

# Optimal Distinctiveness and Inclusive Hiring

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## **ABSTRACT,**

*This study examines the concept of optimal distinctiveness in an inclusive hiring context. Since inclusive hiring, in the Netherlands, is subject to considerable institutional pressures, and diverse hiring has been shown to have potential for strategic advantage, this context lends itself well to this research. Empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The results of these interviews suggest that organizations indeed experience institutional pressures regarding the hiring of people with a disability. Also, the findings suggest that having a group of employees that includes people with a disability does have the potential to be a source of competitive advantage. However, more important than employing people with a disability is that the organization has the knowledge, skills and willingness to work with people with a disability. Only then, an organization is able to unlock the full strategic potential of such employees.*

## **Graduation Committee members:**

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## **Keywords**

Optimal distinctiveness, inclusive hiring, institutional theory, strategic management, resource-based view, strategic balance

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# 1. Introduction

Since some time, the Dutch government has adopted policies to promote the integration of people with a developmental, psychiatric or physical disability in the labour market. This has become especially clear when the government adopted the Participatiewet in 2015. The Participatiewet was designed to control the level of given subsidies and increase the participation of people with a disability in the labour market, for example by proposing to possibly oblige employers with more than 25 employees to employ people with a disability in the future (Edzes & Van Dijk, 2015). At the moment, a gentlemen's agreement between the business world and the government with the same goal in mind exists (Ministerie van sociale zaken en werkgelegenheid, 2018). Governmental pressure on organizations to employ people with a disability is not limited to the Netherlands; policies to enhance the number of disabled employees in the workforce have been adopted in several countries in the western world, for example the United Kingdom (Hall & Wilton, 2011).

The hiring of people with a disability can be considered as a part of diversity management, which can be defined as the hiring and managing of a heterogeneous set of employees (Besler & Sezerel, 2012; Henry & Evans, 2007). As such, diverse hiring has, like inclusive hiring, been subject to governmental pressures, where the Dutch government adopted policies to further the hiring of a diverse set of employees (Subeliani & Tsogas, 2005; Wolfs, 2003). Again, governmental pressure regarding diverse hiring is not limited to the Netherlands but has been subject to governmental pressure all over the western world (Yang & Konrad, 2011).

The Government is not the only institution pressuring organizations to adapt their organizational form regarding the employment of disabled people. As shown by Burge et al. (2007), the public views the integration of disabled people in the labour market as favourable, meaning they might favour organizations who do employ disabled employees as opposed to those that do not. Similar to the findings by Burge et al. (2007), Morin et al. (2013) found that the general public stands favourable to the employment of people with a disability. Again, this might mean they favour organizations who do employ disabled employees as opposed to those that do not. Furthermore, societal expectations have greatly influenced organizations in their corporate social responsibility efforts, of which diversity management is a part (corporate social responsibility can be defined as the actions an organization takes to the benefit of societal good) (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). This favourable public perception on the employment of people with a disability cannot only be found in respectively the United Kingdom and Canada, where the previously mentioned results were found. De Clercq (2008) also had results showing public support for the employment of disabled people in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Based on the findings in previous research, we can safely state organizations have to deal with both coercive and normative pressures regarding the employment of disabled people (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Because organizations face both coercive pressures as well as normative pressures, and possibly mimetic pressures, regarding the inclusion of disabled people in the workplace, there is a need for organizations to take these institutions into account. Mimetic pressures refer to how organizations tend to imitate the practices of other, successful organizations. The imitation of the practices of other organizations is especially prominent when organizations

themselves are uncertain about how to implement practices. Coercive pressures refer to institutions that require an organization to comply to certain rules that limit their flexibility, for example labour legislation (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Normative pressures refer to norms and values/ expectations of stakeholders and how they influence the processes in organizations. When firms conform to these institutional pressures, the result is isomorphism, which means firms become highly similar to each other (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Nevertheless, the fact that unemployment in the group of people with a disability in the Netherlands is currently still high (maakerwerkvan.nu, 2018) lends credence to the assumption that institutional theory alone cannot fully explain why or why not organizations chose to adopt inclusive organizational practices.

Another theory which might explain the adoption of inclusive hiring by organizations is the resource-based view. The resource-based view is a strategic management theory on how organizations attempt to gain competitive advantage (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). It states that, to achieve competitive advantage, an organization must determine which strategic resources and/or capabilities residing within the organization can be used to best exploit opportunities in its environment. To ensure sustainability of this competitive advantage, managers must make sure that these strategic resources are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (Deephouse, 1999; Peteraf, 1993). In obtaining a sustained competitive advantage, an organization becomes distinctly different from its competitors (Barney, 1991).

In direct contrast with institutional theory, the resource-based view proposes that, by obtaining strategic resources, firms become highly dissimilar to each other. As such, the hiring of disabled people is not only a way of conforming to institutional expectations; diverse hiring can be a way in which an organization makes itself distinct from other organizations, possibly obtaining a competitive advantage (Besler & Sezerel, 2012). Many organizations are reluctant to hire people with a disability because of a feared decrease in organizational performance (Halme et al., 2012). However, this can be explained by the fact that leveraging diversity asks for a dedication of a lot of firm resources and is a long process regularly accompanied with a decrease in organizational performance in the early phases (Bruce, 2006; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Shaban, 2016).

While the resource-based view might give some more insights to the reasons for adoption or non-adoption of inclusive hiring by organizations, institutional pressures do still play a role in this adoption. Therefore, a theory combining the two perspectives is needed. Optimal distinctiveness is such a concept that seeks to combine both institutional theory as well as a strategic management perspective, of which the resource-based view is a part. To attain the highest possible chance of survival, an organization has to find that point where it is both different enough from their competitors as to be able to achieve competitive advantage and conforms enough to institutional pressures (and thus becomes more similar to other organizations) to remain legitimate in the eyes of its environment. This concept of a break-even point between being different from and being similar to competition has been called optimal distinctiveness (Durand et al., 2017). Optimal distinctiveness has been defined as a point of harmony between assimilation (meaning being similar to) and differentiation (meaning being different) from others (Brewer, 1991; Alvarez et al., 2005). Based on their concept of optimal distinctiveness, Durand et al. (2017) argue that, to be successful, an organization needs to orchestrate all its different strategic aspects. They propose two possible forms of

strategic orchestration: integrative orchestration, where all different firm aspects combine in unique configurations, and compensatory orchestration, where a legitimacy loss in one aspect is negated by a legitimacy gain in another aspect.

In their study from 2011, Yang & Konrad tried to understand the concept of diversity management through the lens of institutional theory and through the lens of the resource-based view. They conclude in saying that there is merit to the studying of diversity management through the lenses of both the institutional theory as well as the resource-based view, and even see some complementarities between the two perspectives. Therefore, they argue the possible merit to study diversity management, and thus inclusive hiring since it is a part of diversity management, through the lens of a perspective that seeks to combine the insights from both institutional theory and the resource-based view. As established, optimal distinctiveness is such a perspective.

Unfortunately, at the moment no research exists in which the context of inclusive hiring is tested through the lens of the optimal distinctiveness perspective. This while the theory lends itself well to this context, because of the established institutional pressures on one side and the potential for competitive advantage on the other. This is especially the case because of the changing employee demographics in several fields such as construction (Freeman, 2006), where it has become increasingly difficult to find suitable employees, which might lead to higher adoption of inclusive practices, as well as an increase in governmental pressure on the hiring of disabled employees with policies such as the *participatiewet*. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the theory of optimal distinctiveness translates to the phenomenon of inclusive hiring.

Since all these topics have been scarcely researched, this study will try to give some more insight into how organizations use the hiring of disabled people to comply to institutional pressures. Furthermore, the researcher intends to give some more insight into how organizations use the hiring of disabled people to obtain an advantage over competitors, how the hiring of disabled people is orchestrated in the rest of the business and how they attempt to create a position of optimal distinctiveness. To guide this purpose, the following research question can be asked: ‘How does an organization use the hiring of disabled employees to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness?’.

The researcher intends to contribute scientifically by providing a deeper understanding of the institutional pressures driving an increased focus on the hiring of people with a disability. Also, a better understanding of how organizations use this inclusive hiring to gain a position of competitive advantage and how this enables them to become optimally distinct will be provided. The researcher intends to provide a practical contribution by providing a clear understanding to employers and managers on which they can base their decision with regards to the hiring of people with a disability.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. First, the literature used will be reviewed and a theoretical framework will be developed. Then, the methodology used to gather the results will be explained. Then, the results are presented and a discussion of these results follows. Last, conclusions will be given as well as suggestions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical Positioning

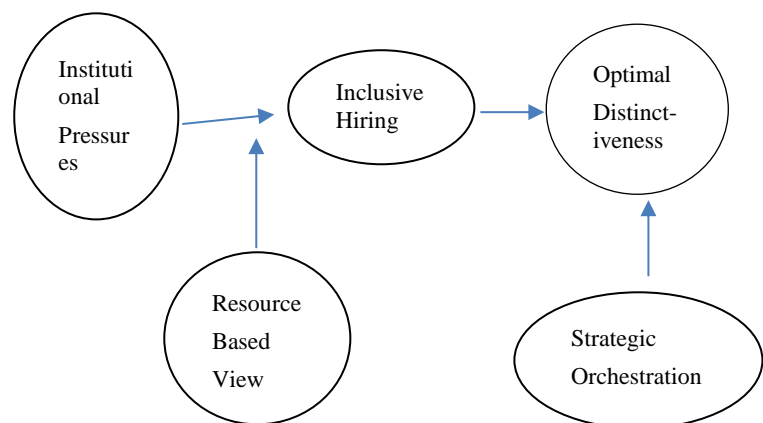


Figure 1: Theory visualization

### 2.1 Institutional Theory and Adoption of Inclusive Practices

Institutional theory poses that organizational behavior can, to a large extent, be explained by the institutional pressures (the rules, norms, values and expectations) in a geographical setting (Edwards et al., 2007) an organization is confronted with. Three drivers which derive their ‘power’ from institutions can be observed; mimetic, coercive and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). Mimetic pressures refer to how organizations tend to imitate the practices of other, successful organizations. The imitation of the practices of other organizations is especially prominent when organizations themselves are uncertain about how to implement practices.

Coercive pressures refer to institutions that require an organization to comply to certain rules that limit their flexibility, for example labor legislation. Currently, coercive pressures regarding the hiring of disabled people can be observed. For example, the ‘*Participatiewet*’, which obliges employers to hire disabled employees, is expected to be enforced in the near future in the Netherlands (Edzes & Van Dijk, 2015; Ministerie van sociale zaken en werkgelegenheid, 2018). Normative pressures refer to norms and values/ expectations of stakeholders and how they influence the processes in organizations. Normative pressures regarding the hiring of disabled people were observed by Burge et al. (2007), who found that the public stood favorable to those organizations that employed people with a disability. Similar to the findings by Burge et al. (2007), Morin et al. (2013) found that the general public stands favourable to the employment of people with a disability. Again, this might mean they favour organizations who do employ disabled employees as opposed to those that do not. This favourable public perception on the employment of people with a disability cannot only be found in respectively the United Kingdom and Canada, where the previously mentioned results were found. De Clercq (2008) also had results showing public support for the employment of disabled people in Belgium and the Netherlands. Due to these institutional pressures, organizations have to rethink their position on the topic of inclusive hiring, in a way ‘forcing’ organizations to adopt inclusive practices.

When firms conform to these institutional pressures, the result is isomorphism, which means firms become highly similar to each

other. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). In any field, the institutional pressures that guide the creation of organizational forms decide what is seen as a legitimate form of business. That means that, when a firm conforms to coercive, normative and mimetic pressures, it gains legitimacy as an organization and a possible exchange partner in the eyes of the institutional field in which it operates (Deephhouse, 1999). Also, customers are more likely to buy products and services from those organizations they deem to be legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

## 2.2 Resource-based View and Adoption of Inclusive Practices

Many theories on how firms manage to create an advantage in their marketplace exist. The resource-based view is one of these theories trying to explain how and why organizations manage to create a competitive advantage and, more importantly, sustain this advantage. In contrast with, for example, Porter (1979), who looks almost exclusively to an industry its environment in determining the relative 'attractiveness' of these industries and the chance of survival of the organizations working in that industry, the resource-based view examines solely an organizations' internal resources and how these resources help an organization to be competitive in its market space (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). The two main assumptions it makes about these internal firm resources are that firms can have control of heterogeneous resources, meaning different organizations can have control over differing resources, and that resources are not perfectly mobile, meaning they cannot freely move between organizations.

Firms are said to have a competitive advantage when they implement a value creating strategy that is not also being implemented by an opposing firm competing in the same market space. However, this value creating strategy can only be a source of sustained competitive advantage when no current or potentially future competitors are able to implement the same strategy or hope to duplicate the advantage following from the original strategy by implementing a different strategy (Barney, 1991).

Because firms depend on internal resources to build their strategies, it is helpful to examine these resources to find out how they can be a source for sustained competitive advantage. Four necessary attributes resources need to have to be a strategic resource can be discerned (Barney, 1991). First, strategic resources need to be valuable, meaning they need to enable a firm controlling the resources in implementing a value creating strategy. When a valuable resource resides in the market space in abundance, they can be possessed by a plethora of organizations and as such cannot be a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, strategic resources also need to be rare. Third, to be a source of sustained competitive advantage, resources need to be imperfectly imitable, meaning other firms need to be unable to obtain a hold of them. Resources can be imperfectly imitable for any of three reasons. When the sourcing of valuable and rare resources depends upon unique historical conditions, resources can be inimitable. This is also the case when the way in which a resource contributes to the competitive advantage is unclear and thus hard to copy, or when it depends on complex, hard to understand relations between resources. Last, to be a possible source of sustained competitive advantage, strategic resources must be non-substitutable, meaning no other resources that can provide the same sort of competitive advantage can exist (Barney, 1991; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992; Peteraf, 1993).

Only when an organization possesses resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable, can it hope to implement a strategy which enables it to obtain a sustained competitive advantage. When the organization has managed to obtain a sustained competitive advantage, it faces no to low competition in its position and should thus have a high chance of survival (Deephhouse, 1999).

As was explained before, diversity management can be a source of competitive advantage (Henry & Evans, 2007). The hiring of people with a disability can be considered as a part of diversity management, which can be defined as the hiring and managing of a heterogeneous set of employees (Besler & Szekeres, 2012; Henry & Evans, 2007). Previous research suggests that the effective managing of a diverse workforce, and thus a workforce that for example includes people with a disability, can be a source of competitive advantage. Potential benefits that were observed were, among others, better decision-making abilities, better work culture, more creativity and opportunities to innovate, better business performance and a higher understanding of niche markets (Cox & Blake, 1991; Halme et al., 2012; Henry & Evans, 2007;). Therefore, we can say there is evidence that, when effectively managed, inclusive hiring can be a resource capable of providing a competitive advantage.

However, when looking at the four prerequisites for resources capable of providing a competitive advantage (resources need to be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991)), it remains to be seen whether inclusive hiring can be a source of sustained competitive advantage. A case can be made that the hiring of disabled people can be a valuable (because of the benefits it potentially provides) and non-substitutable (because no other demographic can give an organization the same insights) resource, and the effective managing of disabled employees might be an activity that is imperfectly imitable. However, disabled people who are available to an employer can hardly be deemed a rare resource, since, at least in the Netherlands, a lot of disabled people who are willing to work are currently unemployed (maakerwerkvan.nu, 2018). Therefore, it remains to be seen whether inclusive hiring can be a source of sustained competitive advantage instead of only a source of competitive advantage.

Where institutional pressures can influence an organization to adopt inclusive practices, the strategic management perspective can be a mediating factor on that relationship, due to the established questionable nature of inclusive hiring as a strategic resource. For example, when an organization does not believe in disabled employees as a strategically valuable resource, this belief can negatively mediate the positive effect of institutional pressures on inclusive hiring.

## 2.3 Optimal Distinctiveness and Adoption of Inclusive Practices

For how paradoxical the institutional theory and the resource-based view may seem, there is merit for the studying of the creation of organizational forms in both. One view that recognizes this combined merit is that of optimal distinctiveness. The optimal distinctiveness view states that organizations both have to conform to institutional pressures and pursue a strategic position of competitive advantage (Deephhouse, 1999). Firms have to conform to institutional pressures to avoid legitimacy problems while they have to pursue a position of competitive advantage to get ahead of their competition. The trade-off between both means that, when firms become too similar, they

cannot hope to gain an advantage over its competitors. However, when an organization becomes too dissimilar, it loses its legitimacy. This results in its environment regarding it as a 'black sheep'. Therefore, its environment will not consider doing business with this organization, meaning it will have a hard time in obtaining resources. So, an organization needs to find that point where its strategy is dissimilar enough from that of its competitors where it can obtain an advantage, but not so dissimilar where legitimacy problems limit it in obtaining needed resources.

As established, organizations do have to conform, at least to some degree, to institutional pressures on inclusive hiring, a relationship which can be mediated by that organization's views on disabled employees as a strategically valuable resource. Both these variables (institutional pressures and the perceived value of disabled employees) influence the position an organization has towards its inclusive hiring practices. In its own right, inclusive hiring can influence an organization its position of optimal distinctiveness. For example, having to conform to institutional pressures by hiring employees with a disability can limit an organization in its chances to become strategically dissimilar from its competitors, in turn limiting their ability to become optimally distinct. However, when organizations find a way to use inclusive hiring as a way to both conform to institutional pressures as well as use it as a strategically valuable resource, it can help them to become optimally distinct.

## 2.4 Strategic Orchestration and Adoption of Inclusive Practices

Durand et al. (2017) discuss three important dimensions which organizations need to consider when attempting to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness: strategic orchestration, stakeholder multiplicity and managing temporal. The main concept to be studied regarding optimal distinctiveness in this paper is strategic orchestration. Stakeholder multiplicity and managing temporal will not be further discussed in this paper, not because there is no merit to these concepts, but because their nature makes it impossible to adequately study them with the limited resources available to the researcher.

Optimal distinctiveness recognizes that an organization its strategy, instead of being one-dimensional, consists of multiple aspects, and that it needs to orchestrate these aspects to achieve optimal distinctiveness (Durand et al., 2017). To be able to achieve a position of optimal distinctiveness, an organization which employs disabled people has to orchestrate this facet of their business with other strategic aspects. Two main alternatives regarding the configuring of different strategic elements can be discerned: integrative and compensatory orchestration. Integrative orchestration means that organizations configure different firm elements in such a way that they become unique, without necessity for any of the individual elements to be unique themselves. Alternatively, an organization its actions on one aspect might seem problematic, but by orchestrating this element with other supporting elements this problematic side disappears (Durand et al., 2017; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006; Simon & Hitt, 2009). Compensatory orchestration is used when organizations try to offset their deviation from the norm on one firm element by conforming with the norm on another (Durand et al., 2017; Philippe & Durand, 2011).

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research context

For this research, interviews were conducted to study the concept of optimal distinctiveness in an inclusive hiring context. This activity was approved by the ethical committee at the University of Twente. Interviews were done at organizations who are currently employing people with a disability, to get a better understanding of the institutional pressures guiding the adoption of inclusive hiring, the strategic reasoning behind inclusive hiring and the orchestration of inclusive hiring with other strategic elements. Also, interviews were held at organizations who are currently not employing people with a disability, to get a clearer view on the reasons why an organization can chose not to work with disabled people.

### 3.2 Research Design

Because of the lack of relevant research, the main goal of this study was to explore the aforementioned concept. Since the focus of this study lies on exploring a concept and gaining new insights, it can be deemed to be exploratory research, for which an exploratory research design is the best fit (Kothari, 2004). Since data was gathered from a population at one point in time, the study can be considered to be cross-sectional (Dooley, 2001).

### 3.3 Data Collection

Since, as aforementioned, the goal of this research is concept exploring, qualitative research is more appropriate (Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, the focus of this research was qualitative research.

In qualitative studies, one of the most used methods of data collection is the interview method, since this method gives researchers more room to explore new concepts (Gill et al., 2008). For this reason, interviews were also the primary source of data collection in this research. For this research, the method of semi-structured interviews was used. This method was used because it gives the interviewer some structure to hold on to, making sure the focus of the interview does not get out of touch, but it also allows the interviewer to make some variations when needed, for example pursuing new avenues when interviewees respond in interesting, unexpected ways or allowing for clarification, explanation and elaboration when needed. To give the interviewees the chance to elaborate on their answers, open-ended questions were used during the interviews. The protocol for the semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix A.

In choosing the observable units, judgment sampling was used. This means that those people who were, in the judgment of the researcher, best able to provide meaningful information were chosen to be studied (Marshall, 1996). In this study, those possible interviewees were considered based on a main characteristic, which was: the interviewees need to be in direct control or have knowledge of both the hiring procedures in the organization, the strategy formulation of the organization and the link between staffing and strategy. Size of the sample was based on the concept of data saturation. This concept states that researchers should do new interviews until they reach a point where no new insights and perceptions are gathered, and it can be reasonably assumed that enough information was gathered to answer the research question (Guest et al., 2006). In this research, the ultimate sample size was thirteen. Based on the concept of data saturation, this sample size would be big enough, since no new insights (on a level of abstraction) were gained in the later interviews. This conforms with findings by Guest et al. (2006), who found that Data Saturation typically occurs within the first twelve interviews but can be observed as soon as six interviews. In the following table, a division of interview participants can be

found. The coded data that was collected during these interviews can be found in external appendix A.

| Participant    | Organization                                   | Duration of the interview | Employs people with a disability |
|----------------|--|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Participant 1  | Organization A – Social company                | 43 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 2  | Organization B – Internet hosting              | 30 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 3  | Organization B – Internet hosting              | 26 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 4  | Organization C – Supermarket                   | 48 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 5  | Organization D – Cleaning                      | 30 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 6  | Organization D – Cleaning                      | 38 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 7  | Organization C – Supermarket                   | 36 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 8  | Organization E – Production                    | 12 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 9  | Organization D – Supermarket                   | 25 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 10 | Organization F – Construction                  | 23 minutes                | No                               |
| Participant 11 | Organization G – Production of machines        | 22 minutes                | Yes                              |
| Participant 12 | Organization H – Day care                      | 19 minutes                | No                               |
| Participant 13 | Organization I – sale and renting of equipment | 27 minutes                | Yes                              |

Table 1: interview participants

### 3.4 Operationalization

With regards to the research question ‘How does an organization use the hiring of disabled employees to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness?’, several variables need to be operationalized into questions to make them suitable for interviews. For example, we need to know the role of institutional pressures in the context of inclusive hiring.

| Institutional pressures (DiMaggio& Powell, 1983; Paauwe& Boselie, 2003) | Operationalization  | Questions   |
|---|---|---|
| Coercive pressures  | institutions that require an organization to comply to certain rules that limit their flexibility, for example labor legislation                      | Is the hiring of disabled people being stimulated by the government? How?   |
| Mimetic pressures   | organizations tend to imitate the practices of other, successful organizations, especially when uncertain about how to implement practices themselves | Do you believe competitors have an advantage because they hire disabled people? How?<br>How do other companies inspire you to hire people with a disability?  |
| Normative pressures   | norms and values/ expectations of stakeholders and how they influence the processes in organizations  | Do you believe customers view the hiring of people with a disability as a good characteristic? Why or why not?<br>Do business partners stimulate the hiring of people with a disability? How?<br>Are there other organizations which stimulate the hiring of disabled people? |

Table 2: institutional theory operationalization

Furthermore, we need to know how organizations view the hiring of people with a disability from a strategic perspective.

| Strategic Management aspect                  | Operationalization  | Questions   |
|--|---|---|
| Strategic leveraging (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004) | The ways in which companies use resources to gain a competitive advantage | Is the hiring of people with a disability an important aspect of your strategy? Why?<br>How do you try to gain an advantage by the hiring of disabled people?<br>How does the hiring of disabled people give you an advantage compared to organizations who |

|                                    |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
|                                    |   | do not hire people with a disability?   |
| Resource-based view (Barney, 1991) | The resource-based view is a theory trying to explain how and why organizations manage to create a competitive advantage and, more importantly, sustain this advantage through the use of strategic resources | Is the hiring of people with a disability an important aspect of your strategy? Why?<br><br>How do you try to gain an advantage by the hiring of disabled people?<br><br>How does the hiring of disabled people give you an advantage compared to organizations who do not hire people with a disability? |

Table 3: strategic management operationalization

Also, we need to know how employers orchestrate the hiring of people with a disability. Durand et al. (2017) propose two ways in which an organization can orchestrate (configure) the different aspects of their strategy: integrative orchestration and compensatory orchestration. Also, we need to know how the organization uses the hiring of disabled employees as a resource which can potentially be an advantage compared to their competitors.

| Manner of orchestration  | Operationalization  | Questions  |
|--|---|--|
| Integrative orchestration (Durand et al, 2017; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2006; Simon & Hitt, 2009) | Organizations configure different firm elements in such way that they become unique, without necessity for any of the individual elements to be unique. Alternatively, an organization's actions on one aspect might seem problematic, but by orchestrating this element with other supporting elements this problematic side disappears. An example of this regarding the inclusion of people with a disability might be: combining the inclusion of disabled people with other corporate citizenship activities to create unique synergies between otherwise conventional strategic elements. | Are there other activities the organization does that relate to corporate social responsibility? |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |  |  |
| Compensatory orchestration (Durand et al., 2017; Philippe & Durand, 2011) | Compensatory orchestration is used when organizations try to offset their deviation from the norm on one firm element by conforming with the norm on another. An example of this regarding the inclusion of people with a disability might be: hiring disabled people as a way of conforming and using this as compensation for not conforming in environmental friendliness | Are there other activities the organization does that relate to corporate social responsibility? |

Table 4: strategic orchestration operationalization

A final variable that needs to be clarified is the extent to which an organization manages to be optimally distinctive and obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness (Deephouse, 1999; Durand et al., 2017).

| Optimal distinctiveness (Durand et al., 2017) | Operationalization   | Questions  |
|---|--|--|
| Description                                   | Managing both conformity and differentiation by orchestrating the strategic aspects of the organization to be both legitimate in the eyes of various stakeholders across time periods and to be unique enough to be able to carve out a strategic position of attained competitive advantage | Is the hiring of disabled people being stimulated by the government? How?<br><br>Do you believe competitors have an advantage because they hire disabled people? How?<br><br>How do other companies inspire you to hire people with a disability?<br><br>Do you believe customers view the hiring of people with a disability as a good characteristic? Why or why not?<br><br>Do business partners stimulate the hiring of people with a disability? How?<br><br>Are there other organizations which stimulate the hiring of disabled people?<br><br>Is the hiring of people with a disability an important aspect of your strategy? Why? |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p>How do you try to gain an advantage by the hiring of disabled people?</p> <p>How does the hiring of disabled people give you an advantage compared to organizations who do not hire people with a disability?</p> <p>Are there other activities the organization does that relate to corporate social responsibility?</p> |
|--|--|--|

Table 5: optimal distinctiveness operationalization

Optimal distinctiveness can be said to have been obtained when an organization does not encounter any legitimacy problems arising from a failure to conform to institutional pressures across different organizational time periods and does manage to be distinct enough from its competitors to carve out a position of competitive advantage (Deephouse, 1999; Durand et al., 2017).

### 3.5 Data analysis

External Appendix A contains the ultimate result of the data obtained during the interviews, of which transcripts were made. The ultimate results were obtained using analysis methods as proposed by LeCompte (2000). First, the set of data was cleaned up by transcribing the raw data, the recordings of the interviews. Then the most useful information, or the items, of each interview were identified, in this case those quotes that present useful information. Then these quotes were grouped in taxonomies based on both literature and research goal. These taxonomies were Coercive pressures, Normative pressures, Mimetic pressures, Strategic leveraging, Resource-based view, Integrative orchestration and Compensatory orchestration. Then, in step 4, the links between the different taxonomies were identified, again based on both literature and research goal. Then, the different taxonomies that linked together were grouped. These groups were: Institutional Theory, which included Coercive pressures, Normative pressures and Mimetic pressures, Strategic Management, which included Strategic leveraging and Resource-based view, and Strategic Orchestration, which included Integrative orchestration and Compensatory orchestration. Then the three ‘patterns’ were all grouped in one structure, named Optimal Distinctiveness.

### 3.6 Reliability/validity

Qualitative research does not inherently possess problematic issues of reliability (King et al., 1994), because in qualitative research, the interpretation of the researcher is necessary in the collecting and using of data. However, when researchers, even unknowingly, are prejudiced about the topic they are studying, researcher bias can occur, which might result in bias in the results. Another possible problem is a lack of validity in the research. Validity deals with the trueness of one’s findings, in other words, does the research indeed measure what it intended to measure?

To ensure the reliability and validity of this study, two main methods (taken from Merriam, 1995) were used:

1. when reviewing the results obtained during the interviews, these results were closely reviewed to examine their similarity to the concepts that were

studied. Since the results were similar to the concepts and to empirical findings in the diversity management literature, validity can be assumed.

2. Peer/colleague examination. Ask different peers to comment on the findings. If these comments all support the truthfulness of the research, the researcher can be confident about the validity of his/her research. Also, these peers can check whether the results the researcher finds are consistent with the data that is collected to ensure the reliability of the research. This was done by asking fellow students to comment on this study, and having one fellow student go through the same coding process (on a small sample of the total interviews). Since the results were similar, validity can be assumed.

## 4. Results

In Appendix B, a brief and comprehensive overview of the results per organization can be found.

### 4.1 Institutional Theory

One of the main parts of this research is the influence of institutional pressures on inclusive hiring. Institutional pressures can be sub-divided into three dimensions, namely the afore discussed coercive, normative and mimetic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

#### 4.1.1 Coercive Pressures

When looking at the dimension of coercive pressure, based on the results from the interviews, it becomes clear that coercive pressures do, at least to some extent, have an influence on the employing of people with a disability. A main example that was mentioned by multiple interviewees was the ‘Participatiewet’ and the ‘quotumregeling’, as adopted by the Dutch government. The ‘quotumregeling’ is, at the moment, not fully instated, meaning employers do not yet have to oblige to this regulation. However, full adoption is something that, as was said by interviewees, is quite possible to happen in the future, and as such, it was observed that as a result of this outlook more organizations were looking into inclusive hiring. For example, one interviewee said:

*“I see that other organizations who did not work with disabled people in an instant think, huh, Participatiewet, what’s that, what do I have to do, so I really think it has encouraged something”.*

For some of the interviewees, coercive pressures exerted by the Dutch government were even a main reason to adopt inclusive organizational practices.

*“under the pressure of legislation like this which is adopted by the government, we try to comply with this”*

*“Is the hiring of people with a disability an important aspect of your policy? Yes, also because this is mandated by the government”*

The ‘quotumregeling’ is not the only way in which the Dutch government tries to stimulate inclusive hiring. Subsidies to alleviate the lower performance of the disabled employees can be granted after the capacities of the employee have been measured. Furthermore, trial periods during which the employer can gauge whether inclusive hiring works in their organization exist. When



it turns out that it does not, employer and employee can part ways without causing problems for either side. Also, Dutch municipalities try to stimulate the hiring of people with a disability by actively engaging local businesses. As evidenced by one of the interviewees:

*“The municipality has a distinct department for that, a couple of civil servants who are constantly working on that participation”.*

However, according to the interviewees, the Dutch government could do more than they are currently doing. One interviewee noted that more help and support to organizations in their dealings with people with a disability could be a huge contributing factor. Another interviewee remarked that the government sticks to talking about the subject but does not act and laments this perceived fact.

This shows that organizations do have to consider coercive pressure with regards to inclusive hiring. That this is also the reality is evidenced by a perceived change in organizations' proceedings after the adoption of the 'Participatiewet'. However, as noted by multiple interviewees, the government could be an even bigger factor with regards to the adoption of inclusive hiring.

#### 4.1.2 Normative Pressures

Normative pressures refer to norms and values/ expectations of stakeholders and how they influence the processes in organizations. One stakeholder which, through its norms and values, can influence organizations to employ people with a disability is the customer base. Indeed, when asked about whether customers see inclusive hiring as a good characteristic:

*“Yes. Definitely”.*

And another interviewee, when asked whether they observe if clients view inclusive hiring as a good characteristic:

*“Yes. We can definitely see that”.*

However, when reviewing other interviews, it becomes apparent that this is only the case for those organizations where employees with a disability have a high degree of visibility, for example in a supermarket. In those organizations where this is not the case, employers of people with a disability stated an absence of the influence of customers on inclusive hiring. Also, an interviewee which did not employ people with a disability noted the same sentiment:

*“I think in a tender offer, that it, I cannot imagine that a client looks at a construction company which employs people with a disability and that those would sooner get the offer, or that those organizations would have an advantage”.*

So, in industries where employees with a disability are less visible, the normative pressure of the customer base is less prominent.

Other stakeholders which can and actively try to influence the adoption of inclusive hiring are local schools and foundations. Multiple interviewees were noted as saying they were actively pursued about internships for students with a disability and influenced by foundations who try to support people with a disability in their social and work life.

*“The foundation is a party that helps to get disabled people a job and helps them to keep their job, but also a party that tries to discuss with us about these employees when they are going through a rough time”.*

Finally, so-called social businesses (Yunus, 2009) actively try, be it for social reasons, financial reasons or a combination of both, to get people with a disability a job in regular organizations.

*“Furthermore, there are a lot of organizations who, from the heart or for a profit, try their best to do this (get disabled people a job)”.*

So, we can see that, based on the interviews, the customer base is a stakeholder that can potentially be a considerably influential normative pressure regarding the adoption of inclusive hiring. Smaller roles in this regard are allowed to certain other organizations, such as schools, foundations and social businesses.

#### 4.1.3 Mimetic Pressures

The third dimension of institutional pressures is that of mimetic pressure. During the interviews, it appeared that mimetic pressures play a less pronounced role in the adoption of inclusive hiring. None of the interviewees said they were influenced by other organizations to start hiring people with a disability, and none of the interviewees said they were inspired by other organizations in their inclusive hiring practices. Therefore, we can say that mimetic pressures do not play a significant part in the adoption of inclusive hiring.

### 4.2 Strategic Management

Another important part of this research is the strategic considerations organizations may have when they consider inclusive hiring. To get a clearer understanding of this topic, we will regard two sub-dimensions of strategic management: first we will regard strategic leveraging, meaning how organizations use inclusive hiring to gain an advantage. Then we will look at inclusive hiring from a resource-based view perspective, to see the value of disabled employees as a resource.

#### 4.2.1 Strategic Leveraging

When looking at the strategic considerations interviewees have in their inclusive hiring practices and the ways in which they believe the hiring of people with a disability can give them an advantage in the market, we can identify two main threads. One of the main advantages an organization can obtain by hiring people with a disability is that of an improved image. It was said by multiple interviewees that the hiring of people with a disability has made them look favorably in the eyes of their potential customer base. For example, one interviewee argued:

*“unknowingly, in hindsight it was almost a bit of marketing. Because doing this, you create a lot of sympathy with your customers”.*

However, this can only be an advantage in those organizations where customers are in direct contact with the employees with a disability. Those interviewees whose employees with a disability were not in close contact with the organization its customers did not report image as a strategic consideration or as a way in which they obtained an advantage. In other words, the visibility of the people with a disability is a main factor in this regard. Interestingly, it was argued that the improved image advantage only works when it is not a strategic consideration of the organization.

*“It was also in the papers, I did not look for that publicity myself, because you do have to be careful with that for people not to judge you and say, “oh, he is only doing this to create goodwill, he is only doing this for his own gain”.*

Another main advantage interviewees created through their hiring of people with a disability is more internally-based.

Interviewees observed that inclusive hiring led to a better work atmosphere. Also, inclusive hiring was beneficial to the culture of the organization, and in some cases it even led to a better quality of work.

*“It was also a consideration, if we help people from the heart to say it like that, it means that people become happy. Also, the people they help become happy. So, it gives a sense of pride to the organization”.*

*“Yes, the culture of the organization, the level of support you give, the contact with the customer, if you know how to show empathy then you can also do that in a telephone conversation where we do the most of our conversations with customer. So that has actually been a good contribution to our culture, to our work experience”.*

***“So the quality of your work is better as a result? Yes”.***

Furthermore, one of the interviewees noted that the decision to work with disabled employees was made out of necessity. One thing the interviewee (organization D) remarked was that the labor market demographics were changing, and that, as a result, it was harder to find good employees, something which the organization suspects will become progressively harder in the near and distant future. However, one big demographic that is still largely untapped is that of people with a disability. Therefore, as the interviewee concluded, being able to work with disabled employees at the present time can give the organization an important edge towards its competitors in the future when labor supply is scarce.

*“The third reason is a very practical one, you see that the demographic labor market, urbanization, all those matters, more women than men, all those things have an effect on the availability of good people. And we said, if we can handle it, and it is complementary to our DNA to be able to handle it, if we can handle that group of employees (talking about people with a disability) then they are for a large part the employees of the future. So it has also been a labor market choice”.*

Another potential advantage to the hiring of people with a disability that was noted by interviewees was that of financial gain. Especially there where, from a quality perspective, it does not really matter whether the work is done by a fully functional employee or an employee with a disability, the subsidies the organization would receive for the employee with a disability could give the organization a potential advantage. However, it needs to be noted that other interviewees agreed that there is no real potential for financial gain. This might be because of how these subsidies are currently regulated in the Netherlands. Periodically, the value of the employees with a disability is measured, and the subsidies are readjusted based on the measurements. Furthermore, it was argued that the money gained because of subsidies would be negated by the extra costs of the needed support for the employees with a disability and the time this support takes.

So, the main advantages that inclusive hiring brought to those organizations that were observed in this research was that of a better work atmosphere, a beneficial stimulus to the organizational culture and even a higher overall work quality. Another advantage is that of an improved image, however, this advantage to inclusive hiring was only found in those organizations where the employees with a disability were highly visible to the potential customer base. Furthermore, being able to work with people with a disability can give an organization an advantage compared to its competitors in the future when the demand for labor is higher than the conventional supply.

#### **4.2.2 Resource-based View**

In this section, we will examine the resources that are needed by organizations to make a success of working with employees with a disability. How this ties into the resource-based view perspective, will be discussed in section 5 ‘Discussion’.

Looking at what was said during the interviews, it becomes clear that, for inclusive hiring to work in an organization, the organization needs to be willing and able to put in the necessary work. However, this ability is not something all organizations seem to possess. As was said during the interviews:

*“Do you want it to work, then both sides should put in the work to come together, if you do not do that you will get big problems”.*

*“I think a lot of organizations want to, but do not know how to do it”.*

*“What you see is that a lot of organizations are still very much searching how to handle this subject (employing people with a disability)”.*

The necessary skills and knowledge that an organization needs to unlock the potential of employees with a disability consist of the ability to give the necessary support, and to exhibit a certain type of personality. As was said during the interviews:

*“You really need more patience, more time, but mainly patience, understanding”.*

*“We direct that with somewhere around 500 people. Of those 500 people, at least five to ten percent is working with this subject, and reasoning backwards would we not do this, we would be able to do work with at least five percent less supervision”.*

This ability to give the necessary support and be the suitable supporting factor for disabled employees needs to be rooted in the organizational culture.

*“Of course, also the organizational culture, as a manner of saying if you have an organization with only lumberjacks who cannot communicate, the someone like that is never going to survive”.*

These are, of course, all skills an organization should normally be able to procure on the market. However, one more essential characteristic of an organization that is able to work with disabled employees became visible during the interviews. The organization needs to have a sort of prior conviction in working with people with a disability. The ability and willingness to work with disabled employees needs to come from the heart, something which you either do or do not have.

*“I think if you do it like we do, and I do not say that to congratulate ourselves, but also other organizations, if you do it because you are intrinsically motivated for that group of people, then it is going to work”.*

*“You do not have to have learned for it but it does need to be in your heart”.*

***“So it can only work, it can only be an advantage if you do it because of your own views? I believe so. Otherwise it is like a farce, like look at how good we are while they are only doing it for financial gains and once this financial gain is gone you will see that it will vanish shortly thereafter”.***

### 4.3 Strategic Orchestration

The last part of this research that needs to be discussed with regards to the results is that of the concept of strategic orchestration. As discussed, organizations can orchestrate facets of their strategy in two distinctively different ways: integrative orchestration and compensatory orchestration. Integrative orchestration refers to a manner of strategic orchestration in which organizations configure different firm elements in such way that they become unique, without necessity for any of the individual elements to be unique. Alternatively, an organization its actions on one aspect might seem problematic, but by orchestrating this element with other supporting elements this problematic side disappears (Durand et al., 2017). When reviewing the interviews, it becomes clear that integrative orchestration is the more preferred manner used by the interviewees their organizations. In fact, none of the interviewees gave any indication that, to them, inclusive hiring was used as a compensatory facet of strategy, simply by the fact that all interviewees gave examples of ways in which they used inclusive hiring in an integrative way.

There were a couple of ways in which the studied organizations used inclusive hiring as a facet of an integrative orchestration strategy. For example, organization C was involved in other activities that were beneficial to the societal good. As a result of these activities, the visibility of the organization and especially the goodwill it had with the potential customer base grew. Combined with the sympathy the organization had evoked with their inclusive practices, these two aspects of the organizational strategy formed an integrative orchestration. This integrative orchestration results in a betterment of the image of the organization which any of these two facets alone could not have brought.

*"We have organized an event and as main sponsor I provided a starting capital which was quadrupled, and with that money we renovated the whole bakery from tip to toe" (about the renovation of a bakery where people with a disability work that is closely akin to a social workplace).*

*"Yes, we have received a lot of good reactions on that, a lot of sympathy".*

Another example is that of organization D. Organization D combines its inclusive practices with an extensive focus on diversity management. Through combining inclusiveness with diversity, the organization can create a synergy (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004), allowing it to create a competitive advantage. These advantages entail every advantage that can be leveraged by inclusiveness as well as diversity (see also Besler & Sezerel, 2012 and Bruce, 2006), which include: a better work atmosphere, a benefit to the organizational culture, higher innovativeness and better quality, among others. Again, this is an example of integrative orchestration.

*"In this organization, we work with more than 110 different nationalities. I think you could call that pretty diverse".*

A final example is that of organization G. Besides their inclusive practices, they provide employees with the opportunity to give financial (fully paid by the organization itself) and emotional (provided by the employees through, for example, writing letters) support to children in need in Africa. This is an example of integrative orchestration, because both activities were reported to contribute to the same goal: a better organizational culture.

*"All of our employees are coupled with a compassion child, previously this was same sort of foster parents, so we have those children in Kenia, and they are being financially supported by (name organization G)".*

## 5. Discussion

In this research, the institutional pressures on organizations to adopt inclusive hiring practices were investigated by means of interviews with organizations who do and organizations who do not employ people with a disability. The findings suggest that institutional pressures on inclusive hiring do exist. Governmental pressure on organizations to adopt inclusive hiring practices were perceived by interviewees to be existent and were observed to be a contributing factor to the adoption of inclusive practices in organizations. With regards to normative pressures, it was found that the potential customer base does look favourably to organizations that do hire disabled employees as opposed to those that do not. However, an important distinction needs to be made. Normative pressures from the potential customer base can only influence organizations to adopt inclusive organizational practices when the employees with a disability have a significant degree of visibility. When this is not the case, and customers thus do not have direct contact with the employees with a disability, the normative pressure from the customer base does not seem to be an influencing factor. Other organizations that are stakeholders in an organization its local environment, such as schools, foundations and municipalities, can also influence organizations in their views on inclusive hiring when they actively pursue organizations in their efforts to get people with a disability employed. Finally, the results suggest that mimetic pressures do not play a significant role in the adoption of inclusive hiring.

So, based on the results, we can say that institutional pressures do have a positive effect on the perceived need to employ people with a disability. As such, it influences organizations to start employing people with a disability.

Also, the ways in which organizations can gain an advantage out of the hiring of people with a disability were researched. Findings suggest that these advantages do in fact exist as they were mentioned in multiple interviews. The main advantages which were observed by the organizations themselves were a better culture, a better work atmosphere and better work quality (of the organization as a whole). Also, in those cases where disabled employees are in close contact with the customer base, inclusive hiring can count as marketing through the sympathy it creates. This idea is also supported by Cox & Blake (1991), Henry & Evans (2007) and Besler & Sezerel (2012), who mention the same and similar advantages to working with a diverse workforce. As explained earlier, inclusive hiring can be viewed as a facet of workforce diversity, and thus, it is not peculiar that inclusive hiring would have the same potential benefits as that of having a diverse workforce.

From the perspective of the resource-based view, one can argue that employees with a disability can only provide organizations a sustained competitive advantage if they prove to be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). As can be gathered from the potential advantages to inclusive hiring shown in the previous section, employees with a disability can in fact be a valuable resource. Also, one can argue that these advantages are distinctly different from those that can be secured by other employee groups and are thus non-substitutable. For example, the aforementioned 'sense of organizational pride' would be distinctly different from the pride reserved from other organizational endeavours. Also, it can be argued that employees with a disability bring a different element an organization its culture and quality when compared to, say, employees with a differing ethnicity or sexual orientation. Looking at the rareness of potential employees with a disability is where it goes wrong. Indeed, in the Netherlands alone a lot of

currently unemployed people with a disability are willing to work (maakerwerkvan.nu, 2018).

However, during the interviews it became clear that employing people with a disability is only part of the resource; the other, arguably more valuable part of the resource is the knowledge, skills and willingness to work with people with a disability. When looking at it from this perspective, one could make the case that knowing how to work with people with a disability and being able and willing to put in this effort is as much a part of the resource 'employees with a disability' as are the actual employees. Again, possessing these resources would be valuable to an organization because it allows them to tap into the aforementioned advantages inclusive hiring can bring them. Furthermore, this knowledge, as it turns out, is quite rare, as was said during the interviews in this research. Moreover, it can be argued the willingness to work with people with a disability is imperfectly imitable. A sentiment that was shared by all interviewees was that, for working with people with a disability to really work, the ability and willingness to do so need to come from the heart, something which you either do or do not have. This also seems to be something which is not easily procurable on the market, because it is such an implicit thing that needs to be tied to the organization as a whole. Therefore, we can consider this an imperfectly imitable resource. In addition, it seems that this knowledge and sense of willingness is non-substitutable; it is hard to think of other ways in which an organization could create an environment in which people with a disability feel so at ease as to be able to unlock their full potential. So, based on the results, we can make a case for the resource being valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable. Therefore, we could say that employees with a disability and the organizational knowledge and willingness to work with these employees is a resource that can secure a sustained competitive advantage. This finding seems to agree with the dynamic capabilities perspective. This perspective states that not necessarily the resource itself, in this case employees with a disability, but the processes, competences and capabilities an organization needs to unlock the potential of the resource are the most important contributing factor (Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997).

Based on the results, we can say that significant a number of the organizations that were interviewed do recognize the value of inclusive hiring. Therefore, this variable has a positive mediating effect on the relationship between institutional pressures and inclusive hiring. Consequently, we can say that, at least in the organizations that were studied, both institutional theory and a strategic management perspective have a similar effect on inclusive hiring.

Combining both the insights gained based on institutional theory and those gained based on strategic management, we can make a couple of observations about optimal distinctiveness in the context of inclusive hiring. We found evidence for the existence of institutional pressures regarding the hiring of people with a disability, and we found evidence for the strategic advantage this group of employees can bring to an organization. This makes inclusive hiring a very suitable context to study optimal distinctiveness. What we found is that, as institutional pressures regarding the hiring of disabled employees continue to grow, more and more organizations are looking at possibilities of hiring people with a disability. In this sense, we can see organizations becoming more and more similar to each other. However, only those organizations which possess the valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable quality of having a real 'heart for the cause' can 'use' inclusive hiring to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness. Organizations can only unlock the strategic potential of employing disabled people when they possess this quality, and only when they can unlock this strategic

potential to differentiate itself from its competitors can they hope to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness. So, we observe that both institutional pressures as well as the strategic management perspective have the potential to drive organizations towards adopting inclusive practices.

Finally, the way in which organizations orchestrate their inclusive hiring practices and their other endeavours were investigated. Evidence was found for the concept of integrative orchestration, which was used by all the interviewees who adopted inclusive organizational practices. Evidence was only found for the existence of integrative orchestration, since this was the manner of orchestration that was used by all the interviewed organizations. However, since we found support for the existence of integrative orchestration, this also lends credence to the existence of compensatory orchestration (Tegmark, 2009).

One main finding regarding integrative orchestration was that the other strategic aspects of the studied organizations that were a part of the inclusive hiring orchestration were geared towards the same goal as inclusive hiring. For example, the foster child program used by organization G seems to work towards the same advantage as does inclusive hiring, the strategic aspect it is orchestrated with, namely that of a better organizational culture. This finding corresponds with statements by Durand et al. (2017), who say that integrative orchestration can occur when different firm elements, while not unique in and of themselves, are configured in such a way that they become unique. Using the same example of organization G: while effective use of inclusive hiring is not unique (although rare) and neither is a foster child program (or a similarly enough organizational activity), the combining of the two and the pointed use of this combination can lead to a unique organizational culture.

Another finding regarding the ways in which organizations used integrative orchestration was the nature of strategic aspects that were combined with inclusive hiring. All these activities can be regarded as corporate citizenship behaviour (CSR). This finding corresponds with statements by Gardberg & Fombrun (2006), who found that combinations of different CSR activities were often more successful than the sum of singular activities.

Something which needs to be noted with regards to strategic orchestration, is that none of the organizations seemed to be explicitly worried about this aspect when they started the respective activities. While evidence was found that the studied organizations used a manner of integrative orchestration, this might be more of a coincidental creation which can be found and was used by the organizations in retrospective rather than a strategic choice at the onset of the respective activities. Nevertheless, the existence and consequences of integrative orchestration were found and as such there is definite merit to what was discussed about the topic.

Based on the results, we can say the following theoretical contributions were provided. A clearer understanding of the institutional pressures influencing organizations to adopt inclusive organizational practices was given, as well as an understanding of how these institutional pressures were perceived by the organizations themselves. Furthermore, the potential advantages inclusive hiring can bring organizations were clarified, as well as the organizational practices that need to be adopted to tap into these potential advantages. Combining these insights, the concept of optimal distinctiveness was explored, and the way in which inclusive hiring can contribute to an organization in achieving a position of optimal distinctiveness was clarified.

## 5.1 Practical contributions

The most important practical contribution of this research is the insight that organizations which want to reap the potential benefits of inclusive hiring need to first look inside their own organization to see whether this organization is suitable for such a strategy. If an employer is only concerned about the potential advantages, such as the potential for marketing, without consideration for the needs of the employee, such a strategy seems to be doomed to fail.

Furthermore, it was shown that organizations do have to deal with institutional pressures in the context of inclusive hiring, and that these pressures are considered to possibly grow in the future. Therefore, organizations need to be aware of the institutional pressures regarding inclusive hiring and be able to deal with these pressures in a satisfactory manner.

Finally, organizations need to be aware of the potential to create a synergy between their efforts in corporate citizenship behavior, of which inclusive hiring can be a part. Integrative orchestration was used by all the researched organizations, and, based on the concept by Durand et al. (2017), can be a potent mechanism through which organizations can align with institutional pressures and pursue strategic advantages.

## 5.2 Limitations

One limitation is that it was not possible to go back and have a second interview with the first interviewees based on the data that was gathered during the later interviews. Had this been an opportunity, it might have led to new insights. However, since the point of data saturation was reached, we can be confident that these extra interviews would have led solely to insights that, on a level of abstraction, were already gathered during other interviews, and therefore, we can be fairly certain this limitation did not have a significant effect on this research.

Another limitation of this research is the subject of this research and the potential for socially desirable answers it harbors. When socially desirable answering occurs in interviewees, this can skew the results. However, the anonymous processing of the data and the clear communication of this anonymity should have eliminated interviewees' tendencies toward social desirability.

## 5.3 Future Research

One possible venue for future research would be further research to investigate whether employees with a disability and the organizational knowledge and willingness to work with these disabled employees is indeed a potential source of sustained competitive advantage from a resource-based view perspective (Barney, 1991). While this study makes a case for the answer being yes, more research is needed to corroborate this claim.

Furthermore, the other two dimensions of optimal distinctiveness as proposed by Durand et al. (2017), stakeholder multiplicity and temporal managing, would benefit from further research, potentially in an inclusive hiring context. This study mainly focused on the broader concept of optimal distinctiveness and one of its proposed dimensions, namely strategic orchestration, and as such found evidence for both these concepts. However, more research on the dimensions of stakeholder multiplicity and

temporal managing are needed to corroborate the concept of optimal distinctiveness as proposed by Durand et al. (2017).

## 6. Conclusion

*'How does an organization use the hiring of disabled employees to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness?'*

Based on the results that were obtained during this research, we can now answer this question. Hiring people with a disability can be a way for employers to be able to obtain a position of optimal distinctiveness. This is the case because, on the one hand, it is a good way to align your organization with institutional pressures regarding inclusive hiring. On the other hand, it can be a way of obtaining a competitive advantage. Only when an organization possesses the willingness and the ability to work with employees with a disability can they unlock both these potentials of inclusive hiring. How organizations use the hiring of disabled employees to do both these things simultaneously is by making sure the employees with a disability can fall back on a good support structure and a supportive culture, and by making them feel at ease in the organization.

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## **Appendix A – Preliminary Interview Protocol**

### **General information about the company:**

Zou u wat kunnen vertellen over het bedrijf?

### **Coercive pressures:**

Wordt het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking gestimuleerd door de overheid? Hoe?

### **Normative pressures:**

Hoe wordt het aannemen van mensen met een beperking gestimuleerd door bedrijfspartners?

Heeft u het gevoel dat klanten uw arbeidsbeperkten integratie als een goede eigenschap zien? Waarom (niet)?

Welke andere instelling stimuleren het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking? Hoe?

### **Mimetic Pressures:**

Heeft u het gevoel dat concurrenten een voordeel halen uit het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking? Waarom/ op welke manier?

Hoe inspireren andere organisaties uw bedrijf om mensen met een arbeidsbeperking aan te nemen?

### **Strategic leveraging:**

Is het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking een belangrijk onderdeel van uw aanstellingsbeleid? Waarom (niet)?

Is het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking een belangrijk onderdeel van uw bedrijfsstrategie? Waarom (niet)?

Hoe probeert u een voordeel te halen uit het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking?

Op welke manieren denkt u dat dit nog meer mogelijk zou zijn?

Denkt u dat het aannemen van mensen met een arbeidsbeperking u een voordeel geeft ten opzichte van concurrenten die dit niet doen? Waarom (Niet)?

### **Orchestration:**

Zijn er andere bedrijfsactiviteiten die aan datzelfde doel bijdragen? Welke? Hoe? /Waarom niet?



## Appendix B – Overview of Organizations

| Organization   | Description of Organization   | Employs people with a disability | Coercive pressures | Normative pressures | Mimetic pressure | Strategic leveraging                         | Resource-based view                             | Strategic Orchestration |
|----------------|---|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| Organization A | Social company aiming to provide employment to people with a disability | Yes                              | Yes                | Yes                 | No               | Image, Culture, Quality                      | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative             |
| Organization B | Managed Internet Hosting, 40 employees                                  | Yes                              | Yes                | No                  | No               | Culture, Quality                             | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative             |
| Organization C | Supermarket, 135 employees  | Yes                              | Yes                | Yes                 | No               | Image, Culture                               | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative             |
| Organization D | Cleaning Company, 10.000 employees                                      | Yes                              | Yes                | Yes                 | No               | Image, Culture, Quality, Future demographics | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative             |
| Organization E | Production of wrapping paper, 70 employee                               | Yes                              | Yes                | No                  | No               | Culture                                      | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative             |
| Organization F | Construction company, 24 employees                                      | No                               | Yes                | No                  | No               | N.A.   | N.A.  | N.A.                    |

|                  |   |     |     |     |    |                  |   |             |
|------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|----|------------------|---|-------------|
| Organizational G | Production of machines, 130 employees         | Yes | Yes | No  | No | Culture, Quality | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative |
| Organizational H | Day care for children, 40 employee            | No  | Yes | Yes | No | N.A.             | N.A.  | N.A.        |
| Organizational I | Wholesale and rent of equipment, 70 employees | Yes | Yes | No  | No | Culture          | You need time, support and a heart for the case | Integrative |