sectors and other European countries. This thesis will also deliver a practical contribution to Dutch companies in the high-tech manufacturing industry. Gaining insights into those underlying processes and mechanisms through which D&I practices can influence job flourishing can be of great value to companies. With these insights, organizations will be able to stimulate job flourishing, thus enhancing organizational performance.

This thesis is structured as follows. In the following chapter, the theory will be elaborately discussed, and afterwards, the methodology will be explained. Subsequently, the findings will be shared, followed by the theoretical and practical implications. The thesis will be finalized by presenting the conclusion, discussion, and limitations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Diversity & Inclusion in Organizations

Economist Gary Becker was one of the first to model how bias and prejudice exist in the labour market, while they reduce economic efficiency. In his book *The Economics of Discrimination*, Becker proposed that some employers are willing to suffer financial losses to avoid hiring individuals from certain social groups. These biased preferences lead employers to exclude qualified candidates based on non-productivity-related characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, or age. In other words, discriminatory behaviour can be sustained in the market not because it is rational, but because some individuals are willing to "pay the cost" to uphold personal biases (Becker, 1957). This insight remains relevant today. The article by Banerjee and Datta Gupta (2015) shows that taste-based biases continue to shape labour market attitudes and inclusion-related preferences. Their study demonstrates that employers exhibit implicit caste bias, which can be reduced through targeted awareness interventions. This reinforces the idea that interventions aimed at increasing awareness or changing perceptions can significantly influence outcomes for minority groups. While discrimination and D&I are conceptually distinct, understanding how bias operates and can be reduced helps explain the relevance and potential impact of D&I practices in modern organizations. While D&I is not a new phenomenon, it has received growing attention in recent decades due to both its ethical and strategic value. Organizations increasingly recognize that excluding talent based on non-productivity-related characteristics can hinder performance, an insight now supported by both economic theory and demographic reality. Besides the economic consequences, the demographic changes emphasize the relevance of awareness of diversity. There is an increasing number of women and minorities entering the workforce. Also, globalisation allows doing business on an international level, thus increasing diversity in terms of diverse cultures interacting with each other. Additionally, immigration and overseas recruitment increase the diversity of nationalities and cultures in the workplace (Leuhery et al., 2024; Richard et al., 2013). A common challenge in defining the concept of diversity lies in its multidimensional nature. Individuals can differ based on both visible and invisible characteristics, such as gender, nationality, age, physical ability, and sexual orientation (O'Donovan, 2018). When an organization is composed of individuals from various demographic groups, this is referred to as representational diversity. While improving representational diversity is a necessary step, it is not sufficient on its own to realize the benefits of diversity. Without an inclusive work environment where individuals feel valued and supported, organizations are unlikely to see positive outcomes (O'Donovan, 2018; Pless & Maak, 2004). Inclusion acts as the enabler that allows diversity to translate into organizational performance

benefits (Richard et al., 2013). Therefore, organizations must move beyond surface-level representation and focus on fostering inclusion. To do so, they need a deeper understanding of what makes D&I practices effective and how they are experienced by employees (Chantarat et al., 2023; O'Donovan, 2018). For organizations to follow up on their D&I goals, they can install policies and practices. Those D&I practices and policies can be diversity-focused recruitment, selection, training, and development. Besides that, performance reviews, employee engagement surveys, and coaching activities can help create an inclusive environment. Additionally, installing gender diversity policies, diversity leadership practices, offering work-life balanced working schedules, and being aware of corporate social responsibility are important for organizations to consider when creating D&I practices (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Leuhery et al., 2024; O'Donovan, 2018).

Chantarat et al. (2023) conducted a study in the Health Services and Policy Research (HSPR) workforce, a study focused on people who research and improve healthcare systems and policies to support better health and fairness in healthcare. Only 49% of the participants say they have witnessed these DEI initiatives being successfully implemented, and 40% reported that these DEI initiatives were merely "tokenistic" (i.e., symbolic rather than substantive). Chantarat et al. (2023) make a distinction between two categories of D&I practices, namely, planning initiatives and implementation initiatives. The planning initiatives are activities that prepare or are part of a D&I strategy. However, they do not directly lead to tangible changes. These initiatives include setting up a workgroup, evaluating existing D&I policies, and assessing diversity. These initiatives are important because they show that the organization is dedicating time and resources to D&I. However, when the employees do not experience any results or changes from these initiatives, they can be perceived as symbolic or tokenistic. The second category considers implementation initiatives, which are tangible actions that support D&I. Such as concrete programs, developing career pathways for previously excluded groups, and publicly reporting on the organization's D&I progress. The findings of the study of Chantarat et al. (2023) show that most organizations participate mainly in planning initiatives, which results in negative perceptions of the organization's efforts to actually change and improve on D&I. While D&I practices are often introduced in organizations, their effectiveness depends on how they are implemented. Ali and Konrad (2017) follow a similar distinction to Chantarat et al. (2023) in terms of D&I practices. They identify several motivations for firms on why they implement D&I practices, one of which is the need to comply with laws and regulations and gain social legitimacy. This resembles the tokenistic efforts described earlier, which may appear effective on paper but ultimately fail to achieve the desired outcomes. Ali and Konrad (2017) argue that for a D&I practice to be effective,

it needs to be part of an integrated Diversity & Equality Management (DEM) system. That means that D&I practices need to be bundled into this DEM system that addresses representational diversity, an inclusive work environment, and a participative decision-making process. These three pillars are needed to realize performance gains. This emphasizes the need for a coherent system, and that implementing standalone D&I practices will not be effective because it can be perceived as insincere and superficial.

2.2 Multi-level Approach

D&I practices have an influence on organizations across multiple levels: the organizational, team, and individual levels (Roberson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2025). At the organizational level, D&I is often linked to improved performance outcomes, such as enhanced innovation, greater adaptability, and stronger financial results. These benefits are attributed to improved organizational capabilities, such as a broader talent pool and a dynamic and innovative workforce (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Ferrary & Déo, 2022; Leuhery et al., 2024; Roberson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2025). At the team level, D&I practices' influence can be recognized by more creative and well-informed decision-making. When managed effectively, diverse teams can generate more innovative ideas and possess a wider range of perspectives, skills, and experiences (Leuhery et al., 2024; Roberson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2025). Finally, at the individual level, D&I practices shape how employees experience their work environment. This includes their sense of inclusion, psychological safety, trust in leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Leuhery et al., 2024; Roberson, 2019; Sharma et al., 2025). Roberson (2019) emphasizes that while D&I research has increasingly recognized the importance of these individual outcomes, studies have largely prioritized organizational and team-level performance indicators. Within the individual level, this thesis explicitly differentiates between managerial and non-managerial roles, as research has shown that hierarchical position significantly shapes how D&I practices are perceived and evaluated. Individuals in managerial roles tend to report more positive perceptions of inclusion, due to their increased access to decision-making and strategic influence (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Dunger, 2025).

2.3 Input-Output Model

Despite the increasing relevance of D&I practices and their recognized impact at organizational, team, and individual levels, the processes through which these practices create value remain underexplored. Most focus primarily on the relationship between D&I practices (input) and performance-related outcomes (output), without investigating the intervening processes or mechanisms that explain how these effects occur (Gerpott & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015;

Randel, 2023; Roberson, 2019). The Input–Process–Output (I-P-O) model offers a suitable framework for understanding how organizational outcomes come to exist (Roberson, 2019). Applying this model in the D&I context, inputs refer to D&I practices and policies, such as inclusive hiring strategies, mentorship programs, or inclusive leadership behaviour (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Leuhery et al., 2024; O'Donovan, 2018). Outputs refer to the results these practices aim to achieve, such as improved performance, innovation, or employee well-being (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Ferrary & Déo, 2022; Leuhery et al., 2024; Roberson, 2019). However, the critical and often overlooked component lies in the processes, the psychological, behavioural, and interpersonal mechanisms through which these inputs are translated into outcomes (Roberson, 2019). In line with this, Randel (2023) advocates for a broader Input–Mediator–Output–Input (IMOI) model as an evolution of the I-P-O framework. While the I-P-O model offers a straightforward sequence from inputs to outputs, the IMOI model introduces two key enhancements and explicitly includes mediators and integrates a cyclical feedback loop. The IMOI model recognizes that outputs from inclusion practices can then serve as inputs in future cycles, creating a continuous feedback loop rather than a linear progression (Randel, 2023). Despite the introduction of these mediating mechanisms, and similar to the findings of Roberson (2019), Randel (2023) highlights that D&I research often neglects to examine these underlying mechanisms. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how and why D&I practices create value (Gerpott & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Randel, 2023; Roberson, 2019). Taken together, these studies suggest that future research must move beyond merely identifying which practices yield which outcomes and instead focus on how these outcomes are experienced and constructed. For this reason, this thesis adopts a perspective that pays particular attention to the underexplored mechanisms on an individual level. In doing so, this thesis conceptualizes *perceptions* as a key process variable within the I-P-O framework. With a focus on how employees and managers interpret and value D&I practices in their work environments. Roberson (2019) argues that while D&I literature covers multiple levels, most studies have focused on organizational and team-level indicators, such as performance, innovation, or group cohesion. Individual-level outcomes, although recognized as relevant, have been limited to investigating attitudes and behaviours. Roberson (2019) calls for more research into individual experiences, emphasizing the need to examine how diversity is psychologically and emotionally experienced in the workplace. Therefore, this thesis aims to generate new insights and contribute to existing literature by deepening the understanding of the underlying mechanisms, with a specific emphasis on the individual level.

2.4 Social Identity Theory

To understand how D&I practices are experienced by individuals in the workplace, it is crucial to consider the psychological processes that shape social perceptions. One of the most widely used theories in this context is Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986). SIT provides a useful lens for analysing how individuals perceive themselves and others within organizational settings. According to SIT, individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups based on characteristics such as gender, nationality, age, and ethnicity. It explains how people find a sense of belonging in their social identity. Individuals perceive the world, their workplace through the eyes of their group identity. This explains why diversity on its own will not be beneficial; solely having diversity will not create inclusion because of the social identities individuals perceive. It is psychologically shown that individuals will (unconsciously) favour their group 'in-group' above other groups 'out-groups'. This categorization often creates an "us versus them" mentality, triggering resistance to inclusive initiatives, which hinder effective diversity management (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory helps explain why, as discussed before, diversity alone is not sufficient to create inclusion. While diversity refers to the demographic representation of an organization, inclusion determines whether those diverse individuals feel welcomed, respected, and able to contribute meaningfully (O'Donovan, 2018; Pless & Maak, 2004). Without efforts to address identity-based barriers, D&I practices may struggle to generate genuine inclusion, or they may even provoke resistance (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For instance, dominant group members may perceive D&I practices as disruptive or threatening to the current situation. Meanwhile, individuals from minority backgrounds may continue to feel excluded if their group identities are not actively embraced and supported in the organization (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These identity-driven perceptions are critical to understand when aiming to implement effective D&I practices. By highlighting the role of group identity in shaping perceptions, SIT emphasizes that individuals derive part of their self-perception from their group identity. As a result, they tend to categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups, favouring those who belong to their group while potentially distancing or excluding others. SIT thus underscores the importance of creating environments in which out-group members are not just merely present or accepted, but where they are actively included and valued within the dominant organizational culture. Without such integration, individuals from out-groups may experience reduced belonging or perceived exclusion, which undermines the intended effects of D&I initiatives (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Moreover, SIT provides a psychological lens that complements the I-P-O model by offering insight into why certain processes may act as barriers or enablers in translating D&I practices into meaningful outcomes. While the I-P-O model maps the structural

relationship between practices and results, SIT helps illuminate the interpersonal and cognitive mechanisms, such as in-group favouritism, identity threat, and perceived exclusion, that mediate this relationship. Integrating SIT into the I-P-O framework, therefore, enriches our understanding of how D&I practices are psychologically and socially experienced by individuals and helps to uncover the mechanisms through which these experiences may influence individual-level outcomes, such as job flourishing.

Furthermore, SIT provides a psychological lens that complements the I-P-O model by offering insight into how cognitive and interpersonal dynamics, such as in-group favouritism and perceived status differentials, can act as enablers or barriers in translating D&I practices into meaningful outcomes. While the I-P-O model maps the structural relationship between inputs and outputs, SIT helps illuminate how these processes are experienced on an individual level, ultimately shaping outcomes such as job flourishing.

2.5 Job Flourishing

Given the importance of moving beyond behavioural indicators to explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of D&I individual-level outcomes (Roberson, 2019), this thesis includes the concept 'job flourishing' as an individual-level outcome of D&I practices. The concept of job flourishing offers a comprehensive and theoretically grounded way to capture these deeper dimensions of employee well-being (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023). Job flourishing refers to an individual's positive state of mental health, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Keyes, 2002). While flourishing has traditionally been studied in the context of general human life, its application in workplace settings has been relatively overlooked (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023; Fabricio et al., 2020). This highlights the conceptual novelty of job flourishing in organizational research and reinforces its relevance for addressing the current gap in individual-level D&I outcomes. Within the workplace context, job flourishing integrates both hedonic well-being (e.g., experiencing joy, satisfaction, and happiness) and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., functioning meaningfully, personal growth, and social contribution) (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023; Hori et al., 2019). Compared to more established constructs like job satisfaction or work engagement, job flourishing offers a broader perspective. While job satisfaction typically reflects evaluations of one's role or environment, job flourishing captures how employees feel and function at work, emotionally, socially, and psychologically. Research shows that job flourishing is associated with desirable outcomes such as enhanced job performance, stronger organizational commitment, increased creativity, and even better physical health (Hori et al., 2019; Redelinghuys et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2019). Despite its potential, job flourishing remains underexplored in organizational

contexts, particularly in relation to D&I (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023; Roberson, 2019). Research done by A'Yuninnisa et al. (2024) provides support for understanding job flourishing through affective mechanisms in the workplace. Their study explores how perceived leader emotional intelligence and positive team emotional climate, two affective interpersonal mechanisms, can foster employee emotional intelligence and thus enhance job flourishing and performance. Their findings highlight that job flourishing is not solely a personal trait or internal state but is shaped by how individuals emotionally perceive and respond to their work environment. This perspective aligns with findings from Redelinghuys et al. (2019), who conceptualize workplace flourishing as a combination of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. They show that flourishing is influenced by perceived alignment between personal and organizational values, and highlight that employees are more likely to flourish when they work in environments characterized by meaning, acceptance, and interpersonal connection. However, A'Yuninnisa et al. (2024) underline that there is a need for more studies on these kinds of mechanisms that can create the emotional conditions necessary for flourishing. In line with this, this thesis recognizes perceived leader emotional intelligence and team emotional climate as promising constructs to explore, particularly potential mechanisms in the relationship between D&I practices and individual-level outcomes as job flourishing.

2.6 High-tech Manufacturing Sector

The question remains why implementing effective D&I practices in some sectors proves more difficult than in others. While many industries have reaped the benefits of diversity, the high-tech manufacturing sector remains behind (Heydari et al., 2024; Luhr, 2025; Tans, 2023). Indeed, despite widespread recognition of the value of D&I, implementing effective strategies in this sector appears particularly challenging. Heydari et al. (2024) identified multiple structural and cultural barriers to inclusion in their systematic review of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Architecture, Engineering, and Construction (AEC) sector. Although the AEC sector differs from high-tech manufacturing in its primary outputs, both industries share an engineering-oriented focus, reliance on technical expertise, and underrepresentation of minority groups. These similarities deem the findings of Heydari et al. (2024) relevant to the high-tech manufacturing context. The barriers identified were male-dominated workplace cultures, gender-based wage disparities, and limited flexibility in work arrangements. Whilst these challenges disproportionately affect women and cultural minorities, language barriers and a lack of inclusive communication practices hinder culturally diverse employees. Overall, these barriers reflect a broader pattern of excluding norms that limit access and participation of minorities in these sectors. A qualitative research study conducted by Luhr (2025) reveals that employees in

the tech industry often perceive their own companies as “better than most” in terms of diversity, despite recognizing the industry-wide problems with diversity. This perception is often justified through leveraging the ambiguity of what diversity can include, for example, solely focusing on educational background diversity, while neglecting nationality and gender diversity. This perception of “being better” can also come from individuals justifying their company’s status by comparing it to others in the industry that perform even worse at diversity. This suggests that the lack of industry-wide standards or benchmarking allows poor D&I performance to be normalized. This raises some concern about the long-term sustainability of the workforce, especially as high-tech manufacturing organizations will also face an aging workforce and increasing labour shortages. Building an inclusive workplace is therefore not just an ethical point of improvement but also a strategic necessity to secure future workforce stability and innovation capacity. Despite corporate-level efforts to promote D&I, translating these initiatives into actual organizational, team, and individual change remains a challenge (Heydari et al., 2024).

Moreover, compared to other European countries, the Dutch high-tech manufacturing sector has the urgency of addressing D&I practices. Tans (2023) highlights that most Dutch companies in the high-tech and digital sectors have made limited progress on D&I over the past years, lagging behind other European countries. Within the broader technical Dutch sector, only 15.4% of companies have successfully integrated D&I practices into their core business strategies. Moreover, while 85% of companies conduct employee engagement surveys, a striking 72% leave out questions related to inclusion (Tans, 2023). These figures reflect a disconnect between formal commitments to diversity and the actual prioritization of effective D&I practices. Taken together, these challenges illustrate a significant research gap for exploring how D&I is experienced by individuals working in the Dutch high-tech manufacturing sector.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To explore and study the perceptions and experiences about D&I practices, this thesis adopted an inductive, qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews. This approach is appropriate because the aim is to study socially constructed concepts, such as how individuals perceive and experience D&I practices in their organizational context (Gioia et al., 2013). This thesis builds on the assumption that individuals are 'knowledgeable agents', which implies that people in organizations are capable of articulating their thoughts, intentions, and actions (Gioia et al., 2013). This perspective shifted the role of the researcher from interpreting experiences on behalf of participants to listening and learning from them, emphasizing that the informants' own insights are a valid and reliable data source. Hence, interviewees were treated as experts, whose experiences and beliefs provide essential insight into the research topic (DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019). Thus, given the exploratory nature of this thesis and the focus on subjective, socially constructed experiences, a qualitative research design was deemed the most suitable approach.

3.2 Data Collection and Sampling

To investigate the underlying mechanisms through which D&I practices create value, the high-tech manufacturing sector was chosen. The research was conducted at a company operating in the Netherlands, and due to anonymisation, this company will be referred to as 'Company X'. This company was a suitable fit for this research as they are a Dutch company operating in the high-tech manufacturing industry and actively encounter challenges related to implementing D&I practices. The contextual relevance of conducting this study at Company X is further supported by prior research, which has highlighted industry-wide difficulties in implementing effective D&I strategies (Heydari et al., 2024; Luhr, 2025; Tans, 2023). Access to the organization and its participants was granted by the HR manager, agreeing to facilitate participation from both employees and managers for the qualitative data collection. This thesis applies purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their relevance to the research topic rather than through randomization. This approach is well suited for qualitative research, where the objective is to develop an in-depth understanding rather than to achieve statistical generalizability (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Participants were selected to reflect variation across four key diversity dimensions: organizational hierarchy, generation, gender, and nationality. These dimensions functioned as identity lenses that shape how individuals perceive and make sense of

D&I within the organization, as conceptualized in SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is important to note that while participants were selected to reflect variation across these individual dimensions, social identities are inherently intersectional; individuals could simultaneously occupy multiple characteristics and therefore identify with multiple identity lenses (Fernández et al., 2023; Irene et al., 2024; Trochmann et al., 2023).

Different hierarchical roles within the organization were included because previous research shows that individuals in managerial positions, due to their greater access to power and decision-making, tend to perceive D&I efforts more positively than employees in lower roles (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Dunger, 2025). Generational background is important for companies to understand, as each generation embodies different workplace values and holds varying perspectives and expectations. This was particularly relevant in the context of D&I, as organizations must increasingly balance the needs of an aging workforce with efforts to attract and retain younger employees (Oude Mulders et al., 2020; Tans, 2023). Gender is included as an identity lens due to the persistent underrepresentation of women in the high-tech manufacturing sector, particularly in technical and managerial roles (SER, 2024; Tans, 2023). Including both men and women in the sample was essential to ensure that these different perspectives are adequately represented, especially given the proven organizational relevance of gender diversity (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Ferrary & Déo, 2022; Richard et al., 2013). Nationality was considered important, as employees from international or minority backgrounds may experience inclusion differently due to cultural or linguistic barriers (Heydari et al., 2024). Additionally, research shows that cultural and ethnic diversity can enhance decision-making and creativity within organizations, making it an interesting dimension for understanding how D&I is experienced (Richard et al., 2013). To ensure the anonymity of the participants, the specific nationality is not specified, only Dutch and non-Dutch. The hierarchy dimension has five levels, starting with level 1, the management team (MT), followed by level 2 (tactical middle management) and level 3 (operational middle management). Level 4 includes indirect employees, and level 5 consists of direct employees. The distinction between direct and indirect refers to whether employees' working hours are billed directly to client projects (e.g., engineers or technicians) or indirectly support operations without being charged to customers (e.g., HR, finance, or back-office roles). The generational classification is based on the Dutch workforce distribution and includes Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2021) (Tans, 2023). Generational classification is used instead of age to ensure the anonymity of the participants. These inclusion criteria were intended to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives on D&I within the organization.

There are no formal exclusion criteria aside from participants needing to be currently employed at the company.

To protect participant anonymity, the sample is not presented in a table. In several cases, the combination of characteristics, hierarchy level, generation, nationality, and gender identity was so specific that individuals could potentially be identified. Therefore, the sample is described as follows. A total of sixteen participants were interviewed for this study, including one pilot interview. The sample reflects a diverse image of the organization in terms of hierarchy, generation, nationality, and gender identity. Participants were chosen from all five hierarchical levels, with roughly equal representation across level 3 (operational middle management), 4 (indirect employees), and 5 (direct employees). Levels 1 and 2, which contain the top management layers, were less represented, due to their being a relatively small proportion of employees within the organization. Generationally, the sample included participants from all generations currently present in the Dutch workforce: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Millennials formed the largest group, followed by Generation X and Generation Z. One participant belonged to the Baby Boomer generation. While the majority of participants identified as male, the sample also included female, agender, and unspecified gender identities. A small proportion of participants had a non-Dutch nationality, whereas the majority had Dutch nationality. Which is also represented in the general workforce of Company X. These inclusion criteria were intended to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives on D&I within the organization. There were no formal exclusion criteria other than current employment at the company. In total, 16 participants were interviewed. Guest et al. (2006) found that in relatively homogeneous samples, data saturation often occurs within the first 12 interviews. However, in this thesis, the sample was intentionally selected across multiple identity dimensions, making the sample less homogeneous. Furthermore, as Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that saturation may not always be the most appropriate criterion for evaluating sample size. In approaches where interpretative depth is prioritized over data redundancy, other factors should also be part of making sample size decisions, such as the richness of the data, the scope of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and practical considerations like time constraints. Based on these criteria, a sample size of 16 was deemed sufficient for this thesis.

3.3 Research instruments

The data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews. This instrument was chosen because it strikes a balance between structure and flexibility. While ensuring a degree of comparability across interviews, it also allows participants to elaborate on their personal

experiences, interpretations, and views related to D&I (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This flexibility is particularly valuable in qualitative research focused on perceptions and experiences, where new or unexpected insights may emerge that would not surface in more structured formats. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the depth of participant responses. Whenever possible, the interviews will be conducted in person, as this allows for better observation of non-verbal behaviour and creates a more open and trusting environment (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). If in-person interviews were not possible, they were conducted via Microsoft Teams. In these cases, measures were taken to ensure a high-quality and trustworthy setting, including a stable video connection, clear audio, and a private environment. Extra attention was paid to building rapport at the beginning of the interview to help establish a comfortable and open atmosphere, even in the online setting. All interviews were audio-recorded with the explicit consent of participants and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and reliability of the data. Transcriptions were facilitated using automatic transcription tools (such as Microsoft Teams or AmberScript), followed by manual corrections by the researcher to address potential errors. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by excluding and/or concealing all personal information linking the individual to the responses (e.g., name, specific age, hometown, nationality, etc.). Age was reported in ranges, roles were described only in general terms, and nationality was described as Dutch and non-Dutch to safeguard confidentiality.

The interview guide was guided by a set of open-ended questions developed based on the theoretical framework and previous studies based on the existing literature on D&I, identity in organizations, and the SIT (see Appendix 2 for the interview protocol). A pilot interview was conducted to assess the clarity and flow of the questions. Based on this pilot, minor adjustments were made to improve the order and phrasing of certain questions. Since no substantive changes were required, the pilot interview will be included in the final data set. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the BMS Ethics Committee at the University of Twente, and all participants received an information sheet and signed a consent form before participation. Given the Dutch organizational context of this study, interviews were conducted in either Dutch or English, depending on participant preference. For interviews conducted in Dutch, the researcher, being a native Dutch speaker and fluent in English, translated the transcripts into English for analysis. To preserve the trustworthiness of the data, special attention was paid to maintaining conceptual equivalence, ensuring that translations conveyed not only the literal meaning of participant responses but also the intended contextual and emotional nuance (Squires, 2009). Translated excerpts were cross-checked with the original Dutch transcripts during the coding

process, and where needed, meaning was clarified through discussion with bilingual peers, to preserve conceptual equivalence (Squires, 2009).

3.4 Data analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the transcripts were analysed using ATLAS.ti to assist with coding and organization. The data was analysed using the Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in combination with the structured approach of Gioia et al. (2013). Thematic Analysis is a flexible and widely used method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. It follows six phases and supports both descriptive and interpretative levels of analysis, making it well-suited to exploratory research. In the first phase, the researcher transcribed and repeatedly read the interview material to become deeply familiar with the data. The second phase involved generating initial codes, staying close to the participants' wording. These codes correspond to the first-order concepts described by Gioia et al. (2013), capturing the informants' own terms. In the third phase, the codes were grouped into initial themes, which reflect the more abstract, researcher-driven second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013). In the fourth and fifth phases, themes were reviewed, refined, and defined. These were then organized into aggregate dimensions, which represent broader theoretical insights. In the final phase, the findings were reported through a narrative that illustrates how participants experience and make sense of D&I in their organization. Combining the Thematic Analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) with the structure approach of Gioia et al. (2013), a rigorous and transparent analysis came to exist. Linking raw qualitative data to higher-level theoretical concepts while remaining grounded in participants' lived experiences.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative data analysis, which are organized along three aggregate dimensions, namely (1) Perceptions of (lack of) D&I Practices, (2) Identity and Inclusion at Work, and (3) Perceived Job Flourishing. Each dimension is elaborated through second-order themes, supported by first-order codes and selected interview quotations. This structure allows for a clear understanding of how D&I practices are perceived and how these perceptions shape individual experiences within the high-tech manufacturing sector. The data structure is visualized into one model, presented as three figures per subchapter to provide clarity and enhance readability. The complete and integrated data structure can be found in Appendix 3.

4.1 Perceptions on (lack of) D&I Practices

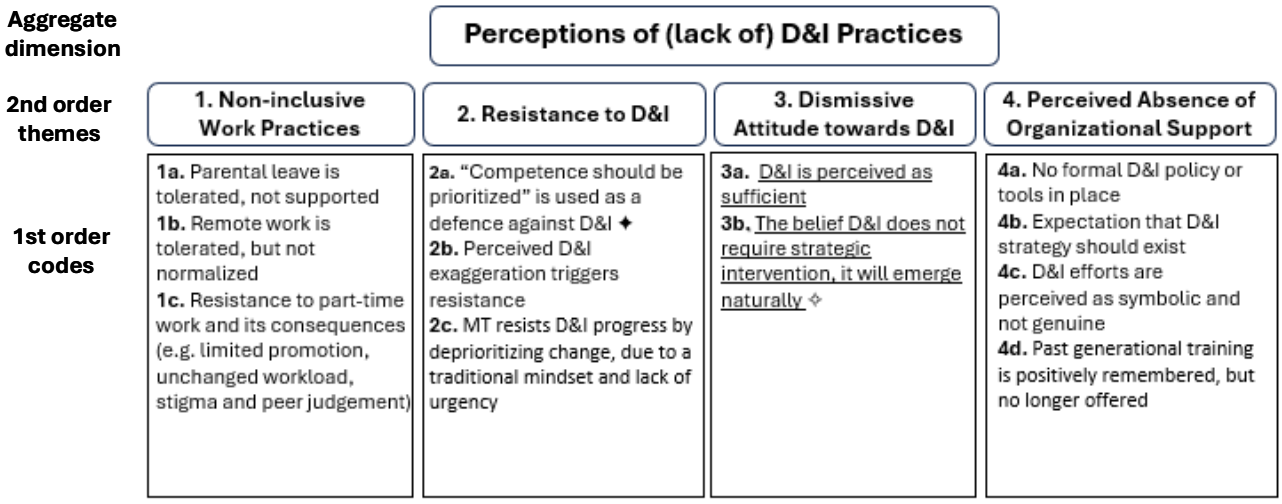


Figure 1: First aggregate dimension

Note. Underlined concepts are based exclusively on statements made by male participants. Concepts marked with the symbol ✦ are based on statements made predominantly by male participants. Concepts marked with the symbol ✧ are based on statements made primarily by participants working in or supervising teams at lower organizational levels.

This first aggregate dimension addresses how D&I is currently perceived and experienced within the organization. It reflects employee observations, attitudes, and reflections on existing or missing practices and the degree of organizational commitment. These findings represent how employees perceive the presence (or absence) of D&I structures, initiatives, and cultural attitudes. Inputs such as policies, leadership behaviour, or company culture shape the environment in which inclusion is, or is not, supported. This dimension, therefore, lays the foundation for understanding how D&I efforts are perceived and what signals they send across different groups within the company. This dimension will be elaborated on based on four second-

order themes: non-inclusive work practices, resistance to D&I, dismissive attitudes towards D&I, and the perceived absence of structural support.

4.1.1 Non-inclusive Work Practices

A recurring theme in the interviews was the absence of inclusive work practices and policies that acknowledge different employee needs and personal circumstances. While some of these policies and practices exist and are moderately tolerated, the responses revealed how informal resistance continues to shape workplace experiences.

Participants described how company culture and leadership attitudes discouraged **parental leave**. One employee noted the difficult trade-off between workplace expectations and personal responsibilities, explaining:

> *"You're caught in a dilemma as a young father. You know work won't like it, but you also want to be there for your family"* (P9).

Another participant described how the mere mention of parental leaves evoked disapproval from senior management:

> *"When hearing the word parental leave, a manager practically jumped out of his chair. And now he's also expected to consider working from home. 'We're a machine factory. You need to be here'."* (P11).

A participant in a managing role reflected on the organization's recent growth and increased visibility, which made it more difficult to disregard legal obligations, which resulted in a change of practice, however, not necessarily in mindset:

> *"In the end, it's the word 'mandatory.' That's what makes a big company different from a small one. Back when there were only 300 or 350 employees, the same regulations applied, but employees would think: 'I'd better not take leave, I'll just keep working, there are plenty of others who could replace me.' (...) In smaller companies, I know cases where someone says they want to work less hours and take leave, and the boss responds: 'That's fine, but by the end of the year, you can grab your things and leave.' It's not legal, but it happens. We've just grown too big to get away with things like that." (P11).*

Similarly, **remote work** was generally perceived as unsupported by the organization. Organizational resistance to remote work also plays a role during hiring processes and can have negative consequences for potential candidates. Several respondents pointed out the absence of a clear or inclusive policy:

> *"There is no policy, well, the policy is that it must be arranged at the departmental level. So ultimately, it gets pushed down in the organization and kept small."* (P8).
>
> *"There's no real policy for it. In fact, the policy is that we don't do it. Do people work remotely anyway? Yes, because otherwise you'd lose them. But if someone applies and says they want to work from home two days a week, they simply won't get in."* (P11).

Part-time work is similarly limited by the cultural expectations around full-time presence. This is perceived as a measure of commitment and competence within the organization. Employees and managers who express their desire to work part-time often experience limited opportunities for advancement. Two participants in managing roles stated:

> *"Working part-time as a manager? You get labelled. It makes it harder to move up in the organization."* (P1).
>
> *"When I said I wanted to work four days because of motherhood, it became more acceptable. But it's not like my workload was adjusted."* (P2).

Part-time working seems to be more tolerated when there is a good rationale behind it, such as motherhood. This statement is reinforced by another participant:

> *"When I said I wanted to work 36 hours, and later 32, the reactions were: 'We all work 40 hours, what kind of weird guy are you, wanting to go down to 36 hours?'"* (P10).

Together, these first-order codes reveal how non-inclusive work practices are shaped by cultural norms and standards that discourage these policies. While some frameworks for remote work, parental leave, or part-time arrangements may exist, they are undermined by cultural expectations of physical presence and full-time availability. These practices suggest that the organization accommodates mainly specific life choices, thereby creating an unspoken standard of what the ideal employee should be.

4.1.2 Resistance to D&I

The second theme captures how some participants express discomfort or scepticism toward D&I initiatives. They illustrate the underlying resistance that challenges how D&I is introduced and prioritised in the organization.

A recurring line of argument was that **competence should be the sole criterion for hiring** and promotion decisions. These responses suggest that D&I efforts are perceived as conflicting with hiring the most qualified candidate, as if the two are mutually exclusive. Some respondents made the following statements:

"I have an allergy to women's quotas. I think it's awful because you should always go for quality, not gender." (P1).

"We need two women in the management team?! No, we need what's best for the company. That's how we all make our living. So, we need people who can execute the role." (P5).

"In the end, we go with whoever fits best. And if it's a man again, then it's a man again." (P8).

This line of thought implies that D&I efforts in selecting candidates from underrepresented groups, in this case, women, would mean settling for someone less capable. These remarks were predominantly made by male participants and illustrate how the idea of prioritizing competence is used to resist D&I efforts. Although focusing on competence is a legitimate action, this sort of reasoning can overlook existing biases and the fact that equally qualified but underrepresented candidates may still be excluded.

In addition to concerns about competence, some employees expressed resistance due to **discomfort with the perceived emphasis on the topic of D&I**. Several participants felt that D&I efforts had become exaggerated. For instance, one participant reflected on the sensitivity surrounding the terminology itself:

"I think that when you explicitly label it, it starts getting negative attention. You're better off just having a conversation about it without calling it diversity or inclusion." (P1)

Another participant described frustration with the perceived complexity and sensitivity that comes with increased diversity in the workplace:

"Because of all these new forms that have emerged in recent decades, it has become harder to please everyone. The Christmas gift? A roast, someone's vegetarian. Can't do that. Someone's Muslim, pork? Can't do that either. A bottle of wine? Not possible. Then you get a gift card instead. 'Oh, I don't like that either.' It's getting harder and harder to keep everyone satisfied." (P3)

Several participants described D&I efforts as exaggerated or going too far, reflecting a degree of discomfort with how the topic is currently addressed:

"It shouldn't get too 'woke' if you ask me. That kind of stuff, no, that's not my thing." (P4)

"Sometimes I think, aren't we taking this a bit too far?" (P12)

These statements suggest that while D&I is intended to create a more inclusive environment, its perceived overemphasis can generate discomfort or resistance.

This hesitancy was also reflected at the managerial level. Several respondents noted that **the management team (MT) resists D&I progress by deprioritizing change**. This is mainly because of the traditional mindset rooted in the MT and a perceived lack of urgency in terms of the topic D&I. Participants frequently described the MT as change-averse, and supporting the perception that D&I is treated as optional rather than as an organizational goal. Respondents reflected on the MT's limited willingness to change:

> *"I think the MT is willing to introduce a D&I policy, as long as it doesn't require too much effort."* (P2)
> *"Trying to introduce change or something new can be difficult because of the MT's inflexible way of thinking."* (P13)

A member of the MT themselves acknowledged the absence of urgency:

> *"It's not like we say, 'let's put this on the agenda and spend an hour discussing it.' That's just not in our nature. It doesn't have a high priority, because we don't feel, at least I don't, that we're missing out on much."* (P3)

Others expressed more critical perspectives:

> *"A lot of people want to do something with D&I, and some already are, but if there's one group doing nothing, it's the MT."* (P5)
> *"There's nothing in our company policy pillars like 'We want to be an inclusive company' or 'We aim to reflect society.' No, that's not a goal at all."* (P8)
> *"What are they doing with this D&I story? Nothing. I don't see any of it. I have no idea if this is even on their minds."* (P9)

Together, these findings reflect various forms of resistance toward D&I, including doubts about its legitimacy, perceptions of overemphasis, and a perceived lack of leadership commitment. It is interesting to see that the framing of D&I as conflicting with competence-based selection and concerns about the topic being exaggerated were predominantly expressed by male participants. These perspectives illustrate how existing organizational norms, particularly among members of the dominant group of the organization, can shape scepticism and resistance.

4.1.3 Dismissive Attitude towards D&I

A third form of resistance expressed by participants was not rooted in scepticism or discomfort, but in the belief that D&I efforts are unnecessary or redundant. Several male employees perceived the current situation as sufficiently inclusive or assumed that diversity would emerge naturally over time without intervention. These responses were exclusively made by male participants.

Several respondents **perceived D&I as sufficient in their direct work environment**. These participants did not recognize inclusion as a challenge or point of concern:

> *"It seems to be working fine. It's never really been an issue."* (P6)
> *"I wouldn't know of any problems. For me, things are going fine."* (P15)

These statements were all made by male participants, most of whom work in or supervise teams in lower organizational layers. Their perception that D&I is either sufficiently addressed or not relevant may be influenced by a broader demographic diversity in lower organizational levels as compared to (upper) management.

Some respondents demonstrated a sense of **indifference or confidence that D&I would emerge naturally**, as one participant put it:

> *"I just think it'll work itself out. We're all just people, and we don't need policies or instructions for that."* (P4)

Others believe that outcomes in career advancement and hiring decisions are based solely on ability or performance, downplaying the need for formal D&I practices.

> *"If people are good at what they do, they'll end up where they belong."* (P5)
> *"When people say, 'There aren't enough women in management,' I find that a bit difficult. I think if you're good enough, also as a woman, you'll get there."* (P11)

These statements suggest a belief in a self-regulating system where fairness and inclusion happen naturally. From this perspective, D&I interventions are seen as unnecessary, based upon the belief that competence will be prioritized without the need for formal policies or support.

Taken together, these statements illustrate a passive or dismissive attitude toward D&I, either because participants do not experience problems themselves or assume that fairness is already integrated in organizational practices.

4.1.4 Perceived Absence of Organizational Support

The final theme within this dimension concerns employees' perceptions that the organization lacks visible structures, policies, or tools to support D&I. While this absence was not always viewed critically, it did signal a perceived disconnect between expectations and the available support in practice.

Several respondents observed that there is **no clear D&I policy, training, or guidance available** within the organization. These participants described D&I as absent from formal processes or management development efforts:

> *"As a manager, it's not like you get some kind of training or toolkit. Like: what do you need as a manager, and how can we, as an organization, help you build a diverse team?"* (P1)
> *"No, I wouldn't really dare to say there's an actual policy for that."* (P6)
> *"No, I don't think we have a policy. I hope we act accordingly, but that's more a matter of conscience."* (P5)

In contrast to the objective observations above, other participants expressed surprise or disbelief that **no formal strategy appeared to be in place**. These respondents expected that a company of this size and complexity would have clear policies and guidelines:

> *"I can't imagine that, being such a large organization, you don't have a formal D&I policy. At least, I never saw one."* (P1)
> *"Honestly, I would expect that something like that exists."* (P16)

Beyond the lack of formal policies and strategies, several participants expressed their doubts about the sincerity of existing initiatives. These participants **perceived D&I initiatives as symbolic**, suggesting that organizational actions were driven by legal compliance rather than genuine commitment. As respondents critically noted:

> *"If I say we must do this because of the law, then they will say: 'Okay, then we'll do it.'" (P1).*
> *"I think there is an ambition to do something with D&I, and I believe there are people putting in a lot of effort. But whether it's actually being implemented, I'm not so sure." (P2).*

This perceived disconnection between intentions and outcomes was further emphasized by participants who questioned how D&I goals were positioned within the organization:

> *"It often gets tucked away as something like: 'Yes, this is also one of the sub-goals we want to achieve this year.' But whether it's genuinely prioritized alongside other main goals, I*

still have my doubts. So, I'm not sure if they're really tackling it seriously, or just saying, 'Yes, we're working on it.' But what exactly are they working on?" (P7)

"We're always eager to start something. But do we follow through and stand behind it? We start little projects, but they tend to fizzle out. So, you end up thinking: take a real stand." (P9)

Generational tensions were also mentioned by participants; they were mentioned as challenges arising from different values and expectations between generations. As participants described:

"You can tell there's a significant difference between generations. I can handle the fact that things are changing, but I notice that the younger generation tends to put work in third place, and leisure comes first." (P11)

These differences result in different attitudes and expectations from each other, which can sometimes result in tensions and misunderstandings between different generations. This is illustrated by participants with the following statements:

"The younger generation just says: 'I work 40 hours and then I go home.' While the older generation says, 'I care about the company, I make sure the job is done, no matter what.' And that causes tension sometimes." (Pilot)

"People in their twenties approach life differently than people in their sixties, and that can clash." (P13)

These generational tensions were acknowledged by the participants, and some of them reflected on the organization's previous efforts to address such tensions through a generational awareness training. Interestingly, several participants recalled that a generational awareness training had been offered in the organization years ago. Although it was perceived as a basic and brief awareness training about generational differences, it was generally viewed as meaningful and effective. One participant did not attend the session but heard about it from colleagues:

"I know there was a training once, I didn't attend as I was not working here yet, but I heard it was about generational differences. It was meant to create awareness about the differences between generations. I think if it were offered now, quite a few people would be interested." (P1)

Another participant who did participate reflected positively on its value:

"I'd do it again immediately. I've already mentioned it before. It was only a couple of hours, but with examples, it helped you understand why people do what they do. If I could pick one training to bring back, this would be it." (P5)

These reflections suggest a **missed opportunity to maintain initiated D&I efforts, as the training is no longer offered** despite the recognized relevance by both managers and employees.

Taken together, these responses suggest that the perceived absence of formal D&I structures creates confusion about the organization's commitment and direction. The added concern that existing D&I initiatives are symbolic supports this disconnect. Even participants who did not express strong opinions on D&I seemed to expect a more visible or structured approach. The lack of awareness about any concrete policies or tools highlights a gap between assumed expectations and organizational communication.

4.2 Identity and Inclusion at Work

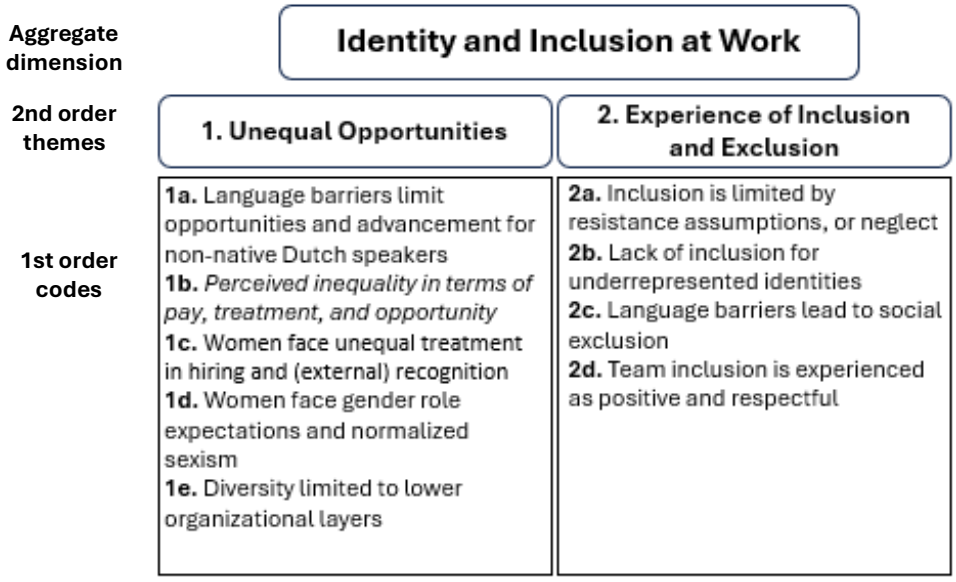


Figure 2: Second aggregate dimension

Note. *Italic* concepts are exclusively based on statements made by participants who identified with minority groups, such as women, non-Dutch participants, and individuals with underrepresented gender or sexual identities within the organization.

The second aggregate dimension explores how employees perceive their sense of inclusion related to their identity within the organizational environment. Rather than focusing only on the presence or absence of D&I policies, this dimension examines how inclusion unfolds in practice and how employees perceive their sense of belonging within the organization. The findings reveal that inclusion is not evenly experienced across identities; it is shaped by identity-based aspects,

informal norms, and the degree of active support provided by the organization. This dimension is structured around three second-order themes: unequal opportunities, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and the perceived need for more meaningful D&I support.

4.2.1 Unequal Opportunities

The first theme within this dimension highlights how employees perceive unequal access to opportunities, resources, and advancement. These perceptions are shaped by interactions with colleagues and managers, norms around language and competence, and internal policies such as hiring and promotion practices. This theme sheds light on the everyday processes through which inclusion is either facilitated or obstructed.

A repeated concern among non-native Dutch speakers was that **language skills influenced access to opportunity**. It is important to note that complete exclusion from roles based on language was mostly linked to practical and safety constraints, such as the unavailability of work instructions in English. As one manager observed:

> *"Sometimes we exclude people based on their level of language proficiency."* (P3).

Besides this legitimate reasoning of exclusion, another participant described how language barriers limited access to new roles within the organization, even when relevant skills were present. In this case, the respondent felt that the restriction was unjustified:

> *"You start to see what you're capable of, 'I could do that, and that too', but then they say you don't have the right diploma, or enough experience. I'm not even talking about a management position, just switching departments. And then they tell you: 'You need to improve your Dutch first.' I think that's unfair. (...) I can do it. I just never received that chance."* (P14).

The consequences of these restrictions were also recognized in relation to contract security and career progression:

> *"It took me a long time to get a fixed contract. I kept being moved from agency to agency because they "didn't want to lose me", but the organization wouldn't offer me a fixed contract because they said my Dutch wasn't good enough."* (P14).

While the organization considered the employee valuable enough to keep through temporary contracts, there was an unwillingness to offer a fixed contract due to language limitations. This raises some doubts about the legitimacy of this requirement, since the employee has demonstrated the ability to perform.

Beyond language, participants also pointed to **inconsistencies in pay, treatment, and receiving opportunities**. These perceptions of inequality were not only grounded in outcomes (e.g., salary) but also in the reasoning behind them. All the statements made in this first order code were perceived by minority groups. One respondent opened up about being treated unfairly in terms of monetary rewards:

> *"It's about salary and bonuses; I get treated unfairly compared to my direct colleagues."* (P1).

A similar experience was shared by another respondent who discovered they earned less than colleagues they had trained:

> *"We talk about human rights and how everyone's equal, that women shouldn't be treated differently than men. But I asked my colleagues what they earn, some of them told me, and I found out they were paid more than me. I've worked here for nine years, and I even trained those new hires."* (P14).

Another statement was made by a participant who also perceived inconsistencies in certain minority groups receiving opportunities, in this case, women:

> *"I've been here for almost five years, and I've only seen one woman make a promotion since I joined. Then I thought, oh, so it is possible."* (P9)

Female employees also experience barriers to recognition and acceptance, both internally and externally. Gender-based barriers were not perceived as direct exclusion, but became visible in interactions, how women were approached, taken seriously, or judged compared to male colleagues. One manager recalled the unequal treatment a female colleague received from suppliers:

> *"We often have to convince the male clients with a woman in my team, and I do recognize the challenge she faces in this field. Some suppliers brush her off, and when I call, they pick up right away. When she asks something, it takes two weeks. When I ask, we're scheduled within half an hour. Then I confront the supplier and say: 'What's going on? Why don't you respond to her? I don't want to do her job for her. She's qualified and follows up. So why don't you answer her?'"* (P9)

Another participant highlighted how female candidates were treated with relatively more hesitance in hiring decisions than male candidates:

> *"I've noticed that during interviews, people are more hesitant when it's a woman. I can think of two cases where I was the deciding factor to hire the woman, and both women are doing great. I didn't understand the hesitation. 'Oh, she seems a bit insecure.' So what? That doesn't mean she's not technically capable."* (P10)

A female respondent added:

> *"No, but I've got a thick skin, but that's just how it is. No, I've never had trouble with it. But I do think as a woman, you need to be able to stand your ground among the men. If you can't handle a joke or some teasing, then I don't think this is the right place for you. Sure, we have a few bullies around, but they don't bother me."* (P13)

Another set of responses revealed how **gendered expectations continue to shape assumptions about work roles** and competencies. Several participants described women as better suited for repetitive or detailed tasks, often portraying this as a natural distinction. These statements, often framed as compliments, reveal how gendered assumptions are normalized and upheld. As one respondent noted:

> *"Well, many of the tasks here are repetitive. You basically need to switch off your brain and just plan. Women tend to be better at that. Sounds silly, but men are usually like: 'Can I do something more ambitious?'"* (P11)

Others made similar generalizations when discussing team composition:

> *"I have a lot of repetitive jobs in my team, and you don't always need a diploma for them. Maybe that's why I have more women in my team, because women, in my experience, are always very precise when it comes to repetitive work. That's just something they're really good at."* (P12)
>
> *"We have one small team of [department]. That's traditionally women. They're good at unpacking, detailed work, stuff like that."* (P6)

While these comments were often made descriptively or appreciatively, they reflect underlying gender role expectations regarding task suitability. Linking specific skills or work styles to women may contribute to assumptions about role division. This can influence how responsibilities and advancement opportunities are divided.

Finally, multiple respondents noted that **diversity in the organization tends to be concentrated in the lower layers** of the organization, with management being predominantly homogenous, typically Dutch men from Generation X. The lack of representation affects how employees

perceive recognition and career advancement opportunities, especially when management continues to reflect a narrow image of who belongs at the top. One participant expressed this concern:

> *"If you look at the management at COMPANY X, it's all white men. So, if you don't see yourself reflected there, do they really see you? Do they recognize your potential? These are all things that matter. I don't think COMPANY X has done very well on that front. Otherwise, the workforce would be different right now. On the work floor, you see more diversity than in the office or in management."* (P10)

Others expressed similar observations:

> *"As you move up toward management, it definitely gets less diverse. Mainly in terms of gender, it's mostly men, either working beside me and above me in different management layers."* (P12)
>
> *"Management is definitely less diverse. It's not like what I see on the work floor."* (P13)

Together, these findings illustrate that unequal opportunities are not only the result of formal decisions, but also emerge through informal influence, interpretation and stereotyping. The limited representation of women and minorities in management, combined with normalized ideas about gender roles, shows how certain mechanisms (or lack thereof) result in employees experiencing unequal opportunities in career development and recognition.

4.2.2 Experience of Inclusion and Exclusion

The second theme within this dimension focuses on how employees experience inclusion and exclusion in their work environment. These experiences are not shaped by a formal policy, but by the social dynamics, habits, and assumptions. They reflect how informal workplace norms and unspoken expectations shape whether people feel integrated or left out.

Participants highlighted how **inclusion can be limited by assumptions or a lack of active engagement**. One respondent pointed out that while women may be expected to feel included, this is never explicitly asked:

> *"They just assume you feel like included as a woman here. But no one ever asks whether you actually do."* (P2)

Others shared experiences where inclusion was perceived as secondary or even met with resistance. Two managers made the following statements, reflecting their opinion and attitude of inclusion towards minority groups:

> *"But the same goes for women. We're a male-dominated organization. Then someone says, 'Don't we need to arrange something for women who just had a baby?' Oh my god, now we need a lactation room. What kind of nonsense is this? But yes, it does end up being arranged."* (P3)
>
> *"I always say: I don't mind what someone believes, as long as I don't get bothered by it. And I mean that. I don't want any trouble. I'm Roman Catholic, and nobody has to be bothered by that. But I also don't want to be bothered by people of other religions walking around the factory, and we have a few of them."* (P5)

One participant reflected on the often-unseen advantages of being part of the dominant group, shedding light on how these norms and values unfold and impact the perception of inclusion across different identity groups:

> *"I think many people, especially white men, underestimate how the system is built to make things easier for them. We could do more to make things easier for others. If I include myself in that group, I benefit from the privilege, and I know that."* (P10)

Beyond generational tensions and different views on inclusion, several participants shared experiences that reflect more **identity-specific barriers to feeling included**. Some participants reflected on how individuals with underrepresented identities, such as gender-diverse, LGBTQ+, or international backgrounds, were not always accepted or supported within the broader organization. One manager described how a transgender colleague faced barriers to inclusion due to the discomfort of coworkers:

> *"I hired a colleague who was born as a man and now identifies as a woman. To be honest, when I hired her, I didn't even know. She never brought it up, and I hadn't really looked into it. I just thought she was the right person for the vacancy I needed to fill. But then some colleagues started digging around, looking things up online, and found out about it. And suddenly they had a problem with it. I thought, why? Is she not doing her job well? Is she being difficult? No, nothing like that. But still, they found it strange or had a hard time working with her or something like that."* (P6)

Other participants described holding back parts of their identity out of fear of judgment, resulting in not feeling entirely accepted and included:

> *"In the beginning, I never told anyone I had a male partner. I received some comments that made me think, hmm... But I was still young and unsure of myself. Now I say, 'my*

boyfriend,' and everyone knows. I don't hear those things anymore, but I heard plenty before I was open about my sexuality. And I thought, is that really necessary?" (P10)

"But then there's my queer side, that basically goes unseen, and I don't know if there's even space for it here. I don't get the sense that the company knows what to do with employees like this. Yet those are exactly the people you want to attract. And then they end up doing nothing. There are large groups of people on the neurodiverse spectrum within the technical demographic you're trying to reach, and those are often the people who have thought about gender and sexuality." (P10)

Also, respondents from the dominant group recognize there are barriers for people who belong to minority groups, due to the organizational culture shaped by Dutch norms:

"Our company just isn't there yet. We're a Dutch company, we communicate in Dutch, with Dutch values. That makes it hard for international colleagues or people from other backgrounds to feel at home or function well." (Pilot)

In addition to barriers non-Dutch speakers face in terms of career advancement, **language barriers were also recognized as a source of social exclusion**. One participant linked language to a lack of belonging within the organization:

"I can imagine that non-native speakers don't always feel fully included here." (P12)

These barriers were also described in more personal terms by a respondent who had experienced them directly:

"At first, I really struggled with the language barrier. It wasn't always easy; I couldn't always understand what people meant, especially with jokes and social interactions. That automatically puts you a bit on the outside. Everyone's laughing at a joke, and you're just sitting there like, 'Okay…' because you don't get it. You're left with question marks in your head. Error." (P14)

Despite these challenges, many participants **described their teams as inclusive**, supportive, and respectful. Two respondents stated:

"I think we have a great team, very open, and we can talk about everything." (P1)

"In our department, I think we can say anything. There's a good atmosphere." (P7)

One participant gave an example of how his team accommodated to colleagues' religious needs, creating an inclusive culture where everyone is accepted and valued:

"Someone said, 'We're doing Ramadan, can we take our break later?' I said sure, as long as we all take our break at the same time, that's no problem. It's important for them, and it doesn't bother anyone else. So, we take our break a bit later altogether. It's about respect for each other, and for each other's religion." (P15)

These findings underscore that inclusion is not experienced as a policy-driven outcome but as a result of daily interactions, social norms, and team culture. Inclusion was often interpreted as a matter of fairness and respect rather than an organizational effort. This suggests that inclusion within the organization is largely informal and dependent on the behaviour and attitudes of direct colleagues and managers rather than on organizational practices. This dependence on informal dynamics is possibly caused by the absence of formal organizational practices to support inclusion.

4.3 Perceived Job Flourishing

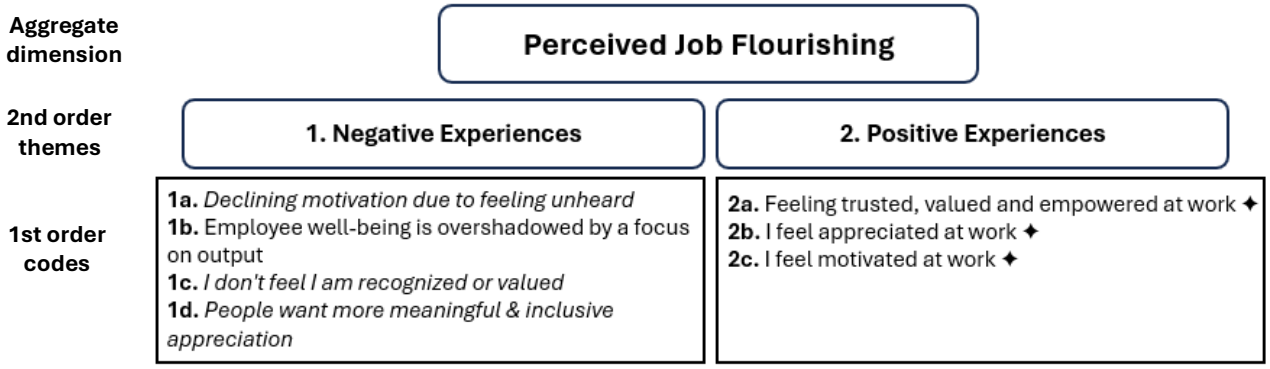


Figure 3: Third aggregate dimension

Note. Concepts marked with the symbol ✦ are based on statements made predominantly by male participants. *Italic* concepts are exclusively based on statements made by participants who identified with minority groups, such as women, non-Dutch participants, and individuals with underrepresented gender or sexual identities within the organization.

The third aggregate dimension focuses on how employees perceive the outcomes of their work experience in relation to D&I, particularly in terms of motivation, well-being, and professional growth. It highlights perceptions related to feeling valued, recognized, and able to contribute meaningfully, as well as how organizational barriers may hinder these outcomes. The findings are structured around two second-order themes: negative experiences and positive experiences.

4.3.1 Negative Experiences

This theme captures the barriers that hinder employees from flourishing in their work. These reflections reveal how unmet expectations, limited recognition, and a lack of genuine support can undermine motivation, well-being, and a sense of personal value. Important to note, the personal negative experiences in this theme were raised exclusively by participants from minority groups, including women, non-Dutch employees, and those identifying with non-normative gender or sexual identities.

Some participants described a **decline in motivation** resulting from the feeling that their input was no longer valued or acted upon. In some cases, this led respondents to disengage:

> *"Right now, if I want to implement something new, it's just not the right time. I feel like whatever I bring up won't matter. So, I've stopped trying."* (P1)

Another participant, after years in the same role, expressed frustration at not feeling heard about the desire to do something else within the company:

> *"Later, I discussed my desires to do something new with my supervisor again, 'Yes, let's keep our eyes open and see what opportunities come up. And then you can just go there'. But in the meantime, I've been in the same role for almost nine years. Maybe it's bad timing, or maybe it's the language barrier, or the diplomas they say you need... But still, it bothers me. I'm tired of it. There's burnout, but there's also boreout. And that's the phase I'm in now, boreout"* (P14)

Another set of concerns focused on a perceived lack of care for employee well-being, especially when **productivity was prioritized over employee well-being**. One respondent noted that action was only taken when product quality declined, not when employees suffered bad working conditions after repeatedly pointing it out to the management:

> *"Even when we said, 'This product doesn't do well in the cold, it oxidizes,' it didn't matter. Only when the oxidation was visible a year later, they said, 'Oh, maybe it is too cold.' Not because people were cold and getting sick, but because the product became damaged."* (P6)

This sense of products being prioritized over the employees was named by other participants as well:

> *"Sometimes I wonder, are we just numbers? As long as the product gets delivered."* (P7)

> *"This is an environment focused on output. If you think about production as the chicken and the golden egg, we only focus on the golden eggs. We don't take care of the chicken."* (P9)

A **lack of recognition** was also frequently raised. Participants described that they don't feel appreciated by their managers, either by it being reflected in actions, verbal expression, or in terms of salary:

> *"Appreciation is expressed, but when actual decisions are made, I don't feel it. That's difficult. Right now, I don't feel valued."* (P1)
> *"At one point, the workload was so high that we just hired anyone. Some of them spent weekends in jail and worked for us during the week. They got higher wages than I did, even though I've been here for years and trained the new people. And then they turned out to be the bad apples. So, where's the appreciation in that?"* (P14)

Finally, participants expressed **a desire for more inclusive and meaningful appreciation**, which should be reflected in an appreciative company culture:

> *"If you're not comfortable, you should be able to say so and be taken seriously. But that opportunity isn't always there."* (P1)
> *"You don't have to say 'good job' every day, because we won't take it seriously then. But every now and then, if you just say to one of us, 'Nice work, well done', that's such a small thing. But it can be so meaningful."* (P13)

Together, these experiences highlight how perceived neglect, limited advancement opportunities, and a lack of recognition can negatively impact employees' sense of engagement and well-being. While the examples are diverse, they share a common thread of feeling unseen or undervalued in the workplace.

4.3.2 Positive Experiences

This theme captures how employees positively experience their work and workplace, highlighting factors that contribute to a sense of appreciation, motivation, and professional growth. While these responses contrast with the previous theme, they are equally relevant for understanding the output side of the IPO framework: the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as flourishing. Important to note, statements within this theme were made predominantly by male participants (✦), reflecting how experiences of recognition and empowerment may be unevenly distributed.

Several participants described **feeling trusted and empowered** in their roles. This was mainly based on receiving freedom and autonomy in their work, being offered opportunities and responsibilities:

> *"I'm given a lot of freedom to plan my own work and shape how I approach it. My manager gives me plenty of space."* (P6)
> *"My experience is acknowledged by helping me take the next step. I keep getting trainings and new projects that help me improve in my work."* (P10)

Respondents also expressed **feeling appreciated**; these forms of appreciation ranged from verbal recognition to financial bonuses:

> *"I feel fairly appreciated. I've even received a bonus now and then, things like that."* (P4)
> *"In general, people listen to what I say and like involving me in new projects. I also receive financial bonuses, and that's just how a company shows that your work is valued. It means they've identified me as someone who contributes"* (P10)

A final set of responses emphasized how participants **experience their motivation** at work, citing enjoyment and pride in their work:

> *"I'd rate my motivation an eight, definitely."* (P3)
> *"I'm always motivated. There's never a day I think, 'Ugh, work.'"* (P7)

These accounts offer insight into the organizational factors that support motivation, appreciation, and professional growth. While they cannot be generalized to all employees, they demonstrate the conditions under which employees report a strong sense of value, purpose, and engagement.

4.4 Collective Recognition of the Need for D&I

While the previous subchapters presented second-order themes that belonged to the three aggregate dimensions, this second-order theme stood apart from the others. This theme did not reflect a direct experience of D&I-related practices or processes, but a broader view on the role and future of D&I within the organization. Participants of both the dominant group and minority groups emphasized the importance of D&I as a strategic and ethical priority, regardless of the extent to which they felt included. This theme is presented outside the dimensions, because it was not considered as a perception of current practices, a lived process, or an experienced outcome related to job flourishing. Instead, it presents a reflection on what is needed moving forward, one that calls for structural change.

This theme captures how employees perceive the absence of meaningful D&I support as a gap in the organization's development. While earlier themes focused on existing barriers and mixed experiences, here participants reflect on how the lack of formal D&I efforts shapes their expectations and creates urgency for more integrated and sustainable approaches to inclusion. These perspectives point to a growing view of D&I as not only an ethical or social concern but a necessary aspect of long-term organizational success and workforce sustainability.

Several participants highlighted that **D&I is important for people and performance**, creating an understanding between individuals, but also significantly contributing to broader organizational success:

> *"I think D&I creates more understanding between people, if it receives more attention."* (P1)
>
> *"It's important for a company's success. There's a reason we say there should be a mixed workforce. Many studies show that when men and women are well balanced, you tend to get much better decisions overall."* (P2)

The importance of D&I is further reinforced by a participant, emphasizing how you need an inclusive and collaborative environment to perform well as a team and organization:

> *"I think it's really important. We're all individuals, with different characters, backgrounds, sexualities. But we have to work together, and that's what makes a team."* (P14)

Beyond expressing the value of D&I, participants also **emphasized the desire for structure, guidance, and action** to ensure progress. Several participants felt that D&I should be treated as a serious topic supported by clear policies:

> *"That's where it starts, by taking guidelines and procedures seriously to make inclusion happen."* (P1)

Others noted the demographic shift in the labour market, in terms of the aging workforce and globalization. Forcing the organization to take concrete action as the pool of talent shrinks and changes:

> *"If we want to remain part of the labour market, it's not just about men and women, it's also about being attractive to people from other nationalities."* (P2)
>
> *"You can't just do nothing anymore. I understand that younger generations expect more from us, and we'll have to move with that."* (P5)

Different respondents supported these concerns with similar statements, but also stressed D&I as crucial to keep up with labour market developments, and to attract and retain talent in an increasingly competitive environment:

> *"If we want to be a healthy and successful company in the future, then we need to engage with this topic. I say 'need to', but I also think we should want to. It's part of reality, we shouldn't look away from it, we should embrace it."* (P8)
>
> *"We have to do this because society is demanding it. We're short on people; we need to do more with fewer hands. And the right people don't always fit the traditional image. If you want to open up new opportunities, you have to invest in making women feel accepted in the technical world."* (P9)

Together, these reflections illustrate that employees not only value D&I as a guiding principle but increasingly see it as a strategic imperative. To move beyond symbolic intentions, they call for more structured, long-term efforts that integrate D&I into the organization and future workforce strategy.

5. Discussion

This chapter reflects on the main findings presented in the results chapter by connecting them to the theoretical framework and existing literature. The aim is to interpret how employees and managers in a high-tech manufacturing organization perceive the role of D&I practices in stimulating job flourishing. Although the data structure was developed inductively, the findings show a clear match with the IPO framework introduced in the theoretical framework. Figure 4 visualizes how perceptions of D&I policies and practices in place, or lack thereof, function as the input. These inputs shape inclusion experiences at work. The way the input mechanisms unfold in practice and influence the perception of inclusion is considered the process. The process influences whether people feel they are flourishing in their job; this is ultimately labelled as the output. What was interesting to see was that these outcomes were not evenly distributed: participants who aligned with the dominant group of the organization, typically Dutch males, shared solely positive experiences. While those in minority positions more often perceived exclusion, unequal opportunities, and a lack of recognition.

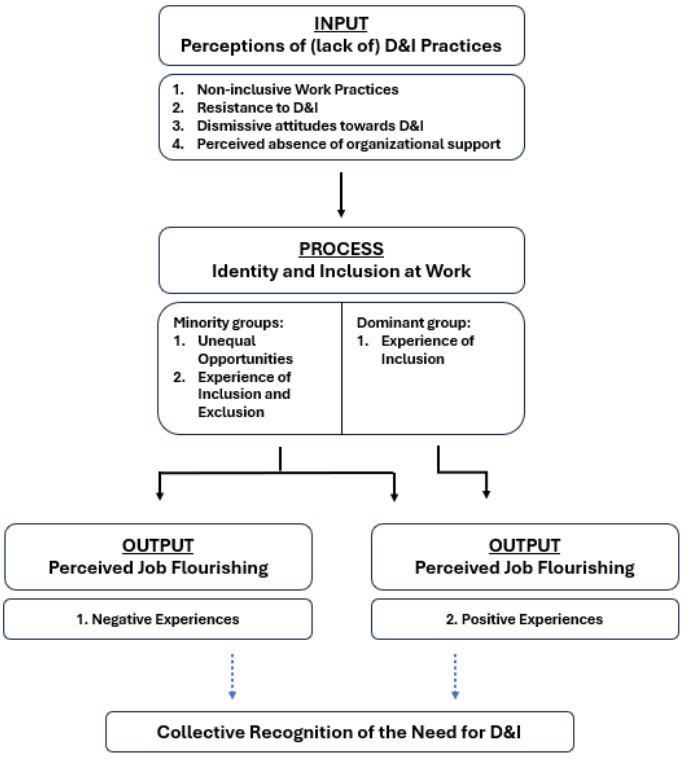


Figure 4: Visualization of findings

Interesting to note, whereas the distinction in hierarchical levels was made in the research question to evaluate possible different perceptions between managers and employees, this was ultimately not supported by the findings. Hierarchical levels were not significantly connected to

the uneven distribution of outcomes. Despite the differences in perception, participants across both groups (dominant and minority) voiced a shared call for more structured and long-term D&I efforts. This is shown in the final box of the model and reflects a broader awareness that current efforts are not yet sufficient.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This subchapter presents the theoretical implications of the findings, structured according to three key contributions. First, the study offers an inductive insight that emerged from the data: perceived inclusion is shaped by being part (or not) of the dominant group, with an emphasis on gender instead of the expected hierarchical status. Second, the study contributes to the growing literature on individual-level D&I outcomes by applying the IPO framework to explore how perceptions of D&I practices influence job flourishing. Third, the findings add qualitative insights to an underexplored context, high-tech manufacturing in the Netherlands.

5.1.1 Inductive Insight: The Role of Gender in Perceptions of Inclusion

Existing literature suggests that hierarchical position shapes how individuals perceive D&I practices, based on differences in access to power, resources, and decision-making authority (Ali & Konrad, 2017). Similarly, Dunger (2025) found in a quantitative study that individuals in higher hierarchical positions reported significantly more positive perceptions of organizational culture than those in lower positions, suggesting that hierarchy plays a determining role in shaping perceived inclusion. It is therefore assumed that managers interpret D&I practices differently from employees in lower organizational roles. This assumption also informed the research design of this study, which explicitly included participants across hierarchical layers and specified the hierarchical difference in the research question. However, the findings of this thesis contradict the literature. Instead of hierarchical position, gender turned out to be a more dominant predictor of perceived inclusion. The findings showed that male participants consistently responded to feel included and described D&I as sufficient, regardless of their hierarchical position. At the same time, the findings showed that female participants, including those in management positions, shared experiences of exclusion, unequal access to opportunity, and having to prove their credibility. These findings contradict the assumption that hierarchy determines perceived inclusion and align more closely with research done by Shore et al. (2010). They argue that gender was the only consistent factor linked to perceived exclusion, with women reporting less access to decision-making and information than men. The findings of this thesis reflect this pattern: male participants, regardless of job level, consistently perceived the workplace as inclusive, while female participants reported exclusion, unequal opportunities, and

barriers to recognition. This suggests that in practice, inclusion remains tied to gendered expectations, and that being male aligns more naturally with perceived belonging in the organizational culture. As such, this study provides an inductive insight: gender overrules hierarchy in shaping how D&I is perceived and experienced in practice. Recent research supports these findings; other studies showed that gendered expectations continue to influence how competence is evaluated within organizations. For instance, women in managerial roles often say they need to prove their credibility, while their male colleagues in similar roles are more easily accepted as credible (Briggs et al., 2023). Furthermore, women are more likely to have their competence questioned or their contributions downplayed, not because of their job level, but due to assumptions connected to gender. This reflects an underlying pattern in which authority does not guarantee recognition and credibility, and management roles do not protect women from gender-based exclusion or doubt. Men, particularly those belonging to the dominant majority, are more often assumed to be competent by default, regardless of their place in the organizational structure (Briggs et al., 2023). Similarly, recent research also shows that women are perceived as persuasive only when their expertise is made visibly clear, for example, through credentials or senior titles. This highlights a deeper underlying inequality: women must exceed expectations or display clear signals of authority to gain the same level of recognition men receive naturally (Sievertsen & Smith, 2025). These findings reinforce the conclusion that perceptions of inclusion are deeply rooted in gender identity and thus overrule hierarchical positions. Additionally, it shows and confirms that gender continues to influence workplace perceptions in crucial and determining ways.

These different perspectives in the literature can be explained through differences in research approaches, cultures, and sectoral contexts. For example, Ali and Konrad (2017) adopt a systems-level view, framing D&I effectiveness as dependent on structural factors such as access to power, strategic levers, and role-based authority. Their model is rooted in North American corporate contexts. Similarly, Dunger (2025) found that employees in higher organizational positions in Germany perceived workplace culture more positively. It might be interesting for future research to explore how individuals respond to hierarchy dynamics across national contexts, as these dynamics may influence the extent to which hierarchical position shapes perceptions of inclusion. By contrast, Briggs et al. (2023); Shore et al. (2010); Sievertsen and Smith (2025) approach inclusion from an interpersonal and identity-based perspective, emphasizing that inclusion is shaped through informal norms, assumptions, and biases, especially those related to gender. These studies were conducted in different countries and sectors, which suggests that gender-based patterns of inclusion may be more universal and less

tied to formal organizational structures. This thesis, situated in the Dutch high-tech manufacturing sector, contributes to this growing body of work by showing that hierarchical job level does not insulate individuals from exclusion. Instead, the findings suggest that gender remains a more determining factor in shaping how inclusion is perceived.

5.1.2 D&I and Job Flourishing: Insights from the IPO Framework

This study contributes to the current literature that aims to understand how D&I practices shape outcomes at the individual level. Even though previous studies have highlighted the importance of inclusion for well-being and engagement, the mechanisms through which D&I practices create value for individuals remain underexplored (Gerpott & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2015; Randel, 2023; Roberson, 2019). By applying the IPO framework to this research, this study provides insights into the processes that mediate the relationship between D&I inputs and individual-level outcomes, specifically job flourishing. More specifically, the findings indicate that formal D&I practices, such as policies or initiatives, were often experienced as symbolic, inconsistent, or absent. Resulting in inclusion being influenced and created by informal mechanisms, such as team culture, language standards, and company culture, instead of being organized through formal policies. These informal mechanisms, especially when they were misaligned with certain employee identities, undermined individual experiences of inclusion. Participants who belonged to minority groups, such as women or non-Dutch employees, frequently mentioned limited recognition or unequal access to opportunities. This negatively impacted their ability to flourish at work. However, the participants who belonged to the dominant group, white male participants, did not report these unequal opportunities or limited recognition. This can be seen in the outcomes where the dominant group reported positively in terms of job flourishing. These results reinforce the call in the literature to move beyond the input–output logic and examine the processes through which inclusion is psychologically and socially experienced (Randel, 2023; Roberson, 2019). The use of job flourishing as an outcome contributes to this perspective by capturing both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being at work (A'yuninnisa et al., 2023; Hori et al., 2019). Whereas previous studies often emphasized behavioural indicators such as engagement or job satisfaction (Leuhery et al., 2024), this study emphasizes how D&I practices, or the lack thereof, impact identity-based experiences of belonging and recognition at work. In doing so, this research extends the IPO framework by empirically demonstrating that perceptions are more than descriptive of inclusion outcomes, but they are part of the process that shapes them. SIT helps explain why the perceptions differ; participants who identified with the dominant group experienced fewer psychological barriers and interpreted the absence of formal D&I structures as unproblematic. In contrast, those who did not identify with the dominant group were more

likely to feel unsupported. Taken together, this study elaborates on the current understanding of how D&I practices influence psychological well-being by showing that process-level mechanisms play a major role in enabling or limiting job flourishing. It answers the call to focus on individual-level outcomes in D&I research and emphasizes the importance of perceived inclusion as a core mechanism of organizational impact.

5.1.3 D&I in Dutch High-Tech Manufacturing

This study adds to the limited amount of research on D&I within the Dutch high-tech manufacturing sector. Existing literature highlights challenges in this sector, such as male-dominated workplace cultures, limited inclusivity, and a general lack of effective and genuine D&I implementation compared to other European countries (Heydari et al., 2024; Tans, 2023). This research reinforces such findings through the perceptions of individuals within a large Dutch high-tech manufacturing organization. It reveals that formal D&I efforts remain underdeveloped, often perceived as symbolic or absent, and that inclusion is largely dependent on informal team-level dynamics rather than coordinated through a formal policy. Particularly, individuals from minority groups described language barriers, unequal opportunities, and a lack of organizational D&I support, confirming the sector-wide patterns identified by Heydari et al. (2024) and Luhr (2025). At the same time, this study provides new insights into how these barriers and patterns are interpreted by individuals. Participants often expressed a belief that a low diversity in their company is justifiable due to the specific demographic they work in, and was experienced as sufficient. All participants acknowledged that formal D&I efforts were limited or absent, where participants who belong to the dominant group perceived this as acceptable or unproblematic. The shared belief was that low diversity within the company was either inevitable due to the demographic characteristics of the sector or not an issue that requires intervention. This aligns with the findings of Luhr (2025), where companies often justify a lack of D&I progress by comparing themselves to broader sectoral norms or by redefining diversity in narrow terms, such as educational background, making them seem more diverse. This study provides new insight into how these barriers and patterns are interpreted differently across individuals. The normalization of minimal D&I efforts contributes to inaction and may limit meaningful change. By combining sector-specific insights with qualitative data on how inclusion is perceived, this thesis elaborates on previous research by illustrating how the Dutch high-tech context reinforces identity-based barriers. The study responds to calls for more context-sensitive research on D&I implementation and its consequences for individual well-being and organizational resilience (Heydari et al., 2024; Tans, 2023).

5.2 Practical implications

The findings of this study highlight several areas where practical improvements can be made in companies in the high-tech manufacturing sector to create a more inclusive work environment where all individuals are stimulated to flourish. First, symbolic D&I efforts are unlikely to foster real inclusion if they are not integrated within the broader organizational strategy. The findings of this thesis repeatedly pointed out a call for more structural, meaningful efforts that go beyond surface-level representation. Participants mentioned initiatives and projects being started, but they "tend to fizzle out", whereas they expressed the need for management to take a stance and see it through. To avoid this, the MT should clearly position itself and the organization: D&I should be actively positioned as a core organizational value, one that is communicated, supported, and upheld at all levels of the company. This means shifting to proactive D&I management. Rather than responding to issues when they arise, the organization needs to articulate what it stands for, who is included, and how this will be achieved. Developing a formal D&I policy, no matter how long, would mark an important first step. This policy should go beyond legal compliance or general statements of intention and should include clear guidelines and procedures for creating inclusion across identity groups. It should acknowledge how factors like language, informal norms, and group dynamics shape the employee experience. In addition to formalizing a policy, the findings show a lack of awareness, particularly in management, whereas lower management levels showed more open-minded attitudes towards D&I suggestions as opposed to the MT. Awareness or bias training could help address the blind spot of the dominant group, pointed out by the data. The results revealed a willingness of individuals to participate in generational awareness trainings; similar trainings can be developed around different themes, such as gender or nationality, depending on company-specific needs. For D&I to be more than a checklist and legal compliance, it needs to be linked to everyday behaviour and team dynamics. The findings show that minority employees primarily experience inclusion, or the lack thereof, through informal mechanisms: being asked for input, being heard, receiving credit, or simply feeling safe to speak up. This highlights the importance of managers and team leaders in setting the tone for inclusion. Leadership development programs and performance assessments should therefore incorporate inclusive behaviour as a measurable competency. Managers must be better equipped, not just to deliver tasks, but to create an inclusive work environment. Lastly, D&I should be framed not only as an ethical goal but as a strategic one as well. With the industry facing both talent shortages and demographic shifts, failing to create an inclusive culture could result in missed opportunities for recruitment, retention, and innovation. Building a workplace

where diverse employees can flourish is not just an ethical issue; it is critical to building a sustainable workforce and organizational resilience.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

As with all research, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, this work made use of semi-structured interviews, enabling participants to share in-depth reflections and offering valuable insight into how D&I practices are perceived in a high-tech manufacturing environment. However, the findings remain context-specific and cannot be generalized to all companies or sectors. The study focused on a single organization in the Netherlands, with its own culture, structure, and maturity level in D&I. As such, sectoral and contextual factors must be considered when interpreting the results. Secondly, the sample consisted of sixteen participants and a pilot interview and was selected through purposeful sampling to ensure variation in gender, nationality, hierarchy, and generation. While this allowed for a range of perspectives to be included, certain identity dimensions remained underrepresented, e.g. sexual orientation, neurodiversity, etc. Moreover, due to time constraints and the availability of participants, the sample size remained modest. Although Guest et al. (2006) note that data saturation can be reached with as few as twelve interviews in qualitative research, a larger sample might have ensured more insights for specific identity groups. Thirdly, another limitation is that the interpretation of data was carried out by a single researcher. Although rigor and transparency were guaranteed using the structured Gioia coding process and regular supervision, the thematic development was impacted by the researcher's perspective. Additionally, all interviews were conducted in Dutch and later translated into English for reporting purposes. Many quotes contained expressions or emotionally charged language. While care was taken to preserve the intended meaning of participants' words, the process of translation inevitably involved interpretation, which may have affected how tone and nuance were conveyed. Lastly, several directions for future research can be identified based on these limitations. First, expanding the sample across multiple organizations would offer insight into how inclusion is shaped in different sectoral and cultural settings. Cross-country studies could further investigate why some studies emphasise hierarchical position while others highlight gender as the main factor shaping inclusion. Comparing companies with varying D&I maturity levels could improve understanding of context-dependent dynamics. Second, future research can benefit from combining mixed methods designs. Quantitative measures, such as validated scales for psychological safety, perceived fairness, or inclusion, could complement and validate the patterns observed through interviews. Finally, longitudinal research could provide insights into how perceptions of inclusion evolve over time, particularly in response to organizational interventions.

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed at exploring how employees and managers in a high-tech manufacturing organization perceive the role of D&I practices in stimulating job flourishing. The findings show that these perceptions are shaped less by formal policy and more by informal norms, identity dynamics, and day-to-day interactions at work. While members of the dominant group often experience the culture as inclusive, employees from the minority group shared more negative experiences, pointing to inequalities in recognition, opportunity, and belonging. This confirms that identity, particularly gender, rather than hierarchical position, plays a central role in shaping inclusion. The study reveals that D&I is perceived very differently depending on one's identity, and that job flourishing is not equally accessible to all. Perceptions of inclusion are shaped by how visible and meaningful D&I efforts are, and whether individuals feel heard, valued, and supported. The MT's limited awareness of how inclusion is experienced by minority employees, combined with the lack of a D&I policy, suggests that inclusion is currently not consistently supported throughout the organization. By focusing on individual perceptions and applying the IPO model, this research offers a deeper understanding of how D&I practices influence job flourishing. The findings show that inclusion cannot be achieved through initiatives alone, but it requires continuous effort, awareness, and good management. As long as inclusion depends on informal efforts rather than a shared and supported organizational approach, its effect will remain limited and uneven.

In answering the research question, this thesis shows that employees and managers perceive the role of D&I practices in job flourishing as strongly dependent on whether such practices are visible in the work environment, applied consistently across the organization, and supported by concrete actions rather than symbolic gestures. Importantly, this study highlights that these perceptions are greatly influenced by individual identity, particularly gender, which determines whether employees feel included and can flourish, regardless of the existence of D&I initiatives. By recognizing the gaps between intention and perception, organizations can start to bridge this disparity, shifting from insufficient efforts toward a more inclusive and flourishing workplace for all.

Reference list

Becker, G. (1957). *The economy of discrimination*. University of Chicago Press.

A'Yuninnisa, R. N., Carminati, L., & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2024). Promoting employee flourishing and performance: the roles of perceived leader emotional intelligence, positive team emotional climate, and employee emotional intelligence. *Frontiers in Organizational Psychology, 2*. https://doi.org/10.3389/forgp.2024.1283067

A'yuninnisa, R. N., Carminati, L., & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2023). Job flourishing research: A systematic literature review. *Current Psychology, 43*(5), 4482-4504. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04618-w

Ali, M., & Konrad, A. M. (2017). Antecedents and consequences of diversity and equality management systems: The importance of gender diversity in the TMT and lower to middle management. *European Management Journal, 35*(4), 440-453. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2017.02.002

Banerjee, R., & Datta Gupta, N. (2015). Awareness Programs and Change in Taste-Based Caste Prejudice. *PLOS ONE, 10*(4), e0118546. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0118546

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006, 01/01). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019, 12/26). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 13*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846

Briggs, C. Q., Gardner, D. M., & Ryan, A. M. (2023, Jan 9). Competence-Questioning Communication and Gender: Exploring Mansplaining, Ignoring, and Interruption Behaviors. *J Bus Psychol*, 1-29. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-022-09871-7

Chantarat, T., Rogers, T. B., Mitchell, C. R., & Ko, M. J. (2023, Apr). Perceptions of workplace climate and diversity, equity, and inclusion within health services and policy research. *Health Serv Res, 58*(2), 314-324. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.14032

DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: a balance of relationship and rigour. *Fam Med Community Health, 7*(2), e000057. https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057

Dunger, S. (2025, 2025/01/02). It's the hierarchy, stupid: Varying perceptions of organizational culture between demographic groups. *International Studies of Management & Organization, 55*(1), 83-111. https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2024.2379092

Fabricio, A., Kaczam, F., Obregon, S., Machado de Almeida, D., Lopes, L., Veiga, C., & Silva, W. (2020, 11/20). Quality of life: Flourishing in the work context. *Current psychology (New Brunswick, N.J.), 41*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01203-3

Fernández, D., Ryan, M., & Begeny, C. (2023, 01/27). Recognizing the diversity in how students define belonging: evidence of differing conceptualizations, including as a function of students' gender and socioeconomic background. *Social Psychology of Education, 26*, 1-36. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-023-09761-7

Ferrary, M., & Déo, S. (2022). Gender diversity and firm performance: when diversity at middle management and staff levels matter. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 34*(14), 2797-2831. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2022.2093121

Gerpott, F., & Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2015). How Differences Make a Difference: The Role of Team Diversity in Meeting Processes and Outcomes. In (pp. 93-118). https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107589735.006

Gioia, D., Corley, K., & Hamilton, A. (2013, 01/01). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*, 15-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006, 02/01). How Many Interviews Are Enough? *Field Methods - FIELD METHOD, 18*, 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Heydari, M. H., Shojaei, A., Naderi, H., & Iorio, J. (2024). Paving the Way for Progress: A Systematic Literature Review on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the AEC Industry. *Journal of Management in Engineering, 40*(3). https://doi.org/10.1061/jmenea.Meeng-5886

Hori, D., Oi, Y., Ohtaki, Y., Andrea, C., Takahashi, T., Shiraki, N., Ikeda, T., Ikeda, Y., Doki, S., Sasahara, S., & Matsuzaki, I. (2019, 12/01). Association between flourishing mental health and occupational stress among workers of Tsukuba Science City, Japan: A cross-sectional study. *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine, 24*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12199-019-0823-7

Irene, J. O., Daniels, C., Irene, B. N. O., Kelly, M., & Frank, R. (2024). A social identity approach to understanding sustainability and environmental behaviours in South Africa. *Local Environment*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2024.2376546

Jehn, K. A., & Greer, L. L. (2013). Diversity as disagreement: The role of group conflict. In *The Oxford handbook of diversity and work.* (pp. 179-191). Oxford University Press.

Keyes, C. (2002, 07/01). The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life. *Journal of health and social behavior, 43*, 207-222. https://doi.org/10.2307/3090197

Leuhery, F., Padang, N., Karyono, K., Puspitasari, D., & Judijanto, L. (2024, 10/07). Workplace Diversity and Inclusion: Strategies for Effective Implementation and Benefits to Organizational Culture. *Dinasti International Journal of Economics, Finance & Accounting, 5*, 4647-4653. https://doi.org/10.38035/dijefa.v5i4.3373

Luhr, S. (2025). "We're Better than Most": Diversity Discourse in the San Francisco Bay Area Tech Industry. *Social Problems, 72*(1), 261-276. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spad014

O'Donovan, D. (2018). Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace. In C. Machado & J. P. Davim (Eds.), *Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management: A Guide to a Specialized MBA Course* (pp. 73-108). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66864-2_4

Oude Mulders, J., Henkens, K., & van Dalen, H. P. (2020). How Do Employers Respond to an Aging Workforce? Evidence from Surveys Among Employers, 2009–2017. In S. J. Czaja, J. Sharit, & J. B. James (Eds.), *Current and Emerging Trends in Aging and Work* (pp. 281-296). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24135-3_14

Pless, N., & Maak, T. (2004, 2004/10/01). Building an Inclusive Diversity Culture: Principles, Processes and Practice. *Journal of Business Ethics, 54*(2), 129-147. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-004-9465-8

Randel, A. E. (2023, 2025/02/01). Inclusion in the Workplace: A Review and Research Agenda. *Group & Organization Management, 50*(1), 119-162. https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011231175578

Redelinghuys, K., Rothmann, S., & Botha, E. (2019, 01/09). Workplace flourishing: Measurement, antecedents and outcomes. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 45*. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v45i0.1549

Richard, O. C., Kirby, S. L., & Chadwick, K. (2013). The impact of racial and gender diversity in management on financial performance: how participative strategy making features can unleash a diversity advantage. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24*(13), 2571-2582. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.744335

Roberson, Q. M. (2019). Diversity in the Workplace: A Review, Synthesis, and Future Research Agenda. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 6*(1), 69-88. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012218-015243

SER. (2024). *SER Monitor Genderbalans in het Nederlandse bedrijfsleven 2024*. https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/thema/diversiteitsportaal/ser-monitor-genderbalans-nederlandse-bedrijfsleven-2024.pdf

Sharma, S., Das, B., G, B., Lalrosanga, Rathod, V., & Patil, M. (2025, 02/03). Diversity And Inclusion In The Workplace: Effects On Team Dynamics And Organizational Success. *Cuestiones de Fisioterapia, 54*, 5180-5187. https://doi.org/10.48047/0tybqv89

Shore, L. M., Randel, A. E., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., Holcombe Ehrhart, K., & Singh, G. (2010, 2011/07/01). Inclusion and Diversity in Work Groups: A Review and Model for Future Research. *Journal of Management, 37*(4), 1262-1289. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310385943

Sievertsen, H. H., & Smith, S. (2025, 2025/03/01/). Do female experts face an authority gap? Evidence from economics. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 231*, 106912. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2025.106912

Singh, B., Selvarajan, T. T., & Solansky, S. (2019, 10/23). Coworker influence on employee performance: a conservation of resources perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 34*, 587-600. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-09-2018-0392

Squires, A. (2009, 02/01). Methodological Challenges in Cross-Language Qualitative Research: A Research Review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 46*, 277-287. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2008.08.006

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 7-24). Nelson-Hall.

Tans, G. (2023). *Dutch D&I in Digital Benchmark Report 2023*. https://www.techleap.nl/news/di-benchmark-report-2023

Trochmann, M., Stewart, K., & Ragusa, J. (2023). The Impact of Employee Perceptions of Inclusion in a Racially Diverse Agency: Lessons From a State Government Survey. *Public Personnel Management, 52*(4), 543-565. https://doi.org/10.1177/00910260231187544

Appendix 1

1A: Interview mail to participants – Dutch

Beste [Naam],

Mijn naam is Sophie Jansen en ik ben in februari begonnen met mijn afstudeerstage op de HR-afdeling. Voor mijn onderzoek moet ik interviews afnemen met medewerkers binnen Company X. Op basis van verschillende criteria heb ik 16 mensen geselecteerd die ik graag zou willen interviewen. Jij bent geselecteerd vanwege (...)

Het interview zal gaan over ervaringen en percepties van bedrijfsbeleid en strategieën die bedoeld zijn om een fijne werkplek te creëren voor iedereen. Dit kan betrekking hebben op wat Company X momenteel wel en niet doet, maar ook op jouw algemene visie over dit onderwerp. Het interview zal ongeveer 30 tot 45 minuten duren, met voorkeur persoonlijk plaatsvinden en zal worden opgenomen. Om vertrouwelijke informatie te beschermen, verzeker ik de anonimiteit van de deelnemers door geen persoonsgebonden informatie vrij te geven (zoals naam, specifieke leeftijd, woonplaats, nationaliteit, etc.), maar alleen algemene beschrijvingen te gebruiken in mijn scriptie.

Ik ben van plan om deze interviews in mei af te nemen. Aangezien agenda's snel vol raken, wil ik graag alvast een moment inplannen. Daarom mijn vraag: zou jij mij willen helpen met mijn onderzoek door deel te nemen aan een interview?

Voorafgaand aan het interview zal ik je nog even meenemen in de structuur en zal ik meer vertellen over mijn onderwerp. Mocht je daar nu al vragen over hebben, stel ze dan gerust!

Mocht je mee willen doen, dan hoor ik het graag en plannen we direct even een momentje in 😊

Met vriendelijke groet,

Sophie Jansen

1B: Interview mail to participants – English

Dear [Name],

My name is Sophie Jansen, and since February I have been doing my graduation internship at the HR office. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting interviews with employees at Company X. Based on several criteria, I have selected 16 individuals I would like to speak with, and you have been selected because (…)

The interview will focus on your experiences and perceptions of company policies and strategies aimed at creating a positive and inclusive work environment. This could include your views on what Company X is currently doing well, or not, as well as your general thoughts on the topic. The interview will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes, preferably take place in person, and will be recorded. To ensure confidentiality, all personal information (such as your name, specific age, place of residence, or nationality) will be anonymized and only general descriptions will be used in the thesis.

I plan to conduct the interviews during May. As calendars tend to fill up quickly, I would like to schedule a time with you in advance. Therefore, my question is: would you be willing to support my research by participating in an interview?

Before we begin the interview, I will briefly walk you through the structure and give you more context about the research. If you have any questions already, please feel free to ask!

If you're open to participating, just let me know and we'll set up a time 😊

Kind regards,
Sophie Jansen

Appendix 2

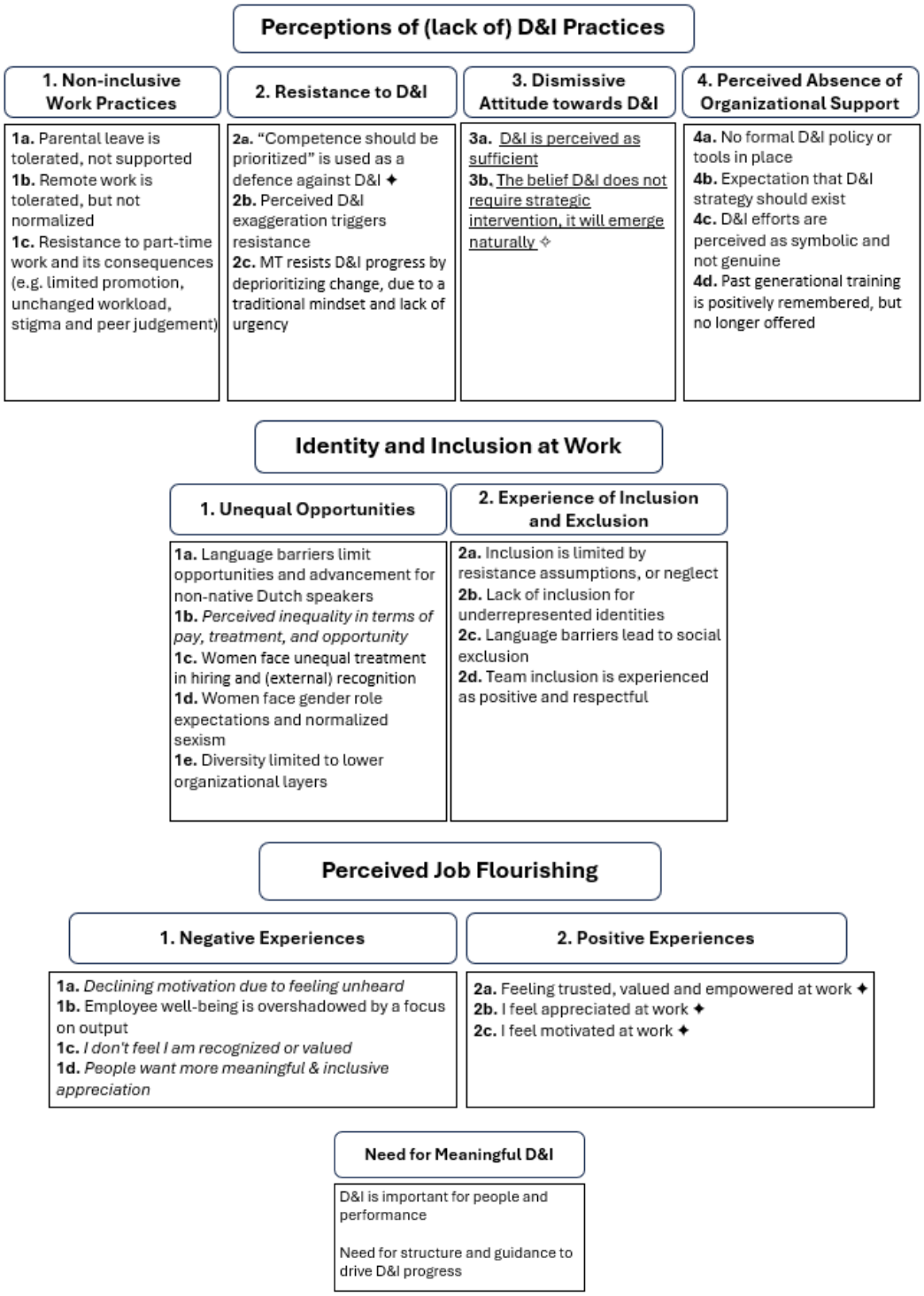
2A: Interview Protocol - Dutch

Ondewerpen	Hoofd vragen	Vervolg vragen
Diversiteit & Inclusie	1. Wat vind je van D&I?	
	2. Hoe ervaar je D&I binnen je team?	a. Kun je een voorbeeld geven van een situatie waarin D&I (niet) zichtbaar was in je team?
Implementatie van D&I-beleid	3. Welke vormen van D&I beleid ben je tegengekomen in je werk?	b. Hoe effectief vind jij deze initiatieven? Komen ze op jou over als oprecht?
Job Flourishing	4. Hoe voel je je op je werk en binnen je team?	c. In hoeverre voel je je gewaardeerd?
	5. Hoe zou je jouw algemene welzijn en motiviatie op het werk omschrijven?	
Persoonlijk - Identiteit	6. Hoe zou je jezelf omschrijven?	d. Bijvoorbeeld: ik ben een vrouw/student/Nederlander/etc.
	7. Hoe vind je dat de organisatie jouw verschillende kanten ondersteunt?	
	8. Welke subgroepen herken je binnen de organisatie?	e. Hoe ervaar je de interactie tussen die subgroepen (ook in termen van 'in-groups')?
	9. Denk je dat de ervaring van D&I verschilt per persoon of groep binnen de organisatie? Hoe zie je dat?	
Management	10. Hoe beïnvloeden managers of teamleiders volgens jou hoe inclusief de werkomgeving aanvoelt?	
	11. Wat vind je van de bereidheid van het management om D&I effectief te integreren?	f. Kun je hier een voorbeeld van geven?
Afronding	12. Op basis van wat we hebben besproken: wat zou volgens jou een mogelijke verbetering kunnen zijn?	
	13. Is er iets dat ik vergeten ben te vragen, maar dat je toch graag wilt delen over dit onderwerp?	

2B: Interview Protocol – English

Themes	Core questions	Probing questions
Diversity & Inclusion	1. What do you think about D&I?	
	2. How do you feel about D&I in your team?	a. Can you give an example of a situation where D&I was(n't) visible in your team?
Implementation D&I practices	3. Which D&I-related practices or policies (if any) have you encountered at your company?	b. In your opinion, how or effective are these initiatives? (genuine?)
Job Flourishing	4. How do you feel at work, and in your team?	c. To what extend do you feel valued?
	5. How would you describe your overall well-being or motivation at work?	
Personal - Identity	6. How do you identify yourself?	d. E.g. I am a woman/student/Dutch/etc.
	7. How do you think the organization is supporting your different identities?	
	8. What kind of subgroups do you recognize in the organization?	e. How do you feel those subgroups interact with each other (including in-group)?
	9. How do you think others in the organization experience D&I differently, based on their characteristics?	
Management	10. How do managers or team leaders influence how inclusive your work environment feels?	
	11. What are your thoughts and feelings about management being willing to effectively integrate D&I practices?	f. Can you provide an example?
Closing	12. In light of what we discussed, what would you suggest as a possible improvement?	
	13. Is there anything I forgot, but that you want to mention around this topic?	

Appendix 3: Complete Data Structure



Note. Underlined concepts are based exclusively on statements made by male participants. Concepts marked with symbol ✦ are based on statements made predominantly by male participants. Concepts marked with symbol ✧ are based on statements made primarily by participants working in, or supervising teams at lower organizational levels.
Italic concepts are exclusively based on statements made by participants who identified with minority groups, such as women, non-Dutch participants, and individuals with underrepresented gender or sexual identities within the organization.

Appendix 4: Exemplary quotes of first-order codes

"There wasn't a space here for breastfeeding or anything like that it just hadn't been considered yet." (P2). *"You're caught in a dilemma as a young father. You know work won't like it, but you also want to be there for your family"* (P9). *"Yes, they do it, but only because they have to. To me, it feels like it's because the law says you must, and as an employer, you're not allowed to refuse. So, they go along with it, but it's just compliance, they accept it because they're required to."* (P9). *"When hearing the word parental leave, a manager practically jumped out of his chair. And now he's also expected to consider working from home. 'We're a machine factory. You need to be here'."* (P11). *"In the end, it's the word 'mandatory.' That's what makes a big company different from a small one. Back when there were only 300 or 350 employees, the same regulations applied, but employees would think: 'I'd better not take leave, I'll just keep working, there are plenty of others who could replace me.' (...) In smaller companies, I know cases where someone says they want to reduce their hours and take leave, and the boss responds: 'That's fine, but by the end of the year you can grab your things and leave.' It's not legal, but it happens. We've just grown too big to get away with things like that." (P11).*	D1. **1a** Parental leave is tolerated, not supported
"There is no remote work policy in this company." (P7). *"I see it as a form of appreciation that I'm allowed to work from home. For me, it feels like appreciation, because apparently, it's not considered normal. Since there's no policy on this matter, I'm just being open and honest about that."* (P7) *"There is no policy, well, the policy is that it must be arranged at the departmental level. So ultimately, it gets pushed down in the organization and kept small."* (P8).	D1. **1b** Remote work is tolerated, but not normalized

"Because I want results. I send my people home. I say to them: you're going to do this from home, because I want it done by next week. So I push them home, otherwise they feel like they have to stay here because that's what the culture expects." (P9) *"There's no real policy for it. In fact, the policy is that we don't do it. Do people work remotely anyway? Yes, because otherwise you'd lose them. But if someone applies and says they want to work from home two days a week, they simply won't get in."* (P11). *"But I do know the company is rather rigid when it comes to working remotely. But personally, I have no issues with it. And I get that it's convenient to be home when a package is being delivered, for example. But in my opinion, they actually have a good policy around it, but that's just how I see it."* (P12)	
"Working part-time as a manager? You get labelled. It makes it harder to move up in the organization." (P1). *"When I said I wanted to work four days because of motherhood, it became more acceptable. But it's not like my workload was adjusted."* (P2). *"So, when I started here, I said that I actually wanted to work four days, but that wasn't an option."* (P2). *"I do believe that someone in a management position really needs to be at work here at least four days a week. If you're not there that one day, that should be manageable, but you need to make sure things are properly arranged. But if you say: I'm going down to three days, then I'm not sure if every role would still suit you."* (P5). *"When I said I wanted to work 36 hours, and later 32, the reactions were: 'We all work 40 hours, what kind of weird guy are you, wanting to go down to 36 hours?'"* (P10).	D1. **1c** Resistance to part-time work and its consequences (e.g. limited promotion, unchanged workload, stigma and peer judgement)
"I have an allergy to women quotas. I think it's awful because you should always go for quality, not gender." (P1).	

"For example, women quotas in the MT, 'oh, that's all nonsense. We just hire the best candidate, don't we?'" (P2). *"Hiring policy is mainly about whether you can perform the role."* (P3). *"We need two women in the management team?! No, we need what's best for the company. That's how we all make our living. So, we need people who can execute the role." (P5).* *"A quota immediately sounds like rules. Rules like: every role must have 20% women, something like that. I'm not into that at all. I don't even know if I could work toward something like that."* (P5). *"In the end, we go with whoever fits best. And if it's a man again, then it's a man again." (P8).* *"A women's quota, I don't agree with that at all. Sure, we can say: from now on there must be at least two women in the management team. But what if one of them eventually says, 'I've found a new job elsewhere'? Then you'd have to find another woman who's also interested in that kind of position. And if there isn't a suitable woman, then what? Then you'd have to choose a woman just because of the quota. So, to summarize my opinion: we should keep focusing on qualities. And yes, taking diversity into account is fine, but quality comes first."* (P12) *"So, I wouldn't say: put hard numbers on it, like we must have a certain amount of women in management. Don't put that on paper. If there's a woman who is just as qualified as a man, then of course it's fine to choose her. But if you say: we want more women in management, then quality should still outweigh the targets."* (P16) *"For me, hiring a woman is not a goal itself. It's a means to achieve something. And I do think it can be helpful, and I believe it can really add value. But for me, quality must come first."* (Pilot)	D1. **2a** Competence should be prioritized" is used as a defence against D&I ✦

"I think that when you explicitly label it, it starts getting negative attention. You're better off just having a conversation about it without calling it diversity or inclusion." (P1) *"Because of all these new forms that have emerged in recent decades, it has become harder to please everyone. The Christmas gift? A roast, someone's vegetarian. Can't do that. Someone's Muslim, pork? Can't do that either. A bottle of wine? Not possible. Then you get a gift card instead. 'Oh, I don't like that either.' It's getting harder and harder to keep everyone satisfied."* (P3) *"It shouldn't get too 'woke' if you ask me. That kind of stuff, no, that's not my thing."* (P4) *"In some departments here, the regional culture with the typical 'down to earth' mentality prevails: 'what a stupid topic.' And that's not helpful at all. They call it a bit 'woke,' right? Well yeah, then you get those kinds of remarks."* (P11) *"Sometimes I think, aren't we taking this a bit too far?"* (P12) *"I am a bit worried that at some point, in society, not necessarily within COMPANY X, because I think we still have some steps to take here, but in society, we might go too far with it."* (Pilot)	D1. **2b.** Perceived D&I exaggeration triggers resistance
"They're not really open to changing things. But that goes for changes in general." (P1) *"I think the MT is willing to introduce a D&I policy, as long as it doesn't require too much effort."* (P2) *"It's not like we say, 'let's put this on the agenda and spend an hour discussing it.' That's just not in our nature. It doesn't have a high priority, because we don't feel, at least I don't, that we're missing out on much."* (P3) *"A lot of people want to do something with D&I, and some already are, but if there's one group doing nothing, it's the MT."* (P5)	D1. **2c.** MT resists D&I progress by deprioritizing change, due to a traditional mindset and lack of urgency

"There's nothing in our company policy pillars like 'We want to be an inclusive company' or 'We aim to reflect society.' No, that's not a goal at all." (P8) *"What are they doing with this D&I story? Nothing. I don't see any of it. I have no idea if this is even on their minds."* (P9) *"Trying to introduce change or something new can be difficult because of the MT's inflexible way of thinking."* (P13) *"Okay, to put it bluntly: I think that if it has a positive effect on business results, they'll find it interesting. But if it mostly requires a lot of effort, energy, and time, then it becomes less of a priority."* (P16) *"No. I don't think it's a priority, if I'm being honest. Yeah, I don't think they see the importance of it. If I'm being honest. And maybe they don't have time for it either. Time? Yeah. Priority/time. 'Okay, it's all nonsense', that's kind of what they say. No, there's absolutely no sense of urgency. None."* (Pilot)	
"I think it's going quite well, yeah." (P4) *"It seems to be working fine. It's never really been an issue."* (P6) *"Well, personally I don't think so. We just talked about this, there's nothing I really run into that makes me feel like, oh, we're not diverse or inclusive enough with each other."* (P12) *"I wouldn't know of any problems. For me, things are going fine."* (P15) *"Phew, what could be a possible improvement? I honestly can't really think of anything right now that I feel should immediately be improved."* (P16)	D1. **3a.** <u>D&I is perceived as sufficient</u>
"I just think it'll work itself out. We're all just people, and we don't need policies or instructions for that." (P4) *"If people are good at what they do, they'll end up where they belong."* (P5)	D1. **3b.** <u>The belief D&I does not require strategic</u>

"When people say, 'There aren't enough women in management,' I find that a bit difficult. I think if you're good enough, also as a woman, you'll get there." (P11)	intervention, it will emerge naturally ✧
"As a manager, it's not like you get some kind of training or toolkit. Like: what do you need as a manager, and how can we, as an organization, help you build a diverse team?" (P1) *"Nothing, no."* (P4) *"No, I don't think we have a policy. I hope we act accordingly, but that's more a matter of conscience."* (P5) *"No, I wouldn't really dare to say there's an actual policy for that."* (P6) *"Nothing. I couldn't honestly say that we have anything related to diversity or inclusion. I find it invisible in this organization."* (P9) *"Uhm, nothing. I don't think we have a policy in terms of diversity and inclusion."* (P12) *"I've never heard anything about a training either."* (P15)	D1. **4a.** No formal D&I policy or tools in place
"I can't imagine that being such a large organization, you don't have a formal D&I policy. At least, I never saw one." (P1) *"I notice it as missing because of the fact that the topic is not discussed here, which I find very odd to be honest."* (P2) *"Honestly, I would expect that something like that exists."* (P16)	D1. **4b.** Expectation that D&I strategy should exist
"If I say we must do this because of the law, then they will say: 'Okay, then we'll do it.'" (P1). *"I think there is an ambition to do something with D&I, and I believe there are people putting in a lot of effort. But whether it's actually being implemented, I'm not so sure." (P2).*	

'Yes, this is also one of the sub-goals we want to achieve this year.' But whether it's genuinely prioritized alongside other main goals, I still have my doubts. So, I'm not sure if they're really tackling it seriously, or just saying, 'Yes, we're working on it.' But what exactly are they working on?" (P7). *"If you, as a company, are not open to change you will not achieve the desired result. And that is often the motivator of our MT, failing to achieve certain goals. So, the missed goal is the motivator, not societal needs."* (P8). *"We're always eager to start something. But do we follow through and stand behind it? We start little projects, but they tend to fizzle out. So, you end up thinking: take a real stand."* (P9).	D1. **4c.** D&I efforts are perceived as symbolic and not genuine
"I know there was a training once, I didn't attend as I was not working here yet, but I heard it was about generational differences. It was meant to create awareness about the differences between generations. I think if it were offered now, quite a few people would be interested." (P1) *"I'd do it again immediately. I've already mentioned it before. It was only a couple of hours, but with examples, it helped you understand why people do what they do. If I could pick one training to bring back, this would be it."* (P5) *"I thought the training was good, but I also recognized a resistance with the older generations to be open to this training. But maybe that is also my bias against older people, I feel like they almost distrust the younger generations motives to do something."* (P10). *"I also think sometimes clashes happen because of mentality differences, for example my generation is less focused on structure and obeying management."* (P10). *"You can tell there's a significant difference between generations. I can handle the fact that things are changing, but I notice that the younger generation tends to put work in third place, leisure comes first."* (P11)	D1. **4d.** Past generational training is positively remembered, but no longer offered

"People in their twenties approach life differently than people in their sixties, and that can clash." (P13) *"The younger generation just says: 'I work 40 hours and then I go home.' While the older generation says: 'I care about the company, I make sure the job is done, no matter what.' And that causes tension sometimes."* (Pilot)	
"Sometimes we exclude people based on their level of language proficiency." (P3). *"You start to see what you're capable of, 'I could do that, and that too', but then they say you don't have the right diploma, or enough experience. I'm not even talking about a management position, just switching departments. And then they tell you: 'You need to improve your Dutch first.' I think that's unfair. (...) I can do it. I just never receive that chance."* (P14). *"It took me a long time to get a fixed contract. I kept being moved from agency to agency because they "didn't want to lose me", but the organization wouldn't offer me a fixed contract because they said my Dutch wasn't good enough."* (P14).	D2. **1a.** Language barriers limit opportunities and advancement for non-native Dutch speakers
"It's about salary and bonuses; I get treated unfairly compared to my direct colleagues." (P1). *"I've been here for almost five years, and I've only seen one woman make a promotion since I joined. Then I thought, oh, so it is possible."* (P9) *"We talk about human rights and how everyone's equal, that women shouldn't be treated differently than men. But I asked my colleagues what they earn, some of them told me, and I found out they were paid more than me. I've worked here for nine years, and I even trained those new hires."* (P14). *"I don't think there are equal opportunities for everyone on the work floor. When you have a foreign name or background you are not the first pick."* (P14).	D2. **1b.** *Perceived inequality in terms of pay, treatment, and opportunity*

"I think a couple things don't work in my advantage, the fact that I am a woman and that I am young" (P2). *"We had a lady working here, she left already, but she just couldn't ground here because yea, she is differently oriented. She thought she was up for it but in the end she couldn't, and she realised that this was not the right place for her. We spoke about it in the team, and I really observed a group forming of the men saying 'yes, but what did you expect, that doesn't fit here'."* (P8) *"We often have to convince the male clients with a woman in my team, and I do recognize the challenge she faces in this field. Some suppliers brush her off, and when I call, they pick up right away. When she asks something, it takes two weeks. When I ask, we're scheduled within half an hour. Then I confront the supplier and say: 'What's going on? Why don't you respond to her? I don't want to do her job for her. She's qualified and follows up. So why don't you answer her?'"* (P9) *"I've noticed that during interviews, people are more hesitant when it's a woman. I can think of two cases where I was the deciding factor to hire the woman, and both women are doing great. I didn't understand the hesitation. 'Oh, she seems a bit insecure.' So what? That doesn't mean she's not technically capable."* (P10) *"No, but I've got a thick skin, but that's just how it is. No, I've never had trouble with it. But I do think as a woman, you need to be able to stand your ground among the men. If you can't handle a joke or some teasing, then I don't think this is the right place for you. Sure, we have a few bullies around, but they don't bother me."* (P13)	D2. **1c.** Women face unequal treatment in hiring and (external) recognition
"We have one small team of [department]. That's traditionally women. They're good at unpacking, detailed work, stuff like that." (P6) *"'Yea but she whines so much', that is how men perceive women in general." (*P9) *"You just have certain tasks that certain types of people can do better, in some things men are better and in some things women."* (P11).	D2.

"Well, many of the tasks here are repetitive. You basically need to switch off your brain and just plan. Women tend to be better at that. Sounds silly, but men are usually like: 'Can I do something more ambitious?'" (P11) *"I do recognize the benefits of having women in the team, because they are more thoughtful when someone leaves for example, they will remember to buy a present and stuff like that."* (P11). *"I have a lot of repetitive jobs in my team, and you don't always need a diploma for them. Maybe that's why I have more women in my team, because women, in my experience, are always very precise when it comes to repetitive work. That's just something they're really good at."* (P12) *"When the director expressed his desire to hire more women, people were joking about that behind his back."* (Pilot).	**1d.** Women face gender role expectations and normalized sexism
"In general, the management consists of white men of 50 plus years." (P8) *"If you look at the management at COMPANY X, it's all white men. So, if you don't see yourself reflected there, do they really see you? Do they recognize your potential? These are all things that matter. I don't think COMPANY X has done very well on that front. Otherwise, the workforce would be different right now. On the work floor, you see more diversity than in the office or in management."* (P10) *"As you move up toward management, it definitely gets less diverse. Mainly in terms of gender, its mostly men, either working besides me and above me in different management layers."* (P12) *"Management is definitely less diverse. It's not like what I see on the work floor."* (P13) *"On the work floor its basically more international employees than Dutch employees, whereas the office is the other way around. I have no clue why this is. Maybe because Dutch people are generally higher educated? I honestly wouldn't know, I am almost never at the office, I am always on the work floor."* (P15).	D2. **1e.** Diversity limited to lower organizational layers

"They just assume you feel like included as a woman here. But no one ever asks whether you actually do." (P2) *"You do have to adjust to the established culture of the company, yes sure you have different norms and values, but you have to adjust in order to align with the organization"* (P3). *"But the same goes for women. We're a male-dominated organization. Then someone says, 'Don't we need to arrange something for women who just had a baby?' Oh my god, now we need a lactation room. What kind of nonsense is this? But yes, it does end up being arranged."* (P3) *"I always say: I don't mind what someone believes, as long as I don't get bothered by it. And I mean that. I don't want any trouble. I'm Roman Catholic, and nobody has to be bothered by that. But I also don't want to be bothered by people of other religions walking around the factory, and we have a few of them."* (P5) *"I think many people, especially white men, underestimate how the system is built to make things easier for them. We could do more to make things easier for others. If I include myself in that group, I benefit from the privilege, and I know that."* (P10) *"In our technical field of work, I would rather work with people who embody the regional values, nicely down-to-earth. We have to get the job done together and that is just easier accomplished when you work together with similar people from this region."* (P11).	D2. **2a.** Inclusion is limited by resistance assumptions, or neglect
"I hired a colleague who was born as a man and now identifies as a woman. To be honest, when I hired her, I didn't even know. She never brought it up, and I hadn't really looked into it. I just thought she was the right person for the vacancy I needed to fill. But then some colleagues started digging around, looking things up online, and found out about it. And suddenly they had a problem with it. I thought, why? Is she not doing her job well? Is she being difficult? No, nothing like that. But still, they found it strange or had a hard time working with her or something like that." (P6)	

"We are as a department, but also as an organization, not a trend setter in this topic. We are not a representation of society, while we could be considering that we have around 1000 employees working here," (P8) *"In the beginning, I never told anyone I had a male partner. I received some comments that made me think, hmm... But I was still young and unsure of myself. Now I say, 'my boyfriend,' and everyone knows. I don't hear those things anymore, but I heard plenty before I was open about my sexuality. And I thought, is that really necessary?"* (P10) *"But then there's my queer side, that basically goes unseen, and I don't know if there's even space for it here. I don't get the sense that the company knows what to do with employees like this. Yet those are exactly the people you want to attract. And then they end up doing nothing. There are large groups of people on the neurodiverse spectrum within the technical demographic you're trying to reach, and those are often the people who have thought about gender and sexuality."* (P10) *"Our company just isn't there yet. We're a Dutch company, we communicate in Dutch, with Dutch values. That makes it hard for international colleagues or people from other backgrounds to feel at home or function well."* (Pilot)	D2. **2b.** Lack of inclusion for underrepresented identities
"I can imagine that non-native speakers don't always feel fully included here." (P12) *"At first, I really struggled with the language barrier. It wasn't always easy, I couldn't always understand what people meant, especially with jokes and social interactions. That automatically puts you a bit on the outside. Everyone's laughing at a joke, and you're just sitting there like, 'Okay...' because you don't get it. You're left with question marks in your head. Error."* (P14) *"There are people who don't speak English, and if you want to have a conversation with them, that is only possible in Dutch. Yea, then you simply cannot have an interaction. It creates a distance."* (P15)	D2. **2c.** Language barriers lead to social exclusion
"I think we have a great team, very open, and we can talk about everything." (P1) *"In our department, I think we can say anything. There's a good atmosphere."* (P7)	

"It is fine, I personally feel drawn a lot to the older generations but in general we all work good together. There is a good team culture." (P13). *"Someone said, 'We're doing Ramadan, can we take our break later?' I said sure, as long as we all take our break at the same time, that's no problem. It's important for them, and it doesn't bother anyone else. So, we take our break a bit later altogether. It's about respect for each other, and for each others religion."* (P15) *"I feel very good in my team, I like my direct colleagues, and I feel good."* (Pilot).	D2. **2d.** Team inclusion is experienced as positive and respectful
"Right now, if I want to implement something new, it's just not the right time. I feel like whatever I bring up won't matter. So, I've stopped trying." (P1) *"Later, I discussed my desires to do something new with my supervisor again, 'Yes, let's keep our eyes open and see what opportunities come up. And then you can just to go there'. But in the meantime, I've been in the same role for almost nine years. Maybe it's bad timing, or maybe it's the language barrier, or the diploma's they say you need... But still, it bothers me. I'm tired of it. There's burnout, but there's also boreout. And that's the phase I'm in now, boreout"* (P14)	D3. **1a.** *Declining motivation due to feeling unheard*
"Even when we said, 'This product doesn't do well in the cold, it oxidizes,' it didn't matter. Only when the oxidation was visible a year later, they said, 'Oh, maybe it is too cold.' Not because people were cold and getting sick, but because the product became damaged." (P6) *"Sometimes I wonder, are we just numbers? As long as the product gets delivered."* (P7) *"This is an environment focused on output. If you think about production as the chicken and the golden egg, we only focus on the golden eggs. We don't take care of the chicken."* (P9)	D3. **1b.** Employee well-being is overshadowed by a focus on output
"Appreciation is expressed, but when actual decisions are made, I don't feel it. That's difficult. Right now, I don't feel valued." (P1) *"I don't feel appreciated."* (P1).	

"Sometimes I would just like a compliment, and I don't feel like I receive that right now." (P2). *"Do I always feel appreciated by my manager? No. It would be nice if he showed a bit more of a human side, we are not robots."* (P13) *"At one point, the workload was so high that we just hired anyone. Some of them spent weekends in jail and worked for us during the week. They got higher wages than I did, even though I've been here for years and trained the new people. And then they turned out to be the bad apples. So, where's the appreciation in that?"* (P14)	D3. **1c.** *I don't feel I am recognized or valued*
"If you're not comfortable, you should be able to say so and be taken seriously. But that opportunity isn't always there." (P1) *"For example, mentioning when someone performed well, 'Ah, great work!'. Something like that would be nice."* (P2). *"Even having a mission statement that says certain minority groups are welcome, that matters."* (P10 *"You don't have to say 'good job' every day, because we won't take it seriously then. But every now and then, if you just say to one of us, 'Nice work, well done', that's such a small thing. But it can be so meaningful."* (P13)	D3. **1d.** *People want more meaningful & inclusive appreciation*
"I felt valued by receiving many opportunities within the companies". (P3). *"I felt empowered and motivated due to receiving career advancement opportunities, especially in the beginning I switched jobs every 2 to 3 years."* (P5). *"I'm given a lot of freedom to plan my own work and shape how I approach it. My manager gives me plenty of space."* (P6)	D3.

"A couple years back I was unsure whether to keep working here or maybe look for opportunities elsewhere. Then I had some conversations with my manager, and they really searched with me to find a new position where I could add value and be happy. I feel like they saw my potential and wanted to keep me. I thought it was so special and great that they were accommodating my needs like that." (P7). *"I feel valued because of the freedom I'm given."* (P8) *"My experience is acknowledged by helping me take the next step. I keep getting trainings and new projects that help me improve in my work."* (P10) *"My manager gives me new responsibilities and challenges, and I'm also trusted to support others. That comes with real responsibility."* (P16)	**2a.** Feeling trusted, valued and empowered at work ✦
"I feel fairly appreciated. I've even received a bonus now and then, things like that." (P4) *"Yes, I feel appreciated, I have also received bonuses which help in terms of showing appreciation as well."* (P5). *"I think they appreciate me, yes. When I see how I am trusted in my work and that I am being recognized for my work, I feel appreciated."* (P6). *"I feel appreciated by the company offering the opportunities I want, but also in terms of monetary rewards I feel appreciated."* (P7). *"Oh, I feel very appreciated. My manager and my direct colleagues express that to me as well."* (P8) *"I feel appreciated through verbal recognition, from my manager, direct colleagues but also from clients."* (P9). *"In general, people listen to what I say and like involving me in new projects. I also receive financial bonuses, and that's just how a company shows your work is valued. It means they've identified me as someone who contributes"* (P10)	D3. **2b.** I feel appreciated at work ✦

"I definitely feel appreciated here." (P11). *"I feel appreciated."* (P15). *"In my performance review, my manager said, 'I keep forgetting you've only been with us for two years,' because things are going really well. This year, that was also rewarded financially, which was a nice bonus. But honestly, hearing that your work is appreciated means even more."* (P16)	
"Yes, I feel motivated, a 7.5." (P2) *"I'd rate my motivation an eight, definitely."* (P3) *"Of course you have the occasional bad day, but on average I'd say an eight."* (P5) *"I'm always motivated. There's never a day I think, 'Ugh, work.'"* (P7) *"Sometimes my team lead has to tell me to take a day off. I pour my heart and soul into my work."* (P11) *"My motivation is always good. I enjoy going to work. I never go in reluctantly."* (P12)	D3. **2c.** I feel motivated at work ✦
"I think D&I creates more understanding between people, if it receives more attention." (P1) *"It's important for a company's success. There's a reason we say there should be a mixed workforce. Many studies show that when men and women are well balanced, you tend to get much better decisions overall."* (P2) *"Diversity and inclusion are more recent topics, and I believe it is very important."* (P5). *"Definitely a very important topic."* (P7)	

"I think diversity and inclusion have way more impact than what people would expect." (P9). *"It is an important topic in general but also in terms of the organization, people deserve to have a good and pleasant work environment, besides that people typically also perform better when they feel good. Emphasizing the benefit of the company."* (P10) *"I think the topic is important, you have all kinds of different people and groups, and it is important that they work well together."* (P13). *"I think it's really important. We're all individuals, with different characters, backgrounds, sexualities. But we have to work together, and that's what makes a team."* (P14)	D&I is important for people and performance
"That's where it starts, by taking guidelines and procedures seriously to make inclusion happen." (P1) *"If we want to remain part of the labour market, it's not just about men and women, it's also about being attractive to people from other nationalities."* (P2) *"I do think it would help to connect D&I to hard targets."* (P2) *"You can't just do nothing anymore. I understand that younger generations expect more from us, and we'll have to move with that."* (P5) *"If we want to be a healthy and successful company in the future, then we need to engage with this topic. I say 'need to', but I also think we should want to. It's part of reality, we shouldn't look away from it, we should embrace it."* (P8) *"We have to do this because society is demanding it. We're short on people, we need to do more with fewer hands. And the right people don't always fit the traditional image. If you want to open up new opportunities, you have to invest in making women feel accepted in the technical world."* (P9) *"I would suggest to just create a policy to start with, communicate your stance."* (P10).	Need for structure and guidance to drive D&I progress

"Create some awareness in the organization." (P13)	