The Inclusive Working Life Program: An Inductive Qualitative Study

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Acknowledgements

The present study transpired from a research project on the practical experiences with the Inclusive Working Life (IWL) program. The project was carried out by Tone Drivdal Stensheim and Ida Bruheim Jensen, master students in work-and organisational psychology at the Department of psychology, University of Oslo. The purpose of the project was to obtain practical experiences with the IWL program through in-depth interviews of employers with personnel responsibility and support staff in public sector. The master thesis is based on an analysis of the data material obtained from the in-depth interviews.

The research question and focus for the master thesis was formulated by us with suggestions from supervisor and professor at the Department of psychology, Roald Bjørklund. We would like to thank Roald Bjørklund for guidance throughout the year. His sharing of knowledge within the field of work- and organisational psychology has been very useful to us. We would also thank the twenty-four informants who shared their perspectives on the IWL program. Additionally we would like to thank our family and friends for support throughout the whole process.

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Abstract

The Inclusive Working Life (IWL) program is a tripartite cooperation between the Norwegian government, labour organisations and employers' associations. IWL aims to prevent and reduce sick leave levels, increase employment of employees with disabilities and increase average retirement age. The IWL program has been evaluated on several occasions. Few measurable effects have been discovered in quantitative studies so far, still the program has been reinstated, last for the period 2014-2018. Qualitative studies can contribute to understand the IWL limitations to meet own targets. As a contribution to enhance knowledge of the IWL implementation process – the present study accessed practical experiences with the IWL program. A total of twenty-four informants with first-hand experience of IWL were interviewed, more specific employers with personnel responsibility and support staff. Through inductive analysis it was discovered that the informants experienced the external IWL program as representing something different than the internal, general work environment (GWE). The internal GWE was broadly characterized by strengths. These strengths were thematically connected to (1) resources, (2) proactivity and (3) Quality of Working Life (QWL) principles for public administration. The IWL program was mainly characterized by weaknesses. These shortcomings concluded that the IWL program was understood as (1) reactive, (2) deviated from success criteria for effective work environment interventions, (3) associated with demands, (4) held a stress perspective on the work environment and (5) was in line with New Public Management (NPM) principles for public administration. This concludes that the IWL program contrasts today's knowledge-based work environment perspectives. GWE indicates to buffer the recommendations the external IWL program imposes.

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Introduction

The Inclusive Working Life (IWL) program was introduced in Norway in 2001 and has been renewed several times last for the period 2014-2018. IWL is a tripartite cooperation to attain a more inclusive working life. The contracting parties are the Norwegian government, the four labour organisations LO, Unio, YS and Akademikerne and the five employers' associations NHO, KS, Spekter, Virke and the government represented by the Minister of Local Government and Modernisation (IA-avtalen, 2014).

Norway has the highest number of sickness absenteeism relative to other naturally comparable OECD countries and 5% of the gross national product goes to welfare expenditures (OECD, 2013). Consequently, the three IWL partakers mentioned ahead have profound interest in reducing Norwegian sick leave levels. Additionally, IWL seeks to increase the share of workers with disabilities and retain ageing workers into the labour market (IA-avtalen 2014). Demographical tendencies in Norway exhibit decreasing birth rates and a growing proportion of elderly, which can create a diminished employable population (Solheim, 2010). As a response IWL is a national intervention program that targets social challenges caused by voluntarily or involuntarily exclusion from working life (Lie, 2008; Ose *et al.*, 2013). In other words, IWL aims to prevent a situation where the amount on welfare programs exceeds the amount of workers by including more people into the labour market (Solheim, 2010).

With this in mind, IWL contains three specific sub goals for the Norwegian working life: (1) prevent sickness absenteeism and reduce national sickness absenteeism to 5,6%, a reduction of 20% from 2001. (2) Prevent drop-out and increase the share of working employees with disabilities. (3) Increase the average retirement age with 12 months after the age of 50 (IA-avtalen, 2014).

To join the IWL program local organisations voluntarily register in NAV, the public administered Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Solheim, 2010). Currently 60% of all employees in Norway are employed in IWL organisations (Ose *et al.*, 2013). IWL highlight the work environment as the most important arena for an inclusive working life. Accordingly IWL is implemented into the work environment of IWL member organisation (IA-avtalen, 2014). IWL centres served by NAV have been established in each municipality in Norway, nineteen altogether (Lie, 2008). The function of the IWL centres is to grant financial incentives and practical guidance so that member organisations can reach the three IWL objectives. In return the involved parts in IWL organisations are obliged to follow

specific IWL commitments such as fixed stops in the follow-up process of employees on sick leave (IA-avtalen, 2014).

IWL was evaluated by the Foundation for Industrial and Technical Research (SINTEF) for the period 2010-2013 (Ose *et al.,* 2013). The evaluation demonstrated that there were few measureable effects of the intervention according to the proposed goal settings – especially in public sector. In fact, the SINTEF report found that the third sub goal targeting retention of ageing workers was the only one reached so far (Ose *et al.,* 2013). These results yield socio economic earnings; however, IWL may not the explanatory cause for this. It has therefore been questioned if IWL works as proposed and whether it is an adequate approach to attain the three overarching objectives (Solheim, 2010). The SINTEF evaluation criticised the discourse on IWL topics as highly consensus bound because it focused on implementation of IWL objectives rather than questioning the programs' content. Despite disappointing results the report concluded that the IWL program had potential and suggested to proceed with the program (Ose *et al.,* 2013).

When investigating the three partakers' argumentation for implementing IWL no sound theoretical basis can be found (NOU, 2003:6). Consequently it is challenging to evaluate IWL on conceptual terms. The field of research on IWL is primarily quantitative and concerned with absenteeism figures (Ose *et al.,* 2013). Percentages might not be a good indicator for evaluation of IWL effects as these numbers might be influenced by a huge amount of other uncontrollable variables (Arthur, 2000; Semmer, 2006). Qualitative studies on practical experiences with the IWL intervention might be more suitable to identify the limitations of IWL (Nytrø, Saksvik, Mikkelsen, Bohle, & Quinlan, 2000; Saksvik, Nytrø, Dahl-Jørgensen & Mikkelsen, 2002). Qualitative studies have the potential to identify the underlying mechanisms of the IWL figures identified in previous reports (Ose *et al.,* 2013). Still very few qualitative studies on IWL can be identified.

This study seeks to evaluate the practical experiences of IWL to contribute with insight on why IWL have failed to meet own objectives. The external IWL intervention is implemented into the internal work environment of member organisations. Therefore comprehension on IWL limitations can be found by exploring current work environment perspectives. This study is divided into four sections, containing: (1) a review of the work environment concept and problems with existing work environment perspectives, before the purpose of the study is presented, (2) a presentation of the methodological approaches applied, (3) a presentation of the results of the study and (4) a discussion of the results, implications and suggestions for further research.

Theory

Work Environment Perspectives

All work environment perspectives share the same superior goal of a workforce that can and will perform their outmost. The difference between theoretical perspectives and approaches can however be found in terms of *how* these perspectives suggest reaching these superior goals (Gustavsen, 2011). IWL does not seem to have a clear theoretical conceptualisation (Prop. 89 L (2010-2011)). What is known is that IWL operates in a work environment regulated by the Working Environment Act (WEA). Accordingly IWL experiences can overlap or differ from more general work environment (GWE) perceptions. The work environment concept is in itself immensely complex and can both be understood from (1) work environment legislations, (2) theory and research and (3) from organisational practices. It can in turn be assumed that these three work environment comprehensions are equally connected as all of them seek to target the same phenomenon. The present study suggests that an integrative understanding of the work environment concept from these three sources can generate insight on why IWL has failed to reach own objectives (Willig, 2008). Figure 1 below illustrates the work environment concept from this triangulated point of view. The three work environment conceptualisations mentioned above will be deliberated next.

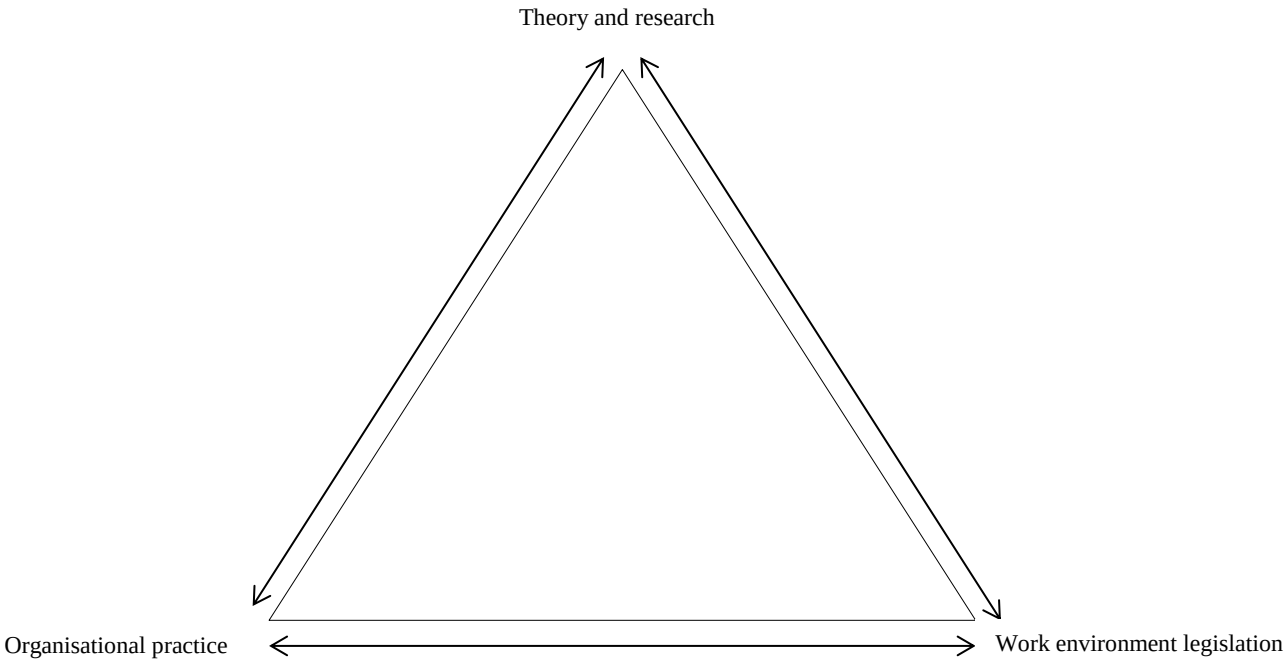

Figure 1. The work environment concept. Constituted of theory and research, work environment legislations and organisational practice.

Work environment legislations. The Norwegian working life is regulated by the Working Environment Act (WEA) that emerged during the 1970s. WEA builds upon the public administration philosophy Quality of Working Life (QWL) (Gustavsen, 2011). Central in QWL is the acknowledgment of the employees as the main resource in the organisation. The underlying assumption is that through concern for employees' interests competitive ability and efficiency is cultivated. Herewith QWL focus on both wellbeing and productivity (Rose, Beh, Uli & Idris, 2006). Three typical QWL values are (1) a focus on work related effects on employee wellbeing as well as organisational effectiveness, (2) an emphasis on worker participation and co-operation in organisational decision making and problem solving (3) rewarding employee input in work process (Rose et al., 2006; Lawler, 1982).

In line with QWL principles, WEA strengthens employees' role in the work environment, as can be seen in the overall purpose of the act, which is:

> To secure a working environment that provides a basis for a healthy and meaningful working situation, that affords full safety from harmful physical and mental influences and that has a standard of welfare at all times consistent with the level of technological and social development of the society (Arbeidsmiljøloven, 2005: § 1.1 a).

Here, two principal components are visible; the first is a health promotional work situation perceived as meaningful and that enhances personal growth for the employees. The second component focuses on preventing physical and psychological damage. Thus, the central focus is to substantiate the employees' possibility to participate in own job construction (Gustavsen, 2011).

In addition to regulations from the WEA which stems from the QWL philosophy Norwegian working life is also influenced by other competing societal trends. IWL was introduced in Norway at a time with parallel shifts in public administration. Starting in the 1990s, reforms were implemented to increase productivity in public sector. Typical measures were implementation of not-overlapping roles and functions, decentralization of public services, competitive tendering, and using quantitative objectives as assessment basis in every public unit (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & Lægreid, 2003; Martinussen & Magnussen, 2011).

Table 1

Seven components of NPM. Based on Hood, 1991.

1) "Hands on professional management" in the public sector (active, visible, discretionary control of organisations from named persons at the top, "free to manage").
2) Explicit standards and measures of performance (definitions of goals, targets, indicators of success, preferably expressed in quantitative terms, especially for professionally services).
3) Greater emphasis on output controls than process (resource allocation and reward linked to measured performance; breakup of centralized bureaucracy-wide personnel management).
4) Shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector (breakup of formerly "monolithic" units, unbounding U-form management systems into corporatized units around products, operating on decentralized "one-line" budgets and dealing with one another on an "arm-length" basis).
5) Shift to greater competition in public sector (move to term contracts and public tendering procedures).
6) Stress on private-sector styles of management practice (move away from military-style "public service ethic", greater flexibility in hiring and rewards; greater use of PR techniques).
7) Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use (cutting direct costs, raising labor discipline, resisting union demands, limiting "compliance costs" to business).

These societal trends by the enhanced focus on cost effectiveness and production rates in public administration are together distinguishable as part of the New Public Management (NPM) philosophy (Hood, 1991). NPM is management techniques and principles retrieved from private sector practices and implemented in public sector (Lapsley, 2009). The NPM philosophy does not contain a consistent set of reforms but rather a collaboration of various, often inconsistent, elements (Christensen, 2004; Christensen & Lægreid, 2003; Hood, 1991). NPM has no solid theoretical ground; however seven typical NPM elements can be identified (Hood, 1991). These are presented in table 1.

The main argument for implementing NPM principles is to save costs, and the underlying assumption is to liberate resources to apply elsewhere in the welfare state. For instance, not-overlapping roles are suggested as a mean to enable work force cuts. One of the downsides of this increased focus on cost-effectiveness in public sector is that it can exclude less employable workers. A strong focus on efficiency will most likely lead to increased unemployment (Christensen, 2004).

NPM and QWL are competing values for working life administration. The fact that these two sets of values operate parallel illustrate the complexity of the Norwegian working life (Christensen, 2004; Gustavsen, 2011). NPM is considered incompatible with the

principles inherent in QWL and the WEA regulations of the Norwegian working life. For instance, whereas QWL value welfare and employee reward systems the NPM exclusively focuses on cost-effectiveness, employee control and sanction systems (Christensen, 2004; Gustavsen, 2011; Solheim, 2010).

At least two arguments make these competing NPM and QWL values for public administration important in conjunction with IWL. *First*, work environment research highlights the importance of the external environments' interplay with the internal work environment (Grant, Fried, Parker & Frese, 2010; Morgeson, Dierdorff & Hmurovic, 2010). Since IWL operate within the internal work environment these types of external values can influence the attainment of IWL objectives. As NPM value efficiency over welfare these types of values can compromise inclusiveness of less employable workers hence prevents the attainment of IWL objectives (Solheim, 2010). This first point targets the system in which IWL operates. *Second*, concern the conceptual basis for IWL which is considered unclear (Prop. 89 L (2010-2011)). As IWL was introduced parallel to other NPM reforms in public sector it is tempting to suggest that IWL is built on these. Contrary it is reasonable to assume that IWL not violate the Working Environment Act (WEA) and herewith have a foundation on QWL values. Still none of these assumptions can be verified as the theoretical composition of NPM seems unknown.

Work environment legislations and external reforms for public administration is just one source to understand the work environment concept. The work environment can also be conceptualized by theory and research on work place factors affecting employee sickness and wellbeing (Arnold *et al.,* 2010). A deliberation of current psychological theories within the work environment literature will follow. Hopefully a more solid body of knowledge on IWL will result.

Psychological theory. Broadly, traditional work environment perspectives have been either sickness- or wellbeing oriented (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Classical questions within the field of psychology have been to find out what motivates people and what makes people stressed (Arnold *et al.,* 2010). Both questions are of interest as they have been linked to productivity. Whereas stress theories assume that reduced stress will increase productivity, motivational theories assume that increased motivation will increase productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Generally, stress theories target demands in the work environment that may provoke stress (e.g. Karasek Jr, 1979; Siegrist, 1996) whereas motivation theories target resources in the work environment that may enhance motivation (e.g. Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

Current work environment perspectives incline an integrative focus on the target variables for both stress and motivation. It is suggested that to answer what motivates and what is stressful, principles from both stress- and motivational literature need to be combined. These integrative approaches share the assumption that stress and motivation are two independent processes, which implies that stress and motivation can co-exist or exist independently (Arnold *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, the target variables demands and resources are assumed to have independent or correlational effects (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R) is an attempt of such an integrative thinking (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

JD-R is considered one of the most structured and applied theories to predict work factors affecting employee wellbeing (Bakker, 2011; Christensen, 2011). The theory argues that all job characteristics can be organized into two main categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands means physical, psychological, social or organisational job characteristics that require employee effort and subsequent cost, either physical or psychological. Demands may not necessarily be negative; however demands can turn into hindrances if they are not easily met (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Time or resource-draining work tasks, bad working conditions or job conflicts are examples of job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Job resources are described as physical, psychological, social or organisational job characteristics that contribute to reduce the potential negative effects of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Social support from co-workers and supervisors, positive social climate and autonomy are examples of job resources (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010). As job demands and job resources are assumed to function independently, rather than on one continuum, job resources can both buffer the effect of job demands and independently enhance personal growth and serve as a mean to reach work related goals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The distribution along both the target variable job demands *and* job resources has been related to stress and motivation and organisational outcomes such as performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker, Van Emmerik & Van Riet, 2008).

It is worth noting that the revisited JD-R theory presented in Bakker and Demerouri (2014) additionally assume individual differences in the effect of demands and resources on wellbeing. These personal dispositions are considered to serve a buffer function (e.g. Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2007, 2009). However, in this study work environment factors are the scope.

In sum, present work environment perspectives focus on the compound relationship between wellbeing and sickness to predict performance. Nevertheless, it can still be questioned whether the JD-R theory and other integrative theories encompass all target variables of work affecting the sickness and wellbeing relationship. For instance, Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) suggest that JD-R's understanding of how job demands affects wellbeing is too narrow. They suggest that it is essential to distinguish between the *types* of demand, because job demands experienced as challenges, such as workload, is assumed to have positive impact on wellbeing. In contrary, job demands experienced as hindrances such as job conflicts may have negative effects on wellbeing.

These existing work environment theories are of interest in conjunction with IWL because the three IWL goal settings demonstrate both motivation and stress tendencies. A motivational objective is suggested by motivating elderly and disabled into the job market and prevent sickness. Still IWL inclines a focus on reduction of sickness numbers, implying an underlying stress and sickness orientation. Still these assumptions cannot be verified as the allegations are not empirically grounded. However, investigating IWL in line with work environment interventions can give a more profound indication of the practical targets of IWL. The next section therefore investigate the work environment concept from an applied source; practical work place interventions.

Organisational practices. As indicated above there is a substantial body of research and theory to base work environment interventions on, in addition to several trials on theory integration of the stress and motivation perspectives. However, a diversified focus on either reducing sickness or increasing wellbeing dominates at the interventional level (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Because of competing theoretical and methodological focuses no clear and agreed upon definition of work place interventions exist. Still, a work environment intervention can broadly be described as a program that seeks to improve the organisational design and/or prevent injury (Nytrø et al., 2000). Work environment interventions can be classified along time and system level. In terms of system level, interventions either take aim to change the individual or to change the organisations' work environment (Kompier, 2003). In terms of time, interventions can be arranged along a continuum of implementation ahead or after injury (Murphy, 2003). In combination, these two classifications produce four quadrants of work environment interventions demonstrated in figure 2.

Interventions within the first quadrant seek to change the organisation of work through task characteristics, social aspects and work conditions. Examples can be job redesign or increased social support (Kompier, 2003; Semmer, 2006). Interventions within the second

quadrant are directed at comparable groups of employees that already show signs of stress, for instance by tailoring special working hours for seniors. Interventions within the third quadrant are oriented at single employees to sustain prolonged wellbeing. Examples can be health promotion campaigns and wellness programs. Interventions in the fourth quadrant are reactive and target single employees, these interventions can be named Employee Assisted Programs (EAPs). Examples of EAPs are rehabilitation after sick leave, psychotherapy or post-traumatic stress assistance programs (Kompier, 2003). Because the IWL has been found reactive in its' interventional design by targeting single employees after transpired injury IWL can be designated an EAP (Stensland, 2014). Note that the quadrants only represent a simplified classification system. Thereby, interventions are not mutually exclusive but a question of degree. This means that interventions can overlap with, and be arranged within, more than one quadrant. For instance, some employees can consider an organisational change by job redesign as a motivational job factor (proactive). Others may consider this same intervention as stressful by adding on stress in an already demanding period (reactive) (Murphy, 2003).

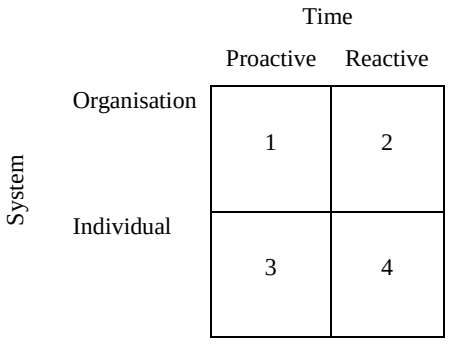

Figure 2. Classification of work environment interventions. Inspired by Kompier, 2003

Extensive research highlight that the work environment should be designed to adapt work according to employee and prevent injury (quadrant 1) (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; LaMontagne, Keegel, Loui, Ostry & Landsbergis, 2007). Moreover, organisations are legally obliged to identify employee related health risks and take measures to eliminate these stressors prior to potential injury (Donaldson-Feilder, Yarker & Lewis, 2011). In Norway, a proactive organisation of work is supported by legislations in the WEA. Unfortunately, many employees fall through the net of proactive interventions. Most interventions are reactive in the sense that they tend to change the individual after transpired injury (quadrant 4). The overall goal of these interventions is to adapt the employee to the stressor instead of eliminating it. Consequently, these interventions focus on reducing damage of an already

occurred work stressor (Arthur, 2000; Kompier, Cooper & Geurts, 2000; Kompier, 2003). Worker-oriented approaches are therefore more extensive than work-oriented approaches (Kompier, 2003). This is inconsistent with today's research on work environment interventions. Work-oriented approaches, or a combination of both work-orientation and worker-orientation are advised (Semmer, 2006).

There are several possible explanations for these theory-practice inconsistencies, like misapprehension of proactive interventions effects and methodological limitations (Semmer, 2006). Proactive interventions may not be the strategy of choice because some employers may consider the source of stress to be within the employee. This further might be displayed through a lack of resilience (Arnold *et al.*, 2010). Further, these types of interventions build on stress theories. Stress theories assume an individual basis for experienced level of job stress and coping skills (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

Moreover, proactive interventions are perceived as timely, costly and difficult to implement. Consequently, these types of interventions are less attractive and cost effective in the short run. However, this is not necessarily true, as firstly, findings reveal that proactive interventions neither need to be time consuming nor costly (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; Kompier, 2003; Semmer, 2006). Secondly, including employees in the process of design and implementation can serve as an independent positive effect as employees might experience a sense of participation and control (Elo, Ervasti, Kuosma & Mattila, 2008). Finally, proactive interventions claim work place changes to remove stressors. Employees then need to adapt to these new work methods. Proactive interventions can thus be argued to require employee time and effort to be effective (Kompier et al., 1998). However these interventions demonstrated to be successful on long term basis (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

Methodological explanations for theory-practice inconsistency can be personal interests in intervention success. In many cases reactive interventions or EAPs are evaluated internally by actors with personal interests in the effectiveness of the programs. Therefore evaluations of EAPs are often biased and methodological weak (Arthur, 2000). Additionally, many EAPs are static and have a "one size fits all" approach. Therefore, stress management programs are often implemented as a package without taking the "temperature" within the organisation ahead. Since every organisation is unique that most likely, meet unique challenges, a standardized approach might reduce intervention adaption to the respective case. This is a profound hindrance for mapping out specific risk factors or risk groups at the workplace (Kompier, 2003). This is further a hindrance to identify the real effect of the intervention relative to the effect of other uncontrollable work place factors. These worker-

oriented approaches affect the specific symptoms of stress on the respective worker, but not the overall wellbeing. Work-oriented approached have more diversified effects (Arthur, 2000; Semmer, 2006). In the longer term proactive interventions is proven effective in attainment of objective goals such as sick leave and turnover percentage (LaMontagne et al., 2007).

EAPs effectiveness might also be low due to a static design and lack of compliance to necessary success criteria for work place interventions (Arnold *et al.,* 2010; Kompier *et al.,* 1998). In fact as many as 25-50% of all work place interventions fail to meet their targets (Saksvik *et al.,* 2007). Nine success criteria should be present in the work environment ahead of work place interventions. These criteria are listed in table 2.

The list for success criteria for effective interventions does not in itself serve as an integrative model but gives direction on work environment facets of importance a priori work life interventions to be effective. The list of success criteria can be considered an attempt to aggregate the most significant work place factors related to interventional success. However the complexity of intervention-organisation-person interaction may not be covered in entirety.

Table 2

9 success criteria for work environment interventions. Based on Stensland, 2014.

1) Employee participation throughout the whole process.
2) Persistent support and commitment from leaders.
3) Clear specific rules, procedures, goals and costs. E.g. assured confidentiality.
4) Close cooperation and involvement of the union representatives.
5) Training of both leaders and employees.
6) Clearly defined roles and responsibilities ahead of intervention implementation, in addition to cooperation among involved instances to ensure cohesive support.
7) Conduct risk analysis and have a logical connection among the problems identified in the risk analysis and the specific intervention program. E.g. To design an organisational specific intervention program and make the program part of the organisational culture.
8) Incorporate a culture for change and map out employee willingness for change.
9) Systematic evaluation using measureable criteria prepared from the risk analysis. I. e. Ensure a logical connection among intervention program and measurement criteria.

The first sub goal of the IWL program related to sickness prevention and reduction has previously been evaluated according to this compound list of success criteria for effective work life interventions. It was proven discrepancy among the IWL program's sub goal one and the success criteria on at least 6 out of 9 points. Overall employers stated that the IWL program consist of (a) unspecific measures and procedures and (b) lack systematic evaluation

criteria. Further it was experienced (c) low levels of organisational fit, (d) diffusion of roles and responsibility, (e) low levels of leader support for the program and (f) absence of leader and employee training (Stensland, 2014). These discrepancies might partly explain the non-effectiveness of the overall IWL program.

In sum the work environment concept remains compound, and work environment legislations exist within a broader working life with competing values for public administration. There are complex relationships between motivational theories and stress theories, and it is debatable whether integrative theories are able to embrace the multifarious interaction between stress and motivation. Likewise, a multifaceted relationship exists between reactive and proactive interventions. It may be a linearity between motivational theories, proactive interventions and Quality of Working Life (QWL) on the one hand. This is likely because QWL values focus on employee welfare. Employee welfare could be understood as a measure to increase employee motivation in addition to employee wellbeing. Attainment of employee wellbeing is central in proactive work environment designs.

On the other hand there might be a linearity between stress theories, reactive interventions and New Public Management (NPM). In contrast to QWL, NPM values focus on efficiency principles, which might overrun principles of employee welfare. Efficiency measures and cost cuts may provoke an increase in employee stress levels. This can lead to a shift towards reactive work environment perspectives, as available resources are insufficient to be ahead of damage and sickness. Exactly where it is natural to place the IWL program within the total work environment systems remains unclear.

The Present Study

The IWL program has failed to reach its goals, which might be due to a fragmented and apparently non-existent theoretic base for the IWL program. Therefore, an inductive approach was applied in the present study. A bottom-up research approach was ensured through contacting relevant organisations to gain in-depth information on their practical experiences with the entire IWL program. Specifically, the sample in the present study is a group of employers with personnel responsibility and support staff which together have the superior responsibility for the implementation of the practical facets of IWL (IA-avtalen, 2014). It is therefore assumed that this specific group of informants occupies valuable first-hand information on the IWL program. The sample is compound encompassing informants from school, hospital and institute sectors where the IWL program is an understudied research topic. Moreover, the sample was selectively chosen from public sector where less research on the IWL program exists compared to private sector (Ose *et al.,* 2013).

The research that exists is primarily quantitative and concerned with the first sub goal related to sickness absenteeism. It is inquired additional qualitative research on the IWL program and implementation process (Ose *et al.*, 2013). The present study therefore seeks to fill a gap in research by applying a qualitative research design. As a result informants shared their experiences with the IWL program through semi-structured interviews. To ensure a bottom-up approach a non-theoretical SWOT format was applied in all interviews. Informants were explicitly asked to give accounts of positive– negative, past– future, and internal–external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with the IWL agreement. In addition follow up questions were asked to obtain thick descriptions of informant accounts. Beyond that informants were free to pursue their reflections on the IWL program during the course of the interview.

In the present study an inductive analytical approach was selected. An inductive thematic content analysis denotes that the themes and categories are data-driven and mirror the gathered data material as closely as possible. The approach is posteriori with the aim of avoiding being directed by a priori assumptions or existing psychological theory. An alternative approach would be a deductive a priori approach in which themes are based on work environment theory and a predefined schematic framework. An overweight of today's content analysis is in fact deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993). A deductive content analysis could have simplified the coding process by coding the data material into a predefined schematic framework (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993). However an inductive approach was considered suitable in this study as there is not a satisfying body of research *or* a clear theoretical basis for the IWL program (Prop. 89 L (2010-2011); Ose *et al.*, 2013). Application of appropriate work environment perspective to illuminate the IWL program is therefore challenging and can limit the characteristics of the data material. A qualitative design and an inductive analytical approach are therefore considered key perspectives to illuminate why the IWL program has failed to deliver on own goal settings. The research question is open-ended and seeks to contribute with valuable applied and basic insight (Willig, 2008). Instead of pointing in a direction the research question is explorative and asks:

"How do a group of informants with first-hand experience perceive the Inclusive Working Life (IWL) program?"

Finally it is worth mentioning that since the IWL program exists within the broader general work environment (GWE) it is assumed that the informants may include GWE-aspects when sharing their perspectives on the IWL program. Both the IWL program and the GWE are regulated by the overarching Work Environment Act (WEA). The assumption is therefore founded on that experience with the IWL program can overlap or differ from the more general work environment.

Methods

Strategy

The approach in this study has been to obtain a group of informants' perspectives on the inclusive working life (IWL) program. This was accessed through in-depth semi-structured interviews followed by an inductive analysis. Data generation was grounded on information obtained from informants imposed working with the IWL continuously. Consequently, the sample holds wide experience on IWL related topics. Informants were recruited from public sector in the Oslo-region.

Sample and Context

The sample is strategic in the sense that criteria for inclusion were (1) employment in the public sector, (2) knowledge to and (3) utilization of the IWL. Recruitment was done through mail correspondence and follow-up phone calls with relevant informants in IWL organisations. The purpose of a strategic sample was to assure broad amount of information on a topic obtained from a relatively small sample size (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Experience with the IWL program varied from 2 to 15 years with a mean of 8 years. For the purpose of this study this was considered a satisfying level of experience.

The objective was to recruit at least twenty participants. A total of twenty-four informants were included in the study, consisting of informants from the school, institute, and hospital sector to assure a compound perspective on the IWL program. A sample of twenty-four informants was achievable in terms of available resources and time. The sample size is consistent with Kvale and Brinkmanns (2009) recommendation of 15+/-10 informants in qualitative interview studies.

Interviews

The instrument for data collection was in-depth interviews. The interviews were based on semi-structured SWOT questions, constructed in line with the PEACE model.

PEACE model. The interviews were carried out according to the PEACE model. The PEACE model divides the interview into distinct phases *Preparation* and *Planning, Engage*

and *Explain, Account, Clarify* and *Challenge, Closure* and *Evaluation*. This interview model is a method to prepare and execute interviews, with the aim of common practice among interviewers (Clarke & Milne, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews. The interview included semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. More specific the interview was made up of a modified SWOT format (*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities* and *Threats)*. This interview design stimulates the interviewee to reflect on perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats on the inclusive working life (IWL) program. The SWOT format is three dimensional and asks explicitly of positive– negative, past– future, and internal–external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Lone, Riege, Bjørklund, Hoff & Bjørkli, in press).

A semi-structured, open-ended approach is preferred when it is desirable to avoid specifying particular types of answers and attain free-reflections on the respective interview theme. Also this reduces the chances to manipulate the interviewees' response by predisposed assumptions and hypothesis of the interviewer.

The interview consisted of four open-ended questions (1) "Please tell me about the strengths you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit today – we call this strengths with the IWL program.", (2) "Please tell me about the weaknesses you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit today– we call this weaknesses with the IWL program.", (3) " Please tell me about the opportunities for improvement you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit in the future – we call this opportunities for improvement with the IWL program." And (4) "Please tell me about the threats you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit in the future – we call this threats to the IWL program."

Additionally, informants were asked to give an estimate of the usability of the inclusive working life (IWL) program by answering the following two questions: (1) "Have you made use of the IWL program?" and (2) "How many times have you made use of the IWL program?"

Beyond the interview guide all informants were asked to answer follow-up questions, more specific to elaborate and exemplify their own statements to attain saturated descriptions. In cases where the questions appeared indistinct to the informant the interviewer concretized the SWOT questions to attain consensus on the opinion of content.

Practical implementation. Two interviewers both trained in the PEACE model and the SWOT format conducted the interviews. The data collection phase started in week 34 and was completed in week 38 autumn 2014.

The interview setting was the office of the informants or available meeting rooms at their unit. All the twenty-four interviews were recorded digitally. The recordings were uploaded on a safe data storage system, available via the University of Oslo (UiO). The recordings were subsequently deleted. The mean length of the interviews was 46 minutes. The interview length ranged from 16 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. The interviews were anonymized by assigning each interview a neutral code to reduce the opportunity for backward identification.

Transcription

Ahead of the content analysis, all interviews were transcribed. Prior to the transcription phase, guard lines for transcription were established to ensure common practice. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in its entirety. Prominent amplifications from the interviewer like "yea" and "right" were included if it led the interviewee to further elaboration. If something in the audio file was diffuse and difficult to translate, this was marked by "unclear" in the transcription. Incomplete sentences such as "So… so, I think it works well" were also written out. Para-language such as pause intervals or laugh was not included. Reflection words like "ehm", "mhm" and "hm" were also excluded.

Transcription quality was controlled through counting error of commission and error of omission. This was done by comparing one randomly selected interview transcribed by both interviewers. No significant differences in the two transcriptions were found. The small numbers of disagreement were (a) error in word order, (b) conjunctions and (c) omission of repetitive wording.

Coding of Statements

The coding included three coding principles, accordingly (1) SWOT coding, (2) IWL and GWE coding and (3) coding of statements thematically.

SWOT Coding. All the statements were coded in accordance to the SWOT categories (1-4). This was done to quantify strengths (coded 1), weaknesses (coded 2), opportunities (coded 3) and threats (coded 4). 101 statements were exclusively descriptive. These statements received a neutral code (0). The descriptive statements were excluded from further analysis. Example of a descriptive statement was "Yes, I have made use of the IWL program".

IWL and GWE coding. The IWL coding consisted of identifying whether statements were related to the IWL or to other GWE aspects. Thus, all the statements were categorized as related to the IWL (coded 1) or to the GWE (coded 0). The division was made to attain the informants' own descriptions. It was noted that informants shared perspectives on the GWE

when asked questions on the IWL. The distinction between IWL and GWE was amplified as important by the group of informants. An example of an IWL statement can be "I think the IWL program function good as a support tool in follow-up cases". An example of a GWE statement can be "I work with these topics continually without thinking of it as part of the program".

Thematic coding. The analysis method in this study was thematic content analysis. In a thematic content analysis, the aim is to identify, analyse and report thematic patterns. An inductive approach was utilized because the main objective of the study was to attain participants own perceptions of the IWL program. Consequently, the analysis was data driven with the aim of avoiding being directed by a priori assumptions or existing psychological theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The content analysis was inspired by the six phases of thematic analysis outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006). Broadly, the analysis was divided into the three following steps (1) familiarization of the data, (2) thematic coding and (3) identifying overarching themes. The three steps are elaborated below.

To familiarize with the data the entire dataset the interviews were interchangeably transcribed. Through this each interviewer attained a profound introduction of the collected data material. Content of the interview was discussed continually, to ensure common understanding and share knowledge and experiences from the interviews.

The thematic content analysis consisted of three steps. The first step involved identifying initial themes and establishing first-order categories. The second and third step involved establishing broader second- and third-order categories.

To ensure consensus and common practice in the thematic coding process two interviews retrieved from two different sectors were analysed collectively by the two analysts. The interviews were divided into the most basic segment of meaning. Relevant features of each segment of data were systematically identified and received a code. This process contributed to a common comprehension of the content of meaning. In total, 193 themes were discovered. However, a large amount of these themes overlapped thematically and a second analysis generated a total of 42 first-order categories. For instance, the two themes *"absence overview is difficult"* and *"responsibility for many employees"* were clustered into the first-order category *"absence overview and follow-up"* (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Statements that could not be coded on the first-order categories were marked as residuals (coded 999) and thereby excluded for further analysis. Examples of a residual could be small talk or statements irrelevant to the interview topic like "Strengths…I cannot think of anything more right now".

Table 3

The associated 42 first-order categories, 16 second-order categories and 5 third-order categories.

First-order categories	Second-order categories	Third-order categories
NAV as control authority, Excessive work with the IWL program, Mistrust with the IWL program	Division of power	State-organisation relationship
Assistance from NAV, Communication with NAV	State cooperation experiences	
Intentions behind the IWL program, IWL program changes	Philosophy	Philosophy/symbol value
Focus on production, Attitudes to sick leave, The IWL program is excess	Symbol value system level	
Expectations to the employee, Exploitation of facilitation offers	Symbol value individual level	
Employee responsibility, Absence overview and follow-up, prioritization dilemma for the employer	Employer demands	Demands
Sick leave overview, Standardization, Rigidity, Communication between employer and employee	Demands towards standardization	
Dialogue meetings, Cooperation with the regular general practitioner, Demands for facilitation, Cooperation with the employee	Demands for cooperation with multiple units	
The company health service, Special health competencies	Support personnel	Resources
Refunds, Facilitation opportunities	Economy	
Informal communication, Employee participation, Exhaustion, Colleague support, Prevention of psychosocial damage	Psychosocial work environment	
Physical work environment facilities	Physical work environment	
Flexibility, Job design, Effects of facilitation	Facilitation	
Uses the program on sub goal 1, follow-up and facilitation	Sub goal 1: prevent and reduce absenteeism	IWL Goal settings
Sub goal 2 relevance, Employees with disabilities at the workplace	Sub goal 2: increase employment of individuals with disabilities	
An older workforce, Facilitation possibilities for seniors	Sub goal 3: increase average retirement age	

After identification of the 42 first-order categories overarching themes were established. The focus was further to generate broader themes based on the first-order categories. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006) this process was flexible in the sense that rearranging of codes was on-going until a satisfactory map of codes were established. In

practical terms this proceeded as interactive visualization sessions by sorting the different codes into potential themes using mind maps and tables. The method stimulates for discussion and reflection. Out of the 42 first-order categories, 16 second-order categories and 5 third-order categories were established. The five third-order categories were considered covering all statements in the data set. The five third-order categories were named (1) *State-organisation relationship*, (2) *Philosophy/Symbol value*, (3) *Demands*, (4) *Resources* and (5) *IWL goal settings*. Table 3 shows which of the 42 first-order categories that are linked to the 16 second-order categories and the 5 third-order categories thematically. View appendix 1 for an operationalization of each of the categories with example of corresponding statements.

A visualization of the coding process from the 42 first-order categories to the 16 second-order to 5 third-order categories is presented in figure 3 below.

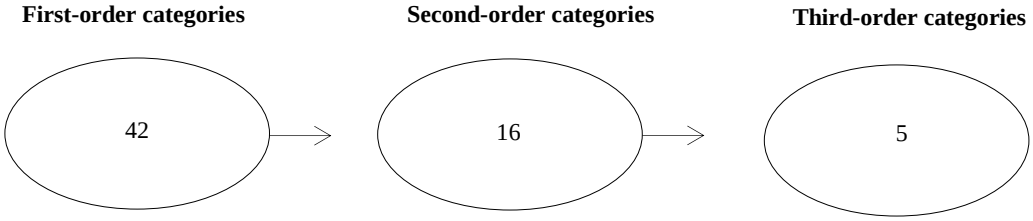

Figure 3. A visualization of the coding process from 42 first-orders to 16 second-orders to 5 third-order categories.

In this study data was analysed at the statement level to attain a rich thematic description of the entire dataset. The focus was to map predominant themes related to the IWL program. This is a suggested method when investigating an understudied topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Individual or group differences were not the target for the present study.

Reliability of Coding

Inter-rater reliability was measured by the two coders independently coding a total of 50 statements representing the informant's most common experiences. These statements were randomly chosen from the interviews. Inter-rater was measured for all the five analysis categories (SWOT-categories, IWL and GWE coding, first-order categories, second-order categories and third-order categories). The resulting Cohen's Kappa is showed in table 4. All the five analysis categories had a Cohen's Kappa above the recommended threshold of .40 with a mean Cohen's Kappa of .694 (Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney & Sinha, 1999). This implies high degree of agreement among the two coders. Reliability was assessed using an internet-based calculator for two coders (ReCal for 2 Coders).

Table 4

Overview inter-rater reliability

Analysis categories	Cohen's Kappa
SWOT categories	.574
IWL and GWE	.592
First-order categories	.780
Second-order categories	.773
Third-order categories	.753
Mean	.694

Ethics

The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) ahead of the data collection phase. The informants all gave their informed consent (view appendix 2) prior to the interview. In the informed consent informants were oriented that (1) the interviews would be anonymized, (2) opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time and (3) participation had no consequences for further employment conditions.

In line with the PEACE model, all informants were in the end asked to evaluate their interview experience. Herewith informants were given the opportunity to express both positive and potential negative experiences during the interview. No one reported the interview setting as uncomfortable.

Results

The SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the inclusive working life (IWL) program and the remaining general work environment (GWE) is shown in table 5. In total 2118 statements were found in which 1509 statements were assigned to the IWL program and 609 statements were assigned to the GWE. Chi-square statistics displayed that the IWL program and the GWE were distributed significantly different on the SWOT categories ($p < .001$). A significant difference was that the IWL program predominantly was denoted to weaknesses (40 %) whereas the GWE predominantly was denoted to strengths (67 %).

Table 5

The SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the IWL program and the GWE

	Strength	Weakness	Opportunity	Threat	Total
IWL *	379	609	309	212	1509
GWE *	410	97	76	26	609
Total	789	706	385	238	2118

* Significant difference between the IWL and the GWE on all four SWOT categories. Chi-square statistics, $p<.001$

Table 6 shows the ten most frequent weaknesses with the IWL program and the ten most frequent strengths with the GWE. The most frequent of the 42 first-order categories are presented with the total number of statements in parenthesis.

Table 6

The ten most frequent weaknesses with the IWL program and strengths with the GWE. First-order categories are presented with the total number of statements in parenthesis.

Weaknesses with the IWL program	Strengths with the GWE
Rigidity (77)	Prevention of psychosocial damage (56)
NAV as a control authority (41)	Facilitation possibilities for seniors (36)
Intentions behind the IWL program (37)	Colleague support (33)
Demands for facilitation (37)	Job design (33)
Facilitation opportunities (36)	Facilitation opportunities (30)
IWL program changes (34)	Physical work environment (28)
Mistrust with the IWL program (33)	Special health competencies (21)
The IWL program is excess (24)	The company health service (20)
Communication with NAV (24)	Sick leave overview (20)
Cooperation with the regular general practitioner (23)	Flexibility (15)

Table 7

The SWOT distribution of statements on the five third-order categories assigned either to the IWL program or the GWE.

Third-order categories		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
State-organisation relationship	IWL*	13	127	27	10	177
	GWE*	0	0	3	0	3
Philosophy/symbol value	IWL	57	120	66	53	296
	GWE	24	11	1	5	41
Demands	IWL	162	218	96	55	531
	GWE	41	15	14	2	72
Resources	IWL	95	101	91	68	355
	GWE	280	48	40	14	382
IWL goal settings	IWL	52	43	29	26	150
	GWE	65	23	18	5	111

*Significant difference between the IWL and the GWE on all five third-order categories. Chi-square statistics, all p's ($p<.001$)

Table 7 shows the SWOT distribution on the five third-order categories *state-organisation relationship* (9 %), *philosophy/symbol value* (16 %), *demands* (28 %), *resources* (35 %) and *IWL goal settings* (12 %). Statements were assigned either to the IWL program or the GWE.

Statements were distributed significantly different on the five third-order categories dependent on assigned to the IWL program or the GWE with chi-square statistics ($p < .001$). Out of the five third-order categories demands were predominantly associated with the IWL program whereas resources were predominantly associated with the GWE.

Table 8 to 12 shows the compound results on each of the five third-order categories. Table 8 to 12 demonstrates the SWOT distribution of statements on the first-order categories assigned to the corresponding second- and third-order categories. Statements assigned to the IWL program and the GWE were distributed differently on the five third-order categories. A more compound elaboration of the findings on each of the five third-order categories will follow.

State-Organisation Relationship

The category *state-organisation relationship* covers informants' perceptions of the cooperative relationship with external governmental agencies to meet IWL obligations. Table 8 shows the compound results on the third-order category state-organisation relationship. Table 8 illustrates how the IWL statements and the GWE statements are distributed differently along the first-order categories. More specific the third-order category *state-organisation relationship* was only associated with the IWL program with an exception of 3 statements related to the GWE under the first-order category *mistrust with the IWL program*. The SWOT distribution of IWL statements revealed an overweight of weaknesses. A more compound elaboration of the findings that constitutes the two second-order categories *division of power* and *state cooperation experiences* will follow.

Division of power. Within the second-order category division of power most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *NAV as control authority* (total of 59 statements). Out of these 41 of weaknesses were detected. The GWE statements were exclusively related to the first-order category *mistrust with the IWL program* where a total of 3 opportunities for improvement were detected.

State cooperation experiences. All statements in the second-order category state cooperation experience category were related to the IWL program. The most frequent first order-category was *communication with NAV* (a total of 31 statements). Out of these 24 weaknesses were detected.

Table 8

SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the IWL program or to the GWE on the third-order category state-organisation relationship.

Third-order category	Second-order categories	First-order categories		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
State-organisation relationship	Division of power	NAV as control authority	IWL	1	41	17	0	59
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0
		Excessive work with the IWL program	IWL	0	18	0	1	19
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0
		Mistrust with the IWL program	IWL	0	33	3	7	43
			GWE	0	0	3	0	3
	State cooperation experiences	Assistance from NAV	IWL	11	11	3	0	25
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0
		Communication with NAV	IWL	1	24	4	2	31
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0

Philosophy/Symbol Value

The category *philosophy /symbol value* covers what informants characterized as underlying assumptions and leading principles for the IWL program. They further distinguish among symbol value on individual and system level. Table 9 shows the compound results on the third-order category philosophy/symbol value. Table 9 illustrates how the IWL statements and the GWE statements are distributed differently along the first-order categories. More specific the third-order category *philosophy/symbol value* was mostly associated with the IWL program. The SWOT distribution of IWL statements revealed an overweight of weaknesses. A more compound elaboration of the findings that constitutes the three second-order categories *philosophy*, *symbol value system level* and *symbol value individual level* will follow.

Philosophy. Within the second-order category *philosophy* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *intentions behind the IWL program* (a total of 89 statements). Out of these 43 strengths were detected. Similarly a majority of GWE statements were related to the first-order category *intentions behind the IWL program* (a total of 8 statements). All of these detected as strengths.

Table 9

SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the IWL program or to the GWE on the third-order category philosophy/symbol value.

Third-order category	Second-order categories	First-order categories		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
Philosophy/symbol value	Philosophy	Intentions behind the IWL program	IWL	43	37	6	3	89
			GWE	8	0	0	0	8
		IWL program changes	IWL	0	34	36	1	71
			GWE	1	0	0	0	1
	Symbol value system level	Focus on production	IWL	0	13	10	30	53
			GWE	1	11	1	5	18
		Attitudes to sick leave	IWL	4	5	5	13	27
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0
		The IWL program is excess	IWL	1	24	8	0	33
			GWE	9	0	0	0	9
	Symbol value individual level	Expectations to the employee	IWL	9	0	0	0	9
			GWE	5	0	0	0	5
		Exploitation of facilitation offers	IWL	0	7	1	6	14
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0

Symbol value system level. Within the second-order category *symbol value system level* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *focus on production* (a total of 53 statements). Out of these 30 threats were detected. The GWE statements were also most frequently related to the first-order category *focus on production* (a total of 18 statements). Out of these 11 weaknesses were detected.

Symbol value individual level. Within the second-order category *symbol value individual level* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *exploitation of facilitation offers* (a total of 14 statements). Out of these 7 weakness and 6 threats were

detected. The GWE was most frequently related to the first-order category *expectation to the employee* (a total of 8 statements). All of these detected as strengths.

Demands

The category *demands* cover informants' perceptions of demands in terms of meeting the IWL obligations. Informants distinguish between demands towards themselves as employers, demands by a standardized implementation process and demands by cooperation with multiple units. Table 10 shows the compound results on the third-order category demands. Table 10 illustrates how the IWL statements and the GWE statements are distributed differently along the first-order categories. More specific the third-order category was mostly related to the IWL program. The SWOT distribution of IWL statements revealed an overweight of weaknesses. A more compound elaboration of the findings that constitutes the three second-order categories *employer demands, demands towards standardization* and *demands for cooperation with multiple units* will follow.

Employer demands. Within the second-order category *employer demands* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *prioritization dilemma for the employer* (a total of 48 statements). Out of these 21 weaknesses were detected. The majority of GWE statements were related to the first-order category *absence overview and follow up* (a total of 11 statements). Out of these 9 weaknesses were detected.

Demands towards standardization. Within the second-order category *demands towards standardization* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *rigidity* (a total of 124 statements). Out of these 77 weaknesses were detected. Hereby *rigidity* was the most frequent first-order category related to the IWL in the entire dataset. A majority of GWE statements were related to the first-order category *sick leave overview* (a total of 24 statements). Out of these 20 strengths were detected.

Demands for cooperation with multiple units. Within the second-order category *demands for cooperation with multiple units* a majority of IWL statements were related to the first-order category *demands for facilitation* (a total of 74 statements). Out of these 37 weaknesses were detected. A majority of GWE statements were attributed to the first-order category *cooperation with the employee* (a total of 8 statements). Out of these 7 strengths were detected.

Table 10

SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the IWL program or to the GWE on the third-order category demands

Third-order categories	Second-order categories	First-order categories		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
Demands	Employer demands	Employee responsibility	IWL	15	3	4	0	22
			GWE	9	0	0	0	9
		Absence overview and follow-up	IWL	0	17	3	11	31
			GWE	1	9	0	1	11
		Prioritization dilemma for the employer	IWL	9	21	6	12	48
			GWE	0	2	1	1	4
	Demands towards standardization	Sick leave overview	IWL	5	1	2	0	8
			GWE	20	1	3	0	24
		Standardization	IWL	74	12	3	1	90
			GWE	2	1	0	0	3
		Rigidity	IWL	5	77	29	13	124
			GWE	0	0	3	0	3
		Communication between employer and employee	IWL	9	18	0	5	32
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0
	Demands for cooperation with multiple units	Dialogue meetings	IWL	19	4	2	0	25
			GWE	1	0	1	0	2
		Cooperation with the regular general practitioner	IWL	4	23	17	1	45
			GWE	0	0	0	0	0
		Demands for facilitation	IWL	1	37	27	9	74
			GWE	1	1	6	0	8
		Cooperation with the employee	IWL	21	5	3	3	32
			GWE	7	1	0	0	8

Resources

The category *resources* cover informants' perceptions of resources to meet the IWL obligations. Informants name that support personnel serve a resource function and economical resources. Additionally informants name resources by the psychosocial and physical work environment and various facilitation measures. Table 11 shows the compound results on the third-order category resources. Table 11 illustrates how the IWL statements and the GWE statements are distributed relatively equally on frequency along the first-order categories. Still the GWE statements and the IWL statements had a different SWOT distribution. The IWL statements were relatively balanced on each of the four SWOT categories. The SWOT distribution of GWE statements revealed an overweight of strengths. A more compound elaboration of the findings that constitutes the five second-order categories *support personnel*, *economy*, *physical work environment*, *physical work environment* and *facilitation* will follow.

Support personnel. Within the second-order category *support personnel* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *special health competencies* (a total of 17 statements). Out of these 14 were strengths. Also most GWE statements were related to the first-order category *special health competencies* (a total of 27 statements). Out of these 21 strengths were detected.

Economy. Within the second-order category *economy* most IWL statements were attributed to the first-order category *facilitation opportunities* (a total of 76 statements). Out of these 36 strengths and 32 threats were detected. Also most GWE statements were related to the first-order category *facilitation opportunities* (a total of 52 statements). Out of these 52 strengths were detected.

Psychosocial work environment. Within the second-order category *psychosocial work environment* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *colleague support* (a total of 31 statements). Out of these 19 opportunities for improvement was discovered. Most GWE statements were related to the first-order category *prevention of psychosocial damage* (a total of 62 statements). Out of these 56 strengths were discovered.

Physical work environment. Within the second-order category *physical work environment* most IWL statements were related to one the first-order category *physical work environment facilities* (a total of 13 statements). Out of these 12 strengths were detected. A total of 33 GWE statements were assigned to this same first-order category. Out of these 28 strengths were detected.

Table 11

SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the IWL program or to the GWE on the third-order category resources.

Third-order category	Second-order categories	First-order categories		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
Resources	Support personnel	The company health service	IWL	12	0	2	1	15
			GWE	20	0	3	0	23
		Special health competencies	IWL	14	0	3	0	17
			GWE	21	0	6	0	27
	Economy	Refunds	IWL	10	11	11	2	34
			GWE	0	1	1	0	2
		Facilitation opportunities	IWL	3	36	5	32	76
			GWE	30	14	2	6	52
	Psychosocial work environment	Informal communication	IWL	0	3	6	5	14
			GWE	15	0	1	0	16
		Employee participation	IWL	4	7	2	7	20
			GWE	14	1	0	0	15
		Exhaustion	IWL	2	4	13	2	21
			GWE	8	10	4	3	25
		Colleague support	IWL	5	7	19	0	31
			GWE	33	1	4	0	38
		Prevention of psychosocial damage	IWL	3	0	17		20
			GWE	56	0	5	1	62
	Physical work environment	Physical work environment facilities	IWL	12	1	0	0	13
			GWE	28	2	2	1	33
	Facilitation	Flexibility	IWL	1	7	4	5	17
			GWE	15	10	11	2	38
		Job design	IWL	15	5	3	1	24
			GWE	33	2	0	1	36
		Effects of facilitation	IWL	14	20	6	13	53
			GWE	7	7	1	0	15

Facilitation. Within the second-order category *facilitation* most IWL statements were covered by the first-order category *effects of facilitation* (a total of 53 statements). Out of these 20 weaknesses were detected. A majority of GWE statements were covered by the first-order categories *flexibility* (a total of 38 statements) and *job design* (a total of 36 statements). Out of the GWE statements denoted to *flexibility* 15 strengths and 11 opportunities for improvements were detected. Out of the GWE statements denoted to *job design* 33strength were detected.

IWL Goal Settings

The category *IWL goal settings* cover the relevance of the three goal settings in the informants' respective units. Table 12 shows the compound results on the third-order category IWL goal settings. Table 12 illustrates how the IWL statements and the GWE statements are distributed relatively equally on frequency along the first-order categories. Still the GWE statements and the IWL statements had a different SWOT distribution. The IWL statements were relatively balanced on each of the four SWOT categories. The SWOT distribution of GWE statements revealed an overweight of strengths. A more compound elaboration of the findings that constitutes the three second-order categories *sub goal 1*, *sub goal 2* and *sub goal 3* will follow.

Sub goal 1: Prevent and reduce absenteeism. Within the second-order category *Sub goal 1: Prevent and reduce absenteeism* IWL statements were mainly related to the first-order category *follow-up and facilitation* (a total of 49 statements). Out of these 25 strengths were detected. Also most GWE statements were covered by the first-order category *follow-up and facilitation* (a total of 12 statements). Out of these 9 strengths were detected.

Sub goal 2: Increase employment of individuals with disabilities. Within the second-order category *Sub goal 2: Increase employment of individuals with disabilities* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *Sub goal 2 relevance* (a total of 20 statements). Out of these 14 opportunities for improvement were discovered. A similar tendency is evident in the GWE statements with the first-order category *Sub goal 2 relevance* being the most frequent (a total of 23 statements). Out of these 12 strengths and 9 opportunities for improvement were discovered.

Sub goal 3: Increase average retirement age. Within the second-order category *Sub goal 3: Increase average retirement age* most IWL statements were related to the first-order category *facilitation possibilities for seniors* (a total of 18 statements). Out of these 10 strengths were discovered. The same tendency is visible in terms of the GWE statements

making *facilitation possibilities for seniors* the most frequent first-order category (a total of 53 statements). Out of these 36 strengths were discovered.

Table 12

SWOT distribution of statements assigned to the IWL program or to the GWE on the third-order category IWL goal settings.

Third-order categories	Second-order categories	First-order categories		Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
IWL goal settings	Sub goal 1: prevent and reduce absenteeism	Uses the agreement on sub goal 1	IWL	11	15	7	3	36
			GWE	1	0	0	0	1
		Follow-up and facilitation	IWL	25	13	0	11	49
			GWE	9	1	2	0	12
	Sub goal 2: increase employment of individuals with disabilities	Sub goal 2 relevance	IWL	3	2	14	1	20
			GWE	12	2	9	0	23
		Employees with disabilities at the workplace	IWL	0	6	2	4	12
			GWE	0	6	2	0	8
	Sub goal 3: increase average retirement	An older workforce	IWL	3	2	4	6	15
			GWE	7	3	1	3	14
		Facilitation possibilities for seniors	IWL	10	5	2	1	18
			GWE	36	11	4	2	53

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to generate knowledge about the practical experiences with IWL. Twenty-four employers with personnel responsibility and support staff gave their evaluation of IWL. The group of informants was explicitly asked to give SWOT formatted accounts of positive–negative, past–future, and internal–external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of IWL. Inductive thematic coding showed that informants experienced the IWL program to represent something different from the remaining GWE (view table 5). The informants' distinction may be understood as the external IWL program encompasses a simplified understanding of the work environment concept. The

distinction among IWL and GWE was to some extent expected because both the GWE and IWL operate within the same work environment system.

Through inductive analysis three main findings evolved. *First*, IWL was predominantly related to weaknesses whereas GWE was related to strengths. *Second*, five cumulative themes (third-order categories) covered all 2118 statements, comprising state-organisation relationship (9 %), philosophy/symbol value (16 %), demands (28 %), resources (35 %) and IWL goal settings (12 %). *Third*, IWL was predominantly associated with demands whereas GWE was predominantly associated with resources. The three main findings outlined above have not been discovered in research so far. Work environment legislations, psychological theory and organisational perspectives will be used to illuminate these findings.

Qualitative Differences among IWL and GWE

IWL and GWE showed different patterns on the SWOT distribution. Most conspicuous was the discovery that IWL was mostly associated with weakness whereas GWE was mostly associated with strengths. Table 6 presented the most profound weaknesses by the IWL program and strengths by the GWE. Investigation of these themes indicated that IWL and GWE hold two different work environment perspectives in terms of public administration values and focus in interventional designs.

Stated weaknesses with the IWL program. The most profoundly stated weakness by the IWL system was rigidity, which provoked irritation and frustration for both employers and employees. Informants perceived IWL as rigid by locking the organisations to a predetermined process. Informants problematized the lack of opportunity to adapt the follow-up process to the respective sick leave case. For instance, one informant stated that "*Yes, you've probably got many such stories, but, but it's probably something many employers have experienced that it is* [the IWL program] *very, was a very rigid system".* Described by another informant in other words *"It may involve workers who must be called into dialogue meetings when they are, yea, four weeks before the due date and has some sick notes on pelvic pain or those sorts of thing things".*

In terms of public administrative values the issue of rigidity is demonstrated by NPM that value clear standards and measures of performance, and focus on results rather than process. With this, both IWL and NPM are inclined to value a "one size fits all" type of process to attain desired goals (Hood, 1991). It could therefore be argued that the IWL program holds a static perspective on the working environment. Further, this might lead to a varied dissatisfaction with the program because every organisation possesses their unique

struggles. Hereby IWL can be traced back to the critique of reactive interventional designs denoted as EAPs outlined in figure 2. One of the most outspoken critiques of EAPs is the tendency for fixed interventional designs implemented as a package solution without diagnostics of organisational needs outlined (Arthur, 2000; Semmer, 2006).

Informants perceived the IWL program as top heavy because the state served as a top-down control function through NAV. NAV controls for adherence of the rigid IWL rules in the respective IWL organisation. The interface of rigidity and control is described well by one informant *"but that another unit will come to verify what I've done and since giving me a snap on the hand because I have not written what they wanted me to write, that is actually perceived as a weakness on my part. Because it is so incredibly irritating."* Inequalities between the state and the respective organisations are also described: "*Like, it is no reciprocity, and it's something with that you get a bit like Big Brother is controlling you perspective on it all. So.*" In other words, hands-on professional management is a key component of NPM. The typical justification for a top-down hierarchy is that a clear assignment of responsibility for action promotes efficiency by avoiding overlapping functions and confusion of power (Hood, 1991). Hereby it can be suggested that NAV function as a control organ to ensure that involved parts in IWL organisations conduct their obligations.

Additionally, the states' possibilities to give sanctions if IWL objectives were not made provoked a negative representation of NAV. This can be exemplified by an informant who said: *"And I also experience that the system that is now where it is very much use of these sanction notification and you have not met and stuff, it ... I mean almost that it should have been incorporated a requirement that the employer could also send a notification of sanction to NAV if they have not answered to inquiries we need answers to to solve our own challenges."* The system of sanctions and rewards is a type of private sector style of management practice typical for NPM (Hood, 1991). The statement indicates that informants wish to increase the reciprocity in the state-organisation relationship thus a shift away from NPM control principles.

Lack of credibility with the intervention emerged on multiple facets and questions were raised in terms of the content and intentions of IWL. Firstly, several informants stated that the program contained good intentions; however, the agreement lacked practical measures. Secondly, informants' experiences lack of confidence in attainment of the three IWL sub goals: *"What shall I say, to a certain extent the IWL program is contradictory in the sense that one will have reduced both the absence and bring in more people with reduced workability".* Thirdly, informants were conspicuous of the unspoken intentions of the

agreement. One informant describes this well by *"unexpressed intentions inherent in this, which involves that the sick leave is extensively high in Norway and that we have to bring down the costs associated with ... yes"*. It was experienced that costs and exertions were moved from the state to the respective unit, so it exclusively became the organisations' responsibility to facilitate an inclusive working life. For example, one informant stated that *"sometimes it can be difficult to be the employer because it exist a system that is made to attend the employee, but we don't have a IWL budget that makes it possible to, that people can get, get all the necessary facilitation that they might wish for, and that, that is difficult."* These perceptions can imply that IWL seeks to "do more with less" by shuffling follow-up and facilitation costs on to the employers.

In addition, this responsibility transfer can imply a shift towards greater competition on welfare issues. Opportunities for facilitation in the respective unit will vary in line with available economic resources. This can be understood as an introduction of competitive elements in public sector (Hood, 1991). A competitiveness between IWL members in terms of providing feasible facilitation offers to employees and parsimony by avoiding overlapping roles. Parsimony in resources use are typical NPM measures.

If these assumptions are correct, the IWL program shares all of the 7 NPM characteristics outlined in table 1 (Hood, 1991). Many informants stated that IWL lacked substance. As one informant states: "*But then again it is few concrete measures, and it is many nice formulations. So it is kind of like the emperors' new clothes however it is no one that dares to say "but he has no clothes on", right."*. These perspectives on lack of substance can strengthen the assumption that IWL have an insufficient theoretical foundation - the same critique have been granted to NPM (Gustavsen, 2011; Hood, 1991).

Stated strengths with the GWE. The most profound strengths within the internal GWE were related to positive psychosocial work environment aspects. Informants experienced that a good psychosocial work environment prevented psychosocial attrition and damage on employees. The following quote describes how an informant highlights the benefit of a healthy psychosocial work environment: *"It is such a social environment we work in, we work close with each other, and it is very few that work in their own office. Meaning, it is alfa omega that too, to get back and that also to not be reported sick if you don't need to. To have the good environment at work."* Additionally informants state benefits of proactive work environment measures to prevent sickness and increase wellbeing by colleague support, flexibility and job design and redesign (Kompier, 2003). Thus, it can be suggested that GWE is focused on a proactive design of work.

The stated strengths with the GWE can together indicate inherent QWL values for public administration as informants highlight that a good work environment have a dual focus on preventing sickness and promoting wellbeing (Arbeidsmiljøloven, 2005: § 1.1 a). In practical terms, these values were motivated in the GWE through the proactive interventional measures mentioned above.

In sum the most profound weaknesses by IWL and strengths by GWE can demonstrate different perspectives on the work environment concept from at least two positions. *First,* IWL and GWE may deviate in terms of public administration values. Whereas the IWL demonstrate NPM values of cost-efficacy the GWE demonstrate QWL values of welfare. *Second,* IWL and GWE may deviate in level of intervention, as the IWL demonstrate a reactive interventional focus targeting single employees and GWE demonstrate a proactive interventional focus targeting the whole organisation.

The second main finding in the present study demonstrated that all IWL and GWE statement could be covered by five cumulative themes. A compound elaboration of these indications will follow.

The Five Cumulative Themes

Five cumulative themes evolved in the interviews and the two cumulative themes *demands* and *resources* together covered approximately two thirds (63 %) of the statements. This composition will be discussed in combination. The remaining three cumulative themes *state-organization relationship*, *philosophy/symbol value* and *IWL goal settings* covered the remaining third (37 %) of informants' statements. These three themes will last be deliberated on in combination.

Demands and resources. Inductive analysis of the informants' statements reveals *demands* and *resources* as two independent categories. Demands and resources are the main components of the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). An inductive obtainment of these two categories provides support for the integrative theory on the stress- and motivation relationship. It was also discovered that informants shared perspectives of both strengths and weaknesses with the demand and resource category. In some instances, informants perceive demands as something positive: *"...so it is good to have the routines to attend to. Because if not this might slip in a busy work life. So, so this, this works well in my opinion. Yes."* Also, one informant pronounced the positive aspect of demands: *"That one through the IWL program has invited people to talk. It is stated that we will, that the employer, the government will facilitate for the employer side, the employee side and the support personnel and together find the best way."*

In terms of negative aspects with the demand category one informant stated: "*despite simplified reporting- the reporting still… which, which, these points which should occur on specific times, doesn't always feel natural (…) and, and then it emerges one of those, a bit, vicious circle. Because you, because you starts out with sick leave, and you might not be able to adapt for the remaining work force. And then you know you will get some sick leave on them as well. And, and then it is a difficult, it is difficult to find a good balance."* This illustrates how demands can be experienced as a weakness. Access on necessary resources was considered positive: *"I have applied for facilitation refunds and often we get it granted. So, this is not complicated and it is very delightful that it is so easy to apply, thus it does not demand too much documentation."* On the other hand, lacks of necessary resources qualify as a weakness within the resource category *"So, I was about to state that, I think that the main frustration for the employees out there is the fact that it takes time and resources."*

In sum, these statements illustrate both positive and negative aspects of demands and resources and may serve as a critique of the JD-R theory. They underline that the theory might expel a too static understanding of the work environment, in line with already existing critics of the JD-R theory. The critique additionally concerns that demands can be experienced as both a positive challenge and a negative hindrance (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010).

This particular study applied a non-theoretical, three-dimensional SWOT format. This format invites informants to express both positive and potential negative aspects of a phenomenon. By avoiding being directed by a priori assumptions resources and demands emerged as dynamical work environment variables. Job demands and job resources indicated to serve different functions dependent on the context in which the variables operated. With this in mind, the distinction between demands and resources was used despite some difficulties as they in many occasions seemed to be intrinsically linked. For example, when informants gave their description of facilitation, this sometimes referred to internal organisational resources, and other times to the IWL programs demand for facilitation.

Although the two categories demands and resources covered over two thirds of the data material, approximately one third fell outside. Based on this notion it can be questioned whether the JD-R theory integrates all workplace facets affecting wellbeing. By investigating the three remaining cumulative themes, JD-R did not seem to cover broader organisational conditions, cultural aspects, external regulations of working life and, how these influence organisational practice. These exteriors have been proven important to understand internal work place compositions (Grant et al., 2010). This suggests that the JD-R theory possess a too narrow understanding of the work environment concept.

Table 13.
9 success criteria seen in conjunction with matching first order categories and corresponding employee statements.

Success criteria	First order category	Employee statement
1) Employee participation throughout the whole process.	NAV as control authority	*And to a greater extent consider the employer a specialist in its own work place, then I think that people would be back to work sooner. I believe they can have a higher percent of presence in the period they actually doesn't feel well.*
2) Persistent support and commitment from leaders.	Mistrust with the IWL program	*And then one learn some, this that one can use close to a "bull shit" - generator, one learn these phrases like "the employee has…yes, no reason to further follow-up and not, it is of no relevance" and so on, these things. And then you paste it on the front page, get it off like that…*
3) Clear specific rules, procedures, goals and costs. E.g. assured confidentiality.	Intentions behind the IWL program	*So that I am…so that I am not aware of when the general rules of the working life ends and when the IWL program proceeds, in a way. So to me, this is an integrated part of it all.*
4) Close cooperation and involvement of the union representatives.	Exploitation of facilitation offers	*Thus, it is, what I experience is that the union system and, this should not, it should not be incorporated with the system which safeguards work conditions which is a separate negotiation institute…*
5) Training of both leaders and employees.	IWL program changes	*This and it works well, in many ways. So, it might not be the IWL program in itself that is the main problem, rather what exactly constitute the IWL program. So the IWL program, in my opinion, over all it, it works well.*
6) Clearly defined roles and responsibilities ahead of intervention implementation, in addition to cooperation among involved instances to ensure cohesive support.	Excessive work with the IWL agreement	*But…but it might be something about the weighting and which I mentioned roles…some mixed roles, which can be a bit problematic.*
7) Conduct risk analysis and have a logical connection among the problems identified in the risk analysis and the specific intervention program. E.g. To design an organisational specific intervention program and make the program part of the organisational culture.	The IWL program is excess	*…To not use the IWL agreement. Right? It is for me in a way as an employer – not interested in make use of it.*
	Uses the agreement on sub goal 1	*But clearly if I have a look upon the three main themes which you mentioned, so are the times I have made use of the agreement in terms of the first, thus prevent and reduce sick leave levels.*
8) Incorporate a culture for change and map out employee willingness for change.	IWL program changes	*Demands are implied not in terms of developing culture and program and systems…It has more or less, to that is why development of systems are less attained to. Even though every unit had these system before. One had it developed for one self, and then these got adjusted to fit in.*
9) Systematic evaluation using measureable criteria prepared from the risk analysis. I. e. Ensure a logical connection among intervention program and measurement criteria.	Uses the agreement on sub goal 1	*So I can also give one example of follow up which I consider to be good. Where he [the NAV consultant] thought we had such a high level of sick leave. One was hospitalized due a hospital mistake, sort of. Simultaneously, I had prolapse, and then it was. Then we had a high level of absenteeism, but the cases were all known, but he would then like to come for a visit and talk to us and wanted to talk to the work environment committee to see what he could do to reduce our sick leave levels.*

State-organisation relationship, philosophy/symbol value and IWL goal settings. The *state-organisational relationship, philosophy/symbol value* and *IWL goal settings* together cover 37% of the data material. These categories address in example cooperation experiences with governmental agencies, underlying constraints for the IWL program and the relevance of the IWL goal settings internally in informants' own units. The thematic content and SWOT distribution of these three cumulative themes were investigated. The content could be understood as omitting success criteria for effective work environment interventions (see table 2). Altogether IWL seem to deviate from the 9 success criteria for interventions. Table 13 demonstrate how IWL deviates from the success criteria on all 9 points. The table illustrations are based on first order categories and connected statements independent of topic frequency and SWOT distribution. The table shows specific descriptions of how the IWL program deviates from the success criteria. The realization that IWL deviates from these success criteria for effective work environment intervention can offer additional insight on IWL limitations to meet own goals.

The last finding in this study revealed a different distribution of IWL and GWE statements on the five cumulative themes. In fact, IWL was to a great extent connected to demands whereas GWE was connected to resources. This indication will be deliberated.

IWL Program Demands and GWE Resources

IWL was predominantly associated with demands whereas GWE was predominantly associated with resources. Based on traditional psychological theories workplace resources is associated with motivation whereas demands are associated with stress. A stimulating working life is recognized by having a good correspondence among job demands and resources. Therefore, the discovered overweight of stated demands with the IWL program may illustrate that the IWL holds an out-dated stress perceptive on the work environment, that consequently leads to a reactive interventional approach with an orientation on sickness and stress. Stress theories have been stated to represent a marginal theoretical approach on work environment mechanisms. This may also apply for IWL. Stress perspectives are criticized for their one-sidedness, a simplification of reality, being static and fail to take into account the ever-changing nature of work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

On the contrary, an overweight of stated resources with the GWE may indicate an integrative work environment perspective as informants state the GWE to be proactive in its interventional approach. Integrative theories on work environment suggest a good balance between resources and demands. This study suggests that the integration of resources and demands are only attained because the resources in the GWE buffer for the IWL demands.

Informants describe that a stimulating work environment can function as a buffer on sick leaves: *"It's to create a, create an environment that, that makes people not, not skip work or get sick".*

Implications and Further Research

The present study suggests that the IWL program holds an out-dated stress perspective on employee wellbeing. In line with principles in stress perspectives the IWL program apply strict demands for the IWL organisations but does not offer necessary resources to attain these demands. Further, the study proposes that the IWL program share many NPM values, which force a focus on efficiency over welfare. This may force a reactive focus where interventions are implemented after injury. This further compromise employee welfare because resources on employee wellbeing is held to a minimum. The IWL program seems to deviate from the three current work environment perspectives (triangulation), and this study therefore suggest that the IWL program lack a knowledge-based approach. Current research suggests an integrative focus of both stress and motivation, proactive levels of interventions and an organisational practice in line with the WEA (founded on QWL values). The organisational practice in GWE seemingly corresponds with today's knowledge-based work environment perspectives.

The benefits relative to the cost of the current IWL program can therefore be questioned, hence the agreement have failed to reach its own goal settings. This study indicates that the program demands more than it contributes on organisational level. The program as it appears today might as well counteract rather than contribute to its own goal settings. Thus, the IWL program should be redesigned in favour of a more holistic work environment perspective, in terms of attendance to both modern stress *and* motivational perspectives. However, this integrative focus seems to be included already in the WEA legislations. Furthermore, the present study suggests that if the overall goal is a more inclusive working life this requires an increased governmental welfare support. Correspondingly, it requires a withdrawal of the NPM principles for public management. It can be assumed that a focus on efficiency will exclude less employable workers, increase unemployment and thereby also increase state social security costs (Christensen, 2004).

The present study used an inductive, bottom-up approach to the work environment and therefore differs from existing theoretical frameworks. This approach revealed both practical implications of IWL perspectives and potential theoretical contributions to the work environment literature. The inductive results disclose JD-R theory as an incomplete integrative framework for analysis of work environment concepts. The work environment

concept should be understood from both internal organisational practice and external work environment systems (Grant et al., 2010). Therefore, the present study suggests that the JD-R theory should include external facets, such as external values and regulations of administrative practice. Thereby the current JD-R theory seems to have a too narrow understanding of the work environment concept.

This study indicates that the limitations of IWL can be explained by its' lack of theoretical foundation. To further investigate the knowledge base for the specific IWL program and the composition of the work environment concept, a deductive reanalysis of the current data material is suggested. Potential studies may reanalyse the data material based on the 7 NPM characteristics outlined in Hood (1991) and on a list of success criteria for interventions. In addition, an interesting target is how resources in the general work environment (GWE) may buffer the demands inflicted by the IWL program.

This study is one of few qualitative studies on the IWL program. More qualitative studies are suggested. One proposition is to include more informants from different sectors in order to investigate group differences in the perception of the IWL program. The present study included informants from the school, hospital and institute division. It is possible that the three sectors had different experiences of the IWL. Each of the three sectors were still too small to contribute with meaningful comparisons. It can be assumed that production companies share another perspective on the IWL program relative to the knowledge-intensive sectors included in this study. One assumption is differing possibilities for facilitation. Competing perspectives on the IWL across organisations can highlight how the static approach of the IWL not is cross functional.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to identify the practical experiences with the IWL program. A bottom-up approach was attained by interviewing twenty-four informants with knowledge to and utilization of the IWL. The choice of method was in-depth qualitative interviews followed by an inductive content analysis. Important limitations with the study will be addressed.

Sample. Twenty-four employers with personnel responsibility and support staff from the public school, hospital and institute sector in the Oslo-region took part in the study. The sample was strategic with the objective to obtain novel insight on experiences with the IWL from a relatively small sample size. Strategic samples have previously been recommended in qualitative interview studies to maintain valuable information on a specific topic. However a strategic sample with a small sample size does not provide a basis for representative results.

Still qualitative studies equivalent to the present have the benefit of discovering underlying mechanisms on a research topic. Thereby analytical generalizability can be a more appropriate term to describe the benefit of strategy and sample. The study allows pointing out tendencies and themes in the dataset that might be studied deductive and quantitatively to enable more general, representative results (Kvale & Brinkmanns, 2009). Further, findings in this study are in line with research on IWL reported previously (Holm, 2014; Stensland, 2014). This suggest that the current group of informants hold perceptions of the IWL that are not distinctive for this specific group, nor too heavily influenced by the expectations of the researcher.

Validity. In qualitative studies validity is threatened both in the data collection and analysis process. Research results are unavoidably more or less influenced by the researchers' preconceptions and theoretical orientation. Questions in terms of validity therefore need to be addressed.

In qualitative interview studies a threat against validity concern whether informants come with credible information and if the interviewer objectively understands that information. Another risk is that the interviewer might elicit specific answers from the informant. To amplify the validity in the data collection phase it is advised to include more than one researcher and attain transparency throughout the whole process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). To accommodate this risk the interviews were carried out by two interviewees both trained and experienced with the current interview method. Follow-up questions were asked in all interviews to avoid potential pitfalls of misinterpretations of informant statements. Further the follow-up questions were voiced to obtain thick descriptions of the IWL. Inclusion criteria for participation in the present study were that informants had knowledge and utilization of the IWL. These criteria can contribute to increase the credibility of informant statements on the topic.

All twenty-four interviews were recorded digitally. The use of a tape recorder can amplify the validity by allowing the interviewer to be fully present in the interview setting. An alternative could be to take continuous notes. Despite the evident strength of digital recordings a drawback is that the interview setting can be perceived as artificial. Nonetheless all informants were asked to give their experience of the interview and none named something as unpleasant. The interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim in entirety. This too can strengthen the validity of the dataset as all statements were written down and included for further analysis. No errors of significance were identified in the transcriptions.

In this study an inductive approach and a thematic content analysis was adopted. Hence the coding is not based on existing frameworks or theories. Validity threats can

therefore be that the researcher discovers and validates its own assumptions. In the inductive analysis themes were systematized in larger categories and in the end five cumulative themes were detected. These five themes were considered comprehensive to the entire dataset of 2118 statements. All statements were arranged as belonging to the inclusive working life (IWL) program or to the general work environment (GWE). It can be discussed if these categorizations were in line with the inductive approach. The categorization may have been informed by the researchers' theoretical orientation and preconceptions. It is plausible that a supplementary method and theoretical orientation would produce other categories. Nonetheless, the researcher cannot be unbound from theoretical and personal perspectives. An account of themes "arising" passively denies the active role of the researcher throughout the whole research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At least two aspects may have contributed to reduce researcher subjectivity. *Firstly*, in this study two analysts identified the themes and established a consensus in the understanding of these. *Secondly*, the analysts did not perform extensive literature research on the IWL prior to the study to minimize subjectivity.

Reliability. A threat in qualitative studies can be that results might not be replicated by other researchers. This is because qualitative studies are all about interpretations and these might vary. Measures of reliability among analysts can improve the certainty of the results' validity. In this study reliability measures were done to attain a reliable data collection, transcription and analysis phase. All twenty-four interviews were carried out by asking the same predefined questions and all interviews were carried out in line with the PEACE model. The interviews were interchangeably transcribed and the inter-rater reliability for the transcriptions revealed no significant errors of commission or omission. Last, the two first interviews were analysed jointly to increase agreement on the coding. The inter-rater reliability on the five analysis categories was tested and considered good with a mean Cohens' Kappa well above the 0.4 threshold (Banerjee et al., 1999).

Prevalence of themes. There are many ways to report prevalence of themes in thematic content analysis. Themes can be reported at the individual level by reporting themes across participants, group level by comparing prevalence of themes across groups or at the statement level across the entire dataset. In this study frequency on each of the three coding principles was reported across the entire dataset. Statement frequency does not necessarily highlight the importance of the theme. On the other side reporting on most frequent patterns and themes can be more true to the inductive, bottom-up approach by selecting on most stated rather than most "appealing" themes.

Further, frequency can be criticized for being a too quantitative method to represent qualitative results. There is still a lack of research on how to report prevalence of themes in thematic content analysis. However the intention of this study was to attain the overall perspectives by the IWL program. Frequency of predominant themes was considered the most covering approach for the aim of this study. Counting frequency is suggested an useful method when investigating an under-researched area as with the IWL program (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Conclusion

Based on a bottom-up approach the present study concludes that the IWL program contrasts today's knowledge-based work environment perspectives. The IWL program demands more from the organisations than it provides. IWL indicates an out-dated stress perspective on the work environment. Further the study proposes that the IWL program share many NPM values on efficiency over welfare. This may provoke a reactive focus and implementation of interventions after injury as resources on employee wellbeing is held to a minimum. Last, IWL can not be found to satisfy suggested success criteria for work place interventions. These findings can together explain why IWL have failed to meet own objectives.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Operationalizations of the first-, second- and third-order categories discovered in the thematic content analysis

State-organisation relationship (covering a total of 180 statements)

The category *state-organisation relationship* covers informants' perceptions of the cooperative relationship with external governmental agencies to meet IWL obligations.

Division of power. Cover informants' perceptions of the division of power among the contract partners.

NAV as control authority. Experiences with NAV as control unit for the implementation of the IWL program in the respective organisation.

Statement level: *In my opinion, the cooperation with NAV as an equal contract partner can, yes, I don't perceive… It does not always have that form.*

Excessive work with the IWL program. Experienced workload in the implementation of the IWL program.

Statement level: *And not, thus, it is something with this alternative description of the IWL program. It is something about… it emphasizes to a great extent the human aspect in follow-up and safeguarding of single individuals this… But the alternative description is this that, now the employers have to take some responsibility and be willing to cover the cost to a larger extent and do more in the follow up.*

Mistrust with the IWL program. Experienced mistrust with the IWL program.

Statement level: *And this is also where I think that NAV and the instruments not always support the intentions of the IWL program.*

State cooperation experiences. Cover descriptions of coordination among governmental agencies.

Assistance from NAV. Evaluations of the assistance offered from NAV to the IWL organisations.

Statement level: *But there, firstly, it is discovered that there are big differences among the various NAV offices. Secondly, also the legislation seems to be enforced differently.*

Communication with NAV. Evaluations of the standardized communication system NAV requires the IWL organisations to follow.

Statement level*: So, I actually believe that NAV has been the most challenging.*

Philosophy/symbol value (covering a total of 337 statements)

The category *philosophy/symbol* value covers what informants characterized as underlying assumptions and leading principles for the IWL program. They further distinguish among symbol value on individual and system level.

Philosophy. Perceived IWL program philosophy

Intentions behind the IWL program. The experienced underlying intentions for the IWL program.

Statement level: *And there have been some sort of commercialization around these which I don't like. It is a huge amount of people who work on these topics. And it is, in some ways a bit project based. And, in my opinion, the allocation of supports and funds and alike in projects are, it is...now it has been a period, because the government has set by a lot of money. And then, suddenly, hundred, two, three, four, five hundreds of thousands in one direction or another and in the next second you'll have discounts for the same. So there are no systematics.*

IWL program changes. Suggestions for IWL program changes and improvements.

Statement level: *Otherwise I believe that. in general, sick leave, at least here with us is followed up. In a sensible way. This, yes. But whether this is the IWL program, I am not sure. As mentioned, I have experiences from units without the agreement and it has worked there as well.*

Symbol value system level. Perceived underlying value systems influencing the working life (system level).

Focus on production. An experienced enhanced focus on production in the respective unit and in the overall society.

Statement level: *The threats against the improvement of IWL work, it is of course the enhanced production requirements… Budget at alike, is independent of the different indicators, do well enough on research, performed well enough on teaching, performance, all these things, so, so, it is of course a profound threat against my opportunity to run this as a protected business. I believe, yes. Because it is, the [name of unit] moves towards a more elitists.... We need to be among the stars, and, and then… or then it is difficult to "give by the doors" if one have not got granted resources for these matters.*

Attitudes to sick leave. Registered attitudes to sick leave in the unit and the remaining society.

Statement level: *The short term absenteeism is very much about attitudes to work. And to which extent you should meet up, and so on, be on time, and such.*

The IWL program is excess. The experience that the IWL program is out of date and not useful in the unit.

Statement level: *Yes. No, there are certainly other adjustments that could be made, but again… I am not sure whether it is the IWL program or NAV more in general which constitutes the problem. So, so, no, the IWL program, it. It is there, but it, we do not relate to the IWL program daily.*

Symbol value individual level: Symbol value system level. Perceived underlying value systems influencing the working life (individual level).

Expectations to the employee. The notion that expectations to the employee might be experienced positively.

Statement level: *On the one side it is positive, that one gives confidence and ... And in many cases it turns out with a sense of responsibility and a very like... you try not to be more absent than necessary and one pushes oneself back to work quickly.*

Exploitation of facilitation offer. The notion that employees might exploit facilitation offers and make it their benefit.

Statement level: *Another challenge may be ... I do not see this often, however, but it could be that much of the adaptation is taken so much for granted that it becomes more a requirement and not a ... "Now let us cooperate to achieve this", that it can …*

Demands (covering a total of 603 statements)

The category *demands* covers informants' perceptions of demands in terms of meeting the IWL obligations. Informants distinguish between demands towards themselves as employers, demands by a standardized implementation process and demands by cooperation with multiple units.

Employer demands. Demands set up for the employer in the IWL program.

Employee responsibility. The notion that the employer has the overall responsibility for their employees.

Statement level: *where formalized agreements, whereby it can also be referred to occurrence of failure, and where the parts in the working life i.e. the worker's organisation discover inferior leaders and stuff. I can, I can insofar understand this, but, but it's.*

Absence overview and follow-up. Systems assuring an overview of employee absence and follow-up

Statement level: *Another weakness or problem is that it provides, that it adds extra responsibilities to me.*

Prioritization dilemma for the employer. *P*ronounced prioritization dilemma for the employer due to IWL demands and work load.

Statement level: *So it is one of many more administrative things that was added after I started out as headmaster earlier I could actually be an educational leader, now I'm to a greater extent an administrator. And I think many, I may say to myself, it feels different than the job I originally applied for and started. And, and that was my, a lot of my motivation was the conducting of educational development, dense personnel work where the aim was student learning.*

Demands towards standardization. The IWL program demands standardized procedures.

Sick leave overview. The organisation's' systems to assure sick leave overview

Statement level: *But I, while I think that, that, the way we work here so, my perception is that we have very close contact with every employee and where they constantly keeps us updated on how things are and how it all works.*

Standardization. Perceptions of the IWL program as a standardized tool

Statement level: *So you asked about what works, yes no it is, it is clear it does give one, it provides a frame of reference when representatives of the employees is to take up cases and could, could refer to the IWL agreement*

Rigidity. Perception of the IWL program as a rigid system.

Statement level: *and it's fairly rigid routines like when follow-up calls should take place and, call in three days and hear how it goes, there is one, you've probably seen the routine description?*

Communication between employer and employee. Communication among employee and employer in the follow-up process

Statement level: *what makes things, what make things not work? So it is perhaps not necessarily just this, will one have a gradual sick leave versus a 100% sick leave. But also talk about and facilitate a dialogue about what it takes to make you come back?*

Demands for cooperation with multiple units. Experiences of the IWL programs' obligation for cooperation with multiple units

Dialogue meetings. Perceptions of the usefulness of the dialogue meetings as an IWL measure.

Statement level: *So. But I'm very satisfied with, or, yes, I have been very satisfied with a good proportion of the dialogue meetings we have had. It's nice that it exists a system. But that's sort of what I have to say.*

Cooperation with the regular general practitioner. Cooperation experiences with the regular general practitioner on IWL issues.

Statement level: *And we saw pretty fast then, that the expectation that the doctor should be included on some of these dialogue meetings was completely "overkill". So, we did not manage that. The doctors didn't have the time, they*

didn't prioritize it. So that we were unable to deliver that, but it was just as much NAVs fault as it was our fault. So.

***Demands for facilitation*.** The IWL programs demands towards the workplaces' responsibility for facilitation.

Statement level: *I think perhaps the biggest weakness is that it adds very much responsibility on the employee ... employer. And that employees somehow very easily can say, "yes, but you've signed the IWL program, then you are supposed to try to get me back to work."*

Cooperation with the employee. Demands for cooperation with the employee in follow-up and facilitation cases

Statement level: *in a sense forced to, to take the conversation and to, to, to catch them up on the way and and get a, map what we as employers can do, to help them*

Resources (covering a total of 737)

The category *resources* covers informants' perceptions of resources to meet the IWL obligations. Informants distinguish between support personnel serving as resource function and economical resources. Additionally informants name resources by the psychosocial and physical work environment and various facilitation measures.

Support personnel. Support personnel serves a resource function to meet IWL obligations

The company health service. **C**ontributions from the company health service in follow-up and facilitation cases.

Statement level: *I have good experience with using the company health service as a consultant and partly included in some cases. As I think is very important, because it's ... I'm no health expert in any way, but, but having someone*

looking at it from outside can sometimes be ... which also has some expertise in it is useful.

Special health competencies. Resources by assistance from other special health competencies. E.g. unions, work psychologists, midwife service, legal assistance, physiotherapists.

Statement level: *We have also had assistance from a work psychologist and also the company doctor in a few cases. So it is a good support system and has actually made the employees come back to work earlier because of it.*

Economy. Economical resources to meet IWL obligations

Refunds. Refunds from NAV for IWL related work

Statement level: *Because the facilitation refunds is, for example, 280 Norwegian kroners per day and that is supposed to be a stimulus for the employer to hire a substitute to do the tasks that another person can't do. But that not even reach to a substitute for half an hour. So that it is, and the application procedure is relatively complicated. So you must first apply and then you have to wait for an approval.*

Facilitation opportunities. Economical facilitation resources

Statement level: *What we have, where we have good flexibility and opportunities to adapt is because we have relatively robust economy at the unit, which means that we have good opportunities to insert substitutes and stuff when it is needed and when we have a longer sick leave we can act on that. To not have a ... this kind of robustness in the bottom makes it harder to relieve people.*

Psychosocial work environment. Perception of psychosocial work environment within own unit

Informal communication. Informal communication between employer and employee in the follow-up process

Statement level: *Like, you, you communicate in that way, verbalize on e-mail or SMS and...continuous*

Employee participation. Involvement of employees can be absence reducing

Statement level: *Also with the involvement then. And experienced that the absenteeism dropped a lot in the course of a year. Yeah, so now it's now manage to attain, attain what we managed, something I think is a continuous work with the involvement in particular.*

Exhaustion. The employers and support personnel desires to prevent physical and mental attrition to a greater extent

Statement level: *And as mentioned a generosity and spaciousness in terms of that you not always are 100 %.*

Colleague support. The benefit of colleague support on wellbeing.

Statement level: *But it is clear that trying to have collegial forums and somehow places where you can take things out and talk about problems if you become frustrated and stuff, it's something I'm working on and that is a challenge for people.*

***Prevention of psychosocial damage*.** Perception of that good psychosocial work environment prevents and reduces absenteeism.

Statement level: *And it is a good psychosocial work environment, a leadership that is aware, who are aware of the employees, who are generous and safe. And that is supportive but not controlling. And a good social glue , social support between the employees and that it is allowed to fail. Culture for this.*

Physical work environment. Physical work environment and facilitation possibilities within own unit e.g. safety, facilitation possibilities, facilities, inclusive design, exercise.

Physical work environment facilities. Physical work environment and facilitation possibilities within own unit e.g. safety, facilitation possibilities, facilities, inclusive design, exercise.

Statement level: *Because I also experiencing that it is a good amount of resources so we have not anything, everybody are now supposed to have like luffing desks and stuff. It has suddenly, even very young people who apparently are in super shape, it is almost a kind of "must". I don't have it myself.*

Facilitation. Facilitation measures and potential effects of facilitation

Flexibility. Being flexible as a facilitation measure

Statement level: *in a stressful operation situation, it can be experienced as a burden more than a resource-accessibility.*

Job design. Job design as a facilitation measure

Statement level: *We, we have also ... benefits here at the unit, we have relatively flexible working hours. At least the scientifically workers. So that it is, where we have different arrangements also with people ... We want to, we try for example to facilitate that if anyone wants to teach after lunch instead of in the morning, then we do that, so that they are ... and research time, there is it more free to decide how it should be done. So I think we go pretty far for that, try to facilitate for, different needs. That, that people has.*

Effects of facilitation. Effects of facilitation on the work environment.

Statement level: *It is perhaps most like that, maybe it's the situation we often face, when we run the clock. So it is precisely that, who can I facilitate for and*

how many can I facilitate for without affecting the others. Because it is no doubt that, it affects the remaining that have no facilitation, and it can also create dissatisfaction.

IWL goal settings (covering a total of 261 statements)

The category *IWL goal settings* covers the relevance of the three goal settings in the informants' respective units.

Sub goal 1: prevent and reduces absenteeism. Relevance of the sub goal 1 within own work environment.

Uses the program on sub goal 1. Descriptions of how the first sub goal is relevant in own unit.

Statement level: *Then, when I use the IWL program, in follow-up of sick leave and we are talking to each a ... Like, we have a follow-up conversation after four, about four weeks absence, sick leave where we talk a lot about what we as a workplace can do for facilitating both in terms of earlier return to work and possibly work, work a little then, work part time, reduce sick leave to some percentage. Yes. So, there, in that area so, I will say that I have used the IWL program a lot.*

Follow-up and facilitation. The workplaces' routines and possibilities to follow-up and facilitate for sickness absenteeism.

Statement level: *Yes, and it is limits as to how many they can in a way that may have special arrangements for, before it affects the operations.*

Sub goal 2: increase employment of individuals with disabilities. Relevance of the sub goal 2 within own work environment.

Sub goal 2 relevance. The workplaces' routines and possibilities to employ individuals with disabilities.

Statement level: *It's* [sub goal 2] *a problem formulation with lack of current interest, it, so that for us it involves to facilitate for those inside and possibly get a disability, I have not been involved in hiring people with disabilities at all.*

Employees with disabilities at the workplace. Informants perceptions of having employees with disabilities in the work environment.

Statement level: *In relation to the the second points …* [sub goal 2] *so, difficulties in facilitation, yes in relation to the increased employment of people with disabilities as it is, it's when emergency purposes so we stand for 24 hours all year round which I see as the biggest challenge, for it can not be a hindrance in it, the acute we are in. It can, we can not, it can not be.*

Sub goal 3: increase average retirement age. Relevance of the sub goal 3 within own work environment.

An older workforce. Informants perceptions of having seniors in the work environment.

Statement level: *So that we, it's a bit frightening what will happen with the recruitment if suddenly everyone is allowed to sit until they are 75 instead of 70, for example. It would have been quite potentially devastating for a period. But it is possible I answer on the side now. It's something we, It is something we are interested in, to put it in that way. Consequences, which is very like, exciting topic. Yes, how, where, for us we are afraid that it may adversely affect in fact, although in, very many others, many other areas of society where there will certainly be very positive.*

Facilitation possibilities for seniors. The workplaces' routines and possibilities to facilitate for seniors.

Statement level: *But we also do some additional measures so that they* [seniors] *are able to stand in, that someone gets health problems, and then we*

have tried to facilitate so that they in periods can be partially in work and periods completely in work. So that part I think works very, very well.

Appendix 2: Informed consent

Oslo, June 5th 2014

Request of participation in the study "Mapping the practical experiences with the Inclusive Working Life (IWL) program"

In this letter we ask you to participate in a research project on the practical experiences with the IWL program. The project is carried out by two master students in work-and organisational psychology at the Department of Psychology (PSI), the University of Oslo. The purpose by the project is to map the practical experiences with the IWL program through in-depth interviews of employees with personnel responsibility and support staff in public sector. The students will examine what kind of experiences the employers with personnel responsibility and support staff have on the IWL program in their respective units. The results will be utilized in a master's thesis in work- and organisational psychology.

The project will be carried out by interviewing employees with personnel responsibility and support staff. The interviews will be recorded digitally and then written out and analysed. The digital recordings will be deleted after the interviews have been written out. The printouts will be anonymized in terms of names. In addition the content of the interviews will be treated confidential. The data material obtained from the interviews may be used in anonymous form in later teaching and research at PSI. The project is reported to the personal protection commission, Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

The IWL program consist of three themes, respectively 1) To prevent and reduce sickness absenteeism, 2) increase employment of people with disabilities, and 3) increase average retirement age.

The interview consists of six questions:

I. As employer with personnel responsibility/support staff, have you made use of the IWL program?
II. How many times have you made use of the IWL program?
III. Please tell me about the strengths you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit today – we call this strengths with the IWL program.
IV. Please tell me about the weaknesses you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit today– we call this weaknesses with the IWL program.
V. Please tell me about the opportunities for improvement you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit in the future – we call this opportunities for improvement with the IWL program.
VI. Please tell me about the threats you perceive in terms of carrying out IWL objectives in your unit in the future – we call this threats to the IWL program.

It is voluntary to participate in the interview and you can withdraw from the interview at any time without having to name any particular reason. To withdraw from the study will not have any consequences for you employment conditions. The duration of the interviews usually is maximum one hour; however this depends on how much information you can give us.

The findings from the study will be available as one to two master's thesis ultimo may 2015.

If you have any further questions or comments, please contact the project responsible at Department of Psychology, Tone Drivdal Stensheim and Ida Bruheim Jensen. Or professional responsible: Roald Bjørklund (professor at the Department of Psychology).

Kind Regards,

Tone Drivdal Stensheim and Ida Bruheim Jensen, Master students at the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo

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I would like to participate in this study.

Sign by project participant, date