MASTER THESIS; VERSION 1.0

MONEY ISN'T POWER ANYMORE, BUT PEOPLE ARE! A HUMANISTIC SHIFT IN ORGANIZATIONS; THE *PEOPLE-FIRST* APPROACH. WHAT CONSTITUTES EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF THIS APPROACH AT THE WORKPLACE?

FACULTY OF BEHAVIOURAL, MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DONYELL DEIRA (S2010992)

EXAMINATION COMMITTEE:

Prof. Dr. T. Bondarouk

Dr. J.S Drost

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

JUNE, 2023

PREFACE

This thesis marks the end of my Master's in Business Administration, with the specialization in Human Resource Management, at the University of Twente. At the start of my academic career, I always had interest in the process of interactions between people; what stimulates one's behaviour to act in a specific manner, and how to foster desirable behaviour. This has led me to achieve my Bachelor's in Psychology at the University of Twente in 2021. After this achievement, I came to the realization that I did not want to apply my knowledge and skills solely in the field of Psychology, but in the field of Human Resources as well. I desired to continue my academic career in the field of Human Resources, as I perceived it to grant me the ability, knowledge, skills and possibility to improve the quality of life of a collective, whether that may concern employees or even society. This duality of interest of Psychology and Human Resources is also reflected in the work I present. I focus myself on the interaction between different "players", and investigate what constitutes the perception of an organizational approach, which is said to tailor itself to one's needs. During the process of construction of this work I have faced challenges, which at the end, have helped to develop myself on an academic, professional and personal level.

However, I was not able to overcome these challenges alone. To start, I want to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to both my primary and secondary supervisor. I want to thank my primary supervisor, Prof. Dr. Tanya Bondarouk, for her willingness to involve and occupy herself with this process, especially considering the substantial responsibilities she carries as Dean of the faculty of Behavioural Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente. I aspired to work with you in a collaborative setting as a supervisor due to your professional background, your consideration to the individual, your feedback, and your character. I want to thank you for your advice, your critique, but also your empathy and understanding throughout the process of my thesis. I want to thank you for sharing your knowledge and insights. Even during times of doubt, you provided me with the comfort and confidence which helped to continue. Moreover, I want to thank my secondary supervisor Dr. Jacqueline S. Drost. I want to thank you for willingness to enable yourself to be involved with my thesis as well. I want to thank you for your precise critiques, which have not only provided the possibility of improvement to my work, but my standards as a researcher as well. Furthermore, I want to thank all of the respondents involved in this research. I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in my research, and the opportunity you granted me to apply my academic skills. You have not only contributed to my work, but also to my experience in the field of research. Such an opportunity cannot easily be obtained; therefore I thank you all.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to my family and friends. If it were not for your support throughout my personal and academic career, I would not have been where I am, be who I am, nor do what I have done. I hope I made you proud.

Thank you all for the support you have provided me, which has been crucial in my academic career. I will carry all that you have taught me into the future and overcome the challenges that I will face.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Employees have a crucial role in organizations as their knowledge is the primary source for production. However, organizations face a challenge where they need to attract, hold, recognize, reward, motivate, serve and satisfy their employees (Drucker, 1992). This challenge is founded by the notion that employees do not focus solely on financial compensation anymore, but other aspects as well; human relational goods (Vroom, 1966, Woodruffe, 2006; Maspero, 2020). The solution to this challenge is the *People-First* approach, which is an approach that focusses on employees and tries to meet their needs through these human relational goods (Leagans, 1964). Despite that the *People-First* approach is the solution for the problem at hand, there is little knowledge regarding what it encompasses or constitutes its perception. For this reason, this research attempts to form a framework as to discover what aids employee's perception thereof. **Methodology:** This research follows a qualitative descriptive design, wherein 25 employees of the University of Twente from different faculties (BMS, EEMCS, ITC TNW & ET) and functions (Academic- & Support staff) took part in semi-structured interviews. **Results:** This research has identified 14 different aspects to constitute to the perception of the *People-First* approach. These aspects are categorized in I-, They- and It-aspects. I-aspects reflect the employee's inherent needs that their profession / employer can offer (e.g., financial renumeration). They-aspects are employee's needs reflective towards their superior (e.g., a certain level of trust). Lastly, It-aspects refer to the employee's needs of their work environment. All three aspects combined form a dynamic relation of associated employees' needs and beliefs of the *People-First* approach. **Conclusion:** This research discovered that the I-, They-, and It-aspects are in a dynamic relationship with another, where all are prone to change due to the influence of the others. Key is that I-aspects play a crucial role in this dynamic relationship. As an employee's needs change over time, constant re-assessment of whether their current needs are met by the environment and by their superior is important. It is how the superior acts towards the employee regarding their needs, and how the work environment can provide space for these needs to be met, that constitutes to the perception of the *People-First* approach by employees.

1 | Introduction |

1.1 | The origin of *People-First*

In recent years, a change in an organization's approach towards current and future employees can be observed. This novel approach is coined as the *People-First* approach. As an approach, the *People-First* approach originates from the economistic tradition, where the factors for production such as land, labour and capital are seen as primary sources for production (Drucker, 1992). However, nowadays those are perceived as secondary, and the knowledge from individuals has become a primary source for production within economy (Drucker, 1992). The reason for this shift is that the knowledge acquired from individuals can be integrated into a task, and create results in tandem with organizations' goals, such as continuous improvement, exploitation of knowledge, or learning to innovate (Drucker, 1992; Griffin et al., 2016). From this movement, where the emphasis is on the importance of an individual's knowledge, the *People* approach originated first. This is an approach that is conceptualized as: "*a strategy that, with its underpinning policies and processes, is developed and implemented by an organization in order to manage its people to optimal effect*" (Gratton & Truss, 2003; p.74). However, as the knowledge of individuals is valued more, organizations face the challenge to attract, hold, recognize, reward, motivate, serve and satisfy their employees (Drucker, 1992). With this shift, it can be said that the economistic tradition where the perspective of *"The people need organizations more, than the organizations need them"*, does not hold anymore. Due to this challenge, organizations try to uphold the coined *People-First* approach. Unfortunately, there is no universally accepted conceptualization of the *People-First* approach yet. Thus, the description is followed where the approach is described as an increase of focus on the individual / the employee, and their needs / desires in the workplace, such as an adequate work-life balance by the organization (SynchHR, 2022). All in all, this showcases that organizations have transitioned towards a more humanistic nature, to focus on employees' needs and desires; the *People-First* approach.

1.2 | The shift to *People-First*

The transition to the *People-First* approach, does not come unexpected. It has been mentioned by Maspero (2020), that a demand has risen from within management to give more attention to the individual. Similarly, this shift from within management has also been mentioned by McGuire et al. (2005), however they associate this shift from within management (from a hierarchic to human relation tradition), to the transition of the organization (from rigid bureaucratic to more flexible adaptive structures). This transition to the *People-First* approach from within management can also be noticed when examining organizations' platforms. On here, organizations mention the *People-First* approach with statements that concern individuals and their needs and desires; that which the *People-First* approach emphasizes. See Table 1 for an overview of statements made by organizations concerning the *People-First* approach.

Table 1; *Organizational People-First Statements*

Organization:	Statement:
Netflix	*"Our core philosophy is people over process."* (Netflix, 2022)
Samsung	*"It is the diversity, creativity, and passion of the people who work at Samsung that have made us one of the world's most innovative companies, and our people continue to drive our innovation forward."* (Samsung, 2022)
Starbucks	*"We actively hire individuals with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations and assistive technologies that enable people to do their job."* (Starbucks, 2022).
Google	*"Googlers care deeply about their teams and the people who make them up."* (Google, n.d.)
Amazon	*"We believe that building a culture that is welcoming and inclusive is integral to people doing their best work and is essential to what we can achieve as a company."* (Amazon, 2022)
Microsoft	*"At Microsoft, you'll be empowered to work on things that you're passionate about. (...).* *Your ideas will matter."* (Microsoft, 2021)
Apple	*"(...) Where a healthy respect for courage and original thinking inspires you to bring your best to what we do together."* (Apple, 2022)
Nike	*"(...) By investing in our employees, we inspire new ideas, methods and products that determine the future of sports."* (Nike, 2022)
KLM	*"(...) We'll challenge you to not only see the possibilities but to grab them with both hands too, resulting in you getting the best out of yourself and making the most of your career."* (KLM, 2021)

The notion that the *People-First* approach has been mentioned by a large pool of organizations, reflects the importance they associate to it and substantiates the claims made by Maspero (2020) and McGuire et al. (2005), regarding the increased focus of management towards individuals.

The shift of focus from management towards the individual can be due to the employees themselves, and their changed perspective on their (future) work. As mentioned earlier by McGuire et al. (2005), there is a shift within management from a hierarchic bureaucratic to a human relation tradition, whereby employees associate increased importance to human relational aspects. These human relational aspects within management are illustrated by several motivational and psychological dimensions, such as teamwork, work-life balance, and mutual trust and knowledge of the process in which individuals are involved (Maspero, 2020). Woodruffe (2006) emphasizes this process as well, as they mention that employees do not focus entirely on money when taking a job nowadays, but also on factors such as a respected work-life balance. Similarly, Vroom (1966) mentions how employees do not focus on solely money, instead they select an organization to work at based on their beliefs of whether the organization can aid them in obtaining their valued outcome(s). Maspero (2020) continues with stating that the *People-First* approach would be reflected at an organization when the human relational aspects, which are inherent to individuals, gain more presence in an organization through the community of employees; emphasizing the importance of the individual which can grow in strength through the collective. Interestingly, the increased importance from employees to human relational aspects emerged due to autonomous self-reflection of the individual (Maspero, 2020). Thus, through individual self-reflection from multiple employees, the demand for certain human relational goods has increased, which is reason as to why organizations and management underwent change.

1.3 | *People-First*; the solution

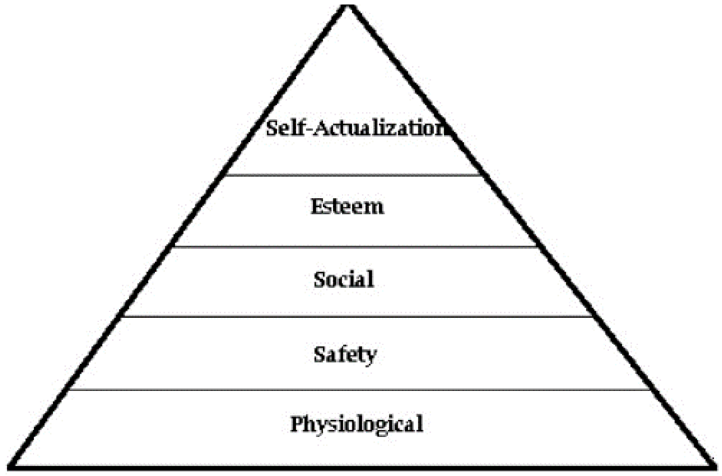
The *People-First* approach brings value to organizations as it can provide a solution to the aforementioned challenge stated by Drucker (1992); attracting, holding, recognizing, rewarding, motivating, serving and satisfying their employees. The *People-First* approach can provide a solution to this challenge by ways of reaching *discretionary effort* (= effort that the employee themselves want to provide, in terms of job commitment and engagement.) (Woodruffe, 2006). As mentioned by Woodruffe (2006), from an increase in execution of the approach at the workplace, an employee's level of engagement could increase as such that they would be fully intellectually and emotionally committed to their job and want to provide *discretionary effort*. This *discretionary effort* focusses on the process of engaging the employee to love and wanting to do their best for their job (Woodruffe, 2006). Hence, through *discretionary effort,* a sense of love for one's job can develop from which their job engagement and commitment can be heightened. This would not provide a possible solution to the challenge mentioned by Drucker (1992) that organizations face, but also increase an organization's economic profitability and survival (Pfeffer & Vega, 1999). Thus, this transition from management to the *People-First* approach can be perceived as a necessity, as abstain from it can bring negative consequences.

1.4 | Theoretical foundation

1.4.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory

Regarding *discretionary effort*, the outcome of love for an individual's job is similar to the outcome that Kapoor and Maechem (2012) state, referring to the "Employees Need", which utilizes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory focusses on the individual and their motivation, whereby Maslow stated that people always want more, and that what they want is dependent on what they already have (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is regarded as a content theory where it attempts to explain the specific things that motivate individuals; identifying their needs, their relative strengths and the goals people pursue (Dinibutun, 2012). Needs as a concept is conceptualized as: "the imbalance, lack of adjustment or gap between the present situation (status quo) and a new or changed set of conditions assumed to be more desirable." (Leagans, 1964, p.92). Within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, an hierarchical structure is constructed which depicts different levels of needs that an individual could have; ranging from Physiological (needs corresponding to unlearned primary needs, e.g. hunger), Safety (needs corresponding to safety, security, freedom from pain or threat of physical attack), Social (needs corresponding to affection, sense of belonging, social activities, etc.), Esteem (needs corresponding to the desire for confidence, strength, prestige, etc.) and Self-actualization needs (needs corresponding to self-fulfilment and realization of all their potential; growth, advancement, creativity) (See Figure 1) (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Important to the theory is that people can "move" to a higher level of needs only if a lower-level need has been satisfied, as it would no longer act as a strong motivator (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976).

Figure 1; *Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976)*



1.4.2 Person-Environment fit

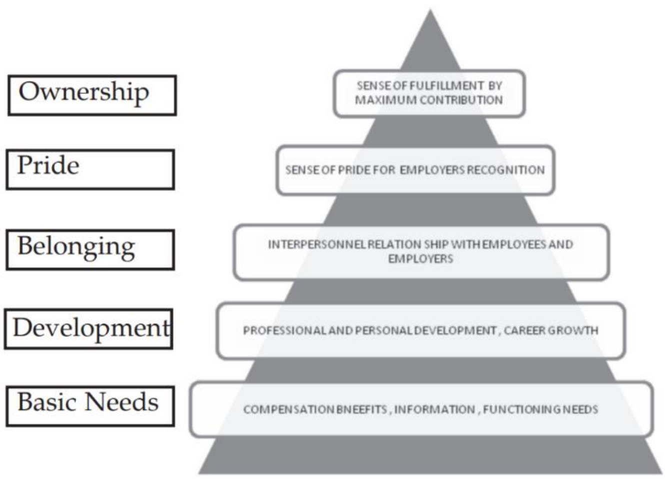
Besides the inherent changes an individual might undergo concerning their needs, their environment also plays a role. Leagans (1964) mentions that, as the individual is surrounded by the environment of people, physical items, social / cultural norms, etc., acts from their needs are based on how they can contribute to the environment, and what the environment can contribute to them. Individuals can experience varying levels of favourableness to progress within the environment, as external forces such as culture are of influence; both positively and negatively (Leagans, 1964). This insinuates that individuals can have different needs depending on the environment in which they are in. Leagans (1964) continues to say that needs arise due to the extent of imbalance within the relationship between mankind and their environment. Thus, there is a connection between the individual and the environment, which can influence the needs of the person. This role that the environment plays to an individual's needs, is also applicable at the workplace.

Specifically related to the workplace, individuals make an "assessment" of the organization based on whether or not it can meet their needs. This phenomenon has been referred to in literature as Person-Environment (P-E) fit (Sung et al., 2014). This P-E fit has been described by Sun et al. (2014, p.469) as: "*The compatibility between an individual and a particular work environment that occurs when their characteristics are well matched.*" With the P-E fit it must be mentioned that there are two different forms of fit, namely supplementary (a state in which the individual and the environment share similar characteristics), and complementary fit (a scenario in which a person's or environment's characteristics provide what the other desires) (Sun et al., 2014). Moreover, with both forms of fit, they are conceptualized and operationalized in different ways. Complementary fit is conceptualized as psychological need fulfilment, which focusses on a person's comparison of the desired amount of a resource / reward to the amount of that which is supplied, whereas supplementary fit is conceptualized as value congruence, which focusses on the similarity between and individual's values and the cultural value system of an organization (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Thus, both forms of fit mention how employees perceive the organizational environment and how congruent the resources and values of it are compared to their needs / desires. Additionally, P-E fit exists in different forms, namely Person-Team (P-T), Person-Supervisor (P-S) and Person-Job (P-J) fit. All three forms can aid in perception of organizational goals and work performance (Sun et al., 2014). P-E fit also holds positive benefits, because an increase in it can lead to an increase in job satisfaction, engagement and commitment (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Sun et al., 2014). Hence, this shows how the construction and provision of the human relational goods at the workplace are crucial to organizations, as individuals assess organizations based on whether they can meet their needs. This stresses the importance of the organization to know what employees' needs are as to appeal to current and future employees.

1.4.3 Employee needs

As stated earlier, Kapoor and Maechem (2012) utilized Maslow's model and applied it to the workplace. In their illustrated model (see Figure 2) it can be perceived how employees' needs follow the hierarchy of Basic (compensation benefits, information), Development (professional and personal development, career growth), Belonging (interpersonal relationship with employees and employers), Pride (sense of pride for employers recognition), and Ownership needs (sense of fulfilment by maximum contribution). Similarly, Dinibutun (2012) also applied Maslow's theory to organizations, and show how the different levels of

Figure 2; *Employee Need hierarchy model (Kapoor & Maechem, 2012)*



needs, mentioned by Maslow, are reflected as organizational factors (See Figure 3). The issue with these models, related to the *People-First* approach, is that they fail to take the employee's perspective in terms of what they associate importance to. Instead, they take the perspective of the organization, and assess what factors have proven to be beneficial. This begs to question as to what constitutes to the employee's perception of the *People-First* approach.

Figure 3; *Organizational factors table (Dinibutun, 2012)*

Applying Maslow's Need Hierarchy

Needs levels	General rewards	Organizational factors
1 Physiological	Food, water, sex, sleep	**a** Pay **b** Pleasant working conditions **c** Cafeteria
2 Safety	Safety, security, stability, protection	**a** Safe working conditions **b** Company benefits **c** Job security
3 Social	Love, affection, belongingness	**a** Cohesive work group **b** Friendly supervision **c** Professional associations
4 Esteem	Self-esteem, self-respect, prestige, status	**a** Social recognition **b** Job title **c** High status job **d** Feedback from the job itself
5 Self-actualization	Growth, advancement, creativity	**a** Challenging job **b** Opportunities for creativity **c** Achievement in work **d** Advancement in the organization

1.5 | Research objective and question

Regardless of the knowledge and the importance associated to the *People-First* approach, there is no framework provided that illustrates what the approach entails and what aids employees' perceptions thereof. To the author's belief, this lack is due to the novelty regarding the *People-First* approach in academic (management) literature. This novelty is reflected by the amount of search results in specific databases, see Table 2.

Table 2: *Database keywords search result*

Database	Keywords	Search results
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEYS (“people-first” AND organizations)	28
	OR (“people-first approach” AND organizations)	28
	Limitation: Business, Management and Accounting	
Web of Science	TITLE-ABS-KEYS (“people-first” AND organizations)	53
	OR (“people-first approach” AND organizations)	1
	Or (“people-first” AND business)	48

Due to knowledge being in an early stage regarding what the *People-First* approach entails and what constitutes employees’ perceptions thereof, this research aims to discover what underlying concepts contribute to the *People-First* approach. To achieve this objective, the following research question is posed and will be answered within this research:

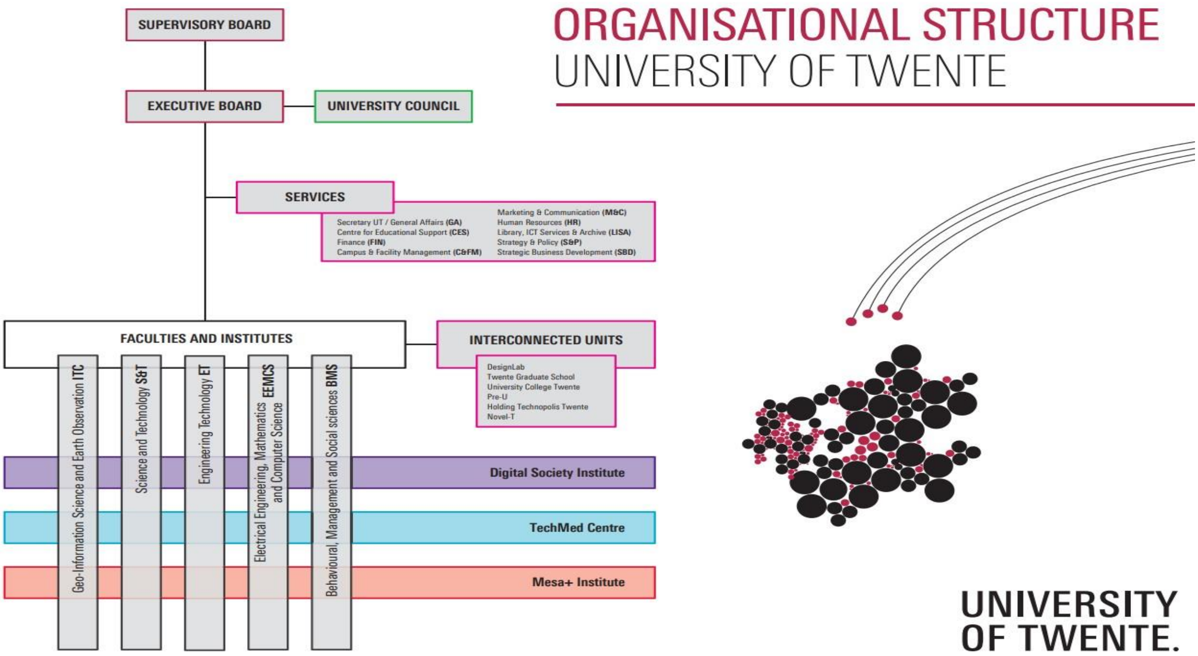
What constitutes employees’ perceptions of a University People-First approach?

2 | Methodology |

In order to gather knowledge and to answer the research question, this research will focus on an organization that also emphasizes and advocates the *People-First* approach, namely the University of Twente (UTwente). UTwente is a university situated in Enschede, The Netherlands, and mainly focusses on providing university level education; Bachelor, Master and PhD. (University of Twente[1], 2022). UTwente has five different faculties in which employees are employed, and in which education is provided, namely: Behavioral, Management and Social sciences (BMS), Engineering Technology (ET), Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science (EEMCS), Science and Technology (TNW) and Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) (University of Twente[1], 2021). These faculties can work in units of DesignLab, Twente Graduate School, University College Twente, Pre-U, Holding Technolpolis Twente, and Novel-T as to provide education or research. Within each faculty, there are multimember boards that consist of a Dean and portfolio’s Education, Research, and Operations. Thus, each faculty is administered by four different individuals, where the Dean acts as the chairperson. The goal of each board is to structure the faculty’s activities in teaching and education, science, and contribution to the overall management of UTwente. Additionally, each faculty is affiliated with the three research institutes, namely the Mesa+ Institute (research institute for nanostructure, materials, -systems and -devices), TechMed Centre (innovation hub in the health-tech domain) and the Digital Society Institute (scientific research in technology that is essential for digitalization which can call upon the knowledge of each faculty). Besides the faculties and institutes, there are also service departments that support the education and research at UTwente. The service departments consist of Campus & Facility Management (CFM), Centre for Educational Support (CES), Finances (FIN), General Affairs (GA), Human Resources (HR), Library, ICT & Archive (LISA), Marketing & Communication (MC), Strategic Business Development (SBD), and Strategy & Policy (SP). Another layer to the University of Twente’s hierarchy consists of the Executive board and the University Council. The University Council is the overall council of all universities located in The Netherlands, with the goal of compliance to the “Good Management” Code of Conduct. The Executive Board is the board charged with the overall administration and management of the University, and are supported by the Secretary of the University, and the highest official advisor of the Board. Lastly, there is the Supervisory Board tasked with supervising the board and management of University of

Twente, as to ensure compliance with legal regulations, and advises the Executive Board. An overview of the hierarchy described, is depicted in Figure 4. Moreover, the University of Twente is involved in individual and collaborative research with companies and other organizations, and provides aid in the process of "start-ups" regarding financial, legal and business development support (University of Twente[1], 2020). With the organizational structure of the University of Twente, they also mention the *People-First approach* on their webpage through statements as: *"(...) the well-being and future of the students and staff are paramount."* (University of Twente, n.d.), and that the University of Twente *"makes sure that their people have enough time to grow and deliver quality work"* (University of Twente[2], 2020). However, despite these statements (and those of other organizations as well), what the *People-First* approach is, is still rather vague and not mentioned. This calls for a need to form a solid foundation as to what the *People-First* approach entails.

Figure 4; *Organizational Structure UTwente (University of Twente[2], 2021)*



2.1 | Design

The design of this study follows an explorative descriptive design with a qualitative nature. The aim of such a design would be to gather data, and from it, construct a potential framework in order to form a foundation of the *People-First* approach. The qualitative aspect of this research is translated into semi-structured interviews with employees of the University of Twente. The questions asked during these semi-structured interviews are depicted in Appendix A. In order for this research to be conducted, it got approved by the Ethics Committee BMS of the University of Twente; review number 221252.

2.2 | Participants

As mentioned, the scope of this research lies on the University of Twente as an organization. The University of Twente has been chosen due to the level of approachability of their employees. The participants involved within this research were employees of the University of Twente, ranging from different functions, namely Academic-, and Support staff. Moreover, as the University of Twente has five different faculties in which its services are provided, employees must be associated with work within one of these faculties. Below, in Table 3, the number of participants per faculty and function is depicted. Note, all participants will be referred to by letters for anonymity reason.

Table 3; *Descriptive Participant ratio*

Faculty	**Function**	
	Academic	*Support*
BMS:	C; H	A; L; Q
ET:	N; M; O	B; K; T
EEMCS:	E; S; U	G; D; W; X; Y
TNW:	/	I; R
ITC:	P; V	F; J

2.3 | Procedure

The collection of data for this research was conducted in two different timespans. The first was initiated on November 14th, 2022, and ended on December the 23rd 2022. The second timespan wherein data was collected started January 20th, 2023, and ended February 3rd 2023.

Data was collected from respondents who are employees of the University of Twente. These individuals occupy the function of either Academic or Support staff. These individuals were approached randomly by me, the researcher, through email, wherein the goal of the research was formulated, the informed consent was attached (See Appendix B), and a request concerning the individual's possibility to participate in the research through an interview was posed. This interview was planned on whatever day and time would be most convenient for the respondent. The email sent can be seen in Appendix C. To know which individuals could be approached for participation in this research, I navigated the website of the University of Twente, and went to the "People"-page. Here, I used the faculties as search terms as to gain results of individuals employed at the University of Twente, at that specific faculty. Herein, I made use of the filter option to discern which individuals are Academic and Support staff. Once results were given by the website, I randomly approached individuals by email. Once contacted, a timespan of three days was upheld for the individuals to respond to the email. If no response would be given, these individuals would be marked as unavailable, and the researcher would continue to approach other employees of the University of Twente. A total amount of 25 respondents were successfully approached and interviewed in these timespans.

If respondents replied to the email and showed willingness to participate in this research, a time and day was scheduled with them as to conduct the interview. The choice as to what time and day the interview would be conducted, lied with the respondents themselves. Most often, these interviews were held in the respondents' offices, as it could provide them with a "safe space" to converse about the *People-First* approach and their employer. If this option was not available, I reserved a room with non-see-through walls (as to ensure a sense of privacy) at the University of Twente. If the option of a physical meeting / interview was not possible, the interview would be conducted through "Microsoft Teams". These options regarding the location of the interview were suggested and mentioned to respondents in the email, as to provide them with the possibility to choose the most convenient and comfortable setting.

The interviews were recorded by an audio application that was installed on the researcher's phone. Only I had access to this application, and the files stored. Once the audio files from the interviews were transcribed into a text-formatted Word-document, the audio files were destroyed. Once the text-formatted Word-documents were made, it was sent to the respondents as to ensure their comfortability with the transcription, and to assure whether I as a researcher, understood them correctly. The notion that respondents received these documents, would offer them the possibility to mention if there were certain aspects within the transcription that would need to be adjusted for given reason. The duration of the transcribing process depended on the duration of the interviews. The shortest interview that had to be transcribed had a time duration of 18 minutes 54 seconds, whereas the interview with the longest duration took 38 minutes 45 seconds to conduct. In total, the interviews as a collective reach a time span of 10 hours, 13 minutes and 30 seconds. The transcription of the audio-files into text-formatted Word-documents took approximately the same number of hours, as the researcher had to re-listen to the interviews. For an overview of time duration per interview, see Table 4. For anonymity reason, all interviews and corresponding respondents, are referred to by a letter of the alphabet. After the transcription, the text-formatted Word-documents were uploaded into an Atlas.ti (ver.23) folder, which was password-protected. Only the researcher and supervisors associated to this research know this password.

Table 4; *Time duration per Interview*

Interview	**Time duration (minutes : seconds)**
A	38:45
B	22:17
C	22:48
D	29:30
E	22:06
F	19:56
G	25:41
H	21:16
I	18:54
J	21:47
K	20:08
L	37:30
M	28:05
N	19:28
O	28:09
P	32:54
Q	20:30
R	21:37
S	20:01
T	22:37
U	27:56
V	23:50
W	22:30
X	22:13
Y	23:12

2.4 | Data Analysis

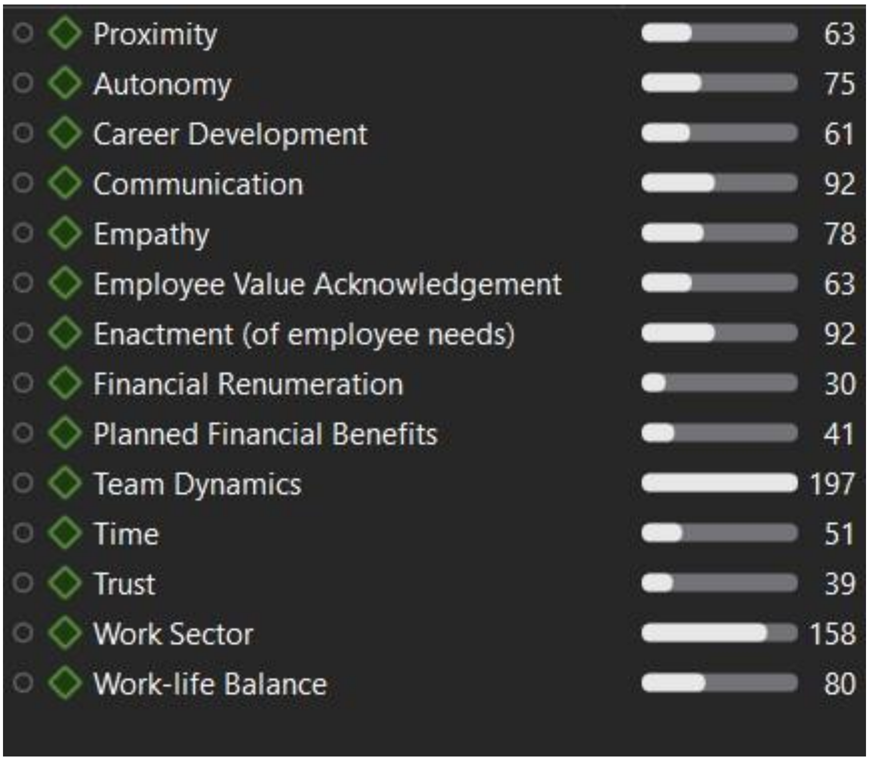
Once all transcripted documents were uploaded in Atlas.ti (ver. 23), I analysed them for statements that could be reflective of aspects of the *People-First* approach. Concretely, I re-read the documents and highlighted sections that concerned a metric variable (e.g., the faculty employed), and sections that concern aspects that the respondents associated importance to; to the *People-First* approach. This process of highlighting sections of importance, is similar to the first steps to coding as described by Gorden, et al. (1998). Moreover, I had to re-read the documents after transcription as to allow myself more time to reflect on whether the statements made by the respondent concerned the *People-First* approach in any way possible. I analysed these sections following a deductive coding approach as mentioned by Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), whereby I determined when statements might be associated to the *People-First* approach based on whether the section(s) of the transcribed interview(s) concerned aspects similar to already stated ones in past literature. This literature concerns the discussion of the organizational factors known to be beneficial at organization. This literature consists of the models provided by Dinibutun (2012) and Kapoor and Maechem (2012), and literature that addresses the importance associate to human relational goods at employees' work, e.g., teamwork, work-life balance, mutual trust and knowledge, wage, etc. (Vroom, 1966; Woordruffe, 2006; Maspero, 2020; SynchHR, 2022). Moreover, the questions asked during the interviews (See Appendix A) allowed for open interpretation for the respondents. This allowed for novel aspects, which could not been mentioned by past literature, to be brought up by the respondents. Most often the respondents mentioned clear and universal aspects, similar to those mentioned by prior literature, to be important. Respondents also provided clarification of such aspects with example situations. In the case where the respondent only gave a description of those aspects, I tried to infer through questioning as to what the actual (underlying) aspect might be. I performed this to confirm that I understood the respondent well, and to ensure that the information is valid. The statements in the transcribed text-formatted Word-document, that mention given aspects, were coded correspondingly to aspects within prior literature. In the case where respondents mention aspects, which were associated as important to the *People-First* approach and which did not align with concepts mentioned in prior literature, I examined those statements on whether there were underlying similarities between them. If there were, I would code them similarly. For example, respondent A stated: *"However, here everyone actually gets a lot of* *freedom, also because there is trust in people."*, while respondent B stated: *"But still, I really wouldn't want to go back to that position because of the lack of support, the lack of trust, yes."*. Both these statements stress the importance of trust but are formulated differently. Despite this difference in formulation, both statements indicate a similar aspect; trust. Thus, from these statements, I associated them to the aspect of trust, which I coded correspondingly.

The duration to re-read and code each interview followed different time durations, due to the difference of time duration each interview has. The shortest time it took to perform these tasks was 12 minutes, whereas it took approximately 17 minutes with more extensive interviews. All interviews combined, gave a total number of 448 statements which were coded. For an overview of the amount of statements coded (=quotations) per interview, see Figure 5. The final coding used in Atlas.ti (ver.23) by me consists of fourteen different codes, and also have different frequencies in the interviews (see Figure 6).

Figure 5; *Quotation frequency per interview*

Name	Media Type	Location	Groups	Quotations
Transcript (A)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	26
Transcript (B)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	20
Transcript (C)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	7
Transcript (D)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	20
Transcript (E)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	14
Transcript (F)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	14
Transcript (G)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	13
Transcript (H)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	17
Transcript (I)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	25
Transcript (J)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	25
Transcript (M)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	24
Transcript (N)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	23
Transcript (O)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	22
Transcript (P)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	9
Transcript (Q)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	24
Transcript (R)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	21
Transcript (S)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	14
Transcript (T)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	21
Transcript (U)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	21
Transcript (V)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	14
Transcript (W)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	27
Transcript (X)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	20
Transcript (Y)	Text	Library	[Regular transcript (Mixed)]	27

Figure 6; *Quotation frequency per code*



3 | Results |

The final coding, consistent of fourteen codes, reflects the researcher's way of thinking following the respondents' interpretation of the questions posed during the interviews. This final coding would reflect the collective thoughts of respondents involved as to create an overview of aspects associated to the *People-First* approach. This final coding will be referred to as aspects, as it has been associated important by respondents to the *People-First* approach. The coding can be distinguished in three different domains; I-aspects, They-aspects and It-aspects.

3.1 | I-aspects

This section will discuss the aspects mentioned by respondents which they perceive as important to the *People-First* approach, and focusses on them as employees. These aspects are "*Financial Renumeration*", "*Planned Financial Benefits*", "*Autonomy*", "W*ork-life Balance (Flexibility)*", and "*Career Developments (Knowledge- & Skills Development)*". These aspects belong to the coined I-aspects because they focus specifically on the employee's needs, and directly influence the employee's work by means of reward or how they can act within their occupation. These aspects fall in line with employee's needs as to what they physically desire within their occupation, wherein a superior has influence on in terms of provision of those needs.

3.1.1 Financial Renumeration

To begin, the first aspect found in the interviews has been coined as "*Financial Renumeration*". This aspects reflects the financial renumeration / wage that employees receive from their employer. From statements of the interviews, financial renumeration has been mentioned as a need of employees. However, it is perceived as a somewhat "basic" need, in a sense that majority of individuals expect it and see it as a mandatory to receive. Examples statements following this aspect are as follows:

"But at the end of the day, you know if you have to ask someone why are you going to work. The reason is normally, OK, I need to pay bills, you know that's normally number one for most people, I think, and then comes other things like, OK I'm enjoying my work et cetera and so."
-Respondent H-

"Yeah, it doesn't have well, of course it's nice if you give people a bonus every now and then"
-Respondent E-

3.1.2 Planned Financial Benefits

The second aspect noted within interviews to be associated to the *People-First* approach is "*Planned Financial Benefits*". This aspect reflects an benefit that an organizations provides its employees, and that employees can choose to (or not to) make usage of. An example of such benefit could be the provision of free coffee or paternal leave. The difference between "*Financial Renumeration*" and "*Planned Financial Benefits*", is that "*Planned Financial Benefits*" does not have an obligatory nature for the organization to have. Whilst it does require a financial investment from organizations, similarly to "*Financial Renumeration*", "*Planned Financial Benefits*" focusses on the added benefits that organizations can offer employees to make usage of, whereby organizations can cater to a specific need they might have. "*Planned Financial Benefits*" is not perceived as a basic need, but serves as an addition to that which "*Financial Renumeration*" already offers. Example statements within the interviews are as follows:

"*I mean there are things, we are treated well as employees. I think as a lot of other organizations do as well. The way we work, we have coffee, good coffee, things like that which you know which shows OK, there's a cure.*"
-Respondent H-

" (...)OK, because I live in [city name] for example and then of course I cannot travel every day. So I rent a house nearby so they give me some sort of like a temporary accommodation. So that is, even though it's not fully allowance. The allowance that I get, but when you contribute a little bit, I feel that OK, you care about me (...)"
-Respondent E-

"Also something like, being able to afford a bicycle with the aid from the organizations. That is something that an employer does not need to provide, but still does. That is something that I happily make use of"
-Respondent I-

3.1.3 Work-life balance

The third aspect noted within the interviews is that of "*Work-life balance*". This aspect reflects the balance of the amount of time an employee can spend in their private life as compared to their work. With this aspect, it can be perceived how multiple respondents associate it as important to the *People-First* approach. However, there is a difference between respondents as to what specific balance is appreciated. This shows the individualistic perspective of what an adequate work-life balance is from an employee's perspective. Examples statements of this aspect are as follows:

"Other people are more focused on having a good balance between work and their private life, as such that they do not want to be disturbed in the evening nor weekends by mails or phone calls. They are searching more for the support and calm in their job."
-Respondent B-

"(…) I am here, it is also a different function, but I am here at the times that I mention to be present. Outside of those times, I am finished with my work."
-Respondent I-

"I work [specific number] of hours on paper, and I have [specific number] of hours of parental leave, so I am working [select number of days]. But yeah, I have a lot of freedom to give shape to my working hours, which is amazing."
-Respondent I-

3.1.4 Career development

Furthermore, the aspect of "*Career Development*" has been found to associate importance within employees to the *People-First* approach as well. The aspect of "*Career Development*" reflects the opportunity or the actual process wherein an employee can place themselves in as to gain novel knowledge or skills that can be applied within their occupation. Concrete examples of such processes stated by the respondents can include congresses, training or career progress towards a higher function. Examples of this aspect as mentioned in the interviews are:

"Besides, the UT provides the opportunity to follow a lot of courses/workshops, from which you can develop yourself further. Yes, you just simply have good secondary conditions to your work, you have the whole campus accessible to you."
-Respondent B

"For the rest, yes. You have all the room you need to develop further here, which is really nice."
-Respondent R-

"What is important to me, is that there is there is a possibility for employees to develop themselves within their occupation, that is comfortable for them."
-Respondent F-

3.1.5 Autonomy

The last aspect noted from the interviews associated to the *People-First* approach and belonging to the I-aspects is "*Autonomy*". This refers to the employees ability to individually act and make decisions within their function without full control of their superior, e.g.: plan their day and their work activities within that day. The difference between the aspects of "*Autonomy*" and "*Work-life balance*" is that "*Work-life balance*" concerns the time an individual spends in their private life compared to their work, whereas "*Autonomy*" concerns the ability of an employee to schedule their time and work-related activities on their own during their work without supervision. This aspect is reflected in the interviews as:

"Yes, I can imagine that it would differ per employee. I, myself, am very set on my autonomy to a certain degree, so that I can act on my own. That I can manage my own time, and that a manager will not be constantly monitoring me about whether I work at home or not"
-Respondent G-

"I am allowed to give my function form, of course in consultation with my manager and with my colleagues, then I can just work. That is actually very pleasant, and of course there are certain tasks that are mandatory to do."
-Respondent A-

3.2 | They-aspects

This second section concerns aspects that respondents associate importance to, but emphasize the role of the employee's superior. These aspects belong to the coined They-aspects as they illustrate and emphasize the position of the superior, and how they can influence the employee's perception of the *People-First* approach. Aspects belonging to this are "*Empathy*", "*Trust*", "*Proximity*", "*Transparency*", "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*", and "*Enactment (of employee needs)*".

3.2.1 Empathy

Related to They-aspects, the first aspect noted to be important by respondents is "*Empathy*". This aspect focusses on the understanding or the sense of empathy that a manager should have in order to make the employees feel heard, appreciated and taken into account. Employees mentioned that the relationship between them and their manager is crucial for the *People-First* approach to be upheld, and that a good sense of empathy and understanding improves this relationship. Statements made that belong to this aspect are as follows:

"You cannot take everything into account, but it is also maybe enough that a sort of understanding is established, like: "Alright, well, you are currently very occupied with this personally, so it is not weird that work is a bit harder."

-Respondent J-

"From my perspective, the presence of empathy within a boss can make or break a department."

-Respondent D-

3.2.2 Trust

Another aspect that belongs to the *People-First* approach, and belongs to the qualities a superior should have, is "*Trust*" towards employees. This aspect mentions that the superior should have trust in the employees to properly, individually and responsibly perform tasks as to reach certain goals. Thus, it concerns the ability of the superior to have trust towards their subordinates, to an extent that they should not have to worry whether the subordinates work properly, if not at all. Example statements of this aspect within the interviews are:

"She (the manager) speaks a lot out of the trust that and mentions that I am good at my job, and that we can look together how she can help me and what the best choices would be. Even if something does not work out, I can mention this to her since there is this trust within our relationship."

-Respondent B-

" (…) here everybody receives a lot of freedom in their job, but that is mostly because there is trust in people. This is very pleasant to experience."

-Respondent A-

3.2.3 Enactment (of employee needs)

The third aspect associated to the *People-First* approach concerning They-aspects is that of "*Enactment*". This aspect reflects the behaviour of the superior to enact that which they mentioned to the employee they would do, concerning their needs. Regarding the aspect of "*Enactment*", it has been mentioned by respondents that the prevalence of this aspect alone aids an employees' positive perceptions of the *People-First* approach. Thus, even if made plans fail, the employee is shown that the superior attempted to cater to their needs, and perceive that the *People-First* approach is upheld. This aspect is reflected within the interviews as follows:

"Then that replacement immediately called [organization] and made sure that extra support was brought in to make sure people didn't fall over. Then I think, yes, if you deal with that like that, then you are really doing a good job."
-Respondent Q-

"(...)But not only that, I also think that people should act on it. So, I value the appreciation and that I am being heard."
-Respondent R-

"(...) and I do want to do everything I can to help that person achieve that, and then you might not be happy in your job or you might not be happy with your salary, by jointly trying to work towards that solution, you still try to keep that person as happy as possible"
-Respondent F-

3.2.4 Employee Value acknowledgement

The fourth aspect related to "They"-aspects is that of "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*". This aspect reflects the importance that the superior associates to the employee through (non-)verbal statements, which shows the individual that they are valued as an employee. Examples of this aspect as reflected in the interviews are as follows:

"(...) they said: "You can get a contract for until [year]". At that point I am already thinking: "Oh, this is how they handle employees". They basically say that I am replaceable."
-Respondent L-

"(...) And I must say that I changed faculties because I was not, I didn't feel and I was not appreciated."
-Respondent U-

" I get the space to introduce that way of working gradually, and I really like that I get that opportunity. I also get that bit of appreciation and recognition during a team meeting, which is actually expressed."
-Respondent R-

3.2.5 Transparency

The fifth aspect of importance within They-aspects to the *People-First* approach is "*Transparency*". This aspect reflects the communication that the superior conducts towards the employee as to provide clarity regarding work processes or goals. This communication can create understanding within the employee, and makes them feel like they belong to the team as no information is withholden from them. This aspect is reflected by statements such as:

"There is this unnecessary tension, because it's not, like things are not clarified."
-Respondent O-

"That as an employee, you get clarity on what you have to do, what you are allowed to do. That there should also be flexibility and clarity about this."
-Respondent V-

3.2.6 Proximity:

The last aspect identified to associate to They-aspects and to the *People-First* approach has been coined as "*Proximity*". This aspect reflects the relationship between superior and employee. Specifically, this aspect refers to how close the employee experiences the relationship with their superior to be, and how easy it is for them to approach their superior regarding questions or concerns. If this aspect is upheld to a certain degree, it can result in positive outcomes, as employees might be more "in-tune" with their superior and feel like they are or can be valued more within communication. Examples of this aspect are as follows:

"Also that people are approachable and accessible. That is just nice."
-Respondent X-

"Management styles, so. Well, what I find comfortable. Do I like to work with deadlines or would I prefer to have someone to check up on me. That's what those kind of conversations were about. Also whether I had enough work to do, and if not, what I would like to do more."
-Respondent J-

"Yes, I do find that tricky. I had given it some thought. On the one hand, they are People-First because if something comes up, you can knock in the manager's door."
-Respondent Q-

3.3 | It-aspects

This last section focusses on aspects that respondents associate importance to, but relate to the workplace environment. These aspects are "*Time*", "*Team dynamics*" and "*Work sector*" .These aspects are put under It-aspects as they do not relate to the employee or superior on an individualistic level. It emphasizes how the environment that the individual works in, influences their perception of the *People-First* approach within the organization.

3.3.1 Time:

The first aspect related to It-aspects is that of "*Time*". The aspect of "*Time*" has its influence to the *People-First* approach, as such that it is the aspect that can alter the desires and needs of the individual / employee. Multiple respondents have stated that over the course of time, their desires and needs have changed due to interpersonal changes (e.g.: relationship status, medical health, self-discovery of their needs etc.). Thus, it indicates that the aspect of "*Time*" has an influence, which could be both negative and positive, on the desires/needs of the individual/employee. Consequently, this change of needs can alter the manner in which the *People-First* approach should be enacted. Example statements of this aspect are as follows:

"Your needs change due to your personal situation at home as well. If things settle down in my personal life, then I can occupy myself with my work more, and find more challenges within it."
-Respondent T-

"It's important to me to be flexible and to have the freedom to do my work my way. I find that very important now that I'm a bit older. I used to have a bit more ambition, then I wanted to move on and get to work as soon as possible."
-Respondent W-

"See, my needs and desires change. They change due to the stage of life. Currently, I do not have any children living at home anymore. Meanwhile, if you do children, you do have more needs."
-Respondent T-

3.3.2 Team dynamics

The second aspect belonging to It-aspects of the *People-First* approach is that of "*Team dynamics*". This aspect concerns the dynamic interaction that one employee has with their colleagues, which they work with in a team; superiors included. It has been stated by respondents that they experience the dynamics with their colleagues as an act that belongs to their needs and desires. Not only has it been mentioned that the aspect of "*Team dynamics*" in itself is a need, but it can also foster the probability to achieve others as well. Example statements of this aspect are as follows:

"At home, I'm more likely to be in that workflow. I think people are more likely to stay home, and that does make it harder to feel like a team. I think it's also an important aspect of that

People-First approach. Yes, that feeling of being part of a team."
-Respondent R-

"I still have to get job satisfaction and that is largely based on having and keeping good contact with colleagues. That is why I found the Corona-period really dramatic. I don't know if it affected People-First, but it did affect the policy because you had to work at home unless your work required you to come to the office."
-Respondent V-

"[talking about past occupation] The difference really is noticeable due to the atmosphere in the group and the personality of the leader, basically. That the leader did not really care about whether people were happy because, well, I am just running the group, and I cannot make everybody happy. Also, I do not care because I have my own goals."
-Respondent U-

"You have to be very friendly all the time. Also, respect the number of aspects that could makes a difference, that is, that makes a big difference. Culture respect."
-Respondent P-

3.3.3 Work sector

The last aspect that was found is that of "*Work sector*". Specifically, interviewees have mentioned how the work environment can influence the enforcement of *People-First* approach. Respondents reflected on past occupations, and recalled differences among their past and current occupation on how the *People-First* approach is enacted by the superiors. From it, multiple statements were made that showed how due to the sector that the University of Twente is in (a public educational sector), it can enact the *People-First* approach differently than organizations positioned in the private / commercial sector. Example statements of this aspect are as follows:

"[talking about past occupation in private sector] It was the pressure to constantly perform. Everything was being transformed into numbers, so that a certain value could be associated to it. For example, I had to keep track of every minute of my work. From that you would feel guilty if you would just look out of the window, while it can also be helpful to do such simple things. (...)"
-Respondent R-

"Well, in the commercial business field, it is always stressed how time is money. At the University of Twente, you do not experience it as much. Additionally, the pressure on work is greater. However, there it is also easier to make changes since the size is not as big as, for instance, that of the University of Twente."
-Respondent W-

"Only, those are commercial companies, and at some point we were also taken over by an American company, which makes it all just a tad worse (...)."
-Respondent F-

"Yes, I didn't know that in advance. But once I was here, I did notice that at UT, at least in my experience, everything is a lot more relaxed. I don't know if that's Twente of it it's the UT's corporate culture. If there is a problem, it is calmly looked at on all sides and discussed a number of times. Sometimes things go very slowly because of that, but it also takes the rush out of it and I really like that."
-Respondent G-

As to provide an overview of all found aspects and in to which domain they belong to, see Table 5.

Table 5; *Aspects per corresponding domain*

"I"-aspects	**"They"-aspects**	**"It"-aspects**
Financial Renumeration		
Planned Financial Benefits		
Autonomy		
Work-life Balance		
Career Development		
	Empathy	
	Trust	
	Proximity	
	Employee Value Acknowledgement	
	Enactment (of employee needs)	
	Transparency	
		Time

3.4 | Associations

Moreover, regarding the aspects found, it is perceived how there are associations between them as well. This was found based on the statements that respondents made. Most often respondents indicated how one aspect could lead to another; indicating the association between the two. These associations give indication that there is a linkage present between aspects. Table 6 provides an overview of all associations between aspects found in the interviews.

Table 6; *Associations between aspects*

	Financial Renumeration	Planned Financial Benefits	Autonomy	Work-life Balance	Career Development	Empathy	Trust	Proximity	Employee Value Acknowledgement	Enactment	Transparency	Time	Team Dynamics	Work Sector
Financial Renumeration	/													
Planned Financial Benefits		/												
Autonomy			/	x			x							
Work-life Balance			x	/										
Career Development					/									
Empathy						/		x		x				
Trust			x				/							
Proximity						x		/						
Employee Value Acknowledgement									/	x				
Enactment						x			x	/				
Transparency											/		x	
Time												/		
Team Dynamics											x		/	x
Work Sector													x	/

<u>*3.4.1 Autonomy – Trust:*</u>

The first association found between aspects is that of "*Autonomy*" and "*Trust*". Specifically, it has been stated by respondents that they are able to experience a certain degree of autonomy in their work due to the level of trust exhibited by their superior(s). Oftentimes, it has been mentioned that the superior would create "space" for the employee to act independently. This space would only be created by the superior once they have a certain amount of trust in their subordinate(s). This association has been found due to following statements:

"*That you just have the freedom to see for yourself how best to do the work. Preferably within regular hours, of course, but if that does fall through, that they have the confidence that you are making enough hours.*"
-Respondent X-

"*You have to be able to create fun yourself in your job, but you have to be given room for that. I think it has to do with trusting your employees.*"
-Respondent Y-

Since this association highlights the link between "*Autonomy*" and "*Trust*", it also shows the linkage between the I-aspects and They-aspects, as "*Autonomy*" and "*Trust*" are part of those, respectively.

3.4.2 Autonomy – Work life balance:

Another association between aspects that has been noted, is the association between "*Autonomy*" and "*Work life balance*". This association concerns the notion that receiving a certain level of autonomy in one's work, can give way to the desire of one's work-life balance. Specifically, if an employee would be granted a certain degree of autonomy in their work, they also, for example, receive the possibility to leave work earlier for personal reasons whereby they gain more control over their work-life balance. This association is indicated by statements such as:

"I think it's mainly because of the freedom you are offered, that you have; you have your package of tasks and you carry them out as well as possible, but apart from that you have a lot of freedom to look, to choose what you would like to do next."
-Respondent I-

"There I couldn't escape the fact that I had to work one day, that I couldn't leave earlier unless I had lasted 8 hours. I was very used to having that in from my first job. At one point I was very much done with it. Sometimes it's better for me to go home after 7 o'clock, and catch up that last hour somewhere, or something else, than to sit there compulsorily. Nobody gets happy about that. That's something I think is important myself."
-Respondent Y-

3.4.3 Empathy -Enactment:

A third association found between aspects is that of "*Empathy*" and "*Enactment*". This association focusses on the superior's level of empathy of the employee's concerns, and the enactment of the superior to these concerns. Reflecting on the statements made by the respondents, it has often been mentioned that a superior's empathy can make the employee feel heard, and is something that precedes the enactment on the superior's behalf on given need. Statements that indicate this association are as follows:

"*That does matter, but if you have a manager who says, "Yes, I understand, I hear what you're saying. I understand what you mean", but then doesn't do anything with it, it's of no use to you.*"
-Respondent Q-

"*For some courses it didn't work out good for me and I would ask them to give me the opportunity to work on a side project related to my project instead of taking the exam or the assignments because it was more related to what I'm doing, and it could contribute more. They accepted that, although they needed to, you know, have a bit more time for such kind of tailored project to, you know, answer my questions and read the project and have a different kind of assessment for me, but most of them accepted it. It helped me to progress in my project, so that was another aspect that I think they paid attention to my needs and desires and they try to tailor the procedure as much as they could.*"
-Respondent S-

3.4.4 Proximity – Empathy:

There is also an association noticed between the aspects of "*Proximity*" and "*Empathy*". This association has been perceived in the interviews of respondents in ways, whereby the degree of approachability of a superior precedes the expression of empathy by that superior. Thus, it does follow a pattern where the aspect of "*Proximity*", if maintained at a certain level, can translate into the aspect of "*Empathy*". This association is indicative by following statements:

"*If there is a question, that maybe some kind of outlet could help with getting it off your chest for a while. Well, that's very much up to the person, of course, but that's how I would see it, I think.*"
-Respondent J-

"*(...)that they should be in their place, and that the door is open if there is something and that they are heard if they disagree with something or what they experience as inappropriate behaviour or whatever.*"
-Respondent F-

<u>3.4.5 Employee Value Acknowledgement – Enactment:</u>

A fourth association that has been noted in the interviews is the association between "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*" and "*Enactment*". It has been mentioned by respondents how the act of being valued by the superior, is reflected in the enactment to their needs by the superior. Therefore, it can be stated that the aspect of "*Enactment*" can contain and precedes the aspect of "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*" . Statements that indicate this association are:

"*(...)to acknowledge their ideas and that you do something with it. It is not about the idea itself, it is what you do and how you work with it, how you propose and implement it. That that is appreciated. Everybody can say that it was great, but it has to have an impact.*"
-Respondent U-

"*Yes, well. We talked a little bit in the beginning about what it means to me. That of course you are appreciated and heard. You will hear that a lot, I think. But not only that, but also that it is acted upon. So, I think valuing and hearing, that's the first step.*"
-Respondent R-

<u>3.4.6 Transparency – Team Dynamics:</u>

A fifth association noticed, lies between the aspects of "*Transparency*" and "*Team Dynamics*". It has been mentioned by respondents that the aspect of "*Transparency*" is associated to the aspect of "*Team Dynamics*" in such manner that, the form of communication present within the team can dictate the type of team dynamics present. The form of communication is dependent on the transparency of the superior as they can provide how work should be done. Statements that indicate this association are:

"That you just know that people do not have double agendas, or that you are not bothered by them."
-Respondent X-

"That's that human side, that the manager knows about it. That human interaction has to be there so you can understand what the needs of your subordinates are. My supervisor also takes time for that."
-Respondent T-

<u>3.4.7 Work Sector – Team Dynamics:</u>

The last association found, lies with the aspects of "*Work Sector*" and "*Team Dynamics*". This association refers to the link that respondents associate between their work environment and the dynamics within their team. Respondents have mentioned how due to different work environments, the composition of a team can change, which can alter the team dynamics. Statements indicating this association are as follows:

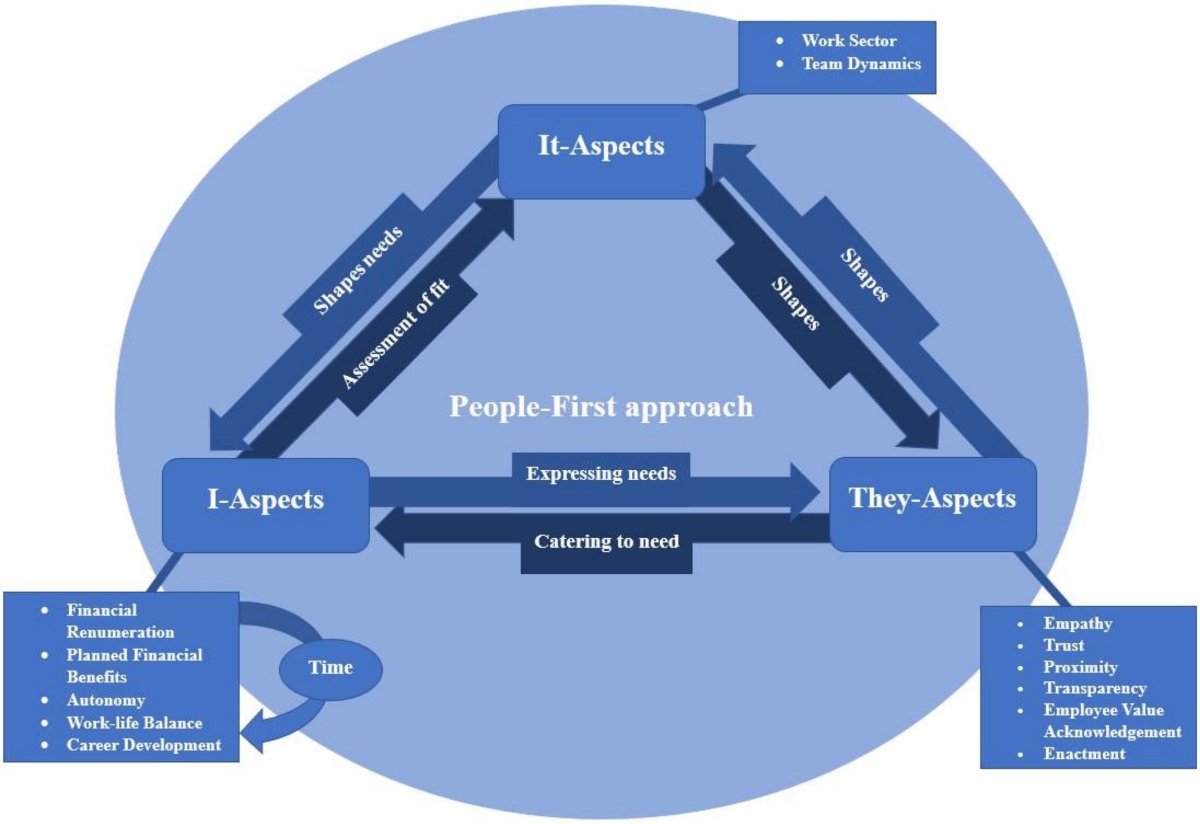
"If I think back to my time in [city], it was a more diverse team and that, for me too, regularly caused difficulties when it came to cultural differences. I mean, of course I consider myself a very decent, right-thinking citizen, but at the same time I am also just yes, really white, and you talk from your own perception."
-Respondent G-

"Yes. I experience it very much like that. I worked in [city] for several years before this and I notice that it is very different there. There it is mainly very much talk that you work a lot. Here people talk a little less, and work harder. I think that's a funny difference. Here people are more down-to-earth, more modest. Maybe that means there is more room for fun, for personal things. Then it's not about ego and how well something is done. Everyone just works hard. Besides, you can always have a good time together."
-Respondent Y-

3.5 | Framework

From the aspects and the corresponding associations found, I visualized their dynamic interaction, which is showcased in Figure 7. The linkages between the aspects are reflective of the associations found, as mentioned by respondents in the interviews.

Figure 7: *Aspects of University People-First approach*



4 | Discussion

Following the results of this research, we will now reflect on them and discuss whether discrepancies or similarities with past literature can be noted. It will also be discussed as to how this research contributes to the current literature concerning the *People-First* approach. The limitations and recommendations for future research will be addressed as well, in line with the findings of this research.

4.1 | Summary research question

In this research I performed an explorative qualitative research, aimed at discovering what constitutes the perception of the *People-First* approach from the employee's perspective in an university setting. Specifically, I conducted semi-structured interviews with employees of the University of Twente, with the goal to research what aids their perception of this approach. I utilized Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, and literature that tailors this theory to the workplace, as tools to discern concepts mentioned in the interviews, which could carry importance to the *People-First* approach. Also, self-assessment of the interviews was performed as to discover aspects that were not mentioned in prior literature, but could be stated by respondents to be of importance. In order to reach the goal of this research, the following research question was posed:

What constitutes employees' perceptions of an university People-First approach?

What this research shows is that employees perceive the *People-First* approach based on different aspects, wherein these aspects are linked to different domains. The first domain concerns I-aspects, wherein the aspects associated, focusses on the employee as an individual and concerns their needs, which can have influence on their way of working. The aspects related to this domain are "*Financial Renumeration*", "*Planned Financial Benefits*", "*Autonomy*", "*Work-life Balance*", and "*Career Development*". The second domain concerns They-aspects, which include aspects related to employees' needs, but stress the influence of the superior. Aspects belonging to this domain are "*Empathy*", "*Trust*", "*Proximity*", "*Transparency*", "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*", and "*Enactment (of employee needs)*". Lastly, the third domain concerns It-aspects, which includes aspects that reflects employees' needs, and stress the influence that the (work) environment has on them. Aspects belonging to this domain are "*Time*", "*Team Dynamics*", and "*Work Sector*".

Concludingly, it can be perceived how the aspects reflect the relationship between employee, superior and organization. Whereas the I-aspects reflect the desires and needs employees might have, the They-aspects reflect the relational side of the superior and their form of engagement with the employees as to meet these desires and needs. Moreover, the It-aspects reflect the external factors that have an influence on the employee and superior, but which can still be given shape by the superior and organization. The relational side of the superior and the organization where they try to meet an employee's needs through They- and It-aspects, is reflective of the phenomena mentioned by Maspero (2020), who stated that organizations focus on the individual more by means of human relational goods. However, what Maspero (2020) did not mention, is that the observable actions and qualities of the superior and organization, are also needs of the employee. On the contrary, Sun et al. (2014) did mention the importance of alignment of characteristics between superior and employee with the P-S fit, but fail to account for the influence of the work sector. This brings an added challenge in the dynamic interaction between employee, superior and organization, as it seems that the nature of the organization has an influence on the maintenance of the *People-First* approach. As mentioned by respondents, the process of catering to one's needs can still be challenging due to how stoic the organization can be, especially one as big as the University of Twente. This notion falls in line with the phenomena mentioned by McGuire et al. (2005), who stated that organizations undergo structural changes; from rigid bureaucratic to flexible adaptive structures. With this claim supported by findings of this research, it could insinuate that the University of Twente could change certain organizational structures still, as to become more capable to cater to employees' needs and to uphold the *People-First* approach. This in turn, can provide a solution to the challenge organizations face, as mentioned by Drucker (1992); to attract, hold, recognize, reward, motivate, serve and satisfy their employees

As to answer the research question of: "*What constitutes employees' perceptions of an university People-First approach?*". It can be stated that the presence and availability of employee needs that target employees way of working, instigated by the superior or the organization, constitutes an employee's perception to an university *People-First* approach. These needs could concern physical observable aspects, e.g.: financial renumeration or work-life balance, or a state, e.g. autonomy, which can satisfy employees' needs. Besides the availability of employee needs, which targets their way of working, the behaviour and actions that the superior enacts during the process of catering to one's needs, aids in an employee's perception of the *People-First* approach as well. These actions can concern a sense of empathy or value acknowledgement from the superior towards the employee. These actions indicate to the employee that the superior and organization do care and appreciate them. Thus, through social interaction between superior and employee, an employee's needs can be known, and possibly be attained. However, besides the attainment of these needs constituting to the perception of the *People-First* approach, the attempts made by the superior and presence of aspects in a superior's behaviour as to satisfy these needs, also aids in the perception of the approach. Lastly, the social and work environment of an employee's profession, also plays a crucial role in their perception of the approach. It had already been mentioned by literature that individuals assess their environments, and select an occupation which they believe can satisfy their needs. This research reflects that as well, as different work and social environments can provide a difference in needs; a different form of social dynamics in one's team or a different work sector, can provide different needs. These environments can be altered by the organization and superior in order to meet employees' needs, stressing their importance once again. Thus, employees perceive the execution of the *People-First* approach through the availability of certain physical and observable needs, and also by actions and behaviour of the superior and organization as to enable those needs. The added challenge to this attainment of needs lies with the personal development that each employee as an individual might undergo, which can further alter their needs.

4.2 | Theoretical reflections

When reflecting on the found aspects and on past literature, it can be noted how the aspects can relate to the hierarchical levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (Dinibutun, 2012; Kapoor & Maechem, 2012). With the aspects related to the domain of the I-aspects, it can be noted how the majority relate to the first two hierarchical levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory; Basic / Physiological and Developmental / Safety needs. The aspects of "*Financial Renumeration*", "*Planned Financial Benefits*" and "*Work-life Balance*" can be associated to the Basic / Physiological needs, and "*Career Development*" can be associated to Developmental / Safety needs. Interestingly, the aspect of "*Financial*

Renumeration" has been mentioned by only a select few respondents to be important. Additionally, only when the researcher inquired about this aspect did respondents mention the importance of it. The low prevalence of this aspect in the interviews could be due to the level of need it is associated to; Basic / Physiological. Kapoor and Maechem (2012) mentioned how financial compensation is the lowest most basic need. Due to this nature of financial compensation, and due to the notion that most respondents stated that financial compensation can be acquired from any job, they could possibly associate less importance to it. This phenomena falls in line with the statements made by Vroom (1966) and Woodruffe (2006), who mentioned that individuals do not focus solely anymore on the wage associated to an occupation. Furthermore, the notion that the aspects of "*Financial Renumeration*", "*Planned Financial Benefits*", "*Work-life Balance*" and "*Career Development*" belong to mentioned hierarchical levels, does not come as a surprise as past literature has mentioned how these aspects are considered by employees as crucial and necessary at work (Vroom, 1966; McGuire et al., 2005; Woodruffe, 2006; Dinibutun, 2012; Kapoor & Maechem, 2012, Maspero, 2020). However, one aspect proves to be more difficult to place in a specific hierarchical level of Maslow's model, namely "*Autonomy*". It can be argued that "*Autonomy*" as an aspect would belong in the hierarchical level of Basic / Physiological needs, as it can contribute to the creation of pleasant working conditions. However, the aspect of "*Autonomy*" has also been found to have an association with an aspect related to the superior in this research; the aspect of "*Trust*". From statements of the respondents it was mentioned that they as employees, were granted autonomy by their superior if the superior has trust in them and their work performance. After they gained this autonomy, they were able to make decisions in their work that improved their working conditions, for example, their work-life balance, which also has been found to have an association with "*Autonomy*". From this, we could infer that the aspect of "*Autonomy*" is a state that an employee requires to be granted, as to responsibly and individually create positive working conditions. This phenomena, where the employee would be granted autonomy based on an superior's trust in them, does contradict Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. Maslow stated that one can only progress into higher levelled needs, when lower needs are satisfied (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Dinibutun, 2012). This begs to question how it would be possible for an individual reach the higher level need of trust from their superior, which can be linked to either Social or Esteem needs, in order to satisfy their Basic need of "Autonomy". Thus, it can be questioned whether the aspect of "*Autonomy*" is a Basic need, or is a factor that aids in the acquirement and fosters satisfaction of the needs within the Basic / Physiological level.

Concerning the aspects related to the They-aspects, namely "*Empath*", "*Trust*", "*Proximity*", "*Transparency*", "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*", and "*Enactment (of employee needs)*", we see a similar trend as with the I-aspects. The aspects of "*Empathy*" and "*Proximity*" can be linked to the hierarchical level of Belonging / Social of Maslow's theory, as these are elements of the social relationship between the superior and their subordinates. The aspect of "*Employee Value Acknowledgement*" can be placed in the hierarchical level of Pride / Esteem, as it concerns the sense of recognition by the superior of the employee. However, the aspects of "*Transparency*" and "*Trust*" are more difficult to associate to a specific level of Maslow's theory. Regarding the aspect of "*Transparency*", it could be linked to the hierarchal level of Belonging / Social of Maslow's theory, as it concerns the relationship between employee and superior. With that said, it can also be argued that the aspect of "*Transparency*" cannot be linked to a specific hierarchical level of Maslow's theory, as it does not concern a specific goal. The aspect of "*Transparency*" could be perceived as an action on behalf of the supervisor to create shared knowledge and awareness, which is a specific need that would be reflective of cohesive work environment that is linked to the Belonging / Social needs by Dinibutun (2012). This phenomena is reflected in this research as well, as it has been mentioned in the interviews how the aspect of "*Transparency*" can provide a sense of clarity for the employee, and result in better teamwork. This claim can also be supported by the found association between the aspects of "*Transparency*" and "*Team Dynamics*". Thus, "*Transparency*" can be seen as an action that precedes one's needs at the Belonging / Social level. Following this explanation, it could not be perceived as a need, but as a desire to facilitate the attainment of one's needs. As for the aspect of "*Trust*", it faces the challenge where it can be linked to either the hierarchical level of Belonging / Social or Pride / Esteem. "*Trust*" could be associated to the Belonging / Social needs, as it can shape friendly supervision and is an element in the social interaction between employee and superior. However, it can also be associated to Pride / Esteem needs, as trust could be a result from the social recognition that employees receive from their superior due to good performance. This phenomena and result of social recognition by means of trust has also been stated by Brennan (2021). Regardless of the issues to link both the aspects of "*Transparency*" and "*Trust*" to Maslow's model, both aspects have been mentioned by literature to be important for employees, as it concerns the human relational good of mutual trust and knowledge of the process (Maspero, 2020). This shows that, despite the applicability of Maslow's theory to the majority of aspects, not all can easily be associated to it regardless of the importance mentioned in prior literature and this research.

Lastly, we consider the aspects of "*Time*", "*Team Dynamics*" and "*Work Sector*" linked to the It-aspects. To begin, the aspect of "*Team Dynamics*" can be linked to the level of Belonging / Social in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. This can be said based on the importance that the team of an employee holds, which has been stated to be important by several authors in literature (Vroom 1966, Woodruffe, 2006; Dinibutun, 2012; Kapoor & Maechem, 2012). Moreover, the aspect of "*Team Dynamics*" also falls in line with what Sun, Peng and Panday (2004) have referred to as P-S and P-T fit. This is due to the notion that the aspect of "*Team Dynamics*" reflects the collective social environment at an employee's workplace, that which the team and the supervisor are part of. Furthermore, the aspect of "*Time*" has also been mentioned in this research to be important to the *People-First* approach. Interestingly, the aspect itself has not been considered to be of importance in management literature. The reason for this omission is suspected to be that, as the aspect of "*Time*" is not a physical observable need of an individual, it cannot be linked to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, as it cannot be something that the employee can physically nor emotionally desire. The aspect of "*Time*" does find its relevance in literature, but only regarding the conceptualization of needs (Leagans, 1964; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). The aspect of "*Time*" stresses the importance of the possible personal change an employee as an individual can undergo, which can change their needs and desires correspondingly. This phenomena has also been mentioned by Leagans (1964), as an individual's needs are based on their current situation, and what they want their future situation to be. This future situation can be different due to the individual themselves through self-reflection (Maspero, 2020). Therefore, the acknowledgement that an employee's needs can change over the course of time is crucial to understand, as it can be both supported by prior literature and this research. Lastly, the aspect of "*Work Sector*" has found to be of importance to the *People-First* approach. The importance that the work environment holds, is mentioned by past literature as well (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Sun et al., 2004). Specifically, past literature has mentioned that a change in environment(s), can alter the needs of the individual (Leagans, 1964); a phenomena also noted within this research by the association between "*Work Sector*" and "*Team Dynamics*". Moreover, the aspect of "*Work Sector*" is also reflective of the literature regarding P-J fit, as respondents stated that they left their past occupation due to it not catering to their needs. A phenomena similar to what Sun et al. (2004) referred to as complementary fit. Respondents also stated that they feel happy and content in their current occupation as it meets their needs, which is unsurprising considering that the positive outcomes of P-E fit is job satisfaction (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Sun et al., 2014). Insightful regarding the aspect of "*Work Sector*", is the notion that respondents also referred to the culture / origin of the organization in terms of work ethics. Specifically, respondents noted how the culture / origin of the organization can have an influence on the perception of the *People-First* approach. This begs the question as to whether specific facets of a culture deters the perception of the *People-First* approach, or if there is a misalignment between employee and given culture present at the organization, which can bring dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, this question goes beyond the scope of this research, and cannot be answered.

In conclusion, this research provides multiple theoretical insights. The first insight this research shows, concerns the applicability of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory to the *People-First* approach. As mentioned, a multitude of the found aspects in this research are congruent to specific levels of needs of Maslow's theory. This congruence supports the relevance that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory has when applied to the *People-First* approach, and the discovery of what constitutes an employee's perception thereof. Examples of congruent needs identified are financial renumeration or an organization's benefits; planned financial benefits. This congruency also lies with the works of Dinibutun (2012). However, Maslow's theory cannot fully support all findings of this research. The possible reason of the inability of Maslow's theory to support all findings of this research can be due to the nature of the theory. As mentioned in the beginning, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is a content theory, which tries to identify the specific things that motivate individuals; what goals they want to attain (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Dinibutun, 2012). In this research, I have identified aspects that concern an employee's need or desire, that are associated to an action or state; not a goal. This state or action that an employee desires, would then lead to an eventual goal. For example, the aspect of "*Autonomy*" aids an employee's perception of the *People-First* approach. The aspect requires to be granted by a superior, whereby the employee can be able to influence one's work-life balance; the eventual goal. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory does not state this process, and neither does prior literature. The notion that this research has identified this, calls for the incorporation of a more extensive theory that can explain the process regarding an individual's needs, its relation to the workplace and perception of the *People-First* approach by employees..

A second theoretical insight this research provides, is its ability to indicate the interrelatedness between past literature, and the relevance of them to the *People-First* approach. An example of this, is the notion that this research identified the aspect of "*Transparency*", which concerns the provision of information by the superior to the employee, as important to the employee's perception of the *People-First* approach. The work of Dinibutun (2012) did not mention this aspect as an organizational factor reflecting an employee's need. However, the works of Maspero (2020) does indicate the importance of it to the employee. Besides this discrepancy between literature, this research found aspects which lie congruent with the findings from bot authors. This research has found the aspects of "*Financial Renumeration*" and "*Planned Financial Benefits*" to be important, similar to Dinibutun (2012), and has also identified the aspects of "*Trust*" and "*Transparency*" to be important, similar to Maspero (2020). The notion that this research has findings in tandem with prior literature, despite that the literature reflects different results, shows that the findings of both studies are interrelated, and important to the perception of the *People-First* approach. Thus, this research provides the theoretical insight concerning the relevancy of prior literature to the *People-First* approach.

The last theoretical insight this research provides, concerns the importance of the work environment / sector. This research has found that the work environment of one's occupation plays a role in the availability of one's needs. As mentioned, the sector and type of organization (public vs. private) seems to be influential on how the *People-First* approach in those organizations can be enacted and is perceived. The importance of the environment to an individual's needs has already been stressed by Sun et al., (2014) by means of P-E fit. Regarding this conceptualization, Sun, Peng and Panday also stated that P-E fit comprises of three different elements, namely P-J, P-S and P-T fit. However, what the theory is unable to explain, is how the sector or type of given organization can have an influence to one's needs. Interestingly, the work of Lan and Rainey (1992) has indicated that there is a difference between non-profit and public organizations by ways of communication. This communication is similar to the aspect of "*Transparency*" as mentioned in this research; as to provide clarity regarding organizational processes. This shows there is a difference between non-profit, public and private organizations by means of communication, the potential for the organization to satisfy an employee's needs, and its ability to uphold the *People-First* approach. From this, it can be investigated as what contributes to this difference as to better understand the organization, and to enact the *People-First* approach.

4.3 | Empirical reflections

This research provides empirical insights for management and organizations alike, regarding the execution of the *People-First* approach. This research shows that an employee's needs go beyond the basic needs, such as financial renumeration, which an organization can provide the employee. Therefore, the (somewhat) simplistic motivational factors that an organization can provide, cannot fully satisfy an employee. This research has shown that employees' needs are also directed at the process and characteristics of interaction with their superior and organization, and the efforts made by both as to cater to one's needs. This indicates that the provision of basic needs to an employee's desires are appreciated, but cannot contribute to a complete positive perception of a *People-First* approach. This calls for the superior and organization to understand precisely what the employee expects and desires from their occupation. Especially considering the findings of this research, which shows that certain elements of social interaction between superior and employee are valued, e.g. empathy and trust, it shows that understanding what kind of social interaction is desired and how it should be upheld, becomes crucial for a positive perception and enactment of the *People-First* approach. Specifically, the actions of superiors and the organization with the goal to cater to an employee's need must be known. This makes it that the superior and organization need to reflect on their role to the employee, and discover how they can foster and improve the *People-First* approach at the workplace through their behaviour. This knowledge and understanding of a superior's role to the *People-First* approach is crucial, as non-compliance and -congruence to an employee's needs can lead to eventual resignation from the employee.

Regarding the superior's and organization's reflection of their behaviour and stance towards employees, this research also provides the insight as to what actions and behaviour the superior and the organization might reflect on, as to improve the maintenance of the *People-First* approach. This research shows that aspects such as "*Empathy*", "*Transparency*", and "*Proximity*", which have not concretely been mentioned by prior literature, are important within the social interaction between employee and superior. With these insights, a superior and organization are made aware of what aspects need to be upheld properly in order to maintain the *People-First* approach. However, important to this reflection is that they must involve the employee in this process, as it concerns their desire as to how the superior or organization should act. Thus, this research can allow the superior and organization to identify actions perceived as a necessity to the *People-First* approach, whereby they have the responsibility to incorporate the view of their employees regarding how those actions should be upheld.

Lastly, it is also noticeable how there are differences in the interviews between Academic- and Support staff regarding the associated importance of aspects found. It is noticeable how Academic staff mentions the aspect of "*Work-life balance*" differently than Support staff. Whereas Support staff mentions that they find it important that there is a clear line of when they should work or not as to uphold a proper work-life balance, Academic staff are more focused on their work as such that they make exceptions for their work and allot more time to it than to their personal life. Additionally, what is also noticeable is how Support staff mentions more often about the career development opportunities that they can take as employees of the University of Twente, whereas Academic staff does not mention it as often. This stresses the difference in needs between individuals, which might be associated to one's occupational level.

5 | Limitations |

With regards to this research, there are certain qualities to it that can potentially pose a limitation. The first potential limitation that can be argued to be present within this research concerns the methodological process of the interviews conducted. As mentioned, the language spoken in the interviews was either Dutch or English. The decision as to which language would be spoken, lied with the preference of the respondent. Seven out of 25 interviews were conducted in English due to the respondents' preferences, mostly because these respondents were unable to speak Dutch. These respondents were non-native Dutch individuals employed at the University of Twente. Regarding these specific interviews with non-native Dutch respondents, it must be noted how English is also a non-native language for them. This notion, whereby English is a non-native language, can be perceived as a possible limitation to this research. Past literature has noted how the usage of non-native language can have a negative impact on the ability of the respondent to express themselves fully, and feel comfortable to open up to the researcher (Tsang, 1998). From past literature, it has been recommended that the researcher/interviewer should converse in the native language of the respondent (if able and competent), as to create a more conducive atmosphere for expression and forming of trust (Andrews, 1995; Tsang, 1998). However, due to my inability to speak the native languages of the non-native Dutch respondents, it begs to question how well the respondents were able to express themselves. The proficiency of English as a second language from these respondents becomes more unclear, as the University of Twente sets different standards for it based on job position. Specifically, the University of Twente requires their Academic staff to have a C1 or C2-level English proficiency, whereas Support staff is admitted to have B1 to C2-level English proficiency (University of Twente[2], 2022). This shows there to be a potential discrepancy between functions, in terms of English proficiency, and correspondingly between respondents in this research. Due to this doubt of how well non-native Dutch respondents who speak English as a second language might express themselves, it can be suggested to omit those interviews as to avoid this methodological implication. However, the omission of these interviews might lead to further implications as it can decrease the validity of this research. This decrease in validity can be due to the *saturation effect*, which can influence the sample size within a research. *Saturation effect* concerns the moment where the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation (Mason, 2010). With the *saturation effect,* it indicates how all possible aspects associated to an issue are found, if no new aspects are mentioned in interviews (Mason, 2010). This shows that the saturation effect and the validity of a research is dependent on the sample size. Therefore, reduction of sample size can lead to further implications, and is undesirable.

A second limitation to this research concerns the environment in which the interviews took place, which could affect the data collected by respondents. Most often, the interviews with the respondents took place in their personal office. This choice was made as to 4potentially provide the respondent with a comfortable, known and safe environment to converse. However, not all interviews had the liberty to be conducted in such an environment. When interviews were unable to be conducted in a respondent's office, it would be conducted in a reserved room on the campus of the University of Twente, or digitally through "Microsoft Teams". The choice as to where the interview would be conducted lied with the respondent. Several authors have already stressed the importance of the environment in which interviews could take place; respondents needs to feel safe, comfortable and at ease, and it should also be free of interruptions, especially when discussing sensitive issues (Elmir et al., 2011). Moreover, past literature has also stated how participants should be interviewed at a location and time selected by them (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This research has been able to comply with the recommendations from Doody and Noonan (2013), regarding the selection of time and place for the interview by the respondent. However it can be questioned as to whether the environment in which the interviews were conducted comply with the necessity of providing feelings of safety, comfort and ease (Elmir et al., 2011). Reason to believe that this research was unable to not provide a safe and comfortable environment for respondents, is attributed to the reluctance that respondents expressed during the interviews, concerning whether or not they should mention a specific occurrence in their job potentially related to the *People-First* approach. Besides this reluctance, respondents also expressed doubt by means of questioning as to how anonymous the transcription of the interview would be, and who would be able to see it. Once I explained that all personal data will not be mentioned in the transcription, nor in the research and that everything will be anonymized, the respondents did continue on subject. However, regardless of this response, it can be questioned as to whether the respondents mentioned everything they had on their minds. Due to this, it can serve as a possible limitation as information could be withheld.

A third limitation concerns my role as researcher in the conducted interviews. According to Roulston and Choi (2018), a proper manner to conduct interviews is to be well-prepared regarding the topic of the interview, have a good sense about that what is desired to be learned, and a willingness to listen carefully and learn from respondents. When reflecting on these mentioned facets, I believe that my stance has followed this criteria, as I prepared the interview questions, educated myself on the *People-First* approach and literature related to it, and allowed the respondents to provide me with information through open and probe questions. Besides these criteria, Roulston and Choi (2018) also mention that researchers should not talk more than respondents in the interviews, as it can likely create data that supports the researcher's viewpoint due to leading questions. They continue to state that, through posing these leading questions, the scientific process may be jeopardized. This criteria raises doubt. Reason being, is that during the interviews, if respondents showed difficulty with answering questions concerning what they perceive as important to the *People-First* approach, the researcher aided them by mentioning past concepts stated influential by literature or previous respondents. This was done as to provide the respondent, who experienced difficulty answering questions during the interview, with an example. This example, however, could potentially be perceived as leading, which can decrease the scientific reliability and validity of this research.

The last limitation of this research concerns the generalizability of its findings. This lack generalizability is due to two methodological aspects. The first relates to the type of function of the respondent / employee; Academic or Support staff. This research only included individuals who occupy these functions, whereby it does not include employees who have a higher or lower function, or whose position is unrelated to this categorization. Examples of higher functions at the University of Twente are Dean, Portfolio of Education or Portfolio of Research. Based on the exclusion of employees with those functions, it can be questioned as to whether those employees experience and perceive the *People-First* approach similarly. Secondly, this research only focusses on the University of Twente; a public organization. Due to this notion, and the evidence from past literature and this research itself indicating that there is a difference between sectors (public vs. private & public vs. non-profit), it can be argued whether this research can be generalized as the focus lied on public organizations.

6 | Future recommendations |

Reflecting on this research, there are multiple future recommendations. The first recommendation concerns the need for future research to continue to focus on the *People-First* approach, and examine what aspects contribute to its perception and maintenance. The goal of this recommendation is to validate and solidify the theoretical foundation created for it by this research. The knowledge surrounding the *People-First* approach addressing what constitutes it, is quite limited. This calls for the need of researchers within management literature to examine this approach more thoroughly, to provide more in-depth knowledge regarding what possible needs or aspects relate to the approach, and what constitutes positive enactment of it. Besides the call for more extensive research of the *People-First*, researchers should also examine the possible differences between work sectors and their utilization of the approach, as it has been mentioned by both this research and prior literature (Lan & Rainey, 1992) that there is a difference between sectors that can affect the satisfaction of employee needs at the workplace. Within the process of further research of the *People-First* approach, the role organizations play becomes ever more crucial, as they can enable the research to be conducted with their employees. Therefore, future research attempts become a collaborative endeavour whereby researchers can examine the approach, if organizations enable their employees to be included in it.

A second future recommendation concerns the operationalization of the *People-First* approach. From this research it becomes clearer as to what aspects are associated to the *People-First* approach, and that aspects mentioned in past literature also hold importance to it. From this, we become more aware as to what constitutes the *People-First* approach. Based on these findings, it can be made possible as to try and operationalize the *People-First* approach; to create a measurement tool aimed at employees, which can measure the maintenance of the approach at the workplace. The responsibility to construct this tool lies with researchers. The benefits that such work can bring, targets organizations. By implementing these measurement tools, organizations can acquire knowledge from their employees as to what and how they can best cater to their needs. With this knowledge, organizations can act accordingly to employees' needs, possible attain them, and solve the challenge mentioned by Drucker (1992); to attract, hold, recognize, reward, motivate, serve and satisfy their employees

7 | Conclusion |

Overall, it can be stated that the employee, the superior and the work environment play a role in the establishment, execution and perception of the *People-First* approach within an organization. Aspects important to the *People-First* approach can be influenced by factors, such as an employee's personal life, the management style of the superior, and the culture, origin and sector of an organization. Between the three players, there is a dynamic interaction present that shapes the process of perception of the *People-First* approach. The employee has needs, which they desire their organization to satisfy. These needs are expressed to the superior. The superior acts in a specific way as to satisfy those needs, by enacting on plans made between the two, and by potentially shaping the work / social environment at the workplace. The behaviour of the superior towards the employee is also a need of an employee, that aids in the perception of the *People-First* approach. Moreover, the change in the work / social environment at the workplace that a superior can facilitate, can influence the possibility of attainment of an employee's needs, but can also give rise to new needs. Thereby, due to these element aiming to satisfy an employee's needs and with its possibility to undergo continuous change depending on individual lifegoals, the process of attaining one's needs and maintenance of the *People-First* approach becomes a dynamic interaction that cannot be static, and requires continuous interaction and effort. Only when this interaction and effort is managed properly by management and the organization, is the *People-First* approach executed properly and solves it the challenge that organizations face.

8 | Bibliography |

Amazon. (2022). *Inside Amazon.* Retrieved at 13 June, 2022, from Diversity and inclusion at Amazon (aboutamazon.com)

Andrews, M. (1995). Against Good Advice: Reflections on conducting research in a country where you don't speak the language. Oral History Review, 22(2), pp. 75-86.

Apple. (2022). *Careers at Apple.* Retrieved at 13 June, 2022, from Work at Apple - Careers at Apple

Brennan, J. (2021). Recognition trust. *Philosophical Studies*, *178*(11), 3799-3818.

Cable, D. M., & Edwards, J. R. (2004). Complementary and supplementary fit: a theoretical and empirical integration. *Journal of applied psychology*, *89*(5), 822.

Dinibutun, S. R. (2012). Work motivation: Theoretical framework. *Journal on GSTF Business Review*, *1*(4), 133-139.

Doody, O., & Noonan, M. (2013). Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data. *Nurse researcher*, *20*(5).

Drucker, P. F. (1992). Organizations. *Harvard business review*, *20*(7), 281-293.

Elmir, R., Schmied, V., Jackson, D., & Wilkes, L. (2011). Interviewing people about potentially sensitive topics. *Nurse researcher*, *19*(1).

Google. (n.d.). *Our hiring process.* Retrieved at 13 June, 2022, from How we hire - Google Careers

Gorden, R., Skills, B. I., Itasca, I. L., & Peacock, F. E. (1998). Coding interview responses. *Basic Inteviewing Skills*, 180-198.

Gratton, L., & Truss, C. (2003). The three-dimensional people strategy: Putting human resources policies into action. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *17*(3), 74-86.

Griffin, R. W., Phillips, J. M., & Gully, S. M. (2016). *Organizational behavior: Managing people and organizations*. Cengage Learning.

Kapoor, S., & Meachem, A. (2012). Employee Engagement-A Bond between Employee and Organisation. *Amity Global Business Review*, *7*.

KLM. (2021). *The world is yours.* Retrieved at 13 June, 2022, from KLM Careers – The world is yours

Lan, Z., & Rainey, H. G. (1992). Goals, rules, and effectiveness in public, private, and hybrid organizations: More evidence on frequent assertions about differences. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *2*(1), 5-28.

Leagans, J. P. (1964). A concept of needs. *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, *2*(2), 89-96.

Linneberg, M. S., & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding qualitative data: A synthesis guiding the novice. *Qualitative research journal*, *19*(3), 259-270.

Mason, M. (2010, August). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research* (Vol. 11, No. 3).

Maspero, G. (2020). Humanistic management for laypeople: The relational approach. *Humanistic Management Journal*, *5*(1), 25-38.

McGuire, D., Cross, C., & O'Donnell, D. (2005). Why humanistic approaches in HRD won't work. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *16*(1), 131-137.

Microsoft. (2021). *Careers.* . Retrieved at 13 June, 2022, from Careers at Microsoft | Microsoft jobs

Netflix. (2022). *Netflix Culture – Seeking Excellence.* Retrieved May 30, 2022, from Netflix Jobs

Nike. (2022). *Careers.* Retrieved at 13 June, 2022, from Werken bij Nike

Pfeffer, J., & Veiga, J. F. (1999). Putting people first for organizational success. *Academy of management perspectives*, *13*(2), 37-48.

Roulston, K., & Choi, M. (2018). Qualitative interviews. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection*, 233-249.

Samsung. (2022). *Working at Samsung; Be a part of meaningful innovation.* Retrieved May 30, 2022, from Working at Samsung | Careers | Samsung UK

Starbucks. (2022). *Culture and values.* Retrieved May 30, 2022, from Culture and Values: Starbucks Coffee Company

Sun, R., Peng, S., & Pandey, S. K. (2014). Testing the effect of person-environment fit on employee perceptions of organizational goal ambiguity. *Public Performance & Management Review*, *37*(3), 465-495.

SynchHR. (2022). *What is a People-First Company Culture*. Retrieved May 31, 2022, from What is a People-First Company Culture | SyncHR | SyncHR

Tsang, E. W. (1998). Inside story: Mind your identity when conducting cross national research. Organization Studies, 19(3), pp. 511-515.

Wahba, M. A., & Bridwell, L. G. (1976). Maslow reconsidered: A review of research on the need hierarchy theory. *Organizational behavior and human performance*, *15*(2), 212-240.

University of Twente. (n.d.). *Shaping2030 – People First.* Retrieved May 31, 2022, from Strategy and culture | University of Twente (utwentecareers.nl)

(1) University of Twente (2020). *Startupondersteunding.* Retrieved 31 Maym 2022, from Startupondersteuning | Startersondersteuning | Business | Samenwerken | Bedrijven - Universiteit Twente (utwente.nl)

(2) University of Twente. (2020). *Our mission – Being 'people-first' is our choice.* Retrieved 31 May, 2022, from Our mission and vision | Our mission | Organisation (utwente.nl)

(1) University of Twente. (2021). *Fact and Figures*. Retrieved 13 June, 2022, from Education | Facts & Figures (utwente.nl)

(2) University of Twente. (2021). *Organisational Structure.* Retrieved 28 June, 2022 from Organisational structure | Organisation (utwente.nl)

(1) University of Twente. (2022). *Onderwijs of de UT.* Retrieved 31 May, 2022, from Wetenschappelijk onderwijs (wo) | Universiteit Twente (utwente.nl)

(2) University of Twente. (2022). *Summary Language Policy*. Retrieved 1 May, 2023, from https://www.utwente.nl/en/ces/language-centre/translation-editing-services/language-policy/summary-utlp/

Vroom, V. H. (1966). Organizational choice: A study of pre-and postdecision processes. *Organizational behavior and human performance*, *1*(2), 212-225.

Woodruffe, C. (2006). The crucial importance of employee engagement. *Human Resource Management International Digest*.

9 | Appendices |

APPENDIX A (INTERVIEW QUESTIONS)

Interview questions:	Reasoning for questions:
What does your current job entail?	
How do you perceive the People-First approach?	To discover whether or not the employee is aware of this approach that UTwente claims to uphold.
Why would you think that this approach is of importance?	To discover whether they can place / understand why this approach is of importance.
What does, in your opinion, the People-First approach entail?	To discover as to what the approach means to them and what it is made up of.
Do you think your viewpoint might change in the future?	
Has this viewpoint been different from the past?	
Compared to your previous job, do you perceive a difference in adherence to this approach?	To discover additional aspects that the employee might associate to the People-First approach.
If yes, how?	

APPENDIX B (INFORMED CONSENT)

Goal

The goal of this interview is to explore, discover and map how employees perceive that what is coined as the People-First approach, which organizations state to follow. Regardless, not much is known about what this approach specifically entails. As the People-First approach has been mentioned to focus on the desires of employees within organizations, your stance and perspective is of crucial importance. Through the interview and the knowledge provided by you, it is intended to create a framework of the People-First approach that could be used to indicate to what extent organizations follow the People-First approach, and what aspects are associated / important to it.

Procedure

The interview will take a minimum of 30 minutes, maximum 45. The interview could surpass this timespan depending on how much knowledge you want to share. Important to note, there are no right or wrong answers in this interview because your own interpretation / perspective towards to People-First approach is asked. Additionally, you are able to stop the interview, and resign from it at any given time, without reason.

Recording

To be able to reflect on the interview, your permission to audio-record this interview is requested. This recording will be performed by a technological device that is owned by the researcher. Only the researcher is able to access this audio-recording. The recording will be transcribed into a text-formatted document in Word, from which statements could be taken to provide empirical evidence. All information will be anonymously handled and referred to. Once the audio-recording has been transcribed, it will be destroyed. The text-formatted document will be destroyed at 06-02-2023.

Additional Information

For further information, questions or remarks please contact the researcher.

Name: *Donyell Deira (s2010992)*

Email: *d.deira@student.utwente.nl*

Phone number: *+31611427601*

With signing this "Informed Consent" you indicate that

- *You have read and understood the goal of this research*
- *You have read and allowed for the interview to be audio-recorded*
- *You are aware that you are able to quit the interview at any given moment, without reason*
- *You are aware that you can contact the researcher in case of question, remarks or further information.*

Name Researcher: ______________________ *Signature Researcher:* ______________________

Name respondent: ______________________ *Signature respondent:* ______________________

Date: ______________________

Appendix C (Email sent to UT employees)

Participation request; Master Thesis Donyell Deira (s2010992)

Dear,

Good day, my name is Donyell Deira and I contact you with a reason. I am a Master's student following "Business Administration" at the University of Twente, and I am currently occupied with my Master's thesis.

My thesis reports on what is coined in literature as the People-First approach that organizations state to employ and uphold. This approach is said to focus on how organizations can cater to the desires of employees, which can increase their commitment to their work based on an increased personal value associated to it. My research focusses on what this approach specifically entails.

In order to find answers to this question, I would require your help. As I focus on the University of Twente and the People-First approach, I want to ask whether I can have the possibility to interview you as an employee. The interview would take a minimum of 30 minutes (maximum of 45). The interview would be recorded as to enable reflection on the interview, and use quotes in the final report. All information will be anonymized, and no other party besides the researcher will gain access to this information.

As for the planning of this interview, I would appreciate it if the interview could take place either this week (12th-16th), or the following week after (19th-23rd). However, I allot the specific time and day to you. Additionally, I am aware that you as a Dean in a faculty can have a hectic and packed schedule. For this reason, I would like to ask what the soonest day is that you could have a moment to be interviewed. As you are occupied with work, I cannot estimate your availability, thus if you could inform me as to when you are available, we can schedule a moment together. In terms of space, if meeting physically on campus is possible, I would highly appreciate this (it can also be held in your own office for convenience sake). However, if a physical meeting is not possible, a meeting/interview through Microsoft Teams is great as well. Lastly, the interview can be conducted in English or Dutch, whichever is preferred.

I eagerly await your response, and would highly appreciate it if you could find the time to participate in the interview.

With kind regards

Donyell Deira (s2010992)

NOTE: in the attachments you can find the "Informed Consent". This explains the process more in-depth.