

CREATING ACCESSIBILITY: THE ACCOMMODATION OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES AS WORKPLACE INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

The marginalisation of people with disabilities in the labour market is a longstanding and global trend. To counteract this is high on the international agenda, for instance as part of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Traditionally, disability has been seen as a personal feature. Contemporary understandings, such as that of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), see disability as a result of interaction between persons with physical, mental, sensory or intellectual impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers (UN 2006). Thus, to move forward on this, it becomes important to enhance the accessibility of workplaces. But at present, the field of organisational and management research on work and disability presents as rather immature. There are meagre amounts of research on disability and the role of employers and managers (Cavanagh, Bartram, Meacham, Bigby, Oakman and Fossey 2017, p. 6; Dwertmann 2016, p. 1477). There is also a lack of differentiation between different subsets of the extremely diverse category people with disabilities (Beatty et al 2019). Lastly, there is a tendency to grand generalizations from researchers based on what I understand as a sample bias towards persons with disabilities that are in or close to employment, neglecting groups which farther from or altogether excluded from employment, e.g. persons with intellectual disability or serious mental illness.

My research question is: What forms of workplace innovation may create accessibility for employees with disabilities require of

organisations and managers? Harnessing theoretical perspectives both from Disability Studies, the Capability Approach (Sen 1980, Robeyns 2017) and Workplace Innovation (Pot, Totterdill and Dhondt 2016), I am doing a qualitative critical case study (Flyvberg 2011) with an ambition of developing theory. After doing field work and qualitative and interviews (2016–2017) and getting to know eight employees with intellectual disability and their jobs, managers and organisational contexts, publishing a book chapter (Owren and Helmersen 2018) and an essay on reflexivity in research with persons with intellectual disability (Owren 2019), I am currently (2018–2020) working on two theoretical models: The first (Owren and Dyrkolbotn, work in progress) builds on an analysis of existing research on work and disability to specify four levels of organisational accessibility for persons with disabilities, 0. Exclusion, 1. Rudimentary access, 2. Providing work accommodations and 3. Committing to reorganise, and three corresponding processes: a) from exclusion to access, b) from access to social responsibility, c) from social responsibility to social justice. The second (Owren and Austrheim, work in progress) builds on a synthesis of existing research knowledge about accommodations related to nine diagnoses and causes of cognitive impairment, at present fragmented across a number of literatures. Both contributions point out that beyond the most rudimentary, creating workplace accessibility may require processes of organisational learning, dialogue, negotiation and reconsidering often taken-for-granted assumptions on part of 'non-disabled'

employers, managers and colleagues. I aim to frame this as a contribution to Workplace Innovation, which is underdeveloped when it comes to disability.

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INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP OF PEOPLE WITH MILD INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Advisory bodies for Dutch government policy witnessed a growing demand for (long-term) care in the last decade, especially by people with mild intellectual disabilities (MID). This sudden rise is often explained by a so-called 'increasing complexity' of societal structures causing exclusion. But what does this really signify? The question arises; how is inclusion/exclusion experienced by people with MID? Where do fits or misfits occur?

We start off with the premise that everyday life activities offer important indicators for studying citizenship. Hence, we studied the lived experiences of people with MID regarding inclusive citizenship, mainly in the public domain of society. Doing groceries, getting around by public transportation, getting in contact with others or performing sports and hobbies at local initiatives are some examples. Through this scope we explored how disabilities are repressed, conquered, preserved or constructed by societal/social barriers.

Through ethnographic fieldwork 33 persons with MID were followed in a variety of daily activities (in the Netherlands). The study was set up with a co-researcher with MID and in collaboration with People's First group 'LFB Wolvega'. Topics of observations and interviews were related to prevailing definitions of inclusion on three levels: participation, belonging and relationships. Participation was studied through observation and interviewing. Photovoice was applied for reflection on feelings of belonging, the same way drawing and eco-mapping provided insights in relationships and networks. In addition, network members and social professionals were interviewed.

Some main results are:

Participation:

- Although people create diverse and creative ways in participating, a variety of barriers for participation were found confirming the notion that mild intellectual disability is shaped through marginality and experiences of exclusion. Opportunities for participation were frequently found to be daily renegotiated and confirmed.

Belonging:

- Stigma performs an important role in feelings of (not) belonging. Many respondents were not comfortable with the label MID and tried to avoid the use of it because of perceived stigma. Nevertheless, some respondents creatively took advantage of the label.

Relationships:

- Weak ties (neighbors, shop personal etc.) can offer significant meaning to people's daily life.
- Also social professionals regularly have an important role in successful participation as they fulfill multiple roles and deliver diverse forms of support.
- Strong ties (family and friends) on the other hand are sometimes unsteady. Situations of abuse, extortion and patronizing behaviour were encountered.

The ways in which people (with MID) daily give shape to citizenship are dynamic, messy and rather unpredictable. Possibilities for participation, feelings of belonging and relationships are often rapidly altering, mutually intersecting and tied to the experience

of stigma. Therefore, inclusive citizenship is not an outcome which one can easily aim for but should be understood as series of parallel processes of fits and misfits which are frequently renegotiated and confirmed. In order to be more effective in stimulating inclusive citizenship for people with MID, both policies

aiming for inclusion and activation should take in account the dynamic character of these processes. To grasp the messiness of daily life experiences of inclusive citizenship, future research should employ a micro-sociological, relational approach to intellectual disability with attention to intersectionality and diversity.

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