

The Role of HRM in creating an Inclusive Work Environment to foster Employee-driven Innovation

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Author: Britt Büter
Student number: s2210479

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1st supervisor: dr. M. Renkema
2nd supervisor: dr. A.C. Bos-Nehles

Management summary

Nowadays, organizations implement different practices to stimulate diversity, as it can lead to positive outcomes such as an increase in creativity and innovation. However, it is also important to take into account the concept of inclusion, which refers to full contribution of employees and reaching their full potential. Employees want to feel accepted and unique within an organization, and they want to have the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas freely. Subsequently, inclusion could lead to employees feeling safe to speak up, and to come up with new and innovative ideas. Therefore, inclusion is particularly important for employee-driven innovation (EDI), in which work floor employees are seen as a resource of innovation. However, the question remains who is responsible for stimulating both the concepts of inclusion and EDI within organizations. It is argued that HR specialists can help in creating an inclusive work environment and in stimulating EDI. Therefore, this study examines the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster EDI, in which the role of HRM is divided into the role of HR policies and practices that can be used, but also the activities that HR-professionals can execute to stimulate both concepts. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 12 HR-professionals, such as HR-managers and HR-advisors, to provide an answer on the following research question: *What is the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation?*

The results showed that an inclusive work environment is one in which employees can be themselves, feel part of the organization, feel psychologically safe, feel respected and valued, and are taken seriously. To create this environment, HR-professionals can execute several activities or tasks, such as designing and facilitating tools, advising and coaching line managers, and motivating and stimulating employees to come up with new ideas. In combination with the HR practices they can use to stimulate inclusion and EDI, they are able to create a positive link between inclusion and EDI. This study suggests that HR-professionals can invest in 1) recruitment and selection, 2) onboarding, 3) training and development, 4) annual interview cycle, and 5) contacts with external organizations to stimulate inclusion. In addition, the EDI-enhancing practices found in this study include 1) training and development, 2) annual interview cycle, and 3) employee sessions, such as idea drinks or focus groups.

However, this study revealed that the line manager is seen as the key factor within both inclusion and EDI. Line managers need to create an open culture in which employees can feel safe and be themselves, regardless of who they are and which function they have. In this way, employees experience high levels of inclusion. Furthermore, employees need to be stimulated by their line managers to come up with new ideas, which can increase the level of EDI. Thus, the HR responsibilities are more devolved to line managers, and, thus, they have an important role in the implementation of HR practices. To implement the HR practices correct and effective, our results suggest that HR-professionals need to advise and coach line managers. Thus, it can be concluded that an inclusive work environment can stimulate EDI, but it is both the role of HR-professionals and the line manager to contribute to this positive relationship.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, diversity is an important theme within organizations, as it can lead to positive outcomes such as an increase in creativity and innovation (Ostergaard, Timmermans, & Kristinsson, 2011; Vlooswijk, 2019). Therefore, organizations implement different practices to stimulate diversity. In general, employee diversity refers to “demographic differences among members, including both observable (e.g., gender, race, age) and nonobservable (e.g., culture, cognition, education) attributes, and is considered a characteristic of a workgroup or organization” (Mor Barak, 2015, p. 85). From this definition, it becomes clear that it is important to look at the demographic attributes, but also at the so-called achieved characteristics, such as educational- and functional background, and work experience (Ostergaard et al., 2011). In many studies, employee diversity is considered to be something positive, as it can stimulate team performance, productivity, organizational decision-making, creativity and innovation within organizations (e.g., van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003; Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Hülsheger, Anderson, & Salgado, 2009; Ellemers & Rink, 2016). To illustrate, organizations that are diverse increase their knowledge base through the interaction between different competences and experiences of individuals, which, in turn, can lead to new and innovative ideas (van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003; Ostergaard et al., 2011). This is in line with results from various studies, which show that job-relevant diversity is positively related to innovation (Hülsheger et al., 2009; Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). Thus, the literature provides a strong basis for the claim that employees with job-related differences, such as function, profession, education, tenure, and skills, have a positive effect on innovation.

Nevertheless, previous studies also suggest a negative relationship between diversity and innovation. This is especially in the case of background diversity, where age, gender, and ethnicity are important characteristics. To illustrate, in the meta-analysis of Hülsheger et al. (2009), they hypothesized that background diversity negatively relates to innovation, as it “may lead to communication problems and difficulties in resolving opposing ideas and reaching consensus within the team” (p. 1129). However, the results show a negative, yet nonsignificant relationship with innovation. Next to the positive and negative effects of diversity on innovation, Sung and Choi (2019) argue that the effect of diversity on innovation depends on environmental factors, in which they measured the contingent effects of high-tech industry and market turbulence. They showed that gender and status diversity have a positive effect on innovation in highly turbulent markets. Additionally, age diversity only has a positive effect on innovation in high-tech firms. These results show that it is important to pay attention to contextual factors in researching the effects of diversity on innovation.

When examining the effects of diversity on innovation, it is necessary to take into account the concept of inclusion, which refers to full participation and contribution of employees and reaching individuals' full potential (Roberson, 2006). According to Randel et al. (2018), “although many organizations have added more diversity to their workforce, there has been increasing recognition that focusing on increasing diversity in organizations does not ensure the potential benefits of individuals from these groups to influential positions in organizations” (p. 190). Thus, increasing diversity does not guarantee that individuals can fully contribute to the organization's success or that their voices are heard and incorporated in organizational decision-making. In addition, Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez (2018) state that without inclusion, the positive effects of a diverse workforce on innovation cannot be achieved. Thus, it can be argued that diversity is a given, as organizations have to deal with different characteristics of employees. However, it is the way in which you deal with these diverse characteristics that leads to inclusion.

The two concepts of diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, but it can be argued that they have different meanings. As described, diversity includes differences among members

on observable (e.g. gender, race, age) and nonobservable (e.g. education, skills) attributes (Mor Barak, 2015). In contrast, various studies describe the concept of inclusion, in which characteristics of acceptance, contribution and participation are often mentioned (e.g. Miller, 1998; Pelled, Leford, & Mohrman, 1999; Roberson, 2006; Wasserman, Gallegos, & Ferdman, 2008). In this paper, an inclusive work environment is one in which employees have the opportunity to express their opinions and are recognized for their efforts in the organization (Wasserman et al., 2008; Sabharwal, 2014). Thus, organizations need to understand and respect the differences between employees to enable them to perform at their full potential, which can create benefits for the organization (Roberson, 2006). In addition, in this study we adopt the framework of Shore et al. (2011), in which it is proposed that individuals need to have a sense of ‘uniqueness’ and ‘belongingness’ to experience inclusion. So, inclusion occurs when “an individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group” (p. 1266). From the distinct definitions, it can be concluded that diversity focuses on the different characteristics of individuals, while inclusion involves the procedures organizations implement to embrace these differences and to make every employee feel accepted and unique.

Despite the fact that many studies have examined the different effects of diversity on innovation, the effects of inclusion on innovation have been overlooked. The inclusion of employees could lead to the use of diverse knowledge and experience, which, subsequently, leads to positive effects on innovation. This is in line with the effects of diversity on innovation. For example, inclusion could lead to employees feeling safe to speak up, and to come up with new and innovative ideas. Therefore, inclusion is particularly important for employee-driven innovation, which can be defined as “the generation and implementation across organizational levels of new ideas, products, services, and/or processes originating from one or more work floor employees who are not overtly required to be active in these activities” (Renkema, Meijerink, & Bondarouk, 2018, p. 7). From this definition, it becomes clear that work floor employees are seen as a resource of innovation. However, work floor employees need to be able to speak out, which relates to the experience of inclusion, and to come up with new and innovative ideas. Furthermore, Shore et al. (2011) argue that the mixed effects of diversity on innovation “may be due to the lack of consideration of the joint roles of belongingness and uniqueness” (p. 1282). Therefore, it is needed to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between inclusion and innovation to, eventually, create an inclusive work environment where employees have the same opportunities to contribute to success of the organization.

HRM could play an important role in creating these inclusive work environments. According to Bamber, Bartram, and Stanton (2017), diversity and inclusion can be value-adding for organizations, and create positive benefits. They argue that HRM specialists can help in creating these positive benefits, and, subsequently, stimulate employee-driven innovation. In addition, HRM has responsibilities in the creation of an organizational climate in which employees are valued for their contributions and, thus, feel included (Offerman & Basford, 2014). Thus, the role of HRM in creating an inclusive work environment can be divided into the role of HR policies and practices, but also the role of HR-professionals themselves is important, as they need to develop and design the HR practices to create a positive relationship between inclusion and innovation. Therefore, in this paper, we focused on two streams of HRM literature. First, according to Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, and Sumelius (2014), the HRM-performance stream emphasizes that “the strategic management of people contributes to the sustained competitive advantage of firms” (p. 122). Therefore, research has focused on the relationships between HR practices and organizational performance (e.g. Becker & Huselid, 1998; Huselid, 1995). Secondly, the HRM function stream focuses on the various roles played by the HRM function as an organizational actor (Björkman et al., 2014). Therefore, in this paper, we looked at what HR policies and practices are used within organizations, and, in addition, the role of HR-professionals in creating an inclusive work environment to stimulate employee-driven innovation is

examined. Thus, HRM plays an important role in creating inclusive work environments, but this role is understudied and there is a lack of empirical support. Therefore, this paper aimed to explore the relationship between inclusion and employee-driven innovation, and to understand the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments that fosters employee-driven innovation. To achieve this goal, the following research question is developed: *What is the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation?*

By answering this research question, this study contributed to the HRM literature in fourfold. First, we contributed to the HRM literature by examining the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation. In this way, we showed that HR-professionals can execute different activities to stimulate an inclusive work environment and employee-driven innovation. Also, HR-professionals can invest in several inclusion-enhancing and innovation-enhancing HR practices, such as recruitment and selection, onboarding, training and development, and the annual interview cycle. Second, this study revealed that line managers are seen as a key factor within inclusion and employee-driven innovation. They need to create a safe environment in which employees are able to express themselves freely, which, subsequently, can have a positive influence on EDI. Third, the concepts of diversity and inclusion are related and dependent on each other, and, therefore, this study both considered the concepts of belongingness and uniqueness. In addition, this study revealed several other dimensions that can stimulate employees' feelings of inclusion. Subsequently, this helped to advance the research in diversity even more (Shore et al., 2011). Next to the theoretical contributions, this study provided practical recommendations for organizations in creating an inclusive work environment and to stimulate employee-driven innovation. Organizations should focus on the role of the line managers, as they have an important role in the implementation of the HR practices that can enhance inclusion and employee-driven innovation. Therefore, HR-professionals should advise and coach line managers in how to implement the policies and practices correctly that are formulated by the HR department.

This paper continues with a literature review on employee-driven innovation and inclusion. Also, the relationship between inclusion and innovation, and the role of HRM to stimulate inclusion and foster employee-driven innovation will be described. In chapter 3, the research methodology will be explained. Chapter 4 contains the description of the results, followed by the discussion and conclusion in chapter 5.

2. Theoretical background

As described in the introduction, inclusion could have different effects on innovation. In addition, HRM could play an important role in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation. In the following sections, this will be further explained through a critical literature review.

2.1 Employee-driven innovation

Nowadays, innovation is necessary for organizations to adapt to rapid economic and technological changes and the growing consumer expectations (Shipton, Sparrow, Budhwar, & Brown, 2017; Bos-Nehles, Renkema, & Jansen, 2017). The concept of innovation can be defined in various ways. Schumpeter already defined innovation in 1934, who states that “innovation is novelty that creates economical value” (as cited in Høyrup, 2010, p. 144). From this definition, it becomes clear that innovation is focused on novelty or newness, and value. However, this definition also receives critique, as it focuses on economic value. It should not only focus on the economic aspects, because it also can create other types of values, such as employability or a learning culture (Høyrup, 2010). Therefore, in this paper, the following definition from West and Farr (1990) will be used: “innovation refers to the intentional generation, promotion and realization of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, in order to benefit the individuals involved, the group or the organization” (as cited in Seeck & Diehl, 2017, p. 915).

In addition, Baregheh, Rowley, and Sambrook (2009) argue that 6 key attributes of innovation can be distinguished: 1) nature, 2) type, 3) stages, 4) social context, 5) means, and 6) aim of innovation. The first and second attribute refer to the form and kind of innovation, such as new or improved products, services, and processes. The third attribute refers to the stages within the innovation process, which, in general, starts with idea generation to the implementation of the idea. Next to this, the social context refers to “any social entity, system or group of people involved in the innovation process or environmental factors affecting it” (Baregheh et al., 2009, p. 1332). Lastly, the means and aim of innovation relates to the resources which are needed, and the goal of the innovation process. On the basis of these attributes, Baregheh et al. (2009) show that innovation consists of important attributes, which define the possible flow of the innovation process.

As explained above, innovation can also be categorized through different types, where three pairs of types can be distinguished (Damanpour, 1991; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2008; Seeck & Diehl, 2017). The first distinction is between administrative and technical innovations, in which administrative innovations refer to changes in procedures, policies, and structures. Technical innovations refer to new technologies, products and services. Secondly, organizations can focus on product or process innovation. According to Damanpour (1991), “product innovations are new products/services introduced to meet an external user or market need, and process innovations are new elements introduced into an organization’s production or service operations” (p. 561). Lastly, innovations can be radical or incremental. Radical innovations produce fundamental changes in organizations, whereas incremental innovations result in small changes (Damanpour, 1991). To successfully exploit these different types of innovations, the new ideas need to go through several stages. Farr and Tran (2008) state that the innovation process consists of four stages: 1) problem identification, 2) idea generation, 3) idea evaluation, and 4) implementation. First, problem identification involves presenting or discovering the problem, in which information is gathered about the problem. Once the problem is identified, the second step involves the idea generation phase. This phase consists of “initiating a new process that departs from the organization’s routine and of generating possibilities through available pathways and the exploration of relevant features in the environment” (Farr & Tran, 2008, p. 382). The third step is the idea evaluation phase, in which it is

determined or evaluated if the product is appropriate and useful. The last phase of the innovation process is implementation, in which the solution to the current problem is applied, thus the innovation will be implemented. Overall, the innovation process is iterative, in which the first stages are about creativity, and innovation is concerned with the last two stages of idea evaluation and implementation (Farr & Tran, 2008). In this research, we will focus on the idea generation and implementation phase, as many studies mainly describe the innovation process consisting of these two main phases (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; Foss, Woll, & Moilanen, 2013). Also, the idea generation and implementation phase can be stimulated by organizations through different policies and practices.

To sum up, a focus on innovation can create positive benefits for an organization. However, according to Høyrup (2010), innovation also constitutes a learning process. The innovation process of implementing new ideas is based on the experience, knowledge, and skills of work floor employees. Therefore, it is important to include employees in the innovation process, which is the core of the concept of employee-driven innovation. In this research, the definition of Renkema et al. (2018) will be used, in which employee-driven innovation (EDI) is defined as “the generation and implementation across organizational levels of new ideas, products, services, and/or processes originating from one or more work floor employees who are not overtly required to be active in these activities” (p. 7). Thus, EDI focuses on the organization’s own employees as a resource of innovation, who are not necessarily required to contribute to innovations.

From the definition of EDI, it becomes clear that it is primarily a bottom-up process, in which innovation starts at the level of work floor employees (Høyrup, 2012, 2010). However, EDI is also a social process, in which interaction between employees and managers is necessary to, eventually, create innovation within an organization (Høyrup, 2012; Kesting & Ulhøi, 2010). Therefore, Høyrup (2012) distinguished between three orders of EDI. First order EDI refers to bottom-up processes where innovation arises from employees’ everyday practice, in which a goal of innovation is not in their mind. Kesting and Ulhøi (2010) state that “ordinary employees are capable of seeing things that management does not [...], and therefore, they can be seen as underutilized sources of potentially valuable ideas” (p. 73). Thus, employee participation in innovation processes is very important to create competitive advantage for organizations. Secondly, EDI can be seen as a mixture of bottom-up and top-down processes, in which managers coordinate and systematize the processes initiated by employees. Thirdly, EDI can be seen as a top-down process, where managers involve employees in innovative processes, by for example involving them in projects (Høyrup, 2012).

According to Kesting and Ulhøi (2010), five drivers of employee participation in decisions about innovation can be identified: 1) management support, 2) creation of an environment for idea creation, 3) decision structure, 4) incentives, and 5) corporate culture and climate. First, high levels of management support is proposed to be positively related to higher levels of EDI. It is important that employees get support from their managers in forms such as mentoring or involvement in project meetings. Secondly, the creation of an environment for idea generation is important for higher levels of EDI. Organizations have to give employees the time and resources to develop new ideas, and some degree of collaboration will also result in higher levels of idea generation (Kesting & Ulhøi, 2010). This is also related to the driver of corporate culture and climate, in which low power distance is expected to relate positively to EDI. The other drivers of decision structure and incentives relate to authority and rewards, in which higher levels of distributed authority and inclusion of rewards are positively related to higher levels of EDI (Kesting & Ulhøi, 2010). These drivers are important to take into account, as this could create higher levels of EDI, which is positive for an organization.

Finally, it can be stated that EDI is related to the concept of workplace learning. According to Høyrup (2010), learning can be seen as the ‘basic mechanism’ behind EDI, as innovation processes rely on the experience, knowledge, and skills of employees. The two processes of learning and

innovation can interact and support each other, both on the individual and organizational level. Thus, workplace learning can be seen as positively related to EDI.

To conclude, organizations have to create an expansive learning environment where employees are involved in innovation processes (Evans, Unwin, Hodkinson, & Rainbird, 2007). Participation, reflection, recognition, and teamwork are important learning conditions, which will create bottom-up approaches to innovation. The involvement in innovation processes is especially important in relation with inclusion, as employees need to feel safe to speak out their ideas and perspectives, and, in this way, can come up with new and innovative ideas. In the next sections, we further elaborate on the concept of inclusion, and how this relates to employee-driven innovation.

2.2 Inclusion

Various studies have described the concept of inclusion, in which different definitions are formed. For instance, Roberson (2006) defines inclusion as “the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in organizations” (p. 217). In addition, Ferdman (2017) states that “in inclusive organizations and societies, people of all identities and many styles can be fully themselves while also contributing to the larger collective, as valued and full members” (p. 238). Likewise, Pelled et al. (1999) define inclusion as “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system” (p. 1014). Lastly, Mor Barak (2000) states that the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical organizational processes relates to the experience of inclusion. These critical processes include decision-making influence, access to information and resources, and involvement in work groups (Mor Barak, 2000; Roberson, 2006). From these definitions, it becomes clear that aspects like acceptance, contribution, and participation are important for employees to experience inclusion. In this paper, an inclusive work environment is one in which employees have the opportunity to express their opinions and are recognized for their efforts in the organization (Wasserman et al., 2008; Sabharwal, 2014). Thus, organizations need to understand and respect the differences between employees to enable them to perform at their full potential.

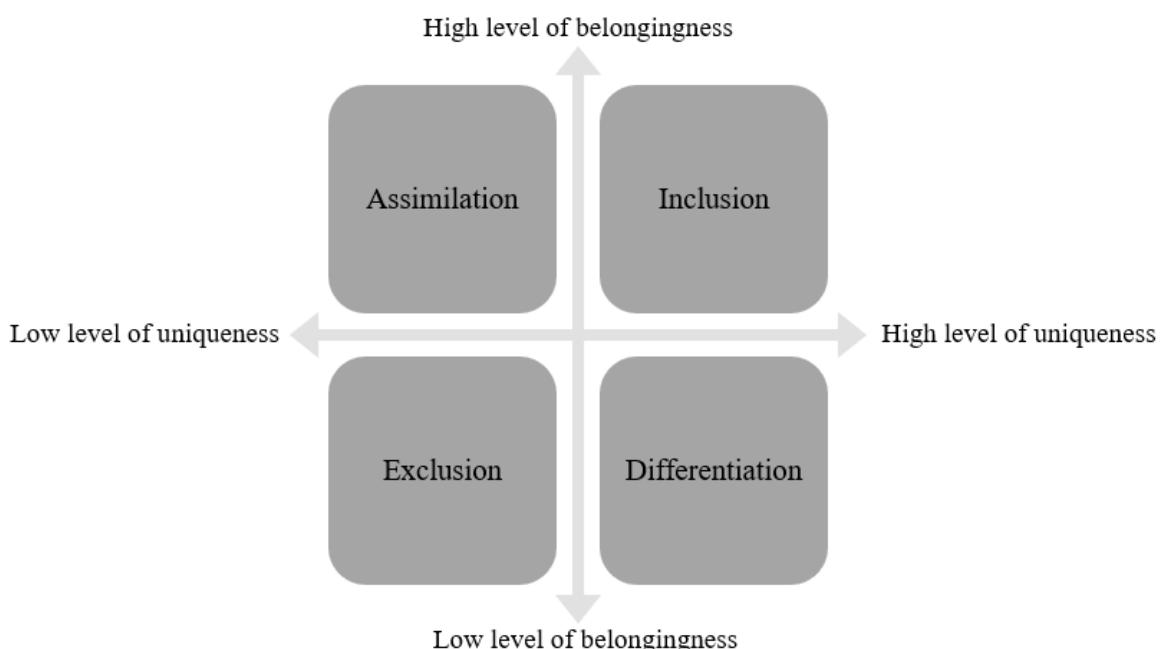


Figure 1. Framework of inclusion, adapted from Shore et al. (2011).

To provide the opportunity for employees to reach their full potential, Shore et al. (2011) developed a framework, in which the concept of inclusion is built on optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT). ODT posits that individuals experience tensions between the need for similarity to others and the need for uniqueness. Therefore, individuals seek to strike a balance between these two needs through the concept of inclusion. Shore et al. (2011) propose that individuals need to have a sense of ‘uniqueness’ and ‘belongingness’ to experience inclusion. In this way, uniqueness refers to the recognition and encouragement of an unique identity, while belongingness refers to the treatment as an insider in the work group. Thus, both elements must be addressed in order to experience inclusion, because otherwise differentiation (high uniqueness, low belongingness), assimilation (high belongingness, low uniqueness), or exclusion (both low values) will arise, seen in Figure 1 above.

However, the question remains which conditions are important to experience high levels of belongingness and uniqueness. Shore et al. (2018) argue that six themes are important for organizations to create an inclusive organization: 1) psychological safety, 2) involvement in the work group, 3) authenticity, 4) feeling respected and valued, 5) influence on decision-making, and 6) recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity. First, psychological safety refers to individuals feeling safe to share their opinions which are different from others. Secondly, the themes of involvement in work groups and authenticity relates to the components of ‘belongingness’ and ‘uniqueness’ from Shore et al. (2011). Individuals want to feel like an insider, but also want to share their unique identity. Another common element is feeling respected and valued, which involves “being treated as an appreciated and esteemed member of the group and organization” (Shore et al., 2018, p. 182). The fifth theme, influence on decision-making, refers to employees’ opportunity to share their ideas and perspectives and that these are taken into account by their supervisors or managers. The last theme of ‘recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity’ refers to fair treatment and top management respecting and encouraging the differences among employees. Overall, these six elements are often cited as key components of inclusion (e.g., Mor Barak, 2000; Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011; Sabharwal, 2014; Tang et al., 2015), and, therefore, it can be concluded that these elements are critical for employees to feel a sense of inclusion.

Working towards an inclusive organization can create challenges and tensions. Ferdman (2017) states that inclusion is complex, as it spans “macro, meso, and micro processes and contexts, ranging from societal and organizational ideologies, values, policies, and practices, to leadership models and practices and group norms and climates, to interpersonal behavior and individual experiences of inclusion” (p. 239). This, in turn, can create tensions, as explained through the lens of paradoxes by Ferdman (2017). He found three dilemmas of inclusion: 1) self-expression versus identity, 2) boundaries versus norms, and 3) safety versus comfort, seen in Figure 2. Especially, the tension between self-expression and identity is important to discuss, as it relates to the concepts of belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). This tension contrasts the view of inclusion as “constituting full acceptance by, belonging to, and absorption into a larger social unit, versus inclusion as the ability to maintain one’s distinctiveness from and uniqueness within the whole without losing benefits or rights available to other members” (Ferdman, 2017, p. 241). Thus, a tension will arise between belonging and being the same (absorption), and belonging and being different (distinctiveness and uniqueness). This is also in line with Buengeler, Leroy, and De Stobbeleir (2018), who acknowledge that simultaneously experiencing uniqueness and belongingness will create tensions. Subsequently, an extreme focus on belonging can lead to homogeneity or exclusion, and, on the other hand, focusing on uniqueness can create a lack of collective identity (Ferdman, 2017). This, in turn, can only be managed by understanding, accepting, and embracing the tension between belonging and uniqueness. For instance, organizations have to focus on collective identity as well as individual uniqueness (Ferdman, 2017). Secondly, the paradox of boundaries and norms focuses on the question if the norms of inclusion should be stable and well-defined or shifting and open. Lastly, the paradox of

safety and comfort focuses on the question if inclusion is about increasing comfort and feeling safe, or leaving comfort zones and be open to change (Ferdman, 2017).

To conclude, it is important to take into account the framework of inclusion of Shore et al. (2011), and the paradoxes stated by Ferdman (2017), to create high levels of inclusion. Eventually, this will lead to positive outcomes, such as high performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and creativity (Mor Barak, 2000; Shore et al., 2011). The increased creativity of employees could lead to innovation, which will be further explained in the next section.

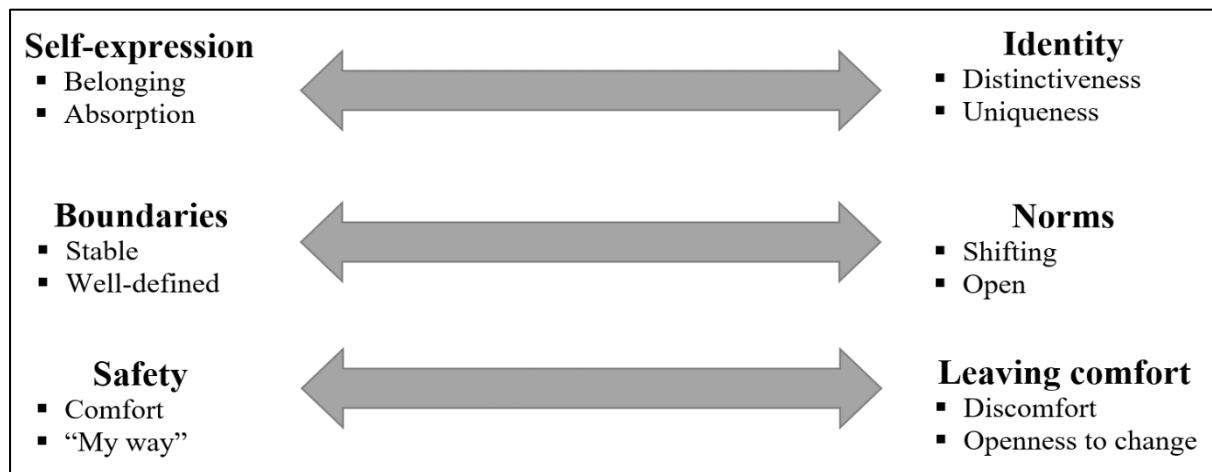


Figure 2. Tensions of inclusion, adapted from Ferdman (2017).

2.3 The effect of inclusion on employee-driven innovation

High levels of inclusion can lead to positive outcomes, such as high performance, creativity, and innovation. As described in the previous section, psychological safety is an important condition to experience high levels of inclusion as an employee. Psychological safety can be defined as “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, as cited in Frazier, Fainschmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva, 2017, p. 115). Thus, it can be seen as a shared belief that individuals can share their ideas, opinions, and concerns without fear. Within a work environment where psychological safety is provided, employees feel free to express their opinions and they are also encouraged by their supervisors to speak up. According to Hirak, Chunyan Peng, Carmeli, and Schaubroeck (2012), the behavior of leaders may play a critical role in promoting psychological safety. Leaders have to provide support and show openness to input, which in turn, create the feeling that it is safe for employees to express and share their ideas and opinions.

Psychological safety is related to the concept of employee voice, which is defined as “employees making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree” (Van Dyne & Le Pine, as cited in Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013, p. 2783). Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010) argue that voice behavior is more likely to occur when employees feel high levels of psychological safety. Thus, “when individuals are comfortable to voice and speak up, they are more likely to make innovative suggestions for change” (Carmeli et al., 2010, p. 253). Therefore, the concepts of psychological safety and employee voice are closely related to each other, but also to the concept of innovation.

First, creativity and innovation is positively influenced by psychological safety. Carmeli et al. (2010) found that psychological safety is positively related to employee involvement in creative work. So, when employees have the feeling of being safe to speak up and express themselves without fear, they are more likely to be involved in creative work, which eventually, could lead to the implementation of new and innovative ideas. Similarly, Frazier et al. (2017) state that

“experimentation that is expected to result from a psychologically safe work context should result in the generation of novel solutions” (p. 121). In this way, employees are expected to be the source of innovation, as they feel free to come up with innovative suggestions. Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological safety positively influences employee-driven innovation.

Secondly, employee voice is seen as the link between creativity, the generation of new ideas, and innovation, the implementation of new ideas (Carmeli et al., 2010). According to Kremer, Villamor, and Aguinis (2019), employee voice is an important factor that leads to innovation. They argue that leaders have to encourage voice behavior, by for example showing support as a leader, which in turn leads to creativity and innovation. Just as with psychological safety, employees are expected to come up with innovative suggestions. Therefore, it can be concluded that employee voice is positively related to employee-driven innovation.

Next to the relationship of psychological safety and employee voice with innovation, the concepts are also related to inclusion. As stated in the previous section, psychological safety is an important condition to experience high levels of inclusion as an employee. Similarly, Tang et al. (2015) found that providing mechanisms for voice is one of the seven important inclusion management practices that organizations can implement for experiencing high levels of inclusion. As stated in the previous section, employees want to feel a sense of belonging and uniqueness to experience inclusion. Uniqueness can be seen as related to employee voice, as both concepts focus on the differences between employees and that those differences are valued in the form of speaking up (Chung et al., 2019). Employees want to feel accepted and respected, and this can be achieved through the concepts of employee voice and psychological safety. In addition, Chung et al. (2019) found that work group inclusion is positively related to employee creativity. Therefore, we argue that psychological safety and employee voice can be seen as the mechanisms through which inclusion leads to innovation. Organizations have to create an inclusive work environment, in which employees feel psychologically safe to speak up and provide suggestions for change, which leads to a high degree of involvement in creative and innovative work behavior, and ultimately this can create innovation. To create an inclusive organization, HRM could play an important role, which will be explained in the next section.

2.4 Creating inclusive work environments – The role of HRM

In general, organizations can implement several practices to create an inclusive work environment (e.g., Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2015; Shore et al., 2018). For instance, participation in decision making, providing mechanisms for communication and information sharing, and fairness systems will enhance inclusion. Also, tolerating different points of view and mistakes, and team-building activities, will lead to diverse thinking and allowing employees to be fully themselves. In addition, Shore et al. (2018) state that leaders have a key role in creating inclusive work environments, which entails giving employees support and encouraging them to fully contribute. This is also in line with several studies, in which it is stated that inclusive leadership can positively influence inclusion (e.g., Buengeler et al., 2018; Randel et al., 2018). According to Randel et al. (2018), inclusive leadership is defined as “a set of leader behaviors that are focused on facilitating group members feeling part of the group (belongingness) and retaining their sense of individuality (uniqueness) while contributing to group processes and outcomes” (p. 191). From this definition, it becomes clear that leaders must show behaviors, in which they respond to the needs of belongingness and uniqueness of employees.

In this research, we will focus on the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments, which can be divided into two roles: 1) the role of HR policies and practices, and 2) the role of HR-professionals themselves (Björkman et al., 2014). First, the role of HR policies and practices can be

seen back in the HRM-performance stream of literature, which focuses on the relationships between HR practices and organizational performance (e.g. Becker & Huselid, 1998; Huselid, 1995). Thus, we focus our empirical research on what HR policies and practices are used to create an inclusive work environment and to stimulate employee-driven innovation. To illustrate, in line with prior research on the impact of age-inclusive HR practices on organizational outcomes, we argue that in order to achieve an inclusive work environment, organizations need to implement suitable and focused HR practices (Boehm, Kunze, & Bruch, 2014). Boehm et al. (2014) drew upon three HR policy domains, which impact organizational outcomes by influencing 1) employees' skills, knowledge, and abilities, 2) employees' motivation and effort, and 3) employees' opportunities to contribute (e.g., Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, as cited in Boehm et al., 2014). Thus, the HR department should focus on HR practices, in which all three policy domains are equally stimulated. To illustrate, equal access to training and development could be one example of an inclusive HR practice which stimulates the knowledge and skills of employees. In addition, leaders and managers could play an important role in the motivation of employees, which relates to the second policy domain. For instance, training leaders and managers in how to give employees the support they need and encouraging them to fully contribute, can be an inclusive HR practice which stimulates the creation of an inclusive work environment (Boehm et al., 2014; Offerman & Basford, 2014).

Secondly, the role of HR-professionals themselves is important, as they need to develop and design the HR practices to create a positive relationship between inclusion and innovation. This role can be seen in the HRM function stream of literature, which focuses on the various roles played by the HRM function as an organizational actor (Björkman et al., 2014). However, the HRM function not only consists of the role of HR-professionals within the HR department, as line managers and employees are also seen as the primary players in HRM processes (Jackson, Schuler, & Werner, 2009, as cited in Renkema, Bos-Nehles, & Meijerink, 2020). To illustrate, HR-professionals have an important role in designing and introducing HR practices within an organization. Also, HR-professionals facilitate line managers in the implementation process of the designed HR practices. So, line managers play an important role in the implementation of HR practices, and, subsequently, employees perceive these HR practices in a certain way (Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2017; Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018; Renkema et al., 2020). Thus, the implementation of HR policies and practices is seen as a multi-level and multi-actor process, and different HRM actors could play a role within the creation of inclusive work environments and the stimulation of EDI (Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2017).

To conclude, HRM can play an important role in creating inclusive work environments. More research is needed, as the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments is understudied, and there is a lack of empirical support, leading to a lack of understanding about the link between HRM, inclusion and innovation. Thus, the current level of knowledge leaves room to discover how HRM can stimulate employee-driven innovation through the creation of inclusive work environments. Therefore, we focus our empirical research on the role of HR-professionals within inclusion and EDI, and on what HR policies and practices are used within organizations to create an inclusive work environment and how this affects EDI. This is summarized in the initial research framework, seen in Figure 3. It delineates how HRM, inclusion, and employee-driven innovation are connected. It is assumed that HRM, divided in the HR policies and practices and HR-professionals themselves, can help in creating an inclusive work environment, which, subsequently, affects employee-driven innovation. These effects will be examined within the different stages of innovation, in which idea generation and implementation are divided. Next to this, the underlying mechanisms of psychological safety and employee voice are shown. From the theory, it can be concluded that these are the mechanisms through which inclusion leads to innovation.

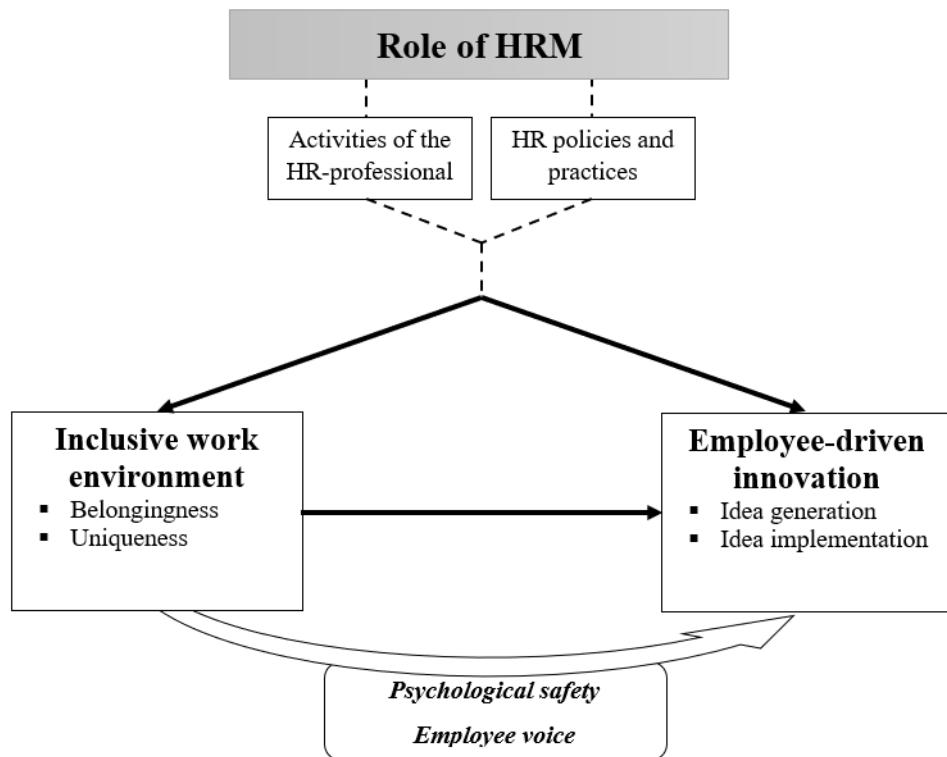


Figure 3. Initial research framework

3. Methodology

To answer the research question, an explorative research is conducted. In the following sections, the research design, the sample used in this research, and procedures of data collection and data analysis will be explained.

3.1 Research design

To answer the research question, in which the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation is examined, a qualitative research approach is used. In general, qualitative methodology refers to “research that produces descriptive data – people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015, p. 7). Thus, we want to explore the meanings of individuals and get an answer on the questions why and how a certain phenomenon occurs. The main aim of this research is to examine the role of HRM, and, therefore, the qualitative data is collected through in-depth interviews with several HR-professionals, such as HR-managers, HR-advisors and HR-specialists, see Table 1. Specifically, we have chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews, which allowed us to ask additional questions to receive more information on a certain topic. Therefore, we have made sub-questions (probing questions), which can be used as additional questions if the interviewee does not provide enough information. The interview protocol can be seen in Appendix I.

3.2 Data collection

As described, interviews are conducted with several HR-professionals, from which an overview can be seen in Table 1. In selecting the organizations, no distinction is made between private or public organizations, their sector or size. The organizations are approached by a post on LinkedIn and via e-mail. In total, 12 interviews are conducted with HR-professionals from different organizations, which, subsequently, made it possible to make comparisons between organizations and the role of HRM within inclusion and employee-driven innovation.

The interviews are conducted between April and May 2020 and are held in Dutch. Prior to each interview, interviewees were told about the aim of the research, and that confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. In addition, the interviewees were asked if they have objection against audio recording the interview. Then, the interview started with some introduction questions, in which the size of the organization and HR department, and the responsibilities of the HR-professional were asked. In this way, the interviewee was able to introduce him/herself and tell something about his/her job and the organization. After the introduction, we focused on the concepts/themes, which are derived from the theory (see Chapter 2). Especially, the interview questions were focused on the link between inclusion, the role of HRM within inclusion, and employee-driven innovation. The division into several concepts/themes made it easier to conduct the interviews, and it created structure within the interviews. Furthermore, each interview took between 30-50 minutes, and the interviews are conducted digitally via Skype or Zoom, due to COVID-19. The interviews are, with approval of the HR-professionals, audio recorded and fully transcribed, and in addition, notes are made during the interviews.

In this research, trustworthiness and validity are ensured in different ways. First of all, all interviews were treated anonymously in this research, which was explicitly mentioned to the interviewees. Subsequently, the interviewees were able to speak freely about their experiences on inclusion and employee-driven innovation within the organization. Furthermore, to ensure the validity in this research, the interview questions (Appendix I) are based on the theory about inclusion, the role

of HRM, and employee-driven innovation. Especially, the role of HRM will be examined, and, therefore, HR-professionals are interviewed, which makes that the interviews measured what it aimed to measure, and thereby enhancing validity in this research.

Function	Type of organization	Time interview
1. Head of HR	Manufacturer	38m 10s.
2. HR-manager	Law and notary	37m 35s.
3. Senior HR-advisor	Medical laboratory	46m 38s.
4. HR-manager	Facility management	41m 13s.
5. HR-advisor	Manufacturer	33m 57s.
6. Manager Inclusion and Social Entrepreneurship	Telecommunication	38m 23s.
7. HR-manager	ICT consultancy	47m 52s.
8. HR-advisor	Police force	35m 05s.
9. HR-advisor	Wholesale	38m 40s.
10. HR-manager	Public transport	32m 08s.
11. HR-consultant	Social services	37m 46s.
12. HR-advisor	Financial services	34m 55s.

Table 1. Overview of interviewees

3.3 Data analysis

As described in the previous section, the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. In addition, notes were made during the interviews, which complemented the audiotapes. To analyze the raw data, the transcriptions are inserted in the data analysis software program AtlasTI and this program was used for coding. Before the coding process started, an initial coding table is made, in which the most important concepts and themes, based on the literature review, are included, seen in Appendix II. This initial coding table is firstly used as a basis for making the interview protocol, and, in addition, the table was used in analyzing the data. In Appendix II, it can be seen that the most important concepts and themes of this research are explained, which include inclusion, psychological safety, employee voice, and employee-driven innovation. A definition is given in the second column, and in the third column, some key words are described, which can be used as sub-topics for the interviews. After this, the coding table is focused on the role of HRM within the different concepts, and, finally, the link between the three concepts/themes of HRM, inclusion, and employee-driven innovation is described. This coding table helped with the analysis of the transcriptions, and, eventually, in explaining the findings.

The analysis of the data consisted of several steps, in which an inductive and deductive approach was combined (Thomas, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Because of the fact that we made an initial coding table, the analysis can be mostly seen as deductive. Specifically, we used the template analysis approach, which is a form of thematic analysis “that balances a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analyzing textual data with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of a particular study” (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015, p. 203). Central to this technique is the development of a coding template, seen in Appendix II. The deductive approach, and specifically, the template analysis consists of several steps. First of all, each transcript is read and re-read in detail to gain an understanding about the content. In this step, initial ideas about the main categories were written down, in which the initial coding table (Appendix II) helped. Secondly, the emerging themes were organized into clusters and examined how they relate to each other (Brooks et al., 2015). For example, the theme of psychological safety was included into the cluster of inclusion, but this theme

seemed to be also important within the cluster of employee-driven innovation. Also, the link between inclusion and employee-driven innovation could be extensively examined through the grouping of the clusters. The other steps of the template analysis were not followed within this study, as we did not modify the initial coding template (Brooks et al., 2015).

However, we also applied two other levels of coding to the raw data, which are derived from the inductive approach: 1) open coding, and 2) axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Especially, this inductive approach is used to examine the role of HRM, as there was a lack of theory about it. First, within open coding, the data was broken down into different labels (codes/categories). Thus, different segments of text were labeled to create categories. For example, we discovered several practices which are used by HR-professionals to stimulate both inclusion and employee-driven innovation. These practices are labeled individually, in which, for example, onboarding and the annual interview cycle were discovered as categories.

Secondly, in axial coding, “categories are related to their subcategories, and the relationships tested against data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 13). From this definition, it becomes clear that connections will be made between categories and its subcategories. This relates to the division of categories into upper-level and lower-level categories of the inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). Within this phase of coding, we examined if we could see any differences and similarities between the group of codes. For example, we found that the annual interview cycle seemed to be an important HR practice to enhance both inclusion and employee-driven innovation. Therefore, we divided these codes into two different upper-level codes. This made it easier to analyze the lower-level codes due to the increased structure within the code groups. To illustrate, within inclusion, the objective assessment of employees, seen as a lower-level category, seemed to be important, while the freedom to discuss ideas seemed to be an important category within employee-driven innovation.

To conclude, the raw data of this research was analyzed through a combination of the inductive and deductive approach. The combination of these two approaches made it possible to analyze the data in detail, and, eventually, to come up with a small number of categories, which are the most important themes given the research question and model (Thomas, 2006). In this way, we are able to examine what the role of HRM is in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation, from which the findings will be presented in the next chapter.

4. Findings

As described before, the purpose of this study is to describe the role of HRM in creating an inclusive work environment and how this affects employee-driven innovation. Therefore, the data contains many different opinions from HR-professionals, divided into the core themes of inclusive work environment, employee-driven innovation, and the role of HRM within these themes. In the following sections, these findings will be presented.

4.1 Inclusive work environment

Overall, it can be seen that the majority of the HR-professionals define inclusion as giving people with a distance to the labour market a chance to work within the organization. People with a distance to the labour market are often seen as disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities, but also people with a cultural background, women, or groups from the LGBT-community. Thus, regardless of certain characteristics of people, everyone deserves a chance on the labour market and a place to work. So, unlike the definition of Wasserman et al. (2008) and Sabharwal (2014), it seems that organizations define an inclusive work environment in which people with a distance to the labour market are given a chance to work. However, it is also important to focus on the other employees, as everyone needs to be able to express their opinions and perform at their full potential, which is described by an HR-professional as follows:

You can only focus on people with a distance to the labour market, but eventually it concerns all employees. So, that people can do the job that fits them, and that they get the opportunity to show what they can. But also that those people with a distance to the labor market are really part of the team, so that they are not seen as different. (HR-professional, wholesale company)

In addition, we find 5 dimensions that explain the concept of an inclusive work environment, which can be seen in Table 2. First, we find that belongingness is an important dimension, as everyone has to belong within an organization, regardless of your limitations. According to the interviewees, employees want to feel like an insider and be highly involved within teams, but also within the whole organization. For instance, employees who work for about 40 years within an organization really belong, but it is also important that recently hired employees feel that they have a sense of belonging and feel at home within an organization. Thus, it does not matter which position an employee has within the organization, he or she needs to feel a sense of belonging to the organization within an inclusive work environment. Secondly, the dimension of belongingness is related to the dimension of uniqueness, as according to Shore et al. (2011), both elements must be addressed in order to experience inclusion as an employee. We find that uniqueness refers to recognition in who you are as a person. This is further described as follows:

Then I think to be seen as a person anyway, so not from your position or as a team member, but really as the person with this profile and who works like this. (HR-professional, ICT consultancy)

Thus, the person behind the function is important and how employees are different within the execution of their tasks. Also, within an inclusive work environment, employees can really be themselves and are able to share their unique identity, which is in accordance with Shore et al. (2011). Thus, regardless of certain characteristics or limitations, every employee needs to be seen as a person and not only as an officer within the organization. Third, the dimension of psychological safety

<i>Dimensions of an inclusive work environment</i>	<i>Description of dimension</i>	<i>Sample quotes</i>
Belongingness	Everyone deserves a place to work	<i>For the people themselves it is the fact that despite limitations, I think it really is a part of something, of a bigger picture. But also matter yourself, so having a function. (social services)</i> <i>But also that those people with a distance to the labor market are really part of the team, so that they are not seen as different. (wholesale)</i>
Uniqueness	Person is more important than function	<i>Then I think to be seen as a person anyway, so not from your position or as a team member, but really as the person with this profile and who works like this. (ICT consultancy)</i>
Psychological safety	Employees can be themselves	<i>And inclusion is actually more about the skin around it, you could say the culture in which people can really be themselves and do their best. So participate regardless of certain characteristics and everyone is seen as equal. (telecommunication)</i>
	Feeling safe to speak up and express your opinions and ideas	<i>Safety is a precondition for being yourself, but also for the feeling that you can speak up, that you can ask questions openly and honestly. So safety is really a basic value to experience inclusion. (telecommunication)</i> <i>I also think that safety and trust within an organization is extremely important. You have to feel very safe and familiar to be able to say anything, because there are no stupid questions. (law and notary)</i>
Feeling respected and valued	Treated as an appreciated member of the organization	<i>We hardly ever reject anything, so I do feel that everyone feels really appreciated in his or her position. (law and notary)</i>
Be taken seriously	Take employees serious and listen to them	<i>In any case, I think it is important that everyone should be taken seriously. I think that is a very important starting point within an inclusive work environment. (medical laboratory)</i>

Table 2. Dimensions of an inclusive work environment

is seen as a basic value or starting point to experience inclusion. So, within an inclusive work environment, employees feel safe to speak up and share their opinions and ideas. Subsequently, this is in line with the concept of employee voice, as when individuals feel comfortable to speak up, they are also more likely to come up with new and innovative ideas (Carmeli et al., 2010). Thus, to experience high levels of inclusion as an employee, organizations need to create a psychologically safe environment in which mechanisms for voice are provided, which is illustrated as follows:

Safety is a precondition for being yourself, but also for the feeling that you can speak up, that you can ask questions openly and honestly. So safety is really a basic value to experience inclusion. (HR-professional, telecommunication company)

Fourth, the interviewees think that employees feel respected and valued within the organization, which is according to the literature an important condition to experience inclusion (Shore et al., 2018). Thus, within an inclusive work environment, employees are treated as an appreciated member of the organization. However, based on our findings, it is not clear if employees also feel respected and

valued, despite the opinion of the interviewees. One example to measure this is to conduct an employee satisfaction survey, in which the degree of appreciation and respect can be measured. Lastly, according to the interviewees, employees need to be taken serious, which is found to be another important starting point to experience inclusion as an employee. Employees need to have the feeling that their opinions and ideas are heard, but also that these will be taken seriously. Thus, the 5 dimensions seen in Table 2 explain the definition of an inclusive work environment, which is clearly summarized by an HR-professional as follows:

Inclusion is actually more about the skin around it, you could say the culture in which people can really be themselves and do their best. So participate regardless of certain characteristics and everyone is seen as equal. (HR-professional, telecommunication company)

Next to the dimensions of inclusion, there are some important factors identified which stimulate or inhibit inclusion within an organization, see Figure 4. First, the line manager is seen as the key factor within inclusion, as HR-professionals feel that line managers need to create a safe environment in which employees are able to express themselves freely. Also, line managers need to actively support and stimulate employees to speak up, and treat them with respect. Therefore, according to the majority of the HR-professionals, line managers need to be people-oriented instead of result-oriented. In this way, they can provide and support the 5 dimensions which are stated above (Table 2) to experience inclusion as an employee. An HR-professional explains it as follows:

Each department has its own culture, which arises when employees are working longer within an organization. As a line manager, you have a lot of influence on this. The one line manager is very much of any idea is welcome and thank you for your idea. And the other immediately starts with ifs and buts. It affects the level of satisfaction or with a sense of being taken seriously. So the manager has a huge influence on the feeling of appreciation and inclusion. (HR-professional, medical laboratory company)

The quote above also relates to another important factor, which is the culture of the organization. According to the interviewees, line managers have an important role in creating an open culture or climate in which employees feel welcome within an organization, regardless of who they are and which function they have. Also, employees need to be actively stimulated to speak up and express their opinions and ideas freely. Third, the relationship and interaction with colleagues is an important factor which can stimulate inclusion. For instance, it is known that some people want to be on the foreground and others do not want this. However, your colleagues can invite you to think with them about certain issues within their job, or they can choose not to do this. This determines the way how employees look at their work and it can also determine the degree of experiencing inclusion as an employee. So, colleagues are also an important factor within inclusion. However, on the other hand, these three factors are also factors which could inhibit inclusion. To illustrate, when a line manager is very result-oriented, they only focus on the results and they are not fully open to the new ideas and opinions of employees. Therefore, there is no open culture, so this could inhibit inclusion. Also, when there are certain dominant groups within an organization, such as groups with a lot of men and few women, then the women are disadvantaged and it can be difficult to cope with this in, for instance, decision-making processes. In addition to these three factors, the offer in terms of possibilities for people with a distance to the labor market is a factor which can inhibit inclusion. According to the HR-professionals, these employees need more attention and assistance, but there needs to be room within an organization to be able to do this. This is further explained as follows:

We also cannot deploy people who have a distance to the labor market at all places within the organization. This are certain functions that do not have too much pressure, and where you do not need the speed that you may need in other functions. So you cannot deploy them everywhere. (HR-professional, wholesale company)

Finally, inclusion can lead to several advantages. According to the interviewees, when employees feel included within an organization, they are also more involved, and, subsequently, this has a positive influence on trust, teamwork, and communication. Eventually, according to the interviewees, this leads to better results and a higher quality of work. Also, when the 5 dimensions described above (Table 2) are provided and supported, then this can lead to employees feeling safe to speak up and voice, which subsequently, leads to new ideas and innovation. However, regardless of the advantages inclusion can bring to organizations, it seems that organizations do not always give equal priority to inclusion. Organizations find it difficult to stimulate inclusion, as it is not always easy to offer the room for people with a distance to the labour market and it takes extra effort, such as making adjustments in the workplace. Also, other employees need to be able to work with these people who need some extra attention and guidance, which can bring some difficulties in the way of working. This is illustrated by an HR-professional as follows:

For example, we are still very far from a paperless office. [...] That is ridiculous, of course, but if you will do it more efficient, you might no longer have a workplace for those people. Are you then going to innovate or are you going to keep a workplace for those people? That is a balance that we have to look at regularly. (HR-professional, social services organization)

To sum up, the dimensions of uniqueness, belongingness, psychological safety, feeling respected and valued, and be taken seriously seem to be important for employees to experience inclusion. Line managers can create an open culture in which employees are provided with these 5 dimensions, and, subsequently, this can lead to several advantages, such as higher involvement, higher quality of work, and more innovation, which will be further explained in the next section.

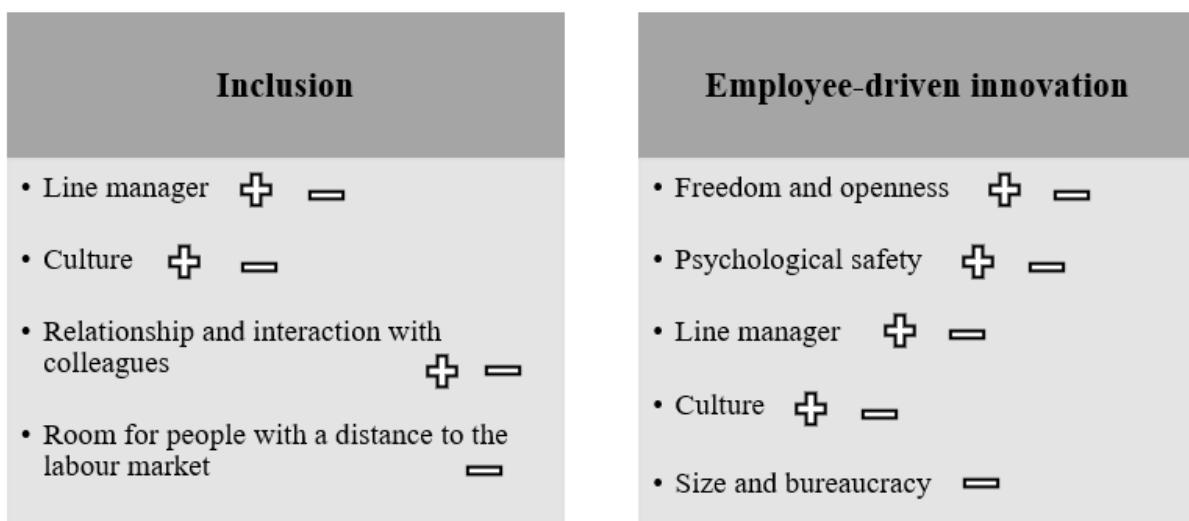


Figure 4. Stimulating/inhibiting factors of inclusion and EDI

4.2 Employee-driven innovation

In general, we find that employees play an important role within innovation, as they work in practice and are able to assess whether a process can be designed, for example, more efficient or faster.

Although employees are not required to be active within innovation activities, it is found that, according to the interviewees, they express their opinions about the organization's processes and come up with new ideas to make these processes more efficient and/or faster. For example, within a manufacturing business, it is found that they receive approximately 360 improvement proposals per year. Thus, employees have a key role within innovation, and they also stimulate the organization to keep critical about their processes and how to improve them.

<i>Factors which influence EDI</i>	<i>Description of factor</i>	<i>Sample quotes</i>
	Freedom to come up with new ideas	<i>When someone has an idea how we can do something better, yes please. We are a very informal organization and a lot is discussed in the corridors in general. [...] I also have the idea that people feel free to discuss that. (wholesale)</i>
Freedom and openness	Involvement of employees within idea generation	<i>Well, put the responsibility on the employee, go and find out what it should look like, talk to colleagues about it etcetera. We do not have fixed structures within innovation, it just goes in the way that someone has a good idea, work it out and then you will hear from your manager. So everything is done together within innovation processes. (wholesale)</i>
Psychological safety	Feeling safe to speak up and express your opinions and ideas	<i>I think in principle that you should dare to say everything and if there is safety and trust, then I think beautiful ideas will arise. (law and notary)</i> <i>Everyone should feel safe and be able to say whether something is bothering them privately, but also if they disagree with something in their work and if they have new ideas. (manufacturer)</i>
Line manager	Stimulate employees and create open culture	<i>Also because we have new team leaders who are more open to this, who are more accessible. Therefore, people will approach them more often when they see things or have points for improvement. And the team leaders also receive this with open arms. I now notice that employees feel that they dare to say things. (manufacturer)</i>
Culture	Open culture within organization	<i>The culture is very accessible, very open and very transparent. So everything is possible to make your own contribution. And that is also what you want in the culture of the entire organization. (facility management)</i>
Size and bureaucracy	More layers can inhibit EDI	<i>I certainly think that within large organizations bureaucracy and politics is a subject that can stop EDI. And that is also difficult, especially as a large company, you have to make a lot of choices in what you do, you have to put in a lot of focus and you cannot give all 1000 ideas a chance. So you have to look very closely at what is a good idea, what is not and why. (telecommunication)</i>

Table 3. Influencing factors of employee-driven innovation

In line with this, we find 5 important factors which can stimulate or inhibit employee-driven innovation (EDI), seen in Table 3 and Figure 4. Firstly, according to the interviewees, employees want to have the freedom and openness to come up with ideas. Therefore, organizations need to create an open culture in which employees have the feeling that they can propose their ideas. Furthermore, employees get the responsibility to develop their ideas further on how it should look and work in practice. However, we find that they only get highly involved within the idea generation phase, and

not within the implementation of the idea. The ideas are mainly forwarded to the line manager, but it is unclear what happens hereafter. Thus, the degree of freedom employees receive to come up with ideas can influence EDI positively or negatively.

Interestingly, psychological safety is also important within EDI, just as it comes back within the concept of inclusion. According to the HR-professionals, safety is very important within EDI, as employees need to feel safe and comfortable to speak up. Subsequently, employees dare to express their opinions and ideas, which will have a positive influence on innovation. However, in order to increase employees' feeling of psychological safety, organizations need to communicate and stimulate that ideas are welcome. This is well described by the following HR-professional:

What you have to do, may be clear at some point. But how you do it, you can talk about it together within the organization. (HR-professional, facility management)

Next to the degree of freedom and openness and psychological safety, we find that the line manager and the culture of the organization can also stimulate or inhibit EDI. Thus, these are the same factors which also came back within the factors of inclusion, which is an interesting finding. According to the interviewees, the line manager is the key factor within EDI, as they need to give the freedom to their employees to develop themselves and that employees are able to take their own role to come up with new ideas. In line with this, the culture is an important factor within EDI, as these are the two elements that determine if employees feel safe to speak up and express their opinions and ideas for innovation. This is further described by an HR-professional as follows:

A good leader stimulates you to think about how you can best fulfill your role and tasks within the organization, so that you feel and experience the space to also come up with a different proposal than that has always been the case. [...] So that's really a crucial factor. This is related to the culture within the organization, these are 2 elements that determine whether you feel you have the space to honestly and openly speak up and also to dispute whether the things always been done are the right ones. (HR-professional, social services organization)

Thus, it is found that employees want to get the feeling that their ideas are welcome. This is also in line with the credibility of the organization, as it must be clear what will be further done with the ideas. Subsequently, according to an HR-professional, this will stimulate employees to keep sharing their ideas and input. However, it seems unclear what will happen with the new ideas after it is submitted to the line manager. On the other hand, these two factors can also inhibit EDI. Especially the line manager has a big role, as when they do not create the culture in which employees can express themselves, then this will influence innovation negatively. This is described by an HR-professional as follows:

A bad line manager could absolutely hinder this. [...] If someone is not open to innovation, improvement, and this is very often due to the fact that it is not an idea of its own. Then, many supervisors are immediately fierce and do not want to use the employees' idea. In the end it might be a very good idea, but because it is not his own idea, he does not like it. (HR-professional, manufacturing company)

Next to these two factors, the size and bureaucracy of the organization could also inhibit EDI. We find that the bigger the organization, the more layers within the organization, and, therefore, ideas need to go through several layers, which can inhibit innovation. Also, as a large organization, you cannot choose every idea, so organizations have to focus on certain themes at different periods of time.

To sum up, line managers play an important role in creating an open culture to stimulate EDI. Within this culture, employees need to feel safe and get the freedom to come up with new ideas to improve the organization's processes. In this way, the link with inclusion could be positive, which will be further explained in the next section.

4.3 The link between Inclusion and EDI

In line with the explanations of Carmeli et al. (2010) and Frazier et al. (2017), the HR-professionals, in general, feel that there is a positive link between the concepts of inclusion and EDI. So, when employees are treated as an appreciated member of the organization, are taken serious, and get the freedom to come up with new ideas, they feel safe to speak up and express their opinions and ideas. Subsequently, they feel free to come up with innovative suggestions. Therefore, high levels of inclusion can lead to more innovative ideas, and thus, an increase in EDI. In addition to this general finding, we find three factors which can influence the positive link between inclusion and EDI, seen in Table 4. First, high feelings of appreciation leads to the fact that employees will be more involved with the company, and therefore, want to contribute to the success of the organization by coming up with new and innovative suggestions. According to the interviewees, employees want to feel appreciated and be themselves, and organizations need to give room to employees to develop themselves, but also, to give them the freedom to express their opinions and ideas. In this way, employees will be more involved with the company and come up with ideas and improvements faster. This is supported by the following quote of an HR-professional:

When you create a kind of warm bath for a colleague in which the person feels appreciated in all kinds of ways, in his work but also in his private situation and who will behave accordingly, then you will push the person to a higher level and then the person will also feel more involved with the company and ultimately be more innovative. (HR-professional, manufacturing company)

However, when you look at the group of people with a distance to the labour market, they are often seen as less innovative than higher educated employees. Therefore, organizations need to find a balance between employees' involvement in innovative behaviour. For example, it is found that stability is very important for the employees with a distance to the labour market, so starting at the same time every workday and no big changes etcetera. Subsequently, this would not have a positive effect on innovation. Unlike the low expectations of innovative behavior, they can also come up with new ideas. Therefore, organizations need to give them the right attention and give employees a 'little credit'. This is further described by an HR-professional as follows:

Basically, I believe in social innovation, so I believe when you see people as the most valuable capital, then you can innovate as an organization. And that you can also achieve the most growth in this. Only we have to realize that we are dealing with a different group of people. But there you can also question what is pleasant and you can also give them the right attention to offer the room to develop and to make suggestions that you may not have expected. (HR-professional, social services organization)

<i>Factors which influence the link between Inclusion and EDI</i>	<i>Description of factor</i>	<i>Sample quotes</i>
Appreciation and Involvement	More appreciation leads to higher employee involvement and contribution	<i>If you feel that your ideas are welcome, and that it is appreciated that you think along, and that you also have the opportunity to research and possibly implement them, then I certainly think that the feeling of inclusion increases. (medical laboratory)</i>
	Balance between employees' involvement in innovative behaviour	<i>Basically, I believe in social innovation, so I believe when you see people as the most valuable capital, then you can innovate as an organization. [...] Only we have to realize that we are dealing with a different group of people. [...] you can also give them the right attention to offer the room to develop and to make suggestions that you may not have expected. (social services)</i>
Culture	More open and safe culture leads to more innovative behaviour	<i>The most important thing I think is the culture. Because if there is not the right culture, then you can actually stop already. When someone feels comfortable and feels recognized, then someone also feels more confident because they are okay with who they are. (facility management)</i>
Diversity	More diversity leads to more creativity and innovation	<i>So I think if you have a safe culture where you can speak freely, where you are taken seriously, that's what is needed to create employee-driven innovation. (telecommunication)</i>
	Innovative behavior within diverse workforce	<i>On the other hand, it also works that the more different types of people you have, the more innovative. Because you just have a wider audience. (telecommunication)</i>
		<i>We also strive as much as possible to a different composition of the teams, so that will only benefit the creativity and therefore also the innovation of an organization. (financial services)</i>
		<i>Not all employees are the same, of course, some are happy with what they do and want to keep doing it and want to stay within a team. And on the other hand, you have people who choose much more for their development and who want to try something new every time. (police force)</i>

Table 4. Influencing factors of the link between inclusion and EDI

As described before, organizations need to create an open culture in which employees feel free to speak up and can come up with new innovative ideas to improve the organization's processes. This is in line with the second influencing factor of the link between inclusion and EDI, as a more open and safe culture leads to more innovative behaviour. According to the interviewees, the employees need to be central within the organization, and, therefore, organizations need to make sure that employees feel comfortable, are taken serious, and can be fully themselves. In this way, employees experience high levels of inclusion, and subsequently, they feel free to come up with new and innovative ideas, which increases EDI. This is supported as follows:

So I think if you have a safe culture where you can speak freely, where you are taken seriously, that's what is needed to create employee-driven innovation. (HR-professional, telecommunication company)

In the third place, we find that the concept of diversity is important in the link between inclusion and EDI, as an increased diverse workforce can lead to more creativity and innovation. To illustrate, a team of employees who work together within a project all have diverse characteristics, opinions, and ideas. Every employee looks from a different perspective to a certain topic, which will benefit the creativity of a team. Subsequently, this will lead to new and innovative ideas, and will increase EDI. This is explained as follows:

It also works that the more different types of people you have, the more innovative. Because you just have a wider audience. So if you look at topics from multiple perspectives of people, you can innovate more. (HR-professional, telecommunication company)

However, a diverse workforce can also lead to some challenges, seen in Table 4. Especially, the majority of the HR-professionals clearly describe the importance of paying attention to every employee and their innovative behaviour. To illustrate, not every employee has the feeling that they need to be innovative constantly. So, they want to do their job and feel comfortable within their job, but they are less interested in innovation. In contrast, other employees want to develop themselves constantly, and, therefore, they are more involved in innovation projects. Subsequently, we find that this could have a positive or negative effect on the feeling of inclusion, which is further explained by an HR-professional as follows:

The employee who is more involved in innovations and who has ideas and plays a role in such a project team, then they also have a higher degree of inclusion if it's about how I experience my work and how I am valued. The employees who are less involved in this, [...] then they will also be less likely to do so and will not feel satisfied. They will hopefully get their satisfaction from the feeling that they are doing a good job. So I think there definitely is a link. (HR-professional, medical laboratory company)

Next to the three factors which can influence the link between inclusion and EDI, we find that the responsibility of employer and/or employee also plays an important role in the link between inclusion and EDI. According to the HR-professionals, it is both the responsibility of the employer and the employee to increase the feeling of inclusion and, ultimately, increase innovation. On the one hand, it is the responsibility of the employee to dare to come up with new ideas. Therefore, it must be clear for employees what their role is and how they contribute to the organization. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the employer to create this safe and open culture in which employees are stimulated to come up with new ideas and be involved within innovation processes. In this way, organizations can create a positive link between inclusion and EDI, as employees feel high levels of inclusion, and, therefore, they will contribute to innovation. This is further explained by an HR-professional as follows:

If an employee knows where he stands and how he contributes, so what he likes to do and he can do well and why he does that here. And next to this, you also remove the obstacles to be able to do this. Then I think that your employees almost automatically dare to come up with ideas and ask questions. (HR-professional, ICT consultancy organization)

However, it must be noted that the link between inclusion and EDI can be influenced by the way how the line manager stimulates inclusion, and how he/she creates an open culture in which employees are actively stimulated to come up with new ideas. Thus, the stimulating and/or inhibiting factors of inclusion and EDI, seen in Figure 4, can influence the positive link between inclusion and EDI. In addition, we find that organizations and line managers experience another challenge in the creation of an inclusive work environment, which is the challenge of making sure that everyone experiences high levels of inclusion. To be more precise, not every employee within the organization will experience the feeling of inclusion, as they feel not involved with the company. Therefore, organizations and line managers need to pay attention to this challenge to create a positive link between inclusion and EDI. This challenge is further described as follows:

But unfortunately, everyone will never feel included, this will never happen. In a company that is listed on the stock market where functions are clearly separated, everyone will never experience high levels of inclusion or attain that status. You have a lot of resistance. For example, I now also notice how people are within absenteeism. People report themselves sick very quickly. This is in conflict with inclusion, as they feel completely uninvolved with the organization. So you have to find a mix in this. (HR-professional, manufacturing company)

To sum up, when organizations focus on the three factors described in Table 4, they can create a positive link between inclusion and EDI. Thus, we find that an inclusive work environment can stimulate employee-driven innovation. However, we also find that HRM plays an important role within inclusion and EDI, from which the results will be presented in the next section.

4.4 The role of HRM within Inclusion and EDI

As described before, HRM plays an important role in creating an inclusive work environment and in stimulating EDI. According to the literature, this role of HRM can be divided into the activities of the HR-professionals and the HR policies and practices. We found that HR-professionals execute different tasks or activities to create a positive link between inclusion and EDI, and can be divided into five activities: 1) formulate policy and goals, 2) designing and facilitating tools, 3) advise and coach line managers, 4) motivate and stimulate employees, and 5) act as a connecting factor, seen in Figure 5. First of all, according to the interviewees, the HR department needs to put the concept of inclusion on the agenda, as it seems that organizations do not always give equal priority to inclusion. Therefore, HR-professionals have a role in creating positive examples of focusing on inclusion, and how it adds value to the organization. This is in line with the first task of the HR-professional, as they need to formulate HR policies and goals, which contribute to inclusion and EDI. For instance, the HR department can focus on the communication of the organization's objectives to line managers and employees, and how to improve the objectives in a way that employees also agree with these objectives and can translate it into their daily work. This is related to both the concepts of inclusion and EDI, as employees want to belong to the organization, which, subsequently, can lead to the feeling that employees can express their opinions and ideas freely, and this could have a positive effect on EDI. However, according to several HR-professionals, when formulating HR policies and goals, you should always keep in mind the concept of inclusion, as every HR tool or practice should contribute to the feeling of inclusion. This is further described as follows:

In fact, every HR project should match with inclusion. If it doesn't contribute to that, you should not even do it. Because otherwise you will only break the organization. So, HR has a controlling and steering role to take it to a higher level and to actually take steps in it. (HR-professional, manufacturing company)

Secondly, HR-professionals play an important role in designing and facilitating tools to stimulate inclusion and EDI. So, according to the interviewees, they first need to find out the problem and/or demand. After this, the HR department can design several tools within the general practices, such as recruitment and selection, and the annual interview cycle. In this way, we find that HR-professionals play an important role in facilitating tools and practices to stimulate inclusion and EDI. These practices to stimulate inclusion and EDI can be seen in both Table 5 and Table 6 separately. For instance, the HR department can focus on recruitment and selection, onboarding, and the annual interview cycle to stimulate inclusion within the organization, seen in Table 5. Everyone deserves a place to work within the concept of inclusion, and, therefore, the HR department can focus within recruitment and selection on including people with a distance to the labour market, but also focus on the inflow of certain groups, such as women. Also, within the onboarding of employees, the HR department needs to make employees feel welcome before and during the first weeks to increase the feeling of inclusion. Therefore, employees can, for example, be introduced to other functions within the organization, in which they can watch the tasks of their colleagues. Third, within the annual interview cycle, it is important that employees are valued objectively. We find that, especially, the focus on reflection and coaching for the future is important to take into account when organizations want to stimulate inclusion. The annual interview cycle also comes back within the HR practices that can stimulate EDI, seen in Table 6. Herein, the main focus is on giving employees the freedom to discuss ideas, which, subsequently, makes a contribution to stimulating EDI. Furthermore, HR-professionals can focus on organizing employee sessions, such as idea drinks, focus groups, or kick-offs. In this way, employees are stimulated to come up with their ideas, which, subsequently, can have a positive effect on EDI. This is supported as follows:

So during a weekly or daily kick-off, employees can submit improvement proposals, but this is also possible at other times. During those meetings they are discussed and the manager (team leader) takes it to a higher level and then it will be presented again. So then you also have to deal with voice of the employee. (HR-professional, manufacturing company)

Next to designing and facilitating tools, we find that HR-professionals play an important role in advising and coaching line managers. As described above, line managers are a key factor within both inclusion and EDI. Therefore, HR-professionals can advise and coach line managers in how to implement the policies that are formulated by the HR department. To illustrate, within the HR practices to stimulate EDI (Table 6), we find that HR-professionals play a role in coaching line managers in giving feedback to employees. In this way, line managers can stimulate employees to think again about, for example, their ideas about certain processes, which, subsequently, can influence innovation positively. So, according to the interviewees, HR-professionals need to offer support to line managers, and advise and coach them in order to create an inclusive working environment and to stimulate EDI. This is further described as follows:

And so for me (HR) there is mainly a role in coaching the line manager of which questions are you going to ask. Besides being responsible for policy, I also feel responsible for how line managers implement it. Because I can write a very nice policy, but if line managers do not follow that path or do not ask the right questions, [...] then it is of little use. So it is not just about policy in my opinion, but it is also about ensuring that the HR policy is embraced and implemented within the frameworks that have been set. (HR-professional, medical laboratory company)

Thus, HR-professionals play an important role in coaching line managers in how to implement the policies and goals correctly that are formulated by the HR department. However, we find that HR-professionals also play an important role in motivating and stimulating employees. For instance, when employees come to the HR department with a problem, then the role of them is to stimulate these employees in trying to solve it independently. So, we find that the HR department really tries to stimulate employees to think along and to come up with solutions by themselves. According to several HR-professionals, it is important to involve employees within certain decision-making processes, as these employees are confronted with it every day and they know best what works well for them and what does not. Furthermore, the role of motivating and stimulating employees can be mainly seen back within the HR practice of training and development, both to stimulate inclusion and EDI (Table 5 and 6). To stimulate employees' feeling of inclusion, we find that it is important that the HR department stimulates employees to develop themselves, with, for example, designing an academy in which employees can switch between different functions. This is in line with the focus on personal development to stimulate EDI, as employees need to be seen as the source within innovation. For example, HR-professionals can coach and stimulate trainees, which is described as follows:

And, for example, I also supervise trainees. Trainees often take a fresh look at things, and, therefore, you stimulate them in how we are going to communicate certain things to employees, so we really challenge them to think along with us. (HR-professional, financial services company)

Lastly, we find that HR-professionals act as a connecting factor. This connecting function can, on the one hand, be between external organizations and the organization itself, or on the other hand between employees and management. For example, when employees have ideas about certain processes and explain this to the HR department, then the role of the HR-professional is to submit this to the management. In this way, HR-professionals play as a kind of intermediary. When we look at the role of HRM from the HR-professionals who define the concept of inclusion as giving people with a distance to the labour market a chance to work, then we find that HR-professionals play a role as an intermediary between the organization itself and external organizations, such as employer service points, municipalities, and schools. This is also seen back within the HR practices to stimulate inclusion, seen in Table 5. To illustrate, HR-professionals play an important role in maintaining contact with employer service points and schools. In this way, when a vacancy arises, everyone gets a chance, also the people with a distance to the labour market. Thus, HR-professionals can act as a connecting factor, which is further described as follows:

I think that HRM should be highly visible within an organization, and must be very approachable. HRM needs to be very close to the people on the working floor, but also very close to the management of the organization. So, I really think HRM is a kind of hyphen. So, they can bring ideas from employer to employees and from employees to employer. I think HRM is really a connecting factor within inclusion. (HR-professional, law and notary office)

<i>HR practices to stimulate inclusion</i>	<i>Description of HR practices</i>	<i>Sample quotes</i>
Recruitment and Selection	Focus on selection of people who fit within the organization	<i>It also has to do with hiring policy, which is why I think it is important that someone from HR is involved in an interview. [...] Look, I am not interested in how good someone is at that moment, but in the hour when I talk to them, I look at how someone is and whether they fit within the organization. (manufacturer)</i>
	Design and/or adjust vacancy texts	<i>We have just made an instruction to adjust our vacancy texts. And they will also be written this way, so not which function is it with which tasks, but what impact will you deliver, that is also part of our payoff. We want to stimulate that if you have a set of talents and if you fit within the organization and our goals. (facility management)</i>
	Include people with a distance to the labor market	<i>But we are constantly looking at, when a vacancy arises, would someone with a distance to the labour market fit this function. (wholesale)</i>
	Inflow of certain groups, such as trainees or women	<i>But we also look at the inflow of trainees, for example, about 40 trainees come into our organization every year and we have also set the target that we want 40% female participants there in order to be able to solve the problem in the future. (telecommunication)</i>
Onboarding	Make employees feel welcome before and during the first weeks	<i>I think introduction policy is the first impression how welcome you feel. That can be flowers on the first working day, but also a good conversation about the terms of employment. [...] I think that is the first step you need to take when it comes to inclusion. (medical laboratory)</i>
	Introduction to other functions within the organization	<i>And we do have an intensive onboarding program, where we think it is important that you experience every function. So whether you are a manager or an order picker, you go along for half a day with all functions to see what the company actually does. [...] So, in that way we try to make someone feel welcome. [...] So that has indirectly to do with inclusion. (wholesale)</i>
Training and development	Focus on the development of employees for the future	<i>The training policy that we pursue, which can influence the feeling of inclusion, it is aimed here in such a way that we mainly look at what is necessary to be able to continue your work. [...] And now I see that there is a need for, for example, young managers to do development projects, which is also part of your training policy on how I will develop my people for the future and how do you participate in their ambitions. So I believe training policy can be very important for inclusion. (medical laboratory)</i>
	Stimulate employees to develop themselves	<i>We are also working on an academy, which is also very similar because we want to encourage people to do more jobcrafting and to switch between functions or take up roles. (ICT consultancy)</i>
Annual interview cycle	Equality within training	<i>But that means that someone with a disability can also do the emergency response training [...]. But these training courses will be adjusted to the right level of them. So there is no distinction between whether I want to follow an education or someone else. (social services)</i>
	Focus on reflection and coaching for the future	<i>I think the annual interview cycle is also important. Actually your assessment cycle. We work here with annual appraisals and herein we will always reflect on how you have experienced the past year and where do you see yourself in 5 years' time. (medical laboratory)</i>

	Objective assessment of employees	<i>So you have to think very carefully in your HR practices and policies about how you promote inclusion. I also think it is important in your assessment system. Do you value people objective? (telecommunication)</i>
Contacts with external organizations	Contact with employer service points	<i>When a vacancy arises, we look if someone with a distance to the labour market would fit within this function. We are also in contact with employer service points or UWV about this. (wholesale)</i>
	Collaboration with schools	<i>That you also have good contacts with external organizations [...] So we also have a lot of contact with schools and with practical education schools. (facility management)</i>

Table 5. HR practices to stimulate inclusion

HR practices to stimulate EDI	Description of HR practices	Sample quotes
Training and development	Coaching line managers	<i>Our role is also to stimulate the manager with giving feedback and how to do it best. Then you stimulate someone to think about it differently and, then, I think you influence the culture and leadership to stimulate innovation. (social services)</i>
	Focus on personal development	<i>In any case, we place a high value on training, including the personal development of our employees. So, there will always be room for that, we are really a learning organization that wants to keep developing. (financial services)</i>
	Coaching and stimulating trainees	<i>And, for example, I also supervise trainees. Trainees often take a fresh look at things, and, therefore, you stimulate them in how we are going to communicate certain things to employees, so we really challenge them to think along with us. (financial services)</i>
Annual interview cycle	Freedom to discuss ideas for improvements	<i>That is actually discussed during performance appraisals, we have coaching and evaluation interviews in which you discuss the work and the agreements three times a year. There will be discussed how it goes, but also what can be improved. What could be better in your work, but also what the organization could do better in guiding employees. (wholesale)</i>
	Focus on reflection and developing for the future	<i>We have grow interviews, which you can compare with performance interviews. [...] Herein, it is important that the skills and abilities will be discussed, and that they also regularly come back from how do you look at that together and what development do you see for yourself, where are you now and what do you still need. (financial services)</i>
	Stimulate employees to come up with ideas	<i>With us it is really focused on personal development, [...] so what do you contribute, what are your plans for the coming year and then we make result agreements and a kind of development plan. (police force)</i>
Employee sessions		<i>And I think, overall, that as an organization, we really encourage that, also from the line. During discussions that people are really challenged to think along with the organization and help us. (financial services)</i>
	Develop tools for employees	<i>Every few weeks we had an idea drink. And people could just go there voluntarily, which was during working hours to exchange ideas with each other. (financial services)</i>
		<i>But we also have an internal ideas box on the intranet, a page where people can really come up with ideas for improvement and suggestions about everything, and then we will look at it seriously. (telecommunication)</i>

Table 6. HR practices to stimulate employee-driven innovation

4.5 Towards a framework for the relationship between HRM, an inclusive work environment and EDI

This explorative study allowed us to build a framework for the relationship between the role of HRM, an inclusive work environment and EDI, seen in Figure 5. We find that HR-professionals can execute several activities or tasks to stimulate an inclusive work environment and EDI. In combination with the HR practices they can use to stimulate inclusion and EDI, they are able to create a positive link between inclusion and EDI. This is summarized in Figure 5, which shows the relationship between HRM, inclusion and EDI. The scheme shows three important factors which can influence the positive link between inclusion and EDI. First, employees want to feel appreciated, respected and valued within an organization. In this way, employees are able to completely be themselves, which leads to higher levels of inclusion. Subsequently, employees will be more involved with the organization and, therefore, want to contribute to the success of the organization by coming up with innovative ideas, which increases EDI. Second, a more open culture ensures that employees can fully be themselves and feel safe to speak up and express their opinions and ideas. Again, this creates a positive relationship between inclusion and EDI, as employees feel included within an open culture, and, subsequently, they show more innovative behaviour. Lastly, the results show that an increased diverse workforce leads to more creativity and innovation. As employees are able to be themselves, they can show their unique skills and abilities, and come up with new and innovative ideas, which will increase EDI. However, we discovered that employees are mainly involved within the idea generation phase, and not within the implementation of innovative ideas. It remains unclear if and how the ideas will be implemented when these are forwarded to the line manager, which results in the need for more insights into the implementation of ideas within an inclusive work environment to increase EDI.

Within this study, an inclusive work environment is one in which employees can be themselves, feel part of the organization, feel psychologically safe, feel respected and valued, and are taken seriously. This result partly supports previous claims in which belongingness and uniqueness were seen as elements that must be addressed in order to experience inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). In addition, the scheme shows that line managers play an important role in creating an inclusive work environment and in stimulating EDI (Figure 5). The findings highlight that line managers need to create an open culture in which employees can feel safe and be themselves, regardless of who they are and which function they have. In this way, employees experience high levels of inclusion. Furthermore, employees need to be stimulated by their line managers to come up with new ideas, which can increase the level of EDI. Thus, the line manager can be seen as a key factor within both concepts, which supports previous research regarding the importance of the line manager in creating inclusive work environments through inclusive leadership, and their support to increase EDI (Kesting and Ulhøi, 2010; Randel et al., 2018). We believe that HR-professionals play an important role in advising and coaching line managers to create a positive relationship between inclusion and EDI. The HR-professionals feel that they need to advise and coach line managers in how to implement the policies correctly that are formulated by the HR department. Therefore, they need to offer support to line managers, and advise and coach them in creating an inclusive work environment and to stimulate EDI. Thus, this result supports the theory on the HRM function, as line managers have an important role in the implementation of HR practices which are designed and developed by HR-professionals (Renkema et al., 2020; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2017; Bos-Nehles & Meijerink, 2018). Next to this role, HR-professionals have important roles in formulating policy and goals, designing and facilitating tools, motivating and stimulating employees, and they act as a connecting factor. In combination with the HR practices they can use to stimulate inclusion and EDI, they eventually contribute to the creation of an inclusive work environment and to stimulate EDI.

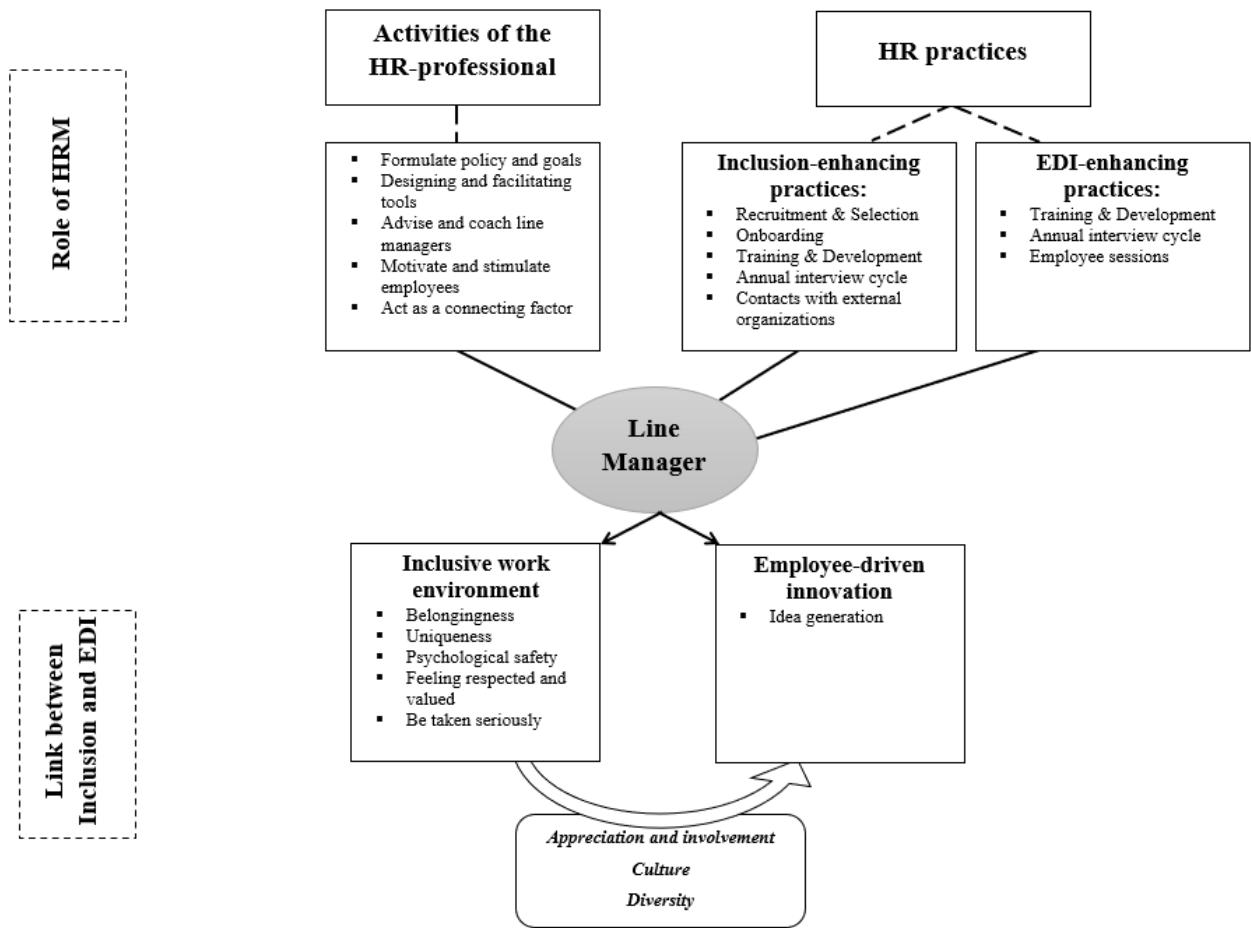


Figure 5. The role of HRM within Inclusion and EDI

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between inclusion and employee-driven innovation, and to understand the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster EDI. According to several scholars, an inclusive work environment is particularly important for EDI, as, for example, inclusion could lead to employees feeling safe to speak up, which, subsequently, could lead to new and innovative suggestions (e.g. Carmeli et al., 2010; Frazier et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2019). However, the role of HRM within these themes has remained understudied. Therefore, this study discovered how HR-professionals can stimulate EDI through the creation of an inclusive work environment by focusing on several HR policies and practices. The results show that the concept of inclusion is mainly seen as giving people with a distance to the labour market a chance to work within organizations. This is contradictory to the literature, as an inclusive work environment was defined as one in which employees have the opportunity to express their opinions and are recognized for their efforts in the organization (Wasserman et al., 2008; Sabharwal, 2014). Therefore, giving people with a distance to the labour market a chance to work can be seen as one part of inclusion. This definition of inclusion could be due to the introduction of the ‘Participatiewet’ in the Netherlands, which resulted in a lot of attention to people with a disability. However, not only people with a disability have a distance to the labour market, as this also applies to, for example, migrants and single parents (de Vries, Beukema, Gründemann, & de Lange, 2017). Therefore, it is important to look at the concept broadly in a way that every employee wants to feel included. Furthermore, it is shown that 5 dimensions explain an inclusive work environment, which are 1) belongingness, 2) uniqueness, 3) psychological safety, 4) feeling respected and valued, and 5) be taken seriously. Similarly to the literature, both belongingness and uniqueness must be addressed in order to experience inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). Also, psychological safety and feeling respected and valued are found as important dimensions that describe an inclusive work environment (Shore et al., 2018). Interestingly, the dimension of be taken seriously is shown to be an important starting point for an inclusive work environment. So, organizations need to listen to their employees and take their opinions and ideas seriously to give them the feeling of inclusion.

In addition, it is shown that employees have a key role within innovation, but they want to have the freedom and openness, and feel psychologically safe to come up with ideas. This is in line with the literature about EDI, as employees want to be involved within innovation processes and feel comfortable to voice and speak up (Kesting & Ulhøi, 2010; Carmeli et al., 2010). Interestingly, this study shows that employees only get highly involved within the idea generation phase, and not within the implementation phase. This is contradictory to the literature, as Renkema et al. (2018) described EDI as the generation and implementation of new ideas from one or more work floor employees. So, it is not clear how the ideas will be implemented when the ideas are forwarded to the line manager. Therefore, it could be that employees are not involved within the implementation of their innovative ideas. Subsequently, employees could get the feeling that their ideas are not taken seriously, and therefore, they will not come up with new ideas in the future, which could have a negative influence on innovation. HR-professionals could play an important role in the implementation of ideas, and Renkema et al. (2018) found that HR practices such as training, job design, selection, involvement, and feedback helped within the implementation of new ideas. Therefore, further research is needed into the implementation of ideas within an inclusive work environment to increase EDI.

Furthermore, the results also reveal that the line manager and the organization’s culture play an important role in stimulating the positive link between inclusion and EDI. Line managers seem to be the key factor within inclusion and EDI, as they need to create a safe environment in which employees are able to express themselves freely and feel comfortable to voice and speak up. So, they

need to create an open culture or climate where line managers provide support and show openness to input. In this way, it creates the feeling that it is safe for employees to express and share their ideas and opinions (Hirak et al., 2012). However, in order to create a positive link between inclusion and EDI, the results show that it is not only about psychological safety and employee voice (e.g. Carmeli et al., 2010). Interestingly, three other factors can lead to the fact that high levels of inclusion can lead to more innovative ideas of employees, namely 1) appreciation and involvement, 2) culture, and 3) diversity. So, employees want an open culture, in which they feel appreciated, be involved, and where diversity is stimulated, which is similar to the literature about inclusion (Shore et al., 2018).

Thus, this study shows that there seems to be a relationship between an inclusive work environment and EDI. Within this relationship, HR-professionals can play an important role, as they are responsible for the HR practices to enhance inclusion and EDI. It is shown that the role of HRM can be divided into the activities of the HR-professionals, and the HR practices that can be used to stimulate both inclusion and EDI. However, it must be noted that the inclusion-enhancing HR practices found within this study do not necessarily lead to an inclusive work environment. This study shows that the line manager also plays an important role in enhancing inclusion. Therefore, it is important that HR-professionals advise and coach line managers in how to implement the policies correctly that are formulated by the HR department. Next to advising and coaching line managers, this study shows the following activities of HR-professionals to stimulate inclusion and EDI: 1) formulate policy and goals, 2) designing and facilitating tools, 3) motivate and stimulate employees, and 4) act as a connecting factor. When HR-professionals focus on these activities and the different HR practices that are found, they can create a positive link between inclusion and EDI.

5.1 Theoretical implications

With regard to theoretical implications, this study makes four important contributions to the HRM literature. First, as described in previous research, organizations can implement several practices to create an inclusive work environment (e.g., Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2015; Shore et al., 2018). However, the role of HRM was understudied, and there was a lack of empirical support. Therefore, this study expands the findings of past research and shows in which policies and practices HR-professionals and the HR department should invest to stimulate an inclusive work environment and EDI. This study suggests that HR-professionals can invest in 1) recruitment and selection, 2) onboarding, 3) training and development, 4) annual interview cycle, and 5) contacts with external organizations to stimulate inclusion. For instance, within the onboarding process of new employees, it is important to make them feel welcome before and during the first weeks, by, for example, introducing them to other functions within the organization. In addition, to stimulate EDI, HR-professionals need to focus on 1) training and development, 2) annual interview cycle, and 3) employee sessions. To illustrate, within the annual interview cycle or within employee sessions, such as idea drinks, focus groups, or weekly kick-offs, employees have the freedom to come up with new ideas for improvement of the organization, which stimulates EDI. According to Boehm et al. (2014), organizations need to implement suitable and focused HR practices. This study shows that HR-professionals can focus on several HR practices in which they can influence employees' skills and knowledge, their motivation and effort, and their opportunities to contribute. In this way, employees' experience of inclusion will be increased, which, subsequently, can lead to more innovative ideas from employees.

Second, previous research stated that leaders have a key role in creating inclusive work environments, and, therefore, inclusive leadership can positively influence inclusion (e.g., Buengeler et al., 2018; Randel et al., 2018). According to Randel et al. (2018), inclusive leadership focuses on increasing employees' feelings of belongingness and uniqueness. However, our findings suggest that

other dimensions are also important within an inclusive work environment, such as being taken seriously, feeling respected and valued, and psychological safety. Therefore, further research on inclusive leadership and their effects on inclusion and EDI should be conducted to confirm the positive link we found between inclusion and EDI.

Third, leaders (line managers) are seen as a key factor within inclusion and EDI. Our results show that line managers have an important role in creating an open culture or climate in which employees feel welcome, regardless of who they are and which function they have. So, line managers need to create a safe environment in which employees are able to express themselves freely, which, subsequently, can have a positive influence on EDI. However, this is contradictory to the literature in which it is argued that HRM has responsibilities in the creation of an inclusive climate (Offerman & Basford, 2014). So, it is not the role of HRM to create a strong inclusive work environment, as our study suggests that line managers have a key role in creating an open and inclusive climate. Thus, the HR responsibilities are more devolved to line managers, which was already discussed by Brewster and Larsen (1992) through the concept of ‘devolution’. Moreover, Bos-Nehles, van Riemsdijk, and Looise (2013) stated that line managers have become increasingly important in the implementation of HR practices and showed that line managers have the competences to perform HR tasks effectively, but HR-professionals need to train and support the line managers in implementing the HR practices correct and effective. So, our results suggest that the role of HR-professionals is to advise and coach line managers in how they can create this open climate. Also, HR-professionals need to facilitate line managers with tools to develop their skills and competences to become effective line managers. However, it must be noted that this research is carried out by conducting interviews with HR-managers and/or advisors, and therefore, the findings are based on the opinions and insights of them. These HR-professionals think that the line manager plays an important role within stimulating inclusion and EDI. However, this could also be seen as a kind of behavior in which HR-professionals shift their responsibilities to the line managers. Therefore, further research is needed on the roles of the HR-professionals and line managers within the implementation of HR policies and practices to stimulate an inclusive work environment and EDI.

Finally, this study expands the findings of previous research that diversity has positive effects on innovation (e.g., van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003; Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Hülsheger et al., 2009; Ostergaard et al., 2011). Within previous research, the concepts of diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, but it can be concluded that they have different meanings. Organizations have to deal with different characteristics of employees, but it is the way in which you deal with these diverse characteristics that leads to inclusion. This study shows that more diversity leads to more creativity and innovation, as employees’ different perspectives lead to more innovative ideas. However, it is important to note that every employee’s innovative behaviour is different. For instance, it seems that employees with a distance to the labour market are seen as less innovative than employees with a higher educational background. Also, not every employee will feel included within an organization, which could have negative effects on innovation. Therefore, organizations need to find a balance in employees’ involvement in innovative behaviour. In this way, a diverse workforce with different feelings of inclusion can still lead to innovation. So, it can be concluded that diversity and inclusion are related and dependent on each other, and, therefore, this study advances the research in both concepts and their influence on innovation.

5.2 Practical implications

Organizations desiring to create an inclusive work environment and to stimulate EDI should focus on the role of line managers within the implementation of HR practices. Line managers need to see themselves as responsible for creating an open culture, where employees can be themselves, feel respected and valued, are taken seriously, and feel psychologically safe to speak up and to come up

with new ideas to improve the organization's processes. In this way, employees feel included and, subsequently, they will come up with new ideas earlier as they feel comfortable to voice and speak up. We suggest therefore to invest more in advising and coaching line managers in how to implement the policies and practices correctly that are formulated by the HR department. This study showed that the HR department can focus on several HR practices to stimulate an inclusive work environment and EDI, including 1) recruitment and selection, 2) onboarding, 3) training and development, 4) annual interview cycle, 5) contacts with external organizations, and 6) employee sessions. To illustrate, to create an inclusive work environment, people with a distance to the labour market also deserve a place to work and within the onboarding process, it is important to make them feel welcome before and during the first weeks. Thus, HR-professionals need to facilitate line managers in the implementation process of the HR practices that can be used to stimulate both inclusion and EDI.

Interestingly, this study shows that organizations seem to be successful in involving employees within the generation of ideas, but not within the actual implementation of these innovative ideas. We have seen that the ideas are mainly forwarded to the line manager, but it is not clear what happens after this. In this way, employees could get the feeling that their ideas are not taken seriously and will not come up with new ideas in the future. Therefore, we believe that HR-professionals could play an important role in stimulating the realization and implementation of the innovative ideas. To achieve this goal, HR-professionals should design and facilitate tools that help within the implementation of ideas. For instance, HR-professionals can introduce employee sessions, such as focus groups or idea drinks, in which the implementation of ideas will be supported and stimulated. In this way, employees will feel more involved with the organization, as they are able to fully contribute to innovation. In addition, HR-professionals can play an important role in bringing employees from different educational backgrounds together to increase the feeling of inclusion further and to stimulate innovation. This study showed that everyone deserves a place to work, regardless of which function you have as an employee. In addition, it seems that employees with a distance to the labour market are seen as less innovative than employees with a higher educational background. Also, it is found that they are more afraid to share their ideas with anybody else. However, every employee can come up with ideas that are not expected, and, therefore, HR-professionals could bring these employees together to share their knowledge and skills. For example, HR-professionals could build an online platform in which employees are able to share their ideas and suggestions freely, but also where the implementation of innovative ideas will be shared and discussed among employees. In this way, employees will also feel more involved with the organization, which increases the feeling of inclusion.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study provides us with interesting insights and more knowledge about the role of HRM in creating an inclusive work environment and within stimulating EDI. However, some limitations can also be distinguished, and therefore further research is needed. First, as described above, this research is carried out by conducting interviews with HR-professionals, such as HR-managers and HR-advisors, which means that the findings are based on their opinions and insights. However, this could influence the trustworthiness of the findings, because, for example, not only HR-professionals have an important role within the implementation of HR policies, but also line managers play an important role (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Therefore, further research is needed on the roles of the HR-professionals and line managers within the implementation of HR policies and practices to stimulate an inclusive work environment and EDI.

Second, within this study, we only focused on the perspectives of the HR-professional about inclusion and EDI, and not from the perspective of the employee. For instance, it could be that employees perceive inclusion in a different way than the interviewees (HR-professionals) within this

study think. According to Chen and Tang (2018), employees' perceived inclusion really matters, as it can influence their behavior and psychological satisfaction in the organization. They found, for example, that perceived inclusion is positively related to innovator role performance through the mediation of organizational commitment. So, they showed that perceived inclusion is positively related to employees' innovative performance. Therefore, it is important to also conduct research on how employees experience inclusion within organizations. Furthermore, it could be interesting to examine how employees experience the implementation of the HR policies and practices that can stimulate an inclusive work environment and EDI (see Table 5 and 6). This is in line with the third limitation, as further research in a broader context is needed to validate the results. This study had an exploratory focus, and therefore, more research is needed to validate the findings. For instance, within the context of inclusion, there could be more discovered about the benefits of an inclusive work environment and how this can affect team performance, and organizational performance in general.

Lastly, as described above, line managers are seen as the key factor to stimulate both inclusion and EDI. Therefore, it is important to conduct more research on the role of line managers within creating inclusive work environments and in stimulating EDI. In this way, it could also be interesting to examine which competencies and skills line managers need in order to create the positive benefits of inclusion and EDI.

5.4 Conclusion

Within this research, we focused on the following research question: *What is the role of HRM in creating inclusive work environments to foster employee-driven innovation?* In order to answer this research question, an explorative study including in-depth interviews with several HR-professionals was conducted to examine the role of HRM within both concepts. It can be concluded that HR-professionals, such as HR-managers and/or HR-advisors, but also line managers play an important role within inclusion and EDI. The role of HR-professionals is to formulate policies and goals, design and facilitate tools, and, especially, advise and coach line managers in how to implement the policies correctly that are formulated by the HR department. Also, HR-professionals have a role in motivating and stimulating employees to come up with new ideas, and they act as a connecting factor between external organizations, management, and employees.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that HR-professionals, and the HR department in general, should invest in several HR practices that can enhance an inclusive work environment and EDI. This study suggests that HR-professionals can invest in 1) recruitment and selection, 2) onboarding, 3) training and development, 4) annual interview cycle, and 5) contacts with external organizations to stimulate inclusion. For example, it is recommended to make employees feel welcome before and during their onboarding process. Also, to stimulate EDI, HR-professionals can invest in 1) training and development, 2) annual interview cycle, and 3) employee sessions. In this way, employees receive the freedom to come up with new ideas for improvement, which stimulates EDI, and it can also increase the feeling of inclusion.

This study showed that line managers are the key factor within both inclusion and EDI, as they need to create an open culture in which employees can feel safe and be themselves, regardless of who they are and which function they have. In this way, employees experience high levels of inclusion and, subsequently, they dare to come up with new ideas and innovative suggestions, which increases EDI. However, our results showed that involvement in the implementation of ideas stays behind. So, it is not clear what will happen with the ideas when they are forwarded to the line manager. Thus, it can be concluded that an inclusive work environment can stimulate EDI, but it is both the role of HR-professionals and the line manager to contribute to this positive relationship.

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7. Appendix

Appendix I: Interview protocol

First of all, thank you for making time for this interview. For my thesis, I am doing research on the role of HRM within inclusion, and the link with employee-driven innovation. Therefore, I want to examine what HRM policies and practices are used to create an inclusive work environment, and how this affects employee-driven innovation. To achieve this, I will interview several HR-professionals from different organizations.

This interview will take approximately one hour. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, as your name will never be used in this research. Also, I want to ask if this interview can be recorded? The audio records will only be used for transcribing and analyzing the interviews, and will never be shared.

Do you have any further questions before we start the interview?

Concepts/Themes	Interview questions
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can you tell something about the organization? What is the size of the organization etc.?▪ What is the size of the HR department and how is this divided?▪ How many years are you working as a HR-professional within this organization?▪ What are your responsibilities as a HR-professional?
Inclusion and the role of HRM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can you explain what inclusion means for this organization? Sub-questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Which aspects are important to experience inclusion?– What could be the advantages and disadvantages of an inclusive work environment?▪ In general, which factors stimulate inclusion within the organization?▪ In general, which factors inhibit inclusion within the organization?▪ Which policies/practices are used to stimulate inclusion within the organization in general? Sub-questions:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Can you give examples of initiatives/policies developed to stimulate this?– How did this turn out in practice? What was the result?

Employee-driven innovation (EDI) and the role of HRM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell something about the role of employees in innovation processes? Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Can you give examples of innovative initiatives developed or driven by work-floor employees? ▪ In general, which factors stimulate employee-driven innovation within the organization? ▪ In general, which factors inhibit employee-driven innovation within the organization? Sub-question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What challenges do you encounter in stimulating EDI? ▪ Which policies/practices are used to stimulate EDI in general? Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Which policies/practices are used to stimulate idea generation? Can you give examples? – Which policies/practices are used to stimulate idea implementation? Can you give examples? – How did this turn out in practice? What was the result?
Link between the role of HRM, Inclusion and EDI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you tell something about a link between inclusion and EDI? Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To what extent is there a link between inclusion/inclusive work environment and EDI in your view? Can you explain this relationship? – Can you give examples from your organization how you have seen this link between inclusion and EDI works? ▪ In what ways can inclusion stimulate/enhance EDI? Sub-questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Can you give examples from your organization how inclusion can enhance EDI? ▪ And what is the role of HRM in fostering/stimulating this? Can you give examples?
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you have further questions or suggestions? ▪ What did you think about the interview? Do you have feedback? ▪ Do you want to receive the report at the end of this research? ▪ Thank you for the interview.

Appendix II: Initial coding table

Concept	Definition/description	Key words
Inclusion	An inclusive work environment is one in which employees have the opportunity to express their opinions and are recognized for their efforts in the organization (Wasserman et al., 2008; Sabharwal, 2014).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acceptance ▪ Contribution ▪ Participation ▪ Belongingness ▪ Uniqueness (identity)
Psychological safety	“Feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, as cited in Frazier et al., 2017, p. 115).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No fear ▪ Sharing ideas and opinions ▪ Feeling free
Employee voice	“Employees making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree” (Van Dyne & Le Pine, as cited in Rees et al., 2013, p. 2783).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comfortable ▪ Voice ▪ Speak up ▪ Innovation
Employee-driven innovation (EDI)	“the generation and implementation across organizational levels of new ideas, products, services, and/or processes originating from one or more work floor employees who are not overtly required to be active in these activities” (Renkema et al., 2018, p. 7).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work-floor employees ▪ New ideas ▪ Innovation ▪ Bottom-up ▪ Workplace learning ▪ Knowledge/skills
Role of HRM within inclusion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies/practices ▪ HR professionals ▪ Challenges ▪ Measurement ▪ (Dis)advantages
Role of HRM within EDI		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies/practices ▪ HR professionals ▪ Idea generation ▪ Idea implementation ▪ Measurement
Link between role of HRM, inclusion, and EDI		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges ▪ Consequences