WORKERS' (DIS)ABILITITIES AND REQUIRED CONDITIONS

"CAN EMPLOYEES USE THEIR DISABILITY AS AN ABILITY AND WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO DO SO?"

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Foreword

This thesis is written by Jaron Devloo and Victor Matthys, two master students in business engineering who would like to give something back to society for the excellent education we were able to enjoy. Our topic of choice was "Workers' (dis)abilities and required conditions" because we believe that we can make a difference for people with disabilities with this dissertation.

Our work focusses on the benefits of a disability, an aspect that is not highlighted enough in our society. You can expect new insights on how people with disabilities are able to excel because of their disability. It is our hope that these insights will lead to further research and an improvement in societal knowledge about people's specific talents rather than a narrow focus on the limitations of disabilities. This advancing understanding then ideally leads to a reduction in discrimination and an increase in recognition of people with disabilities.

We would like to explicitly thank our promoters who guided us in an excellent manner with their extensive expertise and experience. Professor Petra Andries and doctoral student Jarno Stappers always gave us the right advice and did never hesitate to answer our questions in great detail. We would also like to thank our respondents for trusting us to conduct a personal interview. Finally, we would like to thank the reader for taking the time to read this dissertation.

"It is important that people accept the fact that all human beings experience some level of limitations in their everyday lives. Such limits are experienced to varying degrees during all the phases of our life. Rather than being something foreign to human experience, limits are as a matter of fact a common quite unsurprising aspect of being human."
-Creamer D. (2009)

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1. Introduction

Flanders is facing one of the tightest labor markets in all of Europe. Although the demand for talented employees continues to grow, the declining pool of suitable workers in Flanders is causing vacancies to remain unfilled. This is what the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy wrote in a report on the tightness of the Flemish labor market in 2019. Fons Leroy, the man behind the Flemish employment service VDAB, even predicted that the tightness in the labor market will only increase in the future. On 15 January 2019, he said in De Tijd, "If we continue as we are doing today, by 2030, we will be stuck with a million vacancies." This is a worrying statement that gives food for thought.

An aging population and the lack of young, talented workers to replace them are at the root of this declining labor supply. However, what stands out in this is that despite this significant shortage, people with disabilities are very often overlooked and discriminated when companies are looking to fill their open positions (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008).
The employment rate for people with disabilities was barely 43.3% in 2017. This is remarkably lower than the non-disabled counterpart, namely 78.6% (Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2018).

Does this mean that people with disabilities are not competent or efficient enough to fill the open positions? Reality suggests otherwise, as there are more and more stories emerging in the news where employers are looking specifically for people with disabilities to employ. On March 21, 2019, Het Nieuwsblad wrote about Brussels Airport, where people with autism are being hired for luggage control because of the exceptional concentration abilities they have due to their autism. Another example is the Antwerp-based software consulting firm Passwerk, which won the 2019 award for 'Social Innovation of the Year'. Passwerk was awarded because they demonstrated that their employees, who have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, are not hindered by their disability but instead have an advantage at work because of it (Het Nieuwsblad, 2019). Quite recently, it came out in the media that, with the help of artificial intelligence and new technologies, the number of people with disabilities that will be able to work will triple by 2023 (Datanews, 2019).

Despite these hopeful stories, unfortunately, the focus to date has been on the detrimental aspects of disabilities. Very little research has been done so far on when a disability can be seen as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Because finding literature on the benefits

of disabilities in the labor market can be compared to finding a needle in a haystack, this Master's Dissertation attempts to fill this gap by formulating two research questions.

With the first question, "*Are employees able to excel at work or in their jobs because of their disability? If so, because of what?",* we tried to determine whether people are sometimes able to excel at work as a result of their disability and to what benefit this can then be attributed. In order to ascertain whether there are specific requirements attached to this, which are decisive for making use of a potential benefit, a second research question was formulated, being: "*Are there certain requirements in order for an employee with a disability to use it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage?".*

This Master's Thesis is divided into four major parts. Chapter two begins with defining the terms used in this dissertation, followed by introducing the Person-Environment theory and by outlining the context of the Belgian labor market for people with disabilities. This is then followed by a literature review in which we link the existing research on the disadvantages experienced by employees with disabilities to the theoretical concepts of the Person-Environment theory. Chapter two concludes by examining what has already been researched on possible advantages of disabilities in the labor market.

Chapter three discusses the two-part empirical research we have conducted in detail, thereby answering our research questions. First we present in detail our media analysis of Dutch-language articles, which was conducted to answer the first research question. Next, we explain how the second empirical part attempted to confirm the findings of our media analysis and we answer the second research question by conducting semi-structured interviews.

We conclude this Master's Dissertation with chapter four, in which we draw the conclusions and thereby summarize the answers to our research questions. It also highlights the need for further research.

2. Literature review

In this section of our Master's Thesis, we reviewed the relevant literature and current knowledge on the presence and implications of having a disability as a worker in the labor market. In the first subchapter, we will discuss the definition of a disability and the current situation in Belgium concerning disabilities and the labor market. We will also present the main theory, the Person-Environment fit, with which we will work further in this dissertation. In the second subchapter, we will focus on the disadvantages people with disabilities experience once they enter the labor market. Since this is the main focus of the existing international research, we present our general findings and conclusions on this subject. Research on the advantages of disabilities on the labor market is extremely scarce. Nevertheless, in the third subsection of this chapter, we will look at what has been researched and briefly summarize it.

2.1 Definition, models and theory

2.1.1 Definition

Before we can talk about the pros and cons of having a disability on the labor market, it is crucial to clarify the concept of having a disability thoroughly. Because the term disability is a very complex and overarching concept, it is difficult to find a comprehensive definition. Therefore, we will describe a disability using different sources and perspectives.

Different models exist that try to place a disability in a specific context. The medical model looks at a disability from an individual perspective. This means that a disability is seen as a diagnosis of a person's body that can reduce his or her quality of life. Therefore, the individual needs medical assistance to treat the disability or to rehabilitate (Fisher & Goodley, 2007). However, a disability does not always have to be seen from this individual perspective. The social model, unlike the medical, places a disability in a social context, where it is seen as a social barrier and as an exclusion from society, whether intentional or not. Therefore society, and not the limitations per se, is seen as the structural factor that imposes several limitations on a person in order to be able to contribute fully to our society (Oliver, 1983; Altman, 2001).

The two different perspectives of both the medical and social model are combined in the definition drawn by the United Nations in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008. It defines disabled persons as those who suffer from a long-term impairment, which may be physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory. This may prevent them from participating fully and effectively, on an equal basis with others, in social life (United Nations, 2008).

Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) also combines both the medical and the social model. It defines a disability as an umbrella term for a disorder, an activity restriction and a participation restriction. A disorder refers to a problem related to the body of the person in question. This can be, for example, the absence or malfunctioning of an organ. By an activity limitation, the WHO means the difficulty experienced when someone is performing a task. A participation restriction refers to the discomfort a person is confronted with during active participation in society.

Thus, according to the WHO, a disability is seen not only as a person's health condition, but also as the interaction between the health condition with the contextual and social factors in which the person finds himself (WHO, 2015). This Master's Dissertation will use the definition drawn up by the WHO as this definition is also applied in other relevant studies (e.g., in Stappers, 2016; Lindsay et al., 2018).

2.1.2 Belgian context

In this section, we will outline the context of the Belgian labor market for people with disabilities. We will make a comparison of the labor market situation between people with and without disabilities. However, we must mention a certain margin of uncertainty given the fact we use data based on labor force surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018.

The labor force survey of 2017 shows that no less than 9% of Belgians experience severe difficulties in finding a job as a result of a disability, long-term disorder or long-term illness. An additional 7% experiences these difficulties to a certain extent, which means that 16% of the Belgian population experiences difficulties in finding a job due to the fact they are having a disability (Eurostat Labour Force Survey, 2017; Statbel, 2018).

Employment and unemployment rates

Figure 1 below depicts a comparison in the level of employment, i.e., the proportion of employed persons in a specific target group compared to the total target group, between

persons with and without a disability in the Flemish Region. It is important to note that the delineation of persons with disabilities was based on a question asked in the conducted Labor Force Survey (Enquête naar de Arbeidskrachten, EAK), which was used to derive the data. The survey inquired whether a person experiences limitations in his or her daily activities, at work or outside of work, due to a disability, condition, or illness.

The figure shows that in the Flemish Region, in 2017, less than half (43.3%) of the persons with disabilities were employed. When we compare this with the 78.6% employment rate for persons without disabilities, a vast inequality is noticeable (Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2018; Statbel, 2018). Within the target group of persons with disabilities (PWDs), we observe differences depending on education.

To specify the overall picture of the employment rate to a breakdown of education level, the Flemish Region Labor Force Survey of 2017 shows that the employment rate for PWDs who are highly educated is about 69.3%. This is a very high figure compared to the 27.2% among the low-educated PWDs. For persons without disabilities, the figures are 88.1% and 51.9% respectively (Steunpunt Werk, 2018). It is again striking that the employment rate for people without disabilities is approximately 20% higher compared to people with disabilities for both target groups.

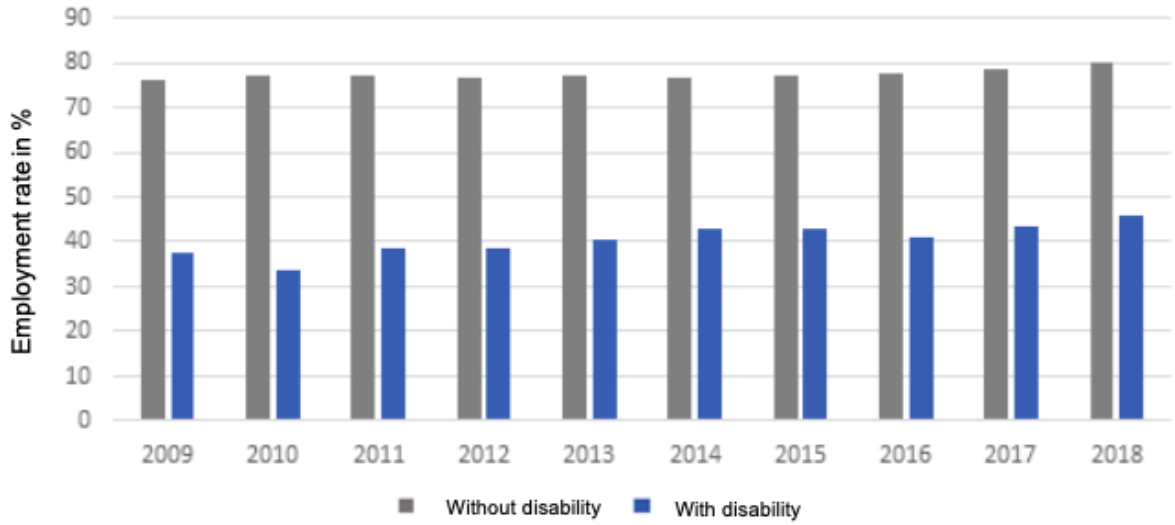

Figure 1. Comparison of employment rates in the Flemish Region between people with and without disabilities, 2009-2018 (own editing on the basis of EAK Statbel, 2018).

To construct a complete picture of the labor market, Figure 2 below also shows the International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment rate in the Flemish Region. In this rate, an individual of the labor force (the employed and unemployed) between 15 and 64 years is only classified as unemployed if he or she is unemployed, has actively sought work during the past four weeks, and is also immediately available for the labor market (ILO, 2019).

If we compare the two groups again, it is striking that the ILO unemployment rate in 2018 for people with disabilities is 2.3 percentage points higher than for people without disabilities (Statbel, 2018). Important to mention is the fact that this rate only takes into account people who are trying to find a job. The inactive people, i.e., those who are no longer looking for work or simply never looked for work, are not included. This means that this unemployment rate does not account for all people with disabilities. If we include the inactive people in the equation, the difference between the two groups is even more striking. More than 74% of people with disabilities are inactive compared to only 32% of the total population (Statbel, 2018; Lauer and Houtenville, 2018).

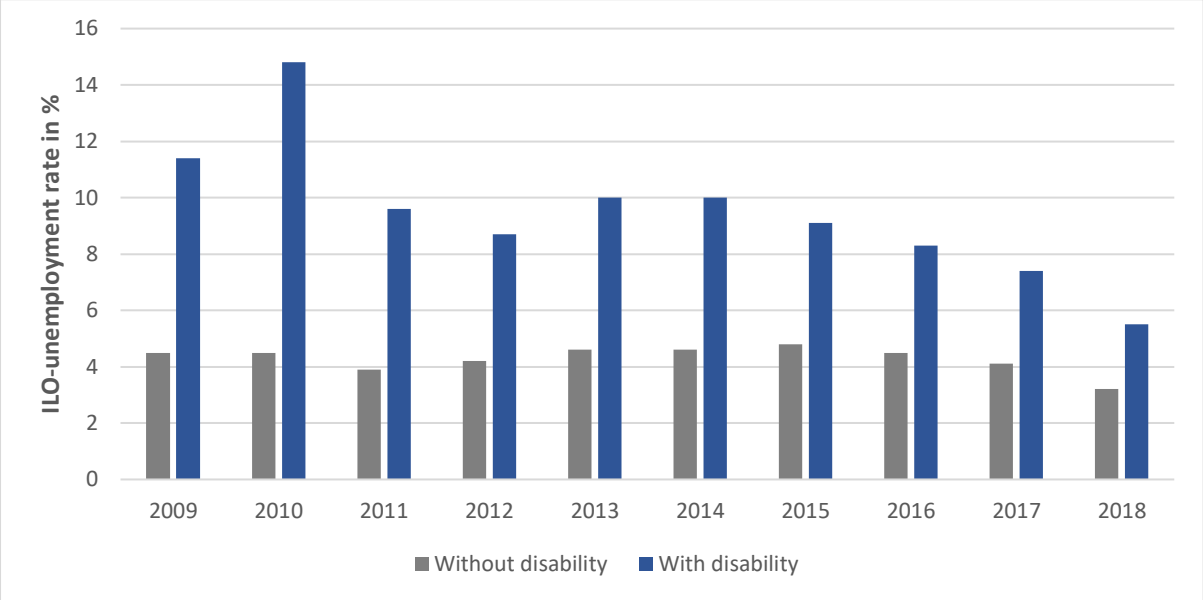

Figure 2. Comparison ILO-unemployment rate in the Flemish Region between people with and without disabilities, 2009-2018 (own edits on the basis of EAK Statbel, 2018).

Also noticeable is that these striking differences in employment between people with and without disabilities do not only apply in Belgium but also beyond the country's borders. All over the world, someone with a disability is less likely to be employed than someone without a disability (Heymann, Stein, & de Elvira Moreno, 2014). These numbers stand in strong contrast to the observation that so many Belgian and foreign employers have difficulties finding employees, which we will discuss next.

Labor market tightness

"No less than 45 percent of Belgian employers do not or barely get their vacancies filled." This could be read in Het Nieuwsblad (2020). Similar articles could also be found in many other Belgian newspapers. Based on the most recent figures from Statbel (2019), there is a clear upward trend in the number of vacancies from 2014 to 2018 (Figure 3). From 2018 to the third trimester of 2019, we see a stagnation of around 140,000 open vacancies.

Remarkably, there was also a total of 494,711 job seekers in the third quarter of 2019 (Statbel, 2019). This means that for each vacancy, more than three people are looking for work. There is no unequivocal explanation why the vacancies are not filled, but it is mainly because the skills requested by the employers do not match the education levels of the labor reserve (Hoge Raad voor de Werkgelegenheid, 2018; Statbel, 2019).

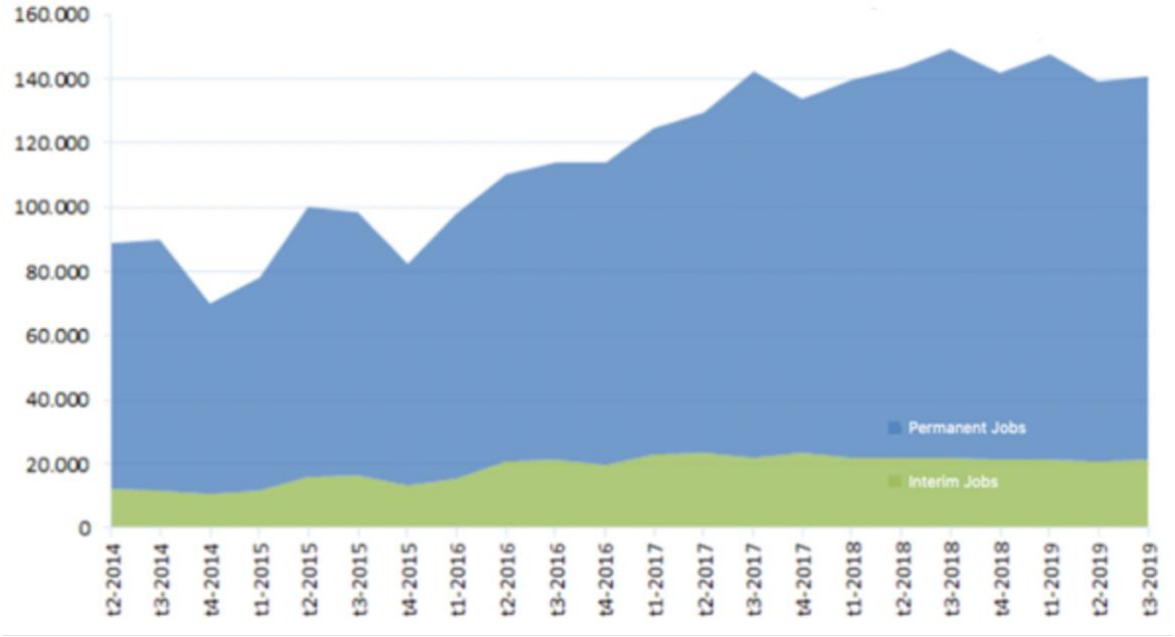

Figure 3. Vacancies from the period t2-2014 to t3-2019 (own editing on the basis of Statbel, 2019).

It is clear there exists a mismatch between supply and demand for labor, resulting in labor shortages. So although the supply of labor is greater than the demand, because there are many more job seekers than vacancies, the two do not seem to match. Given that people with disabilities make up a large proportion of the unemployed, it is logical that policymakers are making efforts to include them more. Flemish policymakers are trying to make it easier for minority groups to find a suitable job by offering a support premium, de Vlaamse Ondersteuningspremie, for any loss of revenue or additional work costs. Despite this, it often remains more challenging to find work with a disability, for example, due to discrimination (Baert, 2016; Stappers, 2016; Acerta, 2018; Unizo, 2019). We will elaborate on these difficulties in the following section 2.2.

In the next part, we introduce the Personal-Environment fit theory (P-E fit theory). This theory will later be used to provide an overview of the existing literature on the disadvantages of people with disabilities in the labor market, partly explaining the low employment numbers for individuals with disabilities.

2.1.3 Person-Environment fit theory

The Person-Environment (P-E) fit is the degree of similarity between the characteristics of a person and his or her environment. The theory suggests an interaction between an environment and people's behavior, motivation, et cetera (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Furthermore, the P-E fit relates positively with job behaviors and attitudes (e.g., performance, job satisfaction, career success, retention rate). This means that if the environment and a person's characteristics match well, the functioning and performance of a person will be higher. On the contrary, if the person's characteristics and the environment do not match, the person's functioning may be poorer (Vogel & Feldman, 2009). Thus, the P-E fit theory is an exciting and relevant theory to discuss the employment of PWDs because, in analogy to the former, we may see that if a work environment accommodates the disability of an employee, job behaviors and attitudes may be influenced positively.

The P-E fit is subdivided into four parts: The Person-Organization (P-O fit), the Person-Vocation (P-V fit), the Person-Job (P-J fit), and the Person-Group fit (P-G fit). Kristof (1996) states that the P-O fit is the compatibility between individuals and organizations. Individuals and organizations match because individuals prefer to work for organizations that share their values. Furthermore, he also applies this reasoning to the employer, who prefers employees whose values correspond to those of the company. These values are guidelines for behavior, judgments, attitudes, and choices (Rokeach, 1973). Next, we have the Person-Vocation fit, where Holland (1985) defines this fit as the match between a person's interest and abilities and the attributes or characteristics of the profession. Subsequently, Person-Job fit is the similarity between the person's skills and the work requirements or the similarity between the person's requirements and to what extent the job can meet those needs (Edwards, 1991). Finally, the Person-Group fit represents the match between an individual and his working groups, which becomes more critical as work environments require more and more teamwork (Kristof, 1996).

2.2 Disadvantages of disabilities on the labor market

In the section about the Belgian context, we showed the big employment gap between people with and without a disability. Reasons for this have been extensively discussed in the existing literature and relate to the P-E fit theory outlined above. People with disabilities often experience different disadvantages when employed or willing to join the labor market, which is outlined in the next section.

Those drawbacks can either be internal (e.g., having a lower education) or external (e.g., due to employer biases) (Lindsay et al., 2018).

First of all, one of the most visible drawbacks that PWDs encounter is discrimination when they apply for a job. After a PWD has been accepted for a job interview, they might get confronted with discrimination in the next step, being accepted for the job. Lengnick-Hall et al. (2008) showed that the willingness of employers to hire PWDs is quite different from their actual hiring practices. A disabled person is significantly less likely to be hired than a non-disabled person, contrary to the statements of many employers who claim to be making great efforts to encourage diversity (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). Finally, once a PWD is employed, he still encounters pitfalls. Wage discrimination is still present and is dependent on the type and degree of disability under consideration (Malo, 2006).

Furthermore, there is a lower tendency to switch jobs between or in companies, resulting in lower wages for PWDs (Gibbons & Waldman, 1999). Next to the discrepancy in wages, Yelin & Trupin (2003) state that the employed PWDs are also less likely to obtain a promotion. According to them, both switching jobs and receiving a promotion are positively related to an individual's wage. Moreover, they claim that disabled people are more likely to lose their jobs than non-disabled people. In order to overcome these drawbacks, there exist a few policies, for example, a wage subsidy. However, Baert (2016) claims that there exists no statistical difference in chances to be accepted for a job with or without the subsidy in Belgium.

Since each type of disability has its specific barriers and the existing literature offers many different potential drawbacks, we have chosen to list the disadvantages using the Person-Environment fit theory that we discussed in section 2.1. In our overview below, a disadvantage falls into one of the four subcategories within this theory: Person-Organization, Person-Vocation, Person-Job, and Person-Group. Hence, a disadvantage exists when either the person and the organization, the person and the profession, the person and the job, or the person and the colleagues or workgroup mismatch due to the person’s disability.

2.2.1 Person-Organization

The Person-Organization fit is the compatibility between the employee and the organization or its employer (Holland, 1985). When they share values or similarities exist between the employer's characteristics and the employee’s, the fit is high. For example, when a company wants to hire a director and finds somebody who has an excellent cultural fit but lacks the

right technical skills. If the company hires the person and then develops his skills to get him to that position, the PO-fit is high, but the Person-Job fit is low. The latter will be defined in 2.2.2

In literature, employer concerns about people with disabilities are plentiful, e.g., lower productivity, lower education level, et cetera (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). This casts doubts about the capabilities of PWDs and thus is unfavorable for their application chances. In an American study from Kaye et al. (2011), in which they identified reasons why employers avoid contracting people with disabilities, more than 80% is worried about the cost of providing reasonable accommodations. However, the costs of providing supporting accommodations have been found to be very moderate (Unger et al., 2002; Dixon et al., 2003). Additionally, the employers also agree that they lack the knowledge to handle the needs of employees with a disability (Kaye et al., 2011).

2.2.2 Person-Job

The Person-Job fit measures the compatibility between an employee and the specific values and features of the job he/she performs. This compatibility can be seen in two ways. First, as the fit that measures the match between the job requirements and the ability of the employee to satisfy those, but also as the match between what the employee needs and how far the job can meet those needs (Holland, 1985).

Burke et al. (2013) state that people with disabilities may have difficulty adapting to new routines and struggle to perform adequately in a work setting that requires rapid communication. Furthermore, they claim that disadvantages are primarily associated with people with a mental disability and can be tempered by providing a wide variety of vocational services and supports. However, disadvantages for PWDs are not always caused by actual impairments. As mentioned in the literature on PO-fit, disadvantages are often only assumed by recruiters and employers, such as, the belief that PWDs have a lower job performance (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, the presumption of lower job performance is one of the most common pessimistic views that employers often harbor (Gold et al., 2012; Hernandez et al., 2008). Employers consider PWDs less productive compared to their counterparts without disabilities (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008; Fredeen et al., 2013). Regrettably, the assumed performance

concerns go beyond just being less productive. Recruiters and potential employers perceive PWDs to be more absent, late, or less committed and trustworthy (Kaye et al., 2011). Another stereotypical issue that can complicate the compatibility between a PWD and his/her job is that these people are often thought to have lower job skills in general. Their disability is thought to hinder them in matching specific job requirements, making them less competent and capable of practicing a particular job (Burke et al., 2013; Fiske et al., 2002).

Many of these perceived disadvantages have proven to be counterfactual. Global studies have analyzed the productivity differences between people with and without disabilities and have shown that this difference is not significant. In cases where the performance does differ, it also happened the employees with a disability were in fact reported as more productive than their counterparts (Hernandez & McDonald, 2007; Kaye et al., 2011; Kaletta et al., 2012). Gröschl (2013) showed, in a case that focusses on the hotel sector, that there are situations where PWDs show a lower job performance, but that this might be caused by external factors that do not need to be related to these persons' abilities. For example, the low job performance of PWDs can be attributed to inadequate HR management practices, such as the absence of both training initiatives for the disabled and awareness programs for the non-disabled. Consequently, the lower performance that was identified can often be solved by providing precise job requirements, organizational support, or managerial support. Concerning the prejudice of absenteeism and lateness, studies point out – just as for productivity – that workers with disabilities do not experience higher levels of lateness or absence in comparison to employees without disabilities (Kaletta et al., 2012; Fredeen et al., 2013). Having a lack of education can be considered a reason for lower job skills for PWDs (Lauer & Houtenville, 2017). However, national studies worldwide have shown that education is comparable between people with and without disabilities in secondary or high school. There is only a difference regarding university degrees (see, e.g., U.S. Census Bureau, 2015; Arim, 2015). However, a university degree is not required in a lot of available jobs. Hence, the educational level of people with a disability cannot fully explain existing differences in job skills and employability (Lauer & Houtenville, 2017).

2.2.3 Person-Group

An essential element is related to how PWDs function in their group of colleagues, which is frequently mentioned in the literature as workplace inclusion. Pelled, Ledford, and Mohrman (1999) defined inclusion as "the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an

insider by others in a work system". PWDs often have more difficulties being included in the workplace. According to Hagner et al. (2015), this is mainly due to different work schedules, which may be shorter, for example, or due to changes in job design. Like other discrimination factors mentioned above, this has spillover effects to other elements such as promotional chances or participation in incentive programs. The degree of inclusion of an employee also has a clear link with their engagement, which is beneficial for their performed work (Lunsford & Dolison, 2019).

Being bullied or harassed are negative experiences that one could encounter in a work environment. According to Shaw, Chan & McMahon (2012), there are multiple characteristics, like gender, age, disability, race, and firm size, that influence the risk of experiencing harassment. Combinations of these characteristics place individuals at a higher risk of being harassed. For example, being Hispanic and female places the individual at a higher risk than being white and male (Shaw et al., 2012). Some case studies about PWDs have experienced harassment or bullying (e.g., McMahon, 2006). However, according to Shaw et al. (2012), the rates are equal to gender-, age- and racial discrimination.

Furthermore, the research shows that people with a behavioral disability are more likely to suffer from harassment or bullying than their peers with a physical disability (Shaw et al., 2012). This conclusion is consistent with other studies about a hierarchy of preferences for types of disabilities. People with one or more physical impairment(s) experience more favorable attitudes than those with mental disabilities. The latter are the most stigmatized group (Chan et al., 2009; Cook, 1998). Furthermore, Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall (2011) explain that a PWD can receive kindness, contrary to harassment, from co-workers or supervisors. Surprisingly, this can generate a negative outcome if it causes PWDs to get fewer or easier tasks. This means that it is more difficult for them to demonstrate their capabilities and improve their perceived job performance. If this happens, it is unfavorable for possible promotional chances and the perception of their capabilities, as described in the Person-Job section (Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2011).

2.2.4 Person-Vocation

The Person-Vocation fit is the degree to which a person's attributes, or personality in general, is similar to either the attributes or the characteristics of the performed profession (Holland,

1985). We can compare this fit with the similarity-attraction hypothesis of Van Vianen (2000) that states that people are drawn to similar values, attitudes, and opinions.

Costa et al. (1984) conclude that vocational interests, although different per individual, do not differ in general between age groups. Furthermore, they claim that the most significant determinant of vocational interest is the personality of the individual. A case study presents consistent results, showing that young adults with low to high levels of disability have a wide range of interests and self-estimated work-relevant abilities that are comparable to young adults without disabilities (Turner et al., 2011). Furthermore, Ali et al. (2011) conclude that non-employed PWDs in general, have similar preferences as non-disabled people about the characteristics of jobs. Rohe & Athelstan (1985) examined whether there was a change in occupational interests among individuals after being diagnosed with a spinal cord injury. The results showed that the occurrence of the injury had no significant impact on vocational interests. The observed changes of interests were comparable to the changes made by the control group, which was composed out of people without a disability. Unlike previous subsections that covered the P-O, P-G, and P-J fit, the literature does not list many disadvantages for PWDs linked to the Person-Vocation fit.

After reviewing the existing literature, one of our main conclusions is that when PWDs are included in the workforce, they often do not differ significantly in job performance compared to the abled-bodied. Furthermore, some disadvantages can be solved by providing supporting accommodations (Gröschl, 2013). Another finding is that we noticed that most of the existing literature has focused on the adverse aspects of disabilities so far, and little research has been done on when a disability can be seen as an asset.

2.3 Advantages of employing persons with disabilities

In the section above, we did a more detailed analysis of the most relevant and widespread factors that are considered disadvantages of PWDs regarding their participation in the labor market by applying the Person-Environment fit theory. One would expect that this successive section will discuss the advantages of a disability in the labor market. One of these potential advantages could be, for example, when a person with Asperger's is hired because of his/her higher cognitive abilities. However, the existing literature on the benefits of disabilities in the labor market is, unfortunately, very scarce. Nevertheless, some recent studies have already shifted their attention to the positive aspects of employing people with disabilities.

Nevertheless, the positive aspects that are covered are not linked to the intrinsic qualities of the PWDs but are primarily indirect benefits for companies. For example, hiring a PWD may lead to an increased corporate image. One of the most extensive and complete research papers about these benefits is *'A Systematic Review of the Benefits of Hiring People with Disabilities'* of Lindsay et al. from 2018. In order to give a brief but clear overview of the advantages, this section is based on this paper.

Lindsay et al.'s (2018) synthesis of existing literature suggests that hiring employees with disabilities can lead to higher profitability for the employer because of an increased competitive advantage and/or because of cost-effectiveness. The competitive advantage is linked to certain benefits in the workplace and an increased and more satisfied customer base. The cost-effectiveness is due to reduced costs. The following paragraphs will elaborate on the elements related to competitive advantage and cost-effectiveness, depicted in Figure 4 below.

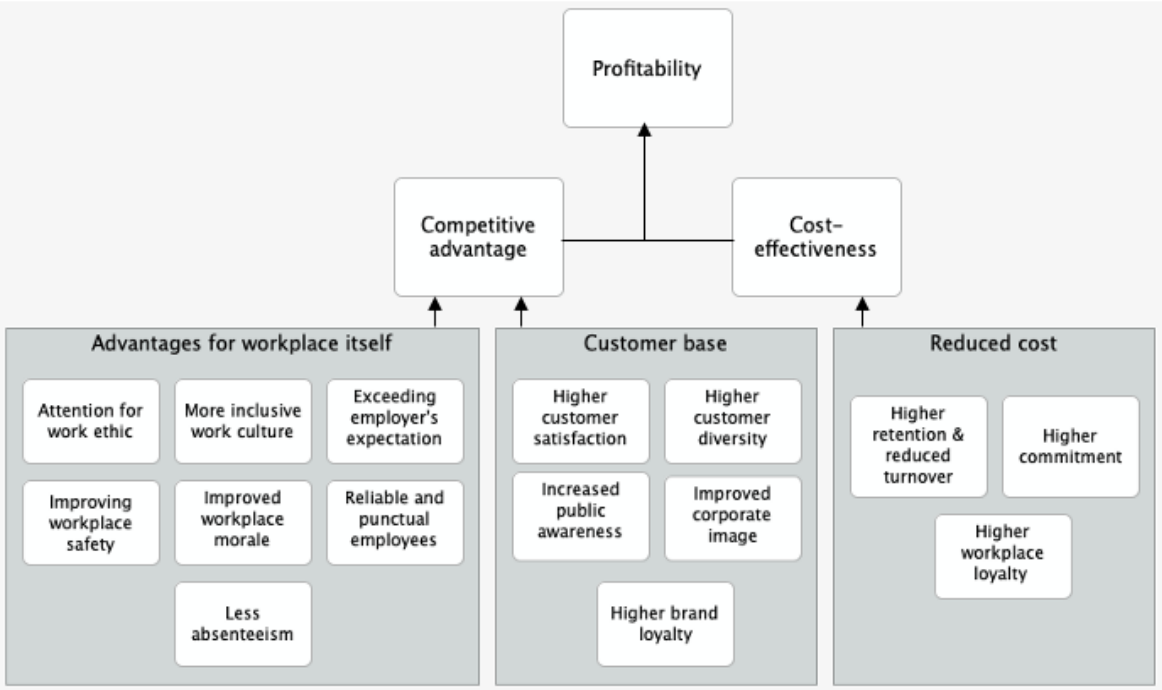

Figure 4. Advantages of employing PWDs (extension on Lindsay et al., 2018)

Hiring PWDs may lead to benefits for the workplace, which can contribute to a competitive advantage. This is reflected in findings of studies that show that PWDs often perform beyond their job functions in terms of attention to detail and work ethic (Friedner, 2015; Scott et al., 2017). Since PWDs sometimes need supportive workplace accommodations, several studies have shown that the inclusion of employees with disabilities even improves overall workplace safety. (e.g., Schartz et al., 2006; Kalargyrou, 2014). Furthermore, research has shown that PWDs have fewer work accidents than other employees (Kaletta et al., 2012).

Hiring PWDs can create a more inclusive work culture and increase awareness of the abilities of PWDs (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2014). According to Kalargyrou V. (2014), the advantages of increased ability awareness are improved performance of employees, increased psychological safety and trust in the workplace. Inclusive work culture benefits the co-worker partnerships and enhances the workplace well-being of all employees (Kalef et al., 2014). Moreover, studies show that the presence of PWDs in the company attributed to improved morale of the workforce (Hartnett et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2017; Schartz et al., 2006). Furthermore, workplace motivation and engagement of all employees may increase due to the employment of PWDs (Friedner, 2015; Kalargyrou, 2014). As mentioned before, engaged employees are a factor that can improve the competitive advantage of a company (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014).

In addition to the benefits to the workplace itself, hiring people with disabilities also has a positive impact on the company's customer base, which can contribute to a competitive advantage as well (Lindsay et al., 2018). In the first place, the diversity of the client base tends to increase, which was demonstrated in a study by Buciuniene (2010) on employing PWDs in a retail chain. What is striking in this regard is that the study shows that, for example, more customers with disabilities also visit retail stores because they are able to communicate with similar employees. Improving diversity can be seen as a competitive advantage, but it is also an opportunity to gain brand loyalty from customers who value inclusion (Henry et al., 2014). In addition to improving customer diversity, customer satisfaction also appeared to enhance due to the introduction of PWDs (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). Besides the positive impact on the customer base, employing workers with disabilities also strengthens corporate social responsibility and creates a more positive corporate image (Hartnett et al., 2011; Friedner, 2015). This improved image does not only create a more positive working environment but can also result in a competitive advantage (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014). A paper by Buciuniene (2010) shows that hiring PWDs increases public awareness of their abilities when they exercise a visual job e.g., a supermarket cashier. Additionally, Buciuniene observed improved social connections, workplace well-being, acceptance of and knowledge about PWDs.

The cost-effectiveness of employing PWDs may be, among other factors, due to various cost savings (Graffam et al., 2002). PWDs tend to have higher loyalty and are more committed to their employers (Schartz et al., 2006; Kalargyrou, 2014), which reduces the cost of rehiring and retraining new employees. This also leads to better retention and lower employee

turnover, which drives profitability as well (e.g., Hernandez & McDonald, 2010). PWDs also tend to be very reliable and punctual employees. Moreover, several studies indicate that they are even less absent from work and have a longer serving than their counterparts without a disability (e.g., Graffam et al., 2002; Hindle et al., 2010).

In addition to these lower costs, cost-effectiveness was also demonstrated in a 2002 study by Graffam et al., which found that more than two-thirds of employers surveyed recognized the overarching benefits of employing workers with disabilities outweighed the costs. This is in stark contrast to the negative perceptions that employers sometimes have about PWDs (e.g., Lengnick-Hall et al., 2008). However, these negative perceptions are not always justified. A case study with employers who have worked with PWDs shows that this new experience has made them question their stereotypes and misconceptions (Lindsay et al., 2014).

In sum, by hiring PWDs, companies may enhance profitability induced by a competitive advantage and cost-effectiveness. Elements that are responsible for the competitive advantage are, among others, a more positive company image, improved customer satisfaction, enhanced workplace safety, increased diversity, a more inclusive work culture and an improved morale. Reduced turnover rates and PWDs that exceed employer expectations may influence the cost-effectiveness of companies. It is important to note that most of these benefits of hiring PWDs are based on their indirect advantages for companies and not per se on their skills.

However, as Levesque (2005) demonstrates, the traditional hiring process aims to maximize the fit between the person and job. In other words, hiring an employee is based on their necessary skills for a specific job or task, not on indirect advantages. Hence, for PWDs, this is a severe disadvantage. As we have mentioned before in section 2.2.2., they are generally perceived as more absent, late, less committed, less productive and less trustworthy by employers and recruiters, while this is generally not true. Overall, employers and recruiters fail to see the direct benefits of hiring PWDs. This is not surprising, as PWDs' added value and skills for a job or task are underrepresented to non-existent in the current scientific literature. This Master's Dissertation will attempt to fill this gap by researching the potential direct advantages of disabilities in the labor market, using a Person-Job fit perspective.

3. Empirical Research

After outlining the context of the Belgian labor market for PWDs and presenting an overview of the existing literature on both their advantages and disadvantages, this section will cover the empirical study. The purpose is to gain more knowledge about how people with disabilities can excel in their jobs by providing an answer to the two research questions of this dissertation. To this end, we conducted an empirical study consisting of two major sequential parts, each of which attempted to answer a specific research question.

First, a media analysis of published Dutch-language press articles was conducted with the research goal of discovering possible benefits and patterns that could answer the first research question, "Are employees able to excel at work or in their jobs because of their disability? If so, because of what?". We found the analysis of press articles to be a convenient and efficient way to screen texts, observations and testimonies. Moreover, media analysis allowed us to use thousands of cases that had already been discovered and investigated by journalists, allowing us to work with much more data than if we had to find and document cases ourselves. From all the available data, a large number of cases proved relevant to our research.

Next, the second part of the empirical study sought not only to confirm the results of the previous media analysis but also to answer the second research question, "Are there certain requirements in order for an employee with a disability to use it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage?". The benefits linked to having a disability that emerged from our media analysis were validated through in-depth interviews with PWDs. The interviews also examined whether there are requirements to use the disability as an advantage. During these interviews, several questions were asked that explored the exact situations in which a disability can be considered a benefit. In-depth interviews were chosen as the interview type, where the interviewees were people with different disabilities, each working in a different industry. These interviews were conducted online through the video software ZOOM. After the interviews were transcribed, a thorough analysis of all the answers was carried out, which allowed us to formulate several conclusions and answer the research question.

In the following sections, we will explain the data collection, method of analysis, results of the media analysis, the research approach and the interviews' results.

3.1. Media analysis

The structure used in this first empirical section is based on some previous studies in which similar methods were used for media analysis (Grafström & Windell, 2011; Kjaergaard et al., 2011). The media analysis is composed of three major sequential steps. First, we explain how we collected all the data by selecting relevant news articles from popular Flemish and Dutch newspapers and magazines. Subsequently, we explain how we used this collected data to analyze the selected articles using an inductive coding procedure. In the last part, the results of this media analysis are presented and discussed.

3.1.1. Data Collection

Database and -sources

An analysis of news media was conducted to understand better whether people's disabilities are sometimes an advantage rather than a disadvantage in their profession. Furthermore, if there are advantages, what exactly is meant by these? Our data sources consist of published articles and testimonials from various Dutch-language newspapers and magazines.

GoPress, an online press database, was used to collect the abovementioned data. GoPress contains over 28 million news articles from printed and online sources since 1988. It is Belgium's leading media research and monitoring service, which Flemish universities and colleges have licensed to offer all their students and faculties the possibility of freely accessing the publications and archives. This allowed us to access the archives of 22 newspapers and 47 magazines. In GoPress, newspaper articles become available with a delay of two days after publication, magazine articles after seven days (GoPress, 2021).

To keep the study doable yet useful, we limited our data collection to Flemish newspapers (11) and magazines (18), along with 14 Dutch newspapers. This means that we neglected all French- and German-language data sources. In addition, we also did not take into account publications that were not included in the license mentioned above and to which an additional cost was linked. Our data collection covered 'all archives.' This means that we searched the database for all articles from the period 1988 to 2020. However, more recent articles were used to collect data. The reason for this is because there were many more recent sources available in the database.

A convenient feature of GoPress is that there is a search function that allows searching the database using keywords and logical operators. This made it possible to set up several searches to search the database for a specific disability, discussed in more detail in the next section.

Search criteria

Our research focuses on finding benefits of disabilities. In order to do so, it was necessary to find enough articles for a given disability to detect potential patterns. As mentioned before, only Dutch-language newspapers and magazines that are fully available in the GoPress database were considered.

Moreover, the number of potential disabilities is vast, so it was necessary to limit our search to a predefined number of constraints. The selection can be divided into two subgroups, being physical and mental disabilities. The choice was made to examine some of the more common and better-known disabilities. We chose to use Dutch keywords for the following disabilities to incorporate in our research: blind, deaf, prostheses, MS, Autism, Asperger's, Dyslexia, ADHD and high sensitivity. Furthermore, the selection is complemented by the general terms 'mental disabilities' and 'physical disabilities'. To clarify, autism and Asperger's are both autism spectrum disorders; this encompasses a range of neurodevelopment conditions. But unlike autism, the delay in language development and cognitive development is not significant for people with Asperger's (Segal, 2010). The keywords are used in the search queries, which will be explained in the following paragraph.

Since the database contains an extensive collection of articles, it was necessary to do targeted filtering to find relevant articles. Thus, in addition to the disability, the search query included conjugations of 'work' and 'benefits' in order to increase the odds of finding articles in which PWDs benefit from their disability in a professional context. In order to conduct targeted searches in the database and remain consistent across all disabilities, we use the following structure for our search query: [Disability] AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten). Where [Disability] has been replaced by the disabilities we researched (see the previous paragraph). The words 'AND' and 'OR' are interpreted as logical operators by the database. This means, in this case, that the database only returns articles that contain at least three search terms provided by the search query, because of the 'AND' operator. The disability must be mentioned in the article. Furthermore, at least one of the following keywords must be included in the article: 'werk', 'job' or 'jobs'.

The same holds for 'voordeel', 'voordelen', 'troef', 'troeven', 'talent' and 'talenten'. The logical operator 'OR' is used for keywords that can be seen as synonyms or related keywords. Benefits and talent are no synonyms but are used together in an 'OR' relationship because dividing them by an 'AND' operator could reduce the number of results too much.

A disability can contain more than one search query. This is the case for the disability [deaf], for which the keywords are [hardhorend] and [slechthorend]. The reason for this is because the keyword 'deaf' (just like the word 'blind') is used a lot in sayings and idioms, e.g., "Tragedy could have been prevented if the warnings hadn't fallen on deaf ears." (Farlex, 2015). Using these keywords in a search query yields thousands of irrelevant articles, which is solved by using alternative keywords for these disabilities.

The search queries specified in the previous section are entered one by one into the search function of the GoPress database. This yields various amounts of articles, ranging from a minimum of 13 articles for [hardhorend] and a maximum of 1316 articles for [Autisme OR ASS OR autismespectrumstoornis].

Selection criteria

Every search query yields a different number of articles as mentioned in the previous paragraph. To know which articles are relevant enough to be included in the selection, we read each of them independently and assess individually whether an article is relevant and may be included. An article is relevant if it encloses at least one benefit directly linked to the disability included in the search query.

The articles that are judged relevant by only one of us are discussed on their relevance until consensus is reached and are included or rejected for the final selection. Only articles that are judged relevant by both of us are included in the final selection.

Important to mention is that some articles can discuss more than one benefit or/and disability. This means that if an article includes multiple cases, we judged each case separately in analogy with the previous paragraph. For example, an article about autism can contain five cases, of which three are relevant and approved in the selection.

For certain disabilities, e.g., with regards to physical disability in general or people with prostheses, no articles made it through the selection procedure. This means that these disabilities will not be considered further in our research.

Results of Selection

The search queries provided us with 3812 articles that correspond with the search criteria, shown in Table 1 below. There is a lot of variability in number of articles over the different disabilities, ranging from 1316 articles for autism to a minimum of 47 for deaf. After applying the selection criteria, a total of 81 articles was considered relevant, with a success ratio of 2,12%. However, for certain disabilities (blind, deaf and MS), very few articles are retained after selection, respectively 3, 5 and 1.

Disabilities	Results from database	Selection	Success ratio
Mental disability in general	1106	8	0,72%
Autism	1316	26	1,98%
Asperger	130	11	8,46%
Dyslexia	349	8	2,29%
ADHD	618	9	1,46%
High sensitive	125	10	8,00%
Blind	68	3	4,41%
Deaf	47	5	10,64%
MS	53	1	1,89%
Total	**3812**	**81**	**2,12%**

Table 1. Number of articles and the success ratio after selection

3.1.2. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the resulting data set and find possible benefits and patterns of people with disabilities in performing their jobs, an inductive coding procedure was applied to all selected news articles. Because we opted for inductive coding, we read all the texts in order to discover, based on our interpretations, specific themes (Chandra & Shang, 2019). So,

before the coding process began, we had not agreed on what themes or categories the articles should be analyzed based on.

In doing so, we use several methods that also appear in other studies with a similar research design, drawing on several of Locke's (2001) recommendations for the systematic coding of textual data (e.g., Kjaergaard et al., 2011). We followed a five-step sequential approach to analyze the 81 articles that were deemed relevant during data collection. These steps are discussed below.

Step 1. Our procedure began with the two of us, each separately and independently, reading each selected article very carefully and marking the fragments of text that we thought were relevant to our research. This resulted in one or more highlighted excerpts for each case that occurred in an article. For both researchers combined, this amounted to 318 highlighted pieces of text across 81 articles. An excerpt usually refers specifically to a situation in which an employee with a disability excels and in which his/her disability thus becomes an advantage. Often these are testimonials from employees themselves who tell of their experiences at work or how a journalist describes a similar situation. It was decided to copy these highlighted pieces of text from the article to isolate the most important parts. Then each of these pieces was logged separately and linked to the corresponding article.

Step 2. The next step was to find a way to code these excerpts with terms or phrases that attempted to capture their essence. To this end, we collectively drafted a set of two questions whose answers attempted to represent the most relevant parts of the highlighted text and summarized the most important information for later use in the analysis. The posed questions were: "*What benefits does the person have?*" and "*Does this particular person truly excel?*". We proceeded independently by rereading all the excerpts with the corresponding article to find an appropriate answer for each case's questions. It is important to note that the answer to these questions, which we call preliminary codes, is still very close to the article's original text. Only in the subsequent steps, will these be transformed into more conceptual and abstract codes.

Step 3. After providing answers to the questions of all cases, we proceeded to the next step. We gradually classified the responses into different categories based on why a person excels because of his/her disability. To do this, we first examined the preliminary codes of a given case to find one or more different words or terms that best encompassed why a person can

excel. It is important to note here that this was done without any prior agreement, as we wanted to do this as unbiased as possible. Thus, synonyms or overlaps might have occurred between each of our terms (e.g., the term 'Focus' has considerable overlap with the term 'Concentration'). To remedy this and strive for consistency, after individual coding, all terms were compared. After reaching mutual agreement, it was decided to create unique categories that best fit the terms and use them for recoding. This approach is also reflected in Jensen's (2002) manual on the qualitative research process.

This led to the creation of 10 unique categories, which are: 'Higher working pace', 'Creativity', 'Repetitive', 'Accurate', 'Engagement', 'Enterprising, 'Flexible', 'Empathy', 'Cognitively strong' and 'Focus', which we will call the first-order codes. These codes are short terms that name the reason for or way of excelling. Not every question was always answered because sometimes the information needed to do so was not available in the article.

To illustrate this first-order coding, the preliminary codes of an excerpt from a given article were as follows: 'The employees work much faster and with as much quality as other, regular employees.' and 'Yes, the article mentions that the individuals in question excel and work faster than ordinary workers.'. Based on these codes, we first chose the terms "Works faster/higher work rate" and "High work rate" separately, i.e., before the mutual discussion, because it reveals why the person excels. Then, any inconsistencies and overlaps were resolved, finally resulting in the creation of the first-order term: 'Higher working pace'. Table 2 on the following page shows some highlighted pieces of text from different cases, illustrating how their preliminary codes, amongst others, contributed to the creation of the ten first-order terms. Note that all the excerpts are in Dutch because we examined Dutch-language newspapers and magazines. To avoid confusion, these were not translated, and the original text was maintained. It should be noted that the individual codes of the two researchers before their mutual agreement are not shown.

First-order coding		
Posed questions: 1. "What benefits does the person have?", 2. "*Does this particular person truly excel?*"		
Highlighted fragments	*Preliminary codes for a particular article*	*First-order code*
"Er was er ook een firma die toegaf dat het werk dat ze deze mensen liet doen, sneller gebeurde dan bij hun gewone arbeiders. Wij werken gewoon sneller en kwalitatiever voor manuele repetitieve taken. Dat is ons grote voordeel. Bedrijven moeten focussen op de competenties in plaats van op onze beperking. Dan pas ontstaan er extra kansen."	1. "The employees work much faster and with as much quality as other, regular employees." 2. "Yes, the article mentions that the individuals in question excel and work faster than ordinary workers."	Higher working pace
"Wat als ADHD geen probleem is, maar net de manier om in onze complexe wereld te gedijen? Je bent dan wel hyper, maar studies tonen ook aan dat je creatiever bent en goed out of the box kunt denken."/"... de vaststelling dat kinderen met ADHD creatiever zijn dan hun leeftijdgenoten werd twintig jaar geleden al gedaan"/"... cognitieve inhibitie'. Terwijl in een 'normaal' brein een aantal filters erop toezien dat enkel de beste ideeën doordringen tot het bewustzijn, zijn die filters er in het brein van een ADHD-patiënt veel minder. Daardoor kunnen ze met verrassende kronkels komen, waar andere mensen niet meteen aan zouden denken. "	1. "Cognitive inhibition / Out of the box thinking / More associative with language" 2. "Yes, emphasis is on the fact that these people can do things just better"	Creativity
"Een werkje dat zich altijd maar blijft herhalen, maar deze mensen vinden dat niet erg. Voor ons zijn zij de juiste personen op de juiste plaats. Ze blijven aan hetzelfde tempo werken en halen zo het beste resultaat. Dat kunnen we niet van elke jobstudent zeggen."	1. "Doing concentrated repetitive work" 2. "Yes, a lot of repeatable tasks they just do much better"	Repetitive
"Het is wel zo dat er in een groep mensen met autisme vaker mensen met een bepaalde piekvaardigheid voorkomen, maar dat wil niet zeggen dat iedereen met autisme zo'n piekvaardigheid heeft. Bovendien hebben heel wat mensen met autisme niet per se nood aan veel sociaal contact, waardoor ze zich terugtrekken en de tijd hebben zich ergens in te verdiepen en expert te worden, legt Roeyers uit. Hun hersenen functioneren dusdanig dat ze doorgaans heel analytisch en nauwkeurig te werk kunnen gaan"	1. "Can work very analytically, in detail and accurately." 2. "Yes, stated that their brains function in such a way that they can usually be very analytical and accurate"	Accurate
"De vlijt en toewijding die deze mensen aan de dag leggen, kan gerust als voorbeeld dienen voor het hele bedrijf."	1. "They work extremely driven and motivated" 2. "Yes, they are better placed than anyone else to fill the vacancies"	Engagement
"Kinderen met dyslexie lijken later opvallend vaak succesvol in wat ze ondernemen./Bovendien hebben dyslectische volwassenen vaak een heleboel moeilijkheden overwonnen op school. En leggen ze zich extra toe op talenten die niets met taal te maken hebben. Dat alles samen betekent dat uw collega met dyslexie een enorme voorsprong heeft op u op het vlak van lateraal, probleemoplossend denken."	1. "Coherent thinking skills, time-based thinking skills, episodic thinking, and spatial thinking" 2. "Yes, the article mentions that the employee with dyslexia has a huge advantage over other employees because of his disability."	Enterprising
"Ook tonen studies aan dat personen die de diagnose ADHD kregen zich veel beter kunnen aanpassen aan veranderende situaties."	1. "Can think in differents way and is better at adapting in new situations" 2. "Yes, emphasis of the article is on the fact that these people can do things just better"	Flexible
"Hoogsensitieve werknemers beschikken vaak over een sterk empatisch vermogen en een goede intuïtie en zijn meestal goed in menselijke contacten. Allemaal troeven die je goed van pas komen als je bijvoorbeeld een job zoekt in de dienstverlenende sector of in de verkoop."	1. "They have strong empathy and intuition. They are also usually good at human contact." 2. "Yes, employees excel in their jobs"	Empathy
"'Ieder individu is verschillend, sommigen hebben een ongelooflijke capaciteit om informatie te onthouden, na te denken op een hoog niveau van detail en verdieping, of blinken uit in wiskunde of programmeren', aldus Mary Ellen Smith, die het heeft over 'een reservoir van talenten'."	1. "Person is able to think very analytically and logically and has a phenomenal memory." 2. "Yes, article mentions that the persons in question are "better" than "ordinary" employees"	Cognitively strong
"Zo wordt er software getest waarbij de concentratie hoog moet blijven..." "Metingen tonen aan dat werknemers van Passwerk, die meestal gedetacheerd worden naar de klanten, gemiddeld beter presteren dan hun valide collega's, en dit dankzij hun oog voor detail, scherpe focus."	1. "Having an eye for detail, sharp focus and high resilience" 2. "Person does excel"	Focus

Table 2. Illustration of the creation of first-order codes

Step 4. In this step, we search overall trends or patterns for each disability. As each case has one or more first-order codes, we have summed up the number of times a first-order code is appointed to the cases of a certain disability. Each researcher did this independently. For example, in the autism cases, the first-order code 'accurate' has been appointed 19 times by researcher 2 of the 53 first-order codes he assigned (Table 3). This means that in 35,8% of the autism cases, the first order code, 'accurate' was seen as the reason why a person excels in their job according to the analysis of researcher 2.

Because the analysis of both researchers had some differences, we chose to take the sum of the first order codes per researcher and per disability. The point of interest is in how many cases a certain first order is related to a certain disability. Therefore, a percentage notation is preferred. The results for the disability 'Autism' are illustrated in Table 3 below. To illustrate, the percentage 13,4% (at the bottom left corner of Table 3) can be interpreted as follows: of all cases that made it through the selection procedure, in 13,4% there is an individual with autism who has a benefit that is induced by his talent 'Focus'.

Researcher 1 • First-order codes for AUTISM										
Focus	Creativity	Repetitive	Accurate	Engaged	Enterprising	Flexible	Empathy	Cognitively strong	Faster pace	Sum
7	2	12	22	7	0	0	0	6	3	59
12%	3%	20%	37%	12%	0%	0%	0%	10%	5%	100%
Researcher 2 • First-order codes for AUTISM										
Focus	Creativity	Repetitive	Accurate	Engaged	Enterprising	Flexible	Empathy	Cognitively strong	Faster pace	Sum
8	1	11	19	5	0	0	0	5	4	53
15,1%	1,9%	20,8%	35,8%	9,4%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	9,4%	7,5%	100,0%
Cumulative • First-order codes for AUTISM										
Focus	Creativity	Repetitive	Accurate	Engaged	Enterprising	Flexible	Empathy	Cognitively strong	Faster pace	Sum
15	3	23	41	12	0	0	0	11	7	112
13,4%	2,7%	20,5%	36,6%	10,7%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	9,8%	6,3%	100,0%

Table 3. Results of first-order codes for the articles about Autism

Based on these first-order codes, we associated second-order codes per disability. These second-order codes can be seen as the most occurring reasons why the disability induces a benefit. The second-order codes for a given disability are limited to three first-order codes and are based on the percentages of the first-order codes. The following criteria is used to assign a second-order code to a disability: [20% ,40%[, [40%, 60%[and [60%, 100%] indicated by respectively *, ** and ***. For example, for autism the first-order code 'Accurate' occurs in 36,6% of the cases of autism. Therefore, 'accurate' is used as a second-order code

for autism that belongs in the first bracket [20%, 40%[. This second-order code is indicated as 'Accurate*'; note that it is indicated with one asterisk. The resulting second-order codes can be found in Table 4 below.

Step 5. The main results of our media analysis are shown in Table 4, it shows that some disabilities can be linked to specific benefits. Furthermore, our research indicated, by using thresholds, to which degree the second-order codes occur per disability.

However, we do have to note that we proportionally found a lot more cases about autism and Asperger's; in contrast for MS, blind and deaf there were only 1, 5 and 3 cases respectively. All other disabilities had at least 8 cases that contributed to the analysis. This influences the validity of the results because in the case of MS, only one first order code was assigned (Empathy). This means that the second-order code for MS is empathy with 100% occurrence. Of course, this is an outlier because other disabilities have more cases improving the validity of those results. The overall conclusion can be found in section 3.1.3.

Physical	Second order code	#first-codes
Blind	Focus*** & Empathy*	8
Deaf	Focus*** & Empathy*	9
MS	Empathy***	2
Mental	**Second order code**	
Mental disorder general	Accurate* & Repetitive*	46
Autism	Accurate* & Repetitive*	112
Asperger	Accurate* & Focus*	43
Dyslexia	Creativity** & Enterprising*	21
ADHD	Creativity* & Enterprising*	37
Highly sensitive	Creativity* & Accurate* & Empathy*	40
* between 20% and 40%, ** between 40% and 60%, *** more than 60%		

Table 4. Second-order codes

3.1.3. Findings

In the preceding section, we attempted to answer our research question: *"Are employees able to excel at work or in their jobs because of their disabilities? If so, by what?"* by analyzing news articles in the media. Based on our findings from the media analysis, we can conclude that there are people that excel because of their disability.

Furthermore, we have found that these benefits can be categorized using second-order codes and can be linked to certain disabilities. For example, '*accurate*' and '*repetitive*' are seen as the two most occurring reasons why people with autism have an advantage at work (mentioned in respectively 36,6% and 20,5% of the analyzed text fragments). We used second-order terms to code the most common reasons. These second-order codes for all disabilities can be found in Table 4 on the previous page.

3.1.4. Limitations

Although the analysis of press articles was a convenient and efficient way of analyzing texts, observations and testimonies, unfortunately it also revealed several limitations.

First, we only analyzed Dutch-language articles, excluding foreign-language articles. Moreover, as we used the online press database 'GoPress' to find articles, our data collection was limited to the newspapers and magazines available on it. Furthermore, only publications covered by our license from Ghent University were used, thereby ignoring articles for which additional costs were applicable. Another limitation is the fact that we only searched for a selection of about ten common and well-known disabilities and thus did not examine many other disabilities. The variability in the number of cases per disability also leads to some limitations. As mentioned earlier, for the disabilities MS, deaf and blind, only a few cases in the media were found. While for autism and Asperger's, numerous cases were discovered. The reason could be that there are more cases where people with autism and/or Asperger's benefit from their disability than someone with MS or deafness. The former may occur if the population of people with autism or Asperger's is larger than the population who are deaf, blind, or have MS and that these populations are proportionally represented in the media. Another explanation is that a particular disability is more likely to benefit than other disabilities. In addition, there may be a preference in the media to cover certain types of disabilities.

3.2. Interviews

The objective of this second and final part of the empirical research is to both confirm the results of the media analysis and to answer the second research question, *"Are there* certain *requirements in order for an employee with a disability to use it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage?*". In order to do so, we opted to survey the findings and experiences of several people with disabilities during a series of in-depth interviews. In order to gather as much information as possible, we chose to interview three people whom each had a different disability and a different job. Consequently, our questions were answered from different contexts and perspectives in each of the different interviews. As a result, we were able to gather a broad and rich collection of answers.

First, we will explain the interview methodology by elaborating on the design, setting and recruitment of the participants. This is followed by a section on data collection, which explains exactly how we conducted the interviews, using a questionnaire to collect all the responses. Then, in the second part, guided by our research questions, we will draw various conclusions that we can derive from the answers. We will then conclude this section with a discussion of the study's limitations and the need for further research.

3.2.1. Interview Methodology

Design

As mentioned in the introduction, we chose to conclude our empirical research using a semi-structured methodology to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with people who have different disabilities and work in different companies. The interviews were conducted between February and April 2021, and each lasted an average of 50 minutes. The interviews had the objective to question the participants' work experiences and thereby identify any advantages that were caused by the participant's corresponding disability.

It also sought to identify the exact circumstances, situations, or instances in which these benefits apply, and any requirements attached. In some cases, topics were also discussed that might serve as support for possible future research. This will be discussed in the final section.

Setting

Participants were contacted in advance via email to brief them on the upcoming interview's purpose and approach. Later, emails were also used to find a convenient date and time with the participants to conduct the interview. The choice was made to conduct the interviews online for practical reasons. The participants could easily schedule the interviews because they did not have to travel, and for precautionary reasons related to Covid-19. This meant that both participants and interviewers did not have to leave their familiar surroundings and could therefore conduct the interviews in their comfort zone. The video software ZOOM was used to both interview the participants and record the conversation. Participants received a link in advance that directed them to the scheduled interview at the appointed time.

Recruitment of Participants

The in-depth interviews were conducted with three individuals who had sufficient knowledge and experience about coping with their disability at work to provide relevant answers to our questions. We chose to use a convenience sample to contact people in our network or our supervisor's network. We succeeded in recruiting participants with different types of disabilities who also each did different types of work. This ensured that the interviews were conducted with individuals who had different backgrounds and other experiences so that as much data as possible could be collected. As mentioned above, participants were contacted in advance via email, in which they were first informed of the purpose of our study. Once they agreed to be interviewed, all practical details were also communicated to them through this means. During the interviews, two mental and one physical disability were examined. The first person interviewed has Autism and Dyslexia, the second is diagnosed with ADHD, and the third is deaf. The participants' jobs are respectively senior security engineer in a leading e-commerce firm, an entrepreneur and a director of a socio-cultural organization. After all interviews were conducted, the names of the participants were anonymized to protect their identity during our further research. This was also clearly agreed with the participants beforehand. No compensation was given to the participants.

Data collection

Since the three interviews dealt with different disabilities and the fact that the backgrounds of the participants were very diverse, it was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. Some questions were predetermined and posed to all participants, while other questions were spontaneous to gather as much relevant information for the two research questions as

possible. First, we inquired about the person's education and current work by asking questions, such as "*Can you describe your current employment and function?*". Next to the former, there were also questions to know more about the person's disability. These preliminary questions sketched a general picture about the participants and made it possible to ask in-depth questions based on their background and past experiences. An example of an in-depth question is the following, "*You said, I regret it for not asking for adjustments from the employer. What would have to change that you could work more optimally or quietly?*". The complete questionnaire with the preliminary questions can be found in appendix C.

All interviews were conducted in Dutch and lasted for about 50 minutes. For the deaf participant, a sign language interpreter was present. This was necessary as it was the only possible way of communication. All interviews were recorded, with the respondents' consent, and transcribed completely; these are only available to the researchers to protect the participants' privacy.

3.2.2. Data analysis

The interviews were intended both to confirm the results of the earlier media analysis (pertaining to the first research question: *"Are employees able to excel at work or in their jobs because of their disability? If so, by what?"*) and to answer the second research question. Once the data collection was finished and the transcription of all interviews conducted was completed, the analysis of the transcribed texts could begin. The method used for this analysis will first be introduced. Following this, the analysis conducted will be summarized and the findings we have been able to draw will be discussed.

This section is divided according to the two research questions because, as explained in the previous chapter, the interview questionnaires used were also structured in this manner. All private information about the interviewees (e.g., their names or the names of their employers) will be anonymized to protect their privacy. We conclude this chapter with a discussion of the limitations of this part of the study and the need for further research on certain topics that came up during the interviews.

Method of Analysis

The analysis began with a thorough rereading of the three transcribed interviews to enable the researchers to recall the moment the interview was conducted. Once this was done, the two researchers agreed to classify the most important pieces from the interviews into three categories. The first, more general category covered everything related to important and rather personal information, i.e., exact disability, education, type of job, et cetera. The second category contained relevant pieces that helped to confirm the results of the previous media analysis and thus also helped to answer the first research question. The third and final category included all pieces of text that made a relevant contribution to answering the second research question.

To divide the important pieces of responses from the transcribed interviews into these three categories, three corresponding colors were chosen with which the two researchers, independently marked pieces of text. These markings were compared afterwards to reach a consensus on which pieces were usable and could be used for analysis.

Research question 1

The first research question sought to determine whether employees may excel at certain times during their work due to their disability and to what exactly this may then be attributed. The media analysis confirmed this and showed that the occurring benefits could be categorized by second-order codes and thus associated with certain disabilities. In the following section, we will show that these findings were also clearly confirmed during the interviews. This will be discussed separately for each participant.

The entrepreneur with ADHD was asked, among other things, if there were certain benefits to be gained from his disability. He answered very affirmatively, emphasizing that his disability can be seen as the source of both his energy and creativity and of his impulsiveness. About his creativity, he said, *"I am sure that because of ADHD, you can be much more creative and come to much more creative solutions.".* As an entrepreneur, he also found it very beneficial that his ADHD helped him take risks more fearlessly. This became clear when he spoke about the way he makes decisions. He said: *"And there, in that being fearless, that is where my ADHD helps me tremendously because ADHD causes you to have no inhibitions.".* We see a clear similarity with the media analysis results, where the terms *"creativity"* and

"entrepreneurial" were also categorized as advantages for people with ADHD. In addition, the entrepreneur said, *"ADHD makes you unable to concentrate for more than 3 hours, but on the other hand, it also makes you able to concentrate very hard on something. I can become obsessed with something. I am very good at short spurts of concentration".* This quote shows that while he is not good at concentrating on the same thing for long periods, which could be seen as more of a disadvantage of ADHD, he does excel at concentrating deeply for short, consecutive periods. According to the entrepreneur, this enables him still to solve complex business problems in a creative way.

During the interview with the security engineer who had been diagnosed with a severe form of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and a mild form of Dyslexia, it was revealed that he was very good at solving complex issues and problems. He gave very profound and accurate results for most of the problems encountered during his work. According to him, this clearly distinguished him from his colleagues, who were usually unable to do this and sometimes could not even follow his train of thought when he tried to explain something. He claims that he is almost always a few steps ahead of his colleagues during his reasoning. The engineer said: *"I think there are two things that I am pretty strong at, which are abstract thinking and reasoning and also that I can focus for a long time."* This makes it clear that both his high focus and abstract reasoning can be seen as explanatory factors for his ability to solve complex problems profoundly and accurately. From this interview, we can conclude that the results of our media analysis for someone with autism spectrum disorder can be confirmed for the benefits '*Focus'* and *'Accuracy.'* However, no mentions were made during the interview that can be linked to creativity and repetitiveness.

The deaf director of a socio-cultural organization did not bring up many important benefits during her interview. Although she told us that she is never bothered by background noise, she did not mention whether she can benefit from it. However, she did talk about the fact that she has several deaf colleagues within her organization who derive certain benefits from their disability. She pointed out that some of her colleagues are tremendously strong at concentrating on particular tasks because they cannot be distracted by sounds. The director said that deaf people can sometimes be compared to autistic people in terms of concentration and can also excel at e.g., programming. Hence, using the stories the director told us about her deaf colleagues, we see that there is a similarity with the media analysis in this third interview, where *'Focus'* was also categorized as an advantage for deaf people.

Research question 2

Our second research question answers the following question: *"Are there certain requirements in order for an employee with a disability to use it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage?".* Therefore, in the interviews our objective was to find the requirements that are crucial for the respondent to make use of a potential advantage of their disability.

For the entrepreneur, it was clear from the interview that he needs his freedom to function well. This is based on the following statement he made: *"I could never in my life work for a boss. No, I really wouldn't. I'm very, very opinionated. I'm very persistent. That also sounds very conceited, but I always want to get my way."* The creative and impulsive decisions he makes throughout the day can't be made if he would work as a subordinate in a hierarchic or bureaucratic environment. About the former, he said, *"Being completely free, I need that for my creativity. If I'm not completely free, then my creativity isn't going to come out as strong, then I'm going to feel truncated and I'm not going to be challenged at all".* Being an entrepreneur enables him to use his advantages, i.e., energetic, creativity and impulsivity, of having ADHD to the fullest.

Moreover, he acknowledges, as mentioned earlier, that he cannot focus on the same thing for more than two hours. Thus, he prefers to do things quickly and efficiently because, despite the above, he can still concentrate well for short periods. We can illustrate this with the ability to perform short-focus sprints. In order to do so, he asks his employees to do preparatory work so that he can make multiple decisions in a short time. He said the following: *"To turn a disadvantage, that I can't concentrate well for more than two hours on the same thing, into an advantage by actually letting other people' deep dive'. Then again, to make use of the fact that I am very good at heavy popping by actually just completing it in half an hour".* We can conclude that this respondent with ADHD does not fit in a traditional subordinate job, something that he acknowledges, and that being an entrepreneur is the ideal solution. As an entrepreneur, he has the freedom to let his creativity, energy and impulsivity thrive to the fullest. Furthermore, he suppresses his disadvantage of not focusing for a long time by outsourcing the research and preparatory work and by only making the decisions at the end.

Our second respondent, the security engineer with ASD and dyslexia, has the benefit of an improved focus and better accuracy in his work. However, in his youth he was taught extra social skills at his school, such as talking to people, how to go to a shop etc.

During the interview, he said: *"Then you are really taught your social skills. How to do the shopping, how to talk, how to... That's really learning how to live ".* These skills were also necessary to function in a professional environment. Furthermore, during his youth and at the beginning of his career, he became more aware of his needs for predictability and control. The literal words from the engineer are: *"It's mostly about control. Control is something abstract, predictability is probably a better word. Knowing what's going to happen the next 5 min, the next half hour, next day, next week, next month.".* He also stated that during his first job, the work was not well defined and that often work and social are combined, factors that are not ideal for a person with ASD. About his former employer, he said the following: *"When I first started working at X, the joke was pretty much that it is a bad idea to have someone with ASD working in such an environment. The environment is complex, the work is not well defined, often work and social is an important perspective".* On his current job, the focus is more on getting the work done, no-nonsense meetings, and attempting to solve problems directly. This is beneficial for him, as he gets a list of what should be done, and for the rest, he gets complete freedom to solve the problems.

The last respondent, a completely deaf director, did not benefit a lot from her disability. The main reason was that she has problems with communication when there is no sign language interpreter available. She said the following when she was talking about online sign-language interpreters, *"If you want to call someone you suddenly see that I have to wait my turn and then I have place 3 in a line, but it can take an hour. And that's not practical and workable if you want to make a quick phone call ".* Sign- and written language are the only ways to communicate for her. For the former, a sign language interpreter is necessary if the receiver cannot interpret and talk in sign language. She pointed out that most disabled people do not experience this communication problem to the same extent as deaf people. This is a severe drawback in a professional context. About this, she said: *"Most people with disabilities can often still communicate, can talk and listen, can listen to and watch the radio and television. Deaf people can't do that and that's something you always have to keep in mind".* She also acknowledged that verbal communication is a real burden that can only be overcome using a sign language interpreter. In Flanders, the sign language interpreters are only available during office hours, and often there is a queue before someone can access them. For example, if someone wants to call someone at 11:00, the person should have made an appointment with the sign language interpreter service. Otherwise, the possibility exists that the person must wait for more than half an hour before a sign language interpreter is available. The drawback of being deaf –difficult communication – is thus hard to overcome in her case.

To summarize, two out of three participants have an advantage because of their disability. Their interviews suggest that they do not experience severe disadvantages at work. The entrepreneur has turned the traits of ADHD that are often considered negative to an advantage. He can use his energy and impulsivity to the fullest, which would probably not be the case if he would be an employee. The second participant with ASD and dyslexia has learned to overcome his lack of social skills and now works in an environment where the emphasis is on the work that needs to be done. He is given the freedom to solve it independently. Lastly, the deaf participant clearly mentioned that communication is a disadvantage that is difficult to overcome.

Therefore, we conclude that, in our cases, there is often a requirement before an employee with a disability can use the advantage linked to their disability. The requirement is that the drawbacks of their disability, that can impact their job performance, may not be too dominant. In the fourth chapter, conclusions and further research, our findings are also related to the previously discussed and used Person-Environment fit theory.

3.2.3. Limitations

Despite being very rich in information, interviews have some limitations. The first is that interviews are very personal, and therefore caution is advised to generalize the conclusion to a larger population. Furthermore, the three respondents each have a different disability (deaf, ASD & dyslexia, and ADHD) as this was part of the research design to have some heterogeneity in the results. However, caution is advised with generalizations both within the different disabilities and for the general disabled population.

In addition, it is important to note that the effect of online interviewing is sometimes debated because it has its pros and cons. However, this holds for all interview methods. According to Stewart & Williams (2005), online interaction with a webcam is comparable for detecting non-verbal and social cues as in real-life interactions. On the contrary, Janghorban et al. (2014) discuss the limitations of online interviews, as it can influence body language observation. Next to the latter, participants' concentration and thus responses may be influenced if they are not used to online communication. This means that there are contradictory conclusions about the effect of online tools to conduct an interview in the literature.
We did not notice any significant drawbacks during the online interviews, also we presume that the interviews would have gone similarly had they been conducted physically.

All three respondents already have advanced careers, which may bias the results. Lastly, no specific requirements were made to include people of different social classes, and demographic factors in the interviews.

4. Conclusion and further research

This Master's Dissertation sought to answer two research questions through an empirical, two-part study: "*Are employees able to excel at work or in their jobs because of their disability? If so, because of what?*" and "*Are there certain requirements in order for an employee with a disability to use it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage*?". In order to draw the context for this, this dissertation begins by defining the term "disability", describing the current labor market situation for people with disabilities in Belgium, and introducing the Person-Environment fit theory. The latter is used to structure the literature review and is linked to the conclusions from the empirical research. Since the purpose of our research questions is to explore possible advantages of people with disabilities, the literature review first begins by providing an overview of the disadvantages that people with disabilities experience in the labor market. This is also the main focus of existing international research. In addition to providing an overview of researched disadvantages, a summary of the limited literature on the potential benefits of employing people with disabilities is presented. The sparse literature on this subject focuses primarily on the indirect positive effect of employing people with disabilities, which employers typically ignore in hiring decisions. Therefore, our empirical study, consisting of two parts, sought to provide more insight into the direct benefits. To this end, as a first empirical section, we conducted a media analysis to discover the potential benefits of disabled people in the workplace. In this way, we attempted to answer the first research question. The second empirical study consisted of conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the aim of answering the second research question.

From the literature review, we were able to conclude that employees with disabilities often do not differ significantly from the abled-bodied in terms of job performance. Moreover, our review of the limited literature regarding the potential advantages of disabilities in the work environment shows that employing individuals with disabilities can lead to a greater competitive advantage and cost-effectiveness, thereby increasing profitability for the employer (Lindsay et al., 2018).

After reviewing the literature, the empirical study could start by first conducting a media analysis to discover the potential benefits of PWDs at work and answer the first research question. The data used in this analysis exists out of Dutch-language articles. These articles were found using search queries in the Gopress database, which exists out of keywords that

include a specific disability and conjugations or synonyms of 'work' and 'benefit'. The search queries provided us with 3812 articles, which a selection procedure has reduced to 81 articles that include various benefits of 9 disabilities. The selected articles were then coded with first- and second-order codes. This way, it is possible to find, in a structured way, patterns related to a potential benefit for each disability.

From the results of the media analysis, shown in Table 4 on page 26, we can conclude that there are people who excel at work or in their jobs because of their disability. In particular, we observed that the reason why they excel could be categorized and linked to specific disabilities. For example, 'accurate' and 'repetitive' can be seen as the two most occurring reasons why people with autism have an advantage at work (mentioned in respectively 36,6% and 20,5% of the analyzed text fragments of the autism cases). To simplify the occurrence rate, the following brackets are indicated by one or more asterisks: [20% ,40%[, [40%, 60%[and [60%, 100%] are indicated by respectively *, ** and ***. For mental disabilities, our results show that people with autism excel due to their accurateness* and their ability to do repetitive* work. While for Asperger's, it is their ability to be accurate* while working and focus*. Dyslexia and ADHD both have creativity* and enterprising* but, for dyslexia, the occurrence of creativity** is higher than for ADHD. The reason why people from the cases who are highly sensitive excel is because of their creativity*, accurateness* and empathy*. Our findings for physical disabilities show that blind and deaf cases mentioned that the ability to focus*** and having empathy* are reasons why blind and deaf people can excel. The third and last physical disability that we researched is based on only one case and should thus be carefully interpreted. This case showed that people with MS could excel based on their empathy***.

The second and last empirical study sought to answer the second research question by conducting online in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three respondents, each having a different disability. Firstly, the interviews confirm the media analysis results, showing some employees excel at work or in their job because of their disability. Furthermore, the answer to the second research question is that there is actually a requirement before an employee with a disability can use this advantage. The requirement is that the drawbacks of their disability, which can impact their job performance, may not be too dominant. To clarify this finding, an example of an important requirement for deaf people is given, communication. Our completely deaf participant is very dependent on sign language interpreters, and if these are unavailable, she cannot communicate with key stakeholders in her day-to-day activities.

In her case, this is a dominant drawback given the importance of being able to communicate easily with various people daily. Nevertheless, for an utterly deaf programmer, this communication factor may be a minor drawback that does impact his job performance much less.

As stated earlier, the outcome of our literature review shows there is currently a focus on the disadvantages of disabilities. Nevertheless, our research showed that PWDs could actually excel in their jobs because of their disability. Thus, the question arises how our research fits in the existing literature. The findings of Gröschl (2013) can help with this as the paper states that some disadvantages can be solved by providing supporting accommodations. This is clearly the case for our deaf participant, as sign language interpreters can partially solve the disadvantage of deafness. Next to this, the participant with ASD needed to acquire social skills before he was able to perform certain aspects of his work well. This was done by a special education in his youth. Even the respondent with ADHD, the entrepreneur, indicated that he cannot focus for long periods and does not like preparatory work. He solves this drawback by relying upon his employees to do the necessary research and preparatory work and only to provide him the most relevant and necessary information to make certain decisions. Our research suggests that PWDs can excel, but a requirement is that the drawbacks of their disability, which may have a negative impact on their job performance, may not be too dominant. Thus, the link can be made that the impact of some disadvantages can be decreased by providing supporting accommodations. If the remaining disadvantages do not have too dominant adverse effects on the job performance, a PWD can excel due to the benefits linked to their disability. However, no supporting accommodations may be needed if the negative effects of a disability are not too dominant by nature.

Furthermore, the Person-Environment fit theory is also relevant in our conclusion. Specifically, the Person-Organization fit represents the compatibility between the employee and the organization. Two participants of the interviews made it clear that the characteristics and the values of the organization for which they work are needed to work well. Our participant with ASD works in a company where there is a no-nonsense culture. For him, this is ideal as he finds it challenging if work and social life are mixed on the work floor. The entrepreneur has a significant impact on the values and characteristics of his organization, as he can shape them in a way that is optimal for him. Lastly, our deaf participant works in an organization where multiple people are deaf and can communicate in sign language.

Therefore, we can conclude that the person-organization fit is high for two participants, and for the deaf participant, the person-group fit is high.

In conclusion, we can say that the research objective of this Master's Dissertation succeeded to the extent that we were indeed able to conclude that workers' disabilities can lead to abilities. The requirement, however, is that the disadvantages of their disability, which might hurt their work performance, should not have a too dominant impact.

Suggestions for further research

Since this Master's Dissertation research focused only on a limited selection of chosen disabilities, further research could be valuable to explore possible advantages for other disabilities. Also, further research conducted with more respondents, possibly from different layers of the population, could deepen and expand the conclusions from this Master's Dissertation and provide new insights. Since this research was also only conducted with Flemish respondents and media articles, international research could also lead to exciting findings. An international approach could show whether our findings can also be confirmed across different national borders or whether there are differences.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Search terms for the GoPress database

Blind:

- slechtziend AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

Deaf:

- slechthorend AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

- hardhorend AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

MS:

- "MS" AND beperking AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

Mental disorder general:

- (beperking OR beperkingen) AND (mentaal OR verstandelijk OR verstandelijke OR mentale) AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten OR sterkte OR sterktes)

Autism:

- (Autisme OR ASS OR autismespectrumstoornis) AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

Asperger's:

- ("Syndroom van Asperger" OR Asperger) AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

Dyslexia:

- (dyslexie OR dyslectisch OR dyslectische) AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

ADHD:

- ADHD AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

High sensitive:

- ("Hoog gevoelig" OR "high sensitive" OR "high sensitivity" OR hoogsensitieve OR hoogsensitief) AND (werk OR job OR jobs) AND (voordeel OR voordelen OR troef OR troeven OR talent OR talenten)

Appendix B: First order results media analysis

	Focus	Creativity	Repititve	Accurate	Engaged	Enterprising	Flexible	Empathy	Cognitively strong	Faster pace	Total assigned first order codes
Blind	6 **75%** ***	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 **25%** *	0 0%	0 0%	8
Deaf	6 **67%** ***	1 11%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 **22%** *	0 0%	0 0%	9
MS	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 **100%** ***	0 0%	0 0%	2
Mental disorder in general	8 17%	4 9%	10 **22%** *	11 **24%** *	5 11%	2 4%	0 0%	0 0%	1 2%	5 11%	46
Autism	15 13%	3 3%	23 **21%** *	41 **37%** **	12 11%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	11 10%	7 6%	112
Asperger	11 **26%** *	0 0%	6 14%	14 **33%** *	1 2%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	7 16%	4 9%	43
Dyslexia	0 0%	11 **52%** **	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	6 **29%** *	0 0%	0 0%	4 19%	0 0%	21
ADHD	6 16%	10 **27%** *	0 0%	4 11%	9 **24%** *	2 5%	4 11%	1 3%	0 0%	1 3%	37
High Sensitive	4 10%	8 **20%** *	0 0%	8 **20%** *	6 15%	3 8%	2 5%	8 **20%** *	1 3%	0 0%	40

Appendix C: Questions of the semi-structured interview

Introductory questions

- What is your education?
- Can you describe your current job and position?
- Before your current job, did you do have another occupation?

Inquire about the interviewee's disability

- Congenital or suddenly?
- What limitations do you experience in daily life and in the workplace?
- Do you use medication or external aids to suppress it?

Research question 1

- What does a typical work day look like for you?
- Do you think you have an advantage while doing your job or with some tasks at work because of your disability?
    - Can you give an example about such a situation?
    - Is work sometimes given to you specifically because your colleagues or boss recognizes that advantage?
    - Do you sometimes choose a particular task yourself because you know you can use it to your advantage?
    - Are there other advantages in day-to-day life that you experience thanks to your disability?
    - Do you think there are other tasks or jobs where your disability would be an advantage?

Research question 2

- Did you need to teach yourself certain skills to do your job?
    - Can you further explain what and why?
    - If so, do you think certain skills would be an advantage should you possess them?
- When you started working at your current job, did you ask for an adapted work environment? (e.g., a quiet workplace)
    - If so, what adjustments did you ask for?
    - Did your boss also adjust certain things?
    - Are there certain things in the workplace that you think you would not be able to do as well if they were no longer present?

End

- Are there any issues you'd like to talk about yourself?
- Or any further additions to the questions we've already asked?